

# BRANCHOUT

WINTER 2006

<http://southwest.rtpi.org.uk>

No. 130

## Message from the chair

Here it is. My last front page for Branchout and I don't know quite what to say, something of a first for me...

I will begin with thank you. Firstly to my employers at Government Office and now at White Young Green Planning in Bristol for allowing me the time to participate in RTPI events this year and to give me the freedom to express my views in public, which might not always have been very comfortable.

I would like to thank the members of the RTPI Regional Management Board for support above and beyond the call of duty this year, in particular Steve Atkinson, Mike Oakley and Chris Dadds who have chaired meetings and conferences for me after the sudden death of my brother. Others within the Region have also been very supportive this year and made it possible for me to carry on. You know who you are and what your support has meant to me - thank you. Helen Clarke has provided brilliant administrative support to the RTPI SW generally and to me in particular and whilst no-one is irreplaceable, I can't imagine how we would survive without her!!

This year we have run one of the most

successful conference programmes ever, 97 delegates on average per conference. We could not have achieved that without the support of a number of local authorities, companies and individuals who have been stalwart supporters of the RTPI SW over the years. These include Plymouth City Council for providing us with the venue for our January conference and Ashford's and Burges Salmon Solicitors for speakers and venues associated with the Development Management conferences. Special thanks also to Mike Fox and his team at Torbay and to Liz Osbourne from Ashford's for stepping in and speaking at conferences at the last minute and to David Seaton of Midas Homes and Carleen Keleman and Mark Yeoman from the Objective One team in Cornwall for speaking at more than one event (and still taking my calls!)

I have enjoyed being Chair, though it has been very daunting at times. I have been able to say what I believe and have tried my hardest to promote the profession and to stand up for professional colleagues at a time when planning and planners are under increasing pressure to perform and deliver at every level, central and local government (including the Inspectorate) and in the private sector.

The Stafford and Lichfield binding reports sent shockwaves through the system, though I am not sure that those reports should have come as such a surprise. The guidance is there, from PINS, DCLG and POS, amongst others. Having said that, I believe that the LDF system was rushed in and that we have introduced a system that is more

complex than the last with guidance that was not always as timely as it should have been. Most planners I know, in all sectors, still feel that we are only just getting to grips with LDF's. Perhaps even more importantly, I am not sure that even informed members of the public will choose to get involved with the Development Framework system.

I still believe that planning matters. I do believe that we need to plan carefully to deliver jobs, homes, schools, shops in the right places and that we can only achieve this by working in partnership with each other. I believe that we should continue to reduce the need to travel (ok, Cape Town wasn't a sustainable holiday destination) but I still get the bus to work and use the train as much as possible. I believe that as planners we can make a difference but that we still have much to do! I would like the RTPI SW to become more pro-active, to be able to offer sub-regional events. I would like to see more members becoming involved, and I hope that we don't have to wait another decade for a female Chair.



**Kathrine Haddrell**

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# News from South West Planning Aid

## Planning Aid Champions and Concordat

In a previous edition of Branchout we reported on a new initiative launched by Baroness Andrews, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Dept. of Communities and Local Government, urging every local authority to appoint a Planning Aid Community Champion. The role of the Champion is to shout about Planning Aid's services within their authority, flag up any new consultations in which Planning Aid might be involved, introduce Planning Aid to new networks and partnerships, and build bridges between the authority and disadvantaged groups in the community. Since the initiative was launched I am very happy to report that a number of authorities in the South West have taken up the challenge and appointed Champions.

Recent Champions include:

Alison Eldergill - Exeter  
Cllr Derick Bray - Plymouth  
Cari Wooldridge - Purbeck  
Joanna Lewin-Harris - Taunton  
Deane, and Mark Stone - Somerset.

In addition to the Champions local authorities have also been asked to pledge their support for Planning Aid by signing the Planning Aid Concordat. As well as the above Councils, Bournemouth, Kerrier and Swindon Councils have agreed to support the work of Planning Aid in a variety of different ways; including providing publicity, referrals, support for volunteering and financial support (the new Swindon-SWPA Compact reported in the last edition of Branchout is particularly interesting and innovative).

Planning Aid works with a range of local authority partners and it is really great to be seeing - and getting - this level of support.

## Gypsies and Travellers

The difficulties that the Gypsy and Traveller community has in securing permanent sites is well known. As an indicator, whereas the settled community secures planning permission in 80% of cases for Gypsies and Travellers it is the exact mirror image: just 20%. Their

problems have manifold causes but are compounded by misinformation and prejudice. The Government is currently trying to change this situation and South West Planning Aid is doing its bit.

Together with the South West Alliance of Nomads we have secured funding from the Home Office to commission a film, to go on DVD, about the issues Gypsy and Traveller groups face in trying to obtain planning permission. The intention is to focus on raising awareness of their difficulties (hopefully doing some myth busting along the way) and providing Gypsy and Traveller families with guidance on the planning system and how best to approach it to get the planning permissions they need. The DVD format will enable the widest possible audience.

## Travellers' Home

Meanwhile our Casework service is helping particular Gypsy and Traveller families. Here's just one example (names changed to ensure confidentiality) provided by Planning Aid volunteer Tim Cox.

"Fairground days are over for Pete and Betty. They travelled for many years before age and ill health took their toll. They now have a paddock and their travellers' van as well as an extensive family to remind them of the past and the future. For the last ten years most of their savings have been used up as they have struggled to get planning permission. Originally for winter quarters, their current application, refused, is to retain their caravan on its site. Their van is their home and they have nowhere else to go.

Planning Aid is helping Pete and Betty, now in their 70s and in poor health, to put their case for a personal permission at an informal hearing to be heard in November. Many local people support them. While planning policy is not helpful to their case, the impact of this single caravan is minimal. The 'humanitarian' case for letting a couple who are valued members of the local community live out their lives in peace and security is a

compelling one. Watch this space!"

## More Casework

And while we're on the subject of Casework it's always good to report examples where we have been able to help the ordinary small person. Here's a case report provided by Clive Smith, one of SWPA's Caseworkers.

"An elderly lady in the south of the region who lives in a bungalow was very worried about a planning application for a two-storey house in a small close of bungalows. I researched the planning history and found that outline planning permission for a house had already been granted last year; the current application sought approval of reserved matters. Having got relevant plans/information off the Council's web-site I sent her three short paragraphs suggesting possible objections on grounds of design, overlooking and lack of information.

Her husband used this in his own objection letter. Given the outline permission I was not optimistic of the application being refused but she has just rung me to let me know the application was refused on design and overlooking grounds and of course she is very pleased. I've explained that the applicant might appeal or submit a revised application but it's a good result for them for now."

I think these two examples show Planning Aid at its simple best; it's not primarily about numbers and targets and bricks and mortar, but people and their right to have a voice. If those of us in Planning lose sight of the human side of our decision making processes then surely we lose our claim to be a profession serving the public interest. And, leaving off where I started, that's why people are prepared to Champion and support our work.

**Barry Pearce**, SWPA Coordinator  
0117 929 7292  
[swco@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk](mailto:swco@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk)

# RTPI Networks and Associations

The RTPI Networks and Associations are a success story. They provide members with a means of direct communication and knowledge exchange, not just with other Institute members but also with non-planning professionals engaged in planning issues. The Networks and Associations are helping to raise the profile and influence of the RTPI, and now play a key role in our engagement and communication with members and other professionals working in planning related fields. The networks and associations are virtual communities, but who also meet face-to-face at events and conferences all around the Regions. Besides providing a forum for networking, they also offer a central voice to campaign for changes in policy and practice.

## Our existing Networks and Associations are:

- Regeneration
- Urban Design
- Transport Planning
- Environmental Planning and Protection
- Development Planning
- Development Management
- Education for Sustainable Development
- International Development
- Young Planners
- Independent Consultants
- Room for All - the Housing Network
- Community Planning Forum
- Politicians in Planning Association
- National Association for Planning Enforcement

All the current networks and associations operate internationally. Existing members come from all sectors – including government, consultancies, academia, and NGO's. They are for all levels of experience, from planning assistant to chief executive. Although members receive regular e-bulletins containing all the latest news and events, the networks and associations are much more than a mailing list – our members are actively involved in activities. Some of their current projects include a web-based publication on Environmental Planning & Protection (EPP Network); a Manual for Planners on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD Network); research into transport assessments (Transport Planning Network); collating case studies of successful community planning initiatives (Community Planning Forum); development of a Planning Enforcement handbook (NAPE); assessing mixed-use development (Urban Design Network); and facilitating the development of Local Development Frameworks (Development Planning Network).

With the development of a new RTPI website which will allow greater interaction with our members, we envisage the networks and associations going from strength to strength. Our latest Network (Development Management) was launched only this month, and we have plans for a new Rural Network for the New Year.

The RTPI has a strong commitment to representing and supporting the whole family of planning, and people working in planning, supporting their standing and professional development. We are in the process of putting together a development strategy for our networks and associations and this will consider the need and demand for new networks, considering the implications of their future growth, which may potentially require a sub-division by nation/region or subject. I would be very interested in hearing your views on the potential for setting up Regional networks in the South West. How would they work? What benefits would you, as a member, wish to see?

We have a Networks and Associations team and they would be pleased to hear from you and answer any of your queries. See [www.rtpi.org.uk](http://www.rtpi.org.uk) for contact details.

For any general information about any of the Networks and Associations (both existing and potential) please visit [www.rtpi.org.uk/resources/networks](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/resources/networks) or contact me at [networks@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:networks@rtpi.org.uk) or on 01262 605972.



**Trish Cookson**  
RTPI Networks &  
Associations  
Developer

## RTPI SW MANAGEMENT BOARD AND ACTIVITIES COMMITTEE

The September joint meeting of the Board and Activities Committee was again held at the new offices of the RTPI SW at East Reach House, Taunton. Principal items on the agenda included:

- A presentation by Trish Cookson, the RTPI Networks and Associations Developer (see separate article in this issue of Branchout).
- A report by the RTPI SW Hon. Secretary on the constitution of Management Board and Activities Committee for the period 2007-2008.
- A report back from the September National Regions and Nations Panel by Mike Oakley, the RTPI SW representative on the Panel.
- A report back on the July meeting of the RTPI General Assembly meeting from Janthia Algate, the RTPI representative on the Assembly.
- A request from the S.W. Director of Future Foundations for RTPI SW support of the South West Sustainability Checklist for Development.
- An update report on the 2006 budget from David Lobban, the RTPI SW Treasurer.
- Progress reports on the CPD conference programme in 2006 and 2007.

# YOU CAN IGNORE THIS; IT'S

**Well .... not really, because this article comes with a government health warning: ignore Community Plans (by which we mean Parish Plans and Market and Coastal Town Plans) at your peril. In fact that health warning is now, very topically, even stronger since the White Paper on local government. Things are now rather blunt**



**- you cannot ignore Community Plans.**

Some colleagues and I have recently finished a project\* that started by looking at the integration (or not) between Community Plans and statutory planning in practice across the South West. The more we looked at the rapidly changing context, the more we realised that that was not the main issue. And the more we looked at the new context the more we realised that planning (and planners) might get left behind, and that wouldn't actually help the next generation of Community Plans (or you).

So, what did we find? What is the 'new context'? And how might planner engagement in Community Plans be not only 'required' but also potentially beneficial to planners and planning?

## **What Did We Find?**

A bit of everything basically. We found some motivated individual planners doing some great stuff in supporting communities wishing to do some sort of 'plan'. There were even some local authorities (ie. beyond just planning) where people were working coherently together to

enhance local capacity, plan for and then deliver innovative projects built on exciting community engagement. But then we found some authorities where the planners just hoped all those whimsy locals would go away, taking their unachievable wish lists with them .... though they never dared to say so in public.

Oh yes, and there were indeed quite a few whimsy locals with wish lists (not another village swimming pool, please), who then complained when they sent their plan to the planners and sat back waiting for an answer; for the planners to 'do' their plan for them. There again they too were balanced by some highly motivated and skilled local groups producing strongly argued, well-evidenced proposals which might grace a Local Development Document but whose outputs were given short shrift (or less) by their local planners.

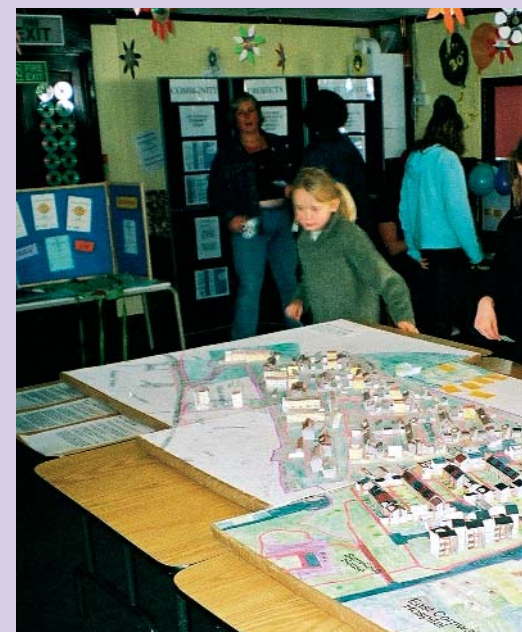
*Perhaps the biggest issue was about the widespread assumption among those doing Parish Plans...*

Perhaps the biggest issue was about the widespread assumption amongst those doing Parish Plans (not an issue for Market and Coastal Town projects) that it was only if they had got their plan formally adopted as SPG (old system) that it could possibly have any value at all – even if less than half of its action plan items had anything to do with planning. That has of course become even more uncertain as SPG has morphed into SPD and the horrendous apparatus of Sustainability Appraisal (or what some people assume it means) has risen above the horizon and frightened off many communities and planners alike. But that has its counterbalance too in, for example, the work of Felicity Sylvester when on a Parish Plans pilot project with Caradon District and the current approach of North Cornwall District where community-friendly Sustainability Appraisal approaches are well underway.

Where things worked best – and hence very cost-effectively for all parties – was when there was a broad support structure for local communities to help them get ready to do their Community Plans (not necessarily run by planners but needing their input) and very early contact between local authority (not necessarily planner but that's useful) or RCC officer and local community groups. That sort of careful preparation and induction (another version of 'front-loading') reduced later problems so significantly that many never happened in the first place. After that sort of good start, good guidance, longer term support, tactical advice (about what is and is not planning-relevant) and common sense rigour on evidence bases all helped consolidate things into useful, even exciting and challenging but certainly practical plans.

## **What is the New Context?**

I don't need to tell you about the key changes in planning but you may need to be reminded that these also reinforce the potential role and status of Community Plans. Think of the shift from a land use to a spatial



# ABOUT COMMUNITY PLANS

focus (just the thing for a typically holistic local community view of its place and people), the increased emphasis on coherent community involvement (what on earth is a Community Plan if it isn't the outcome of a robust involvement process?) and the potential offered, though we have no detail yet, by changes in planning obligations, (especially the ability to 'pool' monies, so crucial to small, rural communities).

But this is when we as a project team started to shift our focus. The more we talked to people, the more we realised that the next generation of Community Plans could better draw its rationale, perhaps even its resources and support, from other things that have happened or will do shortly. In this wider context the team drew attention to the potential and implications of:

- the shift from Community Strategies to Sustainable Community Strategies;
- the implications of this in terms of more comprehensive and consistent topic coverage, taking a longer term view and avoiding narrow parochialism in strategy development;
- planned changes to the system of Local Strategic Partnerships;
- piloting of Local Area Agreements; and
- the hints (at the time) of what might be in the Local Government White Paper about 'neighbourhoods' and devolution.



And this is of course where what has happened as I write (this very day) creates even more urgency for you as planners to start to look again at how you work with communities and their potential 'plans'. Even a quick look at the White Paper highlights mentions not just in general about generating more very local councils (or equivalents) and giving them more control and influence, even budgets, but also specific demands on better integration between the aims, formats and production methods of Sustainable Community Strategies and those of LDFs. If you see (as we do) Community Plans as Local Sustainable Community Strategies the need for planners to work with communities is unavoidable.

## And What's in it for Me?

So is this 'hello planners' time or 'goodbye planners' time? Having said you cannot ignore what's happening, you can of course. You can retreat to the bunker and see your profession reduced even further to a limited control system only, or you can seize what I believe is the best opportunity (along with greater community involvement generally) that you have had for years.

Engaging with Community Plans can add enormously to your resource base (the average Parish Plan generates the equivalent of £72,000 of voluntary time), working collaboratively can add to your

evidence base, it can revive the role of planning as practical policy making, it takes you out of the office back into real life situations, it satisfies the requirements of just about every bit of the new systems and it ensures a speedier and more robust link between policy and development control. The end result may be that no Community Plan ever becomes, as a whole, SPD ever again, but that is of no consequence given the medley of other and better ways in which your approaches and community approaches can combine to mutual benefit.

Over to you folks. This is probably no more than an appetite-whetter ..... but that makes it easy to ignore again, doesn't it?

**Jeff Bishop**  
BDOR Limited  
October 2006

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\* 'An Exciting Future for Community Plans' is available from the South West Acre Network at [www.swan-network.org.uk](http://www.swan-network.org.uk). This is the summary report; the full version is also available.

# INVOLVEMENT IN THE REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY

When invited, your Branch attempts to respond to consultations on planning matters in the region, when and as they arise. Whilst this can present problems as it is felt necessary to maintain a certain professional neutrality, after all one opinion on planning matters may well clash with that of fellow professionals in the region, whether they are representing themselves, authorities or clients. This is an issue that confronts the Institute at many levels and on different fronts and thus we try to steer an uncontroversial route. This might make it boring and perhaps we do duck some of the more controversial issues but you can't please all the people all the time.

Other Branches have also been involved in RSSs to a greater or lesser degree. The North East has been active at the EIP whilst East Anglia and the North West have relied on written representations. We await to hear whether the Branch will be invited to take part in the EIP next summer and should have an idea by the end of November.

A number of the members of the Executive have attended workshops, seminars, and presentations over the past three years, covering all the main RSS activities and some of the sub-regions when invited, e.g. West of England, Cheltenham and Gloucester, and Exeter.

Given our perceived need to maintain some geographic neutrality our submissions have concentrated on broader topics and the regional planning process in general.

On the topics, of particular concern, have been a perceived dominance of housing, which appears to have led much of the strategy. Whilst accepted as important, in particular affordable housing, where we think "exception" policies should be promoted, and second homes, the overall economy of the South West must be given importance. In this respect there is probably the need for more debate about the levels of economic growth that it is appropriate to pursue and greater scope to integrate with SWRDA programmes.

The issue of integration also arises in respect of transport infrastructure, not least the financing of the requirements to meet much of the demand that will arise particularly in those areas where growth is envisaged. This issue we see as going to the very status and validity of the entire RSS process. If it cannot be seen to be delivering then the spatial strategy will fall and whilst the supplementary Implementation Plan that is part of the documentation is useful more information on dates and phasing, and on the role of the private sector, would have given increased credibility.

The RSS not surprisingly tends to focus on the main urban areas as these are seen as being the power houses of growth. In sustainability terms this makes much sense in respect of residential development, employment opportunities and their transport interrelationship but smaller towns and the rural areas have a role that is somewhat underplayed. Given the general character of the South West Region, where rural life makes a significant contribution, it was considered that the role of market towns, including coastal settlements, and larger villages could well make a major contribution to the provision of affordable homes.

The manner of production of the RSS, with a number of sub-regional teams producing strategies for their areas, has meant that whilst this has no doubt enhanced the quality of the evidence base it has inherent weaknesses. These operate at two levels, on one level there is a lack of appreciation as to how the major centres (SSCTs) interrelate to one another and on the other level it created a context for parochial political involvement. There is also the need to explore the interrelationship between the South West and wider national and international agendas, whether this be adjoining regions e.g. West Midlands, South East and Wales or indeed European issues given coastal links with France and the Iberian Peninsula.

If these were some of the issues that concerned the RTPI, and there were others, like Green Belt and Tourism, there were also some concerns about the regional process itself. To start with the RSS is one of several documents that make up the Vision for the South West and integration is an important factor. This also applies to the relationship between the RSS and LDFs. This is an untried and untested "gap" and some still bemoan the lack of guidance promoted through the county structure plan. It is likely that housing development will present the major test of this gap and the proceedings at the EIP could be very interesting if the quantity and quality of representations on this topic is anything to go by.

The RSS has a twenty year time horizon to 2026, some others only go to 2021. This in itself is a challenge and it is possible to be critical of the lack of vision in the strategy. Think about what has happened in the last twenty years and let your mind run to what could happen in the next twenty years, everything from advances in telecommunications to global world trade. The only thing we can be certain of is that the rate of change is ever increasing and with it comes uncertainty.

Uncertainty presents a major challenge as events over the next twenty years will test the flexibility and robustness of the strategy and its inherent policies. To this end the quality of monitoring will be critical and ultimately the need and response of review procedures. This highlights one of our major concerns that relates also to the credibility of regional planning and that is the need to build and retain the expertise garnered in the production of the RSS. Regional planning has been largely off the planning radar since the 1970s, making only brief forays into the public realm, and as a consequence strategic policy thinking and implementation has waned. Having produced the RSS it is important that the momentum in regional planning is maintained, that it is not subjected to political fashion, and that a quality monitoring process is introduced thereby ensuring the strategy provides a meaningful context for local planning.

The Branch submissions are available from the author of this piece, **Bryan Smith on 0117 9624925** or at **basplan@hotmail.com**.

# Up close and personal

## Steve Atkinson, RTPI SW Chair 2007



Welcome. I am Stephen Atkinson (known as Steve) and was born in Yorkshire in 1955. I went to school in the York area and college in Scarborough where I became interested in planning. Then I started work for Flaxton Rural District Council, a little district council which became part of Ryedale on Local Government Reorganisation in 1974. Following a few years at Selby District Council and Leeds City Council I moved to North Cornwall in 1987, firstly as Forward Planning Officer and then as Principal Planning Officer (Development Control).

In 2002, I became Head of Development Services at Sedgemoor District Council in Somerset responsible for Development Control and Building Control. This year I became a Group Manager within the same authority and now manage a number of services including Development Control. I live in the village of Cannington about three miles west of Bridgwater. On moving from Cornwall to Somerset my plan was to reduce all my journeys by 50% in the interest of sustainability which I have succeeded in.

In the past I have been a member of the Yorkshire Branch Executive of the RTPI and have been a member of the South West Region's Executive since 2004. I have strong views on the planning profession and consider that in many ways it has lost some of its original vision in that it has become bogged down in trivial detail (albeit that I agree that detail can sometimes be important). However, I am pleased that the profession has become more customer focused over the years.

I have been married three times. My current wife is Claire and we got married in Sri Lanka at the millennium. I spend my rare spare time with my family, having started again with the birth of my latest addition to the family in 2004; over 20 years after my previous offspring were born.

I am committed to lifelong learning and since completing my planning qualification have undertaken a maths degree and am currently undertaking an MBA with the Open University, which is due to be completed in 2007.

I love walking, swimming/keep fit, yoga, genealogy, drinking and eating. Above all I like to have a good time and to be able to relax outside work. I am a fan of Little Britain and have won a national competition for my impersonation of one of the characters (Emily Howard available for weddings, bar mitzvahs and christenings at reasonable rates).

## Lynn Jenkins

The Region has received the sad news that Lynn Jenkins passed away on 16th October 2006 at the age of 86. Lynn will be remembered by many for regularly attending the RTPI SW conferences throughout the region when he was well into his 80s, sometimes driving many miles or often car sharing with members from Dorset.



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## Letters *The following letter was received from a member:*

Dear RTPI southwest,

Now that the new chair of our branch is a woman, I expected a less female-unfriendly approach in terms of the training that the branch offers.

I raised this issue a couple of years ago, and was told by Helen Clarke that efforts would be made to take female/part-time planners' issues into account when devising the training programme; yet nothing has changed. In the 2007 conference programme, all conferences bar one are on Fridays. Most part-time workers, most of whom are women, in my experience, work for the beginning of the week, and are therefore excluded from your training programme. Also, from the group of people that job-share, only the ones covering the latter part of the week can attend.

I would like to hear your views on this - in my view, this is an equal opportunities issue.

Regards....

This letter raises interesting issues which I am happy to discuss here and to invite further comment from members within the Region. To start with the blindingly obvious, yes I am female. I don't have children and I work full time, not that this makes one jot of difference in my professional life. I am disappointed to be considered "female unfriendly" as I have approached my tenure as Chair very much mindful of the fact that I wanted to promote women within planning and related professions in 2006 and have invited female speakers to every conference this year, with success in 10 out of 11 conferences. Anyone who heard MJ Long, Liz Osborne, Sarah Hawkins or Carleen Keleman speak, amongst others, will know that we have been lucky enough to have had speakers of the highest calibre.

I would hate to think that our conference programme excludes anyone from attending our events which for the most part are very well attended. Indeed, the average attendance over the last 3 years is 97 delegates per conference. I believe that this is significantly above other Regions and even some national events. Having attended some national events I fully appreciate just how good a job we do down here, it might not be perfect and of course there are things we would like to do to improve events.

When as Senior Vice Chair I began to plan the 2006 conference programme, I began by looking at topics that had been popular in the past or that I thought would be topical, not always easy 18 months to a year ahead. I could not have known that the announcement on

the Gloucester Quays call in decision would be announced on the same day that we held our regeneration conference in Gloucester or that my colleague Sarah Hawkins would be on tenterhooks!

As a Region we have experimented with various days and locations for conferences. Some are more popular than others. Previous member surveys, indicated that a Friday was the most popular being a day on which Local Authority Committees or Public Enquiries were less likely to be held. I have learned that you cannot please all the people all the time, but that delegates always appreciate a good lunch ("good" appears to include quality and quantity of food).

I would love to be able to provide "after hours" sessions or sub-regional events but the logistics of these are immense. However, we operate within very tight constraints. We rely on the goodwill of speakers and Chairs to give their time voluntarily, often requiring a whole day out of the office and work around the day job and family commitments. The fact that we have had three barristers and at least three solicitors prepared to speak for us says much about the regard with which the RTPI SW Region is held and we could not afford to pay the hourly rates of these speakers whilst keeping conference prices so low.

I do know that the ROOM@RTPI offer free half day events every quarter, held in Taunton, though I believe generally on a Friday. I also know that the RTPI SW offers help towards childcare for parents attending conferences. Whilst this is stated on the block booking form I don't think we have ever had any members take up this offer.

Lastly, not all employers pay for RTPI membership or CPD. Some of the RMB and RAC take flexi or leave to attend meetings. I see no reason why similar arrangements shouldn't be made by Members to attend conferences.

The Regional Management Board and Activities Committee will be discussing some of these issues on 1st December 2006 and we will follow this up in the next edition of Branchout

I have said before in Branchout that our Region is only as good as its Membership. If enough Members believe that there is demand for sub-regional events then we will try to provide them. However, this will depend on more volunteers being able to assist with organising venues and speakers. If you are able to offer a venue or suggest speakers who are willing to help out, then please let me or Helen Clarke know. Kath Haddrell  
RTPI SW Chair 2006

All contributions for Branchout to:

Helen.clarke and email southwest@rtpi.org.uk 01823 250822 Address for correspondence: Ground Floor, East Reach House, East Reach, Taunton. TA1 3EN.

The deadline for the next edition is **9th February 2007**. The Royal Town Planning Institute is a registered charity in England and Wales No 262865. Registered Office: 41 Botolph Lane, London EC3R 8DL.

# DIARY

## 26th January 2007

Community Involvement in Planning.  
Venue: The Lighthouse, Poole

## Friday 9th & Saturday 10th February 2007

The Homes for Good Exhibition 2007 - Exhibitions, demonstrations and presentations on sustainable building design, materials and services and ecological living. Venue: The Winter Gardens, Weston Super Mare. Further details can be obtained at: [www.sustainablehousing.org.uk](http://www.sustainablehousing.org.uk) or 01458 259400

## 2nd March 2007

Development Management.  
Venue: The Brewhouse, Taunton

## 29th March 2007

Communicating the benefits of Planning through the Media. Venue: The Thistle Hotel, Exeter

For further details contact:

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Telephone: **01823 250822** or  
email: **southwest@rtpi.org.uk**

The RTPI Policy Team has produced a 'Briefing Paper' (<http://www.rtpi.org.uk/front-page-news/2006/q4/briefing.pdf>) on the Local Government White Paper launched by the Government in October. Should you have any queries relating to the White Paper this should provide a helpful guide.

## From the editor

Although it seems like only yesterday that I took on the role of Editor of Branchout I will be handing on the baton to a new editor for 2007. I will also be standing down from the Regional Activities Committee. It has not yet been decided who will take on the editing, but in the meantime if you have any articles or letters or general queries about Branchout please contact Helen Clarke at the RTPI office. It has been an interesting year and I'd like to offer my thanks to everyone who has provided articles for inclusion and to Helen for doing all the 'legwork' in producing the newsletter. - **Colin Blundel**