

Although I hadn't planned to write about the weather this month, unfortunately it has quite a knack of making the news this winter. One of the benefits of the cold Christmas weather was that it allowed – or perhaps forced - time to sit down, read and reflect - even with the knowledge that there was work to be done! On a personal level there is something useful in being reminded of what can easily be forgotten (although perhaps less so this winter) - that our actions whether personal or professional are ultimately dependent on the natural environment and elements.

The need to have something to look forward to is often more immediate in these raw, early days of January than at any other time of year, and while the January exams still loom, our previously postponed rural field trip to west Cork is now planned towards the end of the month (weather permitting of course), and should be a pleasant change of scene. We are told that this will include a visit to the Mizen and possibly the Beara areas. Although these places are well known to some of us, the trip will provide the opportunity to see these in a new light as we discuss them in terms of landscape character, and hopefully will also get to spend a bit of time looking at the character of our base in Baltimore.

The trip will also hopefully include a trip to a wind farm, which should be interesting. Once something of a rarity, these are now quite a common feature of the west Cork landscape, and having lived in close proximity to one, I can appreciate their fitness to an undulating landscape such as this. When properly planned in the right location and of the right scale, as I believe our local one to be, I am convinced they can be not only benign but a positive addition to rural areas which can offer a real possibility of diversification of rural activity and a very welcome alternative to the practice of selling sites for development. In any event, the visit will no doubt start off some interesting debates.....

On the subject of rural areas and debates, there appears to be, both from discussions within the class and other sources, a perception that planning issues and indeed planners can have an urban bias. While not personally in agreement with this, I can see how this perception may develop, and this, I think, underlines the importance of these field trips in creating familiarity for student planners with both rural and urban environments so that we may be conversant with and understand issues relating to both. In my mind, for more effective planning, urban areas should be seen as existing within - and not independent of - rural areas.

Back firmly in an urban area, and probably in the library, is where most of us will be sitting studying most of the next week – that is, if we can get through the snow and ice.....