

WORKSHOP 3 THE LIMITS OF POLITICS

In March 2014 the planning minister Nick Boles wrote to the Planning Inspectorate to say he was “disturbed” by an inspector’s report ratifying Reigate and Banstead Borough Council’s controversial plans to release green belt for up to 1,400 homes. Boles had been “very troubled” by media coverage of the decision, and his original letter seemed to be an attempt to distance the government from an unpopular decision that was having to be made at a local level - especially when that local authority is Tory-controlled. The letter set in motion a dramatic see-saw of political pressure which sent the planning world into a tailspin. Boles had brought on Reigate-gate.

Boles’s intervention prompted Reigate’s Conservative MP Crispin Blunt, who had been lobbying him on the issue, to triumphantly claim “the minister has said that the green belt trumps housing numbers, which is a sea change.” This in turn provoked dismay from the development sector, and a letter from the Home Builders Federation warning Boles that his message could have a “potentially disastrous effect” on meeting the nation’s housing crisis. Boles was then forced to respond with a second letter clarifying that his first letter “did not signal a change of policy or approach”. When Nick Boles famously said “chaotic is a good thing” in planning, he probably didn’t have this kind of chaos in mind.

Reigate-gate has ultimately had no real effect on planning policy. But it has exposed the political fault lines running deep through England’s Green Belt. Nowhere is the push and pull of planning and politics stronger. To build or obstruct building in the Green Belt means learning how to harness these political forces. This is just as true, if not quite as patent, in the wider built environment. It is not enough for an architect to know how to produce the contents of planning application. Successfully influencing development demands diplomacy, campaigning, lobbying and spin.

This workshop will teach you about the design of politics in relation to planning. From placards to posters, leaflets and letters, and now online petitions, exhibitions and twitter campaigns, this is the visual language of realpolitik. Your task is to create one piece of material from a campaign for, or against, your design proposal. This could be anything from a developer’s newsletter, to a bumper sticker, to a demonstration outside the planning committee chamber. We will be joined by Andrea Klettner of ING Media, formerly news editor of Building Design, who will help you define the angle of your campaign and craft the copy of your material. At the end of the workshop you will be presenting your campaign to Phélim MacCafferty, Green Party Councillor and Chair of Planning at Brighton and Hove City Council.

REFERENCES

- Design as Politics*, Chair at the Architecture Faculty of Delft University of Technology, Wouter Vanstiphout
- Grotton revisited: Planning in Crisis?*, 2010, Stephen Ankers, David Kaiserman, Chris Shepley
- ING Media blog*
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- Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*, 1988, Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky
- Permission Impossible*, 2014, BBC2
- The Art of Protest*, 2014, Jeremy Deller
- Reigategate: the fallout*, April 2014, Planning Magazine
- The Deptford Project*, Cathedral Group & London Borough of Lewisham
- The Edifice Complex: The architecture of power*, 2011, Deyan Sudjic
- The Goodsynd*, Soundings for Hammerson and Ballymore Group
- The Politics of Aesthetics*, 2004, Jacques Rancière
- The Smithfield Inquiry*, The Victorian Society, SAVE & Cathedral Group v Henderson Global Investors & John McAslan + Partners

TIMETABLE

THURSDAY 1 MAY

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| <p>10.00 REALPOLITIK, an introduction to the workshop by Finn Williams</p> <p>10.30 MEDIA PLANNING, a discussion of the role of PR and communications in development by Andrea Klettner</p> <p>11.30 CAMPAIGN, define the angle, audience and medium of your campaign</p> | <p>12.30 MATERIAL, produce the content and graphics of your material</p> <p>16.30 LOBBYING, present your final material to a panel including Andrea Klettner and Phélim MacCafferty</p> <p>18.30 ENDS</p> |
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