

# RTPI NEWS

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## Regional tour aims to raise planners' contribution to wider policy dialogue

Raising the status of local authority planners is the first step towards persuasive and positive engagement with public and private stakeholders for a co-ordinated response to framework delivery, writes *Martin Willey*

I start my regions and nations visits in three weeks' time and with the support of RTPI member services manager Charles Veal and Tino Hernandez's communications team, we are trying to introduce some pizzazz.

What I am seeking is not just the pleasure of meeting successful, enthusiastic planners and visiting great projects, but perhaps talking to local authorities where the planning function wants a bit of a lift or a consultancy close to becoming an RTPI learning partner and just needs that final encouragement. I also want to find out what relationships RTPI regional and national bodies have with their respective influencers, movers and shakers.

The institute is being supported in this in a number of ways. Government office briefings are being arranged by DCLG chief planner Steve Quartermain, who will join me on a number of visits.

In advance of this I am enquiring whether regional boards and committees and national bodies hold regular dialogue with their relevant government offices to see where our agendas coincide. Certainly, in Scotland and Northern Ireland links between the RTPI and civil servants are both close and effective, often promoted by RTPI officers to support policy initiatives.

However, it is not just in the area of policy that such regional or national dialogue is important. We recently met Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) regional director for Yorkshire and Humberside David Curtis, to whom agency chief executive Sir Bob Kerslake has given the brief of liaising with professional bodies. Curtis is keen to promote a closer relationship with the RTPI to help the HCA deliver its objectives for sustainable communities at regional level.



**Regular dialogue: meetings aim to establish higher levels of influence**

“We will need to show that where planners are at the top table local frameworks are providing the basis for investment”

Appropriate HCA investment, for example, will need the foundation of a good local development framework (LDF). The DCLG has set up support teams drawn from government offices, the Planning Inspectorate and the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) to help authorities deliver these. Development management support for infrastructure and mixed-use schemes is also on hand from the HCA's Advisory Team for Large Applications aimed at restarting the regional economy.

The West Midlands region is seeking a meeting between council chief executives and myself to champion the cause of planning at management team level. This is in line with an emerging RTPI campaign to raise the status of planners in local authorities and seek to ensure that the head of planning has the high level of influence needed to persuade public stakeholders to align policies with the LDF. This will not be achieved just by asking.

The RTPI will need to show, ideally in each region, that where professional planners are at the top table, effective LDFs are providing the foundation for public and private investment to speed recovery. The presidential awards for Today's and Tomorrow's Leaders, currently seeking nominations in the regions and nations, will provide another opportunity to demonstrate that good planners are essential players in any community.

Persuading stakeholders of the value of engaging with professional planners in the public, private and third sectors requires a number of skills. Leadership is certainly one and I look forward to an initiative on this from PAS head Sarah Richards, which offers a clear resonance with the RTPI's aspirations.

Other examples are the NHS's London Healthy Urban Development Unit — of which I am chairman — and the London Thames Gateway social infrastructure framework. Lawyers and planning consultants have established a rationale for co-operation between public service providers. These vary from policy issues such as serving a common catchment or providing services that follow on from each other — poor educational attainment, employment problems, health issues, care need, housing need — to financial benefits of co-located services provided in a spatial framework.

There are plenty of examples where planners have used powers of persuasion to achieve public and commercial objectives through a co-ordinated planning framework. Be confident in the process. It offers far more solutions than barriers, a message that the RTPI will continue to press home at every opportunity.

*Martin Willey is RTPI president.*

# Partnerships support spatial visions

Delivering a successful infrastructure strategy requires clear lines of communication between all development parties, argues *Janice Morphet*

When preparing a core strategy for submission, PPS12 identifies two key elements required to underpin delivery of infrastructure as part of demonstrating local development frameworks' (LDF's) effectiveness.

The first is an evidence base that sits outside the core strategy and the second a delivery strategy within it. What might this delivery strategy contain to be found sound and support the delivery of the core vision?

PPS12 provides a number of indications. First, it needs to show that the delivery partners have been involved in the preparation of the strategy and infrastructure schedule. As the DCLG's *Planning Together* guide indicates, this is likely to be through a continuing local strategic partnership process rather than a one-off consultation or meeting. There is also an expectation that



CHARLOTTE MORPHET

**Development: regular meetings clarify infrastructure delivery progress**

these talks will be held as a group rather than on a one-to-one basis between planners and agencies.

These agencies and other parts of the council will have their own infrastructure planning and delivery processes. Part of the role of the LDF delivery strategy is to bring them together to encourage discussion of the wider implications of public investment decisions and to see whether projects can be carried out in combination.

Infrastructure providers may not necessarily want to take part in all the sessions. There might be an advantage in holding discussions on themes such as health or school provision, while there could also be benefits in carrying out place-based reviews of opportunities for remodelling or public sector land release. For utilities such as water companies, engagement may be more useful when discussing strategic sites or through water cycle studies.

Another key element of the delivery strategy is regular engagement with landowners. These might include large estates as well as public bodies such as the Ministry or Defence or universities. Major businesses may also need to be involved, where future intentions can be discussed and there can be briefings on the directions the LDF is taking.

What else might be in this delivery strategy? At the outset, the establishment of a common evidence base to ensure that all parties are working from the same assumptions will be important, as will the definition of service standards.

Other obvious components are the annual monitoring report and development management and developers' contributions policies. It might also be useful to appoint an infrastructure delivery manager, who can work directly with all parties to ensure that there is an understanding of what is required. Taken together, these elements offer a good basis for the delivery strategy.

*Janice Morphet is a director of RMJM Consulting and visiting professor at University College London's Bartlett School of Planning.*

## Sides line up in West Midlands homes battle

Conflicts between government housing targets and the regional draft strategy are being played out in public, explains *Colin Wood*

The examination in public (EiP) of the West Midlands regional spatial strategy (RSS) revisions, finally under way in Wolverhampton, has polarised opinion on the amount and location of housing land release.

The RSS, published in June 2004 to replace regional planning guidance RPG11, encompasses four themes. These are urban renaissance to promote cities as attractive places to live and work in, rural renaissance with better access to services and jobs, diversifying and modernising the economy and modernising the transport infrastructure.

After initial revisions were made, the West Midlands Regional Assembly's preferred option concluded that land for 365,000 homes would be needed up to 2026 and this would balance supply with the overall



**West Midlands: scenarios outlined**

objectives of the strategy. The draft was submitted to the DCLG in January last year.

The response from communities minister Baroness Andrews was that the regional housing land release would not reflect the government's national annual targets of 240,000 homes up to 2016. She asked the Government Office for the West Midlands to commission further work, with options to deliver higher housing numbers.

Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners (NLP) won the work and last October

delivered a report on how the National Housing and Planning Advice Unit figures could be delivered. Its three scenarios — south-east focus, spreading growth and maximising growth — proposed from 417,000 to 445,000 homes respectively up to 2026, a jump of between 51,000 and 80,000 on the draft RSS.

The NLP study claimed that increased housing need not harm the urban renaissance, but there may be limits on supply of more homes in major urban areas. It argued that extra housing could support economic growth and help tackle the region's affordability problems. It also indicated that a green belt review is needed. New settlements are consistent with RSS objectives and can meet requirements in the right locations, NLP suggested. To allow for consultation, the deadline for comments was extended to 8 December.

Responses show a predictably divided pattern. Some 42 per cent supported NLP's findings, largely developers, agents and landowners favouring the maximum growth scenario. However, councils and civic and amenity groups argue that

the contestable household projections do not reflect policy input.

Opponents contend that extra housing will undermine the urban renaissance. They say viewing housing in isolation from jobs and transport is ill conceived and assuming that more housing will make homes more affordable is simplistic. Further, they claim that releasing greenfield sites will erode urban land values, that the infrastructure cannot cope and that in the recession the construction industry will not be able to deliver extra homes.

Concerns are also expressed about limited public input to the NLP exercise and its terms of reference. One observer said: "Because the study was initiated by the government, its support for the housing levels being sought by government does not come as any surprise."

The EiP panel faces a dilemma, then. Does it recommend a strategy backed by elected regional bodies or does it side with the government and building lobby on release of housing land considered inappropriate or undesirable by councils?

*Colin Wood is a senior lecturer in Birmingham City University's school of property, construction and planning.*

# Planning Aid North stands by to guide unitaries' progress

Streamlined authority structures offer chances for communities to shape their future, says *Kevin Lillie*

The involvement of communities in the planning system continues to be a high priority and is reinforced by encouragement from the DCLG.

If people are to effectively contribute to the future of place-shaping, it is important that they understand the system. Many communities are proud of their neighbourhoods and receptive to improvement, but sometimes feel too intimidated to get involved. Planning Aid is in a strong position to support these communities through our awareness and capacity-building programmes.

Over the past few weeks, many communities have started to come to terms with the unitary authorities created by local government reorganisation. In the north of England alone, 15 county and district councils are operating as two unitaries in Durham and Northumberland.

While these authorities manage the changes, they are rising to the challenges of the economic downturn, the decline of traditional industries, the need to regenerate and expand communities and the importance of enhancing learning and skills to meet future needs.

Planning will need to play a key role in supporting this. It remains at the heart of local, national and global issues — such as the potential growth of affordable housing, the regeneration of our regions and the impact of climate change.

Planning Aid North (PAN) sees a great opportunity to support local authorities independently during these transition periods and help communities better prepare to support growth and regeneration when the upturn arrives.



**North East: unitaries established**

The authorities are already preparing to consolidate their statutory planning documents and evolve new sets of documentation for local development. There are positive changes from control to management and to speed plans for housing growth and regeneration. The demand for enhanced infrastructure and renewable energy solutions will remain. It is important that planners, urban designers and architects help their communities contribute to a sustainable future.

PAN is taking a national lead with its Planning Education for Young People programme. This offers an opportunity for independent partnerships with councils to build on its work, to embrace lifelong learning and ensure that whole communities contribute to their future.

*Kevin Lillie is PAN regional manager. He can be emailed at [ntco@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk](mailto:ntco@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk) or called on 0191 222 5776.*

# RTPI Bulletin Board

## Young planner picked for palace commonwealth date

Young planner Charles Collins was nominated by RTPI president Martin Willey to represent the Commonwealth Association of Planners among 300 guests at a champagne reception in Buckingham Palace on 28 April that celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Commonwealth of Nations. The Savills Planning and Regeneration principal planner is the 2009 young planners' representative on the RTPI executive board. He was presented to the Queen and met representatives from other Commonwealth associations and high commissions. He discussed how planning can offer solutions to rapid urbanisation in the developing world and planners' role in tackling the effects of climate change.

## Help sought on masters study of bats and the planning system

Keith Cohen is doing a masters degree study investigating bats and the planning system at the University of St Andrews and would be grateful for responses to a short questionnaire. His project aims to provide mechanisms to support the efficient screening of planning applications. All responses will be treated with confidentiality.

To participate, please visit [www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=gTFLwud9cM4jFjWqu8iXQ\\_3d\\_3d](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=gTFLwud9cM4jFjWqu8iXQ_3d_3d).

## Events

### Development Control Law Conference

20 May. RTPI Yorkshire. The Hospitium, Museum Gardens, York. This popular event, organised by law firm Cobbetts, brings a range of speakers to pass on relevant and topical experience. Barristers from No5 Chambers in Birmingham are also expected. Cost: £105 +VAT; £15 for students, unwaged or retired.

For more information, please visit [www.rtpi.org.uk/ct/EVENT/702/11/events/702](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/ct/EVENT/702/11/events/702)

### Rural Issues — Update on Sustainable Rural Communities

3 June. RTPI North West and Rural Planning Network. The Elms Hotel, Morecambe, Lancashire.

This event will provide an update on sustainable rural communities. It will assess the effectiveness of the broader rural and rural planning policy framework and debate some of the specific problems and options open to planners at the local level.

Cost: £99.87; limited £20 subsidised places for students and unwaged. For more information, please visit [www.rtpi.org.uk/ct/EVENT/542/11/events/542](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/ct/EVENT/542/11/events/542), email [northwest@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:northwest@rtpi.org.uk) or phone 0161 969 3815.

### Independent Consultants Network Meeting

30 June. RTPI in Scotland. 57 Melville Street, Edinburgh. This informal meeting with Oonagh Gil and Andy Kinnaird from the Scottish Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals offers an opportunity for independent planning consultants to discuss changes in the system and to network. Non-network members welcome. Cost: Free, but booking essential. Lunch included.

To reserve a place, please email [icn@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:icn@rtpi.org.uk)



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# Negotiation skills

2 June 2009 • London  
15 September 2009 • London  
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