

Young Planners consider the future of planning

The evening of 18th May saw over 60 young planners from the region gather at UWE in Bristol for what was the South West Young Planners Steering Group's inaugural event. Planning...what next? sought to consider current developments in the industry and provide an invaluable opportunity for younger members of the profession to meet peers and catch up with old colleagues and friends.

Sir Mike Pitt (IPC/PINS) opened the evening with an interesting discussion on where the infrastructure industry is heading, highlighting the vast scale of proposals currently on the IPC's books, both in monetary terms and, particularly, energy generation. He provided an insight into work to integrate The Planning Inspectorate and the IPC, highlighting the aim to create a body of planning expertise; to see this continue to be based in Bristol is something the region can be rightly proud of.



Simon Prescott (Barton Willmore) followed and let slip his (healthy) addiction to Parliament TV and the second reading of the Localism Bill (ongoing as we met). Simon's synopsis of the Bill proved to be incredibly insightful of the changes coming and highlighted the scale of the task ahead for planners across both public and private sectors. Understanding these changes and being able to hit the ground running once the economy upturns will surely prove to be critical for all.

Following networking and the finishing of Tetlow King's generous sponsorship (refreshments), Peter Goatley (No.5 Chambers) sought to disturb the younger members of the audience with some eclectic images of our favourite minister, all the while providing a fascinating take on the ongoing saga of CALA Homes and the great RSS challenge. Recent developments have seen this conclude (for now) but it highlights that despite Government's intention, the RSS remains for a little while longer and further reminds us of the scale of the changes we face in the next year or so.

Finally, Janet Askew (UWE) provided the view of the education sector whilst introducing UWEs CPD offer, reminding the older young planners that UWE aren't purely about initial planning education. Janet's concluding remarks summed up the evening perfectly, reminding Young Planners that they truly are the future of the profession and should be proud to stand up for their chosen career and influence its direction.

All in all, it was a really interesting evening and feedback to date has proved to be very encouraging. The steering group are particularly pleased with the level of interest and enthusiasm displayed by delegates, further justifying the hard work put into organising and spurring us on to arrange further events.

Our next event (26th July) is a study tour of Bath followed by drinks – more details to follow so keep an eye on, and joining our facebook site, linkedin and follow us on twitter @SWYoungPlanners. If you have any questions, suggestions or comments please get in touch via ypsouthwest@gmail.com

Mike Harris

Young Planners Steering Group Chair and Regional Representative

DIARY DATES

Friday 9th September 2011 – RTPI SW Conference – **Rural Planning** – The rural area has always struggled for a voice but with the South West so reliant on these areas, how do they cope? Speakers will cover rural housing initiatives, small scale rural employment and rural leisure opportunities. Venue: National Maritime Museum, Falmouth. Cost £75+VAT for RTPI members, £85+VAT for non members. Special rates for full time students/retired/unwaged members.

Friday 14th October 2011 – RTPI SW Conference - **Housing in areas of Constraint** - Housing targets may have gone but the pressure for new housing remains and in many areas this creates conflict between housing numbers and the environment. Our speakers will endeavour to look at ways in which such conflict can be resolved and examine solutions being tried in the region. Venue: RNLI, Poole. Cost £75+VAT for RTPI members, £85+VAT for non members. Special rates for full time students/retired/unwaged members.

Wednesday 16th November 2011 – RTPI SW Conference - **Development Management - SPONSORED BY BURGESS SALMON** - An update on planning law and thoughts on issues facing those at the "coal face" of Development Management (Development Control) with workshop sessions in the afternoon to consider the issues in more depth. Always a popular conference which needs to be booked early. Venue: Burges Salmon Offices, Bristol. Cost £75+VAT for RTPI members, £85+VAT for non members. Special rates for full time students/retired/unwaged members.

22nd November 2011 – RIBA SW event - **Low Carbon Design: The power to deliver change** - Watershed, Bristol - How do we put into practice the latest thinking on sustainability, retrofit and low carbon technology, and what is the role of architects and built environment professionals in shaping the policy framework in which we work. Cost: From £120+VAT for RIBA/RTPI members.

Keynote address:

- Peter Madden, Chief Executive Forum for the Future

Info at <http://www.architecture.com/ribaconferences2011>

Further details available from Helen Clarke, RTPI SW Coordinator, Tel 01823 250822 or email: southwest@rtpi.org.uk

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BRANCHOUT

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Welcome from the Chair



I'm feeling hot and bothered: not only by the weather – well it was hot when I first wrote this - but also about the worrying simplicity with which the amendments to the Localism Bill seemed to slip through Parliament and is, at the time of writing, in the House of Lords for its second reading. I wish it were as simple to enact local planning policies and decision making....

Election fever has now subsided in those local authority areas affected and most planning departments seem to be back on track with progressing policy making and decision taking, despite the huge levels of change still on the horizon. With those changes in mind, my first attendance at the RTPI General Assembly in May was quite a eye opener, particularly given that the Director General of CLG, Richard McCarthy, and the Planning Director, Shona Dunn, were present. They seemed to imply that the Localism Bill was not going to be the biggest shake up of planning we will see but that the Growth Review was going to result in a fundamentally different planning system by May next year. The changes to the Use Classes (affecting B uses) and the Penfold Review are just some of the plethora of changes we can expect. If, like me, you are finding it hard work to keep track with what is going on, don't forget the RTPI SW Conference series, which is excellent value for money! (That was a very subtle hint! Ed)

The draft National Planning Policy Framework is due later this summer with a view to a final version by the end of the year (maximum 40 pages apparently) and the Localism Bill itself is still intended to be enacted by the end of the year too. The RTPI main website is incredibly helpful for an overview to what is proposed and also sets out the detailed responses that the RTPI have made. It is useful to know that nationally the Government has started listening quite carefully to what the professional bodies are saying and that the constructive nature of the RTPI's comments has been welcomed, although it will be interesting to see if Clause 124 makes in into the Bill which, rightly, the RTPI nationally has campaigned against.

Planning Aid is now safe for a year, hopefully for 2 and the RTPI is now looking at new ways of ensuring future funding beyond this. The revised service will not be an exact replacement but thankfully by the summer it should be fully operational and serving the individuals and communities that need and rely on this service. Here in the South West we have been extremely lucky with the level and quality of assistance we have provided to the community through Planning Aid and I am sure we will continue to ensure effective working with the new system. Particular thanks are due to Mike Oakley for his work at the national and regional level.

The conference series is now half way through with some really interesting debates and topics covered thus far, and more planned after the August break. By the time this goes to print, I will have attended the RTPI SW Annual Dinner on 1st July, a time to get out that smart suit and posh frock and get down to Exeter for a fun filled evening of entertainment with a bunch of planners – and I can assure you, we do know how to have fun, honest. For me it was a choice between attending the RTPI dinner or Beaver Camp with a load of 6-8 year olds.....hmm what a choice to have to make!! (Surely this is a no-brainer!! Ed)

Jean Marshall

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Highlights of the latest Regional Management Board/Activities Committee meeting held on 20th May 2011

- The Committee was pleased to receive the nomination of Nick Smith as Junior Vice-Chair for this year. Nick is already a member of the Regional Activities Committee and there was unanimous agreement that the nomination be accepted – so welcome to your new role Nick.
- The usual informative and full report from Mike Oakley gave an update on the current situation with regard to Planning Aid which included concern over the way that the established form of Planning Aid was disbanded so quickly without its successor being in place and almost complete astonishment that it was done at a time when encouraging community involvement in planning is such a hot topic!
- The proposed new class of Affiliate Membership was the subject of a lively debate and concern expressed that whilst it might sound good in principle it could undermine the professional standing of Corporate Membership.
- Financially the Region remains in good health largely due to the support of the CPD programme of conferences – these represent excellent value and thanks must go to the current Chair (Jean Marshall) and, of course, our Admin. Officer, Helen, for arranging such an interesting programme of conferences.
- Finally the question was raised as to why so many local planning authorities had failed to produce local development frameworks? Suggested answers included lack of resources and lack of commitment on the part of local political leaders- any others on a postcard please!
- Kath Haddrell was elected as the RTPI SW representative on the Creating Excellence Design Review Panel.

RTPI SW Elections 2012

It is time once again for nominations to be made for election to the RTPI SW Regional Management Board and Regional Activities Committee. Nomination papers can be downloaded from <http://tinyurl.com/6ae8wrt> or alternatively can be requested by phone from Helen Clarke, Regional Coordinator (01823 250822).

Nominations are required for the following:

Principal Officers on Regional Management Board

1. Senior Vice Chair for year 2012
2. Junior Vice Chair for year 2012
3. Hon. Secretary for year 2012
4. Hon. Treasurer for year 2012

Other Members of the Regional Activities Committee:

5. 8 Corporate Members for years 2012/2013
6. 1 Technical Member for years 2012/2013 and 1 Technical Member for year 2012
7. 6 Student/Licentiate Members for Year 2012

Nomination papers when completed must be returned to the RTPI SW 2011 Hon. Secretary, John Shaw, by post or fax by Thursday 1st September 2011 at 1600 hrs. Details of this are set out on the nomination forms.

SPOTLIGHT ON...

Planning for Success at the University of Plymouth

In July 2010, the University of Plymouth received provisional accreditation from the RTPI for its new Masters course in Planning. A small cohort of students was recruited for a September start and, as the end of our first academic year approaches, it is worth reviewing progress.

Dr Stephen Essex, who was responsible for setting up the course, says: "Our aim is clear – to provide students with a first rate planning education which will equip them for a career in planning either in public or private sectors." The degree course builds on the strengths of the University in teaching and research around issues which are relevant in the far South West. It offers the opportunity to specialise in marine planning, coastal urban regeneration, and rural planning and sustainable transport. In addition, teaching aims to provide students with the core skills which are likely to become ever more demanded of planners grappling with the localism agenda, such as communication, mediation and negotiation.

The course has been designed to offer both part time (two year) and full time (one year) routes and is delivered through an 'effective planning school' drawing on resources from across the University as well as professional practice. The course benefits enormously from the strong links which the University has established with Plymouth City Council and other authorities in the South West. For example, in their first year, students have undertaken work on 'live' regeneration projects in Newton Abbot and worked closely with staff from Teignbridge District Council.

The backgrounds of our students, who are drawn primarily from planning authorities across Devon and Cornwall, means that learning draws on academic teaching as well as practice and shared experience. This mix is critical, particularly at a time when politicians are having

another go at reforming the 'system'. Feedback from the students has been extremely positive, who feel that they have benefited from the supportive and small group learning environment.

In an attempt to understand the changes which are underway, the University has undertaken research into the expectations for localism across local authorities, town and parish councils in the SW. The results of this work formed the basis for a seminar attended by nearly 90 representatives of local councils in January. The University has subsequently been invited to assist with the Dawlish 'front runner' neighbourhood planning pilot as well as with research on localism being undertaken on behalf of the RICS. This involvement highlights a determination to engage with the wider planning and development community.

Looking forward to the second year, continuing growth of the MSc Planning Course is anticipated with a mix of full and part time students from a variety of backgrounds. Professor Chris Balch, who is from a career in planning and development consultancy, believes that the University of Plymouth will establish itself as a recognised centre for teaching, research and practice in planning over the coming years.

"These are tough but exciting times for the planning profession. More than ever there is a need to ensure that we have the relevant knowledge and skills for the challenges which lie ahead".



AM2CM (Associate Membership to Chartered Membership)

The RTPI will be shortly launching a new entry route to chartered membership for associate members. I was part of a small pilot group upon which the new procedure was trialled and tested. For any associate members wishing to 'up-grade' or for any members with concerns about the rigour of this route to corporate membership, I thought that it might be instructive to share my experience.

Associate membership was introduced in 2007 for those with experience of planning, but who did not hold an accredited planning degree. There was an intention at this time for a route to chartered membership to be introduced for suitably qualified individuals at some point in the future. The pilot tested this route and consisted of the preparation of a portfolio for assessment, containing:

- A statement of education and experience
- Six Professional Narratives of Learning (1,500 words each) to demonstrate learning from formal education and experience of planning work based on the RTPI's Learning Outcomes for accredited degrees: namely, knowledge and understanding of spatial planning in practice; inclusive planning (equality and diversity, working with stakeholders); sustainable planning (values and development economics); legal and ethical frameworks; professional reflective practice; and specialist expertise.



Presentation to Stephen Essex

- Supporting evidence, consisting of educational qualifications, examples of planning work, reports and publications, witness testimonies, peer observation and reflections.
- Continuing Professional Development record sheets for the previous two years.
- Professional Development Plan for the next two years.

The preparation of my portfolio proved to be a challenging task. However, the process was also greatly rewarding because, by reflecting on my experiences and learning, caused me to assess all my past activities and achievements, as well as focusing on my future professional development needs. Therefore, my advice to anyone contemplating this route to RTPI membership would be to 'go for it', but to be under no illusion that it will be a 'breeze'. Here are my thoughts on how to approach the process of application:

- Allow yourself plenty of time to prepare and edit (and re-edit) the narratives carefully. There will be a wealth of practice and academic literature that you will be able to draw on for the background context of your discussion.
- Ensure that the content of the narratives reflects directly upon your own experience and learning in situations related to the learning outcomes, and especially how your developing track record has shaped, changed or informed your practice. This emphasis is not always as easy as it sounds, especially if you are used to writing technical reports.
- Seek advice and critical comment on drafts from a colleague/mentor.

I am pleased to report a positive outcome: my own portfolio was successful (after a part resubmission) and I collected my Chartered Membership certificate from the RTPI President, Richard Summers, at the General Assembly in London on 25 May, 2011.

Stephen Essex, University of Plymouth

Planning in limbo in England ?

Am I alone in thinking that, in England at least, we are currently in limbo as far as both the development controls system and planning policy are concerned? An over-prescribed and over-complex LDF system introduced under the 2004 Planning Act, which fewer and fewer professionals are now prepared to defend, is about to be significantly modified – simpler 'Local Plans' and new 'Neighbourhood Plans' in, as yet, untested ways. Statutory strategic spatial policy, in the form of the Regional Spatial Strategy, has been 'revoked', with little apparent concern on the part of the new Coalition Government as to what is to take its place. We have still to see the operation of the 2008 Planning Act system take its full course, including the finalisation of just the first few of a promised raft of new National Policy Statements and their application within the new IPC/ PINS process and the new National Planning Policy Framework, which is to replace thousands of pages of existing PPG and PPS policy guidance (but which, rather confusingly, is to have nothing to do with the 2008 Act system and its policies!) has only just appeared, in draft, for consultation. Added to all this are the big questions surrounding the operation and effectiveness of the 'patchwork quilt' (with big holes in it!) of the Local Enterprise Partnerships currently being set up to take over much of the planning related work hitherto carried out by the soon to be abolished Regional Development Agencies.

This all adds up to massive uncertainty all round as far as both the strategic and local pictures are concerned. This is of course just the sort of uncertainty that investors and developers do not need, especially at a time when they are being encouraged by the Government to go for economic growth. In the meantime of course, the diminishing band of planning professionals in local government are grappling with this uncertainty, whilst at the same time, soldiering on with the day to day work of policy making, interpretation, evidence gathering, consultation, mediation and development management.

Still slow going with the South West's 'Local Plans' – why?

As of May this year, the 40 or so relevant planning authorities in the South West still had only eight Core Strategies in place between them – 20% 'coverage' compared to a not much better 22% nationally, as quoted recently by DCLG. In addition, in the region, just 21 Development Plan Documents (DPD's) have now been declared 'sound', with more than half of these accounted for by just two authorities – Plymouth and South Hams. Just five further Core Strategies have been submitted to government and are at various stages of being 'examined'. It would seem that the South West is a microcosm of the very slow progress of the LDF process nationally. So, to what extent do local planning authorities think this is politically acceptable and what is causing the delay? There are both general issues and particular local circumstances involved here.

Firstly, most people would probably accept that the policy production and adoption timetable estimates in the 2004 Act based guidance for both the RSS and LDF documents were far too optimistic. Complex processes, involving several stages of consultation took longer than expected. Requirements for vast evidence bases, which have had to kept up to date have also created problems, but more significant overall are problems due to steadily diminishing resources – both expert staff and other funding.

For many years now local authorities have seen their resources reduced and, with a few exceptions, the planning function within local government in England has been experiencing a diminution of status. The steady removal of departmental/ chief officer status for planners and the re-positioning of the planning function within all kinds of different combinations/directorates, sometimes even involving policy and development management teams finding themselves in different directorates, speaks for itself. There has also been the added complication in many authorities of regular internal reorganisation and, more recently, redundancies and frozen posts. All of this has typically manifested itself to the 'outside world' as delay and frustration, both in getting statutory development plan policy in place and in making timely development management decisions. In making difficult decisions on priorities within a situation of diminishing resources, many councils have reduced the corporate commitment to the spatial planning function in the interests of maintaining other 'essential' services. Whilst it is difficult to see what else councillors might have been expected to do under the circumstances, 'short-termism' of political horizons has seldom been on the side of the planning function, which is, by definition, long-term.

Some have argued that planners themselves have been part of the problem. Have they shown enough initiative and imagination in finding a way expediently through the LDF procedures? Have they failed to get critical 'stakeholders' such as local business and industry, sufficiently engaged with the process? Have they been too weak in fighting the spatial planning corner in terms of priorities and resources? Have they failed to enthuse their councillors and carry them with them at critical stages in the process and have they simply proved too co-operative in accommodating changes to working circumstances? The planning profession has always shown itself willing to provide a good service whatever the system within which it has been asked to work – laudable, but at the same time, a weakness in terms of fighting for a higher priority for the planning function.

Historically, help has been on hand from central government, though more recently this has been accompanied by threatened 'sanctions'. Whilst successive Governments have drawn attention to the slow progress towards LDF coverage in England, they have also taken steps to ease the regulatory burden on plan preparation. The requirement to prepare and constantly update a Local Development Scheme (a plan about proposals to make plans!) has been removed and the requirement for Statements of Community Involvement to pass government examination has also gone. The preparation and adoption of Supplementary Planning Documents (typically, such things as design guidance and site development briefs) has also been made more flexible. In addition, as the RTPI has recently pointed out (*Existing Tools for Neighbourhood Planning – Information Note 24.May.11*) the removal of the requirement for Local Development Orders to be based on adopted development plan policy, has made these, potentially, a more practicable tool for local planning authorities. Finally, the Coalition Government has now concluded that, in place of Core Strategies, DPD's and SPD's, there should be a single 'Local Plan' using a 'proportionate' evidence base (*Draft National Planning Policy Framework, May 2011*) Help and advice on LDF work, and particularly Core Strategy preparation, has also been provided by Government Regional Offices and the Planning Inspectorate.

In terms of 'sanctions', the Government now expects all local planning authorities to have an up to date Local Plan in place as soon as is practicable and if this is not the case, applications will be

determined in accordance with the NPPF, including its presumption in favour of 'sustainable development'. It remains to be seen how much of a threat this is taken to be across all those authorities who have still to produce the goods.

So, where does this all lead us in the South West? South Hams (Core Strategy in place November 2006 + six Area Action Plans and other DPD's since) Plymouth (April 2007 + seven AAP's since) Mid Devon (May 2007); Dartmoor NPA (February 2008); Poole (January 2009) each has a Core Strategy / Local Plan in place. In addition, Wiltshire & Swindon have both Waste and Minerals Core Strategies, plus the respective Development Control Policies, in place (May 2009) and the West of England Partnership has a Joint Waste Core Strategy in place (2011). If these authorities have managed to do this, why haven't all the others in the region done so?

Invite readers across the South West and beyond to join the debate and let me have their thoughts and comments on the above.



Geoff Walker

(Oh, I am itching to respond to this...but, like Geoff, would really like to hear the views of others in the region. Many of you will have heard me speak about this or seen some of my thoughts in the past. Over to you!! Ed.)

Geoff Walker
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SUMMER SCHOOL 2012

It's that time of year to remind you all that Planning Summer School will be taking place this year from 3rd-7th September in Swansea.

If you are an avid Branchout reader, you'll remember my missive last year; Planning Summer School is run by planners for planners, and the ethos established over 75 years ago of "a short time each summer to reflect and exchange ideas" is as relevant as ever. I would guess that most of us, whether as individuals or as organisations, are under more pressure than at any time before, in my working life at least, to do more for less and to cut budgets.

This is where Summer School can help, it will provide up to 20 hours of CPD and will leave you refreshed and recharged and hopefully having rediscovered your verve for planning!

This year we have built on what makes Summer School special but adapted it to meet current needs - two days each of elected members and planners school, with a crossover "summit day" for both planners and elected members (and ideal as a day ticket).

The focus for 2011 is "Planning with Communities" with workshops and papers on community engagement, producing joint core strategies, strategic planning as well as study tours. Given the importance of river systems and "blue infrastructure" in the SW, you might be particularly interested to hear the winner of the International Scholarship, Clare Healy from Arup, who will present a paper on the "Seoul 'Lost River' Project on the 7th September.

You might even be inspired to apply for next years scholarship!
Details can be found at:
<http://www.planningsummerschool.org.uk/>

I look forward to seeing you there!

Kath Haddrell



RTPI SW Gets Nosey! – At the RTPI SW's Development Management Conference in March, which coincided with Comic Relief's Red Nose Day, £50 was raised by the sale of red noses. Many thanks to all who contributed.

Trudi Elliott, RTPI Chief Executive and Jean Marshall, RTPI SW Chair, have a nose to nose about Planning!

Planning Aid England launches new services

A new Planning Aid service in England began on 13th June. This follows the success of securing £1m from the Department for Communities & Local Government's new Supporting Communities and Neighbourhoods in Planning fund.

Two main services will be provided - a single national Planning Advice Line on **0330 123 9244** where all callers can receive 15 minutes of free, independent and professional advice. In addition some callers may be eligible for further assistance from a professional volunteer. Other callers will be guided to the website and to other organisations.

A neighbourhood planning service will also be provided to support people and communities in gaining knowledge about the planning system and how they can be involved. A team of community outreach co-ordinators have been recruited to support volunteers to work within target communities to build their own plans for the neighbourhood they live in. Details of the service can be obtained by calling **0207 9299453**.

The RTPI is keen to engage and mobilise its volunteer network as a priority and a national volunteer workshop took place on **1st July in Leeds**. Further similar local events will take place shortly. These workshops will be an important opportunity for local community

outreach co-ordinators to engage with local volunteers. Volunteers are central to the Planning Aid England service and will be at the forefront of the work in engaging disadvantaged and marginalised communities.

In addition the RTPI has set up a Planning Aid England (PAE) Giving Scheme to encourage donations to help support its work following the reduction in PAE's funding from Government. To help the RTPI promote the donation scheme to stakeholders and through networks please visit <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/item/4641/23/5/3> for more information.

There will continue to be a close working relationship between Planning Aid England, based in London, and the RTPI in the South West which has set up a sub group to monitor and assist the Planning Aid service in the Region.

For further information, please contact the RTPI SW Planning Aid Liaison Officer **Mike Oakley** on 1179 314933 or email mro6085@btinternet.com or Planning Aid England's local community outreach co-ordinators **Joanna Widdecombe** (joanna.widdecombe@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk) and **Peter Whitehead** (peter.whitehead@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk)

RTPI FINANCES

The 2009 recession has had an effect throughout the UK and the RTPI has also felt the impact of the downturn. As an organisation the RTPI has seen its revenues fall and in a similar fashion to many other planning organisations and we have had to make hard choices to ensure that we can continue to deliver services to members and to train the next generation of planners.

Helping our members at this difficult time has been a key priority for the RTPI and since 2008 we have frozen subscription rates, with 2011 now being the third year of no subscription rate rises. We have also developed our Planners in the Workplace programme which offers support and advice to planners facing redundancy or difficulties at work and we have expanded the number of free and low cost events available to our members.

However freezing subscription rates doesn't mean that we can freeze inflation and the RTPI has been working hard to make sure that we live within our income. Not only have we faced tightening subscription income we have also seen declining revenues from our commercial activities such as advertising jobs in Planning and event income from RTPI Conferences.

In order to maintain services we undertook a comprehensive review of all RTPI activities with the aim of finding savings wherever possible. As a target we asked most RTPI departments to find 5% savings. Those departments critical to delivering frontline member services such as the Regions and Nations had their budgets protected so that they could continue providing low cost CPD. In 2009 we found £400k worth of savings and in 2010 we managed to find an additional £200k worth of cost reductions.

We found savings in a number of different areas, for example we looked at our travel budget and made sure that all journeys were strictly necessary and we always buy advance tickets. Where possible we have combined meetings to reduce the number of trips. We have expanded the use of teleconference and online meeting technology. The RTPI also revisited our suppliers and looked for improved value and more cost effective solutions - for example, this led to cheaper contracts for printing services. It is not only in big costs that we have

sought to make savings but also in the detail. We have found more cost effective lunches for committees, timed meetings to avoid peak time fares, used cheaper venues or hosted smaller meetings, all helping to keep the Institute's costs down.

The RTPI has additionally taken a long hard look at recruitment. Since 2009 we have had a recruitment freeze on creating new posts and as members of staff have moved on we have considered whether there job could be outsourced or combined with another role. In this way over the last three years we have managed to make the RTPI leaner and more efficient.

One of the biggest financial changes for the RTPI is the Coalition Government's decision not to renew the Planning Aid England grant after the 31 March 2011. This grant was worth £3.6million and supported over 60 staff. As members are no doubt aware the RTPI has had to reduce the scope of Planning Aid England and unfortunately close many of the regional offices and staff are being made redundant. Whilst the transition to a smaller Planning Aid England is very hard the Institute is committed to making sure we can provide a financially viable Planning Aid England service. 2011 will see the RTPI looking to find new ways of delivering Planning Aid England and rethinking our financial models.

The drive for improved value for money will continue, the RTPI will not only rigorously scrutinise and question all expenditure; we are also looking at ways of growing our income and ensuring that our subscription structure is the right model. At the same time the RTPI is expanding the number of events that we have on offer; we are investing in new IT systems and improving our procedures to make us as cost effective as possible.

The RTPI is a membership organisation and we want to make sure that we use members' money as effectively as possible. In difficult economic times we have looked again at how we do things and found savings whilst maintaining standards. We will continue to make sure we spend your money wisely and continue to look at how we raise money and new opportunities to improve the RTPI.

Creating sustainable livelihoods

What do we mean by 'sustainable development' and how can the planning system help to deliver it?

These two questions will be hotly debated (again!) this year as the Decentralisation and Localism Bill moves forward and the contents of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is thrashed out. The RTPI has long campaigned for a NPPF but was quick to express concern at the way in which the presumption in favour of 'sustainable development' has been expressed in the draft prepared by the independent Practitioners Advisory Group.

In my opinion, the twin challenges of climate change and energy security are redefining our starting point. They evoke a whole new language, based on carbon accounting and full lifecycle assessment. One only needs to look at the UK's Transition towards a low carbon economy, to see how it is permeating all aspects of our life; Environmental legislation, taxation and economic investment currently form the main drivers, but I'm sure that national planning policy will also need to align and adopt the language.

But how best to express it in a way that communities can understand? Personally I like to talk about 'sustainable living', 'sustainable livelihoods' and 'resilient communities' (the latter being a term coined by the Transition Towns movement) rather than sustainable development. However, I'd be interested in hearing your thoughts on this?

At present, I feel that the planning system sometimes lacks the courage to support new forms of sustainable living (although as always, there are notable exceptions!). The views and experiences of those 'walking the walk' - those individuals and communities that live and work in harmony with our natural environment and endeavour to 'minimise their ecological footprint' - hold the most credibility for me. I feel that they aren't always adequately represented in the planning realm. This is more than a hippy ideal; it takes a huge amount of hard work and determination as evidenced in the publication 'Small is successful'. As you'd expect, the motivations aren't purely financial, albeit the individuals and communities involved do need to be enterprising and demonstrate long term viability in order to be taken seriously.

Small is Successful is freely available from Ecological Land Co-operative; the report sets out eight case studies of food production enterprises occupying ten acres or less. It provides a unique insight into the motivations, practical realities and financial viability of each case study. I found it to be an inspiring read and very informative. The recommendations within the report are very astute.

Intuitively living and working in harmony with the land, fits comfortably with the concept of 'resilient communities', and subject to 'lifestyle' choices would perform well in a 'carbon audit'. Yet the case studies in Small is Successful often reveal the planning system to be a perceived obstacle, rather than a positive enabler of low impact development.



The marginal financial viability of some of the enterprises might be one reason for this. Some required a sympathetic land owner, great creativity on the part of the occupier or the use of land with little alternative value to get going. The perception of planning as a bureaucratic obstacle will also owe much to the well founded precautionary approach taken by many planning authorities in dealing with perceived 'lifestyle choices'. 'Motivations', which might well change over time, cannot be regulated. Again, I'm sure that we all know of attempted abuses of the planning system and instances where incremental creep has led to development that would otherwise be regarded as inappropriate. However, notwithstanding the difficulties, I believe that the planning system does need to find the confidence to enable resilient communities. In this respect the

case studies and key lessons set out in Small is Successful present an important step forward.

We have witnessed how lessons from LAMAS have filtered into Welsh national planning policy and similar policy approaches are being considered as part of LDF formulation here in the South West. Other local authorities have sought to encompass forms of low impact development within exceptions policies. The Decentralisation and Localism Bill may also throw up new opportunities, with enlightened communities having the ability to promote sustainable living, sustainable livelihoods and resilience through local neighbourhood plans - this may yet prove the planning systems best means of delivery.

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