

Tripwire



Beauty and the beast in this instance are not the characters from *Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve's* 18th century fairy tale *La Belle et la Bête* but rather subjects involved in two recent publications; design quality (including the value and role of beauty) and the behemoth of development (the beast).

This is not to imply that development is intrinsically ugly or monstrous (or indeed that it can magically be transformed by the power of love¹) but rather a description of its gargantuan scale and the enormous and profound effect it has upon our lives.

The two publications mentioned above are the Government's ***Creating space for beauty - The Interim Report of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission***, July 2019 and the RTPI Research Paper ***PLANNING AND DESIGN QUALITY - Creating places where we want to live, work and spend time***, June 2019.

The objective of the report '***Creating space for beauty***' is to help tackle the challenge of poor-quality design and build of homes and places across the country and help ensure we do so with popular consent.

Its purpose is to gather evidence to develop practical policy solutions to ensure the design and style of new developments help grow a sense of community and place'. It contains 5 aims which includes identifying the key issues, developing

practical and workable ideas and solutions as well as championing for and committing to 'beauty in the built environment'.

The RTPI's research paper ***PLANNING AND DESIGN QUALITY*** is based upon a survey of planners in early 2019 which revealed that while the vast majority of planners want to engage more in design quality and place making, they consider that the current system makes this difficult.

The paper contains 9 key findings from the survey and presents 15 recommendations for improving design quality in the built environment based on the survey outcomes. The survey revealed that the majority (77%) of respondents believed that design is of equal importance to factors such as affordability and the availability of infrastructure.

It identified that planners believed that creating quality design goes beyond the concept of securing beauty and that any new definition of design quality should not include reference to style or beauty, perhaps a rather ironic finding in light of the Government's *Creating space for beauty* report.

Instead the respondents focussed on the holistic meaning of design quality, objective criteria against which the quality of design can be assessed and how it should address inclusivity, wider needs and impacts, security, accessibility, safety and usability.



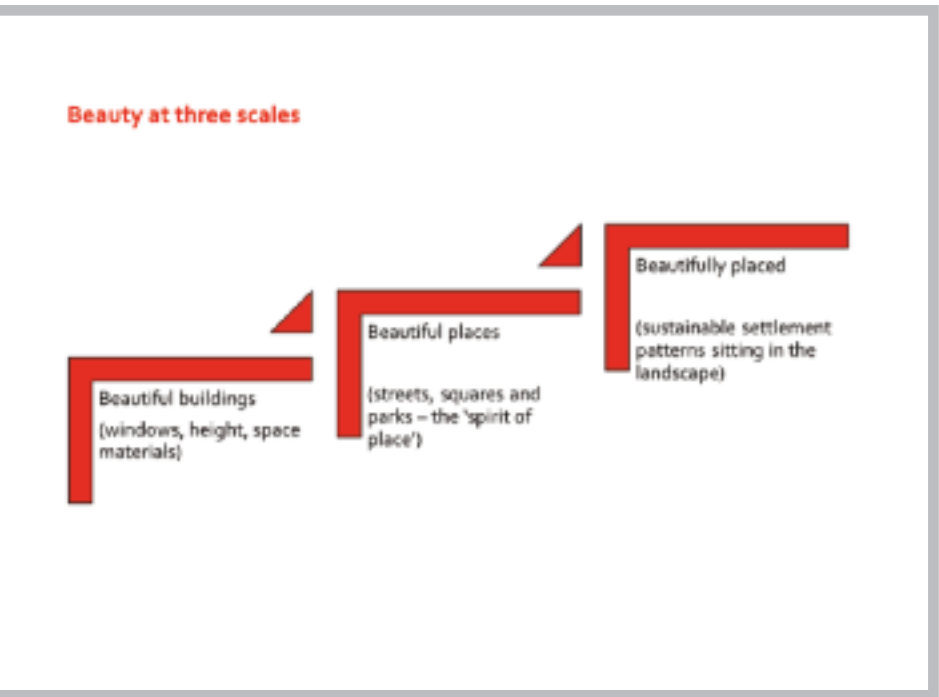
The Wintles, Shropshire.



Accordia, Cambridge.

Whilst this edition of Tripwire contains a selection of different items, the focus is upon urban design and design quality, hence these opening editorial references to very recent design quality publications.

The West Midlands RTPI would once again thank the contributors to the magazine and as always would invite readers to submit comments and offer ideas and articles for future editions. Enjoy. ■



Creating space for beauty – The Interim Report of the Building Better, Building Beautiful Commission, July 2019.

We are seeking contributions for the next edition of Tripwire which will focus upon climate change. If interested please contact either the West Midlands RTPI co ordinator or

the Tripwire editor at: westmidlands@rtpi.org.uk or m.a.vout@btinternet.com

Michael Vout
West Midlands RTPI Regional Secretary.

Notes
¹ Perhaps there is something for urban design in this after all...

Tripwire



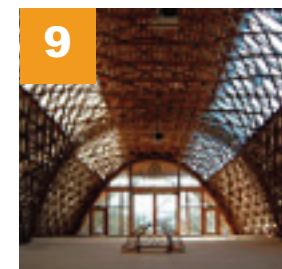
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What is the Future for Planning?

Since our last Tripwire, the call for better longer term, strategic and spatial planning has become louder.

Almost unanimously now, planners, and indeed many politicians, now believe strongly that we cannot continue to “plan” only. We face enormous challenges both globally and locally – climate crisis impacts, creating better places, building homes we need, addressing regional economic and social inequalities, etc.

The UK2070 Commission published its first report in June. This Commission, led by Lord Kerslake, has proposed that the UK requires a spatial plan to guide its future development. It highlights that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all have spatial frameworks that play a “key role” in helping to shape their future development. But England, though, does not have one – meaning that there is “no common understanding of shared priorities beyond the individual nations”.

The Commission says national and sub-national frameworks would help to resolve this problem, “identifying and connecting national economic hubs, providing a firm basis for long-term infrastructure investment, identifying priorities for a new urban policy and securing better national management for the natural and historic environment”. Indeed the work of our Student Futures project with BCU and



Sandy Taylor.

the University of Birmingham Planning Schools is beginning to skill up our future planners awareness of the value of strategic spatial planning.

The Commission has made a number of suggestions about regions, and comments are welcomed on its first report before its final report is published in the Autumn.

Having attended the RTPI Planning Convention in June down in London, I was encouraged to hear the Minister for Housing, Kit Malthouse state that he saw a need for more longer term thinking and that five years for Local Plans was too short to ensure effective strategic decisions were made. However later in the Convention, Steve Quartermain, the MCHLG Chief Planner, poured a little cold water on the thought that

we might see a return to formal strategic planning and plans, saying that it was only an ambition.

So once again, where do we stand on the Future of Planning? Well a thought-provoking book published by the RTPI at the Convention “A Future for Planning” by Michael Harris, demonstrates how, in recent years, planning has been constrained by “short-termism”. The RTPI has also demonstrated how planning has been relegated from the top tables of local government. Some 80% of Local Authorities don't have a Chief Planner sitting at its top decision-making table.

Given the challenges we are facing, then maybe, just maybe – we are at the dawn of a new era!

I would also like to the opportunity to warmly congratulate two of our members being awarded honours in the Queen's recent Birthday Honours. Ray Colbourne, who has just retired from MCHLG, and who is a stalwart of our Regional Activities Committee and our CPD programme for many years, has been made an MBE. And Louise Brooks-Smith, the UK Head of Town Planning at Arcadis has been made an OBE. Louise is well-known for her leadership on diversity and women in both planning and in RICS where she was the RICS Global President in 2014. It is so pleasing to see both colleagues recognised in this way. ■

Sandy Taylor
RTPI West Midlands Chair

The (Re)Launch of RTPI West Midlands Urban Design Forum

RTPI West Midlands // Summer 2019



The RTPI West Midlands Urban Design Forum (WMUDF) Chair, **Luke Hillson**, Design Director at Barton Willmore, welcomes attendees from a variety of professional backgrounds from across the West

Midlands for the inaugural re launch of the West Midlands Urban Design Forum.

Tuesday 2nd July saw the (re) launch of the RTPI West Midlands Urban design forum (WMUDF). The event, the first of regular planned events, was organised for those with an interest in urban design and the built environment from across the West Midlands to get together and share ideas on how the quality of the design across the region can be improved.

Luke gave a short (Pecha Kucha style) presentation on the findings of the RTPI Survey, **Planning and Design Quality**, June 2019 (<https://www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/research/projects/planning-and-design-quality/>), which emphasises the need for contextually informed design codes and masterplans.

The group collectively started to set goals and aims for the Forum. Initial ideas have included a design mentorship scheme, improving awareness of urban design, lessons learned project crits and local study visits.



The *Planning and Design Quality* report available at: www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/research/projects/planning-and-design-quality

Forthcoming Urban Design events were discussed which includes the Urban Design Group National Conference in Birmingham on 26-28 September



(<http://www.udg.org.uk/content/national-urban-design-conference-2019>) and the WM RTPI 'Urban Design and Masterplanning for Non-Designers' CPD on Tuesday 26th November in Birmingham (<https://www.rtpi.org.uk/events/events-calendar/2019/november/urban-design-and-masterplanning-for-planners-the-basics/>)

The next WMUDF meeting will be on Tuesday 1st October at 6pm, to be held at the Old Joint Stock, Birmingham.

The Forum will also host smaller discussion groups to focus on particular issues and make the sessions more accessible for those unable to attend evening sessions. For further information please contact: westmidlands@rtpi.org.uk ■

Luke Hillson
WMUDF Chair and WMRTPI Vice Chair

Design Quality Assessment at Homes England

RTPI West Midlands // Summer 2019



Dan Roberts MRTPI
Homes England.

powers, influence and expertise to drive up the quality and pace of development.

Creating great places and well-designed homes where people want to live is at the core of Homes England's mission. We are committed to showing leadership on design in the sector and are using our

The five year Strategic Plan, published in the autumn of 2018, sets out the steps the Agency will take with industry to respond to the long-term housing challenges facing this country. This includes a commitment to working with house builders and the wider housing industry to promote better design and higher quality homes – and to challenge the traditional norms and build better homes faster.

The revised National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) highlighted the importance of high quality design through the planning process. The Agency

has made it a priority to work with Local Planning Authorities, developers and land owners directly, and through the MHCLG, to help them build confidence and capacity.

Our challenge is to create great neighbourhoods so that they are well planned, fit with the character of their surroundings and, most crucially, serve the practical needs of their communities. We are doing this by working with people and organisations from across the housing industry – to ensure new homes are designed well, with the green spaces and the facilities communities need to thrive.

development
transport design
Plan RTPI existing policy
infrastructure green access housing open contemporary
traffic character neighbourhood

The Agency has adopted the 'Building for Life 12' (BfL12) principles to benchmark good design through activities within our Land programmes, embedding them into conversations with our partners from the very start and throughout the lifespan of a project. This includes a mandatory self-assessment against the BfL12 criteria as part of our tender process. To help us assess design proposals from developers, our Land teams have undergone a 3 stage BfL12 training programme. The training will be on-going in order to update and inform existing and new staff members.

Where our land is being developed by our partners, for 50 or more homes, they will be required to demonstrate how design has been considered and applied on projects and detailed layouts will be assessed against BfL12 criteria.

To ensure consistency of approach and to drive design quality standards, Homes England has commissioned a BfL12 design guide. This is intended to showcase some of the very best examples to share with the housing industry.

There is a focus of government interest on making new build development more distinctive. To this end, Homes England is placing particular emphasis on BfL12 criterion 5, which requires the consideration of character. With guidance from Design for Homes, the organisation responsible for BfL12, the Agency has formulated some tender questions. We will also be asking our partners to

demonstrate other tools and techniques used in the development of their plans.

Each BfL12 self-assessment will be appraised by Homes England and evaluated against the criteria. Where necessary, we can use independent assessors to appraise proposals. The specific number of criteria to be met will be set out in the invitation to tender. Based on a traffic light system, the aim is to achieve as many 'greens' as possible, interrogate and improve any 'ambers' and avoid 'reds'. The specific score required may be dependent on market factors and the scale of development.

Homes England issued the latest guidance for tender submissions in April 2019, which includes assessment against BfL12 with a focus on criterion 5 (character). Whilst we are asking particular questions around character, this reflects – rather than sets – Government policy.

The Agency tested this assessment process with external stakeholders and, no doubt, we will be making further refinements as our experience and understanding develops. At present, 8 green scores against the BfL12 criteria will be our minimum. However, a threshold will be established for each site, to determine what is required, and for some strategic sites we will expect 12 greens.

We are asking for a focus on the following to demonstrate character but will ask for local distinctiveness to be evidenced:

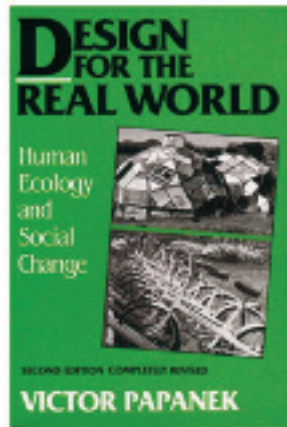
- Building arrangement to create strong building lines and corners
- Use of gables and terraced roofs to link coherently
- Use of different house types and cohesion
- Use of materials and local distinctiveness
- Effective but unobtrusive placement of utilities and services
- Relationship between service strips, back of pavement and face of buildings
- Boundary treatment and public realm
- Green street landscaping and maintenance
- Hard street landscaping and maintenance

The Agency is also considering the most effective ways to use Design Review within its acquisition and disposal processes and is inputting to the Ministry's Planning Practice Guidance, which will support the NPPF. It is fair to say, design quality is, very much, back on the agenda at Homes England as we try to make better places, everywhere. ■

Dan Roberts MRTPI
Homes England

‘Design for the Real World’ was the title of the 8th in the series of RTPI WM CPD events in 2018. The half-day seminar in September explored the need, principles and examples of ‘design quality’ and was introduced by Harry Burchill (RTPI Urban Design network lead). The programme was organised by Michael Vout to be thought-provoking rather than necessarily providing definitive answers. Focal points of the morning were to reflect on the degree of ‘personal preferences’ in judging ‘good design’; how to balance different aspects, such as functionality, comfort and aesthetics; and how attention to detail and to the bigger picture *both* matter and have to come together in quality design. The recently updated NPPF also highlights design quality which is not only relevant for housing but place-making and day-to-day decision-making more generally. We can expect to see more discussions and attention to design in the coming months and years.

The title of this CPD event comes from Victor Papanek’s book first published in 1971 with a second revised edition in 1985. Papanek’s anthropological and environmental interests strongly informed his conception and principles of good design, taking a user-centred and ethical, rather than aesthetic, stance.



Much attention in England is typically directed at new housing development, especially in light of the Government’s White Paper on Housing (2017) and the challenge to build 300,000 new homes in England per year. **Dan Roberts** from Homes England (HE) explained how HE works with Local Authorities, SMEs and other built environment stakeholders and injects design quality into whole life-cycle ‘master-development’ of projects of 50 or more homes. The emphasis here is not so much on adopting a specific building standard but on place/place-making and form and function; for example using the 12 Building for Life (BfL) principles (<http://www.builtforlifehomes.org/go/about>) as evident in Manor Kingsway (Derby) and Northstowe (Cambridgeshire); or CABE’s 7 principles of good design (<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110118103740/http://www.cabe.org.uk/councillors/principles>). Highlighting the importance of Green Infrastructure and nature-inspired design is captured in a relatively new benchmark/accreditation called ‘Building with Nature’ (<https://www.buildingwithnature.org.uk/>) which won the RTPI’s 2018 Sir Peter Hall Award for Wider Engagement and sets Wellbeing, Water and Wildlife Standards.

Dan finished his presentation with a good motto (“Building better places everywhere”) and a useful set of lessons learnt, including:

1. Build on existing work and guidance and focus on implementation;
2. Try and influence development early using windows of opportunity;

3. Raise the bar of ‘ordinary’ rather than just focus on ‘exemplary’;
4. Build up momentum and influence;
5. Bring in some external validation for credibility.

A brief **Q&A session** drew attention to the lack of training offered to elected planning committee members, where concerns get addressed rather late in the process and often focus on matters such as ‘waste bins’ or ‘parking’ rather than place-making more holistically. More effective would be to deal with specific end-user and stakeholder concerns early on in any development project. In relation to producing design guidance at a national level, the importance of locally specific and regionally sensitive in addition to general guidance was flagged as well as the use of BfL, and other standards or principles, as a *process* rather than a check-list. Also, the need to be more *user-focused* rather than profit-driven was highlighted. Another important point raised was the need for regional urban design networks and support (see <https://www.designnetwork.org.uk/>) to help promote better and more sustainable places and inspire and support professionals (which may need some government funding). For example, there is *MADE* in the West Midlands (www.made.org.uk/); *Open* in the East Midlands and *Design Matters* in North-West England. In different regions, expectations of standards of design may be pushed to different levels; for example, where viability is less of an issue (due to higher profit margins by location / default) attention to design may be much higher and

more fine-grained than in regions where viability and attracting investment are big concerns.

After the coffee-break, **Anthony Clerici** RIBA facilitated a highly interactive session eliciting participants' suggestions of 'cool cities' (e.g. Copenhagen, Melbourne, New York, Edinburgh, Liverpool) and a reflective exercise on why we find certain buildings 'cool' or not (on a scale from 'seriously uncool' to 'sub-zero') handing out a range of international examples as diverse as shopping malls, skyscrapers, terraced houses and iconic buildings such as the Brandenburg Gate, the Gherkin, Birmingham Selfridges, the Eden Project and the Jewish Museum in Berlin. There was no clear agreement on allocating specific buildings to just one category but an overall trend was noticeable where older, traditional styles generally



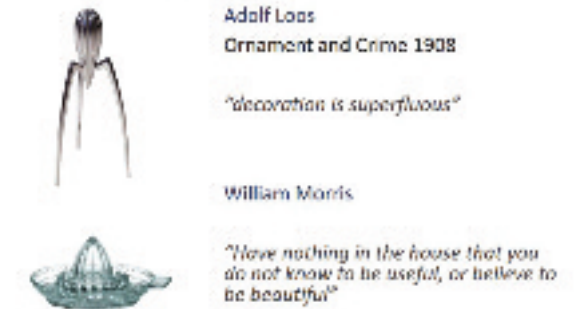
scored better than more modern and 'bland' designs. However, as participants quite rightly pointed out, it is one thing to find a building or city 'cool' and another whether one would like to live or work there (also, 'being cool' may not necessarily be the best variable in judging design).

In our own words, what made a design outstanding was that it was/provoked: emotional reaction, distinct, impressive, iconic, timeless, interesting but not weird, doing the job, sociable, at a human scale, 'shiny', open to the public, meaning, symbolic, strong place identity, well maintained, a landmark. At the other extreme, identifiers for undesirable buildings or designs included: dull, ugly, institutional, bland, pretentious, poor space definition, boring, no nature or natural features, useless, messy, out of scale, desolate. Importantly, the appreciation of design went well beyond 'like' or 'don't like' and a better appreciation of the wide spectrum of factors influencing the judgement about design. The session was too short to also consider buildings in their wider context, which of course, is essential for place-making.

The next perspective on design was by an academic and practitioner of the creative arts. **Kate Farley**, a Print and Pattern Designer (www.katefarley.co.uk) and Senior Lecturer in Textile Design at Birmingham City University, sees 'design' as being everywhere and in everything. Excited about design being back on the built environment agenda, she considered a range of

questions: Who determines taste? And what influences taste? (According to Grayson Perry "more than age, race, religion or sexuality – one's social class".) Is good design the same as good taste? (No!) Who has the right to define what is 'good design'? (Why) does taste matter? When Kate starts a new design project, she considers the client profile, purpose and context. Her example of two lemon squeezers brought home the message of form and function and good design being able to do everything it needs to: in this case squeeze the lemon, catching the pips and collecting the juice.

Example taken from Kate Farley's presentation (slide 3) –
Which lemon squeezer is the better design?
Which would you prefer?



Going through different époques (Baroque, Classical, Neo-Classical revival, Gothic Revival, Industrialisation, Art Nouveau, Modernism, Bauhaus) Kate illustrated how taste is shaped by various (borrowed) styles and forms over time and how in the mid-19th century the Parliamentary Select Committee on Art and Manufactures raised

concerns over the quality of British export goods when compared to those made in France, Germany and USA. This then triggered Government Schools of Design to improve the education of designers. Principles taught included that form is dictated by function and materials used; and that the ornamental aspect should always be secondary to utility. The presentation also briefly dwelled on Augustus Pugin, an English architect, designer and artist in the first half of the 19th century, who was concerned with 'the beautiful', the 'true' and moral responsibility; honesty in design here then means not to add 3D effects to flat design, or giving wood a marble effect. No fake designs or faux materials. On the other hand 'borrowing' and 'developing interpretations' are common and encouraged, even though they may 'copy' rather than 'capture the soul' of a place / the original.

Good design often costs more; context and how things are made are important. For example, natural dyes are more laborious to produce but they are part of a specific place and vernacular; not synthetic and from elsewhere. William Morris was very influential here, in terms of good design and local materials and workmanship. Industrialisation, however, has hugely influenced mass/mechanised production in England and sense of taste of the nation. Also, childhood experiences shape taste, preconceptions influence taste. There may be a connection between materials and taste; we are influenced by (and wish to reflect) history and may be sensitive to integrity. Birmingham's recent focus



Contemporary design - interpreting the past



National Express station, Birmingham



World and Downland Living Museum, Sussex



on iconic buildings or landmarks was raised and the question posed whether buildings such as the Cube, Selfridges building and the new central library will 'look good' in 150 years' time.

Who are the taste trend-setters today? Who is making the decisions? What kind of macro and micro trends are we currently experiencing and what kind of online forums or magazines and adverts are telling us what to have and influencing our decisions? Do you decide your taste or are you being controlled by others?

There was not much time left for Q&A although we found out that Kate's favourite building in Birmingham is the New Street signal station.

Finally, look out for the forthcoming PPG on Design Practice. In the meantime, the 2014 Guidance on 'Design' (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/design>) provides advice on key points to take into account. ■

Claudia Carter
Associate Professor, School of Engineering and Built Environment, Birmingham City University

The Future of Strategic Planning in the West Midlands – Wednesday 12th May Millennium Point

On Wednesday 12th June, the West Midlands Futures Project held an academic-practitioner planning conference at Birmingham City University on the future of planning, in particular strategic planning in the region. The Conference marked the culmination and completion of two academic years' worth of work and focused on the past, present, and future of regional planning in the West Midlands. The project was run by *Sherman Wong* as organised jointly by the RTPI Futures Network West Midlands, Birmingham City University (Drs *Beck Collins* and Prof *Claudia Carter*) and University of Birmingham (Dr *Mike Beazley*).

The project brought together post-graduate students from Birmingham City University and the University of Birmingham to work together in their own time, outside of the formal curriculum. The Project involved presentations by leading planning related professionals across a number of disciplines, with group project work by MSc Planning students. Students studied the history of regional planning during the project's first phase and future scenarios work on the impact of technological, economic, social and environment changes and how planning can best respond to this in the second phase. At the Conference on 12th June, this future scenarios project work was focusing on transport and mobility,



The great and the good of the planning world gathered at Millennium Point!

the environment/ natural capital, climate change and energy. There was then a series of expert speakers presenting including *Trudi Elliot* (Former Chief Executive of the RTPI; Independent Chair of the Planning Inspectorate and a Commissioner of the UK2070 Commission), who spoke on work of the UK2070 Commission which aims to research how best to address regional inequalities and which has recently published an Interim Report (<http://uk2070.org.uk/>). *James Harris* from the RTPI



Trudi Elliot presenting on the UK2070 Commission.



Students and presenters.

spoke about its ongoing work on the 'Great North Plan'- essentially working with local partners to facilitate the development of a voluntary spatial plan for the North in the absence of statutory regional plan - and Councillor *Phil Davis* (from Birmingham City Council and West Midlands Combined Authority Transport Committee) spoke on statutory and voluntary cross-boundary working in the West Midlands. A very lively panel discussion then took place sparked by several questions from the audience, including how climate change will be addressed in planning / by planners and the need for interdisciplinary trained planners to facilitate joined up thinking and decision-making.

On reflection, this Conference was very successful at bringing academics, campaigners, retired and practicing planners and planning groups/ networks together to debate, discuss and consider the future for the West Midlands and for strategic planning.



The panel - chaired by Sherman Wong and composed of James Harris, Trudi Elliot and Phil Davis.

Both the authors found the Project useful at deepening our planning knowledge and understanding of planning in the West Midlands but, perhaps more importantly, the Project also encouraged us to be visionary, interdisciplinary planners or more 'reflective practitioners'. For more information about the project, including the publications by the students and presentations by speakers throughout the project, there is a dedicated website:

<https://www.rtpi.org.uk/knowledge/better-planning/better-planning-smart-city-regions/west-midlands-futures/>. ■

Charles Goode
University of Birmingham

Frances Keenan
Birmingham City University



The Report authors presenting with Gary Evans.

Notes

¹ The student groups for this project were:

Transport and mobility:

Charles Goode, Robyn Bennett, Karamrhys Clair, Gary Evans, Frances Keenan

Environment/Natural Capital:

Jennifer Pardon, Kavir Singh Mahil, Gunpreet Balaghan, Chloe Edgington

Climate Change:

Meg Stewart, Sarah Macpherson, Sam Miller, Immi Hopkin

Energy:

James Dunn, Karina Duncan, Andrew Tew, Tim Shrosbree

Reflections by the Immediate Past President of the RTPI



Over the years the regional and national RTPI have discussed the value and benefits of producing a regional RTPI magazine, particularly in an age where we now have access to so much

social media. But we always reach the same conclusion, that a magazine such as Tripwire, is vital as a means of sharing information, promoting regional CPD and events and projecting our identity.

The last issue of Tripwire was its 100th edition. Quite a milestone!

The name 'Trip - wire' is believed to be an anagram of RTPI. It was my 'baby' for over 15 years from January 2001 (Tripwire No.1) until the Winter 2016 edition (Tripwire No. 92) when my responsibilities as Vice President of the RTPI, meant that I had to pass the baton into the capable hands of Michael Vout, who has now taken it to a new level.

In fairness, Tripwire No 1 was by no means the first edition. Prior to 2001, Tripwire was produced in black and white on a monthly basis by Dr Alison Millward and overseen by an Editorial Committee. I

have copies stretching back to April 1990 - almost 30 years ago! Sadly, I never throw anything away!

The April 1990 edition had a front-page article entitled 'Affordable Rural Housing in Practice' heralding an all-day CPD event at Shifnal on the topic, which demonstrates that nothing changes in the planning world. We keep going over the same ground. But dig a little deeper and we find that late 1989 was the birth of the 'exceptions site' when planners were looking for ways of overcoming the acute shortage of affordable housing in rural communities without opening the floodgates to everyone who might want to live in the countryside. The pressures nowadays are perhaps a little different with declining rural services on the one hand, the continued aspiration of some for countryside idyll living and a desire by younger people to live in towns and cities on the other.

So what made me decide to edit the magazine? In 2000, after my first term as Chair of the region

(originally termed 'Branch'), the editor of the magazine decided to step down and I volunteered to take it on. After experimenting with the frequency and format, it was decided to produce a two-monthly magazine, to liven it up a bit and to

introduce a splash of colour – red of course, since at that time I was working for Redrow Homes in Tamworth. The new 'red hot Tripwire', as it was described, was introduced with the old joke – 'What is black and white and read all over – the answer of course is Tripwire'. (Ed: the old ones are the best) !



An early edition of Tripwire from April 1990.

What was the big news at the time? Well, set against the background of serious flooding in the Midlands, the front page included a picture of the River Severn having burst its banks, with the City of Worcester under water. Despite being only 2 years after the notorious 1998 Easter Floods, 'climate change' it seems, was not blamed for the deluge. The question posed by the magazine was, 'Are the planners to blame?' Was the flooding

due to development on flood plains or is it caused by changes in farming practices? Perhaps the more obvious answer; that it had rained a lot didn't seem to feature as a reason, let alone why.



Above left: black and white November 2000 winter issue; middle: issue number 1 of the revised look Tripwire (Jan/Feb 2001); right: issue number 62 (Jan/Feb 2011) where Tripwire became full colour.

On the RTPI front, Mike Beazley was just taking over as Chair from a very boyish looking David Chapman and the December 2000 AGM had been held at the Barber Institute at Birmingham University, continuing the practice of incoming Chairs hosting a reception on their 'home ground'.

Since then Tripwire has gone from strength to strength, introducing more colour, more illustrations and more flair (with occasional 'special editions' on specific themes, sponsored by local consultants). This gradual improvement in product and presentation has continued under 'new management' so that Tripwire today remains relevant as well as resilient. It's just not produced on paper.

Over the 15 years of my editorship, I faced remarkable changes in technology. When I started, the Internet was still in its infancy and early editions were captured on 'floppy discs', which have long since become obsolete, although thankfully every edition still exists in my files. (Ed. John tells me that he gets out more these days)

It is telling that as I 'signed off' in an extended editorial in Issue 92 (Winter 2016), I commented on the dramatic political changes going on both in Britain (with the vote to leave the EU) and in the USA (with the arrival of Donald Trump as President). Against the background of the move towards populism and the decline of the 'experts' it seemed that the planners would increasingly find themselves in the firing line.

For my own part, I devoted a large part of my life, my energy and my spare time to producing Tripwire, something I often found exhausting but always found rewarding. But in doing so, it gave me a breadth of experience, a range of skills and ultimately a wealth of contacts, so that when, quite unexpectedly, I found myself standing for the Vice Presidency, it stood me in good stead - and the rest is history.... ■

John Acres

Immediate Past President of RTPI
(and former editor of Tripwire).

Research questionnaire on the Green Belt and Housing

RTPI West Midlands // Summer 2019

Charles Goode is a Doctoral Researcher in Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Birmingham. He is researching the Green Belt and the implications and issues involved with and related to the housing crisis. The West Midlands Green Belt is the project's main case study. An important aspect of this research is to get as broad a spectrum of views as possible and the views of planners is a critical part of this.

Whilst Charles is very grateful to the planners who have already been interviewed as part of the

research, he is seeking a broader cross section of the views of planners in the West Midlands and has produced a Green Belt questionnaire for this purpose.

This questionnaire provides planners the opportunity to contribute to the project and give their views on the Green Belt in an anonymous way. Participation is entirely voluntary and the questionnaire should take only 7- 8 minutes to complete (and the data will be only used for the purposes of this research project).

The questionnaire closes on 8th September.

The questionnaire is accessed via the following link: <https://bham.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/green-belt-questionnaire-the-views-of-west-midlands-planners>

Also, feel free to contact him about the project via email: C.Goode@pgr.bham.ac.uk. ■

Charles Goode

Doctoral Researcher in Urban and Regional Planning at the University of Birmingham



The RTPI West Midlands hosted a Digital Planning Event at the Bond Company in Birmingham on 1st May with speakers from the RTPI, Connected Places Catapult, Urban Intelligence and Arup. The event opened with Planning Smart City Regions (RTPI) exploring how land use planning and infrastructure planning processes can be better integrated through the use of digital platforms. The need for better systems of strategic governance was highlighted to make use of digital tools at a strategic level across boundaries.

Connected Places Catapult recognised the constraints of current practices with the use of out dated tools and less technological maturity compared to other sectors. It was recognised that a major constraint is data is undervalued and non-machine readable. The emergence of plan tech presents an exciting opportunity to create a planning system that is adaptable, flexible and responsive.



This presentation was complemented by Urban Intelligence who presented their Automated Plan Making and Site Appraisal system showing what can be achieved by plan-tech to create efficiencies in planning. Data and technology can be harnessed to understand and manage complexity moving towards the creation of a 'live plan' based on current data sets rather than dated documents.

The Arup presentations on a Virtual Future and Consultation and Urban Sound Design looked to the future and the innovation digital technology can bring

to planning. They explored the use and benefits of Virtual Reality to create sense scapes and communicate ideas and concepts. This was demonstrated through the Arup ILab which combines visualisation and soundscapes to bring concepts to life.

The future of planning and digital innovation will be explored further at the RTPI / Connected Places Catapult plan-tech conference in September. ■

Danielle Nevin MRTPI
Planner | Planning, Policy & Economics, Arup

A dubious history of the way in which 20th century planning was shaped by modern day pop songs.

The song *'Our House'* by the group Madness was released in 1982. Most scholars¹ agree that in addition to being one of the most profound observations of socioeconomic planning since Jane Jacobs *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* published twenty years earlier, it is also an early exponent of the principles of urban design. As the planning press remarked at the time², they were "One Step Beyond" others in this field.

Much of the commentary contained in the song focusses upon issues of social and gender inequality; *'Father wears his Sunday best, Mother's tired, she needs a rest'* (the father is off to church and probably the pub whilst mum is having to do all the domestic tasks). However it also explores economic inequality; *'Our house, it has a crowd'*, which is a direct reference to the increasing numbers of young people living in their parents' home due to the unaffordability of buying or renting a home.

There is much debate of course around the issue of consistency and apparent contradiction contained in the text. In the second verse it mentions that *'nothing ever*

slows her (the mother) down' and yet in the second line of the first verse it states that the *'mother's tired (and) she needs a rest'*. It also states that *'The kids are playing up downstairs'* in verse one. Critics of the text have suggested that it is unclear whether they were up or down stairs whilst others state that this is deliberate rhetorical ambiguity to capture the uncertainty of the times.



It is in the chorus that the particular strength of urban design in the song is revealed: *'Our house, in the middle of our street'*. This was a radical concept that placed the house, centre stage, in the middle of the street. The prevailing wisdom of the time, exemplified by the Department of the Environment's DB 32 tended to focus upon the street as a highway corridor primarily intended for the swift uninterrupted movement of motorised vehicles rather than as a living space with homes. Indeed, this concept pre dates *Manual for Streets* by 25 years.

By adopting a simple and bold device by implying that their house was in the middle of the street³, Madness radically changed our understanding and approach to residential street design, paving the way (pun intended) to the renaissance in highway design.

Next time on *Tripwire Words of Wisdom...*
... regulatory air quality assessment and the environmental implications of the 2000 Sting song *'Every Breath you Take'*. ■

Michael Vout
West Midlands RTPI Hon.
Secretary

Notes

¹ *By most we mean none*

² *See footnote 1*

³ *When adopting a grossly simplistic, pedantic and literal approach*

Neighbourhood Planning // An Opportunity for All?

RTPI West Midlands // Summer 2019

University of Birmingham, 11th July

Neighbourhood Planning continues to attract considerable debate, discussion and even disagreement among planners, academics and community groups.

On the one hand, Neighbourhood Planning seems to be increasingly embedded in the planning system, especially with the revised NPPF articulating a vision of Local Plans setting out strategic priorities and housing numbers and Neighbourhood Plans then incorporating a vision for place and more detailed policies. On the other hand, the growing focus on housing numbers (associated with issues relating to 5 Year Housing Land Supply and the Housing Delivery Test) and the increasingly rigorous and scrutinised Examination process, seem to be undermining Neighbourhood Planning.

Additionally, there are the broader issues surrounding the purpose of Neighbourhood Planning, the future vision and direction for the initiative, the uneven take-up across the country and debates about whether it is the 'right' and appropriate planning tool for every area with quickly changing cities and more transient populations. These were some of the fascinating and perplexing issues explored in this very action packed and thought-provoking seminar.

The seminar was organised by **Kat Salter** of the Centre for Urban and Regional Studies (CURS) at

the University. It was chaired by **Dr Mike Beazley** (Director of CURS and Senior Lecturer) who has had a longstanding interest in and experience of community involvement in planning.

The first speaker was **Tim Jones** (No.5 Chambers and Neighbourhood Plan Examiner) who provided a legal update and explained that it has been a relatively 'quiet' year in terms of legal challenges to Neighbourhood Plans.



Dr Mike Beazley introducing the Seminar.

He began with the important *People Over Wind* case (see: Dempsey, 2018) followed by the recent *Oyston Estates v Flyde* case where the Court of Appeal upheld a High Court judgment to refuse an attempt by a landowner (*Oyston Estates*) to have a site allocated for housing in the Neighbourhood Plan which was made outside of the six week deadline (see: Donnelly, 2019).

Bassetlaw v SoS provided the next example which stressed that important Development Management points in Neighbourhood Plans should be placed in 'policies', not under 'priorities'/'objectives', followed by the *Crantock Parish Council v Cornwall County Council* and *Cheshire East v SoS* cases where the former stressed the importance of clarifying phrases like 'local need' and the latter stressed that both Local and Neighbourhood Plans are not 'absolute' but are to be weighed against other material considerations.

Tim explained that the revised NPPF (2019) is clearer on Neighbourhood Planning with strategic priorities to be set out in Local Plans and the possibilities for Neighbourhood Planning to amend Green Belt boundaries.

He also drew attention to the PPG on affordable housing although he questioned how much Neighbourhood Plans could secure affordable housing given that they predominately allocate sites for under 10 homes. Tim finished by saying that it is unwise for Neighbourhood Plans to have too many redactions due to the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

There were a number of questions on Green Belt being released through Neighbourhood Plans, Plans examined under the 'old' NPPF, the decline in legal challenges this year and Plans seeking to restrict second homeownership like *St.Ives* and *St. Minver*.

Kat Salter provided an overview of key issues in Neighbourhood Planning, including experiences to date. By August 2018 there were 2,450 Neighbourhood Plan area designations, 81% of Councils have at least one designated neighbourhood area and by February 2019 51% had a 'made' Neighbourhood Plan.

Kat also highlighted that the average Neighbourhood Plan takes much longer to 'make',

from designation to adoption, at 27 months than the Ministry expected, which was 18 months. Notable 'hotspots' of Plan activity include Herefordshire, Cornwall, Wiltshire and districts in West Sussex.

As part of Kat's PhD research, which explores the response of Councils to Neighbourhood Planning, she has categorised local authorities 'response' into three main types:

- **Integrative:** these councils integrate or embed Neighbourhood Plans with their Local Plans/ Core Strategies e.g. West Sussex, Herefordshire and Cornwall.
- **Reactive:** councils that support Neighbourhood Plans as a response to interest expressed by groups.
- **Deflective:** councils that try to steer potential Neighbourhood Planning groups towards other forms of planning policies like Supplementary Planning Documents (SPDs).

Kat explored some other key issues such as the 'North/ South', 'rural/ urban' division in the take-up of Neighbourhood Planning, the representativeness

“ By August 2018 there were 2,450 Neighbourhood Plan area designations, 81% of Councils have at least one designated neighbourhood area.”

of designated bodies and how we evaluate the benefits of Neighbourhood Planning beyond a narrow focus on housing supply numbers¹.

Questions then focused on conflicts of interest and how these are dealt with through Declarations of Interest, whether Neighbourhood Planning merits the resourcing given to it and how Neighbourhood Plan groups could better consult with business.

The final morning presentation was by **Martin Dando** (Birmingham City Council) who gave an urban perspective on Neighbourhood Planning.

Martin highlighted that while there are Neighbourhood Plans progressing in Birmingham City Council area, such as Balsall Heath, the 3'Bs (Beechs, Booth and Barr) and the Jewellery Quarter, it can be questioned whether Neighbourhood Plans are always the 'right' planning policy tool for large, fast growing and quickly changing cities.

Martin identified that the Neighbourhood Plan areas were those with already established communities, like Balsall Heath or those with specific planning challenges such as protecting the heritage and industry of the Jewellery Quarter. He then explored alternative, perhaps more flexible planning policies like the Moseley SPD and Castle Vale's Neighbourhood Plan by its Community Housing Trust.

Martin outlined a vision for community/ neighbourhood led planning in the City, even if this

did not mean formal Neighbourhood Planning. Questions then focused on alternative approaches by other large cities, such as Neighbourhood Plans in Leeds, and the success of the Moseley SPD compared to if those areas had followed a Neighbourhood Plan approach².

After the break the focus moved to rural areas with **Samantha Banks** presentation (Herefordshire Council) on Neighbourhood Planning in Herefordshire. She outlined the fascinating set of circumstances or 'perfect storm' that led to the growth of Neighbourhood Planning in Herefordshire:



Kat Salter discussing key issues in Neighbourhood Planning.

the Localism Act, growing public distrust in the planning system and a new Core Strategy.

The county is a unitary authority and is almost uniquely fully parished, which has enabled the Core Strategy to set out strategic priorities, a settlement hierarchy and proportional growth targets for each parish. The Neighbourhood Plans then draw settlement boundaries and allocate sites with the county having a dedicated Neighbourhood Planning Team (matching Kat's category of being an 'integrative' council). So far, Herefordshire has been very successful with 61 'made' Neighbourhood Plans and only 20 parishes without designated Neighbourhood Plan areas (for example, Hereford City was deemed too big an area to develop a Neighbourhood Plan for).

Despite this, Samantha outlined some of the significant challenges to Neighbourhood Planning, especially the need for the plans to be renewed relatively frequently and since the arrival of a new administration at Herefordshire Council, the possibility that this could lead to a change in development strategy and approach. Neighbourhood Plans are therefore being 'paused' until after the new Core Strategy is published.

Questions then focused on how best to resolve community conflicts in Neighbourhood Plans and whether renewed Neighbourhood Plans could be 'fast-tracked'.

The final presentation by **Helen Metcalfe** (Planning with People) was focused on community engagement, who shared her extensive experience of engagement training and running engagement activities.

Helen discussed the importance of setting out the basic conditions and frontloading engagement to resolve conflicts early in the process. Although some people initially get involved to 'stop' things, Helen said that these usually 'drop-off' quickly and, in general, local knowledge is very useful resource.

Helen acknowledged that, while occasionally Neighbourhood Plans go 'wrong', like the Swanick Plan (which failed referendum), in general Neighbourhood Plans are successful and open up other opportunities in urban areas in need of regeneration like the Stanton Hill and Gainsborough Neighbourhood Plans.

Helen concluded by making the case for more support for Neighbourhood Planning by central and local government as well as by developers.

The Q & A Panel provided a fascinating debate including the extent to which Neighbourhood Plans groups engaged with developers, how they are implemented in practice³, whether Neighbourhood Plans were 'easier' to develop in unitary authority areas compared to district council areas and what the future of Neighbourhood Planning is.

On reflection, it appears that Neighbourhood Planning is becoming increasingly embedded in the planning system, especially given the move in the NPPF to set out more strategic policies in Local Plans and give Neighbourhood Groups housing targets. However, there are clearly a number of significant challenges to Neighbourhood Planning, including the Government's housing 'target' of 300,000 homes per annum and maintaining the momentum of Neighbourhood Plan groups, especially given the time and resources involved and the limited resources of local authorities.

Ultimately, the longevity of Neighbourhood Planning depends how its wider benefits, such as more engaged and informed local communities and the wider focus on place, are weighed against the aim of increased housing delivery. Moreover, there is the crucial issue of whether it can be reinvented and reinvigorated. Two key issues are that planning policy needs to better reconcile strategic, local and neighbourhood priorities in a clear governance framework and whether Neighbourhood Plans could be better integrated into Local Plans (to avoid the complicated situation of a Neighbourhood Plan being 'made' in the absence of an up-to-date Local Plan). Additionally, are there ways that the process of Neighbourhood Planning could perhaps become more streamlined to reduce the time and resource burden on local communities but also not jeopardise both the enthusiasm/ ambition of local communities *and* housing supply?

Wargent and Parker (2018), have set out some very helpful criteria for what Neighbourhood Planning *could* be:

1. More equitable plan-making (distribution).
2. Deeper co-production (better integration between community and local government).
3. Greater social inclusion within plan-making.
4. Improved quality of Neighbourhood Plans (recognising the 'value added' – e.g. nuanced housing provision, place-shaping, environmental protection etc.).
5. Reconciliation of hyper-local and strategic concerns.
6. Enhanced community control and Neighbourhood Planning 'authority'.

There also needs to be critical reflection by policy makers and the profession about whether Neighbourhood Plans are *always* the most appropriate planning approach for *every* area. Clearly, the *concept* of community involvement behind Neighbourhood Planning is a good one but whether it is *the* best approach everywhere and how Neighbourhood Planning could be improved remain interesting and complicated questions. ■

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Notes

- ¹ For example, the DCLG (2016) claim that Neighbourhood Planning had increased housing numbers by around 10% higher than Local Plans and the Lichfields (2018) Study that countered this claim.
- ² The SPD process was begun before Neighbourhood Planning was introduced. Dr Austin Barber, Director of Moseley Community Trust, also attended the Seminar so was able to add his perspective on the SPD process.
- ³ In particular, whether Development Management are 'using' them in planning decisions and whether Neighbourhood groups are engaging with and commenting on planning applications.

The 2019 RTPI Regional Summit

RTPI West Midlands // Summer 2019

Responding to current and future planning challenges – Perspectives from Europe

To celebrate World Town Planning Day 2019, the annual RTPI West Midlands Planning Summit is going international!

Hear from international planning experts, not only on what we can learn from practical examples in other countries but also on how our approaches can be applied internationally.

The Summit will take place on Tuesday 5 November 2019 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel in Birmingham from 9.30-16.30.

Click here to purchase your ticket:

<https://www.rtpi.org.uk/events/events-calendar/2019/november/rtpi-wm-planning-summit-2019-responding-to-current-and-future-planning-challenges-perspectives-from-europe/> ■



The annual RTPI West Midlands Annual Ball & Awards Ceremony

RTPI West Midlands // Summer 2019

Join us for an evening of celebration at the annual RTPI West Midlands Awards Ceremony and Ball, to be held on Friday 18 October at the Macdonald Burlington Hotel, central Birmingham.

The evening includes:

- 7:00pm drinks reception
- 7:30pm three-course dinner including wine
- Presentation of the RTPI West Midlands Awards for Planning Excellence
- Live music, dancing (not compulsory) and socialising

Dress code: Black tie

Individual tickets are available for purchase, however please note that those purchasing will be seated at mixed tables.

With thanks to our headline sponsor No5 Chambers, and to our additional sponsors: Avison Young, WYG, DLA Piper and Kings Chambers.

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