



Planners explore 'The Origin of the Species'

There is a strong Darwinian theme running through our major events in this year's RTPI West Midlands Regional calendar. Our summer reception in early July, was held at the home of Erasmus Darwin, grandfather to Charles Darwin (of 'Origin of the Species' fame) and himself an eminent philosopher, scientist and herbalist.

The event began with the presentation of the RTPI Regional Awards for Planning Achievement, sponsored once again by Alliance Planning. This year's award winner was a partnership including Coventry City Council, Complex Development Projects (CDP) and architects Bryant Newman Priest for the impressive Electric Wharf urban regeneration scheme.

The runner up receiving a commendation was Stratford District Council for their Urban Design Framework for Stratford upon Avon. (More information on both the winning entries on pages 4 & 5 inside).

Following the presentations, members were treated to a comprehensive tour of the historic centre of Lichfield by two very well informed and entertaining

City Guides who gave a running commentary on the history and folk-lore of the town.

Looking forward, on 29th September we will again pick up the Darwin theme, with a visit to Shrewsbury, home of Charles Darwin as part of the Presidential Visit to the West Midlands Region. Martin Willey, the Institute's National President will be spending time with RTPI members and senior figures from across the Region, including Advantage West Midlands, the Homes and Communities Agency and the Leaders' Board. He will also be making a special visit to meet with officers and members at the new Shropshire Unitary Authority and Stafford Borough Council.

As part of the visit, Shropshire Council will be hosting a meeting of the Regional Activities Committee in Shrewsbury, to which all RTPI members are warmly invited. We expect the President to make the presentation of the Today's and Tomorrow's Leaders' Awards at the meeting. We are keen to welcome as many planners from the Region as possible so please contact Sue Griffith Jones, our Regional Co-ordinator, or check the CPD events on the back page, if you want more details.

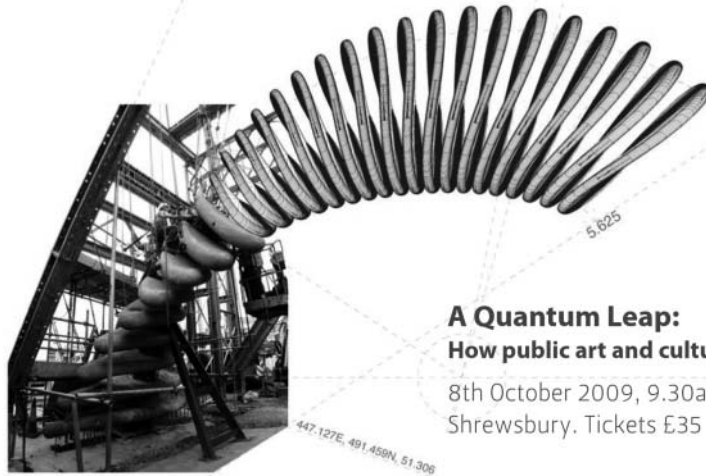


Electric Wharf.

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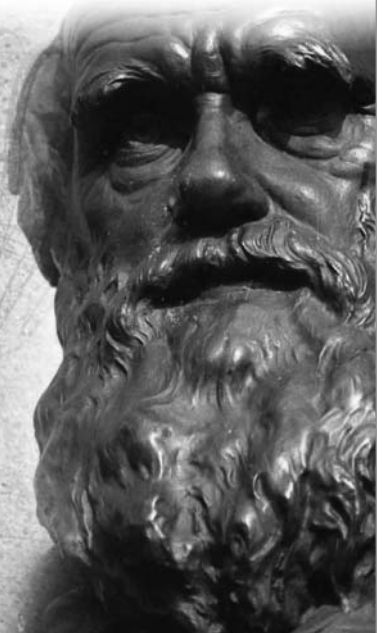


**A Quantum Leap:
How public art and culture adds value to regeneration**

8th October 2009, 9.30am-3.30pm, Theatre Severn,
Shrewsbury. Tickets £35



Public art and cultural projects are an established component of urban regeneration. This conference explores the issues from both the regeneration and arts/culture perspectives to show that public art and culture are just as important in regenerating smaller towns as in big cities. Expert speakers from around the UK will draw on examples including a number of internationally renowned projects as well as Shrewsbury's recently opened Theatre Severn and the Darwin Memorial Quantum Leap (the largest new piece of public art in the West Midlands), to demonstrate the practical approaches required to integrate such projects into a town regeneration strategy and examine how, even during the current recession, we need visionary, ambitious thinking.



Information from www.shropshire.gov.uk/arts
Box Office 01743 281281



Supported through Defra's
Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund

Fancy a trip to China?

This autumn, for the 5th time, a study tour of China has been arranged for architects, planners and urban designers. The tour lasts for 10 days, flying from Birmingham on 14th November and returning on 24th November.

The tour will begin in Hong Kong where delegates will be immersed in new developments through lectures, visits and debate; it then moves to Beijing where planned visits will take in both traditional sites such as the Forbidden City and Great Wall together with the Olympic stadia. There is also an optional extension to see the terracotta warriors at

Xi'an. Throughout the tour there will be tour guides and interpreters. A flyer is available which gives further details.

Anyone interested in the trip should contact the chair of the Europe & International Group, Anthony Clerici ant@clericidesign.com or the tour organiser Kevin Fang kevinfanguk@yahoo.co.uk

A further China tour is planned for March 2010 – expressions of interest are invited for either date.

Anthony Clerici Chair of Europe & International Group

Floreat Salopia! – the birth of a unitary

Nick Taylor, Assistant Director, Strategy and Development, Shropshire Council

To local government planners of a certain age, the words “Local Government Reorganisation” arouse fear, loathing and envy in equal measure. To those who were around in the 90’s, when a number of unitaries were created, it was probably a mixture of all three, to those in the 80’s, when Met counties were abolished, it was predominantly the first two and, to those few (not including this planner) who remember the 70’s, it must have been a case of “which district council did you say you would like me to become Chief Planner for?”.

The latest round of restructures, on 1, April this year, was probably hardly noticed by most of the region’s planners. Whilst they were preoccupied with RSS revision, achieving sound Core Strategies or development control performance, in a remote corner of the West Midlands the new Unitary Shropshire Council was born. This love child of Labour ministers and local Tory councillors is an amalgamation of Shropshire County Council (England’s largest inland county, we are told) and the district or borough councils of Shrewsbury and Atcham, Bridgnorth, South Shropshire, North Shropshire and Oswestry. Shropshire Council has a population of nearly 290,000 and expects to receive 5,000 planning and related applications a year. It held its first elections in June and returned a large Conservative, former district councillor-dominated majority.

Change is unsettling at the best of times and, for the staff of the six councils, the couple of years leading up to 1, April was tough. On top of the uncertainty about their own futures, many of them, the senior managers in particular, had to take on the project management for reorganisation on top of their day jobs. In Planning, we knew that it was going to be particularly challenging, with radical change a necessity and no opportunity for a gentle transition.


Planning emerged strongly in the new structure. It forms the core of my remit of Strategy and Development which, including economic development and regeneration, has a total establishment of 230, within a Development Services Directorate that combines the main place-shaping services. It was vital, in my view, that planning policy and development management should be closely related – a situation that could not be taken for granted in a radical restructure. Secondly, we wanted strong capability in environmental disciplines, such as natural and historic environment, sustainability and climate change. Elected members recognised that housing strategy and affordable

housing delivery were very closely related to planning and so these have been grouped with planning policy, implementation, information and research.

We have adopted a development management approach, linking development control with Building Control, Land Charges and Street Naming and Numbering. The debate around centralisation versus area working resolved itself into three Development Management area teams, but with the North and South teams divided between the market towns of Oswestry, Wem, Ludlow and Bridgnorth. Minerals and Waste Development Management is delivered by a Shropshire-wide team.

Although Shropshire’s approach to planning and our rapid progress towards creating the new service was strongly praised by a CLG audit of new unitaries back in the early part of the year, the transition to the new service has not been without its difficulties. The ambitious decision to procure a new integrated land and property IT system and to create a central validation team has challenged our IT capability, business processes, staff training and data quality. Planning application and property search performance suffered an initial, and perhaps inevitable, dip immediately after 1, April. The effort required to get back to the challenging performance standards we set ourselves has been considerable but we are now getting there. On the plus side, the joint working on policy and the evidence base that the county and districts began over a year ago has enabled our LDF Core Strategy to remain on target for adoption in February 2011. The Policy Directions (or Preferred Option) consultation stage is taking place during August and September. The recently adopted Interim Affordable Housing Policy Guidance has been widely welcomed as helping to put an important Community Strategy aim into effect.

Of course, all of this has had to be achieved against the backdrop of the recession, with depressed fee levels and cuts in Housing and Planning Delivery Grant and Growth Point funding. No sooner has the new service been established than we find ourselves facing a period of severe restraint in public sector spending.

Nevertheless, Shropshire’s planners remain optimistic and committed to providing the best unitary local authority planning service; an ambition that we will be sharing with Martin Willey, the Institute’s President, when he visits the region on 29th September. We hope to see you there! 

Nick Taylor
Assistant Director; Shropshire Council



Electric Wharf wins RTPI Regional Award

The impressive canal-side Electric Wharf scheme in Coventry has won this year's West Midlands RTPI Award for Planning Achievement.

Electric Wharf demonstrates how a complex redundant site within a difficult area can be transformed into a successful series of buildings and spaces forming the heart of a vibrant community.

Situated in one of Coventry's most deprived areas next to the canal and bounded by streets of two-storey Victorian terraces, Electric Wharf was originally the city's first power station dating back to 1896. The building was not listed and was proposed for demolition and redevelopment for low spec industrial units. But the canal-side setting had great potential and the building has been brought back to life through a major partnership initiative.

Indeed, collaboration has been a very important factor in the design and construction process and is something which has contributed to the scheme's success. A partnership between developer Complex Development Projects (CDP) and Coventry City Council, has shown how a commitment to creative practice and a belief in involving the arts can produce outstanding results.

Electric Wharf is a complicated and pioneering project. It is an example of how local history and distinctiveness can be maintained and how old industrial buildings can be carefully remodelled and re-used by introducing quality modern

design. The new-build elements create a wide variety of spaces which has helped to attract new occupiers to an otherwise unfashionable location.

Each phase of Electric Wharf has been designed with the end users in mind and more than 15 companies have now established themselves and are growing amidst the live/work office suites, which make this development such an exciting concept in urban life.

A new canal bridge provides a direct and attractive route to the city centre as part of the new regeneration area at Swanswell.

The City Council has always been a keen supporter of the development and planning consents were achieved in relatively short timescales. Implementation has taken place in a series of phases reflecting different and distinctive components of the overall scheme.

The Award for Planning Achievement, sponsored once again by Alliance Environment & Planning, was accepted by Dean Shaw, of Project Architects, Bryant Priest Newman, at the RTPI Summer Reception in Lichfield. The Judging Panel this year comprised Sue Manns (our regional Chair), Katy Craddock (Chair of the West Midlands Urban Design Forum) and Jo Hooper (a member of the Young Planners Group).

Congratulations to all concerned! 🏆



Lichfield Walkabout

Photos showing planners who attended the RTPI Summer Reception at the beginning of July. Earlier in the Summer, Lichfield District Council launched a

new Speakers Corner in Lichfield – the only 'Speaker's corner' outside London. (See pictures.) 🏆



Stratford Urban Design Framework – RTPi commended

Stratford District Council has been commended in this year's RTPi Regional Awards for Planning Achievement for its Urban Design Framework for the town.

The Urban Design Framework for Stratford-upon-Avon is intended to set out how new development can complement and positively contrast with the town's unique historical character.

Early in 2005 the District Council, along with its partners Warwickshire County Council, Advantage West Midlands and a range of local stakeholder groups, made a commitment to work together to oversee the preparation of a strategy for enhancing and regenerating Stratford-upon-Avon town centre. They commissioned Urban Practitioners to lead a team to prepare an Urban Design Framework for the town.


The Royal Shakespeare Company had already embarked on an ambitious £100m scheme to upgrade their main theatre. The Urban Design Framework seeks to ensure that corresponding levels of investment and improvements are made to the town as a whole.

The UDF is a blueprint for the managed improvement of the town over the next 15 years or so. It presents a co-ordinated approach to change based on three fundamental components: a movement strategy, a public realm strategy and a detailed development strategy.

A number of key steps in its long-term implementation have already been taken:

- Bancroft Gardens, the main public park adjacent to the river and theatre, have been remodelled and revitalised
- a scheme has been drawn up to create a new access into the town from the Warwick Road, one of the key entrances for visitors,
- a scheme to resurface and manage traffic on Waterside and Southern Lane that run past the theatres is due to start shortly,
- planning permission has been granted for a steam railway centre,
- planning permission has also been granted for the first phase of a canal-side regeneration project.

There is still a long way to go in fulfilling the vision and aspirations of the Urban Design Framework and the economic recession has put some schemes on hold for now. Nevertheless, the UDF should stand the town in good stead as it wrestles with the challenge of managing millions of visitors each year and preserving the quality of the very things they come to see.

The commendation was received at the RTPi Summer Reception by Paul Ogden, Project Director for the World Class Stratford initiative. 



Bridgeway, Stratford.

Last chance to vote!


This is your last chance to vote for the nominated Leaders of Today and Tomorrow. (if Tripwire reaches you in time!)

You will be pleased to know that RTPi West Midlands has received two nominations for the 'Today's Leader' Award (Sue Manns & Annette Roberts) and four nominations for the 'Tomorrow's Leader' Award (Wayne George, Joanne Hooper, Tim Webb & Lucy Williscroft).

The Supporting Statements for the nominees are displayed on Survey Monkey so that RTPi West Midlands members can vote to select the winners. The link to the

survey from the RTPi webpage is <http://www.rtpi.org.uk/item/2798&ap=1>

Voting will close at the end of August and the awards will be presented when the RTPi President, Martin Willey, visits the Region on 29th September 2009, at the Special Presidential Regional Activities meeting in Shrewsbury.

So please vote now. 

Sue Griffith-Jones
RTPi West Midlands Co-ordinator: 0121 709 1599

Chair's final remarks

As many of you may already know, I have recently accepted the position of National Planner for Planning Aid and as such I am required to step down from the role of Chair for the West Midlands region.

This is will be my last Chair's report as I will take up the new role on 1st September. The role of National Planner will focus on developing the presence, influence and future growth of Planning Aid and I will be working with a range of stakeholders at regional and national levels.

I feel very privileged to have acted as Chair to what is one of the most dynamic, forward looking and professional RTPI regions. I have been inspired and humbled by the work put in by the volunteers who give up their time to represent the region and would strongly encourage anyone who may be thinking about joining the Regional Activities Committee to do so. You will find, as I have done, that not only will you be

made most welcome, but also you will make some lasting friendships and most importantly, have a good time.

Finally, I hope that you will all join with me in supporting Steve Hill, our current Vice Chair, who is stepping up to the role of Regional Chair earlier than he had anticipated. Steve will make a brilliant Chair and an excellent Ambassador for the region.

With best wishes to you all, and looking forward to meeting up with you in my new role.

Sue Manns
West Midlands Regional Chair.



(Ed: I am sure I am not alone in wishing to thank Sue Manns for her huge contribution and commitment to the Region over the last (nearly) two years as Regional Chair. We wish her every success in her new job as National Planner for Planning Aid). 📱

In town? Why not visit the RIBA Bookshop?

The regional bookshop and offices at the RIBA's base at Margaret Street in Birmingham has had something of a facelift in recent months. Thanks to the considerable energies of the regional team and Regional Council and the creative input of local practice, Kinetic AIU, the bookshop has become, the RIBA - would like to think - an attractive and inviting place in which to browse.

For those that knew the bookshop of old, we thank you for your support over the years and we hope that you will enjoy and appreciate the change. The shop is open



to both members of the construction industry and the public. For those that have yet to visit, then please do pop in and say 'hello'. Our extensive range of contracts and practice publications means that the RIBA Bookshop in Birmingham is your 'one stop shop' for all construction contracts and practice publications.

You can find the regional office and bookshop in the BMI, Margaret Street, Birmingham, B3 3SP. Tel: 0121 233 2321 email riba.westmidlands@inst.riba.org. We are open Monday - Friday 9am - 4.30pm. 📱

Will the last one out please turn off the light!

Robert Upton, the RTPI Director General, will shortly be leaving the RTPI after being chosen as the preferred candidate for the Deputy Chair of the Infrastructure Planning Commission. Robert wrote to colleagues in July saying 'it has been a great pleasure and privilege to work with the outstanding company of people that you are'. Robert will be leaving his post in September.

More recently Rynd Smith, the current Director of Policy & Partnerships has announced that too will be leaving the

RTPI to become the new Director of Policy and Plans at the Inspectorate, replacing Leonora Rozzee, who has just retired.

Finally, within the last few days, Jacque Ward, the lifelong Learning Officer at Botolph Lane, has announced that she too will be leaving the Institute to join the Civil Service working in education and skills.

We wish each of them well in their new careers. 📱

RTPI creates new policy group to review RSS

The West Midlands Region of the RTPI has established a new Policy Group, chaired by Colin Wood, to review emerging planning policy.

The Group kicked off in the summer by examining the consultation report of the Issues and Options stage of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy - Phase 3 - which deals with such disparate issues as minerals, rural services, renewable energy, green belt policy and gypsies.

A small team worked to collate a response which has been approved and endorsed by our national HQ and submitted to the West Regional Assembly, on behalf of the RTPI Region. Anyone wishing to obtain a copy is welcome to contact our Regional Co-ordinator, Sue Griffith Jones 0121 709 1599 or email: rtpiwstmids@btinternet.com 📱

Young Planners First Annual Speed Networking Event

A miserable, grey June evening... what could be better than a drink or two with friends in the pub? Nothing, you say? Well, how about meeting new people and extending your networking circle? On Tuesday 30 June, that is exactly what a small cohort of young planners did. Assembling in Bushwacker's in Birmingham, young planners from a number of public and private sector organisations engaged in a session of speed networking hosted by YPwestmids.

The objective was to meet as many young planners new to their networking circle and find out who they worked for, why they chose planning as a career and what they enjoy most about their jobs, amongst general gossiping! Four

minutes per session and no set questions led to some fairly frantic and unusual discussions.

With Rob Krzyszowski and the Core Group taking to the 'mic' to ensure that there was some element of time restriction (in what was otherwise an immensely relaxed evening), an hour of speed networking was enjoyed! Following the formal session, a few young planners remained in Bushwacker's, chatting the night away and swapping business cards.

A successful evening all round and thanks to all those who attended! 🏠

Claudia Clemente Drivers Jonas

Planning Aid Services celebrates another successful year

Almost 40 people attended the Planning Aid (WMPAS) AGM in Birmingham at the end of July. The meeting held at St Philips Chambers, in Birmingham, was attended by volunteers, clients and friends of WMPAS.

Head of St Philips Chambers, James Burbidge QC welcomed delegates to the meeting which was followed by a review of the year from WMPAS Advisory Group Secretary, Mark Walton. A presentation on the future challenges and opportunities facing Planning Aid was then given by National Planning Aid Programme Manager, John Rider-Dobson.

The meeting concluded with a keynote speech from Pat Niner OBE, from CURS, who offered a thought provoking presentation on the planning issues facing Gypsy and Traveller communities. This led on to a valuable discussion on how best Planning Aid can support Gypsy & Travellers in the planning process, both generally and in the current review of the West Midlands Regional Spatial Strategy.

For more information please contact: Jon Lord, West Midlands Planning Aid Regional Manager 0121 693 5568 email: wmco@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk 🏠

Accreditation for CURS course

The Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (CURS) at the University of Birmingham is delighted to announce that our MSc Urban and Regional Planning programme has been awarded full accreditation by the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI).

The programme was introduced in 2007 and builds upon CURS' longstanding teaching and research strengths in regeneration and community involvement. It is also deeply embedded in our locality – we see Birmingham and the West Midlands as an ideal "learning laboratory" for our students through the extensive use of case studies, site visits, and engagement with practitioners.

The programme is designed so that it can be studied full-time or on a part-time basis, ideally suited for busy

practising professionals. Its structure combines core spatial planning elements with the opportunity to develop a specialism in a field such as urban regeneration, community planning, economic development or transport planning.

With the full accreditation now in place our MSc broadens the professional planning education options in the Midlands. As directors of the programme we'd be happy to discuss the opportunities it could provide for you, your staff or your organisation.

You can find out more about the MSc by visiting www.curs.bham.ac.uk or by calling Sue Truman on 0121 414 3260. 🏠

Dr Mike Beazley and Dr Austin Barber

Major Infrastructure Projects – Young Planners' Event

Earlier this month, King Sturge played host to the latest successful *ypwestmids* event in Birmingham exploring the key changes relating to Major Infrastructure Projects shortly to occur in the planning world. The meeting was chaired by Elle Cass from King Sturge and introduced by Jo Hooper, Chair of *ypwestmids*.

By early next year, all 'Major Infrastructure Projects' will be judged not by local planners, or indeed by Government Inspectors, but by the Infrastructure Planning Commission, (IPC) based in Bristol.

Vincent Maher, from the fledgling IPC gave a fascinating insight into the future role and function of the new body promising a simplified planning process, quicker decisions and more sustainable development. The IPC is intended to

be transparent, accountable, and independent and will rely on new national strategic policy statements on key issues such as Nuclear Energy, Ports and Airports making future decisions on the location of major developments theoretically more straightforward.

Hector Pearson, from National Grid, followed up with a very practical explanation of the sort of projects which will, in future, qualify as Major Infrastructure Projects..

Against a background where renewable energy projects, such as onshore wind and wave power, once the 'holy grail' of energy projects, now seem much less popular locally, Hector warned that liquid gas, nuclear energy and offshore wind-farms provided the only real answer to our growing energy needs, if the lights are not to go out in the near future. 🏠

