

<i>Reference</i>	ICN21/Feb/0
<i>Date</i>	5 February 2021



ROYAL TOWN PLANNING INSTITUTE

## **INDEPENDENT CONSULTANTS NETWORK**

ICN Steering Group Meeting

**5 February 2021, 10.00 to 12.00**

Remotely via Go To Meeting

### **1. Welcome, Introductions, Apologies for Absence**

- In attendance: Deirdre Wells (Chair), John Lynch, Helen Prangle, Alyn Nicholls, Peter Lloyd, Anton Lang, Jenny Divine (RTPI Network Manager)
- No apologies or absences

### **2. Update on ICN membership**

- The Network currently has 807 members
- There are 226 subscribers to the ICN Discussion Forum

### **3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 17/04/2021 and matters arising** ***PAPER 1 Minutes 17 April 2021 ICN Steering Group Meeting***

Covid-19

All agreed there is nothing further to discuss

#### Steering Group Nominations and Selection Process

The Steering Group discussed the nominations and selection process, during which it was agreed that:

- This year SG members will be selected by the RTPI's Nominations Sub-Committee.
- Moving forward, consideration will be given to an election process. This would involve putting the election out to all ICN members and may not be a suitable option for the ICN, as regular contact with other ICN members was considered essential to ensure awareness of issues of concern by SG members.
- JD advised that nominations would need to be opened by the following specified dates in order to align with the Nominations Sub-Committee Meetings in 2021:
  - 22 September meeting – Nominations to be opened by the start of August
  - 17 November meeting – Nominations to be opened by end of September.

#### *Actions*

- JD to circulate a draft role description and eligibility requirement document for the Steering Group to complete. Once finalised, this document will be adopted for future SG nominations processes and will be used by the Nominations Sub-Committee in the 2021 selection process.

### **4. RTPI online directory of Chartered Town Planners**

- JD confirmed the RTPI is supportive of creating a free online list of members as part of the RTPI's GROWPLAN strategy. This list would comprise the name of each RTPI member and their membership status (i.e. chartered, licentiate etc.).

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- The SG discussed the current RTPI Consultants Directory and raised the following concerns:
  - That cost of the Directory is such that it is only beneficial to large practices able to pay £3000 to get themselves at the top of the tree. This goes against the RTPI's one vote one member principle.
  - Planning Portal are entering an area where surely there are huge conflicts of interest. The Planning Portal is seen by the average person as a quasi-governmental organisation that you have to go through to lodge a planning application. For this organisation to then direct individuals to one commercial enterprise is appalling.
- It was agreed that, in the first instance, the SG pursue a simple online member list that can be accessed for free via the RTPI website.
- AL also requested information about the length of the RTPI's contract with the Planning Portal and what percentage the RTPI gets from the silver, platinum etc. packages.

*Actions*

- JD to advise DW who in the RTPI is responsible for delivering GROWPLAN
- JD and SG to continue to press for a simple online member list that does not compete with the Directory.
- JD will find out what information the RTPI is able to be disclosed to the SG regarding the Directory.

**5. 2020 ICN member feedback**

DW advised that she put a call to members via the Discussion Forum about their experiences working throughout 2020 and received an unprecedented response. Many people who are not regular contributors to the Forum contacted her, indicating that there are many 'watchers' of the Forum. There was an outpouring of personal views and experiences, which shows the trust that is placed in the SG by ICN members.

*Actions*

- No Action required

**6. ICN Discussion Forum – feedback since the transition**

- The SG agreed that the transition went smoothly and the new Forum settled down quickly.
- DW proposed that a distinctive name for the email/website group to distinguish it from the wider ICN membership would be helpful, as the difference between the 2 had to be explained in every report. JD advised that 'ICN Discussion Forum' was generally used in the RTPI, and it was agreed that this term should be adopted by all.
- It was agreed that SG reach out to non-forum ICN members on an annual basis to invite and encourage them to join the Forum.

*Actions*

- JD to send an annual invite to ICN members to join the Forum from August 2021 (i.e. a year since the last invite was sent).

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## 7. 2021 ICN Conference

- The SG discussed the feasibility of planning an in-person conference for 2021 or moving the conference to an online format. The following points were raised:
  - There is still so much uncertainty regarding face-to-face events that it would be difficult to make any concrete plans for an in-person conference this year. On this point, JD advised that the venue the SG had booked for last year are not taking any bookings until they know when they will be allowed to reopen.
  - The purpose of the conference is to be able to meet face-to-face. An online conference would not be as enjoyable. There are so many online CPD webinars. The ICN would not be able to offer anything not already offered by others.
- It was agreed that, although the SG would love to organise a 2021 conference, it is just not going to be possible.
- (Post meeting note: following rapid vaccination roll out, projected lifting of restrictions in England, it may be possible for the ICN conference to go ahead later in the year. The RTPI is due to review its position on events at the start of April, following which we will consult with ICN members via questionnaire as to whether attempts should be made to continue with plans for a late 2021 event)
- It was agreed that the SG could pursue alternative options for 2021, such as:
  - Small online workshop sessions for people who would like to meet more experienced independent practitioners to discuss setting up in private practice.
  - Small online social gatherings to allow ICN members to meet and chat generally.
  - A buddy system could be established for members who feel they would benefit from the expertise of a more experienced member.

### *Actions*

- DW to put a call out to ICN members asking them what would be helpful to them in the absence of a conference this year and suggest the above options to see if there is an interest.

## 8. MHCLG NPPF and National Model Design Code Consultation - [National Planning Policy Framework and National Model Design Code: consultation proposals - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/national-model-design-code-consultation-proposals)

- The SG discussed whether or not it would be beneficial to prepare a response on behalf of ICN members for the RTPI to include in its formal response.
- HP offered to look through the consultation to ascertain if there are any concerns from an ICN point of view that the RTPI could feed into its response on the ICN's behalf.

### *Actions*

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- HP to review consultation and feed any comments back to the SG and JD.

### **9. Update re Steering Group liaison with PINS**

- The SG discussed their last meeting with PINS in June 2020 and made the following comments:
  - The role previously held by Ben Linscott is now split between Graham Stallwood and David Smith.
  - Graham Stallwood appeared willing to assist, but many of the issues seem to be outside of his responsibilities.
  - David Smith appeared less willing to engage.
  - Overall the SG were unimpressed by the outcome of the meeting.
- The SG agreed that it would be beneficial to set up another meeting with PINS to keep the lines of communication open.
- It was agreed that the SG survey ICN members to ensure communications with PINS reflect ICN views.
- AL queried if anyone in the RTPI regularly liaises with PINS as they could also attend any future meeting.

#### *Actions*

- DW to circulate minutes from June 2020 SG/PINS meeting
- DW to contact Graham Stallwood and arrange another meeting
- DW to draft possible customer feedback survey questions and circulate to SG for comment.
- JD to advise DW/SG who at the RTPI is in regular contact with PINS

### **10. Starting your own private practice PAN update**

- DW advised that update was previously considered to address issues of mental health and wellbeing that are unique to independent consultants, particularly as many work from home in isolation.
- Experience during the last year has overtaken this issue since the majority of the country is now working from home in isolation, and advice is now more widely available and problems recognised.
- It was agreed that the SG put the mental health aspect of the update on hold for the time being and undertake a general review of the document to ascertain if other updates should be made.
- It was suggested that the ICN buddy system could be incredibly beneficial to the mental health of ICN members moving forwards.

#### *Actions*

- The SG to review the Advice Note and advise JD of any potential updates required.
- Suggestions to expand a buddy system to be submitted by SG to DW and JD.

### **11. AOB (due notice having been given)**

- Date of the next meeting to be agreed at a later date via email communication.
- No other items put forward