



Tripwire



Tripwire magazine is published four times a year in digital form by the West Midlands region of the RTPI.

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West Midlands RTPI Chairman's opening remarks

As chairman of the WM RTPI, you have both responsibilities and opportunities. On being handed the baton at the beginning of this year, I promised myself that I would uphold the traditions of the role, but at the same time provide a personal take on things and try to stimulate some thinking amongst colleagues and fellow professionals. My theme for the year has been about planners (in whatever guise) showing passion and leadership: not being afraid to express well-argued views, pushing clients, developers, elected members to get a better deal, contributing to delivery of good quality environments and taking credit for what we do. By taking on challenges and by showing the many skills and aptitudes we have, we gain an ever more positive profile in the media and with other professional bodies.

The idea of leadership has particularly resonated with me recently after the deluge of elections this year. Leading up to these events, planning was an issue—particularly housing, but also green belt and the need to provide key infrastructure alongside housing and jobs. The Housing White Paper of last year, for example, seemed to suggest that the Government was ready to bring forward fresh

proposals that would tackle the housing problems we face, and hopeful politicians and mayoral candidates were all keen to express their views. Since then, nothing—and whilst our 'leaders' have had some truly awful incidents to deal with, for the most part they seem fixated with Brexit negotiations, at least when not trying to outdo each other politically to either stay in or gain power.

Where does that leave the average person? The great majority have little or no influence on Brexit negotiations, and maybe they don't even care about them all that much. They do, however, care about



Craig Jordan

the state of their roads, the amount and quality of housing being provided in their areas, the retail and leisure offer... But who is looking at these matters and responding?

Whilst not claiming that we, the RTPI in the West Midlands, or planning professionals in general, face the same responsibilities or pressures as MPs and local members, the same issues that were important before the elections remain so now. People need the assurance that their housing, employment, service and infrastructure needs are going to be met, that the necessary policies, plans and strategies will be put in place and action taken. Here, we can and should have a role. We need to be listening to the views of local people, we need to be identifying priority issues, we need to be seeing where and how we can make a difference, whether that be by providing evidence, signposting advice and guidance or generally supporting key agendas.

What are we doing, then?

Since the spring edition of Tripwire, we have held CPD events on good design, tourism and best practice for major planning applications. The Regional Activities Committee/Regional Management Board (RAC/RMB) have been progressing the key projects identified in our Business Plan for this year, including developing good practice in urban design, exploring the past and future role of strategic planning in the region and developing learning tools for students aspiring to engage with planning.

In May, furthermore, I and colleagues from the RAC/RMB represented the WM RTPI at the annual awards and dinners of both the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors and the Institution of Civil Engineers. This was an opportunity not only to recognise good work, but also to develop important ties between the RTPI and organisations sharing our interest in the built environment. Likewise, we have started talking to RTPI South West, with whom we share a boundary, to see how we can work better collaboratively.

In June, we hosted a housing roundtable on behalf of the National Planning Forum and the RTPI. We discovered new housing delivery models within the public sector and fed into Janice Morphet's report on the subject. In the same month, members also attended the annual RTPI National Planning Convention in London, which was, as ever, very popular, and highlighted the importance of planning here and overseas.

More recently, we held our own Awards Ball at the Macdonald Burlington Hotel in Birmingham. This was very successful, with over 240 planners dressing up to the nines to network and celebrate the award winners: the Birmingham Resilience Project, Young Planner of the Year James Carpenter and Walsall Housing Group for their Waters Keep scheme in Goscote/Blakenhall. Thanks to Stephanie Eastwood and her team for doing such a superb job organising the event, to Maria Dunn for arranging the awards judging and, of course, to our sponsors.

Looking forward, we have more CPD events (of which more later in the issue) and the Autumn Reception on 27 September in Lichfield. The cathedral city is a lovely location to host this event, and one that, due both to its history and its modern-day development pressures, presents an interesting case study for planning practitioners and anyone concerned with balancing old and new.

Then, on 30 November at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, we have the 2017 Planning Summit. Work on the event has already started in earnest, and it's shaping up to be a worthy successor to last year's outstanding event. The Summit's theme this year is 'planning in the future': which influences are likely to be motivating people, their lifestyles and their environment, and how will professionals engaged in the built and natural environments actively respond? We're recruiting speakers now, and it's certain to be a hot ticket!

So we are doing our bit, I feel, with a wide range of events at which to develop strong working relationships, share knowledge and good practice

and promote the benefits of planning, both to the public and to its practitioners. Long may it continue...

In closing, I would like to pay tribute to Sue Griffith-Jones, our Regional Co-ordinator, who leaves us on 14 September. Sue has been a wonderful servant to the RTPI and the WM Region: always helpful, professional in her approach and full of good advice, not to mention cheery of outlook and blessed with a great sense of humour. In my time as chair, Sue has been a superb support, as I know she has also been to our colleagues. She will be missed, but I am sure she will enjoy her retirement, and no doubt our paths will cross again in the future.

I hope you will join me in both thanking Sue for her service and in welcoming Trish Cookson, formerly of RTPI Yorkshire, who will take over from Sue in due course. ■

Craig Jordan is Head of Economic Growth at Lichfield District Council and is Chair of the West Midlands Branch of the RTPI

“ People need the assurance that their housing, employment, service and infrastructure needs are going to be met. ”



Paul Thompson

‘What’, you may be wondering, ‘is this admittedly rather well-dressed hippy doing editing Tripwire?’ It would be a fair question; it’s one I’ve asked myself several times since I agreed to do it. What insight can I offer, really? I’ve been presented with a pulpit, but what can I preach from it?

I’m an accidental planner, you see, which is as oxymoronic as it sounds. Casting around for some way of paying the bills after my first, abortive

member myself. So, what with not being a real planner ‘n’ all, it seems presumptuous at best, if not downright hubristic, for me to start sounding off to people who really *are* real planners about how they could do a better job of it.

Reflecting thusly on my ‘career’, however, I observe certain themes that might bear wider application. There’s the relationship between theory and practice. *In* theory, everything we build (or allow to be built) as planners is underpinned by more than a

“ the mark of a good plan is that it can accept the unexpected and turn the unforeseen into an opportunity. ”

attempt at university, I managed to land three months’ data entry at my local council. That was 12 years ago, and I’m *still* there, only now, for some reason, people keep asking me whether they can extend their houses. I’ve even started learning, formally, how to answer such questions (although I’ve mostly just learned that the learning and the doing rarely seem to have much to do with one another). The ultimate goal, of course, is to become a chartered member of what I still think of as ‘your’ august Institute, despite now being a student

century’s rigorous study of what works and what doesn’t, of how to deliver what we need whilst ensuring as many of us possible get what we want.

Yet it can often seem that such lofty goals are secondary to concerns we’re told are pragmatic, but which, in retrospect, can come to seem darkly, woefully venal. I need only mention the word ‘cladding’, in this summer of 2017, to illustrate this point. If medieval monks managed to avoid the floodplain when building their monastery in

Tewkesbury, as **Bryan Smith** observes in his report, then we modern planners, with all the tools and resources we have at our disposal, have no excuse for delivering substandard, unsustainable development—a subject with which **Vicky Edge**'s report is also concerned.

That leads me to the theme of adaptability, one's ability to navigate the relationship between what might have been and what is. It is said that the mark of a good plan (and, I would argue, of a good planner) is that it can accept the unexpected and turn the unforeseen into an opportunity. I never planned to be a planner, but since I've turned out to be one anyway, here I am guest-editing Tripwire, doing a Masters and crushing dreams of home gyms beneath the jackboot of the state.

Talking of jackboots, Coventry had no intention of getting the stuffing bombed out of it in 1940 either, but that's what happened. Rather than giving up, however, it has since then become a byword for award-winning regeneration and reconstruction, the old ring road notwithstanding—and, as **Sarah Willetts** reports, it is now making an audacious bid to be UK City of Culture in 2021, just one of many ways in which our region is repurposing its industrial past to build a brighter future.

That adaptability is also true of this issue in general. I had intended to theme it around 'Market forces and planning in the UK', hence the inclusion of my somewhat bleak essay on the relationship between

the two, and of **Reuben Bellamy**'s op-ed reimagining it as an *actual* relationship (even if the status of that relationship is 'it's complicated').

Alas, for one reason or another, I'm about three contributors short of a theme, and several days short of making my own copy deadline. Besides, I'm realising that the more I learn about planning, the less I actually *know*, so pontificating on a theme becomes ever less appealing.

Moreover, the more (brace yourselves) 'networking' I do with private-sector colleagues at events like the regional **Awards Ball** (which **Steph Eastwood**, **Craig Jordan** and I report on presently), the more I realise that most of us are on the same team, more or less (though not if we're playing five-a-side football, as **Alex Mitchell** discovers later). If the system that we're perpetuating prevents us from doing this, then it needs to evolve. And evolution means mutation, and mutation happens in response to external pressures, which, in this context, means more input from and interplay with even *more* people who aren't real planners. **Sue Manns**, whom unusually anally retentive readers might recall from my Winter 2016 report on the Planning Summit, delivers a persuasive clarion call on exactly that subject.

This issue has adapted, then. Become something other than it was, just like me, just like the planning system at large. I've no real insights to claim, no real agenda to push and no sermons to preach,

about market forces or anything else. I'm not going to tell you how to do your jobs, either. All I can do is my own, as I see it, which is to pick out some common threads in contemporary planning practice. Maybe, between us, we can weave a few conversations from them about where we've come from, where we are and where we're going. Maybe we can stitch those conversations together into a colourful patchwork quilt to cover the land: a less adversarial, less detached, more collaborative planning system, one that's fit for purpose, one that we can all be proud of. I may not be a real planner, but I'm learning from you all, and that sounds like a worthy goal to me.

So find me on LinkedIn, run into me at a CPD event, email me at work or via the RTPI WM staff, whatever works. Let's start adapting reality, rather than merely adapting *to* it. Let's get knitting. ■

Paul Thompson is a Graduate Planner for South Staffordshire Council. All opinions expressed are his own, and not necessarily those of his employer or any of his colleagues.

10th Annual RTPI WM Summer Ball & Awards Ceremony

RTPI West Midlands // Summer 2017

The pleasantly warm evening of Friday 7 July saw 240 suited, booted, gowned and renowned luminaries of the West Midlands planning scene descend upon Birmingham's Macdonald Burlington Hotel. 'twas the pinnacle of the Birmingham social season: the 10th Annual RTPI WM Summer Ball and Awards Ceremony!

This year's sold-out guest list included not only the *region's* young(ish) hopefuls, wise old(er) hands and biggest hitters, but also *national* Young Planner of the Year **Luke Coffey**, RTPI Chief Executive **Trudi Elliott** and representatives from the **Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors**, **Royal Institute of British Architects**, **Institution of Civil Engineers** and **Landscape Institute**. There to present the awards were Regional Chair **Craig Jordan**, RTPI Vice President **John Acres** and a representative from each of the three award sponsors: **Gary Smith** of **Kings Chambers** (Young Planner), **Sarah Butterfield** of **WYG** (Regional) and **Trevor Ivory** of **DLA Piper** (Chairman's).

After initial registration and lubrication in the bar, guests flooded into the splendidly bedecked banqueting hall—and then milled around for a while trying to locate their tables, which appeared to have been numbered according to the Fibonacci sequence. The atmosphere was convivial and the hubbub considerable; outbreaks of networking were observed.

Ablly compered by **Stephen Hill**, proceedings began in earnest with what **John Acres** himself called a

“mercifully short” speech. John noted that the choice of venue was not coincidental: the Burlington was also host to the first Ball, back in 2008. However, the intervening years have seen the Ball



DJ John “Hell’s Half” Acres wrecking the mic.

become something of an institution; in 2008, its organisers were more concerned about whether they would break even than whether they could fit everyone in. Warming to the theme of change, John went on to acknowledge (as has become obligatory over the past couple of years) its constancy and the uncertainty with which that leaves us. Nevertheless, he urged the planners present to take inspiration from the award winners and to be proactive, both in their quotidian work and in raising the profile of planning in the public—and indeed political—eye.

With that, the attentive table staff finished issuing buckets, shovels and rammers and guests tucked in with congruent gusto. After obliterating three courses of oddly geometric vittles (domes of goat's cheese, pucks of beef and quite possibly irregular dodecahedrons of chocolate), cummerbunds were loosened, chairs rotated and imaginary smoke rings blown: gong time! To enhance your immersion, the award citations are presented forthwith in the judges' own words.

Young Planner of the Year: Winner

James Carpenter demonstrated a good range of experience within public-sector planning. He has been involved with the RTPI at regional and national level and is a strong advocate for the planning profession, having supported five people in gaining RTPI membership at Solihull MBC. James demonstrates a high level of achievement at a young age; he led Blaby District Council out of special measures and, in 2015, joined Solihull MBC,



(l-r) Gary Smith (King's Chambers), John Acres, James Carpenter and Craig Jordan.

where he is now Head of Planning and leads a number of significant projects, including town-centre redevelopment proposals and the Solihull Local Plan.

Young Planner of the Year: Commendation

Chris Moore displays a commitment to the planning profession that extends above and beyond the responsibilities of his day job. He is the current chair of the regional Young Planners' group and recently led a bid to host the 2018 Young Planners' conference in Birmingham. Chris has also championed the planning profession, achieving a commendation for his own APC submission and mentoring junior members of the Savills team.



(l-r) Gary Smith, John Acres, Chris Moore and Craig Jordan.

Regional Excellence: Winner

The **Birmingham Resilience Project** is the biggest infrastructure project of its time and is extremely important in ensuring a reliable water supply for the region. The project is an excellent example of cross-boundary working, which used pragmatic solutions to deliver planning consents across four different local planning authorities to the same timescale. The project is an excellent example of community involvement, with 36 public events taking place covering the length of the 16-mile pipeline.

Regional Excellence: Commendation

The **Jaguar Land Rover** development at **i54** promotes many aspects of sustainable development, and is a significant project both within



(l-r) Dominic Moore, Sarah Butterfield (WYG), Hannah Kirkham, John Acres, Emma Palmer and Craig Jordan.

the region and nationally. It provides opportunities for best practice in building design to be replicated nationally. However, we would have liked to have seen more emphasis within the submission on the role of the planning process.

Chairman's Award

Walsall Housing Group's (WHG) residential development on the Goscote Lane Corridor consists of two key sites: Waters Keep, which includes 177 homes for affordable rent from WHG, and a further 235—a mixture of one-, two-, three- and four-bed properties—for open-market sale from Keepmoat. On Site B, on the former Goscote Estate, a mixture of properties and a wellbeing scheme for the over-55s are planned. The regeneration has also involved



(l-r) Mark Tranter, Craig Jordan, John Acres, Gary Fulford & Trevor Ivory (DLA Piper).

improvements to the neighbouring Blakenall estate, including 300 properties that have been upgraded with thermal wrap insulation and new roofs.

Although this project has created affordable modern homes for residents, it is not just about building homes. It is about investing in people and improving lives in order to achieve sustainable long-term change in the neighbourhood.

I gave the award having visited the site with the national President Stephen Wilkinson in March. We were impressed by the WHG's commitment not just to develop good quality houses but to work with the adjacent community, thereby integrating the houses and their new occupants into a living, breathing

community. We consider it a good example of planning for people and place.

Fresh from presenting his award, Chairman **Craig Jordan** closed the awards ceremony with a rousing peroration, in which he called for place-makers to practice partnership, crossing boundaries professional and spatial to meet the needs of future citizens, and to demonstrate leadership, particularly at a time when there is little enough to be found thereof at the highest levels in the land. Craig's final duty was to thank **Sue Griffith-Jones**, our tireless—and, alas, outgoing—regional co-ordinator, for her exemplary service, and to wish her well for the future.

Suitably replete with gifts, Sue left the stage and house band 'The Smooth Criminals' took it, striking up an energetic set list of covers and classics. Those guests with some light fantastic still to trip thereafter, heedless of the dry-cleaning bills that would await them tomorrow, ploughed on through the night at the after party, hosted by the 'Be at One' cocktail bar just around the corner in the Piccadilly arcade.

The Ball committee (pictured on the front cover) have asked me to convey their thanks to all who attended the Ball and made it such a success. For my part, I am sure that I am not alone amongst the guests in wishing to return those thanks effusively; the Ball was a fantastic opportunity to meet the brightest and best in the West Midlands planning community, engage in interesting and provocative conversation and make vital contacts from across the industry. But you don't

need to take my word for it—book your tickets early (and/or persuade your employer to do it for you) and come along next year! Thank you to the event sponsors **No5 Chambers, Pegasus Group, RCA Regeneration and Systra** for making the event possible and to everyone who attended and made it such a successful evening. A photo album of the evening can be found [here](#). ■

Report by Paul Thompson with input from Steph Eastwood and Craig Jordan



(l-r) Craig Jordan, Stephen Hill & Sue Griffith-Jones.

Online learning module – Dementia and Town Planning

RTPI has developed a new free online training module that explains how good quality housing and well-planned, enabling local environments can have a substantial impact on the quality of life of someone living with dementia. Through a series of clear explanations, instructive images, short videos, and quizzes, the module guides you through the basics. It can be completed in 1 hour and can contribute to your CPD requirements as an RTPI member.

Access the module here <http://rtpilearn.org.uk/> (login required).

The web story is here <http://rtpi.org.uk/briefing-room/news-releases/2017/july/new-online-training-on-dementia-and-planning-launched/> ■

RTPI WM multi-buy CPD programme

To help members plan their CPD and book places at a discount, RTPI West Midlands offers multi-buy tickets for CPD events (though you can still book individual places).

Multi-buy credits can be used at one or different events, by one person or more than one person, and you can pay by credit card or invoice. Book your places as normal via the RTPI website and

enter your multi-buy code. Your confirmation email will tell you how many multi-buy places you have redeemed and what you have left.

The multi-buy prices are follows:

£220 + VAT (£264) for 5 places/credits
£415 + VAT (£498) for 10 places/credits
£635 + VAT (£762) for 15 places/credits
£830 + VAT (£996) for 20 places/credits

It isn't too late to purchase a multi-buy for the 2017 programme. There are still places available on 4 multi-buy programme events between September and December. Details at www.rtpi.org.uk/the-rtpi-near-you/rtpi-west-midlands/events/

Looking forward, RTPI WM are starting to plan the CPD programme for 2018. If you have any suggestions on topics, speakers or venues please email them to westmidlands@rtpi.org.uk ■

Does your local authority engage in direct provision of housing? Is it considering it?

For a number of reasons, local authorities are engaging with direct provision of housing both through the traditional means of the HRA but now also through the use of housing companies established under 2011 Localism Act powers. These local authority companies are frequently wholly

owned and are providing housing across all tenures. As part of a research project funded by the RTPI and the National Planning Forum, Professor Janice Morphet and Dr Ben Clifford of the Bartlett School of Planning, University College London, are attempting to put together a database of local authority activity in this area that can be shared publicly.

Janice and Ben have already spoken with planning and housing colleagues in a series of roundtables across England and have constructed a survey questionnaire derived from the information they have contributed. They are trying to get a response from every local authority in England on their housing activities.

If you can spare 10 minutes to help contribute to this national picture of local authority housing provision then please complete the survey at: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/FQDWXVM>

Only those working for local authorities should complete the survey. Perspectives from Finance Officers will be very useful in giving a complete picture of this area.

The results will be published on the project website after 4th December when the project is due to be launched. ■

Dr Michael Harris
Deputy Head of Policy and Research
Royal Town Planning Institute

Town Planning and Market Forces, sitting in a tree...

RTPI West Midlands // Summer 2017

*Me and Mrs. Jones
We got a thing goin' on
We both know that it's wrong
But it's much too strong
To let it go now*

'Billy Paul' — 1972 song by
Gilbert, Gamble, Gamble and Huff

They are in love: madly and passionately in love. TP 4 MF — tru luv. They can't live without each other; they nourish and feed each other. But they don't want you to know. To the outside world, he is caring and worried about his impact on others, especially those less able to shout for themselves; he is responsible and oh-so-slightly left-leaning. She is dynamic, on the other hand, thrusting and entrepreneurial, and she gets frustrated when her creativity and ability to add value are fettered by well-meaning types, with their policies and rules and procedures.

How can they let their own worlds in on their secret affair? People would judge, they always do; she might be black-balled from the golf club, he politely asked to leave the conservation volunteer group. But the truth is, she completes him and he completes her; if one did not exist, neither would the other. Just imagine if she was caring, imagine her without externalities. What if she couldn't even spell *laissez-faire*? What if she were fettered? Then, there would be no need for him. But look at the future he paints for her. Any favours he bestows on her will increase

her sustainability, many, many, many times. He provides a safe and stable environment for her to operate in. Outwardly she pretends otherwise, but she needs him almost as much as he needs her.

Is any love affair truly equal? The truth is, she *is* high maintenance. He doesn't really like out-of-town shopping centres, but she has built loads of them, always with his reluctant permission in the end. He wants policy-compliant affordable housing provision, but he doesn't always get it, especially when she builds on his favourite type of site: brownfield. He wants locally distinctive design but, despite his best efforts, everywhere looks like anywhere. This is no frictionless affair.

If only they could be open about their love. Then they would realise they need to work together, to learn about and shape each other, to make what

seem to be compromises that will work to both their benefit in the long term. He knows he needs to work harder to understand her, to acknowledge the strength of her feelings, for behind her feelings is the most powerful force in the world; if money goes before, all ways lie open. She knows she needs him, to regulate and constrain her, and she knows that if she goes along with some of his obsessions — good design, for example — it will make it easier to get his approval and increase her value.

Surely, with a bit of relationship guidance, there is a beautiful future for these two. Or am I just a hopeless romantic?

— *With apologies to Professor Colin Jones.* ■

Reuben Bellamy
Planning Director, Lone Star Land Ltd



'One would expect', argue Knox & Cullen (1981, p.184), 'complex and ambiguous relationships in a movement which originally sprang up as a counter to the unfettered forces of capitalism only to find itself taken over in the long-term defence of the capitalist social formation'. In this article, I aim to explore the evolution of planners' relationship to the market, from counterbalance to complicit, and highlight some of the practical ways in which it has been expressed. I will argue that modern town planning is rooted in attempts to curb the market's worst excesses—that its theoretical underpinnings are inherently contrary to pure free-market capitalism. In contemporary practice, however, planners are invariably obliged passively to accommodate the market, if not actively promote capitalist interests. I attribute that evolution to the sharp economic shift rightward inculcated by the New Right Critique's rout of the post-war consensus and the neoliberal policies enacted by Margaret Thatcher's successive Governments.

I begin by examining modern town planning's origins amidst the cholera-ridden hell of the 19th-century urban environment, before tracing its evolution and erosion through the 20th century. In particular, I follow Henderson & Ellis (2016) in ascribing the successful establishment of neoliberal planning practices as the "new normal" to the failure of social-democratic planners to present a convincing alternative. Notwithstanding the foregoing, I conclude (with a tip of the hat to Marxist

critiques; cf. Knox & Cullen, 1981; Gould, 2014) that the new neoliberal normal merely emphasises an economic, market-led impetus intrinsic to spatial planning since its inception; rather than revolutionise planning, Thatcher and her fellow travellers merely stripped away planning's more socialist raiment to reveal its capitalist underbelly.

Modern British town planning, then, arises from the pattern of economic growth (or the lack thereof) and urbanisation established during the Industrial Revolution, and its impact on public health and wellbeing. Early industrialisation required little in the way of state intervention or spatial planning, being largely expressed in the textile mills and ironworks scattered across the countryside. However, the conversion of almost all industry from hydraulic to coal power in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, together with later famines and so-called agricultural land "reforms", transformed the country physically and demographically, with landless former peasants seeking employment in burgeoning industrial towns and established trade centres. The effect on the urban environment was catastrophic, with whatever rudimentary arrangements for potable water, sewage disposal and general sanitation each town possessed being swiftly overwhelmed by the influx of people, whose novel mobility helped spread the inevitable cholera epidemics faster and more widely (Hall & Tewdwr-Jones, 2011, pp.12–15). Even those slum-dwellers who survived the epidemics were subject to brutal, unremitting and frequently lethal poverty, with no formal or readily accessible relief

from the vicissitudes of market forces if their family's bread-winner were to find themselves unemployed or incapacitated (Engels, 1987 [1845], pp.109–119; Hall, 2014, pp.15–18). Central government eventually empowered local authorities to interfere 'with market forces and private property rights in the interest of social well-being', in a prototypical form of the Building Regulations, but, crucially, only once they had realised that the 'overcrowded insanitary conditions resulted in an economic cost' (Cullingworth *et al.*, 2015, p.17).

Contemporaneously and subsequently, philanthropically-minded captains of industry sought to remove their workforces from such stygian conditions by building model villages for their labourers outside the growing industrial centres: Robert Owen at New Lanark (*fl.* 1800–1810), Titus Salt at Saltaire (*fl.* 1853–1863), George Cadbury at Bournville (*fl.* 1879–1895) and William Hesketh Lever at Port Sunlight (*fl.* 1888) (*ibid.*, p.18; Hall & Tewdwr-Jones, 2011, pp.28–29). They may have provided vastly improved environments for their workers, but again, it had not escaped their attention that there was a competitive, economic advantage to so doing: 'they built their factories cheaply on rural land; it was necessary to house the labour forces outside the city in consequence, and they got a modest return in rents for their investment' (*ibid.*, p.28; cf. p.31). The later "garden cities", for which these workers' utopias were the prototypes, were not as widely adopted as their progenitor, Ebenezer Howard, might have hoped

(nor in the expansible, networked “Social City” form he envisaged), but Howard and his disciples, chief amongst them Raymond Unwin and Barry Parker, were instrumental in the creation of Letchworth and Welwyn garden cities, as well as “garden suburbs” in the outskirts of London and Manchester (*ibid.*, p.33). The principles of their founding were avowedly socialist; industry was to be spatially and developmentally constrained, and harnessed to work for their host communities, rather than the obverse (Cullingworth *et al.*, 2015, p.18). It may not be coincidental to the abortion of the garden-city experiment, however, that both Letchworth and Welwyn suffered financial troubles (Hall & Tewdwr-Jones, *loc. cit.*).

Nevertheless, escape—be it to one of the garden cities or by landing employment with a Quaker magnate—was not the only means by which the late Victorian labourer might avoid becoming a casualty of market forces. *Fin-de-siècle* thinking on both sides of the Atlantic recognised *laissez-faire* capitalism as the cause of urbanisation’s ills, and advocated state intervention to counter it (Foglesong, 1986, pp.3–4; Hall, 2014, p.19). The British Royal Commission of 1885 recommended measures to ensure that local authorities properly exercised their existing public health powers, which they saw enacted immediately (*ibid.*, pp.23–24). Those powers were gradually expanded (and their use more vigorously enforced) by several *ante-* and *intra-bellum* Acts of Parliament, the *Housing, Town Planning &c. Act 1909* perhaps most notable

amongst them (*ibid.*, pp.55–57; but cf. Cullingworth *et al.*, 2015, p.19). The emphasis in the first half of the 20th century was very much on local-authority provision, with large public schemes in east and west Birmingham and west London; the schemes were ‘a notable advance’ on the monotonous “by-law” houses that preceded them—though still occasionally prone to the same failures of spatial imagination—and, of course, massively preferable to the slums *they* relieved (Hall & Tewdwr-Jones, 2011, p.21; Hall, 2014, pp.57–59).

grievously wounded nation rebuilding itself (Hall & Tewdwr-Jones, 2011, pp.71). The Committee considered nationalising the land itself, which would have wound up the British property market at a stroke and made planning planners’ sole preserve, but the Labour Government predicted that such a measure would be politically unpopular, instead settling for a planning system that their Conservative counterparts would likely have enacted themselves (Taylor, 1998, pp.21–22). The post-War consensus thus alighted on a “middle-

“ The emphasis in the first half of the 20th century was very much on local-authority provision ”

However, perhaps the high-water mark of British planning’s social-democratic and market-interventionist inclinations came shortly after World War II, with the *Town & Country Planning Act 1947*. For better and for worse, the 1947 Act was to become ‘the cornerstone of the whole planning system created after the Second World War’; its crux was the nationalisation of land development rights, by which means its progenitors on the wartime Uthwatt Committee envisaged the state

way” between the extremes of liberalism (with its support of private enterprise and the free market) and socialism (with its advocacy of greater public ownership and control)’ (*ibid.*, p.21; cf. Hall & Tewdwr-Jones, *loc. cit.*).

Diluted though it may have been, the 1947 Act was still intended to regulate a landscape dominated by public-sector development (*ibid.*). As such, in addition to development-right nationalisation, the local planning functions it devolved upon local

authorities (that is, the duty to select land parcels under their aegis for certain developments and/or uses) constituted unprecedented state intervention in the market and fundamentally overturned the relationship between the rights of individual property owners and the public interest (Cullingworth *et al.*, 2015, p.26). But then—

effective planning necessarily interferes with the market, sometimes removing a hoped-for increase in value by determining that an area of land will not be developed for profitable use, at other times boosting the value of land by designating it for development[.]

(*ibid.*)

The Uthwatt Committee recognised that it would have been unjust and illogical for private landowners to benefit directly from, or suffer loss due to, public decisions in which they had played no part. As such, the Act also sought to redirect the ‘development value’—the benefit accruing to the owners of land selected to host the envisaged waves of public-sector development—to the public

purse via a ‘development charge’, which the act set at 100% of the gain; compensation would also be paid to owners of unprofitable land from a £300 million fund (Hall & Tewdwr-Jones, 2011, p.73; Cullingworth *et al.* 2015, pp.26–27). However, ‘the only difficulty was that it did not work’—because the 1947 Act had not nationalised the *land* the state needed for development, the state was simultaneously relying on continued land speculation on the private market and removing any incentive for such speculation to occur. The result was rapid inflation in the cost of land, since buyers effectively had to pay the development charge twice over, and the charge was repealed in 1954 by the Conservative administration elected three years earlier (Hall & Tewdwr-Jones, *loc. cit.*).

The tension between the assumed aims of post-War planning and its governing legislation reflected wider societal debates between socialism and liberal capitalism, between the idealistic allure of utopian theory and the cold pragmatism of functional practice and, ultimately, between modernism and postmodernism. In each debate, the

former favours grand, state-led visions and the latter more piecemeal, developer-led provision, overseen by light-touch state regulation. Arguably, the 1954 Act was the point at which the former began to give way to the latter; its repeal of the development charge allows developers to recoup vast profits simply by seeking and obtaining planning permission, without even carrying out any work, thus providing a potent stimulus for private land speculation once more (albeit whilst contravening the capitalist truism of “just rewards”, ironically) (Gough, 2014). Labour governments in 1967 and 1975 tried to reinstate variations on the same theme, but their Conservative successors repealed them in each case. Yet the extended *contretemps* over the development charge did not necessarily indicate an abyssal division between the two primary political parties in the UK. The middle way was just that; for all that Labour and the Conservatives might have been more inclined towards one pole or the other of each of the aforementioned debates, there was a broad social-democratic consensus over the function of planning and its role within a “mixed” economy’ (Taylor, 1998, pp.131–132).

The consensus was only shattered in the late 1970s, when inflation, sluggish growth and high taxation created an economic and political environment ripe for free-market liberal theorists, and their political champions in Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, to argue that the state intervention inherent to the mixed economy was

“ there was a broad social-democratic consensus over the function of planning ”

stifling ‘enterprise, competitiveness and efficiency[;] planners were singled out for special criticism’ (*ibid.*, pp.132–133 & 136). The electorate agreed, electing Thatcher’s Conservatives in 1979, yet the expected neoliberal assault on the planning system itself failed to materialise. Instead, Thatcher’s Secretary of State for the Environment, Michael Heseltine, busied himself with ‘streamlining’ procedure, but his (and Thatcherism’s) greatest impact on planning was ideological, to be found in policy rather than legislation: ‘planning authorities should take a “positive” view of applications for development, and hence be more supportive of the market system which generated these proposals’ (*ibid.*, p.138). This was in marked contrast to the explicitly regulatory role the state had taken from the earliest Planning Acts onwards.

Considered from a distance, however, Thatcherism merely kicked down a crumbling edifice unsupported by either side: ‘she gave a push and the damn thing fell over’ (Upton, 2016). An examination of the development charge’s equivalents in the post-2010 planning landscape is perhaps instructive here. Notwithstanding unimplemented New Labour proposals to reinstate the charge (again), Section 106 Agreements (S106As) and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) are comparatively anaemic, the onus being on the local authority (LA) to clear numerous bureaucratic hurdles before it collects a penny. Even where the LA does so, the developer can simply present (or concoct) evidence that S106As

or CIL payments would render the development non-viable in the property market, and their obligations are reduced or waived altogether in the interests of “sustainable development”; furthermore, since they provide the highest returns where development is most profitable, they frequently benefit those areas least in need of their regenerative effect (Henderson & Ellis, 2016, pp.14–15 & 41; cf. Hall & Tewdwr-Jones, 2011, p.166; Cullingworth *et al.*, 2015, pp.166–167).

single and unifying idea about what planning was for’ (Henderson & Ellis, 2016, pp.18–19; cf. Dear, 1986; Friedmann, 1987, cited in Beauregard, 1989, p.383). More generally, the National Planning Policy Framework—the sacred text of the English planning system since 2012—hews closely to Heseltine’s “positive planning” with its ‘presumption in favour of sustainable development[;] approving development proposals that accord with the development plan without delay; and, where the development plan is absent, silent or relevant

“ the developer can simply present (or concoct) evidence that S106As or CIL payments would render the development non-viable ”

Effectively, then, the market now dictates the terms by which the state operates the few significant regulatory tools remaining to it. This is because the shared goals of investors, landowners and developers are closely aligned to the powerfully simple (and painfully simplistic) neoliberal consensus—economic growth is paramount, and planning regulation hinders it—which is guaranteed a sympathetic reception in Whitehall. By contrast, ‘planning simply wasn’t a priority [for successive neoliberal governments] because there was no

policies are out-of-date, granting permission’ (DCLG, 2012, pp.3–4). As the preceding discussion of S106As and the CIL suggests, those parts of the document that appear to address more social-democratic aims (from ‘sustainable development’ onwards) are little more than platitudes at best, accorded nothing like the same weight in decision-making as those directives serving the market, such as viability assessments (Henderson & Ellis, 2016, pp.17–18).

“ town planning [has] to be seen within its political economic context ”

I have argued that the craft of planners in the UK, and especially England, grew from explicitly social-reformist, if not outright socialist, roots, dedicating itself to righting the social wrongs inflicted on Victorian working classes by *laissez-faire* capitalist industrialisation and urbanisation— by the markets, in short. Nevertheless, ‘town planning [has] to be seen within its political economic context, and [...] in western liberal societies this context is a capitalist market economy’ (Taylor, 1989, p.135; cf. *ibid.*, p.104). It was thus when those roots first found purchase, and it continues thus today. As such, whether western planners work for or against the market, it seems that they cannot—and probably should not—wholly replace it; besides, the current political consensus is neoliberal, and far more inclined to replace state planning with market forces than the obverse. As such, any opposition state planners may be permitted to muster in the foreseeable future is likely to be little more than nominal. ■

Paul Thompson

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Reaching out to everyone to engage them in the future spatial planning of the country has never been needed more than it is now.

Technological change is outpacing plan-making. As a country, we need to stay ahead of the curve if we are to be dynamic, economically successful, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable.

The challenge: working with humans. Humans are 'programmed' to resist change and in recent years we have been allowing those most likely to resist, to dominate the discussion.

Let's start an exciting nationwide conversation about the spatial future of our country, and in doing so, let's change the unbalanced, objection-driven engagement culture that has dominated planning over the past 50 years.

In 1968 the RTPI gave evidence to the Skeffington Committee looking at public participation in planning. The RTPI were of the view that—

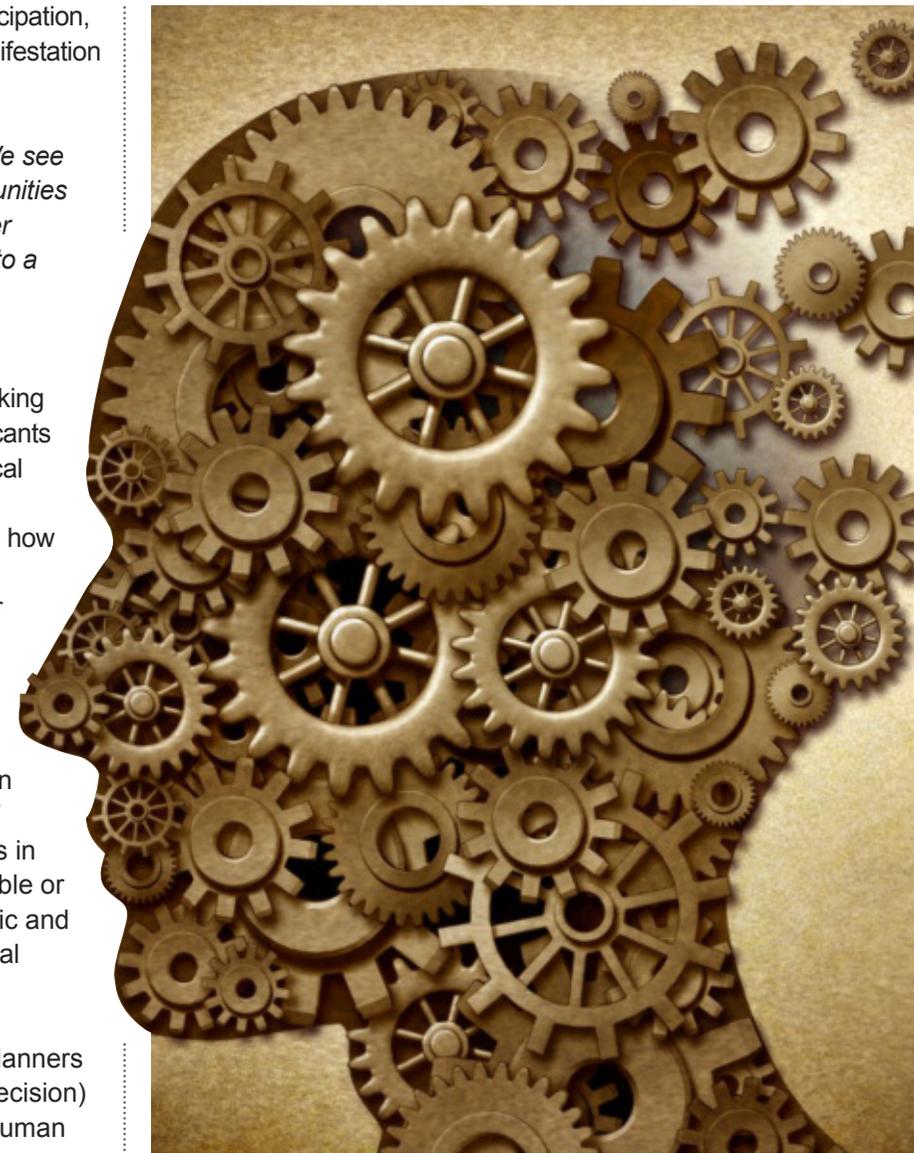
planning is unpopular with many members of the public... This 'we' and 'they' attitude — 'we' being the public, at the mercy of 'they', the planners — is all too prevalent, and is indicative of the extent to which public participation in the sense of full public involvement in, and responsibility for, planning is not being achieved at present.

The implication was that through 'proper' participation, the public antagonism to planning and its manifestation in the lodging of objections would fade away.

Skeffington Report (1969) concluded that "*We see the process of giving information and opportunities for participation as one which leads to greater understanding and co-operation rather than to a crescendo of dispute.*"

Almost fifty years has now passed and public engagement is a statutory part of the plan making process. The NPPF (2012) encourages applicants for planning permission to engage with the local community prior to submission and many developers now do this on a regular basis. So how successful have we been as a profession in engaging people in the future planning of their areas? Have objectors faded away as Skeffington envisaged? Who engages and why? Can we do better?

Planning is unique in that it requires decision makers to understand and weigh a range of technical and spatial material considerations in order to conclude whether they are acceptable or not. This includes balancing social, economic and environmental impacts, physical and financial development constraints and other related matters, including the views expressed by members of the public. However very few planners or politicians (who may be taking the final decision) have any background or understanding of human



behaviour; specifically, the psychology and physiology of the human response to change.

Humans are naturally programmed to protect their homes and families and to resist anything that might be perceived a threat thereto. Fear of change, or the perception that change will have a negative impact on these factors will result in a stress response. The way in which this response is manifested will vary between humans, but all will experience some degree of physiological response. At its most basic this is the 'freeze, flight, fight' mechanism. Around 10% of humans are 'fighters', and it is these whom we mainly encounter in response to planning proposals.

As humans age, they become more resistant to change and find it harder to envisage how life 'might be' if change happens, preferring to cling on memories of a 'rosy past'. The 'immediacy' of a threat or perceived threat can affect the way in which the 'fight' is played out. The more distant a threat is perceived to be, the more the strategic thinkers will come to the fore; the more immediate or significant the threat, the more 'aggressive' fighters will be seen. People also find it hard to recognise that others may hold different views on the same matter – accepting different views can add to the stress response through internal conflict. Behaviour will also be affected by past experiences of 'engagement' and by group dynamics – humans rarely want to be seen to disagree with the views of a group that they are part of and may be ostracised if they do so.

The clear majority of those who engage in planning are over 55 years. Response rates to a typical pre-planning consultation are around 3% of those directly made aware of the consultation. In local plans consultations, this figure can fall to less than 1% of the population of a district. Yet planning decisions are then based upon this respondent profile. What other organisation would base important decisions on this level of response without, as a minimum, checking to see if it was 'representative'? Yet this is what happens in planning decisions. How can we change this? Why would people get involved in planning when they have more pressing priorities and busy lives, or if they feel that their views will be shouted down by those with the loudest voices or simply ignored?

Well-managed consultations start early, seek a more balanced engagement and encourage the 'strategic' thinkers to engage. But despite this they too frequently fail to engage with the younger age groups – yet it is their future that we are planning.

We need to take a step back and re-think. We need to find a way to re-ignite excitement in planning amongst younger age groups. How can we stimulate discussion and debate on equal terms across society? How can we encourage everyone to think about change and how this might affect the way they live their lives, where they live and work and how / where they spend their leisure time?

Technology has and will change the way we live, work and play. It is doing so daily; the internet is just

one example. The rapid growth of internet shopping is changing the retail market and the distribution industry; yet many of our planning policies seek to protect retail frontages and resist the introduction of other uses to take up the vacant spaces on the High Street.

How will the logistics industry change to accommodate changes in retail and manufacturing patterns? What role will drones play in future delivery patterns? How will 3D printing impact on the location of manufacturing industries as economies of scale and the need for large premises to achieve this are lost?

There is little doubt that these will have an impact on spatial planning, and we planners need to be ahead of the curve, not rooted in past patterns or ways of life. Spatial plans are evidence-based, but typically that evidence looks backwards, not forwards. And in a world where technological change is vastly outpacing our ability to prepare and adopt a local plan, our challenge is to develop the foresight to make policy for the future, not the past.

We need to start a nationwide conversation around the spatial impacts of technology change, embrace young and dynamic thinkers and those who see change as exciting. Let's rebalance public engagement in spatial planning. ■

Sue Manns
Regional Director, Pegasus Group

Rather appropriately, it was Stratford-upon-Avon, one of the region's biggest tourist hotspots, that hosted the recent RTPI WM tourism seminar. In the glamorous ballroom of its Town Hall, Paul Harris compered an eye-opening day of revelations about the honeypots in the conurbation and its environs.

Rachel Baconnet (Warwickshire County Council) began by acknowledging that, delightful as it is, Birmingham is no Vegas. Nevertheless, it's worth noting that tourism is playing an ever-increasing role in the UK economy—it's the fifth-largest industry, and it's still growing. And it just so happens that the West Midlands is experiencing a tourist boom with 16 million visitors annually.

It's not all plain sailing, however (or plain navigating, for that matter, of which more presently). Most of those visitors go home after their daytrip, with knock-on effects for the region's nightlife and hotels. Moreover, there are doubts about accessibility: can everyone access Midland destinations equally? can we all enjoy the same experiences? is transport infrastructure up to snuff?

Collaborative planning methods can help; Stratford and Warwick, neither averse to the odd tourist, have begun to use 'destination management plans' to link planning policy and development management. Wider adoption could provide joined-up solutions for some of these niggling concerns.

Lucie Hoelmer (Canal and River Trust) and Roger Clay (Avon Navigation Trust) joined forces to demonstrate how the region's industrial heritage has been repurposed to support tourism. Lucie showed how canals are prime examples of that process, being both seeds for the regeneration of the localities on their banks and destinations in their own right, with visitor numbers continuing to increase. Investment in towpaths, basins and moorings is vital if this trend is to continue.

With infectious enthusiasm, Roger drilled down into the detail of leisure routes, loops and river links, which increase accessibility and opportunities for both leisure and regeneration schemes—white-water rafting on the Avon, anyone? And to Lea Valley: build it and they will come!

Suzanne Clear (National Farmers' Union (NFU)) sought to explain the pressures on the rural economy and the NFU's expanding role in alleviating them. Already, every pound spent in agriculture returns over £7.40 to the wider economy. Day trips to the countryside are commonplace.

Yet the NFU believes the rural economy can do even better by embracing diversification: facilities for rural 'experience' days and outdoor pursuits, overnight accommodation, festivals and markets... we are limited only by our imagination. Again, public and private investment in infrastructure—particularly physical accessibility, broadband and mobile coverage—is vital if rural tourism is to grow.

Andrew Erskine (Tom Fleming Creative Consultancy) posed a crucial question: what makes you tick—or, to put it another way—what's your USP? Those responsible for the region's urban centres need to appreciate and develop their facilities, widen their aspirations and try to retain in the employment pool the talented graduates passing through their universities.

But how? Some places are more successful than others. Take Bristol, a vibrant and productive city, and one sufficiently attractive to its graduates that a significant proportion remain beyond their studies' conclusion. It works because those students can work, play and rest within the same short radius. And these are the places we need to build in the West Midlands: workplaces, hearthplaces and places of leisure, all readily accessible and well connected, both to each other by the expanding Midland Metro and to the rest of the nation by HS2.

Helen Peters (Shakespeare's England) proved a passionate advocate for the multi-agency or 'octopus' approach to destination management, wherein transport authorities, the hospitality industry and tourist attractions join forces to tempt visitors not just to visit, but to 'stay, play and explore'. Co-ordination and co-operation on this level means the Midlands can offer packages like the Explorer Pass, comprising quality accommodation, inclusive transportation and entry into attractions.



Shakespeare's Birthplace, Stratford upon Avon.

To conclude, Dr Geoff Willcocks (Executive Bid Committee for Coventry UK City of Culture 2021) sent us to Coventry, which is bidding to be the UK City of Culture in 2021. Coventry has medieval origins, but suffered intense bombardment during World War II and was significantly rebuilt thereafter. The city is protecting and enhancing what remains of its heritage with an Action Zone, but it must draw on the experiences of predecessors like Liverpool and Hull if the bid is to succeed. If it does—and if the quality of the work going into it is any indicator, it should—Coventry hopes to share the tourist benefits with the rest of the region. Good luck with your bid, Coventry!

Overall, I found that 'planning', in the traditional sense, represents just one of the cogs in a much bigger mechanism. We need to look at where our gears are meshing well with those of other industries and try to replicate it throughout the machine. If we do that, we can make the West Midlands a national and international destination and enjoy the consequential economic benefits for years to come. ■

Sarah Willetts

Principal Planning Officer, Bromsgrove District Council and Redditch Borough Council

The stylish new office of Pinsent Masons LLP in Birmingham city centre was the venue for the sold-out RTPI seminar on major planning applications in June. The seminar was fast-paced and productive, exploring what constitutes best practice from a range of perspectives, including a planning authority, applicant and developer. A representative from DCLG was also present to give their latest thinking on major applications.

Clive Harridge (Head of Planning, Transport & Design for event sponsors Amec Foster Wheeler, themselves occupying a brand new office in Brum) chaired the event. Following a few moments of reflection (two of the speakers are involved in Grenfell Tower follow-up work, and that tragedy and other horrible events have affected us all in various ways), Clive asked delegates to spend some time thinking about how major planning applications can be used to improve sustainable outcomes. Currently, the focus tends to be on speeding up the planning process, but if we don't focus on sustainability we will store issues up for the future. After all, as Clive remarked, *"If planning was all about process then we would all be administrators. Planning is much more than process – it's about outcomes."* Clive invited delegates to submit three suggestions for improving the planning system's contribution to sustainable development; readers can find the three most popular at the end of this article.

The first speaker was **Tony Thompson** (Deputy Head of Development Management Division at

“ If planning was all about process then we would all be administrators. Planning is much more than process – it's about outcomes. ”

DCLG), who opined that, since the Killian Pretty review in 2008, reform of the planning process has been consistent, end-to-end and aimed at streamlining decision making.

Tony observed that one issue with major planning applications is the amount of information requested. The planning process is an opportunity for people with widely differing levels of expertise and interest to engage with projects on a plethora of issues, so it is difficult to limit information. However, requests should be proportionate and reasonable, per the NPPF, and conditions kept to a minimum.

In summary, planning is all about people. It is important to have well informed clients, an experienced team who can address a range of issues up front and a positive and proactive local planning authority (LPA).

Rebecca Warren (Partner at Pinsent Masons LLP) described how to future-proof and build flexibility into major planning applications, which can span more than the current plan period. Masterplans and

parameter plans must have long-term flexibility. For example, developers can include several alternatives for school sites, or pencil in a broad highway for a highway, both of which can be narrowed down as plans evolve.

Equally, LPAs should aim to impose more flexible conditions. Phrasing such as “intermediate” can be built into S106's, with issues such as tenure being fixed at the reserved matters stage.

For **Paul Seddon** (Chief Planner at Nottingham City Council), planning is about place-making, not just housing numbers. The market doesn't deliver alone, but the state must avoid making itself a barrier to regeneration.

The Nottingham City Development Protocol¹ outlines how the authority will deal with major applications. It includes the ambitious aim to *“provide the most effective development support in the UK”*. Planning Committees want development to happen, but not at any cost—high-quality design and place-making are crucial. To assist, the

authority ensures skills are shared across the planning team at weekly design meetings, has a Design Review Panel and practices visible management.

After coffee, **David Fovargue** (Technical Director, Amec Foster Wheeler) gave his three top tips for a better planning application process: preparation, negotiation and permission. Preparation involves knowing your case and site inside out, never taking anything for granted. A flat, greenfield site could still have issues.

Where negotiation fails, an application could go to appeal. It is important to have a robust, justified and evidenced position. Permission is not the end of the story, new risks and costs are often flagged after outline permission is granted. It is therefore important to have a comprehensive understanding of the risks and technical issues for due diligence and site delivery.

Lindsey Richards is the Head of Planning, Enabling and Development at the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA), which acts as an investor, landowner, developer, enabler, activist and consultee. The HCA are publicly funded and will de-risk sites when effective and in the public interest. One challenge for the HCA is balancing speed of delivery and policy compliance. Planning Performance Agreements (PPA) can be an effective tool in this regard.



Lindsey set out successful case studies of developments at Northstowe and Chalgrove, alongside an application for 1,000 new homes at Hardingstone, which was allocated through the Joint Core Strategy but refused at Committee. The HCA had spent two years developing the

application and appealed successfully. In response, the LPA proposed a Planning Committee member training session to review the case². Delegates also raised member training at the Q&A session following Lindsey's presentation.

James Scott, the Director of Planning and Communications at Urban & Civic Plc was the final speaker and gave a developer's perspective. Developers of large strategic sites often have guardianship of the land for upwards of ten years, delivering important infrastructure like roads and schools. Much of the heavy lifting is done upfront, with developers looking for confidence from officers in return for the money and time they have invested.

The Rugby Radio Station site was used as a case study of best practice. Newts were a major issue at the site, and if the 'lift and shift' window were missed, it might have delayed the development by a year. Newt habitats were therefore delivered from

the start. HCA loaned the developer money for a link road, which couldn't otherwise be delivered viably until the 750th house. Borrowing money allowed the link to be completed by the 300th house, which accelerated the development overall. Notably, Urban & Civic plc paid for the provision of a Programme Officer for the local authority, to assist with the complex application's technical content.

Between them, the speakers left an energised audience and generated a lively closing plenary session, chaired by **Clive Harridge**. Of note was an alternative perspective on PPA's, of which there have been mixed reviews. In one case, once a PPA contribution was secured, interest from the local

authority waned. If use is to increase, engagement from both parties must be encouraged. It was also argued that a PPA can be a distraction from the application itself. ■

Vicky Edge

Senior Consultant, CH2M (www.ch2m.com)

Top 3 Best Practice Suggestions

The most popular suggestions from seminar delegates were as follows.

- Undertake early and proactive pre-application engagement with the local planning authority (LPA), local community and stakeholders.
- Develop a good working relationship and undertake constructive, open dialogue between the LPA and applicant/agent.
- Know the site well and gather sufficient technical evidence at an early stage.

If you would like to receive a summary list of all the delegates' suggestions please contact Clive Harridge on clive.harridge@amec.com.

Notes

¹ <http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/planning-and-building-control/planning-for-developers-and-businesses/#Development>

² <http://www.northamptonboroughcouncil.com/documents/s49592/Hardingstone%20Appeal%20Decision.pdf>



This informative seminar was held at the offices of Cushman and Wakefield in Birmingham on the morning of 27th April 2017 and was chaired by the RTPI West Midlands Regional Secretary, **Michael Vout**. Four speakers delivered engaging presentations, comprehensively exploring the role of design control in planning.

Professor Matthew Carmona of University College London's Bartlett School of Planning opened with a talk focussed on place quality—a holistic concept, the value of which there is a range of evidence to support.

We learned of the various obstacles to achieving place quality in our urban environments, as Matthew explained that often places are designed incrementally rather than comprehensively, resulting in places that are actually quite “placeless”. Matthew described how “placelessness” is ubiquitous and is the default outcome of our development processes. He outlined the issue with the government setting the tone through policy, regulations and standards that are then unthoughtfully applied.

Matthew explained how good place making always involves clear local leadership, and occurs within a context of joined up professional thinking and collaboration. He also highlighted that a long-term commitment to place quality involves the consideration of the stewardship of place, which is often divorced from our development processes.

This, however, should be considered upfront to ensure that the public realm we create is well cared for.

Former RTPI president and CABE Built Environment Expert **Colin Haylock** followed with a talk centred on the principles, processes and ideas from the practice of good urban design.

One of Colin's key points was that we have lost our common language through the NPPF, which does not contain detailed design guidance. However Colin then referred to the Housing White Paper which has some useful material and also brought our attention to Urban Design London's recent publication '*The Design Companion for Planning and Placemaking*' which expands on the design policies in the NPPF and provides up to date explanations, examples and practical advice to help the reader understand and apply national policies and guidance.

Colin outlined a series of potential tools to progress design conversations through the planning application process. He emphasised the importance of pre-application discussions with local planning authorities to establish key issues on site, particularly planning policy challenges. He also explained the role of Design Statements in clearly setting out the intent and reasoning behind the proposed scheme, making it easy for planning officers and consultees to understand and appreciate the design concept and ultimately buy into it.

Architect **Nigel Ostime** of Hawkins Brown, who is a member of the RIBA Practice and Profession Committee and chair of the Client Liaison Group, then gave his perspective on the value of design control in planning.

Nigel drew upon the RIBA *Plan of Work* guide, which organises the development process into a number of stages. Nigel explained that there are two phases where design quality can be delivered or destroyed: the conceptual design and planning application phase (RIBA stages 1-3) and the post-planning phase (RIBA stages 4-5).

In terms of the former phase, Nigel advised that a design team should invest significant time into formulating design proposals, through an iterative process where ideas are refined and modified, which will result in a better development.

Regarding the latter phase, Nigel recommended that the original architect is used for any further planning applications, acting as a “design guardian” and ensuring that design intricacies are not compromised or lost.

He also advocated a Section 106 design review mechanism, allowing local planning authorities to intervene if the design details in subsequent planning applications are too dissimilar from the initial planning permission.



Planning Director of Lone Star Land Ltd **Reuben Bellamy** concluded the morning's seminar with a lively and humorous presentation on design from a house builder's perspective, supported by a series of anecdotes.

Reuben set out that a key challenge faced by any "Big Boy Homes" is that design quality ultimately affects the price paid for the land. He outlined that certain house builders will always deliver bespoke homes, as this ethos is inherent in their business, whilst others tend to deliver more standard products, noting that this isn't necessarily synonymous with poor quality. Reuben highlighted that in areas with invested planning and design departments, standard house types can actually be aesthetically pleasant.

Regarding local planning policies, Reuben expressed that fundamental design principles are often masked by a plethora of other very generic requirements. According to Reuben local planning policies should be refined so they can be feasibly implemented and local planning authorities should ask themselves: "does this really matter?" and "how will this be applied?" to ensure they set requirements for the aspects which make a real difference.

Reuben also highlighted that local planning policies sometimes don't keep up with contemporary technology, confirmed by photographs of recently developed homes that incorporated out-dated features. We were also shown some images of poor design quality in a wider sense, where the style of a

group of new properties has not tied in with the surrounding built form.

To conclude the morning, **Michael** chaired a discussion featuring questions from the audience. Michael offered some final thoughts, including:

- Should planning policy focus on high level or detailed design guidance and how is this best applied at national and local levels?
- What tools are available to show developers that good design will add value?
- What can we do in order to help ensure good design is realised?

Related to the last question, some delegates felt that we are unfortunately working in a context where passionate and skilled people are being let down by a democratic system that doesn't want to invest in these matters. It seems to me that we should therefore embrace the opportunity to share our knowledge and build a commitment to good design into our business models, whether we work in the field of planning, urban design, architecture, development, or as an intermediary. The benefits will reach far beyond the delivery of attractive and resilient buildings and spaces, offering the potential of environmental enhancement, economic development and a happy society. ■

Natalie Render
Planner, GVA

This year, almost 400 delegates gathered in Central London to hear from speakers from as far afield as Sweden, the USA, Malaysia and Australia covering a wide variety of topics on the theme: how can we deliver a strong and inclusive future? Lord Taylor of Goss Moor gave a thought-provoking and inspiring keynote address, which acknowledged the challenges we face as we enter Brexit negotiations and incorporated some ideas on locating development.

Stephen Wilkinson, RTPI President, insisted that planners continue to be the 'catalysts for change'. Planners need to embrace the shift in the debate, which is now around the wider issues affecting housing delivery, infrastructure, industrial strategies, localism, social equity, investment, air quality, supporting the vulnerable, inclusiveness, and quality of life. He encouraged planners to be 'enemies of uncertainty and champions of delivery in changing times'.

As part of an initiative to raise the profile of the West Midlands Region at national events, the RTPI West Midlands **Chair Craig Jordan, Vice Chair Maria Dunn and Junior Vice Chair Sandy Taylor** all attended the Convention. For **Maria**—

Attending the Planning Convention is a great opportunity to hear from a range of high profile speakers engaged within the planning profession both within the UK and elsewhere. The event showcased current

best practice, allowing delegates to think about how they can challenge their current ways of working but also provided an opportunity to think about the challenges that we as planners might be facing in the future as we respond to changes in technology, demographics and society.

Finally, **Craig**—

thought it was, as usual, an interesting and thought-provoking event highlighting both common themes across the globe as well as not so common. The challenge of making sense of new and changing influences on

“ **What was very apparent is that as planners we cannot stand still and rely just on our traditional skills and knowledge** ”

Sandy said—

This was my first attendance at the Convention. I very much appreciated the speakers insights to the current wave of uncertainties affecting planning just now. But was it ever thus! The impact of Brexit came up, as did the never-ending saga of top-down interference in planning, coupled with the “avalanche of opinion” opened by the internet and social media. But the key thrust from the Convention to me was that planning matters more than ever to bring some sense of rationality—and leadership—to our apparently irrational world.

planning and local communities whether here in the UK or abroad and hence being able to plan accordingly was a particular topic for speakers and attendees. What was very apparent is that as planners we cannot stand still and rely just on our traditional skills and knowledge; like society in general we need to adapt, challenge ourselves and be willing and able to learn and apply new talents. ■

Maria Dunn, Sandy Taylor & Craig Jordan

At the end of June an inaugural joint meeting between the RTPI regions of the South West and the West Midlands was held in Tewkesbury. Organised by the former the programme was to include a presentation by the Borough Council planners on local planning issues, a walk around the town centre and a visit to the historic Abbey. The inclement weather curtailed the town centre visit, unfortunately, but this presented opportunities for more eating, drinking and discussing, collectively known as “networking”.

Meeting at the Council Offices, located most auspiciously next to the town’s sports centre (now that is what I call planning), the party of some 45 were informed of local planning issues. An introduction by **Mike Dawson** (CEO) stressed the contrasts of the borough, embracing attractive open countryside, parts of the Cotswolds AONB and Severn Vale but having an urban presence, which, besides Tewkesbury itself, embraced extensive suburban areas of Cheltenham and Gloucester. The latter has the added ingredient of being separated by a long established Green Belt.

Annette Roberts (Head of Tewkesbury BC Development Services and senior vice –chair SWRTPI) enlarged on matters challenging the local planners, namely Green Belt, AONB, economic growth and demand for housing. The

Gloucestershire Joint Core Strategy forecast 40 percent growth for the area managed by Tewkesbury BC, which is in fact one of the most extensive district councils in England.

Whilst much of this growth relates to the demands of Gloucester and Cheltenham, thereby necessitating joint working with those authorities, Tewkesbury also has its own pressures. The historic town centre,



including the old mills along the River Severn, presents opportunities for heritage regeneration. This contrasts with Junction 9 of the M5, including also the nearby settlement of Ashchurch, which offers considerable economic and residential growth potential. With a largely redundant military site offering scope for some 2,500 homes, an underused railway station on the main Southwest to West Midland rail link, and a quality motorway access with an established commercial presence, the locality

claims to be in the top ten locations for business in the region. However, the Ashchurch locality is currently regarded as a longer-term growth option with the larger towns being seen as the main recipients in the meantime.

With the heavens opening the town centre visit was cancelled and everyone adjourned directly to Tewkesbury Abbey. Addressed briefly by the Vicar, over a splendid supper, he amusingly recounted being contacted by the BBC during one of the town’s earlier flooding episodes, and asked if that was the “Island of Tewkesbury”. This reflected favourably on medieval monks’ appreciation of planning: recognising the town’s flooding potential, they erected the Abbey on a slight rise, invariably remaining above the invading waters. Duly replete, their modern-day successors then received an informative tour of the Abbey.

Joint meetings and visits offer a very relaxed and informative way for members of our profession to get together. We should organise more, not least because the West Midlands’ central location means that several RTPI regions surround us—and that offers scope for many informative and pleasant summer evenings, minus the rain. ■

Bryan Smith
RTPI WM Regional Activities Committee

Five-a-side football

RTPI West Midlands // Summer 2017

This year's RTPI WM five-a-side football tournament took place on 13 July at Star City in Birmingham. Involving 18 teams from across the region, representing a wide variety of public and private concerns, the competition ran for nearly four hours.

It was a tough tournament, and **McCarthy & Stone** took a while to get going after two rather fortunate early draws against **Amec** and **Cerda Planning**, which at least resulted in points on the board and no losses for the defending champions.

As the tournament progressed, **McCarthy & Stone** started to click, finishing the group stage strongly with three victories. The players' tails were firmly up going into the business end of the tournament following the mad rush at the mid-evening buffet.

Two hard-fought victories in the quarter- and semi-finals set up a mouth-watering final with the experienced and tough **Kings Chambers**. It was always going to be a tight final with very few chances and neither team wanting the dreaded penalties.

The moment of magic came when **Alex Mitchell** unleashed a left-footed drive that fizzed and swerved its way through a series of players and rocketed high into the net, leaving the goalkeeper no chance. That strike was enough to secure **McCarthy & Stone** a well-deserved victory in a tournament that was notable once more for its organisation and spirit of sportsmanship. ■



The victorious McCarthy & Stone team with their hard-won trophy

RTPI WM 2017 CPD // Forthcoming events

RTPI West Midlands // Summer 2017

Further information about all of these events and how to book is available on the [RTPI website](#)

Monday 11 September

9.30am – 4.30pm, Birmingham
Organiser RTPI WM, part of multi-buy programme
Preparing for Public Inquiries and Examinations in Public

Thursday 14 September

6pm – 9pm, Hull
Organiser RTPI Yorkshire
Reimagining Hull – The City of Culture
RTPI Yorkshire 2017 Annual Lecture and Reception

Tuesday 26 September

9.30am – 1.45pm, Birmingham
Organiser RTPI WM, part of multi-buy programme
Planning and Health

Wednesday 27 September,

6pm – 9.30pm, Lichfield
RTPI WM Autumn Reception

Friday 13 October

Birmingham – Sold Out
Organiser RTPI WM, part of multi-buy programme
Building New Homes

Tuesday 31 October

9.30am – 1.45pm, Birmingham
Organiser RTPI WM, part of multi-buy programme
Planning Law Update

Friday 3 – Saturday 4 November

Manchester
Organiser RTPI NW Young Planners Committee
Healthy, Happy Places and People: Planning for Well-being
Young Planners 2017 Conference

Thursday 23 November

9.30am – 1.45pm, Warwick
Organiser RTPI WM, part of multi-buy programme
Flood Protection - the Role of Planning

Thursday 30 November

9.30am – 4.30pm, Birmingham
Organiser RTPI WM
Embracing future influences – the changing world of planning
RTPI WM 2017 Planning Summit

