

THE ROYAL TOWN PLANNING INSTITUTE

GENERAL ASSEMBLY

MINUTES of a meeting of the General Assembly held at At-Bristol, Bristol on Tuesday 3 July 2007.

PRESENT Jim Claydon (President), Janet O'Neill (Senior Vice President), Martin Willey (Junior Vice President), Vincent Goodstadt (Honorary Treasurer).

Janthia Algate, Mike Ash, Jan Bessell, Ken Burley, Joanna Chambers, David Chapman, Heather Cheesbrough, Nick Davies, Joanne Dutton, Jed Griffiths, Mike Hayes, Roger Kelly, David Marshall, Janice Morphet, Alan Morris, Kevin Murray, Cath Ranson, Alistair Stark, Des Stephens, Richard Summers, Ron Tate, Andrew Taylor, Mark Tewdwr-Jones, Alan Wenban-Smith, David Westhead, Tony Whitehead, Owain Wyn.

Guests: Steve Atkinson, Peter Lamb, Mike Oakley, Richard Williamson.

In attendance: Various RTPI members of staff.

Apologies for absence: Don Alder, Ian Anderson, Faraz Baber, David Barraclough, Chris Berry, Pat Castledine, Sandra Fryer, Peter Geraghty, Clive Harridge, John Harvey, Mike Haslam, Colin Haylock, Kelvin Hinton, Emma Kirk, Hazel McKay, Ismail Mohammed, Michael O'Connell, Catherine Quigley, Carol Robinson, Leonora Rozee, Carol Ryall, John Scott, Chris Shepley, Ann Skippers, Pat Thomas, Peter Wilbraham, Joanna Williams, Maggie Williams.

General Assembly business

2008 RTPI Subscriptions: In response to questions from Joanne Dutton, Keith Mitchell, Director of Corporate Planning & Resources, noted that the number of bands for low income concessions had been changed from four to three last year, but after a number of objections, it had been decided to revert to four. The concessions available to student and other members will all be fully explained in the subscriptions booklet that is sent out to members later in the year.

There was a robust debate on this topic. Whilst some were opposed to such a large rise in subscription rates *per se*, most felt that it was justifiable. It was noted that the raising or otherwise of subscriptions was ultimately a matter for Executive Board – this was a consultation exercise. It was also noted that subscriptions accounted for just over 50% of income received.

The main view expressed was that the tabled paper did not explain in sufficient depth the rationale behind the subscriptions

increase. It was felt that the detail given was not sufficient for General Assembly members to go back to their regions and explain it to local members. The Institute was doing a lot to make its voice heard, as well as having ambitions to increase its influence and profile – it was felt, however, that the achievements, current and future, were not sufficiently well communicated to the wider membership, in order that they could see where the resources were going and feel more a part of the Institute. More clarification and explanation was necessary if members were not to feel this increase was high.

Janet O'Neill then gave a report on a number of topics, which are covered in the attached presentation.

Janet O'Neill presented the report of Executive Board to the Audit Committee, which is attached.

David Marshall reported that he had been concerned that staff had been upset at the wording of the Audit Committee report on the topic of Planning Aid funding. He had now been assured by Debbie Sorkin that Planning Aid budgets were indeed closely monitored – more so perhaps than any other area. He accepted that there had been a partial communications breakdown and that he had not asked for relevant information which was available. He apologised to Debbie Sorkin, Dave Chetwyn and Planning Aid staff, and pledged that the subject would be looked at again at the next Audit Committee meeting.

Janet O'Neill continued her presentation by looking at the Planning White Paper consultations, Administrative Arrangements and the Institute's report on Land Stocks of House Builders.

Ron Tate asked that the General Assembly should send Robert Upton their best wishes for a speedy recovery, and express their hope that he should return to work when it was appropriate for him to do so. The General Assembly endorsed these sentiments.

Mike Ash noted that, when the Competition Commission had been looking at supermarkets, they had needed a planner to help them. He wondered whether the Institute had a similar role to play in the impending OFT enquiry.

Kelvin MacDonald responded that there was a role for the RTPI to play, by providing an independent planner. This was also the case for an inquiry on finance in planning that was soon to be conducted by the National Audit Office.

A number of General Assembly members expressed the view that the Institute's Business Plan should be made available to GA members and others, as a sign of greater transparency. However, Kelvin MacDonald noted that it was confidential as it had sensitive information within it concerning, *inter alia*, implications for staff arising from proposed new structuring. Some Trustees

registered their view that, if not completely open to scrutiny, as much information as possible should be available.

This led to a discussion on the role of General Assembly in relation to the Executive Board. The improvements that the Institute had undergone since the 'New Vision' were manifold; however, now was a time to take stock and revisit the structural relationships it created. Several felt that, specifically, the role of GA was now unclear, particularly as Executive Board members were elected by the General Assembly and were responsible to the wider membership.

Kevin Murray put forward the following motion:

...that ExBo undertake an interim overview of governance and operations of the Institute, assessing how enhancement of the General Assembly could aid the effective 'participation', 'succession' and 'growth' of the RTPI."

This motion received widespread support. Whilst guests are invited to General Assembly to view its policy debates and other work, it was also suggested by Jan Bessell that a more 'human' side of GA and Executive Board members could be shown by a 'day in the life' feature on the website and/or in *Planning*, to enlighten RTPI members of both bodies' work and to encourage greater member participation.

General Assembly thanked Kelvin MacDonald for the huge impact he had made in policy terms during the last five years. The members also recorded their thanks to Janet O'Neill and the rest of the Presidential Team for handling the difficult situation that has arisen in the Institute over the last few weeks.

Jim Claydon presented the latest edition of RTPI Update to the General Assembly. This is now available on the RTPI website, under 'Governance.'

General Assembly members were canvassed for future policy topics to debate at their meetings. Suggestions were:

- Interface between Transport and Planning
- Climate Change
- National Planning Framework

There was no other business.

Next meeting

3 October 2007 at Woburn House, London.