

Planning adapts to an era of cuts

Planners' strategic skills will be central to meeting critical challenges ahead, maintains *Jenny Crawford*



Ireland: housing developments have been left empty in the recession

Realisation of the potential impact of public sector cuts on the capacity to plan strategically or proactively is hitting the planning community in wave after wave. The latest edition of *Planning Theory and Practice* journal reflects on international experience of planning activity in an era of austerity.

In his editorial, Mark Scott of University College Dublin highlights an Irish perspective, where speculation in rapid, lightly regulated, developer-led house building helped bring the national economy to its knees. The 300,000 vacant dwellings in a population of 4.2 million indicates a shocking legacy. The role of planning in co-ordinating investment in infrastructure and residential development is being revisited in a retrospective reaction to blighted estates.

The Irish national plan was recognised as a groundbreaking document in spatial planning. But there appears to have been a systemic failure in the links between national, regional and local planning. In their analysis of the national planning framework for Scotland for 2010 to 2025, Greg Lloyd and Deborah Peel of the University of Ulster point out that economic crisis has driven increased emphasis on the importance of a strategic national framework underpinning economic policy and local planning reform.

The journal's lively Interface section explores the response of US planners to the new vistas promised by the Barack Obama administration. John Forester of Cornell University asks: "After so much right-wing presidential bashing,

after so much invective hurled at 'faceless government bureaucrats', might there now be new opportunities for effective planning interventions?" The response is a breathless rollercoaster of hope, disappointment and refusal to despair in the face of adversity.

Interestingly, among the distinctive characteristics ascribed to the Obama model of change by Phillip Thompson of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology is "values-orientated local group organising versus traditional issue-based and oppositional forms of campaign".

He welcomes the opportunity to engage the diversity and complexity of communities that has been underplayed in previous rhetorics about community involvement and empowerment. The debate raises the prospect that the key arena for local planners will be the convoluted landscapes of civil society.

They will need to hone their social and political mapping skills in the fundamental planning work of generating low-carbon employment, minimising exposure to environmental risks and achieving basic standards in the quality of urban and rural life for all.

Jenny Crawford is RTPI head of research. Planning Theory and Practice is an international peer-reviewed journal published by Routledge in association with the RTPI. RTPI members receive a major reduction in subscription and can access the Interface section free of charge. Please visit www.rtpi.org.uk/member_services/planning_theory_and_practice

Research Bulletin

Report reviews progress on Welsh regeneration initiatives

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has published a new report from the University of Manchester's centre for urban policy studies. It reviews the Welsh Assembly Government's flagship regeneration programme Communities First, which aimed to improve the conditions and prospects of people living in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The report compares the extent to which neighbourhoods in the programme have improved relative to other similarly deprived neighbourhoods in Wales using key change indicators. Report author Stephen Hincks concludes: "The critical factor underlying neighbourhood change is the composition of the population. Where younger populations with higher skills move in and there is a mix of housing tenures, we can see positive changes in the socio-economic circumstances. The danger is that areas which have seen progress may suffer as job losses and public sector cuts affect the economy." *The full report is available at www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/communities-regeneration-Wales-full.pdf*

New book explores European trends in spatial planning

A new book by Neil Adams, Giancarlo Cotella and Richard Nunes considers some of the challenges facing EU regional policy following expansion. *Territorial Development, Cohesion and Spatial Planning* looks at trends in policy and practice and reflects on the politics of policy formulation and approaches to spatial planning. The book focuses on the experiences of central and eastern Europe. *Copies can be purchased from www.routledge.com/books/details/9780415551946*

Events

Sustainable Transport Forum

30 November. RCE Severn and University of Gloucestershire. Cheltenham.

Session one will look at the development of green travel plans that have been used in a strategic approach to sustainable transport by universities and colleges. The second session will showcase innovative practices through workshops while masterclasses will show the key challenges to sustainable transport and how they can be overcome.

The full programme can be accessed at www.glos.ac.uk/vision/sustainability/unurce/Pages/sustainabletransportforum.aspx

Future Strategic Planning Options

2-3 December. DCLG, ESPON UK and RTPI development planning and regeneration networks. University of Manchester.

Two workshops will explore strategic planning options in the light of government reforms. They will look at new research in spatial and governance issues for the development of the UK's urban and rural economies arising from the ESPON programme. They aim to allow high-level discussion between researchers and practitioners in spatial planning, from both the UK and the other European countries, at a key juncture in the UK's urban and rural policy landscapes.

For more information and to register, please visit www.rtpi.org.uk/4159



Wales: regeneration programme targets disadvantaged areas