

## **ROYAL TOWN PLANNING INSTITUTE**

### **GENERAL ASSEMBLY**

**Notes:** of a meeting of the General Assembly held at Drapers' Hall, Throgmorton Avenue, London EC2N 2DQ on Wednesday 19 January 2011.

**Present:** Don Alder, Janthia Algate, David Barraclough, Paul Bateman, Chris Berry, Ken Burley, Andrew Charles, Laura Cox, Michael Crossley, John Downey, Peter Geraghty, Jed Griffiths, Kath Haddrell, Clive Harridge, John Harvey, Mike Hayes, Colin Haylock, Bernadette Hillman, Ann Hockey, Rob Krzyszowski, David Marshall, Daniel Massey, Hazel McKay, James Morris, Janet O'Neill, Cullum Parker, Hector Pearson, Cath Ranson, Wayne Reynolds, Chris Shepley, Ann Skippers, Graham Stallwood, Alistair Stark, Richard Summers, Ron Tate, Andrew Taylor, Martin Taylor, Pat Thomas, Alan Wenban-Smith, Tony Whitehead, Peter Wilbraham, Martin Willey, Phil Williams, David Worthington, Ian Wray.

**Apologies for absence:** Ian Angus, Janet Askew, Craige Burden, Jim Claydon, Julie Cowans, Vincent Goodstadt, James Hooker, Ismail Mohammed, Julie Morgan, Sara Parkinson, Bob Reid, Julia Riddle, Leonora Rozee, John Scott, David Suttie, Richard Williamson.

**Guests:** James Carpenter, Councillor Mike Haines, Roger Hopher, Ruth Reed Stephen Tapper, Liz Peace.

**In attendance:** Trudi Elliott (Chief Executive) and other members of RTPI staff.

### **MORNING SESSION**

#### **Welcome**

Ann Skippers, RTPI President, welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the programme for the day.

#### **Item 1: Report of the RTPI Chair of the Board, including report by Audit Committee Chair**

Richard Summers RTPI Senior Vice-President and Board Chairman gave his Executive Board report. He set out the following:

- The achievements of the RTPI over the last year
- Issues facing the RTPI in the future, including budgets, Planning Aid funding, the Localism Bill and recession.

A summary of the Audit Committee report was presented to members.

- The Audit Committee has called for more timely papers from the Board.
- Both Hazel McKay and Michael Napier will be having regular meetings with Sara Drake.
- The Audit Committee was pleased with the risk register.

#### **Actions:**

- The RTPI to look at lessons to be learnt from devolved nations.
- Trudi Elliott to undertake monthly phone conferences with the chairs of each of the Planning Aid regions.

- Sue Percy to discuss the use of surpluses with the Executive Board for Planning Aid.
- RTPI to submit more timely papers to the Board.

**Item 2: Soap Box Session**

**Ken Burley**

- Thanked the GA for the opportunity to speak on Planning Aid (England), for which he is a volunteer and the chair of the Yorkshire region.
- Planning Aid is very grateful for the encouragement they have received, but are very aware of the need for financial support.
- It was recognised there is a need to make a strong bid for DCLG funding in order to compete with others.
- Ken called for members to continue campaigning on behalf of Planning Aid.

**Item 3: A few words from the new Chief Executive**

Ann Skippers welcomed Trudi Elliott, RTPI Chief Executive. Trudi joins the RTPI from the Government Office for the West Midlands.

Trudi set out the RTPI's key priorities which include the future of Planning Aid, the Localism Bill and the impact of these on the Institute. Trudi will also be undertaking a review of policy within the Institute and as part of that addressing how we make our voice count.

Members had the opportunity to put forward questions to Trudi Elliott:

- Ron Tate felt there was an opportunity to approach friends of the RTPI and Planning Aid that might be willing to make financial contributions or offer financial support to Planning Aid.

Trudi responded by saying that unfortunately it is too late for this year, but she does support the idea.

- Mike Hayes commented on how the RTPI approaches its policy work. He felt that there was a need for ownership of policy statements.

In response, Trudi felt that we are not currently harnessing our full policy capacity and there is a need to make better use of members. Trudi used the example that NAPE ([National Association for Planning Enforcement](#)) are currently looking at the enforcement elements of the Bill and are working with the policy team in forming the RTPI response.

- John Harvey asked Trudi about the impact of change at a regional level.

Trudi felt this resulted in a loss of expertise at a regional level, but she highlighted the important role and opportunity for the Institute in providing guidance, which will be lost from the regional level of government.

**Actions:**

- Trudi Elliott to undertake a review of the policy functions within the Institute.
- Trudi Elliott to consider approaching friends of the RTPI and Planning Aid to make financial contributions or offer financial support to Planning Aid.

## AFTERNOON SESSION

### **Item 4: Discussion Session ‘Sustainable Development: What it means to us, and the implications of the Localism Bill’**

The discussion session was introduced by Ann Skippers. Ann provided different interpretations of sustainable development and spoke about the presumption in favour of sustainable development and how it might apply to the English planning system. Ann also outlined what the Institute is doing and highlighted the RTPI's Seven Commitments to Climate Change.

Ann invited a number of guests to speak at the session. Speakers included Liz Peace, Chief Executive, British Property Federation; Councillor Mike Haines, Deputy Chair of the Environment and Housing Programme Board, Local Government Association (LGA); Ruth Reed, President, Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA).

#### **Liz Peace**

- Stated that there are no magic solutions to sustainable development.
- Feels that we already have a locally based planning system and the last thing the property industry wants is a free for all.
- Noted that the presumption in favour of sustainable development is given precedence in the Growth White Paper.
- Questioned if the Bill is pro-development then what sort of development?
- Feels that presumption in favour of sustainable development will not work.

Liz believes that sustainable development should be based on three main elements:

- Economic - provision of development that provides employment
- Environmental - supporting principles of environmental responsibility preferably covering; energy, waste, water and transport
- Social - related to the social acceptability of proposals.

#### **Mike Haines**

- Highlighted that the LGA is in principle supportive of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the changes to enforcement law and of neighbourhood planning.
- Believes that the proposed reforms of the planning system should build on existing good practice and avoid duplication.
- Feels that sustainable development can only be defined locally and the government must not set up a definition of sustainable development in national policy which overrules legitimate local democracy.

#### **Ruth Reed**

- Believes that sustainable development should adopt the Brundtland definition with tripartite elements.
- Stressed that flexibility over life is a key part of sustainable development, long life - loose fit.
- Views the Government's approach towards sustainable development as 'nudge theory' incentivising people to undertake good behaviour (presumption is the stick sustainable development is the carrot).
- Feels that local planning authorities don't have the time to define sustainable development.

- The idea is to ensure that if the system fails then development can still be delivered.

#### **Item 5: Breakout Workshops**

Delegates were invited to take part in one of five workshops:

- Setting Standards: environmental and energy performance of buildings and places
- Costing the Earth: economic viability as a criterion for sustainability
- A Point of Law: the pros and cons of statutory definition vs policy
- A Presumption, I Presume: how a presumption in favour of sustainable development might work
- Think Globally, Act Locally: how can communities promote sustainable development at neighbourhood level?

#### **Item 6: Plenary Session: Question Time**

The plenary session on sustainable development was chaired by Ann Skippers. The panel included; Liz Peace, Mike Haines, Ruth Reed, Roger Hephher (Savills) and Stephen Tapper (Planning Officers Society).

- Ian Wray opened the session with the question; should sustainable development be defined in policy or law? Ian suggested that policy was the right place but there is a need for the process to be prescribed in law.

Stephen Tapper responded by highlighted that The London Plan defines sustainable development so there is no need for another definition in London.

Mike Haines agreed that sustainable development should be defined in policy but in local policy. Mike questioned whether we should be thinking about a definition for sustainable communities rather than sustainable development.

Roger Hephher added that a degree of responsibility for defining sustainable development is with John Howell's advisory group which hatched the 'presumption' idea. Roger further stated that sustainable development does need a definition but not within the Localism Bill.

Liz Peace stated that the NPPF should be referenced within the Localism Bill i.e. what it is and what its role is. She outlined the need to recognise the difference between the definition of sustainable development and the 'presumption'.

- Stephen Tapper highlighted that sustainable development tends to focus on sustainable buildings as it's easier to define buildings then other aspects of sustainable development, such as site selection, location and accessibility.

Mike Haines responded by saying that grappling with sustainability of buildings, of place and community needs to be much stronger. Building regulations should take some of the burden from the planning system.

Jed Griffiths agreed that there is a need to strengthen the linkage between planning and building control. He explained that sustainable development in relation to planning is more about places, their size, location etc.

Ruth Reed highlighted the ramping up of building regulations to deliver zero carbon homes by 2016 and zero carbon commercial properties by 2019. She stated that local planning authorities have an option to meet targets through local plans.

- Clive Harridge noted that we have established practice for local plans to go through Sustainability Appraisal (SA) and Sustainability Environmental Assessments (SEA) for which criteria is locally developed, plus a similar approach extended to projects. So there is no need to reinvent the wheel on localism.

Cath Ranson added that we also have health impact assessments, transport assessments and economic viability, can we afford the plethora of appraisals and can we wrap them all into a single appraisal? She further questioned whether there is a need for local determination if most SA criteria tend to be the same.

Mike Haines suggested that maybe research is need into how much variation there is.

Liz Peace felt that developers probably pay far too much so would support a streamlined system. The issue of local variation can be like a postcode lottery. There are ways to make things simpler by defining them nationally.

Alan Wenban-Smith stated that that is no enthusiasm for proliferation of impact studies. There is a need for fewer but bigger criteria. The focus should not be on building by building but on a larger scale.

- Graham Stallwood asked if the panel would agree that the focus on new development is false and that the focus on neighbourhoods may protect development that is inherently sustainable.

Liz Peace answered by saying that statistics agree with the basis of Graham's question. Liz further stated buildings cannot take place if standards aren't meeting met, but this is not a role for planning.

Ruth Reed further added that the interesting aspect of neighbourhood planning is that it rightly encourages communities to consider making their environment more sustainable.

Roger Hephher said that a lot comes down to how the presumption in favour of sustainable development is going to bite. Could it encourage neighbourhoods to make their area sustainable or does it just say that you can build anything that appears sustainable?

Ann Hockey felt that development needs to adopt a long-term vision of 25-50 years and in the definition which goes beyond political horizons. She further stated that sustainability will be different in urban and rural contexts.

- Hazel McKay raised whether we should revert to the old system of 'presumption in favour of development'.

Kelvin MacDonald felt that the most depressing thing he had heard at the meeting was the threat aspect of 'presumption'. He went on to say that neighbourhood plans can only exceed statutory elements of local plans. What happens if neighbourhoods

want to exceed sustainability criteria - has the government thought through the consequences?

He further highlighted that there is already a statutory duty on sustainable development in the 2004 Act and a duty on climate change in the 2008 Act. Is it therefore sustainable development that is the issue or the presumption in favour of sustainable development?

- Kelvin raised the point - if the presumption in favour of sustainable development is going to be detailed in the NPPF, then doesn't the NPPF need to be statutory?

Stephen Tapper noted that the industry of sustainable development has changed over the last ten years. Some things such as performance need to be in regulation, other things like housing mix/ tenure or energy supply have local variation. So development needs to have flexibility to adapt to changing industry.

- Ron Tate stated that planning equals management of change. He suggested perhaps sustainable development doesn't exist but is a direction of travel.

Alan Wenban-Smith agreed that a form of words for sustainable development may not be possible today but rather a direction of travel.

- Peter Geraghty made a point on whether local planning authorities will be resourced to deliver.

Mike Haines said that his authority will overrun on current timescales so will be caught by the presumption in favour of sustainable development but there is no scope to deliver quicker.

Kelvin MacDonald closed the session by saying that it has been very useful and that the RTPi will sooner or later be put on the spot regarding sustainable development.

**Item 7: Speech by Ann Skippers**

Ann stepped down as RTPi president.

**Item 8: Inauguration of Richard Summers**

Richard Summers became the new RTPi President.

**Item 9: Speech by Richard Summers**

Richard Summers gave his speech and set the themes for Presidential year 2011:

- Promoting planning and planners in challenging times
- Supporting local communities through spatial planning.

**Close**