

John Bethell

John is a public law specialist with related expertise in public international law and information law. He is ranked as a leading junior in Chambers and Partners and Legal 500 and is described as “a very effective advocate” with “great client-handling skills” and “real clarity of thought and an ability to cut through the difficulties in public law”.

John acts for central government, local authorities, other public bodies and claimants. He was appointed to the Attorney General’s B Panel of Civil Counsel in September 2022 and to the Panel of Public International Law Counsel in October 2020.

John acts in public law matters of every type and is regularly instructed in sensitive and high-profile litigation, particularly in matters that raise national security, international relations or diplomatic immunity issues. His recent cases include:

- ***R (YVR) v Birmingham City Council*** [2024] EWHC 701 (Admin), [2024] PTSR 866, acting for the Council in a challenge to the policy of charging the statutory maximum amount for the provision of adult social care, in circumstances of financial difficulty (with Joanne Clement KC).
- ***EFG v The Security Service*** [2024] UKIPTrib 2, acting for the Respondent in an application for interim injunctive relief arising from alleged unfairness in a review of the Complainant’s security vetting.
- ***Dalston Projects Ltd v Secretary of State for Transport*** [2024] EWCA Civ 172, acting for the Claimants in an appeal arising from the first statutory review of a decision to detain a ship under the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (unled).
- ***R (Milburn) v Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman*** [2023] EWCA Civ 207, [2023] PTSR 1250, an appeal concerning the limits to the scope of the Ombudsman’s jurisdiction, where a complainant has appealed to the Special Educational Needs Tribunal (unled).
- ***R (Liberty) v Secretary of State for the Home Department*** [2023] EWCA Civ 926, a challenge to the lawfulness of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 (with Julian Milford KC).
- ***The BIOT Migrants Litigation***, arising from the arrival of Sri Lankan migrants in the British Indian Ocean Territory, including ***BAA & Others v Commissioner for the British Indian Ocean Territory (Mr Paul Candler) & Others*** [2023] EWHC 767 (KB), a Divisional Court application for urgent, interim relief seeking to prevent the return of 5 migrants from a hospital in Rwanda to the island of Diego Garcia.
- ***Liberty and Privacy International v Security Service and SSHD*** [2023] UKIP Trib 1, [2023] HRLR 5, a claim in the Investigatory Powers Tribunal, alleging misuse of authorised data by MI5 (with Julian Milford KC).
- ***The Inquiry into the death of Jalal Uddin***, who was murdered in Rochdale in February 2016
- ***Sir Charles Haddon-Cave’s Independent Inquiry Relating to Afghanistan*** investigating alleged extrajudicial killings by UK special forces in Afghanistan (arising from ***R (Saifullah Yar) v Secretary of State for Defence***).
- ***The Dawn Sturgess Inquiry*** investigating the Novichok poisoning of Dawn Sturgess in Salisbury in 2018.

Before coming to the Bar, John completed a PhD in history and was a soldier and diplomat.



Professional Summary

Called 2014

Contact Details

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Clerk Harry Gilson

Clerk Iva Mirjam

Stipanovic

Clerk Isabella Quill

[Contact Clerks](#)

Specialisms

Public Law and Human Rights

John is instructed to advise and represent clients across a broad range of public law matters. His recent work has included issues from ECHR extra-territorial jurisdiction to retained EU law obligations, public interest immunity. His recent cases;

- ***Dalston Projects Ltd v Secretary of State for Transport*** [2024] EWCA Civ 172, acting for the Claimants in an appeal arising from the first statutory review of a decision to detain a ship under the Russia (Sanctions) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019 (unled) and previously in ***Dalston Projects Ltd v Secretary of State for Transport*** [2023] EWHC 1885 (Admin) (with Nigel Giffin KC, instructed by Jaffa and Co).
- ***R (Milburn) v Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman*** [2023] EWCA Civ 207 1777, [2023] PTSR 1250, a case concerning the limits to scope of the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, where a complainant has appealed to the Special Educational Needs Tribunal (unled).
- ***R (Liberty) v SSHD and SSFCA*** [2023] EWCA (Civ) 926: Challenge to the compatibility of the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 with EU and ECHR law (with Sir James Eadie KC, Gerry Facenna KC, Julian Milford KC, Michael Armitage and Clodhna Kelleher, instructed by GLD).
- ***BAA & Others v Commissioner for the British Indian Ocean Territory (Mr Paul Candler) & Others*** [2023] EWHC 767 (KB), a Divisional Court application for urgent, interim relief seeking to prevent the return of 5 Sri Lankan migrants from a hospital in Rwanda to the island of Diego Garcia (with Cathryn McGahey KC, Sian Reeves and Emilie Pottle, instructed by GLD).
- ***R (Stride) v Wiltshire Council*** [2022] EWHC 1476 (Admin) (with James Goudie KC), a challenge to the exclusion of the public from a Council meeting and the selection of a new road route.
- ***R (Saifullah Yar) v SSD*** [2022] EWHC 3238 (Admin), [2021] EWHC 3219 (Admin), etc: Article 2 ECHR investigative duty challenge to the adequacy of an investigation into alleged unlawful killings by UK forces in Afghanistan, considering the recent Grand Chamber judgment in *Hanan v Germany* (with Lisa Giovannetti KC, Andrew O'Connor KC, Neil Sheldon KC Steven Gray and Natasha Barnes, instructed by GLD).
- ***R (Hoareau and Bancoult (No.5)) v SSFCA*** [2020] EWCA Civ 1010, [2021] 1 WLR 472 and below [2019] EWHC 221 (Admin): ECHR and public law challenge to the outcome of a policy review on resettlement of the British Indian Ocean Territory, raising novel issues about the significance of an ICJ Advisory Opinion in domestic law (with Sir James Eadie KC, Kieron Beal KC and Philippa Webb, instructed by GLD).

Public International Law

John is a member of the Attorney General's PIL Panel and is regularly instructed in matters that straddle domestic and public international law, including the law of UK Overseas Territories:

- ***R (VT and Others) v Commissioner for the British Indian Ocean Territory*** BIOT SC Case Nos. 3 and 4 of 2023): lead counsel for the Commissioner in a challenge to the availability of legal aid under the constitution of the BIOT.
- ***R v TRA*** [2019] UKSC 51: junior counsel for the Intervener, REDRESS, in the Supreme Court, in a case concerning the definition of "torture" in s.134 of the Criminal Justice Act 1988 and Article 1 of the UN Convention Against Torture – arising from the prosecution of alleged offences during the Liberian civil war (led by Sudhanshu Swaroop KC).
- ***Local Authority v X and Others*** [2018] EWHC 874 (Fam): submissions in Care Order proceedings in the Family Division of the High Court, on the nature and extent of a particular form of diplomatic immunity, on behalf of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (led by Guglielmo Verdirame KC)
- Advising a client on the scope of provisions in the Diplomatic Privileges Act 1964 and the Vienna Convention.
- Advising a client on the intersection between maritime law and international human rights law.
- Advising a client on the use of force.
- Advising a client on the extra-territorial effect of data protection law.

Representing a diplomat of a foreign state in proceedings before the English courts. In addition, John has experience of investment treaty matters, having appeared in;

- ***ICSID Arbitration ARB 16/20, Iskander Safa and Akram Safa v Hellenic Republic***: junior counsel for Greece in a Bilateral Investment Treaty arbitration (with Guglielmo Verdirame KC and Jonathan Ketcheson).
- ***ICSID Arbitration ARB/16/24, CEZ v Bulgaria***: junior counsel for CEZ in an Energy Charter Treaty dispute (with Guglielmo Verdirame KC).

Information Law

John has a developing practice in information law. In addition to the public law cases described above, his recent work includes:

- ***Liberty and Privacy International v Security Service and SSHD*** ([2023] UKIP Trib 1: a claim in the Investigatory Powers Tribunal concerning MI5's handling of data obtained under warrants and authorisations (with Sir James Eadie KC, Julian Milford KC, Richard O'Brien, Andrew Byass and Natasha Barnes).
- ***Privacy International v SSFCA, SSHD, GCHQ, Security Service and SIS*** [2021] UKIP Trib IPT_15_110_CH: a claim in the Investigatory Powers Tribunal concerning the secret intelligence agencies' use of 'bulk' data obtained by directions under the Telecommunications Act 1984 (with Sir James Eadie KC, Robert Palmer KC and Richard O'Brien).
- Responding to Freedom of Information Act 2000 challenges, for the Information Commissioner's Office, in the First-tier Tribunal.
- Advising a client on freedom of information and market abuse issues in connection with the authorisation and licensing of COVID-19 vaccines in the UK.
- Advising a client on the extra-territorial effect of UK data protection law, following Brexit.

Commercial

Before joining 11KBW, John practised from another leading commercial set. He is very familiar with commercial disputes work, in both courts and arbitration. His cases include:

- ***SAS Institute Inc v World Programming Limited*** [2019] EWHC 2496 (Comm) and [2019] EWHC 2481 (Comm): junior counsel for the Defendant / Applicant, WPL, resisting enforcement of a US judgment for multiple damages in a multi-jurisdictional intellectual property dispute and seeking anti-suit relief (with Paul Lowenstein KC, Thomas Raphael KC and Josephine Davies).
- ***Paylor & Ors v Bowers and Ors*** [2018] EWHC 2244 (Ch): Civil fraud proceedings against the former directors of insolvent companies, suspected of involvement in a complex multi-jurisdictional fraud. *Ex parte* applications for freezing and search orders, *inter partes* return dates and applications to discharge, ancillary applications and substantive claims (both unled and as junior to Marcia Shekerdeman KC and Philip Riches, instructed by MHS Sprecher Grier)

Recommendations

"John has real clarity of thought and an ability to cut through the difficulties in public law." (Chambers and Partners 2025, public law)

"John is clear, concise and measured. He is a very effective advocate." (Chambers and Partners 2025, public law)

"John is a very good advocate." (Chambers and Partners 2025, public law)

"John has an understated confidence which is very effective in the court room." (Legal 500 2025, public law)

"John is clever and intellectually strong, and he has great client-handling skills." (Chambers and Partners 2024, public law)

"John is extremely capable. He cuts to core issues in all of the drafting." (Chambers and Partners 2024, public law)

"John has great legal skills, and provides good drafting and legal analysis." (Chambers and Partners 2024, public law)

"An elegant and skilful advocate, who is easy to work with." (Legal 500 2024, public law)

Education

BPP University Law School: Bar Professional Training Course, Very Competent (2014)

BPP University Law School: Graduate Diploma in Law, Distinction (2013)

University of Cambridge, Peterhouse: PhD in History (2006)

King's College London: MA in War Studies, Distinction (2003)

University of Cambridge, Pembroke College: BA (Hons) in History, First Class (2002)

Awards

Queen Mother Scholarship for BPTC, Middle Temple (2013)

Excellence Award for BPTC, BPP (2013)

Domestic Research Scholarship, University of Cambridge (2003)

Foundress Scholarship, Pembroke College, Cambridge (2002)

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