

# Paul Coveney



## Job title

Senior Clerk at Francis Taylor Building

FTB is a long established leading public law set, with particular expertise in planning, land valuation, infrastructure, environmental, public law, licensing, religious liberty and ecclesiastical law and regulatory law.

## Having been a clerk for almost 30 years, to what do you credit your success?

Hard work, commitment and focusing on building long-term relationships with both members and clients. I have been fortunate to have worked with and to be working with some really first class colleagues – members and clerks alike. I also have a real passion for the business.

Completing a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) with the Cass Business School at City University in 2003 was a real turning point in my career. The nature of the MBA gave me a good basic grounding in numerous key areas which as a senior clerk you inevitably encounter in the day-to-day running of a set of chambers – such as marketing and business development, strategic planning, leadership, HR, business finance etc.

The MBA also enhanced my general confidence, which really helps when speaking with clients – particularly those from the business and commercial world. I think it has given me a great insight into the client's decision-making process.

I have an inquisitive nature – so I have always tried to understand properly the

practice areas of my chambers and to do my best to get to know the clients well. Having a good knowledge of the current issues affecting a particular area of law helps – at the end of the day as a clerk, you are usually the main point of contact for clients. The nature of the role means that members and clients place an enormous degree of trust in you and to succeed long term it is vital you carry out your job in a totally professional and ethical way.

## What areas of growth have you seen over the years and what does the future hold for your chambers?

The core of FTB's work has always been based around the law relating to the use and development of land and property. The UK is a relatively small and densely populated island. This means that whenever a developer, operator or government wishes to carry out its business, develop sites or build infrastructure, there will always be an impact on the environment and people's lives, so there is bound to be some form of contention – leading to the need for advice and representation for the promoters, objectors and other interested parties.

More generally I'm a firm believer in the chambers business model – it is actually a very lean and surprisingly modern way of running a business – low overheads, independence, flexibility and value for money are central facets of the model. I feel that providing that the Bar does not lose sight of what its key strengths are and that we focus on those, there will be a bright future ahead, particularly for the specialist.

## Can you give us an insight into the type of cases your members are currently involved in?

We have continued to see a lot of planning and environmental work stemming from the need to build new houses. There has also been a lot of work emanating from a number of major infrastructure projects, particularly in the energy and transport sectors – such as HS2 and Hinckley C Nuclear Reactor, the Thames Tideway Tunnel, a variety of new roads, railways and airports – very much building on our long-standing reputation in this area.

Growing concern around social issues within the night-time economy and expansion in the gaming and betting industries has also kept our licensing team busy, particularly in and around central London. We are also handling a

large number of compulsory purchase compensation claims from the London 2012 Olympics, Crossrail and various urban redevelopment schemes.

We are very fortunate to have a good spread of regular developer, public authority and interest group clients.

## What trends have you seen with respect to international and direct instructions for your members?

Chambers has always carried out work in the UK for a number of large international companies – usually on big infrastructure projects – and a lot of EU environmental cases. However, in recent years we have also seen a steady increase in the volume of international work in overseas jurisdictions, typically the Caribbean, Hong Kong and other counties with UK based jurisdictions. These cases have tended to relate to compulsory acquisition of land needed to enable re-development or to facilitate transport infrastructure schemes.

The Internet and modern communications have made this type of work far more attainable and manageable and I can see further growth in the area. Marketing on an international level presents chambers and the Bar generally with a challenge – I think in our circumstances it's a case of focusing on building up existing relationships and reputations in particular regions rather than anything wider at the moment.

## In an increasingly competitive market, what advice would you give to clerks developing their careers?

I think you need to have an inquisitive nature – get to know your members, the clients and your main areas of law. You need to get into the nuts and bolts of the markets your particular set practises in.

Speak to clients and members – find out what the current issues and trends are in those fields. Attend CPD and client social events. I'd also take the time to watch your members in action at court – you need to understand their skills and styles so as to advise clients on counsel selection.

## How do you relax?

I love spending time with my family and getting outdoors – a bit of mountain biking, scuba diving or in our camper van. ●

Paul Coveney was interviewed by Mathew Kesbey and Guy Hewetson of Hewetson Shah LLP.