

Dr Wei Yang FRTPI

Valedictory speech

January 19 2022

Good afternoon. I welcome everyone watching online and our guests attending in person.

As I conclude my term as the 107th President of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI), I stand before you truly proud of what we have archived together.

We finished 2021 with a record number of 27,000 members. We made cases for the key role planning profession can play in tackling climate change, delivering the levelling-up agenda, and supporting a green recovery. We won the Best Industry Institute Award in the Black Professionals in Construction awards 2021.

All these achievements come from years of campaign by the RTPI members and dedicated efforts from the RTPI staff team. I would like to begin my valedictory speech by sharing my great appreciation.

First, I want to thank RTPI members across our nations, regions and based overseas. In 2021, as the RTPI President I had the privilege of meeting so many of you in person and virtually. When I look back, your smile, your passion and your dedication to the profession remain vivid in my mind. I have drawn so many inspirations from all of you.

I would also like to send my heartfelt thank you to our amazing staff team led by Chief Executive Victoria Hills. It was a great pleasure working closely with you all. Thank you for your great support during my presidential year.

I also want to take this opportunity to thank Ian Tant our President for 2019, Sue Manns our President for 2020, and our 2022 President Timothy Crawshaw. Working together in the Presidential Team, you have inspired me enormously. Without Ian's championship on Climate Actions, without Sue's championship on Diversity, we won't achieve what we had achieved in 2021.

Many congratulations Sue, for your recognition in the Queen's 2022 New Year Honours list.

And I warmly welcome our Chair of the Board, Sue Bridge joining the Presidential Team as Vice President in 2022.

Last but not least, let me express my sincere gratitude for the support of my husband, Jun Huang. It was a big decision when I decided to stand for election more than two years ago. Without your support, there is no way I can fulfil this role. Thank you very much Jun!

The journey of my RTPI Presidency started from the day when I wrote my Manifesto in summer 2019, as I strongly believe we need a revival of spirit and a modernised planning profession.

My core activities in 2021 were focused on articulating the vital role planning profession can play in tackling the grand challenges of our times, and at the same time creating sustainable, beautiful, and inclusive places for us and for our future generations.

I took the message that 'planning profession has a positive solution to offer - a place-based systems approach' to COP26, Conservative Party Conference, and many events I spoke in the UK and internationally. It was great to have the opportunity to showcase the best planning research and practice.

Planning is a key part of our national survival system! Planning is at the heart of the Government's levelling up agenda! Planning is a powerful leverage to enable a circular economy.

But planners we cannot achieve these alone. At this crucial moment in history, we must break professional barriers and work together with like-minded professionals and good forces in the wider society by forging a collective sense of purpose.

After attending COP26, I had the great privilege of convening more than 20 presidents and chairs from our sister built and natural environment professional institutes. There was a strong consensus on our joint professional responsibilities and the priority of tackling climate change.

We need a stronger voice for built and natural environment professionals collectively. Whatever we do, the relationship between people and nature has to be our first consideration.

I am delighted to report that I have drafted a joint Charter based on the discussion. I will seek further input and endorsement from leaders of our sister institutes to demonstrate our joint commitments to deliver a zero-carbon and prosperous future.

Strengthening international collaboration on capacity building is a mission close to my heart. In March 2021, I had the privilege to launch the new RTPI International Strategy.

It was a great pleasure meeting regularly with our international sister institutes' Presidents and CEOs through the Global Planners Network

during 2021. I have a strong sensation that we face so many similar challenges around the world.

Together we are stronger, Planners, we need to be united globally!

During 2021, **I had the privilege of visiting all the RTPI nations and regions in person**, apart from Ireland and Northern Ireland, which I only visited virtually due to travel complications. It felt like traveling through time and history - Lincoln, Northallerton, New Lanark, the National Forest, Becontree Estate, Park Hill regeneration, Redbridge, Waltham Forest, Milton Keynes, rural Kent, Ashford, Manchester, Plymouth, Glasgow, Gateshead, Cardiff, Rugby, Bracknell – just name a few.

I had so many proud and special moments - when I spoke to a full chamber of councillors about the importance of the planning profession, when so many Council Leaders told me that how much they appreciated the contributions from their planning colleagues; when I officially congratulate Welwyn Garden City's Centenary on behalf of the RTPI; and when I planted a cherry tree at Letchworth Garden City - I wish you were there, so I shared those special moments through my President's blog and my social media channels with everyone. I hope you felt as proud as I was.

I also clearly heard our members' frustration on planning resource and capacity. I have reflected this issue whenever I could. **Campaigning for a well-resource planning profession** is one of RTPI's on-going priorities. I will certainly carry on supporting it.

In 2021, as the RTPI President, another joy for me was meeting our talented young planners and students.

As I outlined in my Manifesto, **I am keen to engage young planners, and to adopt new technologies to empower the modernisation of the planning profession.**

There is an urgent need for the planning profession to develop more skills and capacities, to ensure we are future proofed to cultivate interdisciplinary leaders and enablers, and to attract future talents.

In 2021, as the RTPI President, I chaired three RTPI General Assembly debates on the future of the planning profession. Leadership skills, digital and data analytic skills, multidisciplinary skills, public/private cooperation and social media skills were identified by the GA members as key future skills which planners should have.

In February 2021, I had the privilege of setting up an independent Digital Task Force for Planning with Professor Michael Batty aiming to raise awareness about the skills and expertise needed to empower the planning profession in the digital age.



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It is vital that we recognise spatial planning as an important applied science discipline, which interconnects social, environmental, and behavioural science. The government has committed to increasing science and innovation funding to £20 billion by 2024-2025 to ensure science and ideas turn into solutions for public good. **I believe enormous potentials can be unlocked if spatial planning can be invested as an applied science discipline of national significance.**

The greatest innovation needed in spatial planning is a whole approach change enabled by digital technology and bigdata.

Planners do not need to be expert at everything but being digitally enabled would allow us to link our unique place-based skillset with other professions' expertise to facilitate democratic and evidence-based decision-making process.

Through the work of the Digital Task Force, we spoke with more than 400 planners and stakeholders and run extensive consultations. Professor Michael Batty and I organised over 100 virtual meetings and workshops last year. I was touched by the overwhelming support from our members and other stakeholders.

Our report, ***A Digital Future for Planning – Spatial Planning Reimagined*** will be launched in early February. I hope it can help to unlock the full potential of the planning profession in the digital era and help to develop a digitally enabled new approach to spatial planning.

Here I want to express my great gratitude to Professor Michael Batty for forming and leading the Task Force with me. From the bottom of my heart, I would also like to thank our panel members, and everyone supported our work.

Finally, to conclude my presidential year, it is my privilege to announce **the 2021 President's Special Award.**

I am delighted to present the Award to the **Chairs of all RTPI Nations and Regions for 2021**, and **Chairs of RTPI National and Regional Young Planner Committees for 2021.**

I would like to express my great gratitude to all of you. Despite the constraints caused by the Pandemic, you have done a fantastic job to keep our members engaged and inspired. Your integrity and dedication have made a huge difference. I would like to say 'Thank You' on behalf of all RTPI members.

Once again, I would like to thank everyone supported me during my presidential year. To serve as President of the Royal Town Planning Institute has been an honour beyond description. Thank you for giving me this privilege to represent the planning profession I love dearly.



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I wish our 2022 President Timothy Crawshaw have a very successful year. Tim with your passion, creativity and flair, I am sure you will be an amazing president. I wish you all the very best in 2022.

**I have no doubt the heyday of the planning profession is coming.
Let's grab it - the Future is in our hands!**