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## Council Courier

**14 December 2023**

*This is an informal account of the discussions and decisions most recently taken at Council.*

### **Obituary**

Members were remembered with a minute's silence. Council resolved to send condolences to next of kin. Particular mention was made of Gareth Scourfield, a former President of RSAW, RIBA Fellow Professor John Watts and Professor Peter Jacob.

### **Minutes of previous meeting, 28 September 2023**

Agreed as a correct record.

### **Equality, Diversity and Inclusion moment**

The President shared two examples of EDI initiatives he had encountered, which complemented the work already being undertaken by RIBA. These were drawn from Johnson & Johnson and Channel 4.

### **President's report**

The President's extensive list of engagements was noted, in particular his recent attendance at COP28 and engagement with ministers and the civil service over matters concerning whole life carbon.

### **Chair of Board's report**

The Board was working to ensure the institute remained on budget and had agreed budget allocations for 2024.

Partnership with the Tate and RIBA in Liverpool was proving very successful. RIBA had recently staged an exhibition, which the President had opened.

The Truth survey of members had shown that the membership valued RIBA's lobbying power. The institute's influencing plan was being reviewed in order to broaden the range of subjects covered.

The Chair of the Board also reported on the progress with the House of Architecture programme.

### **CEO Report**

Highlights:

- Launch of Principal Designer Register
- Black History Month
- Stirling Prize
- Upgrade of IT/digital requirements
- COP28 attendance

### **VP Membership report**

Tom Foggin explained how high-level issues from the regions were reported to the Nations & Regions Council Committee (N&RCC). The main ones recently reported concerned procurement, pay, the planet and planning.

Volunteers were an important part of RIBA's output and delivery. A presentation was given on projects in receipt of Local Initiative Funding (LIF).

In 2023 there had been 136 applications for funding, of which 112 were granted. So far 70 had been delivered, with 21 rolling on into 2024.

LIF also unlocked a lot of external funding. Its longer lead-period enabled members to plan. There was a timeline for applications for 2024 which was being circulated.

There was general enthusiasm for the work being undertaken and it was recommended that RIBA communicate the range of these activities to the membership, as many would be unaware of them and the value they added.

The President thanked Tom Foggin for his inspiring presentation.

### **Governance Review**

Council resolved to request the governance review working group and the Board produce details of the required delegations for changes and to report further to Council.

There were some queries and comments from the floor, in particular from Timothy Onyenobi who was keen to see greater involvement of regional chairs in Council meetings and more regional outreach in the form of town hall-style meetings. These and other points were noted, bearing in mind that the review was a long process.

### **Principal Designer registration fees**

Council approved a proposal for registration fees. It also requested that a lower cost option for those working in the domestic market should be put forward at the next meeting.

### **Expert Advisory Groups (EAGs)**

Adrian Dobson, Executive Director Professional Knowledge and Standards, briefed Council on the current EAGs:

- 1) Climate Action
- 2) Fire Safety

- 3) Finding and Accessing Architecture
- 4) AI and computational design
- 5) Planning and Housing

Council noted the scope of activity and current membership of the EAGs. The groups would start work in January. Any Council member interested in joining one of the groups could contact the EAG lead member/s. The lead members were permitted to invite non-Council members to join the group to provide additional expertise.

### **Discussion: Progress in Planning**

A joint presentation was made by VP Membership Tom Foggin, Council member for Wessex Tom Bell and Regional Chair for RIBA East Jerene Irwin. This was followed by a discussion in response to the question: 'What strategic and positive action can RIBA take to improve the planning experience for architects in England?'

VP Membership Tom Foggin gave an update from the Nations & Regions Council Committee (N&RCC) which is the 'hotline' for the regions. He referred to the Membership and Volunteer Engagement Insight Response undertaken in 2022 which had reported to Council with recommendations on a range of issues including Planning.

A Planning and Housing Expert Advisory Group to be led by Council member Tom Bell had been formed – this had come about from insights from local members and via a previous regional task and finish group.

A lot of complaints come from members about planning – access to planners is difficult, with slow decision making, inconsistencies and lack of design expertise.

There was pressure on the system: increase in applications but a decrease in major applications (authorities are reliant on income derived from the major applications and PPAs to fund their teams).

54% of councils can't retain staff, 78% can't attract appropriate skills. The podcast: 'Fifty shades of planning' was cited which had mentioned the whistleblower survey from local authorities showing the abuse planners received from everyone involved in the process.

So, how proactive could the RIBA be on planning?

RIBA regions are working with planners to improve their working conditions and reach common ground. They have run design and planning events in partnership with similar organisations such as RTPI. RIBA has members all over the country working with local authorities (of which there are 370 in England). The intention is to have regional planning champions to feed through N&RCC and the relevant EAG.

Planning affects how architects operate, their cash flow, ability to programme and pay staff, maintain good relationships with clients and so on. Good relations with planning departments would achieve better outcomes. Architects could have a critical influence in demonstrating the value of design.

Comments from the floor:

- USA perspective – proscriptive planning codes don't work and have led to urban sprawl. Planning authorities are now looking at design for its measurable contribution to certain goals such as health and economic benefits.

- Nottingham City Council - £110 million of funding taken from it by central government since 2018. Perhaps RIBA could lobby nationally for investment in planning systems?
- Design expertise needs to be embedded in local authorities but architects aren't well represented there.
- Planning fees should be ringfenced to support the planning system.
- Design advisory panels had some influence with local authorities previously. RIBA should push this concept in planning law that local authorities should be obliged to have an outside volunteer group to give advice.
- RIBA should publicise what its volunteers are trying to achieve on planning.
- RIBA Design Panels are a good halfway house requiring less resource.
- Secretary of State has ability to call in schemes after they have been through all the approvals required – this shouldn't be in their remit. New planning authority should be set up for decisions on big projects. It should be depoliticised.
- In Scotland a place-based planning system has recently been introduced. However, resources within the planning system are required to make this approach work.

Summary:

1. Adopt a 'top down and bottom up' approach (grass roots work and influencing at a national level)

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2. Develop regulatory incentives – drawing on how planning and housing relate to positive economic factors
  3. Revive design review panels
  4. Focus on delivery
  5. Housing and planning EAG to be asked to explore these ideas.

Drawing the meeting to a close, the President thanked the speakers for a very interesting session and wished everyone a happy holiday and an excellent 2024.

*Ends*