John Bethell



Call: 2014

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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 A Panel of Counsel in September 2025, after three years on the B Panel and three years on the C Panel. John is also called to the bar of the Virgin Islands.

John acts in public law matters of every type and is regularly instructed in sensitive and high-profile litigation involving the UK Government. He has particular experience in matters involving national security or international relations issues and in applications for injunctive relief.

His recent cases include:

- ***Ministry of Defence v Global Media and Others***, the MOD super-injunction proceedings, arising from a large-scale data incident [2025] EWHC 1806 (Admin), [2024] EWCA Civ 838, [2024] EWHC 1220 (KB), [2024] EWHC 312 (KB), [2023] EWHC 2999 (KB).

> ***John is hugely intelligent, strategic and pragmatic. He works seamlessly with the solicitors and instils great confidence in clients. He is a calm and collected advocate.***
>
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- ***R (TPL1) v Secretary of State for Defence*** [2025] EWHC 1729 (Admin), defending alleged failures to publish relevant information for the 'Triples Review' into the eligibility of former Aghan Special Forces for relocation to the UK under the ARAP scheme.
- ***R (Pompe) v Secretary of State for Foreign Commonwealth and Development Affairs*** [2025] EWHC 1489 (Admin), resisting an application for an urgent, interim injunction to prevent the signing of a treaty between the UK and Mauritius regarding future sovereignty of the Chagos Islands.
- ***R (Irwin) v Coventry City Council*** [2025] EWHC 1100 Admin, resisting an interim injunction and permission for judicial review over the felling of trees for a cycleway (with James Goudie KC)
- ***R (KP) v Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs*** [2025] EWHC 370 (Admin), defending the refusal to admit to the UK an individual with complex mental health problems, serving a prison sentence in the British Indian Ocean Territory, following a claim for international protection. The latest case in the long-running ***BIOT Migrants Litigation***, arising from the arrival of Sri Lankan migrants in the British Indian Ocean Territory (see also: ***BAA & Others v Commissioner for the British Indian Ocean Territory (Mr Paul Candler) & Others*** [2023] EWHC 767 (KB)).
- ***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 (unled).
- ***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).

Expertise

Public International

John is regularly instructed in matters that straddle domestic and public international law, including the law of UK Overseas Territories. In addition to the public law cases listed above, his instructions in this area have included:

- Advising a client on banking regulation in an Overseas Territory.
- 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.

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)

CEZ v Bulgaria

ICSID ARBITRATION ARB/16/24

Junior counsel for CEZ in an Energy Charter Treaty dispute (with Guglielmo Verdirame KC).

Iskander Safa and Akram Safa v Hellenic Republic

ICSID ARBITRATION ARB 16/20

Junior counsel for Greece in a Bilateral Investment Treaty arbitration (with Guglielmo Verdirame KC and Jonathan Ketcheson).

Achievements

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)

John is absolutely superb...he is very bright, very hard-working, technically excellent, easy to work with and has exceptional judgement. He already has the measure of many silks.

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John is very hands-on and very easy to work with, extremely fair and just a great guy.

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He is knowledgable and approachable, provides clear and consistent advice that is easily comprehensible for clients.

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He is reliable, sensible and a clear advocate.

CHAMBERS & PARTNERS 2027

John is a brilliant public lawyer and very user-friendly.

LEGAL 500 2027

He's a very safe pair of hands: he's smart and switched on, responsive and proactive, and does a good job representing a client who is sometimes a bit challenging.

CHAMBERS & PARTNERS 2027

John is a really impressive barrister with an extremely good legal mind.

CHAMBERS & PARTNERS 2026

John is hugely intelligent, strategic and pragmatic. He works seamlessly with the solicitors and instils great confidence in clients. He is a calm and collected advocate.

CHAMBERS & PARTNERS 2026

John is a superb barrister. His written work is extremely precise and focused. He is great with clients - he explains his thinking clearly and understands entirely the context in which decisions are taken by public authorities and the different pressures they are under. His oral advocacy is also masterful - a calm yet powerful delivery.

LEGAL 500 (2026)