

Incoming Chairman's Address – Paul Astbury

Firstly, on behalf of the Committee and the Association, I would like to thank Barry Denyer-Green for his tremendous contribution as Chairman over the past year and of course in other roles in years prior to that.

Our strengths

It is through contributions such as Barry's and others that the CPA has come such a long way since its inception in 2002. One of our strengths is the cross discipline nature of our membership and it is encouraging to see that, as our membership grows, that diversity is being maintained across disciplines and across the public and private sector.

It is this variety that allows us, as members, to learn from each other, to understand compulsory purchase and its problems from a broader perspective, and to campaign for well rounded and worthwhile reforms of the law.

To say that our people are our greatest asset has unfortunately become a rather tired cliché. But in the case of the CPA I think it is true – not least because other than the balance of our bank account our members are our only asset!

But we do have a very broad and deep collection of compulsory purchase expertise among us. Our events such as this evening's AGM and inaugural Tony Johnson Memorial Lecture, the National Conference, and the increasingly popular regional events arranged by our regional convenors allow us to tap into this expertise, to meet and exchange views and ideas to our mutual benefit. That is an area where as an Association we do well.

Promoting Reform

An area in which we do less well is tapping into that same expertise and experience when promoting our ideas for law reform. Over the last two years and more, we have developed good contacts within government and also in the opposition to put forward the Association's proposals for change.

We have had a very encouraging success with the amendment of s.237 of the Town and Country Planning Act, but where we have all too often come unstuck is when the Government has asked us for specific examples of the damage our reforms are intended to correct. It is there that we need to tap into the collective knowledge and experience of our membership but have to date been unable to do so effectively.

The committee have already been working on ways to improve this and we have been and will continue to pursue ways of improving communication between the membership and the committee in both directions.

CPA Website

The first thing we have done is to reorganise the website which was launched at the National Conference. If you have not had a chance to look at it yet I would urge you to do so. We have

focused on presenting the most useful information in the most straightforward way so that it is functional and informative.

We now have a single section on the website for all our reform proposals. Each subject has its own sub page. There you will find a paragraph or two on the latest position as well as any papers or relevant case law so that you can get up to speed on the issue and the proposed reform easily and quickly. The Committee members responsible for each issue are named on each sub page, along with email links. If you would like to contribute to the debate or provide examples to demonstrate the problem in question so that we can back up our case to Government you can do so directly via the website or contact one of the relevant Committee members.

We will also shortly have minutes and agendas for committee meetings on the site, and there are pages with details of all the Committee members and the Regional convenors with contact details.

As well as papers in respect of reform issues we are currently promoting, back issues of the CPA News are available to download which contains commentary on legal cases and points of interest to compulsory purchase. We have a case digest on the site as well going back to 2002.

On the home page you will see the What's New section giving details of upcoming events and new info on the site and many of the events can be booked online.

The Committee

The other way we will be seeking to broaden communication between members and the committee is directly involving more members in the work of the Committee. This will be done via co-option and the use of working parties to begin with and in the longer term by the expansion of the Committee as voted on this evening.

As an Association we need to refocus our reform agenda following the House of Lords decision on Spirerose. We need to bring forward new issues as well as reviewing and pressing on with existing ones to make sure that we, as the people who work most closely with the compulsory purchase and compensation process, take part in making it as workable, consistent and fair as it can be.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I urge you to take a few minutes to look at the website, see which of the reform issues we are currently promoting are of interest, suggest new ones, send examples of problems so that we can back up our case to Government, and contact the Committee or your convenor if you would like to get involved in a working group or contribute in some other way.

But in the meantime, relax and enjoy the rest of the evening.