

Timothy Crawshaw

Inauguration speech

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1. Thank You and Introduction

Good evening fellow Members, guests, and officers I am delighted to be right here right now at the start of what will be an exciting and challenging year. I am honoured and delighted to be the next President of the RTPI, and **I hope that I can be the best possible representative of over 27,000 Members around the world.** This is an exciting time to be President and, I believe for the reasons I will talk about later, to be a Planner.

Firstly, and importantly, I would like to say thank you to the many people who have supported me thus far and offered encouragement and advice leading up to today.

Thank you to **Wei Yang and Sue Manns** who have both set the bar high in what a President can achieve in the difficult circumstances of the pandemic, your dedication, innovation and energy has inspired me and you have both always been on hand to provide advice and support in my role as Vice President. Sue, it has been great working with you and Wei, there is still loads to do together as a team with our new incoming Vice President **Sue Bridge.**

Thanks also go out to the **officers** of the Institute who have made me feel so welcome and supported over the past year. There has been a lot to learn, and the team have always provided more support than can be accounted for in one speech. **You are a fantastic team and it's great to know you have people who have got your back.**

The **North East Region** are getting a shout out as this is where I have developed my career and had the pleasure of being Chair in 2020. If it wasn't for friends and colleagues and long serving and generous



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volunteers in the North East I would not be standing here today accepting this great honour.

Special thanks go to Kim Walker, regional coordinator who stoically supported me in my role of Chair and also to those Members who **supported my application for Chartered Membership** including Past President Colin Haylock.

Finally, thanks to my **Family** who have supported me in my career and had to put up with my **obsession with towns and cities** for too long. Being a Planner is not always an easy path and the **support of my family has often seen me through difficult times**. I am so pleased that two of my children can be here this evening (**Hello Eve and Beth**) and my love goes to them **and also to my wife and younger members at home in Yorkshire**.

I would like to talk to you now about my priorities for the year ahead and hope that these resonate with you as Members. **Planners are in the business of making the world a better place** and these priorities are my take on **where the action is in 2022** to help to achieve this.

2. Presidential Priorities for 2022

My headline priority for 2022 is health and wellbeing. When I say this, I would like us all to keep in mind not just the wellbeing of people, but also the wellbeing of all beings. Our interconnected, entangled, and messy lives are the stuff of magic and creation.

As we begin to accept what were once fringe concepts into mainstream thinking, **the opportunities to inform our practice as Planners and as global citizens are enormous and fundamentally radical.**

Think for a moment about the profound implication of the realisation that the **traditional subject / object** relationship we have previously had with the environment around us is no longer a refuge where we can separate the wellbeing of the planet from our own wellbeing. Planning, if applied creatively, sensitively, and collaboratively is part of the solution, and we should **feel the responsibility and share the power.**



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To achieve wellbeing in the widest sense we must tackle **climate change**, the biggest existential threat yet to life on earth whilst also ensuring a **just transition** through the **elimination of inequalities** locally and globally.

The incidence of climate related risks and deprivation and poverty are all too common. If you overlay flood risk, urban heat island effect and poor air quality on many towns and cities you will see that these often coincide with poor quality housing, indices of multiple deprivation and an overall lower quality of life and health outcomes.

This was made even more starkly visible through the Pandemic through the incidences of infection and mortality and the long-term consequences of lockdowns and restrictions that are beginning to emerge, **further widening inequalities in life chances and healthy life expectancy.**

So, what can Planners do?

Health and Wellbeing

Planning and health are interlinked. **Planning is a discipline that was born out of the need to tackle gross threats to life** such as organic disease on account of overcrowding, poor quality infrastructure and rapid urbanism. **Something to be consigned to the past?**

The greatest growth globally in terms of urbanisation is in small to medium sized cities of around **500,000** people. Without resources, skills and investment **and CRUCIALLY a plan**, the problems that planning seeks to address will become increasingly common again.

In my professional life I have worked in different countries and across the UK for many **local authorities and municipalities** providing expertise, training and working with communities to understand the place.

Whilst everywhere is somewhere, and understanding this is key to local distinctiveness and identity, there are persistent 'wicked issues' that relate directly to geography, patterns of growth and the consequences of a lack of planning or investment. How many times have you heard of a 10-year difference in life expectancy between the most affluent and deprived wards within a single town or city? **10 summers!** And this 10-year difference is a gross figure that does not factor in healthy life expectancy. This, by anyone's standards is a **waste**



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of human potential and crucially money which is spent on treatment through the **NHS, social care system and criminal justice**. As described earlier basic determinants of health, whether overcrowding, poor quality housing and tragically air quality are still threats to health that can be avoided through **place-based approaches** to health and wellbeing.

Allied to this but nonetheless an important part of what we do is in the **creation of new places**. I was lucky to be a part of the NHS England Healthy New Towns Programme where many of the planning and design related determinants of health were explored and piloted through masterplans and various initiatives.

This is important ongoing work that must not be forgotten as we build back better and meet the challenge of the housing crisis. **However, there is something deeper at stake in terms of tenure and affordability**, and a **market led approach** that is failing to meet targets and the needs of our communities.

There is no shortage of planning permissions that could be built out.

Not everyone has the security of income and a standardised domestic circumstance to buy the family homes that are typically the main product. The form and layout of new housing often meets the need of a narrow demographic and is **reliant on the private car**, this is saving up problems for the future in terms of healthy travel choices, access to goods and services via walking and cycling and **facilities appropriate to early and later life**.

Those with a low or insecure income, or who are starting out, are left with options in the private rented sector, **often in areas of poor-quality housing that has not benefitted from investment at scale**, and so it goes on. **A vicious circle leading to more wicked issues?**

Finally, and relating directly to my current work in the **North East and North Cumbria** through the **Academic Health Science Network and the Integrated Care System** via the **Healthy Happy Places** programme are the links between **urban planning and design and mental health**, explored in place based approaches.

The subtle impact of place on mental health outside of traditional associations with physical activity is presently not well understood. Extend



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this to the neurological impact of a **poor quality, threatening and degraded environment** and the invisible harm of loneliness on health outcomes there is a long way to go to ensure that we are maximising opportunities to create places that **heal and not harm**.

One thing I will say is that **sensitivity and humanised approach** required will be the **next frontier** of understanding that extends beyond notions of beauty and colonial design cues.

Consider for a second that **agoraphobia, associated with the mental health of the individual, could indeed be a consequence of rapid urbanisation and dislocation**. With therapeutic approaches currently focussed on behaviour sets associated with **traditionally male relationships to space** we perhaps need to re-examine the spaces and places we are creating.

Planners need to be at the centre of this work, not just in the creation of new places but in the **good curation of existing settlements** and the **urgent task of retrofitting our neighbourhoods**, not just to respond to climate change and ecological collapse but also to **improve health outcomes**.

This year I will be championing the role of **Chief Planning Officers** and how this role should re-establish the concept of **area-based regeneration** that secures **multiple benefits for people and planet** working closely with public health colleagues as part of the Integrated Care System.

This agenda has a direct relationship with the RTPI's priorities in the Corporate Strategy including HOPE (Heads of Planning Everywhere) and the promotion of **Green Growth Boards**.

Tackling Inequalities

You are probably wondering why behind me is a picture of railway tracks, let me explain...

In many cases what divides the rich from the poor is the **railway**. Being born on the wrong side of the tracks is not a trope of the lyricist, it is an everyday reality. Cast your minds back to this year's Nathaniel Lichfield Lecture where Professor McCann mapped the inequalities spatially across Europe whereby the **disparity between the richest and poorest**



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neighbourhoods in the UK is greater than that across eastern and western Europe.

These structural inequalities are related to a wide range of factors that are planning related and the **urgency of regenerating our existing places is as important as our work in creating new places.**

As a visible symptom of a much wider malaise, **the much-lamented death of the high street**, is most often preceded by a toxic phase of hot food takeaways, betting shops and pawnbrokers that **become the only offer to those who don't have the luxury and independence offered by the private car.**

With many deprived neighbourhoods being characterised by less than 50% car ownership per household and with public transport being expensive and under threat in many places the gap income is exacerbated by the **'poverty premium'** of convenience shopping outside of the **supermarket chains, keycard meters and expensive credit.** Add to this poor access to employment, education and skills and the **wicked issues make an unwelcome return.**

We might recognise some of the actions that we as Planners can undertake every day to stop the rot and begin to turn the curve. **Controlling the proliferation of hot food takeaways is just one important but obvious example that is not universally attempted.** Making interventions in existing places through the regeneration of existing town and district centres is another.

I am constantly inspired by the work of planners working in regeneration and the actions of ambitious local councils that are doing the hard mile and seeking to use their powers and investments to make a difference in deprived areas. I am lucky enough to work with some of them.

Clearly, strong, and visionary leadership needs also to come from politicians, and initiatives such as **Politicians in Planning**, an RTPI initiative, provide a platform where the core skills, values and the discipline of our profession can be shared more widely.

At the moment, a market led approach to housing and the local economy is often further widening the gaps between the rich and the poor. **Layer upon layer of new development around our existing towns and**



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villages without the necessary transport and social infrastructure is saving up problems for future generations to solve.

Think of many new developments, can you find the community hall? Are there shops, healthcare facilities and sufficient **multi-functional public spaces** and green infrastructure available within 10 minutes' walk. Are there sufficient places to sit and rest on the way to these facilities. Whilst these elements are not delivered, **inequalities become baked in and bad habits in terms of travel choices develop.**

There is another way. I talk to many planners who understand the ingredients and the mechanisms to deliver healthy and equitable places, we all need to examine whether our practice is **helping or hindering this whether we work in the public or private sectors.**

Climate Change

I was privileged to join Team RTPI at **COP 26** in Glasgow in 2021. There was so much to learn from the gathering whether from the **scientific community, city leaders or indigenous people** and whilst there is cause for cautious optimism there is still much to do.

Urban planning and cities were not a central issue, being left for the penultimate day. Whilst there a recognition of this at a high level at the UN, there is still a long way to go in establishing integrated urban planning approaches. **Without this integrated approach investments and initiatives will not secure the multiple benefits** that will make them **cost-effective and resilient for the future.**

Planners have the skills and training to embrace the challenge of climate change and they need to be in key strategic roles. Ambitious places are beginning to recognise that climate change is a key strategic issue with **director level roles** created to coordinate strategy and action at a local level. **This individual should in my opinion be a Planner.**

Whether climate change is happening or not and the impact that this will have on planetary life is not in question, the challenge is urgent and whilst there are global and national actions that are essential there is a huge role for **local action and initiatives.**



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It is often **regions, cities and towns that are showing leadership** and a breadth of approaches that reflect the diversity of the people who are making a difference. **I have often noted that leaders have often had a background in planning or have planners working closely with them** and at the **scale of city, region, or town our skills set is key.**

The RTPI has championed the need to **tackle the fundamental issues that will remain should we reduce fixed emissions and create a decarbonised grid** and power network. **This next frontier is spatial**, in the **location and density** of development, the ability to **access affordable public transport**, walking and cycling infrastructure and **local goods, services close to where people live.**

Electric vehicles are seen as the future, however, micro-plastics from high torque motors are poisoning urban and wider ecosystems through poor **air quality and surface water run-off.**

Buildings designed not to respond the micro-climate and orientation are, **decarbonised grid or not, a wasteful squandering of the energy that our children and grandchildren will have to generate. Business as usual with a heat pump attached is not going to be enough.** This is the work of planning and professional Planners and **I am honoured to be the President of an Institute that is dealing with these issues head-on.**

An area of passion and interest for me is **nature-based solutions to climate change.** The natural environment is **working hard for us every day** no matter how much the **mechanistic paradigm** still appears to be on the ascendancy. We must, however, lead a nuanced conversation about how we can **make space for nature** and provide the conditions where the **power of nature can be realised for the benefit of all beings.**

I love trees, don't get me wrong, but there are many other ways that nature can provide habitats, sequester carbon and protect our communities. **Seagrass sequesters carbon 35 times faster than rainforest** and our coastline is our greatest asset in terms of carbon sequestration.

It is probably time to mention the **UN Sustainable Development Goals.** **These are not for somewhere else, they are for here and now.** In addition the New Urban Agenda provides a values based framework



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where **no-one is left behind**, the **benefits of economic growth are fairly distributed** and where the **nature and clean technologies will ensure that our towns and cities are sustainable and liveable for the next generation.**

This is the work of Planners, and the RTPI is the natural home of all of those who are seeking to **make the world a better place through the planning and good management of our places.**

I could not conclude this part of my speech without highlighting **the great work the RTPI is doing in thought leadership through initiatives such as Plan the World We Need** and important research into climate change and planning.

3. Key Themes for 2022

I hope you all agree that **there is much to do** and that our Institute is at the forefront of **innovation, learning and partnership building** that promotes the virtues of planning and supports its membership in achieving amazing things, often in the face of inadequate resources and a **sometimes hostile political environment.**

There are several things that you will hear me talking about in the coming year that I would like to share, and I hope that these resonate with you.

Planning is for Everyone

Whilst **we are the experts** and should be rightly recognised as such, we represent the communities we serve. It is incumbent upon us to provide communities with the **understanding and skills to engage meaningfully with the planning system**, wherever we work.

Planning is as fundamental as food, if we could take up even 5% of the airtime in the media or online with **successful recipes to try**, personalities that inspire and challenge and **fantastic examples of success**, we would transform our towns and cities. **A greater awareness and a demand for better places from communities can only help us in our work.**

We are a Global Network

There is much to learn from each other's context. Planning systems may differ, but the core experience of being a professional planner **often has recognisable characteristics**. Whether that be **negotiating politics, powerful interests or working in a challenging funding environment with few resources** many of us would recognise this and mutual support is important.

As an Institute we are there for our members and our **members should support each other irrespective of the sector we work in**. Equally, it is important to celebrate success and collaboration, **and I would like to celebrate this with our global membership**.

Planners are the Conductors of the Orchestra!

The planned and built environment requires a massive **team effort to make it work for everyone** and create a harmonious whole, **just as in a complex piece of music**. Planners are the people who understand the power and role of each of the sections.

Perhaps the **Brass section** (using a Yorkshire term) are like the **Surveyors**, the engineers are the percussion section, the architects the strings and landscape architects woodwind(?), **I could do on....** but the point being that as Planners we need to understand the **role and power of each** and coordinate the parts to make the whole. **Not all of us are drawn to be composers, although many of us are, and we should recognise the importance of our work in retaining the integrity of the composition...**

4. Closing Remarks

I became a Planner because I want to **make the world a better place**. I want to use my year as President to underline the message that planning is the **means to securing better and crucially, more cost-effective solutions to the challenges of the age**. The consequences of unregulated growth are self-evident, and we can both provide a



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vision for a sustainable future and also protect that which is good for generations to come.

I look forward to meeting many of you in 2022 and hope that we can celebrate our successes and share our experiences. It has been a hard couple of years for many of us, but I believe that 2022 is going to be awesome.