

# Tripwire



2018 has been a year that links the names of two historically famous people; John Parr and George Edwin Ellison.

The former was the first recorded killing of the First World War and the latter was the last, on 11th November 1918.

What is powerfully revealed in Peter Jackson's new movie *They Shall Not Grow Old* and by books such as *All quiet on the western front* by Erich Maria Remarque or *Birdsong* by Sebastian Faulks is the telling and impact of this event (and the big decisions associated with it) upon and through the eyes and lives of individuals.



Planning is a remarkable profession in the way in which it makes similar connections, as it straddles that enormous ground between the extremely strategic and daily life, contributing to as well as formulating strategic policy, frequently within a political context, which ultimately filters down and affects the lives of individuals.

The RTPI continually strives to navigate this difficult and challenging ground, engaging with and influencing decision makers as well as providing help and assistance such as the *Planning Horizon* papers (which can be found on the RTPI web site).

Turning to Tripwire, this edition brings together a metaphorical smorgasbord of items including the usual mix of articles, reports from CPD events and RTPI news and, as it is the Christmas edition, a few festive items.

The regional RTPI would like to thank all who have provided material for this edition of Tripwire and would invite all regional RTPI members to take the opportunity to contribute to future editions.

For further information about contributing an article to *Tripwire* or to submit an article please email: [m.a.vout@btinternet.com](mailto:m.a.vout@btinternet.com) ■

**Michael Vout**  
West Midlands RTPI Hon. Secretary



In 2017 the RTPI modified its logo which dropped its strap line '*Mediation of space, making of place*'. Whilst this produced a simpler and more visually powerful logo it possibly lost a word which describes a function that is very central to planners, the act of mediation; that bridge which seeks to resolve conflict and find solutions and a bridge that can help make links between the strategic and the day to day.







# Tripwire



Tripwire magazine is published four times a year in digital form by the West Midlands region of the RTPI. The opinions expressed in Tripwire are the view of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the editor, publishers, or the RTPI.

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RTPI West Midlands Chair's opening remarks // Winter 2018	<b>04</b>
Incoming Chair Sandy Taylor	<b>05</b>
Regional Management of the RTPI	<b>06</b>
Trees and Design Action Group	<b>07</b>
Telford New Town 50 Years On	<b>08</b>
Building Bridges	<b>10</b>
Cars, canals and... cycling?	<b>15</b>
Viability Assessments	<b>17</b>
Annual Christmas 'Fun' Page	<b>22</b>
Christmas Quiz	<b>23</b>
Tripwire Festive Words of Wisdom	<b>24</b>
RTPI News	<b>25</b>



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# RTPI West Midlands Chair's opening remarks // Winter 2018

RTPI West Midlands // Winter 2018

**W**elcome to the Winter 2018 edition of Tripwire and my last as RTPI WM Chair. It has been a privilege to undertake the role of Regional Chair and I would particularly like to thank my fellow RMB and RAC members for their encouragement and support during what has been a particularly busy year for RTPI WM.

Many of you will know that Susan Millington has been undertaking the role of Regional Coordinator for much of this year. Susan has been a fantastic asset to the region but unfortunately will be taking on the role of Regional Coordinator in the South East Region from January. I'd like to thank Susan for all of her hard work and wish her all the very best in her new role.

Craig Jordan, in his final Tripwire column described 2017 as a rollercoaster of a year for planning, well it seems, we're still on the rollercoaster! After a number of consultations during 2017 and early 2018, culminating with the RTPI launching the Draft Revised NPPF on behalf of the Government, a great opportunity for Luke Coffey, Young Planner of the Year 2017/18 to welcome Prime Minister, Theresa May to the stage, we received the final NPPF2 in July, only for a further consultation relating to changes to it to start in October. We've also seen a raft of other consultations on matters such as permitted development rights, the future of the High Street and Developer Contributions. RTPI, both in the West Midlands and nationally actively seek members views and prepare responses to these consultations and continue to promote the importance of good planning. One example of this



*Maria Dunn.*

was the series of round table events which were held on the draft NPPF, organised with input from both national and regional representatives and giving members an opportunity to ensure that consultation responses reflect the wide spectrum of views that come from such a diverse profession.

Chairing the Region has given me the opportunity to get involved in, and see the benefits of, many projects nationally. Most recently, the Ball and Awards ceremony was an evening which celebrated the best of planning in the West Midlands. Our winners (documented elsewhere in Tripwire) will now go onto

the national awards and I wish them all the very best in their respective categories. I urge you all to think about projects that you are particularly proud of which represent the best of the profession and to get involved in making nominations for the 2019 awards, it's your opportunity to showcase your success stories.

My theme this year was planning across boundaries, both geographical and professional. We have seen increased interaction with our neighbours, including a joint event with RTPI SW and other professions, including a joint dinner in Stoke on Trent and networking events including RTPI WM's involvement with the Building Brum series. Whilst there is still some way to go, I hope to see more joint events with neighbouring regions next year and also stronger relationships with other professions – if you'd like to plan an event in your area get in touch.

Lastly, the Regional programme is dependant on having volunteers who are willing to deliver it. We are always looking for new Regional Activities Committee members, it's an opportunity to shape the profession, learn new skills and see things from a different perspective. I'd encourage you to get involved.

Lastly I hand over the role of Chair to Sandy Taylor for 2019, I wish Sandy all the best for a 2019.

Have a wonderful Christmas and New Year. ■

**Maria Dunn**  
RTPI West Midlands Chair

# Incoming Chair Sandy Taylor

RTPI West Midlands // Winter 2018

**S**andy Taylor will take on the role of RTPI West Midlands Chair for 2019. Sandy has now retired from Birmingham City Council but remains active as a Green Urbanist and now undertakes a number of voluntary roles.

He worked for the City Council for 30 years in various economic development, regional Planning and climate change and sustainability roles., until his retirement in 2014. He is currently a Trustee of the Birmingham and Black Country Wildlife Trust and is Chair of Futures Network West Midlands.

He joined the Region's Regional Activities Committee in 2015 and has taken an active part in its work, supporting the re-establishment of the International Group, CPD events, and as Junior and Senior vice-Chair in 2017 and 2018.

I am looking forward to taking on the role of Chair in 2019. The year will continue to be challenging for the planning profession As we face further pressures to deliver housing targets and support much needed job-creating investments, while balancing community and environmental needs, the resources available to planners remains hugely constrained.

We have seen the emergence in 2018 of a greater understating of the importance of strategic integrated planning. The recent Raynsford Review has highlighted this forcefully. And Lord Kerslake launched his 2070 Commission in October to



*Sandy Taylor.*

address the deep regional inequalities facing our country at present. I was honoured to attend the launch of his Commission and I look forward to our region providing a string input to its work.

During 2019 I am looking forward to the continuing build up and planners roles in delivering the Coventry City of Culture 2021 and the Commonwealth Games 2022 in Birmingham and the region. We will be developing our CPD with the organisers around these events. And also of course this coming year we will celebrate the 70th Anniversary of World Town Planning Day on 8th November. Watch this space!

I look forward to our hugely successful CPD programme, and am encouraged that RTPI have

increased the number of national CPD events to be held in our region in 2019. I hope that all members will be able to actively support these.

Cross professional working is vital to effective strategic planning and I welcome the continuing importance of the Great Regional Debate between our professions in the built environment. Last year a number of cross regional events took place and I hope that we will be able to continue these in 2019.

During this coming year some rule changes the RTPI has introduced on membership will apply to our Regional Management Board. A new 6-year rule will apply. This means that from 1st January 2020, a number of current members will be required to standing down. I see this as an opportunity for members to consider standing for the RAC and positions on the RMB, especially our young planners. There will be many opportunities to be involved not only as a member of the RAC but also in supporting our events or joining or leading one of our Working Groups. I will also be encouraging local authorities and private practice to encourage their members to support your involvement in the valuable work of our region.

May I also take the opportunity to wish you a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year and to thank you for your ongoing support of your Branch in the West Midlands. ■



**W**hilst the overall management of the RTPI is based in London at Botolph Lane, each of the nine English regions is managed by the Regional Management Board (RMB) and the Regional Activities Committee (RAC). Membership of the RMB and RAC for 2019 is:

## RMB

<b>Chair</b>	Sandy Taylor
<b>Immediate Past-Chair</b>	Maria Dunn
<b>Representative on GA</b>	Maria Dunn
<b>Honorary Secretary</b>	Michael Vout
<b>Honorary Treasurer</b>	Mark Walton
<b>Young Planner Chair</b>	Stephanie Eastwood

## RAC

Neville Ball	Luke Coffey
Mike Beazley	Michael Barker
James Carpenter	Claire Bridges
Stephen Hill	Ray Colbourne
Dan Roberts	Richard Hammersley
Bryan Smith	Charles Robinson
Katherine Green	Sinead Turnbull
Luke Hillson	Danielle Nevin
Daniel G. Wilson	David Brammer
Rebecca Fieldhouse	

Nominations for membership of the RMB and RAC is undertaken in Autumn of each year but all members are welcome to attend RAC meetings which take place in central Birmingham. For further information please contact either [m.a.vout@btinternet.com](mailto:m.a.vout@btinternet.com) or [westmidlands@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:westmidlands@rtpi.org.uk). ■



# Merry Christmas!



*from us all at*



**RTPI West Midlands**  
Royal Town Planning Institute





**T**he Trees and Design Action Group (TDAG) is an open collaborative forum facilitating cross-sector and cross-disciplinary dialogue and projects promoting the role of urban forest throughout the UK. The Group shares the collective vision that the location of trees and the benefits they bring can be secured for future generations through better collaboration in the planning, design, construction and management of our urban infrastructure and spaces.

Established in 2007 as a not-for-profit and apolitical forum, TDAG incorporated as a Charitable Trust in 2013. Its membership, online publications and information are free. This approach enables TDAG to assimilate ideas and knowledge independently of organizational hierarchy, profit or commercial interests. TDAG provides a forum for cross-sector working, best practice guides, dissemination of knowledge, research and partnering with other organisations to further activities which contribute to TDAG's goals.

TDAG Midlands meets regularly in Birmingham and hosts guest speakers followed by discussion and debate. The meetings aim to share and promote the benefits of urban green infrastructure and provide members with information and tools to assist their professional work or research.

TDAG Midlands in association with the RTPI and the Birmingham Institute of Forest Research (BiFOR) has held two cross-sector and cross-disciplinary workshops. Most recently in September this year

with "How do we value trees and other green infrastructure in the urban environment" held at the University of Birmingham.

The workshop provided an overview of the tools available and the contexts in which they are most appropriate, ultimately to increase their usage and therefore increase or improve the amount of green infrastructure in our urban areas. Around 120 people attended the workshop. Delegates came from across the UK and from a range of professions, including research, the private sector, the public sector and not-for-profit organisations. The workshop delivered 10 presentations from expert speakers and concluded with a plenary discussion. Opportunities for future events will be followed up next year.

There is an accumulating and compelling evidence base that urban and rural green infrastructure provides significant and multiple societal benefits. National and local tree and woodland strategies would address this. In particular urban canopy cover significantly contributes to achieving national policy objectives in transport, health, flooding, atmospheric pollution and climate change adaptation.

Urban trees are important environmental assets because they are closest to most of our population and directly provide benefits where those people live and work; they are natural capital and emerging policy recognises that they should be accounted for in the decision-making process.

Planning is at the heart of this process, making policy and development management decisions. Planning can provide local strategies to protect the trees as well as deliver more and stronger green infrastructure in our urban areas. Planning can improve the consistency and coordination of delivering tree benefits at local level by:

- improving interdisciplinary cooperation and coordination
- placing a focus on managing the strategic benefits that trees provide, irrespective of location
- seeking to direct and assist local authorities in the preparation and adoption of local tree strategies, placing canopy cover as a necessity in the planning process
- emphasising the principle of tree value being factored into the decision-making process in line with the principles of natural capital accounting

In their key role of planning our urban areas planners can champion tree projects and make them examples for others to learn from. Planners can give green infrastructure the same status as the other infrastructure components in our development plans.

To find out more about TDAG and download TDAG documents go to [www.tdag.org.uk](http://www.tdag.org.uk) ■

**Michael Barker**  
Chair, TDAG Midlands



# Telford New Town 50 Years On

RTPI West Midlands // Winter 2018

**O**n its 50th anniversary Telford displays an interesting mix of new and old. As a maturing New Town Telford contains former New Town estates, modern market housing and a revitalized town centre. The legacy of Telford's industrial past as part of the East Shropshire Coalfield and its rural heritage is evident in the buildings and monuments that have been preserved. Throughout its development Telford has been a place of innovation and change. From its emergence as an early centre for iron making in the Ironbridge Gorge (now a UNESCO World Heritage Site) to its current competitive position in advanced

manufacturing with a large number of foreign investors Telford has been a leader in the region.

From its first designation as Dawley New Town in 1963 and its re-designation in 1968 as Telford growth has been the driving theme. Initially planned for some 70,000 people and then re-planned for around 180,000 the completion of new homes has been steady and continuous. Telford is still one of the fastest growing towns in the West Midlands. With the support of Homes England (HCA) high quality design in new housing has been a feature in the larger developments.

Over the last 15 years over 9,300 new dwellings have been completed and over 31,800 Square metres of employment space completed, together with extensive new retail and service development in the town centre. Telford's current population is over 150,000 and is likely to grow to over 170,000 by 2031.

Alongside the development of housing and employment major areas of green space have been integral to the New Town. The landscape policy aimed to provide functional as well visual links between the residential communities that make up Telford. The landscape plan proposed a "forest







*New footbridge linking Telford Central Station to the town centre.*

town” and around 20 million trees and shrubs were planted between 1968 and 1991. By the early 1990’s there were some 100 hectares of woodland within the New Town area. The landscape plan also aimed to create a network of green corridors and spaces to link the centre of the town with the surrounding



*Telford Town Centre Early 1970s.*

countryside and provide a wooded edge to built development. The Green Network has statutory protection in the Telford & Wrekin Local Plan.

The re-vitalised town centre also has unique features. The Telford International Centre located



*Woodside Housing Estate.*

adjacent to the shopping centre provides one of the country’s largest venues for national and international conferences, exhibitions and sports and leisure events. Also at the heart of the centre is the 180 hectare Town Park that provides recreation for the whole town. The Green Network and the Town Park are defining features of Telford.

While it may have had a slow start, first as Dawley then as Telford the New Town has matured into a strong and successful growth point in the West Midlands. With a new Local Plan in place it seems likely that Telford’s strong growth and development will continue into the future. ■

**Michael Barker**



*Southwater, Telford Centre.*

*'Physical clarity cannot be achieved in a form until there is first some progmmatic clarity in the designer's mind and actions ; and for this to be possible, in turn, the designer must first trace his design problem to its earliest functional origins.*

*It is based on the idea that every design problem begins with an effort to achieve fitness between two entities: the form in question and its context. The form is the solution to the problem; the context defines the problem. In other words, when we speak of design, the real object of discussion is not the form alone, but the ensemble comprising the form and its context.'*

**Notes on the synthesis of form**  
Christopher Alexander 1964

In the early afternoon of March 15th 2018 Oswald Gonzalez and his friend Alberto Arias were driving down Southwest Eighth Street in Miami, Florida. It was a warm spring day without a cloud in the sky.

Their journey took them past the Florida International University which was in the process of completing a new 'signature' pedestrian bridge connecting the university with the local student centre of Sweetwater. The bridge was going to be special in both appearance and construction employing a relatively new technique championed by the university which substantially reduced the installation time.

Although only partially complete, traffic was already using the highway beneath the bridge.

At 1.47pm, five days after the main section was hoisted into place the bridge collapsed killing Oswald and Alberto, a construction worker, three other people in cars and seriously injuring nine others.

This is an account of aspirations, aims, communication, design and assorted structural

concepts, construction and installation and planning which ultimately led to a disaster and the tragic loss of life.

Perhaps because the event occurred in America (rather than in a faraway third world foreign country) it received (and continues to receive) considerable social media attention and the internet is awash with reports and videos by both professional and amateur engineers who have speculated and attempted to



*Picture of the collapsed Florida International University bridge.*



explain the cause (s) of the incident. Some provide part of the story whilst several are incorrect.

The jury is still out regarding the definitive reasons for the collapse. The purpose of this article is to explain the apparent causes and implications in an uncomplicated way and to see what planners and those in the built environment professions in general might learn from the event.

For those with many hours to spare, typing 'Florida Bridge Collapse' into Google will produce a wealth of videos and reports on the subject.

### Background

The \$9 million 175 -foot-long span, 950 ton bridge was intended to allow students to cross from Florida International University's main campus to student housing neighbourhoods in Sweetwater over a eight-lane highway.

The purpose of the bridge was to provide a safe way to get from the university to the student



*Two impressions of the completed bridge.*

accommodation, to provide an area of public realm where people could meet and to be a 'signature' statement for the university.

### Construction concepts

Whilst the university's desire for a 'signature' bridge is perhaps the key which led to an unorthodox design and its ultimate demise, this was compounded by a combination of structural concepts.

The bridge principally involved four concepts which to varying degrees were modified in the process of being combined:

- Post tensioned concrete
- Modified truss construction
- 'I' beam construction
- Cable-stayed construction

At the risk of offending readers who are engineers or have good engineering knowledge, the following is an extremely simplified explanation of the four concepts listed above.

### Post tensioned concrete

Concrete has enormous compressive strength; the ability to withstand heavy weights or forces, however it has almost no tensile strength; the ability to withstand pressing or stretching.

To help strengthen concrete, apart from using reinforcing rods (those metal rods known as rebar we often see embedded in concrete) it can also be additionally pre or post tensioned. The Florida bridge used post tensioning, where cable rods are inserted into tube like channels created in the concrete structure and are then tightened, 'squeezing' the concrete after it has 'cured' (hardened).

Imagine holding four matchboxes in a row between your hands. If you press against each end the matchboxes will stay supported.

### Modified truss construction

Many people will be familiar with old steel railway bridges that are made up of zig zag steel members on each side of the structure. This is a strong and still popular construction because it acts like a box. Compare pressing down on a single vertical sheet of paper with a piece of paper which has been formed into a box shape. The single sheet will easily bend whilst the box shape will resist bending.





An example of a Truss bridge.

The regularity of the trusses in a truss bridge helps to evenly distribute stresses throughout the structure.

In the Florida bridge design, the familiar double line of 'zig zag' members involved in the standard truss bridge was reduced to a single central truss to provide a more 'open' feel to the bridge.

**'I' beam construction**

In the same way that the truss construction acts like a box, an 'I' shape (a vertical sandwiched between two horizontals) is also a strong shape. It's why so many steel beams are made in this shape. ('T' shapes are also common).

In the case of the Florida bridge, the canopy roof provided the top of the 'I', the deck provided the bottom of the 'I' and the single zig zag truss along the centre provided the upright middle of the 'I'.

**Cable-stayed construction**

Superficially the finished design of the Florida bridge looked like a Cable-stayed bridge. This is a very popular bridge construction concept and involves the use of a tower or towers and cables that reach down and support the deck. The weight of the bridge deck (and the traffic and activity on it) is supported by the cables and the tower (s).



Millau Viaduct (an example of a Cable-stayed bridge).

But the Florida bridge was not a cable-stayed bridge. The height of the tower (109ft) was chosen to reflect the name of the adjacent highway (Southwest 109th Avenue) and the 'cable stays' were concrete tubes. The 'cable-stayed' element of the design was essentially included to give height and scale to the bridge, to make it look more imposing.

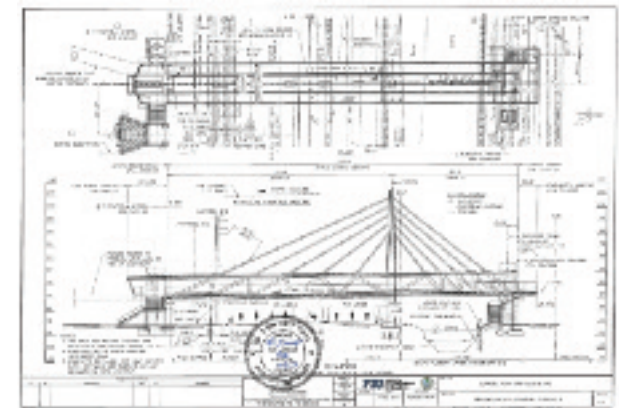
The faux cable-stayed component of the design had no (or extremely little) structural purpose....but *critically* ...it did have an effect on the structure by affecting the shape and layout of the zig zags used in the 'truss' construction whereby the arrangement

of the truss zig zags were aligned to form a continuation of the lines of the 'cables'(concrete tubes in this instance) coming from the tower instead of being a series of consistent regular shapes.

This largely aesthetic contribution to the design meant that, unlike the standard regular truss design, the structural stress was not evenly and consistently distributed throughout the structure.

This element of the design undoubtedly involved additional cost and construction time, but more importantly it had an extremely significant affect upon an already compromised truss concept (using a single truss instead of two).

Modifying any one of these four concepts meant great care had to be taken to avoid reducing their



Construction drawing.

structural integrity. Modifying *all* of these concepts, particularly when one was being used for largely aesthetic reasons was an even greater risk.

### Installation

The bridge had been fabricated by the side of the road over several months as part of a process known as accelerated bridge construction (ABC), a new but widely used approach that minimizes the time a road must be closed and a technique that the university was internationally renowned for.

Lifting the main span into place took only a few hours. It involved a transporter which 'carried' the bridge and placed it onto two short concrete towers at each end, a contraption reminiscent of the kind of device used by International Rescue in **Thunderbirds** in the 1960's to help stricken aircraft and spacecraft to land safely.

This device has to be placed extremely carefully under the structure so that it does not cause undue stress. At a point during the installation process the position of the transporter device was changed (from the original specification) due to the location of a highway barrier. The effect was to place excessive stress on one part of the bridge. Soon after the bridge was placed onto the two end towers small cracks started to appear, indicating that not all was well.

The construction team applied increased tension to the post tensioning cables in the belief that this

might help resolve the problem, not realising that the structural integrity had already been compromised.

The bridge collapsed while construction workers were working on the problem.

Questions have naturally been raised as to why, once indications of a problem first appeared traffic was not immediately stopped from using the highway. This would have saved lives but would not in itself have prevented the collapse.



*Image of the bridge transporter.*



Following the incident, Southwest Eighth Street as well as other surrounding highways were closed for traffic. It has led to expensive on-going legal action, the reputation of various individuals as well as that of the university has been seriously damaged and the students don't have a safe 'signature' bridge to cross the dangerous multilane highway.

### **What do we learn from this incident?**

Hindsight is a wonderful thing and many are asking questions such as "why did it happen" and "could it have been avoided"?

There are many lessons to be learned and the following are just a few of the issues the incident has raised.

### **Clarity and clear thinking**

This article began with a quote from Christopher Alexander. It talks about the importance of clarity in the planning and design process. The Florida footbridge incident appears to demonstrate an apparent lack of clear or at least comprehensive thinking at the very start of the process.

Seeking a structure which would provide a way of getting from A to B as well as being a physical landmark and something which displayed the engineering skills of the university are perfectly reasonable objectives. Indeed, achieving these less tangible objectives can be the very issues that distinguish great or good design from the mediocre. As Victor Papanek explains in *Design for the Real*

*World*<sup>1</sup>, aesthetics and the meanings associated with objects (including buildings and bridges) are very important aspects of function. But of course it is critically important that these, perhaps less tangible objectives are pursued as an integral part of the design process and do not compromise structural integrity.

One need only look at the wonderful work of Santiago Calatrava to see exciting and outstanding structures which combine great beauty with extremely good engineering.

This might be expressed and summarised as design integrity.

Perhaps the most striking lack of design integrity in the Florida bridge incident was the superficial use of a faux cable-stayed concept which appears to have had no other purpose than to provide an aesthetic highlight. At the very least the 'use' of this feature incurred unnecessary additional cost, construction time and structural weight and at worst distracted from and compromised the features which were providing the main structural support.

In hindsight, to make the bridge 'special' a better course of action would have been to utilise and celebrate the devices which actually were doing the structural work i.e. aesthetics and meaning in harmony with good engineering.

### **From the big idea to the detail**

Good detailing can be traced back to a good concept. When I'm asked to comment on the design detail of a planning application I'm not thinking 'do I like this or not', I'm asking myself 'in what way does this match up with the overall concept and design'?

The Florida bridge appears to be a very mixed concoction of concepts which did not entirely 'communicate' with each other but rather compromised their individual integrity leading to details in design, construction and installation which did not entirely match up.

### **Holistic understanding**

Good planning and project management is critical. Some might say that this is essentially about getting the project done on time and within budget and these are indeed critical issues.

However, having a clear, comprehensive and agreed understanding of the aims and objectives and making sure that all of the elements, aspirations, engineering, architecture, landscape and planning are in harmony with each other not only helps produce a good result but provides the logic and rationale from the strategic to the detail. ■

### **Michael Vout**

West Midlands RTPI Hon. Secretary

<sup>1</sup> The Function Complex, Design for the Real World



## A reflection on Birmingham's 'Cycle Revolution'

In 2013, Birmingham City Council were awarded £17m of Department for Transport 'Cycle City Ambition Grant' funding. This formed the first phase of the 'Birmingham Cycle Revolution' (BCR). Later successful grant funding applications brought the overall budget to around £30m. What followed was a series of on-road, off-road schemes and behavioural change programmes. Five years later, and with work finally underway on two high quality cycle superhighways, we can reflect on the challenges, successes and lessons learned of the project.

Birmingham has long been associated with the automobile, and car dependency in the city remains high. A *Guardian* report in 2015<sup>1</sup> stated that commuting into the city centre is split 50:50 between car and other modes, including public transport and cycling. There is high demand for precious space on the city's roads, and for those wishing to cycle, this often means an unpleasant, polluted, and sadly, life-threatening experience. It is hardly surprising that a *Sustrans* study in 2017<sup>2</sup> found that a mere 3% of all trips are made by bike in the city. The end result is a self-fulfilling cycle, whereby consistently low levels of cycling make it difficult to build a business case for decent cycling

infrastructure. The question often raised is, "why should we pay for cycling infrastructure, reducing capacity for cars on our roads, when nobody cycles?"

The BCR funding gave Birmingham City Council a real opportunity to make a step-change in cycling provision. The first years of the scheme, however, saw a number of low-profile projects spread across the city. Routes of varying quality were implemented as cycling corridors into the city centre. At the higher end of the spectrum, we saw canal towpath resurfacing and improved access points. At mid-end of the spectrum we saw shared space cycle paths, which do not provide quick and convenient routes for cyclists. At the bottom end of the spectrum we saw 'quiet routes', consisting of white bicycles painted onto road surfaces. For cyclists and campaigners in the city, this was not the Dutch-style revolution they were promised.

The second phase of the BCR programme has seen a dramatic shift in strategy. This came as higher quality schemes were emerging across London and in other British cities, and as Brummie cyclists expressed their dissatisfaction at previous attempts. The focus shifted away from several on-road schemes, which consisted mainly of painted white lines, to two high quality, fully segregated cycle routes. The corridors selected were the A38 to Selly Oak, and the A34 to Perry Barr. Both cycle ways are currently under construction, and promise to deliver safe and segregated cycle routes which are

signalled and provide priority to cyclists at key junctions.

Unlike canal towpaths and 'green routes' which enjoy high usage but are hidden away, the visibility of these routes to drivers stuck in traffic, public transport users and pedestrians alike is likely to encourage modal shift. One can assume an element of pragmatism in choosing to connect the cycle route to the University of Birmingham, Selly Oak and Edgbaston. These are areas which happen to have the highest concentration of cyclists in the city. Meanwhile the A34 to Perry Barr could be a useful, cheap and healthy way to get masses of people to and from the Commonwealth Games in 2022. If the schemes see the high usage, and local politicians and Councillors can see the benefits, it should be much easier for Brummie cyclists to campaign for and demand high quality schemes on other corridors in the future.

Alongside all of this, the BCR behavioural change team have been busy delivering the award-winning 'Big Birmingham Bikes' scheme. This involved a mass giveaway of bright orange bikes in numerous deprived areas of the city. GPS trackers were fitted onto bicycles to monitor usage. The agreement is that if the bicycles are not being used, they are taken back and redistributed. In addition, the use of GPS trackers has generated powerful data on when bicycles are used, for how long, the type of journeys undertaken, and how often these journeys take place. Interestingly, the scheme has highlighted the

deficiencies of traditional forms of public consultation. In those wards of Birmingham where there was apparently a low appetite for cycling, evidenced by low turnout at consultation events, the Big Birmingham Bikes saw high uptake. In addition, while much previous cycle route planning in Birmingham has followed paths of 'least resistance', the more recent datasets can reflect cyclists' 'desire lines'. This will allow more effective planning of future cycle routes and targeting of investment. It is intended that data generated from Big Birmingham Bikes will be incorporated into Birmingham City Council's forthcoming 'Local Cycling and Walking Investment Plan'.

The BCR team are currently rolling out a second phase of Big Birmingham Bikes to a wider demographic. Interestingly, users are invited to log their journeys via an app. This data can be used to make powerful statements on the health, congestion and economic benefits of cycling. One question asked is, "are you replacing any car journeys with your bike?" If the answer is yes, the BCR team can check the GPS data to verify and calculate the tangible benefits of modal shift. As of 2017, the Big Birmingham Bikes had replaced 37,336 miles of car journeys with bicycle journeys. This means 3113 hours of reduced congestion, and equates to a reduction of 4218kg of CO2 emissions.

As the air quality agenda continues to evolve, it is this growing evidence base which could convince politicians and decision-makers that the benefits of



*Grand Union Canal, Birmingham, before improvements.*



*Grand Union Canal, Birmingham, after improvements. Upgraded to bonded surfaces.*

increased cycling which are most tangible, namely lower pollution levels, healthier citizens, lower obesity levels, and a lower burden on the NHS, are worth investing in. As the saying goes, Rome wasn't built in a day, and neither was Amsterdam. Perhaps, however, the Birmingham Cycle Revolution is setting the foundations for a high quality cycling network, meaning that what was once the 'Motor City' may become the UK's premier 'Cycle City'. ■

**Stuart Hodgetts**

Graduate Planner, Arup

*Note: The article above is a reflection on the author's dissertation, undertaken for an MSc in Urban & Regional Planning at the University of Birmingham. All opinions are solely of the author.*

- <sup>1</sup> *The Guardian*, 2015, 'End of the car age: how cities are outgrowing the automobile'.
- <sup>2</sup> *Sustrans*, 2017, 'Bike Life Birmingham 2017 report'.

Viability is an issue that crops up frequently in relation to debates about the lack of new (affordable) housing. In the Higher Education sector, the ability to evaluate the “practical application of development finance” and “added value for the community” is a required learning outcome for any RTPI accredited planning degree in the UK. The assessment of viability is, however, a task that to most is a black box rather than a clear methodology, also reflected in the rather vague guidance issued by government.

Unsurprisingly then, this makes it an excellent topic for CPD to allow planning practitioners to become more aware of the approaches to viability assessments. ‘Planning and Viability’ was a sold-out event, hosted by Cushman and Wakefield, chaired by Sandy Taylor and included three speakers and two short plenary discussion sessions.

‘Doing the Viability Sums & Achieving Balance & Trust’ delivered by Jonathan Tutt of Cushman and Wakefield with 20 years’ experience provided some insights of how planning and viability are meant to deliver better places outcomes.

The presentation started off with some context setting and a historical perspective. An interesting read here, and Winner of the Royal Town Planning Institute award for research excellence, recommended by Jonathan is the *Planning Gain: Providing Infrastructure & Affordable Housing* by Tony Crook, John Henneberry and Christine

Whitehead. This provides a review and rationale for planning gain, looking at lessons from the past and relevance in an age of public finance austerity.

Different mechanisms exist for posing a planning obligation as part of planning approval; in the past this included various taxes/levies and currently in particular CIL and Section 106. Betterment is an issue here, such as the gain in value when a piece of land goes from agricultural use to housing. Looking at the statistics of income received from such betterment / gain, Section 106 has raised more than past taxes so it seems to have worked quite well as a planning gain mechanism. However, if any demands are too high, a developer and the landowner will not come forward, if too low the public/state will miss out on infrastructure. Getting the amount / conditions right is thus a key point: having a willing landowner and a willing developer - “or nothing happens”.

Here then comes the financial viability test, anchored in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2012 Paragraph 173; note that some changes have occurred with the recently published NPPF 2018 Paragraphs 57 & 76) and a guidance note *Financial Viability and Planning* published by RICS in 2012 and RICS funded research by the University of Reading with a report titled *Financial Viability Appraisal in Planning Decisions: Theory and Practice* published in April 2015.

We were then taken through various calculation steps in the basic residual land value formula and

typical assumptions applied in viability assessments (see Figure 1) and calculations for the gross development value (GDV) for commercial and residential properties.

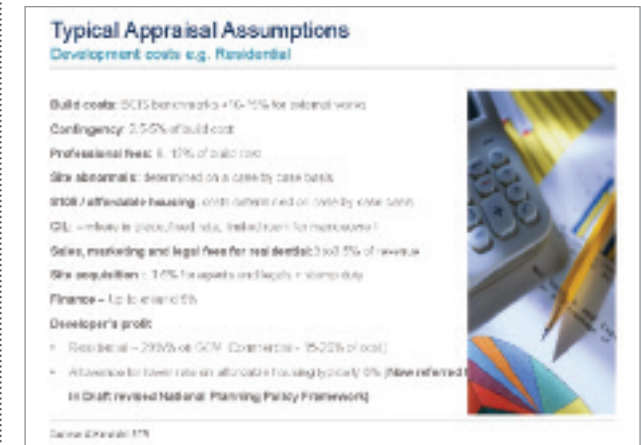


Figure 1: Typical viability appraisal assumptions.



Figure 2: Varied guidance and practice for BLV.



Complications in the assessment relate to prices paid not necessarily reflecting actual land value, the presence of competing (and somewhat conflicting) guidance and practice with the revised NPPF not making things clearer either; thus a case by case approach is used. Further complications exist around whether, when and how to use existing use value (EUV), alternative use value (AUV) and benchmark land value (BLV), with a preference expressed for the latter as a base for viability assessments.

One of the conclusions from the talk were that the RICS 2012 guidance document needs revising to clarify market valuation concepts and techniques. Another crucial point was about the causal



Figure 3: Negotiated planning gain for New Lubbethorpe project

relationship between land value and policy: Does land value determine policy or policy determine land value?

Jonathan's slot finished with a quick case study presentation about New Lubbethorpe, a 390 hectare sustainable urban extension in Leicestershire providing 4,250 new dwellings and upfront provision of infrastructure including a new primary school (ca. £5mio) and two new motorway bridges (ca. £15mio each) and plenty of green infrastructure. This is an example where long term goals has been taken very seriously and successfully negotiated (see [Figure 3](#)).

**Craig Rowbottom** presented next focusing on the **Langley Sustainable Urban Extension (SUE)** as part of Birmingham's growth agenda with 6,000 new homes planned and currently working through the various delivery challenges. Using Birmingham's approach ([Figure 4](#)) and if all goes to plan, Langley will have an unusually high amount of green space/infrastructure, a rapid bus service and a range of other supporting facilities and services ([Figure 5](#)). While this sounds in principle good, building into the greenbelt caused ripples with serious concerns also raised about the current inadequate infrastructure to support the development and the expected negative impacts on traffic congestion, air quality and noise pollution. Adjacent to Langley, a strategic employment site, Peddimore, is also in the pipeline.

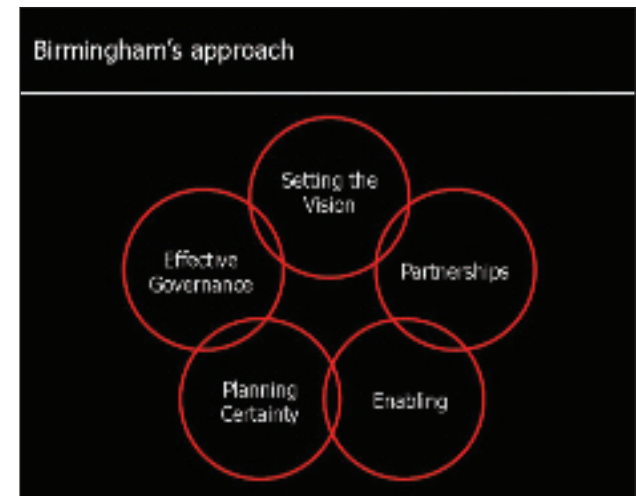


Figure 4: Birmingham's development approach.

**Key Infrastructure**

Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Walking and Cycling Routes</li> <li>- Sprint / Rapid Transit, and Other High Quality Public Transport Services</li> <li>- Principal Movement Network with access onto the A38</li> <li>- Off-site Highway Improvements</li> </ul>
Centres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Shopping and other facilities / services</li> <li>- Community Hubs focussed around Primary Schools</li> </ul>
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 3 Primary Schools, Secondary School and Special Education Needs provision</li> <li>- Health Care and Community Facilities</li> <li>- Affordable Housing (35%)</li> </ul>
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Major Green Corridors with at least 30 ha of Public Open Space</li> <li>- 18ha of Sports Pitches</li> <li>- Sustainable Drainage and Low/Zero Carbon Energy</li> </ul>

Figure 5: Infrastructure vision for Langley SUE.



Viability assessments for Langley are highly complex trying to capture all costs from concept to delivery and satisfying the different land owners' demands (there are 17, most of whom formed a consortium).

Key here is to ensure that the development plans are deliverable and that the payment burden is fair/proportionate and not excessive. This is easy to say but difficult to ensure with on the ground varied specific contexts and conditions. Key here is to develop a clear approach and communicate with stakeholders and especially developers. Another concern is how to build in some flexibility (in light of changes in policies, governance, trends and assumptions) without compromising set goals and equitable burdens in cost and responsibility?

Viability was considered based on NPPF and NPPG guidance and the decision taken not to use CIL but satisfy specific infrastructure needs through planning conditions and Section 106. Birmingham's Development Plan (BDP) requires a Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to provide detailed guidance on the design, phasing, site access and ensure overall coherence and sensible connection / relationship with the neighbouring Peddimore development and coordination across the different timescales. Development tariffs in the SPD may seem a suitable mechanism here but this would not be in line with the NPPF (2012).

While the details about how best to share the burden are being worked out, the preferred approach is to

secure infrastructure investment through several 'infrastructure packages', some on-site and others offsite.

For anyone interested in the details, the consultation on the draft SPD takes place in September. This is an interesting project to follow over the next 15 years!

There was time for a short **Questions and Answers** session before the refreshment break, with three interesting questions from the audience: What happens if not all money is spent; if the costs are lower than expected? Jonathan's response was that some variability is common but following guidance cost estimates would usually not err more than 5 percent (with a typical contingency of 5-10% built into the calculations) but this depends very much on the scale and complexity of the project and whether there are any risks associated with the land (such as on some brownfield sites). Attention was also drawn to the fact that viability assessments for different types (such as whether land is used for housing or a new road) will be quite different with different levels of profit for the various landowners. Thus developing a fair scheme and to balance out burdens and benefits can be difficult.

Another question focused on housing saturation and how many houses to bring onto the market at any one time? This affects profit margins and also relates to the extent to which communal infrastructure (such as schools and shops) is

frontloaded in a development project (and to secure the necessary finances for that). In the Langley case, with the expected arrival of HSBC HQ and the HS2 development, demand for housing is expected to be high. Still saturation points need to be checked and calculated.

The third question was about the land assembly process and use of Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs). In the case of Langley, principal agreement has been secured from landowners so there is probably no need to use CPO. This also highlighted the importance of pre-development discussions and agreements.

The final presentation by **Ruth McCarthy** from Homes England (HCA – Homes and Communities Agency previously) focused on **Design Quality and Viability** with many years of experience working with small and large developers, landowners, and local authorities to deliver good quality housing. 'Building for life', 'placemaking' and 'good design' are core to Homes England but with a more market oriented standard setting and CPO power compared with HCA's role. A strong emphasis is also placed on modern methods of construction (MMC) technologies.

Ruth highlighted the DAT – the **Development Appraisal Tool** - developed by the HCA and available since November 2014 with a user manual and guidance, and downloadable version: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/development-appraisal-tool>. This tool can be used to (i) analyse

viability of planning obligations / S106; (ii) consider the balance between affordable housing and other planning obligations; and (iii) assess the potential land value (where LPA is considering a disposal).

Ruth's presentation was structured around busting **four myths** of design and viability.

Myth 1: Add design features later if enough money left. However, good design is not an add-on but integral to the whole of a development. Setting exemplars and putting the bar high is important here.

Myth 2: Design is only about looking good. Design is not just about appearance and key is to address sustainability and use placemaking to facilitate community spirit, improve health and address local challenges.

Myth 3: Good design is expensive. However, this is not necessarily true. Good design can increase land value (e.g. RICS 2016 study on *Placemaking and Value* although it is now labelled as no longer current; <http://www.rics.org/uk/knowledge/professional-guidance/information-papers/placemaking-and-value-1st-edition/>)

Myth 4: The market won't stand for it. There is evidence to the contrary as illustrated by a Savills report published in 2016 putting *Development: The Value of Placemaking* under the spotlight, concluding that the long term value of a scheme by building for life can pay off.



So the overall message was that good design is necessary, possible and viable. Good design is not just about meeting a standard or winning a specific award, it should infuse all lifecycle aspects and short and long-term goals of a development project. This can be complex or simple, rich in new technology or traditional materials driven.

Three main themes were highlighted with 12 associated place-making principles as reflected in the **Building for Life** standard / award:

Theme 1: Integrating into the neighbourhood

- Connections
- Facilities and services
- Public transport
- Meeting local housing requirements

Theme 2: Creating a place:

- Character
- Working with the site and its context
- Creating well defined streets and spaces
- Easy to find your way around

Theme 3: Street and home:

- Streets for all
- Car parking
- Public and private spaces
- External storage and amenity space

However, good design also needs to inform internal spaces and layout, using space effectively, building in some flexibility for different uses and different needs

of occupants. Ruth covered many examples illustrating how specific design decisions worked well or not. Paying attention to detail is important here. Importantly, any development must include maintenance, stewardship and resident engagement.

The take home message (see also [Figure 6](#)) included to be proactive liaising with developers and to include design policies in the Development Plan. Furthermore, to make sure that buildings are built to last, that designs are maintenance easy and that places are looked after.



Figure 6: Design elements that can improve viability and long-term sustainability

The final plenary **Q&A** session covered a wide range of topics, including:

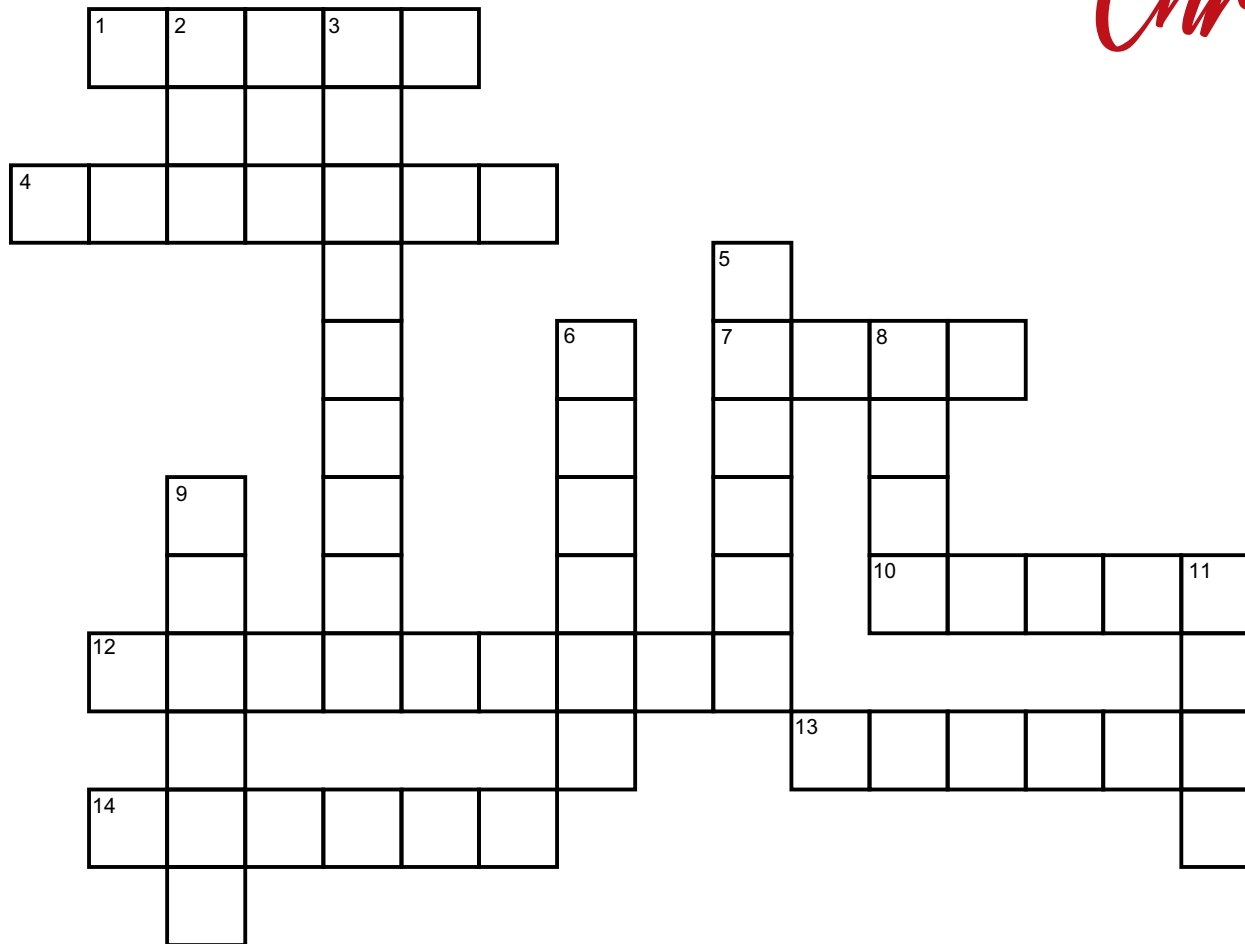
- the implementation of Birmingham’s 35% affordable housing rule;

- nationally prescribed space standards (guidance rather than policy or law);
- CPOs (and a current trend to avoid them);
- development site negotiations being often carried out with developers rather than directly with landowners and problems of stalled housing developments on agricultural and greenspace land;
- how to get transparency of viability assessments which is not helped by the wide range of different contexts and complexities of specific development projects (and the economic reality being that a 20% profit margin is regarded as normal);
- the importance of transparency for and better understanding of not just viability assessments but across the whole planning process (with more information now publicly available online).

On reflection, while very interesting presentations and discussions, in the end viability assessment is not a straightforward method. One of the speakers used the term ‘dark art’ to describe how the practice and use of viability assessments feels to some. The point was made that it is not a loophole and that greater clarity is hoped to emerge from government and RICS to inform future viability assessment practice. ■

*The CPD event was produced by Claudia Carter, Reader in Environmental Governance / Associate Professor at Birmingham City University*

## Christmas Crossword\*



### Across

- 1 Announcing fake news
- 4 Preserved ex Minister
- 7 The planners club
- 10 Housing land sounds like an orange drink
- 12 Good idea in need of a review
- 13 A type of city supported by the TCPA
- 14 Who is asking "are we land banking"

### Down

- 2 Regional RTPI management confused with a motoring organisation
- 3 Important for beer and housing
- 5 European goodbye
- 6 Special buildings
- 8 Small sharp decision makers
- 9 A type of highway and regional leader
- 11 A valued landscape

[\\*Click here for the answers](#)

**The Chief Executive of the RTPI is:**

- A: Victoria Principle
- B: Victoria Hills
- C: Victoria Falls

**The Chair of the West Midlands RTPI is:**

- A: Maria Underdunn
- B: Maria Overdunn
- C: Maria Dunn

**The first President of the RTPI was:**

- A: Thomas Adams
- B: Thomas Edison
- C: Thomas Dolby

**The current President of the RTPI is:**

- A: John Hectares
- B: John Acres
- C: John Field

**The RTPI was founded in which year:**

- A: 1954
- B: 1924
- C: 1914

**The RTPI has:**

- A: 20,554 members
- B: 25,154 members
- C: 27,321 members

**The West Midlands RTPI has:**

- A: 1,730 members
- B: 1,204 members
- C: 1,413 members

**What is the percentage of women in the RTPI:**

- A: 20%
- B: 54%
- C: 38%

**Who is the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government:**

- A: James Brokenhouse
- B: James Brokenbone
- C: James Brokenshire

**Who used the term “muscular localism”:**

- A: Eric Pickles
- B: Arnold Schwarzenegger
- C: Clive Betts

**What is the highest point in the West Midlands:**

- A: Turners Hill
- B: The Wrekin
- C: The Rotunda

[Click here for the answers](#)



**C**hristmas is the time of year when we celebrate the work of one of our most esteemed regional philosophers and wordsmiths of the modern age, Noddy Holder. Indeed the seminal work *Merry Xmas Everybody* has become to symbolise the true meaning of Christmas and all that Christmas represents (Ed – check this).

And yet for all of its profound significance it must be viewed within the context of its age, the 1970's, a long past historic period which, through archaeological remains of flared trousers and platform shoes is only now being revealed and understood. It is the duty and the responsibility of those involved in the built professions including planners to both assess and question the wisdom of this great sage or alternatively, to spend more time getting out.

The text begins with the words:

*Are you hanging up a stocking on your wall?  
It's the time that every Santa has a ball  
Does he ride a red-nosed reindeer?  
Does it ton-up on his sleigh?  
Do the fairies keep him sober for a day?*

We are immediately plunged into potential issues relating to The Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 and Temporary Event Notices not to mention possible traffic offences under the Road Safety Act 1967.



In the second verse Noddy tells us, *“Are you sure you've got the room to spare inside? At the very least this means that there is a need for assessment under the Welfare Reform Act 2012 as it is assumed that the property is rented and may be judged to have more bedrooms than necessary.*

Noddy goes on to say ; *“Do you ride on down the hillside in a buggy you have made? When you land upon your head then you've been “Slade”.* Noddy is highlighting the potential dangers involved in winter activities and we as planners must be critically aware of our responsibility in the delivery of strategic health provision at a local level to address quick medical assistance to communities or in this case, for an accident due to the dangerous and negligent use of a homemade vehicle.

Finally, in the chorus Noddy advises the reader and /or listener to; *“Look to the future now, it's only just begun”.* These are very wise words, mostly because without the facility of a time machine the future does indeed begin from now, but also because as planners we are always looking to the future.

Next time on *Tripwire Words of Wisdom...* the acoustic and environmental policy implications of the 1973 Slade anthem 'Cum On Feel The Noize'. ■

**Michael Vout**  
West Midlands RTPI Hon. Secretary

## RTPI election result 2018

### The RTPI annual elections boosts female representation at top table.

The RTPI election results see a female Vice-President, an additional woman on the Board of Trustees and more than half of General Assembly members as now female. The result is a huge success for the RTPI's diversity, with equal numbers of men and women elected to lead the Institute into the future.

RTPI Chief Executive, Victoria Hills, said:

"Whilst there is more work to do on securing better proportional BAME, age and disability representation in our governance, today's results mark an important step forward in our commitment to diversity and Inclusivity throughout the planning profession.

"I'm thrilled we have attracted so many rising stars who will play an active and important part in shaping the future strategy and activities of the RTPI and the planning profession. Many congratulations all!"

### The RTPI Vice President

Sue Manns FRTPI, FRSA, FRGS has been elected as the RTPI Vice President in 2019 and will lead the Institute in 2020.

Sue Manns said: "I would like to thank all those who voted in the recent RTPI elections and especially



those who put themselves forward as candidates for the various posts. It is good to see that so many people are engaged and committed to the future of their Institute.

"I am personally very grateful for the support I received from members of the Institute

and so pleased to have been elected as Vice President for 2019 and to lead the Institute as its President in 2020.

"I am looking forward to playing my part in 'raising the volume' and 'changing the conversation' around planning, ensuring that the voices of RTPI members and the wider profession are both heard and respected."

Click [here](#) for more details.

## West Mids CPD Programme 2019

The region is once again hosting a regional CPD programme of events. The following is a list of events according to each month. For further information please contact the RTPI Regional Coordinator at: [westmidlands@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:westmidlands@rtpi.org.uk).

Planning Law Update 1	March
Digital Planning	May
Housing and Social Care	May
Accelerating Public Sector Housing Delivery – Planning's key role	June
Planning for Infrastructure	June
Neighbourhood Planning	July
Public Inquiries	September
Regeneration in Conservation Areas	September
Planning Law Update 2	October
Urban Design and Masterplanning for Planners – The Basics	November
Delivering the WMCA's Vision	November

## Important Regional Events

- RTPI WM Dinner and Ball
- WM Spring Reception
- President's Visit

### Great West Midlands Debate 7th Feb 2019

The Great Debate is jointly organised by the professional Institutes responsible for the built environment, principally the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) and the Institute of Civil Engineers (ICE). The intention is to bring together members of the Institutes and interested individuals to discuss an issue of key mutual interest.

### Women in Planning West Midlands 17th Jan 2019 Launch of Women in Planning launch on 17th January

"Guests are invited to enjoy an evening of networking to celebrate the launch of Women in Planning in the West Midlands. The forum seeks to promote diversity and equality within the planning profession by empowering women.

The event will be held at The Alchemist on Thursday 17th January starting at 6PM – 10.30PM, with guest speaker Sue Manns. A welcome drink and nibbles will be provided by King Chambers, who are kindly sponsoring the event.

Book your space [here](#)

## National Training and Education

### National Training Events in the West Midlands

- Environmental Impact Assessments – 5th February, Birmingham, [Book here](#)
- Nationally significant infrastructure projects and PINS – 28th March, Birmingham, [Book here](#)
- Writing skills for planners – 15th May, Birmingham, [Book here](#)
- The planning system explained – 12th June, Birmingham, [Book here](#)
- Challenges of waste management – 5th September, Birmingham, [Book here](#)
- Local plans: policy and practice – 1st October, Birmingham, [Book here](#)
- Leadership for planners – 8th October, Birmingham, [Book here](#)
- Current issues in planning – 14th November, Birmingham, [Book here](#)
- Project management for planners – 20th November, Birmingham, [Book here](#)

RTPI Learn online training is available for members on the go, for phones and tablets, click [here](#)

RTPI has published a new Core CPD Framework to support and guide members in developing their career and skills. Look out for the new logo for professional skills and key planning knowledge! For more details click [here](#)

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## RTPI WM Awards for Planning Excellence

**The 2018 Regional Awards was presented at the Award Ceremony Dinner and Ball, on Friday 12th October at the Burlington Hotel, Birmingham.**

### Transformation of vacant football stadium into homes wins top regional award

St Modwen Home's residential scheme at Victoria Park in Stoke on Trent has won this year's RTPI West Midlands Award for Planning Excellence.

The awards celebrate outstanding projects that demonstrate the power of planning in transforming the communities where we live. Entries to this year's awards included restoration of a Grade II Listed building and a student project on strategic regional planning.



The transformation of the brownfield site will provide 200 homes on the site of the former stadium of Stoke City Football Club, which was acquired by St Modwen in 1997. Through extensive partnership working with the City Council and other stakeholders, St Modwen overcame several barriers to bring forward the site.

The scheme also responded to wider community aspirations for the naturalisation of a culverted section of the River Trent, reconnection of the riverside walk, and new school sports fields.

The judges also highly commended Jenna Langford who won the Young Planner of the Year award. Recognised for her commitment to supporting others, Jenna Langford is the newly appointed Regeneration Manager at Sandwell Metropolitan



*St Modwen Homes.*



Borough Council and has been integral part of the regeneration team since 2010.

This year's Chair's Awards goes to Birmingham City University for their work and contribution in the Planning Game.

The Regional Award celebrates the best and brightest professionals in the early stages of their planning careers.



*Jenna Langford (Sandwell MBC).*

**Chair of the Judging Panel, Craig Jordan MRTPI said:**

“St Modwen Homes worked extensively with the local Council, Environment Agency, and most importantly with local residents, to transform this derelict brownfield site into vital new homes. They are an exemplar of partnership working.”

“A significant challenge for the project was a parallel bid by the Environment Agency to re-naturalise a culverted section of the River Trent. St Modwen were able to adapt their project by re-designing the project into two phases.

“In overcoming this barrier and others, they have demonstrated the hallmarks of great planning: creativity, tenacity and innovation.”



*Birmingham City University.*

## Student Awards

Tina Song-Ashdown from University of Birmingham and Shannon Franklin from Birmingham City University were awarded the 2018 student prizes for the excellence in their studies. The Awards were presented by James Carpenter and Sandy Taylor, members of the Regional Activities Committee.



Tina Song-Ashdown.



Shannon Franklin.

## RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence 2019

The RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence are the longest running and most high-profile awards in the industry. For 40 years they have rewarded the brightest talent in the profession; the teams, projects and individuals that transform economies, environments and their communities all over the UK and internationally.

With planners tackling some of the most pressing issues of our time, from population growth and housing shortage to environmental issues and climate change, it has never been more relevant.

Being shortlisted for one of the prestigious awards is an excellent opportunity to raise your profile as an award winning team, consultancy or individual. Best of all it is completely free to enter, you have nothing to lose!

The Awards recognise outstanding projects, plans and people in the categories below.

The submission deadline is 14th December 2018.

The finalists will be announced next February and the winners will be announced at a ceremony on 24 April 2019, at Milton Court Concert Hall in central London.

Check here for more details: [Awards for Planning Excellence 2019](#)

## Research and Policy

- Local Authority provision of housing – West Midlands roundtable discussion

Date: 8th January 2019

Venue: Birmingham City University

***Join for a round table 'show and tell', comparing experiences, issues and successes around Local Authority direct provision of housing.***

*In 2017, the National Planning Forum and RTPI sponsored [research on local authority direct provision of housing](#) led by Janice Morphet and Ben Clifford of the Bartlett School of Planning. The research was well received across the sector and several of the recommendations, including the removal of the HRA cap, are now being enacted. Following this success, RTPI and four English regions (including the West Midlands) have commissioned a second phase of the research, with new questions including a particular focus on the specific role planners have to play. The RTPI will use both pieces of research to produce practice advice later in the year.*

*There has been much positive feedback from members stating that the roundtables for local authorities conducted as part of this research were particularly helpful for sharing and making positive relationships with housing colleagues and other neighbouring local authorities. As such, a second wave of roundtables will be held around the country.*

*This West Midlands Roundtable is open to all local authority planners and housing colleagues with relevant experience to share.*

*Places are limited so please book your place early to avoid disappointment.*

- **Consultation:** The RTPI seeks to advance the science and art of planning by influencing policy. We encourage members our to contribute to the formulation of RTPI responses to government consultations and outside calls for evidence.

MHCLG consultation on high streets, [click here](#)  
Please send comments by 17th December to [tom.kenny@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:tom.kenny@rtpi.org.uk).

- **Futures Network in the West Midlands -A vision for the West Midlands - the challenges facing the region and the shape of a future planning system**

Having looked at past experiences and current strategic, cross-boundary planning practice in the region, the culmination of the programme was a workshop session where the students considered the future. During this session the students worked in groups and collectively to sketch out a vision for the West Midlands, the major challenges facing the region and some of the characteristics that a future planning system should have. The results of their collective work can be downloaded [here](#)

For more information you can get in touch with Sherman Wong, the Project Coordinator, at [sherman.wong@bcu.ac.uk](mailto:sherman.wong@bcu.ac.uk)

## Planning Aid England (PAE) Update

Since January, our very popular email advice service, has been delivered by a team of chartered volunteers a number of whom are based in the West Midlands. The advice service receives approx. 170 email enquiries per month with volunteers responding to requests on a range of planning topics including how to comment on a planning application, change of use classes, planning appeals and enforcement. Additionally, regional volunteers have provided support for several pieces of casework across 2018, helping those that otherwise would not be able to afford professional planning advice, and in October, volunteer Andrew Matheson spoke about the PAE offer at a breakfast event organised as part of Civic Voice's annual conference.

Thank you to all PAE volunteers in the West Midlands for your ongoing support – we look forward to working with you in 2019!

## Christmas crossword answers

- 1 Trump
- 2 RAC
- 3 Malthouse
- 4 Pickles
- 5 BREXIT
- 6 Listed
- 7 RTPI
- 8 PINS
- 9 Street
- 10 SHLAA
- 11 AONB
- 12 Greenbelt
- 13 Garden
- 14 Letwin

## Christmas Quiz answers

B, C, A, B, C, B, A, B, C, A, A.

