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The voice of RTPI Cymru

# CYNLLUNIO

Summer 2010 Edition

## Special Feature : LDPs



### INSIDE this edition of Cynllunio:

- Wales Planning Conference
- Policy Update
- Profile: Huw Evans
- Place making in a Valley's Town
- Special LDP Feature
- Events
- Affordable Housing in Conwy
- much, much more
- RTPI Services
- Planning Aid Conference



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Printed by lcomworks on recycled silk paper.

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## Welcome to the summer edition

This edition of Cynllunio certainly is a summer 'bumper' edition - so if you're about to head off to the sun and sand, you have plenty of good reading to take with you!

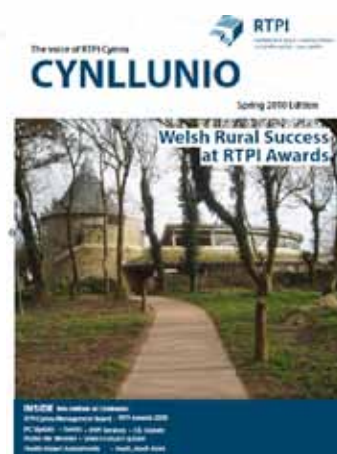
I've heard a number of comments over the past months, reflecting frustrations on all parts regarding the LDP system - the underlying message behind this, from all corners, seems to be "they don't understand us". So this edition of Cynllunio is an LDP special, which includes a number of articles from a range of different perspectives airing these views. I hope that you find this both interesting and useful. And we look forward to the first approved LDPs in the next few months.

There's also plenty more in this edition - report back from conferences and events, including the Wales Planning Conference. Thank you to everyone who supported it this year. The Conference is

an important tool; it brings many of us together - from all sectors and disciplines of planning to learn from each other and catch up on the latest news. It gives us a breathing space from the office to reflect on what we are doing. So whilst I am sure we are facing tough times ahead, I hope that you will continue to see the value in the Conference. If you are interested in sponsoring the Conference in 2011, or supporting it in another way, please get in contact.

We have a number of feature articles in this edition: Roger Tanner tells us about place making in the Valleys, we hear from Conwy's discussion on tackling affordable housing and Rob Cowan gives us advice on understanding design and how to test proposals. Carole-Anne Davies adds to this with news of the Commission's new tool - "No Place Like Home".

There are the latest policy



*Cynllunio, Spring 2010*

updates and Huw Evans reveals all about his career in this edition's profiled planner.

Lyn Owen provides a reflection on the life of Peter Roderick, who sadly passed away recently. RTPI Cymru offers our condolences to his family and friends.

There are also details of plenty of events coming up over the next few months.

Roisin Willmott  
Editor

## Contributing to Cynllunio

Contributions are welcome from RTPI members and others on a wide range of topics and in a variety of different forms:

- Conference announcements
- Reports on conferences
- Critical thought pieces
- Updates on policy in Wales
- Recent project successes
- Humorous items
- Images, photographs

Croesawn erthyglau yn y Gymraeg.

The copy deadlines for the next 3 quarterly issues of Cynllunio are:

- Thursday 14th August 2010
- Thursday 28th October 2010
- Thursday 27th January 2011

If you want to make contributions to the newsletter then get in touch on 029 2047 3923 or email [roisin.willmott@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:roisin.willmott@rtpi.org.uk).

## Advertising

Cynllunio is distributed to all RTPI members in Wales and also to Chairs of Planning Committees, Assembly Government Ministers with a relevant portfolio and other key organisations, and therefore provides an excellent way of reaching the wider planning community across Wales. Circulation is currently approximately 1,150 each quarter.

Current advertising rates are (excl. VAT):  
Back page: Full - £300; half - £250  
Internal: Full - £250; half - £200; 1/4 - £125  
Discounts are available for multiple editions.

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RTPI, a charity registered in England 262865 and Scotland SC 037841

# Six months as Chair

Lucie Taylor shares an update of her year to date as Chair



Above: Lucie Taylor accompanying Ann Skippers on her visit to Newport. Pictured here on the roof of the new University of Wales, Newport Campus.

Half way through my year as Chair I would like to update you on how things are going for me here in Wales.

Over the last three months

I have had the pleasure of working with some students from Cardiff University in looking at whether the Welsh Planning System is able to support the delivery of the

Welsh Assembly Government's Physical Activity Agenda. The students from the Live Project module at Cardiff University's Planning School: Amy Crampton, Dunya Hurley, Charlotte White and Davina Harris, have recently completed an excellent report with some thought provoking conclusions.

On 7 and 8 June I had the pleasure of attending the annual Wales Planning Conference at City Hall in Cardiff. This was an excellent event as ever. We seem to improve every year and this year we really did pull in some great speakers. Many thanks to Roisin and Georgina for all their efforts on the day and in the lead up to the event. I was most pleased with the attendance in such tricky times. Over 220 delegates – that's over 10% of the Welsh Planning Membership! Not many conferences will be able to boast such figures in 2010.

The following day I hosted a

visit of the RTPI President, Ann Skippers to Newport, where I work as Planning Policy Liaison Officer. As detailed in this issue, it was a thoroughly enjoyable day and I was very proud to present some excellent new buildings and projects to her, all here in the City of Newport.

I am still on the look out for a project to receive my award for the year. I have seen a few very good candidates that fit with my theme for the year – 'Embracing Culture, Heritage and Sport in Planning', but if you would like to advise me of any relevant projects that you think fit the bill then please let me know soon!

I am also looking forward to hosting a debate towards the end of the year on the current challenges being faced in the planning process in Wales. So look out for news of that.

Finally, I look forward to seeing you all at our annual dinner on Friday 26th November 2010!

# President's Welsh Tour

This year's President's Tour kicked off at the networking event held to launch the Wales Planning Conference 2010. Lucie Taylor, RTPI Cymru Chair, formerly welcomed Ann Skippers at the event at City Hall in Cardiff.

On Tuesday 8 June, Ann's official duty was to Chair the Wales Planning Conference; which is reported on elsewhere in this edition of Cynllunio.

As Lucie works for Newport City Council, Ann's third day moved east.

Lucie and Ann first visited the University of Wales, Newport new city centre Campus which is nearing completion, accompanied by Wyn Mitchell of Newport City Council and were shown round the site by Graham Rogers, Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University.

They then moved on to the Fairlake Housing Scheme, introduced by Rob Frowen from Newport City Council and Kate Rees from Fairlake.

The Fairlake scheme is an affordable housing scheme known as Mariners Quay. Nearing completion, this will be one of the largest schemes in

Wales to achieve Level 5 of the Code for Sustainable Homes, with energy costs to residents of less than £5.00 per week. Mariners Quay is a high profile partnership development for Charter Housing, Newport City Council, Newport Unlimited and Leadbitter, and will provide 101 homes along Newport's riverfront. Properties will include a mix of rented and affordable homes.

Commenting on her visit, Ann said: "I was amazed by Newport – there is a great deal going on. I was particularly impressed with the new University campus; it is a state of the art facility which not only combines fantastic resources for teaching and learning, but will be a landmark building that the local community can use as well. The quality of thought that has gone into the long-term planning of the area is outstanding.

The area next to the riverfront is taking shape and already it is clear that the development schemes along the river will ensure that the people of Newport have a city that they can be very proud of. Newport is a real hidden gem and I can't



Above: Roisin Willmott, Lucie Taylor and Ann Skippers with the winning team from Coleg Gwent.

wait to return."

Over lunch at the Waterloo Hotel, itself a private regeneration project next to the Newport Transporter Bridge, Ann and Lucie were joined by members of the Regeneration Skills Collective Wales, including Richard Essex, RSCW's Coordinator, and representatives from The Landscape Institute Wales, Royal Society of Architects Wales, Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and of course RTPI Cymru. Ann was briefed about the work of the RSCW and the integral role

plaid by RSCW in setting up CREW (see Spring Edition of Cynllunio). This was of interest to Ann, given her aim to encourage joint working between built environment professions.

Ann's final 'duty' was to judge a student project at tNewport's FE College. IT and hairdressing students participated as part of the College's Tutorial Enrichment Programme to inform them about sustainability, equality and citizenship through planning; and in case you are wondering - the hairdressers won!

# Wales Planning Conference 2010

This year's Wales Planning Conference was the third and support for the event was strong. This was welcomed given the current budget constraints that everyone is under.

This year's Conference theme reflected the important role of planning in the making of quality places. Jane Davidson, Assembly Government Minister made a number of announcements and updated delegates on progress against a number of One Wales targets, in what is likely to be her last Wales planning conference before she stands down in May.

The Minister reported that the GVA Grimley study into the planning application system in Wales, had now reported and the Assembly was finalising its response. The research has found good practice in parts across Wales, and concluded that wholesale structural change is not needed, but the clear message is that the application process must be improved. The Minister announced there would be a consultation on proposals on how small-scale developments, could, within certain safeguards, be taken out of the planning system, enabling authorities to concentrate on dealing with more complex applications.

She raised the issue of large infrastructure projects and stated that "I have made no secret of my concerns about how the Infrastructure Planning Commission will reflect Welsh Assembly Government policy with regard to major energy projects in Wales." She will raise this and other issues at a meeting with Eric Pickles, Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government and Chris Huhne, Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change.

A key announcement by the Minister was the launch of the new edition of Planning Policy Wales. Other updates made at the Conference by the Minister included the publication of TAN22: Planning and Sustainable Buildings;

plans for a consultation on proposals to review planning policy for renewable energy; the revised TAN 6: Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities is nearing completion; and an announcement soon on how Building Regulations will be taken forward in Wales.

John Davies from the Planning Inspectorate built on the Minister's endorsement of Local Development Plans as important in building quality places. He stressed that to protect our valued landscapes, we have to allow for development. It is a reality that we need buildings, so we must plan for development where it is needed, which is properly designed and located. It is important that difficult decisions are not shied away from in formulating LDPs locally, policies need to be in place that direct and control development and enable investment.

Derek Martin from the International Federation for Housing and Planning highlighted that there is value in 'going in search of Europe', otherwise 'Europe might find you'. He highlighted the large amount of legislation affecting planning which emanates from Europe and that we should engage with its drafting, to make it fit for our purposes.

The afternoon of the Conference delved into the detail of Making Place. Carole-Anne Davies from the Design Commission for Wales, emphasised the importance of local distinctiveness, but also raised the question of what makes a place truly distinctive? Jason Prior from AECOM, emphasised the need to create places for things to happen, and Rob Cowan of Urban Design Skills, emphasised the need to understand the place, but above all urged us to ask the question: What is the big idea?

In summing up, Ann Skippers RTPI President and Conference Chair, said "We can create a place, but we need to think carefully about whether we can create a successful place and what

would that look and feel like? In fact it may be different things to different people, but at least we must ask the question."

"A key message is how to relate larger issues into small action. By this I mean how we create local distinctive, special places with the communities on the ground, but also ensure that the challenges of climate change, of quality, of development which will stand the test of time, are

also addressed. What is clear, is the important role of planning and the role of planners in championing making places of quality that people will chose to live in, work in and come back to."

Next year's Conference date has been set – 7th June – so start saving!



# Peter Roderick: An Appreciation

*Lyn Owen provides a reflection on Peter Roderick*

Friends and former colleagues were sad to hear news that Peter Roderick, former Chief Planner of the Welsh Office has died. Although not a planner by training he had a genuine interest in planning and made a huge contribution to the development of the present planning system in Wales. As a former colleague it is an honour to write an appreciation of his important work.

Peter was born in Brecon in 1937, and was educated at Brecon Grammar school before progressing to Swansea University where he studied economics. Later he followed the path of so many from Wales into the teaching profession. Living first in London and then Weybridge, he taught economics at two secondary schools before joining the Civil Service in 1969. He had the good fortune to have a post as a research officer at the then Ministry of Housing, later absorbed into the Department of the Environment, in the branch dealing with the development of New Towns. This gave him a thorough knowledge of the planning system and its interface with local and central Government.

In 1974 Peter returned to Wales to a research post at the Welsh Office. His early work involved a range of departments including water, industry and a spell as a principal research officer for planning when his assistant was a young Rhodri Morgan. He became head of part of the planning service, dealing with policy in 1992. In 1995 he became the first Head of Planning to cover all policy and casework aspects of the service. The role, popularly known as Chief Planner for Wales, was a significant one. It involved advising Ministers on planning policies and casework as well as functions in relation to the work of the Planning Inspectorate in Wales. There were also important links with the Westminster Departments to develop and maintain, including input to UK wide policies and legislation.

Under Peter's leadership the

Planning Division also developed a growing influence across the Welsh Office. The Division's input was sought to advise on transport programmes and schemes, on economic initiatives and grant applications and a wide range of strategies for subjects as varied as housing and tourism. The Planning Division's mapping team also developed as a centre for data presentation for the entire Welsh Office, gaining new advanced technical expertise.

Peter had an important role in the development of a distinctive body of planning policy for Wales. Previously planning policy for Wales usually meant reproducing a Westminster Government Circular or Planning Policy Note with an additional Welsh Office number. Rarely a separate Welsh document was produced. It is often not realised that it was John Redwood, when Secretary of State for Wales, who resolved that Wales should have its own better and simpler system. The Planning Division under Peter responded by developing the concept of a single policy document supported by additional technical advice notes. First issued in 1996 as 'Planning Guidance Wales' the system has proved to be an effective one and remains with us today.

Planning casework which reached the Planning Division was by nature the most complex and sensitive proposals, needing knowledge, a keen sense of the legal dimension, and political acumen. Peter Roderick was at his best dealing with all the complexities of such cases and, when necessary, ensuring that Ministers understood the limits to their discretion and followed the most reasonable and proper course towards a decision. He was never afraid to speak bluntly and could say 'no Minister' as confidently as 'yes Minister'.

The development plan system in Wales also developed rapidly under Peter Roderick with a distinctive system of Unitary Development Plans for Wales. There was a strong commitment to supporting local planning authorities and Planning Division staff, often accompanied by Peter, were encouraged to visit every single planning office at least once a year. Peter was always well briefed and enjoyed the serious

discussion and exchange of views immensely. To those Chief officers, many now retired, who organised the good lunches which often accompanied those meetings, it can be honestly revealed that Peter enjoyed them immensely as well.

Possibly his most important work was in taking a large role in an effort, still not widely appreciated, to raise standards of planning decision making in Wales. In the early 1990s there was wide concern amongst politicians and many members of the public about planning decisions, leading to files full of complaints at the Welsh Office, to criticism from the Local Government Ombudsman and an inquiry by the Welsh Affairs Committee at Parliament. With political support a lengthy exercise was undertaken, over several years, involving new guidance, frequent meetings with particular local authorities, and monitoring arrangements. Peter's particular combination of affable encouragement with a hard and steely edge when it was needed came into its own in this work. Peter's experience in this work was part of the reason he was asked to give evidence in 1996 to the Inquiry of the Parliamentary Committee on Standards in Public Life.

Peter retired in 1997. His successor as Head of Planning Division was Kay Powell. Remembering Peter she recalled that "he was the first Head of Planning Division to combine the policy role with that of professional advice on casework. A defining achievement was his work, with his staff, to produce 'Planning Guidance Wales' as the first ever national and comprehensive planning policy. He was invariably

courteous, and with a good sense of humour he was able to get away with delivering even unpalatable news to local authority planners."

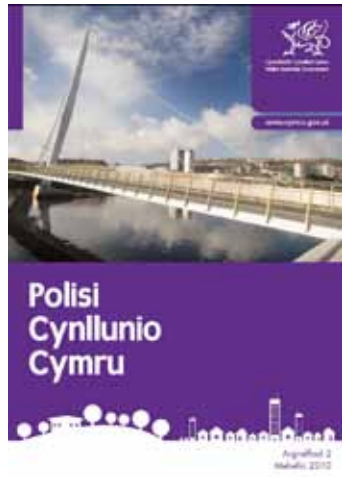
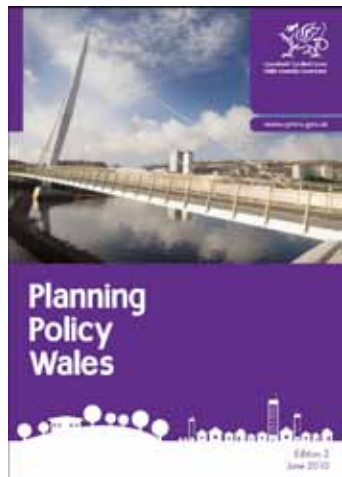
Rosemary Thomas the present Head of Planning at the Welsh Assembly Government also has fond memories of Peter. She said "Peter was Head of Planning Division when I joined the Welsh Office in 1993 and he made me feel very welcome. I learned an immense amount from him, both about the ways of the Civil Service and the relationship with Ministers, as well as about technical issues associated with overseeing planning in Wales. Sometimes when I am thinking about how to tackle a new challenge, I ask myself what Peter would have done. His wisdom has provided me with the compass bearing for my current role."

Away from the office Peter was a genial man, happy to share a conversation and a good lunch with staff. Many of his colleagues experienced examples of his support on personal as well as professional matters. He was concerned that all staff should make the best of chances open to them. He welcomed and encouraged involvement by his staff with the Royal Town Planning Institute.

At home he was a happy family man who, with his wife Margaret, brought up two sons and a daughter. His interests were wide including active support for Cardiff City Football Club where he never failed to buy a season ticket – good season or bad. He was a keen attendee at classical music concerts, a knowledgeable bird watcher and a collector of post cards from the great years of cinema.

Following a difficult illness borne with good humour Peter died on 7 June 2010. All those who knew him will regret the loss of a good friend of planning.

# Second Edition of PPW Published



A second edition of Planning Policy Wales (PPW) was launched by Jane Davidson AM, Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing, at the Wales Planning Conference in Cardiff on 8 June.

Since its publication in 2002 PPW has set the context for sustainable land use planning policy in Wales and provided the framework for the development and use of land within which local planning authorities' statutory development plans are prepared and development control decisions on individual applications and appeals are taken.

The main impetus for this consolidated version of PPW is to further embed the need to tackle climate change into the planning system. It therefore incorporates additional content in response to the 'Planning for Climate Change' consultations in 2006 and 2008. PPW Edition 2 also includes all the policy updates that have been issued since 2002 in the form of Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statements (MIPPS). In addition it reflects changes to facts, law, policies and other documents referred to in the original PPW and in the subsequent MIPPS.

The most significant of these changes arises from the introduction of Local Development Plans (LDPs) which has necessitated some fact-based amendments. Related to this, the guidance provided in the Planning Policy Wales Companion Guide (2006) has also been incorporated. The

Companion Guide provided a classification of the national policy statements in PPW, identifying those which do not need to be repeated in LDPs and those where local planning authorities may find it useful to apply or elaborate national policy in a positive way. This guidance has been adapted for inclusion at the end of each of Chapters 2-13 in the new edition of PPW and these sections are also reassembled under the different types of policy headings in Annex 2.

A summary of the main changes that have been made to the original PPW has been published alongside the new edition.

The consolidated version of PPW has been published in electronic form only to enable the guidance to be more readily updated when new or revised policy is agreed. This will also be the case for future editions. Consultation on proposed changes will continue to be in the form of Draft MIPPS, but the agreed policy changes will then be incorporated into new editions of PPW.

A third edition is expected to be published later this year to include the policy changes associated with the forthcoming publication of revised TAN 6, Planning for Sustainable Rural Communities.

Edition 2 of PPW is available on the 'Planning' pages of the Assembly Government's website: <http://new.wales.gov.uk/topics/planning/policy/ppw2010/?lang=en>

# TAN 22: Planning for Sustainable Buildings



The Welsh Assembly Government published Technical Advice Note 22: Planning for Sustainable Buildings at the Corus Greener Homes and Buildings Exhibition in Builth Wells on 4 June.

The TAN sets out guidance for both developers and local planning authorities in implementing the national planning policy on sustainable buildings published last year. This sets out the expectation for most new residential and non-domestic developments to meet minimum levels of sustainability (including carbon emissions).

The TAN provides detailed guidance on:-

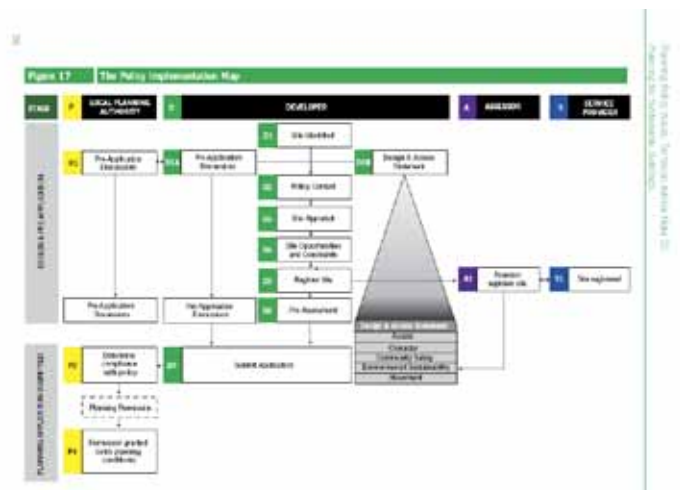
- The various sustainable building design solutions that may be employed to meet the minimum standard;
- A design approach to the incorporation of low and zero carbon design solutions that may be employed to meet the minimum carbon level;

- A policy implementation map setting out the key steps for developers and local authorities;
- The use of planning conditions and negotiation to secure these standards;
- The role of the local development plan; and
- How the policy will be monitored.

The national planning policy on sustainable buildings threshold for residential developments will be lowered from 1st September 2010 to capture all new homes.

To assist local planning authorities in determining compliance with the national planning policy all Code for Sustainable Homes and BREEAM Certificates published in Wales will contain a statement setting out how many credits have been obtained for Energy/CO2.

The TAN is available in electronic form only and can found on [www.wales.gov.uk/planning](http://www.wales.gov.uk/planning).



# Improving Affordable Housing Delivery in Conwy

*Robin Sandham and James Harland discuss an event held to discuss the delivery of affordable housing and how to improve efforts.*

There is no denying that providing affordable housing is a complicated process, perhaps overly so, but in the absence of appropriate funding mechanisms in a time of economic crisis, it is here to stay unless innovative approaches to delivery are found. The increased reliance on Section 106 Agreements is being undermined by the drop in new house starts and is placing demands on local authority officers and Members for greater level of skills, knowledge and resources. The availability and cost of private finance, and lenders' expectations, are also changing. Some RLSs and developers may no longer find it easy to access private finance in the same way as before.

On March 19 Conwy County Borough Council through its Planning Policy and Housing Strategy teams brought together key local and national representatives involved in the delivery of affordable housing. "The Way Forward" was organised as a major consultation event to engage with stakeholders across North Wales, including WAG, Home Builders Federation, Registered Social Landlords, national lenders, developers, agents, landowners and housing enablers and to identify barriers to meeting housing needs, as well as establishing a proactive approach to improving future provision. Presentations on the most pressing issues covered economic viability, mortgages, Section 106 agreements, funding and information sharing. The day was chaired by Sue Essex who is widely accepted as being a pre-eminent expert on housing issues in Wales.

The successful conference was a direct response to the escalating affordable housing need in Conwy and represented a pressing political and social issue. It is no doubt that the Council is committed to increasing the supply of new housing generally and to maximising the supply of affordable housing through private development and

through the use of its own land across the County Borough. At the same time, the Council is working to bring empty properties back into occupation, to address the causes of homelessness, to improve the quality and accessibility of private rented accommodation, to help people stay in the area and in their own home. However, progress towards each of these goals can only be made through varied, innovative and concerted effort with key stakeholders and partners.

Developers fear more costs and planning authorities fear a greater expectation from less funding and resources. However, the affordable house applicant is...still on the waiting list. How can this be resolved? What was wrong with local authority housing? Didn't that do its job? Should the onus be on the planning system to deliver affordable housing units or can central funding be found in order to at least secure some land?

With this in mind, the Council has, amongst other things, looked at how affordable housing is provided through private developments and, in consultation, has adopted an approach that is now set out in the Affordable Housing Delivery Statement in the interim to the adoption of the Conwy Local Development Plan. The adopted new policy for affordable housing is in response to the identified need and provides clear planning policy to guide the negotiation process between the local planning authorities and key partners. This has resulted in Conwy providing further guidance and support on issues such as the availability and appraisal of potential sites for affordable housing.

The day's morning sessions consisted of presentations considering the barriers to developing and delivering affordable homes and focused workshops, where delegates identified salient issues and focused on identifying 3 priority issues to inform the conference. In the afternoon



sessions speakers delivered challenging presentations from their perspective and field of expertise on the way forward. These presentations were then followed by an open session in which delegates highlighted potential solutions to overcoming barriers to the delivery of Affordable Housing. The conference identified five main sets of factors hindering the development of affordable housing: funding, planning obligations, public attitudes, rural issues and working practices.

The outcomes and potential solutions included:

- Employing a dedicated officer to deal with S106 agreements and associated issues of the Community Infrastructure Levy
- Cross boundary collaboration and delivery
- Being aware of the limitations of your team and importing expertise as necessary
- Assessment of housing need must be robust
- Need for specific financial flexibility for rural development
- To work closely with the Welsh Assembly Government to ensure that they fulfil their obligation in terms of the standardisation of S106 agreements and future finance
- That the Local Authority continues to view the

provision of Affordable Housing as one of its priorities when considering the disposal of its own lands.

- That the Local Authority's attitude to risk be carefully balanced to ensure it doesn't stifle innovation and that any risk identified be managed through the existing corporate frameworks.

The Conwy Affordable Housing 'One Stop Shop' web-site was also launched on the day ([www.conwy.gov.uk/affordablehousing](http://www.conwy.gov.uk/affordablehousing)). The key objective of the new website is to promote a more effective negotiation process and so improve the delivery and take-up of affordable housing in Conwy. The site will not only provide clear information but also act as valuable resource for County Councillors, Ward Councillors, community groups, landowners, developers and individual residents.

The Council are currently in the process of preparing and Affordable Housing Viability Study in partnership with Dr Andrew Golland (Three Dragons Development Appraisal Toolkit) and Snowdonia National Park Authority as a separate event for developers to discuss viability and conclude appropriate provision via market areas throughout the County Borough Authority areas.

*Robin and James are both Senior Planning Officers at Conwy Borough Council.*

# Qualityreviewer: appraising the design quality of development proposals

Rob Cowan builds on his presentation at the Wales Planning Conference to explain the use of Qualityreviewer

'Qualityreviewer provides a simple framework for thinking and a logical structure for approaching pre-application discussions,' says Carole-Anne Davies, chief executive of the Design Commission for Wales. 'Perhaps its greatest strength lies in the book's drawings, which provide immediate visual evidence, demonstrating the key issues. Each simple case study could probably save a week's worth of fruitless meetings and complex language.'

Every year one question is asked of hundreds of thousands of planning applications, ranging from household extensions to new settlements: 'Will this planning proposal create a well-designed development?'

Qualityreviewer has been developed to help the many planners, councillors and others who have little or no training in or experience of design to assess the design quality of planning applications. Ideally they will be able to draw on specialist support in this. But in the many

cases where this is not available, Qualityreviewer, developed for the Homes and Communities Agency, helps them to think through the issues. It is not intended to turn every planner and councillor into a design expert, but it can help them make better-informed and more thoughtful decisions.

The Qualityreviewer method helps, not just in determining the planning application, but earlier in the process, getting the best out of applicants and developers, and making the most of the potential of design and access statements. It helps to develop new skills for planners, councillors, regeneration professionals, students and anyone else who is committed to raising standards of design quality.

Qualityreviewer can structure pre-application discussions, focusing on quality at the start, and helping planners and applicants to understand one another. It can structure design and access statements, focusing them on the important issues. It can structure



Above: The developer of these three houses near Cardiff has claimed a degree of adaptability: the ground floor and parking areas could be converted to liveable rooms, with the parking moving onto the street. Drawing by Rob Cowan.

planning applications, and provide a clear and simple basis for appraising their design quality.

The Qualityreviewer method explains how to assess design quality by asking 10 questions:

1. What is special about the place?
2. How should policy and guidance be applied?
3. What is the design concept?
4. How significant is the scheme's impact likely to be?
5. What are the design's strengths and weaknesses?
6. Does the design team have the right skills and approach?
7. How can we ensure that the design will be well executed?
8. Is the scheme likely to be well managed and maintained?
9. Do we need more information and advice?
10. Is the design good enough?

Those questions may sound obvious. Too often, though, a development proposal goes through the planning process without anyone asking them.

Consider this example of how Qualityreviewer can be used in development control and management in a local authority in Wales.

The developer wants to discuss a development proposal. One of the local authority's staff – let us call her the quality champion for this proposal – sees it as her role

to help reconcile the developer's own interests with the wide public interest, with the hope of achieving an outcome that is better for both sides than anyone imagined.

The first step is to make sure that the developer understands the site and area, and what policy and guidance apply. The developer's short written record of his conclusions is useful at this stage in discussions with the local authority's officers, and will later become part of the design statement.

The planners ask: what is the design concept? In other words: what's the big idea? The developer explains, and the planners begin to understand how he is thinking. Now they are able to consider the likely impact of the proposed development, and to allocate the local authority's resources of time and skills accordingly. As it happens, this is both a sensitive site and a fairly large development.

Sometimes the local authority's officers discuss a development proposal in its early stages by exchanging written comments or by meeting among themselves to present their individual perspectives. In such exchanges or meetings the highway engineer explains what road widths and radiuses are specified in the regulations; the planner has figures for minimum overlooking distances; the police



Above: The main living space in this house in Brecon is cantilevered towards the river. The timber and steel frame structure is clad with Welsh slate and local timber. Resource-saving features include high thermal mass, grass roofs, solar panels, wood-chip boiler and recycled grey water. Drawing by Rob Cowan.



liaison officer explains which types of layout she objects to on security grounds; and so on.

In this case the quality champion calls for a different approach. The officers consider what qualities the development could create for the place, and how each of their own particular skills and perspectives could help to create a place with those qualities. The design qualities set out in Qualityreviewer, and the related questions, are used as a prompt for this.

The officers start by considering movement and legibility. Who will be able to get around most easily and reach their destinations most conveniently? To whom will the development be easily accessible? How will the proposal accommodate existing desire lines for pedestrian movement? How will the proposal promote the use of public transport and cycling? And so on. They ask only those questions that seem relevant, and give the issues the attention that is due according to the proposed scheme's impact and significance.

The officers follow on with Qualityreviewer's questions about space and enclosure; mixed uses and tenures; adaptability and resilience; resources and efficiency; and architecture and townscape. It is not an easy discussion. There are some difficult potential conflicts of opinion and professional perspective to resolve. But by the time the planning application is submitted, the officers – and the councillors who have been involved – all feel that the final development scheme will achieve more for the public interest than they had thought possible.

As for the developer, he sees the planning process as having contributed to his scheme's design quality, rather than having subjected it blindly to a series of unconnected standards, regulations, practices and prejudices. The developer is used to the job of writing a design statement to accompany a planning application being a chore. This time it is much easier. The design statement has been developing in draft from the start of the project. The site and area appraisal was recorded at the time it was carried out, so now it just has to be accommodated in the design statement. The design principles were carefully thought out as well, so they can now be reproduced in the design statement.

This design and access statement, unlike many others, shows a clear relationship between the appraisal and the design principles, and between the design principles and the final scheme. That constitutes a logical story that the local authority, and anyone else with an interest in the planning application, will find easy to understand.

The aim of Qualityreviewer is to make that sort of logical thinking more common in the planning process. Find out more at [www.qualityreviewer.co.uk](http://www.qualityreviewer.co.uk)

*Rob is a director of the training provider and consultancy Urban Design Skills ([www.urbandesignskills.com](http://www.urbandesignskills.com)). His publications include the CLG/CABE's *By Design* (joint author), the Scottish Government's *Designing Places*, and *The Dictionary of Urbanism*.*

## New Policy Alert Service

Following recent feedback received from private consultants, a new service has been launched.

Many working outside government often find they have missed out on news of a new policy or guidance or similar. Therefore RTPI Cymru has started a service alerting RTPI members operating in the private sector in Wales of new policy, legislation and guidance which is relevant in Wales, that we are aware of (we will endeavour to cover all matters, but there may be some which we do not pick up).

To subscribe to this free service, please send your e-mail contact details to: [walespolicy@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:walespolicy@rtpi.org.uk)

## Vacancy: Policy and Research Forum

RTPI Cymru's Policy and Research Forum has a vacancy for the remainder of its current term, following resignation of a member.

The Forum forms part of the formal governance structure of RTPI Cymru. Its role is to be a pro-active voice in the Institute's response to planning policy in Wales. To respond to consultations with the Institute in Wales from National Assembly for Wales and Welsh Assembly Government and from others and to issue memoranda of observations and policy statements on planning issues.

The Forum itself, under the rules of RTPI Cymru, will end its first three year term this December and a new Forum will be formed.

This vacancy is for the current Forum and will involve attendance at two meetings: 16 September in Wrexham and 26 November

in Cardiff. In addition you will be asked to contribute to the formulation of policy responses. Reasonable travel and subsistence will be paid (in accordance with the RTPI rules).

This may be a good opportunity to 'trial' membership of the Forum before applying to be a member of the next term (which will be advertised in the next edition of Cynllunio).

If you are an RTPI member based in Wales and would like to be considered, please send your contact details along with a short summary of your background and experience to: Roisin Willmott: [roisin.willmott@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:roisin.willmott@rtpi.org.uk) or by post to: RTPI Cymru, PO Box 2465, Cardiff CF23 0DS by **Monday 16 August 2010**.

If you would like to discuss this opportunity further please contact Roisin by e-mail or by telephone: 029 2047 3923.

## Are you Registered?

RTPI Cymru sends out a monthly e-bulletin and occasional other alerts by e-mail to members. However we can only do that if you have registered your e-mail address with us (and you keep it up to date!).

So if you would like to have a regular update on events and news, please register your e-mail address with: [wales@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:wales@rtpi.org.uk)

## Stop Press ....

As Cynllunio was going to press, The final report of the Research Study to Examine the Planning Application Process in Wales (GVA Grimley report) was published. A Plenary Debate on the Welsh Assembly Government's response to the recommendations was due to take place on 22 June 2010.

# Huw Evans

*Huw Evans reflects on a career in local government and the private sector and 1960's influences*



How on earth did I get into planning? What possessed me in 1969 to go to Liverpool Polytechnic to study planning? Well, apart from it being a good opportunity for a Pembrokeshire lad to watch Everton I had always been fascinated by maps and geography was about the only subject that genuinely interested me at school. As a child I used to draw maps of imaginary places complete with secret harbours, hidden treasure and fire eating dragons – if only development plan preparation was as quick and easy!

The late 60s and early 70s was a period of civil and student unrest throughout Europe and the US. It was also a great environment in which to study planning and the Poly had a number of young progressive tutors who encouraged more radical ways of teaching, both in method and content. Liverpool was an eye opener for me. Seeing such poor housing conditions lacking the basic amenities that I had always taken for granted coupled, with a revolutionary spirit and sense of justice, shaped my outlook on the world. I had a great year out at Lambeth which was just beginning to feel the impact of major community opposition to extensive redevelopment and clearance schemes. So that's how it began - I could see planning as an instrument of change

which could bring about social equality and improvements in quality of life.

So where did it take me? Well, qualifying at a time of major local government restructuring in 1974 was a distinct advantage as there were plenty of jobs to choose from in the newly formed district councils. I started in development control at Ellesmere Port but in a matter of months moved on as a senior planner to North East Derbyshire where I worked in dc and then local plans. It was a good grounding and one of the plusses was getting involved in economic development and handling the letting of the Council's small industrial units. That gave me early experience of dealing directly with businesses and recognition that what developers' really appreciate is prompt and clear professional advice.

My next step was a move back to Wales and I joined Swansea City Council as a Principal Planner and stayed for 12 years. During this time I was involved in regeneration, development control and policy. By far the most enjoyable experience was being responsible for the Gower AONB Management Plan which at the time was the first of its kind. It took me over every inch of the coastline and involved close working with the National Trust, Nature Conservancy

Council, and Countryside Commission plus landowners, farmers, commoners and local communities. It had many challenges but was extremely rewarding and that first plan held good for 15 years.

I headed to north east Wales in 1991 as Assistant CPO at Alyn & Deeside District Council. The area had suffered significantly with the closure of Shotton Steelworks and it was not surprising that employment creation was the first priority. The success in bringing major employment opportunities to Deeside needed to be matched by safeguarding internationally protected environmental areas. I was privileged to take a leading role in the development of the Dee Estuary Strategy via a cross border partnership of local authorities, statutory bodies, business, wildlife, and community groups. Cross border working on the Chester Deeside Transport System was ongoing and it remains one of my biggest disappointments that it failed to materialise – a classic example of nimby's blocking sustainable development.

The local plan was eventually adopted at the time Flintshire was reincarnated in 1996 where I progressed to become Chief Planning Officer. Having responsibility for planning policy, development control, conservation, minerals and countryside services was a huge privilege and I enjoyed working with a great team. The same goes for POSW and WLGA with whom I was actively involved.

So why after 35 years of local government did I move to the private sector?

Frustrations with Committee decisions contrary to policies and guidelines shook my belief in local democracy and made me think about what I wanted to do with the remainder of my career. The UDP had been through public inquiry and it didn't seem right for me to be involved in

an LDP that I wouldn't see through to finish (the Council still hasn't adopted the UDP!). It was time for a change!

I joined the Capita Symonds multi disciplinary consultancy at Colwyn Bay and it's satisfying to get back to more hands on planning working with architects, landscape architects, ecologists, surveyors, highway and structural engineers. As well as working for local authorities there have been a number of exciting projects such as the Welsh Food Centre at Bodnant and the new college at Glynllifon outside Caernarfon. I've now become accustomed to a different way of working, tighter efficiency and project control. It is in these areas where the public sector could make significant savings through better systems and performance management. This is vital if planning is to deliver quality services in the face of severe public spending reductions.

As for my views about the future of planning in Wales I remain optimistic. We are much better off in Wales than our colleagues in England. We are small enough to know each other and have the benefit of good links between local planning authorities and the Assembly where POSW, RTPi Cymru and WLGA play crucial roles. I do feel however that there is room for more inclusivity. The Planning Forum needs a higher profile with greater visibility and sense of purpose focussing on achievable deliverables where the private sector can make a greater contribution. An interactive Forum website would be a good start so that more people involved with the planning system can feed in. I also feel that there needs to be closer links amongst the planning, architectural, engineering, environment and property professions in the development sector. We should all be working towards the same goal as we owe that to present and future generations.

# What can we do for Rural Rail Services in Wales?

Ringo Chan discusses options for rural rail services in Wales.



Above: Rail Bridge across the Maddawch Estuary

Recent improvements in rail infrastructure and the quality of passenger rail services have significantly increased patronage level of rail services in Wales. But since these improvements have, for the most part, been concentrated in the urban areas of south east Wales where demand for passenger rail service is the greatest, the quality and patronage levels of the rail service in rural Wales has remained low.

With rail fares constantly rising above the cost of motoring and general household spending, people in rural communities from these remote parts of Wales are choosing to use their car rather than rail, particularly in the more remote parts of Carmarthenshire and Pembrokeshire where most

journeys are quicker by road and stations are often inaccessible by rural communities. In addition, stations in these areas are often of poor quality with limited facilities and information services.

Unlike the rail services in urban areas, rural rail services are often not constrained by capacity but by sparsely located communities. Coupled with the continuous problem of out-migration from rural Wales, conventional practices such as increasing service frequency and expanding railway network would hardly be cost effective.

Station area travel planning can be an inexpensive planning tool that brings travellers closer to existing rail services. The process reinforces facilities that are already available in the local

transport network and if carried out successfully, can transform a station from a little-used space to a gateway to users.

Within the station area and its vicinity, the priority is to remove the physical barrier to walking and cycling. The layout of the station should be organised in a way that gives fair attention to the needs of pedestrians, cyclists, bus users, and car users. Entrance to the station should not be dominated by road traffic. It should enhance the pedestrian and cyclist experience by providing safe and clearly signed traffic-free routes between station and key facilities.

In areas that are further away from the rail station and where there is limited public transport connection between key settlements and the station, the priority is to offer more travelling choices to commuters to help 'fill the gaps' on the rail network. The travel plan should consider providing on demand taxi-bus and rail station 'Park and Ride' facilities. Stations and train carriages can also be refitted to provide for the needs of certain users, for example, by providing bicycle hiring facility at rail stations and secure bicycle storage on board.

A station travel plan should also pay attention to the need of leisure travellers. Leisure journeys make up of a third of

all the journeys made in Wales every year, yet a majority of these journeys are made by cars. Rail patronage can be improved if travellers are given sufficient information about the station area. A station travel plan can set-up a station website to provide information about adjacent accommodation and leisure facilities. It can also promote the use of other public transport facilities through the website by providing a station transport route map and timetable information.

When establishing a station travel plan it is essential to set up a working group to gather opinions from transport operators, local authority and commuter representatives. The working group can agree on objectives of the plan and customise the desirable strategies to achieve the best possible outcome.

*This article was written on behalf of the RTPI-TPS Transport Planning Network by Rural Transport Interest Group member Ringo Chan. The Interest Group was established by the Network in 2010 to explore issues related to effective transport planning in rural areas. Author Ringo Chan is a Graduate Transport Planner with Arup. For more information on the RTPI-TPS Transport Planning Network or to join the Network, email: [transport@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:transport@rtpi.org.uk)*

## Wales Planning Award 2010

Promoted and administered by RTPI Cymru, the purpose of the Award scheme is to recognise, applaud and publicise examples of good planning practice in Wales.

To merit an award, entries must demonstrate outstanding achievement judged to have advanced significantly the science and art of town planning for the benefit of the community, or provide an outstanding example of the beneficial impact of positive planning.

Do you know of a planning project, scheme or initiative that meets the requirements and in your view deserves recognition?

To enter is simple.

Submit a project summary not exceeding four sides of A4, drawing attention to the particular nature and merits of the project, in terms of methodology, approach, design, co-ordination or implementation along with basic facts about the entry:

1. The location / coverage of the project
2. A description of the area
3. The timescale over which the project evolved
4. The problems tackled by the project
5. The solutions devised
6. The results achieved
7. Building elements and financial aspects
8. How the entry fits into its statutory planning context, and sustainable development requirements.

Further information is available on line: [www.rtpi.org.uk/rtpi\\_cymru](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/rtpi_cymru)

The closing date for the receipt of all submissions is **30 July 2010**.

The Wales Planning Award 2010 is sponsored by DPP.



# Special Feature: Local Development Plans in Wales

In this edition of Cynllunio we include a special Feature to consider the roll out of Local Development Plans in Wales. Prompted by the first Examinations and evidence of a learning curve for us all, we hear from different viewpoints from across the profession.

Neil Harris introduces us to the discussion, providing us with background to where we find ourselves.

We hear from both the Welsh Assembly Government and the Planning Inspectorate, as well as two Local Planning Authorities who have been through an Examination and also those working in the private sector and community engagement.

We hope that this feature provides some value to taking forward the plan-led system in Wales by informing the discussion, and most of all by sending the message that we are all in this together and all climbing the learning curve.

Cynllunio is grateful to those who have taken the time to contribute to this feature and for their openness and recognition of the need to openly discuss the issues. The comments made here are those of authors and not necessarily those of their employers.

A snap shot in time of where all 25 LPAs in Wales are at in the LDP process is also included.

## Development Plans in Wales: a system in perpetual reform

*Neil Harris introduces the special feature on LDPs in Wales*

Next year marks the twentieth anniversary of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991 and the introduction of the plan-led system in England and Wales. The Act introduced the first of three significant changes or reforms to the development plans system. The requirement for district-wide local plans aimed to ensure complete, detailed plan coverage across England and Wales in place of the patchwork of various local plans of differing status and coverage. The ambition was that this would be achieved by 1996. In Wales, however, the new development plans framework was foreshadowed by local government reorganisation. The shift to unitary local government across Wales was accompanied by the introduction of unitary development plans as the second significant change to the development plans system inside five years. That system was itself subject to scrutiny within a period of five to six years. Across the border in England, government was making its first steps down the pathway to local development frameworks and a new, 'spatial planning' approach. In Wales, we were now fully responsible for our own planning system following devolution. A parallel process of reform, Planning: Delivering for Wales, debated the future of the development plans system in Wales. Three options were presented – the retention of unitary development plans, a move to something similar to the 'folder' approach of local development frameworks as proposed in England, or a

third option of a reformed and reinvigorated development plans system in the form of local development plans. Consequently, Wales embarked on a reform of its development plans system, although along a significantly less radical path to that being taken in England. Legislation soon followed in the form of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and detailed regulations were published in 2005. Some five years later, there are now important questions being asked about whether the system is fit for purpose.

This short history of development plans in Wales highlights a series of key points. Firstly, it highlights that when there appear to be difficulties or delays in plan production, the first instinct is to implement a programme of reform. The planning community in Wales would do well to pause before even considering further reforms to the development plans system. The pattern in Wales has been to introduce a new system, and by the time that planners at local level get to grips with that system, the system has changed yet again. The experience that has now been built up in Wales in preparing local development plans should be used to propose sensible, incremental changes to the system, rather than be used to justify wholesale reform of the system. Secondly, it highlights that it takes less time to re-engineer the development plans framework than it does



*Above: Neil Harris*

to prepare a development plan. Each of the development plans systems outlined above make it evident that the usual government ambition – to achieve complete and up-to-date plan coverage within a period of four to five years – is never achieved. The delays associated with delivering up-to-date plans are not eradicated by changing the form of development plans or the process of preparing plans. Some argue that it is the introduction of the plan-led system itself that is responsible for the continuing weakness of the development plans system. The pivotal role of the development plan in planning decisions subjects the plan to conflict, bureaucracy and delay in its preparation. And therein lies the irony. A plan-led system needs up-to-date development plans to be in place, yet it is the emphasis on the plan-led system that contributes to the continuing

patchwork of dated, abandoned and incomplete development plans across Wales. I started this account with a historical outline that noted four different development plan systems in Wales within the past twenty years. The map of up-to-date plan coverage in Wales makes it clear that some parts of Wales have not yet completed a full cycle of local plan preparation within any of these systems. The 'solutions' to the present difficulties being experienced in some quarters with the local development plans system – whether that be further reform, a refinement of the system or simply getting on and making it work - will therefore depend very much on how the 'problems' are framed.

*Neil is a Lecturer in Statutory Planning at Cardiff School of City and Regional Planning.*

# The Assembly Government Perspective

Mark Newey sets out the Assembly Government's view

Over the last six months we have started to see Local Development Plans (LDPs) being submitted for examination, a very encouraging sign. In fact, progress has been so rapid that Pembroke Coast National Park has completed their formal hearings. We look forward to the inspector's Report, hopefully the first adopted LDP in Wales. Well done to Martina and her team. I trust they will take time to recover and re-energise!

LDPs are different from their predecessors Unitary Development Plans, in that there is a far greater emphasis on evidence to underpin the plan, including new areas to address, such as viability assessments of affordable housing, demonstrating delivery (infrastructure, timing, funding and linkages) and an integrated monitoring process. This is a change in ethos, resulting in a different plan, more succinct, strategic with a focus on delivering change. This requires a change in approach when formulating a plan.

Good project management skills are vital to keep plan preparation on track. The unknown may happen, but doing the best to minimise risks, even pre-empt and avoid them, will maintain plan preparation momentum. A key part of project management will be to identify the scope and level of detail required to provide a robust evidence base, particularly in relation to the resources available. Whilst the array of evidence necessary for LDPs may be greater than UDPs, LDPs are a key tool for delivering not just planning, but local authority corporate objectives. Engaging colleagues in different professions within local authorities, as well as utilising the expertise of other stakeholders, such as developers/communities, can minimise duplication, gain greater consensus and reduce costs. Remember, you are not alone!

On that note the Welsh Assembly's Development Plans Team has also approached LDPs afresh, particularly with



regard to our relationship with local authorities. We see our role as supporting local authority colleagues throughout the plan preparation process, not hindering them. We attempt to provide objective advice, as early as possible, assisting wherever possible. If your perception is different, please let me know.

Looking ahead to the formal hearings, do not fear. The Inspector is not seeking to catch local authorities out. The questions and discussion which shape the hearings are designed to explore the evidence base, hopefully confirming the plan can be found 'sound'. I cannot over emphasise the importance of ensuring the evidence base is robust. Good preparation, the preparation of clear and explicit written statements, combined with a team ethos on the day is the way to approach the hearings.

In summary, there is light at the end of the tunnel for LDPs. Those local authorities currently progressing through formal hearings demonstrate that adopted LDPs can be achieved. Our goal is to have complete development plan coverage for Wales. With continued engagement and collaboration I'm sure we can achieve this goal.

*Mark leads on LDPs at the Welsh Assembly Government*

# A word from Caerphilly County Borough

Rhian Kyte and Roger Tanner provide a view from Caerphilly

Caerphilly County Borough Council is among the leading councils in Wales in terms of progress through the new LDP system. Having commenced the process as soon as the new system became law in 2004, we hope to have our plan adopted by the end of 2010. In the process we can offer a quick overview of what we think are the positive features of the new system and some areas where we think the process and guidance could be improved.

First, the positives;

- The Delivery Agreement which contains the Community Involvement Scheme and Timetable; we didn't like this at first but it does give development planners something to wave at cost cutting council treasurers and, let's face it, it combats the natural temptation to delay until you've got it 'just right'.
- The candidate sites process. Get the development industry to show their hand up front and have the sites evaluated early on so we all know where we stand.
- Guidance to not replicate government policies. It can make plans look incomplete but on the whole, it makes for more concise plans.
- Inspector's recommendations to be binding. A lot of council's won't agree that this is a good thing but public confidence in the system was undermined when Councils used to simply ignore inspector's recommendations when it suited them.

Areas for Improvement:

- The Strategy stage. What is the point? The Strategy document goes through consultation but that's it – it's not amended as we then move on to a different document - the Deposit Plan. Anyone who has worked on a county structure plan under the old system could have told you that consultation on strategy is fairly meaningless to most people. They are interested in the

detail, ie, sites; – BRING BACK THE DRAFT PLAN!

2. The Deposit Plan is the first opportunity people have to comment on the details, however at this stage the Council is not expected to make any changes to the plan, as the Deposit Plan must be sound and changes should only be made exceptionally! What then is the purpose of this consultation? There is no point if you cannot change the plan in light of comments made.

3. The information mountain. In Caerphilly we have had to produce over 100 background documents, some, like the SEA/SA, much bigger than the plan itself. This is far, far too much – most of them are write-only (ie they have to be produced but nobody reads them) and are predicated on a futile search after absolute certainty on every aspect of plan delivery. It requires an enormous input in resources.

4. The emphasis on certainty and deliverability removes any aspiration from the plan. Budgets are uncertain, global markets are uncertain yet the plan has to evidence that every allocation is deliverable within the timescale of the plan. It is difficult therefore to try to turn around the fortunes of more deprived areas by allocating land for new housing, retailing etc where markets are reluctant to invest or not so buoyant. The plan can, and should act as a catalyst for regeneration in these areas.

5. Bring back separate minerals plans. Minerals planning is a specialist field all of its own (it has a separate set of guidance, after all) and perhaps should be planned on a regional basis (as was the case before 1996). The multiple designations required make a mess of LDP proposals maps and unnecessarily complicate and prolong the main LDP process.

Oh – we've run out of space. The other 108 things that need to improve on the LDP system will have to wait for future editions of Cynllunio.

*Rhian & Roger are in the Policy team at Caerphilly CBC*

# The View from the Inspectorate

John Davies gives the view on LDP development from the Planning Inspectorate



Above: John Davies at the Wales Planning Conference

Local Development Plan (LDP) preparation involves several stages; the examination is the penultimate, prior to adoption. To date 6 local planning authorities have submitted their LDPs for examination. Merthyr Tydfil CBC was first, followed by Caerphilly, Cardiff, Rhondda Cynon Taff, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority (NPA) and most recently Snowdonia NPA.

The first examinations raised difficulties. Merthyr, Caerphilly and Cardiff's LDPs were all subject to Exploratory Meetings. Caerphilly and Merthyr satisfied the Inspectors that they should be given the opportunity to address concerns by undertaking further work. But after considering the concerns set out by the Inspectors, Cardiff withdrew their LDP in April.

The examinations have presented challenges for everyone, not least the Inspectors; we are all on a learning curve. Every new system will have its problems - the test is whether we learn and progress. Caerphilly and Pembrokeshire Coast NPA have now completed their hearings sessions and the Inspectors are writing their reports; Pembrokeshire should have their report in

August. Rhondda Cynon Taff's hearings finish this month. After a period of suspension, Merthyr's hearings will recommence in October and Snowdonia's hearings will probably start the same month.

So what have we learnt? Experience has shown that the Procedural Timeline in our 2009 Guidance, based on examinations in England, is optimistic. The 8 week target for the Pre Hearing Meeting and production of agendas has been difficult, and in some cases impossible, to meet. Rhondda Cynon Taff's LDP attracted some 3,650 deposit representations, plus almost 3,000 on alternative sites. In future we will gather information from authorities on the number of representations at an earlier stage, before submission, and tailor the examination timetable accordingly. Nonetheless we remain committed to delivering the Inspector's report in 12 months, using an Assistant Inspector where necessary.

Many people have been confused by the need to fill in a separate form for each soundness test or each part of an LDP. It has also caused unnecessary administrative work for authorities and Inspectors trawling through multiple copies of the same representation. So Inspectors involved in the first crop of examinations have designed, with help from Planning Aid Wales (PAW), simpler forms (see web address) for comments at the deposit stage, on alternative sites and on focussed changes. It will allow representors to say all they want on one form, both electronically and in hard copy. Brecon Beacons NPA intends to trial this form with the aid of PAW when their LDP goes on deposit in June / July. LPAs may wish to create a record of each individual representation / soundness test for their own use, but it is not necessary to provide the

Inspector with multiple copies of the same representation. Save the rain forests!

Each LDP is different but we have identified a number of common issues and themes –

- Put difficult choices before communities at an early stage so they can be involved
- It is the Authority's plan: do not leave difficult decisions for the Inspector
- Evidence is critical: it must be interpreted properly and easily accessible
- Think about deliverability: consider infrastructure and viability
- Think about monitoring: what would trigger a review?
- Sustainability information needs to be publicised for comment
- Last minute changes cause problems, especially without supporting evidence
- The Inspectors' scope for changing an LDP is limited; they cannot re-write a basically unsound plan.

To help authorities and everyone wanting to be involved in LDP preparation the Inspectorate has published early experiences and lessons on our website (see web address) giving more detail and explanation of these cryptic pointers. By sharing early experiences the Inspectorate hopes to build confidence and help create an up to date planning system for Wales.

John is Director for Wales at the Planning Inspectorate.

More information can be found from: [www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk/cymru/wal/appeals/local\\_development\\_plans\\_e.htm](http://www.planning-inspectorate.gov.uk/cymru/wal/appeals/local_development_plans_e.htm)

# A new way of development planning

Elwyn Thomas gives a community engagement perspective

Planning reforms have radically changed the way development plans are prepared. A Community Involvement Scheme agreed at the outset describes how the community will be involved during the early strategic stages of LDP preparation, and how they will be consulted later on. A 'sound' plan is prepared in accordance with the Community Involvement Scheme.

'Front-ended' community involvement now underpins the development of strategic policy. This theory is sound; involvement in developing 'broad brush' strategy reduces public antagonism later down the line. Also, people gain an understanding of the process, the Examination is less adversarial and the final plan enjoys public confidence.

## The challenges

Reform poses significant challenges for planners in planning authorities. Early stage engagement needs new ways of thinking, working and communicating. Developing effective ways to communicate complex issues to the public, including more marginalised groups, requires innovation and creativity.

On the flip-side, 'front-loaded' engagement offers huge potential. It is an opportunity for planning authorities to improve relationships with local people. It helps build public understanding of the relationship between planning policy and planning applications. And it offers planners a mine of local detail, information and evidence which would not otherwise be available.

## Realising the potential

Planning Aid Wales has been commissioned by two Welsh authorities, Brecon Beacons and Carmarthenshire, to assist with early stage engagement. While the two authorities took quite different approaches to engagement, there was one common lesson which came

out clearly from both pieces of work: Before inviting lay people to get involved in plan-making, they must understand the 'big-picture' context of the invitation and be given answers to basic questions: What is the shape of the overall plan-making process? How does it relate to decisions on applications? If they do get involved, what will they be doing, who with, and for how long? How will they get feedback?

Our experience of working with planning authorities as an independent provider of training, facilitation and 'critical friend' services during plan-making has made clear to us the need for a support package for those planning authorities about to embark on LDP preparation. Inviting early-stage involvement whilst managing expectations is not easy; it requires a crafted, systematic approach which defines the process and parameters of community engagement from start to finish. Some authorities are doing good, imaginative engagement work, but the learning isn't always flowing to those authorities needing help with this challenging agenda.

### Learning lessons

The majority of authorities are now reasonably advanced with their LDPs, and there is a much clearer picture of the issues and pitfalls of community engagement in strategy development. The knowledge and experience gained by individual authorities could usefully be pulled together into an online resource library, which could grow over time for use by all in the future.

One sometimes hears the phrase 'raising expectations unrealistically' in relation to the statutory need to engage communities in plan-making. To keep the sceptics at bay, we will continue working to prove that engagement in policy making, undertaken within a managed and balanced framework, delivers positive outcomes for both planners and people.

There is nothing fundamental stopping high quality engagement in forward planning – it just needs more resolve, creativity, careful planning and empathy with the non-specialist audience.

*Elwyn is Chief Executive of Planning Aid Wales*

## How was it for us?

*Sarah Middleton shares the experiences of the Pembrokeshire Coast LDP*



*Above: Pembrokeshire Coast Examination at Newport, Pembrokeshire*

We have recently found ourselves in an unusual position - being the first local planning authority in Wales to start..... and finish the Examination Hearing sessions into our Local Development Plan. Having carefully negotiated our way through the new guidance and procedures, given our unwavering attention to every snippet of advice from PINS and WAG and kept everything tightly crossed to the point of it being utterly uncomfortable, we set forth to charter the unexplored territory of the Examination Hearings.

Getting to that point was no mean feat. Our timetable was intact but it had taken all our resources and a liberal sprinkling of perseverance to stick to the task we set in our Delivery Agreement. This, of course had been the starting point of our contact with our communities, who of course couldn't understand why we were consulting on how to consult them! We did get a response from some, but looking back you can't help but wonder how on earth anyone could give a considered response when really they knew very little about the system to start with. At the same time the consultation on the Delivery Agreement failed to flush out the fact that the statutory undertakers were not coping with the amount of consultations being thrown at them as each Local Authority embarked on its LDP preparation.

Our team is a small one, with just 3 planning officers, ably

supported by a Research and Monitoring officer who admirably took on the considerable task of Sustainability Appraisal. The fifth team member is our administrative assistant who led on getting the right bits of paper out to the right people – and at the right time. At least we were well into the process and beyond the Deposit stage when our Team Leader surprised us all by announcing that she was expecting a baby!

It took a concerted effort by the team to stick to the timetable, and as we negotiated the rules and regulations it emerged that some things just didn't work as expected. For example; At the alternative sites stage consultation, the statutory undertakers didn't know whether they were expected to respond. After all when submitting sites for consideration at the Deposit consultation the representors were supposed to have done all the legwork themselves. (We left the decision to them.) Then after all of the public consultation there are bound to be changes which need to be made to the Plan – not fundamental or minor – just common sense things that have emerged. Not to make the changes would be to make a mockery of the consultation itself, and yet we were discouraged post Deposit from making such changes.

There was a lot of criticism from the public about the process – and ultimately about the consultation methods. Many wanted more time (they had 8 weeks) with 3 months suggested

– but how do you square this with shorter preparation time?

The most contentious issue though was the tests of soundness. These were far too complex, even for many of the planning consultants to comprehend. People are naturally parochial and do not involve themselves with strategies. Neither are they interested in judging whether a Plan is 'Sound'. Front loading of engagement and consultation works for organisations and authorities but the ordinary man in the street or local landowner is not concerned about whether the inclusion of their land – or house for a family member is compatible with a strategy or if it has been sustainably appraised. For them the Deposit Plan was the first opportunity to view the detail and see if their land was 'in' or not.

Whilst these issues have emerged as Authorities have felt their way through the new system, the biggest plea of all must be – please don't change it again. There is little appetite for another press of the 're-set button' both by the planners and public suffering consultation fatigue. The public don't understand why we don't let the Plans run to their end date before setting off again. For most of us who have been planning for the last 20 years 'monitoring and review' are unused skills which we would now dearly like to develop. With a small amount of 'tinkering' the new system would be workable.

For those of you who have the daunting prospect of an Examination looming, it may not be as bad as you think. For our part we found this a big improvement on the old Inquiry method as it offered scope for debate on issues rather than single lines of objection. Our Inspector, Mr Barry Juniper led us calmly and collectively through a series of issues he wished to have considered - which occasionally led to new evidence being submitted by other parties, but a round table discussion allowed all to hear the range of views.

Now we're waiting on tender hooks for our Inspector's Report – oh and mother and baby are doing well!

*Sarah is Planning Officer at Pembrokeshire Coast NPA*

## A Private View

*Gareth Williams shares his experiences of acting both on behalf of LPAs and private clients.*



*Above: Gareth Williams*

NLP has been fortunate to act for both private sector and local authority clients at LDP Examinations during the past six months. Key themes that have emerged are:

- The robustness of the evidence base
- A strategy that flows logically from the evidence base
- It is not about having a 'better site'
- Front load evidence to avoid the need to be at Examination

Inspectors have not been shy in rigorously dissecting the justification for specific Plan objectives and supporting policies. The robustness of the evidence base is essential as is the need for it to be internally consistent and for policies to flow logically from it.

There are fewer formal requirements to undertake background studies, e.g. Employment Land Reviews, compared to England. This may be helpful when managing restricted budgets but can undermine the quality of the evidence base and thus justification for the plan strategy. WAG should give further guidance on whether key evidence base studies should be mandatory and what constitutes best practice.

It is no longer adequate to simply

roll forward housing sites from previous plans without proper scrutiny. Greater attention is required in demonstrating that housing sites are deliverable within at least the first 10 years of the plan period including the use of housing trajectories. The scope of JHLAS should be reviewed to address this issue as part of the plan preparation process.

Whilst there is a greater burden of proof on LPAs to justify their policies the quid pro quo is that if the evidence base is robust and policies flow effectively from it, it is more difficult for objectors to sustain amendments to the plan.

As a result promoting omission sites is far more difficult as you need to convince an Inspector that the plan is unsound without the allocation of that site. It is not about having a better site but demonstrating that the plan would be unsound without the promoted site.

To avoid potentially abortive Examination costs site promoters must engage in the early stages of plan preparation and 'front load' submission of supporting evidence. It is too late to be submitting key supporting evidence for a site at the Examination stage.

Similarly, there must be an onus on LPAs to demonstrate that they have rigorously and consistently examined the alternative sites options as part of the early LDP stages. A cross flow of information between LPAs and site proponents should be an essential element of the early stages of plan preparation.

*Gareth is Director at the NLP Cardiff Office.*

## The Home Builders' View

*Richard Price gives a perspective from the house building sector.*



*Above: Richard Price*

The LDP system in Wales has a number of positive features. The emphasis on deliverability and flexibility offers a good foundation for creating workable policies and the binding Inspectors report provides the checks and balances that are essential to producing a fair and just plan. That being said, there are still some fundamental problems that we believe need to be addressed.

Evidence gathering has shifted focus with the new system to a requirement for 'front loading'. In many cases this can be a very costly and risky process, particularly where expert services are required and the level of uncertainty in terms of the final decision is considerable. For the average member of the public this can also be a very arduous task and often requires the services of a professional in order to simply ensure their comments are 'duly made'.

For local authorities the process also has its difficulties. On the one hand, the Assembly Government requires the local authority to gather and meticulously analyse as much evidence as possible, but with the proviso that such tasks are completed in short and often unfeasible timescales. However, it would seem that local authorities do have the freedom to submit new evidence at any stage of the process which at least provides them with a little leeway, which is not afforded to others.

Turning attention to the concept of 'soundness', this now appears to represent 'adequateness', which severely compromises the creation of an optimal plan. For example, when promoting a housing site, the actual quality of the site is irrelevant provided the plan is still 'sound' with its current allocations. In effect, you have to try and prove that the whole plan is unsound without the inclusion of your site, which seems wholly excessive. This places site promoters at a severe disadvantage within the process and also leads to sub optimal allocations being given the green light.

In terms of process, the requirement for the Deposit plan to be virtually spot-on in terms of soundness before it is submitted for examination is a significant hurdle. After submission, the scope for major changes is minimal, which can lead to local authorities attempting to use the review process as an escape route. A major contributory factor to these issues is the disparity between Preferred Strategy and Deposit. The broad strategic character of the Preferred Strategy does little to inform the reader of the detailed content of the Deposit plan, which means any requirement for fundamental changes after submission can bring the process crashing to its knees. We believe a 'draft Deposit' would definitely help, even if it does sound a little too much like the previous system!

Finally, we would like to draw attention to the old adage that written representations carry equal weight to oral representations at the examination. This, we believe, is absolutely not the case. The chance to bolster arguments and respond to criticism provides the examination sessions with a clear advantage over a single written statement. In light of this, the importance of the examination session should be emphasised, with the advantages of attendance clearly set out.

*Richard is Planning and Policy Advisor - Wales for the Home Builders Federation*

# A Private Sector Perspective

Mark Roberts gives a view based on his work representing private interests in the LDP process.

Whilst I welcome the sentiments of the new LDP system which seeks to streamline and simplify the Development Plan process, from my experience I have reservations about whether this is actually being achieved in practice. I recall that the Welsh Assembly Government previously targeted the adoption of LDPs in Wales by the end of 2011, which now seems improbable given that the majority of authorities in Wales have yet to progress beyond the publication of a Deposit Plan. Whilst I will let Local Planning Authorities speak from their own experience, I would offer the following brief observations from the perspective of private landowners and developers engaged within the process.

A front-loaded evidenced based system requires not only Local Planning Authorities to make substantial investments in the preparation of LDPs but requires representors, particularly those seeking the promotion of new development sites through the



Above: Mark Roberts

Plan process, to undertake often costly survey work to support their sites. This is coupled with the need to undertake SEA and SA work and is akin to the level of supporting information one would normally expect to support a detailed planning application, which is particularly challenging to justify and secure within the current economic climate. This is particularly pertinent as the advice provided by the Welsh

Assembly Government has confirmed that it will be difficult to secure individual sites within plans, if the plan's general strategy, approach and evidence base is considered to be sound.

The tests of soundness appear to place Local Planning Authorities in a strong position in the drafting of Deposit LDPs given the requirement to demonstrate that the plan is sound regardless of the specific objections made. Put simply, it is somewhat of a challenge to demonstrate that the plan as a whole is unsound given the omission of the individual site you may be promoting. The remit of Inspectors serves only to consider whether the plan is sound and not to improve or refine the plan through a 'beauty parade' in the consideration of sites to be allocated. Accordingly, the system in my view favours Local Planning Authorities rather than placing representors on a level playing field in this regard.

On a positive note, it seems that the investment currently being made in the Development Plan

system from both public and private sectors in Wales has never been greater, although it remains to be seen whether this produces better plans. It also remains to be seen whether the Government's proposals for cost cutting within the public sector will be to the detriment of the substantial resources required in order to successfully progress an LDP through to adoption. Whilst I acknowledge that it is early days for the new regime, there is little evidence at present to suggest that the new system will achieve the objectives originally set by the Welsh Assembly Government although no doubt time will tell. I simply hope that the new system will be given sufficient time for all parties to become fully familiarised with the process before it is changed.

*Mark is Planning Director with RPS. The views expressed here are his own personal perspective, and not necessarily those of RPS.*

## Local Development Plan Progress in Wales

The Table below summarises where each local Planning Authority is in the move to developing a Local Development Plan.

The Information has been collected directly from Local Planning Authorities and was correct at the time of going to press.

**Blaenau Gwent:** Blaenau Gwent will be consulting on its Deposit Plan this autumn.

**Brecon Beacons:** The Deposit LDP was agreed for consultation by members of the Authority on 28 May. It is anticipated that the Deposit Plan will be published for an 8 week consultation starting in September.

**Bridgend:** Bridgend has produced and consulted on its LDP Pre-Deposit Proposals and is currently strengthening its evidence base in preparation for the Deposit LDP, which is anticipated to be published in the autumn.

**Caerphilly:** Hearings to Examine the Deposit LDP ran between April and June 2010. It is hoped that the Plan will be adopted by the end of 2010.

**Cardiff:** Following the withdrawal of the Cardiff LDP from the examination in April 2010 due to significant concerns raised by the Inspectors examining the Plan, the Council has started work on a new LDP and is due to consult on a draft Delivery Agreement in the near future.

**Carmarthenshire:** Following consultation on the Preferred Strategy and the consideration of responses, it was recently approved by Council and work is currently progressing on the production of the Deposit Plan scheduled for April 2011.

**Ceredigion:** The Council is hoping to place the LDP on Deposit in November 2010 with a view to submitting the plan for examination towards the end of the summer 2011.

**Conwy:** The Conwy LDP went on deposit in April 2009. Re-deposit following a review of strategy is programmed for November 2010.

**Denbighshire:** Following public consultation, the Site Allocation Representation Stage took place in May and June 2010. A report on the results will be taken to Council in September before submission to the Assembly in October. Examination is anticipated in spring 2011 and adoption of the LDP in the autumn of 2011.

**Flintshire:** Flintshire adopted their UDP 'in principle' in March 2010 subject to further representations being made by Councillors on a series of sites and policy issues. The matter will return to Council in June.

**Gwynedd:** Gwynedd Council adopted a UDP for the Gwynedd LPA area in July 2009. Discussions are currently taking place with Anglesey County Council to explore the possibility of preparing a Joint LDP.

**Merthyr Tydfil:** Following submission of the LDP in August 2009, Hearings commenced in November 2009; they were suspended in February until August to enable completion of agreed additional work. The consequential changes will be subject to further public consultation and a limited number of Hearings will resume in October; it is anticipated that the Inspector's report will be submitted in January 2011.

**Monmouthshire:** The Preferred Strategy was out for consultation last summer. The issue of the Deposit Plan is scheduled for autumn 2010. An informal consultation is currently being prepared on proposed rural housing allocations, which is due to take place in July.

**Neath Port Talbot:** The initial consultation on Issues is largely completed; the second Candidate Sites and Sustainability Appraisal Scoping document consultation is underway. The Pre-deposit Plan date is to be agreed.

**Newport:** The Preferred Strategy was consulted on between January and March 2010. Consultation on the Deposit Plan will take place in October and November.

**Pembrokeshire:** Pembrokeshire County Council published its Preferred Strategy for consultation in 2009 and intends to publish its Deposit LDP in autumn 2010.

**Pembrokeshire Coast:** The hearings for the Examination in Public finished on the 29 April 2010. It is hoped to be able to take the Inspector's report to the National Park Authority and adopt the LDP on the 29 September 2010.

**Powys:** The Powys Unitary Development Plan (2001-2016) was adopted on 1 March 2010. The process for preparing a Powys LDP has begun and it is anticipated that a Delivery Agreement will be in place by the end of 2010 with the aim of adopting the Powys LDP at the end of 2014.

**Rhondda Cynon Taf:** The LDP Examination sessions started on 11 May 2010 and are currently programmed to finish towards the end of July.

**Snowdonia:** The Eryri LDP was submitted for examination on 20 May 2010 and is the first in North Wales to reach this milestone. The Examination is expected to start in September and likely to last for three weeks.

**Swansea:** Preparation of the Swansea LDP will formally commence August 2010. In advance of this a Delivery Agreement has been approved, baseline data is being collected and assessments have been commissioned to inform the evidence base for the Plan.

**Torfaen:** The Deposit Torfaen LDP is expected to be out for public consultation at the end of 2010. The Council is currently working with the private sector to provide deliverability evidence in order for the Plan to be considered sound when placed on Deposit.

**Vale of Glamorgan:** The pre-deposit public consultation took place in January and February 2008 and the LDP strategy was approved by Cabinet in February 2010. It is anticipated that the Deposit LDP will be published for public consultation in spring 2011.

**Wrexham:** Wrexham's LDP will be on deposit from 4 June to 16 July 2010, with alternative sites due to be placed on deposit in January 2011, with submission in summer 2011 and Hearings in winter 2011/12.

**Ynys Môn:** The timetable in the revised Delivery agreement, signed off by WAG in January 2009, will not be met due to the need for the LDP to take into account the implications of major new developments focussing on renewable energy production - nuclear and wind and tidal power in the Irish Sea. Discussions are taking place between Ynys Mon and Gwynedd to prepare a joint LDP.

# We can't afford to build our way out of flooding...

Planners must step into the breach in the transition from flood defences to flood risk management, reports Karen Potter

On the 8 April, the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 received Royal Assent in UK Parliament; the Act will provide more comprehensive flood risk management for people, homes and businesses. In response, the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) is preparing a national strategy for flood and coastal erosion risk management.

Peter Jones (Head of Flood and Coastal Risk Management, WAG) emphasises that to deliver the risk management approach effectively will involve robust partnership working.

The importance of partnership working between planners and other key stakeholders was reaffirmed by all speakers at the RTPI Cymru Spring Conference, 'Planning for Flooding' in Llandudno. As the chair, Andrew Grime (Managing Director of Weetwood) indicated, this was possibly the first flood themed conference following the assent of the Flood and Water Management Act – the emerging requirements of the Act now need careful consideration across our

institutions.

Flood risk in Wales is high, although only 6.7% of land is at risk, this affects 1 in 6 buildings at an estimated value of over £10 billion. Chris Mills (Director of EA Wales) reminded delegates of events in New Orleans. Although building higher defences can lower the risk of flooding, this can encourage more intensive development resulting in more serious consequences should the defences be breached. Although TAN15 is working effectively as a planning tool in not adding to the burden with further inappropriate development on the floodplain - moving from fighting flooding to a more holistic approach is still in transition with EA Wales only currently having a 'strategic oversight' role. Planners can help by taking flood risk into account at the very earliest stage possible in development. Neil Taunt (EA Wales, Bangor) emphasised the resources and support available from the Agency to undertake such work as Strategic Flood Consequence Assessments (SFCA), although

he acknowledged that these were not a statutory requirement. Ruth Goodall from Capita Symonds confirmed, however, the benefits to the LDP process of having in place a sound and purposeful SFCA.

Ian Wyatt and Ryan Bowen (Welsh Water) discussed partnership working with developers, planners and engineers in realising opportunities to remove surface water from combined sewers and manage surface water in a more joined up and sustainable manner. However, Ian confirmed that the new act did not directly remove the automatic right to connect to public surface water sewers and that charging developers for downstream upgrades to their networks had no legal basis.

Adrian Philpott (EA Wales) was particularly interested in how strategic planning can help existing development at risk from flooding, including creating bluebelts through our towns, but the solutions are still far

from clear. Arthur Philp (ABI) highlighted the possible impact of climate change on annual losses, directing delegates to a new guide on flood resistant measures and resilient repair to properties after a flood. He reinforced the message that insurance is the last line of (flood) defence. Phil Dyke (Marine and Coast Advisor, the National Trust), was concerned that public policy remains stuck in 'the defend or do nothing' stalemate. Long term planning and public involvement is essential, working with not against nature – WAG needs our support and collaboration to deliver. As Chris Mills stressed, we have some very difficult decisions to make, we all need to work together and all of us have a role to play.

*Karen Potter is a PhD researcher at the University of Liverpool, and member of the RTPI Cymru Management Board.*

*The RTPI Cymru Spring Conference was sponsored by the Environment Agency Wales*

## The Planning Aid Conference 2010

Sarah Minnett tells us about the UK Planning Aid Conference held in Cardiff

The Planning Aid service holds a vital function within the community, enabling hard-to-reach groups to engage with the planning system. This year's annual Planning Aid Conference brought together Planning Aid staff, volunteers and trustees together with representatives from local community and voluntary groups from across the whole UK, seeking to determine how best it can improve the effectiveness of its role and focus activities where they are most needed. The conference was hosted by Planning Aid Wales in Cardiff, enabling key projects such as the Cardiff Bay regeneration to be showcased.

Jane Davidson, Welsh Assembly Government Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing, opened the event with a ministerial address. She highlighted the importance of the work that Planning Aid undertakes and congratulated delegates for their enthusiasm and ability to facilitate change

in the community. The Minister highlighted the Welsh Assembly Government's perspective on sustainability as its 'central organising principle'. She cited the 5th dimension of sustainability as "wellbeing", highlighting a key area where Planning Aid can contribute to national aims.

The first day of the conference sought to share examples of best planning practice around the UK to inspire, motivate and perhaps even enlighten delegates. Sessions included 'Food in the City' - which included a focus on the work of the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens in Wales and Newport City Council; a case study of 'Llammis' - a revolutionary low carbon development in Pembrokeshire; an example of a community enterprise scheme promoting micro-hydro power generation schemes in the Brecon Beacons; and two case studies of how Cardiff City Council planners and

Planning Aid England are utilising innovative techniques to engage with community groups, including young people, to improve their local areas.

The second day of the conference concentrated on exploring the priority areas that the different Planning Aid services should be focusing on and how this might be best achieved. Delegates engaged in lively debate in a workshop format, facilitated by key Planning Aid personnel from across the UK. The final plenary session was hosted by the animated conference chair from the University of Cambridge, Kelvin MacDonald. Mr, MacDonald summarised the workshop findings, highlighting the key opportunities for the Planning Aid service in Wales and the UK. Raising awareness of the service in the first instance was emphasised by Macdonald as a key area of focus. Another key opportunity to arise from the conference was the need to

build capacity and skills amongst communities, especially within hard-to-reach groups such as Gypsies and Travellers and Travelling Showpeople, to enable them to continue to engage with the planning system effectively after the Planning Aid volunteers' role has ended.

The findings of the conference will enable Planning Aid Wales to continue its work with more focus, to generate greater benefits for the communities with whom it works. As a Planning Aid volunteer, I found the conference both inspiring and informative and I know that I will use what I have learnt both in my professional life as well as in my continued voluntary work for Planning Aid Wales.

*Sarah is a volunteer with PAW. In her day job she works for Atkins as a Sustainability Consultant in the Cardiff office*

# Place Making in a Small Valleys Town

*Roger Tanner details the extensive plans for remaking places in a small Welsh town.*

History and topography have conspired to make Wales a land of small towns and villages. Only 23% of us live in cities (and relatively small cities at that). This is in dramatic contrast to most countries in the developed world and in particular to England, where the majority live in cities or conurbations.

This contrast is rarely remarked upon yet it is one of the most compelling arguments for devolved government in Wales. The planning and delivery of jobs, housing, health and educational services and above all transport poses quite different challenges in most of Wales to those facing large cities and urban conurbations.

It is high time, therefore, that a distinctly Welsh approach to urban planning and regeneration was developed, focussing largely though not exclusively, on the regeneration of small towns.

Immediately this reveals the scale of the challenge facing us in Wales, for while the new knowledge based economy has developed rapidly in big cities in recent decades, the inexorable trend towards centralisation and 'efficiencies' in both the private and public sectors has led to widespread closures of shops, post offices, cinemas, job centres and many other key features of urban life in smaller towns across the UK. While this presents difficulties everywhere it is particularly acute in Wales because of our lack of large cities.

On the plus side the countryside surrounding small towns generally provides a more amenable setting than the urban sprawl of the cities and the built environment is of a more human scale. In the centres of small towns in particular, building heights are from one to two times the width of the street, giving a non threatening sense of enclosure that contrasts with the urban canyons in many major city centres.

So, the urban challenge to planners in most parts of Wales is to retain the best features of our small towns while identifying new

roles that will support economic viability and a sustainable future. In most towns it will be a case of place 're-making' rather than the creation of new 'places'.

The rest of this article illustrates this approach in relation to one specific example of small town regeneration – in Bargoed in Caerphilly County Borough. Here the challenge is particularly daunting. The colliery that was the reason for Bargoed's existence closed in 1977. Little was done to regenerate the town over the next 18 years and in fact degeneration best describes the town's fate in that era, as the population declined, shops and businesses closed and services moved away. By 2001 the population total had declined by 40% from its peak of 13,901 in 1921.

The topography in Bargoed is both challenging and dramatic. The town is located on a slope on the west side of the Upper Rhymney Valley. The linear town centre itself runs south to north and is hemmed in by dense terraced housing to the west and a steep slope down to the Rhymney Valley railway line in the valley floor.

The starting point for Place Making should be the Local Development Plan. Caerphilly's LDP identifies five 'Principal Towns' each of which has a role providing some but not all of the retail, leisure, cultural, health, and educational services to serve the county borough as a whole. Bargoed is one of the 'Principal Towns' with roles in retailing, leisure and employment identified.

While the LDP identifies a role for Bargoed in the wider area, it sets key objectives for the urban environment in the county borough and allocates key sites, including a 2.2 hectare site in the town centre for mixed use, the details of 'Place Making' in Bargoed are to be found in Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) in the form of a Town Centre Action Plan. The Bargoed Town Centre Action Plan was adopted as SPG in April 2009. It is an update of an earlier Action Plan and incorporates

some of the suggestions arising from successive studies of the town centre over the past decade.

Caerphilly County Borough Council commissions surveys of shopping behaviour every three years to monitor the health of the County Borough's six largest town centres and the public's perception of them. The surveys, which date back to 1994 show a consistent pattern of decline in Bargoed, to the extent that the 22% of households who did their main food shopping in Bargoed in 1994 had shrunk to only 0.5% in 2008. Clearly, the main priority to restore the town centre to health would be a major injection of convenience shopping floorspace.

Accordingly, the LDP allocates a substantial 2.2 hectare site in Bargoed for retail and other town centre developments. Physically this takes the form of a plateau, which was recently created on the steep slopes east of the town centre by importing a quarter of a million tons of colliery waste across the valley. Plans are now being worked up for the implementation of phase 1 which should be completed by 2013. At the northern end of the plateau would be a multilevel development with parking on the plateau itself ('Level 1') a major 50,000 square foot foodstore on Level 2, together with another tier of parking, and unit shops on Level 3 which would front directly onto the main shopping street, Hanbury Road

*Below: Hanbury Road*



Functionally, to provide for a spatially balanced development the Action Plan identifies three complementary 'zones' within the town centre, though these are not rigidly defined. In the south is the New Retail Area, centred on the proposed 50,000 square foot foodstore. In the north, adjacent to a proposed public transport interchange (railway station, bus station, taxi rank, Park and Ride facility and cyclepaths) it is proposed to create a new 'Business Quarter' by attracting small and medium sized offices, giving Bargoed an enhanced role as an employment centre. In the middle of the town centre the emphasis in the 'Historic Core' will be on maintaining and enhancing the traditional architecture and street rhythm and providing a home for local independently owned businesses, to prevent Bargoed from turning into a 'Clone Town'. In this way Place Making will apply to distinct quarters within the town centre as well as creating a new image for the town as a whole.

One of the most spectacular proposals in the Action Plan is the conversion of Bargoed's only grade II\* listed building – the Hanbury Road Baptist chapel in the middle of the high street – into the town's main library. This move was necessitated by the demolition of the old library to make way for the retail development but its proposed re-location in the magnificent chapel building will ensure the survival of this centrepiece of the town's



Above: Hanbury Road Baptist Chapel

built heritage and provide a boost to the town's historic core by generating footfall. Its lift will also provide a DDA compliant link between the lower level car parks at the rear of the building with the shops on the high street. The proposal, which has listed building consent, will see the undistinguished rear façade of the building replaced by a consciously modern frontage (in accordance with the Action Plan's design philosophy) featuring views over the valley from the building's proposed café.

Bargoed's railway station and rail service have been upgraded to provide four trains an hour to Cardiff. The town's bus station, currently in the south of the town, is being moved to a location next to the railway station – in fact to a site directly on top of a new railway tunnel. The resulting transport interchange is complemented by a recently constructed 90 space Park and Ride facility.

In order for the new shopping development to have a positive, rather than negative effect on the rest of the town centre, it is essential that the new development is integrated as closely as possible into the town centre. This will be achieved by providing a direct frontage onto the high street. To achieve this, the town's unloved 1970s library building and twelve adjacent unit shops were acquired and demolished.

The steep topography of Bargoed presents a challenge for DDA compliance. This will be addressed by various means including travelators and lifts

between the various levels of the new retail development and a lift facility within the proposed library building. This provision will also tackle the problem that most of the parking in Bargoed town centre is 9 to 15 metres below the shopping street.

A huge £8 million programme of public realm improvements is planned in four phases over the next three years. Partly financed by EU Convergence funds, it will feature a fourfold increase in pavement width and include a spectacular new civic space and public artwork – features absent from the town centre when it was first created in the early years of the 20th Century.

As well as presenting problems, the topography also presents opportunities for dramatic visual effects. These will include a 55 metre long, four metre wide angled flight of steps linking the transport interchange with the high street, the multi-level nature of the new shopping development and new façades at the rear of the proposed library building and the former Woolworth store, taking advantage of the spectacular views across the valley where a country park is now emerging from the former colliery site. A pennant stone 'town wall' has been built around the edge of the retail plateau. Behind it is a three metre wide 'promenade' affording views over the valley. The promenade will eventually stretch the entire length of the town centre on its eastern edge.

Until the recently constructed relief road around the town was constructed, the high street served as the main

route for through traffic up the Rhymney Valley. It was flanked by pavements less than a metre wide. The removal of through traffic by the new road has enabled the high street to be made one-way and when the proposed pavement widening works take place the town centre will be transformed from a traffic dominated highway to a pedestrian friendly 'street'.

Design objectives at Bargoed include the desire to project a modern, dynamic image and at the same time avoid the trend to 'Clone Town' development and preserve and enhance a distinct local identity. Therefore different design philosophies apply to the new developments visible from the approaches to Bargoed on the one hand and the traditional high street on the other. The new developments, including the development on the retail plateau, the rear of the proposed library building and the transport interchange, will be built in an attractive modern style complemented by stainless steel street furniture. Part of the new retail development will front the high street, however, and here although the shops will be modern, the distinctive Edwardian street rhythm of 5 to 6 metre two storey frontages will be maintained. In the historic core, street furniture will be painted black, individual hanging signs will be a feature of shop signage and the library building will maintain its listed chapel façade



Above: Retail Plateau

almost unchanged.

A feature throughout the town centre will be the use of 'local' pennant stone, although only two quarries now supply the appropriate material – one in south Wales and one in the Forest of Dean. The 'town wall' for example is faced with pennant stone.

The impressive agenda for regenerating Bargoed would not be possible without generous funding support from the Welsh Assembly Government. Bargoed is located in The Heads of the Valleys strategic regeneration area and also qualifies for EU Convergence funding. The key factor, however, is that the various initiatives are being planned as a mutually supportive and coherent whole to attract private sector investment back into an area that has not known such investment for forty years.

The Council's triennial shopping surveys includes a question on how favourable respondents are towards their local shopping centre. In 2008 Bargoed's 'favourability' rating was just 26% (an improvement nevertheless over the low point of 20% in 2000). The test of whether the town's 'Place Making' plans have been successful or not will be the response to that question in the coming decade.

*Roger is Strategic Planning and Urban Renewal Manager at Caerphilly County Borough Council.*



# The Post War Planners – A Key Generation Recalled

*Reflections on the important legacy laid by post war planners*

A short while ago the Planning journal included an article focusing on a golden post war period of planning in the United Kingdom. This prompted Alwyn Williams, one of the longest serving members of RTPI Cymru to draw the attention of Cynllunio to the important work of the first generation of planners after the Second World War. That generation made an immense contribution to resolving the great problems of that time. They also laid the foundations of modern planning and we still benefit from their achievements today.

Alwyn Williams himself had a distinguished career beginning with early planning experience in the North of England before becoming the County Planning Officer of Glamorgan. Later, following local government reorganisation in 1974 he became County Planning Officer of Mid Glamorgan County Council, retiring in 1991 before the most recent reorganisation. He has served as Chairman of the former County Planning Officers Society for England and Wales, as well as active involvement with RTPI activities in Wales and beyond. Becoming a Fellow of the Institute, he fully deserved the detailed review of his career in the October 2005 edition of the former Planning Wales which can be viewed on the web. He is well placed to provide an overview of the work of post war planners, including the input made by ex servicemen.

The difficulty of the task which planning faced in 1945 is hard now to imagine. War damage meant that millions of homes needed replacement or repair. The infrastructure of the Nation was deeply damaged. There were limited

resources of money to pay for redevelopment. Also professional resources were greatly limited as so many who would have passed through technical or higher education had been called to the forces.

It would have been easy to despair or to tackle this daunting task in a timorous way. The extraordinary thing that happened in the 1940s was that the entire Nation seemed united in saying things would be restored and rebuilt not as before but new and better; in every way physically and socially. PLANNING and PLANNERS, with deserved capitals, were at the heart of that rebuilding.

The role of Lord Silkin was key to tackling the problems. He had served during the war years in the forces, in active duty in the Far East for Naval Intelligence. At the end of the war he became MINISTER FOR TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (yes we had our own Ministry then) from 1945 to 1950. He steered the Planning Act of 1947 through Parliament and anyone wanting a superbly intelligent explanation of why Planning is important can do no better than read his Parliamentary speeches during that process. The ability of this man was shown by the fact that he combined his Ministerial work with studying at Trinity College Cambridge from 1945 to 1948, gaining a BA and LLB.

Alwyn Williams recalls that in the post war years many ex servicemen like himself, as well as others wanting to work for a better future, saw planning as the way to tackle the immediate problems and to achieve progress. They wanted to become qualified town planners but at that time there were only three Universities

in Britain offering a full time degree course in planning (Durham, Manchester and London). A generation of committed new planners graduated from these universities, some having taken undergraduate courses, some as postgraduates from other disciplines and some having followed external courses. Some able individuals who could not secure a formal planning education still took their place in planning, learning on the job. This was the generation to implement the vital 1947 Planning Act. From their ranks came many of the Local Authority planning officers, Inspectors and consultants who oversaw post war reconstruction. Also the academics who staffed the growing number of planning schools, such as Cardiff, and so laid the foundations to train the men and women who became the planners now active in the profession.

It is also worth recalling that the process to release the talent of ex servicemen was assisted by the Government's 'British Further Education and Vocational Training Scheme' which helped them gain access and support to study at University. This was a far sighted use of scarce resources in post war Britain. A reminder if one were needed that spending on future skills is something to be prioritised, not cut, at times with difficulties to overcome.

Most of that post war generation had experience in different areas across the United Kingdom. However it would be remiss not to take this opportunity to mention some of the others, alongside Alwyn Williams, who made a particular contribution in Wales. All were respected members of the Institute,

including many ex officials and Chairmen of the former South Wales Branch. Some are sadly no longer with us. Individuals to be mentioned must include:

- Alwyn T Lloyd – the first Chairman of the South Wales Branch and a distinguished consultant;
- Les Hulley and Bill Unsworth – who had strong council careers later to develop the Welsh Office planning service;
- Ted Bland and James Kegie - who again had long careers leading up to periods as Chief Planning Officers at Glamorgan and Gwent
- Ewart Parkinson – former Chief Planning Officer of South Glamorgan, former President of the RTPI and a leading and active light in the development of International links for planning;
- Denis Harmer and Wyn Thomas O.B.E. - whose work as consultants set high standards for that activity.

There are certainly many others who merit recognition alongside those listed. The focus, drawing on Alwyn's knowledge is related especially to South Wales. Perhaps a Branch member from the North can provide an equivalent account of major post war planning figures from there for a future article.

Hopefully this article will act as a reminder that the planners of today inherit a long tradition to which no generation has given more than those planners who joined the profession in the post war years.

## Events Corner

**Calculating the Viability of Housing for Assessing Affordability**

Wednesday 21 July, 2-4.30pm

Location: County Hall, Mold

The North Wales Chapter's summer event will discuss housing viability. Speakers include Ian Carruthers from the Valuation Office and Phil Dansen from the North Wales Housing Association.

Cost: £10.00

See: [www.rtpi.org.uk/rtpi\\_cymru](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/rtpi_cymru)

**Regeneration in Action**

Friday 6 August

Location: The Works Offices, Ebbw Vale

In support of the Eisteddfod Genedlaethol, RTPI Cymru will be holding a morning seminar to discuss examples of regeneration from around Wales. Simultaneous translation will be available.

See: [www.rtpi.org.uk/rtpi\\_cymru](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/rtpi_cymru)

**RTPI Independent Consultants' Network meeting with Planning Inspectorate Wales**

Friday 2 September, 2-5pm

Location: Conwy Business Centre, Llanduno Junction

This free, short, informal event offers an opportunity for independent consultants to meet with John Davies (PINS Director for Wales) to discuss issues arising in their day to day work. It is primarily aimed at independent consultants (i.e. chartered town planners running their own small consultancies, either as sole practitioners or small businesses) but should space allow we will open it up to others. Topics to be discussed on the day will include:

- Householder Appeal Service Pilot
- New Procedures - Environmental Impact Assessments and bespoke timetables
- Hearings - choice of procedure
- Timetabling problems

- Delays with hearings and decisions
- Consistency of decision making
- Affordable Housing Obligations v. viability of Development

It will be possible to raise other questions on the day. This will be a roundtable discussion and participation will be encouraged.

Please book online: [www.rtpi.org.uk/ct/EVENT/946/11/events/946](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/ct/EVENT/946/11/events/946)

**Planning Summer School: Planning to Live Within Our Means**

3-11 September

University of York

[www.planningsummerschool.org.uk](http://www.planningsummerschool.org.uk)

**Planning for a Healthy Wales**

Thursday 28 October

Location: Dylan Thomas Centre, Swansea

Price: £40

The Chartered Institute of Environmental Health in Wales and RTPI Cymru have

teamed up to organise this joint seminar drawing together professionals with common goals in delivering a healthy Wales.

The Day will discuss issues including area renewal, the new environmental noise Directive, the practical application of health impact assessments and how to tackle the health effects of climate change.

See: [www.rtpi.org.uk/rtpi\\_cymru](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/rtpi_cymru)

**RTPI Cymru Annual Dinner**

Friday 26 November

Location: Parc Hotel, Cardiff  
This year's annual conference has moved to the Parc Hotel, Cardiff. Further details will be available shortly.

**Diary Markers:****RTPI Cymru AGM**

Friday 3 December

Further details will be available shortly.

**Wales Planning Conference 2011**

Tuesday 7 June 2011

Location: City Hall Cardiff

# Young Planners Heading to Cardiff in Autumn 2010

Andrew Charles updates us on plans to hold the 2010 UK Young Planners Conference in Cardiff.

*Wish you were here...*

<http://www.rtpi.org.uk/wales-young-planners/>



Following a fantastic conference in Newcastle in 2009, young planners across the UK will this year be invited to visit one of Europe's youngest cities, Cardiff, for what the organisers are hoping will be one of the best RTPI national Young Planners' conferences yet.

The 2010 Conference is being championed by Young Planners Cymru (YPC), the group representing the RTPI Young Planner's network in Wales. The theme for the 2010 conference will be 'Local Distinctiveness', and the conference will seek to address and debate a number of questions around this theme:

- What is local distinctiveness?

- What isn't local distinctiveness?
- Why is it important?
- Who decides on whether a development is locally distinctive?
- Can a development plan or local planning policy be locally distinctive?
- What tools can we use to enable locally distinctive policies and developments?

There is a clear expectation in national planning policy throughout the UK for the planning system to reflect local distinctiveness in local planning policy, guidance and day to day decision making at the local level.

Is it sufficient to argue that the plan making process or development control decisions already reflect the local needs and character of an area but the renewed focus and even rebranding of the development plan process would suggest a clear steer from government as to the importance of such a theme

As such, the fundamental questions that will be explored at the conference will be What is local distinctiveness? and even What is not locally distinctive? Is it far easier to say what isn't locally distinctive than to define what is? And how is the planning system achieving local distinctiveness and how can we check?

A little bit more detail about the conference etc....:

The conference will be held in Cardiff in October 2010, with keynote speakers including Ann Skippers (RTPI President 2010), Jane Davidson AM (Minister for Environment, Sustainability and Housing) and will include

a variety of workshops and speakers from throughout the UK, all of which will be seeking to explore the themes outlined above. The conference will also give delegates an opportunity to go on a number of study tours in and around Cardiff, such as Cardiff Bay.

This is a conference which should be of interest to all those young planners involved across the profession and as the organising group have said:

"We may not find the answers to the question, but we are sure going to enjoy having a go!"

More detailed information on the conference will be made available in the coming weeks. Please visit the conference website here for further information:

[www.rtpi.org.uk/item/1330](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/item/1330)

To keep up to date on the progress of the conference please sign up to the Young Planners Cymru: [info@youngplannerscymru.org](mailto:info@youngplannerscymru.org)

# Transforming the Waterfront

Simon Gilbert introduces the new RTPI Tourism and Regeneration Interest Group



Above: Cardiff Bay Aquabus

The RTPI Regeneration Network has set up a Tourism and Regeneration interest group for anyone who is interested in or has experience of how tourism can aid regeneration. The group exists to provide a source of information and expertise on this topic. So far the group has organised two study visits (with one being the visit to Cardiff), set up a webpage with resources on this topic, and written a case study about the regeneration of Brighton. New members are welcome: please contact [regeneration@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:regeneration@rtpi.org.uk) for more information.

Cardiff has seen a dramatic transformation over the past two decades with the waterfront regeneration of Cardiff Bay and the recently completed St David's Centre elevating the city's profile as a top UK retail and leisure destination. In May 2010, the RTPI Regeneration Network organised a study visit to the area, to see at first hand some of the changes to the waterfront.

Landmark developments such as the Millennium Stadium and Wales Millennium Centre are boosting Cardiff's reputation as a tourism and leisure destination. Hotel bedspaces in the capital have risen by over 40% in the last ten years and events

such as the 2009 Ashes Test and the 2010 Ryder Cup are all contributing to Wales's growing reputation as a host for major sporting and cultural events.

The visit took in the developments and attractions around Cardiff's waterfront. Participants travelled in a Cardiff Water Taxi to see the Cardiff Bay Barrage and along the River Taff past the Millennium Stadium to Bute Park. They returned on foot, taking a short stroll through the park to absorb the gothic splendour of Cardiff Castle before arriving at City Hall for a presentation and discussion.

During the discussion, participants covered the following topics:

- Use of water as an amenity and transport asset
- Recognising tourism and development potential of industrial heritage
- Architectural quality and the need for design to be at the heart of sustainable regeneration and placemaking
- The benefits of having a design 'champion'
- Promoting indigenous growth in areas such as the media, arts, creative industries and the knowledge economy

- Economic uncertainty and the impact upon land use, density and design quality
- Developing balanced, mixed-use communities
- How Cardiff will manage the southern expansion of the city centre and integrate with traditional communities
- Opportunities for sustainable transportation locally, regionally and nationally
- How strategic infrastructure can provide the environment and confidence for investment

Feedback from the study visit included "Enjoyed the informality of the event especially the discussion

Below: Cardiff Bay Waterfront



/ presentation where the format was very good. Team of presenters and break up of event into activities. A good template for other events...[It would be] Good to have a follow up event 3-5 years time and maybe a regional comparison event Bristol / Gloucester in the near future." It will be interesting to see how the Waterfront is transformed further in future, and how those changes affect the surrounding area.

To find out more about the Regeneration Network or the interest group, including how to join, please visit [www.rtpi.org.uk/regeneration](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/regeneration). Members of the Network receive a weekly email bulletin with topical regeneration news, get priority booking on the free Network study visits and roundtable discussions (held all over the UK), and have the opportunity to work with other Network members in interest groups.

*Simon is Team Leader with responsibility for preparing Cardiff's City Centre Strategy, planning policy and regeneration frameworks for the city centre and Cardiff Bay.*

# Volunteering for Planning Aid Wales: Caerphilly Miners District Hospital

*Helen Ridgeway provides an update on a Planning Aid Wales project and how this has contributed to her career development*



*Above: Caerphilly Miners District Hospital*

For Cynllunio's predecessor, I wrote an overview of the Caerphilly District Miners' Hospital project that I worked on as part of my Masters in Planning Practice and Research Three years on and now as a volunteer for Planning Aid Wales (PAW), I continue to be heavily involved with the community group striving to protect the original building for an alternative community use, once the hospital moves next year. This article gives an update on the progress being made by the community group's Management Committee and allows me to reflect on some of the benefits of being a PAW volunteer.

I, along with two other PAW volunteers, Katherine Hughes and Davina Powell, advising the Management Committee on planning matters have built upon the work of the initial feasibility study undertaken three years ago. Over this time, the main focus has been to promote a community facility through the emerging Local Development Plan (LDP) but also to further develop the interest and support of the community.

The deposit LDP proposes that the Miners' Hospital site is allocated solely for residential development. We have prepared a series of representations that seek to maintain the original building, The Beeches, and

support its redevelopment as a new facility for the whole community. To accompany the representations we have undertaken consultation with the Countryside Council for Wales, the Environment Agency, Cadw (now part of the Welsh Assembly Government) and Glamorgan Gwent Archaeological Trust to inform the Sustainability Appraisal. Last month, Katherine Hughes along with the Head of Community Investment for United Welsh Housing Association, Steve Cranston, appeared at the LDP Hearing on behalf of the Management Committee.

Apart from the work for the emerging LDP, we have also provided the Management Committee with advice on how to engage with the wider community to understand the needs of the community and to foster further

support for potential future uses. We have written articles for the local free newspapers and magazines and also undertaken a number of surveys through these media and door to door questionnaires.

More recently, we have set up a website which keeps the community up to date with what the Management Committee has been doing and what progress has been made. The website is updated regularly and includes a selection of personal stories which emphasises what the Miners' Hospital means to the community. A facebook group to complement the website has also been set up and has been a useful tool to gathering the interest of wider members of the community. Two of the Borough's newspapers have run a variety of stories such as reporting on the two coffee mornings that we have held.

Earlier this year, the Committee appointed Gareth Kiddie Associates to undertake an in-depth feasibility study to research a variety of different options for the community facility, to undertake a viability analysis and a sustainability critique of the preferred options and then to provide recommendations for the mix of uses which could be pursued. In addition, the Management Committee and PAW volunteers have been working closely with United Welsh Housing Association as preferred affordable housing

providers in this location.

Perhaps the most important milestone achieved to date is that as a result of discussions with the Health Minister, Edwina Hart, there is now a firm commitment from the Welsh Assembly Government to support the acquisition of the original building by the Management Committee. The support has provided the Management Committee with a very strong foundation to continue working towards its vision which was not only used to demonstrate to the LDP Inspector that there is a realistic option for redeveloping the building as a Community Facility but it also means that should the Plan be adopted without the mixed use residential and community provision allocation, the Management Committee can continue to have the opportunity to work towards providing a facility.

The full feasibility study recommendations will be made during the summer and providing the outcome is positive we will continue to work with the stakeholders and continue to capture the momentum that has been built up throughout the community. The Inspector's report of the LDP will be published towards the end of this year.

At a personal level, I have worked as a planning consultant since graduating and have found my job both varied, challenging and rewarding. However, in that guise I have yet to have the opportunity to work directly with a community group and as such my role as a volunteer complements my day-to-day work. I have particularly strengthened my skills in community and stakeholder engagement. This work has also allowed me to demonstrate an increased scope and depth of experience for the Assessment of Professional Competence for membership application to the RTPI. The experience used for my voluntary role has been mainly developed from my full time position. However, I also think that the volunteering experience has helped my work as a planning consultant and together provide a well rounded basis to my career.

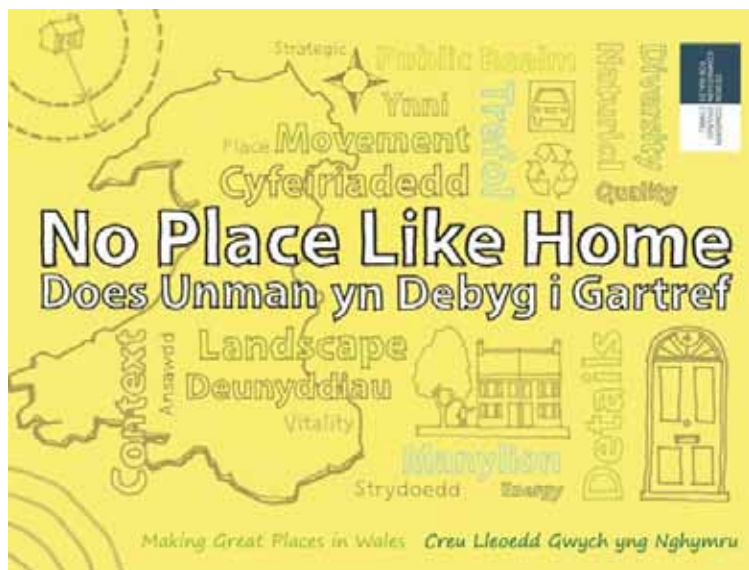
*Below: Members of the management committee at the exhibition*



*Helen is a planner at Nathaniel Lichfield and Partners*

## “No Place Like Home”

With its new publication “No Place Like Home” launched at the Wales Planning Conference, DCFW tackles decision making for our most important place, head on. It is unashamedly populist, it’s not all planning and design-speak and it’s not three feet thick. Carole-Anne Davies explains why:



The importance and challenge of delivering good quality residential development that is well laid out, connected and properly served by good amenities looms large. As a key component in a good place, good housing design continues to be a strong theme for us in our pursuit of excellence in everyday development as well as in the stand-alone star projects. Our population is set to rapidly expand in the capital and elsewhere, so housing is increasingly important – and not just as our most significant built form or market commodity. Good homes will need to form the heart of good, sustainable neighbourhoods. That’s why our new booklet is accessible in approach, tone and language and is designed to inspire

everyone in aiming for everyday excellence in the places we call home.

In our workshops at the conference Wendy Richards and I made no apology for grabbing delegates’ attention with a clip from the 1939 movie classic *The Wizard of Oz*, when Dorothy awakes to find all her adventures were just a terrible dream and she’s really still at home, safe and sound. When we asked delegates to jot down the things they associated with home, the words that occurred most frequently were comfort, family, friends, safety, privacy, loved ones. No one mentioned legibility, permeability, adequate parking or multi-agency access routes. Funny that.

It seems we step over our



Above: Dolgellau

thresholds in the morning as people emerging from the comfortable havens we share with those close to us and by the time we enter our workplaces, we’ve forgotten who we are and from whence we came. Suddenly we are looking at schemes, units, density, access, parking and highways. Even when we ask the right questions – What kind of place will this be? Is the character appropriate for this context?, Are the materials of the right quality? – we are disconnected. We forget that we are people, making places for other people. We forget that the decisions we make, the questions we ask – or don’t ask – will have a huge effect on the kinds of homes and places that will get built. No Place Like Home is about re-connecting; remembering what it is we are actually doing and the impact of our decisions. We’re making decisions about places that could be there for a very long time.

At the conference, in an entertaining panel discussion on the proposed motion, we heard how the private sector could take the lead in delivering great places, and let’s face it they do deliver some great stuff. For a moment there we were hooked. We saw public squares and sparkling new high street retail, great parks and award winning buildings. On balance though we didn’t see too many great homes, streets, town and village centres and yes, we know this medium scale stuff just isn’t that sexy. Trouble is, it’s the medium scale stuff – or to put in another way, our homes, public realm, parks and places – that are commonplace in a small country.

Taken together, the impact of the everyday is enormous.

The Commission is seeing more evidence that we know how to get this right but we’re not there yet. We must maintain the focus on ensuring that design for residential development, from all sectors, is as good as it possibly can be; that it reflects local distinctiveness and responds to the context in which it sits.

Local authorities need to be clear about what they aspire to in their areas and state that they expect good quality. We must work together across professions, departments and agencies to use the design skills, good policy and guidance tools we have, to best effect. We need to remember how important our homes are to us throughout our lives and through the generations. We need to deliver places we can sustain, places we can cherish and of which we can be proud. So next to time you step out of the door and head off to work, remember that today and everyday you are in the extremely powerful position of deciding on matters that deeply affect the quality of people’s lives. Remember that places are for and about people, and that there really is no place like home.

*Carole-Anne is Chief Executive of the Design Commission for Wales.*

*More information about No Place Like Home is available from Wendy Richards at DCFW. The booklet is free of charge from DCFW and can be downloaded in PDF from [www.dcfw.org](http://www.dcfw.org)*

Below: Blaenavon



# Wales Planning Conference 2010



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