

RTPI NEWS

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Institute's seven commitments set out action plan for climate change

Pledges ranging from encouraging low-carbon footprints and recording best practice to guiding government policies and boosting skills indicate the determination that planners play a full role, writes *Luke Dickson*

Our environment is in a state of flux — economically, socially, climatically and politically. The choices we make today will have significant repercussions for the future and therefore our decision-makers need to be as informed as possible about these issues.

This week, the RTPI launches a major initiative to help professionals tackle the significant environmental issues of these extraordinary times to safeguard our world for future generations. The *Planning to Live with Climate Change* document comes after extensive debate with members about the immediate action that we and our partners should take to tackle climate change as part of our updated approach to sustainable development.

Central to the initiative are seven commitments. These are to:

- Promote behavioural change.
- Adapt existing places.
- Work towards responsible legislation and policies.
- Improve current practice.
- Celebrate best practice.
- Compile a compendium of best practice.
- Develop climate change education and skills.

Commitment one recognises that there is no technological “quick fix” and we need to fundamentally change the way that we live. Promoting behavioural change is about using planning to help people reduce their carbon footprints. This could involve the carrot of local development orders extending permitted development rights to on-site renewable installation, or the stick of Merton rule-type policies. The goal is to make this behaviour normal and for everyone to be conscious of their carbon footprint.

One of the biggest concerns expressed by our members is the



Traffic: changing people's behaviour to cut their carbon footprint is key

need to deal with existing development's contribution to climate change. Planning has always focused on new development but the email marked “existing buildings” cannot simply be forwarded to our building control colleagues. There is a need to restructure places on a low-carbon foundation.

Our members want the RTPI to use its position to bring about legislation that will make a real difference in tackling climate change. This might on occasions involve using the institute's collective planning voice to make the government sit up, listen and act.

To achieve these aims, our members point out, we must work more closely with other professions, organisations, agencies and developers. The nature of climate change is that it crosses disciplines and only together will we find solutions.

Commitments four, five and six are made because the RTPI is the guardian of good planning practice and is the best place for the celebration of ideas and work that tackle

climate change. The RTPI needs to use its resources and position to spread the word among the profession regarding the best practice in planning and climate change, our members firmly believe.

There is already a lot of information available with case studies of inspiring projects using solar panels and sustainable drainage systems. However, planners need practical information in a form that they can apply in their everyday work.

For this reason, we plan to create an online resource to provide direct access to good practice in terms of such things as appeal decision precedents, conditions, core strategies, supplementary planning documents and working practices. We now need to hear from you about innovations for dealing with climate change.

Finally, commitment seven reflects planners' growing concern that the emergence of climate change demands different skill sets from competent professionals in the 21st century. Some skills have increased in importance and some have been added to the portfolio. Not every planner will need to become a climate change scientist or energy engineer but all will need to be literate about carbon footprints and their impact on our environment.

The RTPI will do everything in its power to push this skills drive, while also helping some planners to go further and develop specialist skills. The seven commitments are designed to help planners in their vital task of tackling climate change. But the RTPI needs the involvement, energy and drive of members to help deliver its pledges.

Luke Dickson is an RTPI policy officer. For more information about the initiative, please visit www.rtpi.org.uk/item/2624/23/5/3

“Members want the RTPI to use its position to bring about legislation that will make a real difference”

Centre extends science of planning

Computer modelling work by a university team continues to pioneer analysis tools to boost understanding of city and land-use planning

Is town planning an art or a science? Since the father of town planning Patrick Geddes likened the planning of cities to an evolutionary process, the debate about whether the methods of science are appropriate to this has rarely subsided.

Computer technologies have given this an added twist, with desktop software and the internet now underpinning the operation of the planning system. Most development is aided by computerised design and production systems.

At University College London's Bartlett School of Planning, Mike Batty and his colleagues in the centre for advanced spatial analysis (CASA) are extending this science by developing tools of analysis and



Batty: widening model application

forecasting. Batty was recently elected a fellow of the Royal Society — one of the few professional planners ever to receive this honour.

Set up in 1995 to develop new technologies for visualising cities using geographic information systems (GIS), CASA's first project for the former Department of the Environment involved digitally defining

town centre boundaries for a census of retail turnover. From this the consultancy GeoFutures was formed.

With the university's space syntax group, it also pioneered models for representing cities in virtual reality. This led to the long-standing Virtual London project — a three-dimensional model of the capital out to the M25 containing 3.6 million building blocks, funded by the Greater London Authority and London Connects for public participation.

The model, however, is now being used for a wide range of applications from flooding to air pollution and is at the core of a longer-term effort to build a London-wide database, linking building geometry to population, employment and land use.

CASA also works on land-use transportation models. It is building a model for London and the Thames Gateway as part of the Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research cities programme. It is working on problems of forecasting how rapid changes in energy costs from rising and falling oil prices can have significant effects on transportation

and land-use patterns, with obvious links to predicting the spatial impacts of the recession as well as the study of future cities.

The centre's work on GIS now focuses on providing web-based tools that let users create their own layers on top of Google maps. The team has recently begun to map all kinds of topical data, such as MPs' expenses and reactions to the credit crunch, using a method called crowd sourcing that allows users to key in data to build maps from scratch.

Work being carried out at CASA illustrates how scientists are beginning to focus their interest on how we can understand and hence plan cities better. The centre is strongly focused on bringing new technologies into planning, set against a longer-term mission to develop a science of cities.

For more information on CASA, please visit www.casa.ucl.ac.uk. Most action is reported in the blogs section. For more details of mapping tools, visit www.maptube.org and www.londonprofiler.org

Climbers beat bad weather in peak challenge

West Midlands team members faced ice and high winds for the good cause of WaterAid in reaching a mountain summit in Snowdonia

The spatial skills of RTPI West Midlands members were tested to the full as a team from the branch braved extremely adverse weather conditions on 6 June to climb Moel Siabod — one of the high peaks in the Moelwynion mountain range in Snowdonia — to raise more than £500 for WaterAid.

The intrepid team was led by branch chairwoman Sue Manns and comprised John Acres, Ashley Baldwin, Phil Crabtree, Steve Hill, Jon Manns and Dan Roberts. The WaterAid challenge aimed to have a team on the summit of the UK's top 100 mountains between noon and 2pm on the Saturday.

"Despite the extreme conditions, we made our contribution," proclaims Sue Manns, who is Arup's associate director of planning, policy and economics. "We faced driving ice and rain, sleet and winds of around 65mph."



Charity challengers: map and compass guided team safely back to base

Moel Siabod is 872m high, sitting above the villages of Betws-y-Coed and Capel Curig. The highest part of the mountain forms a relatively level, rocky ridge about 800m long, running roughly south-west to north-east, with steep ridges and precipitous cliffs.

"The weather forecast was bad when we started out," Manns recalls. "But having checked with a local mountain leader we were advised that it was still safe. As we

ascended, the weather deteriorated. Waterproof cagoules began to leak, gloves became sodden and fingers were numbing as we scrambled up the ridge.

"By the time we reached the summit, the temperature was down to 2°C, the wind was blowing frozen lumps of ice and sleet into our faces and visibility was less than 10m," she explains. "After a quick photograph, we postponed lunch and started our descent across a boulder

field. We relied entirely on teamwork using a map and compass to pace distances and walk to a bearing. This saw us safely back into a sheltered woodland for the final stroll back to base."

A huge feather in the team's cap is that unlike many others on the mountains that day the RTPI team ascended and descended the steep ridges, with their share of scrambling and navigational challenges to reach the summit, without needing to call out Mountain Rescue.

Soon afterward, they discovered just how lucky they had been in getting back down the mountain safely. "Three full Mountain Rescue teams were out on the range that day, together with an RAF Valley rescue team," says Manns.

"Three different challenges were taking place in the area and teams of walkers and fell runners were being led to safety or airlifted off the mountains around us. The moral of the story is that if you get into difficulty, teamwork and spatial skills are the key to a safe escape."

Manns credits people's sponsorship for keeping the team going, while two dedicated supporters on the day, Zoe Green and Roberts's uncle, gave practical support. Looking back, the group feels that its ordeal was worth the effort because, from the summit, "the views of the Snowdon Horseshoe are fabulous".

Conference sends message of delivery despite recession

Planners from across the Welsh spectrum debated their role in policy objectives, reports *Roisin Willmott*

Although we are experiencing difficult times, it is not a universal shut-down of business. This fact was stressed at the 2009 Wales Planning Conference earlier this month by Cardiff Council development manager and Planning Officers Society for Wales chairman Phil Williams.



Davidson: project quality sought

Borrowing the RTPI's definition, he said sustainable planning consciously mediates between short-term social and economic benefits and larger social and environmental need. He outlined a range of major projects under way in his city.

The conference drew together delegates from councils across Wales, private consultancies, developers, lawyers and third sector representatives. The theme was delivery of the Welsh planning system and Welsh Assembly Government environment minister Jane Davidson explained how planning could deliver two key objectives — climate change policy and improved public services.

She announced that former RTPI Cymru planning policy panel chairman Mike Sant would head an independent steering group to oversee research and carry out a comprehensive review of the application process. "I would like to see the poorest performing authorities learning from the best. This is not just a question of time taken to determine applications. What I want are timely decisions that secure quality, sustainable developments," she said.

Planning Inspectorate deputy chief executive Leonora Rozee provided an excellent reflection on its experiences in England, how the system differs from that in Wales and the lessons that Wales can learn

for the roll-out of local development plan inquiries.

The afternoon session focused on the tensions between delivering wider social, economic and sustainability objectives in the recession. Home Builders Federation director of economic affairs John Stewart highlighted the viability issue for developers, backed by evidence of "the 29 burdens" imposed by central and local government that chip away at profit margins. Many projects are now simply not viable and will not happen, he said.

Modwen Properties regional director Rupert Joseland and planning manager Colin Darby illustrating the preparatory work being carried out by the firm on regeneration projects in South Wales. In conclusion, conference chairman and RTPI director of policy and partnerships Rynd Smith highlighted the importance of such events in enabling professionals to learn from each other.

Roisin Willmott is national director of RTPI Cymru.

RTPI Bulletin Board

Chair hands over network responsibilities

RTPI transport planning network chair Victoria Hills is stepping down after four years of heading the network to focus on her new role as Transport Planning Society (TPS) chair. Hills was instrumental in launching the network as a joint initiative between the RTPI and the TPS serving as a forum for members to share information and good practice on transport planning.

During her time as its first chair, she has seen membership grow to more than 450 and contributed to the delivery of events, policy responses and more recently the launch of "hot topics" to encourage greater member involvement. She is handing over the role to Steer Davies Gleave associate Chris Ferrary, with East Midlands and Humberside Airports planning adviser Jonathan Hockley becoming vice-chair.

Hills says: "I would like to thank all those who have supported me in this role over the past four years and especially the RTPI for its continued commitment to the networks, which provide vital arteries from central office to the wider membership." Ferrary commented: "Hills has made the network one of the institute's most successful. I hope that we can continue this work with her help on the advisory group and take the network from strength to strength."

For more information or to join the network, please email transport@rtpi.org.uk

Development nominations invited for 2009 Scottish Awards

The 2009 Scottish Awards for Quality in Planning have been launched. Nominations under the categories of development plans, development management, development on the ground and community involvement are sought by 11 August. The awards are run by the Scottish Government and are open to anyone from practitioners to voluntary organisations and community groups working on projects in Scotland.

For more information and application forms, please visit www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/National-Planning-Policy/awards or email saqp2009@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Events

The Future for Development Planning

16 July. RTPI Development Planning Network. 41 Botolph Lane, London. Members will discuss the future for development planning and the possible impacts that a change of government might bring. The Conservatives' green paper *Control Shift — Returning Power to Local Communities* outlined plans to abolish regional planning and housing powers, returning control to local communities. RTPI head of policy and practice Matt Thomson will give a short presentation on how this could affect the English planning system and what practices are emerging in the Welsh and Scottish systems, which might inform discussions.

Cost: Free.

Limited places; to book, please email Rhian.Brimble@rtpi.org.uk



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