

RTPI NEWS

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Bristol's section 106 meeting opens debate over infrastructure funding

A networks meeting provided a forum for local authorities and developers to discuss the city's approach to planning gain obligations and consider ways forward in the current economic climate, explains *Rynd Smith*

We live in turbulent economic times, if the number of conversations about the recession's duration and impact is any indication.

After the defining two successive quarters of economic shrinkage, we all started to wonder whether the recession would have a V profile with a sharp downturn followed by a swift recovery or a U profile with a longer, flatter floor. More recently, people have begun to speak of an L-shaped event, significantly resetting values in the development sector for a long time to come.

However you assess the severity of economic events, it is becoming clear that the effects on the development sector and hence on planning are likely to be profound. One measure is the increasing number of developers calling for renegotiation of section 106 agreements or even their wholesale abolition, as recently demanded by the Federation of Master Builders.

What should be done about section 106? One good way to develop fresh thinking is to use the RTPI's networks, which provide a forum for linking planners in the public and private sectors with representatives of the wider property and development industry. Last month, we debated the future of section 106 agreements in Bristol, with attendees from across the UK.

The opening proposition was put by Bristol City Council head of major projects Gary Collins. His authority has devised a concordat with the local property sector that aims to reduce the burden of existing planning conditions and section 106 agreements in the hope of maintaining delivery on key schemes.

Actions include a review of the uses granted as part of mixed-use scheme planning permissions, reconsidering the overall package



Bristol: action being taken to ease development permission conditions

“The current economic circumstances place many approved schemes in Bristol seriously below the waterline”

and timing of section 106 contributions, deciding whether pre-commencement conditions still need to be discharged and examining the timing of development.

Bristol Property Agents Association vice-president Chris Haworth welcomed this approach but made it clear that the current economic circumstances place many approved schemes seriously “below the waterline”. He highlighted the need for a pragmatic reassessment of the strict need for gain delivered through section 106 agreements and suggested that the requirement for 100 per cent to be realised upfront might lead to the loss of otherwise beneficial and supported development.

A robust debate ensued, with development management planners making it clear that care is needed when renegotiating agreements. If contributions made under an existing deal complied with Circular

05/2005, then they were necessary to ensure that the development received permission. A suggestion that some of this gain could be negotiated away might imply that either the original deal had not followed the circular's advice or that a fundamentally unacceptable development would now take place.

For these reasons, many attendees started to consider the timing as opposed to the nature of section 106 contributions. A council may legitimately defer payment — and hence delivery of a component of gain — without conceding that it is unnecessary or that development would be unacceptable in the long term.

There were many different views about the lawfulness and appropriateness of renegotiation. Most participants emphasised the need for a phase of flexibility, innovation and sharing good practice.

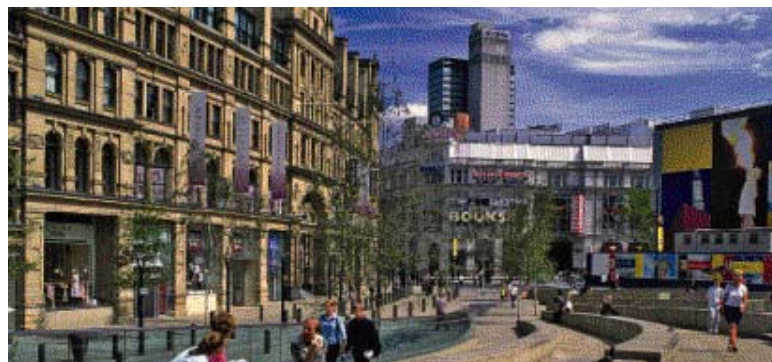
In the long term, many suggested that the change in economic circumstances has been so profound that a systematic re-evaluation is needed on the balance of infrastructure funding coming from taxation revenue and the value extracted from land. Some considered that the era of high land values is ending, heralding a return to public sector funding of a greater share of development infrastructure. For others, the end of the recession will return us to more or less business-as-usual approaches.

The answers are not yet clear but a frank multidisciplinary debate through the networks is a good place to consider them. Bristol's council and property agents enabled such a stimulating debate.

Rynd Smith is RTPI policy director. Network members interested in hosting a debate to test their section 106 approach should email Rhian.Brimble@rtpi.org.uk

City-region set to build on strength

Skills inequality found in a review of Manchester lays a challenge for spatial planning, says *Jenny Crawford*



Manchester: knowledge-based industries have benefited central areas

With its large concentration of people and businesses and its highly skilled workforce, Manchester is one of the best-placed cities in the UK to match the economic strength of London and the South East, concludes the Manchester Independent Economic Review.

The study provides the latest thinking on bringing long-term sustainable economic growth to the city-region. It was launched this week for local authorities and business groups after an intensive series of stakeholder roadshows. The research has been carried out over the past year and includes contributions from London School of Economics spatial economic research centre director Henry Overman and Greater London Authority chief economist Bridget Rosewell.

Large businesses in the region are the city's main source of investment and productivity. The review found that in contrast to the rest of the UK, investment by foreign firms does not crowd out or displace jobs and investment by domestic firms.

Manchester has a larger workforce in knowledge-based industries and financial and business services than any other regional UK city, increasing by 120 per cent since 1981. This has had an impact across the whole city-region, but the central and southern areas have benefited most as greater numbers of highly skilled workers live there.

The city-region regularly outperforms its competitors in recruitment and retention of talent in high-skilled jobs. However, performance in this area is not matched by its productivity. It is argued that productivity of the most skilled workers depends on those around them

and there are relatively high levels of unqualified people in the workforce as a whole.

The review provides a detailed economic analysis of individual neighbourhoods and the forces that have driven their changing fortunes over recent years. The most deprived seem to have improved recently in absolute terms, although many with the highest unemployment have failed to keep up with the average levels of change.

There are particular concentrations of improvers next to Manchester city centre, including Salford and a southern arc taking in Stockport, Tameside and Trafford.

The areas with considerable deprivation show levels of extreme unemployment — commonly more than 75 per cent above the average for Greater Manchester. The review also found a significant number of so-called “isolate” neighbourhoods, whose households move between areas of similar or greater deprivation. The geography of labour market inequalities and social exclusion is a major challenge for spatial policy, it says.

This is echoed in recent research by David Etherington and Martin Jones on the Sheffield city-region, which concludes that current policies are failing to sustain regional labour markets and are even promoting unevenly developing cultures of employability.

*Jenny Crawford is RTPI head of research. For more information, please visit www.manchester-review.org.uk. Details of the Sheffield study by Etherington and Jones can be found in **Regional Studies** Volume 43, No 2.*

Research Bulletin

Centre wins funding to study transport investment impact

A national hub for transport research is being set up at Imperial College London, which is to work with University College London and the University of Leeds. The UK Transport Research Centre will be funded by the DfT, the Scottish Government and the Economic and Social Research Council. Its £7.75 million programme will look at the impact of government investment in transport infrastructure and its effects on the labour market and the economy. Other projects will consider how to improve governance and decision-making in the transport system and how technological advances might affect future demand.

Report updates progress on mixed communities programme

The DCLG has published its research on delivering mixed communities, including findings from existing programmes and the initial evaluation from the demonstration projects. The evaluation is being carried out by academic researchers and consultants including the University of Cambridge's centre for housing and planning research. For more information, please visit www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/mixedcommunitiessummary

Events

Valuing our Life-Support Systems

29 April – 1 May. Natural Capital Initiative. Savoy Place, London. This three-day symposium brings together government departments and agencies, parliament, academia and research and businesses. It aims to identify the research and policy gaps in linking the health of our environment and the health of our economy. Cost: £230 for the plenary sessions; £120 for the workshops. For more information, please visit www.naturalcapitalinitiative.org.uk

What Migration Research is Needed to Support Spatial Planning?

13 May. European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON). London. This workshop will explore migration information needs for spatial planning practice. For more information, please email research@rtpi.org.uk

Territorial Development Opportunities in the Global Recession

3–4 June. ESPON. Prague. This seminar will discuss the findings of the ESPON programme in spatial development across Europe. It is open to all policy-makers and researchers in regional development and spatial planning. Cost: Free; travel and accommodation expenses not covered. For more information, please visit www.espon.eu

Spaces of the Nation — The Planning of Space in Ireland and Scotland

12–13 June. Irish–Scottish Forum for Spatial Planning. Aberdeen. The goal of this first meeting of the forum comprising the University of Aberdeen, Queen's University Belfast and the National University of Ireland, Maynooth, is to place formal planning and spatial imagining of cities, towns and countryside in a historical, environmental and cultural perspective and relate this to concepts of nation and identity. Cost: Free. For more information, please email riiss@abdn.ac.uk



Aberdeen: spatial planning to be explored by universities' forum

Convention opens window on planners' shared visions

Mixing youth and experience offers opportunities to explore fresh approaches, writes *Susannah Guest*

It is not often that you have the chance to celebrate being a planner — a sad reflection on those outside the profession, I choose to think. Even less frequent is the chance to gather planners together without the aid of a black tie dress code to share experiences and recognise the successes of our profession.

Step forward the Planning Convention, to be held in central London in June. It offers the perfect mix of a high-profile event, a fantastic venue and an informal atmosphere for three days of listening, learning, inspiring and challenging others. Fundamentally, it is about taking a break from the office routine and looking at the bigger picture. The convention provides an excellent forum to appreciate what planning and planners can and are achieving.

You can choose your own programme from plenary sessions, workshops, speed briefs and break-out sessions. Beyond that, there are exhibitors from all sectors of planning and planners with a wide variety of specialisms. It is an ideal opportunity to learn more about topics that you might not realise you are interested in.

You can catch up with university friends and join in the social activities. You can share experiences with international delegates, gaining an insight into the similarities and diversity of life as a planner in different places around the world.

But do not simply ask what benefits the Planning Convention can offer you. The bigger question is perhaps how you can contribute to it. To carry out planning in a changing climate and economically uncertain times needs a commitment to



Guest: celebrating the profession

the continuing validity of our profession and our activities.

Effective input from those with a fresh perspective is invaluable. Young planners should come and learn from the experiences of those who have seen regulatory reform and economic upheavals. But perhaps more importantly, we need young planners to challenge existing methods and attitudes and help explore fresh approaches.

By getting involved, you can help make the changes rather than just responding to those implemented through your workplace. If all else fails to appeal, last year lucky delegates had the chance to take away free trees. Come and find out what surprises are in store this year.

Susannah Guest was last year's RTPI Young Planner of the Year and is senior planner at the Planning Inspectorate. The convention will take place from 17 to 19 June in London. To view the programme or book a place, please visit www.theplanningconvention.co.uk

RTPI Bulletin Board

Landscape response urges multifunctional management approach

Planners should be encouraged to recognise that landscapes are valuable for more than just their scenic beauty, wildlife or recreation, according to the RTPI's response to Natural England's draft policy on future landscapes. "Landscapes must be managed in a way that recognises their many functions and this must be drawn out in policies in regional strategies or local development frameworks," said policy director Rynd Smith. Ecosystem goods and services need to be provided in ways that are visually compatible with a healthy and well-managed landscape, Smith added. Planning Aid may help bridge the gap between decision-makers and communities' different visions, the response suggests. Planning tools can be used to resolve conflicts. For the full response, please visit www.rtpi.org.uk/download/5848/RTPI-Response-future-landscapes.pdf

Reference manuals sought for street design guidelines compilation

The Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council is developing a set of standards and guidelines for street design and is looking for reference manuals. Asian manuals would be particularly welcome. For more information or to contribute, please email the international development network at idsn@rtpi.org.uk

Events

World Poverty White Paper Consultation

16 April. Department for International Development (DFID). Sheffield. This is one of 12 consultation events being held by the DFID up to 18 May in preparation for its white paper on tackling world poverty, to be published in July.

Cost: Free.

For more information, please visit www.coievents.co.uk/dfidwhitepaperconsultation

Infrastructure Planning Strategy and Delivery

27 April. RTPI West Midlands. Colmore Circus, Birmingham. This seminar will provide practical guidance on infrastructure planning as part of the local development framework core strategy process and a hands-on perspective from a major developer. Speakers include Pinsent Masons head of planning and environment Richard Ford, rmjm consulting director and University College London visiting professor Janice Morphet and National Grid policy manager Hector Pearson.

Cost: £50; £15 for full-time students or unwaged.

For more information, please email westmidlands@rtpi.org.uk

Planning Law New Directions

11 May. RTPI North East. St Anne's Quayside, Newcastle. This one-day seminar organised with Kings Chambers and Dickinson Dees LLP will hear leading practitioners review new and emerging guidance and discuss current planning topics.

Cost: £99; concessions available.

For more information, please email northeast@rtpi.org.uk



RTPI
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An introduction to sustainable buildings

7 May 2009 • London

5 November 2009 • London

- Sustainability overview
- Ecology and biodiversity
- Water
- Materials
- Communicating sustainability
- Energy

Masterclass trainer: Miranda Pennington,
Sustainability Consultant, Metropolis Green



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