

Message from the Chair

“Looking back”

A number of people have said to me, in the last few weeks: “The end is nigh!” Not in the sense of climate change impacts or even England’s cricket tour to Pakistan, but because my 12 months tenure is almost up. Those ‘doomsday’ words have caused me to look back over 2005, to reflect on a year as Chair.

I’ve really enjoyed it. It has often been mad, hectic and ‘seat of the pants’ – but fun nonetheless. Everyone should give it a go. Well, almost everyone.

Twelve months is not long enough – I’m just getting the hang of it. Other regional representative organisations provide longer or permanent spells as Chair and seem to benefit. Don’t take this as a plea to stay on. Quite apart from the fact that there are some keen and very able colleagues lined up for the next three years, it has been tricky to fit this voluntary role in with a demanding day job. At times it has felt like I’ve not done the role justice, that I haven’t been doing enough (and there have been a few things that I should have done – but didn’t!) – but looking back, quite a

lot has happened and I think the South West has moved forward a fair way.

It has been a year of big changes: the changes to the planning system have kicked in big time and changes to the way the RTPI and regions operate. There are other things that haven’t changed and won’t be changing: the RTPI(SW)’s conference programme, for example. Those things were obvious at the beginning of the year and are why, in the first Branchout of 2005, I wondered to what extent I would provide a ‘caretaker’ or ‘champion’ role.

Let’s look at changes to the planning system first. I’ve said, at every opportunity this year (and there have been lots!) that the changes provide a fantastic opportunity, not just for

planners but for all those involved in enabling the right things to happen in the right place at the right time. I’m worried that some of the critical elements of the new system are not being fully picked up:

- There are great opportunities for partnership – across sectors, professions and political boundaries. Whilst some good things are happening, I still see planners expected, and expecting, to do all the work.

- Long term vision has become even more critical. Again, there is some visionary and visioning work going on – but I see and hear of lots of short term political posturing.

- A clear focus on product – what we need to deliver on the ground – is essential. Instead I see many people completely tied to, enslaved by, process. Instead of making the process work for us it seems to be working against us. I know many other share this concern.

- A The development industry (planners included) must deliver sustainable outcomes, but I haven’t seen environmental, social and economic issues treated equally. By the same token, I haven’t seen enough from developers to suggest they’re keen to provide the high quality sustainable outcomes we’re all looking for.

These things are all close to my heart, and many of them will take time to come to fruition, but we need to pick up the pace a bit if we want to see a

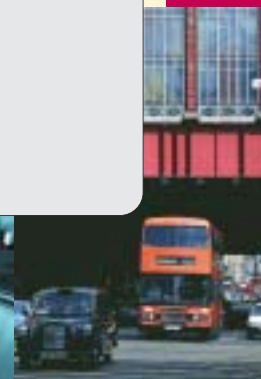
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PAT STEWARD
Chair 2005

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South West that we can be really proud of.

What about the way in which RTPI(SW) will operate in the region? There are some really exciting and positive things happening. I covered many of these in the last edition of Branchout – so won't be repeating myself. I think RTPI(SW) will gain a new lease of life, a new focus and a renewed sense of purpose in the region. Yes, there will still be institute issues to deal with on your behalf, but there will now be a greater emphasis on partnership in the region, more of a campaigning role and, hopefully, more of a role for RTPI(SW) to influence the plans, strategies and business of other organisations. To do that effectively we need to ensure new people take part in RTPI(SW) activities. This year I've heard many people saying they ought to get involved with RTPI(SW). Well, DO IT. GET INVOLVED. This does not mean sitting in committee meetings – there are plenty of other ways to get involved.

The 2005 conference series has been awesome – but I would say that, wouldn't it? I didn't think finding

55–60 speakers for 11 conferences would be so much fun! We've averaged more than 80 delegates at each of the conferences and broken the £60K income mark – enough for an EP competition house! Some of the key, frequently repeated, messages underline the points I've made above: Vision, partnership, boldness, quality (especially of design) and community involvement.

What about the campaigning role I've referred to in this article? Whilst continuing to work with our RTPI colleagues in London, to ensure you get an improving service and, for example, providing responses to a range of policy consultations (thanks to Bryan Smith and others), we have become involved in a couple of other more regionally focussed 'campaigns'. The first relates to affordable housing provision and the economy – known as the 'South West Housing Initiative'. A useful, mixed profession conference in February enabled a detailed and positive report to be produced. This has attracted the attention of ministers and has significantly raised the profile of the issue – nationally and regionally. More details of this

campaign can be found on our website. The second, more recent initiative involves working with rural community councils, GOSW, Creating: Excellence, the Market & Coastal Towns Association and other organisations to ensure there are better links between community/parish/town plans and the formal planning process. By March 2006 a best practice document, aimed at planners and communities, will have been produced alongside a concordat. These documents should help demystify planning (especially for communities) and provide some examples of the good things already happening in the region to integrate 'bottom up' with 'top down'. If you have an example of good practice, please drop me a line (pat.steward@southwestrda.org.uk).

Finally, a few thanks. To the SWRDA for allowing me the time – it's been productive; to Helen Clarke who makes the RTPI(SW) work like clockwork; to Kath Haddrell, Steve Atkinson and Chris Dadds who have helped with conferences this year; to David Walsh who has done a fantastic job as editor of Branchout, but is handing the role over at the end of this year (see back page).

At the beginning of the year the challenge was whether to be a champion or caretaker. In truth it's been a bit of both. Also in truth – it has been a lot of fun and very worthwhile. ■

RTPI South West – Recent Activities

Principal items on the Agenda of the Executive and its two Sub-Committees in September and October included:

- Attendance at the Executive in September of Jim Claydon, the Junior Vice President 2005 and Chair of the Branches Liaison Panel. He gave the Executive his views on the way forward for the new Regions from 1st January following the extensive Branches Review undertaken over the period 2002–2004.
- The September Executive meeting was also attended by Debbie Sorkin, the new RTPI Director of Programmes and Services. She explained that her wide ranging role covered the new Regions, Networks and Associations, events, awards, Planning Aid and international issues. There were three important aims:

(a) Giving RTPI members a better service

(b) Ensuring that the new Regions are well supported by the Institute nationally

(c) Good knowledge sharing across the whole Institute.

- A presentation by Martin Willey, a member of the Institute Executive Board, on the South West Housing Initiative, the aim of which is to promote cooperation between SW businesses, the housing industry and government to sustain and develop a prosperous regional economy through the provision of better, more affordable housing in sustainable communities.
- A progress report on the South West Planning Aid Service given by Barry Pearce, the SW Planning Aid

Co-ordinator based at the Architecture Centre in Bristol.

- Discussions and decisions on the Rules to be adopted for the running of the new RTPI SW Region based on a set of model Regulations and Rules issued by the Institute.
- The mode of operation of the new RTPI SW Region as from 1st January 2006 including the composition and responsibilities of the new RTPI SW Management Board and the Regional Activities Committee (should members wish to have further details of this would they please contact Helen Clarke, the RTPI SW Administrative Officer, Tel 01823 665532, Email: southwest@rtpi.org.uk ■

News from South West Planning Aid

Staff News

Barry Pearce has recently joined South West Planning Aid as its new Coordinator, based at the Architecture Centre in Bristol. Barry has previously worked mainly as a University Lecturer in Planning (*combining teaching and research at Cambridge University*). Other jobs have included work as Senior Planning Executive at the East of England Development Agency and as a Planning Inspector, where Barry has worked on housing, economic development and heritage issues. In a 'busy' past life he's been, among other things, a consultant to the OECD and Nuffield Foundation, Director and Development Manager for the Cambridge Civic Society and a local Magistrate. He has a particular interest in the development of mediation and negotiation skills and their use in the planning system.

Barry has been joined by Liz Payne, as one of the team's Caseworkers, helping to run the 'Helpline' (*offering callers advice and help on planning applications*). Liz has previously worked for South Somerset District Council as a community worker, policy planner and in development control, and will combine her role at South West Planning Aid with being part of the AONB team at Somerset County Council.

Planning for Non-Planners!

One of the ways in which South West Planning Aid can help community groups, local representatives and others is to ensure they are as well informed and prepared as they can be, when they need to be, about the planning system and about how best they can speak to and engage with planners. SWPA is aiming to roll out a series of workshops on the planning system, to be held throughout the region, targeted at those who know little about planning or wish to refresh or develop their knowledge. The emphasis will be on 'learning by doing', with activities as well as informative talks on how and when



Barry Pearce
SW Planning Aid's new coordinator

groups can best engage with planners and planning authorities, to build their confidence.

We need volunteers who might be prepared to help us run workshops (*we will do the basic organisation*). Volunteers will get the training in facilitation they need – and will get the chance to practice their communication skills. We plan to have a training event on this in December, with a series of workshops in the New Year. We hope this 'tool' will become a basic service provided by South West Planning Aid and reach groups which we have not been able to reach so far. If you think you can help, please get in contact with **Barry Pearce** on **0117 929 7292** or swco@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

Education for Sustainable Communities

In consultation with some 20 geography teachers from the Bristol area, local architects, CABE Education, the Architecture Centre and the Bristol Education Business Partnership, South West Planning Aid is developing a field resource to help Geography Teachers deliver learning to Key Stage 4 students (14 and

15 year old), using the Regeneration of Bristol Harbourside as a case study.

The resource will help teachers and pupils carry out field visits to the Harbourside area to assess the issues surrounding urban regeneration projects and, in particular, the role of Planning and Urban Design in ensuring sustainable development.

Planning Education projects such as these have huge benefits for both the teaching and the planning professions: For planners, young people gain skills and understanding so that they easier to engage through the Statement of Community Involvement. Also, closer involvement with planning issues can stimulate an interest in embarking on a career the profession. Finally, if planners get involved in education projects they can learn new skills. The benefits for teachers are equally significant as there is a big overlap between the geography syllabus and planning matters. By getting involved in projects such as these teachers and students gain access to abundant resources like maps photos, plans which significantly deepens their understanding of the learning topics that link with planning.

Again, if you think you might be interested please contact Barry Pearce.



Planning and Design: Vision and D

During my train journey down to Plymouth a colleague and I discussed the negative perceptions we have of Plymouth as a grey run down city. My opinions have been informed by my brief time living in the city 10 years ago and a couple of day visits since this. At the end of the day; four presentations later and after guided tour of the city centre later my views have changed and I can see that Plymouth has a lot to offer. The city is embracing this by tapping into this development potential ready to become one of the South West important regional cities.

The president of the RTPI, Ron Tate, began the day with an update on the progress of the 'dynamic' reforms emerging from the Institutes 'New Vision for Planning'. The changes the Institute envisage, aim to improve the service that the RTPI provides whilst being good value for money. On the ground these changes include; support to planners with the day to day problems experienced in their work; £3.8 million Government investment which is enabling the continuation of 'Planning Aid' (volunteers welcomed); new Regions will replace the existing Branches in 2006 - including the amalgamation of some branches; changes will be made to the structure of the Institute and how it is run, this includes the formation of new directorates and the development of a communication strategy which will set out improvements to links with internal and external bodies/parties combined with the continued development and growth of specialist' network groups.

Adrian Vinken (Chair of Culture South West) then kick-started the design focus for the day with an inspiring presentation on the 'Importance of Vision'. He used examples where 'radical' cultural solutions have been used as part of successful regeneration projects to completely transform areas far beyond the expectations of those living and working to improve them. He strongly believes that the 'Vision' should aim



Hayley Stokes

high in order to reverse negative perceptions and shatter complacency that communities have about a place.

Amongst projects including, the 'Sage' in Newcastle and the 'Eden Project' in Cornwall, Adrian talked about the redevelopment of the Salford Quays area in Manchester in great detail. Here an iconic building, 'The Lowry'; now home to the LS Lowry art collection and works by other local artists, has acted as the catalyst for regeneration in an industrial waste land. This building, with its unique glass and metallic facades that reflect the surrounding landscape, opened in 2000, and the surrounding area has since developed at significant pace with hotels, a major shopping complex, cinema, office blocks and by the end of 2005 10,000 apartments had been built on the site. The site has attracted significant private sector investment, has generated 10,700 new jobs in the area which is more jobs than those created during the Industrial Revolution!

Another success story a little closer to home is the new Theatre Royals TR2 building in Plymouth. This award winning landmark building, with its unusual bronze fabric clad exterior, has been used to raise the profile and

stimulate regeneration of a declining docklands area in the city. Adrian talked through the difficult decisions made due to funding constraints which almost resulted in compromising the vision, to use an 'Iconic' building, in favour of a more practical larger space. Fortunately the choice for good design prevailed and a unique building had been created that provides the city with a new theatre production and education centre.

Adrian finished with the advice that it takes courage to use radical visions and stick to them, but would encourage this approach to achieve successful regeneration.

Mark Pearson of CABE (Devon & Cornwall) seamlessly moved on to discuss the importance of the design of the 'background' - ordinary buildings in comparison to the 'foreground' - Iconic buildings of the previous presentation. He talked through examples of good and bad design found in the South West region explaining that the successes had considered the context of the buildings in the new design and paid attention to detail.

Mark emphasised that poor design should be refused and justifications should be clear and concise, backed



The Lowry

up by strong policy so that they will uphold at appeal. He is a strong advocate of the 'By Design' policy document, developed in conjunction with DETR and now referred to in the new PPS 1 (Delivering Sustainable Development). The new LDF's (Local Development Frameworks) will also help with this but he also encouraged planners to make use of CABE services to inform good design. This includes advice mechanisms, such as the 'Design Review Panels' that have been set up in Plymouth and Carrick; training and publications; including the pockets size 'Design at a Glance' which sets out national planning policy on design.

For more information on how CABE can help you and to gain access to a fantastic library catalogue of high quality designed buildings in the South West, go to the CABE website@cabe.co.uk and for dates of future conferences go to createexcellence.co.uk

Paul Barnard, Head of Planning and Regeneration at Plymouth City Council followed this with a whirlwind presentation on how Plymouth is embracing the new planning policy framework to drive change throughout the city. He set out how he sees planning at the heart of 'creative thinking' and the role of Local Planning Authorities as central to delivery. He explained that they need to be; 'Visionary' with proposals that are innovative and bold; provide leadership; ensure quality and willing to take risks to realise projects.

Plymouth is already pursuing its role as a delivering authority with the development of a new sustainable community on the Plymstock Quarry site on the edge of the city. The Council's 'Vision for Plymouth' also sets out an ambitious programme of radical regeneration projects that will form Area Action Plans in the cities new development framework. These include redevelopment of the city centre, the docks at 'Devonport and 'Millbay' and Sutton Harbour to name but a few. It was clear that Paul wants to make a difference in the city

and the Council taking a lead role to deliver this through the new planning system.

No graveyard slots in the afternoon, but for a refreshing change an opportunity to get out and see the city instead with a choice of three tours to complement the mornings presentations; 'Urban Renaissance' city centre and Millbay, 'New Communities' at Plymstock quarry and 'Icon Projects' (TR2 Building).

I opted for the 'Urban Renaissance' tour which began at Millbay, a brown field dockyard site, just south west of the city centre. This waterside location currently acts as a gateway to the city and the South West for the many European visitors arriving by ferry. The remainder of the site is covered by vast areas of concrete used for parking and maritime/industrial buildings, many of which are in a poor state of repair. There is considerable potential to retain the maritime character of the area and renovate these buildings, which includes a huge grain silo, reminiscent of the Baltic building in Newcastle. Through an Area Action Plan in the emerging LDF, the City Council is working with English Partnerships to redevelop the site with a mix of high quality residential, office and commercial uses. The maritime setting and history of the site will also be developed through a new centre for Marine and Research Science and other maritime related employment. Central to the proposal is a new boulevard that will link the area with the city centre and plans to provide waterside café's and bars are hoped to turn the area into an attraction in its own right. They are looking to not only transform the area economically but socially and our working closely with the local community in 'Stonehouse' (one of the most deprived wards in England) to achieve this.

We were then taken through city centre; Patrick Abercrombie's creation as part of post war redevelopment in the 40's. I was impressed by the recent public realm improvements to the main boulevards, particularly the



Plymstock quarry

elegant lighting and landscaping of the scheme which form part of the City Centre Area Action Plan. Another major component of this plan is the new undercover shopping redevelopment planned for 'Drakes Circus' which is hoped to become a focal point for retail in the South West. It will create 51,950 square metres of retail floor space, generating 2000 jobs in the retail sector when it opens in autumn 2006, although I wonder if the design is striking enough to meet this aspiration.

I thoroughly enjoyed the day, particularly the chance to get out and see real life projects, I hope the success of which will mean they form a common feature of future RTPI conferences. These visits helped to change my opinion of the city and clearly the pro-active and forward thinking approach of the City Council has been recognised by the RTPI as it's LDF has recently been short listed for a planning award.

I felt inspired by the enthusiasm and ambition that came across in all the presentations and hope that I too can make a difference and get the chance to deliver visionary high quality design.

■ **Hayley Stokes**

Planning and the Historic Environment

Dartington Hall, Totnes

September 2005

Steeped in history and standing on a site continuously occupied for over 1000 years, Dartington Hall was an apt setting for this conference. If the distinctiveness of the location was reflected in the quality of lunch, then we were in for a good one. Having been collared in a no doubt well honed manoeuvre, I found myself taking notes of the day's proceedings. This was not, however, the chore envisaged.

The morning kicked off with a talk from Chris Oldershaw of the Gloucester Heritage Urban Regeneration Company. As the name suggests, the regeneration company has harnessed the city's heritage as a driver for change. Chris explored the benefits to regeneration of utilising an area's heritage in defining the identity of a place and providing a competitive advantage (e.g. *tourism*). However, he also highlighted the big issue of changing perceptions of listed building as costly to refurbish, subject to highly restrictive planning controls etc. Chris's key message was about getting the vision right, ensuring the right people are in place to deliver it and being bold in delivering it.

Although coming from a different perspective, Nigel Grainge, an architect and proponent of "humane architecture", touched on some similar themes. Leading the



conference on a European tour of projects undertaken by international architects, Nigel demonstrated a number of "contemporary solutions in historic settings". The message was clear. Cherish the old and celebrate what's new.

No fan of historical pastiche, Nigel highlighted several examples where an understanding of the character and function of a building had enabled bold, contemporary interventions to be made. Using local examples, Nigel noted that sometimes it's case of what's the least which can be done to "create magic". The key message here was creating relevant changes that work with history and leave a clear timeline for the future.

After coffee and a fruit shortcake, Barry Marmot, an architect who has "done rather a lot of listed buildings" continued the proceedings. Barry began by comparing himself to a pork butcher addressing the vegetarian society annual tofu picnic. (You'll be relieved to hear Barry managed to get out of the building with only minor cuts and bruises). "Successful ingredients" was the basis of this talk, which highlighted the experience of rejuvenating the Great Hall, Place Barton. We were taken on a gallop through the process of breathing new life into an old barn requiring significant repair.

Although an example of a successful project with a happy ending, the process wasn't plain sailing and was actually a rather bumpy ride, navigating the often conflicting requirements of conservation practise, building regulations and insurance requirements. It has to be said that the project no doubt benefited from clients with a definite sense of community spirit and probably a little spare cash. However, the venture was a prime demonstration of what can be accomplished with a little flexibility and sheer determination on the part of all involved.

Lunch: impressive, one of the best yet. Nice dessert.



The woman eating public art in Exeter High Street

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Alan Stone took the after lunch “grave yard” slot but maintained the pace with a talk entitled “Quality Street – a confectioners guide to the public realm”. Alan, who leads the urban design team at Devon County Council, noted the issues affecting the public realm; the complex pattern of owners, tenants and users and the creeping degradation of previously well-designed public places through the simple carelessness of users, the indifference of some service providers and the ravages of time. In response to this problem, the County Council set up a multi-disciplinary team to proactively tackle public realm issues.



Mortonhampstead – sheep and clutter

Mortonhampstead was highlighted as a case study where a comprehensive approach was taken to public realm management. Key lessons learnt from the process included a requirement for a “top to bottom” culture ensuring everyone is aware of the big picture in order for all to pull in the same direction. Alan also touched on the important contribution of public art in making a place. However, he did strike a cautionary note for anyone involved in designing in public realm, highlighting an incident where a young woman was trapped by a piece of public art in Exeter High Street, only to be freed after the intervention of the Fire Brigade. Mental note.

The final speaker of the day, Deborah Porter from English Heritage, provided some welcome news – proposed simplification of the regulations around the historic environment and heritage protection and the promotion of a unified consent regime. In a presentation

that provided a national perspective on the issue, as well as a range of good examples, Deborah revealed that the proposals would provide a much better and holistic understanding of the historic environment.

Importantly, new legislation will encourage integration of different parts of the historic environment, including groups of buildings and their setting, to enable us to plan better for their future. For many places, people and communities, such as Gloucester, this constitutes a very positive step forwards. This proposed new legislation is a clear indication that other ‘single consent procedures’ will be coming forward soon.

All in all, this was a useful and thought provoking series of talks bound together by a number of themes which are not necessarily new but worth reiteration. The importance of contextual knowledge and having a vision of where you want to go is a simple concept but often lacking. Ensuring the right people are in the right place with the right skills is also essential but often difficult to achieve.



Mortonhampstead – just follow the guidelines!!

A key message throughout was the importance of treating the historic environment not as something to slavishly preserve but where sometimes bold alteration can create something of its time, maintain historic character and add something strikingly new and useful to its community. Full marks to the chef.

■ **Stephen Cains**

And it's goodnight from me . . .



It only seems like yesterday when I agreed to give Mark Walton a helping hand as he took on the role of Branchout Editor, following in the illustrious footsteps of the great and good such as Steve Garrett and Bryan Smith. It wasn't long after that Mark then decided to leave the South West and further his planning career in the Midlands, leaving me with the visor, red pen and copy deadlines. Thanks Mark, I really do hope Wolves do well this season (for a change).

But seriously, the years served as Branchout Editor have been mostly enjoyable, from my point of view. I only hope that you the reader, and I know a few people do actually read it, have got some enjoyment and enlightenment from the printed pages. The introduction of full colour, including photographs, was well received and served to make Branchout a more appealing publication.

The job of Editor is fairly easy when there is plenty of copy to edit, and the decisions are around which articles can wait until the next edition. Not quite so easy when copy deadline date arrives and the only article submitted is the Message from the Chair! This has happened on occasions, and thanks to those who answered the urgent calls for assistance.

Don't forget colleagues, that Branchout is an opportunity for you to

showcase what you are doing out there to improve the quality of life in the South West. I know we are all too busy to write articles for Branchout, but bear in mind that Sedgemoor have noted increased levels of interest in jobs advertised following the article in the Autumn edition. And they didn't even have to pay for the publicity! It's your newsletter, so make the most of it.

Before I go I would just like to thank everyone who has assisted me over the years, with conference reports, up-dates on the activities of RTPi SW, the regular Message from the Chair, and all the other bits and pieces. A special thank you to Helen Clarke, who has harried people for conference reports extracted information from Botolph Lane, and organised the distribution of Branchout four times a year. Also many thanks to Richard Windsor, my designer and link with the local printing company.



Just like Old Father Time makes way for the New Year (topical or what?), I am passing the visor, etc., onto **Colin Blundell** (above) as the **new Editor for 2006**. Colin will do a brilliant job, so please give him your support and articles. Copy deadlines will be publicised in Branchout, and all articles should in future be submitted to Helen Clarke, RTPi SW Administrator at southwest@rtpi.org.uk

DIARY

A Warm Welcome to New Members to RTPi South West

New Branch Entrants:

Roger Pidgeon, William Broadbent, Graham Clarke, Martin Joyce, Chris Oldershaw, Patrick O'Leary, Roland Close, Lynn Hayler, Rebecca Harfield, Marcus Beddoe, Nicholas Ford, Emma Norgate, Steven Sheasby, Thomas Silk and Neil Jones.

New Students:

Simon Rees, Vincent Albano

RTPi South West Conference Programme

9 December 2005

E-planning – love it or hate it, it's happening!

The Guildhall, Bath

27 January 2006

Understanding Development Finance.

Civic Centre, Plymouth

(in partnership with Plymouth City Council).

28 February 2006

Development Management

Brewhouse Theatre, Taunton

17 March 2006

Planning & Architecture

Maritime Museum, Falmouth

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