



town & country planning

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- **Special Issue on the PERFECT Project – Planning for Environment and Resource efficiency in European Cities and Towns**

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looking ahead to 2020 with our new government



Following the outcome of the general election the TCPA is looking ahead to 2020, and, as always, we will have much work to do. Inevitably there will be challenges, but there were some hooks in both the Conservative manifesto¹ and speeches by the Prime Minister in the first few days of the new government that we must make the most of.

An initial priority for us must be relationship-building. Westminster welcomed 140 new MPs in mid-December – for over 20% of the 650 seats in the House of Commons. A number of the new intake have experience of being local and parish councillors, and they may be potential allies to help raise important issues in Parliament, not least in relation to the quality of new homes. The new intake also contains a substantial number of members from solidly working class seats in the North of England. Addressing all political parties before the election we argued that the new government needed to make regeneration a priority and commit long-term funding to support areas of the country and communities in desperate need of revitalisation.

The Conservative manifesto highlighted the need to regenerate towns and help high streets to thrive. A key part of this was seen to be devolving more power, in relation to which the manifesto stated:

*'In the 21st century, we need to get away from the idea that 'Whitehall knows best' and that all growth must inevitably start in London. Because we as Conservatives believe you can and must trust people and communities to make the decisions that are right for them.'*¹

In his victory speech² the Prime Minister of course focused on 'getting Brexit done'. But he also argued that people 'voted to be carbon-neutral by 2050' and that his government would make the country the 'cleanest, greenest on Earth, with the most far-reaching environmental programme'. There may be some scepticism about how far-reaching the Environment Bill was, but for environmental issues

to be of sufficient priority to be included in the speech is definitely a positive hook we need to try to use.

Ahead of the election we argued there is a need for a new Department for Climate Change with a Secretary of State to take national leadership on the topic. Actions need to include putting in place mechanisms at national, regional and local levels to support radical reductions in carbon dioxide emissions, and enabling the adaptation to/mitigation of climate change that is needed. There is currently speculation that we may see a wider re-organisation of government departments, including reinstatement of the Department of Energy and Climate Change,³ which may need to be a key focus for us during 2020.

In light of these two priorities, perhaps the government will look favourably upon the work of the UK2070 Commission, an independent inquiry chaired by Lord Kerslake which aims to better understand and tackle city and regional inequalities in the UK. It published its second report to coincide with the party conferences in the autumn, and one of the seven national priorities for action was embedding spatial justice into tackling climate change:

*'the national goal of moving to a zero-carbon economy must avoid an 'unjust transition' which merely reinforces the existing patterns of spatial inequality. 'Spatial justice' must become embedded in the UK's contributions to the global response to climate change.'*⁴

The Commission also echoed the Raynsford Review's call for a national spatial plan.

Seeing the Commission raise the issue of inequality and environmental and social justice was very welcome, and we hope that the government will consider the various recommendations. A month or so ago we published a new report, *London: Planning for a Just City?*,⁵ which analysed all the capital's Local Plans and considered the extent to which their policies address social and economic inequalities, seek to increase social housing stock, and encourage collaboration with local people. The project focused on London as it was funded by Trust for London, but we are clear that planning has a key role to play across the country in achieving greater social and economic inclusion, promoting equality, and reducing poverty. Many of the report's recommendations are applicable everywhere.

Some key figures from the analysis were:

- 57% of councils had no requirement for like-for-like re-provision of affordable housing within their Local Plan.
- Only 29% of councils' Local Plans had a specific target for 'social rent' housing, the only tenure genuinely affordable to people on low incomes.
- 60% of councils' Local Plans had no requirement for 'tenure-blind' housing, thus allowing developers to supply lower-quality dwellings for affordable housing tenants.
- Although issues of poverty, social inclusion, social justice and economic inequality are major concerns in the capital, 31% of councils did not set these out as key considerations in their Local Plan.

It was also interesting to find that, while all councils outlined how they will engage with local people in developing their Local Plan, only 12% outlined a clear commitment for genuine collaboration in plan-making.

The report makes 20 recommendations that, if acted upon, would enable the planning system to deliver participative and inclusive decisions and implementation on the ground. The detailed recommendations include the following:

- Local planning authorities must ensure that Local Plans are ambitious and aspirational in promoting equality and reducing socio-economic exclusion. Local planning authorities must also ensure that corporate strategies and other strategies that relate to inclusion and equality fully recognise the key role that planning plays in achieving these ambitions.
- To achieve meaningful public participation, local planning authorities should strengthen their Statements of Community Involvement by including targeted methods to include under-represented groups, improve the inclusivity of public participation processes, ensure that wider public engagement directly feeds into local plan-making, and ensure that proactive engagement takes place at all stages in the planning system.
- To understand how planning policies impact different groups of people differently local planning authorities should ensure that Equality Impact Assessments conducted in developing a Local Plan are not merely tick-box exercises, and that the Equality Impact Assessment process starts early and is embedded within the iterative process of policy development and implementation.

To support the last of those recommendations we have also produced a short guide to meaningfully assessing policy impacts on equality and inclusion.⁶

As the TCPA often argues, the homes and communities in which people live have profound

impacts on their health, wellbeing and life chances. We will need to work hard to make sure that the new government recognises the powerful role of planning. We know this will be easier in relation to some parts of our work than others, but there are certainly opportunities that we will need to make the most of during 2020.

● **Fiona Howie** is Chief Executive of the TCPA.

Notes

- 1 *Get Brexit Done: Unleash Britain's Potential*. Conservative and Unionist Party, Nov. 2019. <https://assets-global.website-files.com/5da42e2cae7ebd3f8bde353c5dda924905da587992a064ba-Conservative%202019%20Manifesto.pdf>
- 2 'Election results 2019: Boris Johnson's victory speech in full'. *BBC News*, 13 Dec. 2019. www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2019-50777071
- 3 G Parker: 'Conservatives prepare shake-up of government machine'. *Financial Times*, 15 Dec. 2019. www.ft.com/content/a7d6a25e-1f3e-11ea-b8a1-584213ee7b2b
- 4 *Fairer and Stronger: Rebalancing the UK Economy*. Second Report. UK2070 Commission, Sept. 2019. http://uk2070.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/FINAL_SECOND_REPORT.pdf
- 5 *London: Planning for a Just City?* TCPA, Oct. 2019. www.tcpa.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=3ae369d9-5163-455c-ab03-59514fc33c46
- 6 *Beyond Box-Ticking*. TCPA, Oct. 2019. www.tcpa.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=5da584b9-f0e6-4ed8-a4ea-b1942a8a582a

Wyndham Thomas CBE

The TCPA records with sadness the passing of exceptional supporter Wyndham Thomas CBE, who died on 2 December 2019 in Peterborough, designated for strategic expansion by a New Town Development Corporation of which he was General Manager from the start in 1968. Peterborough made him Freeman in 2012.

Wyndham was TCPA Director from 1955 to 1968, leaving to take up the Peterborough task. He later served on the Boards of Inner City Enterprises and London Docklands Development Corporation. An appreciation was published in the January 2019 issue of this journal (pp 4 & 5) to mark his 95th birthday.

The thoughts of the Association are with Wyndham's wife Betty, and all the family. It is hoped that a memorial service will be arranged in 2020.

evolutionary transition to zero carbon? it's too late for that...



This is the first in a new regular column on the climate crisis, and it is written while I occasionally look out over the floods in Matlock, which impacted on the town centre and sadly cost a life. The reality of such impacts on people's lives is a harsh reminder of our failure to grasp the enormity of climate change.

Over the coming months these brief interventions will look at some of the policy and legal issues around the planning and climate change agenda. The column will seek to highlight some good practice and direct a critical eye on those parts of our sector that present real barriers to solving the climate crisis by standing in the way of the kinds of radical action that we need. It will also be a place to highlight some of the inspirational progress in both the public and private sectors, which is, for example, transforming our deployment of renewable energy.

The TCPA has been working actively on this agenda for a quarter of a century, and the recent political interest driven by Extinction Rebellion has given fresh impetus to our work. While civil society may just have woken up to the existential threat of climate change, it is worth remembering that we have had 30 years in which to address this fundamental issue. I attended my first meeting on planning and climate change 28 years ago, and at that time concentrations of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere were around 360 parts per million. Back then, a level of 400 parts per million was thought to signify 'game over'. But concentrations reached 415 parts per million in 2019,¹ and, as the graph in Fig. 1 illustrates, last year we saw the largest single increase in carbon dioxide emissions on record.

Setting the current debate in this wider context is important because the kinds of urgent action we need to take now in radically reducing carbon dioxide emissions result from a catastrophic political failure to act on what we knew the climate science was telling us. While the journey before 2010 in the UK was not always perfect, we were on a trajectory

to begin to deal effectively with the climate challenge. The period after 2010 has been a wasted decade, defined by the triumph of climate denial and a commitment to deregulation which has removed important obligations and powers such as the 2016 zero-carbon commitment. It may well be that this decade of inaction will prove to have been one of the greatest lost opportunities of modern times.

A very great deal has been written about climate change, in terms of both the technical detail of the science and the politics of why we have failed to respond. To understand where we are now, a number of core propositions are worth setting out.

Climate change as an environmental fashion statement?

There is no doubt that climate change is the greatest existential threat to human civilisation. The reason that we at the TCPA are so exercised about it is not simply because it is an environmental cause, but because climate change stands between us and everything else we wish to achieve in pursuit of the good society. Tackling climate change is about practical survival, but it does not remove the need to consider how we organise society to secure social justice.

It is also significant that climate change will impact on our economy first. Some of our most vulnerable coastal towns and cities are also some of the most in need of regeneration and investment. Repeated flood events and rising insurance costs are major deterrents to investment and exacerbate economic decline. That is why building resilience to climate change should be the foundation of all local economic development thinking. At a national level, we also need a complete reassessment of infrastructure needs, with climate resilience as the first priority.

The state of climate science

The impacts of climate change are happening faster and with greater intensity than we had expected. The nature of these impacts is focused upon the increasing incidence of severe weather events, including intense rain, heatwaves, and sea level rise. In practice this means increased tidal, river and surface water flood events, along with

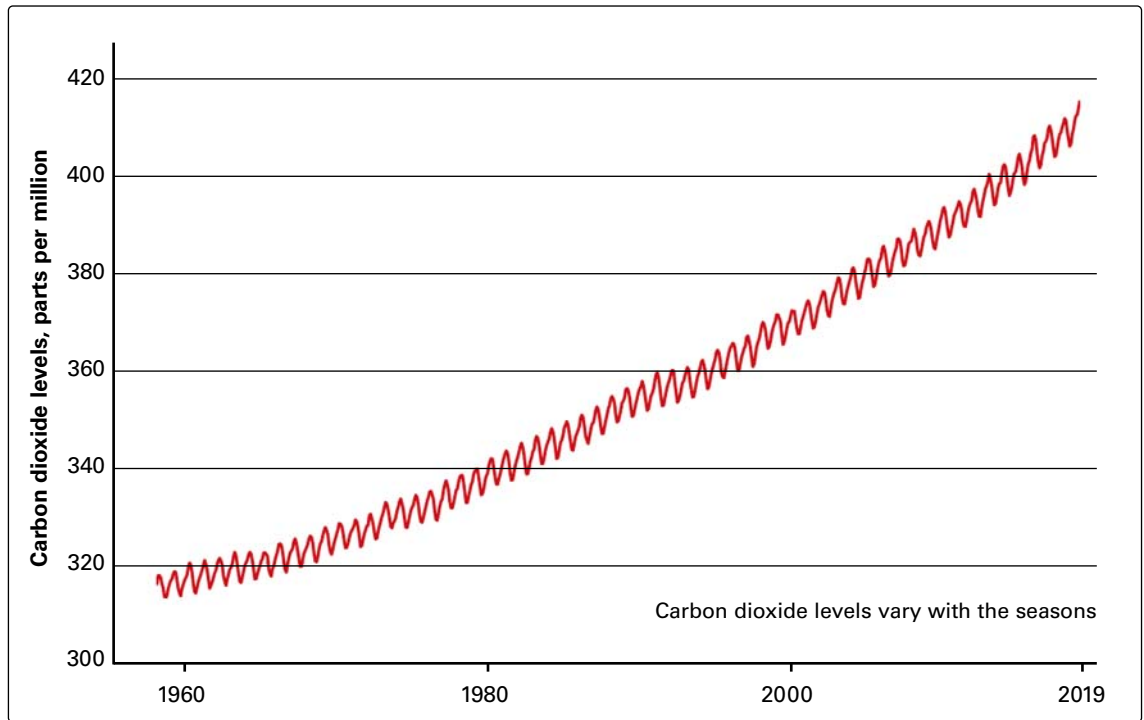


Fig. 1 Atmospheric carbon dioxide concentration - rising to record levels in 2019

Source: Measurements from Mauna Loa, Hawaii, US Earth System Research Laboratory¹

temperature spikes, particularly in our big urban areas.

One indicator of this problem is sea level rise: we are now meant to be planning for a rise of 115 centimetres by 2100 on the east coast of England.² Observable sea level rise has been occurring faster than had been anticipated. A working average for sea level rise is now 5 millimetres per annum, with worse to come as current Environment Agency estimates do not include the break-up of the West Antarctic ice sheet, so sea level rise figures will be revised upwards. The best estimate is now 200 centimetres by 2100. Sea level will go on rising after 2100, so the viability of places needs to be seen in this long-term context.

There is now a limited prospect of stabilising global temperatures in line with the Paris Agreement (at 1.5-2°C above pre-industrial levels³), so while we must make radical reductions in carbon dioxide emissions now, we are locked into multiple and severe climate impacts.

A nation critically unprepared

As a nation, the UK is critically unprepared for the impacts of climate change. This failure is largely

about political leadership, but it is expressed in practical terms by a failure to organise ourselves to meet the scale of the challenge – witness the recent floods, the reaction to summer heat, and the perilous state of some of our older dams. The result is that, as the climate crisis intensifies, we will be made poorer and more vulnerable than we need to be. The key areas of dysfunction are:

- **Institutional fragmentation:** There are multiple national and local agencies with a stake in adaptation but no single entity with oversight of the complete agenda. The Environment Agency has no formal remit to deal with heat stress, nor does it have responsibility for all aspects of flood risk. Most significantly, there is no single agency for the delivery of the multiple actions that are needed to build national resilience. Local planning authorities are the closest proxy we have, with the powers to both plan and control development, yet their boundaries are very poorly aligned with the functional geography of, for example, flood risk. In the absence of any coherent strategic planning framework, co-operation between districts in similar areas of vulnerability is institutionally and politically difficult and, in some cases, non-existent.

- **Austerity:** Since 2010 a lack of resources has impacted severely on the skills and institutional capacity of all the key players relevant to building resilience. However, this is most acutely expressed in local planning authorities in top-tier flood authorities. The resources to develop and retain staff, as well as commission relevant supporting evidence, are inadequate.
- **Skills:** There is a widespread lack of the key relevant adaptation skills, particularly in planning, but also in the wider built environment sector in terms of design and construction.
- **Deregulation:** Those on the front line of securing adaptation in local government have much less power over the built environment than they did a decade ago. The rapid expansion of permitted development is a key example, allowing commercial property to be converted to housing units without the need for full planning permission. Nor do local authorities have the ability to insist on a wider range of adaptation measures.

‘There are many pathways through the climate crisis, but few are offering a hopeful vision of a very different but better society. This is surprising, because there are so many actions on climate change which offer multiple benefits for human health’

So, where does this leave us? It is now too late for an evolutionary transition to a zero-carbon economy and for incremental changes to climate resilience. Radical action is required on both, which means the re-engineering of energy and transport systems, as well as putting place the large- and small-scale resilience measures on flood and temperature risks. The remaking of the whole fabric of the built environment requires fundamental changes in law, policy, business models, and personal action. It will, for example, mean rethinking the role of government, and new levels of organisation not seen outside of war time.

What should the TCPA be doing in all this?

Climate change is the greatest barrier to the goal of achieving the practical utopia defined by the Garden City Principles. But it is not our only

problem. We have to simultaneously deal with entrenched poverty, provide meaningful work, and reduce inequality.

There are many pathways through the climate crisis, but few are offering a hopeful vision of a very different but better society. This is surprising, because there are so many actions on climate change, such as greening cities, which offer multiple benefits for human health and wellbeing, including reducing temperatures and absorbing surface water flooding. In fact, all of the technical solutions that we need are already proven; what we lack is the collective will to take action.

And those who believe that the current focus on climate is just another brief flirtation with the environmental agenda should think again. We are being hit hard by climate impacts right now. These impacts will intensify, costing lives and damaging the economy. We have had our wake-up calls and we have ignored them. Now we have to act.

● **Hugh Ellis** is Policy Director at the TCPA. The views expressed are personal.

Notes

- 1 ‘Trends in atmospheric carbon dioxide. Monthly average Mauna Loa CO₂’. Earth System Research Laboratory, National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration, US Department of Commerce, Nov. 2019. www.esrl.noaa.gov/gmd/ccgg/trends/
- 2 *Understanding the Risks, Empowering Communities, Building Resilience: the National Flood and Coastal Erosion Risk Management Strategy for England*. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs/Environment Agency, Sept. 2011. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228898/9780108510366.pdf
- 3 *Frequently Asked Questions*. FAQ on the Paris Agreement. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, Dec. 2018. www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/sites/2/2018/12/SR15_FAQ_Low_Res.pdf

planning – get it done



Some readers of this column develop an enthusiastic – even vocational – interest in town and country planning, leading to undergraduate or postgraduate study and eventually, after some years in practice and a written submission, membership of the Royal Town Planning Institute (I've been paying my RTPI subs for about 45 years). The underlying driver is typically 'to make the world a better place' or to 'help people live a better life', or a variation thereon. RTPI status opens a wide variety of career choices in the public, private or voluntary sectors; and it is said that it adds gravitas to one's professional evidence given at formal planning hearings (although in recent years I have heard enough fellow RTPI members present such unprofessional evidence that I reckon that factor may be fading¹).

If we value having a professional cadre of planners to serve us, we need to maintain professional standards such that the community's respect is earned. We also need serious manpower planning, and to refresh the structure and content of education and training programmes to ensure that our planners have a relevant contribution to make to today's society. Planners should be serving people's need to make things better, not helping the selfish duck and dive to keep others hungry and homeless, or trash the planet.

Others come to the field of planning as objectors to a development proposal sufficiently serious to have fired an interest in understanding planning processes, better to fight their case. They may be part of an action group or a longer-wave interest group, or just a distressed individual. For big enough issues, there are sometimes people able to make the commitment to become elected members of the local authority to pursue their fight.

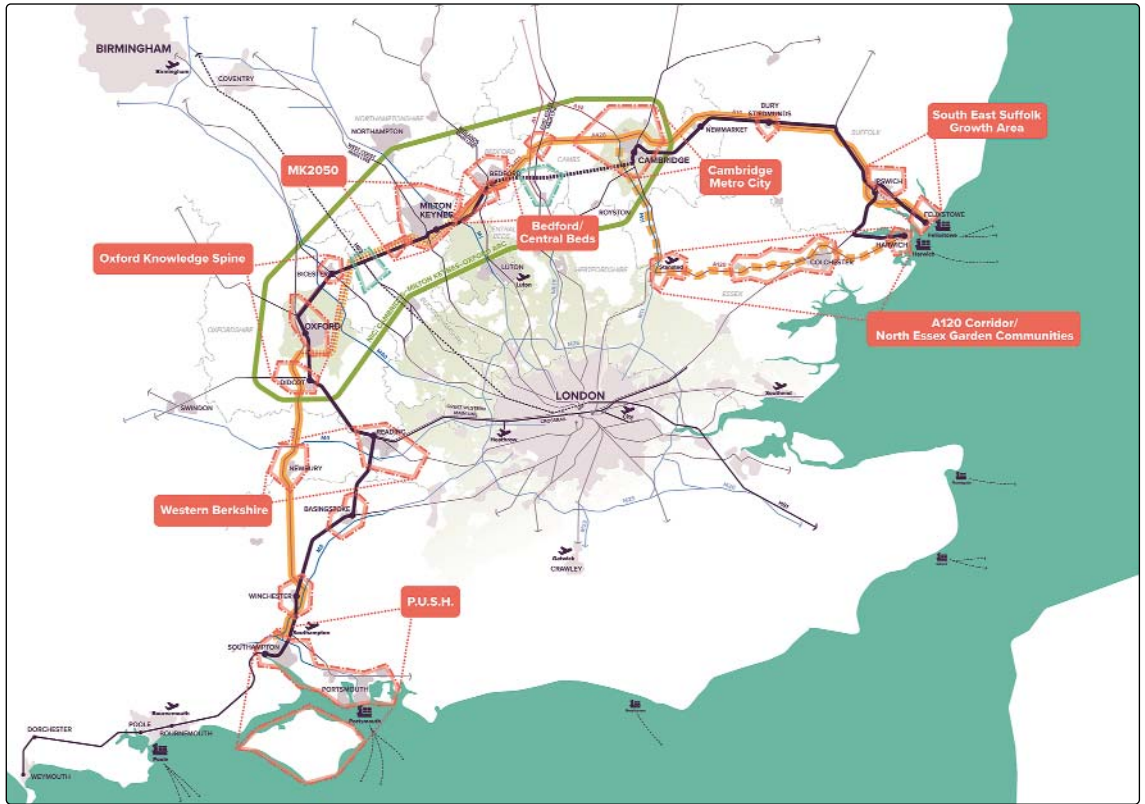
This is an increasingly common occurrence, but it can be an immensely frustrating experience for them: *local* planning authorities are constrained by the precise text and punctuation of their own statutory development plan (which is actually a

portfolio of documents, more likely than not the actual cause of the objectionable development), by *national* planning policy, by *national* planning practice guidance, and by the accumulation of 'precedents' set by *national* decision-makers in the Planning Inspectorate and the Ministry.

The highly motivated new local authority members will find they hit a brick wall. Bold is the planning committee that will not accept its officers' advice, and bold are the officers who will help their committee to find a way around national policy obstacles or try to initiate a whole new type of policy. Official training for members must tell them how to achieve their objectives, and stop just telling them to do what they are told by their officers. Local planning authorities need help to enable localities to change for the better, in appropriate local ways.

Others come to planning motivated by a wholesome desire, whether politically motivated or not, to give public service. Members of a local authority are drafted onto all types of committee. Some are allocated to planning, and will find that there is no pleasure in being warned that 'costs might be awarded' if a decision is appealed and the applicant might win; and that there is no pleasure in trying to prepare a statutory Local Plan of ever-increasing complexity (for example the impossibility of the duty to co-operate when town pushes into country, and the need to prove the viability of all proposed site allocations) when there is insufficient money or staff, and the 'examining' Inspector can only practice the weird religion of 'the test of soundness' instead of doing something useful like requiring the correction of absurd wrongnesses.

There are other tributaries of people into the congregation that is the world of planning, but the overarching message is the same: we must pay for planning properly and stop pretending it is OK. People expect a planning authority to be accessible, responsive, accountable, energetic, creative, and ambitious. People appreciate the protection that planning can give them in allowing their voice to be heard on planning applications without face-to-face confrontation with the applicant. People like the way that planning helps control the building excesses of horrid neighbours and careless transient developers with their often fraudulent 'public consultation'



Who knows about all this? Some strategic planning under way in the Outer South East/South Midlands

Courtesy David Lock Associates, presentation to the National Infrastructure Forum in June 2017 (note date!)

games. Relaxing local planning controls is a grave political misjudgement. Ministers are not listening to their constituents.

The new Johnson government must change the operational environment at a large scale, too – ‘levelling up the regions’ in return for being ‘loaned’ the votes of previously long-standing Labour voters. Since the Cameron/Clegg government’s catastrophic abolition of the Regional Spatial Strategy system, there has been a void. There is no joined-up transparent method of designing the future of large areas. It is being done piecemeal in specialist silos – Network Rail, Highways England, Natural England, the utility companies, and the innovation Catapults, for example.

The unelected Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are preparing sub-regional strategies for their assemblages of antique local government boundaries which do not reflect real geography, and they do so with inadequate resources and shouty but dreadfully shallow public engagement. The Catapults around the country are enjoying generous budgets to promote innovation with closed circles of

participants. The National Infrastructure Commission’s job is to advise government on long-term visions for spatial and economic change, and unlike the LEPs it has generous budgets for its ‘evidence base’ but, as has been shown in its approved proposals for the Oxford to Cambridge Arc (I persist in reading left to right), the people living in their diagrams don’t know what, where, when or why. The excellent vision of the Arc is still an idea for consenting strategic planners in private.

The Johnson government must therefore find some face-saving words to construct a fresh system for devising wide-area strategies in which the public can be confident that they will be engaged and receive a fair hearing if necessary. Paying clever people in white coats in closed rooms to come up with whiz-bang projects that don’t join up, or just telling people what is to be done to them as the bulldozer hoves into view, will produce a backlash.

It may be the rush, and the narrow political focus, but the Johnson government had no manifesto paragraphs on strategic planning, or on planning at

all. Its Seasonal Selection Box said the sale of council houses is to continue, and there will be more council houses built. More houses of all sorts are to be built generally, to bring down prices, yet the Help to Buy programme will continue, even though it has caused prices to rise. An unspecified Towns Fund will enable 100 towns to win money for regeneration. A town will have electric buses. There will be more devolution in England, but how, where and why rests on a mention of the Northern Powerhouse, Western Gateway and Midlands Engine. I will not include 'the biggest ever pot-hole filling strategy' as it is such a silly house-keeping item to put in a general election manifesto.

'The present tangle of activities is incoherent, inherently wasteful of public money, and does not carry the people. It needs sorting'

As we face 2020, I think the point to make is this: if the people can be trusted by a Cameron government to decide to leave the EU; and trusted to choose a Johnson government to 'Get it done'; the people can be trusted to discuss the strategic design of the UK. The present tangle of activities is incoherent, inherently wasteful of public money, and does not carry the people. It needs sorting. Get that done.

● **David Lock CBE** is Strategic Planning Adviser at David Lock Associates, and a Vice-President and former Chair of the TCPA. He was Chair of the Planning Committee at Ebbsfleet Development Corporation until October 2018, has served as Chair of his local Parish meeting, and helped prepare the Business Neighbourhood Plan for Central Milton Keynes, which received 89,900 votes in support at referendum. The views expressed are personal.

Note

- 1 The RTPI Code of Professional Conduct is clear, but enforcement is not fit for purpose. Complaints take months to process, and when the result is published, typically as a small note in *The Planner* saying unprofessional behaviour was found, 'guilty' persons are rarely named and the sanction is usually a letter telling them not to do it again. Reform is needed, otherwise there is no point in the Code

central london meeting rooms for hire

The TCPA has two meeting rooms for hire in the centre of London for conferences, meetings and training events.

The refurbished Boardroom overlooks the Mall. It can accommodate up to 40 people in a theatre-style layout and up to 28 in boardroom/roundtable style. A small meeting room, which can accommodate up to 10 people, is also available for hire. A laptop and projector can be hired, subject to availability. Refreshments and lunch (not included in the room hire) can also be ordered at the time of booking.

The TCPA's premises are situated in the Grade I listed 17 Carlton House Terrace, close to Trafalgar Square, and a few minutes' walk from Charing Cross and Piccadilly Circus Underground stations. The TCPA has no parking facilities, but a National Car Park at the end of the Terrace in Spring Gardens can be accessed via Trafalgar Square.

The rooms are available for hire all year round during office hours. Evening hire may be available by arrangement.

Booking priority and preferential rates are given to TCPA members.

For further information and hire rates and to check availability, ring **020 7930 8903** or e-mail roomhire@tcpa.org.uk



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TCPA Seminar

the heart of the matter – long-term stewardship in new communities

Thursday 26 March 2020

TCPA, 17 Carlton House Terrace,
London SW1Y 5AS

Community ownership of land and the long-term stewardship of assets is one of the core Garden City Principles. In recent years, many local authorities have made commitments to apply the principle of long-term stewardship to their new communities.

As local authorities and their private sector delivery partners are getting to grips with delivering stewardship models, key challenges have been identified around the details of finance, governance and community participation. Building upon previous practical guidance on long-term stewardship, the T CPA has taken a step further and explored the technical detail and challenges being faced by those forming models for long-term stewardship in new communities.

This seminar will explore the findings of this project and hear from those involved in delivering stewardship models.

This seminar is part of the T CPA New Communities Group (NCG) programme of events, but is open to both members and non-members of the NCG.



To book tickets, see
www.tcpa.org.uk/Event/tcpa-seminar-the-heart-of-the-matter-long-term-stewardship-in-new-communities

TCPA Seminar

understanding the garden city approach – seminars for councils

Tuesday 4 February 2020 : Letchworth

Thursday 6 February 2020 : York

Tuesday 25 February 2020 : London

Wednesday 26 February 2020 : Manchester

A series of **free seminars** for councils exploring the opportunities to bring forward sustainable new communities within the context of national policy and the Garden City Principles.

Across the UK there is a chronic shortage of affordable housing, and this housing crisis is damaging people's life chances. But meeting the nation's housing needs will involve more than just delivering housing units – we must create beautiful green places which offer a wide range of employment, retail and leisure opportunities; supply a complete mix of housing types; adopt zero-carbon design; implement sustainable transport; provide well managed and connected parks and public spaces; and offer people a better quality of life and more sustainable lifestyles.

The T CPA is publishing a new guide to help councils who are considering the new Garden City developments as part of their portfolio of housing growth options. This accompanying series of free seminars will help councils to understand the opportunities and challenges of this approach.



To reserve places, see
<https://www.tcpa.org.uk/Pages/Events/Category/all-events>

learning into action

Jessie Fieth opens the Special Issue on the PERFECT project by outlining its aims and looking forward to its second phase

The PERFECT project (Planning for Environment and Resource Efficiency in European Cities and Towns) started in January 2017; the first phase – the ‘learning’ phase – finishes in December 2019, and the second phase – the ‘implementation’ phase – will run from January 2020 to December 2021. The purpose of the project is to highlight green infrastructure’s potential contribution in creating resilient and prosperous regions, by transferring good practice and expertise across the project partnership. The project, which is co-funded by Interreg Europe, is being delivered by a partnership of seven municipalities from seven different EU member states, led by the TCPA (see Box 1).

The exchange of experience

Through an extensive programme of workshops, presentations, peer exchanges and study tours, partners have learnt about the wealth of indisputable evidence that green infrastructure can help improve to people’s health, build resilience to climate change, and have a positive impact on growth and job creation and retention. Partners have been visiting and researching good practice across Europe and exchanging experience in order to identify ways in which they can influence policies so as to increase investment in green infrastructure.

The project has offered the municipality partners many opportunities to involve stakeholders, including politicians, in project activities in order to encourage them to prioritise investment in green infrastructure. Detailed study tours to high-quality green infrastructure schemes, highlighting the multiple benefits delivered, have been particularly effective in persuading stakeholders of the value of green infrastructure. The partnership was fortunate to be able to visit the city of Freiburg in Germany to gain experience of the social, economic and environmental impacts of the long-term, integrated green strategies implemented there.

Implementation on the ground

At the time of writing, each partner is finalising their ‘Action Plan’, a document which details how the lessons learnt from the co-operation will be exploited to improve a policy instrument within their region in the second phase of the project. The

Box 1 The PERFECT project partners

The PERFECT partners are:

- Town and Country Planning Association, UK (lead partner)
- Cornwall Council, UK
- Provincial Government of Styria, Department for Environment and Spatial Planning, Austria
- Social Ascension of Somogy Development, Communication and Education Nonprofit Ltd, Hungary
- City of Amsterdam, Netherlands
- Regional Development Agency of the Ljubljana Urban Region, Slovenia
- Bratislava–Karlova Ves Municipality, Slovakia
- Municipality of Ferrara, Italy

partners’ Action Plans will be available on the PERFECT website in early 2020, and the website will provide periodic updates on the partners’ progress in delivering against the plans.¹ PERFECT will culminate in a high-level event to be held in London in spring 2021 to share the successes and disseminate the learning gained during the project.

The continuing partnership

As this special issue of *Town & Country Planning* illustrates, all partners have benefited from joint learning, as well as from bi- and tri-lateral peer working – providing unique opportunities to learn about the multiple benefits of green infrastructure, about how to make it happen, and about how to transfer the learning to help improve policies in the partner regions. Although phase 1 of the project is coming to a close, the partnership is strong and, regardless of the outcome of Brexit, will continue to exchange experience and learn from each other throughout the coming years.

● **Jessie Fieth** is Projects and Policy Manager at the TCPA and is the PERFECT Project Manager.

Note

- 1 Further information about the PERFECT project is available from the PERFECT project website, at www.interregeurope.eu/perfect

while riding on a train going west ...

The TCPA's European Advisor **Diane Smith** offers a personal reflection on 12 years of EU projects at the TCPA



Professor Sir Peter Hall addressing one of the TCPA's European study tours

I write the beginning of this article while travelling on a train in Somogy County, Hungary. It is raining heavily and it is one of those greyish-yellow days where the land and horizon are ill-defined and the bleakness is never-ending. I wonder if that is how it was for the Magyars when they were rampaging across the Great Hungarian Plain. Somehow I hadn't imagined those horse-riders of the Middle Ages having to contend with this bleakness – instead I had pictured either endless hot and dry vistas or sparkling snow crunching under foot and hoof.

But I digress; I am on TCPA business, travelling from Budapest to Kaposvar on the last leg of a magnificent series of train journeys all the way from Hove – Hove-St Pancras-Paris-Zurich-Budapest-Kaposvar. And why am I doing this? Some might say joyriding and free trips, and that's what EU project work is all about. But they would be wrong: I'm travelling to the last meeting of phase 1

of the PERFECT project and the train journey was by choice – not only for climate reasons but because this is the last major trip I shall be making for the TCPA and I wanted to get a better feel for the pan-European experience at ground level.

But back to the question, why? It's a question that I've often asked myself during my 12 years of working for EU-funded projects at the TCPA. There's no denying that since 2007 I have often felt like the Foreign Secretary to the Association – more often away from the office than at a desk at 17 Carlton House Terrace; either working from home in Hove (much of the work on EU projects is virtual and the call of the Seagulls (*sic*) has a great attraction), or travelling to meetings, study tours, conferences, workshops and the like across the 28 EU member states. Being 'Foreign Secretary' has afforded tremendous opportunities for travel and new experiences – and that applies not only for me but

of the success of GRaBS in raising awareness of the importance of strategic planning for climate change adaptation in order to better prepare our towns and cities to cope with flooding and intense heat. Not only was this was the first time that the TCPA had won a European Award, but it was also a first for the an Interreg IVC funding stream.

So some of those 'Why?' questions are answered. Then there is the financial aspect. GRaBS effectively funded two full-time posts at the TCPA over the three years of the project. These positions were spread across several different people to enable the Association to build its corporate intellectual property in both planning and adaptation, within the wider context of EU planning, climate change and adaptation solutions. This, in turn, helped place the TCPA in pole position to bid for, and win, the role of co-ordinator of the Green Infrastructure Partnership initiative once the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs decided it could no longer support it.

Through Hugh Ellis, TCPA Director of Policy, appointed in 2008 initially to work exclusively on GRaBS, the knowledge and experience gained from GRaBS has filtered organically through TCPA policy and research development, leading to new projects, new commissions, and new research. And even today, the TCPA continues to trade off the success and influence of GRaBS. For example, one of the Expert Papers in the PERFECT project, written by Henry Smith from the TCPA and Peter Massini from the Greater London Authority (GLA), is not only based on an updated version of the Green Space Factor (GSF) identified in GRaBS but demonstrates the influence of the TCPA's work on the GSF on the

Box 2 EPICURO

The European Partnership for Innovative Cities within an Urban Resilience Outlook (EPICURO) project, funded by DG ECHO (the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations), promoted the sharing of good practice in resilience to climate change in urban areas. It facilitated access to knowledge and expertise on the issue of climate change adaptation, and promoted multi-actor transnational co-operation among a multi-actor partnership of bodies and agencies actively working on the enhancement of urban resilience.

GLA, and, as noted above, a version of the GSF is included in the new London Plan.

At this point the 'Why?' should become, 'Why stop there?'. And the TCPA didn't. The next project LEAP (Leadership for Energy and Planning),⁴ which ran from 2011 to 2013, took the Association in another direction, focusing how to institutionalise the planning and development of sustainable energy policies and practices into the corporate structures of local authorities. Led by the TCPA, the project partnership of ten municipalities across Europe not only enabled TCPA staff (and partners from Southampton City Council and Cornwall Council) to learn about the Covenant of Mayors and Sustainable Energy Action Plans, but also enabled the TCPA to develop in-house skills in peer working, SWOT analysis, and quantitative and qualitative surveys.



The TCPA has organised a number of very successful study tours of Freiburg

Once again, the equivalent of 1.5 staff posts were financially supported during the 30 months of the project, and several study tours were organised.

By this time, the TCPA was engaged in forward planning to ensure that we had, as far as possible, a major EU-funded project to ensure both our continued learning on EU planning policy and delivery and a funding stream to support staff posts. The success of LEAP led to the TCPA developing the concept of planning for sustainable energy a step further, and SPECIAL (Spatial Planning and Energy for Communities In All Landscapes)⁵ was born.

We almost felt our name was on this project as this Horizon 2020 Call asked for projects to address the need for greater integration of sustainable energy policies and practice into spatial planning strategies at the local and regional levels. It was a dream project! We developed the concept with planning associations from Germany, Austria, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Sweden. Planning systems were scrutinised, good practice identified, guidance issued, and several study tours again took place. The SPECIAL project was of inestimable value to the TCPA in terms of its workstreams on climate change adaptation and mitigation, and also fed directly into awareness-raising for the members of the TCPA's New Communities Group (NCG) and into the development of the Association's Garden City Guides.

SPECIAL finished in spring 2016 and our next major EU work was as a partner in the EPICURO (see Box 2). There were many advantages for the TCPA in taking a role in the project, mainly in relation to increasing our knowledge on planning for adaptation and mitigation, learning directly from the 100 Resilient Cities⁶ and C40 Cities⁷ and further building the credibility of the Association's international knowledge base on how the planning system can have a positive impact in addressing the challenges of climate change.

PERFECT and beyond

Which all leads to the PERFECT project – Planning for Environmental Resource Efficiency in European Cities and Towns. When SPECIAL wound down in 2016, and with the early rumblings of Brexit and doubts over Horizon 2020 funding, the TCPA decided to apply for an Interreg project again, and to move away from the climate change and energy focus and develop a project on the multiple benefits of green infrastructure.

Such a project would tick a number of boxes for the TCPA – the project fitted well with the TCPA's Garden City Principles and the new Garden City Guides; green infrastructure forms a key part of NCG member strategies; the TCPA was managing the Green Infrastructure Partnership; green infrastructure is a key element in the planning and health agenda; the project would review and build

upon the GRaBS project; and we believed that we could demonstrate the positive influence of green infrastructure on the growth and jobs agenda central to ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) funding.

The learning gained from the project, and from the practical study tours and workshops, would feed into much of the TCPA's day-to-day work – and indeed our Action Plan on implementing PERFECT in England over the 2020-2021 period focuses on just this. And although the recent election result indicates a hard Brexit, the TCPA's PERFECT Action Plan includes developing closer working relationships with the City of Amsterdam with funding for – guess what? – yes, more study tours.

At the end of phase 1 of PERFECT, the TCPA is in a good place, with the learning and knowledge gained, with our relationships across most EU countries, and with a portfolio of knowledge that is firmly embedded into TCPA culture. We may do more...

A further project proposal – ROBUST (Reducing Obesity in Urban Schoolchildren in Towns across Europe) – has passed Step One of Interreg North-West Europe approval, and if we are successful the finance is underwritten by the Treasury and so, as this goes to press, the finance for a final Interreg project is secure. It is a good project, and I hope it succeeds. For me, I am finally retiring on 6 February 2020, the date we submit the final ROBUST proposal.

It has been a great privilege to have worked for the Association off and on for nearly 30 years; and I really do know *why* that is: the TCPA is an organisation that truly has planning and social justice at its heart. All that we have studied and learnt across Europe has focused on this, so let's keep up the good work. Bah humbug Brexit!

● **Diane Smith** is European Advisor with the TCPA. The views expressed are personal.

Notes

- 1 A GRaBS resource archive is available from the TCPA website, at www.tcpa.org.uk/grabs-resource-archive
- 2 The Climate-ADAPT online resource is available at https://ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/online-resource/climate-adapt-european-climate-adaptation-platform_en
- 3 *RegioStars Awards – Ten Years of Success Stories*. European Commission Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy, 2017. https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/projects/regiostars/doc/regiostars/2017/regio_stars_10years_en.pdf
- 4 Outputs from the LEAP project are available at www.leap-eu.org/
- 5 Outputs from the SPECIAL project are available at www.special-eu.org/resources
- 6 See the 100 Resilient Cities website, at www.100resilientcities.org/
- 7 See the C40 Cities website, at www.c40.org/

policy success through inter- regional exchange

Eilish O'Loughlin and **Aleksandra Niechajowicz** from the Interreg Europe Joint Secretariat discuss Interreg Europe's environment and resource efficiency priority and reflect on how the PERFECT project has contributed to meeting it



Yelizaveta Tomashovska/iStock

PERFECT seeks to highlight an integrated approach to demonstrating the multiple benefits of green infrastructure

The PERFECT project is funded by Interreg Europe, which exists to help regional and local governments across Europe develop and deliver better policy. It is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and provides co-financing for inter-regional co-operation projects that bring together national, regional and local organisations from the EU, Switzerland and Norway.

Interreg Europe focuses on creating partnerships and networks which can be used to share solutions so as to ensure that government investment, innovation and implementation efforts all lead to integration and sustainable impact for people and places in relation to the jobs and growth agenda. The aim is to encourage learning by exchanging solutions with peers across Europe facing similar challenges. The programme focuses on policy learning and policy improvement; and the importance of this type of European funding should

not be underestimated – it supports regional and local public authorities across Europe in exchanging practice and ideas on the way that public policy works, and thereby helps to improve policies to achieve better outcomes for all people.

The Interreg Europe programme has four priorities:

- Strengthening research, technological development and innovation.
- Enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises).
- Supporting the shift towards a low-carbon economy in all sectors.
- Protecting the environment and promoting resource efficiency.

What is the ERDF?

The cohesion policy of the European Union, known as the Europe 2020 strategy, works to

reduce disparities in the levels of development, growth and quality of life in European regions. It promotes actions designed to make the European territory more innovative, more sustainable, and more inclusive. While the large majority of the funds designated to reduce these disparities are managed nationally, co-operation across borders and inter-regional learning across the EU and Member States is encouraged and financed through many Interreg programmes, including the Interreg Europe programme, which, in turn, is financed by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

The contribution of PERFECT

PERFECT has made an impressive contribution to the ongoing success of Interreg Europe's environment and resource efficiency priority, considering its unique thematic contribution, the results it has achieved, and the participation in capitalisation activities undertaken at programme level.

While around 25 projects financed by the programme tackle natural heritage or biodiversity preservation, PERFECT is the only project from the first three calls to address this particular sub-topic. This was reflected in the quality assessment of the project proposal, in which the assessors highlighted the added value of the green infrastructure (GI) topic for European policy-makers as a strength, along with the integrated approach to demonstrating the multiple benefits of GI.

'PERFECT has made an impressive contribution to the ongoing success of Interreg Europe's environment and resource efficiency priority, considering its unique thematic contribution, the results it has achieved, and the participation in capitalisation activities undertaken at programme level'

The assessment also recognised positively that inter-regional exchange of experience at policy level was at the heart of the foreseen co-operation, along with high chances of the project achieving good results. This has proved to be the case, as the project has succeeded in influencing and improving policy in the partner regions (see, for example, the article on policy change in Bratislava elsewhere in this issue), thereby increasing the amounts of

investment in GI. Policy changes resulting from the project have also been reported in the Municipality of Ferrara in Italy, which again demonstrates that policy learning financed by the programme leads to tangible changes in participating regions.

Looking beyond the scope of its own project partnership, PERFECT has also contributed to the dissemination of results within the wider community of Interreg Europe projects via programme events. For instance, Diane Smith from the Lead Partner (the Town and Country Planning Association) spoke at our 'Europe, Let's Cooperate' event held in April 2019 about the concrete results that are coming out of the PERFECT project. By making the link between PERFECT and its predecessor project GraBS, financed under Interreg IVC, Diane highlighted that investing in co-operation over the long term has been a worthwhile investment for the region.

Good practices highlighted by PERFECT have also fed into various Policy Learning Platform activities developed by Interreg Europe's thematic experts. For example, Beam Parklands in London, which demonstrates how investment in GI can increase the economic viability of an area, was featured in a policy brief dedicated to the *Protection and Sustainable Management of Heritage in Coastal and Fluvial Regions*.¹ There was also a group discussion focused on this good practice at the thematic workshop focused on natural heritage organised in November 2018. This is only one of seven good practices identified through the project which are published and available for any policy-maker to learn from via the programme's good practice database.

While the first phase of PERFECT is drawing to a close, we expect many more positive results to come from the project during its second phase, not to mention outcomes from the other projects that are taking inspiration from it. For instance, the project Blue Green City approved under Interreg Europe's fourth call plans to build on the PERFECT MAGIC Matrix, while focusing on the obstacles to, and drivers for, adopting green/blue infrastructure for climate change adaptation.

We thank all the PERFECT partners for their strong contribution to the programme, and hope that the project will bring worthwhile, lasting changes in all their regions!

● **Eilish O'Loughlin** is Policy Officer and **Aleksandra Niechajowicz** is Finance Officer with the Interreg Europe Joint Secretariat.

Note

- 1 *Protection and Sustainable Management of Heritage in Coastal and Fluvial Regions*. Policy Brief from the Policy Learning Platform on Environment and Resource Efficiency. Interreg Europe, Sept. 2018. www.interregurope.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/2018-09-24_Policy_Brief_Heritage_in_coastal_and_fluvial_regions.pdf

inter-regional learning and positive policy change – an exemplar approach from slovakia

Zuzana Hudeková explains how Bratislava–Karlova Ves Municipality has successfully used its involvement in the PERFECT project to influence an amendment to national policy on green infrastructure



Photos: Zuzana Hudeková

Urban wildflower meadow – green infrastructure in Bratislava

The PERFECT project aims to improve policies so as to maximise the multiple benefits of green infrastructure for jobs and growth. This article provides an update on how the PERFECT partner Bratislava–Karlova Ves Municipality has worked to

influence national policy in Slovakia, based on learning gained and activities carried out during the course of the project to date.

At the first PERFECT partner meeting, held in January 2017, all the partners, together with



representatives of the European Commission, discussed their current understanding of and learning on green infrastructure, in order to ensure that all the stakeholders would be working to a common definition.

In November 2018, the Slovak Republic's Ministry of the Environment published a draft amendment to the Nature and Landscape Protection Act for public consultation. Although Bratislava–Karlova Ves Municipality agreed with many of the proposals that the amendment put forward, its view was that there was still a lack of relevant support for green infrastructure issues, including the better management of greenery and trees in the cities and towns. Through the PERFECT project, Bratislava–Karlova Ves Municipality and its stakeholder group prepared a response to the consultation which mainly focused on:

- a new definition of green infrastructure that more accurately describes its functions; and
- better protection and promotion of green infrastructure in general.

The results of a survey of key stakeholders carried out through the PERFECT project in March and April 2017 were fed into the new proposed definition of green infrastructure, which was put forward as:

'Green infrastructure is a network of natural and semi-natural elements, green areas and aquatic ecosystems that provide ecosystem services, support biodiversity, offer near-nature solutions for problems, especially in the built-up areas, and ensure the linking of the built-up area with the natural surrounding countryside.'

The consultation response also referenced another PERFECT project output produced by Bratislava–Karlova Ves Municipality – *Green Infrastructure: A Guide not only for Municipalities*,¹ which provides

justification for the better promotion and protection of green infrastructure.

By the time the Ministry of the Environment's consultation period had closed, Bratislava–Karlova Ves Municipality's response had been supported by over 900 others. This level of support meant that the Ministry had to consider the comments, with the aim of incorporating them into the final amendment to the Nature and Landscape Protection Act. This negotiation process started in the first half of 2019, and the amendment to the law, with the new definition of green infrastructure (based on the suggestion of the PERFECT team in Bratislava), was adopted by the national parliament in September 2019.

The achievements of Bratislava–Karlova Ves Municipality to date in influencing national policy – by bringing together stakeholders through the work of the PERFECT project – demonstrates clearly the benefit of inter-regional co-operation. This positive example from Slovakia is providing learning on which other PERFECT partners can draw to create similar results through their Action Plans.

Further information about the impact of this policy change can be seen in *Nature Comes to Town*, a YouTube video available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=dy0wth-SdAE&feature=youtu.be

● **Zuzana Hudeková** is Project Manager with Bratislava–Karlova Ves Municipality in Bratislava, Slovak Republic. The views expressed are personal.

Note

- 1 Z Hudeková: *Zelená Infraštruktúra: Prírucka nielen pre Samosprávy*. (Green Infrastructure: A Guide not only for Municipalities) PERFECT project. Bratislava–Karlova Ves Municipality, May 2018. www.karlovaves.sk/wp-content/uploads/Zelena-infrastruktura-prirucka-nielen-pre-samospravy.pdf

rethinking green infrastructure

Silvia Mazzanti outlines the aims and content of the *Rethinking Green Infrastructure* handbook – a major PERFECT project output

The Municipality of Ferrara has a strong history of promoting citizens' involvement, especially in planning for new urban landscapes. Its latest contribution to thinking and expertise in this area is *Rethinking Green Infrastructure*,¹ a handbook on participatory planning at the local level, produced by the Municipality of Ferrara as an output of the PERFECT project. Written by Elena Farnè, a landscape architect and expert in participatory processes, the manual gives an overview of the innovative methodologies and tools that can be used to increase people's awareness of the multiple benefits to be gained from green infrastructure.

The introduction and glossary set out some key principles – on process timeframes and phases, the diversity of groups and skills involved, experimentation, and commitments, all within a very practical approach.

The use of appropriate tools and techniques specific to the challenge of planning and delivering green infrastructure is essential for the better management of debate and to stimulate the creativity and ability of all those involved in exploring new solutions and reaching the goals that are set. For this reason, the central part of the manual presents eight inspiring case studies, setting out key information to pragmatically highlight background, objectives, conflicts, methodologies, actions, and, primarily, impacts and replicability. A rich set of images support the text.

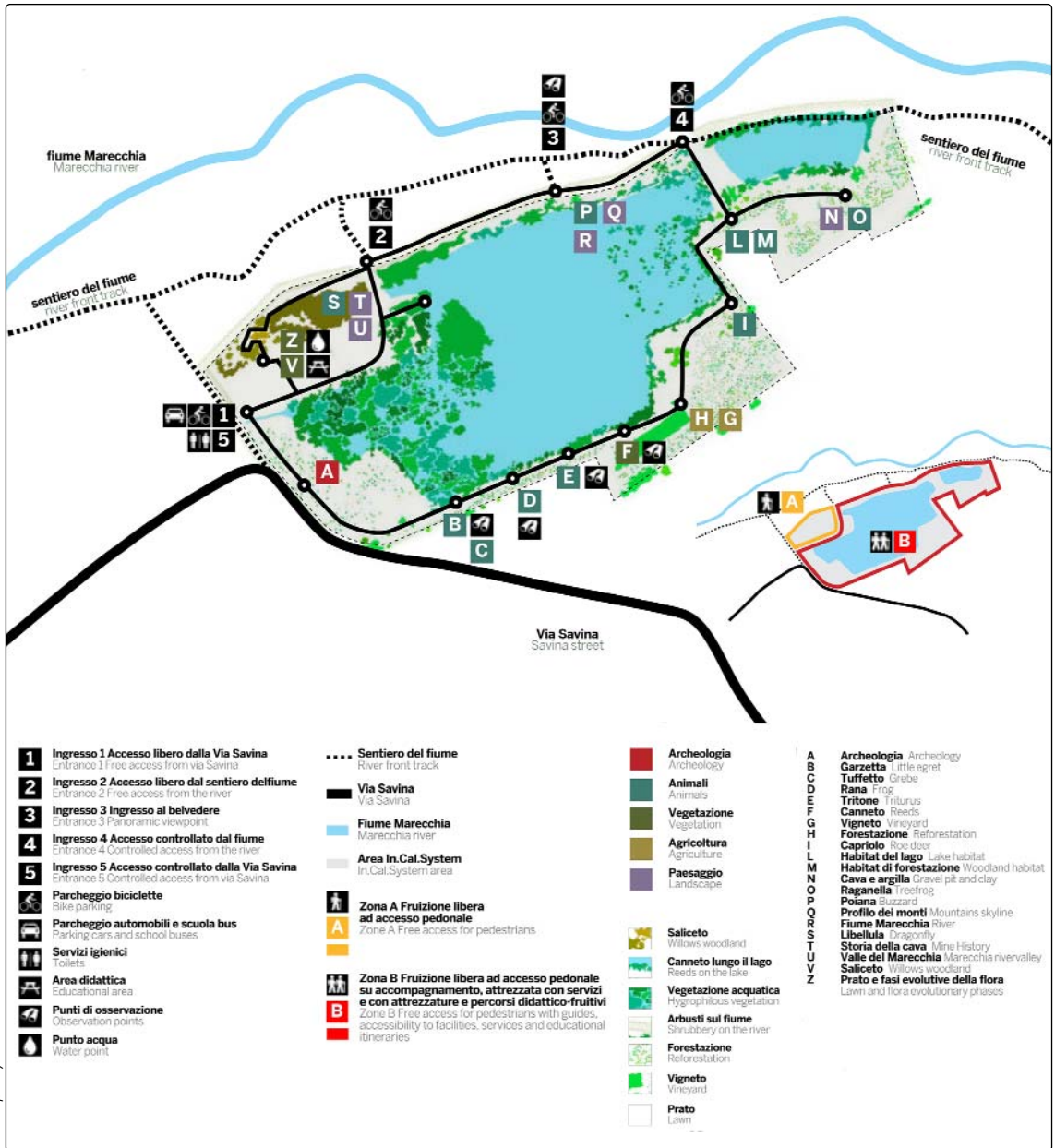
Following the fourth partner meeting, when the first draft was presented, together with a call to offer relevant experience for inclusion, all the PERFECT partners have offered input to the handbook's content. As a result of this co-operation three of the case studies came from the PERFECT partners.

The handbook is structured in four sections:

- **Co-design and participation processes:** The first case study focuses on the Ferrara Urban Centre, an office of the Municipality of Ferrara which supports local civic participation initiatives to improve people's living environments (including those directed at enhancing urban natural capital), in order to help enhance communities' self-organisation capacities. This public service

promotes a new relationship between public administration and citizens, based on dialogue and empathy – and seeking the development of forms of 'self-government of the commons', supported by necessary modifications to municipal regulations. The second case study is on the participatory 'design labs' organised for the inhabitants of Rimini focusing on the environmental restoration of the former In.Cal.System quarry, an area of 37 hectares returned to the city after years of use for mineral extraction.

- **Simulation games:** This section presents the 'Planning Game' case study promoted by the TCPA (a role-playing game in which the participants compete to conceive ideal cities with trees and urban greenery), and the REBUS case study, a role-playing game promoted by the Emilia-Romagna Region in Italy, in which municipal and other professionals compete in redesigning existing neighbourhood public spaces to integrate nature-based solutions aimed at combating climate change.
- **Training tools:** This section considers the activities of the Portland Depave Association in the USA, which has been working to de-pave excessively asphalted urban areas in order to create new green spaces and permeable gardens, and which has developed its own working methodology and an action toolkit, as published in *The Guide to Freeing Your Soil* that inspired other green communities elsewhere in the world. The training tools section also sets out work undertaken by the Trees and Design Action Group in London, which carries out research on green infrastructure and produces, in collaboration with a range of professionals, a series of guides, including *Trees in Hard Landscapes*.
- **Urban plans and urban regeneration strategies:** This section illustrates the urban, environmental and social strategy developed by the Municipality of Medicina in Italy which will create a system of public spaces and green and blue infrastructure along the entire length of the canal that runs through Medicina city centre. It aims to involve residents the care of their green and public spaces and in



Plan of the reclaimed former In.Cal.System quarry near Rimini – from the *Rethinking Green Infrastructure* handbook

public debate. This section also focuses on the interactive web platform that played a key part within participatory processes used in developing the Green Infrastructure Strategy for the Ljubljana Urban Region.

Through these experiences the handbook demonstrates that many different models are available and readily replicable to suit different contexts. In most of them citizen involvement is integrated with decision-maker engagement and technician training, with the goal of constructing a new common

awareness feeding into policy instruments and enhancing the role of green infrastructure at the local level.

● **Silvia Mazzanti** is a Technical Expert in the Municipality of Ferrara PERFECT Team. The views expressed are personal.

Note

- 1 E Farnè: *Rethinking Green Infrastructure: Handbook for Decision Makers and Technicians*. PERFECT project. Municipality of Ferrara, Apr. 2019. www.interregeurope.eu/fileadmin/user_upload/tx_tevprojects/library/file_1570549393.pdf

learning from a sustainable city

Dave Solly highlights key features of the German city of Freiburg, subject of a PERFECT partner study visit in early 2019



Dave Solly

Part of the Vauban district of Freiburg

In March 2019 I was very fortunate to be able to accept on behalf of Natural England an invitation to join the TCPA and its PERFECT project partners in a visit to Freiburg im Breisgau in Germany to learn from the city's experiences and approaches, with the ambition of identifying transferable examples suitable for application in England and elsewhere.

The city of Freiburg has gained an international reputation as a sustainable city and a place where many want to live. Today, the population is 220,000, equivalent to that of the city of Derby. The city dates from mediaeval times as a regional centre on the border with France and Switzerland. During the Second World War its historic buildings were by and large destroyed by bombing, with its exquisite Gothic cathedral a very fortunate survivor. When the time came to rebuild, the city leaders chose to recreate to a high standard the picturesque houses and city gates of the historic city for which it was known. Today, many of the central buildings bear two dates: the first that of their original construction, the second that of their reconstruction.

In the 1970s the city and its surrounding region was faced a further challenge: the area needed power and the proposed solution was a nuclear power station. The region is famous as one of Germany's wine-growing areas – the Kaiser Stühl. Local communities that included a strong environmental movement became concerned that the steam from the power station's cooling towers would increase local rainfall and in turn prevent the grapes from ripening, putting their wine-making livelihoods at risk.

Concerns escalated into civil protests to a level that ultimately led to the cancellation of the nuclear project in 1975. An alternative option had to be found, and the city's leadership chose in consultation with local people a future underpinned by sustainability – one of alternative energy production and better energy use.

Today, Freiburg relies on many sources for energy across its districts, from combined heat and power systems to alternative power sources, notably solar energy. Newer districts are dominated by apartments rather than individual houses, it having long been

appreciated that the city does not have the capacity to offer individual houses to everyone. When privatisation of key utilities was proposed, the city retained sufficient interest to be able to bring about change, and extensive use is also made of sustainable solar sources and even water power, with screw turbines found in a number of the city's rivers. The iconic Civic Hall leads by example in promoting sustainability as the world's first net-surplus building, thanks primarily to its coating of solar panels, which generate more energy than the building uses.

When it comes to transportation, the car is most certainly not king. Planning for a sustainable transport system has resulted in an extensive tram network that provides considerable capacity and enables people to easily reach their homes in the city's residential districts as well as key civic buildings and many key places of work and business. Grassed tram tracks form part of the city's green infrastructure, bringing natural corridors into the heart of the city and giving biodiversity opportunities to travel freely (without a ticket!) throughout the city, and between its natural and formal spaces.

Complementary to the trams are many kilometres of cycle routes, on which many are known to cycle 15 kilometres each day, with longer distances now considered possible with the advent of electric bikes. Adjacent to one interchange station – where the trams cross the city's mainline rail station – can be found a sizeable bike park in the form of a circular building next to the original blue bridge across the station. When this bridge was superseded by a more substantial crossing, necessary to take the tram tracks, it was put to good use as part of the network of dedicated cycle routes. Its use for its new purpose is monitored electronically and displayed publicly to celebrate the growing number of people who are cycling each day.

Further into suburbs, existing shared housing has been regenerated, with car parking moved underground and replaced by community green space. Newer suburbs have extensive green spaces for multiple purposes, from attractive habitats to play areas and space for community growing. Dedicated buildings exist for car parking, and 'virtual car park' green space is reserved for other buildings, should there be a growth in demand for cars. Development of these has so far not been necessary, thanks to the quality of the extensive public transport and cycling network and the opportunity to hire cars for short periods when one is necessary. The virtual spaces have instead been used for many years by the local community as green space, and in one case as a community food-growing area.

Accessible green spaces and more inaccessible green infrastructure features can be seen throughout the city – and in many places extend to people's front doors. Turn a corner in more traditional areas and you will find green walls and roofs, and vines

trailing across city streets. In established suburbs, buildings have been modernised with solar panels and other sustainable features such as better windows. Features are not forced on residents, but as they move on buildings are upgraded before the next residents move in. Newer districts have been designed to include nature on the doorstep, with in many cases people walking out of their front doors into playgrounds, allotments or shared spaces. Public transport extends deep into estates, and cars are allowed into these streets only for unloading – and in some cases, are banished for part of the day.

'The city of Freiburg is tackling some issues that others may consider too difficult'

The city is now a highly desirable place to live – and is still expanding; at the time of our visit, proposals for a new district were in development for public referendum. Fundamentally, involving local people in design, planning and management decisions relating to where they live is part of the way of life. Referendums are regularly undertaken on future plans, development and change, and at a more local level, and individual families have the opportunity to work with architects to shape the design of the buildings in which they will live – and to agree together who they will live with.

In the newest district of Vauban – a significant regeneration of a military barracks – it was the voice of the people who would live there that saw the best of the barrack buildings retained and successfully refurbished as living accommodation. With much delivered by the local authority, we heard that taxes are relatively higher than in England, while also hearing that people are willing to pay more for certainty that where they live is a home and that their community areas and facilities will be well maintained and available.

Having originated as a reaction to an issue and from the need to respond with alternative solutions, sustainable living has now become a way of life. On the evidence that we saw, the city of Freiburg is tackling some issues that others may consider too difficult, and showing what can be achieved in terms of a sustainable place for people and nature with sustained commitment and civic will, where people are genuinely and continually involved in decisions about where they live.

These insights showcase just a few of the many different approaches to be seen in the city – a visit is highly recommended.

● **Dave Solly** is Senior Adviser, Green Infrastructure at Natural England. The views expressed are personal.

PERFECT resources

The PERFECT project partnership has produced a suite of pan-European resources on a range of green infrastructure topics. These resources are available to download for free, from www.interregeurope.eu/perfect/library/

Factsheets



The PERFECT Factsheets are designed to help make the case for green infrastructure to decision-makers and politicians by bringing together evidence and key statistics from across Europe to demonstrate the benefits provided by networks of green space in urban areas – and that investment in high-quality green infrastructure is easily repaid from the benefits that it brings.

- Factsheet 1: Green Infrastructure and Health
- Factsheet 2: Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity
- Factsheet 3: Green Infrastructure and Climate Change
- Factsheet 4: Green Infrastructure and Food (to be published in early 2020)
- Factsheet 5: Green Roofs (to be published in early 2020)
- Factsheet 6: Green Infrastructure Glossary (to be published in early 2020)

Expert Papers



The PERFECT Expert Papers are intended for the audience of policy-makers and practitioners working in local public sector organisations, as well as national and international organisations who are responsible for setting policy frameworks and investment strategies.

- Expert Paper 1: Health, Wealth and Happiness – the Multiple Benefits of Green Infrastructure
- Expert Paper 2: Planning for Green Infrastructure – the Green Space Factor and Learning from Europe
- Expert Paper 3: How Can We Assess What Good Green Infrastructure Policy Looks Like? (to be published in early 2020)
- Expert Paper 4: Using Natural Capital Investment to Finance Green Infrastructure Assets (to be published in early 2020)
- Expert Paper 5: Place-Making and Green Infrastructure (to be published in early 2020)
- Expert Paper 6: The Benefits of Increasing Biodiversity Levels (to be published in early 2020)

introducing the PERFECT action plans

Catriona MacRae outlines the aims of each of the PERFECT partners' Actions Plans, which are to be implemented in the second phase of the project

The PERFECT project Action Plans are documents that provide details on how lessons from PERFECT will be implemented in attempts to improve the policy instrument identified as a target for action by each partner at the start of the project. Action Plans include, unsurprisingly, 'actions' to be undertaken, and have been prepared and developed during phase 1 of the project, based on experience shared among the partners.

Exchanges of knowledge, good practice highlighted and developed within PERFECT, learning from partner meeting and study visits, use of the PERFECT project MAGIC Matrix and the Interreg EU Good Practice database and, finally, peer group visits and other types of peer group exchanges have all been central in the partners' development of Action Plans – and will also be crucial in the implementation in phase 2 of the project. Each partner has demonstrated what they and their stakeholders have learnt in phase 1 as a direct result of being in the PERFECT partnership, and how this has influenced their Action Plans.

The articles in the rest of this Special Issue briefly run through what each partner hopes to work on and achieve.

The TCPAs Action Plan focuses on strengthening the input that the organisation offers to bodies such as the Green Infrastructure Partnership, and on continuing to develop important relationships with stakeholders. It also aims to increase the level of consideration and discussion on green infrastructure and its multiple benefits through conversations with the government and senior planners. And it highlights the bond and shared learning that needs to continue with European project partners and, indeed, throughout Europe.

Cornwall City Council sets out two main actions in its Action Plan. First, it seeks to create a

consistent approach to planning guidance, focusing on efforts to deliver greater levels of green infrastructure – this started with reviewing all relevant guidance and then the development of the Cornwall Design Guide, and will soon be followed by the development of an assessment metric, involving regular reviewing and monitoring of policy. The second action is to create a comprehensive, locally led understanding of green infrastructure opportunities and ensure that they are understood and used by decision-makers, through workshops and collaboration with councillors. The Action Plan also highlights the opportunity to develop a green GIS spatial resource for Cornwall in order to share and enable better understanding.

The aims of the Action Plan developed by SASD (Social Ascension of Somogy Development, Communication and Education Nonprofit Ltd), Hungary, are in line with the country's regional development programme to create liveable cities and climate-friendly urban areas by increasing the area of green spaces and enhancing the quality of green infrastructure. The plan's actions reflect this. The first action focuses on the protection and development of natural heritage through recognition of the multiple benefits of green infrastructure, using the Biological Activity Value (BAV), an urban planning methodology introduced in 2007 and based on the scores of different land use categories, with an overarching principle that any development is not allowed to reduce the 'BAV score'. The second action aims to increase professional expertise in municipalities by creating roles such as a 'Chief Gardener', specialising in green infrastructure. The third action aims to contribute to the retention of local populations by establishing green exciting and inviting environments in cities and the necessary supporting infrastructure, such as water-saving

irrigation systems, that will appeal to and be used by local residents and tourists.

The Provincial Government of Styria, Department for Environment and Spatial Planning, has learnt from previous experience of issuing publications that they can be highly influential and can secure a lot of political buy-in. As a result, its Action Plan includes production of a 'Green Infrastructure Cookbook' for Styrian local councils in order to raise awareness of green infrastructure in spatial planning and help with decision-making by explaining green infrastructure's multiple benefits. It will then focus on disseminating the 'Cookbook' throughout Styria.

The City of Amsterdam's main objective is to strengthen local policy by promoting the health of disadvantaged communities through investments in green infrastructure in their neighbourhoods. The city faces health issues such as sedentary lifestyles, increases in overweight populations, and social isolation. Aiming to tackle these public health issues, the City of Amsterdam's two actions are:

- to empower local communities to enhance green infrastructure and thereby promote positive health impacts and social inclusion; and
- to strengthen the 'Amsterdam Schoolyard Incentive' to ensure that the city's children enjoy the benefits of good-quality and healthy green schoolyards.

Ljubljana aims to improve the quality of public spaces and the efficient use of space within urban areas by reactivating abandoned and under-used areas and buildings which have resulted from increasing suburbanisation in Slovenia, with urban centres being relocated to the periphery. Ljubljana's two actions in its Action Plan focus on putting green infrastructure on the political agenda and creating a strategy for the protection and development of green infrastructure in the Ljubljana urban region.

Bratislava-Karlova Ves Municipality, Slovakia, has listed four green priorities in its Action Plan, with actions attached to each:

- climate adaptation – introducing more green roofs, green walls and SUDS (sustainable drainage systems);
- biodiversity – protection of species and improvement of the connectivity of green infrastructure;
- social and health aspects of resilience – more schoolyard and community garden initiatives and the planting of fruit trees; and
- education – more public events and programmes, with an information centre set up for a local community.

It is hoped that these actions will achieve a more integrated approach to green infrastructure, as a result of recognising that it needs its own dedicated funding and national legislation.

The Italian PERFECT partner, the Municipality of Ferrara, wants to improve the quality of its green infrastructure networks rather than the quantity, focusing on and analysing the benefits that this will provide citizens. At present there is an abundance of green infrastructure, but it is poor in quality. Ferrara's Action Plan will be a key instrument in persuading those producing the emerging General Urban Plan (GUP) to make it more green infrastructure oriented, with a strategic approach focusing on ecosystem services and multi-beneficial green spaces. Ferrara has nine actions, seven of which are site-specific changes and focus on improvements to green infrastructure. The other two are the creation of a green infrastructure database, and changing people's attitudes by promoting a 'positive culture' about trees and other green infrastructure through a communication campaign.

During the two years of phase 2 of the PERFECT project Action Plans will be implemented, acting as a template for the work programme. At this stage, the draft Action Plans have received encouraging feedback from the Interreg Europe Joint Secretariat – a positive result showing the hard work that all partners have put into writing their Action Plans. Partners will continue to amend and review the plans, including their self-defined performance indicators, before final Action Plans are published, with a stamp showing local political or senior level endorsement. All the Action Plans will be available on the PERFECT website in early 2020, highlighting all the good practice that the project has achieved and the influence that each partner aims to exert.

● **Catriona MacRae** is a Projects Assistant at the TCPA, supporting the PERFECT project. The views expressed are personal.

For further information on the PERFECT project Action Plans, please visit the PERFECT project website, at www.interregeurope.eu/perfect/ or email jessica.fieth@tcpa.org.uk

enhancing everyday activity

Jessie Fieth outlines the three actions within the TCPA's PERFECT Action Plan

When the PERFECT project was being developed, the TCPA took on the role of 'advisory' lead partner, meaning that the Association would not be addressing a specific policy instrument or developing an Action Plan. However, as the project progressed, it became apparent that the TCPA could use the PERFECT project to raise awareness of the significance of green infrastructure and strengthen the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) to reflect its importance. Interreg Europe approved the TCPA's request to take this action, and throughout 2020-2021 the Association will be working to use the knowledge and experience gained through PERFECT to campaign for improvements to the NPPF to encourage greater investment in green infrastructure in the UK.

However, the current political uncertainty in the UK means that this will be a challenging task, and there is no guarantee that the TCPA will be successful. Against this uncertainty, the TCPA's Action Plan will continue to focus on the NPPF and on influencing the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The most effective way of achieving this will be to incorporate the knowledge and experience gained through PERFECT into the everyday work of the TCPA.

Working with the Association's extensive range of members and other stakeholders (including specifically the local authority members of the New Communities Group), the TCPA will, by example, demonstrate the multiple benefits of green infrastructure and recommend to MHCLG the necessary changes to the NPPF to encourage greater investment. Additionally, the TCPA will work with key public and private sector stakeholder organisations involved in policy relating to, and involved in the development of, green infrastructure.

The three main actions in the TCPA Action Plan are:

- **Working with the New Communities Group (NCG) on investment in green infrastructure:** The TCPA will work with the NCG to increase the amount of investment in green infrastructure delivered through the Community Infrastructure Levy and Section 106 agreements. This will be

achieved through capacity-building training for NCG local authority officers and elected members, involving training workshops, study tours and parliamentary briefings with MHCLG staff. The TCPA will work with NCG members to identify relevant and costed good practice that demonstrates the economic as well as social and environmental benefits of including creative and sustainable green infrastructure within new developments.

- **Mainstreaming project learning within the TCPA's work:** The TCPA has a long history of collaborative working, through partnerships, coalitions, research projects, committees, and working parties across a broad spectrum of interests involving the public, private and voluntary sectors. All TCPA staff will benefit from learning gained through the PERFECT project, and the all-round effectiveness of project and policy staff's day jobs' will be enhanced, for the benefit of TCPA members, by the inclusion of green infrastructure solutions in the Association's work in areas of health, climate change, new communities, Garden Cities, culture, and inclusivity.
- **Continuing exchange of information with the City of Amsterdam:** The TCPA will set up a bi-lateral agreement with the City of Amsterdam to continue with the mutually beneficial exchanges and continued learning on the socio-economic benefits of green infrastructure, particularly in work on reuniting the health and planning sectors. The TCPA has a ten-year history of working with the City of Amsterdam on EU projects – APaNGO, GRaBS, and now PERFECT. Several study tours have been co-operatively run, and a close working relationship has developed between the TCPA and Amsterdam City planners and other professionals.

The TCPA looks forward to the positive impact that the Action Plan will have on its work, and progress will be reported here over the coming months and at the end of the project.

- *Jessie Fieth is Projects and Policy Manager at the TCPA and is the PERFECT Project Manager. The views expressed are personal.*

embedding green infrastructure and environmental growth in cornwall

Robert Lacey outlines learning gained and actions taken as a result of Cornwall's involvement in the PERFECT project

Despite Cornwall being an overwhelmingly green peninsula with only around 5% of its land cover urban, Cornwall's environmental quality has actually been in an extended process of decline, and direct investment in green infrastructure remains relatively low. In fact, investment in green infrastructure is often a hard sell in a rural area with so much visible greenery.

PERFECT has helped us to explore the reasons why investment in the environment that our residents and visitors clearly appreciate has lagged behind that of traditional grey infrastructure. The project has also enabled us to experience some of the incredible good practice to be found across Europe and the UK.

We identified from the early stages of the project that a key issue was one of confidence – both in encouraging investment in green infrastructure, and also in the benefits afforded and in making the right decisions. Decision-makers have often found it difficult to find information about the best opportunities to use green infrastructure and the right locations for it to be used, as well as details on how it can address multiple needs. Unintentional silo working both between council services and outside of the council meant that multiple benefits were not always realised, reducing the potential and investment value.

The certainty given to investment decisions among our European partners and the opportunity to experience green infrastructure in use has inspired Cornwall Council to use the tools that we have to better frame the actions required. While the UK planning system does not have the zoning system often used by our EU colleagues, new design guidance, mapping and facilitation of green

infrastructure opportunities in Neighbourhood Plans (of which there are now well over 100 in Cornwall) and strategic mapping of habitat and natural systems opportunities across Cornwall will help in explaining the benefits and in ensuring that decision-makers and investors know both what is expected, and also that it is possible to increase investment benefits through increasing multi-functionality.

We have also been able to take a critical look at the processes that the council uses across its services to understand whether or not our separate specification, decision-making, adoption and maintenance regimes result in barriers to delivering the right sort of green infrastructure. Over the next month or so we will be delivering the first part of the actions set out in our Action Plan, including an integrated design guide and a working method to help parishes proactively plan for multi-functional green infrastructure. A long-term stewardship method and other tools will be introduced in the second phase of the project. The development of a Climate Change Development Plan Document for Cornwall is also exploring further embedding of natural solutions in development decisions.

These are exciting times for green infrastructure in Cornwall. We are confident that all of the challenges that we currently face, when combined with a Cornish willingness to innovate and the learning potential that our partnership with the TCPA and our European colleagues presents, will aid the embedding of green infrastructure at the heart of our everyday business.

● **Robert Lacey** is Planning Policy Group Leader at Cornwall Council. The views expressed are personal.

innovative models for green cities

Márk Gábor outlines how PERFECT's Hungarian partner has benefited from peer-to-peer learning and aims to promote the use of the Biological Activity Value methodology through its Action Plan

The planning system in Hungary is in need of innovative models. The PERFECT project's three-year learning phase, which has now come to an end, has enabled SASD (Social Ascension of Somogy Development, Communication and Education Nonprofit Ltd) staff members and stakeholders to visit and gain an understanding of ground-breaking projects, enabling decision-makers to see for themselves the advantages of non-traditional urban methodologies. PERFECT has provided opportunities for professional co-operation between spatial and urban planning experts in the partner countries, leading to new approaches being adopted, based on learning from how other municipalities have addressed shared issues and developed innovative solutions.

The maintenance of green spaces is expensive, so there is a need for cost-efficient maintenance practices and an awareness of – and the full use of – green infrastructure's multi-functional benefits.

During the peer-to-peer working between the PERFECT partners the Biological Activity Value (BAV), a Hungarian assessment methodology, emerged as a key issue in discussion. The BAV provides a very exact methodology for selecting the best green infrastructure project proposal from an ecological point of view. The PERFECT partners agreed that the BAV can be a very useful tool in the development of future 'green city' projects. The methodology of calculating ratings using the BAV has already been published in national regulation, but SASD aims, through its Action Plan, to get the BAV adopted in Hungarian projects being funded through the Green City call in the next EU programming period.

This aim has been made possible through learning about good practice in other countries. Expert Papers published as outputs of the PERFECT project have introduced professionals to different approaches to green infrastructure. Expert Paper 2, *Planning for Green Infrastructure – the Green Space Factor and Learning from Europe*,¹ is a comprehensive document explaining international practice on green

space analysis. The TCPA introduced the Green Space Factor to PERFECT partners as a way of determining green infrastructure requirements for new development. It is used within the policies of many municipalities to set requirements that developers must agree to before planning permission for a site is granted. The aim is to ensure that, in creating places, green infrastructure is planned at the earliest stages. The Green Space Factor has been adapted in different ways across Europe, and its adaptability has been one of the reasons that it has been successfully transferred between cities, as it can be altered to suit various political, planning and cultural contexts.

In early 2019, the PERFECT partners took part in a study tour to Freiburg in Germany. The city council started to reorganise the maintenance of Freiburg years ago and applied a combination of renewable energy sources and green space investments. Sustainability is the main principle of the city's development strategy, in a new approach that has required new kinds of professional, with new, different kinds of professional areas of expertise involved in development projects. This gave the Hungarian PERFECT stakeholders the opportunity to see for themselves the benefits of long-term investment in green infrastructure.

The site visits and presentations were useful in the elaboration process of the Action Plan, and peer-to-peer working has ensured that there have been ample opportunities to discuss the planning methodology of green infrastructure enhancement.

● **Márk Gábor** is Project Manager with Social Ascension of Somogy Development, Communication and Education Nonprofit Ltd (SASD) in Hungary. The views expressed are personal.

Note

- 1 P Massini and H Smith: *Planning for Green Infrastructure – the Green Space Factor and Learning from Europe*. Expert Paper 2. PERFECT project. TCPA, Dec. 2018. www.interregeurope.eu/perfect/library/#folder=1280

cooking up a success

Christine Schwabinger explains why the Action Plan of the Provincial Government of Styria, Department for Environment and Spatial Planning, features an online green infrastructure 'Cookbook'

'We wish we could act and work like you, Christine'. This compliment was made at the first peer-to-peer meeting held between three PERFECT project partners (the City of Amsterdam, Cornwall Council, and the Province of Styria) in Cornwall in 2017. In reciprocation I was impressed that our Cornish partner motivated so many councillors to attend a two-day workshop on regional and spatial planning and implementing green infrastructure.

At the meeting I had the pleasure of making a presentation about the Green Net in Graz, the capital of the Province of Styria in Austria, and about the legally binding determinations in Styrian spatial planning law and the regional regulations on implementing green infrastructure through local planning instruments in Styria. The municipalities, which in Styria are responsible for local planning issues, largely have to stick to these strong determinations.

The Provincial Government of Styria, Department for Environment and Spatial Planning, a PERFECT project partner, has a strong influence on municipal planning outcomes and can refuse plans if they do not conform to the rules, before they are decided in the Styrian parliament. This aspect of Styrian practice impressed the Cornish councillors, but it also influenced our decision on the kind of Action Plan we will produce and work to during the second phase of the PERFECT project.

Styria's Department of Spatial Planning was also one of the project partners in the INTERREC IV C GRaBS project (Green and Blue Space Adaptation for Urban Areas and Eco Towns), which was also led by the TCPA and came to an end in 2011. Addressing the rising concern over climate change, a key aim of GRaBS was to create Adaptation Action Plans for green and blue infrastructure. At that time, our department created a guidebook for planners to show them which spatial planning instruments they could use to deliver more elements of green (parks, playgrounds, alleys, green roofs, etc.) and blue (ponds, retention areas, etc.) infrastructure.

Drawing on this experience, and its positive outcomes, we decided to create as the key element of our PERFECT Action Plan a 'Green Infrastructure Cookbook' – a collection of 'recipes' for green and healthy planning. During our daily working process, we increasingly realised that the planners undertaking spatial planning within municipalities were already convinced about using more green elements in their planning. So it is now time to convince politicians at provincial and especially local levels, as these are the decision-makers on local planning. Politicians are also named as one of our stakeholder groups in PERFECT.

In June 2018, we convinced Leibnitz, a city to the south of Graz, to bring its whole city council to join a peer-to-peer meeting and study visit in Ljubljana, held with our PERFECT partner from the city. This was to enable the city council to see at first hand good practice on how to implement action to bring about more greenery in a city.

At the end of August 2019, four months before the end of phase 1 of the PERFECT project, the 'Green Infrastructure Cookbook' is on the homepage of the department¹ and has been sent out by mail to all 287 Styrian municipalities and all stakeholders (planners, other departments of the Styrian Government, etc.). And to be honest, for these results to have been achieved in just two and a half years is something that makes us proud.

● **Christine Schwabinger** left the Provincial Government of Styria, Department for Environment and Spatial Planning, Austria, in August 2019, but stills works as PERFECT Project Manager & Senior Technical Expert on its behalf as an external expert. The views expressed are personal.

Note

- 1 *Mehr Grün in der Örtlichen Raumplanung. Ein „Kochbuch“ für Gemeinden und Planer (More Green in Local Spatial Planning. A Cookbook for Communities and Planners)*. PERFECT project. Provincial Government of Styria, Department for Environment and Spatial Planning, Aug. 2019. www.verwaltung.steiermark.at/cms/beitrag/12670567/144383763/

social inclusion and health in a greener amsterdam

Age Niels Holstein and **Imke van Moorselaar** explain how involvement in the PERFECT project is helping the City of Amsterdam to focus on raising awareness of the benefits of green infrastructure for low-income groups



Photos: City of Amsterdam

Green infrastructure can be made an integral part of the city

Amsterdam is a fast-growing city. As a result of economic growth the city is densifying at a rapid pace, and the growth of the city's population is

increasing pressure on the precious green infrastructure in Amsterdam. In the first phase of the PERFECT project we learned what challenges



The Green Schoolyard Incentive offers new green places for neighbourhood communities, aiming to ensure that schoolyards become better places for children growing up in densifying cities

other partners face with regard to their green infrastructure, and were inspired by their projects. For instance, we learned a lot from the Green Net in Graz, Austria, which shows how green infrastructure can be made an integral part of the city.

As a partner in the PERFECT project, we chose to raise awareness about the benefits of green infrastructure for low-income groups, specifically for their health. There is accumulating evidence showing that health benefits linked to access to green space may be strongest among the lowest socio-economic groups. We focus on the beneficial effects of greenery for local communities. For example, investment in the improvement of the Noorderpark, situated in a socially deprived part of the city, is linked to ERDF (European Regional Development Fund) investments for start-ups, and social enterprises are linked to park activities. We argue and show that higher quality leads to better usage and greater health benefits for neighbourhood communities. Examples from other partners, such as the Bicester story and the work at Rainham Marshes in the UK, help us in spreading this message.

The Green Schoolyard Incentive in Amsterdam offers promising new green places for neighbourhood communities, particularly after school hours. The PERFECT team aims to strengthen the incentive, to ensure that schoolyards become better and greener places for children growing up in densifying cities.

The Green Schoolyard Incentive is included as a good practice example on the INTERREG Learning Platform, and throughout the project it has proved to be an inspiration for other partners to learn from.

In phase 1 of the project the Amsterdam PERFECT team linked to the Green Agenda which feeds into the development of the new Green Vision of the City: social inclusion and health are becoming pillars of our green policies. In our visit to Ferrara we learned a lot from the approach to community engagement and involvement taken there. Based on these lessons we developed a tool called the 'Healthy Green Pointer', which strengthens and supports local communities in new green infrastructure development in socially economically deprived neighbourhoods.

In Amsterdam the Mayor and the City Council are aware of the importance of green infrastructure. PERFECT has contributed to making Amsterdam a healthier, more inclusive and greener city, and to safeguarding the ambition to create a new green legacy that promotes health and wellbeing for every 'Amsterdammer' in the future.

● **Age Niels Holstein** is International Project Manager, PERFECT, and **Imke van Moorselaar** is Project Manager, PERFECT, with the City of Amsterdam. The views expressed are personal.

PERFECT inspiration from across europe

Gaja Trbižan outlines the lessons learned by the Regional Development Agency of the Ljubljana Urban Region through its partnership in the PERFECT project



Photos: Gaja Trbižan

Turning experience and knowledge gained into practice - a workshop on preparing the green infrastructure strategy in Ljubljana

Green infrastructure is still a relatively new concept in Slovenia and, despite growing interest, there is limited information on its implementation, operation, performance and impact. The concept has its origins in ecosystem services and biodiversity conservation, but green infrastructure also plays a significant role in improving the quality of people's living environments, in helping to mitigate climate change mitigation, and in enhancing the social, cultural and economic value of the urban environment.

Through the PERFECT project we have been fortunate to learn from the experience of other project partners across Europe, each highlighting a different set of benefits to be gained from green infrastructure and different approaches to implementing green infrastructure initiatives – including work on a marshland nature reserve, providing socio-economic benefits from green space for surrounding

communities (Rainham Marshes in the UK); riverside renovation, bringing benefits from natural assets for tourism and recreation (River Sava in Ljubljana, Slovenia); the use of green belt as a buffer zone for the preservation of cultural heritage (the city walls in Ferrara, Italy); the use of a green network for biodiversity conservation, simultaneously providing a better-quality living environment (the Green Net in Graz, Austria); the transformation of grey infrastructure into green space for better connectivity and flood resistance (regeneration in Houthaven, Netherlands); and many more. And the project has demonstrated that the key factors enabling the adoption of green infrastructure include:

- strong local leadership (political commitment);
- collaboration between multiple and diverse services and stakeholders (cross-sectoral and inter-institutional work);



Green infrastructure contributing to local biodiversity and social inclusion in Graz



Green infrastructure in Amsterdam, demonstrating its beneficial role in improving the quality of the living environment and enhancing flood protection (left), and green infrastructure helping to protect cultural heritage in Ferrara (right)

- learning from other communities' experience of adopting green infrastructure; and
- full consideration of the multiple benefits to be gained from green infrastructure (not just environmental, but social and economic as well).

Conversely, obstacles that discourage the implementation of green infrastructure include a failure to appreciate the vital need for long-term thinking (compared with the desire for results in the short term), concerns over cost-effectiveness (including maintenance), a lack of inter-departmental co-ordination and funding, and inadequate technical capacity and expertise.

The lessons learned, the knowledge passed on through the shared first-hand experience of the PERFECT partners on specific aspects of green infrastructure, and the scientific support offered by

the TCPA have all helped us greatly in shaping our regional Strategy for Protection and Development of Green Infrastructure (through specific measures and tools) and the Action Plan, which, by raising national and local policy- and decision-makers' awareness of the importance and function of green infrastructure, aims to help increase the current low levels of political interest in green infrastructure projects.

● **Gaja Trbižan** is Project Manager at the Regional Development Agency of the Ljubljana Urban Region (RRA LUR), Slovenia. The views expressed are personal.

towards a nature-based approach

Zuzana Hudeková explains how Bratislava–Karlova Ves Municipality is pursuing a nature-based management approach in its Action Plan

The City of Amsterdam's Green Agenda – the subject of a presentation by Amsterdam's Geertje Wijten to a PERFECT project partner meeting in Ljubljana – has served as an example of good practice and the basis for the development of a pilot project to install green roofs on the Majernikova elementary school in Bratislava and on Municipality Bratislava–Karlova Ves buildings.

Geertje Wijten's presentation on the various SUDS (sustainable drainage system) options and the multiple benefits of greenery while densifying the city proved very useful when developing a first pilot project on a rain-garden in the Kaskady Park public open space. The project also includes infiltration swales and strips on Veternicova Street and rainwater capture and re-use in the Koliskova kindergarten and the Majernikva elementary school. A brochure, *Amsterdam Rainproof*, distributed during the fourth PERFECT partner meeting (Project Steering Committee 4 – PSC4) held in Graz and a presentation on rainwater modelling in Amsterdam made by the Waternet company were also influential.

A 'Green Infrastructure Partnership Platform' will be established, taking inspiration – and drawing practical information on how to run a similar body – from a presentation made during the first PERFECT project partner meeting (PSC1) held in London, in which the TCPA's Julia Thrift talked about the model of the Green Infrastructure Partnership in the UK.

Inspired by a presentation on tools for planning and evaluating urban green infrastructure at the same meeting, and by partner experience in using spatial mapping, the Municipality Bratislava–Karlova Ves will add to its Geographical Information System (GIS) the relevant classification and evaluation of ecosystem services, tree canopy coverage and accessibility of green spaces. Currently, GIS serves as an effective tool for classification and management of green spaces and as an interactive map for city inhabitants.

Thanks to involvement in the PERFECT project a plan for nature-based green space management in Bratislava–Karlova Ves was established, featuring



Zuzana Hudeková

Educational activities are planned on, among other things, community gardening

various activities which are to be implemented step by step. The enhancement of natural processes by fostering nature-based solutions and the maintenance of greenery in a manner close to natural processes, with pesticide-free management, are of great importance, and can help to expand and enhance the biodiversity and natural value of green infrastructure areas.

The principles of nature-based green space management in residential areas will be applied by implementing actions such as different mowing methods for lawns, mosaic mowing, the creation of flowering meadows, the planting of fruit bushes and trees, the creation of green walls and roofs, the revitalisation of green public spaces and parks, the incorporation of water retention measures, protection for animals in residential areas, and educational activities (on building green communities, adopting public flower beds, community gardening, etc.), including educational activities in schools.

● **Zuzana Hudeková** is Project Manager with Bratislava–Karlova Ves Municipality in Bratislava, Slovak Republic. The views expressed are personal.

changing how we plan green areas

Silvia Mazzanti explains how and why the Ferrara Action Plan aims to exert a major influence on the city's emerging General Urban Plan

The Municipality of Ferrara, a town in Northern Italy, has a strong tradition in European projects but our experience of the world of Interreg co-operation began with the PERFECT project. It was February 2017 when a group of colleagues and I entered the offices of the T CPA to attend the first project meeting. The days spent in London and then in Bicester immediately revealed the scale of the opportunity presented to us: co-ordinated learning, study visits, and, above all, the exchange of experience and opinions among professionals from all over Europe offered us a chance to discuss and form elaborate concrete plans for action on green infrastructure – a subject which at the time still seemed new and difficult to fully understand.

Almost three years have passed since then, and in the meantime the concepts of 'green infrastructure', 'nature-based solutions' and 'ecosystem services' have been much more widely received. Diffusion of the ideas has been fast. At the same time, PERFECT has progressively gained more weight in the agenda of our day-to-day office activities: there is a growing interest in the practices observed during the project's study visits, in the content of its expert presentations (especially in their combination of specific knowledge on the best technological, architectural and landscape solutions), and in discussions about the processes needed to ensure the success of innovative policies. This is probably the most important legacy of PERFECT.

The recent history of urbanism, and not only in Italy, tells us how difficult it can be to implement the strategic visions put forward in urban plans – for several well known reasons, such as the weakness of public bodies compared with private interests. But sometimes the vulnerability is in the strategies themselves, often outdated when compared with the evolving background and the emerging challenges to be faced (above all resilience and climate change adaptation).

Thanks to PERFECT we have started to reflect on the chains of influence and on the improvement of decision-making processes relating to a specific policy instrument, and we have tried to build a solid

and effective network with selected stakeholders and to experiment in cross-sector activities. It all involves very complex exchanges, but it is now clear that working on green infrastructure is not a matter for single-discipline evaluations.

The heterogeneous structure of the project partnership is clear evidence of this, involving different administrative sectors (planning, health, local development) and different hierarchical levels (municipalities, provinces, regions).

Another gain from partnering in the PERFECT project is an awareness that successfully planned green infrastructure calls for the evolution of traditional paradigms of planning activity and the resignification of the terms 'nature' and 'urban ecology' within our urban plans – a real cultural transition that involves all actors of city life, especially local communities.

These reflections guide the construction of our Action Plan, which is aimed at influencing the Municipality of Ferrara's General Urban Plan, the new policy instrument that must be approved in the coming years, replacing the current (and outdated) plan. The new plan must change the approach taken on green areas, traditionally considered only for their aesthetic and recreational value or with a compensative function. The actions identified in our PERFECT Action Plan and through the PERFECT stakeholders group will help us in this transition, experimenting with a new methodology for seven study areas. The first activity will be to undertake an analysis of the services provided by the existing green spaces network, putting together the lessons learned from PERFECT, in order to develop a specific strategy to increase the main ecosystem services provided in each district.

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can we redevelop the rhetoric of local power?



Elections appear to be becoming increasingly vacuous affairs. This may be my age speaking – I’ve been voting in them now since 1979. Yet even 20 years ago, when the leaders themselves held press conferences every day, they seemed a good deal less pointless as learning processes.

Only 15 years ago, when I was writing speeches for one of the party leaders for those events – I won’t say which one, but he had a baby in the middle of the campaign, which required some rapid re-writing – it seemed less of a grindstone.

By 2010, the morning press conferences had gone. So apparently has much concern about the content of their proposals. Can you imagine anything so debilitating, so pointless and so insulting to local intelligence when the main concern of one party is to make a spending promise of £3 billion on filling local potholes?

By the time you read this, the nation will have decided one way or the other. So perhaps we should let bygones be bygones. But I have been worrying why localism has been slowly disappearing as a respectable election issue.

To be fair, so have most of the others – anything more complicated than can be explained with a big target figure. Yet even the Lib Dems seem to be tiptoeing away quietly from the idea that most systems are better, and operate more efficiently and more effectively, if run far closer to people than they are in the UK.

Ironically, of course, this was the idea – subsidiarity, from Catholic social doctrine via John Ruskin – that formed the founding philosophy of the European Community. At least before it began to attempt to control everything – it was not obvious in the EU’s treatment of Greece during the financial crisis, for example. For some reason, the more the Lib Dems embrace the EU, the less central is the idea of devolving power.

As I began writing this piece it looked as if Labour was experiencing a late surge of the sort that stymied

Theresa May in 2017. Last time, having watched the bravery of a number of people during the two London Bridge terrorist incidents – armed in this case with a narwhal horn and last time with some beer bottles and stools – people felt subtly different about themselves. Not because they had actually tackled the terrorists, but because others did so. After the attack in 2017, the new Metropolitan Police Commissioner, Cressida Dick, changed the usual language – away from the usual stuff about standing strong and hunting perpetrators down, and simply praised people in the emergency services and the public. We all felt a little taller as a result, and a shift away from the cynicism that the governing party needed to win outright began to feel apparent. Some people may have been inclined to vote just a little more generously as a result.

Unfortunately, none of the party machines saw things that way. They are geared up to complain about whose fault the cuts have been and who had said what when, but they seem unable to raise the level of debate beyond what *we* can do for *you*, and beyond their underpinning belief about people and the role of central government.

Of course, elections are not and never will be about what people can do for themselves (except perhaps briefly when David Cameron introduced the idea of the ‘Big Society’). They are about how the parties and their leaders can do things for us. The rhetoric about people power doesn’t seem to fit – hence, perhaps, the reticence and nervousness around localism.

Equally, it may also be a reason why the debate has become quite as dull and empty as it has – when all you get is screeds of figures, and congratulations for our leaders for the way they all add up in the end. It is more of a depressing thought than I would normally allow myself in these columns.

But there is also a potential solution – to redevelop the political rhetoric of local power. Not, I may say, the usual stuff about ‘empowerment’, which is simply a way of repeating the canard that *they* provide power to *us*. It is, of course, the other way around ...

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theaster gates – transforming chicago’s south side one vacant building at a time



Not many urban planning graduates get to have a solo exhibition at the Tate. But Theaster Gates is no ordinary urban planning graduate. For a start, he has two planning degrees. Performance artist, ceramicist, and urban regenerator, Theaster Gates' first solo exhibition in the UK, 'Amalgam', opened at Tate Liverpool in December.¹ For those not familiar with him and his work it's worth a brief re-cap.

Born in Chicago in 1973 to a roofer father and school teacher mother, and the youngest of nine, he has lived almost his whole life in the city, where he is now Professor of Arts and Public Life at the University of Chicago and Director of Place Lab in its Harris School of Public Policy. If that sounds a little on the conventionally academic side, nothing could be further from the truth. Gates first sprung to prominence in 2007 when, having studied ceramics in Japan for some years after graduating in urban planning and ceramics in 1996, he returned to Chicago, only to discover that American ceramics collectors weren't interested in a black ceramicist's work.

After ten years of struggling to sell under his own name, Gates created the fictional character Shoji Yamaguchi. According to the invented back-story, Yamaguchi arrived in the USA after the Second World War, settled in Mississippi, and married a local black woman who was a civil rights activist. They were both conveniently/tragically killed in a road accident in 1991. Gates acquired Yamaguchi's body of work and put it up for sale in a conceptual exhibition at Chicago's Hyde Park Art Center. The exhibition included a full blown dining experience and a guest appearance by Yamaguchi's son, played by a young mixed-race artist, who spoke movingly to the diners about how much his father would have loved to have been there. The ceramics, highly priced because ceramics by Japanese makers are the thing to collect, promptly sold out.

Gates had made his name as an artist, arguably in a rather roundabout way, and proceeded to use his fame/notoriety (the buyers weren't unhappy with their purchases, especially when he suddenly sprung to fame) to focus on a much larger project, the regeneration of whole neighbourhoods in the South Side of Chicago through arts and culture.²

Backbone of his 'redemptive architecture' approach is the Rebuild Foundation.³ Based in Chicago's Grand Crossings neighbourhood, it is a non-profit organisation focusing on culturally driven redevelopment and affordable-space initiatives. Its purpose is essentially to create ways for existing residents to feel that culture can thrive where they live; i.e. there is no gentrification or displacement of existing communities by better-off incomers.

First up was the Dorchester Projects, which involved the purchase and renovation of two large houses on Dorchester Avenue, one of which – the Archive House – holds 14,000 architecture books acquired from a closed bookshop. The other – the Listening House – holds 8,000 records, purchased at the closure of Dr Wax Records. Linked to these are the Dorchester Art + Housing Collaborative and the Black Cinema House. The crowning glory was Gates' purchase of the prohibition era Stony Island Trust & Savings Bank, long abandoned and with several feet of water flooding its basement vaults. It has now become the Stony Island Arts Bank and contains the book collection of John H Johnson, founder of *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines, the record collection of Frankie Knuckles, the godfather of house music, and a series of other black arts-related initiatives.

The projects have had a transformative effect on the locality and continue to be funded through arts-related initiatives ranging from the sale of lengths of fire-hose rescued from the bank to materials from the houses, such as planks, window frames and rafters, surplus to the renovated houses and repurposed by Gates as art works. None of them are cheap, but purchasers know that the money goes to important regeneration work in poorer neighbourhoods. These ideas are now being replicated by Gates in neighbouring cities in the Mid-West, including Gary, Akron and Detroit.

Martin Stott



Performance in the 'Sanctum' within Temple church in Bristol, in 2015

The re-purposing of building materials is something of a theme, and Gates' first foray into the UK was an installation called 'Sanctum' in Temple church in Bristol in 2015.⁴ The church itself is a ruin – the victim of the first night of the Nazi blitz on Bristol in 1940, symbolically never rebuilt and rarely open to the public. Gates' installation in the nave was made entirely of recycled building materials, mainly from the local disused molasses and chocolate factories, with their unstated connection with slave trade. The space created was used as a new performance space which ran 24 hours a day for 24 days, hosting live musicians, dancers, singers and poets – it had no programme; just turn up and enjoy.

In the Tate Liverpool exhibition, Gates develops the ideas he has been working on for the past couple of decades, in this case documenting and interpreting the history of Malaga, a small island off the coast of Maine, USA. During the 19th century the island had been the home to an ethnically mixed community, but in 1912, on the orders of the State Governor, the island's inhabitants were forcibly removed to the mainland, where they were offered no housing, jobs or support. Through sculpture, installation, film, and dance, 'Amalgam' responds to

this history, exploring the complex and interweaving issues of race, territory and inequality in the USA with which Gates has become so closely associated through his socially engaged practice, both as an urbanist and as an artist.

It is the kind of work that will inspire anyone who understands that the work of urban planners can be transformative, if only through one vacant building at a time.

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Notes

- 1 The 'Amalgam' exhibition is on at Tate Liverpool until 3 May 2020. www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-liverpool/exhibition/theaster-gates-amalgam
- 2 N Moore: 'How Theaster Gates is revitalizing Chicago's South Side, one vacant building at a time'. *Smithsonian Magazine*, Dec. 2015. www.smithsonianmag.com/innovation/theaster-gates-ingenuity-awards-chicago-180957203/
- 3 See the Rebuild Foundation website, at www.theastergates.com/project-items/rebuild-foundation
- 4 E Heathcote: 'Theaster Gates' Sanctum, Bristol, UK: 'A bricolage of the city's archaeology''. *Financial Times*, 6 Nov. 2015. www.ft.com/content/9199176c-83e1-11e5-8095-ed1a37d1e096

of humbug, christmas spirits, 'guilty governments', and worlds made 'otherwise'...



The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost; some few (they might be guilty governments) were linked together; none were free.'

Charles Dickens, 1843

It has become common almost to the point of cliché at this time of year to 're-purpose' the format and characters of Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* to frame reflections on contemporary events. But in a season not exactly devoid of cliché, and which perhaps derives not a small amount of its charm and comforting atmosphere from precisely this fact, to do so again is perhaps in the spirit of what the festive season has become since its own earlier 're-purposing' by Victorian society.¹ The following lines are offered in the 'what if?' 'spirit' of counterfactual history telling.

2019 – a tale of Christmases Past and Present which may have been

An election before Christmas was far from everybody's idea of good timing and had occasioned many groans and exclamations of 'What another vote? 'Bah humbug!' when announced. What with work deadlines to meet, parties to attend, Christmas cards to write, and children's Christmas shows and associated costume-making to fit in etc., for 'normal' people this new political intrusion was about as welcome as a puncture on a bleak midwinter snow-filled lane between Skipton and Pateley Bridge (a picturesque seasonal image, even if there was unlikely to be much snow even 'up there' these days).

Perhaps reflecting this, in England turnout was down on the 2017 general election from 69.1% to 67.4%. But something was stirring north of the

border as Scotland saw a rise in turnout, with 68.1% of the electorate voting compared with 66.5% in 2017.

In any case it was all over now – and what a relief! The level of debate had been unedifying, with repeated failures to ensure effective press regulation over the years resulting in the usual partisan position-taking and broadcasters seemingly happy to introduce bias into their reporting to ensure a veneer of 'balance'. A process of the UK exiting the European Union (which had come to be known as 'Brexit') had been launched after a referendum held on the matter in 2016, which had dragged on past the point at which the UK was supposed to have left. In fact, few could remember how many times this was meant to have happened already, or had a clear idea of how long the next phase of agreeing the minutiae of the UK's future relationship with the rest of the EU would take. People were weary of it all.

Still, the Conservatives had sought to make getting the issue 'done' the central plank of their electoral strategy while other parties had spread their bets rather more widely, also focusing on issues such as the crises in the National Health Service, housing, social care, and the climate. The latter strategy seemed to have paid off, with the Conservatives' attempt to use a single issue and simple 'crude factually reductionist' slogans to replicate the 'Leave' campaign's narrow victory in 2016, having failed to deliver their hoped-for knockout electoral blow.

The party only managed to secure 43.6% of the popular vote with its 'Brexit first' based strategy, while a clear majority of voters had voted for parties in favour of remaining in the EU, or giving the people the option of having a second referendum on the terms of withdrawal. Adding Conservative votes to those of smaller parties, the pro-'Brexit' parties had garnered 46.4% of the popular vote, as opposed to the straight 'remain' or 'second referendum' parties' total of 52.7%. The issue was clearly still dividing opinion quite equally, even if the margin in favour of remain and/or referendum was greater than it had been in favour of 'leave' in 2016.



John Leech's classic 'Last of the spirits' illustration of 'Christmas Yet to Come' for Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* - 'Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of things that May be only?'

However, analysts pointed out that, despite this state of affairs, thanks to the reform of the electoral system in the mid-2000s which had abolished 'first past the post' (FPTP), the representation in the House of Commons did broadly reflect the views of the electorate on the matter. Instead of the traditional outcome under FPTP, where a minority could typically dominate the majority, the prospect of a coalition of the Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, Scottish National Party, Greens and perhaps Plaid Cymru was a viable option.²

Few doubted now that the electoral reform had been a crowning achievement of New Labour's modernising agenda for getting government to be more 'in touch with the people' in the then contemporary jargon. Yet at that time, at the apogee of the Blair years, there had been some in the Labour Party who had been resistant to the process

of reform, with one Labour old-timer colourfully remarking 'Why do we need PR when we are kicking the Tories' arses down the road anyway?' But the 'fuel protests' in autumn 2000, which led to some opinion polls showing that the Conservative Party had overtaken or reached equal standing with the Labour Party, had focused minds. One observer noted shortly afterwards around a Christmas Past in 2000, that 'This seems to be a new kind of protest co-ordinated with new technologies like mobile phones and e-mails with strong populist overtones and supported by a biased media. So we shouldn't be too complacent, as this kind of thing could be a growing phenomenon over the coming decades.'

In hindsight, although FPTP had served it well at different times in history, Labour had not regretted the decision to push for reform, which had enabled it to lead the 2010-2015 Labour-Liberal Democrat

coalition after the party had lost its overall majority after 13 years in power. The coalition had had to struggle with the aftermath of the financial and economic crises of the late 2000s and made some unpopular decisions, such as raising student fees (although the Lib Dems bore the brunt of anger for this, having committed not to do so in their 2010 manifesto). Labour's strongly unionist stance in the 2014 Scottish independence referendum had also seemingly entrenched its long decline north of the border.

Despite this, the coalition had not been widely unpopular, and Labour and Liberal Democrat Ministers had generally worked well together, bringing in strengthened (although still insufficient, some said) 'localist' autonomy and devolution to England and seeking to mitigate the effects of reductions in local authority budgets through targeted support, including EU Structural Funding, to areas facing particular challenges.

But by 2015 – 18 years since Tony Blair had walked into 10 Downing Street – the big pendulum of politics was ready to swing again and a Conservative administration came to power, promising among other things to 'balance the books', cut immigration, and offer an 'in/out' referendum on EU membership. The latter had duly taken place and been lost by the Prime Minister Theresa May, who had advocated remaining in the EU, after a bitter campaign marred by breaches of electoral law and foreign interference.

May had immediately had stood aside in favour of Jeremy Hunt, a convert to the 'Brexit' idea, but by summer 2019, after earlier losing his majority in an election rashly called in June 2017, and following his failure to get the withdrawal agreement he had agreed with the EU through Parliament, he made way for Boris Johnson, who gambled everything in a new general election following a rehashed withdrawal agreement concluded with the EU in autumn 2019. With an election strategy of keeping the message simple and avoiding any scrutiny of the actual detail of the withdrawal agreement, this delivered some 304,000 more votes for the Tories than Hunt had attracted in 2017. The Liberal Democrats meanwhile improved their tally by 1.3 million votes.

Analysts pointed out that under the old FPTP system Johnson would have secured a sizeable majority with which to force through his agreement – as 43.6% of the vote share would have converted into a remarkable 56.2% of the seats³ (although at the democratic cost that 45.3% of voters in the UK would not have voted for their MP⁴). Clearly, under FPTP an election would have been by far Johnson's safest gamble, as, unlike in a referendum, a majority would not have been needed.

In the event, the shift in opinion against 'Brexit' shown in opinion polls was reflected when voters actually 'went to the polls', and this, coupled with the PR system, meant that by Christmas 2019, another coalition was on the cards. The negotiations were complex, for the potential partners' positions were varied on 'Brexit' and other issues. The Labour Party, the SNP, Plaid Cymru and the Greens supported a new referendum ('a people's vote') on any withdrawal agreement, and the Liberal Democrats favoured revocation of the notice to withdraw from the EU. But as no majority of voters had endorsed leaving the EU on the terms of Johnson's agreement, but rather a majority had rejected the idea of leaving the EU with no opportunity to vote on this, or any revised withdrawal agreement, all agreed that in the national interest they had to work together.

Labour wanted its partners' full support in the renegotiation of a new EU withdrawal agreement to be put to the voters as an alternative to remaining in the EU in a subsequent referendum. In return for key posts and the guarantee of the 'remain' option being on the referendum ballot the Liberal Democrats agreed to come on board.

The SNP agreed to join the coalition, happy that the commitment to a new referendum would allow Europhile Scotland another chance to vote on remaining in the EU (after all, the opportunity to do so had been a key selling point of the 'Better together' unionist campaign in the 2014 independence referendum), and that the new UK government would not frustrate an agreement under Section 30 of the Scotland Act 1998 to devolve the power to hold a subsequent independence referendum to the Scottish Parliament (under PR the SNP had won fewer seats than they would have done under the old FPTP system and so had a need to negotiate and seek consensus on this point).

Plaid Cymru wanted a higher profile for Welsh issues, but was realistic that the appetite for an 'Indyref' did not yet exist in Wales to the same degree. Finally, the Green Party had been encouraged by aspects of the Labour Party's Green New Deal proposals and agreed to join the coalition in return for commitments on this, and consequential posts for some of its 17 MPs.² Once the coalition was in place the voters waited to see if the partners would be 'better than their word' and do 'it all' or even 'infinitely more' (apologies to Charles Dickens).

An area of strong consensus among the coalition partners was that local areas, citizens and governments should be involved in a national conversation, or 'Grand debate', on 'Things that may be' with representation from different kinds of areas

(urban, rural, 'remain', 'leave', prosperous, deprived, etc.). Local government argued it had a significant and legitimate role to play here, as, despite a difficult decade in financial terms, a concerted effort at encouraging voter registration and participation, and a move to all-out local elections, had seen turnouts increase to 62.13%.⁵

Bah humbug!?

The scenes outlined in this counterfactual or, virtual, history may seem fanciful or even 'humbug'. Yet the kinds of debates, compromises and trade-offs described as being made in the fictional Christmas Present of 2019 are in truth only the bread and butter of more representative and consensus-seeking political systems and cultures. In the same way that *A Christmas Carol* confronts the extent to which choices and actions in the past shape the present, and how both the past and present shape the future, the account of an imagined past above postulates that different choices, at different points, or critical junctures, may have set in train different path dependencies leading to an alternative present for the UK.

'Nobody can say for certain which 'Christmas Yet to Come' – how many a linked chain – the UK has forged with its path these past weeks and years, or if things can yet be made otherwise, and if so how'

But what of actual Christmases Present and Yet to Come? As Scrooge anxiously enquires of the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come after being shown a bleak glimpse of a future Yuletide: 'Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of things that May be only?' – the kinds of questions a futures-orientated activity like planning deals in. After all, as Nigel Taylor states, planning:

*'is about intervening in the world to protect or change it in some way – to make it other than it would otherwise be without planning.'*⁶

But how can it be done? Is there still scope for an activity like planning to make the world 'otherwise'? In his last national newspaper article, Peter Hall commented that:

'the current state of planning presents a special version of that dilemma that George Orwell

*famously spelt out in his essay on Charles Dickens: how can you improve human nature until you have changed the system? And what is the use of changing the system before you have improved human nature? The fact is that we will need to do both in parallel.'*⁷

These lines, their ambition, the allusion to human nature, are both inspiring and sobering at a time when nobody can say for certain which 'Christmas Yet to Come' – how many a linked chain – the UK has forged with its path these past weeks and years, or if things can yet be made otherwise, and if so how. But no doubt many in the land this Christmas will empathise with Scrooge's supplication to the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come: 'Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life.'

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Notes

- 1 A recent film about the writing of Dickens' novella is even called *The Man Who Invented Christmas* – see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Man_Who_Invented_Christmas_\(film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Man_Who_Invented_Christmas_(film))
- 2 P Worrall: 'What might have happened under Proportional Representation?'. *Channel 4 News*, 13 Dec. 2019. www.channel4.com/news/factcheck/factcheck-what-might-have-happened-under-proportional-representation
- 3 'UK election a first-past-the-post disaster of the highest order'. *News Story*. Fair Vote Canada, 15 Dec. 2019. www.fairvote.ca/2019/12/15/ukelection/
- 4 '2019 general election results'. Webpage. Electoral Reform Society. <https://ge2019.electoral-reform.org.uk/>
- 5 In truth this was the turnout in in the second round of the 2014 local elections in France
- 6 N Taylor: *Urban Planning Theory since 1945*. Sage Publications, 1998
- 7 P Hall: 'Sir Peter Hall: reflections on a lifetime of town planning'. *The Guardian*, 1 Oct. 2014. www.theguardian.com/cities/2014/oct/01/sir-peter-hall-reflections-on-a-lifetime-of-town-planning

connections

Paul Burall on climate change risks, building designers' use of solar PV panels, changing town centres, and the growth in electric scooter use



Act now

Greta Thunberg and the Extinction Rebellion have undoubtedly raised public awareness of the need for action to curb global warming, with almost a third of UK voters now listing this as one of their top priorities. The urgency for such action was underlined at the UN Climate Change Conference of world leaders in Madrid in early December, which began with a stark warning from Inger Andersen, Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme:

'Our collective failure to act early and hard on climate change means we now must deliver deep cuts to emissions – over 7 per cent each year, if we break it down evenly over the next decade. This shows that countries simply cannot wait until the end of 2020, when new climate commitments are due, to step up action. They – and every city, region, business and individual – need to act now... If we don't do this, the 1.5°C goal will be out of reach before 2030.'

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that going beyond 1.5°C will increase the frequency and intensity of climate impacts, such as the heatwaves and storms witnessed across the globe in the last few years.

Global warming will also lead to rising sea levels, with some experts warning that this could be by as much as two metres by the end of the century. This would affect far more people than previously thought, as the way that satellite information that

has traditionally been used to estimate land elevation has been mistaken, often confusing rooftops and forest canopies with ground level, meaning that a skyscraper-packed city such as Shanghai previously believed to be at low risk of flooding may, in reality, not be safe.

There are other risks from global warming. Researchers at the Australian University of Melbourne have suggested that hotter weather due to climate change could cause one in four steel bridges in the United States to fail in the next two decades, and that the same issue could affect bridges elsewhere in the world. The problem is caused by the fact that the expansion joints get clogged with dirt and debris; this does not matter too much with current temperatures, but could become a real issue as temperatures rise.

Modest and immodest PV

With a third of the world's total energy consumption being used by buildings, some companies are responding with innovative solutions. Panasonic, for example, has developed a net-zero-energy house design that is expected to be widely used across Japan. The entire roof is made up of photovoltaic (PV) panels with the capability of generating more than 10 kilowatts of power. The house also utilises geothermal cooling in summer and heating in winter, which, combined with high levels of insulation and large windows to provide excellent ventilation, reduces the energy load. As a result, the house will be a net exporter of electricity.

While the Panasonic home looks much the same as any other, the same cannot be said for the Kendeda building at Georgia Tech in Atlanta, which features a huge PV array stretching onto a large porch at the southern end. The designers explain that 'Before air-conditioning, every house had a porch – front porch, side porch, and back porch –



The Panasonic net-zero-energy home (left) and Georgia Tech's Kendeda building (right)

and that's really where life occurred during the day.' The Kendeda porches will be used in much the same way for spill-out classes. The designers tried to minimise air-conditioning costs for the building by incorporating natural ventilation, but found that, even when Atlanta's humidity is manageable, pollen was causing an allergy problem for some students.

Planning by credit card

Credit card spending may not seem an obvious source of information for planners. But London – along with other cities such as Chicago and Dublin – is using anonymous and aggregated merchant transaction data to assess the city's economic health at a very detailed local level, including traffic patterns.

One such initiative is City Possible, which has been set up by MasterCard (<https://citypossible.com>) and has already enabled London Transport to make £100 million in annual savings. At the very least, collecting and using data such as this can avoid unnecessary infrastructure expenditure by identifying real needs more accurately than traditional methods.

The changing face of town centres

Tracking private equity and venture capital funding also reveals some interesting trends on the high street. Data provided by PitchBook and published in the latest edition of Savills' *Impacts* magazine shows that investment in food and beverage outlets is slowing, with leisure activities increasing, especially in what those who like the jargon call 'competitive socialising'; this includes everything from urban golf and table tennis to escape rooms and games arcades. Within these trends is a move to introduce traditional drinking and eating into the new active venues.

Technology is having an impact as well, with some venues introducing virtual-reality experiences. Elsewhere in the world this is being taken even further: Tokyo now boasts a 10,000 square metre digital museum providing an immersive and interactive art experience in a three-dimensional setting; visitors can touch and follow the exhibits, which react and flow constantly. Digital art has also arrived in Paris, where Atelier des Lumières features huge multi-sensory projections of famous works.

The scooter debate

A third of all car trips in London are less than two kilometres long, and a quarter of all car trips in the UK are less than a mile. So replacing these journeys with electric scooters could be an excellent way of reducing congestion and pollution. And they can help with longer journeys: research in Paris has shown that 23% of scooter trips were used to link into public transport.

Electric scooters have yet to be introduced here in the UK, as the Department for Transport is still evaluating whether they are suitable for road use and whether they meet the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations.

Globally, Lime is one of the biggest operators and demonstrates the rapid growth of the sector. Launched in 2017, it has already been valued at around \$2.4 billion, partly due to an investment from Google and the venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz. However, the way that Lime operates is being questioned. The system works by allowing users to pick up and drop off their scooter anywhere, with the Uber app being used to find available nearby scooters. The operator collects scooters from major destinations and takes them back to where they are needed. This may be convenient for Lime and its customers but can lead to pavements being obstructed and residential streets littered with scooters waiting for customers or for collection. There have also been reports of complaints about the alarms designed to prevent unauthorised use regularly being set off and waking residents.

If the use of scooters is to be authorised here, this ought to be controlled by local authorities with the ability to ensure that the benefits are matched with regulations to protect the local environment.

No wet feet

In my last column I reported on a company in China that tried to meet its environmental obligations by painting nearby rocks to look like vegetation. It seems that other Chinese developers also have some strange ideas about greenery: one has marketed flats in Changsha in the centre of China with the promise of 'park views and high vegetation cover', which turned out to be an area of blue plastic material pretending to look like a lake and featuring a small timber bridge.

● *Paul Burall is a freelance writer specialising in business, environmental and design issues. The views expressed are personal.*

designing new communities for the 21st century

the art of building a garden city



*The Art of Building a Garden City:
Designing New Communities for
the 21st Century*
By Hugh Ellis, Kate Henderson
and Katy Lock
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The concept of the Garden City is perhaps the most radical and relevant legacy of British town planning and the utopian tradition. Its pioneers aspired to provide a blend of environmental sustainability, social inclusion and steely economics; a new kind of mutualised community with the highest standards of design accessible to all and the profits of rising land values shared for the benefit of everyone. With the nation now facing an acute housing crisis, these principles are more relevant than ever.

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