

## Planning Officers Society Annual General Meeting 15 June 2018 Report by the Chairman of POS Enterprises

### Introduction

- 1 This is my first report as Chairman of POS Enterprises, having just taken over from Roger Hargreaves. Before anything else, I'd like to put on record my appreciation and that of other directors for the excellent leadership Roger provided during his time as Chair. I shall work hard to emulate him.

### Headlines

- 2 2017/18 saw a small dip in activity for POS Enterprises, with income down from about £265,000 in 2016/17 to about £255,000. The profit on the year was also down, from £23,500 to about £12,400. This was mainly due to a reduction in the number of member authorities of our learning groups. The good news is that the number has risen already in 2018/9, so this should be a better year. And of course, we have still assisted a lot of authorities, whether directly, in supported learning groups, or through Society workshops.
- 3 Work for local planning authorities accounted for nearly 95% of our business in 2017/18. The remainder has been for the delivery of free workshops for the Society, and some work on behalf of the Planning Advisory Service. However the amount of work for the PAS has fallen substantially over the years as its resources have been reduced.
- 4 During the year we have continued to run free seminars for the Society membership, and also invited non-members so that they can appreciate the inherent value of the Society's activities. These have been a considerable success, and very well supported by the membership. The seminars act as a showcase for both the Society and for POS Enterprises as its commercial arm. They are delivered at cost. Hopefully the free seminars will be an intrinsic ongoing part of the Society's services to its members.
- 5 Once we have the formal accounts, the whole of the final amount of profit will be paid over to the Society by deed of gift. Together with a surplus on the Society's budget, this all helps it to provide enhanced services to the membership.
- 6 Being a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Society we share its values and objectives, while providing services and support to authorities and others on a fee basis. Directors put great value on the relationship, and the way the reputation and standing of the Society reflects favourably on POS Enterprises as a trusted provider of support.

### Activities

- 7 POS Enterprises focuses on activities which support planning authorities and their staff in dealing with change and new challenges. This year has seen a sustained level of work on local plan support and development management reviews, but other areas of support have stood up well despite the relentless on-going pressure on local government resources.
- 8 The biggest area of support continues to be the supported learning groups, which are unique to us. We continue with three CIL and infrastructure groups, two meeting in London and the third in Leeds. Similarly, we have two local plan groups, with one based in London and the other in Leeds
- 9 We continue to run the specialist minerals and waste group, which provides excellent opportunities for networking and learning for an aspect of planning which is important but receives little other support. The localism and development management group also continues to be strong, having held its membership at a healthy level throughout its life.

- 10 Towards the end of the year we committed to set up a new group to work with those who help others with neighbourhood planning. I am particularly pleased about this, because although there is support available to neighbourhood forums, there was nothing for those whose job is to support them. I am pleased that the new group has made a very good start.
- 11 We continue to provide critical friend support to plan making through our critical friends, together with CIL and S106 direct support and elected member training.

## **Looking ahead**

- 12 The main drivers of change recently have, of course, been the Housing White Paper and draft revised NPPF, with their wide-ranging provisions designed to help stimulate a major increase in housing delivery. We have followed up on the Society's work with MHCLG on better strategic planning, and now offer support to groups of authorities who are looking at how they can best work together in the future.
- 13 The continuing pressure on local authority resources and the special measures regime continue to make life demanding for development management services. We anticipate that further authorities will conclude that they need an external review to help them find savings, or to verify the robustness of their operations.
- 14 After an extended period of uncertainty, the Government has now confirmed that the CIL regime will continue largely unchanged, though we are much encouraged by the proposals in draft revisions to national guidance and the consultation on the future of developer contributions, which hold out the hope of a more level playing field for authorities' negotiations. Now the uncertainty is over, the CIL learning groups are holding up well as a key part of our support package.
- 15 Clearly, helping authorities as they tackle these and other challenges must be a priority over the coming year, for both the Society and POS Enterprises as its delivery arm. We are continually looking to strengthen the range of services we can offer to authorities, in terms of direct support and new training topics.

## **Our thanks**

- 16 A key function of POS Enterprises Directors is to bring their knowledge and awareness about current challenges into our business planning and decisions on priorities for new services. I have already expressed the Board's gratitude to Roger Hargreaves, and should like to express my thanks to my fellow Director's David Evans, Phil Kirby, Richard Morris, Paul Seddon, Penelope Tollitt and Lonek Wotjulewicz for all their invaluable support.
- 17 I must also state that the Directors are very grateful to our support team of Andrew Wright and Linda Durnal for their hard work and commitment in sustaining services and developing new opportunities; and to our associates for their energy and exemplary commitment to supporting good planning.

Steve Ingram, Chairman, POS Enterprises

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