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Suzanne Ornsby QC

Practice Profile



QC 2012

Year of call 1986

Suzanne Ornsby QC specialises in planning law and has spent most of her career acting in three main capacities. Firstly, for local planning authorities in promoting their local plans and in defending their position at large public inquiries usually against volume housebuilders or land speculators. Secondly, for high end niche developers in promoting residential schemes in the countryside or on previously developed land at local plan or at appeal. Thirdly, for water utility companies mainly in promoting their water resource management plans and advising on drought planning and drought orders. Suzanne has also been instructed on a number of other cases that are somewhat unusual and which are also identified below.

Suzanne is consistently recognised as a leader in this specialist field of work in the Legal 500, Legal Experts and in Chambers and Partners in which she is described as follows:

Testimonials

"An excellent advocate...who is able to marshal complex legal arguments in a palatable

and convincing style, and achieves successful results." The Legal 500

"Rigorous and meticulous style" The Legal 500

"Great commercial advice and is a delight to work with" The Legal 500

"A highly proficient inquiry advocate at the planning bar". The Legal 500

Experience

Local Plans

Suzanne enjoys acting in the public interest. She has spent much of her career in promoting controversial local plans for Local Planning Authorities in areas where there is considerable pressure for development and therefore many competing interests seeking to be accommodated. This is an invidious position for a Local Planning Authority where numerous objectors consider either far too much, or not nearly enough, land has been allocated for development, usually for housing. These plans need careful consideration and thought given the legal and policy complexity that they give rise to.

Suzanne has promoted numerous plans over the past 20 years or so and in making cases has promoted numerous plans for the same authority. She currently acts for North Hertfordshire District Council, Aylesbury Vale District Council (Buckinghamshire Council), West Oxfordshire District Council, South Gloucestershire Council, North Somerset Council, Bristol City Council, Bath and North East Somerset, and the West of England Combined Authority.

Suzanne also has acted for, and advised, Local Planning Authorities, in relation to neighbourhood plans and appears in the High Court for Local Planning Authorities in challenges to Local and Neighbourhood plans as well as other statutory and judicial challenges. She seeks to give pragmatic, strategic advice to authorities who are almost always resource challenged. She has also recently been advising Local Planning Authorities on changes to the CIL regulations and the interrelationship with infrastructure provision through plan making and financial contributions through obligations towards infrastructure through decision making.

Suzanne regularly lectures and gives seminars on the ever moving legislative and policy framework relating to plan making and decision taking to both the private and public sector. By agreement she will hold bespoke seminars for client Local Planning Authorities focussing on issues specific to them.

Suzanne has also throughout her career successfully acted for various Local Planning Authorities against volume housebuilders and land speculators at major public inquiries where permission has been sought, but ultimately refused, for major speculative housing sites. (For example she often acts against Gladmans, Bloor Homes, Taylor Wimpey, Barratts, Persimmon, Bovis Homes and Crest Nicholson).

Niche Developments

Suzanne enjoys acting for developers who promote high quality developments. She regularly acts for good quality, niche developers promoting small, high value schemes. She is presently instructed on a proposal for a high net worth individual seeking permission for an isolated house in the countryside near York, a small bespoke development around Cambridge, a high quality bespoke designed housing/student scheme around Enfield Green and a small residential scheme in Bath. She is also instructed on the promotion of a high quality new settlement in Buckinghamshire for Unilever. In the past she has successfully acted for developers promoting a high quality landmark tall building in Bristol and a highly controversial scheme in the Clifton Conservation Area for two neoclassical town houses designed by one of the architectural advisers to Prince Charles

All these proposals involve well-known architects and landscape designers, environmental innovators, high quality planners and heritage consultants.

Water Utility Companies

Suzanne also enjoys the demands and technical complexity of water resources planning. For much of her career Suzanne has acted for Water Utility Companies and successfully promoted the UK's highly controversial first desalination plant on the River Thames at public inquiry. She acts for Anglian Water, South East Water and Thames Water on their Water Resources Management Plans where the pressure on water resources is severe, major resource development is necessary, and the issue of environmental control and climate change centre stage.

Other Experience

Throughout her career Suzanne has also acted on cases which are somewhat unusual. This has included acting for two major sand and gravel operators at the first UK inquiry into dues charged by a harbour authority on sand and gravel dredgers under the Harbours Act 1964; for the Lake District National Park Authority promoting a reduction in the speed limit on Lake Windermere; for Historic England on development that affected the site of the Battle of Tewkesbury; for the London Fire Brigade on a state of the art fire station to accommodate new fire appliances necessary to deal with the terror threat; for the promoters of Manston Airport concerning business/commercial use of the airport; and also re Garsington Opera and the proposed first all weather racecourse in the UK.

She has also acted for a specialist charity seeking permission for living accommodation for young adults with learning disabilities (which she undertook pro bono). She has also from time to time worked for mineral operators such as Cemex and Tarmac.

From time to time Suzanne has advised both insurers and individuals on planning related professional negligence issues, the majority of which, fortunately settle prior to court. However she did appear, albeit some time ago, for the successful party in Motorcrown Petroleum Ltd one of the leading cases on professional negligence in the planning context.

Suzanne has also been appointed as an Independent Planning Counsel under the provisions of the Arbitration Act 1996 in contractual disputes over residential development.

Professional Membership

Suzanne is committed to training the future bar to ensure high standards of advocacy are maintained. She is a grade A advocacy instructor for the Middle Temple where she trains other barristers in the skills of cross-examination. She has also recently been involved in training planning Inspectors under the new Rosewell Procedure. She is a Bencher of the Middle Temple and chairs the Pupillage and Tenancy Committee in Chambers.

Suzanne is a committee member of the Planning and Environment Bar Association, a member of UKELA, the Administrative Law Bar Association, the Compulsory Purchase Association; the Health and Safety Lawyers Association and the Criminal Bar Association.

For a more comprehensive discussion of Suzanne Ornsby Q.C.'s experience please contact her principal clerk, James Kemp on 020 7427 1846 or james.kemp@ftbchambers.co.uk

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