



Sponsored by



## BRIEFING

# DELIVERING GREAT PLACES IN DIFFICULT TIMES: DEVELOPING SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

### INTRODUCTION

This Briefing is one of a series of three published by RTPI Scotland looking at how planners and the planning system can help to deliver great places in difficult times. The paper has been written after discussion at a *Convenor's Colloquium* discussion dinner which brought together key influencers and experts to come up with solutions, ideas, innovation and good practice. These were organised by RTPI Scotland and sponsored by Halcrow, a CH2M Hill Company.

The paper summarises the points raised by those participating in the discussion. These are set out to help stimulate discussion and debate on future approaches to delivering great places and so do not necessarily represent the views of RTPI Scotland, Halcrow or all of the participants in the discussion.

### SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

This paper focuses on "Skills and Knowledge" asking questions such as:

- What skills and knowledge do planners need to develop further to support the delivery of quality places?
- How can we support planners to develop and implement these skills?
- How can we support planners' employers to develop a culture which allows them to develop the right skills and knowledge?
- What tools and techniques will be important in the future and how do we develop a skills base on these?

## SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE NEEDED

The first question asked was what skills and knowledge do planners need to develop further to support the delivery of quality places? Key points raised included:

- **Expectations:** There are enormous, and often unreasonable, expectations put upon planners to know about a wide range of issues given the impact of planning. It is important to have a clear understanding of the limits of responsibility.
- **Confidence:** There is a lack of confidence within the profession. In order to counter this we need to show value of planning and ensure that planners know where they fit in, how they contribute, the value that they bring and that they are respected by colleagues and other organisations. This must reinforce the role of planners in providing professional advice for politicians and build on Scottish Government's support for planning.
- **Elected Members:** We are unsure about the skills and knowledge needs of Councillors and MSPs. We need to get a better understanding of this and keep them up-to-date on issues.
- **Delivery:** Planners can have skills and knowledge gaps in terms of development economics, issues in delivering development and the viability of development. Although this is improving, there is still a need to skill-up planners on these issues.
- **Implementation:** The very large majority of graduates entering jobs in planning are highly skilled and knowledgeable about planning. They do however need support in translating these skills into implementable actions.
- **Synergy:** Planners are often very good at bringing in the 'softer' issues around development delivery through joining up the different players and perspectives to create the synergy needed to take a holistic approach.
- **Risk and Innovation:** Planning authorities can be risk averse at a time when risk may often be required. They can also be cautious about introducing innovative new approaches. This can also be the case for funders and developers. How can we overcome this?

## SUPPORT

The next questions asked how can we support planners to develop and implement these skills and how can we support planners' employers to develop a culture which allows them to develop the right skills and knowledge? Key points raised included:

- **Supporting Staff:** Employers have a key role to play in supporting staff. They have to commit to supporting employees to access CPD. This should include providing resources to allow staff to engage in CPD activities and through organising local activity which shares experience.

- **Vision:** Employers need to provide vision and leadership so as to ensure that employees have a clear understanding of what their job is about and where it fits in delivering the organisation's objectives.
- **Performance:** Employers can use performance systems to provide clarity on the role of staff and the link to corporate objectives. Such systems can also be used to incentivise, reward and showcase good performance.
- **Influence and Leadership:** Planners are not at the top table in many local authorities and this can restrict their influence over corporate approaches. We need to examine how best to exert influence so that planning is seen as a key part of delivering corporate strategies.
- **Professionalism:** RTPI has an important part to play in supporting its members to be 'fit for purpose' in a changing world. It has a role in driving up standards and in providing members with opportunities for CPD through its events programme and through its Chapters. A key component of this should involve cross-professional training opportunities.
- **CPD Provision:** A range of organisations have a responsibility to support CPD provision and to be active capacity builders including Scottish Government, Improvement Service, RTPI Scotland, local authorities and the key agencies. Events like the Architecture + Design Scotland's Skills Symposium is a good example of this.
- **Planning Development Programme:** There is need to decide how skills development is going to continue after the winding up the Planning Development Programme in March 2013. This has been a major, and welcome, investment by Scottish Government in skills development amongst planners. There will still be a need for training in the future.
- **Coaching and Mentoring:** We should be looking at how best to develop approaches to 'experiential learning' through, for example, mentoring, action learning, coaching and sharing of experiences within and across organisations and sectors. There was already some good practice in this but much of it is uncoordinated and so functions in isolation. Can we coordinate approaches and join up opportunities to share experience?
- **Young Planners:** The Scottish Young Planners Network is a vibrant and creative group who should be supported to bring together young planners to discuss issues and to provide CPD opportunities. Is there an opportunity to work with the Young Planners to help support graduates to widen their experience through a placement scheme working across organisations and sectors?
- **Specialisms:** A number of planners have developed highly specialised expertise in particular issues. We should 'shine a light' on them to show the benefits this expertise can bring.

- **Linking Academia and Practice:** Our academic institutions are keen to develop partnerships with employers. This is especially important given the limitations of what can be done in a one year Masters programme, which can't cover every aspect of planning. Can we develop closer links between academia and practice to help students better understand how to implement what they have been taught? A key issue here is the lack of opportunities for students to undertake work experience or internships given reluctance amongst employers.
- **Good practice:** There is a lot of good practice underway across Scotland, and beyond. A number of organisations - such as Scottish Government, Improvement Service, RTPI, Heads of Planning Scotland – attempt to capture and share this. However this is often uncoordinated and there is no 'one stop shop' or recognised gateway which pulls it together to help planners learn more effectively. There is a need for a more systematic approach to knowledge transfer. This should be linked into CPD provision which helps planners to learn from and apply good practice.

## TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

The final question asked what tools and techniques will be important in the future and how do we develop a skills base on these? Key points were:

- **Value:** There is need to develop techniques which measure the value that planning brings and to articulate this to key influencers. Possible approaches include the Balanced Scorecard approach and more qualitative approaches including, for example, resident surveys. This will be complex and difficult, especially as there is often value when planning says 'no' to development proposals.
- **Charrettes:** The Charrettes programme has been seen as good example of collaborative working between planners, communities and other professions to develop a vision for a place. We should build on this and make sure that we gather, share and implement the learning which has come from the exercise. Is there a case for allowing people to shadow the Charrettes?
- **Community Planning:** There is a need for better connectivity between Community Planning and the land use planning system, and vice versa. Is there a case for better explaining what one another do and exploring how they can support one another's objectives? Does this need training or information for the planning profession?
- **Research:** We need to invest in research and analysis to ensure that our approaches are evidence based. Although there are a number of research and statistical programmes underway which are of interest and use to planners, it is not 'joined up' and dissemination is sporadic. Is there a need for better coordination of research and statistical analysis to assess what evidence base exists, what gaps there are, how to fill these gaps and how to better share findings?

## PARTICIPANTS

Those participating in the discussion were:

- Professor David Adams, Ian Mactaggart Chair of Property & Urban Studies, University of Glasgow
- Graham Black, Catalyst Consulting
- Ailsa Collin, Consultant, Halcrow
- Mandy Gallacher, Planning Development Programme, Improvement Service
- John Bury, Head of Planning, City of Edinburgh Council
- Laura Hoskins, Regeneration and Environment, COSLA
- David Littlejohn, Head of Planning and Regeneration, Perth and Kinross Council
- Jim MacDonald, Chief Executive, Architecture + Design Scotland
- Zoe McClelland, Chair, Scottish Young Planners Network
- Craig McLaren, National Director, RTPi Scotland
- John McNairney, Assistant Chief Planner, Scottish Government
- Murray Shaw, Partner, Biggart Baillie LLP
- Stefano Smith, Regional Director, Halcrow
- David Suttie, Convenor, RTPi Scotland
- Willie Watt, Partner, Nicholl Russell Architects

**If you want to discuss this please contact Craig McLaren, National Director of RTPi Scotland on 0131 229 9628 or 07850 926881**

**Published: 15 December 2011**



*Sustaining and improving the quality of people's lives.*

We believe in making places work through our unique collaborative approach to planning, design, transport and development. We take proposals and projects from inception to successful implementation. Our skills are equally important to small-scale commissions as to major masterplanning and infrastructure projects. For further information, please view [www.halcrow.com/dpd](http://www.halcrow.com/dpd). Halcrow is a CH2M Hill Company.

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPi) is the champion of planning and the planning profession. We work to promote the art and science of planning for the public benefit. We have around 2,200 members in Scotland and a worldwide membership of nearly 23,000. We:

- support policy development to improve approaches to planning for the benefit of the public
- maintain the professional standards of our members
- support our members, and therefore the majority of the planning workforce, to have the skills and knowledge they need to deliver planning effectively
- maintain high standards of planning education
- develop and promote new thinking, ideas and approaches which can improve planning
- support our membership to work with others who have a role in developing places in Scotland
- improve the understanding of planning and the planning system to policy makers, politicians, practitioners and the general public.

**Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland**  
18 Atholl Crescent, Edinburgh EH3 8HQ

Tel: 0131 229 9628 | E-mail: [scotland@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:scotland@rtpi.org.uk) | Web: [www.rtpi.org.uk/scotland](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/scotland) | Twitter: @RTPIScotland

The Royal Town Planning Institute is a charity registered in Scotland (SCO37841) and England and Wales (262285).  
Head Office: Royal Town Planning Institute, 41 Botolph Lane, London EC3R 8DL