



Birmingham Gateway wins RTPI Regional Award

Partnership was the watchword of this year's RTPI Regional Awards, with Birmingham City Council and Network Rail connecting in harmony to win the overall prize for their proposals for Birmingham New Street Station in the heart of the city.

What's more the runner up prize went to a partnership of Birmingham City Council and Bromsgrove District Council for their work on the Longbridge Action Area Plan, which received a commendation.

The awards which were presented by the RTPI National President, Ann Skippers, and were sponsored once again by Alliance Planning, were held at the Botanical Gardens in Birmingham as part of the very successful RTPI Summer Reception and Ball.

The event, which was sold out weeks beforehand, represented an excellent opportunity to acknowledge the good work

which has been undertaken over the last year to regenerate and create places in the West Midlands, whilst at the same time allowing planners to enjoy a warm summer evening in beautiful surroundings – and a live band of – yes, planners!.

This year, for the first time, there was a special 'Oscars' theme to the event, with guests attending in evening dress, being welcomed by paparazzi photographers and the dinner being followed by a whole host of prestigious awards. (More about this inside).

Thanks must go especially to GVA Grimley who was the 'lead' sponsor for the event, but also to No5 Chambers, JMP Planning, the Homes & Communities Agency and Atlas who sponsored the individual awards. Last but not least Sue Griffith Jones and the organising team deserve special mention for the smooth and efficient organisation of the Summer Reception and Ball. Let's do it all again next year! 🏠



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Chair's remarks

The pace of government announcements has certainly picked up over the last couple of months and barely a day seems to go by without a new initiative around planning or a further dismantling of the previous 'big government' architecture making the headlines. However, despite all the announcements, I'm not sure that any great detail is emerging in terms of what the future planning system under the coalition government will truly look and operate like. To my mind, this lack of detail actually tells us quite a lot – the new system has started to arrive already and will be shaped at a local level rather than a national or regional one. Those of you who are standing by and waiting for more detail from government before you begin to act may well be left disappointed. The clear message to me is that we are being expected to get on with things and effectively make it up as we go along. There seems to be two ways of looking at this as a profession: either we stand on the sidelines and complain that this is unfair and we need greater certainty and detail to be able to plan the future of our areas; or we grasp the nettle and start to demonstrate that we are flexible and dynamic and able to respond to a challenge. Having discussed this matter with Ann Skippers during her recent brief visit to the West Midlands, I am reassured that the approach of the RTPI is the correct and more positive one. We may all have reservations about many of the announcements being made, but if we are a constant negative voice against anything new, we will soon be sidelined and overlooked. The RTPI are taking the stance of welcoming the positive aspects of the changes being made, whilst pointing out caution where necessary in an attempt to influence the agenda from a proactive stance.

The challenge for us all is therefore to consider what localism means to planning. To me it means putting a greater emphasis on truly engaging with local people and communities rather than simply consulting them. It means thinking about the needs and requirements of our towns, cities and districts and addressing them through public/private partnership. In short, we have an opportunity to shape our own agendas locally and failure to respond could not only be damaging to our economic recovery and quality of life but could significantly

damage the view of the planning profession by the powers that be.

This plea to approach the current uncertainties with as much positivity as possible is not in any way to belittle the problems and difficulties currently faced by many organisations and individuals within the region, particularly within the public sector. I am acutely aware that many planners are either under threat of losing their job or are finding it increasingly difficult to gain a foothold in the profession. We as a Regional RTPI need to respond to these challenges and we will be looking hard over the coming months how we can help support those out of work and how we collectively can sharpen our skills and knowledge to respond to the emerging agenda. The W.Mids Young Planners have already started to respond and I have to

congratulate them on holding a recent seminar to assist young planners seeking work.

On a positive note, the recent Summer Ball gave us an opportunity to celebrate the successes of planning across the region and there are more details on the awards contained in this edition of Tripwire. It was fantastic to see such a good turnout from all sectors of the profession, for what was a truly enjoyable evening. It was certainly a fitting event to acknowledge the substantial contribution that the editor of this esteemed publication makes to the planning profession in the W.Midlands and I was very pleased to present John Acres with the Chairman's Award. John's commitment to the RTPI is second to none and he has been immensely helpful to me personally since joining the Regional Activities Committee and is equally helpful and supportive to anyone else requiring advice and assistance on all matters RTPI. John to me epitomises the qualities of many of the volunteers within the Regional RTPI who ensure that it is an active region. Over the remaining months as Chairman I will be hoping to encourage greater involvement by as many of you as possible in the activities of the region as I firmly believe that this is an important time for us to stick together as a profession - the more we support one another, the stronger we can become collectively and the better placed we will be to face the challenging times ahead. 🏠

Stephen Hill

West Midlands Regional Chair



The RTPI Regional Award Winner - A new Gateway for the City

The Birmingham New Street Station Project, which will transform the centre of Birmingham and provide a new 'welcome' to the City, is the winner of this year's RTPI West Midlands Award for Planning Achievement.

The prestigious award which was sponsored by Alliance Planning, was received at last month's RTPI West Midlands Summer Reception and Ball by Councillor Timothy Huxtable, Birmingham City Council's Cabinet Member for Transport and Regeneration, who was joined by Carol Stitchman, Head of Design for the project at Network Rail and Andrew Round, Head of City Centre Development at Birmingham City Council.

The Judging Panel this year comprised Steve Hill (our regional Chair), Annabel Stott (Chair of the West Midlands Urban Design Forum) and Claudia Clemente (a member of the Young Planners Group).

This exciting and impressive scheme will provide:

- Room for even more passengers to use the station in comfort
- More accessible, brighter and clearer platforms reached by new escalators and lifts
- A grand concourse three and a half times bigger than at present, enclosed by a spectacular, giant, light-filled atrium
- An iconic new station façade, building on Birmingham's growing tradition of leading-edge design

- Better links to and through the station for pedestrians, with eight entrances
- The stimulus for the physical regeneration of the areas surrounding the station leading to the potential creation of over 10,000 new jobs across the city.

From the outset, the City Council's Planning & Regeneration Service have been instrumental in ensuring that the redevelopment of New Street Station is more than just a rail infrastructure project. As Councillor Huxtable said in receiving the award; *'The great news is that the transformation of Birmingham New Street station is underway and the Government has reiterated its support and funding for the project. Construction on site started in April and Network Rail's project team are currently removing more than 7,500 tonnes of concrete from the car park next to the station to create a new concourse. Work has also started to refurbish the first of New Street's 12 platforms'*.

The £600 million project is a true partnership to develop an integrated transportation and regeneration project and it will see New Street station transformed into a bright, modern, 21st century focal point for Birmingham.

We can anticipate Birmingham Gateway receiving national and international awards when the project is completed. Congratulations to all concerned. 🏆

Longbridge Action Area Plan receives Commendation

Birmingham City Council and Bromsgrove District Council have both received a commendation at the RTPI Regional Planning Awards for their work on the Longbridge Area Action Plan.

The Award which was again received by Councillor Tony Huxtable, Cabinet Member for Transport and Regeneration at Birmingham City Council, reflects the impressive achievement of the two authorities and best practice in cross-boundary collaboration and partnership working which has been a hallmark of the preparation of the Plan.

The Action Plan has been the vehicle by which the tragedy of massive unemployment and the loss of an internationally known car plant at Longbridge has been turned into an exciting vision for the future. The new spatial planning process has proved to be effective in achieving the regeneration of Longbridge and in giving local people a positive role in determining a new future for their community.

Planning has been the catalyst to deliver economic recovery and a new heart for Longbridge. The result has been an exemplar plan that is effective, flexible and deliverable, prepared in a timely manner, in response to an unexpected crisis.

The Action Plan has a strong emphasis on place-making, seeking a high quality built environment and a well-designed public realm. The schemes now coming forward for the local centre and college have caught the imagination of the public. This shows that the policies in the Plan are being turned into reality, and planning can be a driver for the highest quality sustainable regeneration.

Two years ago, the first Area Action Plan to be adopted in England won the regional award; now the first cross-boundary Area Action Plan to be adopted is in the West Midlands and has also been recognized in our Awards. 🏆

Those Awards in full

TEAM OF THE YEAR: Key criteria Must have demonstrated high achievement; outstanding and innovative work; implemented good planning practice; and demonstrated a strong team ethos.



Team of the Year: DLA Piper; David Brammer of DLA Piper with Sandra Ford (Atlas and RAC Committee member).

Winner: DLA Piper. For their work on planning law across the region in both the public and private sector. Providing free legal training alongside a number of the professional institutes; including especially the RTPI Young Planners, working with No5 Chambers in a new 'pro bono' initiative to provide planning guidance, as well as their involvement on several high profile projects across the country.

Other nominations for Team of the Year: Defence Estates Planning and Development Team, Stratford on Avon Planning Policy Team, CSJ Brooke Smith Ltd, Calfordseadon and Orbit HA and Planning Aid West Midlands

CONSULTANCY OF THE YEAR: Key criteria.. Measured against the quality of their work; how they have improved the profile of planning within the W Midlands; the extent to which they have demonstrated professionalism; and promoted good planning practice generally.



Consultancy of the year: Entec; Clive Harridge and the Entec Team.

Winner: Entec For continuing to demonstrate and develop a broad and diverse client base, playing a significant planning role in a number of local councils within the region and for carrying out high quality master planning work alongside local communities and public sector

colleagues on a variety and wide range of projects within the West Midlands whilst maintaining a commitment to research and general planning advice nationwide.

Other nominations for consultancy of the Year; Barton Willmore Partnership, CSJ Brooke Smith and Alliance Planning.


LOCAL PLANNING AUTHORITY OF THE YEAR. Key Criteria. Must have demonstrated an exceptional, professional approach to their work; a commitment to sustainable development; a proactive attitude; and a general appliance of good planning practice across the board.



Local Planning Authority of the Year: Shropshire Council; Dyanne Humphreys & Martin Guard from Shropshire Council.

Winner: Shropshire Council for demonstrating a unique display of adaptability and commitment to continued service to their area in times of particular local upheaval. They have proven that development control (or management) can be a positive force to assist in the delivery of sustainable development and this has been epitomised by the efforts of their Southern Area Team and in particular Dyanne Humphreys.

Other nominations for Local Authority of the Year: Birmingham City Council, The Black Country Consortium, Warwick and Stratford District Councils.

SPECIAL CHAIRMAN'S AWARD. Winner John Acres. Editor of Tripwire and twice Chairman of the RTPI West Midlands. Regional Committee Member since 1996. 



Special Chairman's Award; John Acres, Tripwire Editor, with his partner Jenny and Hon. Secretary, Paul Harris.

Birmingham appoints new Development Director


Mark Barrow has been appointed as the new Development Director at Birmingham City Council to succeed Colin Dutton, who has moved to become the new Chief Executive at Newham Borough Council in London.

Mark Barrow who, until now, was Chief Executive at Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council will be looking after strategic management to ensure the successful delivery of the City's regeneration, development, planning and



transportation strategy as well as its climate change functions.

Cllr Whitby in announcing the appointment said that 'Recruiting the correct person to this role was of critical importance in helping to develop our economy, quality of life, global status and role as a regional leader, both now and for the future'.

In our next issue, we hope to provide a feature on Mark and his ambitions for the City. 

Picture Gallery



What is Charlotte Saying to Gavin Gallagher? Answers by email to the editor at acresclark@lineone.net. The best entry will receive a special prize and be printed in the next edition.

The demise of Regional Planning

Things are changing very fast! It took decades to build a culture of co-operation and consensus within the West Midlands, it took years to prepare the latest Regional Strategy and it took months to hear and then consider the detailed evidence from the Independent Examination in Public, but it only took weeks to dismantle the whole process.

In our last issue of Tripwire, following the warning on 27th May by the Secretary of State, Eric Pickles, that he intended to abolish Regional Spatial Strategies, we asked 'Is this the end of Strategic Planning as we know it?' Then, on 6th July 2010, he issued a statement indicating that he had formally revoked all the RS's across the country. Since then local authorities, including those in the West Midlands, have been rethinking their Local Development Frameworks and in some cases reviewing their positions. Some may continue as before, others may start again. For the most part, developers have stopped making key decisions about investment until the picture is more clear and planning consultants are scratching their heads trying to decide what advice they can give against a background of total confusion. The whole planning system has been thrown into complete chaos.

Since the last issue of this magazine, most of the Regional Planning staff have been put onto formal notice and many have now gone. The Leaders Board will continue with a token staffing, undertaking essential functions necessary to co-ordinate activities. The closure of the Government Offices has been announced and the Audit Commission and the National Housing & Planning Advice Unit have been abolished.


The West Midlands RSS has therefore been formally revoked, subject to a possible High Court Challenge currently being mounted by Cala Homes, and the

'conformity' function has been disbanded. No formal strategic planning work is now being undertaken. So within a matter of weeks regional planning has been brought to a standstill.

There are however some crumbs of comfort:-

- Technical and monitoring information is still available and the evidence base behind the RSS is regarded by civil servants as still being important.
- Officers' groups, staffed by individual local authorities, are still being convened to provide a background and strategic overview for local Councils,
- There is scope for parts of the RSS to be woven into emerging LDF's, which would otherwise contain no strategic context, and
- Regional Housing Strategies remain alive and Strategic Housing Market Assessments and other strategic documents, including the RSS EIP evidence will continue to provide a valuable evidence base to local Councils.

More significantly and perhaps inevitably, new partnership bodies are beginning to emerge through the Local Enterprise Partnerships, based on sub-regional groupings. So as has so often been said in the past; if Regional planning did not exist, it would have to be re-invented.

As we look forward, with the Comprehensive Spending Review set to slash Council's budgets, the Government's intention to incentivise new development through the New Homes Bonus Scheme seems likely to thrust planning and planners much more into the spotlight. Local Councils may soon realise that growth is the only option to support local funding on any scale and that investment is the key to creating a vibrant economy and a modern infrastructure. Pity though, that it may take the disintegration of the planning system to achieve it. 

2nd Sub-regional Planning Debate – Leamington Spa

If you had 2 minutes with Mr Cameron or Mr Pickles, what key areas would you focus upon to convince them of the value of planning? This was the opening question at the Second Chairman's Debate held on the 17th June 2010 at Warwick Town Hall, in Leamington Spa, which inevitably was somewhat overshadowed by the famous 'Pickles letter' heralding the end of Regional Planning.

Despite being held on a warm summer evening, during the World Cup competition, the event was nevertheless attended by a full house of around 60 planners and there was a lively and interesting exchange of views.


The Panel was chaired by Steve Hill, the RTPI West Midlands Chairman who was joined by Ian Dove QC (from N05 Chambers and former Leader of Warwick DC), Clive Harridge (former RTPI President and Director of locally based Entec), Gary Stephens (Chief Planner of Warwick District Council), Alistair Thornton (Young Planners' Group) and John Acres (Editor of Tripwire and former Regional Chairman).

Indeed, many of the questions focused on the impending abolition of Regional Planning, the content of the Conservative Party's 'Open Source Planning Paper' and the implications this could have for the planning profession and the country at large. When asked; what does the planning system need, evolution or revolution,

all 5 panellists opted for the latter – perhaps indicating the professions natural desire for co-operation and consensus and for some stability in a system which has had more than its fair share of upheaval over the years.

Nobody was too sure whether planning was at the root of the Big Society or part of Big Government – another of the questions posed to the panel – but then when they thought about it, none was too clear what the terms 'Big Society' and 'Big Government' actually meant. Perhaps the main lessons to be learned from the first few weeks of the Coalition Government is that politicians tend to be better at creating clichés than producing progress. All though were supportive of the idea of a new National Planning Strategy, something also headlined in the Open Source Document.

Finally, the panel were asked what advice they might give to a youngster coming into the profession today and what skills do all planners need to focus on developing. Thankfully Alistair Thornton, from the Young Planners had some imaginative ideas which perhaps bodes well for the future of the profession. We will need all the skill and patience of those young minds to steer us forward over the coming years as we enter what seems likely to be a challenging time for the profession.

Thanks to all those who attended, to all the panellists and to Warwick DC for kindly hosting the event. 

Localism – The Death or Rebirth of Planning?

It is a brave new world – a Government that is implementing its manifesto.

It is tempting to write a Doomsday scenario, extolling the virtues of the planning system as we knew it. However, over the period of the previous Government and even before it, the planning process had always been in constant evolution and arguably over time, the system became ever more bureaucratic and complex.

That said, the Pickles' short statements are bemusing - with many hidden messages and scope for conspiracy theories direct from the pages of the latest Dan Brown novel.

I'm not saying that I endorse these changes, but I can see why residents, businesses and interested parties have become increasingly exhausted and disengaged by the planning system. Yet the new Coalition approach leaves me cold and uncertain. That warning light keeps coming on - how on earth are we going to manage this?

Quite simply, we need to consider; what is the role and function of the planning system and how are we best to solve the genuine problems of our age, such as climate change, obesity, an ageing population and social and ethnic integration? There is still much work to do and the poorest towns and cities are still urgently in need of regeneration.

The planning system is bearing the brunt of criticism, but in reality, the planning system is not only to blame for the current mess. The development industry also needs to shoulder some responsibility. With few exceptions, progress has been slow in addressing the standard mass-produced builders' product. The 'i-pod generation' are not living in stylish, modern, smart and energy efficient housing. There is little genuine consumer choice and development design and construction techniques have not moved as fast as other manufacturing industries (e.g. mobiles, computers, cars, etc). In short, there is simply no 'Apple vs Microsoft' creative and technical rivalry to push the development industry forward.

The aim of 'localism' should be to move the development industry away from the City and shareholders, who control the developers and their companies back to the communities who will live in the new developments. But it remains to be seen whether the Government's statements will improve either quantity or quality.

The 'localism' agenda relies on there being an educated and motivated community seeking to do the best for others without personal gain, and striving for the highest possible quality. This is laudable, but in reality unrealistic. Sadly, not every person is educated, nor are they interested in development (until it is being proposed next door to them). Most people do not wish to sit on committees, run schools or get involved in the complexities of negotiating design, viability, or the traffic impact of development.

When most debate focuses on the quantity of house-building rather than quality, how can we lift the standard of building as a product of localism? The Coalition says that national design standards will be introduced for 'Community Right to Build', but what will these be and how will they be taken forward?

How are we to engage with disenfranchised communities that have no interest or belief in development? How can we ensure that town centres are strengthened, that natural habitat is protected and that historic assets are not lost? How can we ensure that the social divide does not widen?

There are success stories, but my experience is that community committees are often dominated by the same people (we used to call them busybodies) who have their own personal agenda and lack experience in negotiation.

But the key question for 'localism' and, in particular the Community Right to Build, comes down to the very definition of the community? If a referendum is held, who can vote? How do you ensure that any referendum is truly representative? What about those people on the edge or just outside a community? What about relatives and friends or people who work locally? Who organises the referendum and who ensures that it is a fair vote? Who indeed ensures that the housing is the best possible development and negotiates for the community impartially? Is anyone else reaching for the headache pill/legal challenge button yet??

But taking 'localism' further still; the Coalition Government have now said that there will be no 3rd runway at Heathrow. But could there be significant numbers of the 'local community' in Heathrow Airport and beyond that would welcome the additional jobs and investment that the 3rd runway and extra terminals may create. Stonehenge needs an improved visitor centre. Why not fund it through a hotel development like Red Centre at Uluru? Are these going to be tested through the 'localism' agenda or would there be a re-think and a strategic system re-created? Are we moving towards a system where areas are zoned for development and precise legal requirements (size of plots, environmental standard, etc) are set out for development?

So to conclude, the de-stabilisation of the planning system has created uncertainty at a time when the industry needs certainty. There needs to be a regulatory system to deliver not just quantity but also quality. There will be many peaks and troughs to come and as always, planners will show both adaptability and ability in dealing with whatever is thrown at us. But on the basis of what I have seen so far, 'localism' will not tackle the key issues and will be shelved as, 'Nice idea, shame it wasn't thought through'.

In the meantime, I look forward to my first appeal on the grounds that the 'community' have not been consulted. That one should be fun! ☺

Andrew Thompson

HST 2 Update – where is it going?

In our last issue, we commented on the announcement that the Coalition Government was now committed to the delivery of a new High Speed Rail connection between London and Birmingham. This major infrastructure project raises a variety of economic, social and environmental issues, which are only just beginning to be explored. Andy Cowan, County Transport Planner at Warwickshire County Council has been reviewing the initial research and investigation of the scheme

Progress and Programme: On 24 June the new Coalition Government published a letter from Philip Hammond MP, Secretary of State for Transport, to Sir Brian Briscoe, Chairman HS2 Ltd, which indicated that the Secretary of State will wish to “review in more detail” the recommended route (route 3 - the previous Government’s ‘Preferred Route’) of the HST, but in the meantime HS2 Ltd can continue to further develop route 3 proposals as he intends to consult on HS2 in the New Year. At the same time, the Secretary of State extended HS2 Ltd’s remit, as an immediate priority, to:

- develop options for a direct Heathrow link (by end Aug 10)
- assessing options/business case for linking HS1 with HS2 (by end Aug 2010) and
- assess the business case for developing a wider high-speed rail network from the West Midlands to Manchester and Leeds (by early July).”

Subsequently, on 22 July, Lord Mawhinney produced the report of the review, commissioned by the previous SoS, to carry out investigations into high speed train access to Heathrow Airport. His main conclusion is that Heathrow should have a loop off the new HS2, but only when the high speed rail network has been extended to the North. Presumably, this and Lord Mawhinney’s other findings and conclusions will be picked up by HS2 Ltd in carrying out their extended remit.

The previous Government’s timetable, published by the DfT on 11 March 2010 looked like this:

March 2010

HS2 proposals published, Exceptional Hardship Scheme consultation opened.

17 June 2010

Exceptional Hardship Scheme consultation closes.

Before autumn 2010

Further engagement and preparations for public consultation.

2011

Formal public consultation on HS2 proposals including preferred route.

2011

Government decision on future of HS2 and preferred route for London to Birmingham section.

2011-2013

Detailed design and assessment of the preferred route.

2013

Further public consultation.

2014

Hybrid Bill laid in House of Commons.

2019

Possible start of construction.

2026

Line between London and Birmingham could open.

The Coalition Government - both the Prime Minister and the SoS - have repeated a desire for ‘a start’ on HS2 in 2015, 2-4 years earlier than proposed by the previous Government. This aspiration looks less realistic given the extra work now being required of HS2 Ltd and may only be feasible if public consultation components are truncated.


Environmental impact. In terms of the environmental effects, Andy Cowan visited Germany where a similar high speed rail-line already exists. Through personal friends in Germany he managed to make contact with the Deutsche Bahn (DB) engineer responsible for the Cologne - Frankfurt high-speed route who gave him an 8 hour programme of presentations and site visits.

Evidently, trains doing 300 km/h or more have a radically different noise and visual impact than anything we are used to (i.e. aircraft, motorways and conventional railways). For example, they are only heard when they are passing at fairly close quarters (up to say 100m) without noise/ wind reduction measures - and usually for only 5 or 6 seconds, i.e. as long as it takes 400m of train to pass. The noise rapidly diminishes afterwards. This means that trains travelling at up to 400 km/h every 3 minutes may cause less than 2 minutes of noise per hour at any point, rather different from ones experience of noise generated by road traffic on motorways, aircraft or conventional rail.

Visual impacts are also very different. This is best illustrated by assuming that one, rather recklessly, happens to be standing on the line. One only gets to hear a 300 km/h train when it’s too late! – If one is lucky enough to see it coming, it appears as a tiny dot 1.0 km away. One then has about 10 seconds to get out of the way. Catching sight of a high-speed train is not an easy exercise, indeed, the DB engineer relied on feeling the atmospheric pressure changes that run in advance of the trains - rather like the tsunami that drain away waters from coasts before they come crashing in!

In fact, these atmospheric changes have played havoc with DB’s experiments to come up with the best form of sound proofing along viaducts - but they think they’ve cracked it now. The use of new forms of specifically contoured materials in track and fence design radically cut down noise, but the fences can still be visually intrusive. The best solution to the noise issue may be fitting the line into the landscape where the existing (or new) terrain naturally deflects the noise upwards over any sensitive localities.

Readers may be interested in a short video clip taken from the footage which Andy Cowan recorded on his visit to the Cologne-Frankfurt line which they have put on their website www.warwickshire.gov.uk/hs2.

We will provide a regular update on this project in future issues of Tripwire. 

Andy Cowan

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Editor's thoughts

As someone who does more than their fair share of driving around the countryside, for both business and pleasure, one of the saddest sights I see is the spectre of boarded up local pubs and village shops – once the lifeblood of the rural community.

There are obvious social trends which contribute to this pattern – the ban on smoking in pubs, the law against drinking and driving and the wider scope for home entertainment with a multiplicity of TV channels and other activities. There are also strong economic pressures which tend to steer people towards supermarkets and the internet, rather than supporting local businesses.

But planning (or rather planning policy) must also take some responsibility. For many years now, most development has been steered towards the larger towns, with housing allocations focused in ever larger 'urban extensions', whilst rural areas have been starved of even modest 'organic' growth. The concept of sustainability has been interpreted primarily in terms of journey to work patterns – based on the assumption that most people work in towns and cities and hence most people should also live there. Planners have largely ignored the fact that rural areas have their own set of inter-relationships which are largely separate from the main conurbations.

The outcome has been a growing mismatch in house values between urban and rural areas, with a preponderance of high density apartments in cities (many of which have proved difficult to sell) and a growing lack of family homes with gardens in suburban and peripheral areas where many people want to live and a lack of new homes at all in many rural villages.

The Coalition Government's immediate reaction has been to opt for populist solutions such as to discourage 'garden grabbing' (surely a misnomer since those houses with large gardens which have been redeveloped must have been acquired from a willing vendor) and which will put even greater pressure on price levels and housing needs.

Their second idea has been to launch the 'Community Right to Build', (previously known as Housing Actions Trusts) whereby local 'community bodies' are given the freedom to build small schemes without the need for planning consent – subject to an overwhelming vote of support through a local referendum – an apparent expression of the concept of 'localism'.

This initiative seems to constitute a classic case of hope over expectation. Whilst rural communities are well known for their self supportive culture; what possible incentive will there be for voluntary groups to set themselves up to deliver housing on a non-profit making basis? Who will stump up the money to pump-prime the proposals and undertake the myriad of studies and surveys necessary to kick-start any scheme? What is the likelihood of any scheme receiving 90% support within a small local community, even where there is general support for an idea? And above all, what gives the general public the right (whether they be local or not) to control the future life chances of their fellow citizens and to act as the 'gatekeepers' of society.

If true 'localism' depends on the 'aga louts' keeping out the 'lager louts' where will this all end? I have long felt that extreme parochialism is dangerously close to racism – the only difference is that the former is designed to exclude all outsiders – not just those who look different. Having only recently experienced the harsh results of 'localism' in Cornwall – where 'the English' are deemed to be unwelcome by many, I am only too aware of where this can take us.

But the most worrying aspect of this policy from my perspective is that, taken to its logical conclusion, this approach will completely undermine the planning profession. If individual members of the public are able to define the policies, determine the plans and choose the sites (and presumably decide whether schemes are appropriate), why bother with planners. Under this brave new world we can all be professional planners – and if we are all 'professionals' then none of us are 'professionals'. 🏠

Titanic Captain is 're-launched'

Those planners who attended last year's RTPi West Midlands Summer Reception will remember enjoying a guided tour of Lichfield and a visit to see the statue of Captain Smith – the master of the ill-fated ship, the Titanic which sank in 1912.

Well, the bronze statue of Capt Smith which stands in Beacon Park's Museum Gardens, has now had a 're-launch' and is looking much improved. On 19 July, Lichfield District Council revealed the newly refurbished statue of Captain Smith.

The bronze statue, which stands in Lichfield's Museum Gardens, was originally unveiled by Smith's daughter Helen on 29 July 1914. It was created by the famous sculptor Lady Kathleen Scott, the widow of Robert Falcon Scott - better known as Scott of the Antarctic.

The work has been possible thanks to £3.9 million funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund, as part of their 'Parks for People' programme. 🏠




A tribute to Colin Davies

It is with great regret that Tripwire reports the sad death of Colin Davies, formerly County Planning Officer for Hereford & Worcester. Colin joined the RTPI in 1965 and worked in planning throughout his career until his retirement a couple of years ago.

As County Planning Officer he was involved in two structure plans and previously dealt with the overspill settlements in Worcestershire. He was extremely well liked by his colleagues and his

funeral was attended by many planners who remember him from his days in the County Council.

After leaving Hereford & Worcester, Colin took on the role as a Planning Inspector for the English then Welsh Inspectorate and managed to keep working long after retirement age due to his love of planning. He died on June 8th 2010 after a long battle with cancer. 

Planning Aid West Midlands says goodbye to Sandra


Planning Aid West Midlands Manager; Jon Lord & Planning Aid England Operations Manager, Sheena Terrace say goodbye to Sandra Newton and welcome Ashley Langrick to the position of Planning Advisor.

On July 1st at its Annual Meeting, Planning Aid West Midlands said goodbye to Sandra Newton, who retired as Planning Advisor. Sandra started in 1999 as the service's Planning Advisor. She brought a wealth of experience from her time with Coventry City Council and put this to good use explaining the intricacies of the planning system to many clients.

She dealt with all sorts of issues including enforcement in a professional but empathetic manner. Often clients would phone back and thank her for her advice.

In addition to this, Sandra organised the volunteer training and nurtured many young volunteers who have gone on to being successful planners. She also edited the volunteer newsletter known then as Blueprint.

Sandra was wonderful talking to people and would often persuade planners to become volunteers and clients to become Friends of Planning Aid West Midlands.

We're pleased to announce that Planning Aid West Midlands new Planning Advisor; Ashley Langrick started on August 24th. Ashley has over 12 years of planning experience both in the public and private sector throughout the East Midlands. I'm sure you will all join us in welcoming Ashley to both Planning Aid and to the West Midlands. 

Jon Lord Planning Aid Manager


YPwest Mids visit Dudley

On 23rd June, a group of around 25 West Midlands Young Planners attended a heritage seminar hosted by Dudley MBC. Pete Boland, Dudley MBC's Principal Conservation Officer opened the proceedings with an invaluable presentation, explaining how PPS5 should be applied at a local level. The explained how this is being achieved in Dudley, which has a rich industrial (and pre-industrial) history. Dudley MBC has developed an extensive evidence base relating to the heritage of the area which includes 'Area Characterisation Studies'.

This was followed by a short presentation from Jayne Pilkington (Senior Conservation Officer) who introduced a heritage trail which is currently being developed as part of measures to improve the tourism offer within the town. The group was guided around the trail by the Council's officers who demonstrated their extensive local knowledge and enabling the delegates to explore

and appreciate the architecture and archaeology of the town centre. The tour gave an insight as to how Dudley will continue to develop into the future whilst conserving, preserving and enhancing the local character, through the Local Development Framework.

The seminar was informal in style yet extremely thought-provoking. The walking tour provided an excellent opportunity to see how the theoretical concepts have been and will be put into practice on the ground. The warm summer's evening was completed by a trip to the Court House Pub where the discussions continued.

A huge thanks must go to Dudley MBC for hosting a very well presented, insightful and enjoyable evening. 

Timothy Webb
YPwest mids

Continuing Professional Development

.....: Events Calendar :: September > October :.....

Regional Programme

Non-members of RTPI welcome to attend.

TUESDAY 28 SEPTEMBER

Regeneration & Development – The Localism Agenda

Speakers: **Andrea Bruce, Knights Solicitors** - Overview

John Barratt, Barrister, Kings Chambers

“Coalition Government: Direction of Housing Policy”

Tim Dean, Planning and Development Manager, Gladman Homes

“Development under the Localism Agenda - A Commercial Reality”

Neale Clifton, Executive Director Regeneration & Development, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

“Delivering Development over the Next Decade: A Local Authority Perspective”

Venue: Office of Knights Solicitors, The Brampton, **Newcastle-under-Lyme**

Staffordshire **ST5 0QW**

Time: 9.45am – 1.15pm including lunch

Cost: **£50 incl. VAT** (£20 for full-time students & unwaged)

Details & Booking: Sue Griffith-Jones Tel 0121 709 1599

Email westmidlands@rtpi.org.uk

FRIDAY 1 OCTOBER

Green Infrastructure

Joint event with RTPI East Midlands & RTPI West Mids Urban Design Forum

Venue: National Forest Visitor Centre, **Moira, Derbyshire DE 12 6GA**

Time: 10am - 4pm (registration & refreshments from 9.15am)

Cost: **£70 + VAT** (£35 for full-time students & unwaged)

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Email westmidlands@rtpi.org.uk

WEDNESDAY 13 OCTOBER

Improving Consultation- changing Rhetoric into Reality

Joint event with Birmingham City

University, University of Birmingham, Planning Aid West Midlands & RIBA West Midlands

Venue: The Dickens Conference Room, Birmingham & Midland Institute, Margaret St, **Birmingham B3 3BS**

Time: 10am – 4.15pm (registration & refreshments from 9.30am)

Cost: **£50 incl VAT** (£20 for full-time students & unwaged)

Details & booking: Sue Griffith-Jones Tel 0121 709 1599

Email westmidlands@rtpi.org.uk

THURSDAY 4 NOVEMBER

12th Annual Development Management Conference

Material Considerations

Conference run by Landmark Planning in association with the East and West Midlands RTPI.

Venue: Central Baptist Church, **Leicester**

(close to railway station)

Time: 10am – 3.45pm (Registration from 9.30am)

Cost: **£117.50 incl VAT** (full-time students & unwaged £25)

Details & booking: Sue Griffith-Jones Tel 0121 709 1599

Email: westmidlands@rtpi.org.uk

Other Events

SUNDAY 5 SEPTEMBER – FRIDAY 10 SEPTEMBER

Planning Summer School

Venue: **York**

Organiser: Planning Summer School

Primarily residential for the week but day & half day places available.

For full programme & to book go to www.planningsummerschool.org

THURSDAY 9 SEPTEMBER

The New Right to Build

Venue: **Cheltenham**

Cost: **Free**

Organiser: RTPI-CIH Planning for Housing Network

Details & booking: Andrew Matheson Tel 01789 763 006

Email housing@rtpi.org.uk

FRIDAY 17 – SUNDAY 19 SEPTEMBER

The 38th Joint Planning Law Conference

Venue: **Oxford**

Cost: **£579 + VAT**

Organiser: RTPI, RICS, the Law Society & the Bar Council

Details & booking: www.jplc.org

TUESDAY 21 SEPTEMBER

Sustainable Development

Venue: **Leicester**

Cost: **£30 + VAT**

Organiser: RTPI East Midlands

Details & booking: Sue Slack

Email eastmidlands@rtpi.org.uk

TUESDAY 21 SEPTEMBER

Artworks in the Public Realm

Venue: **Stoke-on-Trent**

Cost: **Free**

Organiser: Urban Vision North

Staffordshire

Details & booking: Hannah Barter Tel 01782 575321

Email hannah.barter@uvns.org

TUESDAY 5 – THURSDAY 7 OCTOBER

Ready to do HIA

Venue: **Gregynog, Powys**

Cost: **£675**

Organiser: West Midlands Public Health Observatory

Details & booking:

www.wmpho.org.uk/hiatraining/

FRIDAY 15 – SATURDAY 16 OCTOBER

2010 Young Planners' Conference - Planning for Localism

Venue: **Cardiff**

Cost: **£39 -£150 + VAT**

Organiser: RTPI Young Planners' Cymru

Details & booking: Georgina Roberts Tel 029 2049 8215

Email ypconference@rtpi.org.uk

Letter to the Editor

I was just reading the editorial and your article on “local choice” in the last issue of Tripwire. It strikes me that the profession is facing an extremely difficult and challenging time at the moment. It needs planners to get together to lobby for something positive and workable to come out of this mess.

I for one am exasperated that whilst I have become increasingly uncomfortable in recent years about the ridiculous amount of Government meddling in the planning system and was never a lover of the LDF concept as it was too detailed, slow and cumbersome, what the new Coalition Government has done by effectively scrapping regional planning for political expediency without putting anything in its place is unbelievable.

The Government may well be able to still say that the status of the Development Plan remains intact, but across the country planning authorities are mothballing progress on LDFs like there's no tomorrow and even where this may not happen, 3rd party objectors will in future have an ‘open goal’ to challenge the whole process given that the recent Government tinkering with PPS3 and the recent abolition of RSS largely undermine the evidence base on housing numbers.

As to “local choice” well maybe I'm getting cynical in my old age, but the concept is totally unworkable for all the reasons you highlight in your article.. and more! It's like turkeys voting for Christmas to believe LPA's and local communities will encourage planned strategic growth that results in the loss of green fields, whatever the financial carrot may be, even in the increasingly unlikely event that the Treasury find any funds to give to the Dept of CLG after the forthcoming spending review.

So I just hope that the profession as a whole comes together to lobby for a system that is workable and that can deliver much needed economic and housing growth whilst respecting local opinion. There is nothing wrong with localism and taking account of the views of the local community was what I was taught to do when I trained as a planner all those years ago. But I was also taught that towns, cities and counties are not islands and therefore some form of strategic thinking is an essential tool of what planning is about. As the saying goes, taking account of local opinion within a strategic framework really isn't rocket science and we owe it to our profession to prove that it can be done. Anyway, apologies for getting on my soapbox! 📧

Michael Jones B.A.(Hons) MRTPI

tripwire

CPD

July / Aug 11