

## Islington optimistic on office-to-resi exemption

29 August 2014 | By Andrew Don

Islington council has voiced its optimism that it can achieve a compromise with the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in the north London borough's protracted battle to halt unrestricted conversions of offices to residential in the borough.

Islington, in July last year, became the first council to make an Article 4 direction to remove new government-given rights for developers to convert offices to homes without planning permission.

Nick Boles, who was planning minister at the time, quashed the Article 4 just days before it was to come into force on the basis that Islington had failed to deliver its housing targets between 2009 and 2013.

Islington led a coalition of London councils that lost a High Court legal challenge against the government's new permitted development rights at the end of last year.

The council argued it exceeded its overall housing target by 43% during the five-year period and it said the DCLG had now accepted it made "a mistake of fact" by failing to take into account all the types of housing that the London Plan housing targets included.

The council said the Article 4 direction was originally intended for the entire borough but had since been scaled back in an attempt to reach a compromise with the government.

The council said the DCLG had agreed to rescind its decision to quash Islington's Article 4 direction in the next few weeks.

However, Brandon Lewis, housing and planning minister, said today: "These reforms are helping promote brownfield regeneration, protect the countryside and increase housing supply at no cost to the taxpayer. It is disappointing that Islington is using public funds to try to oppose new homes for Londoners.

"Their latest judicial review attempt relates to a technical point on housing numbers in London. We are happy to have a dialogue with the council on these issues, but we have been clear about the real need for more homes, especially in London."

Lewis said Islington council was "out of touch" if it thought more one-bedroom and studio flats in central London for young people were a bad thing.

Councillor James Murray, Islington council's executive member for housing and development, said: "No one would deny that London needs new homes. We are one of the top boroughs nationally for building new homes - we're actually building thousands of genuinely affordable homes for social rent.

"The government says its policy is about converting empty offices into homes. Yet in Islington we can see the damaging effect this policy is having. We're losing jobs but getting lots of one-bed and bedsit flats, with no affordable housing or other community benefit."

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