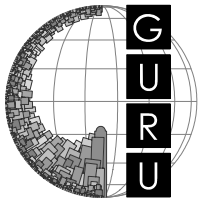

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EXPERTS, ETHICS AND ENABLING IN THE CURRENT PLANNING CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

This is a collection of three short papers which explore important issues facing the planner in practice today. The first reviews different views about the nature of the planner's expertise. The second considers the increasing complexity of the ethical issues planners face in practice. The third shifts attention to the changes in the local government context in which most planners still work, and discusses the implications of a more enabling role for local authorities. In each paper, the author sets out the issue, drawing on some of the available literature, and then relates it to their own experience while in practice during their 'year-out' as part of their planning programme. Each paper raises issues with which many practitioners are familiar, and encourages debate as well as offering suggestions as to how to approach each issue. These papers arise from work undertaken as part of the final year of the Diploma in Town Planning at Newcastle University, and provide an illustration of the kind of work being produced by senior students in planning schools these days.

PREFACE

These three papers, written by graduates just embarking on their planning careers, cover three key aspects of the practice of town and country planning at the end of the twentieth century. The Ethical Issues paper is particularly timely, following closely on the publication of the Nolan Committee report, *Standards of Conduct in Local Government in England, Scotland and Wales,* and the allegations of irregularities in Doncaster.

The perceptive views of the students reflect well upon their academic course at Newcastle with its emphasis on developing communication and group working skills and on their experience in their 'year out' employment. I wish them well in their careers and hope that other planning practitioners and students will benefit from reading their work.

Mike Haslam,
Chief Planning Officer
South Norfolk Council
(the external examiner for the programme)

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INTRODUCTION

Patsy Healey

Most planners in practice in Britain these days recognise that their work context has changed significantly in recent years. Although planning has survived the onslaught on local government of the Tory years, the performance of the planning function has been under pressure to change in several ways. These pressures arise not merely from national government policy. They also arise from shifts in the wider society. Increasing popular interest in the planning function means more demands and challenges for planning officers and councillors. Councillors in turn are increasingly interested in the planning function and prepared to challenge the opinions of their planners. More and more planning work is being undertaken outside local government, in consultancies and in a variety of different agencies. These changes revive in new ways the ever-contentious question of exactly what a planner is skilled in. They also place planners in often acute difficulty as to the stance they should take in relation to the pressures on them. Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s, we used to discuss planners' values in a broad sense, now we have to discuss the ethical dilemmas which planners face in the daily flow of action. It is also important to replace the accounts of the experience of being a planner which we have from the late 1970s (Underwood 1980) and the late 1980s (Thomas and Healey ed 1991) with contemporary experience.

These three papers draw on the experience of new entrants to the profession. All three authors were undertaking the first year of their Diploma in Town Planning at Newcastle University during 1995/96, which involves a 'year out' in practice, following a first degree in planning and preceding the final year at University. As students, in between the academic world and practice, they have been able to combine a perceptive and lively 'bottom-up' view of their working context with an awareness of how the dilemmas they face are discussed in the literature.

The papers were produced as part of 1996/97 *Planner in Society* course which is undertaken in the first semester of the field year (see Appendix). This course views planners not as academics often do, from a critical outside perspective. It takes the stance of the planner and explores issues from the point of view of being a planner. It emphasises practice experience, but at the same time makes links to theory and literature. These papers thus also make a contribution by drawing on some of this material to help make sense of contemporary practice. The papers also develop many of the issues which I myself have considered over the years, with the added benefit of a fresh perspective which the students bring through the relation to their practices.

The papers were selected from the work undertaken by a group of around 50 students. They were chosen because they were good papers in themselves, because they drew well on practice experience and because of the way the link between theory and practice was developed. They were produced as part of a 'seen examination'. Each student had to write a paper in response to one of three questions and had a week to do this.

We hope that this collection of papers will be of interest to practitioners puzzling about these kinds of questions, to student planners setting out into practice, and to planners interested in planning education, to see the product of a learning process which combines academic and practice inputs.

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THE PLANNER'S EXPERTISE[1]

Adam Ross

> *"expert (adj. & n. - adj.) 1. having special knowledge or skill in a subject. - n. a person having special knowledge or skill."* (The Concise Oxford Dictionary)

Like a child arriving mid-term at a new school, planning, as a relative newcomer to the list of the built environment professions, has been looked upon with suspicion and caution, and has had trouble being accepted into an already well established group of professional 'friends'. This, combined with the subject's unique nature, has meant that planning has always had to try hard to prove itself, not just to practising professionals who question its validity as a profession in its own right, but also to the commentators, academics, politicians, and journalists, that have consistently argued that the *"expertise claimed by planners is non-existent or irrelevant*"(Evans, 1995). What is unusual however, is that planners themselves often find it difficult to identify the exact nature of the expertise that they hold and thus, perpetuate these opinions. As discussed by Thomas and Healey (1991), this perhaps stems from the lack of self reflection within the profession, which tends to make planners, "..unaware of what is distinctive about their knowledge, skills, and perspectives". This paper, although written by a planner and perhaps, therefore, biased to a certain degree, intends to illustrate that planners can certainly claim to be experts, in a number of senses.

Knowledge of the Planning System

The most obvious expertise which a town planner can claim is an expert knowledge of the political, procedural, and institutional context of planning practice itself. David Nicholson (1991), after experience in the development control section of Hereford City Council, saw this as the critical expertise of any planner, drawn from a combination of "*..their formal education and partly from experience itself*". It is the Royal Town Planning Institute, charged with advancing,

[1] The original exam question was: *In what sense is the planner an expert*

"..the art and science of Town Planning" (RTPI, 1991) that dictates the core learning content of any planning course. With regard to knowledge of the planning system itself, the RTPI insist, in their "General Guidance for Academic Institutions", that planners have a detailed knowledge of the following :-

- The planning system in context
- British law, politics and government
- Law, procedure and organisation of British planning practice
- Related areas of policy

In addition to these areas of detailed planning knowledge, planning students are also required to have a specialised knowledge, which involves familiarity in depth with at least one area of knowledge within the above range, or developing from it. Students are also required to learn about "*..the nature, purposes and method of planning*"(RTPI, 1991) , which in more simple terms means a knowledge of the central traditions and current ideas of planning thought and practice. The RTPI insist that all of these criteria are satisfied for a planning course to be accredited by them. The importance of the Institute to the credibility of the profession as a whole, means that all planning courses in the UK subscribe to this content and, therefore, all qualified planners possess this detailed knowledge of the planning system itself and its context. This knowledge is enhanced and reinforced through practical experience and is vital for work in the public sector. It has, in recent years, "..become highly marketable to the private sector" (Thomas and Healey, 1991). This education is not provided by courses in any other discipline, and is a special area of knowledge that certainly supports a planners expert status.

Connecting and Co-ordinating Technical Disciplines

A planner's expertise does not lie solely in the knowledge of the planning system, however. The nature of the development process means that planning involves dealing with a range of professionals including architects, surveyors, and ecologists, to name just a few. To do the job properly, therefore, planners clearly need a certain knowledge of these other related professions to allow effective communication, and the mutual understanding of ideas and concepts. It is for this purpose, that planning students are, in addition to a knowledge of the planning system, required by the RTPI to have an understanding of the, "*..natural and built environment and the natural and social (economic, socio-cultural, political) processes of it production, use, appreciation and evaluation*"(RTPI, 1991). This includes three main areas of learning :

1. The dimensions of the natural environment (ecology and landscape, water systems, energy systems, ecosystems etc..)

2. The dimensions of the built environment (building forms, technological and aesthetic processes, urban structure, building design and urban design etc..)

3. The development process (development appraisal and valuation, development finance, agencies involved in development process etc..)

In this respect, the planner is a generalist rather than a specialist, possessing a broad knowledge of a number of relevant subjects, in addition to a fundamental knowledge of the planning system itself. It is easy, in these circumstances, to see why many people fail to see their expertise (other than a knowledge of the planning system), as a planner's limited education in the natural environment, for example, does not make them ecologists, their knowledge of the built environment does not make them architects, and learning about the development process does not make them qualified surveyors. It is for this reason that planners are often charged with being a "Jack of all trades and master of none" and are not seen as experts in their own rights, but more an unnecessary fusion of existing professionals.

This is, however, an unfair judgement upon a planners skills and expertise. Planners are not, and cannot be expected to be experts in all of these areas, which are courses and professions in their own right. A planners key attribute in this regard, is their "*..ability to make relationships across these areas of knowledge*" (RTPI, 1991), and it is here, to a large extent, that a planners expertise lies. It is a planners role to take an overview of development proposals, rather than focusing on specific technicalities and this is where planning becomes unique amongst the built environment professions, being very much a, "connective and co-ordinating activity" (Thomas and Healey, 1991) rather than a specific science. A planner is not an expert in architecture, surveying, ecology, or engineering, that is clearly the domain of the respective professionals in each

discipline. A planner's expertise, however, lies in knowing enough about these technical disciplines, so as to be able to assess how one will effect another, or indeed simply recognising that one will effect another. As such, a planner's job is not necessarily knowing what the technical solution to something is but recognising that a solution is required, and knowing where to find such a solution. In this respect, planners can, to a certain extent, be compared to the husband in the AA (Automobile Association) television adverts, who when asked by his family if he can fix the car, smiles and replies, "No, but I know a man who can!" i.e. he knows there is a problem, and knows where to look for someone with the necessary technical expertise to solve it.

These connective and co-ordinating skills are required of all planners, as analysis of planners' roles in both the public and private sectors highlights. In a public sector, development control role, for example, the ability to make links and know where to find information, is a major part of a planner's expertise. Knowing that a particular planning application will require a highway closure for example, means that a planner can point this out to the relevant engineer for his detailed comments; the planner does not need to know the specifics of a highway closure. Similarly, knowing that a landscaping scheme may not be satisfactory in environmental terms allows a planner to pass on an application for a landscape architects comments; the planners does not need a detailed knowledge of landscape architecture.

Similar skills are required in the private sector, as Ian Blacker, a Town Planner with Jones Lang Wootton explained in a recent presentation[2]. He heads a team of professionals within the built environment field, whose collective objective is to advise clients on the potential for site re-development. This team includes architects, surveyors, engineers and geologists, but as Mr. Blacker stated, he, as the sole town planner, knows little of the details with regards to any of these disciplines. His job is to co-ordinate the group (assigning the necessary professionals in his team to deal with the relevant planning obstacles relating to their areas of expert knowledge), and to provide personally the expert knowledge of the planning system - his area of expertise.

Connecting Technical Disciplines and the Planning System Itself

In a similar fashion, planning also involves making relationships and connections between technical subjects and the planning system itself. This is illustrated clearly by Healey (1992) in a study that analysed the communicative acts of a senior planner in Manchester City Council, and focused on two episodes in a 'typical day'. In particular, the episode involving the senior planners negotiations with an architect illustrate clearly the aforementioned expertise. The planner was negotiating design changes with regard to a proposed new office development. In

[2] Ian Blacker gave a presentation to students on the final year programme in early 1997.

this meeting, he was involved in detailed negotiations with an architect, and his design knowledge, although not as comprehensive as the architects, did allow him to take part more than adequately in this conversation. However, this episode highlighted the planning officers' skill in making relationships between the design changes and the planning system. He informed the architect that the proposed changes to the scheme were material ones, which under planning law required a new application, as the changes made were too "..significant for us to say as officers, well we'll accept that as an amendment"(Healey, 1992).

This ability to make, "connections over time and space" (Thomas and Healey 1991) between individual technical disciplines, and technical disciplines and the planning system itself, is a key area of expertise for planners and is the critical ingredient of a planners distinctive perspective. In this respect, knowing who to get involved and why, and not necessarily knowing what, is not a deficiency in a planner's expertise, but part of it, positioning the planner as an expert 'link person', a co-ordinator, an interface.

'Soft' skills

In my opinion, the third main area of expertise for planners are what are referred to as 'soft skills' (Nicholson, 1991) which include negotiating, political, inter-personal, and team-working skills. However, Evans (1995) claims that these cannot be regarded as expertise, as they are skills that, "..would be expected from any well-educated and capable person". He seems to have come to this conclusion as these skills are not ones with a clear, "planning specificity or technical intricacy" (Healey and Underwood, 1979). In my opinion, however, this statement by Evans (1995) is ill-informed and unfair. Certainly, these skills may seem natural, requiring little actual skill, but from my own experience, this is certainly not the case. When working as a town planner in the public sector last year, I came into contact with various members of the public, developers and Councillors, and had to be able to present information to, and work and negotiate with, all of them. At the time, I had no relevant work experience at all in this particular area. However, due to the skills with which my planning course had provided me, through group projects and written and verbal presentations, I was able, after some initial hiccups, to do this to a professional standard.

However, it was noticeable to me that not all of the professionals within the organisation had these skills. It cannot be argued, for example, that Engineers are not well educated or capable; indeed they often have vast technical and practical knowledge of engineering matters. However from my experience, despite possessing detailed technical expertise in their fields, some professionals are often unable to work successfully in a team situation with others, or to present their knowledge clearly and successfully to members of the public or Councillors. This is not in any way due to their personal incompetence, but these are simply skills that have not been developed to the same extent as Town Planners.

In a similar vein, it is noticeable that it was Ian Blacker, the Town Planner, who was appointed to head the team of experts for Jones Lang Wootton, in addition to providing his expert knowledge of the planning system. Organising such a team clearly requires highly developed 'soft skills', and his appointment seems to imply that he, as a planner, had developed these skills to the greatest extent.

In my eyes, these two practical examples, from both the public and private sectors, highlight these 'soft skills'. Evans (1995) plays these down as ordinary capabilities that everyone possesses. But in my view they are a major asset to a planner. Although they are not skills restricted solely to planners, planning courses sow the seeds of these skills in their students, and practical work experience seems to cultivate them to a greater extent than is the case for other professions. For this reason, these range of skills are, in my opinion, another area of a planners expertise.

Conclusion

Planning, due to its unique and novel nature amongst the built environment professions, has always had to, and must still continue to, justify itself to those cynical members of the practising and academic worlds, who question its validity as a profession in its own right. Indeed, Evans (1995) goes as far as arguing that the profession relies upon the prestige and status of its Royal Charter, rather than any particular skills or expertise. Indeed, he goes on to say that the RTPI has provided "*..evermore prestigious academic qualifications for professional planners*", purely to make the subject appear complex and requiring expert knowledge, therefore, making sure that "*..the career opportunities for town planners have not been too restricted.*" Extreme conspiracy theories, such as this, are the exception rather than the rule with those who question the planning profession, but it is important that planners themselves recognise the areas of expertise which they possess. However, it is also important that planners are able to describe their areas of expertise to others, as it is not only

> "*..what planners are doing that matters; it is also what they are seen to be doing, what they are thought to be doing, and what general impressions are being left by the ways in which they are conducting themselves*" (Kitchen, 1991).

This paper has only scratched the surface of a detailed debate that rages on throughout the practice and academic worlds, but I hope to have shown that planners can be considered as experts in a number of senses. They clearly have an expert knowledge of the planning system itself, but more importantly, they have the expertise to make relationships across a number of technical disciplines, and between these disciplines and the planning system itself, which allows them to act successfully in a connective and co-ordinating capacity. Finally, their 'soft skills', including negotiation, presentational, and team working skills, although not exclusive to planners, are important attributes in which few other professions educate students, and this provides the final area of expertise that a planner can and should rightfully claim.

ETHICAL ISSUES FOR PLANNERS IN PRACTICE[3]

Alistair Flatman

What are ethics and ethical issues?

This paper, after defining what ethics and ethical issues are, attempts to identify the many reasons why ethical issues have become increasingly apparent and prominent in the everyday work of the planner. With an increase in ethical issues there are obviously going to be implications for planners. This paper highlights the possible strategies available to planners for dealing with the ethical dilemmas they are now confronted with. Where appropriate, examples will be used from both my experiences of working in the Planning department at North East Derbyshire District Council (NEDDC) during my placement year and also my summer employment (1996) when I worked for an Architectural Design firm (Oulsnam Design Associates), the other side!, dealing with their planning applications.

Ethics are commonly defined as "the rightness or moral quality of an action", that is, what is the right or good thing to do. It should be noted that the good thing is not always the right thing to do. In some cases it is better not to tell the truth in order to achieve the best outcome. A 'consequentialist' is someone who believes that the ends justify the means. A 'deontologist' focuses instead on what is good 'conduct' (Howe 1990). Ethical issues focus on what is morally correct behaviour and involves moral dilemmas about both what are 'good / right outcomes' (ends) and also what are 'right/good actions' (principles). Ethics play a major role in guiding how a planner thinks and acts whilst going about the day to day aspects of their work.

Within the planning profession there are codes of conduct (RTPI, adopted 1994) and codes of ethics. It is necessary to distinguish between these : a code of ethics is '*comprised of visionary statements regarding the normative and ethical aspects of the profession*'. A code of conduct on the other hand contains '*certain guidelines for professional behaviour including conflict of interest and professional competence*' (Hendler 1991). A code of ethics is also sometimes referred to as a code of aspiration.

These codes are useful points of reference for planners when confronting ethical issues, although, as will be illustrated later, these are not the only options available to planners when

[3] The original exam question was: *Planners in practice are increasingly being confronted with ethical issues. Discuss why this is so and what the implications are of this for planners*

dealing with ethical issues. So what are the reasons behind why planners are being increasingly confronted by ethical issues?

Until the 1970's, the planning profession had little explicit concern with issues of values, ethics and legitimacy. Until then the main role for planners was as an urban development manager and was grounded in the idea of planning as the production and management of good urban design and development, the land manager and urban designers. During the 1970s planners appeared as public bureaucrats primarily performing duties defined by politicians, and also as policy analysts. In this case planners were seen as policy scientists drawing on 'procedural planning theory' and its development. These three viewpoints present planners as experts servicing the requirements of clients or policy systems, but carrying out bureaucratic or technical tasks apart from clients and interest groups.

More recently planners have been seen as intermediators whereby planners use interpersonal skills in negotiating and 'social learning'. A fifth role model for planners is that of social reformer. With these last two, planners are seen to be more interactive, exchanging knowledge and ideas with clients and a wide range of other interested parties (Healey 1991). Nowadays, planning expertise is more to do with the discussion and exchanging of ideas and knowledge rather than writing reports or designing policy frameworks.

This changing role of planners over the years is one reason why the profession is being increasingly confronted with ethical issues. This changing role can be approached from two perspectives. Firstly, there are the changes within the planning profession itself and secondly, there have been changes in the way in which the public and potential clients perceive planners and their work.

There have been a number of changes within the planning profession over recent years which have resulted in planners being increasingly confronted with ethical issues. Thomas and Healey (1991) describe planning as a multi-disciplinary field drawing on diverse fields of knowledge. Planners must be able to draw together these diverse fields and co-ordinate agencies with different knowledge and responsibilities.

Perhaps the biggest of the changes affecting the profession has been the growth in importance of the environment. In the past, economic growth has been the primary aim of local authorities and consequently planners have been encouraged to assist the pursuit of this aim. More recently, however, and especially since the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, the environment and sustainable development have become major issues. This introduces a whole new 'field' of thought to planners, namely Environmental Ethics. Environmental ethics can be defined as "that area of thought and moral discourse dealing with our ethical duties to, and relative to, the natural environment" (Beatley 1994). In the past, our ethical view with regard to the environment has

been anthropocentric. This anthropocentric view places humans at the centre of the moral universe and regards the environment primarily as a human resource, there to satisfy human needs and wants.

The opposite of this is the non-anthropocentric view whereby nature, or the elements of nature, have inherent worth and intrinsic value. In the light of the increasing importance of the environment, many planners, and powerful environmental pressure groups, now argue for this point of view. This increased awareness and importance of the environment has lead to an increase in the issues that planners must consider which consequently creates further ethical issues. What 'rights' should be accorded to the environment and what weight should environmental issues be given in planning decisions? Should species have 'rights'. Should the environment be considered more important than social or economic issues? How do planners manage social and economic pressures in ways which leave future generations with the same net environmental asset stock as we received, that is, how can we be environmentally sustainable? The next section explores some of these issues in a specific practice context.

Ethical issues in practice

At NEDDC there appeared to be a definite bias amongst elected members towards encouraging economic development onto the coal field areas within the District. They felt that every effort should be made to provide sites for this investment, even to the point where if a developer did not like those sites allocated for economic development then members would pressure the planners to find other sites with, in some cases, little regard for the possible effects on the environment.

This raises another reason why planners are increasingly being confronted with ethical issues. Within local authorities today there appears to be far greater contact and discussion between planners and elected members. Unfortunately the views of the two often differ as was highlighted during my placement at NEDDC. Members are typically interested in getting votes which often means that views and priorities differ. Members often want to be seen to be making a clear contribution to their district, for example, by creating new jobs through encouraging inward investment. However, this economic aim often conflicts with environmental issues and planners are then confronted with the dilemma of the environment versus the economy. In other cases, a member may be keen on social issues such as housing. This again may differ from the views and ethics of the planner. Whilst realising the importance of the environment planners must also be aware that members potentially have the power to terminate their employment, hence another dilemma appears. Both Mike Haslam, Chief Planning Officer at South Norfolk District Council[4], and Ted Kitchen stress the importance of creating and maintaining a good

[4] Mike Haslam gave a talk to the students as part of the course. See Appendix.

working relationship with members (Kitchen 1991). But should this occur at the expense of your own personal and professional views and opinions?

Planning has also seen the introduction of performance indicators used to assess the efficiency of a planning department. Perhaps the most common of these is the aim of dealing with all planning applications within 8 weeks. Consequently, in order to appear more efficient, planners may be encouraged or pressured to 'rush through' some applications in order to meet the 8-week deadline. This may mean that an application is not dealt with in the best possible way and thus the quality of the decision making may be jeopardised. At NEDDC, the planning officers I worked with always ensured that those applications that required extra attention and negotiation received it regardless of whether it then took longer than 8 weeks to determine the application. Hence, every application was determined to the highest standard possible. In other authorities, the situation may differ. Planning officers may strive to be efficient, but is this at the expense of determining an application to the best of their ability? Are they being fair to the client ? Whilst working at Oulsnam Design Associates, I was responsible for keeping track of the firm's planning applications. The firm were heavily involved in the conversion of public houses into combined restaurant and drinking pubs (Chef and Brewer). The schemes often involved listed buildings and were quite complex. However, in many cases it was apparent that the local authority planner was more interested in the 8-week period than undertaking time-consuming consultation in an attempt to negotiate a satisfactory compromise. Planners were often prepared just to refuse an application rather than contact us to discuss possible amendments to schemes. It was only when I chased them up did they inform us of their misgivings with the said scheme. In one case, the local authority refused to negotiate once a formal application was received, as they carried out all their negotiation and discussion at the pre-application stage, again an attempt to ensure that all applications were determined in 8 weeks.

The expanding agenda of ethical issues

As has already been stated, planning is multidisciplinary. This is further strengthened by Ted Kitchen who identifies a number of areas of expertise and knowledge a planner should possess (Kitchen 1991). These include knowledge on procedures, design, politics and understanding people. Planners must be able to communicate and discuss ideas and information with a wide variety of clients. This expanding awareness of the range of relevant knowledge and points of view expands still further the ethical dilemmas and issues planners face.

The organisation of governance is also having an effect on the content of planning work. Apart from the introduction of customer charters and performance criteria, there have also been developments in new forms of consultation and participation with greater interaction required with more parties. Planners are now encouraged to interact and consult with more community and interest groups, for example, those dealing with disability and discrimination. Community groups can be very demanding and want to be involved. They want to participate. Their views and ethics often differ from those of local authorities thus adding further ethical dilemmas to the

work of a planner. This increased involvement of community groups was identified by John Litherland of Sedgefield Borough Council as an increasing challenge facing district councils[5]. As more points of view are raised by different groups, planners are confronted by more ethical issues but which are most important.....social issues?, or economic considerations?, or the environment?. All must now be considered by planners.

Furthermore, there has been an increase in Nimbyism in recent years as people become more aware and protective about the environment they live in. This has meant that people have become more vocal and are more willing to put their point of view over, thus giving the planner more issues to deal with. There has also been a growth in pressure groups who are keen to bring specific issues to the attention of the planner, something they can easily do now that planners are encouraged to interact with many interested parties.

Another issue facing planners is the lack of money available nowadays within local authorities. This leads to the problem of what schemes or projects are allocated money and how do you choose which should receive the most.

As well as changes within the planning field and the role of the planner, there have also been changes in the ways in which the public perceive planners. People nowadays demand 'good conduct' from planners as experts but are not sure that they will get it and therefore are more likely to question decisions or become more involved in decision-making processes. It could be suggested that increased media attention on controversial planning issues, for example, the proposed development of Leazes Park[6], has been at least partly responsible for the increased awareness of the public in planning. This may also explain why the public have little faith in our skills and knowledge. Furthermore, planners are increasingly challenged to account for and justify themselves, again as a result of planners being encouraged to interact and be more accessible to the public. As the public become more demanding, the ethical issues confronted by planners become greater and more obvious.

It is clear that there are many reasons why planners are increasingly being confronted by ethical issues but what are the implications? The next section of this paper identifies methods of dealing with these increasing ethical issues that have arisen.

Strategies for dealing with ethical issues

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[5] John Litherland also gave a talk on the course, see Appendix

[6] This refers to a proposal in Newcastle to allow the football club to expand from its present edge-of-city centre location onto historic common land adjacent to it.

Firstly, you could talk to a friend or find a mentor. By talking your dilemma through it may then be possible to overcome it or find a solution. Taking this idea a step further, you could discuss the issue in a group. This latter option may not always be available as it all depends on the 'climate' of the organisation within which you work. In some cases organisations may wish to suppress discussing moral issues as they are often emotive and disruptive. Speaking out can be difficult as you do not want to 'rock the boat' or be labelled a trouble-maker. This is especially true if you are a graduate new to a job. Whilst on my placement year I spoke out a number of times about the work I was being given to do and subsequently got labelled as a 'jumped-up opinionated student'. This rather put me in my place and I kept quiet from then on, preferring to discuss any grievances with people away from work. However, staff meetings were arranged at NEDDC and these were often used to air views and discuss issues. The success of these meetings rather depended on receptiveness of senior team members.

A second option when dealing with ethical issues is to change the direction of your work. This can take on a number of forms. Perhaps the least drastic is to try to move from a project or area of work you find morally dubious to one that you feel more comfortable with. Alternatively you could make an effort in compensatory activities such as Planning Aid[7]. This may help make right the wrongs which are implicated in day to day work. Another option is to try and change jobs or perhaps, most drastic of all, resign. However I feel that in today's economic climate it is very unlikely that people would resign over an ethical issue as jobs are difficult to come by. Thus I believe that planners would try to stick it out, as described by option three below, rather than risk becoming unemployed.

The third option is known as compartmentalism which describes how, in an imperfect world, we are sometimes obliged to make compromises and to 'put up with' situations with which we disagree. This strategy can be used in a number of ways. A planner could, for example, use it as a temporary suspension of judgement whilst new skills are learnt to help settle into an organisation (Nicholson 1991). In some ways I followed this approach on my placement when I kept quiet after being accused of being a jumped up opinionated student. Alternatively you can, like Bob Pell, think of work as a game with its rules separate from everyday life (Pell 1991). Hence you are able to work hard and successfully rather than stand outside and criticise.

Finally, a planner can refer to a central guiding principle when approaching ethical issues. This guiding principle could be anything that you feel strongly about, this may stem from why you decided to choose planning as a profession in the first place such as, for example, care for the earth or social justice. Ted Kitchen identifies that ultimately a planner's loyalty should rest with

[7] This is of course not possible to undertake in your own local authority area

their employer. However, he highlights a second important principle, namely that all clients of the planner deserve respect. Thus planners must possess minimum standards of honesty, fairness and openness when dealing with all clients. This is highlighted in 'A Planners Day' (Healey 1992) when Ted Kitchen deals with an applicant whose planning application had not received a decision three months after submission. He was truthful and admitted that it was their fault and apologised to the applicant[8].

A role for the R.T.P.I.?

In conclusion it is clear that there are many reasons why planners are becoming increasingly confronted with ethical issues. This is mainly due to the changing role of planners in that they are expected now, as experts, to have a diverse field of knowledge and also to co-operate and interact much more with a wider variety of clients. This, together with increasing awareness of the environment and the introduction of performance criteria, has meant that planners are dealing with far more issues, knowledge areas and clients in their day to day work than ever before. Subsequently, there has been an increase in the number of ethical issues confronted by planners. Furthermore, a growth in public awareness and pressure groups has demanded more from planners as planners are forced to consider a wider variety of issues, which further explains the increase in moral dilemmas being faced.

There are a number of different strategies for dealing with these increases although I personally believe that, at present, many planners, especially new graduates, will, when confronted with ethical dilemmas, 'stick it out' (compartmentalism) rather than speak out and possibly 'rock the boat'. This other strategy could lead to the loss of a job, and in the current economic climate, being employed is possibly more important to people than having ethics that could, one way or another, jeopardise that job. Sue Essex expresses concern that planning is dominated by those who see it merely as a 'nine to five' job. This attitude can in turn have detrimental effects on the department (Essex 1991). This concern seems to back up my view that people are currently more concerned about having a job than anything else.

Finally, I feel that it is important to encourage planners to discuss ethical issues and that it is an area of planning that can be further researched. The drawing up of an 'aspirational code' is useful in that it keeps moral issues to the forefront of professional debate and discussion. The RTPI, as a professional body, should play a greater role in creating a suitable forum to discuss ethical issues. Although it is important that planning students, like ourselves, are made aware of ethical issues and encouraged to discuss moral dilemmas, it should be stressed that when we start work as graduates, many more factors come into play. Consequently, it often takes time to develop your own ethics and decide what part one's own values will play in one's work.

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[8] This focus on acting according to principles and moral values is known as the Deontological approach to dealing with ethical issues. In contrast, the Teleological or Consequentialist approach focuses on achieving outcomes, the ends justify the means (Howe 1990)

PLANNING IN AN 'ENABLING' CONTEXT[9]

Julia Summerfield

> *"Ideas are powerful organisational instruments of change. If management is changing in local government at the present time it is because ideas are changing....local government is being transformed through the medium of ideas."*
> (Leach, 1992)

From traditional bureaucracy to an enabling role

As Stewart Leach stated in 1992, the role of local government has evolved, notably since the Conservative Party gained power in 1979 and thus began to implement their own particular 'ideas'. Changes in local government finance and power have meant the relationship between local and central government is conflictual, the gap between the public and private sectors is closing and "*...as one surveys the local government world, change and instability appear endemic*." (Wilson et al, 1994). Since the late 1980s successive Conservative Governments through legislation have introduced their alternative vision for the future. The term 'enable' has become synonymous with the role of local government accompanied by the diminution of power and the "*...most severe financial crisis in living memory*" (Leach et al, 1994).

But how has the transition of local government affected the role of planning? Not only have local authority planners had to adapt to the changes outlined above, but also to the ever increasing new buzz words of local government such as equal opportunities, networking, competition, quality, and customer for example. With the aid of my experience at Southampton City Council, this paper will address the transition in the function of local government and planners, and explain how planners have had to adapt their skills and knowledge to fulfil their role within local government in the 1990s, at a time when it is "*...in a state of flux*" (Wilson et al, 1994).

Before the conflict between central and local government from the late 1970s onwards, local government operated typically as the 'traditional bureaucratic authority', when local authorities strove for self sufficiency and "*statutory duties were seen as the 'raison d'être' of the council*" (Leach et al, 1994). The archetypal bureaucratic authority existed from 1945 to 1980 when there was a strong emphasis on service delivery and the benefits of public rather than private sector provision of these services. *"Public needs were interpreted by professional officers who tended to view service recipients as clients in a reactive sense*" (Wilson et al, 1994).

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[9] The original examination question was: *Discuss the implications of the shift from a 'providing' to an 'enabling role for local government as it impacts on the role of the contemporary planner*

Enabling and the work of a planning authority

From my experience of working with colleagues who climbed the career ladder during this period, I can imagine that it was a time when the term 'local government officer' had more prestige and respect. Planners as professionals knew best. These values held by planners were well established by the end of the 1970s, a decade which saw a dramatic increase in the membership of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), before Margaret Thatcher's attack on professions in the late 1980s. It was perhaps this air of self importance held by local authorities that provided the impetus for change by successive governments during the last decade. Many public attacks on local government declared that authorities focused inward on the organisation rather than on the public as customer and citizen.

In the late 1980s, it seemed that a coherent vision of local government was beginning to emerge.

> "*Local authorities were seen as 'enablers' in the extremely limited sense of agencies which made arrangements for the provision of the limited number of services which the market could not provide, acting as kind of a 'safety net'*" (Leach et al, 1994).

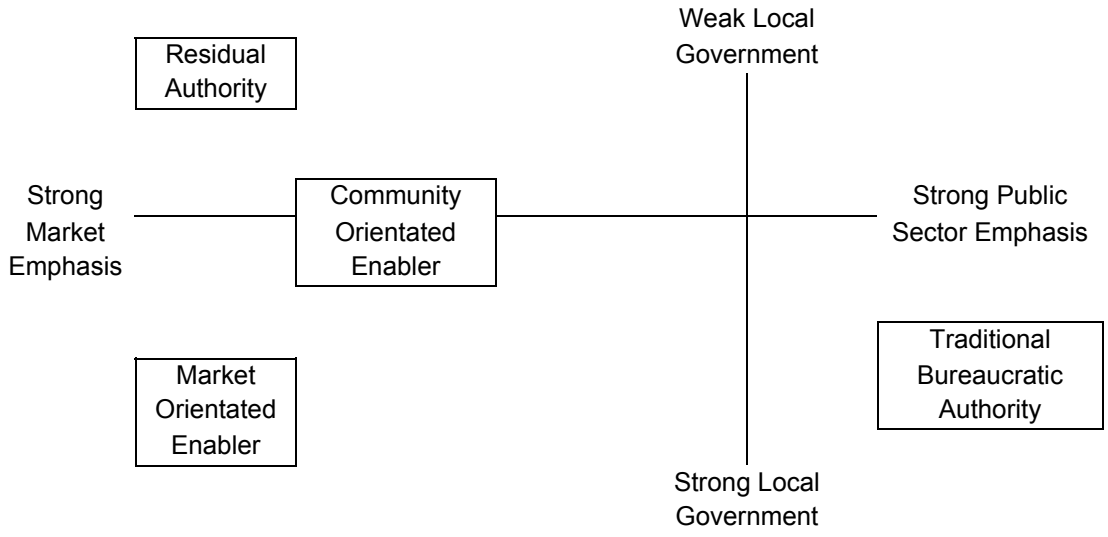
Yvonne Rydin has recognised a number of strategies used by the Government to engineer this shift in the function of local authorities from 'providers' to 'enablers'. She states that legislation, minimal consultation, targeted funding, bypassing local government procedures and the reorganisation of local government in 1974, 1986 and now in 1997 have led to the diminution of local government power (Rydin 1993). Perhaps the most dramatic representation of this power loss is through Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT). The Local Government Acts of 1980 and 1988 introduced the contracting out of many blue collar services such as refuse collecting and building cleansing, and the government predicts that more white collar services such as information technology and personnel will come under the CCT banner once unitary authorities are up and running. This has lead to the introduction of commercial discipline and practices not only in the contracted out services, but in Council work itself. Southampton City Council (SCC) has taken this approach into the planning field. Not only, as discussed later is there a distinct client/contractor split throughout the council, but all employees work within business units. Southampton follows the restructuring process identified by John Stewart who stated that within local government there is, "*the development of a commitment to a more 'business-like' management*" (Stewart and Stoker 1989). Every Monday morning all employees at SCC are compelled to complete a dreaded time sheet on which the time spent on all projects within the previous week is totalled up to the nearest 0.25 of an hour. Certain codes are still engraved on my memory, not least the code for filling in time sheets. The forms are then grouped into business units, and as a member of Local Plan Services, I was in business unit QD23. Consequently depending on the length of conversation (and it's topic) with an economic development officer (QD22) located in the same room, I was obliged to note it down on my daily record. Perhaps this is not seen as a problem from the point of view of other professions, but planning notably in the

1990s is concerned with team working, advising, negotiating and co-ordinating. "*Planners do not work in isolation but interact with others in complex institutional settings*" (Healey 1992)

Communication is an ability of primary importance for successful planners and such action may be constrained by a business style of management. Business organisations, in my opinion, hold learning within their own boundaries and there may be a lack of organisational learning in the future. Planners thrive on learning new skills and being flung in at the deep end, and they need to be able to converse with engineers one minute, councillors the next and members of the public the next. "*In planning practice, talk and argument matter*" (Forester, 1989). In my opinion, it is these aptitudes that distinguish planners within a 'traditional bureaucratic' authority, "*..when the report and the Plan were the most important products of planning work*" to planners within an 'enabling' authority. (Thomas and Healey 1991) The age of consumerism is upon us and it has entered the world of local government too. The result has been a new style of management that is, "*..mimicking private sector planning organisations and developing new organisational cultures, often directly opposed to previously-held values*" (Rydin 1993).

Enabling, according to Stewart Leach, is concerned with finding new ways of delivering services through agencies other than the local authority itself, and research has indicated that there currently exists a significant degree of choice as to how local authorities can interpret the meaning of this role. This is illustrated by the diagram below:

Local Government: Directions of Change



Source: Local Government in the UK - D. Wilson et al 1994

What kind of local authority did I work in?

There follows a summary of the terms above, an explanation of where Southampton City Council fits into the equation, and an interpretation of how these roles affect planners.

The role of a residual enabling authority entails the authority directly providing as few services as possible to the general public. The authority is in a weak position and notions of community are dismissed as insignificant. The priority is to make the local authority accountable to each council tax payer "*..the exchange being viewed as involving as close an approximation as possible to a supermarket transaction*" (Leach et al, 1994). In contrast the role of the local authority in a market-oriented authority is much more active and economic development is the priority. "*The importance of the local authority as a focal point in a network of external, primarily private sector linkages would be emphasised*" (Wilson et al, 1994). Immediately Sedgefield Borough Council comes to mind[10]. As John Litherland, Director of Technical Services, explained the Council's economic development unit has re-located to the centre of an industrial estate so that the local council can be the focus of economic development networking. Perhaps it is also located there to enable the unit to be seen as separate from the council, and to promote partnership between the public and private sectors. The community-orientated enabling authority as one would anticipate emphasises the "*...collective as well as individual needs, and especially the ideas of communities*" (Wilson et al, 1994). The implications of customer/consumer roles are overtaken by participatory democracy and the concept of serving the local people to the best of the council's ability by both direct, private or voluntary sector means.

> *"Different patterns [can] be identified in the structure, strategies and culture of authorities...depending on the dominant 'core values' which had been identified in that authority*" (Leach et al, 1994)

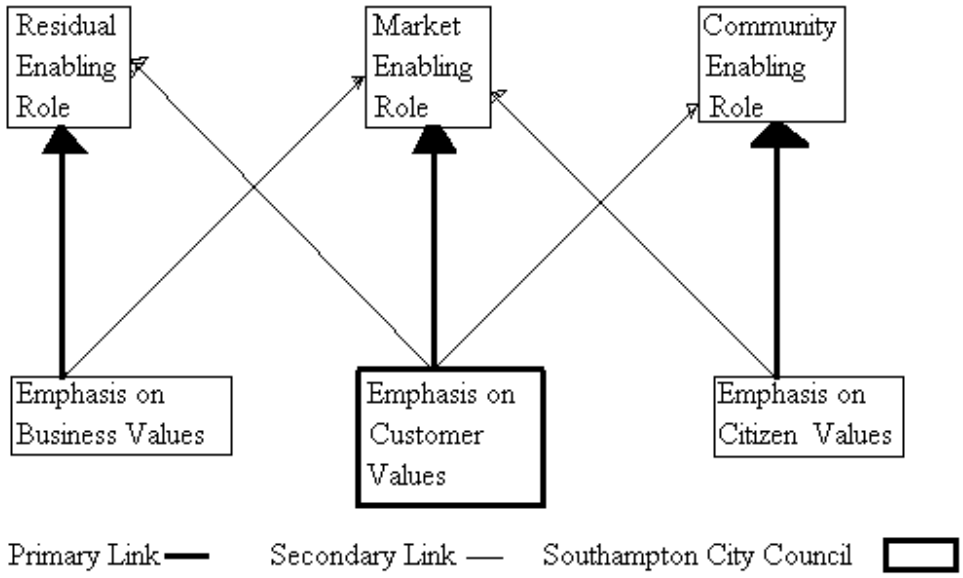
To determine the category that best accommodates SCC, I questioned the core values of the council and decided that the council best fits the diagram below which shows a primary orientation towards customer-responsiveness but also an affiliation towards both commercialism and citizenship.

I perceive Southampton City Council (SCC) to be most characteristic of a market-oriented enabling authority because in my opinion its core values are accountability to the public and economic development. In addition, the Council concurs with the statement that "*There would be a good deal of scope for a strong 'figurehead' with a high public profile and considerable*

[10] See footnote 5

entrepreneurial bargaining and networking skills" (Leach et al , 1994). SCC has an influential leader and had a Chief Executive who had a business as opposed to a local government background. Consequently, it may be said that it is due to these strong individuals that economic development is a key strategic aim within the city. Many of the headlines which grabbed the city's news during my placement were in relation to the £2.5m development of the city's Oceanography Centre; the 'South's Principle Trade and Industry Exhibition', held at the Civic Centre; Southampton's Esplanade - 'one of the biggest city centre redevelopment's in Europe' at a cost of £250m; and the relocation and expansion of Southampton Football Club. Furthermore these headlines were contained within an international newsletter. The other core value of a market oriented enabling authority is the focus on customers and their values. "Attempts would be made to negotiate contracts which maximised the benefits to the local authority, rather than the adoption of the more passive 'least cost' contract-letting mechanism....by a residual authority." (Leach et al, 1994) Through the business unit style of management, time sheets and the client/contractor split explained below the Council is aiming to be accountable to the public, and offer them value for money services.

Role-Orientation & Dominant Values



Source: The Changing Organisation & Management of Local Govt.
S Leach et all, 1994

Implications for the role and skills of the planner

In all of the 3 enabling authority models, the role and skills of the contemporary planner have shifted or even reversed, *"...planning roles have evolved..to the salience of centralist planning, advocacy, regulatory and intermediary roles*" (Schon, 1983). In the 1970s and early 1980s, it was highly likely that professionalism would have appeared as a high priority whilst responsiveness to the public and creativity would have been subordinate. Notably in a market oriented enabling authority, planners would need to possess creative and intermediary skills to 'make things happen'. Planning would not only involve much networking and acts of negotiation to smooth the process of planning approval, but knowledge of politics and the institution in order to be able to 'work' the system. A sound business mind would also be important so that good advice could be administered. Gaining significance as a resource which planners need is knowledge of other international markets and languages. SCC is currently endeavouring to form business links with Russia, the east coast of America and Kalisz in Poland, to build on their strong links with northern France. All of the abilities above are relevant to planners deploying "*..expertise in exchanging and discussing ideas and information with a range of people*", whether it be a major developer, a one man cottage industry or a Polish market trader (Thomas and Healey 1991) Economic development is definitely one area which will grow within the planning regime. This has been demonstrated at Coventry University where the subject plays an integral part of the planning degree.

"*Contract specification and management would also be one of the key organisational bases of the market enabler*" (Leach et al, 1994).

However, I think SCC has taken this aspect into the residual enabling authority realm The client/contractor split can have many benefits. Clients can control a project from an independent viewpoint, specify service requirements, interpret policies from members, monitor a projects' progress, overcome contractual problems, and effectively 'drive' a project. Contractors and clients can work together to predict a projects time scale, the number of officers needed to complete a task, and foresee problems. At SCC, this style of management has evolved in anticipation of CCT encompassing all white collar services. If and when CCT is compulsory, the City Council will have the necessary information to estimate how much effort in officer time and money is required to fulfil a task. Consequently realistic tenders can be submitted and hopefully the vast number of services will be contracted to in-house teams. However, there are inevitably problems. It has been said that "*The necessity for clients to specify requirements and the management freedom given to the contractor are clear benefits*" (Leach, 1992). This is so in an ideal world, but the uncertainty surrounding budgets and the overriding influence of members means that within planning authorities in some instances the client cannot write a brief for the contractor. It is formulated as a project progresses. Also, because clients are politically accountable, there is a lack of member/contractor contract. Furthermore at SCC due to financial constraints in some instances, clients were obliged to fulfil both client and contractor roles. I agree with Stewart Leach when he states that "*There are...dangers if this approach is treated as the universal approach to be applied to all activities within local authorities*" (Leach 1992). Estimating the cost of preparing plans is extremely difficult. I contributed much time to SCC's Environmental Policy Plan. Forecasting its time scale through consultation to adoption will be an arduous task never mind the costs involved with implementing its policies. Who can accurately

predict the costs in terms of officer time and money involved in the progression of a development plan from its Consultation Draft to a Public Local Inquiry to its adoption?

Certainly a planner within a residual enabling authority needs technical expertise in evaluation and time management, and also needs to be proficient at 'hard skills' rather than 'softer skills'(Thomas and Healey 1991). Another requirement would be the ability to assemble, analyse and use information. As far as communication is concerned, I would imagine planners would need to be able to stand up and campaign for their cause against other professionals all vying for additional funds from members.

The third and final role for an enabling authority is the community-oriented enabler which is apparently the 'ideal' type premised on the view that "*...a local authority exists, or should exist, to meet the varied needs of its population*" (Leach et al, 1994). I perceive SCC to have a secondary link to the core value of citizen values. Community Action has grown to be a very influential section within the Council over recent years. The Community Action Managers are within the Chief Executive's Directorate and by April 1997 there will be a Community Action Forum covering every part of the administrative authority. Stewart Leach has suggested that this is the route that the majority of local authorities are taking, and it means that planners will have to take more of an intermediary role and be able to converse and empathise with all different types of people. Consequently as "*...long as a practitioner chooses to play an intermediary role, he cannot avoid the conflicts inherent in the role*" (Schon, 1983). Although planners in this particular scenario must gain the community's trust, they must not at the same time raise expectations that the Council cannot fulfil, or contravene an authority's norms and standards.

"*Reality comes at you like a wet rugby ball on a muddy pitch*," remarked Alan Wenban-Smith regarding planners in their first job[11]. Through my experience at SCC I may not have learnt about the intricate details of the GDO, but I have certainly learnt about the conflicts and relationships within local government, and how the thoughts and priorities of certain individuals can shape an organisation. I have been able to see how the structure of local government fits together and the significant part that politics plays. Until you experience work in a local planning authority, I do not think its intensity can be appreciated. Furthermore if local government is instructed to follow the CCT path I should hopefully be able to adjust quickly. Through working with a range of planners I have also experienced how planners "*..have to be capable of change both in their policies and in their ways of working* " (Leach et al, 1994).

Are we witnessing a period of transition between one form of local authority and another, or will

[11] Alan Wenban-Smith, of Segal Quince Wicksteed, also gave a talk on the course. See Appendix.

local government be "*...as unclear as ever about its role and purpose in the mid 1990s?*" (Wilson et al, 1994). It is now 1997 and the future looks as uncertain as ever. Not only is there instability due to the implementation of Unitary Authorities and the expansion of CCT, but financial constraints are also affecting certainty and moral. As I write, it was reported that more than 200 jobs could be shelved to meet budget cuts at Kent County Council, and 16 of these are within the planning department[12]. The outlook is unpredictable.

> *"Central government may, in the future specify a preferred direction, based on a more explicit conception of role and purpose, or it may introduce legislation which makes any of the existing choices of direction more or less difficult*" (Leach et al, 1994)

[12] Planningweek 23 January 1997

APPENDIX: THE COURSE SCHEDULE

Department of Town and Country Planning
University of Newcastle upon Tyne
Diploma in Town Planning 2
Master of Town Planning 2

Course Schedule 1996/1997

TCP 824: The Planner in Society: Roles, Expertise, Values and Ethics in Professional Planning

Staff: Patsy Healey

The Course will consist of 10 sessions, combining lectures, talks from outside speakers, discussion groups and seminars. To make the best of this course, you are asked to do some preparation for the discussion sessions and the seminars.

Aims
To review key trends affecting planning work in the 1990s
To review the institutional roles in which planning expertise is practised
To review the way knowledge is related to action in these different roles, and the interrelation between technical and political knowledge, fact and value
To review the debates on professionals and professionalism, with particular regard to planning
To review the discussion of expert ethics and its relation to the planning field

Learning outcomes
An understanding of how general economic, political and social trends impact on the role of the planner
A greater awareness of the way values enter into the detail of planning work
Acquisition of ways of addressing ethical and value dimensions of planning work

PROGRAMME

Week 1: October 10th Introduction: New roles and relationships in planning
Week 2: October 17th: Institutional roles and dilemmas for planners

Seminar issue: The role of the planner will be fundamentally different in the year 2001 from that established in 1991! Discuss!

Seminar reading: Albrechts 1990, AESOP 1994, Leach ed 1992 Chapter 7 (by John Stewart); Stoker and Young 1993, Chapter 1., Swinburne 1991, Schon 1991, Chapter 7, ; Howe 1994, Chapter 6, Leach et al 1994, Chap 10, Wilson et al 1994, Chap 10, Jones in Tewdwr-Jones Chap 5))

Week 3: October 24th: Knowledge and Values in planning work: The issues: Managing multiple values and knowledge claims

Seminar issue: The Planner: Jack of all Trades and Master of None! is this a Fair Description!

Seminar reading: Kitchen 1991, Healey 1992, RTPI 1991, Forester 1994, Grant J. (chapters 9 and 10 in *The Drama of Democracy*), Evans 1995, Chap 6, Healey and Thomas, Chap 16, also chapters by Nicholson and Essex

Week 4: October 31st: Talk from John Litherland, Director of Technical Services, Sedgefield District Council: Challenges facing District Councils and the implications for the planning service.

Week 5: November 7th: Knowledge and Values in Planning Work: How to become a reflective practitioner

Seminar issue: Practice knowledge is more important than academic knowledge in planning work: Discuss

Seminar reading: (see reading for Week 3)

Week 6: November 14th: Talk from Alan Wenban-Smith, of Consultants Segal Quince Wicksteed, and formerly of Birmingham City Council: Knowledge and skill required in planning work in the contemporary period.

Week 7: November 21st: Talk from: Mike Haslam, Chief Planning Officer, South Norfolk District Council, The relationships between officers and members in a changing local government context.

(background reading: Essex, in ed Tewdwr-Jones 1995, and Kitchen 1996)

Week 8: November 28th: Expert Ethics: the issues

Seminar issue: Select a number of difficult ethical issues and discuss how you would deal with them as a planner?

Seminar reading: Hoch 1994, Howe 1994, Beatley 1994, Crow 1994, Taylor, 1992, Tewdwr-Jones 1995, Thomas, Chap 13 in Thomas and Healey 1991

Week 9: December 5th: Professions and professionalism: the issues

Seminar issue: Do we need a planning profession and if so, what do we need it for?

Seminar reading: Reade 1987, pp. 187-194; Healey 1985, Evans 1995 Chap 6,

Week 10: January 11th: Professions and professionalism: The RTPI as a profession
For discussion: The RTPI Code of Conduct and Discipline cases
(see Hendler in Thomas and Healey 1991, on codes of ethics, see also Taylor 1992)
(Cases will be circulated in advance)

Assessment

This will be assessed by examination at the end of the semester. It is proposed to do this by a single question paper with ONE question distributed five days before the date of examination. You will be assessed on your overall knowledge and grasp of the issues, your capacity for independent judgement, your ability to relate the discussion both to relevant literature and to your own practice experience, and your capacity to organise a discussion paper.

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