



Summer Reception at Lichfield

The unique and historic City of Lichfield will this year play host to the RTPI West Midlands Summer Reception on Monday 6th July 2009. Our Summer Reception is traditionally the stage for the presentation of our West Midlands Awards for Planning Achievement and therefore it is a very special occasion.

The event, sponsored by Alliance Planning, will begin at 6pm at Erasmus Darwin's House, off the Cathedral Close in Lichfield with a drinks reception followed by a guided walking tour of the City returning to Erasmus Darwin House later in the evening for a supper.

Erasmus Darwin was grandfather to Charles Darwin, the author of Origin of the Species, and himself was a prominent scientist and philosopher and a member of the Lunar Society. He was a close friend of Josiah Wedgwood.

This should be a really interesting and enjoyable evening. If you would like to attend please contact Sue Griffith Jones, West Midlands Regional Co-ordinator on 0121 709 1599 or contact Sue at westmidlands@rtpi.org.uk.

The cost of the event will be £16 (or £11 for students and licentiates). Non members of the RTPI are welcome.

Later in the year, probably on 28th – 30th September we will once again be entertaining the National RTPI President, Martin Willey in Shrewsbury, the once home of Charles Darwin, where he will be meeting planners in the new Unitary Authority. This will be the venue for the presentation of the Today's Leader and Tomorrow's Leader Awards – which celebrate the work of proven and potential leaders in the region. 🏠



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Chair's remarks

I was recently looking at the planning history of an industrial plant (not within the West Midlands region) and came across the parking requirements which had been applied to the development in 1971. They make very interesting reading as you will see from the extract below:-

Sex and Social Class	No of Parking Spaces per Worker
Male 1 and 2 (Professional Managerial and Intermediate Employees)	0.68
Male 3 (Skilled Employees)	0.58
Male 4 and 5 (partly skilled and unskilled employees)	0.47
Female	0.17

This set me reflecting on just how much society has changed in the 38 years since these standards were developed. Women were certainly second class citizens in 1971 and treated as such. Today's females are equal when it comes to parking spaces, more than equal in educational attainment, but still have some way to go to secure fair representation at the higher levels of organisations – so a score of 8/10 overall seems fair. However I am not sure we have broken down the allocation of parking spaces by grade / social class? How many of today's leaders still expect the 'perk' of a parking space next to their office, or first class travel on the train?

The gap between rich and poor continues to grow and as we all know this affects life chances and even life



expectancy. I suspect that many of us were inspired to become planners because we believed that we could make a difference – well that need is greater now than ever as we face up to the challenges of the recession.

The West Midlands has been hit particularly hard recently, with unemployment in Birmingham running at 11%, and that's before the news about LDV. There has never been a better time for planning to show what it can now deliver in terms of a holistic revival. Bringing forward development which captures social, environmental and economic benefits for sustainable communities is now more critical than ever before.

Planning for the recovery is now a priority for Councils. For example, initiatives which link new development with jobs in areas where need is greatest are starting to make a difference as seen at the Bullring in Birmingham and Cabot Circus in Bristol. The next few months will be challenging for us all, but I strongly believe that as planners we are well equipped to make a difference and play our part in delivering a sustainable future.

And finally, on 6 July we will be able to celebrate the achievements of planning within the region at our RTPI West Midlands Summer Reception when the very worthy winner of the West Midlands Annual Award for Planning Achievement will be announced. I hope to see you there (it is at Erasmus Darwin's House in Lichfield and includes a guided walking tour of Lichfield). Have a good summer. 🏡

Sue Manns
West Midlands Regional Chair

West Midlands AGM – Fame and fortune

AGM's can often be extremely dull affairs - but once the main business was out of the way, those Members attending the RTPI West Midlands AGM held at the Old Joint Stock Pub on 20th April were treated to a fascinating insight into the world of celebrity and politics.

No, it was not another MP's expenses scandal, nor a 'Britain's Got Talent' debacle, but a genuine true life story about one of our fellow planning colleagues and her brief time in the television spotlight.

Inspired by an invitation put out by the Sunday morning 'Politics Show', Louise Brooke Smith regaled how she had risen to the challenge of coming up with ideas about the role of 'women, the recession and the construction industry'. Within a few weeks, she was in the studio with two other lively ladies, both from very different backgrounds – Liz from deep down in Cornwall and Denise a firefighter and a trades union leader from Glasgow.

Top level discussions followed with Harriet Harman, (fresh from a savage mauling in the Commons), Teresa May (a self confessed shoe fetishist), Cherie Blair (nee Booth) and Jo Swinson (a young Liberal Democrat MP replacing Nick Clegg, whose wife was about to give birth). Each clearly had their own views about the role of women in politics and society, but nevertheless still keen to draw on the ideas of LBS and her colleagues.

The resultant discussions and interviews were filmed and edited and shown on the Politics Show, giving the three women a wonderful platform for their views and a once in a lifetime chance to rub shoulders with those political personalities we all know and love?! But it was not over yet! The ladies were finally invited to contribute to a Round Table meeting at No.11, enabling them to throw in their twopennyworth and allowing Louise to enjoy her own personally guided tour around the Chancellor's office. An intriguing story and a thrilling opportunity, born out of a single phone call. 🏡

'Water Aid Challenge' proves a tough test for planners

If the 'Water Aid Challenge' had 3 key aims – to raise the awareness of water, to raise sponsorship aid for charity and to create a challenge for the participants – then it certainly achieved its objectives.

Water was in abundance throughout the day - it poured with rain from start to finish, well over £500 was raised for the charity and it proved one hell of a challenge for the 9 planners who participated.

Led by our intrepid Branch Chair, Sue Manns (an experienced walker and climber) the team of John Acres, Dan Roberts, Steven Hill, Ashley Baldwin (and his uncle), Phil Crabtree, Jon Manns and Zoe Green achieved their target of reaching the top of Moel Siabod (in the shadow of Mount Snowdon) by midday on Saturday 5th June amid thick clouds and driving sleet and ice, and down again. Indeed, the conditions were so bad that another team which we met on Moel Siabod nearly missed the summit, despite being only metres away from the top!

But if the ascent had been challenging, the descent was even more dangerous - and taking twice as long. Tackling a different route down the mountain, the abysmal weather conditions proved particularly treacherous with visibility down to merely 10 metres. However, careful compass readings taken by Sue Manns and Dan Roberts working in close partnership proved effective in getting the team slowly but steadily down off the summit and back to base.

Our Leader's careful planning and close attention to detail was ultimately invaluable in guiding the team home, when other less well prepared parties on the same mountain range nearby were being led off the mountains to safety by Mountain Rescue teams.

Thanks go to the West Midlands Regional Activities Committee for supporting the Team with sponsorship money for Water Aid. If others wish to sponsor the Team in retrospect please contact either sue.manns@arup.com or john acres at acresclark@lineone.net. 🏠



Editor's thoughts

To say that the recent revelations about Members' expenses has left this country looking like a banana republic, is almost an insult to bananas!

The good British public has always had a healthy scepticism about the motives of politicians. Sadly, for many people, the Telegraph's daily stories about our MP's shenanigans have simply proved them right, but having had a short spell in 'public service' albeit only at the 'parish pump' level, I tend to take a somewhat different angle. Most politicians I believe, like most planners, enter public life because they want to make a difference. They either have a strong political conviction, or more likely (as in my case) they can see things which they believe desperately need to get done. It is only once they have been in power for too long, that they become casual, careless and complacent. Power, as they say, corrupts!

It would be easy, as many have said over the past few weeks, to simply have a General Election to sort things out and 'get rid of the politicians'. But what would that achieve? An election fought on the issue of 'sleaze' would merely avoid the key issues and simply replace one set of politicians with another. The new breed would by definition be less experienced and probably therefore less capable to resolve the many issues facing this country. Worse still, we could find ourselves with an administration run by a coalition of untested and possibly extremist parties with little genuine support and no clear mandate to govern. Sadly it would seem, if you didn't have politicians and political parties they would need to be invented!

But perhaps a bigger and more complicated question is; what is the role of politicians at different tiers of Government and are those tiers of Government still relevant? We have just experienced a set of European elections whereby voters have been presented with a choice of over a dozen parties to vote for (many of which were a complete mystery to most people) and a set of candidates few people had ever heard of. The proportional

representation system applied at European level had created a remote team of Euro MP's for each region who are scarcely accountable to their electorate.

Our regional tier is also in danger of becoming moribund following the outcome of the referendum a few years ago in the North East where the public voted clearly against directly elected Regional Assemblies and the recent promise by the Tories (within their published policy document) to abandon Regional Assemblies altogether.

At the more local tier, where once we had a clear two-tier system with Counties and Districts (each with their own responsibilities and representatives) we now have a hotch-potch arrangement whereby many of our Counties and Districts have now disappeared to be replaced by amorphous 'unitary' authorities (which then have to be sub-divided into operating units for service delivery) whilst others have remained as two tier. This 'dog's breakfast' of local government, created in order to avoid the accusation of 'one size fits all', has generated a situation where there is no longer any consistency and the public are completely confused.

The public now shows much more interest in voting for Celebrity Skating or Strictly Come Dancing than it does in how the country should be run or what should happen to their local community. But that does not diminish the importance and the responsibility of politics and politicians.

Amid all the tensions and torments and the traumas of the last few months, it seems to me that planners, with their ability to weigh up the merits of policies and proposals, stimulate ideas and initiatives and trigger activity and action, have a key role to play in helping our politicians to make wiser decisions. We are not politicians ourselves, but we can advise and administer, we can guide and control and above, once those policies are adopted, we can help achieve the delivery of development and progress. 🏠

RTPI Good Practice Note 5: Delivering Healthy Communities

The RTPI Planning Convention 2009 sees the launch of **RTPI Good Practice Note (GPN) 5: Delivering Healthy Communities**. The Note, one of a series prepared by the Royal Town Planning Institute, provides advice to planning practitioners in the UK on planning for health.

Delivering safe, healthy and attractive places to live is a key objective of spatial planning. In order to deliver sustainable development that effectively meets the needs of all sections of the community, the health and wellbeing of a community must be considered at all stages of the planning system. One way to ensure this is by integrating public health and spatial planning processes, enabling the two professions to promote health and wellbeing through the delivery of neighbourhoods that promote and provide opportunities for active lifestyles. This in turn assists in the management of health service demands and budgets by promoting healthier communities.

The GPN aims to aid in this process by outlining the basic structures of planning for health, providing signposting to the relevant sources of information and

outlining key recommendations on how and when to work together. Whilst the note is principally intended for planning practitioners in the UK, the note is also intended to provide assistance for other stakeholders involved in planning and health delivery processes. Some of the generic advice may also benefit professionals outside the UK.

GPN 5: Delivering Healthy Communities has been led by the RTPI Environmental Planning and Protection Network (EPP) and, following the Convention, will be available to download, along with supporting online resources and case studies, on the RTPI website. For more information on the Good Practice Note, please e-mail: epp@rtpi.org.uk. 🏠

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Wroclaw Technical University – Polish Exchange

Wroclaw Technical University – Study Tour to the West Midlands May 2009

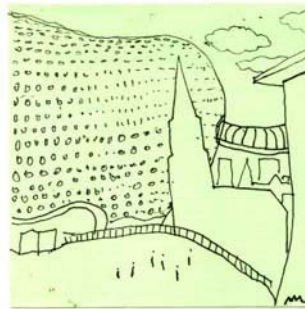
The RTPI and RIBA West Midland Regions hosted a study tour from Wroclaw Technical University. A dozen planning and architecture students and two staff had a packed programme that enabled them to see some of our best and perhaps a few of our not so good developments. The itinerary speaks for itself but what is more difficult to portray is the interest and enthusiasm shown by the students. This was no “holiday” but a study tour. The illustrations are from a book they produced as a thank you.

The week started with a visit to BCU and an introduction to Birmingham’s recent past and future aspirations: a talk on the Big City Plan was followed by a walk from the university to the Library.

On day 2, Mike Vout and colleagues from Telford and Wrekin gave a fascinating tour that provided an insight into the “new town” and contrasted new housing with some of the 1970’s estates, the town centre and the World Heritage site in the Ironbridge gorge.



This is really nice story about the revitalisation. They had huge problems with the area of the bulging concrete collar chaos, etc.



But, fortunately they figured out what to do... Almost everything got destroyed... and they put an UFO in! Yes! The Selfridges is the answer!!!

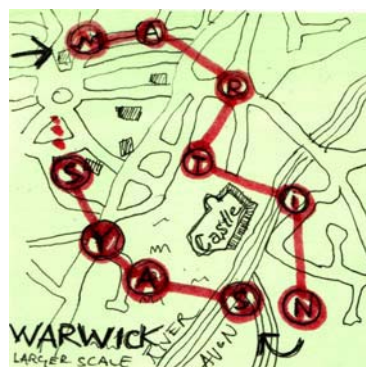
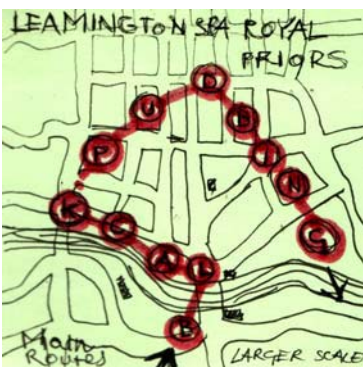
that could teach you a lesson... +bc.

The day ended with a walk around a rainy Shrewsbury.

The third day was a return to Brum and MADE’s offices where public consultation through the work of artists was brilliantly demonstrated with two projects from Solihul and in the Black Country. That afternoon saw further walks, first a look at the canals and then the next piece in the city centre jigsaw – Rob Krzyszowski from Birmingham’s South Development Planning & Regeneration led us from the Library to Brindley Place and the Mailbox via the Cube.

The day ended at the RIBA West Midlands.

Another day and another insight into the West Midlands; this time historic Warwick and Leamington Spa led by Martin Haslett from Warwick District Council.



Herefordshire's transport chief helps cycling "buddy"

Herefordshire Council's head of planning and transportation has got on his bike to help promote the benefits of cycling to his own staff. Andrew Ashcroft, a keen cyclist, has been "buddying" a member of his planning staff who is keen to cycle to work but needs extra confidence on the city's main roads.

Debby Klein, a principal planning officer based at Blueschool House, was said to be keen to cycle to work for health reasons and because it was far quicker than driving but felt nervous about cycling into the city centre. "When Andrew offered to 'buddy' me, it was an offer I couldn't refuse' she said.


With National Bike Week (June 13 to 21) coming up, Andrew felt it was an ideal opportunity to support a member of his own staff and help her gain the confidence to cycle to work.

"As Head of the council's transportation unit, I am fully aware that cycling is often the quickest way to get

around the city. If more people did it, then the environment would be greatly improved," said Andrew.

Herefordshire Council offers pool bikes at most of its offices so staff can ditch their cars and cycle to meetings instead. Employees also get special discounts at selected cycle stores.

The council's sustainable travel team also provides free adult cycle training to help people who haven't cycled for a while gain confidence to get back in the saddle.

Any companies wishing to find out more about schemes available to help employees purchase cycles or wanting to develop their own Travel Plan as well as anyone interested in free adult cycle training, should contact the Travel Choices team by emailing sustainabletravel@herefordshire.gov.uk. 

Alison Grange
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Caption: Debby Klein and Andrew Ashcroft take a breather during one of their regular lunchtime cycle rides.


"Construction Talk" podcasts available on itunes

Following the success of the WMCCE Podcasts in 2008, a new series of 'Construction Talks' podcasts has recently been launched by West Midlands Centre for Construction Excellence (WMCCE).

Hosted by Sky News presenter Marverine Cole, the podcasts give an insight into what is happening in the UK construction industry, particularly in the West Midlands. The podcasts are recorded at WMCCE's office in central Birmingham. Guest speakers from the construction sector are welcome to attend and express their opinions.

Topics debated include: the meaning of best practice in the industry, and why the construction sector does not receive the same amount of support as the car industry with Lorely Burt, Liberal Democrat MP for Solihull.

Michael Thompson, WMCCE Executive Director, expressed delight with the responses to the first series of Construction Talk podcasts. "By making the new season available on iTunes, more people will be able to keep on top of the hot topics in the industry and hear what sector specialists have to say," he said.

For more information about participating in the podcasts or suggestions for topics, please contact Victor (WMCCE Marketing Manager) on 0121 688 4050. 

Email: t.victor@wmcce.org

Direct Line: 0121 688 4056

Web Podcast Page: <http://www.wmcce.org/page.php?page=podcast>

The 'Cycle of Life' – a lesson from Germany

Jon Fairburn, of the Institute for Environment, Sustainability and Regeneration at Staffordshire University reflects on a week in Oldenburg, Germany and the lessons for increasing cycling in the region.

As I came out of Oldenburg train station, the first thing I saw was a mass of parked bicycles. By the time I got to the hotel, I had already seen more cyclists in that short trip than I had seen in North Staffordshire so far this year. Checking in, I asked the hotel receptionist whether there was a cycling festival going on, he just laughed and said "Oldenburg has 160,000 people and 320,000 bikes."

My colleagues at Oldenburg University had delivered a bike to my hotel for me to use from the University bike hire shop, it cost 5 Euros to hire for the week. One of the first differences you notice in Germany is the type of bikes being used. In the UK cycling is for recreation so people have BMX, cross country or racer bikes. In Oldenburg biking is part of every day life including recreation; as such the vast majority of bikes are of the sit up and beg variety. There is rarely a cross bar (making it easier to get on and off); they have a stand, lights, a covered chain guard, mud guards, and a rack on the back (to which a shopping basket can be attached).

People in Oldenburg don't dress in Lycra to go cycling, they just wear normal clothes. Some children wear helmets but the vast majority of adults don't. Cycling starts at an early age in Oldenburg, between 80 to 90 percent of children cycle to school, the rest go by bus. It is very unusual for a child to be driven to school. Cycles are used to get to sports facilities and if a child doesn't have a bike, there will be a 'bike pool' for them. Planning officers told me that this gives children great mobility from a young age and more confidence. It becomes natural to go by bike.

A culture of cycling is encouraged in many ways, but perhaps most important is the provision of a proper cycling infrastructure. Most main roads have separate cycle lanes down both sides, usually allowing cyclists to ride two abreast. There are separate traffic lights for cyclists and pedestrians synchronised across a series of junctions to allow cyclists to continue uninterrupted. Cyclists can go both ways up one-way streets, yet in 5 years there hasn't been an accident between a cyclist and a car. There are many other facilities too.

Parking for cyclists happens in several ways. Many shops and businesses have their own bike racks outside their premises and there are many public bike racks. Next to the railway station is a 24 hour covered cycle park attached to a bike shop (one of 30 in Oldenburg) and a repair shop. This costs 30 euros a year and is commonly used by commuters who arrive by train and then cycle to work.

In the inner area of Oldenburg they estimate that 50 to 70 percent of the journeys are by bicycle. Children and adults get exercise just from going to school and work everyday by bicycle, let alone the other cycling they do. This has a direct impact on health because it means the population is breathing cleaner air compared to most UK cities due to the lack of car pollution. The lack of overweight people was noticeable in Oldenburg. Increasing physical activity is one of the UK government's key messages as it helps prevent coronary heart diseases, diabetes, obesity and some cancers.


The general culture is supportive and appreciative of cycling in Oldenburg, in part because many car drivers also cycle and if they don't, their children almost certainly do. More cyclists mean that car drivers are more aware of them and more careful. I got caught out the first couple of days in Oldenburg wondering why cars were stopping before turning into streets – the answer was they were waiting for me!

Cycling in Oldenburg is a way of life, you see people cycling with their dogs, lovers cycling hand in hand, mothers towing their youngest children behind them in trailers, people riding home with shopping and pensioners cycling (and when the pensioners get older they often move onto tricycles).

As a city, Oldenburg is attracting young families due to its quality of life, a large part of which is down to a cycling culture and the benefits that provides. So Oldenburg is actively reducing carbon emissions and has better air quality and a healthier population compared to many British cities.

For those who fancy a holiday where you can cycle easily and safely as a family, I recommend Oldenburg, Bremen, Osnabrueck, or Munster. These cities should also be study destinations for councillors and officers who are committed to sustainable transport for their cities and towns in the UK.

Useful websites for visitors; All these sites have English versions, just click on the British flag.

Bremen <http://www.bremen-tourism.de>
Oldenburg Tourist site
<http://www.oldenburg.de/stadt/>
Osnabrueck <http://www.osnabrueck.de/>
Muenster <http://www.muenster.de/stadt/tourismus/en/> 

Jon Fairburn
01782 294038 jon.fairburn@staffs.ac.uk
www.staffs.ac.uk



Bicycles in Oldenburg.

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