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RTPI PLANNING AWARDS 2008

Presented on Thursday 5 February 2009

JUDGES' REPORT

The Royal Town Planning Institute established its Annual Awards for Planning Achievement in 1977. The purpose was twofold: to mark the 25th Anniversary of the Queen's accession to the throne; and to throw a public spotlight on the positive achievements of the town and country planning profession.

INTRODUCTION

It's been a good year for the judges.

We had a record entry of 111 schemes. It would still be good to have more, but this was up from 87 last year and it meant that the standard of the 34 short listed entries was very high.

Whilst entries are required to indicate the award category under which they are submitted, the multifaceted nature of many of the projects means that they could be considered under several headings. We used our discretion to make awards under whichever category we considered appropriate, and indeed we introduced a new category – “Infrastructure” – to accommodate two entries which had been in the “other” category and which we felt merited awards. (As previously we carefully considered whether any conflicts of interest arose in relation to any project with which we had recent past or current involvement, so that we could absent ourselves from the judging process, and this did arise in three cases.)

In deciding the initial short-list, we looked very closely at how the submissions met the award criteria. To merit a national award an entry should demonstrate outstanding achievement that has advanced significantly the art and science of town planning. So the degree of originality and innovation, and the extent to which the project might serve as a model for others, were particularly important considerations.

We'd like to say a word about the entries that didn't get through to the short list. They were to a degree unfortunate – in that there was so much competition. We left many of them out with great regret. Since there are nearly eighty of them, we can't list them all – but we want the entrants to know that we were grateful for their entries, that there was much excellent stuff amongst them, and that we hope they will not be put off entering again. We particularly remember some very good examples of public involvement in some of those entries (as in the short listed ones); and some excellent work in the rather crowded categories of planning process (19 entries), and City & Metropolitan, Spatial Strategies, Renewed Neighbourhoods, and Sustainable Communities (all of which had 10 or more entries). But having said that, we did set the bar high, and a few entries – though no doubt excellent - were really of only local or regional significance. Projects involving newly built facilities which focused on the architectural merits of the building rather than the wider planning issues were not shortlisted.

We enjoyed our visits immensely and we are grateful for the arrangements which were made for us and the time which people spent with us. We would have preferred a larger vessel to whisk us across Loch Lomond. Two of us thought the little inflatable affair was a bit on the basic side, though the third (a seasoned sailor) loved it. We missed out on a rather more gentle barge trip on the Grand Union canal due to slow service in the lunch venue (and, incidentally, it is a rule that such venues are not lavish – we eschew generous hospitality so as to demonstrate the impossibility of purchasing our favour via food and drink). In terms of sheer efficiency Stratford on Avon shone. Ebbw Vale were also excellent, though it was disappointing that (for logistical reasons) our examination of their railway scheme took place mostly by road.

A number of themes emerged, and the first is this. Major projects can be delivered on time and quickly through the planning process. This will come as a surprise to some of those who are not well acquainted with practice in the real world. The planning approval process for High Speed One (the Channel Tunnel Rail Link) is the prime example but the speed with which Liverpool One, Princesshay, Media City and Adamstown had moved through the process was also very impressive. Never let it be said that the planning system is incapable of delivering big projects in a reasonable time and to a high standard. With a professional approach, a quality product, and a partnership mentality – we have seen proof that it is possible.

The second is that climate change is now built in to almost all planning work. In nearly every case we were told of the things about each scheme which made it sustainable. BREEAM ratings, renewable energy, restricting the need to use cars – these things were the lingua franca of the RTPI award entrant.

We would say the same about public involvement – a common theme across the awards.

Twenty schemes have received awards or commendations. The Channel Tunnel Rail Link emerged as the winner – and, though there were at least three other entries which might have taken the Cup in another year, we had little doubt that it should prevail.

The two awards in the Sustainable Communities category are very different. Adamstown is a big new settlement (they might refer to it as an eco town if they were in England), and a model for how these things should be done. The Hambleton project – essentially a highly intelligent and effective form of environmental education (of which we hear too little) – is exemplary.

The City and Metropolitan category was hard fought. We would give a mention to the Bristol Harbourside which narrowly missed out. But we thought both Liverpool One and Media City were quite magnificent, in their different ways. Both are major, transformational investments in places which have struggled; and both are planning led, demonstrating how positive thinking in the profession is alive and well. The Princesshay scheme in Exeter was also justifiably commended in this category.

The Pembroke Dock scheme, in the town regeneration category, was at a different scale but none the worse for that. It would be wrong if all the awards went to the big Cities and a great job has been done in regenerating this very attractive (but not very well connected) town, which has been one of many victims of Ministry of Defence retrenchment.

In the rural category the Carrick Golf Course by Loch Lomond received an award despite the boat trip. There is a great deal more to it than just a golf course, as the description will show, and a notable feature is the added value which came from the planners in helping to turn what might at one stage have been an ordinary scheme into a very good one. We noted too the attention to detail – something for which planners are sometimes criticised but worth the effort here. We also gave an award to the Rural Facilitation Service in Cumbria. Quite a simple idea in some ways, but a model which others might follow in assisting rural diversification.

The Channel Tunnel Rail Link also won the Heritage category. The scale of the work which they had carried out all along the line, and the care with which it had been

undertaken, were impressive. The work on St Pancras Station was the star attraction, but by no means the full story.

We were pleased to be able to give an award in the Arts Culture and Sport category. There were again disappointingly few entries here. We think these should be central themes of planning. But the originality of the Folkestone "Other people's photographs" scheme was striking. It is rooted in the community too, and we think a genuine planning achievement.

There were also relatively few entries in the Climate Change category – probably because it has been, as they say, "mainstreamed". But the Tower Hamlets initiative certainly merited recognition for the hard and careful work which had been put in. Similarly Stratford on Avon's Urban Design Framework, in the spatial strategies category, was striking both for the quality of the output and for (once again) the partnership approach which had been adopted.

Plymouth struck again in the planning process category. They won the cup four years ago for their LDF, and their response to the new planning system is remarkable. They seem to be far ahead of almost everyone else, and they continue to impress with yet another action area plan coming on stream rapidly. We have to ask why, if they can do it so well, others are struggling rather than getting on with it in this exemplary way. The public involvement part of what they are doing is especially impressive.

The Manual for Streets, which also won an award in this category, is transformational too. Not just because the previous advice was so ghastly. Change was overdue, but the Manual will perhaps have a greater effect, nationally, on the living environment over the coming years than any of the other entries.

We also recognised in this category the work of the Northumberland Planning Officers in preparing for the new Unitary Authority – their work may well be a good example to follow for others who are going through this process – and the planners are in the lead once again.

In the e-government category we gave an award to the RSPB for their minerals planning website. A perfect use of the web and one which should make a real difference. We also recognised the simple but effective work of the Planning Portal in creating the unlawful advertising and flyposting database, which is designed to help enforcement officers tackle this scourge more effectively. And in the equality and diversity category we were unhesitating in giving an award to the group of Regional Assemblies who had made an innovative and interesting film about the needs of gypsies and travellers. It should help to find a way through this intractable problem.

In our new infrastructure category, we recognised the re-opening of the Ebbw Vale railway – all too rare but an effective initiative to assist the residents of this deprived area to move around and to attract investment and economic activity – in an environmentally friendly way.

Finally the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (High Speed One) speaks for itself. It is of course a remarkable engineering achievement, delivered on time and on budget. But it is also a planning achievement; a complex project, running through precious landscapes, assisting

regeneration in East London, boosting the use of sustainable transport, and altering our relationship with the continent.

There is huge diversity here – as always. Planning is not so easy to define; but it is far from being just a set of regulations, still less a negative force. All of the shortlisted schemes (and those that were not) show planners at their positive best, moving forward, changing the world for the better. Working in partnership and working with communities. Heroes in their many ways, and well deserving of all the praise and congratulation which should and will flow from the receipt of these prestigious awards.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES (*sponsored by The Crown Estate*)

Award for Sustainable Communities

to

“THE PREPARATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLANNING SCHEME FOR THE ADAMSTOWN STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT ZONE (SDZ)”

Submitted by South Dublin Council

Adamstown is a large-scale, mixed-use new urban district on a 550 acre (220 hectare) green field site 10 miles (16km) west of Dublin City Centre. It will comprise up to 10,000 homes and 125,000 square metres of non-residential development including community, shopping, leisure and employment uses together with a new transport interchange, with at least five schools and four major parks, all on a phased basis.

The site is topographically flat and measures 1 mile x 1 mile at maximum extent. It is on the fringe of the existing built-up area of Dublin and is entirely in private ownership. The adjoining areas to the north and east mainly comprise low-density two-storey suburban development and the areas to the west and south are mainly in agricultural use. The site adjoins an existing main railway line into Dublin centre, which is currently being upgraded.

In 2001 the site was designated as a ‘Strategic Development Zone’ (SDZ) by the Central Government under the Planning and Development Act 2000. A Planning Scheme was prepared and adopted by South Dublin County Council and approved by An Bord Pleanála in 2003.

The overall project aim was to prepare and implement a plan that would result in the delivery of a sustainable mixed-use, medium density alternative to the segregated land-use, low-density suburban development norm. This required:-

- the up-front provision of infrastructure and facilities necessary to serve the new community. This is governed by a system of *sequential* phasing, with the provision of specified infrastructure, services, facilities and amenities *prior to* the completion of a series of threshold quanta of development;
- enhanced design quality and improved standards of residential accommodation. This was achieved by promoting contemporary architecture based on a traditional town layout. This is combined with certain space standards, e.g. minimum dwelling unit size 25% above that existing generally. Initial phases of housing were built to *Sustainable Energy Ireland (SEI)* ‘House of Tomorrow’ energy saving standard;
- variety and diversity in terms of urban design, building typology, land use and residential tenure. The site is sub-divided into 15 ‘sub-areas’, each with a simple code that governs the type and extent of development permissible;
- a safe, attractive and walkable public realm, with the centres and main parks linked by a series of boulevards/malls designed to encourage walking and cycling, with access to public transport;
- an ability to adapt to changing conditions over a relatively long implementation

period. Minimum and maximum quanta of dwellings and floorspace are specified as permissible. There is a 20% variation and a variable relationship, whereby the 'min.' number of dwellings may occupy the 'max.' amount of floorspace and vice-versa. This facilitates variation in dwelling type and size over time.

In addition to sustainable residential densities, community provision and transport-land-use integration, Adamstown District Centre has been designed to achieve a minimum 60% energy saving using a high performance external envelope (airtight and highly insulated) natural ventilation and a district energy system based on at least 30% renewable energy sources. This will reduce CO₂ emissions arising from space and water heating by 80%. Rainwater harvesting and low carbon GGBS 'Ecocem' concrete are also proposed.

The Council established a project implementation team and the three developers formed a consortium to deliver the infrastructure and facilities required to develop Adamstown. Both have established good relationships with the community and external agencies. The latter are represented in project implementation structures such as the Steering Group, which also includes local elected members.

By the end of 2007 a total of 2,165 homes had been permitted, with 892 completed and 300 under construction. A new railway station, park & ride and two primary schools were open, with a secondary school under construction. In 2008 planning applications for the District Centre, including retail, leisure, employment, residential, health centre and library/civic elements, and for 800 further homes, were under consideration. 15% of the total homes are designated social or affordable. In addition to train services to the City, there is a new high frequency bus service.

The design and layout of Adamstown delivers an attractive "modern vernacular" incorporating, despite the greenfield location, the key features of a sustainable community. This extends to extensive social facilities (leisure centre, swimming pool, cafes, restaurants, cinema etc) and shared places of worship for four local Christian churches, with co-located faith and non-faith schools. The majority of the buildings and infrastructure are being built and financed by the developers, with over 100 million Euros of development contributions.

We were impressed by the quality and scale of the development at Adamstown. It is of a size (10,000 homes plus community and employment uses) often advocated for "new settlements" and, as such, is a model for developments elsewhere.

For these reasons we have given "Adamstown" an Award in the Sustainable Communities category.

Award for Sustainable Communities

to

"TAKING PLANNING OUT OF POLICY AND INTO THE COMMUNITY"

Submitted by Hambleton District Council

In June 2008 Hambleton District Council's year as a Beacon Authority came to an end. A key reason for achieving Beacon status was the way in which the authority had embraced the new planning system, made significant progress with its LDF and aligned it to the aspirations and outputs contained in its Sustainable Community Plan. The authority was

keen to mark this achievement with a meaningful and relevant legacy.

The authority came up with the idea of promoting the planning process as an integral part of sustainable community life by creating a teaching and learning resource for use within the District's schools. This would promote community involvement in all aspects of the planning process and increase awareness of the role of spatial planning and how it can help the development of sustainable communities.

The educational pack that Hambleton have produced is designed as a resource to support Citizenship Key Stages 3 and 4 of the National Curriculum. The educationalist contracted to undertake the project was chosen because of his expertise in the field of e-learning and his ability to align material to the preferences of the learners. These criteria were important if the resource pack was to meet the needs of future teachers and students.

The project team quickly became aware of the complexity of the subject matter – how to summarise the key issues relating to sustainable community planning whilst promoting engagement in democracy and participation in local activities within a manageable framework. This had to be tailored towards young people - a group notoriously hard to engage with.

To make the project work it was essential to strip the concept of what makes a sustainable community down to its key components and work up from there to deliver a range of teachers' background notes; curriculum planning outputs; students' learning areas; and activities for classroom, home and project working.

The approach adopted was to work from Global to Local – tackling all of the key issues of global sustainability and working back to a 'which means that within Hambleton' point, and within the perspective of the students own timeline. The pack then picks up and links into the key themes and aspirations of Hambleton's LDF Core Strategy and that of the Hambleton Strategic Partnership's Sustainable Community Plan – thereby making the links between the SCS and the LDF. It goes on to explore change, embedding the message that 'it is only by changing behaviour that we will make a difference'.

The topic sections are prefaced by a detailed curriculum planning overview and a series of background information sheets about the district, the planning process, and national, regional and local planning policies, including a detailed description of the LDF process and its component parts. Each section in turn contains background facts and activity sheets plus web links to current information and interactive graphical tools.

The next step was to try the concept out for real – team members met with curriculum planners in schools to health check the validity of the approach. It was enthusiastically welcomed. Its proposed delivery method – a hard copy master teaching pack with CD and PowerPoint based presentation material - meant it was suitable for use with ICT cluster working, individual computer working and conventional front of class and breakout group teaching. As part of the rollout Hambleton is providing officer resources to promote the project through teacher and student training sessions in schools.

The teaching and learning resource is designed to be a growing tool which is capable of expansion into other associated curriculum subject areas (such as Geography; History; Design and Technology) and downwards into Key Stage Two learning zones (top of primary school learning).

The project is suitable for adaptation to use with a broader range of audiences - by removing the curriculum teaching element the modules can be separated and tailored to be a basis for workshop sessions with Councillors/Parishes training; Local Democracy Week activities; Community Safety Partnership activities; Community Plan Theme group activities; and vocational training and careers advice to inspire a new generation of planning professionals.

It is of vital importance that young people should develop an understanding of the need to adopt sustainable lifestyles and to contribute to local governance. Hambleton have shown real innovation, imagination and creativity in developing a learning resource which can be used with a wide variety of other groups within the community, as well as young people, which is readily transferable to other authorities' areas and which has the potential to make a real difference to the level of understanding of the role spatial planning and place making has in promoting sustainable communities.

For these reasons we have given "Taking Planning out of Policy and into the Community" an Award in the Sustainable Communities category.

CITY AND METROPOLITAN AREAS

Award for City and Metropolitan Areas to "LIVERPOOL ONE (THE PARADISE PROJECT)" *Submitted by Liverpool City Council*

The Liverpool One development (formerly known as the Paradise Project) is a major mixed use development in the centre of Liverpool which has been developed over a remarkably short timescale, at a cost of more than £1000 million, and has already begun to transform the fortunes of Liverpool City Centre.

The scheme covers an extensive area adjoining the main retail area. One of the most striking features of the development is the way in which it links the shopping area to the waterfront (as well as with other areas which are undergoing regeneration such as the Ropewalks and the Baltic Triangle). Previously the journey from the centre to the Albert Dock and other waterfront areas seemed long, unattractive and daunting; but now the route is clear, direct and extremely appealing.

The area had suffered war damage and long remained underused or derelict. It was identified as the most suitable location for major retail development (with other uses) in the late nineties. Liverpool had slipped somewhat dramatically down the retail league table, reflecting the general decline of the local economy, and its catchment area covered little more than the conurbation core; it needed a serious boost to compete with other centres in the region.

The development partner, Grosvenor, was selected in 2000, a Masterplan was agreed in 2002, construction started in 2004, and the development was completed in 2008, as scheduled, in time for Liverpool's year as the City of Culture. This is a remarkably short timescale for such a major scheme. It is clear that a good partnership between the Council and the developer, together with support from the Government Office for the North West,

has enabled this to happen. A careful planning process helped to ensure that there was relatively little opposition to the proposal, again given its size, and there was no call-in Inquiry (although there was a CPO Inquiry). This also reflects the extensive consultation which had taken place; and the fact that the scheme was in line with Regional and Local plan proposals.

The Masterplan is described as a “subtle but prescriptive document, in which a layer of mixed uses is folded over a conventional retail offer. The use of traditional public streets, open 24 hours per day, with many connections between levels and with the surrounding City, has been coupled to a complex procurement process involving separate design teams for over 30 buildings”.

We were certainly impressed with the results in design terms. Though the development was not quite complete at the time of our visit in the early summer, it was clear that the links with the surrounding streets worked well. We liked the openness of the scheme. We also enjoyed the varied designs of the buildings, and the high quality of the architecture. The new Chavasse Park provides a new dramatic open space leading down towards the waterfront (it is a shame that the dual carriageway separating it from the developments by the river cannot be seriously changed, though crossing points will be greatly improved). Other uses include residential, hotel and leisure. The development has extensive underground parking but is also linked directly to the public transport network, including the underground trains.

We were impressed by many aspects of the scheme. The partnership approach had clearly worked, not just between the City and the developer but also across the Sub-Region and the Region. The long-term commitment of Grosvenor to the scheme is a notable feature. The timescale from inception to delivery was remarkable. The design was extremely impressive across the board, with the use of different designers giving the scheme the flavour of a slice of the City Centre rather than a monolithic slab of development. The standard of architecture and the public realm is very high.

Above all this has the potential to be a transformational development, changing the reputation and fortunes of one of our major City Centres, both by making the centre work better (through the improved linkages) and by providing a range of attractive facilities which should bring many more visitors to Liverpool.

For these reasons we have given the “Liverpool One” scheme an Award in the City and Metropolitan category.

CITY AND METROPOLITAN AREAS

Award for City and Metropolitan Areas

to

“MEDIA CITY UK”

Submitted by S Wright Ltd

Media City UK at Salford Quays is envisaged as an innovative, creative hub to rival media cities emerging around the world. The public-private partnership behind this concept seized the opportunity presented by BBC restructuring to undertake a transformational

development. Media City has the potential to impact way beyond Salford and to compete on equal terms with the small number of other developments on this scale world-wide.

The BBC needed a site in the north of England for a purpose built centre fit for the digital age. Working as a team, land-owners Peel Holdings, Salford City Council with Urban Vision, Trafford MBC, Central Salford URC and the North West Development Agency, attracted the BBC to locate in the heart of Salford Quays in a high quality waterfront development. The aspiration is to create a world class environment - with high quality architecture and public realm to complement The Lowry and The Imperial War Museum North - that will function as a destination in its own right.

As well as BBC North, the 80 hectare site alongside the waterway and docks of the Manchester Ship Canal will provide a mix of uses space and support for a wide range of media companies, ICT and creative businesses, and a base for collaboration between northern universities on digital research and development, all set in an attractive and high quality setting. Phase I includes 3 x100,000 sq ft office buildings and studio block for the BBC, a 216 bed hotel and surrounding public realm.

The context for the development of Media City was provided by a Masterplan for the area and planning guidance prepared by Salford and Trafford Councils. Outline planning permission was granted in October 2006 for the core 15 hectares of the site for a mix of uses including business, studios and production space, residential, live/work units, retail, hotel, leisure and associated car parking, highways and open space. Construction started in June 2007 and substantial progress is being made on site.

Planning has been - and will continue to be - an important and positive force driving the project forward from Masterplan to completed development. The Masterplan and planning guidance provided the overall context and the original concept has been maintained throughout. Pre-application discussions with Salford/Urban Vision planners and Member Briefing Sessions for the Planning Panel significantly helped progress and improve the individual planning applications.

The scheme has good sustainability credentials. A condition on the outline planning permission requires the development to achieve 45% non-car modal split. Vehicular penetration into the site is limited, with priority given to pedestrians and cyclists. The BBC office buildings will be BREEAM 'excellent' standard and a condition on the outline planning permission requires all other buildings to achieve BREEAM 'very good' or Eco Homes 'very good'. A tri-generation plant will serve the whole of the Quays Point site. The piazza on the waterfront will provide space for cultural events on a grand scale as well as well-managed areas of hard and soft landscaping. An extension of the Metrolink line is planned to bring enhanced tram services into the heart of the development; in the meantime public transport provision is available close to the site via existing tram services.

The project has involved a high level of public-private partnership and co-operation. It evolved over a relatively short timescale from initial interest shown by the BBC and responded to unique challenges posed by the scale of the development, the tight timescale and stretching quality and security requirements. The partnership showed that it knew what the client (the BBC) wanted, engaged key stakeholders at the most senior level from the outset, and demonstrated that they could deliver.

A Media City of this scale is a unique concept for the UK. We were convinced that this project - being driven with enthusiasm, energy and vision - will deliver the goods.

For these reasons we have given "Media City UK" at Salford Quays an Award in the City and Metropolitan category.

CITY AND METROPOLITAN AREAS

Commendation for City and Metropolitan Areas

to

"PRINCESSHAY EXETER"

Submitted by Exeter City Council

This mixed use "open street" scheme in the heart of a historic city centre is a splendid addition to the urban environment of Exeter. The quality architecture and public realm in the new Princesshay integrates well into the urban fabric, providing enhanced pedestrian routes through a busy part of the retail centre. As well as providing for a mix of uses including shops, cafes, offices and apartments, the scheme complements and revitalises the city's historic core.

The new Princesshay replaces an outdated retail area that was the first pedestrianised shopping precinct in the country built in the late 1940s. Whilst the old precinct preserved views of the Cathedral, it had turned its back on a substantial section of the Roman City wall and by the early 1990s had out-of-date shop units and vacant upper floors.

There had been strong pressure for out-of-town retail in the 1980s but this was resisted by the City Council. In the context of supportive national planning policy (PPS6 published in 1993) the Local Plan included a strategy to regenerate the retail core of the City. Following a retail study by Hillier Parker the Council concluded that there was a need to consolidate and upgrade the city centre.

Land Securities - the area's primary leaseholder - submitted a planning application in July 1998 for a mixed-use development with large underground service yard, covered shopping mall and anchor department store. The Council resolved to grant consent for this, but the application was called in by the Secretary of State in January 2000 on grounds of height, massing, impact on the Conservation Area and impact on archaeology. Land Securities responded immediately by commissioning Turley Associates to review the proposals, and the focus of the scheme was widened to include an adjacent office block with underground car park which has become an integral part of the new development.

Turley Associates recommended a fundamentally different design-led approach, and subsequently were commissioned to carry out Conservation Area Appraisals to identify key buildings and views to be retained. A key innovation - given that the site area was not large - was the appointment of three architects: Panter Hudsmith, Chapman Taylor and Wilkinson Eyre, with Livingstone Eyre as landscape architect.

A project team involving the developers, consultant architects, CABA, English Heritage, Exeter City Council, Devon County Council and other key stakeholders worked intensively for 18 months to set out development principles and establish the framework Masterplan. A fresh planning application was submitted in line with these which met commercial

requirements and added value in terms of a vibrant mixture of uses, design, streetscape, permeability and heritage. The changed attitude of the developers and the process of close partnership working that evolved presents useful lessons for others, even though amenity groups could not be persuaded to play a positive role and continued to oppose the new scheme. Nonetheless, the scheme for a department store, over 60 retail units, 122 apartments, tourist information centre, 10 cafes/restaurants and visitor attractions was granted planning permission in May 2003 with a lengthy list of conditions to control design detail and a S106 agreement to secure a considerable amount of planning gain. It has substantial sustainability credentials, having achieved BREEAM 'very good' and incorporating an important cycle link along one of the pedestrian streets. A S106 contribution was made to the city's Park and Ride provision. The standard approach of providing a major new car-park has been avoided by having small scale provision on site combined with the existing underground car park and some off-site car parking. All the necessary interests were acquired by negotiation without need to invoke the CPO, and the City Council and County Council also secured the necessary Pedestrianisation Order.

The main contract on site started in January 2005. Implementation was complex because of the need to conserve extensive archaeological remains and three Scheduled Ancient Monuments and to reduce effects on adjacent businesses and occupiers. The contract was well controlled to minimise adverse impacts. Residential uses have been introduced and the development has improved the visual appeal of the centre and provided access to several historic features including a unique monastic building and medieval underground passages.

For these reasons we have given "Princesshay Exeter" a Commendation in the City and Metropolitan Areas category.

TOWN REGENERATION

Commendation for Town Regeneration to "PEMBROKE DOCK REGENERATION" *Submitted by Pembrokeshire County Council*

A strong partnership team has succeeded in revitalising the small town of Pembroke Dock - giving it a new sense of purpose and pride.

This town of 12,000 people on the shores of the Milford Haven Estuary on the Atlantic coast of Wales grew around an historic walled Admiralty Dockyard. Construction of the Dockyard started in 1814 and includes offices, housing and a Garrison Church. The "new" town of Pembroke Dock was built over the following 50 years on adjacent land. It comprises a mix of fine buildings and spaces laid out in a grid-iron pattern, and is now a Conservation Area.

The Dockyard closed in 1936 resulting in the loss of some 5,000 jobs. Part of the Dock area became a Sunderland flying boat base during the 1940s. The town sustained war damage and has since suffered decades of underinvestment. Designation of an Enterprise Zone in 1984 covering several sites in the town had a significant impact, but a series of other major employment closures compounded the town's problems. There

continued to be high unemployment, widespread dereliction and minimal local entrepreneurial capacity.

In the early 1990s South Pembrokeshire District Council (population 44,000) and the Welsh Development Agency began a partnership approach. Consultant studies and master-planning exercises informed a local regeneration strategy - adopted in 1996 - which identified key sites and actions. The work has been carried on since 1996 by Pembrokeshire County Council and the Welsh Assembly Government, drawing in other key partners.

The partnership has shown tenacity in tackling deprivation in this small peripheral town, drawing up and sticking to a long term strategy and accessing external funding to kick-start regeneration. Key achievements to date include:

- securing the UK's largest Heritage Lottery Townscape Initiative grant for the Former Royal Dockyard and Town Centre Conservation Area;
- developing a £15m BREEAM Excellent Technium Centre designed to build on Pembrokeshire's strengths in the energy industry marine industry, alternative energy, the green agenda and sustainable development;
- public sector funding support for port development and an improved ferry terminal facility providing an important link to Ireland;
- securing investment in 40,000 sq. ft. of high grade office accommodation now occupied and creating 400 new jobs;
- reclamation of two large and contaminated wartime oil tank fuel depots to create the Cleddau Bridge Business Park and South Pembrokeshire Golf Course; and
- providing the framework for substantial investment in educational, community and leisure facilities including the Pembrokeshire Activity (Water-sport) Centre operated by the Prince's Trust.

The Wales Spatial Plan identifies Pembroke Dock as a Tier 1 settlement in "Pembrokeshire – The Haven Area", and its regeneration is in tune with the vision for this area deriving from its unique environment, energy, maritime access and tourism growth opportunities. It also features in the Joint Unitary Development Plan which reflected the potential for the Marina and other key sites identified in the regeneration strategy.

The principles of sustainable development have been considered - and incorporated with increasing rigour - in the delivery of key elements of the regeneration strategy, for example the environmental impact of the proposed Marina adjacent to the restored Martello Tower was assessed in the context of the adjoining Marine SAC, the commitment to achieving BREAM excellent in all projects the Assembly Government has part-funded (including the Technium), and the re-use of historic buildings and other properties.

The team recognises that there is more to do, but has already achieved a substantial turn-around in the town's fortunes deriving from the high level of commitment to partnership working and quality outcomes. The town has a long-term strategy underpinned by the development plan and the Wales Spatial Plan. The team has been successful in using public sector funding to pump-prime private sector investment, and has been prepared to wait to secure the right uses for key heritage buildings.

For these reasons we have given "Pembroke Dock Regeneration" a Commendation in the Town Regeneration category.

RURAL AREAS AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Award for Rural Areas and the Natural Environment to

"THE CARRICK GOLF RESORT, LOCH LOMOND"

Submitted by Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park Authority

There is much more to the Carrick Golf Resort than a golf course. The development, on the western shores of Loch Lomond, involves the reclamation of a 260 acre site of former sand and gravel workings including despoiled land, redundant farmsteads, unmanaged woodlands, and dangerous lagoons; and the creation of a golf resort with a nature reserve and various buildings including a clubhouse/leisure complex and holiday apartments and lodges, all developed to a very high standard.

Outline planning permission had already been granted by a predecessor Authority for a golf course, hotel, and chalet development. This is important; it could have been implemented, and there were relatively few conditions (eg in relation to landscape appraisal, archaeological assessment, or the creation of the nature reserve); a relatively poor quality development might have ensued. Credit should go to the developers, De Vere Estates, for their wish to ensure a higher quality of development, as well as to the National Park Authority for insisting on it in this context.

The judges were impressed by the quality of the planning effort made by officers of the Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park, their attention to detail, the breadth of the issues they had had to tackle, and the quality of the resulting development. This was particularly impressive since the Authority had only just been created when the application arrived – so there was a very steep learning curve for both Members and Officers. The judges were not influenced by the fact that, on the day of their visit, a major golf event involving Sir Alex Ferguson and others, was in train.

The site is a sensitive one, visible from the Loch (as the judges saw from a rather small but very powerful boat) and from the surrounding hills. The scheme had to be integrated into this setting, ensuring the protection and enhancement of the woodland and the protection of important species such as otters. There were important archaeological resources on the site too, from various periods including prehistoric, Roman, Viking/Norse, and Medieval. A Management Plan for the nature reserve areas had to be negotiated, and much attention was given to the long-term management of the site. Public access had to be improved, for walkers and cyclists in particular, and an excellent route was provided through the site, much improving public enjoyment of it. A high standard of design and materials had to be secured.

Though there were hiccups along the way, including the service of a stop notice at one point on the developers to protect the woodland and wildlife, a good relationship grew and the developers came to appreciate the value of insisting on the highest quality in all aspects of the proposal. This had commercial benefits for them, as well as obvious

benefits in terms of fitting into the landscape and meeting the aspirations of the Authority for the improvement of the National Park Environment.

As we have mentioned, we were impressed by the level of detail in the planning process. As an example, the design of the course itself took account of the need for particular types of grass which would not look incongruous in the landscape setting, and the bunkers were designed and located so as to be hidden from important viewpoints (including the Loch itself); parts of the historic field pattern were retained and things like tee boxes, tracks and other structures were carefully designed and located. Walls and fences, signage and all the other accoutrements of a large development such as this were carefully thought through, and buildings were designed using locally sympathetic materials. There was also an action plan for sustainability with attention given, for example, to lighting, water management, and recycling.

On the nature conservation side, habitat management plans were produced to enhance biodiversity within the site. A very detailed management plan, including provision for monitoring and review, should safeguard the site in the longer term.

The judges were very impressed by the professionalism of the planners (backed up by their Members) in the National Park Authority (together with their advisers on matters such as landscape, archaeology, and ecology). The standard of the development, which in the light of the previous permission might have been poor, is very high. It is a classic demonstration of the way in which the planning process can add value, for the developer and the community. What is now on site is better, in very many ways, as a result of the hard work of the Authority and we commend their work.

For these reasons we have given the "Carrick Golf Resort development" an Award in the Rural Areas and the Natural Environment Category.

RURAL AREAS AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

**Award for Rural Areas and the Natural Environment
to
"RURAL PLANNING FACILITATION SERVICE"
*Submitted by Cumbria Rural Enterprise Agency***

Putting enterprising ideas and farm diversification proposals into place can be a complex and confusing process and the planning system can appear daunting. The Rural Planning Facilitation Service (RPFS) - developed by the North West Development Agency (NWDA) - provides professional pre-planning application advice that enables planning issues to be considered at an early stage in project development. It has proved an easily deliverable, value for money, transferable tool for supporting sustainable development in rural areas.

Based on the results of research project commissioned by NWDA in 2000/2001, a 6-month pilot RPFS was financed in Cumbria and Lancashire and extended to Cheshire from late 2002. NWDA has continued to support the service, funding a further 3-year programme from July 2006. The service is coordinated by a regional team based at Cumbria Rural Enterprise Agency (CREA) but delivered through a team of locally based town planners through CREA (Cumbria), Lancashire Rural Futures (Lancashire) and South Cheshire Chamber of Trade (Cheshire).

The RFPS builds on existing successful rural support services; gives general and specialist advice on planning matters (not residential); assists in formulating diversification proposals; promotes positive working relationships with Local Planning Authorities; and provides information and advice on good practice in rural diversification.

After the initial contact, the Planning Adviser meets the client on site, discusses proposals and helps develop ideas likely to be acceptable in planning terms. Their Planning Assessment Report reviews the proposal and planning implications, assesses its likely success and makes recommendations on next steps.

The Advisers are professional planners with extensive experience in rural development and diversification recruited from local consultancies. Their mediation work has resulted in a high level of win-win outcomes, and their contact with counterparts in LPAs has raised awareness of rural development issues and encouraged supportive policies and practice.

CREA has assisted more than 1,350 businesses via this scheme since it started in 2001. In the pilot 201 cases were completed in Cumbria and Lancashire; there were 59 proposals for new build, 105 for conversions, and 21 for change of use. Of the proposals, 83 were for tourism businesses, 37 for commercial enterprises, 14 for equestrian businesses and 4 for wind turbines. During the first full programme (to March 2006) 1017 further cases were completed across the North West; and since July 2006 144 cases have been completed in Cumbria alone. The cases are split 50:50 between farm diversification and other rural businesses. The average cost of each intervention is £600 including adviser time, project management, administration and overheads.

Nearly 59% of 379 clients contacted in a 2006 survey had not pursued their ideas through to planning application stages for a variety of reasons including viability of the business proposal, lack of finance, not needing planning permission, receiving advice that planning permission would probably not be granted, and having found alternative premises. For these clients, early advice has saved time and abortive expenditure.

The success rate for those who have pursued viable proposals is high. Of the 125 clients who submitted planning applications 108 were approved, 9 pending decision and only 8 refused. Development is complete or in progress in 65 cases; already 63.5 (FTE) jobs have been safeguarded, 90 new jobs created and 14,488 m² of new business space and a range of other facilities developed including caravan sites and equestrian cross-country courses.

The RFPS has a key role in identifying and promoting new developments that will contribute to sustaining rural communities. This includes providing new employment, additional income streams for farmers or the provision of facilities and attractions that will draw in more visitors. Issues such as re-use of existing buildings, protection of wildlife and its habitat, conservation of the built and natural environment, pollution and flood risk are examined to achieve sustainable solutions. Evaluation of the service has confirmed its success and it has received a very positive response from clients, Local Planning Authorities and other consultees. As a successful experiment in the use of mediation in planning, it could provide a model for similar schemes elsewhere.

For these reasons we have given the "Rural Planning Facilitation Service" a Commendation in the Rural Planning category.

HERITAGE

Award for Heritage

to

“HERITAGE AND ARCHAEOLOGY ON THE CHANNEL TUNNEL RAIL LINK”

Submitted by CTRL Project

A quote from Marcel Proust, *“A voyage of discovery is not seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes”*, provided an apt conclusion to the presentation on Heritage and Archaeology on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. The biggest archaeological project in the UK to date, it aimed to mitigate the impact of construction of the rail link on the historic environment of Kent and east London, and to provide a legacy of artefacts and knowledge for current and future generations.

Approval for the Channel Tunnel Rail Link was obtained by Act of Parliament in 1996, which included powers relating to listed buildings and Heritage Deeds for an approvals process in line with PPG 15 and 16. The newly named High Speed 1 was opened by Her Majesty The Queen in 2007. Work on the link was completed on time and on budget.

The team approached heritage aspects of the project by building on the knowledge base in the Environmental Statement, defining the risks involved for each site and devising investigatory work timed to fit in with the construction programme. It involved a cycle of consultation and discussion followed by implementation, monitoring and amendment. This resulted in a continuous dialogue between the heritage, planning, design and construction staff, 25 local authorities, agencies and heritage consultees. The objective was to secure buildings and sites in situ where possible, and where this proved impossible to record and/or excavate. Specifications for the archaeological work were set out in “Written Schemes of Investigation” – in parallel with planning applications for elements of the infrastructure.

Archaeological specialists were deployed as part of the project management in a way that has since become the norm on major projects. This facilitated early and informed input into design and provided deeper understanding of the historic assets and conservation options. It also enabled solutions to be devised on rare occasions when there was an unexpected find during construction.

The chosen route corridor contained 351 listed buildings, of which 14 had to be demolished, 6 partially demolished and 26 altered. Wherever possible, demolished buildings were re-erected close to - or in similar settings to - the original. One building that could not be demolished was moved as a whole. The triplet and single listed gas holders at St Pancras have been dismantled and will be integrated into the design of cylindrical apartment blocks in the Kings Cross regeneration area.

Historic elements in the countryside were subject to the same careful consideration. Ancient woodland that had to be relocated was undertaken by transferring trees and plants with large quantities of soil to facilitate their re-establishment in the new site.

A key aspect of the work was communication with a wide variety of people – local communities and interest groups, construction workers, academics, schools and developers. The results of the heritage and archaeological work are being made available

via popular publications, exhibitions, research monographs, databases and the worldwide web.

Undoubtedly the project's highest profile triumph was the rebirth of Barlow's magnificent Grade 1* listed St Pancras Station, saved from demolition by Sir Nicholas Pevsner and Sir John Betjeman. An ingenious engineering and design solution enabled the new Eurostar platforms to be inserted at first floor level under the original roof span. The new platforms rest on a concrete raft supported by some of the original columns and extend further north under a completely new modern glass roof which also houses domestic rail services. Complexity was added by the need to excavate under the station to provide a connection for Thameslink services.

Clear openings cut in the concrete raft on the west side of the station allow light from the restored glass roof to flood into the ground floor where local residents as well as passengers can make use of the mixture of shops, cafes and bars in a new concourse with views up to the roof struts painted in their original pale blue. The restoration work has revealed the full beauty of this building for the first time in decades.

Public art is an important element in the re-creation and enhancement of this famous building and includes the building, a statue of Betjeman clutching his hat on an imaginary windswept platform, and a controversial statue of a couple greeting each other under the replica Station Clock.

The comprehensive heritage work undertaken for the CTRL has undoubtedly provided a lasting legacy and set the standard for future major infrastructure projects.

For these reasons we have given "Heritage and Archaeology on the Channel Tunnel Rail Link" an Award in the Built Heritage category.

ARTS CULTURE AND SPORT

Award for Arts Culture and Sport

to

"OTHER PEOPLE'S PHOTOGRAPHS, FOLKESTONE"

Submitted by Strange Cargo in collaboration with the residents of Folkestone

Other People's Photographs (OPP) is a public art project designed to enhance the redevelopment of Folkestone town centre and help create a more sustainable community. It has successfully engaged large numbers of the local population in its development and delivery, breaking down barriers between people and stimulating a wide interest in the fabric and social history of the town.

OPP began as a project in association with Bouverie Place, a redevelopment of a large part of the main shopping centre of Folkestone. The aim was to create a public artwork that would establish this new communal space as a destination of choice for local people and encourage footfall and exploration.

The project involved the production of a public display panel for each street of the town with a photograph taken in that location at some time over the last century. The signs are fixed to existing structures (lamp posts, parking poles etc). Unfortunately, for health and

safety reasons, the signs had to be positioned at least 2.2 metres above the ground, which makes some less easy to see. However, the most important aspect of the signage is its subject matter, which is a reproduction of an original photograph loaned to the project by a member of the public.

Strange Cargo worked for many months in direct public consultation, and using a variety of approaches, to inform the local population about the call for photographs. Over a period of two years 1,650 photographs were loaned from personal photograph albums. The technical quality of the photographs was unimportant; the only stipulations were that the photographs should have been taken in a recognisable location outside in any street in the town, should include people as its main subject, and should be the property of the lender. Some 540 were selected for display.

Once the photographs were collected, a single image was selected to represent each street; a team of sound technicians worked with the owners of the photographs to record the stories behind them, each photograph was digitally scanned, and an interactive digital map created to take visitors on a virtual journey through each and every street in the town. This is accessed via touchscreens located in the new public square in Bouverie Place, where all the points of pedestrian access meet.

On the touchscreen the viewer encounters the virtual map and each of the 540 street sign images, some of which they will have certainly passed on their journey from home. The touchscreens also have audio speakers and people can listen to the associated stories behind the photographs. Because there was often more than one image loaned for each street, and not all of the photographs were reproduced as signage, the touchscreens are the only place where people can view all of the images in this huge town family album. The screens are the hub of the artwork, they draw people to them, successfully attracting everyone who took part in the project, their families, friends, and thousands of other interested people into the public square in Bouverie Place. The artwork has fulfilled its brief of animating the space in a very meaningful way, helping to re-establish this long redundant site as part of the new circulatory network, and the hub of the new town centre. By inviting the whole town to become involved in delivering the artwork, Strange Cargo has ensured that each local person visiting the shopping centre has a vested interest in the space, because the shopping centre is directly linked to every street in the town through the signage trail.

Other People's Photographs is an original concept. Apparently a work of this size and complexity has never been attempted previously. The project sought to directly engage the new customer base for Bouverie Place by intrinsically linking people to the development through a sense of personal ownership. As a model for future interventions, OPP has the capacity to translate to any community, be it large or small, and anywhere in the world. The language of photography is universal and there cannot be many homes in developed countries that do not have at least one photograph of family or friends taken outside in the street.

The most important aspect of the work is that participation was integral. The project has exceeded all expectations in its ability to engage all age groups, and social backgrounds; everybody who wished to contribute to the production was able to do so equally, so that Folkestone can now proudly exhibit their very personal memories in a very public expression of community.

For these reasons we have given “Other People’s Photographs” an Award in the Arts, Culture and Sport category.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Commendation for Climate Change

to

“DELIVERING SUSTAINABLE ENERGY AND BIODIVERSITY ENHANCEMENT IN TOWER HAMLETS”

Submitted by London Borough of Tower Hamlets

If you were asked to list key planning issues for a densely developed inner East London borough over the next 10-15 years you would probably include housing affordability and local employment, major projects such as the Thames Gateway or the 2012 Olympic Games and legacy issues. You might not include sustainable energy or biodiversity enhancement - however the project submitted by the London Borough of Tower Hamlets for an RTPA Award for 2008 featured both.

Environmental issues have not been a political priority for Tower Hamlets for many years, but increasing awareness about the need to tackle issues relating to climate change within the Council - and its decision to sign the Nottingham Declaration - provided a more favourable context. It was decided to develop guidance for renewable energy and biodiversity to help focus on the most appropriate approaches.

The project started before publication of the PPS1 Supplement on Planning and Climate Change. A range of generic guidance was available, and the overall context had been set by the London Plan and the East London Green Grid, but the latter had an open space focus. There was nothing locally spatially specific that could provide a guide for stakeholders and decision-makers in Tower Hamlets on either biodiversity or sustainable energy.

Lack of in-house expertise in these relatively specialised and rapidly changing fields meant that there was a need for external input. This could have been bought on a ‘task and finish’ basis, but a decision was made to use external support to build capacity and confidence within the Council to address the issues through the Local Development Framework and over the longer term.

Progress was helped when a CPA of the Borough by the Audit Commission highlighted the need for more emphasis on environmental issues - in particular in “Building Schools for the Future”. The team was able to help education colleagues integrate environmental considerations while still meeting Government criteria for the programme. This helped to change the culture and encourage joint working.

The key aims of the study were to identify:

- low carbon/renewable energy technologies most appropriate for sites likely to come forward for development or regeneration, including decentralised energy (communal/district heating or combined cooling heat and power);
- spatial opportunities to maximise new and existing biodiversity enhancement;
- a robust evidence base for the LDF; and

- funding and delivery mechanisms.

The work provided the opportunity to move from generic to specific policies in the LDF - from policies that 'encourage' to those that 'require'. The study was used to develop a vision for a greener future for the Borough *"using less energy, supplying energy more efficiently, using renewable energy...(and)... creating a network of green corridors for wildlife and people"* to enhance its natural assets such as the 'blue ribbon network' of waterways. It will help to ensure more prudent use of natural resources, promote equality and social cohesion by delivering more affordable energy, and make the Borough more attractive for economic regeneration and employment.

Land Use Consultants and the National Energy Foundation worked with Borough officers and stakeholders on scoping, survey, analysis and delivery phases to ensure buy-in and increase the potential for achieving successful outcomes. Using a GIS, Borough characteristics (open spaces, waterways, conservation areas) and opportunities (development sites and regeneration areas etc) were mapped, and the types of low carbon/renewable energy technology most suitable for each area identified. Existing biodiversity resources were overlaid with opportunities and areas of deficiency to highlight priority areas for biodiversity enhancement. The recommendations are already given weight in decision-making and complement the Borough's Community Strategy.

The delivery framework benefited from professions working together both within the Borough and with stakeholders including the Greater London Authority, Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, Natural England, Environment Agency, British Waterways and Registered Social Landlords. Links with the community were not part of the study, but it has informed discussions with community groups on specific topics including conservation areas and photovoltaics. An Action Plan is being prepared which will feed into future Annual Monitoring Reports.

The study tackled important issues in a comprehensive, straightforward way that could be applied to any neighbourhood or local authority area in the UK.

For these reasons we have given "Delivering Sustainable Energy and Biodiversity Enhancement in Town Hamlets" a Commendation in the Climate Change category.

SPATIAL STRATEGIES

Commendation for Spatial Strategies

To

"URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK FOR STRATFORD UPON AVON"

Submitted by Stratford on Avon District Council

'World Class Stratford' is the strap line of the Urban Design Framework (UDF) for Stratford-on-Avon. With leadership and support from the Leader and Chief Executive the Planners in this small District Council - working with a team of consultants led by Urban Planners and including Allies and Morrison - have evolved a clear spatial framework for the regeneration of the town. This was adopted as a Supplementary Planning Document in June 2007 and launched in October 2007.

Known around the world as the birthplace and final resting place of William Shakespeare, with a resident population of 25,000 and visited by millions of tourists each year, Stratford-on-Avon had nonetheless seen a decline in visitor numbers. Traffic congestion and poor quality approaches to the town by train, coach, car and foot and increased competition from other centres had impacted on the town's overall prosperity.

The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) had embarked on an ambitious £100m programme to upgrade their Stratford home. The Council saw the need to play their part in revitalising the rest of the town by providing a vision for its future to complement this major investment. There were competing demands from its other towns and rural areas, but Councillors were persuaded to support the initiative because the fortunes of the Borough as a whole depend upon the success of Stratford.

Preparation of the UDF provided an opportunity to explore the issues from a fresh perspective and to mobilise key partners including Warwickshire County Council, Advantage West Midlands, RSC and town residents. Some of the latter felt that tourism rather than local issues tended to take priority, others wanted more preservation of the town's heritage, others be it that there was already too much new development. The Council wanted to ensure that they tapped into the full range of opinions, including those of young people, to make sure they took a balanced view. Public engagement was seen as central to the preparation of the strategy, and was facilitated by artists plus on-street temporary art installations or "Telescopes".

The team of consultants produced initial ideas based on an analysis of the issues. They took account of flood risk, traffic and circulation problems with advice from the Environment Agency and highway authority. Initial ideas were tested out during community engagement and the results fed into the final document. The document has three main components: a movement strategy, a public realm strategy and a detailed development strategy.

The full document is used as the planning framework and a summary document - a shorter and punchier overview of the town's short and medium term aspirations - was produced to convey key messages about the strategy and generate investor interest.

An important sign of the success of the initiative is the positive response of the Town Trust - a charity with significant income from land and property holdings in the town that is used to benefit local people. The Trust is working with developers on a regeneration scheme for a large parcel of land north-east of the town centre, a project they have had in mind for some time but have failed until recently to get adjoining land-owners to take seriously. This initiative is making significant progress because of the confidence boost given by the UDF.

The need for speed and the relatively recently adopted Local Plan persuaded the Council to opt for producing the UDF as a non-statutory planning document. Extensive public involvement and approval by the Council gives it weight for decision-making; however we felt that the extra time needed to prepare a Local Development Framework Core Strategy would have proved a worthwhile investment in the longer term.

The UDF is nevertheless a significant achievement for Stratford-on-Avon District Council, and has shown the potential of planners and urban designers to contribute to the development and delivery of their vision for the future. On an immaculately organised visit

we were given a presentation, tour and met the key stakeholders. We gained the impression that this vision has substantial delivery potential.

For these reasons we have given the “Stratford-on-Avon Urban Design Framework” a Commendation in the Spatial Strategies category.

PLANNING PROCESS

Award for Planning Process to “YOUR PLACE, YOUR FUTURE” Submitted by Plymouth City Council

With an adopted Core Strategy and a range of adopted DPDs, Plymouth City Council has made rapid progress in implementing the 2004 Acts spatial planning system. Along the way it has learned some important lessons. The Council recognises that involving people early, and in the right way, helps ensure that they engage fully with the process, remain involved for the duration and ‘own’ the conclusion, supporting its implementation.

Having completed most of the key documents relating to the main development and regeneration areas in the city, the Council set out to prepare its Sustainable Neighbourhoods (Key Site Allocations) DPD covering all 40 neighbourhoods that did not need an AAP. The approach that has been adopted has involved:

- effective engagement
 - enabling everyone to participate,
 - involving key stakeholders and statutory agencies,
 - building capacity so that communities are empowered to articulate their needs and aspirations, helping to plan their own communities,
 - building partnerships to deliver beneficial change;
- putting Sustainable Development at the heart of the process
 - preparing a truly spatial plan
 - pushing the boundaries of spatial planning by incorporating a wide a range of matters and other strategies into the DPD;
- focusing on delivery
 - leading to tangible social, economic and environmental benefits.

The process for preparing the Sustainable Neighbourhoods DPD is in two distinct stages:

- the initial ‘Plan Formulation’ stage, involving evidence gathering and discussion with interested parties to establish issues, options and opportunities;
- a second ‘Plan Preparation’ stage, based on the outcomes from the initial work, which may need further evidence base to support it, as well as further discussions with some of the parties involved. The outcome of this stage will be consulted on through a Pre-submission DPD.

The community involvement in Plan Formulation has been extensive and has included:

- involving people, and Councillors, in preparing the evidence base through Sustainable Neighbourhood Assessments to inform people about their local area and help to begin to identify some of the key issues, building on local knowledge and perceptions. Each Councillor led a neighbourhood “walkabout” to identify issues and opportunities;
- Community Planning Workshops with residents, associations, religious leaders, teachers, police, land owners and key stakeholders. These were interactive, based around the Egan Wheel for sustainable communities, and involved mapping potential sites. Over 1000 people were involved.
- following on from the workshops an exhibition enabled anyone in the community and across the city to come along and comment on the information and ideas collected so far, suggest changes or add more details. Officers and other experts were available at different times during the week to answer questions. These events have been held in places like local supermarkets, the park-and-ride service, GP surgeries or libraries, to encourage a wide range of people to add their ideas.

Online bulletin boards were available to ensure that anyone could comment on the individual neighbourhoods or write in at any time during the process. This had the added benefit of ensuring that contacts and enthusiasm continued whilst the plans were being developed, as well as providing opportunities for people to keep in touch and get involved in other aspects of LDF work. There were also regular Newsletters.

Although this process was well structured, it was flexible enough to engage with people with different requirements. For example a different approach was taken to engage with people with disabilities, young people and BME communities. Partnership working has been developed with a range of other agencies and strategy makers to co-ordinate consultation events, avoid consultation fatigue, build capacity in the community and integrate strategies.

Plymouth considers that the trend for people to get involved only at the end of the process rather than at the beginning has been reversed. More people are understanding the difficulties inherent in balancing competing priorities and making difficult choices. And more people are appreciating that whilst planning is challenging, it can also be enjoyable and it helps make their communities better places in which to live.

We consider that the approach adopted by Plymouth to the preparation of this DPD is exemplary. The scale and scope of this DPD is considerable. Use has been made of a wide range of techniques to involve the community and great imagination has been used to make events and publications interesting and relevant. This has involved a considerable commitment of staff time and resources, but the results have made this worthwhile.

For these reasons we have given “Your Place, Your Future” an Award in the Planning Process category.

**Award for Planning Process
to
“MANUAL FOR STREETS”
Submitted by Tribal Urban Studio**

Streets make up the greater part of the public realm. Better designed streets therefore contribute significantly to the quality of the built environment and play a key role in the creation of sustainable, inclusive, mixed communities...”. The recognition of this fact is at the heart of the “Manual for Streets” (MfS) the guidance document published by the Department for Transport, along with Communities and Local Government and the Welsh Assembly Government.

Previous guidance, notably the out-dated *Design Bulletin 32*, had led to large areas of soulless development designed primarily around the needs of the car. Until MfS was published, the focus was almost always on the ‘movement’ function of residential streets, at the expense of the ‘place’ function – neighbourhoods were designed as places to move through or past, rather than to live in. As the submission from Tribal Urban Studio pointed out, well-thought out and context specific housing schemes were often stymied by the dogmatic application of a rigid set of highway standards. And, according to the original research carried out by TRL for MfS, these standards had no evidence base and actually made our roads less safe by encouraging faster, ‘autopilot’ driving.

The main changes in the approach to street design that MfS recommends are:

- applying a user hierarchy to the design process with pedestrians at the top, followed by cyclists, public transport and, finally, private cars;
- emphasising a collaborative approach to the delivery of streets, uniting planners, designers highways engineers, communities and others from the very outset;
- recognising the importance of the community function of streets as spaces for social interaction and promoting an inclusive environment that recognises the needs of people of all ages and abilities;
- developing masterplans and preparing design codes that implement them for larger-scale developments, and using design and access statements for all scales of development;
- creating networks of streets that provide connectivity to main destinations and a choice of routes;
- developing street character types on a location-specific basis with reference to both the place and movement functions for each street and encouraging innovation with a flexible approach to street layouts and the use of locally distinctive, durable and maintainable materials and street furniture;
- designing to keep vehicle speeds at or below 20 mph on residential streets unless there are overriding reasons for accepting higher speeds;
- using the minimum of highway design features necessary to make the streets work properly.

The guidance is applicable to all residential and lightly trafficked streets in England and Wales. But its influence spreads wider: the principles are equally applicable to other streets (from High Streets to rural lanes) and a Scottish version is currently being prepared.

With any guidance document related to design there is a risk that a new uniformity will result from slavish replication, stifling innovation and creativity. Essentially that is what happened with DB32. However, MfS should avoid that trap by concentrating on establishing the principles of good design and by the skilful use of case studies and illustration.

The submission pointed out that MfS is changing practice 'on the ground', putting planning where it should be: at the heart of every part of the development process. Local authorities countrywide are adopting MfS and its principles, and re-writing their streetscape and public realm guidance in response. The Planning Inspectorate is using MfS to rule against poorly-designed schemes. And developers are realising the opportunities the MfS offers them. Positive planning is taking the lead as all players are finding the freedom and confidence to insist on higher quality.

Whilst MfS was produced by a consultant team led by WSP with the planners at Llewelyn Davies Yeang (now called Tribal Urban Studio), Phil Jones Associates and TRL Limited, they were supported by a wide ranging, cross-sectoral, steering group and sounding board with significant input from bodies such as the Planning Officers Society and CABE. The guidance has a strong evidence base of research and case studies.

We were impressed both by the way MfS was produced and by the results achieved. The guidance is well written and illustrated, making its messages clear and easy to understand in what can be an all too easily jargon-packed subject area. By supporting connectivity, walkability and quality of place, MfS is likely to prove one of the key documents produced by the Government in supporting the delivery of sustainable development.

For these reasons we have given the "Manual for Streets" an Award in the Planning Process category.

**Commendation for Planning Process
to
"CREATING A STATE OF THE ART PLANNING SERVICE FOR THE NEW
NORTHUMBERLAND"
*Submitted by Northumberland Planning Officers' Group***

Northumberland is being reorganised. It is far from alone in this, and one of the interesting things in looking at their plans for reorganisation is the extent to which they might have lessons for others. We think the work which is well under way is impressive and that others who are going, or will be going, through the same process could benefit from seeing what is being done.

The existing County and six Districts (Alnwick, Berwick-upon-Tweed, Blyth Valley, Castle Morpeth, Tynedale and Wansbeck) will be replaced by a single Unitary Authority in April 2009.

The Northumberland Planning Officers Group (NPOG), who are leading the project, describe this as a "once in a lifetime opportunity" to design and implement a state of the art planning service. No "off the shelf" solution was available, but a very strong partnership between the Chief Planning Officers of the County, the Districts and the National Park

Authority has produced a solution which in many ways may be a model for future reorganisations.

The eight Local Planning Authorities vary in their geography and their social mix; some are very rural and some are urban. They also have varying performance levels in development control, plan making and IT capability. They have had recruitment problems and difficulties in gaining access to specialist expertise. Previous ad hoc solutions had achieved only limited success. There is – not surprisingly – a variety of processes and governance arrangements.

Reorganisation was the chance to create a new service which was much more than simply bolting together existing services – it was a fresh look at what was required. A detailed timetable for the work, which will continue beyond April 2009, has been produced. The aim was also, as NPOG put it, to put planning at centre stage in the new Unitary Authority.

And, of course, the Government is busy reorganising most aspects of the planning system, at the same time as the new Authority is being designed; this has had to be taken on board too.

As always there are financial constraints – the new Authority is predicated on the basis that money will be saved through its creation. But because there are shortages of staff at present it is likely that all existing staff will find a home in the new Authority, either at the strategic level (where specialists will sit) or in the three area teams which are being created. There is a little way to go in defining the role of the third tier of the organisation (at neighbourhood level); a change of political control has led to some revised thinking. But this has not prevented the partnership from continuing its work, with existing Councils modifying their aspirations in the interests of achieving the best solution. The Planning Advisory Service has been closely involved in supporting the work.

Planning is recognised within Northumberland as an exemplar. Staff are already working in “virtual teams” and beginning work on, for example, the core strategy for the new Authority. They are taking a leading role in the development of the Integrated Regional Strategy and a draft Local Development Scheme has been discussed with the Government Office. Reviews of development control processes, IT systems (building on work which NPOG had done before the reorganisation decision), and specialist planning services are under way and joint training activities are taking place across all the Authorities.

We were impressed by the work which is under way. We are particularly impressed by the obviously strong partnership, which was formed despite some disagreements which had taken place about the best reorganisation solution for the County. This is a major project and one which contains lessons for other Unitary Authorities which are being created around the country – particularly in terms of the positive approach; the aim to put planning at the centre of things; the way in which planning has moved ahead of other services in developing the new structure; and the basic wish to create something new and “state of the art” rather than simply stitching together the previous arrangements.

For these reasons we have given “Creating a State of the Art Planning Service in Northumberland” a Commendation in the Planning Process category.

E-GOVERNMENT

Award for E-Government

to

“THE RSPB MINERALS RESTORATION POTENTIAL PROJECT – CREATING NATURE AFTER MINERALS”

Submitted by the RSPB

It was the sheer usefulness of this project which impressed us. By the exemplary use of the internet and the collection and dissemination of a mass of well-organised practical information, the RSPB have created a resource which will have direct value in ensuring that former mineral working sites are re-used in a way which contributes to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan targets. People and wildlife will benefit from the creation of a variety of new habitats throughout England.

Mineral sites have the potential to create new habitats through restoration, but before the “Nature After Minerals” project there was little information readily available either about the extent of the potential or about the techniques which needed to be used. With the support of Natural England, and immense help from Mineral Planning Authorities and others, RSPB have created a website which meets these needs.

Launched in February 2007, the interactive website www.afterminerals.com makes it much easier for planners, landowners, the minerals industry, and nature conservation organisations to access the information they need.

The project has shown that there is much greater potential than anyone had realised to use mineral sites to meet and often exceed the UK BAP targets. For example over 8000 hectares of reedbed and almost 25,000 hectares of lowland meadow could be created. It puts mineral sites “at the forefront of the potential mechanisms for delivering habitat creation and therefore benefits the environment on a large scale”. The website gives information on opencast mineral sites in England, with information about their status and potential, taking into account the local environment and the very particular potential of each piece of land. It also gives detailed information about how to create the suggested habitats on each site, and case studies of real life examples.

The potential benefits of all this – economic, social and environmental, will be clear. Jobs will be created in developing and managing these sites; they will provide opportunities for visitors to enjoy the natural resources and wildlife involved; and they will create habitats of all kinds in most parts of England which will help to reduce the declines in habitats and wildlife which we have seen for many years.

Even a brief look at the website shows the time and effort which has gone into collecting and presenting the vast amount of information involved. Using a GIS base, it is possible to locate sites easily and to access the detailed information. The technical difficulties of collating all this information were explained to us and we were impressed with the way this had been tackled. Consultation with potential users had helped the RSPB to arrange the presentation so that it was as useful as possible to stakeholders. We thought it was an exemplary use of the web, and a model which might be extended to other forms of land use (for example former MoD sites, or landfill sites) or, as the RSPB suggested, to the development of Green Infrastructure strategies.

We were also impressed by the partnership approach to the project. Planners throughout England (the site has yet to be extended to Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland) readily provided information (96% of sites are covered), and bodies such as the Quarry Products Association and many mineral companies were integral to the success of the project. Natural England supported the project throughout.

There is of course a further step to be taken – the translation of the advice and information into the development of sites on the ground. We were satisfied that this had already begun and that the scope and potential is very likely to be realised over the coming years.

We think this is a highly practical tool. We think it has been developed in a comprehensive, imaginative and professional way. We think it will make a difference, in an area which is important for many reasons. It is a project which might have won an award in more than one of our categories.

For these reasons we have given the “RSPB Nature After Minerals” Project an Award in the E-government category.

Commendation for E-Government
to
“UNLAWFUL ADVERTISING AND FLY-POSTING DATABASE”
Submitted by the Planning Portal

Sometimes the simplest ideas are the best. This is essentially a very simple process designed to assist in tackling an intractable problem – that of unlawful advertising and fly posting.

It originated in complaints about advertisements placed alongside motorways and trunk roads. This blight on the countryside will be familiar to all. Authorities have had difficulty in prosecuting the perpetrators, and particularly in persuading the Courts to apply appropriate fines which would act as a deterrent.

The Planning Portal decided to set up a database of prosecutions against companies who had illegally displayed advertisements in this way, or who had been responsible for fly posting. It is not publicly available, but nominated enforcement officers at .gov.uk e-mail addresses have access to it. The same people are also the source of the information and when there is a successful prosecution the details are entered for others to see.

Though the system was set up only on early 2007, it already has a wealth of information, as the judges saw, and is assisting in Court cases. The ability to show not just that there has been an offence but that the perpetrator has been found guilty of other offences – sometimes many others – locally or recently is very helpful and some large fines have been imposed.

The system also contains a discussion forum. The exchange of information has proved valuable to users; when an officer is faced with an unusual case, he or she can privately consult others across the country to see whether there have been previous decisions on the point. Is a laser beam pointing to the sky an advertisement? A fibreglass statue of a naked, golden Greek God on a mobile platform? Enforcement Officers have found this

section of the site very helpful and it has saved a great deal of time and resources on occasion.

The system was designed in consultation with others, including the Local Government Association, the Planning Officers Society, the National Farmers Union, and the Highways Agency. There was extensive discussion and testing before it went live. It was funded initially by CLG – though the cost of setting it up was only £10,000 and the running costs (managed from within Portal resources) are only £10,000 per year. Consideration is being given as to whether it can be extended to other areas such as fly tipping.

We were impressed by this simple but effective information sharing system, using the tools of e-government to good effect. The problem which it tackles is a real one, and success will lead to an improvement in the environment, road safety, and quality of life. It is a fine example of the use of the Portal to deliver tangible and meaningful contributions to the planning community. Both the “collaborative workspace” and the database of convictions will, as time goes by, help enforcement to become both more efficient and more effective.

For these reasons we have given the “Unlawful Advertising and Fly-Posting database” a Commendation in the E-government category.

EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Award for Equality and Diversity

to

“SOMEWHERE TO LIVE – A SHORT FILM ABOUT MEETING THE ACCOMMODATION NEEDS OF GYPSIES, TRAVELLERS AND TRAVELLING SHOWPEOPLE”

Submitted by East of England Regional Assembly, 4NW, South East England Regional Assembly and West Midlands Regional Assembly

Before decisions are taken on any matter under consideration within the planning system there needs to be a rational debate based on a proper understanding of the issues involved. This applies to plan makers and decision takers, to the community, the politicians and the officers involved. One of the issues most bedevilled by a lack of understanding has been that of meeting the accommodation needs of Gypsies and Travellers.

There are around 16,000 gypsy and traveller caravans in England – nearly 75% are on authorised sites. The rest are on unauthorised sites of one form or another. While the number of caravans on unauthorised encampments has started to decline, the number of caravans on unauthorised developments (sites owned by Gypsies and Travellers but without planning permission) has increased.

Local Councils have a duty, following recent changes in legislation and national policy for Gypsies, Travellers and Travelling Showpeople (GT&TS), to deal with the severe shortage of sites through the planning system. This will not be easy and local authorities can expect to come under intense public pressure to resist meeting their legal responsibilities.

Regional Assemblies play a key role in this process through the identification of the scale and distribution of new pitch provision in Regional Spatial Strategies (RSS). To assist in this the Regional Assemblies for the East of England, North West, South East and West

Midlands produced a short film to support their policy development and consultation work on Partial Reviews of RSSs.

The purpose of the film is to improve awareness of both the lifestyle/culture and issues connected with GT&TS communities, to demonstrate that tensions between the travelling and the settled community can be resolved, and explain the RSS consultation process. Given the controversial nature of the topic and the diverse communities involved, it was important to engage a wide range of stakeholders in the reviews, including hard to reach groups, in a different way to that traditionally used by planners.

Final versions of the film were produced on a DVD disc, enabling widespread distribution, and also made available on Assembly websites. The DVD was distributed to local authority Chief Executives and Chief Planning Officers, with a request that the film be shown to relevant elected members and officers, and to all the relevant statutory and voluntary organisations in the regions. This has allowed extensive engagement and awareness raising to take place within the tight timescale available for the preparation of the Partial Reviews of RSS.

In preparing the reviews, the Regional Assemblies are ensuring that spatial planning for the location of sites supports sustainability – eg that they are near towns and services, reducing the need to travel for work, schools, health care, that they avoid despoliation of the countryside and protected sites etc.

Each region is at a different timescale and is tackling the issue in a slightly different way. But each of the four versions of the film shares common messages and footage making efficient use of time, resources and research. Each film includes relevant and region specific elements addressing the region's local needs eg regionally-specific interviews and case studies.

In preparing the film the regions had to address issues associated with:

- engaging and building confidence/ trust with the GT&TS communities, so that they would proactively take part in the filming through interviews and help convey balanced messages;
- finding a way of tackling and addressing negative perceptions of GT&TS to help overcome prejudice and misconceptions without losing audience interest;
- explaining complex planning issues in plain English for a varied target audience.

We consider that the films have the potential to play an important part in raising awareness of the key issues concerning Gypsies and Travellers in a positive, engaging and educational way. It is an original approach to engagement in policy development at the regional level, in line with the Government's equality and diversity and e-governance agendas. Very rarely have films been used by planners to educate, inform and raise awareness about contextual issues associated with planning policy development. For relatively low cost, it is possible in approximately 10-13 minutes (depending on the version) and to provide a lot of information on the issues in a format that is easy to use and understand – which will grab and hold the attention of its intended audience of professionals, officers, elected members, interested parties, members of the public and the GT&TS communities.

The experience in producing this film could be applied to other issues in RSS reviews in future and used as best practice in consultation. It demonstrates an innovative and creative approach to an important part of the planning process.

For these reasons we have given “Somewhere to Live” an Award in the Equality and Diversity category.

AWARD FOR INFRASTRUCTURE

Award for Infrastructure

to

“CHANNEL TUNNEL RAIL LINK : HIGH SPEED 1”

Submitted by Channel Tunnel Rail Link Planning Forum

The Channel Tunnel Rail Link (now known as High Speed One) is one of the larger projects submitted for an award and it has many important planning features.

The nature of the scheme itself will be well known. The rail link between London and the Channel Tunnel was opened in November 2007, on time and on budget, after a long history of debate and discussion about possible routes, financial arrangements, and strategy. The route was agreed in 1993, and a Hybrid Bill procedure took the process through Parliament in two years, during which those with concerns about the project had the opportunity to address the Select Committee. The new 109 km line was built in two sections and runs from Cheriton in Kent to St Pancras in London.

There are several aspects of the project which impressed the judges (leaving aside the heritage issues which are the subject of a separate entry).

The first was the extent to which public consultation and involvement had been developed along the route. This took place against a background of opposition over a long period. Clearly lessons had been learned from the previous attempts to find an acceptable route. There are so many examples of this that it is hard to summarise but one which was described to us was the way in which residents around St Pancras station itself had been brought into, and had influenced, decision making. We were impressed by the level of engagement which had taken place and though a project of this immense scale can never be without controversy it is clear that everything possible was done to accommodate people’s concerns.

The second was the high degree of partnership working between the developers and the other stakeholders – notably the 25 Local Authorities along the route. The CTRL Planning Forum was instrumental in ensuring that this happened. Government, local government, and the private sector clearly worked hard to make this project a success.

The third concerned the regeneration benefits of the route. The entry from the Forum did not include the strategic planning work which had taken place in arriving at the route; it concentrated on the planning achievement of delivering the project. But nonetheless the planning which went into the final decision making was crucial and made it possible to realise significant regeneration benefits in the Thames Corridor and North Kent. The existence of the CTRL was clearly a factor in the UK winning the Olympic Games in 2012.

The fourth was the way in which the line has been designed to limit and avoid impacts on settlements and individuals and to fit as comfortably as possible within the landscape. Much of the route followed existing public transport corridors, with 25 km in tunnels, but there were many sensitive problems to be resolved in accommodating this major piece of infrastructure within the fine countryside through which much of it runs.

Fifth, linked to this, is the environmental sensitivity of the work – in terms, for example, of the code of construction practice, the spoil disposal strategy, the measures to mitigate noise, the wildlife habitat creation, and so on. This involved applying the concept of “NEWT” so that the (inevitable) changes should be “Not Environmentally Worse Than” the baseline design assessed in the Environmental Statement.

Two other things are clear. The first is that the CTRL serves as a model for other projects of its type. Many of the arrangements which were made are being followed, for example, in Crossrail. The consultation and engagement techniques, the planning structure, design innovation and partnership approach are all suitable for use elsewhere.

The second is that major infrastructure projects CAN be delivered. Although there had been false starts and considerable dispute about the line during the previous two decades, the eventual process for agreeing the route, hearing objections, then developing the two sections of the route was impressive. This is not just a major engineering achievement; it is a major planning achievement too. The strategic thinking, the complexity of the process (over 2000 planning applications were submitted for the two lines), the thoroughness of the consultation process, the delivery of the project on time, and the vast bundle of environmental, heritage, landscape, financial and technical issues involved make this unique (at present – it is to be hoped that other similar projects will follow in the years to come and that the lessons learned from this one will be applied).

For these reasons we have given the Channel Tunnel Rail Link (High Speed One) an Award in the Infrastructure category.

We have also decided that this project should be awarded the Silver Jubilee Cup.

Commendation for Infrastructure

To

“EBBW VALLEY RAILWAY PROJECT”

Submitted by Capita Symonds & Blaenau Gwent Borough Council

For communities to be sustainable they need effective and efficient transport systems that provide a real alternative to the car. Such provision can play a key role in the economic and social life of communities, as well as protecting the environment. In the past many railway lines have been closed in the name of operational economies. Times have changed.

The Ebbw Valley Railway runs through the South Wales’ local authorities of Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council, Caerphilly County Borough Council and Newport City Council. It last ran for passenger services in 1962. The project reinstated this service along the Western Valley branch line (WVL). This involved upgrading 18 miles of track and installing a 3-mile passing loop, renewing signalling, upgrading structures and

constructing six new stations to permit an hourly passenger service between Ebbw Vale and Cardiff.

The area is a typical South Wales valley comprising small communities, which developed around the coal mining and steel industries. Since the decline of these occupations the area, particularly in the north, has experienced significant social decline and deprivation. In recent years a number of regeneration schemes have tried to revive the communities and the railway forms an integral part of these.

The project's key aims were:

- to provide public transport services which meet the needs of people living in the Ebbw Valley;
- to provide access to work, education, training, health and leisure opportunities;
- to provide a catalyst to stimulate economic regeneration within Blaenau Gwent and Caerphilly County Boroughs;
- to provide environmentally sustainable alternatives to the car, particularly for travel to the M4 corridor and the coastal plain;
- to promote social inclusion.

The promoters realised that it was important to achieve a balance between providing an attractive service, with a journey time that could compete with that of the car, whilst providing enough stops to serve the different communities. Public Consultation was carried out in order to get local residents' input at a relatively early stage. Six stations were chosen as this allows the majority of the population access to the service but keeps the journey time competitive with the car. Park and ride facilities were provided at five of the stations, together with cycle parking and integration with dedicated feeder bus services. Station locations are all central within the urban communities with large walk-in catchments. Most of the stations are situated on brownfield sites and construction has involved site clearance, ground investigation and ecological translocation of slow worms and common lizards. The topography of the sites had to be carefully considered to ensure that design standards were met and the stations were compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act.

The project is now substantially complete with four of the six stations operational and the rail infrastructure to allow hourly services between Ebbw Vale and Cardiff, which has cut journey times for these trips by public transport by 30%. Services began in February 2008, and by May 2008 were averaging around 12,000 passenger trips a week, which is above the annual forecast of 400,000 trips per annum. An estimated 95% of the trains have run on time providing a reliable service.

Capital funding for the project came from various sources and the Welsh Assembly Government is providing revenue support for the first three years.

The scheme provides a method of transport that was previously unavailable to the population in the area. Train travel is less polluting per passenger mile than the equivalent journey by car and so is a more sustainable option. The new railway line has significantly improved the transport network and will help to sustain local communities as residents will now be able to more easily and quickly access education and job opportunities without having to move out of their local area. The improved

access will also attract people and businesses to the valley helping to sustain and stimulate the economy. The railway scheme complements other regeneration activities such as the large-scale redevelopment of the former steelworks site in Ebbw Vale as well as smaller-scale local improvement schemes in Llanhilleth and Newbridge.

We understand that the scheme is the first of its type in the UK to be procured and delivered by a local authority, rather than by Network Rail. The project can serve as an example of how local authorities can manage and procure an unusual project and how the input from specialists can be invaluable. It also illustrates that integration, both within the transport network and existing communities, should be a key aim of any development. The railway is an example of how a transport project can make a major contribution to improving the sustainability of a number of existing communities.

For these reasons we have given the “Ebbw Valley Railway” a Commendation in the Sustainable Communities category.

Chris Shepley CBE BA MRTPI (Chair)

Mike Ash CBE BA MRTPI

Kay Powell BSc MSc MIHT MRTPI