



Christmas Planning Pantomime

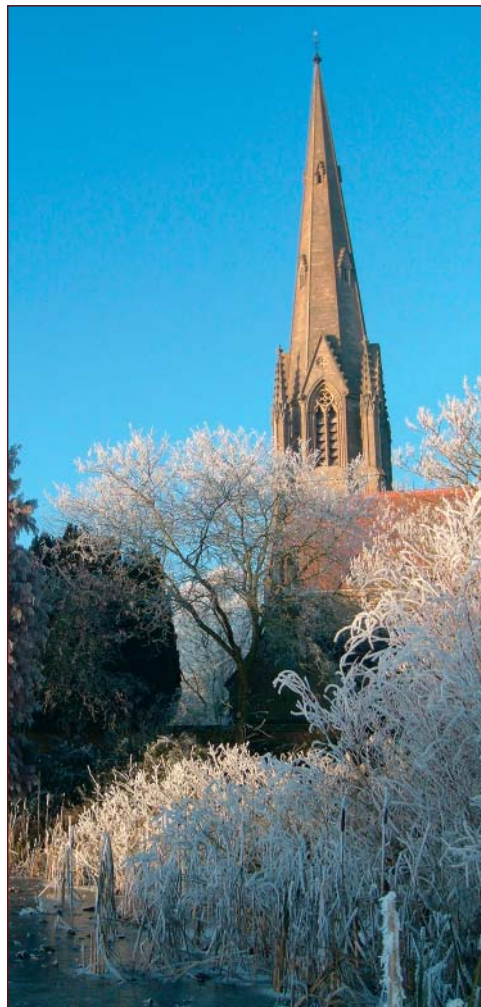
Christmas is almost upon us and it would seem that the pantomime season has already arrived. The Localism Bill has emerged (after several false starts) in a puff of smoke, turning the planning process literally upside down. At the same time, the Government has announced that the ‘Cinderella’ local authorities’ budgets will be cut.

Worse still, in a scene reminiscent of the Dickensian ‘Christmas Carol’ story, the Planning Aid service - which might reasonably have been expected to form the backbone of the new neighbourhood planning process – has had its Government grant cut altogether, sending out very mixed messages about the priority which the Coalition Government devotes to the concept of community involvement.

Some weeks earlier, Eric Pickles, the Communities Secretary, lost a High Court Challenge brought by Cala Homes, which ruled that he had acted unlawfully in revoking Regional Spatial Strategies proving that whilst he may ‘rule the waves’ he can’t ‘waive the rules’. Since then Cala Homes has mounted an injunction to challenge the status of the DCLG letter indicating that the intention to revoke RSS’s is still a material consideration. (As Tripwire went to press a decision was still awaited).

With the prospect of neighbourhood plans drafted by community groups being approved by referenda, local people exercising the ‘Community Right to Build’ without the need for planning consent, communities being given the power to run local services and people being given the freedom to veto ‘excessive’ Council tax rises, it is clearly going to be a very different world in the next decade than it was in the last.

But once the genie of public engagement is out of the bottle it may be quite difficult to control it. With ‘people power’ increasingly being expressed much more openly on the streets in this country and throughout Europe, some would say, ‘one needs to be careful what you wish for’.



Sherbourne in Warwickshire.

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Editor - John Acres, Ripon Cottage, 5 Manor Road, Kilsby, Near Rugby, Warks, CV23 8XS
Work: 01789 203800 • Home: 01788 824343 • Email: acresclark@lineone.net

Chair's remarks

And so to my final Chairman's report (no cheering please!). Time has flown since I took over the mantle from Sue Manns in September 2009. Given that I am about to vacate the 'Chair', it is customary to look back and reflect on my period of office.

The last year or so has certainly been a period of much activity in both planning and the wider world. My first task as Chairman was to host the previous President, Martin Willey on his visit to the West Midlands where amongst other activities, he attended a reception at Shropshire Council which had recently acquired 'Unitary' status. There was an air of optimism at Shropshire, given their new beginning, but a feeling of uncertainty was also evident, echoed across the planning profession as we all pondered the inevitable impacts of the economic downturn and speculated on the outcome of a General Election the following year.

Planners in the private sector were already facing up to the impacts of leaner times in the autumn of 2009, but at that time it was far from clear what the repercussions would be for the rest of the profession. Little were we all to appreciate the true magnitude of the changes to come. Even by the turn of 2010, the talk at many events I attended was for a need to change rather than fully review the planning system. The main concern from those in the development industry (and within that I include colleagues from RICS and RIBA) was that we must create greater certainty for all concerned. We should perhaps recall that this was against a back-drop of wondering when the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy review would finally be published!

At that time, the RTPI nationally sought to emphasise the positive aspects and impacts of the planning profession through the production of their manifesto, 'Shaping the Future' which aimed to create a dialogue with all the main political parties ahead of the election.

Few of us would have forecast that following the General Election a Conservative/Liberal Coalition would emerge, but this seemed to simply increase the period of uncertainty, as we all waited to see what policies would emerge from the new Government. In terms of planning, the policies appear likely to be those espoused in the Conservative Party's earlier Green Paper, '*Open Source Planning*'. Our hopes of avoiding wholesale change to the planning system now seem a distant, rather naïve dream.

'Localism' has fast become the new watchword for planners, even if we don't really know what it means. So we all now await the 'flesh on the bones'

(in the form of the much promised Localism and Democracy Bill) for this brave new world of community engagement and empowerment in a planning system without bureaucracy – I for one cannot wait! But am certainly not holding my breath!

Unfortunately, the prospect of a major upheaval to the planning system is accompanied by both a severe tightening of belts within the public sector and little evidence of significant growth in the private sector as the economy struggles to return to anything resembling growth.



And at this point I realise I am in real danger of finishing my final report on a thoroughly negative and depressing note. So instead I will draw on my experiences of the last 18 months to conclude with some reasons to be cheerful. My experience tells me that the planning profession is actually very resilient. We have dealt with change and lack of resources in the past and can do so again. Many of the people I have met this year have demonstrated a desire and willingness to get on with things

and a strong intention to make things happen – and things are very much still happening as represented by and recognised through our RTPI West Midlands awards this year, a personal highlight of 2010.

The mood in most places is undoubtedly bleak, but we must recognise that as planners we have a wide range of transferable skills that will place us in good stead going forward. I have also learnt that we have a very strong regional RTPI and we must draw upon and evolve the support network that already exists, both to assist those fellow professionals who fall on harder times and to ensure that we are fully prepared for the implications of the new system as it emerges.

Having got to know those involved in the West Midlands Regional Activities Committee much better over the last 18 months, I am confident that we have a wealth of experience, enthusiasm and importantly to me, good humour, that will help us all through this period of change and adjustment. I am very grateful for all the support and encouragement I have received as my time as Chairman and would like to thank everyone on the RAC for their effort and enthusiasm and I will finish with one final call to you all to get as actively involved as you can in the regional RTPI. The more we are, the more we can achieve.

I intend to provide as much support as I can in the future, as a continuing member of the RAC and wish Mark Walton (the incoming Chairman) all the best for his year ahead. 🏠

Stephen Hill
West Midlands Regional Chair

New Faces • New Faces • New Faces • New Faces

Meet the RTPI West Midlands Chair 2011- Mark Walton



For those who don't know me, I was born and bred in the West Midlands and I am very proud of my Black Country (Dudley) roots. I studied planning at Birmingham City University, back in the days when it was still a Polytechnic and have worked in planning for the past 16 years.

I have specialised in planning issues related to mineral, waste and renewable energy projects and have significant expertise in preparing Environmental Impact Assessments. I worked in the public sector for 8 years, both within policy development and development control, before moving into consultancy in 2002. I am now Associate Director at Alliance Planning, one of the UK's fastest growing planning consultancies, based in Birmingham.

In my free time, I enjoy socialising, cycling, reading and following the highs and lows of 'Wolves' FC and Wolverhampton Speedway. I also enjoy supporting my nephew, who is FGA Grasstrack (motorbike racing for those unfamiliar with the term) Cub Class Champion 2010 and still only 12 years old.

I have always believed that if you are the member of an Institute, society or group then you should be actively involved. I have been an RTPI member since the mid 1990's,

with previous national and regional roles as, Young Planner Representative and deputy Newsletter editor in the South West Region, deputy chair of the RTPI Young Planners Panel, member of the RTPI Future Strategy Group and currently, a member of the RTPI Environmental Planning and Protection Network Steering Group.

I have always been a strong supporter of Planning Aid. As well as being a Planning Aid volunteer I am currently Chair of the West Midlands Planning Aid Advisory Group. At the moment Planning Aid needs all our support.

As Junior, and then Senior Vice Chair I have seen at first hand the hard work, commitment and enthusiasm of the Regional Activities Committee, Regional Management Board and Chair(s) to support planners and promote planning in the West Midlands - and it is all voluntary. It is with some trepidation therefore that I prepare for my year as Chair of RTPI West Midlands which will undoubtedly be a challenging year for planning and planners.

I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible during 2011 and representing you all as Chair of the RTPI West Midlands.

Mark Walton
Senior Vice Chairman

Andrew Thompson - appointed as Junior Vice Chairman



Andrew Thompson, Principal Planning Officer at Walsall MBC has been elected as the new Junior Vice Chairman for the region and will take over from Mark Walton as Senior Vice Chairman in January.

Andrew is a senior member of the Development Management Team (West) in the Borough and has dealt with a whole range of projects with a particular focus on the work of the former Regeneration Company. Andrew has been the case officer on schemes such as the Waterfront, the Office Corridor project, known as Walsall Gigaport, the new Town Centre Tesco store and a number of major housing and employment projects.

Andrew is interested in sustainable economic regeneration, planning law and urban design as well as seeing as much of the world as possible, his favourite places being New Zealand and Rome.

Andrew originally studied Environmental Sciences at the University of London before doing an MPhil at Reading in Environmental Planning and Development. After working at Waverley Borough Council in Surrey, he moved back to Birmingham where he worked at Birmingham City Council and then in the private sector for Barton Willmore before joining Walsall.

He is an active member of the Regional Activities Committee and has begun work on the newly established Promotion/ Communications Group and the Policy Group. He regularly contributes to Tripwire and is a Planning Aid volunteer.

Peter Geraghty elected as RTPI Junior Vice President



The Royal Town Planning Institute recently announced that Peter Geraghty has been elected by RTPI members as Junior Vice-President for 2011. He will become President of the Institute in 2013.

Peter has more than 20 years experience in the planning sector and is currently the Group Manager of Development Control and Building Control at Southend-on-Sea Borough Council. He has been voted into the post by the Corporate membership of the Institute.

Peter said: "I am delighted to become the new Junior Vice-President. Working in public service I experience the pressures that our colleagues are under; whether working in consultancies or local authorities. We need an Institute that demonstrates to government the value of planning to the

future prosperity of the country and promotes the importance of planning to the localism agenda."

Peter has said that he wants to support the RTPI in promoting the interests of the profession by:

- Doing all it can to protect the public service and the interests of planning professionals.
- Standing as the acknowledged voice on spatial planning and planning practice.
- Continuing with its change agenda to meet the challenges of the future and the demands for improved member services.

For further information please contact:
Ben Lee, Communications & Public Affairs Officer, RTPI on 0207 929 9479.

The Localism Bill – emerges at last

The Localism Bill was finally introduced to Parliament on Monday 13th December 2010. This involved the first reading of its title and a précis of its contents. The Second Reading, when it is debated, may be as early as next week.

In presenting the Bill, Eric Pickles said *“The Localism Bill is a centrepiece of what this Government is trying to do. By pushing power out and letting councils and communities run their own affairs, we can restore civic pride and democratic accountability... It’s the end of the era of big government: laying the foundations for the Big Society.”*

The Bill will be debated by MPs, Lords and their Committees over several months. Indeed, it could be a year before the Localism Act comes into force.

The broad aims of the Bill are to:

- Devolve power to local authorities and communities
- Provide a necessary replacement for regional planning
- Minimise centralised target-setting and government control
- Encourage community groups to become more involved in local decision-making

‘Localism’ and Decentralisation is all about devolving power where possible to the lowest possible level - the individual - and only pushing power “upwards” to Councils, or Whitehall when strictly necessary.

For services which are used individually, this means putting power in the hands of individuals themselves. Where services are enjoyed collectively, they should be delivered by accountable community groups. Where the scale is too large or those using a service are too dispersed, they should be delivered by local institutions, subject to democratic checks and balances, with full transparency.



The Bill itself is only one part of a wider programme of change. The Government sees Localism as part of the journey towards the “Big Society”

The key provisions of the Bill are as follows:

- Communities will have the right to prepare “Neighbourhood Plans”, at ward or Parish-level informed by local people using a “Neighbourhood panel”.
- New consultation requirement for developers to follow before submitting applications for large developments.
- The planning inspectorate will lose the right to rewrite local plans.


- The “Community Right to Build” will roll out across the UK.
- Communities to get first refusal to buy local assets such as pubs and post offices and “save” them from private redevelopment. A community will have the right to take over a local service
- Councils to get a “General Power of Competence”- allowing them to do anything which is not specifically prohibited by law.
- Local Government Ombudsman rulings will become binding.
- The Standards Board for England will be abolished.
- Councillors will be allowed to take part in normal political activities without legal challenge for prejudicing or ‘pre-determining’ decisions.
- Local referenda to be used for anything, from planning to the frequency of bin collection. This will form the basis of a veto on Council Tax rises.
- Councils may go back to pre-2000 Committee structures if they choose.
- Community Infrastructure Levy revenues to revert to the neighbourhood from which the funds were raised.
- Local authorities will produce an annual statement setting out the remuneration of their chief officers.
- Referendums on Elected Mayors in the 12 main cities and more power for the London Mayor.
- Councils will be able to decide who qualifies for their housing waiting list and be allowed to offer short-term council house tenancies.
- A national homeswap scheme for social housing tenants will be set up.

Conclusions

Taken as a whole, this will mean radical changes in local government designed to better address local needs. For those active communities which wish to see things done, the system may work well and enable people to achieve their aspirations. For those areas reluctant to see change, this could result in frustration for all concerned. Local authorities that are struggling will continue to struggle.

Time will tell whether local discounting of business rates will appeal to local authorities, particularly if there is a rebalancing of local government finance to allow Councils to keep more revenue, whether the New Homes Bonus will encourage communities to accept development or indeed whether there will be widespread take-up of the ‘Community Right to Build’.

As always the devil is in the detail, and nowhere more so than in this Bill. There is nothing, for example, about how housing provision will be determined – this must wait for later advice (if it arrives). Nor is there any help on simplifying LDFs. Above all, there is no clue how authorities are meant to encourage ‘neighbourhood planning’, with a declining level of public resources.

As one consultant put it *‘Maybe we are all missing the point, Perhaps the Government’s Big Idea is that they don’t have an idea. It is simply up to us to fill in the blanks and if we can’t do it, we will get the blame’.* 

Adapted from a summary of the Localism Bill by Green Issues Communications, with courtesy to Gabriel Abulafia.

Localism Bill: RTPI calls on ministers to clarify planning reforms

The RTPI has raised concern that the Localism Bill raises more questions than answers in crucial areas of planning reform.

The Bill which was published on Monday (13th December) is now being scrutinised by the Institute. The RTPI takes the view that the Bill must be revised to take account of the need for certainty and more a seamless transition from the present system.

Ann Skippers, President of the Royal Town Planning Institute, said:


"We have waited a long time for the Bill but there is still uncertainty about key planning reforms, the issue of financial incentives and implementation. Neighbourhood planning in particular remains unclear, with huge questions remaining over how communities will be supported to achieve effective plans. No one knows how the planning system will work".

Among the many suggestions that RTPI will make to the Secretary of State:

- There is the need to ensure the coordination of planning at a national level. The Coalition has proposed introducing a National Planning Policy Framework. There is no reference to this in the Bill but is essential that this document is properly coordinated with the National Policy Statements (including the Marine Policy

Statement) and the National Infrastructure Plan and established as part of the statutory development plan for England.

- Where government is proposing to establish a duty to cooperate on local authorities this needs to involve a much firmer requirement to work together on the delivery of infrastructure and other major projects which provide for more than one local authority area.
- While the production of neighbourhood plans is to be offered as a right to local communities, there needs to be greater clarity of their scope, their delivery and how they fit into the development plan. It is particularly perplexing that the grant funding for Planning Aid is being ended after March 2011 when communities are going to need its services more than ever.

The Institute welcomes the retention of the expertise of the IPC and the democratisation of its decision making. The introduction of a duty to consult on proponents of major development is a consolidation of good practice and the strengthening of the enforcement of planning decisions should enhance the reputation of the service to the public. 

For further information contact: James Butler, RTPI Communications Officer, Royal Town Planning Institute on 0207 929 8182.

A week is a long time in politics; well they should try planning...

Planners have been called 'lightning rods of public frustration'. We are certainly absorbing a lot of electricity at the moment but the storm appears to be coming from Westminster, not the local community.

Every day a new opinion is aired or an event is held on the topic of 'Localism' and despite the fact that the Localism Bill has now been published, I am already tired of hearing the word and still no one has yet even defined it. There is a relief that third party rights of appeal, the curtailment of appellants' rights to appeal and payments to local objectors to remove opposition to development proposals have not found their way into the Bill. However the requirement for pre-application consultation for significant developments could be far reaching in practice.

How are Councils now going to implement the increasing burden arising from the 'Localism' Agenda to engage more with people with ever decreasing resources? With significant job cuts at almost every Council now being planned as part of the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) there is genuine fear that talent and ability within the profession will be lost.

The Local Growth Agenda announced the first wave of Local Economic Partnerships. But although these bodies will have powers for strategic plan making we are not clear who will actually carry out these functions and how.


Some areas are still outside approved LEP areas, whilst others are now inside. For those authorities which are outside LEPs, should they try and join one of the existing LEPs to secure funding or should they continue to press for their own LEP and put at risk further years of funding? For those inside LEPs, how will the LEPs will be set up and how will they be funded? No-one yet knows how or what to do with the power that they have been given.

There are proposals for "strengthening leadership through setting up mayors in the 12 largest English cities". This could happen, apparently, as early as 2011. Will the Mayors have planning call-in powers?; Will they be akin to London Mayor or more ceremonial? and how large will their administrative boundary be? Surely these will compete with LEPs?

And finally the 'Cala Decision'.. I have never seen a Government Minister so widely criticised in a High Court Decision and then reply in such unrepentant manner in a Select Committee. The reference to invoking a Henry VIII clause (i.e. having a divine right to change the law because he is beyond rebuke) is a particularly stark criticism that Mr Pickles needs to consider more carefully.

So what is Localism? Many planners I talk to, now get the idea. It is about:-

- 1) building developments and plans that the community want and helping them achieve them so that developments fit in with each other. (But isn't that what we do anyway?), and
- 2) removing unnecessary processes and bureaucracy from the system whilst keeping those arrangements that work.

But with all the new jargon, how we get there is a lot more confusing. I am not sure that anyone - planners, DCLG and Government included - actually knows. As the waters become a thick layer of mud, the losers will be those for whom the system is supposed to be designed. 

Andrew Thompson
Junior Vice Chairman
RTPI West Midlands

An example of 'Local Choice'

A hardy group of enthusiasts from the RTPI/CIH 'Planning for Housing' Network braved the cold and freezing fog of December to see what the Stratford-on-Avon District 'Local Choice' Policy is achieving for the village of Harbury, near Leamington Spa in Warwickshire. By the end of the event – which included a site visit and productive discussion – the mists had begun to clear but the metaphorical mists surrounding the motivation behind the Coalition Government's 'Community Right to Build' initiative had perhaps thickened!

Linfort Homes and Warwickshire Rural Housing Association are presently close to completing the first phase of a 49 dwelling development on the southern side of Harbury. 13 dwellings in the first phase of 22 are for social renting and the balance for 'local market' housing, meaning that people with a connection to Harbury have an absolute priority.


The most distinctive feature of the development is that it was entirely community-led. A Harbury Parish Council survey identified the housing needs, the community agreed the Village Design Statement and determined the character of the development, a community meeting identified acceptable sites and later scrutinised layouts, and a local landowner agreed to enter into the spirit of the enterprise and make suitable land available at a price appropriate to the community's ambitions.

As a result the mix of rented and market houses exactly matches the needs survey, there was no opposition to speak of to the planning application, construction has progressed despite the economic downturn and the buildings themselves blend into the village wonderfully and avoid the 'standard design' approach – but further there was a queue forming at 6am on the day that the market housing was first offered 'off-plan' to local people. How many other developments were selling off-plan in 2010?

This rosy picture does, of course, need some caveats. The Harbury development was made possible with a little help from their friends. Most pertinently the local planning authority, Stratford on Avon District, which has a Supplementary Planning Document which commits the Council to working with communities to meet housing needs that are identified locally (and Stratford DC is looking to roll out this approach beyond villages to the market towns and major settlements).

Of equal significance has been the injection of funds from the Homes & Communities Agency, which not only helped the delivery of social rented housing but helped to meet such 'extra' costs as the pumping of the foul drainage. The development also benefitted hugely from the expertise of a Rural Enabler and the specialist services of a local housing association who have together, problem-solved their way through the difficulties to arrive at a positive outcome. Fundamentally, the landowner working with the knowledge that the alternative options for his land were severely constrained, agreed to sell the land now to meet immediate housing needs rather than hold out for its 'hope value' at some future date.

The Harbury development was achieved within the context of the existing local planning system which nurtured it. However, the discussion at the meeting took place before the Decentralisation & Localism Bill had been published. This left a number of puzzles unresolved in many peoples' minds.– such as, Why is the Government 'Community Right to Build' policy so determined to by-pass the planning system and not build on existing arrangements? With local authority planning policy apparently put to one side, will Councils feel an obligation to change priorities and make savings? Will the Homes & Communities Agency give any priority to small, village-scale developments in future when their budget is being halved and its funding for developments slashed? With funding for bodies like Planning Aid removed will there be any remaining expertise on which the community might draw to help with options and appraisals? And with the open approach envisaged in the Community Right to Build, will there be any landowners that will not take the opportunity to sell land exclusively for market housing at the full hope value if they can?

Community aspirations may be given a boost by the 'Community Right to Build' but will there be any remaining friends out there to assure actual delivery? Let us hope that the consultation stages of the new Bill will bring much more positive reassurance. 

If you would like to join in with Network events and activities – membership is free and not restricted to RTPI or CIH Members – please see www.rtpi.org.uk/housing

Andrew Matheson



Harbury scheme before; the turfing ceremony.



Harbury scheme after; nearing completion.

A year of change – the great debates

Over the last 12 months, Stephen Hill our West Midlands RTPI Chairman has organised three separate panel debates around the region. Steve looks back at the key issues that have emerged as a result.

2010 has been a year in which we have seen immense changes. We have witnessed a change of Government, a fundamental change in the planning system and a huge shift in the economy and the market. As part of my term as Chairman I have tried to stimulate discussion amongst planning professionals to explore what are the implications of these changes and how we as a profession should respond.

Each regional debate was held in the style of BBC's Question Time, with an invited panel comprising a cross section of planning professionals, answering questions set by the Chairman. The audience was encouraged to enter into the debate through further questions or general comments from the floor.

The first debate was hosted by Worcester City Council back in April, in the run up to the General Election. Questions were focussed around the manifestos of each of the main political parties and also the RTPI's own manifesto 'Shaping the future'. The panel comprised Malcolm Scott, Mike Parker, Cllr Rob Rowden and Ben Simm. They were unanimous in their opinion that whilst the Local Development Framework (LDF) system has been extremely difficult to implement with a target culture dominating planning, there was no appetite to face up to a full scale upheaval of the system. We needed evolution rather than revolution. In a moment of premonition, Malcolm Scott predicted that the economic down-turn could result in protests on the streets and social unrest – a full 6 months before the recent student protests!

A second and most lively debate followed at Leamington Spa in June, hosted by Warwick District Council. An audience of over 50 planners enjoyed a wide ranging discussion with the heavy weight panel of Ian Dove QC, John Acres, Clive Harridge, Gary Stephens and Alistair Thornton. The letter from the newly appointed Secretary of State for Communities, Eric Pickles, announcing that he proposed to unilaterally revoke the Regional Planning system proved, not surprisingly, to be the hot topic of the evening. There was genuine concern from Ian Dove that the lack of any interim proposals had the potential to cause chaos and with a further demonstration of panel premonitions, he forecast a likely legal challenge. There was a noticeable atmosphere of uncertainty from the audience as reality dawned that planning was indeed heading for a major shake-up, but this was backed up by a mood of cautious optimism that planners have the necessary skills to adapt to whatever the politicians may throw at us. Alistair Thornton provided a spirited critique of the RTPI's Assessment of Professional Competence (APC) process that drew comments of supportive concern from the panel and audience alike.

The final debate in early November proved to be the best attended, not least because of the presence on the panel of our national President, Ann Skippers, who was joined by Louise Brooke-Smith, Peter Taylor, Simon Leask, Jo Hooper and Dave Carter in the conveniently located offices of DLA Piper in Birmingham. A good humoured and spirited debate saw the panel and audience alike question the real intentions behind the concept of 'localism'. There were split views on how well the planning system had served the country to date and how effective the emerging new agenda is likely to be at assisting growth in general and resolving the housing crisis in particular. Ann Skippers provided a heart-felt defence of the planning profession. She also gave a clear and well supported case in relation to the RTPI's tactics in attempting to influence the Coalition Government's agenda through constructive dialogue, by being 'in the big tent' – time will tell how effective this approach has been.

Overall, the panel debates have allowed over 150 regional members to actively engage with the planning issues of the day, in what has been a tumultuous 12 months. It has enabled a cross section of experts from the West Midlands planning profession to express their views and help instigate debate and thought, in what hopefully served to be a relaxed and stimulating environment. At times it has demonstrated the passion that can be stirred by our profession. It has also highlighted the uncertainty affecting many of us which has grown evidently stronger as the year has progressed.

However, all the debates demonstrated that we have an articulate, thoughtful, questioning Membership in the region, who genuinely care about the future of planning both nationally and within the West Midlands and whatever the future holds, this must be positive.

Thanks go to all those who took part, either as panel members or as part of the audience and given the likelihood that the pace of change is set to continue, maybe there will be a place for further such debates in 2011? 🏠

Stephen Hill
Regional Chairman



The Chairman's debate in November at DLA Piper, Birmingham. Left to right; Jo Hooper, Ann Skippers (President), Dave Carter, Steve Hill (Chairman). Peter Taylor (host) Louise Brooke Smith, Simon Leask.

A President calls.....

RTPI President Ann Skippers recently enjoyed a three day visit to the region ahead of her meeting with Eric Pickles on Monday 8th November 2010. During a hectic schedule Ann was shown a variety of projects in the region, demonstrating what we, as planners, can achieve. Here is a brief summary of what Ann got up to:

Tuesday 2nd November

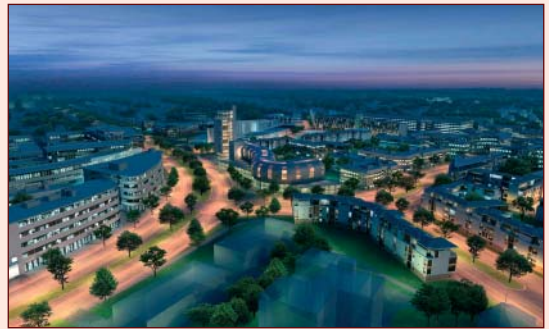
Following Ann's arrival, the rest of the day was spent on a walking tour around Birmingham City Centre, including the New Street Gateway Project (winner of this year's RTPI Regional Award for Planning Achievement) and the landmark library development on Centenary Square, which is currently under construction. Birmingham City Council has just launched its City Master Plan and there was much to see in the City Centre as well as much to look forward to.

In the evening, Ann met and enjoyed the company of the West Midlands' Young Planners and spent much of the time discussing and understanding the issues and concerns of those involved in the APC process and the problems of losing and retaining talent in difficult times.

Wednesday 3rd November

A full day was spent at DLA Piper's offices in Birmingham at the HCA/RTPI West Midlands 'Planning Summit' chaired by Stephen Hill, debating the future of planning as a profession. Ann Skippers gave a thoughtful opening speech, which was followed by an informative presentation by Janice Morphet about future funding mechanisms within the new Coalition regime. Further speakers, including Andrew Whitaker from the Home Builders' Federation and Dave Carter explored the implications of the new 'Localism agenda' and Jake Berriman gave a practical and very positive example of how 'localism' was working in Shropshire - the people it seems, now have the power of choice. (The trick is to define who 'the people' are).

In the evening, after informal drinks, the last of the year's 'Open Regional Debates' was held on the Future of Planning. An excellent panel chaired by Stephen Hill and comprising Simon Leask (ATLAS), Louise Brooke-Smith (CSJ Brooke-Smith), Ann Skippers, Dave Carter (Birmingham City Council), Peter Taylor (DLA Piper) and Jo Hooper (Drivas Jonas Deloitte and Young Planners Representative) debated how the profession is to survive and retain the quality in times of austerity and budget cuts. Also in attendance was Trudi Elliot CBE (RTPI's incoming Chief Executive) who made a valuable and interesting contribution at the close.



Artist's impression of Longbridge by night.

There was clearly disquiet among those who attended and debated about how planning needs to change from a process driven philosophy to a proactive force for positive regeneration and sustainable development. The importance of promoting the profession cannot be ignored; planning, after all, is at the genesis of regeneration.

The panel concluded the day with members of the Regional Committee afterwards as attention turned from the serious activity of the day to a more light-hearted and relaxing evening.

Thursday 4th November

Ann Skippers had an early start to see first-hand the regeneration of Longbridge. Accompanied by RAC member, Julie Morgan, Ann joined Mike Murray (St. Modwen) and Jason Tait (Planning Prospects) at the Innovation Centre, Longbridge Technology Park to hear more about the scheme. Afterwards Ann was able to see the size and scale of the project first-hand, with a guided site tour.

Ann then travelled with Jon Lord and Richard Cobb from Planning Aid West Midlands to a sheltered housing centre for older people in Albrighton in Shropshire to see the delivery of a rural toolkit session to residents in action. The event was also attended by senior Shropshire planning officers and Members. With the 'localism' agenda already being spearheaded in Shropshire, it was a perfect opportunity to experience at first-hand how planners were breaking down the barriers in the wider community.

After three full and eventful days, for our national President it was back to London to prepare for the fireworks (of November 5th) and the meeting with Eric Pickles. 🏠

Stephen Hill
Regional Chairman

A Christmas Carol

A festive time was had by all who attended the RTPI social event held on the evening of 3rd December 2010. Three wise men in the form of Mark Herbert (GVA), David Brammer (DLA Piper) and Steve Hill (RTPI) gave us the Planning "Christmas Carol", taking us through planning's past, present and future during which Eric Pickles (the "Scrooge" of planning) was mentioned more than once.

Thanks go to DLA Piper who not only provided the venue and hospitality for the event but also for managing to reserve a space in one of the bars at the German market which meant that we could all enjoy a drink or two!! in the relative warmth. Not only did they reserve the venue but representatives of DLA also sampled the quality of beer at lunchtime just to make sure that it was ok for us to drink. Whoever said that lawyers weren't dedicated to duty!!! 🏠

Sandra Ford

Looking ahead to 2011: RTPI Incoming Chairs Meeting Report

My first 'official' engagement as future RTPI West Midlands Chair for 2011 was to represent the Region at the 'Incoming Chair's meeting at Botolph Lane on the 30th November.

The day offered a unique opportunity to meet with the future 'Chairs' from all the other RTPI regions and nations, share ideas and discuss concerns about taking on this important role. All the future Chairs were equally looking forward to meeting and engaging with other planners across their area, but also expressed concern as how to juggle this role with other work and home commitments. However, help was on hand in the form of RTPI President Ann Skippers, Senior Vice President, Richard Summers and Junior Vice President, Colin Haylock, all of whom have been Chair of their RTPI Region in the past.

Ann provided the meeting with a reflection on her year as President that included a poem highlighting the key events of her time. Then Colin set out the important work undertaken by the RTPI Regions and National Panel in supporting Regional Chairs and sharing good practice examples across the UK.

As the forthcoming Institute President, Richard Summers confirmed that he has set two themes for his presidential year, namely, "*Promoting planning and planners in challenging times*" and "*Making localism work through spatial planning*". In support of these

themes, Richard will be holding a 'colloquium' or open discussion about planning policy and practice throughout the year around all the Regions and Nations. The discussion will seek to identify examples of best practice in 'localism' and planning across the UK. Richard is also keen to promote the services that the RTPI offers and provides to members which will be particularly relevant during these challenging times.

RTPI West Midlands has already agreed provisional dates for the 2011 Presidential Visit (mid-September), so watch out in the New Year for your opportunity to take part in the President's Colloquium on Planning.

The meeting also provided an opportunity for group discussions and included a funny and insightful presentation by the RTPI Communication Team entitled 'What makes good publicity'? In future, I shall always consider the backdrop when a photograph is being taken.

Overall, the day was very productive and offered reassurance as to the level of support and assistance the RTPI can offer Regions and Regional Chairs during their year in office. It was also nice to talk to others in the same position about the year to come. I think I am ready for the challenge now. 🏠

Mark Walton
Senior Vice Chair; West Midlands

Editor's thoughts – on happiness!

Christmas is meant to be a time for happiness, though it may be difficult for everyone to enjoy the festive season in this 'age of austerity' when so many jobs are being lost and budgets cut. Of course happiness is a state of mind and is not just determined by economic well-being – although being poor or in debt clearly doesn't help.

Last month's proposal by David Cameron to launch a £2m consultation on happiness was probably primarily intended to deflect peoples' minds from the current economic woes, but at the same time it made a valid point that there are so many other ways of measuring well-being than simply financial wealth. Indeed, never more so at Christmas time.

Happiness of course is ephemeral and transitory. Last week I was really happy when I was awarded 11th prize in a charity duck race, winning a £25 voucher at the local Garden Centre. I was less happy when I realised I would have to go on a shopping expedition to redeem it. Peoples' moods change by the moment, by the day and by the week. Sometimes happiness can only be judged negatively by an absence of sadness, or in retrospect, as memories of the past.

A few years ago, a national survey of well-being concluded that Britain was somewhere near the bottom of the league of happiness and contentment – whilst other countries, especially those much poorer than our own, fared much better. Clearly then, happiness must not be just about how you feel, but what you expect. Our expectations may be higher in that we strive for

economic wealth, achievement, enjoyment and satisfaction whilst others are perhaps more content to simply avoid poverty and disaster and take comfort more from family life, religion or faith.

One thing is clear though, as a nation we have a shocking tendency to dwell on the downside, to wallow in bad news and to focus on problems rather than solutions – our politicians and news media are undoubtedly largely to blame. Few news stories focus on good news and political parties thrive on polemic debate and the blame culture.

Of course planners are trained to take a positive outlook on life, to look to the future and create 'visions' and then to devise policies and strategies to achieve them. Those who work at the sharp end, involved in the implementation process – whether for the public sector or the private sector, have to take an optimistic viewpoint – otherwise they would never achieve anything.

Perhaps that is the spirit which David Cameron is trying to instill, - the can-do culture which planners try to display. Whether a 'happiness index' (as he suggested back in 2005) or a happiness plan will help, seems very doubtful, but the ability to think positively and work together is an essential pre-requisite to achieving success – whether in planning or in everyday life – perhaps that is one resolution we can all take forward to 2011. 🏠

John Acres
Editor

West Midlands Young Planners – End of Year Review 2010

YPwestmids is part of the Young Planner's Network attached to the RTPI West Midlands Region. It aims to provide a forum for aspiring young planners to develop and expand their interest in planning through professional, social and networking events. During 2010, the YPwestmids Committee have held a number of successful events, for planners within the region.

In anticipation of the year's general election, the inaugural event of 2010 focused on **Politics and Planning** and saw over 100 young planners gather at PriceWaterhouseCoopers' Auditorium to hear the various parties' manifestoes and the thoughts of key speakers including Bob Neill MP, Shadow Local Government and Planning Minister (now Junior Minister), Hugh Ellis, Chief Planner at the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA), and Lord Greaves, Liberal Democrat Spokesman for Communities and Local Government. The event was followed by a lively and constructive debate, Looking back, it provided an initial insight in to what we know now as the 'localism' agenda.

The widely renowned YPwestmids **Quiz night**, took place at Bushwackers during March. Twelve teams representing both public and private sector planners competed for the highly coveted prize and subsequent bragging rights. An all female team from GVA Grimley were eventually run away winners. No doubt they will be looking to retain their honours next year.

Moving into June, YPwestmids organised a **Heritage Seminar** in partnership with Dudley MBC. During the event Pete Boland, Dudley MBC's Principal Conservation Officer, provided an invaluable insight into how PPS5 transcends the local level by drawing upon the experiences of the Borough and its industrial heritage and legacy. The presentation was followed by a walking tour of the town with Jayne Pilkington (Senior Conservation Officer) following a heritage trail developed by the Council to improve the town's wider tourism offer, conveniently ending in one of the town's real ale establishments.

In July, YPwestmids supported the very enjoyable RTPI West Midlands **Summer Reception**, held at Birmingham's Botanical Gardens. Also during July was one of YPwestmids most important events – **Planning Through the Recession**. This free workshop served to provide support to young planners and graduates either looking to get back on the career ladder or trying to secure a job during the economic downturn. Chris Sheridan (RTPI Planners in the Workplace Manager), and Tom Herriots and Emma Lockerbie (Hays Recruitment) provided information on the support available from the RTPI and the Careers Service, alongside practical tips on writing CVs, applying for jobs and obtaining the work experience vital to gain a foothold within the profession. This can of course include engagement with the YPwestmids network.

YPwestmids, in association with the RTPI, later held an informal workshop primarily aimed at Licentiatees,

mentors and students embarking on the **Assessment of Professional Competence (APC)** process route to Chartered Membership of the RTPI. The session was presented by Tracey Lloyd (Head of Membership and Careers at Birmingham University) who provided an overview of the APC process whilst highlighting the criteria and competences assessors are looking for in final submissions. Young Planners who had recently undertaken the APC process provided advice on their own experiences.

Ann Skippers, the RTPI President, visited Birmingham at the start of November. YPwestmids invited Ann to the young planners' **Autumn Social** at All Bar One in Brindleyplace which provided a great opportunity for people to meet her and discuss issues first hand as well as extending their own networking circle. It was particularly refreshing to see such a significant representation of young planners who have recently embarked on RTPI accredited courses at universities within the Region.

At the end of November, YPwestmids held a seminar on **Ecology and Planning** at DLA Piper's offices, in Birmingham. Excellent presentations were given by Oliver Ramm, Senior Ecologist at WYG, Penny Simpson, Associate DLA Piper and Steve Bloomfield, Worcestershire Wildlife Trust. This event provided an excellent opportunity to appreciate ecology issues, including the legislation, survey methods and timings for such works to be undertaken. With ecology surveys and reports no longer being simply left to planning conditions and the new consultation procedure from Natural England, this was an opportune time to get up to speed on such issues. Another great social event followed at the Chameleon Bar in Birmingham.

YPwestmids events in 2010 closed with a walking tour of Birmingham's latest landmark regeneration project – the new **Birmingham Library** hosted by Birmingham City Council. This visit provided an invaluable insight into the construction process and regeneration philosophy behind the £93 million project to create a leading centre of knowledge, learning and culture in the heart of the City.

2010 has been a very successful year for YPwestmids and the Committee would like to express their sincere gratitude to all speakers, sponsors and individuals who have been involved in the programme during the year. YPwestmids have held the most events of any of the regional young planners' groups.

At the time of writing, YPwestmids has submitted a bid to hold the 2011 YP Conference in Birmingham – we're expecting the result before Christmas!

The Committee will be working tirelessly to deliver a full events schedule throughout 2011. If you have any suggestions for future events or would like to get involved with the running of the group then please email us at ypwestmids@googlemail.com. 📧


Alastair Thornton MRTPI
Senior Regeneration Officer Walsall MBC

Get LinkedIn...

The newly formed Promotions and Communications Group have formed an RTPI West Midlands page on the business network website *LinkedIn* (www.linkedin.com).

The Group is set up to engage and discuss issues that you think are important and to promote the work you are doing. Current topics for discussions are 'What you want from your Region?', 'What do you want to see in the next Tripwire?', Feedback from the RTPI Social at the German Market and a broadly titled 'What are you doing?' discussion which is aimed

at promoting planning applications and developments, local development framework documents or other good practice documents.

It is early days but it is seen as a great way to get in contact with the Membership and promote discussion between fellow professionals as well as publicise events (social and CPD) and the hard work of members. Get connected and let us know what you think. 


Andrew Thompson

Get active

RTPI West Midlands has established three new groups to help achieve key objectives in its Business Plan for the next three years.

- 1 Promotion Group – to improve the public's awareness of the work of planners in the region, to include contacts with the regional and provincial media.
- 2 Policy Group – to consider and formulate responses to Government consultation papers and to provide opportunities for debating planning policy issues.

3 Careers Group – to liaise with local education authorities and the independent sector to ensure that planning is promoted effectively as a career in schools.

There will be more about these activity groups in future editions of Tripwire, but if you are interested in being involved in any of them please get in touch with the Regional Secretary by emailing paul.harris@stratford-dc.gov.uk. 

Paul Harris
Honorary Secretary

Manual for Streets 2: A report of the Urban Design Group event

Over 40 planners attended a recent Urban Design Forum event on 23rd November at MADE's offices in the Jewellery Quarter, to learn more about the new 'Manual for Streets 2 – Wider application of the Principles' document which takes a fresh approach to the design of more major roads in urban areas – following on from the earlier 'Manual for Streets' which set new standards for urban design of local communities.


The presentation by Phil Jones, of Phil Jones Associates, was extremely informative with Phil providing a detailed commentary of the new guidance, exploring in greater detail how its key principles can be applied to non-trunk highways and helping to fill the perceived gap between mfs1 AND Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB).

The presentation sparked off a lively debate with Colin Knight (Assistant Director; Planning, Transport and Highways) from

Coventry City Council helping to answer questions on the application of the principles from a Council perspective.

Following the event, attendees were invited to put their names forward to be involved in the establishment of a 'West Midlands Manual for Streets Forum' which could provide an informal design review for proposals involving highway improvements. Establishment of this group is currently being investigated by MADE.

Attached to this bulletin is a summary of the Manual for Streets 2 document, prepared by Alan Young of WSP Consulting, the author of the MFS2 paper.

If you are interested in taking part in the Forum please contact either annabel.stott@me.com or pj@philjonesassociates.co.uk 

CPD • CPD • CPD

REGIONAL PROGRAMME

Non-members of RTPI welcome to attend.

TUESDAY 25 JANUARY 2011

The Great Regional Debate

This annual event brings together Planners, Landscape Architects, Surveyors, Architects and Civil Engineers to debate the future of the region.

Time: Refreshments from 6pm. Debate starts 6.45pm

Cost: **Free**

Venue: Nyquist Theatre, Arup Campus, Blythe Valley Park, Solihull B90 8AE

Details & booking: Sue Griffith-Jones Tel 0121 709 1599
Email westmidlands@rtpi.org.uk

FRIDAY 28 JANUARY 2011

Planning for Low Carbon Communities

An ATLAS workshop.

The need to reduce carbon emissions remains a priority and planning has a vital role to play in shaping low carbon communities. Following their successful workshop at the RTPI Planning Convention 2010, ATLAS will examine the current and emerging policy basis around the low carbon agenda, as well as looking at practical ways in which high quality, low carbon communities can be planned & delivered.

Time: 10am to 3.30pm (registration & refreshments from 9.30am)

Cost: **£50 incl VAT**. Full-time students and the unwaged £20. Some free places available for unemployed RTPI members seeking work.

Venue: 5 St Philips Place, Birmingham B3 2PW

Details & booking: Sue Griffith-Jones Tel 0121 709 1599
Email westmidlands@rtpi.org.uk



*Christmas Greetings from
Tripwire and the RTPI
West Midlands*





MANUAL FOR STREETS 2

Applying Manual for Streets on busier streets

MANUAL FOR STREETS 2 - THE WIDER APPLICATION

WHY THE NEED FOR ANOTHER GUIDANCE DOCUMENT?

When published, Manual for Streets (MfS) stated that its principles could be applied to busier streets outside residential areas. This companion document, Manual for Streets 2: Wider Application of the Principles (MfS2), gives guidance on how the MfS principles can be applied to these busier streets, so helping to fill the gap in design guidance between MfS and the Design Manual for Roads and Bridges.

At its core is the premise that roads and streets should be designed to create desired speeds and traffic flow rather than being designed to accommodate existing speeds.

By rethinking the way high streets and non-trunk roads are designed we can change the fabric of our public spaces and the way people behave. It means embracing a new approach to design and breaking away from standard, traditional engineering solutions.

This new document does not supersede MfS; rather it explains how the principles of MfS can be applied more widely. The numerous sources it draws upon include; the Department for Transport's Mixed Priority Route research study, Interim Findings from the ongoing Department for Transport's research study into Shared Space, case studies; including detailed research by CABA and further research into the relationship between junction visibility and collisions.



'Designing our streets to create attractive places for people by changing the fabric of our public realm.'

WHAT'S NEW IN MFS2?

Integrating Link and Place Functions

The guide integrates the fundamentals of "Link and Place" allowing the engineer to set the right design strategy – whether a route's main function is to act purely as a 'link' or is interspersed with 'spaces' as the local context changes to meet needs for local, social and commercial activity.

Integrating engineering and urban design elements provides all users of the guidance with a powerful tool for developing new urban realm initiatives.

Understanding Safety at Junctions

MfS2 shows how the reduced sight lines recommended in MfS can be applied to busier streets. It also addresses the issue of reducing street clutter and not resorting to signs, lines, guard rails and bollards as the 'fall back' design option.

High risk priority junctions from across the country were assessed, looking at the correlation between poor visibility and collisions. It concludes that visibility is not a significant determining factor in collisions at such junctions.

This allows designers and planners to make sensible choices, reduce sanitised areas associated with visibility splays and to deliver more flexible schemes.

Stopping Sight Distances

Following the publication of MfS some concerns were raised about the use of the stopping sight distances for buses and HGVs, which stop less rapidly. MfS2 provides guidance on when consideration should be given to the HGV/bus element of the traffic flow with some improved empirical data on stopping distances.

Designers will be able to make informed choices based on the latest evidence, allowing locally sensitive designs to be developed.

THE BENEFITS

Busy streets are some of our most important; from an economic, cultural, transport and movement perspective. Any investment made must deliver tangible benefits easily recognisable in real, credible terms.

Market Value

The 'Quality' of a street (in terms of materials and design) is shown to have a direct impact upon market prices of local properties. Improvements can deliver change and movement "up market" for local businesses as well as significantly increasing footfall.

This provides a real and immediate benefit to the local economy through increased property values and increased rental values for commercial and retail properties. ¹

Improved Road Safety

Many of our busier streets are hazardous for users, especially the more vulnerable pedestrians and cyclists. Quality design provides a safer and more pleasant environment and can deliver significant reductions in the levels of road casualties.

These reductions result in immediate social cost savings ranging from healthcare costs to loss of earnings. ²

Reduced Maintenance

MfS2 supports the simple, neat street design approach. This results in reduced signing, lining, and protective features and is naturally self-enforcing.

With less street furniture there will be less to maintain, and what is maintained will be done so more effectively through easier access for cleaning machinery and operatives.

Reduced Space

The MfS2 approach to control driver behaviour through reduced carriageway width provides more space for people and other modes of transport. Reduced sight lines can also in more developable land.

¹ CABE: *Paved with Gold the Real Value of Good Street Design*. (2007)

² DfT: *Local Transport Note 3/08: Mixed Priority Routes: Practitioners' Guide*. (2008)



'WSP led the development of Manual for Streets. We've now delivered another important guidance document addressing key design issues on our busier streets. As lead author, we've produced Manual for Streets 2 for the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation.'

MANUAL FOR STREETS 2 - THE WIDER APPLICATION

A DATA-LED APPROACH

Recognising the need to provide planners and designers with support in making judgements on key design aspects of busier streets, MfS2 makes extensive use of new research and case studies.

The Link Between Visibility At Priority Junctions And Collisions

The purpose of this research was to identify whether or not a direct relationship can be established between variations in visibility and collision frequency at priority junctions.

A series of "high risk" priority junctions were identified as the basis for research. Uncontrolled crossroads and T-junctions were selected for all classes of road with 20, 30 and 40mph speed limits in Nottinghamshire, Sandwell, Lambeth and Glasgow. Each location was analysed in detail to identify specific collision characteristics.

Detailed statistical analysis confirmed that visibility distance from the side road cannot be seen as a single determining factor at these high risk collision locations.

Case Studies

MfS2 makes extensive use of case studies to demonstrate how MfS principles can be applied to the wider highway network to enhance 'place' and safety. Research by CABE for the study includes:

- Walworth Road, London
- London Road, Southampton
- Sheaf Square and Howard Street, Sheffield
- High Row and West Row, Darlington
- Maid Marian Way, Nottingham

The ten schemes delivered as part of DfT's Mixed Priority Routes, covering city centre, urban and suburban street environments are also referenced extensively.

MfS2 provides a window onto a range of successful schemes that can provide inspiration and guidance.



MfS2 has been prepared for the Chartered Institution of Highways and Transportation (CIHT) by a multi-disciplinary team of consultants. The document is endorsed by the Department for Transport (DfT), Communities and Local Government, the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), the Association of Directors of Environments, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) and English Heritage. All of these organisations contributed to its development. Manual for Streets 2 provides advice and does not set out any new policy or legal requirements.

Copies of the document can be purchased through CIHT and WSP provides training services for MfS and MfS2.