



RTPI

mediation of space · making of place

**26th February Westminster Hall Debate
Briefing, called by Mr John Penrose MP**

The Role of Planning in Preserving Urban Views and Regenerating High Streets

22 February 2013

The Royal Town Planning Institute and summary

1. The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) represents 23,000 members worldwide who work in the public, private, charitable and education sectors and is the largest professional institute for planners in Europe. It is a charity whose purpose is to develop the art and science of town planning for the benefit of the public. The RTPI develops and shapes policy affecting the built environment, works to raise professional standards, and supports members through continuous education, practice advice, training and development.
2. The RTPI believes that the current discussions surrounding the future of our town centres need to take into account wider considerations than are currently taking place, and primarily that town centres can be renewed through the provision of public services.
3. Planning is far more than a regulatory function. A key element to town planning is not to stifle development by hiding behind designations, but to use their knowledge and expertise to produce a mixture of contemporary and historic neighbourhoods up and down the country.

The Role of town planning – an example

4. Town planning is a statutory function of local authorities: unitary authorities, borough and district councils, with county councils as upper tier authorities having limited planning functions. Planning is required to promote sustainable development. Town planning is about planning on a wider scale, taking into account *all* the viable issues which will affect the success of a sustainable development.
5. Accordingly, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) was the latest in a long line of planning policy to place a duty upon local planning authorities to promote a 'Town Centre First' policy, in which planning applications for main town centre uses should be placed first in town centres, and then elsewhere if there is a need, with out of centre locations being the least preferred. The document also requires local planning authorities to promote healthy communities through the development of their local plans, taking into account the views of a wide range of partners in order to provide 'safe and accessible developments, and high quality public space, which encourage the active and continual use of public areas.'¹

The role of planning in preserving urban views

6. As stated in Mr John Penrose MP's Daily Telegraph article of 2nd January 2013², local councils designate views and create conservation areas in order to ensure that future developments not only protect, but also enhance out historic landscapes. The best known example of this is the

footnotes

¹ Department for Communities and Local Government (2012) *The National Planning Policy Framework* available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6077/2116950.pdf

² Mr John Penrose MP in The Daily Telegraph *Now let's protect our favourite urban views* 2nd January 2013, available at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/environment/conservation/9773192/Now-lets-protect-our-favourite-urban-views.html>

protected framework of London panoramas and other viewing areas in parks to both St Paul's Cathedral and the Palace of Westminster.³

7. Furthermore, the NPPF states that the planning profession exists to 'contribute to protecting our natural, built and historic environment.' Planners are also required to 'create a high quality built environment, with accessible local services that reflect the community's needs and support its health, social and cultural well-being.'⁴
8. Town planning, as a profession, also has to weigh up the need to meet the need for sustainable growth, alongside maintaining areas of historic interest for tourism, by 'ensuring that sufficient land of the right type is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth and innovation; and by identifying and coordinating development requirements.'⁵

Town planning and the regeneration of high streets

9. The RTPI supports the recognition that town centres are being given at this time most notably in the focus that the Westminster government has given to this area through the Portas Review⁶ into the future of Britain's high streets, and the creation of the Future High Streets Forum⁷. However, both the Portas analysis and the perceived remit of the Forum have been heavily based in the retail aspects of high streets, and neglected the role that other sectors can play in the maintenance and regeneration of our high streets.
10. The Institute concurs with the viewpoint of the Outer London Commission, stating that town centres need to diversify their offer and become less dependent on retail if they are to survive. In particular, we support their recommendation that town centres should look to be renewed via the development of what the commission terms 'lifetime neighbourhoods' – eg that town centres become the 'main locations for delivery of public as well as private services e.g. education, health, civic, voluntary and reinvent these e.g. through 'one-stop shops' or libraries as resources for local businesses as well as residents.'⁸
11. Encouraging public services to relocate to town and district centres is a positive step for a number of reasons in the drive to both promote regeneration of town centres and reduce health inequalities. This is not just an issue for the public sector, but also the private and voluntary sectors, who are as equally likely to be providers of such services. Firstly, these areas are in many cases already the focal point for a well-serviced local public transport network. By not placing services in out of town areas which are heavily dependent on a car being the mode of travel, providers would be increasing the accessibility of their services to the whole population.
12. In order to fully maximise these opportunities, it is important for a town centre to be an attractive place to visit, and the Institute supports the work of the Mayor's Outer London £50m fund to 'rejuvenate town centres through the improvement of retail, leisure, culture and arts

footnotes

³ More information can be found at <http://www.london.gov.uk/thelondonplan/maps-diagrams/map-4b-02.jsp>

⁴ *The National Planning Policy Framework* Page 2

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (2011) *The Portas Review: An independent review into the future of our high streets* BIS: London

⁷ Mark Prisk MP *Building the High Street of the Future* via <http://markprisk.communities.gov.uk/building-the-high-street-of-the-future/>

⁸ The Outer London Commission (2012) *Second Report* Available at <http://www.london.gov.uk/olc/docs/OLC-Second-report-Nov2012.pdf>

provision⁹ as a welcome step in revitalising our town centres. By going further to recognise the important part that public services could play in both revitalising town centres and reducing health inequalities in an area, the remit described by the Outer London Fund would echo the Marmot Review's¹⁰ call to fully integrate healthcare policy with transport, housing and environmental policy.

13. Much of what is being described above is already taking place in measures taken by local planning authorities. These bodies are bound by the National Planning Policy Framework to 'take account of and support local strategies to improve health, social and cultural wellbeing for all, and deliver sufficient community and cultural facilities and services to meet local needs' when formulating their Local Plans. It is vital that any changes in the planning of public services, be they managed by the public, private or voluntary sector, take into account the ongoing work that is being taken through these processes, and look to actively work with planning authorities to plan for the economic regeneration of a local community.
14. However, it is not just public centres that will help to renew our town centres, and the Institute would draw your attention to the research undertaken by economic research consultants TBR and MAKE¹¹ regarding the value and reach of the UK's evening and night-time economy. The research highlights that this aspect of the economy is often overlooked, however it is considered a crucial driver for tourism, leisure and business growth, and has an estimated potential worth of £66bn to UK plc.¹² By creating a safe and vibrant night-time economy, councils can also help to reduce crime in their local centres – or, perhaps more importantly, the perception of crime in an area.

Contact the RTPi

If you require more detailed information please contact the RTPi.

Tino Hernandez

Head of Marketing & Communications

e. tino.hernandez@rtpi.org.uk

t. 020 7929 9486

m. 07830 879 274

Royal Town Planning Institute

The RTPi is a charity registered in England (262865) and Scotland (SC 037841)

footnotes

⁹ London Assembly (2012) *Proposed review of the future of London's town centres* available at:

<http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/05a%20Final%20town%20centres%20scoping%20271112%20v4.pdf>

London: London Assembly

¹⁰ UCL Institute of Health Inequality (2010) *Fair society, healthy lives* Available at

<http://www.instituteofhealthequity.org/projects/fair-society-healthy-lives-the-marmot-review>

¹¹ <http://www.tbr.co.uk/pages/tbr-observatory/night-time-economy.php>

¹² *ibid*