

The South West : current planning issues, major projects and professional planning activity

Written to brief The RTPI President for his regional visit in October 2019
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A LARGE AND DIVERSE REGION

The South West is the largest of the nine English regions. At 23,800 sq km, it is larger than Wales and its northern boundary, in the Gloucestershire Cotswolds, is closer to the Scottish border than it is to the Scilly Isles, its southern boundary. It is renowned for its environmental quality, its mild climate and spectacular coastline. The image of the region as a popular British holiday destination, dates from the days before mass foreign travel. However, tourism remains a key element of the economy, with more than 25 million visitors each year. Because it is such a diverse region, physically, economically and (increasingly) in terms of local government structure, achieving coherence has always been a challenge for the South West.

Population

The resident population of some 5.5 million (ONS, 2016 mid-year), has all but doubled over the last 100 years, from 2.8 million back in 1911 (an increase of 89% compared to that for England overall of 57%). The population is projected to reach 5.8 million by 2024 – a 7.3% increase, which is the fourth largest after London, Eastern England and the South East. Inward migration has long been a key element of population growth in the region, so that whilst the percentage of growth due to natural change is one of the lowest of any region, that due to inward migration is much the highest of any region (ONS forecasts to 2024), with most of this accounted for by migration from other parts of the UK. The region's population age structure is older than the average for England, with the proportion of older people expected to grow faster than the national average over the next 20 years.

The last few decades have seen major urban growth around Bristol, Bath and Weston-super-Mare (in the 'West of England' sub-region – not to be confused with the South West of England region) ; in South East Dorset ; Swindon and Exeter, and significant growth elsewhere, which has changed the character of many of the smaller country and seaside towns. This has given rise to a demand for further new housing which remains un-met and has put a strain on social and physical infrastructure, not least the road and rail systems. All of the region's major urban areas are now experiencing road traffic congestion and pressure on their open space and surrounding countryside.

Economic change

At the same time, the South West has been undergoing 'structural' economic change. Decline in agricultural, fishing and other traditional employment such as mining and manufacturing, has now been joined by threats to the more recently established economic base of defence-associated, banking and insurance services, employment. This has, in part, been countered by new 'scientific' employment such as the Met Office, which in 2003 moved to Exeter from Bracknell ;the establishment of 'science parks' in Plymouth, Emersons Green (in the West of England) and Exeter ; and employment in an expanding higher education sector. The South West has the highest part-time working rate of any English region and 'seasonal' employment, much of it poorly paid, is a major feature - a reflection in no small part of the significance of the holiday industry.

Settlement pattern

The population density of the South West is the lowest but one of the English regions and it has an essentially rural settlement pattern in which half of the population lives in towns and villages of less than 20,000 people. There is no single, dominant, urban focus, with the 'Greater Bristol' urban area (551,000); the 'South East Dorset' conurbation – Bournemouth/Christchurch/Poole (400,000); Plymouth (264,000); and Swindon (218,000); as the only major contiguous urban areas. Bristol is generally considered to be the 'regional capital', though the far south west looks to Plymouth as its main centre. Sitting between these two is Exeter (130,000) the county town of Devon, serving as a major administrative, educational and cultural centre, and the 'home' of the former South West Regional Assembly and former South West Regional Development Agency. The geographical 'balance point' of the region is the Somerset county town of Taunton (65,000), which was the administrative centre of the Regional Assembly and where the RTPI South West has for many years held its RMB/RAC meetings and where, until recently, it had its office. Overall however, the region has an essentially rural settlement pattern in which half of the resident population lives in towns and villages of less than 20,000 people.

Contrasting levels of well-being

The South West is externally perceived to be a prosperous part of the UK, enjoying a good environment and a strong economy – a perception which many claim has consistently put it at the end of the queue when it comes to central government recognition and investment priorities. However, areas of affluence mask a lower than UK average income overall. The reality is that there is, in detail, great variation in the quality of life enjoyed by the region's residents. Alongside areas of relative affluence, areas with high levels of multiple deprivation, measured in national terms, exist in a number of urban areas, such as Bristol, Plymouth and Bournemouth, and even Cheltenham, as well as in smaller towns and the more isolated rural areas, especially in Cornwall. At the same time, housing affordability levels (measured in terms of average income against average house prices) are amongst the lowest anywhere. Recent research into the deliverability and affordability of housing, carried out for the RTPI South West (*Heriot Watt University & Three Dragons, August 2017*) has confirmed that the region overall remains one of the least affordable in England, with the problem being particularly acute in Bournemouth, North Devon, Cornwall, Weymouth/West Dorset and 'Greater Exeter'. Overall, house prices have increased three times faster than the average regional income over the past 10 years and the latest figures from ONS (*Housing Affordability, England & Wales 1997-2016 , March 2017*) indicate that by between 1997 and 2016 , average house prices over most of the South West had risen to between 7 and 10 times average income, whilst in certain areas, notably 'South Devon', 'South East Dorset' and Cotswold, the figure was 10 to 14 times. The average ratio for England & Wales was 7.6. Low affordability is now a particularly acute problem in most rural areas of the region.

Parliamentary constituencies

The South West has 55 Parliamentary constituencies. Following the 2017 General Election, the Conservatives remained by far the largest party, with 47 of these seats. Labour has 7 (4 of them in Bristol, plus 1 each in Exeter, Plymouth and Stroud). The Liberal Democrats have just 1 seat – Bath. Back in 2010, this Party held 15 of the seats, though its decline since then in Parliamentary terms has not been mirrored in local government, where it remains a major force.

European Parliament

The region is divided into 6 European constituencies, with party representation evenly distributed – 1 seat each being held by Conservative, Labour, Independent and Green, and 2 by UKIP MEPs. Since 2004, the 'South West of England' constituency overall has included Gibraltar – the only case where a European Parliamentary constituency does not correspond to a standard U 'region'.

THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT PLANNING STRUCTURE

Following the most recent round of local government reorganisation in April 2019, which saw reorganisation within the former County of Dorset, and the merger of Taunton Deane and West Somerset Councils (to become Somerset West & Taunton) , the region now has 35 Planning Authorities, as follows :

12 Unitary Authorities , including the former Counties of Cornwall and Wiltshire.(both of which went unitary in 2009) and Dorset Council and Bournemouth/Christchurch/Poole (BCP) which, in April 2019, between them replaced the previous structure in Dorset.

3 County Councils – Devon, Gloucestershire & Somerset

18 Districts/Boroughs ‘sitting within’ these three Counties.

2 National Park Authorities – Dartmoor and Exmoor.

The past ten years have seen a significant reduction in the number of individual planning authorities. Prior to April 2009, there were 53 of them, which between them, and via the mechanism of the former South West Regional Assembly, were responsible, together with the South West Regional Development Agency (SWRDA), for the production of the Regional Spatial Strategy (RSS). The history of this particular RSS and its planned successor ‘Integrated Regional Strategy’ (combining spatial land use and economic development policies) ended on a somewhat sad and sorry note. Following many years of work, by planning professionals, politicians and others, which eventually succeeded in producing a workable consensus across a diverse region on the scale and distribution of future development, the whole process was derailed. Not only was this RSS much longer in the central government ‘processing’ stage than that for any other region (four years), it was ‘revoked’ [abolished] in May 2013 by the incoming Coalition Government, having never been put in place, in final form, by the previous Labour administration !

All those bodies with a remit for across the region strategic, spatial and economic planning, including the Government Office for the South West (GOSW), having now been abolished, there seems little prospect at the moment of any kind of replacement regional strategy emerging. In its place have come the ‘strategic’ policies of local authority Core Strategies/Local Plans (some of them joint) with a ‘duty to co-operate’ with one another and the separate economic strategies of the region’s six Local Enterprise Partnerships. More recently however, a number of joint Core Strategy / Local Plans have emerged, including, the Gloucester/Cheltenham/Tewkesbury JCS, [see below] ; a ‘Joint Spatial Plan’ being prepared by the four Unitary Authorities comprising the ‘West of England’ sub-region [see below].; and the Plymouth & South West Devon Joint Local Plan [see below].

THE SOUTH WEST’S DEVELOPMENT PLANS

Core Strategies / Local Plans

Work on the 2004 Act LDF system Core Strategies got off to a promising start in the South West , with South Hams, Plymouth and Mid Devon very much in the van nationally in terms of producing new style local policy documents which were relatively quickly pronounced ‘sound’ and adopted. In the case of Plymouth, its pioneering LDF work was recognised within the planning profession by the award of the 2005 RTPI Silver Jubilee Cup for planning achievement .The pace of plan production was not however maintained , whilst the strategic policy context had, within a further five years, all but disappeared. At this time, the then 39 relevant planning authorities required to produce Core Strategies/Local Plans,(12 Unitary Authorities ; 25 District/Borough Councils ; and 2 National Park Authorities) had as their context, the ghostly legacy of ‘Regional Planning Guidance 10’, dating from 2001 ; some ‘saved’ Structure Plan policies; and some very old [pre-2004 system] Local Plans.

The process of getting all of the new plans in place has proved to be slow and in many cases, tortuous [as it has been in England nationally]. Among the reasons for this have been over-stretched professional resources due to local government cuts, the complexity of the required process, and an ever changing national policy and process context. Not confined to the South West, but certainly prominent here, have been delays due to the need for multiple rounds of consultation ; assembling the evidence base ; and more latterly, the process of arriving at an ‘objectively assessed need’ for new housing ; the requirement to demonstrate a five year housing land supply; and the requirement to comply with the Duty to Co-operate. All of this delay has been despite the best efforts of the local government planning professionals on the

ground. There have also been suggestions that this delay has been due, at least in part, to a lack of local political commitment to the plan-making process within some authorities.

A major on-going concern in the region, both for the Government and for those seeking housing, has been the significant reduction in planned new housing numbers in many of the newly emerging plans compared to the figures previously included in the draft RSS. In addition, the level of new house building over the last 30 years or so has been in serious decline (*Heriot Watt University & Three Dragons, August 2017*) Additionally, Cornwall and Wiltshire have each experienced delays to the plan-making process due to local government reorganisation in 2009, which stopped the emerging former district-based plans in their tracks.

Complete geographical coverage across the region of 'first wave', up to date Core Strategies / Local Plans, was however achieved in October 2018 with the adoption of the North Devon & Torridge Joint Local Plan, ending what had been a drawn-out two year long Examination process. Local Plan coverage of the South West on the 2004 Planning Act LDF model had thus taken 14 years to complete.

Plans within the region's two National Parks

Exmoor

Designated in 1954 . 693 sq km Resident population 10,273 (2011) .

Approx 2/3 of the area is within West Somerset District & 1/3 in North Devon.

Huge differential between average local income (lowest of all the English National Parks & 15% lower than in the South West as a whole) and house prices (on average 14% higher than in the South West as a whole)

In October 2011, Exmoor became the first National Park to achieve 'Dark Sky Reserve' status).

Exmoor was the home of one of the national pioneer Neighbourhood Plans, 'LynPlan' (Lynton & Lynmouth), which was 'made' in December 2013.

The Exmoor National Park Local Plan 2011-2031 was submitted in May 2016 and adopted in July 2017. It incorporates Minerals & Waste policies.

Dartmoor

954 sq km Resident population 34,000

Area covers parts of West Devon, Teignbridge and South Hams.

The current Core Strategy was one of the earliest to be produced in the region – submitted in June 2007 and adopted in April 2008 (following on closely from those of South Hams – Nov 2006 and Plymouth – April 2007).

A separate Minerals & Waste Plan was adopted in 2004 , indicative of the national importance of minerals extraction within the Park. The NPA is currently consulting on a draft revised Local Plan 2018-2036 which was published in September 2019 following three years work. The aim is for adoption in 2021 and the Plan will incorporate revised Minerals & Waste policies., which will replace the Plan adopted in 2004 [see above]

Plans within South Somerset

The 'South Somerset Local Plan 2006 -2028' was adopted in March 2015. The Council has launched a Review, looking ahead to 2036, which was the subject of a 'Preferred Options' consultation between 28 June and 18 September 2019. The Council committed itself to this review following concerns raised by the Inspector at the Examination into the current Plan regarding housing and employment land allocations at Wincanton. There are 8 Neighbourhood Plans at various stages of preparation within the District , the first to be 'made' being that for Wincanton in March 2018.

Minerals & Waste Strategies /Plans

The South West has a wide range of nationally important mineral deposits and, like all other parts of the UK, faces a major waste disposal challenge. Planning for the sustainable extraction of minerals and disposal of waste is another 'parallel' development plan area. Now the responsibility of the three remaining County Councils together with the Unitary Authorities and the two National Park Authorities, the region has a range of minerals and waste Core Strategies and Plans. Some of these have been in place for many years, whilst others are much more recent. For example, Wiltshire has both Minerals and Waste Core Strategies prepared jointly with Swindon Borough, adopted in 2009 and looking ahead to 2026; Somerset has a Waste Core Strategy adopted in 2013 and a Minerals Plan adopted in 2015. In addition, in 2017, it published a Minerals & Waste Development Strategy setting out the new documents it expects to prepare over the next few years. The former Dorset County Council has recently submitted a new cross-County Waste Plan looking ahead to 2033. The four West of England Unitary Authorities have a Joint Waste Core Strategy and work together on Local Aggregates Assessment.

Moving towards Core Strategies /Local Plans covering more than one LPA area

Taking up both the spirit and the letter of the Duty to Co-operate, a number of authorities within the region have been involved in preparing joint Core Strategies or Local Plans. For example: the Christchurch & East Dorset Joint Core Strategy (Adopted April 2014); the West Dorset, Weymouth & Portland Joint Local Plan (Adopted October 2015); the Gloucester/Cheltenham/Tewkesbury Joint Core Strategy (Adopted December 2017); the North Devon & Torridge Joint Local Plan (Adopted October 2018); the West of England Joint Spatial Plan: the Plymouth & South West Devon Joint Local Plan; and the Greater Exeter Strategic Plan. All of these joint plans have responded to the realities of economic areas wider than individual Districts, particularly Housing Market Areas and journey to work areas. Details of the most recent plans are set out below.

The **Gloucester/Cheltenham/Tewkesbury Joint Core Strategy 2011-2031** was formally adopted by the three Councils in December 2017 following a long and complicated journey, starting with public consultation on Issues & Key Questions in October 2008, and including a protracted Examination process which had to work its way through a very long list of issues raised by the Inspector, Elizabeth Ord. The proposed strategy was submitted back in November 2014, with the first of three stages of examination hearings starting in May 2015 and the third stage ending in April 2016, involving almost 200 tabled documents.

The strategy covers three of the six Gloucestershire Districts/Boroughs containing a population (2016 Mid Year) of 334,607, more than half that of the County overall, representing its main economic hub and where growth pressures have been at their greatest. The process of preparing this strategy has had to face up to the challenge of development in areas of Green Belt. Following additions made by the Inspector, 35,175 new dwellings are provided for and the need for such a joint plan is starkly illustrated by the fact that most of these will be provided in a number of major urban extensions involving Green Belt land – three of them to meet the housing needs of Gloucester, located entirely within Tewkesbury Borough; and two others to meet the needs of Cheltenham, falling across the administrative areas of both Cheltenham itself and of Tewkesbury. A new Local Transport Plan 2015-2031 and Transport Implementation Strategy have been prepared by Gloucestershire CC, as Local Transport Authority, to 'sit alongside' the JCS.

In the meantime, the three LPAs are separately working on their individual City and Borough Local Plans within the context of the JCS.

Strategic planning and devolution in the West of England sub-region

The West of England sub-region - 'a twin city region' based on Bristol and Bath, and said to have one of the fastest growing economies in the UK, now worth £25.5 bn, has a population (2016 Mid Year) of 1,121,268. A new joint strategic plan for this sub-region with a 'colourful' collection of predecessors, starting with the Avon Structure Plan, approved back in 1985, was submitted for Examination in April 2018. Following the abolition of Avon County Council in April 1996 and its replacement by four new Unitary Authorities, collectively covering the same geographical area – Bath & NE Somerset; Bristol; North Somerset; and South Gloucestershire, it was quickly accepted, following central government advice, that from a planning and transportation point of view, joint working was vital. The strategic framework for the

sub-region had been provided by the Avon Structure Plan, by then in its 'third alteration' version. A replacement was now necessary to provide a coherent and collectively accepted set of strategic policies.

Despite the best endeavours of the professional officers working in a Joint Strategic Planning & Transportation Unit, who were able to build upon the Structure Plan review work already begun by the Avon planners, the emerging 'Joint Replacement Structure Plan' was not without its political difficulties. The new Plan was placed on deposit in 1998, but the process dragged on for several years and, in the end, it required the intervention of the then Secretary of State responsible for these things, John Prescott, to 'direct' the four Councils to reach a suitable accord on total new housing numbers and their distribution, before the Plan could be given the Government's approval in September 2002.

Following yet another change of context provided by the 2004 Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act, each Council began work on its own Core Strategy, whilst at the same time attempting to take account of what each of the others was doing. Following long, complex and separate Examinations, the respective Core Strategies were adopted, but with an 'early review' stipulation attached due to only partially resolved housing land allocation and evidence base issues.- Bristol in June 2011 ; North Somerset in April 2012 ; South Gloucestershire in December 2013 ; and B&NES in July 2014.

The West of England Joint Spatial Plan 2016–2036 takes in all four of the Unitary Authority areas and is a recognition that the sub-region needs a new overall strategic framework .Work started on this Plan almost as soon as the respective Core Strategies had been put in place. It was not until 2017 that the first major consultation – on Issues & Options, took place however, and the preparation process has proved less than straightforward. The Plan was submitted in April 2018 , but subsequent exchanges between the combined authorities and the Inspectors on significant technical matters meant that the Hearings did not begin until summer 2019.

The JSP includes provision for 105,000 new homes, mostly on 12 major 'sites' spanning the sub-region. Land for 60,000 of these has already been allocated in existing plans, but as with most things associated with strategic planning policy in the area, the proposals are highly controversial, even though the Plan does not identify sites as such, but rather 'Strategic Development Locations'. At the time of writing , the examination process has been halted in order that fuller and further justification for the selection of these SDLs can be prepared !

Alongside the JSP is a new 'Joint Local Transport Plan 3' produced under the auspices of the Joint Transport Executive Committee, whilst the West of England LEP(see below) , which has been working closely with the joint plan teams, has in place a non-statutory 'Strategic Economic Plan 2015 -2030', with a focus on 'financial interventions' and delivering specific projects.

A new West of England Combined Authority

An additional factor in this sub-region, though probably too soon to assess from a planning point of view as yet, was the arrival on the scene, in May 2017, of the new West of England Combined Authority, with an elected Metro Mayor, established under the Government's devolution deals agenda .The failure to secure political agreement on this across all four Unitary Authorities has meant however that North Somerset has not become a Combined Authority member. It does however continue to work with the other three Councils on most strategic planning and transport matters.

The Plymouth & South West Devon Joint Local Plan : 2014- 2034

At the other end of the region is another pioneering example of joint working by Plymouth City, South Hams District and West Devon Borough, following a decision to 'roll into one' the Local Plan review processes which had then

begun in each authority respectively. This is one of the only such plans in England to date to set out both strategic and local policies and site allocations in the same document. In this way, 'stand alone' Local Plans will be completely replaced. Equating to the 'Plymouth Housing Market Area', but excluding that part of it within the Dartmoor National Park, the geographically large Plan area has an existing population of just under 400,000 . Provision is made for the delivery of at least 26,700 new homes – 19,000 of them Plymouth. The Joint Plan was submitted in July 2017, followed by Hearings in summer 2018 and Adopted

by each of the Councils in March 2019. Professional recognition of the work on this Plan has come in the form of a 'Highly Commended' award for Excellence in Spatial Planning 2018 by the RTPi South West.

The Greater Exeter Strategic Plan (GESP)

This Plan, which looks ahead to 2040, but will not replace the sub-region's Local Plans, is being prepared jointly by Exeter City, East Devon, Mid Devon and Teignbridge Councils in partnership with Devon County Council. It encompasses the 'Exeter & East Devon Growth Point' (see below) and has an existing population of just over 470,000. The Authorities' respective Local Plans, which have each only recently been adopted, will remain, for the time being 'sitting within the context' of the new strategic framework provided by the GESP. Consultation on 'Issues' took place early in 2017, but for a variety of reasons, including significant and on-going changes to national planning and housing policies ; a 'call for sites' which generated over 700 of them ; and the need to resolve complex transport issues, especially in the Exeter area, progress has been slower than anticipated. By summer 2019, a First Draft Plan had been published for consultation.

Reorganisation followed by Devolution in Cornwall

Cornwall became a Unitary Authority in 2009, but the Council subsequently secured a Devolution Deal from central government in July 2015 (the third nationally after those for Greater Manchester and West Yorkshire). This was the first in England relating to a major rural area, as opposed to the more typical urban ones, and for not involving a commitment to have an elected mayor. Its devolved powers cover the franchising of bus services ; joint working to 're-shape' FE training and adult learning ; and new apprenticeship opportunities. More significantly from a planning point of view is the fact that the deal has given the Council direct 'Intermediate Body' status for access to two EU Structural Funds,

Reorganisation / Devolution in Dorset

At the other end of the region, devolution/ local government reorganisation in April 2019 has seen the former Dorset County Council replaced by two new Combined Authorities. Under this, Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole have come together as a new unitary authority (BCP) for what is essentially the south east Dorset conurbation, whilst the remaining districts – East Dorset ; North Dorset; Purbeck; West Dorset and Weymouth & Portland, form the other Combined Authority – Dorset Council.

THE DEVELOPMENT PLANS PICTURE – EMERGING NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS

In the South West, by April 2018, there were just over 300 Neighbourhood Plan area designations, with 75 Plans 'made'. As with the national picture, most of this progress has been made in the last two years. In terms of geographical distribution by LPA, there are now very few of these without a handful of area designations. Leading the field in terms of plans made are Wiltshire, with 20 and a further 51 designations with plans at various stages of production : Cornwall, 19 made and a further 92 designations; and East Devon, with 9 made and a further 31 designations. Cornwall's progress and pioneering work on NP support, has been helped by its long experience of community involvement in planning 'neighbourhood-sized' areas.

As is the case nationally, the vast majority of the South West's plans are being prepared by rural parishes, which have enthusiastically grasped the opportunity to become directly involved for the first time in the statutory policy-making process. However, almost all of the 'qualifying bodies' have found themselves on a steep learning curve with very limited financial resources. At the same time, the LPAs have, to varying degrees, provided the obligatory support to a steadily increasing number of plans coming forward at a time of steeply declining local government resources (affecting planning in particular!) , growing costs of officer input to the NP process, and the need, in many cases, to prioritise getting an up to date Local Plan in place. Particular issues associated with plan making by means of NP Forums within non-parished urban areas are illustrated by experience in Bristol . Here, just five plan areas with Forums have been designated (with Plans now 'made' in two of these), for both complex inner city areas and 'problem' estates further out. On-going issues here have included trying to establish what the eventual plan should do ; getting the right governance, support structures and finance in place ; ensuring effective working with the Council ;

appropriately channelling the skills and resources available within the local community ; and sustaining energy levels and commitment over several years !

Early promise

As had been the case with the 2004 Planning Act Core Strategy/Local Plan system, the South West was once again in the van nationally in the early years in taking up the opportunities provided by the new Neighbourhood Plans. The region featured prominently in the Government's 'NP Frontrunners' programme (announced in 5 'waves' between April 2011 and March 2012), with 37 of England's 233 'trial plan areas', including 4 of the 17 in the 'first wave' – Dawlish, Cerne Valley, Lockleaze(Bristol) and Lynton & Lynmouth. The region also saw the very first informal 'pilot Neighbourhood Plan Examination' in Dawlish, held by Prof Chris Balch, of Plymouth University and RTPI South West Chair 2014, whilst Exeter St James and LynPlan(Lynton & Lynmouth), where among the first plans nationally to complete all stages to 'being made' [adoption by their respective LPA's], in July and December 2013 respectively. There followed a period within which progress in the region was slow compared to the situation nationally, with just 18 Plans 'made' by April 2016. However, in the two years since then a further 57 Plans had been put in place, though at the same time, fewer new areas are coming forward for designation.

THE SOUTH WEST'S LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIPS

There are six Local Enterprise Partnerships in the South West, with areas defined in all cases by local authority boundaries, but differing significantly in size and 'economic potential'. They are, in order of establishment :

West of England The former County of Avon area, comprising 4 Unitary Authorities, with an already well established 'West of England Partnership' between commerce, industry and local government, giving it a head start on other parts of the region. The main concentration of population, jobs and economic potential in the South West, this 'city region' has a population of 1,121,268 (2016). The Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) was formally established April 2011 and secured the region's first Enterprise Zone - Temple Quarter, Bristol – in June 2011, followed by Bath Western Riverside in 2016.

Cornwall & Isles of Scilly The newly-Unitary Cornwall & the Scilly Isles. Formally established May 2011, with a population 556,000.(2016) As a mainly rural area and one of the least affluent and least well-connected parts of the UK, it is recognised by the EU as a 'less developed area'. The LEP regards economic growth 'as a sine qua non if the people of Cornwall are to gain improved standards of living and well being' .The only part of the region to benefit significantly from EU Structural & Investment Funding. Secured the region's second, Enterprise Zone – Aerohub Newquay – in August 2011.

Heart of the South West (HotSW) The largest South West LEP both by area and population, covering the Counties of Devon and Somerset with their 13 constituent 'second tier' authorities, the Unitary Authorities of Plymouth and Torbay and the Dartmoor and Exmoor NPAs – in all,19 Local Planning Authorities. Population 1,727,363 (2016). A physically and economically diverse area, where many of the issues relate to the dispersed nature of economic activity and problems of connectivity, but also growing urban centres such as Plymouth, Exeter and Taunton. Has secured three Enterprise Zones – South Yard, Plymouth and more recently, the 'multi-site' Huntspill Energy Park, near Bridgwater and the Exeter & East Devon Enterprise Zone (4 sites) (see below)

Dorset Covering the County of Dorset plus the Unitary Authorities of Bournemouth and Poole, - 8 LPA's in all - this LEP was formally established in July 2011. It has a population 771,884 (2016), 400,000 of whom live in the Poole, Bournemouth, Christchurch ('SE Dorset') conurbation. An economically buoyant part of the region, with better than average 'connectivity' with the rest of England : notably with the South East and London.

Gloucestershire (GFirst) The only South West LEP covering a single, traditional, two-tier County area – 7 LPA's in all. Spun out of a previously unsuccessful bid to the Government for a 'Gloucester, Swindon &

Wiltshire LEP'. Formally established in November 2011. Population 623,129 (2016). Heavily business orientated, with a philosophy of 'run by business for business' and part of an already established local economic development and promotion 'landscape'.

Swindon & Wiltshire (SWLEP) The newly-Unitary Wiltshire and Unitary Swindon. Established in February 2012. [spun out of an unsuccessful bid- see above]. Population 706,314 (2016), of which 217,905 is accounted for by Swindon, one of the region's major and fastest growing urban areas, which is seen as a significant 'urban economic growth pole' along the M4 corridor. The largely rural area of Wiltshire (Population 488,409) is dominated by a low wage economy, agriculture and a diverse range of very small firms. At the same time, has a relatively well educated workforce contributing to an emerging 'knowledge economy' and modern, hi-tech manufacturing and research. There is a high defence presence on and around Salisbury Plain, where the resident military population is set to increase rapidly as forces are brought home from Germany.

The LEP's as successors of the South West Regional Development Agency

The Government has been gradually giving more economic power to the LEP's , seeing them, in particular, as spearheading 'sub-regional' bids for project finance as well as local 'custodians' of such resources. In this respect, the region's Partnerships have developed much like the other 33 across England, with activities, to date, focussed on such things as economic regeneration, skills training, transport funding and 'image-building' to attract inward investment. Further power for the Partnerships was signalled in the March 2013 Budget with the introduction of a 'single pot funding' system, as recommended by Lord Heseltine. More recently, and in common with all LEPs, those in the South West have produced Strategic Economic Plans as a bid for central government funding to be supported by private/local funding.

The 'Growth Deals', for the period 2015/16 -2016/17, announced in July 2014, saw the six South West LEP's between them secure £650m of central government funding to sit alongside an anticipated £1,156m of private/local funding. Dorset, notably, received the largest of the region's Deals, with £66m of government funding alongside £530m private/local. The LEP's have also produced Strategies for how they each propose to handle their respective shares of the EU Structural & Investment Fund Programme for 2014-2020. These allocations ranged in size from 593 million Euros for Cornwall & The Isles of Scilly [one of the largest allocations of all the 39 LEP's] , to 80m for the Heart of the South West, down to 38m for Gloucestershire.

The South West LEPs and the planning process

To date, LEP involvement in the planning process in the region has been limited, but, to better understand their potential role in delivering economic growth, strategic planning and sustainable development, the RTPI South West commissioned Plymouth University, in association with Hardisty Jones and Figura Planning, to conduct in depth research into their activities. This provided a South West specific picture to build upon the findings of previous RTPI national research into the role of LEPs across England in planning for growth. (*Planning for Growth : The Role of LEPs* , Pugalis & Townsend, July 2015)

The South West study findings, which were published in March 2016, were as follows : As champions for local economic growth the LEPs have been focussed on growing private sector business activity, improving skills and productivity and economic infrastructure. There has been increasing involvement in competitive bidding for funds, particularly Local Growth Funds [see above], although their performance in these areas has been variable. All six of the LEPs have identified 'priority sectors' as a means of delivering local growth eg. aerospace, nuclear power, renewable energy and advanced manufacturing. Their agendas have addressed 'soft' people issues, such as knowledge, innovation and skills, as well as 'harder' place-based matters such as strategic connectivity, infrastructure, land and premises.

However, few South West LEPs have so far taken up the opportunity to adopt a strong role in relation to planning. Some have decided not to engage in the planning process given their limited resources and expertise, relying on their relationship with their constituent LPAs to ensure alignment between economic, spatial and transport planning. In this regard, the LEPs have operated within the framework of the region's adopted and emerging Core Strategies/Local Plans. A particular focus has been transport and other infrastructure projects aimed at 'unlocking' employment and housing development and funding has

focused on principal urban areas and main transport corridors. Only in the West of England has the LEP taken on a formal role in contributing to and brokering joint work between the four LPAs.

This has included working as part of the partnership preparing the 'Joint Spatial Plan' and 'Joint Transport Study'. Elsewhere, the Heart of the South West LEP (HotSW) has been closely involved in securing new economic opportunities with significant planning implications, such new research and educational opportunities arising from the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station and the recently confirmed new Enterprise Zones near Bridgwater and Exeter [see above].

PLANNING ISSUES ARISING FROM GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY, POLITICS AND MECHANISMS

There is one overriding issue which continues to challenge the South West's planners and looks set to do so well into the future. This is the need to balance the level of investment and development, essential to maintain the region's economy and quality of life of its residents, with the need to protect its greatest asset – the quality of the renowned natural and built environment in its countryside, around its long coastline, and in its cities, towns and villages.

It is a concern of many professionals that there is no longer a region-wide strategic planning policy mechanism in place at either local or central government level to address this issue. Also now missed is the former South West Observatory , a network of professional expertise from local government, the Universities and government agencies from across the region. Set up in 2001, this operated for over 10 years, with a core unit of full time staff, drawing together research, resources and analysis, with the aim of informing decisions based on the best available evidence. Sadly, the Observatory had to be wound up in the wake of the Coalition Government's cuts to all things 'regional'.

TOPIC-BASED ISSUES IN THE SOUTH WEST

Outlined below are some of the more significant 'topic-based' issues and challenges which planners and others in the region are addressing :

Satisfying the demand for new housing in the most sustainable way

Pressure to provide more housing has been a common feature of virtually all development plan work in the region for many years, with long, drawn out Core Strategy / Local Plan Examinations seeking a resolution of matters such as 'objectively assessed need' , the five year housing land supply , and the Duty to Co-operate. Added to this, in many areas, has been the separate and continuing need for new 'affordable' housing – an issue brought into sharp focus by former South West MP, Lord Matthew Taylor in his 'Review of the Rural Economy and Affordable Housing' published in 2008.

Particular major housing development initiatives have included two 'New Settlements' on sites allocated originally in the Devon Structure Plan – at Cranbrook,(8,000 new homes) east of Exeter and a key element of the 'Exeter & East Devon Growth Point' (see below) ; and at Sherford, east of Plymouth (5,500 new homes) .Other on-going schemes include 'Clay Country' – an Eco Town scheme designed to regenerate an area of redundant china clay quarries north of St Austell ; the Seldown Eco-Village on a brownfield site close to the centre of Poole; and Crest Nicholson's Tadpole Garden Village on the northern edge of Swindon (1,300 new homes).

In Taunton Deane, in response to the Coalition Government's 'Locally-led garden cities' initiative of 2014, and with access to special central government funding, has come the Monkton Heathfield 'Garden Town' (urban extension) on the northern edge of Taunton, where around 950 dwellings have already been delivered, with a planned total of some 4,500 energy efficient homes. Here a full range of new infrastructure including a new district centre, three new primary schools, a new secondary school, a country park, locally generated electricity and SUDS.

Major urban regeneration / brownfield site schemes include, in Bath, Western Riverside and three former MOD sites, together providing several thousand much needed new homes, within the challenging context of a World Heritage City ; in Charlton Hayes, South Gloucestershire ('Greater Bristol' urban area) 2,200 new homes on land previously part of Filton Airfield ; and Plymouth's RTPI award-winning 'Plan for

Homes' involving the release of 33 Council owned sites (73% brownfield) which is planned to deliver 1650 new homes.

Regeneration has gone hand in hand with listed building restoration in schemes such as the 201 home 'Old Railway Quarter' in Swindon – an RTPI SW award winner in 2017.

A particular challenge for South West planning, perhaps greater than in any other English region, has been the regeneration of land and buildings in and around former active docklands for housing, commercial and leisure uses. Major examples include the former Bristol City Docks ; Gloucester Docks (winner of RTPI regional and national awards for planning excellence in 1992 and 2013 respectively) ; Royal William Yard, Plymouth ; and Exeter and Bridgwater Docks.

Harnessing the region's huge potential for generating renewable energy

Wind, wave, solar, tidal and geothermal resources have all been harnessed in the South West, whilst protecting the best of the natural environment. Projects like the 'Wave Hub' and others involving wind and solar power in Cornwall and elsewhere and the capture of tidal power from the Severn Estuary (which the region 'shares' with Wales), are seen by some as major commercial opportunities responding to global warming, and by others, as environmental threats. The development of on-shore windfarms has posed particular challenges in Devon and especially Cornwall, which saw Britain's first ever commercial wind turbine, at Delabole, come into operation in 1992. More recently, solar power generation has come to the fore in many areas. In 2010, Cornwall Council set up a specialist 'Solar PV Planning Team' in response to an increasing volume of planning applications for solar PV arrays.

Electricity from nuclear power

Nuclear power plants have operated along the Severn Estuary / Bristol Channel coast since Berkeley came on stream in 1960, followed by Oldbury in 1967 and Hinkley Point A in 1965. All of these have now been de-commissioned, but new and much bigger plants are now planned on two of these sites, which will have to be successfully accommodated environmentally, whilst at the same time making the most of the related local economic benefits on offer.

The £22.5 bn Hinkley Point C scheme (HPC), which was granted its Development Consent under the 2008 Planning Act NSIP system back in March 2013, has become a saga of international proportions. After many years of uncertainty, delay, and rising cost, the decision to go ahead was finally made in Autumn 2016. This new 3.2 GW plant, being built on the West Somerset coast near Bridgwater, by EDF Energy with financial partner China General Nuclear Power Corporation, is the UK's first new nuclear power plant in a generation. The scheme has been a severe test for the NSIP consents regime, with its significant up-front consultation requirements ; for the finances of EDF; for UK central government energy policy ; and, more recently, for Anglo Chinese international relations ! It has also been a severe challenge to the host local planning authorities who have responded in an exceptionally pro-active manner (see below)

Work is now well underway on what is undoubtedly the largest single construction scheme ever in the South West and arguably the largest currently in the UK. Alongside this is National Grid's new 400,000 volt power line scheme to link the new plant to the main electricity grid near Avonmouth some 35 miles to the north, with 5 miles of the route underground as it passes across the Mendip Hills. This has also been granted consent under the NSIP regime, but, like HPC, has been subject to delays.

Meanwhile, on the local stage, the economic benefits of HPC for West Somerset, Sedgemoor and the wider County area promise to be considerable - 25,000 jobs during construction; 900 permanent jobs on site when the plant is operational and £40 m into the local economy each year during the life of the plant through wages and supply contracts. Among the new spin-off investment projects is the Somerset Energy Innovation Centre near Bridgwater opened in 2016. The associated planning processes for HPC have also set records. The scheme was the subject of a massive Planning Performance Agreement signed in 2009, which set the context for the subsequent raft of planning applications between February 2010 and September 2014 dealing with access and preliminary works, whilst in 2011, West Somerset Council produced and adopted an 'HPC SPD' to provide a context for EDF and other related development proposals. The professional planning expertise in handling nuclear power station construction, honed within a very small team here in the South West, has already been in demand from other professionals

faced with new nuclear plants in Anglesey and Suffolk. The excellence of the work involved has been recognised by an RTPI South West Award (See 'recent successes' below)

A few miles upstream, on the English Severn Estuary coast, and in what is now South Gloucestershire, is Hitachi's Horizon Nuclear Power 2.7GW Oldbury-on-Severn scheme. This had reached the pre-application stage, also under the NSIP regime, by summer 2016. There are now doubts however about Hitachi's continuing commitment to this scheme.

Transport infrastructure

In part due to its size and physical and economic diversity, achieving modern standard connectivity has long been a concern in the South West. The region's 'spine' motorways – the M4 and M5, are poorly connected to outlying areas which they must serve, the latter only goes south westwards as far as the middle of Devon. Sections of both motorways now suffer from severe congestion on a regular basis, especially the M5 south of Bristol and the Almondsbury M4/M5 junction. The A30 – the main spine route onwards from Exeter into Cornwall, has only recently been given long overdue up-grades and sections of the A303 through Wiltshire and into Somerset are in need of upgrades.(see Projects below)

The rail network is limited and vulnerable. There are no significant local commuter rail services, with just limited networks serving the Bristol, Exeter and Plymouth areas. The Great Western mainline electrification scheme between London, Bristol and South Wales, work on which is now underway, will only go part of the way to addressing the issue, offering little for region beyond Bristol, apart from new 'dual mode' trains, which will then be diesel powered as they travel further south west. The experience during the winter of 2013/14, of the severance, for several months, of the main [and only !] rail link between south Devon, Plymouth and Cornwall, and the rest of England, at Dawlish, amply demonstrated just how vulnerable the region's rail transport infrastructure is.

The region's seas and coastline

The region's coastline is both longer than that of any other English region, but also spectacular and, in many stretches, of internationally recognised environmental significance. Major examples include the Dorset & Devon World Heritage 'Jurassic Coast' and the Severn Estuary , with its RAMSAR status and multiple other designations. Recreational and commercial (ports and fishing) opportunities have had to be sensitively accommodated, but there have been more recent challenges. Off the Dorset / Hampshire coast, in the south east of the region, the proposed Navitus Bay offshore windfarm project , involving 121 turbines, each 650 feet high, just a few miles off the coast, proved highly controversial, with significant high-level political opposition. At the time, the Government was known to switching its support, in principle, from on-shore to off-shore windfarms, but in 2016, the scheme was refused Development Consent by the then DECC Secretary, in what many will have seen as a strong acknowledgement of the importance of protecting the region's natural environmental assets.

Elsewhere, the economic opportunities provided by offshore renewable energy activities [wave, tidal and offshore wind] are being assessed and co-ordinated by planners and others. On the national stage, the UK's emergent marine spatial planning regime has been playing 'catch-up', with the programme of Marine Spatial Plans recently reaching the region in the shape of the 'South Inshore & South Onshore Marine Plan . The 'South West Marine Energy Park' was launched, with Government support, early in 2012, to create ' a favourable business environment' to facilitate access to marine energy resources. Its 100 member organisations include Cornwall Council ; the Cornwall & Isles of Scilly LEP ; the Universities of Plymouth and Exeter ; and Regen South West.

Protecting and enhancing the natural environment generally

In addition to the region's two National Parks (Dartmoor & Exmoor) and 14 AONB's , there are many other areas with designated protection featuring prominently within Local Plan policies. Notable among these are the region's three most significant Green Belts - around Bristol & Bath ; Bournemouth / Poole / Christchurch ; and Cheltenham & Gloucester. Core Strategy bids for land to meet 'objectively assessed [housing] need' have now put these long established Green Belts under significant pressure, with fierce

local debates about how much protection should, or can, be afforded to them in the long term within the context of a desperate shortage of new housing.

Protecting and promoting the interests of the region's rural areas

Outside of the few significant urban centres, the South West is essentially rural, with most of the population living in small market towns and villages. Here, issues such as poor connectivity (including very limited broadband coverage) and appropriate access to essential services such as public transport, medical facilities, and shops, as well as a chronic shortage of 'affordable' housing, remain a challenge.

Devolution and the future administrative structure with the South West

The national 'devolution train' appears to be slowing down somewhat now and no longer making the headlines. Reference was made earlier to the three areas of the South West which have so far made and secured devolution bids, but it is, at this early stage, difficult to judge the extent to which the process is going to change the local governance geography of the region. Potentially however, devolution 'deals' provide major new sources of central government funding and the opportunity for levels of strategic planning which were lost to the region with the demise of the RSS. It is, as yet, too early to assess the detailed implications for the planning system.

The devolution process is an on-going one, both nationally and in the South West and much of it would appear to be driven by local government efforts to make 'economies of scale' cost savings, at the same time as securing more powers locally to take decisions. It remains to be seen how much planning, which many would consider has already received more than its fair share of cost cutting, is going to feature in all of this. A related factor, due to their sub-regional strategic role, is the future of the region's LEPs. They have already been involved in the devolution bidding process and there is now evidence that they are taking on more of a combined role, for example in the promotion of a new sustainable energy strategy involving three of the partnerships. The business community at least appears to have high hopes for devolution. According to the recent CBI report [*Shaping Regional Infrastructure – Priorities for growth – South West, April 2017*] businesses see it as a means of introducing more effective governance, collaboration and strategic planning.

A very unusual opportunity

The Goonhilly Earth Station on Cornwall's Lizard Peninsula has for many years been a significant part of the UK's satellite communications system, whilst nearby Newquay Airport, on the north coast has been steadily developing commercial air services as well as being the site of the 'Aerohub' Enterprise Zone. However, the South West has now featured on a shortlist as a location for our first 'Spaceport'. Material published at the 2016 Farnborough Air Show, as a follow-up to the Government's 'Space Innovation & Growth Strategy 2014-2030' included a shortlist of six potential sites. These sites are as follows : Campbeltown (on the Mull of Kintyre) ; Prestwick Airport (Ayrshire) ; RAF Leuchars (near St Andrews, Fife) ; Stornaway Airport (on the Isle of Lewis) ; Llanbedr Airport (in the Snowdonia National Park) ; and Cornwall Newquay Airport.

In an outline evaluation, it is noted that each of the sites in Scotland has weather issues which could be a problem, as might future uncertainty about Scottish independence. The site in Wales would obviously face the major environmental issue of being in a National Park . Newquay however, is seen as potentially the most promising, because although it can also suffer from poor winter weather, it is close to Goonhilly and could provide 'an important potential economic bonus for England's poorest County'. Since then, information has begun to emerge (See '*Beyond the horizon : The future of UK aviation*', HM Gov July 2017) about what a UK Spaceport might look like and about how, and under what kind of regulatory framework satellite launches might take place. A move towards such a framework could emerge in the recently published 'Space Industry Bill'. In the meantime, those in the South West, and Cornwall in particular should watch this space !

MAJOR PROJECTS IN THE SOUTH WEST

Major projects currently underway include :

Hinkley Point C nuclear power station This £22.5 bn project by EDF with Chinese support, is almost certainly the largest single construction project ever in the region. Over 5,600 people will be working on the 176 hectare site during the busiest part of the construction and commissioning phase, which is due to take close on 10 years. HPC presents a transformational opportunity for the economies of West Somerset, Sedgemoor, Somerset County and the wider South West, with an estimated 25,000 new job opportunities during construction and 900 permanent positions during the station's 60 year life (see below for the Local Councils' response) .

The Exeter /East Devon Growth Point A long-term strategic development partnership project involving several elements catering for housing and employment growth within and to the east of Exeter, adjacent to the A30 and M5. Includes Cranbrook New Community (with a new railway station) ; Exeter International Airport (expansion) ; Skypark Business Park ; Exeter Science Park ; Flybe Training Academy ; a Clyst Honiton By-pass; an Intermodal Freight Terminal ; and improvements to Junctions 29 & 30 on the M5. In addition a multi-site Enterprise Zone has recently been established. New sustainable public transport infrastructure is being developed to serve the area as are new parks and open spaces as part of a green infrastructure strategy.

A30/A303/A358 Trunk roads improvements These long overdue improvements to one of the region's spine routes, involving several elements, were 'unlocked' by a £2bn South West roads investment strategy announced by the Government in July 2014. Details of the elements are now emerging, including consultation on the proposed route for the new dual carriageway on the A30 in Cornwall, between Chiverton and Carland Cross, costing between £100m & £250m ; further dualling of the A30/A303 and of the A358 link between the A303 and the M5 at Taunton ; and a planned 1.8 mile dual carriageway tunnel plus 8 miles of new dual carriageway, on the stretch of the A303 running close to Stonehenge. This highly contentious tunnel scheme was finally confirmed by the Government in January 2017 following 28 years of discussion, debate and indecision, during which time the volume of road traffic on this single lane stretch of trunk road has increased dramatically.

Great Western Railway Electrification Though subject to delays and recently scaled down (with the centre of Bristol and Bath not to be included for the time being) this scheme will see brand new dual-mode electric/diesel Hitachi trains running on the main line out from Paddington, through the region from Swindon to Bristol Parkway and on through the Severn Tunnel to Newport and Cardiff. (the extension on to Swansea having been shelved)

The Army Basing Programme, Salisbury Plain

(see below)

RECENT PLANNING SUCCESSES

The RTPI South West's Awards for Planning Excellence (run in conjunction with the Institute's national awards competition) have been showcasing the achievements of the region's planners annually since 1992. Projects large and small, involving completed schemes on the ground, as well as plans and other work , continue to reflect the diverse nature of what the region's planners do.

Recent award winners – five very different examples from different parts of the region, include : **The Stafford Close Housing Scheme, Christow** - an 18 home development with high sustainability, affordability and low energy credentials on a highly sensitive village edge site within the Dartmoor National Park ,delivered by a partnership including a Community Land Trust, and a local Housing Association , together with positive planning input by the planners of the NPA. ; the **Army Basing Programme on Salisbury Plain**

in which the Defence Infrastructure Organisation, together with partners and most notably, Wiltshire Council, and supported by consultants WYG, has been leading a £1.2bn project to deliver new facilities on five existing locations within the Salisbury Plain training area for 4,300 additional troops and their families returning from Germany by 2020. ; **Planning to Ensure Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects Realise Tangible Legacies**, by which the planners at Sedgemoor District Council, West Somerset Council and Somerset County Council , have devised and successfully operated an innovative and proactive approach to deliver benefits for the community and local economy from the Hinkley Point C (HPC) nuclear power station project .This work has seen transformational results on the ground including : The National College for Nuclear ; The Somerset Energy Innovation Centre ; the EDF Energy Low Carbon Leadership Training Campus at Cannington Court ; the ‘Bridgwater Gateway’ employment site; and new facilities at Bridgwater & Taunton College. All of this is already leading to a sea change in what was the area’s previously low value economy. Also involved are a comprehensive planning policy framework and a new development management system dealing, in parallel, with the two different planning system involved. This work was recognised with the Overall Winner Award in the 2018 RTPI SW Awards for Planning Excellence. ; the **Dawlish Countryside Park** on the edge of this Devon seaside town, was also recognised in the 2018 Awards. This scheme functions as a ‘Sustainable Alternative Natural Green Space’ (SANGS), providing a ‘green lung’ for the local community and, in particular, an adjacent 1700 home urban extension ; and finally, **McArthur’s Yard, Bristol**, by the Nash Partnership, highly commended in the 2018 Awards, which will see the delivery, after many years of inactivity and failed attempts, of a mixed use scheme on one of the last remaining undeveloped sites on Bristol’s historic harbourside.

SKILLS & EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

The range of planning skills required and the range of public and private sector employment opportunities are as extensive and varied as the South West is large and diverse. Despite recent ‘contractions’, the region’s Planning Authorities continue to require and attract young planners, attracted by the range of rural and urban challenges here as well as by the quality of life offered by its environment. Although opportunities within central government agencies are now limited, there continue to be others within a number of ‘green’ organisations based in the region, including the Soil Association and SUSTRANS., which has its HQ in Bristol.

The private sector is characterised by a flourishing body of planning consultants, with over 80 firms operating within the South West, offering a wide range of specialist expertise to developers, local planning authorities and other bodies. A number of the larger firms, including WYG, Peter Brett Associates, Savills/Smiths Gore, RPS and Pegasus, have offices in several towns, and international names such as Colliers, Arup and Atkins, also operate here. Research and consultancy expertise, not to mention a supply of young graduates and post-graduates, is also provided by the region’s two University planning schools – UWE, Bristol and Plymouth, the former of which has been providing RTPI accredited planning courses continuously for almost 40 years.

And finally, some less well-known facts about the South West

According to the Government, Swindon is the most ‘statistically average’ place in the UK. ‘Plasticine’ was invented in 1897 by William Harbutt, in Bath and ‘Ribena’ was invented at the Long Ashton Research Station near Bristol to improve the population’s health during WW2.

Written by

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NB Any views or opinions expressed in this paper, beyond the direct reporting of facts, are those of the author, though they are based on many years of being involved in and the monitoring of planning activity in the South West.