



Merry Christmas To All Our Readers!



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No ROOM at the Inn-stitute!

A housing crisis at Christmas has narrowly been averted!

The merger of the Royal Town Planning Institute with 'ROOM' (formerly the National Housing and Planning Council) looked likely to leave the staff at ROOM homeless over Christmas after they gave up their 'old' offices at Old Street in London.

But the RTPI has found room under the roof of their Botolph Street HQ for the ROOM staff. Kevin MacDougall former Director of ROOM and now Chief Policy officer at the Institute said;

'It is great to find stable accommodation after so nearly finding ourselves out in the cold at Christmas. We are enjoying our new life with the RTPI and hope to contribute to a genuine re-birth in planning – or is that the other way round?'

Staff at both the RTPI and ROOM have seen a real benefit from the merger. A new logo has been launched which looks suspiciously like a nativity scene including a middle eastern building with two steps leading up to it. Could this symbolise 'Room for improvement? 🏠



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Message From The Editor

It is two years now since Tripwire was re-launched in its new format. We are constantly looking at new ways in which the magazine can be improved, albeit with the work continuing to be done on a voluntary basis and within a limited production budget.

This special Christmas Issue is intended to be an experiment. It is not being circulated through the normal channels (ie. in paper form and by post) since there is no budget to cover an extra edition. Instead we are distributing the magazine purely by Email to explore how many planners we can reach this way and whether people will actually read a publication produced in 'virtual' format. Please come back to me with your comments.

If Tripwire is to continue to improve, we will need more support from sponsorship. We circulated a letter to planning consultants earlier this year seeking sponsorship funding but received very little response. Tripwire goes out to some 1600 planners in the West Midlands and is probably read by many more. This provides a real opportunity for business, private practice and even local authorities to market their work and publicise their achievements. Please let me know if you wish to place an advertisement, sponsor an article or help fund an edition of the magazine. Alternatively you may wish to promote your company on a regular basis simply by including you logo in Tripwire showing that you support the magazine.

Tripwire is issued on a two-monthly basis. Although Tripwire used to be produced on a monthly basis, there is now no provision within current RTPI rules for more frequent publication. This is both to prevent Branches devoting too many of their resources to their Branch newsletter at the expense of other services but also to avoid undermining 'Planning' magazine with whom the RTPI has an agreement.

However, a two monthly magazine which takes a fortnight to produce and circulate can never be as topical and up to date as a weekly publication with more immediate production deadlines. On order to produce a magazine which is of interest to planners, Tripwire therefore relies on receiving articles, comment and responses from organisations, authorities and individuals right across the region. If you have an opinion, you wish to publicise a particular achievement or there is simply something you wish to say, do please contact the editor at the usual address.

Have a good Christmas and enjoy a prosperous and sustainable new year. 🏠

John Acres

Tripwire Editor

Professional bodies score own goals.

All the professional institutes related to planning seem to be making a habit of shooting themselves in their collective feet.

The RICS has just issued a report criticising the move toward 'gated developments'. It concludes that housing schemes which attempt to segregate new homebuyers from the outside world, ostensibly for security reasons, are in danger of undermining the drive toward social inclusion. The idea, which was largely conceived by surveyors in the first place seems to have taken off as a way of helping developers to market difficult brownfield sites in more run down urban areas. Developers therefore now find themselves under fire from their own side at a time when they have succeeded in meeting the Government's 60% brownfield objective 6 years before the 2008 target.

The Institute of Civil Engineers has also scored a remarkable own goal. The ICE report complains that the building of new roads is causing a creeping urbanisation of the countryside at a time when the Government has just announced major new highway investment plans. The increase in car traffic is blamed for the breakdown of non-motorised transport. John Thackray, chairman of the Red Routes Working Group was quoted in a recent edition of 'Planning' magazine as saying '*for the past 50 years we have given the car priority in the countryside. This has driven most walkers, cyclists and horse riders off country lanes. A new approach is needed with a review of funding to change the emphasis from building new roads for the motor car towards a more sustainable solution*'.

This week the RTPI welcomed the positive reforms set out in the new Planning Bill. Lord Rooker has said that he wants to speed up the planning system to make it simpler, quicker and easier to understand. The changes will remove a whole tier of the planning system through the abolition of Structure Plans helping local authorities to make swifter decisions and giving the public a clearer understanding of the process. So now there will be a streamlined process with fewer jobs and therefore less need for town planners. The process will involve much greater public consultation whereby the public and outside organisations decide the future of their areas (instead of relying on the planning profession).

The next thing that will happen will be that the RTPI will allow the ruling Council to be controlled by organisations and individuals outside the Institute. But then surely that really would be an own goal! 🏠

Best value - Blame academy!

First there were the 'carrots' with the 'best value' targets and the drive for 'Beacon' status. Then there were the 'sticks' with the Audit Commission league table based on the Comprehensive Performance Assessments (CPA's) with the threat of Government intervention by 'hit squads' to run services on behalf of 'failing' Councils. Local authorities simply don't know which way to turn.

But now a new initiative is being explored by 'Big Brother' John Prescott, to be piloted in the West Midlands – it is called 'Blame Academy – the rivals! Local Councils will soon have to 'perform on the regional stage' demonstrating the quality of their output. Council's will be subject to a weekly telephone poll – accompanied of course by a vote from a studio audience.

Following an increasingly predictable theme, people will take part in a poll to knock local Councils out one by one as viewers aimlessly select which local authorities they wish to put on probation. At the end of each financial year there will be a grand final with the winners being rewarded with substantial grant bonuses to use on 'shop window' schemes as a prize for their exceptional performance.

An LGA spokesperson said *'This is a novel concept which gives local authorities a real incentive to succeed, but I can't imagine the idea of people voting for local Councils will ever catch on'*. 🏠

Merry Hell in Dudley.

An earth shattering event occurred in Dudley earlier this year. A major earthquake measuring 4.8 on the Richter scale hit the Black Country in the early hours of Monday 23rd September 2002 - its epicentre based on Dudley.

Victims were seen wandering aimlessly around muttering 'Yoam Orwight' 'Boing Boing' and 'Bostin'. An urgent appeal was immediately announced to raise clothing and food parcels for those unfortunate enough to be caught up in it.

Specific requests were made for flat caps, donkey jackets heavy twill trousers and boots. Food parcels proved harder to put together. Desperate requests were sent out for faggots, grey peas, pork scratchings, chitlins, tripe and onions and pigs blood pud.

Final estimates showed that the earthquake caused £7,000,000 worth of improvements to the area. 🏠

Sean O'Grady

Willey prevented from growing by planners.

The little village of Willey in Warwickshire, just off the A5, has got a real problem. It just can't grow any bigger!

Tiny little Willey would like to expand – even just a bit – but the planners at Warwickshire are particularly sensitive about allowing new buildings to be erected in small villages. Willey which is completely washed-over by green belt is in the Borough of Rugby, where balls tend to be oval instead of round.

In the past villages like Willey have extended in a limited way, but now that the Warwickshire Structure Plan (WASP) has finally been adopted, no new housing is permitted in remote rural villages and Willey is therefore caught in a predicament.

Andy Capp, strategic planner for Warwickshire County Council, defended the policy. *'We can't have new houses stuck out in the middle of nowhere, it wouldn't be consistent with PPG3.'*

The Countryside pressure group CRAP supported the County Council in their approach. *'Unwanted housing development is wreaking havoc across the country as developers rape and pillage our precious rural villages. People should go and live on those nasty brownfield sites in the towns and leave the pleasant countryside lifestyle for those who can afford it'*.

But the local Member who represents the village put forward a different angle. *'Normally proposals for development in villages like Willey face stiff opposition from local people. But in Willey's case there is a real shortage of affordable homes. The population has drooped sharply as the youngsters have moved away. We need some new blood coming into our village. The WASP was supposed to protect our precious rural communities but this policy is causing a real sting in the tail.'* 🏠





'Agent speak'

A hot air balloonist got lost and descended to ask directions.

"I promised to meet a friend an hour ago but I don't know where I am" he called to a figure below.

"You're in a balloon 30 feet above the ground at between 40 and 41 degrees north and 59 and 60 degrees west," came the reply.

"You must be a planner," cried the balloonist.

"How did you know?"

"Well, everything you've said is technically correct, but I have no idea what to make of your

information, and I am still lost. Frankly, you've been no help at all."

The planner responded to the balloonist: "You must be a chartered surveyor."

"How did you know?"

"Well, you don't know where you are or where you are going. You have risen to where you are thanks to hot air, and you've made a promise you've no idea how to keep – and you expect me to solve your problem. You are in the same position you were before we met, but now it's my fault." 🏠

Reflection by Charles Robinson



Merry Christmas to all our readers.

I would like to thank all those planners who have contributed to Tripwire magazine over the last year. Thanks must also go to our publishers, Brewin Books, who have produced, printed and distributed the magazine on our behalf. They have done a superb job in helping to improve the quality and reliability of the magazine.

Members wishing to publish their own material may wish to contact;

Alistair Brewin, Brewin Books, Doric House, 56 Alcester Road, Studley Warwickshire. B80 7LG Telephone 01527 854228. Fax 01527 852746. Email: admin@brewinbooks.com 🏠



Christmas Tripwhere Competition.

Many regular readers of Tripwire complain that the Tripwhere competition is far too easy. Sadly this may be true. But the original purpose of the puzzle was both to introduce a bit of fun into the magazine and to encourage planners to read it straight away.

For this special Christmas edition however, the Tripwhere competition has been made much more difficult. There are 10 different answers and they are all quaintly named little places around the West Midlands region, so you may need a map this time!

The 10 questions are as follows:-

1. Clues on the A5
2. Woodentops at odds with each other.
3. Washing powder on top of the world.

4. The sound of a feline friend, but backwards.
5. Angry crustacean.
6. Lady Chatterley's husband's bedroom.
7. Dick's home town?
8. Black Country writing implement.
9. Fantastic pub, just off the M6.
10. Arctic relief.



Answers should be sent either by post to the usual Tripwire address below or by Email to acresclark@lineone.net The first correct reply will receive a copy of the RTPI West Midlands Branch book 'Region and Renaissance' produced to celebrate the Golden Jubilee in 2000.

The winner of the last Tripwhere competition was Vivien Jones from Worcester. The correct answer was Ross on Wye in Herefordshire. 🏠

John Acres - Editor.

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