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New Planner is available on subscription to non members of PIA NSW at a cost of $88 per annum, GST inclusive.

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ISSN 1324-8669 PP a233-867-00015
PIA NSW has released an updated position statement on the NSW Planning Reforms.

1. PIA continues to be committed to the reform of the planning system in NSW. It is essential for the momentum behind reform to be sustained. Good planning is the only option for the community to achieve its aspirations and for NSW, to successfully chart a sustainable future for the environment, housing, jobs, industry and infrastructure. The current Act is flawed and cannot adequately realise these aspirations. A new Planning Act and systemic reform is imperative.

2. The reform process to deliver a new Planning Act must not stall. Strong leadership needs to be applied so that the reform process continues until resolution. Good leadership acknowledges that some trade-offs may be necessary so long as the fundamental tenets of the Bill are retained.

3. PIA remains supportive of these key elements:
   a. The primacy of upfront strategic planning to manage sustainable growth, development and conservation in a way that reflects and balances State and local community interests;
   b. Delivering a hierarchy of interdependent strategic plans – state, regional, sub regional and local;
   c. Embedding meaningful community consultation in all strategic planning and to an appropriate level in development assessment processes;
   d. Adequate financing and timely delivery of infrastructure;
   e. Streamlined development approval tracks according to risk and complexity;

   These elements are consistent with the primary components of PIA's position as set out in our submission on the White Paper dated June 30th 2013.

4. PIA has no objection to the Upper House amendment to the Planning Bill in relation to affordable housing. PIA has strongly advocated for measures to assist and support housing affordability.

5. PIA has consistently argued the case for reform of development assessment to restore the concept of process complexity, time and cost being proportionate to the risk and complexity profile of the development, which we contended is often not the case under the current system. We support the restoration of code assessment to the Act subject to it being implemented only in areas where proper strategic planning and community consultation has occurred, generally limiting it to growth areas (to be defined) and where Councils wish to implement it.

6. PIA urges the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure to pursue the passage of the Planning Bill through the Parliament as a matter of urgency. PIA urges the Parliament to support the passage of the Bill with the restoration of Code Assessable Development subject to the preconditions outlined above. PIA is willing to explain our position and provide whatever support we can to the Minister and any and all other Members of Parliament, in the interests of realizing the planning reforms so urgently needed by this state.

PIA continues to advocate for a fresh, more positive and transparent culture across all participants in the planning process and PIA will continue to work to ensure the planning profession is recognized and supported through lifelong learning and professional practice.

PIA urges resolution be sought as soon as possible to the deadlock over the mining provisions to restore certainty to both the industry and affected communities. Significant consultation and negotiation with all stakeholders is required in order to reach a workable compromise for this important industry and its host communities.

PIA continues to advocate for a fresh, more positive and transparent culture across all participants in the planning process and PIA will continue to work to ensure the planning profession is recognized and supported through lifelong learning and professional practice.
Welcome to 2014! With the NSW economy showing signs of life, particularly in the development and construction sector, together with (hopefully!) a new planning system being rolled out, I think we can look forward to a particularly busy and exciting year for the planning profession.

I would like to begin my first Column as NSW President by acknowledging two people who have made a tremendous contribution to PIA NSW over recent years.

Firstly, Sarah Hill, the outgoing President; whose enthusiasm, energy and professionalism in the role over the last 2 years has been remarkable. She will be a hard act to follow! She has championed a number of causes, most particularly in the areas of cultural change and education. I recall Sarah’s first ‘speech’ to the Divisional Committee as President 2 years ago about her desire to raise the issue of cultural change in planning and agitate to improve that culture. Through her efforts since that time she has succeeded in having the topic of culture change front and centre in most discussions about planning reform in NSW (and nationally). There is still much to be done on improving the culture of planning in NSW, however, Sarah has gone a long way to ensuring that it will be a focus of our attention and action in the foreseeable future.

Secondly, Robyn Vincin, NSW Executive Officer of PIA for the last 7 years, has decided to move on from that role. I have described Robyn on many occasions as the glue that binds so much of NSW PIA’s activities together. Much of PIA’s recent success in the whole range of organisational, financial and advocacy areas can be put down to her efforts. She is taking up residence in Victoria and I am sure all PIA members will wish her well in whatever she chooses to do in her ‘post-PIA’ life. She leaves the NSW Division in much better shape than she found it and she will be a great loss to PIA. The National Executive is currently recruiting for a replacement.

Through the efforts of Sarah and Robyn and others on past Committees, PIA is now seen as having a strong and credible voice, representing the planning profession at the highest levels of government and other industry and professional associations.

I sometimes hear the opinion expressed that PIA is too close to the Government, mainly when it comes to our support for the recent NSW planning reform initiatives.

In my view, we have supported the broad principles of planning reform because they have largely reflected the principles PIA has advocated since well before to the election of the current government. PIA supported greater emphasis on strategic planning informed by meaningful and robust community engagement, streamlined and proportionate development assessment tracks, adequately financed infrastructure, enhanced e-planning and overall cultural change. I believe that most members of PIA would support these principles.

Support for the broad principles does not mean we will support every detail contained in the Bill. In fact we have expressed our concerns over a number of aspects. We will continue to advocate a position that we consider represents the best interests of our profession and planning in the State. If the Government accepts our recommendations we will express our support the Government, not for partisan or other political purposes, but simply in recognition of good planning policy and practice.

I intend to make a major theme of my Presidency that of member involvement in the activities of the Institute. The profile and credibility that PIA now has means that we have the ability to actively influence the direction of planning policy and practice in NSW. This gives all members a ‘louder voice’, than most of us would have as individuals. If there are members out there who disagree with PIA’s position on aspects of planning reform or anything else, I would say, get involved in the various Chapters and Networks and seek to influence the direction of PIA policy by force of argument.

The next couple of years are going to be hugely important for our profession. We need to take the opportunities given to us by Government and others to advocate our view on the shape of planning in NSW. This ranges across all areas of our professional activities, not just strategic and statutory, but also related areas of economic development, urban design, transport planning, planning education and others.

The NSW Executive Committee and Divisional Committees of PIA cannot respond to every request for advice on all issues. We need the involvement of as many of you as possible to enable us to:

• Tap into the huge range of expertise across all of the disparate areas of ‘planning’
• Spread the load: there are 16 members on the Divisional Committee, all but the EO being volunteers with ‘day jobs’. We cannot do justice to every policy initiative. We need as many members as possible to assist in formulating our responses.
• Ensure that the positions expressed by PIA are truly reflective of the opinions of our membership, not just a few people on a particular committee

Finally, I would like to introduce the new executive team for the next 2 years. My Vice Presidents, Scott Anson, Marjorie Ferguson and Stephen Gow cover the spectrum of local and State Government and urban and regional experience. Together with Sarah Hill who retains an important role on the Executive as Immediate Past President, I believe the Executive is more than capable of providing strong leadership for the NSW Division over the next 2 years.

I look forward to catching up with as many of you as possible in my new role – don’t hesitate to contact me directly about anything relevant to the profession – or to just say hello!
Executive Officer’s report

Robyn Vincin, PIA NSW Executive Officer

As this edition of New Planner goes to press we are a matter of weeks away from the PIA National Congress in Sydney. The annual Congress is not only an opportunity to hear the latest thinking in planning; it is also an important opportunity to connect and to reconnect with other professionals in the planning arena. I hope you have all registered to attend.

Wherever we have held PIA events in NSW and whenever we have undertaken feedback surveys, the very strong purpose for attending these events has been the opportunity to network. In a very competitive ‘professional development’ space, the unique difference for PIA has been the networking and the very strong focus on coming together as professionals rather than competitors. This sharing is one of the principal values of being a Member of a professional association.

This support becomes critical as all NSW planners embrace the change agenda in 2014 and beyond. As you will read elsewhere in this issue, PIA NSW has reiterated our support for planning reform; calling for the agenda to be moved forward.

We will shortly release a professional development and networking program for the remainder of the year. This will to some extent be influenced by the current planning reforms and our commitment to support professionals in the rollout of any change. Watch out for our annual planners’ forum, which will be held in the Hunter Valley in the second half of the year; the annual Awards for Excellence in November and the Planners’ Dinner in Sydney in May. Our regional committees have a calendar of events underway; the Young Planners have their Small Bars program and an exciting “meet the experts” evening in preparation; there will be some one day professional development programs rolling out during the year. Please read your fortnightly eNews and visit our website for updates.

As this is my final New Planner column I want to take a moment to acknowledge the commitment of a number of people - the Members past and present of the NSW Division Committee; regional Branch Convenors and Committees; the Young Planners, Consultant Planners; the LGPN and the Chapter Groups who have found the time and the energy to engage and to progress the profile of PIA and planning in NSW. A special thank you to the large number of individual Members who have stepped up to provide input to submissions, attendance at meetings, or who have been an invaluable sounding board as we have sought to make sure PIA is at the table. I would also like to acknowledge the sponsors who have supported our work over the years; your contributions have given us the needed support to deliver high quality events and products.

New Planner continues to serve as an important voice for the profession and it has been exciting to watch the increase in ‘unsolicited’ contributions in recent times. Thank you to the regular contributors, the sponsors, advertisers and importantly to Editors and Editorial Committee, past and present.

Here’s hoping your planning year will be a good one!

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Infrastructure Matters
Infrastructure costs benchmarking and what it means for planners.

Greg New, Director, GLN Planning

The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) is currently undertaking a project on the costs of local infrastructure typically included in section 94 contributions plans. At the time of writing, public submissions on the draft report titled Local Infrastructure Benchmark Costs, were still being accepted. The final report is due at the end of April 2014.

The main purpose of the project is to develop benchmark costs that can be used to standardise infrastructure costs in local infrastructure plans. The draft report provides costs on 80 local infrastructure items. It also provides advice on approaches to estimating costs for infrastructure items that could not be benchmarked.

The benchmarking exercise will affect planners and other professionals involved in preparing and reviewing infrastructure plans and planning agreements.

The implications of IPART’s work are unclear, but could include:

• Local infrastructure plans that are based on IPART’s benchmarked costs may be approved in a shorter time frame.
• Impartial data will be available on one of the main components of determining developer contribution rates – costs. This may lead to more robust and transparent works schedules included in the infrastructure plans.
• A higher level of consistency in infrastructure plans across the state, and councils will be required to provide justification where they vary from the benchmarked costs.
• It provides a starting point for councils to consider what it costs to provide different development-related infrastructure. This can lead to better choices about prioritising or arranging infrastructure inclusions in order to contain developer costs.

Overall, IPART’s work should lead to more rigour in the compilation of costs in infrastructure plans.

IPART canvassed its draft findings at an industry roundtable in early December.

Some important issues about the benchmarking were raised:

• The costs benchmarking project does not do anything to address the issue of needing to find various sources of revenue to fund infrastructure, in an environment where there is little political desire to increase taxes. The contributions gap is to be removed, but how will the extra costs be funded? Reallocation of some costs is to be achieved through the Planning Bill’s Regional Growth Fund, and the detail of how the new cost sharing will work should emerge in 2014.

• The benchmarking appears most useful in the preparation of plans for greenfield areas. It will be more difficult to have useful baselines in place for infill and brownfield areas. For example, the quality and standard of streetscape works, foot paving materials, etc. currently vary between municipalities. It will become very complex having a whole set of benchmarked costs for different standards of the same asset.

• Developer and council representatives at the roundtable raised that, while cost benchmarks can be useful, developers will be more concerned with the nexus, apportionment, and the planning benchmarks driving the infrastructure plan inclusions. That is, how much of the roads, or open space, or community facilities costs will be allocated back to the developer? Penrith City Council suggested the two conversations – about costs benchmarks and planning benchmarks – should be undertaken concurrently. This is a sensible approach.

• Will benchmarked costs assist in reducing turnaround times for DP&I and IPART to review and approve draft infrastructure plans? Currently many contributions plans are approved well after the date of rezoning, which has led to delays in approvals of the first subdivision DAs. Costs benchmarking will be of value only if it improves, rather than protracts, the plan making process.

• The ‘specification trade-off’ should be addressed – i.e. the relative merit of assets having higher upfront capital costs and potentially lower recurrent costs versus lower capital costs / higher recurrent costs. IPART could resolve the different views on this issue.

• Infrastructure costs vary significantly depending on the geology and topography of the land, making costs benchmarking difficult, or at least limiting its usefulness.

• The evolving cost of land is a major issue. It is impossible for development contributions to cover all the cost of land required for infrastructure over the life of the plan, because its market value changes so much. The value of the land increases as the development progresses, so estimated acquisition costs based on existing (at start of plan) market value will be below the actual cost down the track when the land value increases. Some clear direction from IPART as to how to address this issue would be welcome.

• Benchmarked costs need to be promoted as a guide, not as just a minimum. Councils should be encouraged to include reduced infrastructure costs wherever this is feasible. Efficient delivery of infrastructure needs to be the goal, rather than gaming the system to arrive at an unnecessarily high contribution rate.

Some comment on consultation: IPART’s consultation process so far has been very good. The roundtable was well planned and appeared to me to be a good example of how to effectively consult on a highly technical matter. This included:

• The agenda and draft report were distributed to stakeholders well in advance of the meeting
• Brief introduction of the topic by IPART secretariat
• Brief comments on the issue from different representatives on the reference group
• Questions and comments from the floor
• All of the above being effectively chaired by one of the IPART members
• Preparation of a transcript and placement on website within 5 days

Inclusive and meaningful consultation happens when it draws out involvement that might not have otherwise have occurred. A measure of the success of the consultation was that there appeared to be people who came to the meeting merely to listen to the discussion; but in the end also voiced their opinion when they hadn’t planned to. This can happen when stakeholder meetings are well run and organised. IPART’s consultation approach enhanced and added value to their project.
The Productivity Commission recently released the first of a series of reports it is proposing to prepare to help inform the production of the next Commonwealth Government’s Intergenerational Report. The focus of this research paper is how Australian society will cope with an ageing population.

As an independent researcher and advisor on social, economic and environmental issues to the Commonwealth Government, the Productivity Commission seeks to review contemporary issues likely to impact the welfare of the Australian community.

2005 Report

In 2005 the Productivity Commission published a report urging governments to take timely action to address the

consequences of demographic change as a result of the ageing of the Australian population in order to avoid the need for “big bang” policy interventions at a later date.

It is now four years since the last Intergenerational Report was published in 2010 and according to the Productivity Commission interest in taking action is waning. The Commission concludes that there does not appear to be any appetite for genuine reform.

Australia’s Ageing Population

By 2060 the Australian population is likely to be 38 million (15 million more than it was in 2012). Sydney and Melbourne will each grow by more than 3 million to be cities with a population in excess of 7 million.

Those over 75 years of age will rise to 4 million by 2060. This will represent an increase in the percentage of the total population from 6.4% in 2012 to 14.4% in 2060. This will place considerable pressures on governments at all levels who will be called upon to provide more age friendly infrastructure.

Budget pressures for governments will grow as expenditure rises in the areas of aged care infrastructure, health services and pensions. This is illustrated in Figure 8 which has been extracted from the Research Paper. This figure shows expenditure by all Australian governments in the period 2011 – 12 by age cohort. The dramatic rise in expenditure required to support older Australians has serious financial implications for an ageing community.

Workforce Impacts

The workforce implications of an ageing population have the potential to produce a dramatic impact on Australia’s competitiveness in an increasingly global economy. The Productivity Commission is forecasting lower productivity levels and labour shortages in the years leading up to 2060. Overall labour supply per capita is projected to contract by 5% during this period.

Conclusions

It is important to be aware that an ageing population is in fact a positive outcome for a society. The Productivity Commission refers to it as “a desirable side product of success.” A child born in Australia in 2012 has a life expectancy of 91 years (male) and 94 years (female), which is something to be proud of.

However we need to recognise that an ageing population brings with it major economic and social transformations at a time when productivity rates are falling in Australia and the labour market is contracting.

I have previously written in Planning Perspectives about the ageing of the population and referred to decreasing household sizes, fewer households with children and a rapid increase in single person households as all having dramatic implications for how we plan for the future. Smaller lots, higher densities, more age friendly infrastructure and innovative aged care delivery options need to be a priority in the planning strategies we prepare.

If the Productivity Commission is correct and there is little interest being shown by various levels of government in taking action now to address the consequences of an ageing population, then the “big bang” policy initiatives needed in future will not only be more costly to implement, they will struggle to deliver the outcomes required notwithstanding the inescapable demographic trends we have been observing for decades.
The NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure launched its Urban Conversations series last year with a forum involving the Grattan Institute’s Jane-Frances Kelly and Jason Roberts of Better Blocks. Their talks threw into relief the challenges facing authorities when engaging communities about planning for growing cities and regional centers.

Kelly gave us a wakeup call on the urgency of educating and engaging broadly about the drivers shaping cities, including the need for infrastructure, growing locational inequities and rapidly declining housing affordability. She suggested that to address these issues a new kind of conversation is required. It is in essence a grown up dialogue about the realities of change, the trade-offs to be made, the benefits to be gained and the unfavorable consequences to be avoided.

However, the way we communicate about strategic planning is often incomprehensible to many but the initiated. Our plans are filled with vague arcs across maps, indefinite bubbles indicating growth, dizzying dwelling numbers and reassuring but vague pleas to vibrancy and livability, all illustrated with pictures of the latest Chippendale café.

These ways of communicating bear little relationship to everyday frames of reference. They fail to paint a meaningful picture for the people living or working in one of those bubbles. Impertinent questions like ‘What will my place be like?’ or ‘How and when will these changes occur?’ are brushed off until, to use a stock phrase, ‘subsequent more detailed phases of the planning process’.

Roberts’ presentation focused on a different spatial level. It was about people claiming their neighborhoods, and the sense of ownership brought about by a guerrilla intervention of placing six trees in a rundown shopping strip. The ‘better blockers’ weren’t engaging in dialogue about density, height and FSR. They were busy planting trees to improve a dusty corner, creating spots for people to sit and talk, or repositioning bus stops to locations that just made better sense.

It struck me that one of the problems we have when engaging communities around planning is the disconnect between the two spatial levels discussed by Kelly and Roberts. There always seem to be parallel conversations happening between the strategic and neighborhood levels.

We can make a deal with the planning devil and take it as an article of faith that, once a strategy is signed off, livability and essential urban infrastructure will follow. Conversely we can happily ‘placemake’ at the neighborhood level. But when it comes to those hated impositions like apartment blocks, rail lines and mobile phone towers, the local discussion either comes too late or is so local it avoids confronting the imperatives of growth.

We need to find a better way of having important conversations to develop long term, high level plans for our cities. We also need to accommodate the finer grain Roberts is working with – the attachment to place, the need to have some ability to shape where we live.

The conversation must bring together the two spatial realms at the right time. Neighbourhood planning can’t be about abstract values or blandishments to amenity. It needs to reflect the fleshed out aspirations of people about where and how they live. It is doubtful whether this can be undertaken at a metropolitan or subregional level. It is necessarily a local discussion that must filter up at the right time rather than too late to inform the larger strategic one.

Until these parallel conversations meaningfully inform each other, strategic planning will continue to encounter local opposition and become eroded by exceptions. By admitting local perspectives it may be possible to develop strategies that are accepted as an outcome of active, informed and collective choices, as opposed to being resented and misunderstood impositions.
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It is well known that one of the objects of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979 [NSW] (EPA Act) is "to provide increased opportunity for public involvement and participation in environmental planning and assessment". However, there has been much litigation since the EPA Act commenced in 1980 regarding what is practically involved in providing for community participation and what requirements are mandatory.

Mr Lester brought proceedings against the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure (Minister) claiming that an approval to a proposed modification to a major project approval (under the now repealed Part 3A of the EPA Act) was invalid on the grounds that the annexures to the environmental assessment were not made publicly available.

Ashton Coal Operations Pty Ltd (Ashton) which operates a coal mining project in the Upper Hunter Valley, lodged a modification request accompanied by an environmental assessment report. The EPA Act requires that the Director General make "requests for modifications of approvals given by the Minister" publicly available.

The documents accompanying the modification request were posted on the Department of Planning and Infrastructure’s website, along with links to the 8 appendices to the environmental assessment. However, the link for appendices 1 to 4 did not work. The page containing the links did refer to the name and email address of a departmental planner who could be contacted for "further information".

The Minister subsequently granted approval to the modification request, subject to conditions. Mr Lester challenged the Minister’s approval of the modification, arguing that the modification was invalid because all the appendices for the environmental assessment had not been made publicly available.

Were the appendices publicly available?

The Court considered that appendices 1 to 4 had not been made publicly available. To be “publicly available” required that the appendices must be able to be viewed on the website when accessed. It is not sufficient to merely identify an action a person might take (e.g., contact the planner) to be able to view a document in the future.

Further, making a document available only to, and on request of, an individual member of the public is not making the document “publicly available”, that is, to the public at large. The notice on the Department’s website also did not state that the appendices could in fact be obtained by contacting the planner.

Did the environment assessment include appendices?

The Court considered, both as a matter of general principle and on the specific facts, that an environmental assessment includes its appendices. There was no justification in Part 3A, or in the form or terms of the environmental assessment, for making some but not other parts of the environmental assessment publicly available.

Outcome

Mr Lester may have won some battles, but he ultimately lost the war. The Court held that environmental assessments accompanying requests for modifications of approval under Part 3A were not required to be made publicly available under s 75X[2][f] of the Act. Section 75X[2][f] only required “requests for modifications of approvals” to be made publicly available, not other documents accompanying the request.

Accordingly, there was no requirement to make the environmental assessment publicly available, and the Minister’s modification of the approval was not invalid.

Would non-compliance invalidate the modification?

The Court found that a breach of s 75X[2][f] would in any case not have rendered the Minister’s modification invalid – the Act did not intend that the Minister’s power to modify an approval under s75W be conditional upon a request being made publicly available. There was no requirement for public consultation or public submissions to be considered by the Minister.

The Court also rejected Mr Lester’s argument that the objects of the EPA Act require by implication that any environmental assessment upon which the Minister relied in granting a modification should be made publicly available.

To take-away

An increase in community participation is a big ticket item in the NSW proposed planning reforms. However, it is clear from the facts in this case that there are some practical challenges involved in implementing aspirations for community participation through an online format. Effective online systems will become even more critical as technology progresses further toward online or “e-planning”. Further it is also clear that requirements may not always be mandatory and it will depend on the particular requirements in the EPA Act.■
In October 2013, the NSW Government submitted a Bill that would introduce a new planning system for New South Wales. A key premise of the Bill was to more effectively engage with the community in the early, strategic planning stage and to promote transparent decision making. The Bill was ultimately defeated in the Upper House, leaving the Government with the option of either supporting the revised Bill when it returns to the Lower House or withdrawing it entirely.

One of the issues emanating from the decision to revoke the Bill is the ongoing status of community engagement within the planning process. Although elements of the Bill concerned local community groups regarding local development decision making processes, the Bill did promote the importance of early and on-going community participation in the strategic planning process, as well as reinforcing that the planning system is just that: a “system” of many parts which depend on one another to function effectively. The Bill at least confirmed that community engagement processes are an integral component of the planning system in NSW.

In this article, Urbis’ stakeholder engagement specialists examine the potential implications of the defeat of the Bill for community engagement in the planning process.

The Planning Reform Bill

One of the key reforms proposed in the original Bill was the streamlining of the approvals process to accelerate housing supply. Referred to as “code assessment”, this component of the Bill was meant to fast-track those developments that satisfy pre-approved performance criteria, thereby taking such developments out of the traditional planning assessment process. The view taken by the Government is that if the community has already been consulted in relation to “code assessment development” and the development accords with the performance criteria, then there is no need for additional consultation to take place on that development. The State Government’s view is that it is sufficient that neighbours are “informed” of the fact that an application for code assessment development has been received by council (Clayton Utz, 2013).

Proponents of the Bill, including the NSW Property Council and Urban Development Institute of Australia, support “code assessment” as an effective way of streamlining the development approvals process. On the other hand, planning and stakeholder engagement professionals and some community-based groups, particularly the Better Planning Network, are concerned that the community would be precluded from the decision making process later in the planning cycle. The Bill was defeated in the NSW Upper House in December 2013 and withdrawn by the Government, which the Better Planning Network described as an “immense win for hundreds of thousands of people in NSW who will retain their rights to have a say on development ... in their neighbourhood” (Sydney Morning Herald, 2013).

Effective Community Engagement: Lessons from the Metro Strategy

Urbis recently facilitated a community engagement process with NSW Planning and Infrastructure to inform the finalisation of the draft Metropolitan Strategy. A series of focus groups took place to supplement the extensive community consultation process that informed the development of the draft Strategy. The aim of the project was to test the draft Strategy’s approach; further explore key values and identities at the sub-regional level; develop understanding of the key concepts, and develop strategies for ongoing engagement and communication. In this regard, the project aligned well with the community consultation related aims and intentions of the Bill and its associated Community Participation Charter.

The focus groups were recruited, designed and undertaken with a specific deliberative emphasis, which required the development of a random representative sample, from which to select a demographic and attitudinal mix. Six focus groups were held in each of the sub-regions, with a final Sydney-wide focus group included three to four representatives from each sub-regional group. This required the design of discussion questions that did not seek consensus, but encouraged a range of responses, particularly individual perspectives, group discussion, cross-fertilisation of ideas and individual reflection.

Some of the key findings from the focus group sessions were:

- a shift from a locality-specific view to a broader Sydney-wide perspective by the final focus group as discussions progressed;
- an agreement that the process helped to inform how participants considered planning issues. A small number suggested the process had actually changed their view on planning for future growth. Almost all participants suggested others would benefit from similar engagement;
- a significant alignment with the vision, outcome areas and objectives outlined in the Draft Metropolitan Strategy for Sydney;
- an agreed desire for much of the State Government’s vision, especially balanced growth, productivity and prosperity, and accessibility and connectivity.

These results led to the recommendation that ongoing community engagement strategies should be adopted by the DP&I, with a particular focus on:

- educative engagement: providing people with information early to inform subsequent engagement;
- deliberative engagement: allowing a range of views to be discussed and tested with peers in similar forums;
- online communications: employing interactive websites and social media to disseminate information and communications;
- clear and accessible communication: avoiding jargon and using visual aids and including collateral in languages other than English in locations across the community (e.g. display booths in public spaces such as train stations).

Participants recommended that future implementation needs to be supported by strong partnerships and working relationships between State and Local Government, as well as between subregional Local Governments. The engagement process highlighted a strong community desire to understand the ramifications of decisions beyond their immediate area and to be involved in regional-level planning decision-making. These findings support a case for maintaining the central premise of the Bill: ongoing education, discourse and
engagement on planning decision-making through all stages of the planning process.

Community Engagement and Participation within the Planning Process: Attempting Double Loop Learning Outcomes

Systems theory looks at the world in which objects are interrelated to each other (Whitchurch and Constantine, 1993). It is useful to understand community engagement as an integral collaborative component of a functioning “system” – in this case the NSW planning system. The Metropolitan Strategy consultation process helped reinforce the notion that community engagement should be integral to the development of plans, policies and processes contained in the planning system.

Magin (2007) states that there are a number of methodological ground rules that need to be adhered to in order for community engagement to be a collaborative component of a planning system. These include open and inclusive structures and processes; policy agents [community representatives, government representatives, business stakeholders etc.] that are autonomous and free to express their views without fear of retribution; mutual respect and understanding of all other agents’ experiences, views and aspirations; no hidden agendas among policy agents; and a commitment to consensus-building rather than power-grabbing. Magin states that by engaging in open, collaborative and critically reflective debate, policy agents become self-learning entities.

Yet, for community engagement to be an effective decision making component, a co-evolutionary process of detection and correction should be encouraged. This perspective recognises that adaptation requires learning rather than simply participation, and specifically a form of learning which is collective in nature (Collins and Ison, 2009). Such learning involves the detection and correction of error. Traditionally within a rational policy making process, most agents tend to look for another strategy that will address the “error” within existing government frameworks: this is called single-loop learning (Smith, 2013). An alternative response is to question the governing variables themselves which may have contributed to the error and to subject them to critical scrutiny. Argyris and Schon describe this as double-loop learning, which can lead to an alteration in the governing variables and, thus, a shift in the way in which strategies and consequences are framed (Smith, 2013).

In relating these theoretical constructs to the practical Metropolitan Strategy consultations, many community participants commented on the value and usefulness of looking at issues from a city-wide perspective later on in the process, rather than from a specific locality perspective only earlier in the process. Some of the groups initially found it very difficult to move from a local area focus to a broader and more strategic focus at the beginning of the process. The focus groups did not set out to change people’s views, but the process was designed to encourage better informed discussion, deliberation and ultimately education. The final focus group participants were therefore asked to reflect individually on what they had learned, how they considered this, and any effect on their views. About half said that the process had reaffirmed their views, and one in five said they had changed their views.

6. Inclusiveness: Planning authorities are to make decisions in an open and transparent way and provide the community with reasons for their decisions (including how community views have been taken into account).

These principles provide a good framework for open and inclusive engagement structures and processes to be developed from beginning to end that result in reflective debate, education and potential double-loop learning outcomes.

Conclusion

The status of community engagement and consultation within the planning process is once again being questioned in light of the defeat of the 2013 Planning Reform Bill. The Bill did promote the importance of early and on-going community participation in the strategic planning process, even though concerns were raised that community participation was precluded from later stages of the decision making process. Urbis’ work with NSW Planning and Infrastructure on the Metropolitan Strategy consultation processes confirmed the effectiveness of community engagement processes that facilitate ongoing education, discourse and engagement through all stages of the planning process. It is vital that the momentum created by placing the Community Participation Charter at the forefront of the Planning Review Bill is not lost.

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The release of the White Paper has created a significant amount of discussion about the role of community engagement in the Planning System, particularly in regards to how the community should be engaged and where the community should have influence in the planning process. It is therefore an opportune time to reflect on how community engagement has evolved over the past few years, particularly with the increasing use of technology.

What’s Old

One of the objectives of the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979, was to “provide increased opportunity for public involvement and participation in environmental planning and assessment.” In 2010 a discussion paper was prepared by the Environmental Defenders Office to investigate how the Community view the current planning system in order to recommend ways that the Department of Planning (now Department of Planning and Infrastructure) could reconnect with the community. One of the key criticisms of the planning system was the discrepancy between the Department and the community’s definition of engagement. Whilst the DOP focussed on providing information to the community – as stated in the objective of the Act – the Community wanted more consultation. As stated by one workshop participant “I’d like to challenge the word consultation. It’s not consultation, it’s presentation. It’s not real consultation.”

Tools typically used to engage with the Community were very much focussed on disseminating information and the Community were invited to write a submission if they had any concerns or comments. Generally, these engagement tools comprised of Council newsletters, letters of notification prepared by Council, Town Hall style meetings and invitations to view Council documents held at Council offices or the local library. Although this list is definitely not exhaustive, it does demonstrate that consultation very much focussed about providing information and generally those engaged were already aware or involved with the Planning System and had the time to attend Council meetings or obtain documents from Council. Consequently, engagement with the Planning System typically occurred with a relatively small sample of people, a group who could not really be considered representative of the broader community. Anyone who has attended a Council meeting would have noticed that these meetings generally attract a certain demographic. Whilst some would argue, that this representation is simply because the rest of the Community (and typically younger members) are not politically engaged or interested, we would tend to argue the opposite. This Community, which is generally termed the ‘hard to reach’ is very much engaged and politically active, they are just not utilising the traditional methods of communication with Council or the Department of Planning. This group is less likely to write a submission but more likely to start a Facebook petition, they might not attend a Town Hall Meeting but will write a blog or participate in an online forum. This is where the White Paper has promise.

What’s New

The White Paper reflects a definite shift in how Planners undertake engagement with the Community. The Community Participation Charter recognises that there are differing levels of community participation depending on how much influence the Community are able to have on the final Plan. This level of influence is generally determined by the proponent of the Plan (be it private developer or the Government), the scope of the plan being prepared and the potential impact of the planning decision. It is anticipated that the Community Participation Plan, to be prepared by each Planning Authority will reflect the International Association of Public Participation’s (IAP2) Spectrum that has five categories of engagement with increasing levels of public impact comprising of Inform, Consult, Involve, Collaborate and Empower (Figure 1). This recognition of the different levels of Community Engagement reflects the Community’s desire to have a more active role in the Planning System. The White Paper discusses how various methods should be used to engage the Community encouraging the use of technology to encourage more members of the Community to have a say and add to the quality of deliberations. This use of technology can include social media, online forums, interactive websites and smartphone applications. A number of Council’s have already embraced the charge, some examples of high quality and innovative consultation campaigns include the City of Sydney’s development of Sydney 2030 and Leichhardt Council’s Callan Park: Our Park, Our Plan.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation

Figure 1 International Association of Public Participation Spectrum (2007)
Whilst this new technology offers so much potential, simply using the new tricks, does not necessarily guarantee an effective community engagement campaign. Social media will only be effective if it is part of an overall engagement campaign, or else tweets and Facebook groups and posts will just be considered ‘noise’ by the Community and filtered out. The other significant concern is ensuring that information gathered from the Community through these various methods can be analysed into something that is useful and therefore incorporated into the final plan. Online forums and discussions may be effective at attracting large numbers of responses but it is only useful if the information provided by the Community can be analysed and incorporated into the final Plan.

**What Stays the Same**

Whilst under the EP&A Act engagement was effective at disseminating information we must be careful that our new methods of engagement are not just consulting for ‘consulting-sake’ but involving the Community at a level proportionate to the significance and impact of the proposed development. In reflecting on community engagement it has become apparent that despite the method of engagement there are a few golden rules that will stay the same regardless of the objective or type of engagement, these can be summarised in Figure Two.

- **Management of expectations** - Whatever level of engagement is selected in accordance with IAP2’s spectrum, the Community’s expectations should be managed.
- **Multi-faceted approach** - Any engagement strategy should include a number of different methods of engagement including face to face consultation and the web based technology.
- **Reportable** - Regardless of the consultation tools implemented the information obtained from the Community must be able to be analysed and incorporated into the final plan
- **Transparent** - The Community should be kept informed as to how the information they provided has been utilised in the development of the plan.

With these thoughts in mind we look forward to embracing this next chapter in the future of community engagement.

**Jill Hannaford** an experienced stakeholder engagement and planning professional who has worked in the field for over 20 years She was a founding member of the Australasian Chapter of International Association for Public Participation.

**Michala Lander** – has over 8 years experience in social sustainability and community engagement. She has a deep understanding and awareness about how technology is shifting the way we have traditionally engaged with the community.
In late-2013, Sydney’s first ‘Better Block’ was held along a typical suburban street in the city’s east. Tired of waiting for change, the local community in East Clovelly re-engineered a section of their main street to make it safer, greener, healthier and more liveable for a day. The idea was to demonstrate the street’s potential and encourage everyone to re-imagine what’s possible. The event was a resounding success. It was also a timely reminder that even small changes to our streets and public spaces can transform the places where we live, connecting people with each other and engaging them with the broader planning processes that shape our city.

Engaging communities on planning issues, from small-scale development decisions to the creation of new plans and legislation, can often be a time-consuming and largely ineffectual task. Defining exactly who the community is and providing opportunities for all community members to have a say in the planning process is a particular challenge faced by many planners and policy makers. This challenge has, perhaps, never been more pertinent given the Government’s proposed changes to the NSW Planning System, which place up-front community consultation and strategic planning at the heart of the process.

Tactical Urbanism

In considering these changes, does the growing public interest and active participation in tactical urbanism provide planners with a new, and possibly more effective, mechanism to engage communities? This emerging form of urban intervention – sometimes labelled ‘guerilla urbanism’, ‘pop-up urbanism’ or ‘DIY urbanism’ – uses the street and other public spaces as a laboratory for small, activist spatial practices. Although temporary in nature, these practices are intended as catalysts for long-term change, helping to make our urban environments more sustainable and people-friendly places in which to live. Tactical urbanism is characterised by:

- A deliberate, phased approach to instigating change;
- The offering of local solutions for local planning challenges;
- Short-term commitment and realistic expectations;
- Low-risks, with possibly a high reward; and
- The development of social capital between citizens, and the building of organisational capabilities linking public/private institutions, non-profit NGOs, and their constituents.

Given these fundamental characteristics, it is clear that tactical urbanism could be used to further community engagement practices, regardless of whether projects are bottom-up or top-down. Indeed, such projects are already regarded as a valuable tool for generating widespread interest in, and support for, local planning. Not only does tactical urbanism provide an avenue through which community members can engage in local planning practices, but it has the potential to unite communities, local business owners, non-profit organisations, policy makers and other key stakeholders in achieving shared goals.

The Better Block Movement

Better Block projects are synonymous with tactical urbanism. Originating in the United States in April 2010, they are demonstration tools that aim to re-engineer existing physical infrastructure with the addition of temporary fixtures, such as bike lanes, café style seating and street trees, and to utilise existing resources, like empty shop fronts, for a single day. One of the movement’s main assumptions is that planning regulations often actively inhibit the liveability and sustainability of urban communities. Given existing regulatory regimes, in fact, it can take years to change policies and laws. A single-day demonstration, by contrast, brings new possibilities instantly to life, illustrating planning and design interventions the community would like to see, and encouraging more immediate change. There have been over 40 of these community-led demonstrations in the USA, and a handful elsewhere in the world. A small number have even been supported and driven by local governments keen to revive run-down neighbourhoods. Inspired by these examples overseas, communities here in Australia have begun to hold their own Better Block demonstration days.

Better Block Comes to Sydney

In June of 2013, Better Block co-founder Jason Roberts was attending the first Australian Better Block events in Geelong and Coburg. After a speaking engagement in Sydney, a local Clovelly resident, Phil Stubbs, invited him to Clovelly, and asked him ‘Can we do this on our street?’ Roberts’ answer was an emphatic, ‘yes, why not?’ Encouraged, Phil went on to create the Clovelly East Village Association, with the goal of transforming his local street block into a thriving community hub. Currently an unsafe environment for children and the elderly, Clovelly Road suffers from high traffic volumes and speeds, lacks bicycling infrastructure and pedestrian facilities, and experiences frequent business turnover. The street’s considerable width, combined with empty shop fronts and an absence of greenery, street furniture, and community art, makes the area feel like a concrete and bitumen dead zone devoid of any real sense of community.

The Clovelly East Village Association’s plans to transform Clovelly Road began with a community meeting on the 29th August 2013. Over 80 people attended, taking part in discussions about how to improve the street. Fifty of those attending completed an open-comment style survey, which asked residents to list the most important qualities that would help improve the street. It also asked them to identify the current strengths and weaknesses of the street block, and to suggest specific ideas that might make the block a better place to live. The survey also invited residents to specify the specialist skills and capabilities they were willing to volunteer to the project. This information formed the basis for a two-page briefing note to Randwick City Council, which also doubled as a business education tool.

Following this meeting, volunteers assigned themselves to a team and prepared a strategy for getting their task done. Teams focused on such activities as media, print distribution and marketing; landscape, traffic and cycling infrastructure; business liaison, logistics and strategy; and pop-up shops. Approximately 15 core volunteers led the teams, while another 150 provided support throughout the process and on the Demonstration Day itself. During initial meetings, the Clovelly East Village Association settled on a loose hierarchy of the most important Demonstration Day features and activities. Cash and material sponsorships were sought and received from Bendigo Bank, Randwick City Council, Andreasens Green Nursery, The Awesome Foundation and Bunnings. The sponsors’ generosity helped pay for liability insurance, for Demonstration Day installations and features, and for the cost of transporting donated plants and other materials to the site. Additional support was provided by the University of New South Wales’ Planning Program and UNSW Professors, and
The Clovelly Road Better Block

On the 27th of October 2013, the community’s vision for change became a reality, as the Better Block Demonstration Day transformed the section of Clovelly Road between Arden Street and Beach Street. The day was a huge success, with an estimated 2,000 people, including local VIPs and council officers, wandering through or directly participating. Plants, traffic calming devices and street furniture were installed, kids activities were organised, and pop-up businesses were opened in empty shops. The result was a safer, greener, more human and liveable place. Indeed, 99% of the visitors surveyed agreed it was a more pleasant environment to be in and would likely improve the sense of community.

Other features and activities included a bus stop library book exchange, vertical and street garden display, cycle maintenance workshop, dogs on the block photomontage, street music and art, and a story wall and living streets gallery (in one of the empty shops). The coffee cart café, with its small outdoor seating area, was another popular feature. The interactive ‘I wish this (shop) was’ board placed on the empty shop facades gave residents a chance to specify the sort of local businesses they’d like to see established. Feedback on the board and in the comments box demonstrated overwhelming support for additional food shops, such as an organic fruit and vegetable market, and for a wine bar to encourage residents to socialise locally in the evenings. The survey’s open comments section also revealed a desire for more community events, including regular festivals. Successful traffic calming, by narrowing the street and encouraging pedestrian activity, created a safer environment for children and the community.

91% of individuals surveyed agreed that the changes would make Clovelly Road a safer place to live or visit. Small Business Commissioner, and Costa Georgiadis, Host of Gardening Australia. All of these VIPs interacted with and addressed the crowds. So too did Randwick councillors Kiel Smith and Murray Matson, other council staff, Transport Manager Tony Lehman, and Open Space Manager Kerry Colquhoun. In the weeks following the Demonstration Day, Matt Thistlethwaite kept the momentum going with a speech in Federal Parliament about the Clovelly Road Better Block.

Most importantly, the local community responded very positively to the day and expressed their support via suggestion boxes at the operation headquarters, or by participating in a survey handed out by volunteers on the day. The survey provided useful feedback for the Clovelly East Village Association’s report on the event, as well as evidence on the project’s success for Council. In total, 257 people were surveyed; 215 on Demonstration Day and 44 online. According to the results, the community felt that the three most significant improvements to the street would be ‘increased greenery/plants’, ‘street furniture and places to sit’, and ‘wider pavements’. The survey also revealed that residents would visit local businesses more often if these changes were made permanent and supported by active transport infrastructure such as bike racks. The community and businesses could work together in making this a reality. Widespread community support for change was demonstrated by the fact that 82% of those surveyed said they would be willing to pay higher council rates to make the Better Block demonstration elements permanent. The comment section also showed support for slower vehicle speeds, more pedestrian crossings and general traffic infrastructure improvements.

With such positive feedback from a wide range of community members, the momentum for change will continue to build. Though council permission required all features be removed by the end of the day, a number survived for weeks. The bus stop book exchange on the corner of Beach Street and Clovelly Road was used continually by locals, with an impressive rotating selection of books available until early December, when the exchange was finally removed by the bus stop maintenance managers. The New Year saw the continuation of the Better Block vision, as the Clovelly East Village Association finalised and distributed the Better Block Strategy and Demonstration Day Report to Randwick City Council, locals, and other groups associated with the event. The report provides background on the area, information on Better Block demonstrations, an account of the success of the Clovelly Road Better Block, a breakdown of the community survey results, and details of the vision for creating permanent changes to this neighbourhood. Research and strategic planning aimed at making the Better Block improvements a permanent reality will also continue, as will the event’s Facebook page – see https://www.facebook.com/ClovellyRoad – which contains photographs and a video from the day.

Conclusion

The Clovelly Road Better Block taught this particular community that urban planning and design interventions can and should actively encourage the transformation of underutilised streets blocks into safer, greener, healthier and more vibrant places. Places, in other words, where residents and visitors will want to be and where local businesses can hope to thrive once again. As planners and other professionals seek to engage communities in policy and plan-making decisions, initiatives such the Clovelly Road Better Block could become an effective means to empower communities, helping them to realise a bold new vision for the future of their neighbourhood.

Photographs by Judith Elijah, Louise Hawson, Henri Kriegel, Phil Stubbs and Andrew Wheeler.


The local community enjoying a more lively and liveable street

The bus stop book exchange attracting interest (and books!)
“Hey Tweed what do you need?”
Getting the best out of youth engagement
Sarah Reilly, Cred Community Planning

In 2013, Cred was engaged by Tweed Shire Council to work closely with local young people to deliver their first integrated service delivery plan, the Tweed Youth Strategy. The Strategy considers how the needs and aspirations of Tweed’s young people can be achieved through action planning across all Council departments and in partnership with young people and the community. A central part of the development of the Strategy was meaningful, participatory and targeted engagement as part of the Tweed “Speak Out” Campaign.

Our approach to engagement was to provide multiple opportunities for young people to participate from the project’s start to its finish. This would build trust, ensure the Strategy has meaning and is implementable. Who knows what young people need better than young people? As Tweed is a geographically large and socio-economically diverse area, engagement was also targeted based on local socio-demographics and place characteristics to ensure that we got the chance to connect with as many young people as possible, in places that they generally hang out. Put simply, we took the engagement to them.

We developed an engagement using multiple platforms including a range of face-to-face, formal and informal, and online engagement techniques. This meant we could engage with young people at schools, beaches, community events, skate parks, youth centres, and at home online, ensuring those we engaged with were representative of the diverse Tweed community. Some of our tools included:

- Postcards promoting the project sent to all high school students in Tweed
- Hey Tweed, what do You Need?
- Speak out website with project information, chat forums, engagement opportunities, surveys, and video/photo upload and competitions
- Vox Pops, where we used local young people to go out and film short interviews with their peers at Tweed City Shopping Centre and Knox Park Murwillumbah. You can view the vox pops at www.cred.com.au/projectsrecent
- Speak out Facebook page. This was hugely popular when we uploaded vox pops of local young people
- Lots of workshops across the Tweed with high school students using techniques such as “If I was Mayor for a Day” and “Speed Dating around ideas for Tweed
- Youth Forum to workshop strategies

The engagement showed that young people are interested in, knowledgable and care about where they live. Young people were eager and willing participants and gave great insight into being a young person in the Tweed. They were very aware of their neighbourhood and were realistic and intelligent about the changes that they would make across all planning areas. The success of the Tweed Youth Strategy (which won the PIA Planning Excellence Award 2013 for Planning for Children and Young people) demonstrates that involving young people in decision-making will result in substantially better and more implementable outcomes.

They promise us stuff like fix the skate park or the toilets and yet they don’t do it and I wish that they would do it because we get so happy and excited and then they let us down.” (Tweed Young person)

• Speak out website with project information, chat forums, engagement opportunities, surveys, and video/photo upload and competitions
• Vox Pops, where we used local young people to go out and film short interviews with their peers at Tweed City Shopping Centre and Knox Park Murwillumbah. You can view the vox pops at wwww.cred.com.au/projectsrecent

As a result of the Strategy, Tweed Shire Council was successful in receiving a $500,000 Federal Grant for the improvement of Knox Park, including a youth precinct. Knox Park is a poorly used, rundown and unsafe district park in Murwillumbah. This park was talked about extensively in engagement and young people had really clever ideas on how to improve it. Tweed Shire Council has followed up with local young people and continued to involve them as part of the planning for this precinct. One key point to remember is that it’s really important to follow up on anything that you have promised!

If you want to engage well with young people, here are our tips:

1. Take the engagement to where young people hang out or gather
2. Make it interactive and participatory
3. Use multiple platforms for engagement
4. Get a young person to do the online and help with language
5. Don’t try to be cool (unless of course you really are!)
6. Listen to, and act upon, their ideas and report back.

Footnote: winner of PIA NSW AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE 2013
Local Government Engagement Initiatives

Stephen Gow

With the strong focus in the new planning system on more effective upfront engagement with our communities, these articles highlight some innovative practices from Councils in regional NSW, which appear to be reaching audiences not traditionally involved in local planning.

Community Engagement Initiatives on the Mid-North Coast

by Joanne Dunkerley, Strategic Land Use Planner, Great Lakes Council and Sue Calvin, Senior Strategic Planner, Greater Taree City Council.

Great Lakes Council and Greater Taree City Council are located on the Mid-North Coast of NSW. With a diverse environment and communities located in towns and small villages a variety of methods have been used to engage with the community on a wide range of issues.

For businesses in Taree, a regional town centre, a central issue is how businesses can attract more people to the shopping centre. But with the reality that Council funds are limited, how do you get people sitting around the table with a positive attitude? Greater Taree City Council was fortunate to have local business identity Graham Brown putting out a call to ‘Tidy Up Taree’ at the same time that Council was ready to commence the Taree CBD Strategy. Graham encouraged businesses and the community to improve the town centre in preparation for the busy summer season. Council partnered with ‘Tidy Up Taree’, culminating in a clean-up day in November 2013. Over 200 people turned out with brooms and brushes to clean shopfronts and pavements, plant gardens and replace gravel in the medians. Donations were provided by many businesses ranging from major contributions of gravel to a cup of coffee for the volunteers.

Building on the theme of making a difference, Council engaged renowned place maker David Engwicht to provide a presentation on how communities can work together to make change happen. Over 100 people attended and were inspired to think ‘outside the box’ as to what can be done to make their shopping centre more inviting. Council proved that it is part of the partnership, by providing volunteers and resources to make the events a reality. This has been a positive start as Council moves to develop a new planning strategy for the Taree CBD.

In the Great Lakes, a Community Engagement Team was established to plan a community engagement strategy for various Council projects. The team included staff members from different parts of Council that regularly engage with the community. Based on previous experiences, it was clear that different methods of engagement are needed to address individual communities within the Great Lakes.

Previous attempts at public meetings in the major town of Forster/Tuncurry had been unsuccessful with attendances of only 10 – 15 people. Rather than expecting people to come to Council, we decided to go to the people. Council staff set up stalls at the local weekly community markets, held a street stall as well as a temporary stall in the local shopping centre. By the end of these activities, Council had spoken face to face with nearly 600 people.

Anecdotal evidence from this process indicated a preference for one on one engagement, and that an audience that would not typically attend public meetings was being reached. Some comments reflected hesitation in speaking out in front of a crowd and the inconvenience of attending traditional ‘town hall’ type meetings.

Social media and other engagement tools in a rural community

by Donna Ausling, Manager, Planning & Development, Liverpool Plains Shire Council

Liverpool Plains Shire Council (LPSC) is a medium sized local government authority located in the north west of NSW, serving a rural population of approximately 8,000. The Shire covers over 5,000 square kilometres and its residents are dispersed throughout the LGA within a variety of towns, villages and hamlets. The Liverpool Plains is internationally recognised as Australia’s food bowl and has recently gained notoriety in the seemingly momentous mining versus agriculture showdown.

In addition to being geographically isolated and staring down the barrel of a resources boom, statistically, our community is ageing and is predominantly of low socio-economic status. These prevailing influences have presented both challenges and opportunities for community engagement and participation in local decision making processes.

In this context, a range of communication and collaboration mechanisms have been implemented and developed by LPSC. These all form part of our local planning tool kit: ‘the engagement arsenal’. The suite of resources is underpinned by a basic demographic analysis, something that all planners are well equipped to do, but is a necessary first step that is surprisingly often overlooked when developing the framework for local engagement strategies. From this essential foundation, a variety of engagement mechanisms have been progressively developed, which can be selected depending on the local project construct, or issue.

An invaluable weapon in the planners’ metaphorical arsenal is social media. Love it or loathe it, Facebook has been immensely successful in our rural context. In addition to being low cost, unlike websites, it also requires minimal maintenance. Council’s Facebook page is actively and regularly used to raise awareness on local planning initiatives, particularly those that are strategic in nature. Additionally, Facebook is also utilised to regularly disseminate ‘good news’ planning stories. ‘Trolling’ is a rarity and since the page’s inception over a year ago, only one individual has been ‘blocked’ from the site.

Facebook’s analytical tools also offer an invaluable window of insight in terms of issues that are of interest to the community, or, that are topical and potentially emerging. As a large proportion of users are female, this particular communication mechanism is extremely effective in reaching households. Most significantly, it provides often isolated rural women a ‘voice’ in local decision making processes.

Other information communication technologies (ICTs) complementing the social media initiatives include the Electronic Housing Code (EHC), which has been recently introduced by LPSC. Online DA tracking is used concurrently with the EHC. Supporting these ICTs is a series of plain English fact sheets, which address a broad range of frequently asked planning and development related questions. These paper resources should not be overlooked as being unimportant and irrelevant in the digital age, as they cater for the significant proportion of the population that do not have ready access to technology, including older persons and socially disadvantaged groups.
Talking in circles, from the future to the past
Engaging with Aboriginal communities in Blacktown.

Lauren Harding, Social Planner, GHD Heather Nesbitt, Principal Social Sustainability, GHD.

The fenced area on site

The site of the former Blacktown Native Institute is nothing much to look at. An open grassy area with a few trees here and there, the site is bordered by noisy major roads on two sides and the back fences of suburban houses. Some people may notice a fenced area towards the centre of the site, but on closer inspection, all there is to be seen inside the fence are more trees and shrubs, the remains of building footings, and an old covered well. The sign on the fence warns away trespassers, but why one would bother trying to get to the other side of the fence is anyone’s guess. However ask most local Aboriginal people or any historian, and the many-layered history of the site of the Blacktown Native Institution reveals an often sad, sometimes horrific past.

The Blacktown Native Institution was the first educational institution in Australia where Aboriginal children were taken, usually forcibly, away from their families to be assimilated into white Australian society. Not only does the site mark the beginning of the colonial policy of assimilation in Australia, just a few hundred meters away is the location of the first land grant made to Aboriginal people, Colebee and Nurragingy. To say this area is rich in cultural heritage and landmark historical significance is an understatement. Yet to the unaware, the site is merely an unused and unattractive piece of land, good for shortcuts between the housing developments and not much else.

For the past year and a half however, a small and somewhat hesitant buzz of energy is starting to build around the site and in the local community. With a push from Blacktown City Council to establish clarity around the responsibility for future management of the site, UrbanGrowth NSW is working with GHD, members of the Aboriginal community and broader Blacktown community to transfer the site into a vibrant place where stories are shared and cultural activities are held.

Best laid plans
In late 2012 GHD’s Social Sustainability team was engaged by UrbanGrowth NSW to prepare a Plan of Management for the Blacktown Native Institution site. As a site of heritage significance due to the potential archaeological remains, the land couldn’t be developed by UrbanGrowth and it was considered a surplus site. The Plan of Management was requested by Blacktown City Council because at the time, UrbanGrowth planned to transfer ownership to Council.

Previous attempts to turn the site into a community space had not come to fruition. In 2008, UrbanGrowth worked with the local Aboriginal community, the Darug nation, to create a Master Plan which recognised and protected the heritage significance of the site while encouraging interpretive uses. While largely supported by the Darug, the Master Plan was not realised. In 2011, in response to plans to widen Richmond Road which borders the site, Carmen Osborne, Development Director at UrbanGrowth, secured the site’s listing on the state heritage register to ensure its protection from further encroachments and adjoining development works.

Developing the Plan of Management is the latest attempt to protect the site from development while creating a place for the Darug and wider community. Working collaboratively with the Darug, there is a real sense that this Plan may be the right vehicle to deliver a positive outcomes for the community.

Having a yarn, sharing stories, getting personal
From the outset, we knew that the Plan of Management had to be developed closely with the Aboriginal community. The land has great cultural significance and means a lot to the community for so many reasons; add to that a long history of distrust of the government, and success would depend on meaningful, transparent and comprehensive engagement.

The engagement process has evolved throughout the project, responding to the needs and issues of the community. A steering group of agencies and organisations committed to the success of the Plan, including Blacktown City Council, Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Management Authority, Greening Australia, and the Blacktown Arts Centre, has guided the project.

We began with individual discussions with local organisations and community representatives about the potential of the site. Many people had been involved in the preparation of the previous Master Plan, earlier archaeological investigations, and discussions with Council over the years to build a cultural centre on the site. Although opinions on how the site should be used differed slightly, a clear message emerged - everyone wanted discuss the future of the site together as a group.

In April 2013 we gathered to walk around the site and share stories. Regrouping at the Mt Druitt Community Hub, we intended to discuss the sorts of opportunities that should be captured in the Plan of Management. However the Darug community members had a clear message – the site should be owned by the Darug people before management opportunities are considered. This was the foremost
priority for a community that has been repeatedly dispossessed of their land.

A small group of Darug representatives worked with us over the next few months to discuss the future ownership and management of the site. It was understood that negotiating Darug ownership of the site with the NSW Government would be a complex and lengthy process. The Plan of Management would provide an opportunity to make positive changes to the site whilst pursuing ownership by the Darug community over time.

The draft Plan of Management began to take shape, setting out the objectives and potential opportunities for the site identified by the community. The draft Plan was placed on public exhibition during July and August 2013, coinciding with ‘The Native Institute’ art exhibition at the Blacktown Arts Centre. The exhibition by six Aboriginal artists responded to the site and its history. Works were displayed at the Arts Centre and on site, with a community workshop held to view the works, share stories and discuss the draft Plan. It became clear that the Darug people have a deep and personal connection to the institution and the site itself, and these connections not only link to the past, but are very real today.

The participants at the workshop, primarily Darug people and other local community members, stressed the importance of future ownership of the site being shared by all Darug people and not any one organisation or person. The successful implementation of the Plan and the realisation of the opportunities on site depend on working together as a community.

It was agreed that a group of Darug representatives should be responsible for implementation of the Plan on behalf of the community, while working towards Darug ownership of the site in the future. This group would be supported by key government agencies, including UrbanGrowth NSW and Blacktown City Council, and involve other interested parties in the management opportunities when needed. Work is currently being undertaken to establish the membership and governance structures of this group, which is likely to be a registered Aboriginal Corporation.

A plan that takes us back to the future

The Plan of Management for the Blacktown Native Institution site is future-focused. The community was clear in the need to acknowledge the sadness of the past, while moving towards a positive future. The objectives and outcomes are based on the many discussions with the community, focusing on sharing and practising Darug culture, education and employment opportunities, healing, spirituality, and the conservation of cultural heritage and biodiversity.

The community identified a range of potential opportunities for the site, from revegetation of the creek line with native species, to creating spaces for cultural activities, developing a website to educate the broader community about the history of the site, employment and training programs for local Indigenous people, continuing to deliver art programs on the site, and registering the site on the National Heritage Register to increase its broader recognition.

Working with the community, we have nearly finalised the Plan of Management. However as it begins to be implemented and the complex ownership issues are worked through, the Plan will be adapted as needed, recognising the fluid nature of planning with communities through collaborative engagement.

A key outcome of the development of the Plan has been that the engagement process itself has provided a vehicle to determine the best way forward for this site and this community. The flexible nature of the engagement process has allowed the community to work with each other and with key stakeholders to develop a Plan that delivers outcomes decided by the community, not by others.

If there’s one thing we have heard again and again from this community, it’s that this time, there is a feeling that real positive change will happen for the community and this important site. The timing certainly seems to be right, but we also like to think that the people involved and the engagement approach we’ve taken has made a big difference. Working with community members, stakeholders and clients who are willing to work together and tackle everything head on and with positivity has been critical to our progress so far.

Working collaboratively with the community, giving people the power to shape the decisions that affect their lives and the land that is so integral to their identity, is the key. There’s still a long way to go, but we think that talking in circles, from the past to the present, has sent us in the right direction.

What we’ve learnt so far

- Start small – speaking with individuals and small groups helped us to determine what the community was thinking and what the issues were, and how to best approach the consultation.
- Take your time – allowing time for considered thought – for yarning - is integral to Indigenous culture.
- Public art can build community capacity - here it helped to bring the site (which is barely visible) to life and provided a focus on a positive future.
- Careful facilitation – government agencies need to guide the planning process slowly and carefully to ensure that what the community wants is heard and able to be delivered.
- Trust and respect – these are the key factors which have made this process successful.
- Build capacity – community engagement has helped to build the capacity of the community to carry this Plan of Management through to implementation.

GHD would like to thank everyone who has been involved in the development of the Plan of Management, particularly Carmen Osborne at UrbanGrowth NSW, Blacktown City Council, the Blacktown Arts Centre, Greening Australia, Hawkesbury Nepean Catchment Management Authority, and Aboriginal Affairs. In particular, we thank members of the Darug nation for sharing their personal stories and working collaboratively with us. We look forward to continuing this important work in developing the site as a place for the celebration of Darug culture.
Reflections on the WHY, HOW, WHERE & WHEN of Community Consultation

Michelle Chapman, Director and Principal Town Planner with All About Planning Pty Ltd.

WHY bother with community consultation when it can be time consuming, create organisational hurdles and result in headaches and stress? Anyone who has ever felt the heat of concerned and upset residents will know that community consultation is not always easy.

This is especially the case if consultation is not carefully tailored to fit the required purpose, if consultation creates unrealistic expectations or is not structured so that all interested parties get to hear and contribute. Of course the key reason to consult is to better understand a person, a people, an area, a region, a community or an impact - either positive or negative.

Community consultation is a component of many projects for a number of key reasons. Firstly, some consultation is legally required under town planning legislation. Secondly, consultation can give decision makers and those backing projects comfort around policy and project decisions. Decision makers want to understand whether there is wide spread support or angst about particular projects and policy. In a democratic society with limited available budgets, politicians will often seek evidence of community support before they will back key projects and conversely, without adequate community support many projects can fail. Further, consultation done well and early enough in the process can add value in terms of improved proposals and/or reduced negative impacts. Community consultation can also assist proponents in obtaining a ‘social license’ to operate/undertake a project.

For consultation to be effective and useful however it has to be appropriate for its context and it has to be undertaken by the right people. HOW to consult is of course another matter entirely. There are so many ways available but it is essential to make sure the consultation approach fits the purpose. You must also ensure you have the right people on board to engage with the community or individuals you are wanting to consult with.

Some consultation tools that I have personally used or seen used to good effect, include:

- Postcards – printed postcards are an effective consultation tool for larger urban planning projects. They are not time consuming, should be engaging and therefore encourage people to record their ideas or issues on them. Postcards can also easily be placed where people regularly go ie. in shops, community facilities, at front counters of Council’s, in local libraries and schools
- Information Events – information events are an effective tool for obtaining community feedback without the potential for grand standing by dominant individuals that can occur at facilitated public meetings. At an information event relevant project information is attractively displayed in the meeting space and participants walk around the meeting space reading and learning about the proposal. Attendees can choose to interact personally with project team members but there is no obligation for interaction.
- Informal Chats and Discussions with key individuals – as the opportunity may arise
- Letter drop or formal letter of notification calling for submissions
- Placing Information in a Local Newspaper and calling for submissions
- Consultation ‘drop in’ centres – perhaps used in association with a newspaper advertisement and/or letter drop/letter of notification. A consultation drop in centre is like an information event but which is run for a longer period of time, minimum few days and that is set up in a central and convenient, maximum footfall location.
- Neighbourhood door knocking – any door knocking should follow a carefully considered and agreed script and the door knocking must be done in pairs and with relevant clear identification of each person prominently displayed. It is also important to have a hand out to provide to any interested persons and
which includes contact details should the interviewee wish to make a further enquiry or contribution
• Prearranged personal meetings with individuals or small groups
• Facilitated Public Meetings—this is perhaps one of the most common community consultation techniques apart from statutory notification requirements, however they should only be used after careful analysis of other available consultation options. At facilitated public meetings only the boldest and/or most passionate individuals will speak and contribute in a public forum.

If you are responsible for organising a public meeting make sure you arrive early to personally greet people as they arrive and hang around afterwards. If you do this you will almost certainly get to hear from some other attendees that were not prepared to contribute in a public setting but who nonetheless have a valuable and considered contribution regarding the subject to hand.

• Either informal or formal sketching of concepts and community vision statements
• Social and digital media such as websites, You Tube, Facebook and Twitter
• Television and Radio interviews

Whatever form of consultation you choose, be mindful of cultural sensitivities. Not all cultures welcome direct engagement. In some cultures, the sharing of views and opinions in many instances has to be earned and/or done by senior representatives only following an accepted protocol and/or methodology. It is also relevant to consider WHERE you should consult. For a large project, just about everywhere is right! Take for instance consultation associated with the preparation of a CBD Masterplan. Consultation could and likely should be undertaken:

• In shops to talk with business owners and customers
• In the streets
• At meetings with business owners and investors
• In facilitated meetings at Council offices
• At Council to hear from Council staff and Councillors
• At the local High School/s
• At the local library/s
• With key local experts and professionals in related fields

Now let’s consider consultation associated with preparation of a Community Plan for a very small remote rural community. It is clear that your consultation approach may need to be very different for such a project. In this instance consultation may be best to occur:

• Informally under a gum tree
• While a consultant team member sketches and illustrates concepts for the site
• During an on-site Community BBQ with key community family groups represented or during a public workshop activity with local kids
• With relevant staff and/or senior traditional owners at the Offices of their representative organisation or onsite
• With well known, locally acknowledged individual stakeholders from the community with expertise to advise on key identified issues

• With higher level government representatives, Research Scientists and other key professionals that can inform the detail of the plan

So finally it is important to consider WHEN you consult. Certainly not during significant sporting events or major community events. The timing for consultation also needs to consider the working hours and likely availability of key stakeholders.

You should also consider that whilst it is good to consult at the beginning of a project, consultation is also very valuable as you move through a project, including at the implementation and future review stages.

I hope that these reflections on the value and key methods of community consultation will encourage you to engage with your community.

Remember that community consultation fit for purpose typically yields positive outcomes including identification of new project possibilities. You may hear about ideas not previously considered or reconsider options that were too quickly dismissed. It is not good practice to assume you know what people think and know. It is better to ask them.

As a general rule, the more proactive you are with community consultation, the less reactive you need to be.

A facilitated community meeting

Extract from a Community Vision Sketch by Kate Bestwick
Chris Bain, Convenor, NSW Consultant Planners’ Network

**Introduction**

Community engagement is a critical part of a consulting planner’s portfolio of skills. Not only can it result in better planning outcomes and a more satisfied community, it can also be the key difference between a successful project and one that doesn’t perform so well. In this edition, Liam McKay from JBA outlines two recent projects he has been involved with that provide us with valuable insights into what makes for good community engagement.

**New tools old rules**

*By Liam McKay Director - JBA*

“But we don’t want a faster bus trip, that’s the best part of our day out.” So said an elderly couple in the largest inland city in Australia after Canberra.

It was a dark and frosty night in Toowoomba and I had driven from Brisbane to attend an MP inspired engagement event about a new bus route that was part of a commercial service contract to deliver bus services.

Previously there had been four operators whose buses didn’t link, three had antiquated fleets, there were no weekend services at all and one of the operators even protested about having to print timetables because “my passengers know when and where the bus runs”. Lord help you if just moved to the town like thousands of university students do each year.

The brave new deal involved one operator that could take you from one edge of town to the other on one bus or if you did have to change it was a seamless experience, services ran every 20 minutes instead of hourly at best, the fleets could be donated to a museum that celebrates such omnibus relics and new air-conditioned Mercedes midi-buses were going to roll out. I was therefore expecting the keys to the city or the renaming of Athletic Oval or Clifford Park racetrack in my honour as the Darling Downs boy who made good and returned to transform the public transport system for the good citizens of the regional hub.

That’s not the way things worked out. It was a salient lesson in giving the community the opportunity to engage when change is proposed and listening to and acting on what they say, even when the change appears to be very positive. It was the mid-nineties and I had been a city boy since 16 when I went to study law in Brisbane bordering it and within a couple of weeks the microsite had over 1600 homes and units in the study area or numbers and the project’s microsite domain and included a piece in the Mayor’s column in the local newspaper. Handing out the postcards at the train station confirmed that most residents had received and read the material.

About one hundred regular bus users let me know in no uncertain terms that the circutous route that took 32 minutes to travel about six kilometres past nearly 20 bus stops was just the way they liked it thanks very much and what would they do with the extra 15 minutes the new route would give them in town anyway? How arrogant to assume you know what a community wants or what it needs. The same mistake was not repeated in Rockhampton, Townsville, Cairns and the other regional cities up and down the coast of Queensland. Instead, we asked the community to comment on and give suggestions about new services and we had a conversation with them about what was possible and some of the transport planning principles behind our suggested network. Sure, not everyone was happy with the result, but the vast majority of users and potential users were - which was reflected in the patronage explosions that followed in the wake of the new services.

So the need for engagement hasn’t changed but some of the tools certainly have. I wonder how many university students these days would flood an online engagement tool and social media platforms wanting the quicker trip but would never attend a meeting, especially with the seniors they have to spend an hour travelling twelve kilometres to from town each day.

It is the challenge for communication professionals to find the right pathways for both information and conversation to ensure that as many voices are part of the process as possible and those who wish to engage have a viable option for doing so.

Working with NSW Planning and Infrastructure certainly provided that challenge, amongst others. Queensland Transport went through a crucial maturation stage as an agency in the nineties and it needed to. Instead of all of the Department’s efforts being aimed at regulating the transport sector to within an inch (old measure used for impact) of its life we started to work as a collaborator in the business of delivering transport services to the public.

Recently my team at JBA and I have worked collaboratively with the City of Canada Bay to look at the residential potential of seven key sites in Concord West that are currently zoned industrial. A forward looking Council, Canada Bay wanted to study the overall impact of housing on these sites and wanted to have a conversation with that community about the changing nature of the suburb.

Some juicy strategic planning facts provided the foundation of the Council’s wish to plan the area as a whole and not site by site with the mixed outcomes that delivers. A new primary school is being built this year, there are two train stations within five to ten minutes’ walk of the sites and there is large amount of open space and parkland in the neighbourhood.

Footwear, clothing and textile factories will not be returning to the middle-ring suburbs of Sydney anytime soon and some urban renewal has already taken place just down the road on the same street in North Strathfield. We started the conversation using the Council’s well supported social media channels including Twitter, Facebook and their website. Recognising not everyone is online we also developed and distributed a postcard with contact numbers and the project’s microsite domain and included a piece in the Mayor’s column in the local newspaper. Handing out the postcards at the train station confirmed that most residents had received and read the material.

There are about 1600 homes and units in the study area or bordering it and within a couple of weeks the microsite had over 2000 unique hits and a dwell time that suggested most visitors read most of the material which included maps and previous studies etc. Discounting a couple of hundred hits from overseas and some from the project team monitoring the conversation it
Canada Bay community workshop

was still an overwhelming response. The one community workshop became two due to numbers and after a twenty minute scene-setter locals got to spend an hour and half working across three themes. The themes were built form, public domain and open space and the subject mentioned whenever three or more people are gathered, traffic and transport.

We gained valuable insights were gained in relation to the key concerns residents had, local amenity issues such as street lighting and access to local parkland and the project team was able to answer questions and better share with residents some of the strategic planning and urban design principles being used to inform the study.

Similar exercises were held with Council and with landowners to separately allow them to express their ideas for the area. March will see round two of that face-to-face engagement, with the microsite allowing a continued conversation of the issues for those who were unable to attend the two early evening workshops.

The hard work of compiling that and feeding it into the planning balancing act that is urban renewal has been completed and the team is looking forward to unveiling the draft masterplan to this well informed and engaged community.

Interestingly, no-one has suggested making the train ride longer and more circuitous – yet.

Planning Ingenuity is a highly skilled specialist town planning consultancy, committed to delivering reliable value adding services in relation to all aspects of the development process throughout New South Wales.

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Engaging with the community is an essential part of the planning process and can also be one of the most challenging tasks. While often a legislative requirement, effective consultation can also be vital to the ultimate success of a project. Increasingly, the consultation process is broadened and tailored for meaningful engagement. Combining new emerging online tools with conventional engagement techniques is proving to have successful results.

Lake Macquarie City Council Senior Land Use Planner Shane Cahill explains that in the past year they have used Social Pinpoint, a new online interactive mapping tool, as part of the community engagement process for several strategic planning projects. Council invited the community to use the interactive mapping tool to comment on issues such as building heights, pedestrian safety, lighting, parking and potential development for Council to gain more local input and to establish new planning controls within the study areas.

In addition to promoting the interactive mapping tool through the Council website and media releases, “information days promoted and encouraged the use of the Social Pinpoint community mapping tool. IPad-wielding staff were on hand to talk to interested community members for projects at Warners Bay, Cardiff, and Edgeworth,” explains Shane.

“Looking more like an outdoor cafe than a Council meeting room, visitors to the Warners Bay information day were welcomed by chirpy staff, astro-turf, plants, ottomans and tablets to post comments on the interactive mapping tool – all in the name of undertaking community consultation to help Council establish new planning controls for the Warners Bay town centre.” Similar days were held at Edgeworth and Cardiff.

By using a combination of engagement techniques, Lake Macquarie Council was able to engage with a larger proportion of the community that may not have otherwise provided feedback on the strategies. The use of the online tool had benefits for both Council and the community.

The Social Pinpoint interactive mapping tool was found to be an easy to use tool that provided the community with a quick, easy, anonymous and less formal way to comment on planning projects. “It allows the user to comment on very specific areas of interest, without the need for lengthy, sometimes confusing descriptions. The spatial context makes it easy for users to comment on a specific area of interest or concern” adds Shane. Council saw benefits of increased community participation and engagement with a broader community cross section. “We were able to use the ‘Stakeholder Engagement Summary Dashboard’ to provide council staff with ongoing..."
snapshots of information about the number of site visits, comments and common issues. We also found the data easy to manage. The online review tools categorise, group and export the project data into spreadsheets for further analysis and reporting. Having access to review and collate the data throughout the project meant that less time was spent processing information at the end of the project. It also enabled any adjustments to the engagement process if necessary.

The community increasingly expects to use social media and online systems to share information, and the community engagement process can gain depth and scope recognising this. Effective online solutions such as the interactive mapping tool that Social Pinpoint provided, work well as part of a suite of ways to enable communities to have a say. The spatial context and simple process enable input from a range of people who know a local area, to share that knowledge in a modern, easy to use, fun way.
PlannerTech 5 digital engagement trends to watch in 2014

John O’Callaghan

The future of online engagement is mobile, appified and interactive.

This aside, it’s also going to be something the clunky systems of the past have failed to deliver, something that our culture and the economy are demanding, a return to the human value of trust with a focus on personable experiences. With the world speeding towards a convergence of realities, how will planning facilitate the future form and function of our cities? Here are my top 5 digital engagement tips to watch in 2014:

1. Digital idea bombing

If asking for community input, forget the online survey, an evolving, dynamic and fun platform is the new status quo. In 2014, early adopters will be looking to enhance the engagement experience online, making it enjoyable and by doing so, building loyalty and trust with the community. Padlet, a web based platform, provides you with a blank ‘wall’, custom web address and the opportunity to design it depending on your needs. Likewise, IdeaShare and iBrainstorm, are two additional platforms focused on the collaborative sharing of ideas.

2. Infographics become the norm

Once you have your ideas, how do you present them? Applications like easel.ly, infogr.am and Canva, are making it easier than ever to convey complex ideas into designs. These online tools are the alternative to expensive, complicated software, and provide the opportunity to collaborate with anyone, anywhere (or so they claim). A great way to visualise data, infographics can be created with relative ease and used to present statistics at public meetings, jazz up your social media accounts or create flyers for upcoming events.

3. Government 2.0: more relevant than ever

The rise of online engagement has flattened traditional social hierarchies and allowed for the flow of information horizontally. In Utah, the State Government has championed a flatter, more transparent model, which provides the opportunity for anyone to connect County officials directly through a variety of social media channels. On arrival to the Utah website, a twitter feed provides you with the latest news while a popup box asks you to update your location (recognising my location as being outside Utah). With more than 15 ways to connect, Utah is just a click away.

4. One foot in the web, the other on the street

A balance between online and real world engagement will continue to deliver the best results in 2014. Over the past few years, online engagement has been a catalyst for DIY Urbanism, place making, and community based urban renewal projects across the world. Made in Lambeth is an online system that mobilises social capital with a focus on digital projects to facilitate connection in the real world. While Made in Lambeth is community run with Council support, another platform with a different angle but similar outcome, is Proxetry, a crowdfunding website that helps you design and build projects in your neighborhood.

5. Augmented Cities (for better or worse)

Last year PlannerTech looked at an augmented reality app called Layar, a new(ish) way of seeing the world in all its digital glory. While there are now many similar apps available on the market, with the release of Google Glass, augmented reality has again jumped ahead bringing the future to the now. One question we should ask is how can we, as Planners, use this technology to solve urban problems and inspire community? Who knows maybe you have an idea? If you do, I encourage you to pursue it. After all, this is the future.

John is a freelance urban planner and will be presenting a paper on Planner Tech at the 2014 PIA Congress. More details about John_OCal here > www.john-ocal.com

Inbox
Nicole Philps

Norma Shankie-Williams has joined AECOM as a Technical Director within the Design and Planning team for the Southern Australia region, based in Sydney. Norma comes from the NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure where she was Director of Metropolitan and Regional Strategies and delivered the Metropolitan Plan for Sydney to 2036 in 2010, and the draft Metropolitan Strategy to 2031 in 2013. In her new role Norma will be working on a number of projects including the structure plans for WestConnex and Broker WSEA.

Hill PDA Consultants has appointed Tim Gavan as Principal of Property Economics and Advisory. Tim brings more than 25 years of advisory, valuation and development industry experience. He has held senior positions with Austcorp Group, LandMark White, IPA Partners and was the inaugural CEO for BlueCHP a not-for-profit community housing provider and affordable housing development company.

After over 17 years, Alison Brown is saying a fond farewell to BBC Consulting Planners and moving to Urbis to take up a role as Associate Director in their Planning Team. Andrew Johnns has joined Lachlan Shire Council as their new Director Environment and Planning and Annalise Cummings is the new Manager Planning Services at Parkes Shire Council.

In slightly late news, EMM Mitchell is pleased to announce that Drs Michael and Louise Askew, both social planners, joined their Newcastle office late last year. Liz Webb and Wendy McLean have also joined to head a new groundwater service.

And the latest from the Strategic Planning Team at Camden, Chris Lalor retired at the end of December. He has been subsequently re-engaged by Council for 12 months to undertake a number of special projects. Tina Chappell took over from Chris as Team Leader Land Use & Planning. Tina was previously working for Council on a casual basis and has extensive planning experience in both state and local government.

Vanessa Morschel, Council’s Section 94 planner resigned from Council in November to take up a planning position with Greenfields Developments. Ron Dowd has been appointed to the Section 94 planner position. Jeff Williams, Team Leader Growth Centres, left Council last August to take up a position with the Lands Department at Narrab. Kate Speare has been appointed as Jeff’s replacement. Kate was previously with the Department of Planning and Infrastructure.

We’re always pleased to receive staff updates, announcements and other news you would like to share. Email your updates to nikphilps@gmail.com
Healthy Built Environments

Making our towns and cities walkable

Susan Thompson¹ and Peter McCue²

It’s good to start a new year refreshed with optimism and energy for the tasks, and no doubt challenges, ahead. 2014 is shaping up to be such a year for healthy built environments. We hope to see a new planning act, with health as an objective, setting the foundation for healthy built environments in planning policy and practice. A diverse range of opportunities will subsequently emerge – from state to local government, to private planning practices and innovative developers’ offices, and across a raft of not-for-profit organisations. Local community groups, concerned parents and motivated individuals, all troubled by escalating rates of lifestyle related chronic disease, will be able to make the decision to be active, to eat healthy food and to connect with others who live or work nearby because the built environment supports everyone being healthy. And as we know, healthy behaviours, as part of day-to-day living, are critical in combating major risk factors for chronic disease.

The role of physical activity is particularly important. Physical activity helps to protect against heart disease and stroke, diabetes, and cancers such as colon and breast. It also diminishes the impact of clinical depression and anxiety. Further, the protective effects of physical activity are independent of obesity – so even if you are overweight, being active will make a positive contribution to your health [see more in the PCAL ‘Why Active Living Statement ‘]. Walking is one physical activity that’s available to nearly everyone. Participation can occur from a very young age to well into later life, irrespective of cultural background, income levels and education. These are all good reasons for planners to have a strong focus on creating neighbourhoods, precincts, suburbs, towns and cities that are walkable. For many, walkability is the foundation of a healthy built environment. A walkable environment is one where it is easy, safe and enjoyable to walk for both recreation and transport. Nevertheless, not all places have such qualities. Suburbs in the poorer parts of towns and cities are often not walkable making it difficult, if not impossible, for residents to be physically active, thereby exacerbating poor health throughout life.

So what are some of the considerations for planners to take into account in creating walkable environments? Accessibility is a key criterion. If we want to encourage walking for transport, the services and facilities that people need to use on a daily basis have to be close, as does public transport. When thinking about walking for recreation, paths have to be handy to residential areas so it’s easy for people to use them. Connectivity is another principle of walkability, as is the quality of the infrastructure. Connections between walking and cycling paths, and quality green open space, are some of the issues here. Path width is an important consideration if walkers and cyclists are to be accommodated safely. Differently abled users, as well as parents with strollers and prams, may be another factor in determining the adequacy of shared paths. Facilities such as water fountains, seating (with shading), public toilets that are clean and well maintained, and rubbish bins are all characteristic of good quality walking infrastructure. Interesting things to see along the way, a pleasant ambient environment free of pollution and excessive noise will also encourage walking. And above all else, walkable areas are safe. Paths are free from trip and fall hazards and users perceive the locality to be safe for walking. This might mean ensuring that a wide range of demographic groups are out and about and that behaviour on shared paths is respectful of multiple users – signage is important here. There are more and more resources on walkability. Have a look at the Heart Foundation’s ‘Walkability Audit’, which focuses on the key criteria of walkable environments for communities – walker friendliness, comfort, safety and convenience, and connectedness. VicHealth recently released a useful manual entitled ‘Measuring Walking ‘. As well, there are many excellent international resources – some of them are listed on the Healthy Built Environments Program website at UNSW. And this year in October, Sydney hosts ‘Walk21’, the world’s leading conference on walking. There will be a wealth of research evidence, practice initiatives and inspiration for creating walkable environments. See the Conference website for further details: www.walk21sydney.com/

So get walking and activating healthy built environments! Peter McCue will be joining Susan Thompson in writing the Healthy Built Environments column in 2014. ¹Susan Thompson is Associate Professor in Planning and Associate Director [Healthy Built Environments] City Futures Research Centre, UNSW. ²Peter McCue is Executive Officer, NSW Premier’s Council for Active Living [PCAL]
In the Courts:
Climate change and development consents

Peter Williams, Faculty of the Built Environment, UNSW

The reasonableness of climate change-related conditions of development consent was recently considered by the Land and Environment Court in Newton and anor v Great Lakes Council [2013] NSWLEC 1248 (20 December 2013). Council had granted consent to the applicant for the erection of a dwelling house adjoining a beach at Port Stephens. Two of the conditions imposed on the consent reflected Council’s concern with issues of sea level rise, coastal hazards and beach erosion, and the potential of consequential risk to buildings in the vicinity of the beach. The applicant appealed against these conditions of consent.

The area had suffered severe storm erosion in the past, and the immediate locality had required extensive sand replenishment as a consequence of storm surges. But for the sand renourishment works undertaken by the Council, the Court noted, it was highly likely that severe damage to property and dwellings along the beach area would already have occurred and eventually all properties would be adversely affected. The dwelling was proposed to be set back from the street in a form consistent with adjoining dwellings and the general setback pattern in the vicinity. In giving approval for the proposed dwelling, the Council had included the two contested conditions, which it considered were appropriate to account for the risks of coastal erosion as a consequence of climate change in coming decades.

The first challenged condition limited development consent to a period of 20 years. It required that 60 days prior to consent expiry the owner’s consultant undertake a review of applicable coastal controls and hazard predictions, including long-term recession and storm erosion data and projections. The review report and its recommendations were to be submitted for Council’s consideration (for further consent) no later than 30 days prior to expiry. The reason cited by the Council for the imposition of this condition was “to allow reasonable expectation of development under current uncertainties in relation to beach renourishment and the resulting effective hazard lines.” The second contested condition required the dwelling’s footings and foundations to be designed and constructed to ensure continued support of the building structure consistent with the 2033 sea level rise conditions. This condition sought to ensure structural stability and safety and to avoid increased erosion of adjacent properties during a severe storm event.

In relation to the first condition, the Court noted it effectively imposed two obligations on whoever was the owner of the property in 2033. The first obligation, subject to reprise by the second, was the obligation to cease using the dwelling at the time of expiry of the consent. The hope of reprieve lay in the second half of the condition whereby the Council held out the potential – subject to the then owners undertaking a coastal hazard study – of approval for some further occupation of the dwelling either on an indefinite basis or on some further time restriction.

Several factors weighed in the applicant’s favour on this point. The principal one, the Court noted, was that development in the locality had taken place for many years and there did not appear to be likelihood of further significant development. If the risks envisaged by Council did occur, the dwelling, by virtue of the second contested condition, would be better protected for its structural integrity than neighbouring properties. The Court also placed weight on the fact that the planning certificate issued by the Council when the applicant bought the subject site only disclosed general information on applicable coastal policy and did not foreshadow the prospect that further controls could potentially specifically arise as a consequence of future hazard studies being undertaken for the locality. On balance the Court held that the first contested condition did not warrant retention, primarily because it was so out of context with that imposed on the surrounding existing development. It emphasised however, that this finding could only be supported if the second contested condition was retained.

In the Court’s opinion the broad underlying suppositions about the likelihood of climate change and its impacts were not open to question. Accordingly, the second condition should be retained as the Court was satisfied that the available coastal hazards data demonstrated there was a reasonable and significant threat to the structural integrity of the dwelling as a consequence of coastal hazards caused by sea level rise. By 2033 there was a real risk that storm events could impact on the structural stability of the dwelling if conventional foundation construction standards, as proposed by the applicant as a consequence of seeking deletion of the contested condition, were to be adopted. It would be irresponsible not to incorporate reasonable precautionary measures at the time of construction. Such measures were not only desirable in the interests of those who were occupants of the dwelling but also in the broader public interest. Accordingly the Court considered that it was reasonable and appropriate that additional measures be undertaken in construction of the footings for the dwelling to protect against the greater risks caused by climate change.

The Court therefore held that while it was inappropriate to impose the condition placing a time limit on the consent, the removal of that condition made it essential that the condition requiring appropriate precautionary standards to be applied in the construction of the footings for the dwelling be retained as a condition of consent.

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Local perspectives
Round up from the regions

Stephen Gow

Here is an update from the convenors of the Institute’s NSW regional branches on their recent activities and plans for 2014:

Hunter Region (Darren Holloway, dholloway@monteathpowys.com.au)
The Hunter branch is in full swing at present following the formation of a new Committee in December. The committee has a wonderful mix of private sector, local government and state government expertise. There are a number of upcoming events in the Hunter area including a seminar at Kurri Kurri on Friday, 9 May 2014 on the planning system and tourism, which has received great support from local Councils in the Hunter. The seminar will provide presentations from a mix of planners, economic and tourism specialists, which should be informative for both private and public sector planners.

The Hunter is also looking forward to hosting the NSW State Conference in October. The conference will be in Hunter wine country and discussions have also taken place with Cessnock Council regarding the event. During the year the Hunter Branch will also likely be kept busy with a number of potential strategies, policies and plans, including the ongoing review of the Lower Hunter Regional Strategy and the possibility this may be the first regional growth plan under the new Planning Act.

Northern Region (Mike Svikis, mikesvikisplanning@bigpond.com)
On 29 November 2013 the Northern Branch held a meeting in Lismore with about 40 planners in attendance. Mike Svikis chaired the Branch meeting and Andrew Swane was elected Branch Secretary. The Committee for 2014 will be Steve Connelly, Georgia Rayner, Anthony Alliston, Michelle Chapman, Steve Thompson, and Chris Pratt. Chris stepped down as Chair after 9 years at the helm, so a huge vote of thanks Chris. Southern Cross University made a short presentation to the Branch meeting about its intention to commence a planning course at its Lismore campus in the next few years.

The meeting was followed by excellent presentations on planning charrettes by Brent McAllister (Lismore City Council Director), and Will Owen (RPS), Paula Newman (Lismore City) on the Lismore Housing Strategy and then Kate Isles (PIA Qld State President) on the planning lessons learned from the natural disasters that hit Queensland in the summer of 2010/11.

The next Branch meeting is scheduled for Friday, 28 February 2014 in Port Macquarie.

South Coast (David Seymour, david.seymour@urplan.com.au)
Following on from a very successful 2013, the South Coast Branch is looking forward to some local planning, and indeed some State initiated, challenges in 2014. The South Coast seminar events seem to be attracting a more diverse industry/discipline attendance, which brings very different perspective and presentation offerings to the program. There has been a deliberate effort to ensure that presentations and discussion materials are topical and challenge thinking about present and future planning practice.

The Branch Committee has taken the opportunity of the proposed legislative changes to review and critically analyse what we do and how this may be moulded for the better in future practice. Many of the more recent presentations have been critical of past planning practice but have also been prepared to predict – and challenge – how things may be different in the future.

To that end, it is the Committee’s aim to provide a varied and challenging program for 2014 and to engage actively in both the regional and state activities of PIA. The Committee is also committed to connecting with the new and younger planners in the region to broaden their involvement in the Branch and hopefully to provide continuity of generational representation within the Institute as a whole.
Welcome to the first edition of BasePlan for 2014. To begin, the Committee would like to sincerely thank Robyn Vincin for her instrumental involvement not just in NSW PIA, but for the continual support Robyn provided to the NSW Young Planners. Robyn, you’ll be sorely missed and we hope you’ll still visit us.

In this edition, Christina Livers from Hill PDA introduces the NSW Young Planners activities for 2014, Tina Kao from the City of Sydney provides insight into how the profession can better communicate to a non-planning audience and Mitchell Davies from Development Planning Strategies agrees to be interviewed as a member of the Committee.

The Year Ahead
By Christina Livers – Hill PDA & NSWYP Convenor

The NSW Young Planners have kicked off 2014 with a bang! In February the NSW Young Planner’s teamed up with the Department of Planning & Infrastructure Young Planners to host a fun networking evening at the Barber Shop Bar. We will continue to explore some of Sydney’s best small bars throughout the year. The next event will be held on 16th April – keep an eye on our Facebook page for further details.

YP Connect is coming to Sydney this year from the 15-16th March. This is a great opportunity to hear from some innovative speakers and network with young planners from interstate.

In May the Young Planners will be holding ‘Meet the Leaders’. This will involve guest speakers who specialise in different aspects of planning. Don’t miss out on this opportunity to hear from the very best in the profession.

The 2013/2014 Mentoring Program will come to a close in mid-2014 and the 2014/2015 program will commence. This program will allow young planners to gain invaluable advice from some of the best minds in the profession. The expressions of interest will open in April – once again keep an eye on Facebook.

The NSW Young Planners will be playing a role in the NSW State Conference that is set to take place in the Hunter Region. It will be a chance for young planners to voice their opinion about the way forward for planning in NSW.

To bring the year to a close, we will be hosting the annual PIA Christmas Party. We hope to see you at many of our upcoming events!

Christina Livers is a consultant at Hill PDA and the Convenor of the NSW Young Planners Group. Christina is the key organiser of the upcoming ‘Meet the Leaders’ Event.

Selling Planning
By Tina Kao – City of Sydney & Committee Member

My move into the planning profession was a long time coming. After the best part of a decade working in communications and marketing, I made the full-time plunge into the world of planning. Pleased to finally make a difference to our social and built environment, I was certain I would engage the disengaged members of community and bring them along on the engagement journey.

What unfolded next tells of the complexities planners face in balancing legal-speak when engaging the community.

Upon opening a file containing recent newspaper clippings of community consultation notices - my eyes started to squint. It seemed a faulty keyboard had been at work. No full stops in sight. An alarmingly long sentence sprawled across numerous lines, splattered with legislative references.

“The City is currently exhibiting a proposed Voluntary Planning Agreement (Planning Agreement) along with an Explanatory Note in relation to Development Application D/2012/0000 for “a 40 storey Commercial Office Development, including demolition of existing structures and excavation associated with 4 level basement car park” at Lot 1 in DP 12345, Lot 2 in DP 12345,...otherwise known as 999-1100 Main Street, Sydney, 123 Near Street, Sydney and 1 Clear Street, Sydney (Development), pursuant to section...”, and the notice continued.

Planning makes vital decisions that affect the community. Is it possible it also turns heads away, with community members in fear of being stunted by undecipherable public notices?

Looking at my past professional life, I see communicators and marketers delving deep into the human response to imagery and words. These professionals intimately understand their target audience and use...
that knowledge to deconstruct messages and convey ideas quickly and effectively. The outcome is the generation of adequate emotional response from individuals to motivate action.

I recently experienced an inkling of the effectiveness of using communications and marketing approach in community engagement; through the work I did on the City of Sydney Plan: 2030 in Your Village. Whilst this work was not entirely implicated by legislative requirements, it did demonstrate local government is able to motivate community response through the use of techniques employed by other professions. The community response was enthusiastic to this engagement, with 4700 ideas collected.

Perhaps what has been demonstrated is the tension planners’ face between two vital and parallel considerations - legislative requirements and effective communication. The current planning reform emphasises community participation, however, moving forward into reform implementation requires guidance and leadership from the Department of Planning & Infrastructure to encourage local government to simplify communication whilst balancing statutory requirements. Striking this balance is the next challenge for all planners.

Tina Kao is a strategic planner at the City of Sydney with a passion for effective community engagement and striking the balance between fulfilling needs and ensuring legislative framework supports them.

Interview with Mitchell Davies
Town Planner at Development Planning Strategies

Where do you work and what interesting projects are you involved in?
I work for an urban design and planning company called Development Planning Strategies (DPS). We have offices in Perth and Sydney. DPS’s works on major projects all over Australia with our Sydney work focused on the South West Growth Centre including Oran Park, Harrington Grove and Gregory Hills. We also have projects in regional NSW, QLD and VIC.

What advice would you give young planners who would like to work for a firm like DPS?
While it is important to be passionate about planning, a good writer and drawer, it is also important to be able to build a rapport with those you work with and clients. I have also found that a basic awareness of other states planning schemes is of great assistance in a system that requires problem-solving skills to meet the expectations of the range of key stakeholders.

What is the value of being involved in the YP committee?
Without a doubt I would say the best thing about being involved in the Committee is the networking and the social events. Being involved has kept me motivated and aware of what is going on in the planning world. This is especially the case with attending YP Connect that has assisted my awareness of planning issues from around the country.

I would highly recommend coming along to YPConnect in Sydney from the 15-16 March 2014. Alternatively our bi-monthly Committee Meetings and bar networking sessions are always an enjoyable occasion. Keep an eye out on the Facebook page for the heads up on the next event.

Mitchell Davies is a Town Planner at Development Planning Strategies and a member of the YP Committee. Mitch is involved in the development of the Committee’s bi-monthly Bar Events, so feel free to drop any venue suggestions in his direction.

The NSW Young Planners Committee is comprised of:
Christina Livers – Hill PDA
Harry Quartermain – URS
Michael Dixon – Roads and Maritime Services
Timothy Sneesby – SGS Economics & Planning
Mathew Quattrovile – Four Towns Consulting
Mark Thompson – Urbis
Jeffrey Bretag – Port Stephens Council
Andrew Wheeler – DP&I
Mitchell Davies – DPS
Rachel Gardner – Kogarah City Council
Laura Schmahman – SGS Economics & Planning
Sophie Butcher – DP&I
Tina Kao – City of Sydney Council
Candice Pon – Willoughby Council

Arup has enjoyed being part of planning for NSW.

From providing environmental planning and approvals consultancy for North West Rail Link to advice on the urban renewal business case for Westconnex.

Our multidisciplinary team of planners, designers and specialists look forward to working with our clients to continue to shape a better world in 2014.

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International Snippets

David Winterbottom

Local Economies
Successful local economies are ones where key economic and political decision makers live and work locally: they work together effectively and are well networked with each other and the wider community. US evidence shows that areas with higher levels of small and medium sized enterprises have higher job growth, enjoy greater worker satisfaction levels, benefit more from civic engagement, and produce better health outcomes. EU studies show that economically successful parts of peripheral regions have local political and economic power and use it effectively. They also show that distant government decision-makers and non-locally-owned firms are a recipe for long-term economic failure.

Jan Morris and Karen Leach, TCPA, Aug 2013

Deregulated Parking
Zoning laws that require onsite parking spaces with every residential unit arguably inhibit housing development in center cities and make housing that is built both more uniform and expensive. In 1999, Los Angeles freed old vacant commercial and industrial buildings in its downtown from all parking requirements if converted to residential use. Developers used deregulation to create thousands of housing units in previously disinvested areas and departed substantially from conventional parking zoning, mainly by providing parking offsite. There is strong evidence that units in deregulated buildings are less likely to offer parking, and mixed support for the idea that units without parking are smaller and offered at lower prices. This lends credence to arguments that parking requirements create barriers to housing development. Policymakers should be particularly interested in the influence of locational requirements on parking. The biggest departure from the zoning code was not in how many spaces developers provided, but where they provided them.

Michael Manville, JAPA April 2013

The Value of Urban Trees
Urban trees are not just attractive: according to a New York Study, every dollar spent on looking after trees brings $5 in benefits. Simply by removing small particulates from the air, trees in New York are reckoned to prevent eight deaths every year. Large trees can also reduce flooding by cutting surface run-off by up to 60% and can counter the heat island effect, reducing summer temperatures by as much as 40°C. And a study in Baltimore suggested that a 10% increase in the tree canopy can cut crime by around 12% by encouraging community spirit and tempting people to spend more time out of doors, thus making criminals more likely to be spotted. But all too often local authorities see trees as a nuisance. A few years ago, only public outcry prevented Norwich City Council from cutting down its horse chestnuts on the grounds that it might be sued by people hit by falling conkers. More recently, Brighton and Hove Council came within a few hours of cutting down a fine elm to improve a road intersection. Again, an uprising of local people stopped the tree from being felled and, to nobody’s great surprise, the Council’s traffic planners then came up with an alternative layout to solve the road problem.

Paul Burall, TCPA December 2013.

Housing in France
The UK and France have similar populations and whilst the UK struggles to maintain annual new house completions over the 100,000 mark, last year France topped out 340,000 new homes and the government has agreed new funding to housing associations to build another 150,000 units to raise the annual figure to 0.5 million in 2015 and allocated 0.5 billion euros to extend insulation grants. Nearly two-thirds of new homes are custom built in France, compared to about 15% in the UK. There are volume house builders in the Languedoc, for example, but they are small beer compared with the mass of long established small builders with good links to the Marne. Britain used to have ‘local builders’ in every town who built homes; now the UK has self-employed tradesmen who carry out extensions.

Graeme Bell TCPA, December 2013

Heidelburg Project
Most of Detroit is still shrinking as houses are foreclosed, abandoned, stripped of their valuables and burnt by arsonists. But even here, new ideas and visions are emerging. Situated in one such neighbourhood, the Heidelberg Project is an on-going art installation created by Tyree Guyton, who began painting polka dots on abandoned houses on his street. The dots symbolise how we are all connected to each other.

The Heidelberg Project is important to contemporary Detroit because it offers an alternative vision to the ruins and decay. It turns abandoned homes and junk into art and, in turn, created a sense of hope of what could be possible by working with the community to reimagine their neighbourhood.

Duncan Doucet TCPA, January 2014

Re-uniting Health and Planning
Real future costs are seldom accounted for at the time that buildings and places are planned. Instead, we tend to aim to reduce immediate costs and increase immediate profit. We leave it to the future residents and landlords to pay the long-term price of expensive heating, cooling and maintenance; and to pay the price of poor physical health, mental health, isolation and crime resulting from poorly designed dwellings, places, spaces and connections.

Newham in East London, where to Council is evaluating the utility of a draft ‘healthy urban planning checklist’. These are formative times for the health and planning agenda. There is pressure to act on a range of public health topics, from providing sufficient affordable housing, to restricting the spread of betting shops, to improving access to healthy food. New organisations and policies will influence planning for health. Evidence on the solutions the planning system can help to implement will continue to evolve.

Michael Chang, Andrew Ross, Tim Chapman & Carl Petrokofsky, TCPA January 2014

Progressive Town Planning
I see as unfortunate the tendency of planners today to rely on advice from government rather than follow their own initiative, so I am not in principle of the view that more guidance = better planning; but I concur more broadly with the view that planning should at root be about making life better for people – as did the ‘founders of the planning movement’. I also agree that part of the problem is that among many in the planning profession today there is ‘a twisted view that so long as there’s a development plan the system will be alright’.

John Sturzaker, TCPA December 2013
In our profession, it takes some mental agility and a Teflon persona to ignore the failings, hypocrisy, inconsistency, uninformed and myopic views, positions, actions and outcomes of our profession (and of the stakeholders that we, as planners, have to deal with on a day to day basis).

Sometimes, if we don’t laugh we cry. So in this Snapped I deviate from the usual digital media and bring you some cartoons published by the UK satirical magazine Private Eye over the last couple of years.

Private Eye rarely misses an opportunity to expose the milieu we work in for what it is.

Thanks Private Eye!

All cartoons sourced from Private Eye (www.private-eye.co.uk)
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