

RTPI NEWS

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Planners step up efforts to improve the nation's health and well-being

Despite latest research revealing an improvement in average measures of health among the UK's population since 1995 the gap between the richest and poorest sections of society is growing wider, *Ben Cave* reports

The recent Commons select committee investigation into health inequalities called for a planning policy statement on the subject (*Planning*, 3 April, p10). The government has asked Professor Sir Michael Marmot to lead an independent review to propose an evidence-based strategy for reducing health inequalities from next year.

His report at the end of this year will include policies to tackle the social determinants of health inequalities, such as transport, housing and social support. Activity in these sectors is key to a healthy, thriving society. Health impact assessment (HIA) aims to improve well-being and reduce health inequalities.

Improving fitness is good in itself and it reduces the burden on the health care sector. Well-being is central to discussions about sustainability and visions for the future. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) sees a link between the built environment and health. For example, a car-dominated environment contributes to rising obesity and fear of crime contributes to poor mental health.

The Commons scrutiny unit estimates that obesity costs the economy £3.6 billion a year and the national director for mental health services states that poor mental health costs £77 billion a year. NICE and the RTPI have each issued good practice guidance on planning and health. These call for improved access to green space, support for walking and cycling, social infrastructure and community cohesion.

HIA enables plan-makers and developers to identify the effects that a programme or project might have on health inequality and the distribution of these within the population. It also identifies actions to manage these effects.



Cycling: institute's health guide called for more support for cycling

Wary of extra burdens, some say that legislation framing planning and environmental assessments already includes considerations of human health, such as limits governing noise, air, water and soil. These afford a measure of protection that is deemed acceptable but are not necessarily the way to improve health and reduce inequalities.

Despite an absence of government legislation, HIA is on the rise in spatial planning. Five out of the nine regional spatial strategies (RSSs) for England discuss or carry policies for HIA. The other four refer to the importance of improving health. As RSSs become single regional strategies, the challenge will be to demonstrate the importance of health and well-being to economic stability.

The RTPI says health should feature in statutory assessment procedures rather than being a stand-alone process. Some local planning authorities require an HIA for major developments. The EU strategic

environmental assessment (SEA) directive requires plan-makers to identify effects on a range of factors including human health. The Department of Health (DoH) prepared guidance in 2007, but assessment is still done with scant reference to the public health community.

There is no consultation body responsible for health as a principal topic. The DoH is developing proposals for a gateway to act as a point of contact for health advice for responsible authorities carrying out SEA. Responsibility for health inputs will be passed on to regions and primary care trusts when appropriate. Health professionals must prepare to meet this requirement.

Organising our environment to protect the public against adverse health effects has always been valuable. Examples include the London Building Acts, the water closet, sewers and fresh water. Walking, cycling and public transport increase physical activity, improve mental health and reduce carbon emissions. Planning has a vital role to play in steering today's priorities.

In the search for improved health, reduced health inequalities and sustainability, public health professionals, planners, developers and environmental scientists need to rediscover a common language. HIA is one way in which this can be done. The RTPI has a healthy communities interest group that is open to members and non-members.

*Ben Cave is a member of the RTPI environmental planning and protection network. To join the network, please email epp@rtpi.org.uk. For further information, read the RTPI practice note **GPN5: Delivering Healthy Communities** at www.rtpi.org.uk/item/1795/23/5/3 or visit the HIA at www.hiagateway.org.uk*

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Spatial challenge faced by Europe

The potential dangers of a European divide were brought to the fore at a recent meeting of spatial planners and economists, *Cliff Hague* explains

Planners, economists and researchers came together to discuss how data from the European Observation Network on Territorial Development and Cohesion programme can help discussions on major development drivers. The event was hosted by the ESPON UK network in Leeds.

The meeting highlighted the fact that while the UK's north-south divide is well known, it is a west-east divide across Europe that could see northern areas losing out beyond 2013 to regions in the central and eastern European countries.

Progress in developing integrated regional strategies in the UK highlights the data challenges that exist. For instance, bringing together regional economic strategies and spatial strategies has required considerable harmonisation of data. Moves towards integration, together with the ESPON 2013 focus on new topics such as urban attractiveness, climate change and maritime issues, suggest that the gap may be less wide in future.

New ESPON projects — in which local authorities can propose work that drills down to data at the relevant scale rather than action that covers all 31 ESPON countries — hold out the promise of improved links with practice.

The strengths of the research lie in its breadth of coverage and focus on the engagement of relations between places. Accessibility is one example, but there are many others. Given the strong emphasis on agglomeration effects that has emerged from the new economic geography, regional policy-makers at European scale and in the UK are confronted with the same dilemma.

Do they "back winners" by encouraging land release and supporting infrastructure investment in those places where the market wants to invest? Or do they prioritise regional equity by trying to steer development to those areas that the market has shunned?

The problem has become even more pressing during the past year. The economic downturn has meant



Leeds: host city for network event

that the private sector can no longer be relied on to deliver necessary development. Now, with the threat of cuts in public spending too, development strategies will need to become very smart if they are not to be left to gather dust on the shelf through the next decade. They must also take on board climate change and carbon reduction.

We face key questions about how we want the UK to develop and how much policy-makers can do to deliver desired outcomes. Practitioners and researchers will need to work more closely together and sustain the narrative that place matters.

ESPON remains an important conduit to EU thinking on these issues and on the future of cohesion policy. The Euro-speak envisages a Europe that combines rather than polarises aspirations for competitiveness and cohesion and that pursues sustainable development.

It means recognising the strengths of diversity rather than trying to make every place the same. But that then means challenging every region to develop its own strategy to maximise its territorial assets, whether they be transport links, landscape quality, renewal potential, cultural heritage or creative clusters.

There are no easy answers but an evidence base and willingness to network and learn from others is a key starting point. The national contact points for the research programme, including the ESPON UK Network, will be an important focus for such efforts.

Cliff Hague is a past president of the RTPI and a team leader of the ESPON UK Contact Point. To join the ESPON UK Network, please visit www.espon.org.uk

Research Bulletin

Story collection aims to demonstrate the value of research

Members are being asked to share effective examples of using research to improve planning policy or delivery as part of work by the Academy of Social Sciences to bring together stories that make the case for the practical impact of research. The most compelling cases will be compiled into a series of booklets and briefing documents to be delivered to key public figures and bodies.

Please email your ideas and summaries to research@rtpi.org.uk

Learning lessons from previous recessions at home and abroad

The Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) latest report asks how policy-makers can respond most effectively to the recession. It explores what can be learned from previous UK recessions in the mid 1970s, early 1980s and early 1990s as well as downturns elsewhere in the world and the global recessionary period of the 1930s. It draws on analysis of a broad range of data sources and the work of numerous researchers and institutions, many of them funded by the ESRC.

Recession Britain is available at www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk/recessionbritain

Online tool maps out information on ageing population trends

An interactive mapping tool that allows users to analyse the population's age structure at local authority level has been launched by the Office for National Statistics. Users can see how the population has aged over time and how it is projected to continue to age by selecting from a list of indicators such as median age.

Ageing in the UK is available at www.statistics.gov.uk/ageingintheuk/default.htm

Events

Making an Impact — Universities and the Regional Economy

4 November. London.

This conference is part of a joint research initiative by the Economic and Social Research Council and Higher Education Funding Council on the impact of higher education institutions on regional economies. Cost: Free.

To book or for further information, please visit www.impact-hei.ac.uk, email [Ursula Kelly at u.kelly@strath.ac.uk](mailto:Ursula.Kelly@strath.ac.uk) or call 0141 548 4206.

Online Conference on Resilience in a Changing Climate

12–14 November.

The RTPI is one of eight worldwide partners in this special event to celebrate World Town Planning Day. The day itself is 8 November but worldwide observance of it varies. This will run on the internet from 12 to 14 November to make it convenient across many time zones.

For further information, please visit www.planningtheworld.net

Beyond the Global Credit Crunch

3 December. Coventry.

This Regional Studies Association conference will examine the economic challenges facing UK regions.

For further information, please visit www.regional-studies-assoc.ac.uk/events/future.asp



Cambridge: impact of universities on economies to be assessed

Enforcement issues debate attracts a packed audience

A debut gathering to discuss key enforcement issues turned out to be a huge success, writes *Miles Thomson*



Enforcement: meeting offered clarification on regulatory compliance

A capacity audience gathered in Maidenhead last month for the first formal tie-up between RTPI South East and the National Association for Planning Enforcement (NAPE).

Elmbridge Borough Council compliance officer and RTPI South East representative on NAPE's management committee Katie Baldwin chaired the event. She explained the association's objectives to promote planning enforcement, representing all involved in this key area. Membership is free to RTPI members and at a modest subscription to others, with benefits including a web-based discussion forum.

The Environment Agency's Mike St Clare-Newman, a technical specialist in the Thames South East area environmental crime team, explained how the agency is looking to work with local authorities to raise awareness of developments that may be a cover for unlawful waste operations.

London Borough of Enfield principal planning officer David Warden recapped the main changes brought about by the new householder permitted development rights. With so

much left to interpretation, he illustrated the practical approaches being taken by Enfield to provide clarity and consistency while safeguarding amenity and character.

Solicitor and planning consultant Linda Russell took the audience through the pros and cons of direct action. She demystified a process that authorities rarely take on and showed how proper preparation is key to success.

Francis Taylor Building barrister Meyric Lewis detailed some of the past year's legal developments. He took in a review of the four and ten-year rules on immunity, the replacement of "estoppel" with "legitimate expectation" and ways to avoid inadvertent under-enforcement.

The audience turnout suggests that further events would be of interest. If there are topics you would like covered, please let the region know.

Miles Thomson is a member of the RTPI South East regional activities committee and an associate at West Waddy ADP. For more information, please visit www.rtpi.org.uk

RTPI Bulletin Board

Young planners

East Midlands group boosts assessment and appraisal expertise

As the nation watched England beat Croatia last month to secure a place in the World Cup finals, East Midlands Young Planners (EMYP) and East Midlands Planning Aid were embroiled in an equally successful event providing a planner's guide to strategic environmental assessment and sustainability appraisal. Josh Fothergill, senior environmental adviser at the Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment, gave participants theoretical understanding and practical guidance. The event was hosted by Charnwood Borough Council and sponsored by Planning Aid.

For further information on the EMYP network and future events, please email Victoria Bankes Price at victoria.bankesprice@lincolnshire.gov.uk. If you are interested in becoming a Planning Aid volunteer, please email Helen Prangley at emcw@planningaid.rtpi.org.uk

Steering group formed to guide progression in Kent

Kent Young Planners have set up a formal steering group to guide their continued progression and arrange more continuing professional development events for young planners in Kent and East Sussex. The seven members of the steering group are Mark Bewsey (Savills), Charlotte Warden (Tunbridge Wells Borough Council), David Maher (Enplan), Eoin O'Connor (Hobbs Parker), Michael Murphy (Maidstone Borough Council), Cian Cronin (Mid Sussex District Council) and Robert Offord (Kent Architecture Centre). A blog has been set up at www.kentyoungplanners.blogspot.com to keep everyone up to date.

To join the steering group or be added to the mailing list, please email kentyoungplanners@googlemail.com

East of England event focuses on professional progress

Ipswich was the location for the latest young planners' event in the East of England and the topic was the assessment of professional competence. RTPI head of membership and careers Tracey Lloyd outlined the key points associated with a strong submission. She stressed the importance of keeping a concise, accurate and up-to-date log book and focusing on the submission statement.

For more details about young planners' events in the East of England, please email robert.hobbs@ipswich.gov.uk

Events

Scottish Young Planners Network Seminar and Social Event

4 November. HBJ Gateley Wareing, Edinburgh. This seminar will explore experiences to date working with the new planning system. The event will be sponsored by HBJ Gateley Wareing and will be followed by drinks at a local venue.

Cost: Free

To confirm your attendance, please email richard.holland@taylorwimpey.com



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mediation of space - making of place

RTPI's 10th Annual Planning Law Update Conference 2009

6 November 2009 • London

10 June 2010 • London

- Local Development Frameworks - lessons learned and the revised system
- Probity, bias and predetermination and freedom of information issues - the need for good procedures
- Planning obligations and Community Infrastructure Levy
- EIA and SEA legal update
- Affordable housing - legal mechanisms for delivery in an economic crisis
- Key issues in planning enforcement

Conference Chair: Paul Winter, Principal, Paul Winter & Co

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