



Light pollution and planning controls – a CfDS conference at Leicester DMU

On 2012 April 20, the BAA Campaign for Dark Skies (CfDS) held its one-day conference on the subject of 'Planning, Exterior Lighting and the Environment' at de Montfort University (DMU), Leicester. CfDS committee member, International Dark-Sky Vice President and DMU law lecturer Martin Morgan-Taylor ably organised the proceedings, assisted by several Campaign members: Graham Bryant, John Harvey, Kostas Katsampoukas, Ryan Laird, Martin Male, Bob and Pam Mizon, David Paul and Mike Tabb. Friedel Pas, who had travelled from Belgium, also assisted in setting up the meeting. Friedel coordinates Preventielicht-hinder (the Belgian national dark-skies campaign) and represents the International Dark-Sky Association in Europe.

Delegates were drawn from many organisations and disciplines, including the Department of the Environment (DEFRA), local authorities, the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE), the lighting industry, wildlife groups, other universities and the astronomical community.

The Astronomer Royal, Lord Rees, had kindly agreed to make the opening remarks, and being unable to attend in person, had recorded his contribution earlier at the Cambridge Institute of Astronomy. He expressed concern that most young people nowadays have little opportunity to see a really pristine night sky, and also emphasised the many non-astronomical facets of the light pollution debate, including impacts on wildlife and national resources.

Bob Mizon, CfDS coordinator, chaired the morning session, which was energetically launched by Martin Morgan-Taylor, presenting 'A legal update on light pollution', which reviewed the new National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Similar to the old guidance this creates an obligation on local authorities to tackle light pollution. The missing element is how this should be done, leading to a variable 'postcode lottery' approach. The NPPF introduces the concept of 'good lighting design', which, if clarified for local authorities, may help foster a uniform approach. The benefits in the revised Institution of Lighting Professionals (ILP) Guidance Notes for the Re-

duction of Light Pollution and the draft Building Research Establishment (BRE) light pollution guidance were also examined.

Matt Shardlow, CEO of Buglife, the UK-based organisation that promotes the interests of all invertebrates, then spoke on 'Invertebrates and lighting'. His talk, which led to much discussion later, investigated how the more humble creatures of the natural world perceive our lights, and how we need to take their life patterns into consideration when planning lighting, illuminating not just for humans but for the benefit of those organisms that need darkness to function. He stressed that if we damage the small creatures on which we depend for the correct functioning of the natural world, and to a large extent for our food supplies, we damage ourselves.

Next, James Hale of the University of Birmingham described a project which he and colleagues have been pursuing, mapping nocturnal landscapes from the air and, with the aid of very high-resolution images, analysing lighting installations and practices across the city. His eventual aim is to gather similar data from other locations, which can be of use to planners, campaigners, environmentalists and legislators in improving the lighting standards of the nation.

Friedel Pas closed the morning session with a brief overview of the exterior lighting situation in Belgium, where his campaign's annual 'Nights of Darkness' have been consistently successful in recent years. Large numbers of Belgian municipalities switch off lights at agreed times to raise awareness of energy savings and the value of a good view of the stars.

Friedel chaired the afternoon session, first introducing David Hook (CPRE Norfolk), who explored rural lighting problems in 'The importance of dark landscapes: the CPRE perspective'. David stressed the need for firmer control of 'rogue' lighting schemes in dark landscapes, bemoaning the fact that local authorities are not always well informed about existing legislation, or are apparently not willing to enforce it. He gave many examples of how unplanned lights can blight lives and interfere with the life chances of various wild creatures.

Stuart Beale, of the Highways Agency, followed with 'Dark Skies – a welcome by-product of a 'lean approach' to road lighting'. He reminded delegates that saving the stars was not necessarily the main reason for the HA's policy of fitting only well-directed flat-glass lights on all its new lighting columns, but this policy and the increasingly frequent practice of switching off lights outside peak times was certainly good news for astronomers. He offered some useful insights into the way large organisations work: the 'lean approach' is a current management/industry phrase, defined as: 'find good people and let them do their own job, encouraging progress, catching errors, and removing impediments'. Stuart examined this approach and the best ways to change practices within the constraints of the current economic downturn, by stressing *why* change is useful and should be a priority, rather than just telling them they've got it wrong!

Lighting consultant Nigel Pollard (ILP), a longstanding friend of the CfDS and always ready to advise on the technicalities of lighting, spoke on 'Significance criteria for lighting impact assessments'. Nigel explained the fairly complicated criteria that are used by professionals and local authorities when lighting schemes are developed, and outlined how they might best be improved and simplified to the benefit of all.

The last speakers performed a 'double act': Nigel Gibbs (Dacorum Borough Council, Hertfordshire) & Pete Lummis (Huntingdonshire Council) told delegates 'How lighting professionals can advise planners'. It must be remembered, they said, that local authority planners have to understand many different aspects of the schemes to which they may give approval, but they are usually not lighting experts. Good liaison between lighting engineers and planners, and sound advice, are of the essence if new developments are to meet the needs of not only those living and working there, but also of local environmentalists, astronomers and, last but not least, wildlife.

DEFRA minister Lord Taylor of Holbeach gave the concluding remarks on video, summarising the growth of interest in the light pollution debate in government circles over the years, and mentioning the current legislation (Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005) and the exclusions to its light nuisance clauses (mainly transport-related premises). A review of these exclusions, he said, is imminent. (The CfDS will be very much involved in this review and hopes that, soon, all premises will be covered by the legislation).

All in all, a very useful day of 'networking' and discussion, which the CfDS believes has brought us nearer to the time when firmer control of exterior lighting in the UK will bring us more stars.

Bob Mizon, Coordinator, CfDS



Delegates at the conference. Photo by Pauline Cliff.