

Adrian Kearley, AKA Planning



Haggerston: estate regeneration advice focuses on winning community consensus

Adrian Kearley established AKA Planning with the objective of providing clients with high-quality, honest and hands-on planning advice. This recipe has created a successful practice which wins regular business from organisations such as Sanctuary Group, London & Quadrant and Avante Partnership.

Kearley served his planning “apprenticeship” at GVA Grimley for five years, rising to associate, before setting up a six-strong planning team at PRP Architects. “I was managing a lot of people but only getting involved in initial project meetings or at difficult stages. I missed the day-to-day involvement,” he explains.

Now, as a sole practitioner, he has a hand in every aspect of each project. He sees his role as that of project manager, urban design adviser and legal sounding board as well as planning consultant. “Clients get me involved at an early stage,” he explains. “My aim is to advise before other consultants are brought in and sometimes before the site is bought.”

A strong sense of responsibility to make a positive input to living environments and quality of life informs Kearley’s particular expertise in urban regeneration and healthcare. He is also convinced that more can be achieved through consensus than conflict. Inclusive consultation is a key part of his service, giving residents and other stakeholders significant opportunities to influence decisions.

These principles are evident in AKA Planning’s work. Kearley is advising London & Quadrant and Taylor Wimpey on the regeneration of the Haggerston and Kingsland estates in Hackney as a distinctive urban living environment featuring an exemplary energy strategy and design code. Last year, extensive community consultation and careful marshalling of evidence from a range of consultants helped Avante secure permission for a retirement community at Hextable in Kent. In the past year he has advised Sanctuary on seven committed projects.

Kearley recognises that a one man band cannot cover every aspect of the development process. So he has built up a network of specialist colleagues, selecting and managing the team with the needs of the project in mind. As his understanding develops, he shares this knowledge with clients via regular briefings and seminars. He also works with community groups and individuals, where possible offering free advice to neighbourhood and religious organisations.

He takes pride in taking projects through from when a development or regeneration opportunity crops up to final occupation, helping to deliver schemes that really matter to local communities. “Rather than having to react to issues, I can understand the commercial needs of a project and genuinely influence the design and development strategy,” he believes.

JUDGES’ COMMENTS

“Adrian Kearley has recognised the market position and strengths of a sole practitioner. Working directly with the client, providing advice on and managing specialist inputs and undertaking community engagement add value. The benefits are increased when the relationship is maintained over several years. His understanding of climate change issues is sound and recognises when specialist advice is required. Reference to a network of professionals allows exchange of ideas, access to specialist knowledge and peer reviews to maintain standards.”

The RTPI Planning Consultancy of the Year, Small Planning Consultancy of the Year and Planning Consultant of the Year Awards were judged by:

Pat Castledine MRTPI, consents adviser, HS1 Ltd

Adrian Penfold, MRTPI, head of planning and corporate responsibility, British Land

Stephen Tapper MRTPI, president, Planning Officers Society