

RTPI NEWS

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A tale of three cities starts an urban renaissance along the south coast

What would happen if we were to turn student planners loose with fresh ideas for place-making in tired old parts of towns? *Miranda Pearce* reports on the huge success that has resulted from exactly such a project

Take some underused spaces in three of the South East's largest cities, link them to creative talent at local universities, ask council leaders to produce an architectural brief and invite urban design students to research and test how the spaces might change and you have Places from Spaces (Pfs).

The project has developed a process to test more out-of-the-ordinary design ideas that might contribute to permanent regeneration schemes. It is a way of asking "what if?" about future ambitions.

The South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) recognises that creating places in which people would choose to live and invest is essential to the region's sustainable development. In this, we must not underestimate the importance of our public realm, which should provide a sense of a place.

There is an inextricable link between good design and creating quality public spaces, so we wanted to give elected members and senior professionals the technical understanding to know how to commission them. The project focused on real places with real issues and involved practical demonstrations.

For the three universities taking part, students were able to develop their knowledge by dealing with real world issues and also show how, newly trained in design skills, they could offer fresh ideas.

We asked the Solent Centre for Architecture and Design to run the project, working with the Universities of Brighton, Portsmouth and Southampton. They co-operated to develop and deliver training, bringing together councillors and senior council officers in each of the cities at a series of workshops to consider what makes a good public space and how design can help to achieve it.



Portsmouth: coloured bathing huts built to inspire locals' recollections

Study visits were made to Copenhagen and Oporto — two cities with excellent examples of this harmony — and US academics joined us to brief us on the American approach.

The three councils selected sites being considered for regeneration at Lower Valley Gardens in Brighton, Queen's Park in Southampton and The Hard in Portsmouth.

All were underused as public places, often isolated by traffic and disconnected from the city centre. A brief for each project was drawn up for the students, who worked in groups to devise solutions. The training enabled the local authority team to assume the role of critic and, finally, judge of the proposals.

We wanted the students to come up with temporary site changes that would allow them to test how permanent transformations might be developed. In Brighton it was a 700-tree forest, in Southampton a soundscape and in Portsmouth multi-coloured bathing huts.

Park trees in Brighton were used to create paths and nature trails to make the gardens a living place rather than a rarely used space in the middle of a gyratory road system. In Southampton, visitors to Queen's Park were invited to take a chair to any spot while hidden speakers relayed low-intensity sounds to test which pleased most visitors. This way, the students could recommend the best possible long-term solutions.

The Hard in Portsmouth was created hundreds of years ago when the area was a landing point for clay — residues forming the original eponymous surface. Today it is a busy but unattractive transport interchange. The city is looking at long-term plans for its centre and the brief was to look at how The Hard might be revived and reconnected.

Portsmouth students derived the idea of placing three vividly coloured bathing huts at the end of key thoroughfares. Using the huts, they hoped to collect reminiscences of The Hard that could provide regeneration ideas for the council.

Councillors and officers in all three cities worked closely with the students, which led to the big success of Pfs. There is much improved understanding in the councils, not just in planning but across departments, of what design can do.

Since the Pfs scheme the universities and local authorities have been working together on other projects. The temporary transformations have proved their worth, offering "what if?" design testing while giving students the opportunity to contribute fresh thinking to real world design issues. It is a different and very refreshing approach.

Miranda Pearce is urban renaissance manager at SEEDA.

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Creating places in which people would choose to live and invest is essential to sustainable development

Landscape rising up policy agenda

The natural environment should be integrated with cultural, economic and social issues when it comes to forming policy, *Alison Chapman* advises



Landscape: character assessment

The landscape is the backdrop to our lives. It is important to recognise the unique and diverse characteristics of UK landscapes and ensure that they are conserved and enhanced for future generations. Landscape character assessment (LCA) is one way of doing this.

As Natural England chief executive Helen Phillips points out in *Landscape Character Network*: "Our landscapes are more than just attractive scenery — they tell a vivid story of how, for centuries, the natural environment and human settlements have influenced each other."

The European Landscape Convention 2000 made many management recommendations now being implemented across Europe. These include the need to recognise landscape in law, develop policies dedicated to its protection, management and creation and set up procedures for the public to take part in policy creation and implementation. It also encourages the integration of landscape into all relevant policy areas.

The most attractive and rare landscapes are protected by law as national parks or areas of outstanding natural beauty. Although many distinctive places are also identified for protection locally, there are huge stretches of English countryside without landscape designation.

LCA is an effective way of identifying then conserving or enhancing the character of different areas that may share similar geology, landforms, soils, vegetation, land uses, settlement patterns, woodlands, hydrology and other aesthetic or perceptual aspects. Once defined, pressures and forces for change can be identified. This allows recommendations for future management to be produced.

As a landscape planner, I have witnessed the diversity and uniqueness of the English landscape and been involved in many LCA projects. Greater Nottingham proved a really interesting assessment, covering restored mining areas, narrow river valleys, rolling farmland, plantation woodland and open farmland.

To carry out an LCA, we often see a new area for the first time to establish where the character changes. We then record characteristics on survey sheets and mark boundary changes on maps. But the best way of capturing changes in landscape character is through photography.

Stakeholder consultation is an important part of an LCA. Talking to people is a vital way of gathering local knowledge and identifying locally valued landscape features. We have to view the landscape with fresh eyes and identify key characteristics without preconceived or subjective values and opinions.

With TEP, I have been on consultations with local people and stakeholders and led group discussions to establish what is special in a landscape, how things have changed over time and how local people would like to see it evolve in the future.

The completed LCA provides a useful evidence base to inform regional and local planning policies, help development control officers assess the impact of proposed development, guide landscape-related mitigation and help developers with designs and proposals. This all contributes positively to the local distinctiveness of any area.

I am looking forward to working with Natural England as a landscape and spatial planning adviser to ensure that the natural environment is fully considered in the regional strategic agenda as an advocate for the aims of the agency.

Alison Chapman is an environmental planner at TEP and is soon taking on a new role as a landscape and planning adviser at Natural England.

Bulletin Board

East Midlands young planners hedge their bets

The East Midlands young planners went to the dogs last month at the Colwick Park track in Nottingham. We were not quite successful enough to give up our day jobs and the plethora of £1 each-way bets may imply that planners tend to be somewhat averse to risk in the current economic climate. However, the evening was a good opportunity to meet other planners from throughout the region in a relaxed atmosphere over a pie, a pint and a punt. A good night was had by all and we look forward to welcoming more young planners to our next continuing professional development event on strategic environmental assessments and sustainability appraisals, sponsored by East Midlands Planning Aid and hosted by Charnwood Borough Council, at 6pm on 9 September. Please email victoria.bankesprice@lincolnshire.gov.uk if you would like to join the group or have any ideas for future events.

Events

West Midlands Infrastructure Planning Commission Seminar

30 July. West Midlands Young Planners. King Sturge, 45 Church Street, Birmingham B3 2RT.

This seminar focuses on the infrastructure planning commission and its regional implications. Speakers include DCLG head of planning casework at the commission Vincent Maher and National Grid land and development stakeholder and policy manager Hector Pearson. The event will be chaired by King Sturge partner Elle Cass. Registration and reception are at 5.30pm and the seminar begins at 6pm. Drinks are available afterwards at the cellar bar in Pub du Vin, 25 Church Street. Cost: Free.

Places are limited so please email ypwestmids@googlemail.com to book.

Cymru Open Air Museum Study Tour

31 July. Young Planners Cymru. St Fagans National History Museum, Cardiff CF5 6XB.

The Welsh young planners and St Fagans National History Museum have together arranged a guided study tour of the open air museum, where more than 40 original buildings from different historical periods have been reconstructed in the 40ha parkland. The tour will offer the opportunity to learn about traditional building form, craft work and also the skills required to reconstruct and maintain these period buildings. It will begin at 11am and finish at around 2pm.

Cost: Free except for parking.

Places are limited so please email info@youngplannerscymru.org.uk to book.

South Coast and South East Summer Ball

18 September. South Coast Young Planners and RTPI South East. Winchester Rugby Club, Hampshire.

The joint summer ball will begin with drinks on arrival at 7pm followed by a three-course meal at 8pm with three complimentary bottles of wine per table, after-dinner speeches and a disco.

Cost: £25 per ticket.

Please email Gemma.Christian@eastleigh.gov.uk for further details.



Colwick Park: East Midlands young planners enjoy social flutter

Action co-ordinated in global fight against climate change

A workshop in Rotterdam offered a big opportunity to act on environmental issues, notes *Richard Summers*

The Rotterdam Workshop on Climate Change and Urban Planning was a vital step forward in co-ordinating action to tackle climate change as part of sustainable development across the world.

It was organised by the Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP), UN-Habitat and the institute of housing and urban development studies at Erasmus University. It brought together about 40 spatial planners and academics.

The workshop showcased developing practice, ranging from situations where climate change is already seriously threatening urban development, such as rising sea levels and increasing rainfall in Ho Chi Minh City, to less pressing but nonetheless serious topics, such as carbon reduction and water management in Rotterdam.

The planners and academics gave fascinating presentations of their current work on various urban planning and climate change challenges in some very different contexts. University representatives suggested the scope of a tertiary education syllabus for planners on tackling climate change.

The break-out sessions proposed support mechanisms and resources to help equip planners worldwide to deal with climate change. Experience in the Philippines, for example, has shown that awareness raising and strategic policies are just as important as tools and action projects in tackling natural disasters. The workshop explored possibilities for developing a toolkit that urban planners can use, linked to a programme of education and continuing professional development.



Ho Chi Minh: climate change risks

UN-Habitat has identified a seed-corn budget of £184,110 for the first two years and is seeking to co-operate with planning associations, including the RTPI, across the Commonwealth and beyond.

These developments have come at just the right time for the institute, which launched seven commitments for action on climate change at last month's Planning Convention. It has also developed its work on Planning to Live with Climate Change through member engagement and a general assembly debate.

There is now an opportunity to develop links between this initiative and the work of CAP, UN-Habitat and the Global Planners Network to support policies and programmes to tackle the climate change challenge.

Richard Summers is RTPI junior vice-president and chairman of the planning policy and practice committee.

RTPI Bulletin Board

Entries now invited for specialist RTPI planning awards

The RTPI Planning Awards seek to recognise the wide diversity of planning achievement and other aspects of the planning profession through the Planning Consultancy of the Year Award, the Young Planner of the Year Award and the Planning Education and Lifelong Learning Awards. The closing date for entries is 28 September. The Planning Consultancy of the Year Award is looking for exemplary practice that meets the requirements of clients and the wider community. Awards may be made in three categories covering planning consultancy, small planning consultancy and planning consultant of the year. The Young Planner of the Year Award is aimed at professional planners under the age of 35 and is intended to seek out and acclaim the brightest younger planners involved in the profession. The Planning Education and Lifelong Learning Award, now in its second year, is divided into three categories — excellence in planning education, outstanding student achievement in planning education and employer-practitioner award for commitment to lifelong learning and professional development.

All entries can be submitted at www.rtpiplanningawards.com or call the awards office on 020 7929 9473 for more details.

Survey on demographic drivers in the UK seeks planners' input

The European Spatial Planning Observation Network project on demographic and migratory flows affecting European regions (DEMIFER) is seeking input to its demographic scenarios work through a survey prepared by its lead partner, the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency.

Please contribute your knowledge of demographic drivers in the UK by visiting www.pbl.nl/demifer. The deadline for completing the survey is 1 September. Results will be presented in the draft final report of the DEMIFER project, due in April 2010.

RTPI South West committee member wins outstanding service award

Congratulations to RTPI corporate member Geoff Walker, who received the institute's outstanding service award at the RTPI South West annual dinner on 3 July at the Thistle Hotel in Exeter. RTPI president Martin Willey presented the award to Walker, who served on the RTPI regional committee since 1982 until he retired recently. He will now take on a new role as RTPI South West policy and media officer.

Event

RTPI Cymru Seminar on Housing in Rural Areas

4 August. Canolfan Cywain, Bala, Wales.

The Welsh Assembly Government is considering new legislation for delivering housing and planning. This seminar, from 10am to 2pm, will offer the opportunity to discuss what is needed to deliver affordable housing in rural areas. It will be chaired by Owain Wyn of Burum, who is RTPI Cymru policy and research forum chairman.

Cost: £23 including lunch and entry to the National Eisteddfod.

For more details, please email wales@rtpi.org.uk or call 029 2049 8215.



Negotiation skills

15 September 2009 • London
3 November 2009 • London
8 December 2009 • London

- What makes a good negotiator?
- The best negotiators do their homework
- The negotiation conversation
- Personal styles, emotion and influence
- Movement, closure and follow up

Trainer: Gareth Batterbee, Professional Trainer
or **Jeff Biggin, Learning and Development Specialist**



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