

The logo features a stylized graphic of two overlapping, curved shapes in shades of blue and green, resembling a swoosh or a stylized 'P'.

RTPI SOUTH WEST
AWARDS FOR
PLANNING
EXCELLENCE 2020

Awards for Planning Excellence Case Study

Conservation through COVID – adapting to new
ways of working

Entered by Bath Preservation Trust

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The logo for wyg. is a stylized, handwritten-style 'wyg.' in a dark blue color, with a small dot at the end of the 'y'.

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About Bath Preservation Trust (BPT)

BPT is a not-for-profit membership organisation with charitable status and structures, it has a degree of authority and accountability which differentiates it from ad-hoc lobby groups, whilst recognising that their supporters reflect a side of Bath which cares about its environment.

BPT's mission is to encourage and support the conservation, evolution and enhancement of Bath and its environs for the people that live and work in it, visit it or simply love it, within a framework appropriate to both its historic setting and its sustainable future; we do this through advocacy and the provision of expert advice and opinion on planning applications, planning policy and other matters affecting the World Heritage City and its environs. As well as running museums, providing educational resources and volunteer participation.

BPT's campaigning activities are focused on the **evolution** and **enhancement** of the city and its environs as well as on the protection of Bath's special character and conservation of its historic buildings and landscape.

BPT aims to position itself as an **essential partner** in the plans of others, seeking dialogue at an early stage and hoping to influence developers before planning applications are submitted.

BPT engages in strategic work with the Council and encourage developers and architects to discuss their work with the Trust.

Through conservation, education and networks BPT helps provide the means to ensure the future success of the City of Bath.

Award criteria

1. Background

Please outline the background to the project:

- **context**
- **timeline (including phase in project, eg. in recognition that some planning work may have been done earlier)**

BPT's planning, conservation and campaigning work is supported by volunteers - professional advisors from within the local community who in normal circumstances attend in-house meetings and site visits. BPT has operated a formal committee meeting system of working for over 100 years. In March 2020 BPT made a rapid and successful transition to new way of working safely through COVID.

In response to the COVID crisis BPT closed its offices and all four of its income generating museums. The majority of BPT's staff were furloughed under the Government scheme, and all staff (including planning and conservation staff) were placed on rotating furlough and part-time furlough within the project period.

The team set out an action plan which identified a range of functions BPT would continue to provide, and how it would be able to do this working remotely, which was agreed by Trustees.

As COVID security means that established ways of working are no longer a safe option, BPT switched all of its volunteer support networks and meetings to remote working and online platforms, using Zoom for hosting monthly committee meetings, and pre-application consultation meetings.

BPT's small planning, conservation and campaigning team, of three staff, continued to work from home as part of a skeleton team and initiated and implemented new models for operating BPT's working groups, committees, and associated activities so that they could continue to function effectively to fulfil the charitable purposes and campaigning objectives of the Trust.

Activities undertaken within the project period (April – July 2020 ongoing) include:

- Online monthly BPT Architecture Planning and Place committee meetings attended by 14 volunteers with built environment expertise.
- Online bi-monthly Environs of Bath committee meetings to review development proposals in, landscape setting of the World Heritage rural areas and green belt.
- Consultation response to the Local Plan Partial Review – review and drafting remotely by committee. Submitted May 2020.
- Monitoring and review of proposed planning reforms in response to Covid and the response from the sector.
- Collaborative working remotely with B&NES on updated SPD's and response to Covid. Eg.
 - High street proposals for pavement cafes/outside tables and chairs and social distancing.
 - Ongoing dialogue with officers, and establishment of summer internship project to support revised Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Guidance for Listed Buildings (SPD), and update BPT's RTPI award winning guidance Warmer Bath, improving the energy efficiency of traditional buildings in Bath.
- Ongoing review of planning applications and detailed submissions/consultation response on planning applications – weekly.
- Participation in local decision making, participation in B&NES Planning Committee – monthly through project period. Attending live zoom meetings recorded on YouTube.
- Stakeholder engagement, and on-going design review and consultation on major projects/development sites, primarily Bath Quays North, The Royal Mineral Water Hospital, the Dick Lovett site/lower Bristol Road, Regency Laundry/St Peters Terrace. Monthly zoom meetings with agents and architects.
- Pre-application consultation – responding to queries from architects and homeowner on a weekly basis.
- Providing listed building advice, heritage and local heritage expertise weekly in response to the public and sector queries.
- Online and social media content as a way to engage the local community in planning and conservation issues through 'lockdown'. Started before project period and continues. Social media campaigns across multiple platforms significantly increased outreach, engagement and audience.
- World Heritage Day Goes Digital – online resources, best bits of Bath, and OUV social media campaigns.

2. Outcomes

Please outline what positive impacts the project has provided for:

- the local community
- the economy
- the environment

The outcomes of the project have many overlapping social, economic and environmental benefits.

Ultimately BPT has replaced old ways of working with COVID secure methods in order to continue operating as a local amenity society and fulfil its charitable objectives. The Trust's continuing functions and project activities are focused on the evolution and environmental enhancement of the city.

BPT has adapted to new ways of working which has enabled local community volunteers to continue working to support their interest in protecting and enhancing the historic environment of Bath.

The local community has been able to access BPT for advice and support with their planning and conservation questions.

The local community has been able to receive and access information relation to local planning and engage with BPT on planning and conservation matters through social media. In particular BPT ran an active social media campaign to promote the Bath World Heritage Site and its Outstanding Universal Values, this involved daily Instagram posts and tweets, and accessible education and teachers' resources on the BPT website to support the community through a period of lockdown.

With input from BPT local planning processes have continued with public and local amenity group participation to BPT's provision of expert advice and opinion on planning applications and planning policy aims to bring forward development that has environmental and public (heritage) benefits.

With input from BPT consultation on major development sites have maintained momentum with stakeholder engagement and remained on track with timescales for planning applications and delivery which will support the economy.

BPT's participated in online planning committee meetings and decision making with positive outcomes. E.g. The Holborne Park application for housing was refused on grounds of inadequate supply of affordable housing which would fail to meet the needs of the local community, and a planning application for New Leaf Farm - agricultural development in the green belt was approved with all of BPT's recommendations as Conditions.

The Trust is engaging with B&NES Council on matters relating to the successful reopening of the High Street and the range of safety measures necessary to enable the social occupation of Bath's public realm, and retail and visitor economy to operate safely in a manner that respects and protects the heritage of Bath. E.g. Working with B&NES to enable the sensitive siting of more outside tables and chairs.

BPT has maintained momentum and is on track for the delivery of data to support B&NES policy updates in response to the Climate Emergency including revised SPD for Renewable Energy Guidance for Listed Buildings (SPD), and an update of BPT's RTP1 award winning guidance Warmer Bath, improving the energy efficiency of traditional buildings in Bath.

3. Planning contribution

Please outline how the project has benefitted from the involvement of a planner or planners:

- providing strong and effective leadership and vision
- working in partnership with others
- managing implementation and delivery

Planners have been involved in the leadership, partnership, implementation and delivery of all activities and strands of the project.

The process of transition to working remotely and maintaining BPT's planning and conservation function has been led by BPT's Senior Planning and Conservation Officer, who is a qualified planner with over 14 years of experience as a conservation planner.

BPT's planner collated the Trusts response to the B&NES Core Strategy partial update submitted within the project period which has ensured the Trusts ongoing participation in the Local Plan Review.

Through the planning application process BPT's planner has worked closely with B&NES planners, policy officers, conservation officer and planning application case officers, to ensure the best possible outcomes through direct communication, with case officers, submitting comments, communication and committee statements, and representations which have been positively responded to.

"Throughout the COVID period Bath Preservation Trust have continued to provide ongoing helpful comments on planning and listed building applications which might impact on the character and appearance of listed buildings, Bath Conservation Area and the City of Bath World Heritage Site."

Paula Freeland, Team Manager – Planning and Conservation B&NES Council

Through the project period BPT's planning team and Architecture Planning and Place committee have worked closely with B&NES planning officers giving pre-application advice on the Bath Quays North Site. Through stakeholder engagement with the development team BPT has been involved in multiple stages of design review and pre-application consultation on the Bath Quays North site with positive impacts on the evolution of a large mixed-use development.

"My experience of working with BPT's planning team has been on a substantial and complex mixed-use scheme in the centre of Bath (Bath Quays North). Through regular meetings we have been able to establish a constructive dialogue with BPT and benefit from their detailed knowledge and expertise."

Joel Hawkins, Bell Hammer Limited

BPT's planner has been available from home to respond to queries and questions from the public about planning applications, heritage impacts, and making changes to listed buildings. Even without the ability to undertake site visits during lock down, support has been given over the phone and by email. Members have been invited to submit photographs or give our planner video tours using their phone.

During the project period BPT's planners curated content for the BPT website and social media platforms, primarily Instagram. BPT's website has been updated to include more accessible resources

BPT's Instagram has run campaigns through the project period with conservation themes, including jobs for the weekend to encourage the care and conservation of traditional buildings, stories on planning applications and sites,

4. Sustainable development

Please outline how the project has supported:

- **positive short, medium and long term public benefit**
- **a balance of economic, social and environmental objectives**
- **the UN's Sustainable Development Goals**
- **aimed to prevent or mitigate climate change**

The Trust exists to protect the amenities of Bath for public benefit. This project, adapting to new ways of working, has enabled BPT to continue to encourage and support the conservation, evolution and enhancement of Bath and its environs for the people that live and work in it, visit it or simply love it, within a framework appropriate to both its historic setting and its sustainable future. BPT's charitable objectives support UN sustainable development Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

Positive short-term public benefits have been the impact of our social media outreach which has provided news and information to BPT's online community. Accessible social media has provided the opportunity for social engagement and dialogue on climate change and sustainability during the project period. Our social media campaigns, in particular BPT's World Heritage Day online event on Instagram and Twitter aimed to connect people, Bath residents to their local environment and through the promotion of daily walks and photographing their 'best bits of Bath' – this meets the UN sustainable development Goal 3 Ensuring Healthy Lives and Promoting Wellbeing.

Online participation in local democracy and decision making resulted in positive influence on planning committee decisions and effective development management. Good decision making, and development management, planning and placemaking ultimately has long term social, environmental and economic benefits. BPT encouraged the LPA to allow the public to participate, refer to Caroline Kay statement to Planning Committee video clip BPT1.

The pre-application advice BPT gave through the project period has maintained a strong emphasis on the need for sensitively 'designed in' renewables, for example solar PV at Bath Quays North.

Through the project period the Trust has maintained an advice service to home owners on energy efficiency retrofits which has enabled listed building consent approvals and actions on sensitive listed building retrofits. (E.g. Lansdown Place East) with long term benefits as local best practice case studies and climate change mitigation.

The Trust has also begun to gather data on energy efficiency retrofits in the Bath area with a view to developing detailed best practice retrofit case studies with the assistance of a fully funded internship from the University of the West of England in the summer. This meets the UN sustainable development goal 4, quality education and lifelong learning, and goal Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

"During this Covid period the Trust have sought to continue to develop a strategic approach to heritage and climate change by helpfully beginning to look at how data might be captured in relation to the future implementation and success of schemes when applications have been made seeking to improve the energy efficiency of historic buildings whilst maintaining their significance."

Paula Freeland, Team Manager – Planning and Conservation B&NES Council

BPT's planning and conservation team is all female which supports the UN sustainable development Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. BPT refers to the current RTPI gender split which is 39% female, 61% male (RTPI Women in Planning report January 2020).

5. Community benefit

Please outline how the project has provided:

- **positive and constructive engagement and dialogue with local people and businesses**
- **a better quality of life for people, especially for disadvantaged communities**
- **tangible benefits for communities such as facilities, infrastructure, jobs, training etc**

Through the COVID crisis BPT has continued to provide a public service to the Bath community. Members of the public, local architects and developers have been able to access BPT's planning team for advice and support.

During the project period BPT has been proactive in using online platforms to maintain dialogue with local Councillors on a range of issues including climate change, planning application sites, and local decision making by Planning Committee.

BPT has been proactively engaged with B&NES Council/Bath BID (Business Improvement District) in response to COVID secure measures to help ensure that they have a positive impact on the environment of Bath.

By working remotely, using online platforms BPT has maintained engagement in pre-application and stakeholder consultation with the primary objective to engage in constructive dialogue which encourages and improves placemaking and design, which ultimately when built enhances local amenity, employment opportunities and quality of life for residents.

"Bath Preservation Trust is an important organisation that provides informative and constructive feedback on design. BPT regularly engages and challenges, taking a historic approach, new development opportunities that are proposed in the City of Bath."

Simon Gould, Mitchel Ely Gould Architects

In the project period BPT's increased social media, in particular Instagram has provided inclusive and accessible advice and information about Bath's historic environment and planning issues to rapidly growing number of followers. At the start of the project period (April) the number of followers was at around 1,000 growing to over 2,000 by June. Social media has provided the opportunity for engagement and dialogue on development sites, World Heritage site issues, climate change, sustainability and listed building maintenance.

BPT has secured a fully funded internship (July 2020) from the University of the West of England to provide graduate training over the summer and support activities within this project.

6. Leading practice

Please outline how the project:

- **is creative and innovative**
- **is an exemplar that is transferable across the UK**
- **promotes equality and diversity**

In the face of a dramatic drop in income and organisational challenge, BPT adapted rapidly to new ways of working which enabled a seamless continuity of service through remote and online working. We further enhanced the profile of our planning and conservation function through increased social media presence and engagement. In particular, Instagram has provided a platform for publishing creative content and community outreach which has been popular and well-received.

Remote methods of working have drawn relevant expertise together using online platforms, including encouraging and persuading B&NES Council (as LPA) to allow BPT to participate in Zoom Planning Committee meetings in person rather than have a Councillor read out statements from the public. Please refer to the general statement to B&NES video clip BPT1.

BPT's participation in planning in planning processes through the COVID crisis is transferable to local amenity societies, community organisations and LPAs elsewhere.