



# **Study Skills for Town and Country Planning**

**Adam Sheppard  
and Nick Smith**

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# Preface

Numerous books exist that consider town and country planning from an academic and/or practice perspective, but few consider how it is studied. The aim of this text is to provide an effective introduction to the essential university study skills associated with town and country planning. The text is interspersed with activities, tips, definitions and further reading to help the reader develop their skills and understanding, and to support onward learning. The book will support those intending to study, or already studying for, a degree or high qualification in town and country planning and associated built environment fields such as architecture, geography, urban studies, housing, property development, construction and surveying.



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# **Part one**

Studying in Higher Education



# 1

## Town Planning and Society

### Aims

To explore the historical evolution of town and country planning in the UK and to identify the role of planners in shaping the places we live in.

### Learning outcomes

After reading this chapter you will:

- understand the origins and development of town and country planning in the UK
- recognise the importance of planning to the management of the built and natural environment
- appreciate the role and importance of planners in society.

### Introduction

The Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), the organisation which represents the planning profession, state that “planning involves twin activities – the management of the competing uses for space, and the making of places that are valued and have identity” (RTPI, 2012a). This goes some way to identifying the breadth of ‘planning’ and it is of note that unlike many other subjects, the content of your course will have both theoretical elements and practice orientated aspects. Studying town and country planning at university therefore means engaging with both an academic subject and a professional discipline.





**tip**

Although we have used the term 'town and country planning' and 'planning' interchangeably throughout this book, the reality is that a range of terms are used to explain the activity. University courses are labelled in a variety of ways but their content is typically quite similar as we explain later on. With regards to those practising planning, we use the general term 'planner' but again a variety of titles are used in reality.

Planning is a dynamic, challenging and fast-changing subject area, and the profession involves a diverse range of interesting and challenging careers. In your studies you will not just learn about planning and the profession today; to truly understand planning demands an appreciation of the past and the evolution of the art and science of the activity into its current form.

## **Origins and history**

It is easy to think of town and country planning as a relatively modern phenomenon. The modern planning *system* that now operates in the UK can trace its origins directly to the early 1900s and the emergence of public health-focused planning legislation, but regulations which existed to manage places and spaces can be traced back to the Medieval period, and the idea of planned places can be traced back to the ancient world.

The earliest settlements were not planned in the same manner that urban areas are planned today, but that does not mean that planning did not take place when they were created. Important factors like the need to have access to clean water and land suitable for farming would have been foremost in the minds of the community group, as would the need to consider defence, flooding risk and the availability of potential building materials, food supplies and so forth. Where a town was positioned would therefore have been a considered and thought-out matter. Similarly, the layout of the actual settlement would have been undertaken with regards to uses, religion and societal hierarchies and relationships.

The extent to which the earliest settlements were consciously 'planned' will have varied considerably, but there is evidence of 'town planning' dating back to the Egyptians and we can certainly see planned settlements from the classical Greek period. Many ideas and philosophies can trace their origins to the Greeks, and this includes theories and concepts for town planning. Greek settlement plans can be found which are clearly laid out having regard to the physical geography of the area, and most demonstrate elements of the grid pattern arrangements many



people now associate with the United States of America. An important point here is the difference between *planning*, and the *planning system*. The *planning system* is a fairly recent phenomenon, but humankind has *planned* since the earliest settlements were created. This history is important and as a planner understanding settlement patterns, morphology, growth, systems and networks and the historical evolution of a place is hugely important.

### Activity

Take the opportunity to learn about the town or city where you live, or near where you live. Consider:

1. How the settlement has changed over time; where is the oldest part? How has it grown? Is much of the history still visible from the buildings and layout?
2. What type of settlement is it? Is it an important retail centre for the wider area? Are there a lot of industrial uses? Or office buildings? Is there a dominant employer like the military? Or a large factory?
3. Can you find out why the settlement is where it is? Was it an important river crossing? Or a port? Did it grow because of a particular industry like coal mining? Or has it grown as a 'commuter town' because of the influence of a nearby major city or access to good transport links like the railways?
4. Can you map out the key periods of growth? Did it grow quickly during the industrial revolution? Was there a period of growth following a particular event, such as the end of the Second World War? Has there been recent growth? And is more growth planned?

Understanding the history and change that has taken place in an area is vitally important to the art and science of town planning. This understanding, together with an appreciation of the current pressures and demands facing the area and its population, helps us to create plans for the future; to help protect what needs to be protected and support growth and change where this is appropriate.

The idea of regulatory control is also not a new one. Although legislation requiring the creation of *plans* to guide development in a given area is relatively new, the use of legal controls to manage the built and natural environment can trace its origins back almost as far as the early evidence of planning activity through very simple laws relating to construction. In the UK, evidence can be found of construction laws dating back to medieval times. Although evidence suggests that even earlier controls existed in London, the Assize of Nuisance in 1275 can certainly be highlighted as one of the earliest forms of control over buildings. This introduced various controls that are akin