



Awards for Planning Excellence Case Study
Savills Wimborne Planning

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1. Team Background

The Savills Wimborne Planning ('WIPL') team is truly unique.

The team has undergone significant transformation recently, growing junior staff numbers and improving gender mix. Of the 18 people, 5 are women and 13 men, with an age spread from graduates to those in their 60s from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. For junior staff, the team is more balanced in a 50:50 ratio, showing the commitment to improving diversity in the long term and reflecting the local area.

Undoubtedly disruptive, COVID also brought us closer together. Despite working apart there are structured weekly team catch ups. Informal meetings are encouraged, with a bi-weekly virtual coffee morning and "pub" drinks on a Friday night. A step challenge was arranged to encourage people away from their desks and beach walks organised once group meetings were allowed.

This has fostered a strong team spirit, and contributes to an environment where everyone feels they can share thoughts and ideas. The variety of work ensures younger members are offered a wide experience and bi-annual appraisals focus on goal setting to ensure people work on projects they are passionate about.

Excellent parental leave is offered as standard and a well-supported return to work provided. A Diversity group has been established, focussing on delivering training and ongoing review of working practices to ensure they remain ahead of industry standard.

Positives of the pandemic experience have been retained, using technology to foster flexible working and provide a positive, inclusive environment.

2. Development and application of imaginative approaches and techniques to achieve high quality planning solutions.

The team prides itself on our high level of service and attention to detail. The Covid pandemic presented new challenges in regards to project delivery, stakeholder engagement and collaborative working which we have overcome with great success.

A recent example of the development and application of an imaginative approach to achieve high-quality planning solutions from the team is the Royal Bournemouth Hospital and Poole Hospital projects. Following a clinical services review, emergency and planned services were consolidated across the two sites, with Bournemouth becoming the key emergency centre and Poole the hospital for planned operations. This included a new maternity unit, pathology lab, entrance way and multi storey car park at Bournemouth and extensions to house new operating theatres in Poole. Both sites presented challenges, with tree retention and traffic generation a concern at Bournemouth and proximity to a listed building a challenge at Poole. In both cases, good design was key and challenging – by their nature hospital buildings are designed to be functional on the inside first. There was also significant public resistance to the changes, with the planning applications embroiled in wider concerns regarding clinical care provision and a vocal action group opposed the applications throughout, including opposition from some local ward Members. The projects also needed to be completed to tight timescales related to Government funding, meaning the planning work had to be efficient and effective. In the context of stretched local authority resource, there were added challenges of effectively engaging in the planning application process.

We also dedicated resource to the project, providing a single point of contact for the client and consultant team to ensure queries were dealt with effectively. The project team comprised director, senior and junior staff to make efficient use of the publicly-funded budget and provide valuable insight and experience.

We coordinated the stakeholder engagement ahead of the application submission, employing technological innovations such as VR representations of the development alongside traditional information boards to provide information clearly and in a timely fashion.

The planning solution focussed on engagement, with detailed liaison with the client to understand

the brief and with consultants to overcome challenges relating to design, tree retention and highways impact. We drew on experience from other projects locally to present ideas for transport solutions and engage with the highways authority. We coordinated design reviews to achieve the optimum solution for the projects which respected local context while being operationally functional. We also advised the client on the Section 106 process and conducted extensive document review of local authority documents to minimise the chance of judicial review.

Changes to the brief throughout the project also required flexibility and effective communication with stakeholders and the local authority. The detailed engagement meant the Poole Hospital application was approved as a delegated decision, while the Royal Bournemouth permission was achieved via a recommendation for approval at Planning Committee

3. Client/applicant/partners satisfaction with the service provided.

The team prides itself on consistently receive positive feedback from clients across projects, and seeks feedback at key project milestones to ensure continuous improvement and that the client is happy with the service. Feedback from staff on working practices is also encouraged to ensure the project team is supported. Recent client feedback includes the following:

Now that the Reg 19 submissions have been completed, Malcolm, John and I just wanted to thank you all for your hard work and contributions to ensure that we have submitted an excellent set of documents which clearly make our case for support of the allocation, whilst ensuring that we have the flexibility within the wording of the various policies to enable us to respond to market demand. Once again, we would like to thank you for your outstanding support. (Sally Fish, Wilky Property Group)

I just wanted to thank you for everything you've done to get this project over the line – as newbies to this the planning process seemed very daunting at first and you have made it simple, clear and as smooth as possible. The curveball from the council at the last minute was far from ideal and you ensured we were always kept abreast of progress and worked with John to provide a creative solution. We can't wait to get started on site! (Mark Bennett, Platinum Property Partners)

Aside from direct testimonials, the team work with a number of repeat clients such as Hall and Woodhouse brewing company, the Secretary of State for Defence and Pennyfarthing Homes who direct repeated projects to WIPL due to the high-quality of service, timeliness of results and ability to respond imaginatively to a brief. We believe our best tool is our best service - providing clients with a flexible, innovative and solution-based planning service means they will recommend and continue to use us.

4. Ability of planners to manage multi-disciplinary projects or to work within a multi-disciplinary environment

The team of qualified town planners and EIA coordinators work on many multidisciplinary projects, coordinating planning submissions and managing input from consultants and architects.

A recent example is the redevelopment of Steamer Point for residential use. Located in Christchurch, Dorset, the client acquired the site with lapsed outline planning permission for residential use. Due to the prominent clifftop location and adjacent Local Nature Reserve, we advised the client undertake pre-application advice to flush out potential issues and worked with a local consultancy to arrange a stakeholder engagement event.

Following extensive pre-application engagement we established LPA support for the proposed design, layout and materials of the development. However, during the planning process key officers changed post and issues were raised in regards to the location of a proposed apartment block, loss of trees on the site and impact on protected bat species.

WIPL undertook extensive engagement with the local authority on behalf of the client, arranging design workshops to establish an acceptable level of tree loss and layout of the development. Two

houses were removed, but the principle of the development was accepted in a manner that was commercially viable and attractive for the client. We then coordinated the consultant team reviews of the supporting information produced.

WIPL engaged with specialist consultants to develop an innovative solution to light spill concerns, offering smart glass to windows on the bat flight path and dusk-level lighting for the street to mitigate any impact on bats. We undertook extensive consultation with the local authority to ensure the proposed solution was acceptable to the LPA and for the client.

Combined, these interventions meant the development did not need to be redesigned, saving the client time and expense, and we secured recommendation for approval at Planning Committee. A further example is for a new Park and Ride at Tipner in Portsmouth, where the liaison between our EIA coordinators and planners was integral to securing recommendation for approval. Allocated in the Local Plan, the proposed development extended the existing parking to encourage green travel into the city and improve air quality. An EIA was undertaken and submitted with the planning application, and WIPL arranged the consultant team and worked with them to assess the likely effects of the development and suggest mitigation where appropriate. Extensive pre-application engagement also ensured the LPA were supportive of the proposal ahead of submission.

During the course of the planning application concerns were raised by Highways England regarding traffic flows on the wider motorway network, and we arranged meetings and consultant briefings to discuss concerns, propose additional modelling and ultimately resolve the queries to the satisfaction of HE and the client.

The adjacent landowner also raised concerns regarding sunlight / daylight, requiring WIPL to work closely with the consultant team and client to model effects of the proposed development and engage with the landowner to mediate a potential dispute.

Outstanding concerns were resolved and WIPL secured a recommendation for approval at Planning Committee

5. A demonstrable commitment to EDI sits at the heart of our definition of a high level service

WIPL has a strong commitment to EDI, with a Diversity and Inclusion group set up to discuss initiatives and keep the team abreast of best practice. This includes arranging events, sharing training and liaison with the wider office.

The group has presented at local schools and careers fairs to engage with local communities, demonstrate the work we do and highlight the planning profession.

Blind CVs are used for graduate recruitment which ensures we recruit those who are the best fit for the team without prejudice and in the past four years we have had a 50:50 split in male and female graduates joining.

Team members are offered generous maternity/paternity packages ahead of industry best practice, and fully supported in returning to the work place. Flexible working is offered and enhanced since Covid, with team members provided flexibility in where they work and when they log on.

The commitment to EDI is also reflected in our advice to clients, where we ensure we work with people and projects similarly aligned – recent examples include the design of inclusive media and teaching space at the Bournemouth University Gateway buildings, where innovative design ensured spaces were accessible. The Bournemouth and Poole Hospital projects improve care provision for

the whole community and all residential projects we work on include a commitment to accessible housing.

In public consultations for recent projects we have designed the process to be inclusive – using digital platforms such as websites to provide materials to a wider audience and arranging virtual meetings with stakeholders and ourselves, the client and the consultant team to ensure no one was prejudiced through lack of information during lockdown or due to isolation. However, to ensure the events were truly inclusive a telephone service is also offered and consultees written to as well as via email in case of a lack of internet access.

6. Commitment to staff development, business improvements and active participation in professional and educational activities

The RTPI and IEMA Professional Development Plans are integral to team planning and staff development, taken into consideration as a key part of the bi-annual appraisal process where training requests are proposed and considered in this context.

The team also draws on the wider Savills training programme, with webinars and courses available to all staff. Partnership with Interactive Workshops training company provides management and networking training at a high quality, virtually and in-person. If an outside training course or networking event is deemed useful, all team members are welcome to attend and requesting training and feedback is actively encouraged.

Project work is peer-reviewed at all levels including directors and feedback is provided by project leads throughout their work on schemes to provide continuous improvement and practical feedback to foster ongoing learning.

The team are ISO-accredited and audited annually to ensure a high level of service is provided to clients and staff in regards to project management and training.

Two team members are members of the RTPI Young Planners Dorset committee and have arranged local events to build networks and ensure the team is represented at this level. Another sits on the Women in Property Solent committee, arranging events and training, fostering networks and raising awareness with the wider team of gender issues. Directors are also members of the Academy of Urbanism and we have a long-standing arrangement with Southampton Solent University to make presentations to their students. We also work closely with Bournemouth University to host events for the local development community, recently looking at green innovations and techniques. Team members and clients are invited to share knowledge and build relationships. The pandemic forced the team to adopt best practice in terms of digital meetings and collaborative working and the efficiencies this has provided will continue once restrictions ease. However, the team is mindful of the value of face-to-face interaction and is encouraging staff to seek out in-person training and hosting events in September. For junior staff, an annual APC event is hosted for team members and clients to share best practice, discuss submissions with mentors and hear from successful candidates.

WIPL also provides all staff with the opportunity for one charity day per year, used recently to raise money for local children's and air ambulance charities through hikes, swims and physical challenges.

7. Why should your team win this award

Like everyone, our team has undergone a significant period of change and disruption since the start of the year. The way we have pulled together to ensure the outstanding service to clients has not

suffered, new joiners are welcomed and existing staff appreciated has been extraordinary and we are confident the spirit this has fostered will long continue. We have emerged from the Covid pandemic stronger, we a renewed sense of togetherness which is reflected in feedback from clients, staff and the wider business. In the face of staff turnover, Directors have created an environment where the team can be honest about challenges they face and where we can celebrate in each other's success as it happens. The team deserves to win the award for their resilience, positive attitude and innovation in overcoming the challenges of a difficult year; looking after each other and our clients and making WIPL a truly enjoyable place to work.