

RTPI NEWS

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Convention hailed as huge success despite tough economic conditions

Delegates at this year's RTPI Planning Convention held at London's Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre last month were treated to lively plenary sessions, workshops and exceptional debates, reports *Martin Willey*

Planning in a Changing Climate was the theme of this year's Planning Convention and it was a huge success, with numbers only a little down on last year. Delegates answered the question: "Did you enjoy it?" with a resounding "Yes".

Why come to the convention, especially when budgets are tight? Our research shows that delegates expect three things — to have their horizons expanded by challenging plenary sessions, to learn from expert practice workshops and to meet and greet old friends or clients and find new ones.

The four plenary sessions and final debate were exceptional and delivered some specific messages. University of Cambridge professor Susan Owens gave the perfect scene-setting introduction with her challenging review of the recent history of planning, concluding that "delay can be democratic".

She argued that the planning process, including appeals on major infrastructure, is the proper arena for tackling development that will have a major impact on our future. I am sure that we all want this process to be efficient but we are the stewards of our environment.

UN-Habitat policy analysis chief Dr Naison Mutizwa Mangiza offered an international perspective on the changing environmental climate. One of his many messages was to move from central to local governance, reflecting the Australian Planning Association mantra of think global, act local.

National Grid director Nick Winsor warned that if the planning process does not permit more infrastructure then there will be a serious threat to energy supply. He said planners can play a crucial part in capturing the public's agreement on the need for alternative projects.



Convention: honorary membership for RIBA president Sunand Prasad



The four plenary sessions and final-day debate were exceptional and delivered some specific messages

promoted "planners as essential tax-gatherers" who "should not be left out of the planning temple".

Consultant Kevin Murray chaired a debate on planning's political climate. After much tactical voting, the delegates supported the motion that planners should be in charge of planning, rather than politicians.

I had the privilege of launching the RTPI's seven commitments on Planning to Live with Climate Change. What is different about these is that they position planners in two fresh areas.

First, we need to change communities' behaviour to mitigate climate change. We can do this in regional spatial strategies and local development frameworks and in considering applications by ensuring that the public is made aware of the consequences and benefits of how their behaviour affects the climate.

Secondly, planners tend to focus and be judged on new development. But this represents only a tiny proportion of all development. The commitments include one to work climate change mitigation into existing development. We can promote neighbourhood travel plans, offer guidance or even introduce a development order consenting local renewable energy infrastructure.

There were also launches, awards — including honorary RTPI membership to RIBA president Sunand Prasad — and a wonderful presentation by our young planners on a 21st century RTPI. If you did attend, I hope that you enjoyed it as much as I did. If you could not make it, then check out the presentations and workshops on our website — and try to come along next year.

Martin Willey is RTPI president. Full details of the convention are available at www.rtpi.org.uk/item2662&ap=1

Sharper focus brings more benefits

Area action plans may grow even more popular once their usefulness among local communities becomes more apparent, suggests *Janice Morphet*

Area action plans (AAPs) have proved to be one of the more popular development plan documents (DPDs) prepared by local authorities in England since the local development framework (LDF) system was introduced in 2004.

Successful AAPs provide the means of focusing on specific areas requiring attention or undergoing major economic restructuring, such as Longbridge in south Birmingham. Elsewhere, they have been used successfully for growth areas or where major locations have become available, such as the Ministry of Defence barracks site in Mill Hill. They have also become a mechanism for tackling town centre problems such as in Kingston-upon-Thames, Reading and Swindon.



Action plans: focus on key areas

Like core strategies, AAPs focus on delivery and need to demonstrate how infrastructure proposals will be funded. The same approach and methodology used for core strategies can be used for AAPs and they will need to meet the same tests of soundness. They also require a delivery strategy and schedule.

AAPs offer a means of considering places where multiple interventions are necessary and where public sector attention might be focused. This could be through funding or more interactive relationships with landowners and developers.

Where AAPs are used to support regeneration they may be an alternative to more frequently chosen masterplans. The masterplanning approach can be very helpful, not least as a means of identifying ideas and attracting developers' interest. They do not have to go through any formal processes and are likely to result in planning applications at a later stage.

But masterplans may be at a disadvantage if their proposed infrastructure requirements are not included in the AAP delivery schedule. This may be a particular issue for publicly-funded projects. When considering transport investment, for example, the latest DfT consultation on local transport plans indicates that proposals will need to be part of the LDF process.

The Homes and Communities Agency seems to be moving in the

same direction. Both initiatives are part of the broader government approach to join up infrastructure funding as set out in its Public Service Agreement 20. It may be more difficult to secure funds for those progressing masterplans without integration, with either the LDF core strategy or an AAP.

Until the publication of the revised PPS12 in June last year, many local authorities were progressing AAPs ahead of their core strategies. As of last September, some 41 AAPs had been submitted to the Planning Inspectorate (PINS) for examination.

However, the advice that core strategies should be completed before other DPDs has meant that only the AAP for South Jarrow has been submitted to PINS since then. Once more sound core strategies are adopted, then AAPs are likely to regain their popularity as an increasingly useful local tool.

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

Advice service celebrates latest milestone

Planning Aid is beginning a fresh chapter of its story by moving to a new head office in Birmingham's city centre, notes *Ben Lee*

Planning Aid's new head office is less than 3km from its previous home but it has come a long way since it began. The doors to its new Birmingham address were officially opened by RTPI secretary-general Robert Upton, showing just how far Planning Aid has developed.

The national service offers free, independent and professional planning advice to individuals and community groups who cannot afford to pay professional fees. Last year, the service provided help to more than 31,000 individuals and nearly 1,100 groups across England.

The West Midlands Planning Aid Service (WMPAS), the forerunner of today's national organisation, is still based in Birmingham's Custard Factory. Upton was in the city to mark the National Planning Aid Unit's (NPAU) recent move from the site to Newhall Street in the city centre.



West Midlands: meeting room dedicated to stalwart service supporter

Planning Aid has operated out of nine regional offices across England since 2003.

This success would not have been possible without the support of the Barrow Cadbury Trust (BCT). Founded in the West Midlands in 1920, it works to fund the promotion of social justice. It was one of WMPAS's keenest supporters from 1989 to 2001, financing its work to the tune of more than £160,000. Upton and RTPI managing director

Sara Drake were at the NPAU's new home to dedicate the spacious meeting room to the BCT as a gesture of Planning Aid's gratitude.

"The funding received almost a decade ago was crucial in the development of WMPAS, allowing it to flourish," said Upton. "In the end, the model was copied as a basis for the national service." Although independent of central and local government, Planning Aid is now largely funded by the DCLG. In

2008-09, the service received £3.2 million of the £11.8 million pledged for 2008-11.

Until the DCLG began to provide core funding, Planning Aid relied on donations from supporters such as the BCT and these still make an important contribution to its income. Its volunteers also remain vital to the network. The service could not carry on without them, particularly as it gears up to helping communities and individuals respond to the challenges posed by the Planning Act 2008.

The challenges are considerable, much as they were when Planning Aid set out to build a network of regional offices when the service went national. Planning Aid volunteers such as Mark Clarke, Patrick Gallagher and Anika Randall were there to greet Upton and Drake as they marked the beginning of a new era for Planning Aid and its network of 50 employees and more than 1,000 volunteers.

Planning Aid may have evolved since its early days. But it is still well placed to meet the challenges of the coming months and years.

Ben Lee is RTPI Planning Aid communications and public affairs officer. He can be emailed at ben.lee@rtpi.org.uk or called on 020 7929 9479 or 07870 672 020.

Employers earn recognition for staff training excellence

The latest RTPI learning partner awards demonstrate continued value for staff training, writes *Jacqui Ward*

The current economic climate poses major challenges, even for employers who are committed to retaining their staff and ensuring that they are sufficiently skilled to respond to the challenges posed by the recession.

Yet training does not have to be costly and can reap generous rewards. This has been demonstrated by two organisations recently awarded RTPI learning partner status in recognition of their investment to support their employees.

At Mid Sussex District Council, planning is central to the corporate structure. The council has ensured that all its planning staff are chartered or working towards chartered status. Its talent management process has also supported staff to move up to senior roles.

“We recognise the importance of having professionally qualified planning staff at all levels to enable the provision of a high-quality service,” says development control manager Nick Rogers. “We have pursued a policy of growing our own planners by funding day-release, postgraduate and on-the-job training. I am thrilled that our efforts have been recognised by the RTPI.”

Seeking to limit the cost of training, the council holds monthly continuing professional development (CPD) sessions so individual learning is shared among all officers. It also participates in the Sussex Training Consortium, a partnership of nine local authorities that develop cross-authority management training modules together.

In the private sector, Tetlow King Planning has also shown support for training and professional development. With all its planners members



Award: development programme

of the RTPI, the firm has created a work environment in which professional qualifications are supported and celebrated.

A checklist for graduates and newly-qualified planners has been developed covering familiarity with the local area, the planning system, key documents and CPD. This ensures that new starters take responsibility for their own development but are supported in doing so.

The practice holds frequent lunch-time seminars on a wide range of planning topics. The programme recognises that knowledge-sharing and transfer offer valuable CPD opportunities. It also encourages team-building and networking.

Director Jonathan Adams comments: “We value our learning partner status because it demonstrates the firm’s commitment to supporting and encouraging the learning and professional development of our staff. Our goal is for all employees to reach their full potential during their careers at Tetlow King.”

Jacqui Ward is RTPI lifelong learning officer.

RTPI Bulletin Board

Professional development record breach leads to suspension

The RTPI's conduct and discipline panel has recently found a member to be in continued breach of the code of professional conduct for failing to provide a written record of his continuing professional development (CPD) activity for the previous two years. Paul Elm was initially found to be in breach of the code last year for failing to provide his CPD record following several reminders from the institute since February 2006. His membership was suspended for a six-month period in September 2008. Elm's membership has now been suspended for a further six months over his continued failure to submit his record.

While suspended, a person is deprived of all privileges and benefits of membership. They cannot receive *Planning*, use the institute's designatory letters, call themselves a chartered town planner or present themselves in any way as being an RTPI member. However, they remain bound by the code and liable to pay their subscriptions. For more information, please email sandra.whitehead@rtpi.org.uk

Ceremony set to unveil Housing Design Awards winners

Communities minister Ian Austin will give a speech and present prizes to the winners of the Housing Design Awards at a ceremony at the Banqueting House in Whitehall next Thursday. The event is being promoted by the RTPI, the Homes and Communities Agency, the DCLG, the National House Building Council and RIBA.

Industrial heritage information sought for online database

The RTPI heritage interest group is seeking information for an online resource. Data is needed on industrial heritage, maps or plans and their interpretation, tourism and heritage, urban integration, historic battlefield sites and social or community aspects of heritage. If you can help, please email andrew.matheson@rtpi.org.uk

Events

The Future for Development Planning

16 July. RTPI Development Planning Network, 41 Botolph Lane, London. This meeting will discuss the possible impact that a change of government might bring, after the Conservative Party's green paper *Control Shift — Returning Power to Local Communities* outlined plans to abolish regional planning and housing powers. It will also look at practices emerging in the Welsh and Scottish systems.

Cost: Free.

To reserve a place, please email development.planning@rtpi.org.uk

Planning and the Historic Environment

17 July. RTPI South West. Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester. This event provides a detailed look at the planner's role in the historic environment from archaeology to world heritage and the impact of proposed single consent regime. Speakers will offer examples of how the various specialists work with planning cases.

Cost: £72 + VAT; £31 for retired; £21 for unwaged and students.

To book, please email southwest@rtpi.org.uk



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Chair: **Keith Holland**, Assistant Director, Planning Inspectorate



UPDATED FOR 2009

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