

Historic Towns Forum

for prosperity and conservation in historic towns



HTF Annual Report 2009

Chair's Report

As I step down after a second spell as Chair, I am pleased to say that the Forum is in good shape and has weathered the early impact of the recession as well as could be expected. The position we find ourselves in is in no small way due to the dedication and commitment of the Director and her small team in Bristol. Their determination to see the Forum not only survive but prosper is evident in the outcomes for the last year: successful conferences, more members, widening the Forum's influence to the remainder of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, recruiting a new Chair and influencing the outcome of government proposals. Much of this has been achieved with fewer resources.

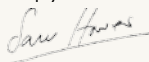
I am therefore grateful to Chris and the team for their efforts in keeping what is a long established and well respected organisation looking forward in these difficult times. However, we cannot afford to be complacent and in that respect we all need to continue to place the Forum's activities at the top of our professional agendas.

I wish our incoming Chair every success in continuing to steer the Forum's activities and trust that you will all support the Forum's work in the coming years with the same enthusiasm that you have in the past.

I am also extremely grateful to our Executive Committee members for their help, support and advice during my term(s) as Chair. They have made valuable input into the Forum's work over the past couple of years, but in particular the work of Brian Human, Richard Tuffrey and John Wrightson merits special mention.

We have an opportunity through the Annual Conference to influence the final version of PPS15, so I hope that you will all contribute to the discussions taking place during the Conference and culminating in a presentation by Vice Chair Brian Human, from which we will formulate the Forum's reply to Government.

Sam Howes



Director's Report

The Forum has experienced a number of significant changes this year. These have included opening the Membership to Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, involving a change of name for the organisation; the move to Unitary Authorities of some of our Members; consideration of changes to the role of Chair and, of course, there has been the recession to deal with.

The move towards electronic communication has been fully embraced by the Forum, which has helped in our efforts to reduce costs but has meant greater reliance on the skills within the HTF team in Bristol. *e-news* was launched in January and a new website was launched in July. New guidance is also in development on several topics but this will not be the paper documents for which the Forum is already well known but on-line facilities bringing together expertise, information and case studies.

However, events remain an important mechanism for exchanging good practice. Despite reductions in training budgets and other resources, a number of conferences have been held and have been well attended. Efforts have been made to maintain professional delivery and high standards of presentations whilst keeping costs to delegates as low as possible. We are grateful for all the support given to the Forum in helping to achieve this.

Financially this year has been very difficult but we hope to weather the storm and to come through with even stronger support from our Members and even greater influence with policy makers.

This report summarises activities over the past year and looks forward to the work we have planned for 2009-10.

Chris Winter



1. Events

1.1 Conferences

Title/Location	Date	Delegates	Income	Costs	Contribution to Overheads
Townscape in Focus: Challenges & Opportunities - Lichfield	8-10 October 2008	79	£21,706	£12,963	£8,743
Breakfast in Bath	12 March 2009	30	£300	£300	£0
New retail opportunities: the key to regeneration in town centres? - Leckford	2 April 2009	25	£0	£85	£0
Historic Towns & Smarter Growth - Cambridge	29/30 April 2009	72	£12,371	£5,979	£6,391
Parking and Park & Ride - as part of integrated sustainable transport strategies - Winchester	13/14 May 2009	45	£5,390	£2,272	£3,118
Retail Development: a time for reflection? - York	23/24 Sept 2009	57	£7,720	£4,256	£3,464

1.2 Executive Committee Meetings

Meetings were held on 31 October 2008, 30 January, 21 May and 24 July 2009. We are grateful to Colin Buchanan, Bircham Dyson Bell, DTZ and RPS for hosting these meetings.

2. Publications

2.1 Newsletters

Taking account of responses from Members, increasing printing costs and the general move to electronic communication, it was agreed that the Forum's regular newsletter would be circulated electronically from January 2009.

The format and design was developed after very careful consideration of the many possible models and the response has been good. This format enables us to keep Members in touch with activities, with the added facility to link to and / or download longer articles or additional information.

Staff time in collecting and writing articles and in the design and circulation activities, although significant, is still more cost effective and efficient than producing the paper version. It is also easier for Members to circulate to colleagues and, of course, there is always the option to download and print the e-news.

Electronic editions of e-news were circulated in February, April, June and September 2009 to approximately 1500 Members and other contacts. Advertising revenue for the year has totalled £300.

2.2 Guidance Documents

Income from sales of publications for the year totalled £3,362. Publications currently in stock cover the two decades of the Forum's work; the content of many of these is still very relevant although they may look a little dated by today's standards. Other documents are out of print but remain in demand. For these reasons decisions are made about making publications available on-line - in some cases free to download as an added benefit of Membership - or to reduce prices with 'special offers' at events for which they are particularly relevant.

Projects currently underway (see below) will develop on-line guidance, rather than paper products, for the reasons outlined in 2.1 above and as the expectation of our audience is to access information via the internet.

We continue to aim for high quality design and content, and welcome the facility for more flexible ways to offer support to Members. Funding is no longer focused on printing costs but on the time to generate, collate, edit and design the content, whether from 'in-house' or outside sources.

Current projects:

Following the conferences held in Winchester and Cambridge in the early part of 2009, task groups are developing web-based good practice guidance on Park & Ride and Housing Growth. Dedicated web pages will offer expert information and case studies, which can be added to, with contributions from the Forum's Members. It will offer a forum for information exchange on topics which challenge most historic towns.

3. Projects

3.1 Retail Development

This topic remains one which challenges many Local Authorities responsible for maintaining the vitality of historic town centres. Three different types of events have offered the opportunity for Members to exchange information this year:

In March a regional networking breakfast was held in Bath with short presentations on the Cabot Circus and Southgate developments and a 'hard-hat' tour of the latter.

In April the John Lewis Partnership hosted a meeting of Local Authority Chief Executives and Strategic Directors at Leckford to discuss the implications of the forthcoming Planning Policy Statement.

A more conventional conference event, looking at a strategic approach to retail development, was held in September in York, bringing together new research and national policy guidance for discussion, with case studies and tours of the City.

3.2 Housing Growth

Pressure for housing growth in historic towns together with the recession was seen by the Forum as an opportunity to look more strategically at development planning - towards 'smarter growth'. A successful conference held in Cambridge in April 2009 has been followed by the establishment of a task group to develop web-based good practice guidance which will be rolled out during the autumn.

3.3 Park & Ride Survey

Although the Forum's Park & Ride guidance document (EHTF 2000) continues to sell well world-wide, technology and case studies have moved on and RPS undertook to survey Members for an up-to-date picture of current schemes.

This information was presented at the conference held in Winchester in May, which looked at P&R as just one of the possible sustainable transport solutions. To disseminate this information more widely and to develop good practice, (another!) task group is working on web-based guidance which will identify the issues and collect case studies.

3.4 Developing Partnership Working in Scotland

Discussions with colleagues in Scotland began some time ago in order to find commonalities between those working in the heritage environment. At the closing conference of the Historic Environment Advisory Committee for Scotland (HEACS) in Edinburgh in May, HTF was invited to exhibit and attend, and a great deal of interest was shown in the Forum's work. The relationship will be developed to widen the sources of good practice and exchange information.

3.5 Developing Partnership Working in the Republic of Ireland

The Forum's links with the Irish Walled Towns Network have developed to include Fáilte Ireland, the Heritage Council and the Department for the Environment in the Republic which are the organisations responsible for heritage and tourism. Representatives of the Forum have been invited on a number of occasions to share its work in particular on tourism and the public realm and in June a delegation contributed to a conference held in Kilkenny.

Further partnership work to support the development of heritage led tourism and public realm improvements is planned for the coming year.

3.6 Conservation Areas At Risk

Following the survey of Local Authorities by English Heritage, HTF made a proposal to offer support to senior officers and elected members and to encourage a more strategic approach to conservation area management. This proposal has been developed with English Heritage and, with its support, a series of six seminars will be delivered between December 2009 and February 2010.

3.7 Heritage Protection Review

Despite the failure of the HPR Bill to go to Parliament, some of the proposed reforms can still be implemented and the Forum is keen to find ways to ensure that a range of policies and strategies are adopted across all sectors to facilitate this.

A proposal is being developed with English Heritage relating to the relevant courses offered by Universities and their content in relation to the historic environment.

3.8 Planning Policy Statement 15

The Forum has followed the development of this PPS and commented at the various stages of consultation. A full response will be developed to reflect the views of the Membership at the Annual Conference.

The Forum's inclusion on the Historic Environment Review Executive Committee (HEREC) offers an opportunity to input, on behalf of the Membership, into a number of important Government activities as well as the mechanisms by which its intermediary (English Heritage) leads the sector.

3.9 Web site / CESW

The launch of the new historictownsforum.org website in July, which has been under development for some time, has not only stimulated interest from Members and facilitated more on-line services, but also attracted the attention of another organisation. Constructing Excellence South West (CESW) has commissioned HTF to design and develop its web facilities. Although not a key area of activity for the Forum, the skills and expertise we now have 'in-house' are valuable commodities and the opportunity to make these skills available has generated some badly needed extra income.

3.10 Business Plan

The Director and Treasurer began, early in the year, to update the Business Plan but, in the light of changing financial circumstances and other considerations, it was decided to postpone this until after the Annual General Meeting.

3.11 Photography Competition / HTF Calendar 2009

Entries for the photographic competition were of a very high standard and the twelve chosen to feature on the 2009 calendar, which was sent to all Members, gave it a very distinctive look. The winner, Roger Elphick of Durham County Council, enjoyed the first prize - a weekend for two at the Midland Hotel - which was sponsored by the hotel.

4. Sponsorship

4.1 The global financial situation has impacted on many of the Forum's supporters - large and small. It was with great disappointment that the news was received that DTZ would not continue as Sponsor / Partners of HTF. Donaldsons - prior to the merger with DTZ - had supported the Forum since its creation over 20 years ago, and we hope that when things improve - as they surely must - we might renew our relationship.

Gillespies, which has also been a supporter for many years, has had to withdraw its support. Colin Buchanan will continue its support but regrettably at a slightly reduced level this year.

We were, however, very pleased to welcome Bircham Dyson Bell LLP as a partner at the end of 2008, and look forward to working with them in the future.

Bircham Dyson Bell



University of the West of England



John Lewis Partnership

Our continuing partnerships with RPS, Land Securities plc, UWE and the John Lewis Partnership have been very fruitful this year with participation in a number of the Forum's projects and events. We are very grateful for their valuable input and support.

4.2 Sponsorship for events helps to defer the costs which otherwise have to be passed on to delegates and, despite the current difficulties, Local Authorities and Corporate Members continue to give generous support. We are grateful to the following for contributions - in kind or financial - to projects and events in the past year:



John Lewis Partnership

5. Membership

5.1 Despite some losses, in part due to the change to Unitary Authorities of some of our Members and in part due to budget squeezes, total membership is up again on last year, and we have welcomed 38 new Members in all.

The Membership is currently made up of the following categories:

Local Authority	74
Associate	4
Civic & Amenity	20
Corporate	64
Honorary	3
Individual	24
Reciprocal	13
Town & Parish	10
Total	212

5.2 An analysis of Membership at the end of 2008 indicated that the Forum was likely to lose some Local Authority Members due to the combining of city, district or borough councils into Unitary Authorities. This would be particularly noticeable in Cornwall, Durham, Shropshire and Wiltshire but I am pleased to report that all of these new Authorities have signed up as Members.

5.3 Since opening the Membership in January 2009 a number of organisations outside of England have joined the Forum: Scotland 4, Wales 3, Northern Ireland & Republic of Ireland 3.

6. UWE

6.1 The Annual Review Meeting was held in January; this was very positive and began the process for renewal of the contract between UWE and HTF. This was subsequently agreed and the new five year contract will run until 31 July 2014.

6.2 Student Placements

Several of the courses run by the Faculty within which the Forum is based have direct relevance to its work and there are opportunities to support the work of students and complement current projects. In the past year Stacey Smith worked with us on the 'Smarter growth in historic towns' and Martin Berney is currently looking at the use of Article 4 Directions, following on from the Forum's previous work on this topic.

7. Partnership working

7.1 During the past year the Forum has worked in partnership with a number of organisations in order to share information and good practice. These have included:

- Academy of Urbanism
- ASHTAV
- Civic Society Initiative
- CIOB
- Drivers Jonas
- Department for Transport
- English Heritage
- HEREC
- Historic Environment Advisory Committee for Scotland (HEACS)
- Irish Walled Towns Network (IWTN)
- Land Securities plc
- Planning Inspectorate
- Prince's Regeneration Trust
- RTPI
- URBED
- ARUP
- British Parking Association/Parking Forum
- Colin Buchanan
- Constructing Excellence South West (CESW)
- Department of Culture, Media & Sport
- EAHTR
- Fáilte Ireland
- Heritage Council (Ireland)
- IHBC
- John Lewis Partnership
- Multi
- Prince's Foundation
- RPS
- UK HRG
- UWE

7.2 The Forum continues to respond to consultations which impact on its Members, in order to highlight the special concerns of managing historic towns and cities. The progress of Planning Policy Statements 4/6 and 15 are being closely followed and will be responded to at the appropriate time.

7.3 Membership of other organisations has always helped the Forum to engage closely with colleagues working in the sector. Where possible this is primarily done through reciprocal arrangements, however, in some cases it is necessary to establish formal membership. This has been the case for the European Association of Historic Towns and Regions (EAHTR), Heritage Link, the IHBC, and the Academy of Urbanism.

The value of these links, in financial terms, is under constant scrutiny and, in the light of the current financial situation, each will be examined on its own merit when renewal is due.

In view of the level of financial commitment required (c £4,500 pa) the Executive Committee decided not to renew membership of the EAHTR in August 2009, although it is anticipated that a close working relationship will be retained.

8. Executive Committee

8.1 Position of Chair

As agreed by previous AGMs the Executive Committee and the Director have addressed the selection of a Chair to succeed in October 2009. A process of identification of the skills and requirements was followed by a recruitment procedure and the 2009 AGM will be asked to endorse the appointment.

8.2 Election of the Executive Committee

Current Members of the Executive Committee who will be standing down are:

Ian Ayris, Newcastle CC
Kim Bennett, Canterbury CC
Freddie Gick, Birmingham Civic Society
Sam Howes, Chichester DC

The Forum is very grateful for their time and energy, especially Sam who has served terms as Treasurer and two as Chair. For those moving on to warmer climes or quieter lives, our best wishes go with you!

Current Members prepared to serve a further one year term are:

Sean Coghlan, Lichfield DC
Chris Hargreaves, Birmingham CC
Nick Hayward, RPS (Sponsor / Partner representative)
Brian Human, Personal Member (Vice Chair)
Ian Poole, Bury St Edmunds BC
Richard Tuffrey, High Peak BC (Honorary Treasurer)
John Wrightson, Worcester CC
Tony Wyatt, _space group (Corporate Member representative)

Some nominations have been received, any further nominations should be notified to the HTF office prior to the AGM if possible. The election of the Executive Committee will take place at the AGM on 21 October.

9. Financial Report

9.1 It has already been mentioned that the Forum's finances have been affected by local government reorganisation and the global financial situation which has caused some of our sponsors to review their position. The impact of these factors is apparent in the summary of the Forum's Annual Accounts below which shows a loss over the year of just over £11,500, up from a loss of just under £4,000 last year. Under the circumstances of the difficult operating conditions felt across all sectors this year, the final outturn is better than might have been expected.

Notwithstanding this, there are concerns about the underlying trends affecting the Forum's business model and immediate measures and a financial strategy for the coming year has been adopted, aimed at reversing the recent operating losses. This is explained in more detail in the appended report.

9.2 Accounts Summary

	<u>Income £</u>	<u>Expenditure £</u>
Operating Income	93,399	
Sponsorship	43,332	
Membership fees	50,067	
Sales / Turnover	50,832	
Publication sales	3,195	
Publication sponsorship	0	
Conference fees & sponsorship	47,337	
Advertising revenue	300	
Cost of Sales		25,273
Cost of publications		0
Cost of conferences		25,273
Admin & General		130,465
UWE accommodation		14,687
Phones		646
Advertising (non-conference)		1,055
Printing (non-conference)		3,084
Stationery		453
Hardware/software		887
Salaries		103,401
Accountant's fee		989
Training		230
Travel/accom (non-conference)		3,688
P O Box		120
Membership fees		450
Insurance		425
Interest		350
Totals	144,231	155,738
profit(loss)	<u>-11,507</u>	