

# The Planning Law Survey 2019: The leading law firms and solicitors

28 March 2019 by Mark Wilding

There is change at the top of the rankings and elsewhere in this year's survey, reports Mark Wilding.



The Town Legal team: the firm launched slightly more than two years ago, and this year becomes the highest-rated law firm

This is the 22nd edition of the Planning Law Survey. As in recent years, only those working in roles that could involve them in commissioning or instructing a law firm or barrister were eligible to vote. The voting group for the law firm categories was made up of consultants, developers and infrastructure promoters, as well as public sector lawyers and planners. The voting group for barristers comprised the same people, plus solicitors working for law firms.

For the first time this year, only named individuals invited by Planning were eligible to vote. This measure was introduced to ensure that the survey results could not be skewed by disproportionately high levels of responses from single organisations. To the same end, we took steps to ensure that the number of individuals that we invited to vote from individual consultants and law firms was proportionate to the number of planners, or specialist lawyers, at the firms.

A total of 181 respondents completed the survey, split between consultants (71), developers and infrastructure promoters (18), public sector planning officers and lawyers (22) and solicitors (70).

Much has changed in our annual review of the UK's top-rated planning law firms, with a new practice installed at the top for the first time in six years.

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## HIGHEST-RATED PLANNING LAW FIRMS 2019

RANK 2019	RANK 2018	FIRM
1	2	Town Legal
2	1	Pinsent Masons
3	3	Eversheds Sutherland
4	6	Clarke Willmott
5	25=	Mills & Reeve
6=	9	Clyde & Co
6=	10=	DLA Piper
8	4	Dentons
9=	5	Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner
9=	18	Osborne Clarke
9=	7	Walker Morris
12=	15=	Gateley
	15=	Gowling wlg
	10=	TLT Solicitors
	25=	Womble Bond Dickinson
16=	10=	BDB Pitmans
	38=	Burges Salmon
	38=	DAC Beachcroft
	12=	Herbert Smith Freehills
	38=	Irwin Mitchell
	23=	Shakespeare Martineau
	38=	Squire Patton Boggs
23=	25=	Ashurst
	20=	Blandy & Blandy
	15=	CMS Cameron McKenna
	10=	Hogan Lovells
		Jones Day
	28=	Keystone
	20=	Mischon de Reya
	8	Shoosmiths

To see an extended version of the table above, please [click here](#).

Town Legal was this year ranked highest by our voting group. The firm, which launched just over two years ago, came second in last year's survey. It has swapped places with Pinsent Masons, which had topped the rankings for five years. Eversheds Sutherland is the only constant in the top five, remaining at number three. Clarke Willmott takes fourth after a gradual rise from the middle of the table just three years ago. Fifth place is claimed by Mills & Reeve, a firm which was ranked 25th in 2018.

Town Legal's rapid rise is no doubt related to the fact that founding partner Simon Ricketts can now report a full decade at the top of the individual solicitor rankings (see panel). The firm reports 14 solicitors, up one from last year, who meet our criteria for inclusion in the count for this table – which is that they spend at least half of their time on planning and related work.

Its solicitor numbers are due to go up again when Norton Rose Fulbright's Duncan Field, who has risen to joint fourth in our individual rankings, joins in April. Instructions being handled by the firm include acting for Stansted Airport on its bid to increase the cap on its annual passenger numbers and advising the Battersea Power Station Development Company on its overhaul of the London landmark.

One consultant described Town Legal as "a fresh new practice which seems to be attracting some of the best planning law talent". Another said: "Their advice is as good as you'll get anywhere, but it's given without fuss and with a charm that fits perfectly with what they got away from their corporate backgrounds to start; a law firm with personality."