



The Society of
Light and Lighting

Opinion: Inconsistency in the approach to lighting in local government

Functional artificial lighting, when we get it right, is, mostly, unseen and innocuous. With a huge range of products now available at affordable prices, there has never been so much choice. But there is also a worrying lack of guidance regarding how much light is needed and how these products should best be installed. Indeed, there seems to be a belief that 'brighter is better' resulting in domestic and commercial exterior 'security' lighting providing many times more light than suggested in professional guidance. Consequently, we see disturbance and nuisance to neighbours, road users, the general public, the environment, our enjoyment of the night sky and protected species.

The remedy, it would seem, is simple isn't it? The Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (CNEA) 2005 made artificial light a statutory nuisance for enforcement and control through the planning process. The CNEA has too many exceptions for enforcement to be considered viable in most cases, so that just leaves the planning process.

I feel sorry for those in local government today. Budget reductions have been huge and as a consequence so much experience has been lost. The result is inconsistency and confusion in approach. There seems to be a lack of knowledge, generally, in the planning and enforcement teams about how to deal with lighting issues and a reluctance to engage lighting professionals for assistance.

Enquiries to ILP and reports from our members in relation to how complaints about obtrusive lighting are dealt with, suggest frustration and dismay with the process. This leaves residents confused and upset

with the lack of support or help in resolving their concerns.

The picture in the planning process is also worrying. Many councils don't seem to know what to ask for to support planning applications or how to analyse supporting information, especially those involving sports floodlighting. There also appears to be inconsistency in how controls to mitigate damage to the habitats of protected species are dealt with. They are either ignored or, not knowing what to do, planning committees ask for unachievable mitigations or complicated reports to demonstrate light distribution from domestic properties that will likely change as soon as the owners change the lighting or install security lighting!

Equally worrying is the lack of communication between different council departments regarding what the planners or ecologists are saying and those that will adopt street lighting for maintenance on completion of the development. This simple lack of communication can result in the various council departments playing power politics to the detriment of the environment and protected species.

So, what is the answer? Simple; if you don't know, get advice from a professional. Lighting in the planning process seems to be an afterthought in many cases. Its impact on the landscape character, protected species residents and road users is far too great to be overlooked or not given the attention it deserves.

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