

RTPI NEWS

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Communications skills hold key to putting confidence on public stage

Planners demonstrate their enthusiasm and commitment in their everyday professional lives but more effort is needed to make communities aware of their positive contribution to place-shaping, writes *Martin Willey*

Confidence is an interesting state of mind. It can be interpreted by some as arrogance, while to others it demonstrates real leadership. Some people react against confidence, while some welcome it.

A number of senior figures in the planning world keep telling me that we lack confidence, especially in the new spatial planning system, in tackling economic conditions and in taking on our political leaders. As this year marks the centenary of the first planning act and the 50th anniversary of the RTPI being granted its royal charter, the time has come for planners to raise their profile.

Membership of the RTPI now exceeds 22,000, our current and emerging young planners are an exceptional bunch of citizens and we have 3,000 members involved through the executive board, general assembly, committees and task groups, regions and nations and especially the networks.

In addition, nearly 1,000 volunteers for Planning Aid support communities and experienced members act as mentors to those at the beginning of their planning careers and join accreditation and partnership boards. Other professions would envy the active engagement of one member in every eight.

Travelling on your behalf this year, I discovered that in Australia planners hold a high position in national and state governance. In the USA, our colleagues are not without considerable influence and in Canada too planning is flourishing.

Of great significance to me on my visits around the UK is that almost without exception, professional planners are full of energy and commitment. Work in a complex system, balancing the needs and pressures of a multiplicity of stakeholders and seeking an efficient



Development: need to balance economic and environmental concerns

community-engaged development solution they do this, in the main, with quiet confidence. Perhaps therein lies the problem. In our media-mad, celebrity-driven world, confidence is as much to do with perceptions as reality.

The RTPI has recognised the need to voice our message of equity, stewardship, place quality and public ownership of the planning process more strongly and clearly, seeking resonance with people's concerns about the environment but also stressing the need for economic development and affordable housing.

Many initiatives are being promoted at the institute, including greater use of digital communications with members and the wider world. On my presidential visits, we are seeking to engage with the local media to press home key planning messages. Somehow, as a profession we need to become more skilled in making the benefits of the planning process worthy of headlines.

Planners may have to lead more public debate and help steer the choices for the greater good. For example, if people resist new homes in their area, those who provide local services such as window cleaning, driveway repairs or supermarket staff may not be able to afford to live there.

Without changing individual behaviours and making housing and other developments carbon-neutral over time, people may not be able to afford their energy bills and in a number of areas their homes could end up being at risk of flooding.

However, I would prefer to offer the carrot rather than wield the stick. Attractive, energy-efficient design will increase property value, reduce crime and create attractive places to live. Collectively, even small contributions could reduce the impact of global warming.

We have to engage the media and cultivate the skills needed to broadcast the correct messages. The RTPI has an accessible online learning resource to support members in their work and professional development. Members of RTPI regions and nations should seek advice from our communications team to publicise messages through the most appropriate media channels.

At a local level, planners should press their case to be consulted for views on planning issues. We should use our statutory responsibilities to engage people on applications and spatial plans to help them understand the need to make decisions that will benefit the wider community and tackle local and global challenges, however difficult.

Martin Willey is RTPI president. For more information on professional support, please visit www.rtpi.org.uk/member_services/planning_matters

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Passing cross-boundary policy test

Authorities must work together to co-ordinate infrastructure provision so they can meet core strategy objectives, explains *Janice Morphet*

When preparing any development plan document and particularly core strategies it is useful to pay close attention to what will be assessed through the examination of the tests of soundness.

The revised versions of the tests, which accompanied publication of PPS12 in June last year, are grouped rather than set out individually as before. But a detailed review of the Planning Inspectorate's advice outlines what needs to be met. One key component of the effectiveness and deliverability test concerns cross-boundary issues. This is frequently overlooked. It is useful to consider what might be included and ways in which matters can be handled in a coherent way.



CHARLOTTE MORPHET

Libraries: centred on convenience

All local authorities have multiple boundaries, although these mean little to communities and individuals. People use services and recognise housing markets in ways that make sense to them. The nearest swimming pool or library might be in the neighbouring authority area. People may shop near their place of work and their children may go to school in yet another area.

People choose services on the basis of convenience rather than administrative boundaries. All of this matters when preparing core strategies because there is a need to plan for infrastructure provision, including housing. The assessment that underpins this will take into account the accessible supply of services, not only those within the boundary of the authority preparing the local development framework.

Establishing the key issues between the core strategy authority and its neighbours needs to be done early. Where do the housing market areas sit? Are neighbouring authority areas providers of employment? Where are the major centres for leisure, cultural and health services? What are the commuting patterns?

Individual issues can be the basis of conversations between authorities on how they might be tackled in the core strategy. Having consistent, coherent policies for issues such as housing does not mean that the policies have to be the same. Each area might provide a different contribution to the market.

Policies will therefore need to be seen in the round, but may be locally differentiated. Where communities are on the edge of administrative boundaries, how are whole user communities for centres being considered? Is waste taken to other local authorities for disposal? What are the destinations of bus services?

Investigating the likely cross-boundary issues can take place in a workshop or through a one-to-one meeting, followed up by email. The ways in which they are being tackled can be cross-referenced with the text or delivery schedules and kept up to date as preferred strategies emerge. Where authorities are compiling joint core strategies then the outer perimeter will need the same degree of consideration.

Janice Morphet is a director of RMJM Consulting and visiting professor at University College London's Bartlett School of Planning. To view the Planning Inspectorate's advice, please visit www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk/pins/appeals/local_dev/ldf_testing_soundness.pdf

Taking up low-carbon leadership challenge

The spotlight on climate change at the Planning Convention will set an urgent timescale for strategic action, declares *Steve Quartermain*

There is a compelling scientific consensus that we are changing the world's climate. The science tells us that since the industrial revolution we have been emitting much higher levels of greenhouse gases and these are causing global temperatures to rise. The evidence now points to us having only a matter of years to make the shift to low carbon living.

In the UK, we are taking a lead through reducing our emissions by 80 per cent from 1990 levels by 2050. Sticking within our carbon budgets and delivering our share of European commitments on renewable energy will mean fundamental changes to decarbonise our homes, businesses, transport and power. But even with strong and global action on emissions, we know that we will still need to adapt to a changing climate.

Planning has a big contribution to make, both to preparing for



Quartermain: reconciling needs

low-carbon living and in helping places adjust to the expected changes in our climate. The supplement to PPS1 on climate change sets out how planning can contribute.

We want planning to do what it does best — shaping new development and places — how much development, what sort and where. In providing for the homes, jobs, services and infrastructure needed by communities — and in renewing and shaping existing places — we

want planners to contribute to energy efficiency and reduced emissions. We need planners to help secure sustainable places resilient to climate change.

Some of this is familiar territory. For example, planning the right development for the right location, alongside more sustainable transport, means that we won't need to travel as much or when we do there will be less carbon emitted.

But we also want planners to be key partners in supporting the national framework to cut carbon emissions from new buildings and in decarbonising the way we heat our existing homes and businesses. For example, locally driven strategies for community energy, with well-defined and evidence-based targets provide a route map for the land-use decisions that help deliver viable heat networks.

We need planners to help create an attractive environment for innovation and for investment in green jobs. Sometimes this will mean making tough decisions, reconciling potential conflicts between the interests of individuals and the needs of the nation as a whole — for example, in delivering the wind farms we need. Each and every decision is going to count.

Planning can also help by bringing together and encouraging action in local communities. Planning should excite the imagination, feed local enthusiasm and give people real opportunities to take action on climate change.

Tackling climate change is now firmly at the centre of what's expected from planning. And this does not change with the economic downturn. Yes, we must avoid making unreasonable or unrealistic demands of industry. But delivering a low-carbon economy is key to the planet's future and our future prosperity. Prime minister Gordon Brown has made this point several times.

He has also challenged us — planners — to “build homes and buildings and businesses and then eco-towns and eco-cities around the vision of a low carbon environment”. We need to equip ourselves for this. This is why I have welcomed the RTPI's climate change challenge and its focus on the planner as a 21st century professional. And it is why I am looking forward to this year's Planning Convention.

Steve Quartermain is DCLG chief planner. This is your last chance to book for the Planning Convention at www.theplanningconvention.co.uk/booknow.html — the event takes place on 17–19 June. Please visit www.rtpi.org.uk for more details.

Inaugural Scottish session provides support to mentors

Sharing experiences and ideas contributes lessons on future training and guidance, reports *Jacqui Ward*

When times are tough, the support available from your profession becomes even more valuable. Last month, 15 registered assessment of professional competence (APC) mentors met in Glasgow for their first training event, organised by the Scottish young planners network with the RTPi education team and hosted by Atkins.

The session provided an opportunity for mentors to gain a better understanding of the APC process, share experiences and ideas and ask questions. Attendees came from a range of public and private sector backgrounds, which contributed to an interesting and lively debate.

Some of the pitfalls of the process were highlighted. Among these are the difficulty of scheduling meetings when mentor and licentiate are not in the same office and the potential for allocating insufficient time for mentoring when both parties are close colleagues. Mentors also shared their own ideas, including group meetings of licentiates to supplement one-to-one sessions and introduce an element of discussion and peer review.

Because most mentors have not been through the APC process, the session sought to reassure them that this is not necessary. Building on the guidance note series available online, the session explored the requirements of the APC log book and discussed how to help licentiates get the most from this learning tool.

Good news stories were also reported — for example where licentiates had used their log book records as evidence to secure more challenging employment experiences, at the encouragement of their mentor.



Ward: further volunteers sought

With all mentors being chartered planners, the process of producing a professional development plan is a familiar one. Mentors also discussed how they can use this document as the basis of mentor–licentiate meetings and to challenge their licentiate to set meaningful objectives.

Planning consultant Nick Wright was one who attended the event. “It underlined the fact that every mentor and every licentiate is unique and each has a different relationship,” he said. The aim is to roll out a series of sessions more widely. The mentors’ experiences and questions provided excellent input for the new training modules, which will be launched shortly.

Jacqui Ward is the RTPi’s lifelong learning officer. Volunteers are always being sought to mentor graduates towards gaining chartered membership. For more information, please visit www.rtpi.org.uk or email education@rtpi.org.uk

RTPi Bulletin Board

Feedback requested on flood and water management legislation

The environmental planning and protection network is asking for feedback from members to develop a policy response to the draft Flood and Water Management Bill. The bill aims to improve security, service and sustainability for people and communities, update the law and clarify responsibilities for managing flood risk, protect essential water supplies, enable water companies to control non-essential use during droughts and encourage sustainable forms of drainage. *To comment, please email epp@rtpi.org.uk by 8 July.*

Applications invited for climate change advisory panel

In a new initiative, the RTPi is seeking climate change champions for each network to sit on an advisory panel. Their role will involve providing examples of good practice, writing articles for the bulletin and other publications and advising the RTPi. Non-RTPi members are welcome to apply. Expertise is sought in biodiversity, environmental assessment, minerals and waste, energy generation and health. *If you are interested, please email network.manager@rtpi.org.uk*

Planning guidance sources sought on farming applications

Rural planning network member Ian Lings is asking for help in researching existing guidance for planners on what they need to be aware of when looking at applications for agricultural development and when preparing local development frameworks. *If you have any information, please email Ian.Lings@lincolnshire.gov.uk*

Production company calls for Grand Designs projects

The producers of Channel 4’s *Grand Designs* are looking for interesting and unusual subjects to feature in forthcoming series and are keen to hear from RTPi members of any suitable projects. *To offer suggestions, please email Edward.Sunderland@granddesigns@talkbackthames.tv or phone 01494 733560.*

Events

Improving Planner and Environmental Protection Officer Liaison

29 June. LACORS–RTPi. Taunton Deane Borough Council, Somerset. This workshop aims to improve links between the two services. Presentations by Mid Devon and Cornwall planners will look at strategy and the development control process, with time for group discussion. Cost: Free. *To book, please email katherine.smith@lacors.gov.uk or phone 020 7665 3875.*

Section 106 Agreements — Time for Review?

2 July. RTPi. 41 Botolph Lane, London EC3R 8DL. Network members will discuss ways forward for agreements in the light of the recession, hearing local authority and private perspectives. RTPi director of policy and partnerships Rynd Smith will chair the event. Cost: Free. *To book, please email Rhian.Brimble@rtpi.org.uk*



9th Annual Enforcement of Planning Decisions Conference 2009

2 July 2009 • London

- Update on Enforcement Law
- Listed buildings and enforcement issues
- Environmental issues – how to make an unchallengeable decision
- Enforcement decisions: the roles and duties of the Planning Inspectorate
- Enforcement issues from the planning consultant’s perspective
- Environmental issues and enforcement
- NAPE

Chair: Anthony Dinkin, QC, 2-3 Gray’s Inn Square



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