

Richard Gill's Reply to Speakers at the BTPS Function on 26 April 2024

Senior Minister Duguid, President Yolanda, Invited Guests, Speakers and fellow Members,

Thank you so much to those who have spoken so eloquently of my career in Planning and I sometimes wondered if they were really talking about me. I also thank the Executive for elevating me to Honorary Membership status of this Barbados Town Planning Society. This is indeed a great honour and I am pleased to have been able to make a contribution to this profession.

My journey as a Planner started 66 years ago when, as a 6th Form school boy I first became aware of the profession. I was a young Council Member of the Barbados Astronomical Society, with Dr. Harry Bayley as President and a membership comprising several keen amateur astronomers and several others. Mr. Donald Wiles (later Sir Donald) was on the Council. He was a Permanent Secretary in Government and asked me what profession I aspired to study. My reply was that I had not yet decided, but that it was likely to be Architecture, Land Surveying or Engineering. He replied, "Oh, I have the ideal profession for you!" and said how a new Planning Department was being set up and that I should read up on planning as a profession and apply for one of the two posts of Pupil Assistant. I followed his advice and started my journey on 1st September 1959 at the princely salary of \$102 per month.

I will not bore you with how the Planning Office operated in those days with a maximum of three professionals, plus technical and administrative staff, nor with now antiquated technical equipment. It had started its public function about eight months before I joined it and it was clear that the public were still generally unaware of their obligations within the area under interim control. Interestingly, few people realized at that time that they had suddenly lost their rights to build what they liked and where they liked under Common Law. This law was later extended to the use to which their land could be put and then the subdivision of land, which had been overseen under public health legislation up to 1962.

The legislation initially applied to Bridgetown and then to a much larger built-up area surrounding Bridgetown, the South Coast and West coast. We in the drawing office were required to record all houses and the land use in the Cattlewash/Long Pond area of the Scotland District just before the Cattlewash/Long Pond Order came into force.

Interestingly, over the four years that I was a working student, we carried out a detailed Land Use Survey of the predominantly built up areas from North Point southwards and eastwards to South Point, producing individual large scale maps of the whole area. This information would be crucial to the work of the UNDP Team which produced the first draft PDP between 1964 and 1966. Never again will such effort be put into manually recording land use data and I hope that some, if not all, of those maps are being kept for posterity.

Periods of my experience in planning over the years

My employment as a Civil Servant encompassed three distinct periods after which I started my practice as a Planning Consultant.

Between 1959 and 1963 as a Pupil Assistant, I witnessed a growing interest in investment in tourism and commerce. Much of Barbados was agricultural and in a good economic condition as a Colony with considerable autonomy, although clouds were on the horizon for agriculture following the use by a former Government of the savings fund of the sugar industry to spend on building the new Deep Water

Harbour, the construction of which I witnessed during this period. This effectively removed the cushion intended to maintain a stable sugar industry by subsidizing years of low world prices.

Between 1963 and 1967 was the period in which Independence was gained and the first National Physical Plan was prepared as a draft report. I had little direct knowledge of this period while studying in the UK, although my boss, Mr. Peter H. M. Stevens, wrote several times to provide news of the Department.

Between 1967 and 1971, there was an increase in investment interest in tourism, with new hotels and apartments being built; the start in subdividing some plantations into medium and small agricultural units; the beginning of large scale housing subdivisions into lots especially between 4000 and 7000 sq ft.; and the outward growth of urban Bridgetown and the development of small industrial estates by the BIDC.

As a Town Planning Consultant after 1971, I have witnessed periods of growth of economic activity including the growth of substantial tourism development including golf courses and other sports like cricket World Cup. However, I have also witnessed the increasing lack of sustainability of the sugar industry and of industrial activity generally and the need for heavy Government borrowings.

Interesting Experiences as a consultant

Some of my work as a Planning Consultant has been well described by the several speakers just now and I wish to confine myself to a few comments which may be of interest to you:

- Aerial photography. Use of Islander 12-seater aircraft and of helicopters to obtain useful information through aerial photos before the availability of Google Earth and other satellite imagery. I thoroughly enjoyed the thrill of flying with the door off and leaning through the open doorway to point the camera downwards through a restricted space to avoid the slipstream. Needless to say, both the pilot and I checked the bolts holding down the bench seat before each takeoff. Major projects like the Bridgetown Traffic Management Study, the Feasibility Study for the South Coast Sewerage Project and development planning for Oistins and Speightstown all benefitted from this approach. Smaller scale projects like the study of Parish Lands, St. George also benefitted.
- Work with overseas golf designers on the creation of the Royal Westmoreland, Sandy Lane and Apes Hill golf projects and the detailing of all the housing layouts and road alignments there.
- Local Planning Appeals. Because of the extent of my training in planning law at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, I was particularly interested in appeals (reviews). For some years I was a Panelist, recusing myself in cases of potential conflict of interest. Much later, it was clear that some panelists were unable to discern what evidence was permissible and what was not and representatives of both sides tended to take advantage of this weakness. I remember at least two panelists who would listen to both arguments, hardly making a note at that time, so I have no idea what they found to write about. It was quite impossible to persuade the responsible Ministry to provide a copy of their reports. That was always a serious problem, as the Planning Minister could take into consideration with impunity whatever factors he or she wished and one would never know.
- Overseas appeals. I had the privilege as the "Independent Inspector" of conducting, over a ten year period, all appeal hearings in Bermuda in which a more open system was employed shortly after I started. There had been many threats of taking the Minister to court so as to obtain the Inspector's report and interestingly, no one was inclined to do so when my reports were made

available to them. What is quite amazing is that I cannot think of a single instance in which the Minister made a decision contrary to my recommendation. A great lesson for Barbados!

- Perhaps my most interesting industrial project was the design and implementation of Warrens Industrial Estate. This had some challenges, a major one being whether or not to provide a road link between the east and west sides. A pedestrian linkage allowed workers free movement, but prevented the use of the site as a short cut and race track between Highways 2A and 2B.

Thanks to other Firms and individuals

- I wish to acknowledge professional firms with which I was involved as the prime or sub-consultant in many infrastructural projects: especially David Lashley & Partners, Consulting Engineers Partnership, Mahy Ridley & Chadderton (now Gregory Hazzard Engineer); Robertson Ward Associates (UWI DP and other projects); Gillespie & Steel (including the Speightstown Study); HHF (surveys and other land information)
- Other Senior Planners in RGAL over time, principally David Staples (from the UK), Len Ishmael, my son Andy Gill (who is taking the Firm to new heights) and of course Billy Bain who now runs his own very successful consulting practice.
- I have not spoken about my roles in the BTPS nor CAP because others have done so most eloquently. I have enjoyed a long journey with colleagues who have contributed much to the BTPS in particular, to the benefit of both the profession and our community. The present Executive are doing an exceptional job and the Society is indeed in good hands.
- I also wish to thank Lynda, my lovely wife of 63 years, for all her support over my rather long career.
- Lastly I wish to thank the Executive and all others who meticulously planned this meeting, Senior Minister Duguid for his thoughtful remarks, the other eloquent speakers and all of you who have made this evening a special event for me.

Thank you!

Richard Gill
(with edits May 2024)