



Interview with a Trainee Solicitor – Planning Law at Lester Aldridge

Planning law is a highly specialised area, and in my experience, something that wasn't touched upon at all in undergraduate or post-graduate education. Whilst it isn't traditionally a standalone seat that Lester Aldridge offers, there is usually the opportunity to get involved with Planning work in the Real Estate Development seat.

I started my journey at Lester Aldridge as a Paralegal in the Southampton Real Estate Development Team before starting my training contract in March 2024, with my first seat in Real Estate Development. As this was an area of law I had previously worked in, I was eager to expand my knowledge of the wider development picture, and I'm grateful Lester Aldridge also encouraged me to do this.

What is planning law?

Clients who want to build something new, change a building, or change the registered use of land and buildings require planning permission. Various development consents or approvals may also be required; these can be from local authorities, Planning Inspectors, or, in exceptional cases, the Secretary of State.

Large-scale housing builders, industrialists, agribusinesses, energy providers and individuals are among those who all must interact with the planning system. Doing work or carrying out an activity without planning permission may result in planning enforcement action or, in some cases, a criminal conviction. There are special areas of law within planning such as the compulsory acquisition of interests in land, tree preservation orders, display of advertisements and listed building consent. Getting planning right releases value, so sorting out a problem with planning law can be time-consuming and becomes an important aspect of a wide range of transactions.

Overview of planning law at Lester Aldridge

Lester Aldridge's industry ranking Planning & Infrastructure team covers a variety of matters that deal with rules and regulations governing land use and development, as well as environmental considerations such as nitrate neutrality and biodiversity net gain. This includes advice on planning permissions and appeals, judicial reviews, enforcements, compulsory purchases, drafting complex infrastructure agreements, and everything in between. The team works with developers, property professionals and businesses to deliver advice and results.

Due to the specialised nature of planning law, not every firm offers this service, but Lester Aldridge proudly serves a wide variety of long-standing clients. This is due to their commitment to helping clients manage their projects with increased certainty and predictability.

My experience

Coming into planning law has been a big change from the transactional work I have been doing in development; however, I have really enjoyed the challenge. One of the biggest differences for me was getting involved in contentious work. This includes everything from creating bundles for judicial reviews, drafting court documents and attending client conferences. I have also been fortunate enough to attend the Royal Courts of Justice, which was particularly interesting to see how our work plays out in an actual courtroom. Another interesting topic was drafting a Biodiversity Net Gain Agreement; this involved a lot of negotiation of clauses between the parties, working through proposed amendments efficiently to adhere to the tight timeframe.

It's not all contentious work, though. In addition to drafting various agreements, there can be a large emphasis on involving yourself in the planning aspects of a variety of commercial, corporate, and transactional matters, assisting across the firm as a whole. General advice on matters and strategies can play a big part in planning work, too. As planning law is a specialist area, the various regulations and terminology can be overwhelming and often require a specialist to highlight the position and potential next steps.

Skills and responsibilities

I have found a multitude of skills required to succeed in this area of law. Being able to act promptly is key, as well as the ability to think on your feet as you may be required to swiftly change your approach to a matter dependent on the court's decisions, which is often something you can't always predict. Attention to detail is another vital part of planning law, as with any areas dealing directly with the courts; the last thing you'd want is to submit a plea to the courts containing inaccuracies, as that can be detrimental to an otherwise sound argument. Interpersonal skills also play a huge part; I found myself having a lot of client contact during my time in planning law, whether in person or via telephone/video.

Final thoughts

My time in planning law has helped me hone a completely new skill set and gain a better understanding of the wider development picture. I've found it very rewarding helping clients achieve their end goal in what can be a particularly challenging regulatory environment.

I have only been working in the world of planning for a few months, so I know I've barely scratched the surface. However, I'm thoroughly enjoying it so far, I think it's a fascinating area of law and something I look forward to continuing throughout my development seat and would strongly recommend anyone to get involved in, given the opportunity.

Contact us

If you want to learn more about our planning law services or need assistance, please contact the Lester Aldridge [Planning Team](#).