

West Midlands Futures

2017 to 2019

As part of the smart city-regions project, the RTPI supported the West Midlands Futures Project, an initiative of Futures Network West Midlands (FNWM), the West Midlands RTPI, Birmingham City University and the Centre of Urban and Regional Studies at the University of Birmingham.

Learning lessons, shaping the future

Running over two academic years, the Futures Project brought together students from Birmingham's two planning schools to consider the challenges and opportunities that the West Midlands will face over the coming years and how strategic planning could shape and respond to them.

Throughout the project, students drew on the region's extensive, practitioner experience in a programme of informal events and workshops. The first stages of the project distilled the issues and lessons from previous decades and took stock of the current situation, allowing future thinking to be built on firm foundations. In doing so, students left a shared resource of their findings for the region's planners, looking both backwards and forwards.

Stage 1: A look back at strategic planning in the West Midlands

Working in small cross-university groups, the students have produced a series of short, accessible leaflets outlining their own findings on a particular decade of strategic, cross-boundary planning in the region. These can be downloaded below:

- [Mid-1960s to mid-1970s](#)
- [Mid-1970s to mid-1980s](#)
- [Mid-1980s to mid-1990s](#)
- [Mid-1990s to mid-2000s](#)

After completing this work, the groups also presented their work to a panel comprised of Trudi Elliott, RTPI Chief Executive and Craig Jordan, Head of Economic Growth at Lichfield District Council and RTPI West Midlands Chair.

Expert panel sessions

Introductory session

- [Programme outline - Sherman Wong](#)
- [Smart City Regions - James Harris](#)
- ["Looking back to look forward" - lessons from 5 decades of strategic planning in the West Midlands - Dave Thew](#)



Looking back

1. Planning for strategic employment sites - from strategy to delivery
 - **Developing and agreeing a regional portfolio of strategic employment sites - Dave Carter**
 - **The role of the RDA in strategy and delivery - Sue Manns**
 - **i54 - Manufacturing, export led, major investment outside of London - Steve Winterflood**
2. Strategic planning for housing across boundaries
 - **Demographic challenges - Greg Ball**
 - **Mind the gap, spatial planning at county level - Mark Middleton**
 - **Private sector involvement in strategic planning - John Acres**

Taking stock

1. Strategic planning post regional spatial strategies
 - **Strategic planning, it's always better to have a plan - Trudi Elliott**
 - **Strategic planning, a bruising experience - Craig Jordan**
2. Current practices in cross-boundary strategic planning
 - **Strategic planning in the Black Country - Ian Culley**
 - **Strategic cross boundary planning, Transport for the West Midlands - Adam Harrison**

Stage 2: A vision for the West Midlands - the challenges facing the region and the shape of a future planning system

Having looked at past experiences and current strategic, cross-boundary planning practice in the region, the culmination of the programme was a workshop session where the students considered the future. During this session the students worked in groups and collectively to sketch out a vision for the West Midlands, the major challenges facing the region and some of the characteristics that a future planning system should have.

[The results of their collective work can be downloaded here](#)

Mini conference: taking stock of strategic planning in the West Midlands

In November, the Futures Project held a mini conference at Birmingham City University to mark the end of the first year of the project and to launch the next stage to current students. The event featured a group of last year's participants presenting a summary of their work, looking back at the past experience of strategic planning in the West Midlands and PhD research on the West Midlands Green Belt. After a short break, current practitioners from Lichfield, Wolverhampton and the West Midlands Combined Authority outlined experiences of the current state of play of strategic planning in the region. The event finished with a lively, interactive panel session with the full-house audience of students and practitioners.



- **Introduction - Sherman Wong**
- **Looking back at strategic planning in the West Midlands - John Killock, Bartie Shirm and Jeevan Thandi**
- **West Midlands Green Belt - Charles Goode**
- **Strategic planning, a Lichfield District perspective - Craig Jordan, Lichfield District Council**
- **Strategic planning in the Black Country - Simon Latham, Wolverhampton City Council)**
- **West Midlands Combined Authority - Jacob Bonehill, West Midlands Combined Authority)**

Stage 3: Looking forwards

The work of last year's students was carried forward and used to identify the key themes for this year's programme. In contrast to last year, which drew on the region's planning experts, this forward phase features experts from a broader range of disciplines. During this phase, the emphasis is on the students to consider changes happening in the wider world and the implications they might have for strategic planning in the West Midlands.

1: Climate change

- **Project introduction and recap - Sherman Wong**
- **Planning for a carbon neutral future: the need to further, faster - Jackie Homan, Cluster Lead - UK and Ireland, Climate Change KIC**

2: Smart cities and regions

- **The future of mobility and what that has to do with smart cities - Anthony Ferguson, Department for Transport**
- **Future energy scenarios - Dr Stefan Preuss, National Grid**

3: Different types of capital

- **Developing local industrial strategies in times of uncertainty - George Bramley, City REDI, University of Birmingham**
- **Natural capital (**presentation one** and **two**) - Jim Davies, Environment Agency**

Student think-pieces

Based on the expert presentations, their discussions with the speakers and their own reading and group work, this year's students worked in small inter-university teams to produce a series of short think-pieces. Choosing the themes of climate change, energy, transport and mobility, and natural capital the student think pieces outline some of their thoughts on current trends and future scenarios and their potential implications for strategic planning.



RTPI

Royal Town Planning Institute

- **Climate change - Sarah MacPherson, Imogen Hopkin, Samuel Miller and Megan Stewart**
- **Energy - Andrew Tew, Karina Duncan, Tim Shrosbree and James Dunn**
- **Transport and mobility - Robyn Bennett, Frances Keenan, Charles Goode, Karamrhys Clair and Gary Evans**
- **Natural capital - Chloe Edgington Jennifer Purdom and Gunpreet Balaghan**

Futures Project Conference: Strategic Planning - Next Gen

After last year's conference looked back at the history of strategic planning in the region and took stock of the current situation, this year's conference looked towards the future. With students presenting alongside Trudi Elliott (UK2070 Commissioner and Chair of the Planning Inspectorate), James Harris (RTPI Policy and Networks Manager) and Cllr Phil Davis (Birmingham City Council and Combined Authority Transport Delivery Committee), the audience was fittingly made up of planners from across the age range.

Following their thought provoking presentations the event closed with a Panel Session where Trudi Elliott, James Harris and Cllr Davis fielded questions from the floor.

Introduction to the project - Sherman Wong, Futures Project Coordinator

Student presentations

- **Climate change - Imogen Hopkin, Sarah MacPherson, Megan Stewart and Samuel Miller**
- **The future of energy in the West Midlands - Karina Duncan, Andrew Tew, James Dunn and Tim Shrosbree**
- **Transport - Robyn Bennett, Frances Keenan, Charles Goode, Karamrhys Clair and Gary Evans**
- **Natural Capital - Chloe Edgington, Jennifer Purdom and Gunpreet Balaghan**

UK2070: An Inquiry into Regional Inequality - Trudi Elliott CBE, Commissioner UK2070

Ambitions for the North: A spatial framework for people and place - James Harris, Policy and Networks Manager, RTPI

Statutory and voluntary cross-boundary working (spoke without a PowerPoint presentation) - Cllr Phil Davis, Birmingham City Council