

# RTPI NEWS

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## Policy statement effectiveness calls for link to national spatial framework

Responses to government consultations on ports and energy development strategy offer suggestions on how delivery of infrastructure could be made more efficient and cost effective, explains *Rebecca Coates*

The final stage of consultation on the first raft of national policy statements (NPSs) is fast approaching. The government released the ports NPS and six energy NPSs last November to mixed reviews from the public and development sectors as well as local communities. The deadline for responding to the ports NPS consultation is 15 February and 22 February for energy.

The RTPI recognised in its response to the planning white paper that the existing regime for obtaining permission for major infrastructure is unwieldy, costly and inefficient. The institute also supported formation of the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC), for assessing major projects providing that clear national policy is in place to ensure that it can make sound decisions.

The RTPI has consistently encouraged government to develop statements of national policy for major schemes as an important step in remedying current deficiencies in infrastructure and for planning future infrastructure to support the growing nation.

A notable gap in the development of major infrastructure has largely existed since the privatisation policies of the 1980s. Infrastructure that historically had been planned and provided at the national, regional or local level are now principally left open to the market to decide where and when they are required.

Sadly, this approach is founded on viability and profits rather than providing infrastructure in the right place and at the right time to support the nation's best interests. In the institute's view, the draft NPSs do not greatly alter this scenario. In fact, the lack of location or site specificity — other than in the nuclear NPS — means that the private



**Infrastructure: wider implications of development need to be considered**

sector will continue to identify locations and timing for development, regardless of the need outlined in the draft NPSs.

In responding to the Commons select committees considering the statements, the RTPI recognises that the draft energy and ports NPSs provide adequate and sufficient information for the IPC to assess proposals for nationally significant infrastructure projects (NSIPs), although it may not be the most strategically appropriate decision.

Most importantly, the RTPI submission raises concern about the limitations of NPSs in the absence of a national spatial planning framework. Such a framework would enable the open and transparent alignment of strategic investment decisions on housing and economic growth with the infrastructure needed to support them.

It would include broad expectations for the location of growth and translate the national need for

infrastructure to meet the requirements of local and sub-national communities. In their current form, the draft NPSs limit the IPC to considering proposals in isolation of the wider spatial implications of other national policy, including the objectives of other NPSs.

NPSs are made up of existing policy that local planning authorities consider when assessing proposals for infrastructure. Importantly, applications that fall below the thresholds outlined in the Planning Act 2008 will continue to be assessed by councils and NPSs will be regarded as a material consideration in deciding non-NSIP proposals. This makes it all the more vital for authorities to review NPSs rigorously to ensure that they are fit for purpose.

For consistency, the structure of NPSs needs to be aligned more carefully with the new-style planning policy statements (PPSs). In these, policy, guidance, background and assessment criteria are separated and so provide distinct guidance for decision and local policy making.

As currently drafted, the NPSs repeat and reinterpret established planning policy. It might have been more straightforward to specify that the IPC should make decisions according to planning policy and guidance unless directly and explicitly superseded by an NPS.

In many respects, it is in the overlaps and variances between the policies and processes of the town and country planning and NSIP regimes that potential weaknesses may surface. A national spatial planning framework that sets out the broad principles for both NPSs and PPSs is in our view the best immediate and long-term remedy.

*Rebecca Coates is RTPI planning policy officer for England.*

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A national spatial framework would align investment decisions to the infrastructure needed to support them

# Adding access to zero carbon goal

Guidance on inclusive design aims to help planners in Wales meet sustainability standards for developments, explains Sarah Minett

The Welsh Assembly Government aspires to achieve zero carbon emissions from new buildings by 2011. It is also committed to reducing greenhouse gases in Wales by three per cent a year from 2011 in areas of devolved competence.

The priority to achieve inclusive design is top of the assembly's agenda. It is now a requirement for most applications in Wales to be accompanied by a design and access statement. The assembly has been seeking to improve the skills of the development industry to provide more detailed guidance for those completing these statements.

Additional guidance for the completion of the access element is being developed by Planning Aid Wales (PAW), which is carrying out a thorough public consultation to ensure that guidance reflects the need for inclusive design in schemes requiring permission.

RTPI Cymru has hosted Planning for Climate Change — Delivering Sustainable Buildings in Wales workshops for local authority and private sector planners and inspectors with support from the assembly and the Design Commission for Wales. This training aims to provide guidance on how to complete the requirements of design and access statements, linking it with the increasingly stringent requirements of BREEAM and the code for sustainable homes.

Further advice on how to integrate the aims of inclusive and climate-sensitive design will benefit developers in making early decisions and incorporating solutions. It will also benefit local authorities when creating area-specific design guidance.

The overarching issues cited in Technical Advice Note 12 are inclusive design, climate-responsive development and sustainable buildings. The note brings these issues together in appendix A: "In defining the policy or approach to good design, it is good practice to look at the need for flexibility of the development and how it may need to adapt to the varying requirements



**Workshops: inclusive design guide**

of inclusiveness and sustainability over time or adapt to changing surroundings, whether in use or in relation to the changing climate."

However, these objectives can sometimes conflict. On the PAW consultation, for example, a comment was made that some sustainable drainage system designs conflict with wheelchair accessibility. How such issues may be overcome is not explored in the guidance.

The zero carbon hub concept aims to help resolve the problem by seeking to improve consistency in the implementation of standards, to prevent poor guidance being used for design, create clarity on levels and assessment standards and share experiences and information between stakeholders.

Created with the Design Commission for Wales and the Sustainable Development Commission Wales, the Zero Carbon Portal will be hosted on the Constructing Excellence Wales website. Directed by Jeff Perren, formerly the leader of the assembly's zero carbon support programme, the hub intends to drive the construction industry forward. "Consistency in the assessment process will assist with both the quality of design and energy reductions," it says.

The key issue is how to persuade developers and consultants to share their knowledge with the rest of the industry. However, as communication is the key to achieving a consistent approach to climate sensitive and inclusive design across Wales, we must all contribute to this resource to help Wales become a best practice nation.

*Sarah Minett is a sustainability consultant in water and environment at Atkins in Cardiff.*

## YP Bulletin Board

### Summer school delegate looks back at attendance benefits

I was fortunate to be offered a last minute place at the 2009 Exeter Planning Summer School. Spread over four days, the plenary sessions provided an opportunity to develop knowledge in a wide range of fields, including negotiation and mediation, flood risk, design, farming and the rural economy, retailing and regeneration, development management, transport systems and world heritage sites.

The wide variety of subjects demonstrated the critical link between planning theory and practice and the interaction between those working towards a common planning purpose, as well as promoting best practice and new thinking both in the UK and further afield. The sessions often generated a wide debate among delegates and seminar leaders and to contemplate in the intervals. Examples of good practice were further demonstrated by the variety of study tours available to delegates.

Since its inception in 1933, the summer school has continued to provide a valuable training resource to planners in the work place, and council elected members. The school is run on behalf of a charitable company, with 30 members, half of whom are elected by attending delegates and half elected through the RTPI. As a young planner in the early stages of a career, the school offered an excellent opportunity to engage with professionals and private sector practitioners outside my usual sphere of activity, offering an insight into the types of work being carried out.

Expanding the remit of knowledge is crucial to ensuring that the profession continues to grow and that ideas can be easily shared and developed enhancing the planners' role in the management of the built and natural environment. I would highly recommend attending this year's school in York. There are opportunities to gain free places, along with travel scholarships to research areas of interest in the UK and abroad.

*Wayne Reynolds is a development control officer at Cardiff Council and a licentiate representative on the RTPI general assembly. For more information on the summer school and copies of resources and presentations from past and present schools please visit [www.planningsummerschool.org](http://www.planningsummerschool.org)*

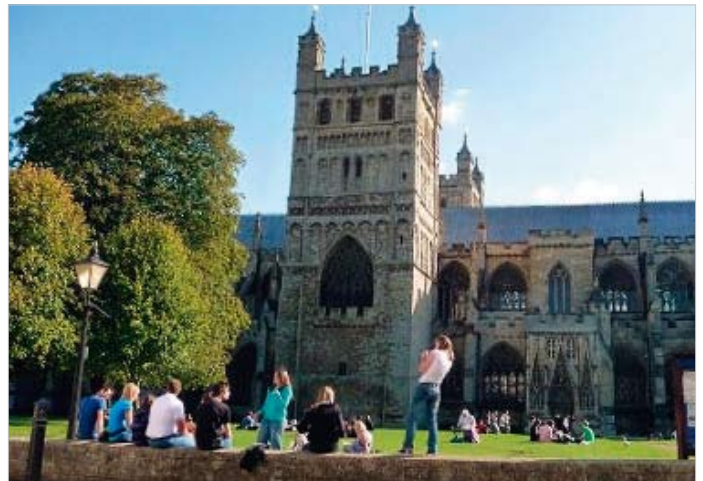
### Events

#### RTPI Assessment of Professional Competence (APC) Event

2 February. North West Young Planners. Arup, St James Building, Oxford Street, Manchester.

This session will discuss the APC process and the importance of maintaining continuing professional development even during difficult economic times. The session will be aimed at licentiates and newly qualified members but will be relevant to APC mentors. Presenter will be RTPI head of education and lifelong learning Brian O'Callaghan. Cost: Free.

*For more details, email [katie.wray@arup.com](mailto:katie.wray@arup.com)*



**Exeter: summer school offers opportunity to widen knowledge**

# Insurance need stressed for consultancy work protection

Planners run the risk of litigation if they do not meet regulations for indemnity cover, says *Chris Sheridan*

All members giving advice in their own name must have professional indemnity insurance (PII) already in place before they do so. The importance of this cannot be overstated.

Compulsory PII was introduced in 2001 to protect both clients and members, who are liable for the advice they give. Although planning is a relatively low-risk profession, we are living in an increasingly litigious society and any risk, however slight, must be covered. It is also a consumer protection issue — where there is blame, there is a claim.

The insurers themselves are clear on the importance of having cover in place. Concern has been expressed to the RTPI regarding a small number of cases where new consultants have already started offering advice before seeking cover,

As well as being aware that this is a breach of the RTPI code, insurers are also concerned that the consultant may lack an appreciation of the risks. In some cases, this issue is resolved with two insurance policies — one to cover the uninsured work the consultant has already taken on and the other to cover future work after an agreed date.

By complying with the RTPI's PII regulations and guidance, members can ensure that they have cover in place and are taking advantage of the most cost-effective premiums. For further information on PII, members should consult the RTPI website.

So how do insurance claims arise? Most are the result of a difference in perception between what the planner is attempting to deliver and what the client wants to achieve. Couple this factor with commercial pressures being applied such as tight



**Sheridan: cost-effective premiums**

timescales and you can see how alleged errors could arise.

The subjective nature of the planning process does not help matters, with clients often expecting certain outcomes only to be disappointed with the result. The importance of effective communication is clear.

Planners are also now being drawn into disputes between their client and other professionals on a job, with the client taking a scattergun approach to everyone involved hoping that liability will stick with some of the parties concerned.

Members should be reassured that the RTPI holds ongoing discussions with the insurance industry in the interests of members to help insurers understand the profession better and encourage the development of products that reflect better the relatively low levels of risk to which planners are exposed.

*Chris Sheridan is RTPI Planners in the Workplace manager.*

# RTPI Bulletin Board

## RTPI seeks new co-ordinator for Young Planners page

Are you keen to promote young planners and their achievements? Are you organised, persistent and happy working to strict deadlines? Then you could be the next Young Planners' page co-ordinator. In April, Louise Bolton will be stepping down as page co-ordinator and so we are seeking a keen new person to carry on the good work. The Young Planners' page appears every four weeks in *RTPI News* and is one of the best read pages in the magazine. If you wish to take over the role, you will need to be an RTPI member of any category and a member of the Young Planners' Network.

For more information on how to apply, please visit [www.rtpi.org.uk/item/2117](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/item/2117). The closing date for applications is 1 March.

## Reinstatement to chartered membership for lapsed members

Former members of the RTPI whose membership has lapsed can take advantage of a one-off subscription arrears amnesty. For a limited period, the RTPI will waive any outstanding membership subscriptions for past members who wish to rejoin. This offer is only available for six months until 30 June, after which date returning members will once again become liable for their outstanding arrears. Reinstatement to chartered membership will involve completion of an application form, including evidence of continuing professional development activity for the past two years, and the payment of a £50 administrative fee. Applications under this amnesty will be considered by the membership panel through the normal process.

For an application form and more details, please visit [www.rtpi.org.uk](http://www.rtpi.org.uk)

## Events

### Getting it Right — Ensuring your Travel Plan Meets Requirements

16 February. RTPI London Region. Pick and Holden Room, Transport for London, 55 Broadway, London SW1.

This session, organised with Transport for London (TfL)'s New Way to Plan project, will give delegates the information to prepare development-related travel plans that satisfy the requirements of TfL and the London boroughs. The session will hear the views of both TfL and borough officers on what they want to see in development-related travel plans. There will also be an opportunity to ask questions and offer feedback to TfL and the boroughs, discussion and sharing of views with other delegates.

To book, please email [Lucy Barton on London@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:Lucy.Barton@rtpi.org.uk) or call 020 8613 8357.

### Development and Scotland's Heritage — Striking the Balance

26 March. Scottish Young Planners Network. Glasgow City Chambers. The network's annual conference will examine how to strike a balance between development and the protection of Scotland's heritage. Sessions will explore challenges both from stakeholders' and developers' perspective on conserving what is good while creating opportunities to grow in the future.

To register your interest, please contact [syprn@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:syprn@rtpi.org.uk)



## 2010 Planning Convention

28-30 June 2010 • London

Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre, Westminster, London

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The Planning Convention is an excellent environment for providing your company or organisation with the following benefits:

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For detailed information on exhibition and sponsorship at the Convention, please contact the Sponsorship Manager on tel: 020 7960 5663 or email: [simon.owen@rtpiconferences.co.uk](mailto:simon.owen@rtpiconferences.co.uk)

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