



Planning Pushes Ahead - Spring 2017 Update

Planning your next step? The latest insights into this constantly shifting sector

Opportunities for planning lawyers continue to be good as law firms shake off the shock of Brexit. Retention rates are high and as team sizes grow so does the need for junior level support. This is backed up by a robust real estate market which has potential to lead to opportunities at firms without a prior planning presence.

AN OVERVIEW

Recruitment for lawyers in the planning sector has continued to remain steady and leaders in this area remain bullish about future prospects and work flows. Development Planning is driving the recruitment market with overseas investors looking to take advantage of the weaker pound. In addition, the continued need for housing and constant reforms of the process has led to steady work and very busy teams.

The knock-on effect of this has meant that retention prospects for newly qualified solicitors wishing to qualify into planning remain good. For those not fortunate enough to be retained in planning or environment, firms are looking to hire external juniors earlier than usual with a number of practices already in the market for September NQs. We expect to see more as the NQ season gains momentum through the summer.

PREDICTIONS FROM ASSERSON LAW OFFICES

Daniel Drukarz, Partner and Head of Planning at Asserson Law Offices states:

“Activity continues at pace at Asserson Law Offices. Developers seem undeterred by Brexit and there remains an appetite generally for London real estate, and a move towards sites in the outer London boroughs for resi and PD schemes at transport hubs. PRS schemes are becoming more prevalent, backed by a wall of institutional money. We are also seeing a growing stream of work within the firm from overseas investors, keen to acquire trophy assets in London, benefiting from the drop in sterling. We predict a buoyant year ahead for our property and planning teams.”

CATCHMENT AREAS

London remains the largest catchment area for recruitment due to the sheer volume of firms with a planning presence, but the regions play a key role as cost sensitive clients seek better value from their legal services without compromising quality. The key regional planning hubs remain around the big cities such as Bristol, Manchester, Leeds, Exeter, Sheffield and Birmingham.

PREDICTIONS FROM BROOKSTREET DES ROCHES

Nigel Hewitson, Partner and Head of Planning at Thames Valley Real Estate heavyweight BrookStreet des Roches says:

“We are finding that development activity across both the housing and commercial sectors is probably at its highest since before the financial crash of 2008. Our landowner, promoter and developer clients are keeping us very busy and we confidently expect that work levels are only going to increase in 2017/18.”

OPPORTUNITIES

While development work has driven recruitment opportunities so far in 2017, infrastructure projects continue to be steady with energy and transport projects providing the main source of work. It is encouraging that despite Brexit energy companies look set to continue their investment into the UK particularly in the renewables sector and we are hopeful that this will continue to lead to opportunities for planners. Large transport projects such as Heathrow, Cross Rail 2, HS2 and the Lower Thames Crossing will continue to provide work and opportunities, but I do have some concern over the long-term financial viability of the nuclear sector.

So far, the majority of vacancies that have come onto the market in 2017 have been at the junior end (circa) 0-4 years qualified. We have seen fewer roles for Senior Associates in London this year, but believe this is more to do with the ebb and flow of the sector as opposed to it being a specific trend. Another sign of a healthy market is that some firms with a real estate presence, but no specific planning functions are beginning to show an interest in bringing on board a dedicated planning partner. This will lead to opportunities for senior lawyers who have reached a plateau. This combined with the rise of the boutiques means there is now a more diverse range of firms which can only be a good thing for the job hunter.

Hiring standards among the top firms remain as stringent as ever with practices expecting strong academics and an exposure to planning law during training. It is worth noting that opportunities are still there for lawyers who have qualified via a local authority, but competition can be tough when compared against lawyers from a private practice background. However, it is not impossible and where lawyers from a local authority can demonstrate strong academics and a keen commercial awareness then their chances of breaking into the private sector remains good. Our advice if you are considering this option is to do it sooner rather than later, as it will be easier to make the transition when you are more junior.

LOOKING AHEAD

As we get well into the second quarter and new financial year we would say that the recruitment market in planning is broadly healthy with firms willing to replace departing staff and others looking to expand with juniors. Of course, no one of can predict what the impact of Brexit and the forthcoming General Election is likely to have, but the fundamentals of housing, transport links and a secure energy supply remain and therefore we believe a career in planning remains a safe bet.

IN SUMMARY

- Steady growth continues
- Retention rates remain high as well as appetite to hire junior talent
- As Real Estate remains busy, opportunistic firms look to capitalise by establishing a planning presence
- Large planning teams capitalise on regional strength

CONTACT

Stuart Phillips is a Senior Consultant at Origin Legal with a focus on the planning sector. If you are considering a career move or would like an overview of the market please get in touch.

Telephone +44 (0)1206 233 504
Email stuart.phillips@originlegal.co.uk
LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/in/stuart-phillips-7b62729/>

A list of active positions can be found here: <http://www.originlegal.co.uk/jobs>

FURTHER RESOURCES

Origin Legal produces a range of information to assist lawyers in both the strategic and technical aspects of making a career move.

We hope you find this document useful please do contact us on +44 (0)1206 233500 if you would like to discuss any of the information in more detail.

For further resources please refer to our website www.originlegal.co.uk

