

RTPI NEWS

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Regeneration winner sets example for raising residents' quality of life

A town centre project designed to boost investment in Merthyr Tydfil in south Wales evolved into an RTPI network award-winning venture, the council's regeneration manager Gavin Lewis tells *Catherine Middleton*

The main aim of the Merthyr Tydfil town centre regeneration project is to kick-start private investment. A programme of public realm enhancements in the heart of the town is designed to ensure that it remains a regional shopping centre and can compete with the emerging out-of-town developments.

So proud of its success is Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council physical regeneration manager Gavin Lewis that he nominated it for the RTPI Regeneration Network Award. He was rewarded when it took this year's award and was described as an "excellent project".

The award aims to acknowledge unique, innovative, informative and inspiring projects delivered by RTPI network members. A member of the network advisory group who voted for the project remarked: "The public realm improvements provide a real difference to the quality of life for residents of Merthyr Tydfil."

The regeneration scheme was funded through the EU Objective 1 programme, the Welsh Assembly Government department of enterprise and transport's Heads of the Valley programme, the council itself and the private sector.

Lewis's submission described how the approaches and gateways into the town centre were transformed with public artwork, dry stone walls, planting and lighting. A way-finding strategy was adopted with directional fingerposts, new street signage and interpretation panels, which feature a map of Merthyr Tydfil and historical information.

The project involved enhancements for two crucial streets, Lewis explains. In the High Street, granite paving was introduced along with granite benches, building-mounted street lighting, litter bins, landscaping and bollards.



Merthyr Tydfil: town centre improvements include coloured lighting

In the Lower High Street, the Café Quarter has been partly pedestrianised with granite paving and a public square around the refurbished Lucy Thomas Fountain. It also features a bronze art band lit up in a rainbow of colours at night.

The River Taff corridor also received significant investment, with a derelict site transformed into a semi-natural park and new railings, paving, lighting, seating and a viewing platform.

Priority projects were identified in a strategic document entitled *The Big Heart of Merthyr Tydfil*, published by URBED in 2003. Design proposals were then consulted on to ensure that the needs of all town centre users were considered. It was imperative that communication was maintained and a website was set up to keep everyone updated. A monthly newsletter was issued during the peak of the work last year.

Fundamental to success, says Lewis, was the appointment of a

town centre manager to ensure that public, business and partner organisations were involved from the start. He liaised with stakeholders about how they would be affected and took action to offset this through marketing campaigns, promotional events and halting work in the lead-up to Christmas.

This partnership working has led to the formation of consultation groups in town including the chamber of trade, which is working with the local authority on the planning and delivery of future projects.

Private sector investment was supported through a grant programme, initially backing 18 businesses. Following on from this, improvements have been made to the privately owned shopping centre, including painting, rebranding, improved signage and landscaping and further work is planned. Another outcome was the purchase of derelict historic buildings by local housing associations and developers, who aim to bring them back into community use.

This phase of physical regeneration may have been successfully completed, but Lewis's role is now to ensure that the communication and relationships that have been built are maintained as Merthyr Tydfil moves into the next phase of regeneration works.

Catherine Middleton is RTPI regeneration network manager. For more information on the regeneration scheme, please visit www.merthyr.gov.uk. The network is also holding an event in Merthyr Tydfil on 6 October to provide a chance to learn about the project from the people involved. To attend the meeting or join the network, please email regeneration@rtpi.org.uk or call 020 7515 1913.

“It was imperative that communication was maintained and a website was set up to keep everyone updated on progress”

Tour offers view on preservation

Welsh young planners gained an insight into heritage conservation techniques on a tour of an historic building museum, *Wayne Reynolds* reports

As a profession, we often face challenges in how to allow for the adaptation of historic buildings to provide contemporary uses.

However, in the case of Pen-Rhiw Chapel in Wales, which was first opened in 1777, its most recent use presented an intriguing conundrum. How do you manage a building traditionally designed to accommodate a small number of visitors each week in such a way that it can cope with almost 650,000 visitors a year?

The chapel, first thought to have been used as an agricultural barn, is just one of more than 40 historic buildings from across Wales that have been reconstructed in their traditional form at St Fagan's National History Museum, visited recently by a group from Young Planners Cymru. The attraction opened in 1948 and is regarded as one of Europe's most outstanding open air museums, displaying buildings and ancient monuments dating back to the 13th century.

Curator Gerallt Nash and the museum's project manager Janet Wilding introduced the ethos of the park by explaining that a degree of flexibility is required to maintain the vernacular character of the buildings while also allowing for the high number of visitors. For example, suitable flooring materials must be used or underfloor heating installed to reduce the effect of changes in humidity during the day. This both protects the fabric of the buildings and helps to control maintenance costs.

An extensive mix of traditional craftsmanship is required to reconstruct these old buildings and bring them back into useful life. Therefore, the museum operates its own staff training programme to develop and preserve skills. These include pottery, stonemasonry, weaving, woodcraft and even baking — as the young planners were happy to discover when the smell of freshly baked bread emerged from the large wood-fired ovens at the Derwen Bakehouse, originally built in Aberystwyth in 1900.



Reconstruction: craft skill needed

Suitably refreshed by a selection of cakes, the group continued through the exhibits, taking in traditional farmhouses, watermills and early 19th century commercial premises as well as the magnificent St Fagan's Castle, a late 16th century manor house donated to the museum's collection in 1946 by the Earl of Plymouth.

The tour ended at the recently reconstructed St Teilo Church, which is believed to have been first built during the 13th century and modified to its current form around 1520. During the initial dismantling of the church, a series of wall paintings were uncovered under layers of lime wash. These were dated to the early 16th century. They have since been restored using medieval techniques and the church is now on display to visitors in its pre-Reformation splendour.

The tour concluded as the young planners learned that the museum, in its quest to collect a range of heritage buildings and monuments, is currently seeking a terraced group of shops to help in the growth of the small urban quarter in the park.

Wayne Reynolds is a planning officer in the development control section at Cardiff Council and a licentiate representative on the RTPI general assembly. If you wish to get involved in future Young Planners Cymru events, please email info@youngplannerscymru.org.uk. If anyone is aware of any heritage buildings at risk or if any historic buildings of special architectural or cultural merit appear in danger of being lost, please email Gerallt Nash at museumwales.ac.uk

Bulletin Board

West Midlands group networks against the clock

On a grey, miserable June evening, could anything be better than a drink or two with friends in the pub? Well, how about meeting new people and extending your networking circle? On 30 June a cohort of young planners from public and private sector organisations assembled at Bushwackers in Birmingham for a speed networking session hosted by YPWestMids. The objective was to find out each other's employers, why they chose planning as a career and what they enjoy most about their jobs, besides general gossiping. With four minutes per session and no set questions there were some fairly frantic and unusual discussions, with Rob Krzysowski and the core group taking to the microphone to ensure that people kept to their time limit. Despite this, it was an immensely relaxed evening and following the formal session a few young planners remained in Bushwackers chatting and exchanging business cards.

Events

Walking Tour of Norwich's Historic Pubs

27 August. City Hall, Norwich.

Norwich used to have as many pubs as days of the year. Despite the current recession, there are still many traditional hostleries in the city centre. This evening event will feature a walking tour of some of the best, led by the Institute of Historic Building Conservation's East Anglian branch chairman Chris Bennett. There will be an opportunity for a taster or two along the way, before completing the tour at a chosen pub for a longer session.

Cost: Free; drinks not included.

For further information, please email SarahPlatt@norwich.gov.uk

Continuing Professional Development and Social

9 September. East Midlands Young Planners. Charnwood Borough Council, Southfield Road, Loughborough.

This introduction to strategic environmental assessment and sustainability appraisal continuing professional development event will be sponsored by Planning Aid. Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment senior environmental adviser Josh Fothergill will lead the discussion. There will be a bottle of wine for the person who travels the furthest to the event.

Cost: Free; includes buffet.

For more information, please email victoria.bankesprice@lincolnshire.gov.uk

East of England Assessment of Professional Competence

29 September. Orwell Room, Grafton House, Ipswich.

RTPI lifelong learning officer Jacqui Ward will give a presentation on the assessment of professional competence for student members, licentiates, mentors and anyone who has an interest in becoming a corporate member of the institute. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions.

Cost: Free.

For further information, please email robert.hobbs@ipswich.gov.uk



Speed networking: West Midlands young planners swap stories

Graduate mentoring offers knowledge support for all

Signing up to help licentiates can keep your skills up to date and foster development, explains *Jacqui Ward*

With the current recession, many employers will be looking for ways to maximise training budgets and many planners will be looking to develop their skills to make themselves more competitive. Mentoring offers a way of doing both.

Mentoring is a great way of developing management and coaching skills by working with individuals to review their progress and plan their professional development. The role is flexible but can involve helping your graduate set new objectives, giving feedback on assessment of professional competence (APC) documentation or just sharing your experiences of the profession.

Unfortunately, the recession means that some very experienced planners are currently out of work or working reduced hours. If this is true for you, mentoring could be a fantastic way of staying in touch with the profession, maintaining and developing your professional networks and keeping your skills and knowledge up to date.

The main requirement of mentors is that they must be chartered town planners. However, a positive approach to skill and knowledge development and to the profession as a whole is also essential, because the role is as much about encouraging your graduates as helping them set new challenges.

With more than 2,000 graduates working towards chartered membership through the APC route, demand for mentors has never been higher. Many licentiates are able to find their own mentor but for those who cannot then the volunteer database is invaluable. We have successfully assigned mentors to 18 graduates in



Ward: registration process is easy

the past two months alone, which is a fantastic testimony to the commitment of established members to support the next generation.

However, this success continues to test our supply of mentors, so we are always on the lookout for new volunteers. Registration is simple, using a straightforward form. Your details will be held until your profile is selected by a graduate in your area. At this point, you will be contacted to reconfirm your availability before your details are passed on to the graduate, who will contact you and begin the mentoring relationship. At all stages, support and guidance are available from the RTPI.

Jacqui Ward is RTPI lifelong learning officer. If you think mentoring could be right for you, please visit www.rtpi.org.uk/item/231 or email education@rtpi.org.uk for the registration form. Advice and support is also available from the RTPI's Planners in the Workplace service at www.rtpi.org.uk/member_services/piwp

RTPI Bulletin Board

Network members keep focus on high-speed rail benefits

The RTPI-Transport Planning Society's transport planning network is continuing to get involved with the High Speed 2 debate after canvassing members' views (*Planning*, 31 July, p24) and raising the issue as a Hot Topics initiative on the institute's website. Independent expert and network advisory group member Alan Wenban-Smith, who is also a member of the RTPI general assembly, has written a report for Greengauge 21 on the complementary measures required to secure regional economic benefits from high-speed rail alongside the core investment. As well as identifying the most desirable and sustainable pattern of development, the report tackles the key question of whether improved connection between the UK's cities will rebalance growth pressures or simply reinforce the dominant position of London. For more information, please visit www.rtpi.org.uk/transport_planning_network or email transport@rtpi.org.uk

Closing date approaches for Planning Award entries

Teams and individuals now have less than five weeks to submit their entries for the Young Planner of the Year, the Planning Consultancy of the Year and the Education and Lifelong Learning Awards. The closing date is 28 September. Winners will be announced at the RTPI Planning Awards presentation at the London Hilton Park Lane on 4 February 2010 and will feature in a *Planning* awards supplement. Entries can be made online at www.rtpiplanningawards.com

Events

UK Spatial Development Evidence Base and ESPON Programme

23 September. ESPON UK Network. Hilton Leeds City. This workshop is designed for those preparing or monitoring spatial strategies. It will ask what indicators are being used and developed and whether there are key gaps to be filled through the European Observation Network on Territorial Cohesion applied research programme. Hosted in conjunction with the RTPI development planning network and the DCLG, the event will provide information on the latest call for projects due to be announced next month, explain how data can be accessed and used, identify gaps in current and forthcoming research and explore how the network can provide outputs relevant to UK planning practice. Cost: Free to members.

For more information, please visit www.rtpi.org.uk/espon

Implementation and Impact of the Planning Act 2008

16 October. Westminster, London. RTPI director of policy and partnerships Rynd Smith is among speakers at the Westminster Energy, Environment and Transport Forum. He will talk about the consultation process and the infrastructure planning commission. DCLG housing and planning director Richard McCarthy will deliver the keynote speech. Cost: £190 + VAT.

For more information, please email info@weetf.co.uk



RTPI

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