

RTPI NEWS

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Creating boundaries for community balance in battle of old against new

Sitting between conservation and development interests planners have a key role to play in reconciling the two and the RTPI heritage interest group is looking for more members to get involved, says *Andrew Matheson*

“Making the past part of our future” is the strapline for English Heritage. But isn't this also what planners do? We want settlements to be distinct, acknowledging their origins and with a resilience for the future. Two recent items in *Planning* illustrate the issue.

First is the controversy surrounding the Canal Corridor scheme in Lancaster (*Planning*, 19 June, p3). At the centre of the issue is a new pedestrian bridge, described as a symbolic link between the old and new parts of the city, but requiring the demolition of a number of buildings in a conservation area. English Heritage and residents' group Its Our City publicly campaigned for an inquiry, while the developer has expressed exasperation at the argument that “retaining a few poor-quality unlisted and unloved buildings is more beneficial than all the benefits of the project”.

The other story relates to an English Heritage survey headline finding that one in seven conservation areas is at risk of neglect, decay or damaging change (*Planning*, 3 July p14). It also notes that urban and suburban conservation areas, making up 23 per cent and 18 per cent of designations respectively, are twice as likely to be at risk as rural ones.

So the Lancaster issue represents a microcosm of a wider concern. In the current economic climate, when every crumb of investment is precious, will our heritage from past generations lose out?

Tellingly, English Heritage concludes: “Conservation areas do not need time-consuming or expensive measures, just commitment and good management from residents and councils alike.” But while it notes that a demonstration of this commitment can come from a formal appraisal, it reveals that only 54



St Martin's-in-the-Bullring: retaining heritage in new city development

per cent of conservation areas have one. This must surely run the risk of blurring the distinction between buildings for which decay, neglect and change could be more of a blessing than a threat and those without which the distinctive character of a place could be irreparably damaged.

Not only in Lancaster has the task of finding a clear boundary proved to be divisive. UNESCO has courted controversy with its world heritage inscriptions, both because of proposals that have not been accepted but also perceived threats to the factors that secured designations.

Ultimately, it is in the planning system that most balances will be struck and where community rather than national interest is at stake. Councils and their planning advisers have been adept at keeping an ethical divide between heritage areas and modern development sites where fresh thinking is cherished and the shopping mall has become the most visible presence.

There are many examples where development has been designed to retain or enhance heritage settings. St Martin's-in-the-Bullring in Birmingham and the rejuvenated St Pancras station in London come to mind. However, no two people are likely to agree on whether the balance between cherishing the old and celebrating the new has been struck exactly right. Decisions are often characterised as a battle between the older and younger generations, but this is rarely the actual case.

This is where planners can make more of their “inbetweener” role, not simply negotiating for the community with prospective agents of change and improvement but also helping with intergenerational teaching about what gives character and distinctiveness to places. Much has been done to improve the interpretation of our heritage for new generations, but too little attention has been paid to building awareness of our everyday surroundings.

There are many green shoots. Planning Aid is working with schools on built environment projects and community theatre is commonly seen in regeneration initiatives. Community engagement helps to build awareness of the here and now, while heritage open days help to remove barriers. The RTPI networks are also playing their part. However, yet more strenuous cultivation may still be needed.

Andrew Matheson is RTPI heritage interest group manager. The network is presently rescoping its activities. To contribute, please visit www.rtpi.org.uk, email andrew.matheson@rtpi.org.uk or call 01789 763006. To follow English Heritage's conservation areas at risk campaign, visit www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.20516

“No two people are likely to agree on whether the balance of cherishing the old and celebrating the new is exactly right”

Award communicates firm message

Winning the Planning Consultancy of the Year has boosted marketing and morale during the tough economic climate, explains Roger Hepher

Awards seem to have proliferated in recent years and being shortlisted for one does not necessarily fill the heart with joy. However, the RTPI Planning Consultancy of the Year Award, coming from the body that holds the royal charter to represent and promote planning, is one to be taken seriously.

We at Savills also realised that winning the award would give us the exposure we needed. The firm has become a big player in planning over the past few years and we are keen to communicate our size and record.

So we decided to enter. But how to start? How would the judges decide what was good? How would they go about comparing our team of 180 planners — covering all property sectors from 15 UK offices — with a niche practice specialising in rural building conversion work in North Yorkshire?

We decided to adopt a sports theme, given that 2008 was an Olympic year. Many in the UK are now



Hepher (second from left): sport-themed entry selection scooped prize

enthusied with the prospect of the London 2012 games and we have a good portfolio of experience in sports development.

So far so good, but we then began to realise that a number of clients did not want their schemes included because it did not fit with their marketing strategy or they were concerned about upsetting delicate negotiations. Eventually we compiled a shortlist, from which we made a selection that we believed showed the practice's geographical and sectoral diversity.

The judging criteria are so wide that it was difficult to decide which aspects of our practice and projects to highlight within the word limits. We seemed to get it right and were delighted to be shortlisted.

The interview was the next challenge because again we struggled to identify which aspects would most interest the judges. It was also a little unnerving to find a senior journalist from *Planning* poised to note what we said. It was a very civilised affair but we did not really know whether we had got it right.

When we signed up for the impressively staged awards lunch it was more out of a spirit of support for the process. If we were the winners there would surely have been some hint, we thought. However, the degree of watertightness over the results must be the envy of government departments and it was a genuine, but delightful, surprise when our name was called.

The hard work was worth it, partly for the marketing value but most of all for the reassurance it gave to everyone in Savills Planning that we really are a top-flight team. Self-confidence is a fragile but vital commodity, especially in difficult market conditions. I thank the judges for giving 180 hard-working planners the fillip they deserve.

Roger Hepher is head of planning and regeneration and a director of Savills, the Planning Consultancy of the Year 2008 winner. The closing date for entries for the Planning Consultancy of the Year Award 2009 is 28 September. There are categories for Planning Consultancy of the Year, Small Planning Consultancy of the Year and Planning Consultant of the Year. For more information, please visit www.rtpi.org.uk/events_awards_and_networking/awards/ or email awards@rtpi.org.uk

Going for growth with spatial partnerships

Proactive planning policy approaches to support emerging industries will help the country prepare for the upturn, argues Jenny Massingham



Massingham: development role

A series of investment streams and taxation measures aims to prepare the UK for a strong economic recovery through the development of low-carbon manufacturing, green industries and advanced technology. Planners can play a vital role here in enabling the development of growth sectors and supporting economic diversification.

The government intends to remove the barriers holding back innovative and fast-growing companies. With a planning system often criticised as being reactive rather than proactive, it is time for planners and developers to work outside their regular parameters and experiment

with innovative practices to champion fresh approaches to spatial planning and meet the country's economic aspirations.

Many leading industries are reluctant to invest in the facilities and premises needed to expand emerging sectors and meet environmental objectives. By forging partnerships

with the front-runners, planners can encourage development through the system and subsequently increase the commercialisation of new technologies and processes.

Without prejudice to overarching planning policies on sustainability and environmental protection, emerging planning policies must promote cluster developments, flexible buildings, high-quality infrastructure and sustainable mixed uses to encourage growth in existing and new employment sectors.

For example, the creative industries and digital media should be working with planning authorities and service providers to take advantage of £10 billion that the government is investing in the sector, including extending the broadband network, ensuring that high-speed and high-quality infrastructure is in place to support their success.

To attract and retain a skilled workforce while also creating sustainable mixed communities, new employment sites should encourage

the development of live-work units, flexible, energy-efficient buildings and starter homes.

While the government is marketing the UK as a front-runner in renewable energy technologies with the world's first carbon budget, only 0.6 per cent of its £20 billion budget to stimulate economic growth has been committed to budding green industries. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 aims to create a more flexible, proactive system and the current economic climate is the perfect opportunity to create incentives for development.

Proactive, wide-ranging policies for innovative employment planning can guide the location, scale and requirements of these emerging industries. Rather than wait for a raft of planning case law to define our approach, it is essential that opportunities to create pioneering policies that direct, support and guide the emerging industries of the future are realised now.

Jenny Massingham is a planner at the Cambridge office of planning and design consultancy Barton Willmore.

Workplace survey highlights role of technical members

Understanding qualification is raising standards across planning services, reports *Chris Sheridan*

The RTPI conducted a survey of its technical members during March. This was part of a review of the qualification to find out more about individual roles and level of responsibility. The survey was timely because the institute had received an enquiry from a council looking to improve development opportunities for staff working alongside professional planners.

So who are the technical members? Job titles vary between organisations, but the majority work in the public sector. More than 63 per cent work in enforcement, with others in policy, development management and technical support.

What many have in common, the survey found, is managerial responsibility. Some 43 per cent of technical members supervise staff, while 57 per cent co-ordinate the workloads of others. Many carry out performance reviews and appraisals. Salaries vary, but 67 per cent earn more than £23,000 a year.

The survey results highlight a range of skills, knowledge and experience. One senior enforcement manager is responsible for a team of two officers and day-to-day running of the service. She advises planning officers, elected members, the public and third parties on planning issues and represents the council at appeals and court hearings.

Another member from a neighbouring authority provides graphic and cartographic support to planning officers. Technical membership recognises the professional commitment that these individuals bring to their daily work.

Other technical members are responsible for checking, validating



Sheridan: range of skills revealed

and registering all planning applications. Some determine householder applications and make recommendations. Some perform section 106 monitoring and compliance duties, making an important contribution to raising professional standards throughout the planning service.

On the question of whether they are valued by their managers, more than 73 per cent of technical members agreed that their employers recognise their professional qualifications and support them with their professional development.

Many staff in a planning service can achieve technical membership and the RTPI will be carrying out a comprehensive review of pre-professional education provision. "The aim is to strengthen the pathway to RTPI technical membership," says education officer Katherine Parkes.

Chris Sheridan is RTPI Planners in the Workplace manager. To view the survey results, please visit www.rtpi.org.uk/item/2776&ap=1

RTPI Bulletin Board

Institute internship opportunities offered for business graduates

The RTPI is seeking one or two interns for three to six months to support key programmes in the organisation and its wholly owned trading subsidiary RTPI Services Ltd. The roles are an opportunity for recent business graduates to work in a vibrant professional organisation and involve support to teams in key areas. These posts, based in London, are unpaid but lunch and travel expenses are offered. For more information, please visit www.rtpi.org.uk/item/2729&ap=1. To apply, please email recruit@rtpi.org.uk with your CV and supporting statement on the skills and experience you might bring to the role.

Planning Summer School set to bring members to Exeter

The annual Planning Summer School reconvenes at the University of Exeter from 4 to 16 September. This influential event enables town planners and elected members to engage with ministers, top civil servants and leading figures in UK planning and development. For more information or to book a place, please visit www.planningsummerschool.org

Presidents' report outlines year's aims and successes

Over the past 12 months, the institute has been active in a range of key areas on behalf of its members. Initiatives and achievements are documented in the RTPI presidents' report. For more information, please visit www.rtpi.org.uk/download/6423/Presidents_report_2008-2009_v3.pdf

Demographic information sought for European survey

The European Spatial Planning Observation Network project on demographic and migratory flows affecting European regions and cities is seeking input through a survey prepared by its lead partner the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency. The results will be presented in the draft final report expected next April. To contribute, please visit www.pbl.nl/demifer by 1 September.

Events

Study Tour of St Fagan's Natural History Museum

31 July. Young Planners Cymru. Cardiff. This tour of the open-air museum with more than 40 original buildings from different historical periods will offer the opportunity to learn about traditional building form, craftwork and maintenance skills. Cost: Free; parking charges apply. To book, please email info@youngplannerscymru.org.uk; places limited.

Planning Law Conference

18-20 September. RTPI, RICS, Law Society and Bar Council. Oxford. This conference is relevant for all those working in planning. Speakers include DCLG chief planner Steve Quartermain, Tory communities spokesman Bob Neill and former London mayor Ken Livingstone. Cost: £538 + VAT. For more information, please visit <http://jplc.org/prog.htm>



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