



BUSINESS AS (UN) USUAL

This is a Spring with a difference, but the good news is that Sworders are working for their clients and helping seek out new ideas and opportunities so I hope you enjoy this newsletter, it may spark an idea for your business.

Now is the time to go through your 'to do' list, which may have been sitting, collecting dust. For example, do you neighbour commonland? If so, double check boundaries and accesses before it is too late to change (detailed further within this newsletter).

And what about that long postponed review of buildings, are there alternative income producing uses? Sworders continue to have great success with planning matters, be it Class Q conversions from agricultural use to residential, business use, new build or extensions.

In the budget infrastructure, spending was promised, the Oxford/Cambridge Arc being one, but there are new roads, pipelines and cables proposed. If your property is affected, early discussions with the acquiring authority or utility company is always beneficial, supported by good professional advice.

Biodiversity, carbon offsetting, environmental land management scheme (ELMS) are now common parlance, but how do they work and how can you benefit? It may be worth a little research and should you wish to speak to an expert, we are able to assist.

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A TIME TO THINK, A TIME TO PLAN

The enforced change to everyone's life has not only prevented people doing things they usually do without hesitation but has given many of us time to think and work out what is important in this often too frenetic age.

Considering how vulnerable our economy is and the realisation that life must change can be sobering but enlightening. The fact that we may need to alter our expectations and may have got our priorities wrong are certainly worth thinking about.

But with any change there are opportunities and here are some thoughts:

Food Supply

The importance of having a well-funded, well supported high-tech and sustainable agriculture and horticultural industry is paramount. Let us promote the wonderful seasonal food from the UK and educate people in cooking and using what we have and not rely on exotic foods from around the world. We export a huge amount of fish and meat, but import meat and fish of different varieties .. sensible? New legislation and new support for agriculture is on its way with the Agriculture and Environmental Bills and ELMS (Environmental Land Management Scheme). How can your business benefit?



Where We Work

It has been realised that quite a few people can work from home or locally, negating the need to travel for meetings and work; the appeal of cities for living and working may diminish, so rural business units, village business centres and rural housing may all be in demand.

But good IT is essential, the need for high speed broadband, mobile telephony etc is clear. What can be done to improve this?

Holidays

People appreciate that you do not have to go abroad, you do not even have to go to the beach. There are many opportunities for holidaying close to home, 30 miles can be as good a change of scene as 3000. Enjoy our quality landscape and habitats, making the most of heritage and a variety of accommodation and delicious local food. Simple pleasures such as walking, cycling, visiting gardens and observing wild flowers and trees seem to be further appreciated, as well as learning new skills and having new experiences



Housing Market

Understandably, there is real uncertainty as to the state of the housing market and potential purchasers are reluctant to commit until there is more clarity with regard to the outcome of the CV outbreak. Now, may be the time to revisit any potential class Q applications or potential development opportunities as we all hope, in time, the market will return to a more normal pattern to reflect the built up demand for housing.

Planning

We all know this can be a slow process, so what better time to think through your project large or small, be it that potential building plot, what to do with that old building, even that much needed extension to your property, why not get the wheels in motion?



So do not be frustrated by staying at home, use it to plan and please discuss any ideas with Sworders who have wide experience of all aspects of rural property. We too are working at home but available and connected and able to provide specialist advice and a fresh perspective.

EAST TO WEST RAIL - THE PREFERRED ROUTE

The favoured route has been announced on the 30th January 2020 for the final stage of the East-West rail link between Cambridge and Oxford. The favoured route for the Bedford to Cambridge link will go South of St Neots, near Cambourne. The project will be decided by Government through the development consent order process. Housing Minister, Esther McVey, has been rallying support for the project, stating that it would “make strides towards our target of delivering at least one million much-needed new homes over the next five years”. The announcement could boost growth opportunities across the Oxford-Cambridge Arc.



Why is this the preferred route option?

- It delivers the best value for the taxpayer, returning the most benefit for every pound spent
- It was the most popular option with people who responded to our consultation
- It would deliver the best opportunities for the environment

If you believe your land could have development potential because of the proposed scheme, Sworders can advise on feasibility and planning opportunities.



TEMPORARY CHANGES MADE TO PLANNING SYSTEM IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

There have been concerns from applicants and local planning authorities about the implications of COVID-19 on the planning system. In order to address this, the Government have announced a range of temporary changes. They have confirmed that legislation will be introduced to allow Council Committee meetings to be held 'virtually' for a temporary period, to allow Planning Committees to continue. Councils have also been encouraged to further utilise technology rather than face-to-face meetings, and to consider delegating committee decisions where appropriate. Local Authorities have been encouraged to work with their community and stakeholders to progress plans, albeit adjusting timetables where necessary. This is essential to support the economy and neighbourhood planning. The Coronavirus Bill (introduced to parliament on 19th March), contains provisions to enable the postponement of neighbourhood planning referendums and electoral events where required.

Councils have also had concerns about their ability to process planning applications within statutory timescales. In a situation where a planning authority is unable to consider a permitted development prior approval application within the deemed consent period, the authority can work to agree an extended approval date with the applicant. Where an agreement cannot be reached, authorities may need to consider whether prior approval is refused if the application cannot be considered with the required attention. Planning authorities should however use their discretion on the enforcement of other planning conditions which hinder the effective response to COVID-19.

Also in response to the spread of COVID-19, pubs, restaurants and cafés are no longer open but can provide takeaway services – this right is covered by legislation with a permitted development right coming into force on 24th March 2020 for twelve months. This new permitted development right will enable pubs, cafés and restaurants to operate as hot food takeaways, in addition to cold and pre prepared food for takeaway for a period of twelve months. After this time, a planning application would be required for continued use as a takeaway.



In light of the current situation, The Planning Inspectorate (PINS) has published further guidance on how it will continue to carry out its duties under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and the Planning Act 2008. While some site visits, hearings, inquiries and events are to be cancelled or postponed, PINS is considering alternative arrangements where possible and a further update is expected to be released shortly.

COMMON LAND

Common Land Deadline - Hertfordshire, Kent and Devon, (and some other counties).

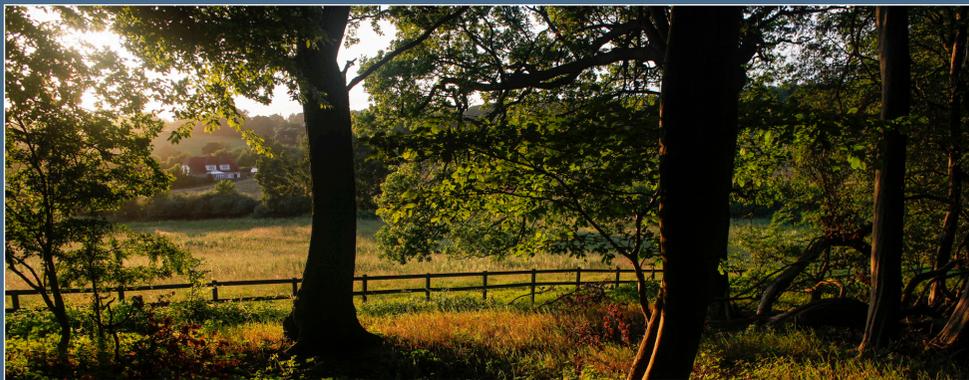
If you own or manage property adjoining a “Common” check your boundaries and ownership before it is too late.

The deadline for challenging the registration of commons is 31 Dec 2020. Landowners have the opportunity (subject to various conditions) to challenge any land that was wrongly registered as common land. This generally occurs on the boundary of commons, gardens, paddocks, outbuildings and small areas that may have been

registered as common. Occasionally whole fields have been registered in error. Driveways and access tracks frequently cross common land.

This can cause major problems when the property is sold or rented out. The opportunity to correct will come to an end on 31 December this year so time is running out.

More information is available from “Commons Registration Authorities Correct Mistakes” on the gov.uk website.



WHAT ARE THE ODDS?

Next time you are considering buying a National Lottery ticket, it might be just worth reflecting that the chance of winning the jackpot is 1 in 45 million.

Alternatively, you could spend the time emailing a plan of your land to Sworders and without obligation or cost, we could advise you as to the potential planning prospects. If we consider there to be some opportunities thereon, we could provide you with some preliminary thoughts on how we might add value.

We cannot guarantee to make £millions for all our clients, but our preliminary appraisal is cheaper than a lottery ticket and you may just stack the odds in your favour.

STAY AT HOME MEANS STAY AT HOME!

As of 27th March 2020, during the Covid-19 outbreak and this period of uncertainty, the UK Government have released advice concerning the sale and rental of residential properties, along with advice for agents dealing with the sale and letting of property.

Whilst the stay at home measures are in place, the Government are advising home buyers and renters, where possible, to delay moving house. For parties who have already exchanged contracts and the property is currently occupied, the Government have advised all parties to work together to agree a delay. Where this is unavoidable for contractual reasons, all parties must follow the Government's advice on staying away or a safe distance from others to minimise the spread of the virus. There is no need to withdraw from existing transactions, however the advice is urging parties to adapt and be flexible in light of the current circumstances.



UK Finance have also confirmed, those who have exchanged contracts for house purchases whereby dates have been set for completion, all mortgage lenders are currently working to find ways which will enable their customers to extend their mortgage offer for up to 3 months. This should enable purchasers to move at a later date.

If you are considering putting your property on the market, given the restrictions on viewings and no visitors in your property, this may be more challenging than usual. As agents, Sworders will be able to provide general advice regarding the local property market and respond to requests and property enquiries remotely. We can use this time to gather the property information, including title and planning history, whilst drafting sales particulars to provide potential purchasers with the necessary information when viewings are able to take place.

Sworders are continuing to operate in line with current Government advice and are working with our clients on current and new property transactions. For further information or advice on how Sworders can help you, please contact a member of our property team or visit the gov.uk website.

CLASS Q - ENDLESS OPPORTUNITIES

Class Q Permitted Development Rights, which allow the conversion of farm buildings into dwellings without the need to obtain full planning permission, has gained increasing popularity amongst landowners in recent years. Latest published figures show that the number of agricultural to residential conversions in England rose from 226 conversions in 2015/16 to 743 in 2017/18, an increase of nearly 230%. The most marked increase has followed changes to the permitted development allowance, which increased the number of dwellings allowed to be converted without full planning permission from three to five.

However, Class Q has never been popular with Local Planning Authorities and, at the end of last year, the Local Government Association (LGA) was calling on the Government to commit to scrapping the permitted development rights for all property types. The LGA's reason for this was that in their view the permitted development rights were denying Councils and communities control over the process. Also, Government has muted more generally, the possibility of changes to residential permitted development rights, although what this will be remains to be seen.

Consequently, if you own any buildings that may have permitted development potential to convert for residential purposes and this may be an option in the future you wish to explore, I would suggest that you consider progressing your plans sooner rather than later.



SWORDERS HEAD TO THE WEST COUNTRY

Sworders are pleased to announce they have opened a new office in Rumwell, just outside Taunton. The office is headed up by James Dennis and Lucy Back. They both have a wealth of knowledge in Rural Estate Management and have key contacts in and around the west country.



FEELING LUCKY

A particular area of specialism in our new Taunton Office is provision of advice on heritage property, with our clients including the National Lottery Heritage Fund. James Dennis is currently monitoring 12 projects on behalf of the Fund with a total value of over £40 million including historic parkland restoration, Landscape Partnership Schemes, canal restoration, restoration

of sand dune systems across the UK, creating strategies to mitigate the landscape effects of Ash Dieback and preservation of Greater Horseshoe Bats. Work for the lottery is only part of a much wider portfolio of heritage advice, helping owners of heritage properties with the preservation of their properties, succession planning and tax mitigation.

SWORDERS' SUCCESS

Sworders have recently been able to successfully negotiate Wayleave agreements on behalf of several landowners to provide improved broadband in rural areas. This not only provides additional income to the landowner but with careful planning, can have minimal impact to the land itself in terms of further poles or equipment on the ground. Some of the agreements reached have also provided improved broadband connection for the client with no installation cost. The operator will usually pay all agent's fees too so no costs to the landowner.



STAFF UPDATE AND PROMOTIONS

Sworders is delighted to announce the following promotions and new members of staff.

PROMOTIONS

Lois Partridge - Director

James Morton - Associate

Hester Dalton - Senior Surveyor



NEW MEMBERS OF STAFF

James Dennis, BSc (Hons) FRICS, Director

James joined Sworders in 2020, having previously been a Partner in Smiths Gore. A Fellow of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, James has provided advice for over 30 years on a wide range of property, including management and succession for rural estates and family businesses, strategic asset management of property portfolios, advice on heritage property and advising on change of use of rural and commercial property.



Lucy Back, BSc (Hons) MRICS FAAV, Director

Lucy joined Sworders in 2019. She has significant experience in a wide range of areas such as estate management, strategic asset management, residential property management, land and property sales & acquisitions, residential sales and lettings, planning & development and diversification activities.



James Morton, BSc (Hons) MRICS, Associate

James joined Sworders in the autumn of 2019, having spent the previous 7 years working for a local firm of Land Agents. James qualified as a Chartered Surveyor in 2015 and is a past chair of the Coventry and Warwickshire RICS Matrics.



Katherine Brett, BSc (Hons), Part 2 Architectural Assistant

Katherine has recently returned to Sworders following working for a Principal contractor on multi million pound construction sites. This has allowed to her to gain valuable construction experience, knowledge and training towards her part 3 architectural qualification.



Lauren Draper, BSc (Hons), Graduate Surveyor

Lauren has a degree in Real Estate from the Royal Agricultural University and joined Sworders in 2019 as a Graduate Surveyor. Before joining Sworders, Lauren worked in the Valuation team at Savills in Oxford, and is continuing to work towards her professional qualification to become a Chartered Surveyor.



Grace Reed, BSc (Hons), Graduate Surveyor

Grace graduated from the Royal Agricultural University in 2018 with a degree in Rural Land Management. She joined Sworders as a Graduate Surveyor in 2019 having previously worked in estate management and valuation for a national firm. She is currently working towards her professional qualification to become a Chartered Surveyor.



CHARITY WORK

During 2019, Sworders held several fundraising events in aid of 'Medical Detection Dogs'. All offices hosted an out-door cake bake, also our Sworders' Girls' Team took on the Eton Dorney Triathlon, plus our 'Walking Warriors' Team and 4 legged friends took on the company's second Charity Trek of walking 14 miles in one day, along the Suffolk coast. We managed to raise just under £2,000 during 2019, of which we are very proud! The pictures show some of our highlights.



We are looking forward to supporting the very worthy mental health support charity 'MIND' during 2020, with lots of fun events planned...with our 3rd Charity Trek to be held in Gloucestershire.



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As rural property professionals, we advise across the agricultural, commercial and residential sectors on all aspects of rural property. We provide advice that seeks to maximise the value of clients' properties, often on a shared risk basis.

To be sure you are maximising the value of your asset, please contact us to discuss your opportunities.

Sworders recognises its impact on the environment throughout its business and is passionate about the need to reduce and manage waste wherever practicably possible. Please recycle or give me to a friend.



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Please note, the articles featured in this publication have been selected and prepared with a view to disseminating key information available at the time of publication and are not intended to be comprehensive nor to provide advice. It should not be acted upon or relied upon, and is not a substitute for seeking professional advice that is specific to your individual circumstances.

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