



Birmingham takes the lead on climate change declaration

Birmingham City Council has set a challenge to all local authorities across the UK by publishing the 'Birmingham Declaration' on climate change. The declaration, approved by councillors earlier this month, underlines the city's ambition to be at the forefront of the national and international effort to combat climate change and tackle issues of sustainability. It is being promoted to delegates from around the world at the UN Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen.

Underpinning the declaration is a plan to use the Council's purchasing power and influence as a means of stimulating green initiatives which will provide significant employment opportunities for Birmingham's people and reduce energy bills for citizens and businesses alike. The declaration – which it is hoped will be adopted by other Councils across the UK – states that by 2015:

- The City Council's energy consumption will be reduced by 25%,
- There will be at least ten "low carbon communities" similar to the successful example of Summerfield Eco-neighbourhood in Birmingham,
- 10% of Birmingham homes will be linked to district heating systems,

- 10% of Birmingham homes will have retrofit insulation,
- The city will develop electric charging infrastructure and there will be at least 500 electric cars running on the streets of Birmingham.
- All vehicles procured by the Council should be run on electric power or LPG
- 50% of electricity used by the council should be generated from renewable sources

The aim is that the Declaration will help Birmingham meet its ambitious target of reducing CO2 levels in the city by 60% by 2026, compared to 1990 levels.

Cllr Paul Tilsley, Deputy Leader of Birmingham City Council, said: *"Birmingham has developed a strong reputation as a national leader on issues of climate change and sustainability. We are now seeking to take that onto the next level with the 'Birmingham Declaration'. By achieving the objectives we have set, we will significantly reduce carbon emissions and make Birmingham a cleaner and greener city."*

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Chair's remarks

Many thanks to those who have congratulated me over the last few weeks, following my elevation to Acting Chairman for the Branch, although as expected, there were a few less than complimentary comments about my photograph!

As often seems to be the way at this time of year, things have been very hectic at the West Midlands RTPI. Since the last edition of Tripwire we have held both a Regional Management Board and a Regional Activities Committee. One of the key aims of both meetings was to set the agenda for next year and I have received warm support from within the Region for my 'theme' for 2010 – which is to promote the importance of planning within the West Midlands.

It seems to me that in an election year and as the region begins to recover from the recession, we have an opportunity to focus on the important role that planning plays for our future prosperity – both within the West Midlands and nationally.

In my opinion we need to stress the positive aspects of good planning, as opposed to the often perceived negative side of bureaucratic planning. This is consistent with the national RTPI's intention to issue a planning manifesto in the New Year. We have therefore agreed to take this debate out across the Region, in an effort to engage with the wider membership in discussing what role we all feel that planning should play in the recovery of the West Midlands.

Following the format of the multi-disciplinary Great Debate (to be held in January), we propose to organise four or five panel discussions across the region, including a cross section of people within the profession – such as young planners, private sector professionals, Heads of Planning Departments, academics and local politicians. These debates will be free and held in locally accessible

venues, with the idea of encouraging as many locally based planners (and associated professionals) to attend and join the discussion, with the aim of increasing the profile of the RTPI Region and encouraging engagement with the wider membership. I would welcome authorities to volunteer suitable accommodation and maybe suggest suitable panel members.

Allied to this, we will also be looking to 'refresh' the Convenors Network (possibly by renaming and redefining the role?). At our last Regional Committee, Sandra Ford volunteered to coordinate Convenors across the region, so that we can ensure the membership are fully informed of regional events and they in turn have the opportunity to raise relevant issues with the Region – my thanks go to Sandra for volunteering.

On the subject of volunteers, a very special mention must go to Peter Lindsell, who after over 16 years service on the RAC (most prominently and recently as Treasurer but also as a Past Chairman) is to step down as Treasurer, following his recent retirement from local government. Peter has done a fantastic job for the Region and will be sorely missed,

although he is always welcome at future RAC meetings and Regional events. Peter has kindly offered to 'train up' his successor and we are therefore seeking volunteers to this important and rewarding post, of which there is more elsewhere in this edition.

As you can see, it's a busy time within the Region and everyone on the Regional Activities Committee is looking forward to what will be an equally exciting 2010. It finally remains for me to wish you a very merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at our events in 2010. 🏠

Steve Hill
RTPI West Midlands Chairman

The Role of 'Convenors'

For many years now, our 'convenors' have provided a valuable service in acting as a focal point for RTPI members in offices around the Region, in particular distributing the regular newsletter 'Tripwire' to individual members.

This system has worked quite well and we are grateful for the commitment of convenors, some of whom have carried out this role for many years. But there have often been gaps when people have left planning authorities or consultancies and not been replaced. What's more, there has been no regular contact between convenors and the Region (other than via our Regional Co-ordinator, Sue Griffith Jones); nor has there been any scope for office convenors to meet and/or liaise with each other.

Typically, like many other representative bodies, the RTPI includes an active minority of members – who like to get involved, and a passive majority, who are content to remain in the background – no doubt with other things to do. Ideally, we would like to involve a much larger proportion of RTPI members so that it becomes

more representative of the profession. At the same time the RTPI Region would become more vibrant and worthwhile.

We are therefore keen to review the role of the convenors, to re-define and possibly extend their role and to give them a more positive function. It might also be useful to provide an opportunity for convenors to get together from time to time to compare notes and share their experiences of good practice. We feel that convenors could also help provide more regular feedback about the needs and views of individual members.

Sandra Ford, who serves on the Regional Activities Committee, has kindly volunteered to provide a contact point for convenors and to handle the review. Sandra will be getting in touch with all the existing convenors early in the new year, but in the meantime if you would like to get in touch with Sandra, her email address is Sandra_ford@blackcountryconsortium.co.uk 🏠

National Policy Statements: A national spatial plan by stealth?

Scotland and Wales both have the benefit of a national spatial plan. Yet despite strong lobbying by the RTPI, the TCPA and other influential groups, the Government has always dismissed the idea of a single spatial plan for England, on the grounds that it favoured regional devolution and believed that achieving consensus for such a national plan would be problematic. More recently, of course, we have seen the demise of the fully elected Regional Assemblies and their rundown to 2010, with the likelihood of regional planning being abandoned altogether if the Tories are re-elected. So is this the time to start thinking again about a national spatial plan?

Almost by stealth, we have the beginnings of one. Seven draft national policy statements were published by Government on 9th November, prepared under the new Planning Act 2008. These draft statements, published by the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and Department for Transport (DfT), respectively, constitute national policy positions for energy and ports in England. They are out for consultation until 22nd February and each will be examined by a House of Commons Select Committee, which will also consider the public consultation responses. They are to be followed by a further five NPSs in 2010 covering national policy for airports; strategic road and rail networks; water supply; water treatment; and hazardous waste.

The Conservatives, whilst not supporting the consent regime for major infrastructure projects contained in the Act, do support the concept of NPSs. But they would prefer to see them ratified by Parliament as a whole, rather than just a Select Committee. So, in other words, if either of the two major parties win next year's general election, NPSs are definitely staying.

Press attention on the published draft NPSs has focused, perhaps not surprisingly almost exclusively on the topic of nuclear power generation. It is certainly the meatiest of the six energy papers (at 300 pages long), and the only one which is site specific. The draft NPS proposes ten new nuclear power station sites, 7 of these are adjoining existing (or in the case of Bradwell in Essex, recently closed) nuclear power stations. They are: Hartlepool; Heysham (Lancs); Hinkley Point (Somerset); Sizewell (Suffolk); Wylfa (Anglesey); Oldbury (Somerset – not West Midlands!) and three in Cumbria: Braystones, Kirksanton and Sellafield. (The latter following intensive lobbying pressure from Cumbria Vision – a sub-regional partnership of the Cumbrian RDA). The biggest surprise is that Dungeness in Kent is excluded as a future new nuclear site. All proposed nuclear sites are, of course, on the coast.

The Overarching NPS for Energy, (numbered EN-1), at 81 pages, combines existing Government policy, ministerial statements and existing consents policy and practice, with a sizable section on impacts. Together with the other energy technology specific NPSs (Fossil Fuel Electricity Generating Infrastructure (EN-2); Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3); Gas Supply Infrastructure and Oil and Gas Pipelines (EN-4); and the nuclear one (EN-6), it provides the primary basis for decisions to be taken by the new Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC), set up under the Act. This independent Commission, which recently opened its doors in Bristol – in the same building as the Planning Inspectorate – will determine applications for major infrastructure proposals and will accept applications under the new Act from 1st March 2010.

The Conservatives oppose the thought of the IPC taking decisions independently, and want the IPC to merge with PINS, with the Minister making the final decision. But the key justification of the IPC, was to allow it to take decisions in a timely way without political interference and in accordance with NPSs ratified by Parliament. Promoters of infrastructure are naturally concerned about the delay in potential referrals of decisions to ministers and point to, amongst other examples, the inspector's recommendation for an overhead power-line proposal in Yorkshire which sat on the Minister's desk for nearly 5 years before being approved in 1996.


The Fossil Fuel NPS (EN-2) – coal, to you and me – covers carbon capture and storage (CCS), involving the burning of 'clean' coal for electricity generation, and the capture, transport and storage of carbon dioxide emissions. Not explicitly stated, the expectation is that CO₂ would be transported by pipeline or by tanker ships to offshore gas fields, and pumped into the sub-sea strata that would originally have contained gas. A competition is being sponsored separately by Government to build one of the world's first commercial-scale CCS projects. Any new pipelines for CCS would be determined by the IPC.

The 71 page renewable energy NPS (EN-3) is mainly about wind, and although not site-specific, paints a clear picture of the pre-eminence of offshore wind generation, as well as onshore wind generation.



The final energy NPS is about Electricity Networks Infrastructure (EN-5) and covers the larger electricity network proposals together with associated infrastructure.

The pre-eminence of energy as an NPS topic demonstrates the increasing concern about climate change and the security of energy supply. South Africa is currently experiencing 'brownouts' or power cuts, as a result of the economy outgrowing power generation whilst no new major electricity generation plants have been built for 20 years. Without new 'green' energy generation, many worry that the same issue may befall Britain.

Taken together, all these draft NPSs and the ones which follow, could be taken as becoming a national development framework for England – national spatial planning by stealth, perhaps? 

Hector Pearson

RTPI West Midlands Regional Treasurer – Outline Job Description (£00K)

After more years than anyone can remember Peter Lindsell is finally retiring from the post of Honorary Treasurer. We are all most grateful to Peter for his long, faithful and prudent service as our Treasurer and we wish him well in his future retirement.


We are therefore inviting candidates to apply for this prestigious and high profile post to work with the Regional Management Board in helping to run the RTPI Region. The job does not command a massive salary (and there are no big bonuses), but it does provide the chosen candidate with a huge sense of satisfaction, a close involvement in the running of the RTPI Region and it looks very impressive on the CV.

Peter Lindsell has promised to assist any new and aspiring Treasurer adapt to the job and as part of that familiarisation process, he has set out the key tasks the new Treasurer would need to perform.

Authorise invoices for payment

- Check monthly transaction lists from RTPI Headquarters for accuracy

- Monitor income and expenditure against the approved budget
- Report on the current financial position to each meeting of the Regional Activities Committee
- Prepare draft budget and assist the Honorary Secretary in preparing the Regional Business Plan (June – September period)
- Check the final accounts and use these to prepare the Financial Statement for the Annual Report
- Help the Regional Co-ordinator to set prices for attendance at events
- Provide advice to RAC Members and the Specialist Groups on budgetary matters
- Attend the annual Regional Treasurers meetings in London,

We would welcome anyone who might be interested in volunteering for the job to contact either the Regional Chairman, Steve Hill at stephen.hill@hca.gsx.gov.uk or the Honorary Secretary, Paul Harris, at paul.harris@stratford-dc.gov.uk. If you have questions about the role and what it involves, contact Peter Lindsell at peter.lindsell@btinternet.com. 

Editor's thoughts

‘Hats off’ to Birmingham City Council for ‘biting the bullet’ and introducing a tangible and positive response to the Copenhagen Climate Change initiative. Instead of just setting targets for other people to achieve, they have come up with a list of clear actions which will deliver positive results.

Amid all the debate about whether the emails to and from East Anglia University prove they have been fudging the figures on climate change, or not, the real issues seem to have become clouded in Co2.


It seems most unlikely that any scientist will be able to prove conclusively whether climate variations are caused by mankind, what is much more certain is that the human race is a major contributor to climate change and therefore we must all do something positive about it.

Planning and planners are in a unique position in being able to influence these patterns, and indeed that is why many young people nowadays enter the profession. Most of us would argue that we have been ‘on the case’ for quite some time. Protecting resources, reducing unnecessary journeys, creating sustainable communities, they are all at the heart of the campaign to combat climate change.

The trouble is, of course, firstly, that we cannot do it on our own, we need the support and co-operation of others and secondly, that other forces, such as commercial pressures, population and migration patterns and social and economic changes in reality are much more powerful. Furthermore, there is little

point in tackling sustainable development and climate change issues in one area, if it simply means exporting pressures to another. Climate change, by definition, is a worldwide phenomenon.

But probably the biggest factor in influencing the sustainability and climate change debate is ‘behaviour’. Until we can convince people that their actions genuinely make a difference and that their consumption (along with everyone else’s) contributes to climate change, we will make little progress.

Which is why Birmingham City’s Declaration – and their desire to bring other local authorities on board – is so encouraging. At last a public body has moved on from simply setting meaningless targets – measured as crude political ‘virility symbols’ to actually doing something positive. 

John Acres
Tripwire Editor



Is this what a sustainable rural community looks like? (pt 1)

There is so much ‘stuff’ talked about sustainability and sustainable communities. The rhetoric and high policy is there – just take a look at PPS1. But much of the discussion fails to get beyond the mantra of the Brundtland Commission’s 1987 definition: sustainable development “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” Fine as far as it goes – as an aspiration and aim. But what are the practical steps that lead us to such a Holy Grail?

In order to tackle this question the RTPI’s W Midlands and Rural Policy Networks combined forces to host *Is this what a sustainable rural community looks like?* A study tour of the edge-of-Cotswolds small town of Winchcombe, Gloucestershire. RTPI network adviser, James Derounian (University of Gloucestershire), led the day. He put forward a simple test of what a sustainable community might be: “Somewhere that you can live your life, from day to day, without having to leave.” Winchcombe – and market towns more generally – fit the bill in so many ways. With a 5,000 population, Winchcombe boasts – as examples only – a health centre, dentists, opticians, chemist, chiropody, hospital out-patients, retained fire crew, library, sports centres, playing fields and community centres, sheltered housing and day centre, bank, building society and cash machines, food & range of other shops [post office, books], churches, garages and petrol pumps, recycling facilities, museums and a volunteer-run steam railway, annual flower show & bonfire night party it even has its own ‘essential serve’ – a castle!

Again, as a selection only, the local economy comprises 170+ businesses, a business park, 1/3 of employed residents who are home-town based as teleworkers, plumbers, electricians, machine repairs, solicitors, builders, gym; proximity to farmers who sell locally produced meat, fruit and vegetables; TIC, B&B, tourist attractions – such as Hailes Abbey (National Trust) plus a folk museum. Socially there are at least 40 societies and clubs, plus a range of house types and styles – shared equity, rented, sheltered, RSL etc. It has also recently become a *Fairtrade* Town and gained ‘Walkers Welcome’ status. The Government’s 2000 rural White Paper made great play of each market town acting as a ‘hub’ connected and serving its ‘hinterland’; this is certainly true of Winchcombe. The central message from the walk-and-talk/show and tell was that England’s rural areas can and should be looked at in terms of sustainable units: town and surrounding villages; not reviewing individual communities and finding them wanting.

You can’t gloss over the issues confronting places like Winch: lack of affordable housing (as portrayed nationally in Matthew Taylor’s 2008 report to Gordon Brown), an ageing population, tensions around ‘us & them’ the classic difficulties between incomers and longer-standing residents; and hidden deprivation: “you can stand outside a former council house and lob a stone at a place with its own private swimming pool no wonder there is resentment about being priced out of the housing market.”

James Derounian
Gloucestershire University



Winchcombe, Gloucestershire.

Is this what a sustainable rural community looks like? (pt 2)

A perspective from Stratford-on-Avon District

As a planning officer at Stratford District Council for over 20 years, I've been directly involved in deciding the appropriate approach towards planning for a range of rural market towns and similar-sized villages in the District – to grow or not to grow, that is the question.

Of the eight such settlements in the District, four have grown by more than 50% in terms of dwellings since 1981, and two of these by more than 80%. Interestingly, their population has not increased by anywhere near as much due to reducing household size over the same period. So the reality is much larger settlements in terms of physical extent but not a particularly significant increase in residents; and it is the latter that makes the difference in supporting shops, services and social activities. Indeed, the range of facilities supported by the District's main rural centres has tended to decline over the past two or three decades due to a myriad of decisions made by households, businesses and public agencies.

But each of these settlements has a vital role to play as a focus for community, commerce and employment, serving their residents and those of villages around them. While it will be claimed, reasonably so, that larger towns are more *sustainable*, and therefore preferable locations for large-scale development, we should not ignore the importance of *sustaining* our larger rural communities. To my mind, this will involve further modest development in terms of homes and jobs; if the character and infrastructure of the place can take it. This should assist shops and other businesses to remain viable and help to ensure that public sector services are retained. In relation to rural market towns there is a strong measure of truth in the adage that 'growth is the only sign of life', in that lack of growth in real terms will often mean a reduction in custom and support for private and public sector services. In turn, this will help their viability and retention.

But there is a dilemma; James Derounian suggests a test of what constitutes a sustainable community is

"somewhere that you can live your life, from day to day, without having to leave". The problem is that most residents choose not to do so; rather they go elsewhere for a wide range of reasons – shopping, education, leisure – and usually by private car. A key challenge that faces planners and other decision-makers is how to make rural market towns more self-centred so that there is less need or inclination to travel further afield.

This is a key reason behind the recent decision by Stratford District Council to grant planning permission for a medium-sized foodstore (2,600 square metres gross) in Southam, one of our rural market towns. A Retail Study commissioned by the District Council showed that about 74% of households in the Southam catchment area are currently carrying out their main weekly food shop *outside* Southam in larger towns some distance away. By providing a store of sufficient size to carry a wide range of products, it is anticipated that 70% of these shopping trips will be retained *within* Southam. As well as dramatically reducing the need to travel, it is hoped that these residents will support other shops and services in the town because they have stayed local. This should help to bolster their future and even lead to new outlets opening up, thus perpetuating a cycle whereby the town becomes more sustainable.

There are hundreds of rural market towns like Winchcombe and Southam across the country. We cannot afford the past and current physical, commercial and social investment in these places to be cast aside on the grounds of unsustainability, which is based mostly on the transport factor. But, we must seek to improve over time their performance on the sustainability scale. That means supporting and improving what they have to offer. In that way there is the prospect of more of their residents consciously deciding to base more of their lives in the local area. 🏡

Paul Harris

Senior Policy Planner – Stratford on Avon DC

(The above views are my own and do not necessarily reflect those of my employer).



Southam, Warwickshire.

A packed year of events for West Mids Urban Design Forum!

The WMUDF has enjoyed a really successful year with a string of interesting events to really promote and share good practice across the region. This has helped to fill the gaps left by ailing training budgets and contributed to members' CPD requirements.

Nottingham's Renaissance

Generously hosted by RegenWM at their brand new Balcony Rooms at Millennium Point in Birmingham, the Forum on the 25th June featured a presentation by Nigel Turpin, Urban Design Team Leader at Nottingham City Council on Nottingham's Renaissance and evolved into a lively discussion of ideas amongst those present, which included a highway engineer – possibly a WMUDF first!

Through the 2005 City Centre Masterplan and 2008 City Centre Urban Design Guide launched at MIPIM, Nigel demonstrated that the clear vision which Nottingham has established for achieving strong design quality is beginning to pay dividends in terms of investment, Nottingham's rising 'liveability' factor, and strong political ownership and leadership where understanding the benefits of high quality design are concerned. Where Nottingham has examples of recently built poor design – and let's face it, every urban area does – councillors have taken part in study visits with Nigel to understand what mistakes were made in the planning decision making process, the social and economic impacts this has had and how future development can avoid it. The learning cycle will be completed as councillors link up with developers to masterplan the next phases of the city's future.

Prospective developers are not expected to turn up to pre-application meetings without having read and understood the suite of urban design documents that Nigel and his team have produced: a strong message about Nottingham's expectations for the quality of development.

Strong leadership, partnership and vision is evidently at the heart of Nottingham's regeneration agenda; which includes a 10-year strategy for making the city centre car-free and Design Nottingham, an annual initiative run jointly by the private sector and Nottingham City Council – but overseen by an independent board – that campaigns to improve the quality of urban design in Nottingham. The theme for 2009 has been 'good design as a driver of new investment'. The aims of the high profile programme are to tackle the barriers to good design, create ambition and leadership in design, demonstrate the economic benefits of good design and quality place making and create collective ownership of the campaign. After four years of Design Nottingham the results are tangible with the public being far more discerning over what good design means and professionals of international renown championing the city, such as Wayne Hemingway.

So what key messages can we learn from Nottingham's success? Have a vision, push the boundaries and break professional barriers. Test

schemes – and review them. Success breeds success. In the decade which has seen 'Towards an Urban Renaissance', the birth of CABA, and the publication of By Design and PPS1, it is a most poignant statement of Nottingham's achievements in urban design that its multi-Civic Trust Award-winning Old Market Square has been chosen to grace the front cover of CABA's 10 Year Review.

'Space in New Homes: What Residents Think' BDP kindly hosted the Forum's Urban Design Week event on 25th Sept at their offices on Colmore Row in Birmingham, the focus of which was the new CABA publication which has researched peoples' thoughts on the quality and liveability of modern housing, with the general view that it is not sufficiently well-designed and spacious to accommodate changes in family size, modern lifestyles and storage space.

In a WMUDF first, the event featured a panel debate on the publication from four different professional perspectives: The Urban Designer – Nigel Wakefield from Turley Associates; The Town Planner – Andrew Thompson from Walsall Council; The House Builder – Nick Wilkins from Bellway Homes; and The Housing Manager – Steve Dallaway from Birmingham City Council. A thought-provoking debate followed which revealed the desire to improve space standards in the housing industry were more common across disciplines that initially anticipated.



Key questions that emerged out of the engaging discussion between the panelists and the audience included whether it was appropriate to impose minimum space standards and how can we as professionals ensure better space? Providing minimum space standards everywhere could be going too far in the opposite direction – people need choice and one size does not fit all. However, this is not a matter to be viewed in isolation, the relationships between houses and their surroundings are of key importance too: people are prepared to live in a smaller property where it is well located and benefits from good quality external spaces. ☺

A packed year of events for West Mids Urban Design Forum!

Is the obstacle to providing larger, more sustainable accommodation inherent within the planning process? Development Control is by nature very reactionary and Development Plan Documents are relied on to bring in spatial standards; PINS believes that the appropriate place for determining spatial standards lies within building regulations – right at the end of the development process.

The key issues seem to be allowing for flexibility of space to allow families to grow and change as well as providing sufficient storage space for 'life clutter'. Every professional has seen layout plans with too many units crammed onto them with seemingly small floor areas and has undoubtedly landed the blame at the door of the developer's greed at least once – but what is the reality of the situation for house builders? In terms of simple economics sales revenue is down a lot while land values have fallen considerably less in comparison. Material costs are down approx. 1%, labour costs are down roughly 10% while sales revenue has dropped circa 20% – and whilst house builders can design and build houses to be 20% bigger they don't get the equivalent revenue return on that extra percentage.

However, let us not forget that the public, the consumer, has a responsibility in all this. In the UK we typically think about houses in terms of bedrooms rather than floor space and make our purchases on that basis – regardless of what the quality of those bedroom sizes actually are. In Europe, it is a very different matter, where consumers are used to interrogating accommodation prices based on the amount of floor space provided. Perhaps then, there is an element of re-education to

be done where the buying and selling of property is concerned and a need for more joined-up thinking concerning the marketing of residential floor space?

Two clear conclusions came out of the debate. Firstly, that this is just the beginning of understanding the matter and instigating any change; there is a great willingness for professional cross-working to start moving the quality of accommodation forward. Secondly, as long as any measures to increase property sizes are voluntary then house builders and developers will not adhere to them. A more detailed report on the discussion will be available shortly on the Forum's forthcoming new webpage on the RTPI West Mids website.

Following the enthusiasm with which the event and debate was met, the WMUDF is in discussion with the Urban Design Group to organise a joint event for the East and West Mids to consider this issue further. Watch this space for more information...

Guided tour of Joseph Chamberlain College: Britain's Best Public Building 2009

The final Forum event of the year will take place on Thursday 10th December at Joseph Chamberlain Sixth Form College in Birmingham, which recently won the coveted Best Public Building in Britain Award. The afternoon will start at 2pm with a talk and guided tour of the college by the lead project architects, Nicholas Hare Architects. Please see the back page for details or contact the Chair for further information. [\[link\]](#)

Katy Craddock
Chair of WMUDF

The West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscape Project

Winter walks in the countryside can provide a good opportunity to get a closer view of the region's wide array of historic farm buildings. These make a fundamental contribution to the character and distinctiveness of the West Midlands' rural landscapes and settlements through their varied forms, use of materials and architectural styles. They also represent a valuable economic asset due to their capacity to adapt to and accommodate new uses.

Across the West Midlands, and nationally, traditional farm buildings are under great pressure for change largely because of the restructuring of the agricultural industry and the high demand for their re-use, especially for housing. Only a small proportion of the historic farm building stock is subject to listing and statutory protection. Until recently there was a lack of information on the character and condition of the whole stock of historic farm buildings. The West Midlands Farmsteads and Landscapes Project will tackle this gap for the first time at a regional scale by developing an evidence base for historic farmsteads in order to:

- inform options for future change for farmsteads in agricultural and other forms of use;
- provide an understanding of the inherited character of farmsteads, their contribution to local distinctiveness and their present day social and economic role; and
- inform planning policy, guidance, and decision-making based on an understanding of local context and the potential for and sensitivity to change of farmsteads.

The project is led by English Heritage in partnership with the region's county and metropolitan councils, and with the support of Advantage West Midlands. The project is due to complete in Spring 2010 with the publication of a series of regional and county reports. We encourage all those with an interest in rural policy and development to contact their local lead for further information and opportunities to feed into the project. A short summary leaflet is attached to this emailed edition. [\[link\]](#)

Contact details and an initial background report can be obtained from: Amanda Smith, Regional Planner, English Heritage, amanda.smith@english-heritage.org.uk



THE FARMSTEADS AND LANDSCAPES PROJECT: BACKGROUND REPORT WEST MIDLANDS

This project will develop an evidence base for historic farmsteads across the West Midlands region, using as a baseline those farmsteads shown on late 19th century Ordnance Survey maps. It is being undertaken because there is:

- a need to inform the options for future change for farmsteads in agricultural and other forms of use;
- little understanding of the inherited character of farmsteads across the region, their contribution to local distinctiveness and their social and economic role;
- a need to inform forward-looking policy and guidance, based on an understanding of local context and the potential for and sensitivity to change of farmsteads.

The historic role of farmsteads has been to act as the homestead of the farm, where some or all of the working buildings were located. Some have been completely demolished but many have retained traditional farm buildings of 19th century or earlier date. Many are now providing homes and workplaces across the region and are no longer engaged in farming. They make a fundamental but regionally varied contribution to local distinctiveness and a sense of place, through their forms, use of materials and the way that they relate to the surrounding form and patterning of landscape and settlement. Field barns, outfarms and smallholdings, whose occupiers are also engaged in non-farming activities, will also be considered as part of this project.



The key products that will be delivered by this project are:

TOOLS FOR INFORMING FUTURE CHANGE

Planning tools based on an understanding of the potential for and sensitivity to change of farmsteads and their buildings, both at an area and site-based level, which will support local authorities in developing guidance, help inform options and proposals for change, and facilitate pre-application discussions and decision-making.

AN EVIDENCE BASE

A Character Framework in the form of Farmsteads Character Statements backed up by regional and county reports, that enable users to understand farmsteads in their broader context.

Farmsteads Mapping, which will:

- enhance county Historic Environment Records through the creation of Geographical Information System (GIS) data recording farmstead address and location, recorded date, historic farmstead type, plan form and degree of change, obtained from modern and historic Ordnance Survey maps and other data;
- be capable of analysis against landscape-scale mapping, in particular Historic Landscape Character; and available data on historic sites and buildings.

Mapping Current Use and Context, which will reveal the current social and economic role of farmsteads by matching the farmsteads mapping data to present-day postal addresses and business data.

Timescale

The gathering of data will continue to the end of 2009, and the results of the data gathering and a full analysis will be published in March 2010.

Project Partners

This is a collaborative project which is led by English Heritage in partnership with county councils across the region, and with the support of Advantage West Midlands.

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From top, Oswestry Hills, Staffordshire Peak District, Teme Valley, Shropshire Hills.

Informing debate and discussion

This project will engage all key stakeholders through meetings and workshops over autumn 2009, as well as through the West Midlands Rural Affairs Forum and other media.

For further details of this project and its products see *The Farmsteads and Landscape Project: Initial Report* at www.english-heritage.org.uk/characterisation.

Key Stakeholders

Local authorities, Natural England, professional organisations and the representatives of landowners, rural communities and estates (including the Institute of Historic Building Conservation (IHBC), Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers (ALGAO), Institute for Archaeologists (IfA), The National Trust, Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), National Farmers' Union (NFU) and the Country Land and Business Association (CLA).