

Land Registry sell-off could be bad news for landowners

Jess Harrold 06/05/2014 16:38

Reports that the Land Registry is heading towards privatisation could be a worry for landowners, a lawyer has warned.

Today's *Guardian* newspaper reported that leaked board meeting minutes had revealed that senior civil servants are deciding between a joint venture with the government and a private company, or allowing a private company run it as a "govco". They believe £1.225bn could be raised from a joint venture deal. The Department for Business said all options remained under consideration.

Former Land Registry executives said a sell-off "beggars belief" because it will enable the private sector to adjudicate on conflicting interests.

And Peter Dawson, partner at Russell-Cooke, said: "This news is unlikely to be welcomed by many land owners – if an Englishman's home is his castle, is he going to be happy if the organisation which keeps the records straight between him and others is privatised?"

He added: "The objectives of land registration remain now as they were when the Land Registration Act 1925 was passed – to make land transfer easier and provide a transparent record of the different levels and priorities of ownership and rights affecting land.

"At the moment, fees are set on a self-funding basis (which does mean they go down at times of high activity in the property market). Will a profit making organisation be inclined to act in the same way? Although the government will still make the policy behind land ownership, it remains to be seen if this can be delivered through a privately owned company."

Peter Dawson partner in the commercial property group

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