



RTPI South West
Royal Town Planning Institute

Branchout **NEWS**

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www.rtpi.org.uk/southwest

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Cover Image
Isles of Scilly
beach scene

Branchout is a members e-magazine issued three times of year. After a recent review of content, Branchout will now focus on RTPI member updates, local interest articles and practical guidance on a variety of planning issues.

Branchout is put together by

Editor Alexis Edwards

RTPI South West Senior Vice Chair

Charlotte Daborn

RTPI South West Regional Coordinator
plus the support of many RTPI volunteers

If you would like to prepare an article or provide feedback on what you would like to see in future editions, please contact southwest@rtpi.org.uk

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APC Assessor Recruitment

The membership team are looking for 20 more APC Assessors to cope with the extra APC applications.

The RTPI is looking for more APC assessors in 2024 due to the increased number of APC candidates applying.

There is lots of information on the website, but here are some reasons to become an APC assessor:

- Support young planners at a crucial point in their career
- Become more involved in the life of the Institute
- Good networking opportunity



- Broaden your knowledge and learn about different areas of planning
- Valuable CPD opportunity

If you are a Chartered member, please consider applying. The registration survey is open now.



Find out more:

www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/assessment-of-professional-competence/assessors/

Town planners play a crucial role in shaping the physical and social environment of both our rural and urban landscapes. The work involves intricate decision-making processes, long hours, and high levels of stress which in turn can be challenging to stay calm and productive amidst the ever-increasing demands placed upon us. Your mental health is a critical aspect that deserves attention and support. By recognising the importance of mental health in this profession, we can develop strategies to improve the overall well-being of town planners.

Town planners often face high levels of stress due to the demanding nature of their work. They are responsible for making complex decisions that impact the lives of thousands of people which can often be overwhelming. This constant stress can lead to burnout, affecting their mental health, overall job performance and quality of life.

It is crucial to cultivate certain mindsets that enable us to remain calm and productive despite increasing pressures in the workplace. There are many more commonly promoted ways to do this, such as making time for self-care or developing a growth mindset, etc. but there are other more targeted working practices that can help individuals to effectively manage stress, enhance productivity, and maintain their overall well-being on a day-to-day basis.

making time
for self-care
or developing
a growth
mindset

Avoid multitasking

Take the time to fully focus on each task to improve productivity and decision making. Avoiding multitasking will likely reduce stress allowing you to stay and feel in control.

Recent studies have found that when people do multiple cognitive tasks at once, this reduces their cognitive capacity. Multitasking not only reduces productivity but is also thought to reduce IQ.

Face challenges with a fresh perspective

Avoid the tendency to jump to conclusions based on previous experiences/past situations. Challenge yourself to look for fresh new information and avoid emotional reactions.

Establish good time management

There are many different techniques you can use to manage your time more effectively, one of the most successful is timeboxing. This is a simple technique that involves giving each task on your to-do list an allotted amount of time. Schedule this on your calendar and block out any distractions while you work on the task. Work on the task until the allotted time has ended, then assess your progress and move on to the next item on your to-do list.



Schedule uncomfortable tasks for times when you feel most alert

Practice scheduling your most difficult tasks for when you have highest levels of focus and energy, for some this is often at the beginning of the day. Manage your schedule by using techniques such as the Pomodoro method (work on a specific task for 20-30 minutes then take a five-minute break, and repeat) to focus on onerous tasks free of distraction. This allows you to keep in control rather than allowing distractions to manage you. Some individuals do this by establishing a routine or by using techniques such as the Pomodoro method or timeboxing.

Refocus on the positives

For some, this may mean finding an activity to clear your head and refocus on the positives, such as taking a break or short walk. Others may prefer to switch to less demanding tasks. Try focusing on the positive rewards for yourself and your team and let go of the negatives.

Practice patience

Try to practice patience by taking a moment to take a few breaths to rest your mind and body when faced with a new issue. Actively listen to input and ask questions to get to the root of the problem before jumping to conclusions.

Schedule one enjoyable activity every day

Try to balance difficult tasks with ones you look forward to. This may mean quiet time to focus on less challenging tasks or a coffee break to chat to colleagues. It's important to celebrate success, even the small successes.

Fostering good working practices in this fast paced world, can help individuals to feel in control and can be achieved at any stage of your career. By cultivating these mindsets, we can navigate through the pressures of modern life and achieve a harmonious balance between productivity and well-being.

Author: Victoria Hodgson

Member of RTPI SW Regional Activities Committee

RTPI Resources

The RTPI website includes some useful mental health resources.

- **Wellbeing Support for RTPI Members** - Members of the RTPI can access Health Assured by downloading the app with RTPI Plus. This provides RTPI members with free access to a range of help advice around, mental, physical and financial wellbeing, including:
 - Wellbeing resources - Webinars, videos, podcasts and guides on topics including; resilience at work, nutrition and stress management.
 - 4-week self-help programmes - Whatever your goals, these 4-week programmes are designed to help you through those small but important lifestyle changes.
- **Stress, Anxiousness and Anxiety Module**
This module covers:
 - Mental Health First Aid
 - Tools to support your mental wellbeing
 - How to support someone with their mental health
- **Help for Employers**
This helps support employers around the provision of skills to help support employees manage mental health and wellbeing with their roles.
- **Help for Individuals**
Provides advice related to homeworking, advice on keeping fit, and help around empowering individuals to understand their mental health.
- **Health and Wellbeing Blogs**
The blogs provide insight and advice from individuals who are happy to share their personal experiences.

Finally, if you yourself are suffering with mental health issues or someone you know, please seek help.



**Find out more
about all these resources at**
www.rtpi.org.uk/new/mental-health-and-wellbeing-hub/

Town Planners have every reason to feel pride in their work as they witness the tangible impact of shaping the environment around them. With each project and application planners can contribute to the well-being and happiness of present and future generations to admire and enjoy. As we all know, sometimes planning is perceived in a negative light, and recent surveys have found that planners often do not feel valued.

For this reason, RTPI South West wanted to celebrate its planners and introduce a new feature in Branchout. We will regularly include interviews with planners who let us know what they feel most proud about. This can be a project (large or small), a collaboration or just a special moment in their career that they want to share.



Making a difference at Cavanna Homes at Elm Park

Our first interview is with Angharad Williams, who is Development Management Manager at Mid Devon District Council. Angharad is a past chair of the RTPI South West and a long-time Member of the Regional Management Board and Activities Committee.



What project are you most proud of?

I am very proud of an application I worked on as a Case Officer for Cavanna Homes at Elm Park which was part of a wider South West Exeter allocation.

Q: What was your role in the project?

I was the case officer on it when I was at Teignbridge Council. I was involved in the initial stages all the way through. It was a scheme that was part of a wider allocation known as South West Exeter which as a whole sought to deliver up to 2500 homes. This part of the scheme was a reserved matters application for 245 units together with Suitable Alternative Natural Green Space (SANGS).

Q: Sounds like a big project! What was the working relationship like between the applicant and the council?

It was great. They were brilliant to work with. They listened to my ideas on how to improve the design of the development and took on some of my suggestions on how to achieve an inclusive development.

One of my interests is how to achieve Dementia Friendly developments. The developers and I worked together on working out what was feasible and discussed how we could work on simple solutions which would be effective but also cost efficient for the developer. Some of the solutions include making distinctive buildings to make the streets more legible using different house types to create different vistas. The great thing is that creating logical and legible places benefits everyone; not just those experiencing dementia. We had a pragmatic relationship where we could use clever solutions including boundary treatments and building materials on key routes through the development to make the scheme both legible and achieving a sense of place, but also making it viable and achievable.

We also worked on including a dementia friendly sensory garden which was filled with different plants that enabled touch and smell to become more apparent and create a calming effect for the user. The open space areas were also designed to ensure all residents could enjoy with dropped kerbed access and wide footpaths to allow for wheelchair and pushchair access.

Q: What have you learnt from the experience?

That you can make a difference when the people you are working with want to work with you and make a positive change. Little changes can make a difference and make a place more legible with very little cost to the developer. Showing practicality and positivity with the developer meant that they trusted me, and they said that they never would have achieved this scheme without the relationship they had with me and my team and the trust they had in the process. They could see that I wanted to approve 'good development' which created a confidence that this working relationship would achieve a great scheme. It's just talking, building relationships - I'm trying to help the developer create a good space. It gives the developer confidence in the planning system. I would encourage anyone to give it a go, and not always just accept what is put in front of you, have the courage to go further and push for better results. You will get there, provided you work together and understand the constraints on both sides and how to overcome them using simple and creative solutions.

Q: How proud did you feel as a result of this?

I was really very proud. It is emotionally empowering to have a result like this. I've always tried to approach development positively. I was proud to share this with my team and we visited the site once it was built so I could show them what we had achieved on this scheme. Even if you can change one person's perspective of how you can achieve great places then it is worth it. We are here to make a difference, and we can, for generations to come, so don't give up and keep achieving great things, and you will make a difference. Just remember little changes and make a big difference. So be brave, be confident and keep going.



Pictures are the site of Cavanna Homes at Elm Park

**Nutrient neutrality**

Harrison Moore is a Planner with Arup. A proud moment in his career relates to a very topical subject - Nutrient neutrality. Harrison is based at Arup in the Bristol office and has been working in a secondment role with Somerset Council to spearhead the first solution to the Phosphates issue in the area.

**Q: Can you tell us about the project?**

Yes - it was a strategy that was two years in the making. In August 2020, all the Local Planning Authority's (LPAs) in Somerset received a letter from Natural England (NE) concerning the unacceptable levels of phosphates in the Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar site. Planning applications were immediately impacted as many different types of development now needed a HRA to be submitted to NE to ensure that the development would be nutrient neutral and would not adversely impact the Ramsar site. Arup and Somerset Council already had an excellent working relationship as a result of two of my Arup colleagues being seconded to the Council's Phosphates team in 2021. I joined the team in 2023 as a Phosphates Planning Officer to help with the implementation of the phosphate mitigation solution.

Q: Sounds very exciting - what was the solution?

It has been a multidisciplinary effort to find workable phosphate mitigation solutions. In the River Tone catchment area, Somerset Council has partnered with a third-party landowner to create a temporary 'fallowing' land scheme at a rural farm site, which will be transferred to permanent mitigation solution in the future. This mitigation scheme was the first to come forward as part of the Council's Interim Phosphates Mitigation Strategy and allowed the creation of Phosphate Credits or "P credits" which applicants can acquire to offset the additional phosphate load generated by new development in the River Tone catchment area, which was the first solution of its kind to address the issue. P credits are currently aimed at small and medium enterprises. The Interim Phosphates Mitigation Strategy for the River Tone catchment area has the potential to unlock between 174 and 871 homes which otherwise may be unable to be determined. Across Somerset, through working with landowners and other mitigation providers, the Council has secured phosphate mitigation to 'unlock' circa 2000-2500 dwellings.

Q: What do you think enabled you to be the frontrunners in creating a solution?

The Council was at the forefront of finding phosphate solutions, and Arup was able to support them in this. This was undoubtedly because of the good partnership - Arup secondees have been embedded in the team. The trust and camaraderie has allowed for a proactive way of working.

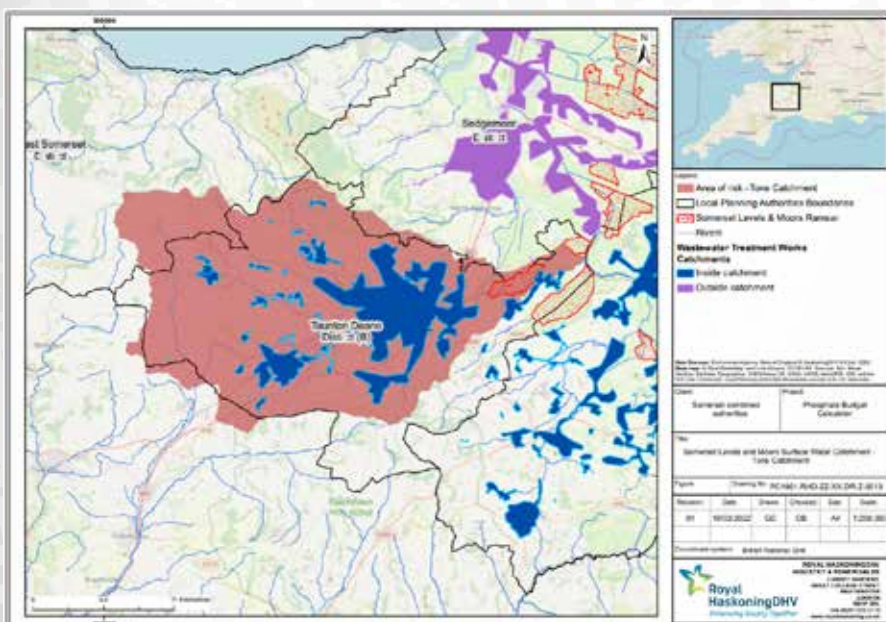
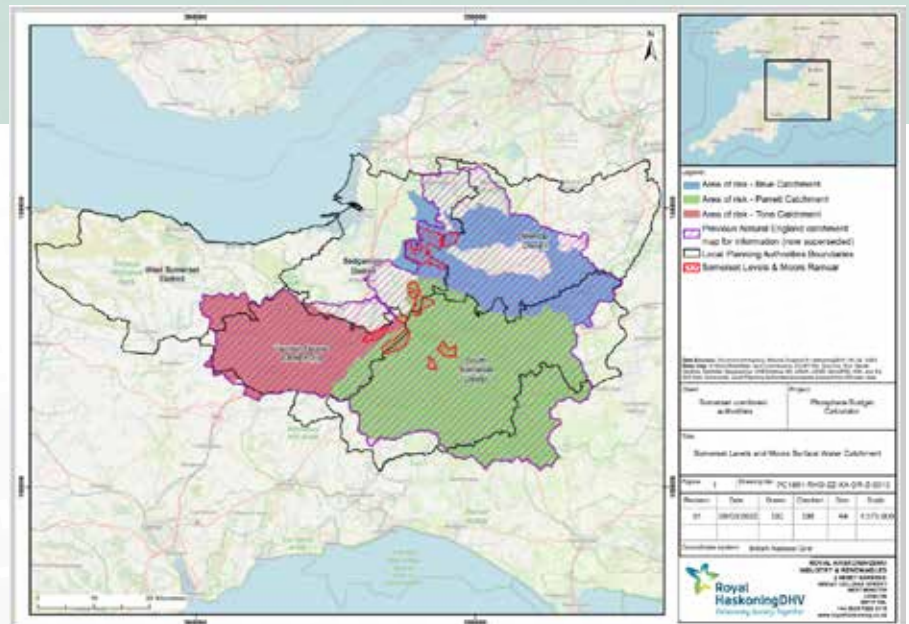
Q: What have you learnt from the experience?

Just the benefits of maintaining a good relationship in this profession. The team work well together and have been able to be both proactive to be at the forefront of finding a workable solution and reactive to emerging NE and Government guidance on the issue.

Q: How proud did you feel as a result of this?

Very proud - it has been fantastic opportunity to work on something both topical and interesting. Finding a solution and in doing so influencing how other strategies elsewhere in the country have been developed was a great experience as a young planner.

 Somerset West and Taunton interim strategy: Phosphate Credit Scheme



 Somerset Levels and Moors Ramsar Site: Affected Catchment Area Maps:

Could you feature next in our Pride in Planning feature? Contact southwest@rtpi.org.uk

03 Theory of Planning

Theory for Planners: or when is a goose not a goose?

As someone who spends a good part of my day job thinking about how to engage planning students with issues of theory, ethics and philosophy, I was delighted to be asked to provide a contribution on this topic for Branchout, even if it has taken me a while longer to get round to doing this than both the lovely editor and myself would have liked.

In this short piece, I will outline why I think it is vital for practicing planners to think about questions of theory - the 'why am I doing this' - not just 'how quickly can I get it done', and draw on some reflections on recent research work to illustrate this (you can find information about many of these projects on our research centre blog <https://blogs.uwe.ac.uk/sustainable-planning-and-environments/>). I will also suggest some ways in which as practicing planners you may be able to engage in such debates and reflections more fully, without having to come back to university to do a PhD (which of course, is a great idea too!).

But first, I will introduce myself. I'm the programme leader for MSc Urban Planning and UWE, and an associate professor. I engage in teaching, mostly but not only postgraduate and Degree Apprentice students, and I also am an active researcher, writer and editor of Planning Theory and Practice journal. I've been at UWE for more than ten but less than 20 years and have taught some variation of planning theory all that time, including having the privilege of teaching alongside Nigel Taylor before he retired. I also really like geese.

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planners.

For me, planning theory, thinking about ethics and philosophy is a vital task for planners. If not important - what is the point of planning practice? Is it not about creating places which are better because of the intervention of planners than they would be without such action? Is it about looking beyond the needs or wishes of an individual property owner to that of neighbours, the community, society more widely and that of future generations? Although the metrics and KPIs or the needs and wishes of clients may dominant immediate decisions, it is vital for planning practitioners to feel equipped in dealing with matters of substance and purpose.

For example, our work with the West of England Combined Authority about whether there is a drop in design quality post the granting of planning permission raises several questions- when does planning end? What is meant by good quality design, or even dare I say it, 'beauty'? What judgements are made to decide in enforcement action is expedient? Are these the same ones that are used when judging if a development should be given planning permission in the first place?

So, this is where my friend the goose comes in next. This might seem like a non sequitur, or at least very much a random link, but bear with. In a recent workshop with PhD students here at the Centre for Sustainable Planning and Environments, I was asked to reflect on the theme of "critical thinking - why and how it is relevant to my research". This friendly goose from Chicago (see figure 1) assisted me in doing this. I had recently returned from a conference in the US, but brought this in not just to suggest that critical thinking gets you good opportunities to travel, but to instead raise the possibility of what the goose in an urban environment may represent. Is it biodiversity, demonstrating the success of the blue/green infrastructure of the area, is it a pest and to be managed as such (maybe also representing an unhealthy or unpleasant environment), is it potentially a tourist attraction- part of the lakefront culture and hence an driver of the local economy, is it a spiritual symbol- linking to ancestors and worthy of respect because of this, is it lunch- part of urban agriculture? Depending on what you think the goose is will relate to what you think should be done to it- protect it? Remove it? Eat it?!

This example may well be silly, and unlikely to be something that comes up in daily work in a planning office. However, it aims to illustrate that there are several ways of judging the environments in which we find ourselves, and find ourselves having to make or influence decisions about their future. Different people perceive the same things in very divergent ways. This is unlikely to be news to anyone reading this, but is key to questions of planning ethics and philosophy- how we see the world, what counts as valid evidence for decision-making and how we judge the right and wrong of such decisions. The goose aims to serve as a memorable introduction to asking some critical questions, ones which can go back to questions of housing development and design. Should planners be providing 'units' to meet (local or nation) demand? Should we be ensuring that development does not contribute to climate change or biodiversity loss? Are we safeguarding community wellbeing by ensuring places are inclusive and attractive? Again, depending on how these are answered will lead to different measures being justified in the writing of planning conditions and enforcement action.

One easy way for practitioners to stay abreast of theoretical debates is by engaging with the work published in the [RTPI supported journal, Planning Theory and Practice](#). Not all the content will have direct relevance to daily working for most planners in the South West- but it would be odd if it didn't, and some pieces are pitched at more academic audiences. However, and please excuse me as I am an editor for this, the 'interface' section aims to promote dialogue between practitioners and academics. If anyone has been inspired to think about questions of theory and philosophy but these few words, or had been thinking about them anyway, I'd love to hear from you think about how to take this conversation forward.

Author: Katie McClymont

Associate Professor in Urban Planning
UWE, Bristol



Figure 1 - A friendly goose from Chicago

Net Zero Carbon Homes at Rainbow Way, Minehead

Background

A scheme of 54 new zero carbon homes are in operation, all for affordable rent by Somerset Council. This is the first high profile zero carbon housing scheme for the Council.

The scheme is currently on site, and has ambitious energy performance targets, using the LETI definition of net zero. A post occupancy evaluation will be carried out annually over a five year period using automated sensors.

The land has been owned by the District Council for some time, and considered for development since 2007. After abortive marketing attempts it was decided to divide the site into two sections, the front being for commercial development and providing the infrastructure to access the residential site beyond. The commercial development went ahead in advance and has been built out by the Council and now let to commercial tenants. Initially the residential land was to be developed by a Housing Association who obtain planning consent for 40 units in October 2019. They decided not to proceed after viability issues, and the Council then felt it would be a good opportunity to develop a zero carbon scheme and look at improving the design and density up to 54 units to improve viability. Grant funding for the infrastructure of just under £1m was provided by Homes England to unlock the residential site, with a time limit for development. The mix is 21 houses of 2, 3, & 4 bedrooms and includes two chalet bungalows for wheelchair use, and 33 one and two bedroom apartments. The location is very sustainable being within easy walk of shops, the sea, schools, and public transport.



Planning

Many conversations were held with the Planning Officer and our Placemaking Manager to ensure that all aspects of the design were thoroughly thought through prior to planning submission. The site constraints were: being in a flood zone requiring finished floor levels 7m above datum; attenuation pond; rhynes on two sides of the site to take overflow water and a cricket pitch near the SW boundary. The main features include: built with Porothers blocks, air tightness <1 m3/h/m2 @ 50Pa; balconies to flats; electric car charging points for all 21 houses and up to 8 points in the communal parking area; PVs to all units, inverter for hot water, MVHR, air source heat pump, smart controllers, high performance insulation and glazing. Fortunately Minehead is outside the RAMSAR area for phosphates, so this did not delay the scheme.

Design considerations included: a reduced development area due to the Rhynes; accommodating the NDSS sized units; sufficient roof space and orientation for the PVs; where to put the MVHRs for the flats (which will be on the balconies); locating the communal EVCPs; and parking requirements, and bin & bike stores with a Sedum green "living roof".

At the time, the District Council were due to become part of the new Unitary Somerset Council as from 1st April 2023, and with this in mind it was agreed (after much discussion with solicitors) that there would be no legal agreement and conditions used instead. This resulted in 29 conditions.

The Travel Plan was agreed as one of these conditions, and through negotiation we agreed reduced the parking requirements, and arranged for first occupations only to be offered green travel vouchers on the basis that tenants do not move out at the same rate as private occupiers. Although eight EVCPs were required for the communal car park it was agreed these could be phased in as electric car usage increases.

One of the conditions related to highways. This used their standard wording for roads being adopted, requiring "details to be approved in writing by the LPA before their construction begins". In practice this requires Technical Approval (TA) of the S.38 works by Highways prior to work to the road commencing. Practically we could not commence on the units until the base course for the road was in place, which would delay the construction period and jeopardise the grant funding from Homes England. After discussions with Highways they supported a change of the condition to

pre-occupation approval and a Section 73 application was successful in amending the wording accordingly.

The other planning matter was a condition brought about due to comments made on the application from the local Cricket Club whose pitch is on land adjoining the site. It was agreed at Committee to include a condition to erect suitable ball stop netting prior to occupation. It transpired that this condition was not valid as it referred to works outside the red line. We now need to take appropriate action to remove, or rectify the Condition and/or location of the netting.

Key Planning dates were: Planning application submitted 2nd February 2021. Planning approved 14th July 2021. Section 73 application (for highways) submitted 19th January 2022, Approved 20th April 2022. Section 73 application proposed to be submitted to vary the Condition re ball stop netting.

We have been on site just over a year with Classic Builders, and due to have first occupations by Spring 2024. We have discharged the majority of relevant conditions. The remainder of the units will complete by Summer 2024.

Lessons Learnt

- The need for understanding of the risks and the risk appetite by all parties involved in Council led schemes.
- The wording of Conditions is key - even minor changes require a return to Committee for Council developments and consequent delays.
- Liaison at key stages between the Client Department, Planning and Highways is very important, and an understanding of the consequences to the budget and timescales of modifications.
- An understanding of affordable housing and how that changes the demographic of the scheme affecting how properties are occupied, car ownership, and traffic movements etc.
- Schemes for 100% affordable housing (both Council and Housing Association) need priority status to ensure their smooth path through the system, and that planning requirements do not have a detrimental impact on delivery.
- The Council's own policies can have an impact on its own developments particularly CIL relief policies, future Infrastructure Levy, and costs for nutrient neutrality and phosphates mitigations,
- The Council's policy on climate change and building zero carbon homes can result in viability issues when applied to affordable housing schemes.

Author: Wendy Lewis

Housing Development Manager Specialist
Somerset Council



Judging by experience in Cornwall, Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) groups typically take very traditional approaches to community involvement, Digital engagement is usually limited to Facebook, sometimes Twitter, and online survey tools. As a result important place-shaping conversations are limited to formats that are notorious for 'grandstanding', abuse and shallow involvement.

We have also seen a significant dip in the willingness of communities to engage since COVID. Maybe to start with a fear of meetings and mixing, but there's definitely a continuing strong element of cynicism about government and planning, which is having an impact on NDP engagement.

However, general online awareness has increased across all age ranges since COVID, providing an opportunity to make it easy for people to take part in NDPs in safe, meaningful and long term ways, moving from simple consultation to effective engagement.

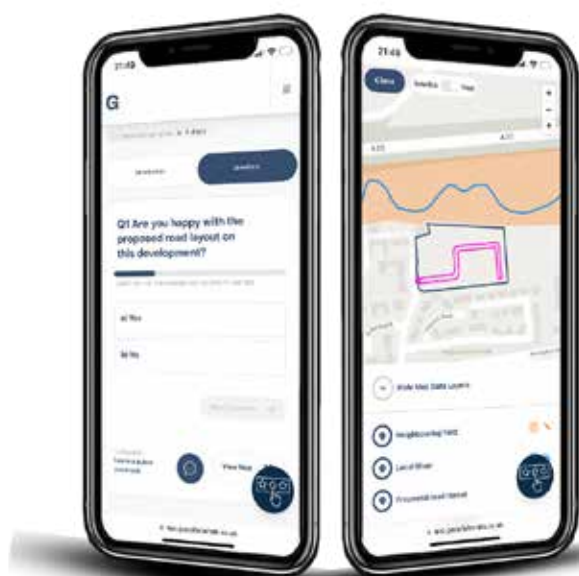
DLUHC is funding demonstrations of how 'PropTech' digital platforms can enhance community engagement in local plans and regeneration. Could the introduction of similar platforms to Neighbourhood Planning help move NDPs to the more positive enabling role that DLUHC wants to see?



I've had the opportunity to work with NDP Groups using early stages of the GoCollaborate.co.uk digital engagement platform for NDP scoping, drawing up draft development boundaries, and formal draft plan consultations. It seems to me that, providing the right steps are taken, there are real benefits to be had through using a well-designed digital engagement platform in NDP production.

These are in an improved quality and relevance of comments received, with greater transparency compared to more basic forms of consultation. The administrative burden of engagement is also eased as much of the data product is pre-analysed and easier to use than raw data. A fixed and accessible record is created – not an excel file on someone's data stick in a drawer somewhere! The chat facility, carefully used, offers a community consensus building tool to support positive working relationships and trust over the long term.

I saw no evidence that older age groups were put off intrinsically by digital engagement channels. However responses from busy under 40s didn't increase above the norm, except where there were issues particularly relevant to them [e.g. school provision]. Awareness raising of issues and the opportunity to digitally engage needs to be well signalled to younger people.



GoCollaborate

Creating better, more sustainable places. Our cost-effective online engagement and consultation platform helps you to reach and connect with your residents, for more representative feedback and more inclusive decision-making.



So what are the pillars for successful digital community engagement in creating NDPs...?

- Understanding - Groups struggle to understand how digital engagement platforms work but this quickly dissipates. Following a digital platform's information 'on-boarding guide' is vital.
- A clear strategy that is focused on engagement, not just consultation, and is 'digitally fit for purpose', backed by a budget that is sensible but adequate to cover both traditional and online channels.
- A stakeholder analysis approach identifying who should be engaged with and how.
- Making equalities and diversity an integral part of the strategy.
- Awareness of what is out there in terms of apps and digital community engagement platforms and the trends in community use of online info and communications.
- A small and active NDP engagement team with a social media aware lead person in charge of each channel to do content creation and management.
- Keeping the team and the campaign active from day one, right through to the referendum.
- Simple 'explainer' videos, digital mapping tools such as Parish Online, and interesting local images to give local appeal.
- Consistency of message and branding in online engagement and traditional leaflets and posters.
- Using social media, leaflets, posters, and business cards featuring QR codes that link to the community engagement platform.
- Real-time evaluation of take up during specific engagement periods so areas of low response can be targeted.
- Avoiding oversimplification of content that could lead to accusations of misleading people.
- Using local 'movers and shakers', community leaders and opinion formers to amplify the campaign... including a young person to raise awareness of issues and champion NDP engagement amongst peers via trusted youth channels [Instagram, TikTok, Twitter, word of mouth].
- Feedback on engagement responses and outcomes to help in build credibility for the NDP.

Looking forward, there is promise for NDPs to go completely 'html' around a fully-fledged digital engagement platform. Many other local council activities could also use digital engagement, such as in the preparation of responses to planning proposals, budget and site management forecasting etc. Given the potential benefits of digitalisation, and the way it is picking up speed in the wider Planning world, planning professionals working with local councils and NDP groups could have an important role in helping them move with the times.



In 2022 I was working for Dorset Council on the Development Management side. One application which was part of my caseload was for a public electric vehicle (EV) charging station. It was for a relatively small station of eight 120kw rapid chargers each offering 80% charge in circa 20 minutes. The applicant, Instavolt, proposed that it would be illuminated and open to the public 24 hours per day, 7 days per week (albeit the illumination would be activated for only when the chargers were in use).

As someone who had run a company EV for many years, I was interested to note that the site, just off the A354 in the village of Pimperne in Dorset, differed from many EV charging stations and locations of charging points that I had encountered previously. Typically, such clusters of chargers were to be found in town centre public car parks, the car parks of larger retail stores, at visitor attractions or as part of a larger facility serving motorists such as a motorway service stations. Other charging stations have also been noted adjoining solar farms.

The EV charging hub proposed at Pimperne was different insofar as it did not adjoin complementary facilities; there was no adjoining café or shop and neither was proposed. The site was part of a green field and the rest of this field was to remain undeveloped.

The undeveloped site

The site's location was also sensitive given its setting within the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB, an International Dark Skies Reserve (IDSR), near to a conservation area and directly abutting medieval strip lynchets (the latter a non-designated heritage asset). There is no street lighting in Pimperne but existing housing lay on the other side of the A354 to the site.

The site was defined as being in the countryside, outside of settlement limits, in both the recently reviewed Made Pimperne Neighbourhood Plan and the North Dorset Local Plan. Both of these development plan documents included policies of restraint for such countryside locations where an overriding need had to be demonstrated. They were also both silent on proposals for public EV charging stations, albeit the Local Plan, dating from 2016, promoted the need to address the causes and effects of climate change and that "one of the challenges to address this would be to develop a more sustainable transport network."

Paragraph 152 of the NPPF states that "the planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate....it should help to: shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience.....and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure."

The application prompted strong objections from the office of the Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs AONB, Dorset CPRE and the Parish Council. These objections focused on the countryside location and lack of need, and the visual and landscape impact on the International Dark Skies Reserve/AONB. The Council's Archaeologist advised that the site was part of the setting of the medieval lynchets which contributed to the significance of the heritage asset.

A question that lingered in my mind throughout the application process was, how will EVs and the associated infrastructure develop over time? There are parallels with the evolution of petrol filling stations (the consolidation and changing character of these facilities over the past few decades, from the abundance of small village garages to 12 pumps plus facilities adjacent to superstores and towns commonly only have one such station).

Increasing EV ranges, the use of home chargers and the provision of charging points at destination points seem to suggest that other charging stations could become obsolete in a short period of time and close in a similar fashion to the village garage. These are considerations which I would welcome the thoughts of readers.

Ultimately, I recommended approval and the application was granted by the Council's Area Planning Committee on the basis that there was a need and the landscape and visual impact could be mitigated by landscaping. The heritage harm was considered to be outweighed by the public benefits that the development afforded to combatting climate change. However, not all my colleagues of the time were convinced of the balance that I had struck and there was a degree of healthy, officer debate within the Council.

The need was derived from a documented requirement for EV charging stations to fill a regional gap in the infrastructure (there was only four rapid chargers within a 20km radius of the site, an area that included the town of Blandford Forum and the A354 and A350).



© Images courtesy of contributor on ZapMap

Weight was also afforded to national government evidence and policy at the time of determination. This showed that 2021 saw the biggest annual increase in the number of registrations, with more than 395,000 battery-electric cars registered, showing a growth of 92% on 2020. The data for 2022 had not been released at the time but, at the end of November 2022, there were more than 620,000 battery-electric cars. The ban of conventionally fuelled new cars and vans was still 2030 at that time of determination and the government advised that the UK would need a minimum of 300,000 public charge points by that time. As of April 2022, there were 32,000 (11% of that required). The government also advised that the need could be up to 700,000 public charge points if people's travel habits change, so 300,000 was a robust minimum requirement.

InstaVolt constructed the site in the first half of this year and it opened in July. The company has wider plans to support the need for more public, rapid chargers, with goals to install 10,000 chargers by 2030.

When asked about usage of the site, Instavolt have advised that it "has been 16% higher than the average across their national network". I also asked them whether their experiences at Pimperne will influence future development and they advised that they "continuously update processes and designs to ensure we are proposing installations best suited for clients, local planning authorities and customers." Asked specifically whether such rural installations would be rolled out they stated "Instavolt aims to install charging equipment with areas with local amenities. In the

instance where this is not possible, we review to see if we can propose our own amenities. However, this would become a much larger development, one of our hub sites."

A non-scientific sample of reviews of the site on Zap-Map reveal comments such as "First class site, wish there more like this", "lots of chargers, but no other facilities", "excellent charging spot, 8 fast chargers, no loo or shop, right by the road", "very fast and a nice pub 2 minutes away", "so handy and surprising to find 8 chargers in a tiny village. Brilliant fast charging too. No facilities though, in case you need a toilet break, there's nothing there."

The lack of signage, location behind a field hedge, reduced lighting and lack of complementary facilities were driven by the sensitive location; had there been such facilities proposed, it is highly likely the development would have been resisted.

It's clear, from usage, that the site has responded to a need and, in my opinion, more such sites are required to complement those at destinations and home chargers. It is also clear that most development plans predate the context of requiring a national charging infrastructure. However, it is also clear that, even with the recently announced delays to the ban on new petrol and diesel engine cars, the rollout of new infrastructure is needed. Readers' thoughts would be most welcome.

Author: Simon Sharp

Associate Boon Brown & 2023
RTPI South West Hon. Secretary

Marine Planners from the Marine Management Organisation visit the Isles of Scilly

Alicia Shephard and Zia Fikardos, Marine Planners from the Marine Management Organisation (MMO), were invited to attend the Festival of Nature on the Isles of Scilly to discuss marine planning and marine plan use with event attendees. The event was led by the Isles of Scilly Wildlife Trust and was aimed to engage locals and tourists on the local environment, as well as involving key stakeholders including the Local Authority, Statutory Nature Conservation Bodies, fishing, and tourism and recreation organisations.

The Isles of Scilly lie 45 km (24 nautical miles) off the Cornish peninsula, and are within the South West marine plan area. The five inhabited islands and numerous islets have been recognised as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty due to the biodiversity and rich fauna and flora found there. The Isles are also considered the warmest place in Britain – although the hosts failed to mention how windy and rough the crossing was!

The Isles of Scilly are England's largest ocean archipelago, are a Special Area of Conservation, and have 26 Sites of Special Scientific Interest, 11 Marine Conservation Zones, 5 protected wreck sites, and numerous RAMSAR habitats.

What Alicia and Zia did

Visiting the Isles of Scilly was a great opportunity to build relationships and to raise awareness of marine planning and the South West marine plan.

Alicia and Zia presented to stakeholders and the public as part of the welcome event that kicked off the Festival of Nature. They also facilitated a series of bespoke training sessions on marine planning and the South West marine plan with a range of stakeholders, involving local council members, the Wildlife Trust, Isles of Scilly Inshore Fisheries Conservation Authority (IFCA), Natural England and the Ocean Conservation Trust.

Issues affecting the Isles of Scilly

Tourism and recreation are widely recognised as very important sectors within the South West marine plan areas, and activities that promote or facilitate sustainable tourism and recreation activities are supported. Although the Isles of Scilly are a small location it has an abundance of tourism and recreation activities taking place.

This comes with numerous issues, and it was highlighted by some stakeholders that tourism and recreation is a major concerning factor that has a knock on effect in other areas. For example, tourists are taken on boats to see wildlife such as seals, dolphins, puffins and to visit the other islands. This tourism is positive for the local economy, but it has an impact on local fisheries, air quality, water quality and underwater noise within protected areas.

The South West marine plan's Marine Protected Area (MPA) policies, alongside Biodiversity policies, seek to protect these areas and the vulnerable species and habitats within them.

Land-based infrastructure is critical to facilitating marine activities upon which the Isles are reliant. Examples of current and potential future developments supported by the Infrastructure policies include: cables between the archipelago and the mainland; infrastructure to support the renewable energy sector; and port development.



Feedback and reflection

There was a general feeling amongst stakeholders that the sessions had helped them to better understand terrestrial and marine planning together. There was limited prior knowledge on the South West marine plans or marine planning in general before the session. Stakeholders were keen to continue this engagement with more sessions for those that were unable to attend.

Other stakeholders facilitated some very valuable discussion around marine spatial prioritisation, and it was considered that in the future more spatially specific plans would be helpful to tackle some of the issues arising on the Isles.

Whilst marine planning is a new concept for several groups it was embraced eagerly, for example, researchers from Swansea University who previously had no knowledge of marine planning highlighted that it would be very useful in their research. Their research involves building a database of evidence on seagrass habitats as well as studying the sociological aspect of stakeholder engagement.

Overall, the trip was successful in creating stronger stakeholder relationships. It initiated some valuable conversations regarding marine planning and the unique challenges that the Isles of Scilly face whilst also learning about the various projects being undertaken around the islands.

Author: Sidonie Kenward

Marine & Terrestrial Planner
Marine Management Organisation

Branchout plans to feature a series of articles about previous winners and commended entries in the annual RTPI South West Awards for Planning Excellence. These articles will, having set out a brief description of the winning Project or Plan and a resume of the main points made by the awards judging panel, then assess the current position in terms of delivery. Have the main aims and objectives been achieved? What have been the successes and challenges, what lessons are there for planners?

The first of these articles relates to the Water Space Project, the winner of the 'Excellence in Spatial Planning' category and overall winner of the SW Awards in 2017.

Description & Judges View

Submitted for an Award by the Waterspace Partnership (Canal and River Trust, Environment Agency, Wessex Water) and Bath & NE Somerset, The Waterspace Project was established in 2015 to develop and deliver projects which would enhance Bath & NE Somerset's waterways through the development of an evidence based strategy for joint investment on, and alongside, 16 miles of the River Avon and Kennet and Avon Canal. The Awards Judging Panel considered this to be an excellent submission relating to an impressive and unusual spatial planning project involving extensive partnership working and consultation co-ordinated by the B&NES planners involving members of the Waterspace Partnership. The Panel was impressed that the issues along an hitherto largely neglected river and canal corridor had been comprehensively addressed by the production of an evidence based strategy including over 30 river and canal side development and improvement projects. Information gathered included land ownership, funding sources (including from S.106 agreements), potential for pooling those funds and the extensive range of wildlife. It was noted that the community consultation programme included a boater survey aimed at gathering information concerning the current and potential future use of the waterways themselves.

It was the Panel's view that the project will assist greatly in realising the potential for future investment along these two waterways and provide a basis for the then impending review of the Bath and NE Somerset Core Strategy and the determination of planning applications. Overall the Judging Panel concluded that this was an excellent submission, in particular an exemplar of partnership working to realise the potential for future investment along these waterways balancing economic and environmental issues.

Where are they now?

The following assessment of the current situation has been provided by Shelly Dewhurst the Bath and NE Somerset Council Green Infrastructure Programme Manager - Avon Corridor. Along with the Waterspace team she is working on a number of river based projects including 'The Bath River Line', an urban regeneration project through Bath, 'Waterspace Connected', a rural strategic green infrastructure project connecting to the neighbouring authorities, 'The Bath Moorings Project' and water quality and flood resilience projects.

The WaterSpace Study - overall winner 2017 Southwest Awards and best entry in the 'Excellence in Spatial Planning' category

In 2016, the issue of how we effectively manage our rivers was moving up the agenda for Bath & North East Somerset Council. We had a plethora of issues that needed addressing, yet lacked the evidence and funding to do much about them. Our main river, the River Avon, wiggled its way through the county, connecting Bath to our rural towns and communities and delivering multiple benefits, yet we didn't have an approach to management and there were multiple agencies delivering different and often disparate elements. So, in 2016 we established the Strategic River Group which brought together the key players - ourselves, Environment Agency, Canal & River Trust, and Wessex Water. The remit was clear, how do we work together to 'Revitalise the Waterways of Bath & North East Somerset'.

One year later, we published the WaterSpace Study. As the name suggests it was a study which collected and collated a wide range of data and evidence about the state of our waterways. It was arranged around five themes - Asset & Asset Management, Moorings & Navigation, Regeneration & Development, Environmental Enhancement & Water Quality and Recreation & Leisure. Through extensive community and partner engagement, ideas for 35 projects were identified, ranging from large-scale strategic green infrastructure programmes to smaller interventions, all designed to improve the canal and river for wildlife, access, boating and regeneration. Crucially, the study enabled our key partners to come together to create a solid partnership committed to driving this agenda forwards.

Winning the Excellence in Spatial Planning Category of the RTPI Awards in 2017 provided a tremendous boost to the team and validated the study. It helped raise the profile of the WaterSpace Project across different departments with B&NES, as well as external stakeholders and organisations. Improving our 'WaterSpaces' was fast becoming a council wide aspiration and acted as the catalyst to implement a new programme of activities.

Fast forward five years and we are operating in a very different landscape. Bath & North East Somerset Council has declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency and established a Green Transformation Team and new policies to help address this emergency. The riverside through Bath has also changed significantly. A new bridge connects Bath Quays north to south and the newly developed Newarks Works. The Bath City Riverside Enterprise Area continues to grow and flourish with new areas of previously industrial land being transformed into contemporary new quarters. The riverside is the city's newest cultural hub offering much needed office, commercial and residential opportunities.

The study itself provided an excellent tool to develop our strategy and shape the programme to improve our waterways. We used the evidence and project ideas in the WaterSpace Study to initiate the following partnership projects.

- We established a volunteer workforce with Canal & River Trust who undertake more than 3000 hours of hands-on river management activities per year from one of their two boats - the Sulis and Community Spirit.



RTPI South West Awards for Planning Excellence

Where are they now?

- We attracted £5m in funding to create a nature-rich greenway and footbridge connecting Bath & North East Somerset to South Gloucestershire and into Bristol.
- We undertook extensive surveys of the bat populations along the river to create guidance on lighting for riverside development.
- We have developed the Better Mooring Project which aims to improve the quality and quantity of mooring provision across the region.
- We have delivered a series of towpath improvements along the canal through Bath.

Alongside these tangible projects, it is also worth noting the intangible benefits the study and this award provided to the team and council more generally. Achieving healthy rivers was a key manifesto commitment for the recently elected administration and is now firmly embedded in the Corporate Strategy. The WaterSpace team is regularly invited to report to the leadership team on issues around water quality, river ecology, and asked by outside organisations for our expertise on the planning, design, and delivery of good quality green and blue infrastructure through the planning framework. This focus on waterways has enabled us to better engage with external partnerships such as the Bristol Avon Catchment Partnership, working with other Local Authorities and public bodies to effectively tackle complex issues.

However, despite the significant progress we have made in this area and the increased awareness communities now have about the benefits of healthy rivers, the plight of our waterways remains a pressing twenty-first century issue that urgently needs addressing. Climate change is exacerbating high flood events, pollutants, litter, and sewage continue to enter our watercourses at alarming rates, fish are unable to spawn in many of the tributaries due to weirs and other infrastructure, and wildlife that rely on the rivers, particularly birds and invertebrates continue to plummet in numbers. The River Avon has been assessed as achieving only Moderate Ecological Status and failing on Chemical Status overall, and by the very nature of a river catchment many of these issues are being caused outside of our boundaries. We recognise that the work we are doing only forms part of a wider solution and by working with our neighbouring authorities, the catchment partnership, and other agencies, we will ensure that our rivers and waterways remain a valuable green and blue asset that can be experienced and enjoyed by generations to come.



To find out more please visit

www.bathnes.gov.uk/services/environment/river-safety/rivers-canal

Shelly Dewhurst is the Green Infrastructure Programme Manager - Avon Corridor at Bath & North East Somerset Council. Along with the WaterSpace team, she works on a number of river-based improvement projects, including The Bath River Line - an urban regeneration project through Bath, WaterSpace Connected - a rural strategic green infrastructure project connecting to the neighbouring authorities, The Better Moorings Project, and water quality and flood resilience projects.

Here is a roundup of RTPI South West activities & achievements in 2023 so far:



RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence

The South West round of the RTPI Awards for planning excellence judging in the South West was completed in May with the award recipients announced and presented in July at the Summer Reception. **More information** at www.rtpi.org.uk/southwestawards.

We are delighted that Hall for Cornwall, Bath and North East Somerset Council Planning and Rebecca Windemer (Young Planner) have all been selected for judging in the National RTPI Awards taking place in November. In addition, Angharad Williams, Mid Devon District Council has made the finalist list for Inspiring Leader of the Year. **More details** at www.rtpi.org.uk/excellence and we look forward to the results on the 21 November.



Rebecca Windemer pictured with sponsors Stantec and Stride Treglown



Annual Dinner

On the 8 June 2023 in at Delta Hotels by Marriott in Bristol we held our biggest dinner to date with over 270 planning and built environment attending. The event was attended by Sue Bridge, RTPI President. Entertainment was provided by a Mindreader (pictured), Magician and Food Scientist. Next year's dinner is set to take place on 12 September 2024. Mark the date in your diaries and send your expressions of interest to southwest@rtpi.org.uk



Summer Reception

On the 3rd July we held our second annual Summer Reception at Somerset County Cricket Ground in Taunton. The purpose of the event was to announce the results of the RTPI South West Awards for Planning Excellence, a celebration of new Chartered and Associate members and a thanks to all our RTPI Volunteers. The event was attended by over 80 members and guests including Sue Bridge, RTPI President.



Picture of RTPI South West Volunteers with RTPI President



CPD Seminar programme

Following successful pilots back in 2022, the region is delighted to have been able to continue in offering its core CPD seminar programme in a hybrid format giving flexibility to members on how they access CPD. This year as well as smaller events, the core seminar programme has delivered the following seminars:

- **24 April** - Housing the Unmet Need Hybrid Seminar in Bristol (114 attended)
- **16 May** - Back to the drawing board, getting design and planning right in Plymouth (190 attended)
- **20 June** - Planning for renewables in Taunton (154 attended)
- **21 September** - The changing role of planning in regeneration, Dorchester (111 attended)
- **18 October** - Multiple choice CPD Day in Exeter (123 attended)

Over 800 delegates have engaged in these events to date. The final seminar event of the year is the ever-popular Planning Law Update with Burges Salmon on the 28 November in Bath with over 237 booked to attend.

Find out more at
www.rtpi.org.uk/swplanninglaw2023



Webinars

These are popular events given their accessibility and being able to watch recordings at your convenience. The South West have added to the extensive online programme offered by RTPi. Popular topics we have hosted have included:

- Planning and Habitat Regulations, the way forward
 - 4 part renewables series on 'Key siting challenges for renewables', 'Community engagement and benefits for renewable energy', 'Nationally significant energy projects' and 'End-of-life considerations for renewable energy'.
 - Joint event with CIHT and TPS on Free Parking - a topical discussion
 - Digitalising Planning
 - Fostering Innovation in Planning International Webinar as part of World Town Planning Day
- RTPi Members can access the recordings for all RTPi webinars, please contact southwest@rtpi.org.uk

Find out about the latest webinars
www.rtpi.org.uk/events/?contentType=Online



Young Planners

Young Planners activity has grown with new groups launched for the areas of Wiltshire and Gloucestershire meaning we now have full geographical coverage for Young Planner activity. Successful recent events have included boat trips, Heritage Action Zones, walking tours, cycle ride to promote active travel, scavenger hunts and SUP/ kayaking. The year will be concluded with a mixture of Christmas socials and infamous quizzes and interesting Christmas jumpers.

www.rtpi.org.uk/swyp





Student Prizes

Recently awarded prizes to our two accredited universities - Plymouth University and UWE in Bristol

Plymouth University

Harriet Fuller (Environment Agency) was awarded Royal Town Planning Institute Prize for best overall MSc Planning student and the Royal Town Planning Institute (South West Branch) Prize for best part-time MSc Planning student.

Mariko Fukunaga (Bassetlaw District Council) was awarded the Royal Town Planning Institute (South West Branch) Prize for best full-time student on the MSc Planning programmes.

UWE

Rebecca Fram was awarded the RTPI South West prize for Academic Excellence (Undergraduate)

Jonathan Bonas was awarded RTPI South West prize for Academic Excellence (Postgraduate)



Top: Mariko Fukunaga with lecturers Dr Stephen Essex and Dr Oliver Wilson Bottom: Rebecca Fram with Julie O'Rourke RTPI SW Past Chair and Nick Croft, UWE Lecturer



Policy

In February we held an in-person roundtable discussion on the NPPF consultation (pictured). In August we hosted a virtual round table discussion on the government consultation on plan making reforms.



Early Career Research Grant

Recently awarded an RTPI Early Career Research Grant to the University of Plymouth. The title of the project is Planning with the 'Protect Duty' and atmospheres of counterterrorism in privately-owned, publicly-accessible spaces in Bristol, Exeter, and Plymouth. This is being funded by £5k from the South West reserves matched with £5k from the RTPI research grant.





President's Visit

The 7th and 8th June was RTPI President Sue Bridge's visit the South West of England, the second leg in her tour of Nations and Regions. On day 1 she visited Teignbridge where she heard about their design code work as one of the pathfinders and visited three sites which form part of the Council's South West Exeter allocation; a multi-use urban extension of 2000 homes. They visited one of the many developer's sites as well as the Ridge Top Park, a SANGS which overlooks much of the allocation and provides recreation and ecological benefits.

On day 2 Sue met Bath & North East Somerset Council's Head of Planning and Regeneration Team to learn about the challenges and opportunities of development and regeneration within a World Heritage city. The visit was concluded by a walk around the Milsom Quarter with representatives of Bath & North East Somerset Council and RTPI volunteers.

Sue then travelled on to visit the University of the West of England which currently has four fully accredited RTPI Planning Programmes, where she met a number of current and past students as well as staff. She heard about UWE's current planning research portfolio and visited the annual architecture showcase, which included work from students on the BA Architecture and Planning programme.

During the afternoon Sue visited the Brabazon site in Bristol, an ambitious arena development, former home to the hangars that saw the construction of the UK Concorde. Hosted by YTL, the visit looked at the masterplan visit for the site before undertaking a tour of the current development.

The busy day then concluded with the RTPI SW Annual Dinner attended by over 270 guests at the Delta Hotel by Marriott. Sue and Regional Chair Ian Perry hosted a table of Senior and Heads of Planning from Local Authorities.

Read more about the visit at:

www.rtpi.org.uk/find-your-rtpi/rtpi-english-regions/rtpi-south-west/regional-news-branchout/





Branchout e-magazine

During 2022, the RMB and RAC committee reconsidered the future of Branchout and its content. A survey was conducted of RTPi members in March. As a result the committee agreed to a revamp of Branchout to be more focussed on case studies/ sharing best practice and less on what the regional branch have been doing, The latter would be communicated more via the website and E-bulletins, with a summary provided in Branchout.



Mentoring

Following its launch in 2022, the South West Pilot Mentoring programme (to compliment NURTURE) has continued into 2023, pairing mentees to mentors as and when requested. Currently there are about 25 pairing still actively engaging.

In addition, the region has recently launched an more adhoc mentoring/ask a planner feature.

Find out more at
www.rtpi.org.uk/find-your-rtpi/rtpi-english-regions/rtpi-south-west/south-west-mentoring/



Careers & Education

There is much work the region can do in this area, 1st priorities are to increase the number of RTPi Ambassadors and increase opportunities to reach out to schools and colleges. For the latter, the working group has made initial contact with the various Career Hubs in the region and plans to engage with them in promoting planning as a career to schools which in turn should drive more opportunities for RTPi Ambassadors.

Find out more about Ambassadors at
www.rtpi.org.uk/become-a-planner/rtpi-ambassadors/

