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## AT THE HEART OF MANAGING PUBLIC PROPERTY FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD SINCE 1987: A HISTORY OF THE ACES HEART OF ENGLAND BRANCH

*This history has been produced by Richard Allen and first appeared in the Terrier: Summer Edition 2015 page 62. It was updated by Richard in March 2020*

### **Formation**

No minutes have been kept from the early years but it has been established that the first meeting to discuss forming a branch took place in 1987. It was hosted by and held in the office of Philip Mason, the then Assistant Director of Technical Services (Land) at Nottingham City Council. Among those present at the meeting were Hugh Davis (Milton Keynes), Peter Seddon (Oxfordshire), Tony Schrier (Northamptonshire) and Bob Entwistle (Wellingborough). It was decided to appoint a Branch Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer. The Chairman would serve for two years with a Chairman designate to serve as Vice Chairman for the year prior to and after holding office. The Branch subscription was £5 and in the early years was collected by the Branch Treasurer.

### **Meetings**

From its formation the aim of the branch has been to hold regular meetings to network, share best practice, exchange views and provide mutual professional support. The geographical size and diverse make-up of the branch membership determined that meetings be hosted by different members and move around the branch area. The area includes the largest city local authority in the country and ranges through metropolitan and county authorities down to districts, some with just a handful of properties. Meetings have been held in obvious buildings such as County, City and Town Halls. But they have also been held in museums (Wellingborough) theatres (Nottingham Theatre Royal, Dunstable Grove, Wellingborough The Castle), business centres (Nottingham Lenton, Derby Friargate Studios, Derbyshire Markham Vale Environmental Centre, Coventry, Staffordshire Forest of Mercia Innovation Centre, Oakham Enterprise Park, King Centre, Oakham), homeless hostel (Derby Milestone House), football stadium (Wolverhampton Wanderers ), cricket ground (Trent Bridge, Nottingham,) recently opened new local authority offices (Nottingham Loxley House, Hinckley Hub, Cabinet Office Nottingham, Woodcock Street Birmingham), joint service centres (Tithe Lodge Southam, Meeting Point House Telford) or refurbished offices (Leicestershire County Hall, Worcestershire County Hall), coroners court (Milton Keynes) and a range of community centres (West Bromwich the 'Public', Wolverhampton Blakenhall Community Centre). These meetings have often included a presentation on and tour of the venues.

Other meeting locations have included Luton, Bedford, Milton Keynes, Kettering, Mansfield, Matlock, Burton, Redditch, Telford, Oxford and Chicksands. Perhaps the most remote location, being on the very edge of the branch boundary, and yet one of the best attended was Ross on Wye in the late 1990s. The best attended meetings generally have been those held more centrally and particularly in Birmingham. In 2009 Jones Lang LaSalle hosted a meeting in their Birmingham office which attracted 20 members. GVA, now Avison Young, hosted a Branch AGM at their Birmingham office in 2018 after an 'Espresso Briefing' and Place Partnership a meeting at their Worcester office in 2019.

Initially it was general practice to first meet for a buffet lunch and informal chat at the host venue, followed by the formal business meeting in the afternoon. These meetings were held four times per year. To justify the time and distance some members have to travel, in 2004 it was decided to move to all day meetings with topical presentations and/or visits of interest in the morning and a general meeting in the afternoon. Since 2012 the number of annual meetings has also been reduced to three.

Members from what is now the Eastern branch area joined the Heart of England Branch until 1992 when their own branch was formed. One of the first meetings was held in Lincoln and the first Secretary was from Peterborough, both now in the Eastern Branch area.

### **Themes/Topics**

In the early years meeting topics and issues were valuation, regeneration and general estate management. At the start of the 1990s the rating revaluation, CCT and best value featured strongly to be succeeded by asset management which was the main topic and challenge to members between the mid-1990s and 2008. Since 2008 the implications of the recession and public sector cutbacks for property services and the market have featured most prominently.

Standard items on the agenda at branch meetings for the last dozen years have been 'Asset Management' and 'Property and Valuation' matters.

Under 'Asset Management' there have been discussions on performance indicators, single capital pot, role of the corporate property officer, asset management systems, incentives to release property for disposal, use of asset rents, area asset management plans, comprehensive performance assessments, RICS guide to local authority asset management, the 'Quirk' review and community asset transfer, peer reviews, corporate landlord, benchmarking, comprehensive spending review, localism agenda, estate office structures, shared disposal and occupation policies, total place, performance management, raising the profile of property and achieving budget savings through property strategies, registration of assets of community value, community asset transfer policies, local authorities support for housing growth, transparency agenda, role of property in the devolution agenda, ethical green investments and excess death strategy.

There has been a myriad of discussions under the 'Property and Valuation' matters heading which have included outsourcing right to buy valuations and fees paid for service, asset

valuations for financial accounting, rating of leisure centres, UPRN, legionella and asbestos surveys and logbooks, development agreements for city centre retail development schemes, housing stock transfer, disposals at less than best consideration, fire risk assessments, travellers sites, leasehold reform act, service charges, voluntary land registration, securing development through a development agreement, disposals of public open space, renewal of substation leases, restrictive covenant releases, commercial lease code, energy performance certificates, 3G masts, asset impairment, wind farms, DRC spreadsheets, whole life costing, peer reviews, framework agreement for estates services, community right to buy, RICS valuers accreditation scheme, land auction pilots, asset valuation priorities and programmes, recession and market downturn, 'Portas' high street review, mobile phone masts, transfer of schools to academies, support for economic development and SMEs, conditional break clauses in leases, implication for property of VAT changes and the specific valuation of over sailing rights, ground leases, highway depots, land for affordable housing, free schools and scrap yards, and setting up of 'promotional agreements' to maximise planning potential and development value, openness of government regulations 2014 and RICS auditing of asset valuations, how authorities are complying with IFRS13, using public assets to increase mobile phone and digital coverage, need for all commercial property to meet minimum energy performance standards by 2018 influence on disposal strategies, use of promotional agreements to remove risk in the disposal of development sites, implications of new reporting standards for school asset valuations, condition survey templates, minimum energy efficiency standards, key worker accommodation, Section 123 and what is undervalue, needs assessments for housing/extra care/restriction on use, valuation of ground leases with long rent review patterns, service reviews, why some retail businesses are paying more rates than rent, bidding for funding from the high streets fund, how commercial portfolios are being rebalanced through ethical green investments such as the use of land for solar farms, tree planting schemes and car charging points and the use of QR codes on for sale/to let boards.

### **Presentations**

There have been many presentations over the years on a wide range of topics from branch members, local government and the private sector. In chronological order these have included the Role of the DVS, Birmingham Eastside and Bullring Shopping Centre, Production of AMPs, Wolverhampton Property Partnership, Freedom of Information Act and Prudential Borrowing, Birmingham City Accommodation Strategy, Creating Value from Local Government Property, GIS and its application to service property, Planning and Development of a Customer Service Centre, Community Asset Transfer of the Lenton Community Centre, Development of Elderly Person Villages, Markham Vale Regeneration Project, Putting value in place - Local Authority property investment, Administration of Regeneration Projects, Derby City Centre Regeneration, Shared Services, Making the most of the Property Portfolio during a Recession, Birmingham Transformation Programme, Negotiating property deals in the Electricity Industry, Public Markets for the Public Good, Regeneration of West Bromwich Town Centre, Benefits of Mediation, Establishment of the Leamington Justice Centre, Benefits of membership of the British Council for Offices, Regeneration of Kettering, Capital and Asset Pathfinder Programme, Leicestershire 'Workwell' Office Strategy, Viability Appraisals and Assessing Sec 106 Payments and Affordable Housing Requirements, Sandwell TNRP Review, Nottingham City Council

Workplace Strategy, Joint Venture Models to Unlock Value, Tools for Economic Growth, Introduction of CIL and Implications for Sec 106 Obligations, Better Use of Property in Worcestershire, Corporate Real Estate Management in the Public Sector, Regeneration of Blakenhall Gardens Area of Wolverhampton, Regional Growth and Unlocking the Potential, Setting up and moving to a new Joint Service Centre, RICS Professional Ethics, Public Sector Collaboration through the 'One Public Estate' Initiative, Regeneration through Collaboration, Oakham Enterprise Park, Growth and Development in Bedford and Collaborative Asset Management through Property Partnerships, Housing Regeneration in Nottingham, Blueprint Regeneration Company, Sustainable Homes and Workplaces, Public Service Transformation, Nottinghamshire County council's Joint Venture and Common Property Unit proposals Tithe Lodge Extra Care housing scheme plus public facilities, Rightmove, Mansfield's Investment Property Strategy to generate revenue, Regeneration of Telford Town centre and Telford Land deal, 2017 Revaluation, HS2 Property implications on Long Eaton, A New Funding Model for Regeneration in the Public Sector, The King Business Centre and Rutland's OPE Project, Barleythorpe House Residential Conversion, ePIMS, Crescent Town Centre Regeneration Scheme in Hinckley, Government Property Agency and Government Property Profession, The Midlands Engine, Ground Contamination Investigation, Asbestos Awareness, The Role and Growth of Place Partnership, Benefits and Lessons Learnt from Birmingham City Council's Accommodation Strategy and Development of the Woodcock Street Offices, Service Lead Strategic Asset Management Planning and Developing a Data Rich Baseline,

### **Guidelines**

Lead by Tony Wood from Wolverhampton City Council, in 2002 the branch produced 'Guidelines for Minor Disposals'. As a project, the branch also produced, with input from members of the Eastern, South West and South East Branches, the 'ACES Guidelines for a Local Authority Property Assets Disposal Strategy' which was featured in the Summer 2009 Terrier.

### **Publications**

The branch has been a regular subscriber to the Terrier with the speakers usually submitting a resume of their branch meeting presentations to this journal. This high level of support has on many an occasion been achieved by the Secretary changing a 'PowerPoint' presentation into a word document that would then be developed into an article for final editing by the speaker - who would get the credit!

### **ACES Presidents and Council**

The national President has visited a branch meeting most years. Four branch members have honoured the branch by serving as national President; Ian MacDonald, Leicestershire (1991-92), Derek Rowell, Bedford (1995-96), John Arnold, Oxford (1997-98) and Richard Allen (2004-05). A number of members have played significant roles on ACES Council, none more so than Malcolm Williams, who was Branch Chair in 1993-95 and is also a past president of COPROP.

### **National Conferences**

On four occasions the Branch has hosted a national conference; Coventry (1989),

Nottingham (1994), Worcester (2002), Birmingham (2008) as well as the Presidential Conference in Oxford (1998) and Nottingham (2005).

### **Joint Learning and Networking CPD Days with Government Property Unit and Valuation Office Agency**

All day themed CPD Events have been held at the Carrs Lane Conference Centre, Birmingham:-

February 2017 'The Role of the Modern Estate Surveyor in the Public Sector' with presentations on One Public Estate, Issues emerging from OPE programme and Opportunities it presents for Place Making and Regeneration, Melton Parkside Centre of Excellence for Information Sharing, Development Viability and Affordable housing, Role of the Homes and Community Agency plus a workshop looking at the role of the Modern Estate Surveyor in the Public Sector; February 2018 'Challenges and Opportunities for the Modern Estate Surveyor in the Public Sector' with presentations on the Government's Estate Strategy, Disposal Strategies for Surplus Public Sector Property with case studies, Valuation of Public Sector Assets for Rating and important changes following recent case law, and workshops on Collaborative OPE Themes, Opportunities and Risks and the Impact of Emerging Technologies on the work of Estate Surveyor; and February 2019 'To Better Understand the Role of and Opportunities for the Modern Estate Surveyor in supporting the Regeneration and Growth agenda' with presentations on the Regeneration Game; Generating Value by Creating Demand and Managing Greed, Update on the Government's Estate Strategy, Economic Growth – the Role of Real Estate, NHS Sustainability Transformation Plan and a half day workshop on Growth and Regeneration.

### **ACES Award for Excellence**

Three authorities have won the ACES Award for Excellence. In 2001 Malcolm Newman, of Birmingham City Council won for his 'Excellence in Property Management', in 2008 Adrian Stringer of Wolverhampton City Council for his 'Ward Street Regeneration Area Project'. Adrian also gave a presentation on his winning topic at the national ACES Spring Conference in Glasgow the following year. In 2015 David Blanchard of Melton District Council for his asset management project 'Sixteen Partner Organisations at Parkside' relating to the joint occupation of the Council's new headquarters building.

### **Membership and attendance**

Membership has fluctuated over the years from over 50 around the mid-1990s to just over 30 at the end of the noughties. The average attendance at branch meetings since 2001 (there are no records prior to this date) is around 15 with the highest recorded being 24 at Dunstable in 2001 and lowest 9 at Worcester in 2019.

### **Branch Officers \***

Since its formation the Branch has been led by 14 Chairs: -.

1987-1989 Philip Mason, Nottingham City Council  
1989-1991 Hugh Davis, Milton Keynes Borough Council  
1991-1993 Bob Entwistle, Wellingborough Borough Council  
1993-1995 Malcolm Williams, Worcestershire County Council  
1995-1997 Peter Manley, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

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1997-1999 Lee Dawson, Wycombe District Council  
1999-2001 Peter Murch, South Bedfordshire District Council  
2001-2003 Richard Allen, Nottingham City Council  
2003-2005 Tony Wood, Wolverhampton City Council  
2005-2007 Peter Hirst, Derbyshire County Council  
2007-2009 Ray Ashton, East Staffordshire Borough Council/Derby City Council  
2009-2011 Steve Meynell, Derby City Council  
2011-2013 Peter Burt, Central Bedfordshire Unitary Council  
2013-2015 David Willetts, Sandwell Metropolitan Council  
2015-2017 Judith Bayes, Rutland County Council  
2017-2019 Geoff Taylor, RC Diocese, Birmingham  
2019 to date Philip Colledge, Mansfield District Council

It has been a policy to share the Chair around the different range of authorities which have been: -

**Metropolitan** – Sandwell

**County** – Worcestershire, Derbyshire, Central Bedfordshire, Rutland

**Unitary** – Nottingham (2), Derby, Milton Keynes, Wolverhampton

**District** – Wellingborough, Wycombe, South Bedfordshire, East Staffordshire, Mansfield

**Church** - RC Birmingham

There have been 5 Secretaries: -

1987-1990 Ian Wilson, Peterborough City Council  
1990-1994 Roy Samuels, Shropshire County Council  
1994-2002 Derek Wilson, Northampton Borough Council,  
2002-2007 Judith Bayes, Northampton Borough Council  
2007-2015 Richard Allen, Nottingham City Council and retired  
2015-2019 Peter Burt  
2019 to date Alison Hext, Place Partnership and retired

and 5 Treasurers: -

1987-1992 Peter Seddon, Oxfordshire County Council  
1992-1997 Dale Reynolds, Aylesbury Vale District Council  
1997-2005 Peter Manley, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council  
2005-2008 Carol Bramley, Leicestershire County Council  
2008 to date Richard Allen 2009 retired

### **The Future**

For the foreseeable future the principal focus for ACES will be supporting its members to drive a better performance from the public estate, deliver efficiency savings and contribute to the growth agenda. And as ever-increasing demands are placed on its members to achieve more for less, the need for support from ACES, the only professional property body that is exclusively dedicated to public property, has never been greater.

***\* As it has not been possible to locate any of the early minutes the post holders and dates prior to 1998 are based on information provided by original members and so the accuracy cannot be guaranteed.***