

Feb 2006

ENGLISH HISTORIC TOWNS FORUM  
for prosperity and conservation in historic towns

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Feature Town:  
Chester

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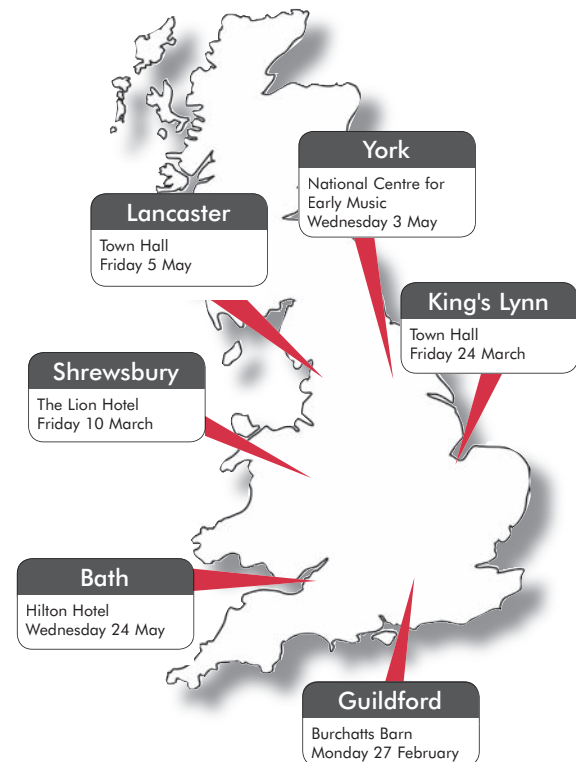
## EHTF offers support for BVPI requirements

The requirement of BVPI 19b and c for local planning authorities to produce **Conservation Area Appraisals and Management Plans** for their conservation areas is causing widespread concern, particularly amongst Forum members who represent the areas in which the greatest concentrations of conservation areas are found.

We have therefore carried out research, with the University of the West of England (UWE), in order to **identify good practice** in preparing these and to develop training to support the practitioners who carry out the work and those who manage the process and the resources required.

Using the combined expertise of EHTF event organisers, a UWE trainer and, with support from the IHBC, a series of training seminars will be delivered in six locations around the country between February and May. The locations have been chosen in order to make the training accessible to practitioners across the country. Bookings can be made online at [www.ehtf.org.uk](http://www.ehtf.org.uk)

In order to achieve the optimum training environment, places will be allocated – on a 'first come first served basis' – so early booking is advisable.



### EHTF on BBC Breakfast News

Good news! In mid-November EHTF member town, Cheltenham, won a poll for the best high street and BBC Breakfast News asked EHTF Director, Chris Winter to comment on what makes a good high street.

Congratulations go to Cheltenham – to Martin Quantock, Town Centre Manager and the Borough Council team – for their achievement. The high street in question was clean and well presented, with eye-catching local art and a mix

of chain and independent stores. As Martin said during the interview, "there is still much work to be done to bring all of the retail area up to this standard, but it was a good start". EHTF was pleased to be asked to add its point of view.

It is always good to have the opportunity to applaud good practice and to hope that others will be inspired to continue their efforts to avoid the 'clone town' label.

## New Members

### **CED Ltd**

Michael Heap  
Managing Director  
728 London Road  
West Thurrock, Grays  
RM20 3LU

Tel: 01708 867237

Web: [www.ced.ltd.uk](http://www.ced.ltd.uk)

### **Jonathan Dixon**

Principal Consultant  
c/o RPS Planning, Transport  
& Environment  
Mallams Court  
18 Milton Park, Abingdon  
Oxon OX14 4RP

### **Ibstock Brick Ltd**

Ken Smith  
Regional Sales Manager  
Lodge Lane, Cannock  
Staffordshire WS11 0LT

Tel: 01922 708012

Web: [www.ibstock.co.uk](http://www.ibstock.co.uk)

### **Kevin McGovern**

Planning & Regeneration  
Consultant

111 Afreton Road  
Sutton-in-Ashfield  
Nottinghamshire NG17 1FJ

### **Springboard Research Ltd**

Diane Wehrle  
Director  
500 Avebury Boulevard  
Milton Keynes MK9 2BE

Tel: 01908 547957

Web: [www.spring-board.info](http://www.spring-board.info)

### **Turley Associates**

Sarah Bevan  
Associate Director  
23 Savile Row  
London W1S 2ES

Tel: 020 7851 4010

Web: [www.rta.co.uk](http://www.rta.co.uk)

### **Urban Initiatives**

Jonathan Bore  
Director: Planning  
1 Fitzroy Square  
London W1T 5HE

Tel: 020 7380 4545

Web: [www.urbaninitiatives.co.uk](http://www.urbaninitiatives.co.uk)

## 'Have your say' members' opportunity to shape the Forum

Following the very satisfying response from EHTF members to the November survey, we have been able to make plans for the next 'Strategy Meeting' at which members will participate in discussions to develop programmes of work for the next two years.

Since the last meeting we have achieved a great deal and, according to the survey results, we continue to provide many of the services our members require. However, there is always room for improvement and, in the ever changing environment in which we work, we need to be aware of the concerns of all members in order to deliver the support they need. As there are shared issues and concerns, we need to formulate the best strategy to address these and to continue to raise our voice to the policy makers.

We are very grateful to **The Prince's Foundation** who will allow us to use their London offices for this meeting on **1 March**, which will be free to members. As well as shaping the future of EHTF, members will be offered the opportunity to network with colleagues over lunch, in these very comfortable surroundings.

We have engaged the help of a facilitator, Lesley Williams, who will guide the proceedings and **George Ferguson**, past president of the RIBA to inspire us!

*Chris Winter, EHTF Director*

## East Midlands Design Review Panel established

Opun, the Architecture and Built Environment Centre for the East Midlands, has launched a Design Action Programme which is aimed at improving the quality of design in the built environment and public places. Aimed at sharing best practice for the benefit of everyone involved across the sector, the programme includes the establishment of an East Midlands Design Review Panel.

The regional panel involves 32 experts from the public and private sector who are qualified in one or more of the core design and construction professions. This wider group forms a pool of experience from which smaller panels can be drawn together to offer a tailored design review service for significant regional projects. CABE are also supporting this new initiative and the criteria establishing the suitability of projects for the design review process has been deliberately set so as to complement the model already operating by CABE nationally.

## Making retail led regeneration in historic towns - Princesshay, Exeter

After the traditional social evening preceding the conference, Ian Poole, Chair of EHTF, opened the event with a résumé of the Forum's long term interest in the topic under discussion.

Many documents had been published to support practitioners, and the conference held in Birmingham earlier in the year had explored the impact of the regeneration of the Bullring on the city. He stressed the importance of encouraging an environment in which independent, unique and traditional shops can thrive alongside the national chains, and in which retailers can appreciate the benefits to be gained from working with, not against, the historic built environment. The importance of markets in the local economy should not be overlooked, nor the balance to be maintained with secondary shopping streets in a town.

As a significant proportion of listed buildings are shops, the retail sector has an important role in supporting the historic fabric both as heritage and tourism assets. Many historic towns have a unique mix of retail, heritage and other tourism attractions; a fabric which offers both opportunities and constraints.



Conceptual illustration - New Bedford

Crossing over with the work the Forum has been carrying out on the public realm, it has become accepted wisdom that, in an attractive public realm, shoppers will spend more, linger longer and make return trips. It is therefore essential that the whole environment is carefully considered when planning new retail development.

The conference explored in detail the Land Securities Princesshay scheme to determine:

- what makes a new retail development happen?
- how can it fit into an historic environment?
- how it is being done in Exeter?

Speakers included Peter Cleary, Graham Thompson and Nick Smith from Land Securities PLC, who outlined the long involvement of the company in historic towns and details of the design and planning of the Princesshay scheme.

The Panel would prefer an early involvement that its advice can be offered at a time when it can still be called upon at any point in the process. In such a case, it represents a valuable new resource for the East Midlands who are committed to developing the necessary in-house design skills.

A similar Design Review Panel has been established in the South East region and one is also being established in the West. There is also interest in establishing such panels in other regions. Further information on the panel can be found at [www.opun.org.uk](http://www.opun.org.uk)

Do you represent a full member organisation?  
To feature your town in 'NEWS', please send a short article (150 words) and an image (300 dpi, tif) by email to [ehhf@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:ehhf@uwe.ac.uk).

## ation work Exeter case study



ford Square, Princesshay, Exeter

John Rigby and Fliss Morey of Exeter City Council explained the significance of the integrated project team and the context of the scheme in the historic city, with reference to the attention to detail which was so important to the success of the scheme.

Contributions from Brian Raggett of CB Richard Ellis and Chris Smith of English Heritage gave the wider context to the economic drivers for regeneration and the historic environment perspective, respectively. Chris also launched 'Retail Development in Historic Centres' the new document produced in partnership with EHTF.

EHTF is very grateful to Land Securities PLC and to Exeter City Council for their support for this conference.

A full report can be accessed at [www.ehtf.org.uk](http://www.ehtf.org.uk). Copies of the powerpoint presentations are available from the EHTF office and copies of the guidance document from English Heritage.

olvement with suitable projects so  
sibility stage, although the service  
(pre or post-application). As  
esource for local authorities in the  
o design excellence but lack the

een in operation for some time in  
out to be launched in the South  
lishing further panels in the other  
East Midlands Panel can be found

hard Tuffrey, Conservation Manager,  
High Peak Borough Council

## National Retail Planning Forum Retail Planning Policy: The next 10 years

It was Charles Handy, writing in his 'Age of Unreason' that likened the structure of a bureaucracy to that of a Greek temple. In retail planning there may also be a Greek temple, commonly known as the 'town centre first policy' – an approach applied when considering locations for new retail development. In short, a 'sequential approach' which favours locating in town centres. The design for the temple is now enshrined in PPS6: Planning for Town Centres as a Government key objective (paragraph 1.3).

Handy also tells us the chief weakness of a Greek temple – a violent shaking of the ground beneath the supporting columns. Thus it seemed at the Conference of the National Retail Planning Forum entitled 'Retail Planning Policy: The next 10 years' held in London, last November.

The ground shaking drew its power from a variety of premises:

- That there was a lack of national retail policy and there were no common threads underlying its broad policy agendas. This leaves policy susceptible to interpretation and, consequently, the ability to press home conflicting agendas.

- The weak research-base for national retail planning policy, including the lack of attention to relevant perspectives on retail and shopper needs.

- The analysis of what was wrong with town centres drawing on the 'clone town centres' (New Economic Foundation report on 'Clone Town Britain'). This stated that the same multiple retailers appear in most of the prime retail areas of town centres affecting vitality and character. Other problems included the lack of big retail units, town centre decline and high vacancy rates, ineffective parking strategies, traffic congestion, the driving out of small businesses by big multiples – to name but a few.

- The impact of changing national retail trends by revisiting: what is sustainable in terms of retail planning including the role of suburban and inter-urban retailing; the role of new style leisure complexes (which did not lend themselves to town centre locations); the current pressure on retail operating

economics; the important relationship between land values and development opportunities; changing retail formats and structure; and the growth of brand retailing and internet/catalogue retailing.

So, as we sit in our temples, protecting and enhancing vitality, viability, sustainability, accessibility and the creation of an attractive public realm, we should be aware of the potential winds for change. The National Retail Planning Forum ([www.nrpf.org](http://www.nrpf.org)) has now been established for 10 years. It is a partnership between local government, the retail sector, developers and funders with the twin remit of providing research and factual information to underpin retail planning debates. The DTI's Retail Strategy Group has recommended the ODPM should consider 'how key planning policy makers, retailers and other stakeholders can be brought together on a regular basis to develop a partnership at national level and to explore improvements to the planning process'. The NRPF feel this is the ideal role for the Forum and intend to widen their membership and raise their profile accordingly. Did the ground shake again just then?

Jeff Clarke: EHTF Executive Member  
King's Lynn & West Norfolk BC

## Action plan for historic Stokes Croft, Bristol

Stokes Croft is a 600m long historic street, and conservation area, at the fringe of Bristol's Broadmead. It is lined by shops and buildings ranging from the early 18th century to recent years. It has a dual role: it is the shopping heart for the nearby communities and it is a main transport corridor for the city. The very attractive and historically significant buildings (including three formal Georgian squares, just off the main street) are tarnished by an aggressive road environment, a general state of disrepair and low commercial activity.

Colin Buchanan's action plan for Bristol City Council and St Paul's Unlimited Community Partnership sets out guiding principles and priorities, developed through consultation with the communities, for a renaissance of the area, including recommendations for appropriate redevelopment, enterprise development proposals and measures to tame the traffic and create an attractive streetscape that would enhance the qualities of the street. The Carriageworks site and listed buildings have recently been selected by English Partnership as a pilot project for quality regeneration.

Contact: [martina.juvara@cbuchanan.co.uk](mailto:martina.juvara@cbuchanan.co.uk)  
More information: [www.cbuchanan.co.uk](http://www.cbuchanan.co.uk)



The Carriageworks Site, Bristol

## View from The Chair

I've been watching from the sidelines the 'demolish and rebuild verses refurbish' housing debate that is occupying a lot of media space at the moment. As professionals concerned with our heritage, we should not lose sight of the fact we are fortunate to be having the debate at all.

My recent visit to China and Hong Kong made me realise that in a number of developing countries the question of preserving older properties and adapting them for modern user requirements does not appear to be asked at all. In many countries, there remains a philosophy of wholesale clearance and replacement with modern and, at best, average new homes and commercial premises. I wonder if, in years to come, people will question what the original architecture and urban fabric of these areas was like.

Having said that, I know that many developing countries are experiencing massive population increases in their urban areas and clearance and new build is seen as the quickest and sometimes cheapest option. Hopefully those days are gone in England. We hope that in our historic towns we are making sure that, where clearance is favoured, we get new buildings and spaces that improve the area and, at the least, respect its history.

As a matter of interest, I did note that Beijing has a Museum of Planning! It's good to see a country that's proud of the planning profession!

*lan poole*

Beijing



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## EHTF/UWE partnership review

The annual review meeting of the partners was held at UWE, Bristol on 13 January and attended by the Chair - Ian Poole, the Director - Chris Winter, Chris Hargreaves, a member of the Executive Committee and Martin Boddy and Nigel Curry, Dean and Associate Dean respectively of the Faculty of the Built Environment.

This regular meeting offers the opportunity to maximize the benefits of the partnership to both parties and to discuss and develop joint projects.

### Out and about

EHTF was represented at the following events:

**Bristol Planning & Law Annual Dinner**  
24 Nov

**Reception at The Queen's Gallery, Buckingham Palace** to launch The Prince's Foundation membership scheme and private viewing of 'Caneletto in Venice'  
29 Nov

**Oxford Castle Heritage Project opening ceremony**  
1 Dec

**'Heritage Link - Heritage Day'**  
7 Dec

**UWE 'Knowledge Transfer' seminar**  
19 Jan

**'Capturing the Public Value of Heritage'** - conference at Royal Geographical Society  
25-26 Jan

## Feature Town: Chester

The historic walled city of Chester is one of the most distinctive places in Europe; a vibrant lifestyle and business city which draws over 8.5m visitors a year to its shops, restaurants, culture and historic assets. The city's unique Rows and highly distinctive architecture are blended with some exciting contemporary architecture, in an intimate relationship with the countryside around.

It is a university city whose economy is strong, at the hub of the North East Wales/West Cheshire sub-region - one of the fastest growing sub regions in the UK economically. Over the last 10 years, the city has attracted major investment from the financial services sector.

Chester is proving to be one of the most successful smaller cities in delivering the Government's Urban Renaissance agenda; over the next 5-7 years over £1400m of private development investment is committed in major regeneration and dependent projects in the heart of this historic city.

The district is large with wonderful countryside and attractive rural villages, including some 61 conservation areas and 2500 listed buildings, Chester still has over half of its 700 shops offering distinctive quality shopping as well as national and international retailers.

*Howard Dickenson, Building & Conservation Manager, Chester City Council*



Vibrant Chester

## In 2006: EHTF will be addressing the following:

### Conferences & Seminars:

Conservation Area Appraisal and Conservation Area Management Plans A series of regional training seminars (see front page for dates and venues)		27 Feb - 24 May
Strategy Meeting	London	1 March
Managing city walls - investment and maintenance	Chester	27 April
Waterways in historic towns	Stratford-upon-Avon	8 June
21st Century development in the historic urban environment - Annual Conference & AGM	Bury St Edmunds	18-20 October

### Forthcoming Publications:

- Focus on ...Tourism - A Forum policy statement
- Designing for housing growth: sustaining historic towns - A research project into urban extensions
- Decluttering the streetscape - Good practice guidance

For details of these and other projects please visit our website [www.ehft.org.uk](http://www.ehft.org.uk)