**RTPI** Scotland
Royal Town Planning Institute
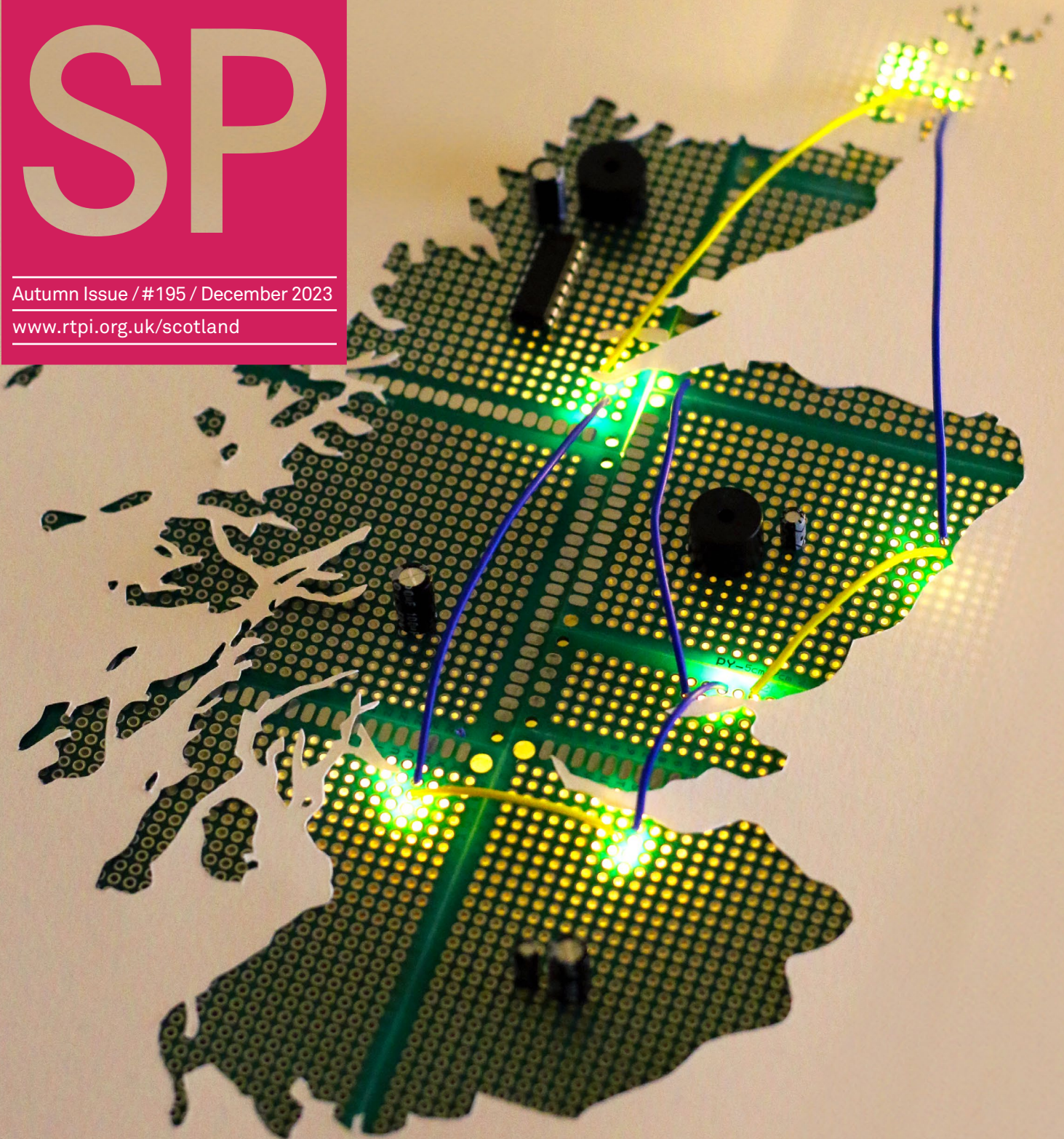
# Delivering a digital future for planning

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## Contents

## Editorial

I'm delighted to be introducing this issue of the Scottish Planner – my first as Director for Scotland. I've had a wonderfully warm welcome in the Institute, and I'm really enjoying settling in and getting up to speed on the detailed work happening around NPF4 and digital skills, plus the Institute's members, volunteers and events across the country.

The theme of this issue is digital planning, revisiting our successful national conference in October. Like many others I wasn't able to make the Conference this year, and I know from social media that there was quite a buzz about the day, so I'll be reading from cover to cover to catch up on the things I missed. While the discussions of change and new technologies may seem a bit daunting, I doubt many of us would go back to the systems that were in place when our careers began. I recall the story from my student days when a city council moved offices but didn't consider the weight of the planning archive [then stored on paper] and had to leave the documents in the old office while the floor of the new department was reinforced!

Whatever our own feelings about new technologies, change is inevitable and will bring challenges as well as benefits. I hope our profession can meet these opportunities with enthusiasm and imagination. There's certainly a lot to learn, and I've a feeling I won't be the only one adding some elements of digital planning to my CPD plans for 2024.

With my very best wishes for a happy and healthy Christmas and New Year. I hope our paths cross soon.

**Caroline Brown**
Director for Scotland, Ireland,
and English Regions

# Convenor's Comments:
# Delivering a Digital Future for Planning



**Kirsty Macari,** FRTPI, RTPI Scotland Convenor, Co-Head of Undergraduate (Architecture & Urban Planning/ Contemporary Art Practice) at DJCAD, University of Dundee, reflects back on this year's RTPI Scotland Annual Conference which explored the challenges and opportunities of delivering a digital future for planning.

**Kirsty Macari**, Scotland Convenor, Co-Head of Undergraduate (Architecture & Urban Planning/ Contemporary Art Practice) at DJCAD, University of Dundee

I am delighted to be able to write my final Convenor's Comments with a focus on digital planning and to bring a wide selection of the excellent discussions and learning points from the sold out Scottish Planning Conference held in October in Dundee to the Scottish Planner audience.

I encourage you to work your way through this edition of Scottish Planner but it is worth highlighting that I certainly had a key priority in ensuring the afternoon was a way to talk, think and test ways of how and where digital can support our planning system of the future.

I was so pleased to see great engagement in each of the sessions. These sessions also supported the five Missions set by Scottish Government. The scene was set by Liz Pringle, Head of Digital Planning (Scottish Government) who took the audience through Scotland's Digital Transformation.

> " Digital can support performance, engagement and efficiency but in order to do that it will require investment, both time and financially. We must continue to promote the holistic value of planning not just the cost of delivering the services that we do."

Liz said, "the Programme is a long-term commitment, with the team working to lay strong foundations and outcomes for each of the five Missions covering Data, Tech, Culture, Engagement and Innovation, to help the public and private sector."

We are clearly at a variety of stages in our digital journeys but our ability to support each other came through loud and clear along with our aspirations to look for the "digital carrots".

There are conversations continuing beyond the day which helps reassure me that we pitched the tone and topic well.

Digital can support performance, engagement and efficiency but in order to do that it will require investment, both time and financially. We must continue to promote the holistic value of planning not just the cost of delivering the services that we do.

Education of ourselves and others will continue to be key. As they say, everyday is a school day. I hope that through peer learning, mentoring and reverse mentoring as well as supported and accessible CPD opportunities we can embrace our respective digital learning journeys.

As this is my last Convenor's Comment I am proud to have supported the conversations and actions towards both digital and education. Although I handover the "bunnet" at the end of the year I will continue to champion and disrupt across these themes. I encourage you to continue to engage with me and the Institute and ensure that we can provide you with the support you need.

Wishing you all a cosy and relaxing festive period, we deserve it. I look forward to an equally exciting 2024. ■

## Article:
# Looking into the digital future as a young planner

**Ciaran Davidson,** Student Member of the RTPI and the current Intern Project Officer at RTPI Scotland, reflects on digital planning through his placement experience at The City of Edinburgh Council and his concluding year of studies.

Digital planning means different things to different people. Coming from a student and local authority background, I envision a mass of attractively visualised data, through maps, infographics, all integrated into visually appealing and accessible software. For others, such as at planning consultancies, digital could mean a streamlined application process, where submissions, updates, and progress can be managed more efficiently and conveniently. For the public, it may mean a streamlined consultation process that is not only more effective, but that also has a wider reach in areas where it hasn't been able to achieve its fullest potential.

Starting out as a student in planning, I had few expectations of what being a planner meant. All I knew was that I loved maps, cities, and problem solving – all of which are common attributes of a prospective planner. As I progressed through my studies, I, and many others began to create very grand aspirations of what our future careers as planners would look like. Staring across a table of a grand masterplan, zoning mass

areas of a city, and overseeing monumental construction sites are just a few of the images that the content of my course inspired.

This image was completely rewritten after my yearlong placement as a planner at The City of Edinburgh Council. I spent part of my time with Development Planning and the other part as a full-time officer with Development Management. The experience was immensely valuable, and I was able to take away such an incredible depth of information on the way in which the city I grew up in has developed.

The most profound and relevant discovery was the way in which the planning system operates. Planning is a process, and often a slow one. A process that involves so many different interests and actors all working towards enabling development within a jurisdiction. What was perhaps the biggest surprise was that while Development Planning informs the future of a city, it is largely achieved through the way that Development Management controls development. This was not a disappointing discovery, but it was a

**Ciaran Davidson,** Student Member of the RTPI and the current Intern Project Officer at RTPI Scotland

bit of a kick in the gut to someone who had perhaps accidentally created an image of his future to family and friends as a Baron Haussmann like figure, who would have immense weight towards the development of cityscapes through plopping buildings and roads on a map of a city.

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**"The opportunities presented at the conference informed me on so many of the possibilities for further digital innovation to be embedded within the planning system to the benefit of planners and wider society. It was encouraging to see such a strong incentive by the Scottish Government towards digital planning."**

University projects that intend to emulate the work of a planner, by nature, differ so immensely to the actual nature of the way in which planning operates in Scotland. Designing a Seafield Masterplan or an underground logistics network for Edinburgh are engaging and rewarding tasks, yet they do not present the actual reality for how such projects would materialise in a real-world context. My experience has shown me that such objectives are not just difficult to deliver but are held back by a system that has been slow to innovate in the wake of technological advancement. It has been my perception that while planning is technically "digital", the extent this exists at local authorities is primarily through digitising formerly physical items, with no real exploration into what this digital presence can bring.

As a consequence, planning officers will often find themselves sifting through the unappealing user interface of a Uniform-like software, delving through PDFs of policy and plans, and responding to endless streams of emails. This can be very rewarding; however, it can also feel quite contrived and disconnected, with the interfaces and the information required seeming to slow down the process, resulting in monotony as opposed to increased efficiency.

Leaning very strongly into the 'young' bracket of 'young planner', I spend much of my spare time playing video games. Though this is common these days, what stands out to me is the fact that much of this time is spent playing city planning games such as Cities Skylines or SimCity. I struggle to imagine many other professions where your relaxation time amounts to playing a simulation of your workday. While these games essentially sum-up an entire planning service in the hands of the player (from an American perspective too), I have always felt there are aspects of these games which the Scottish planning system could learn from. Data on your city is presented to you in an extremely detailed and visual means, which allows you to make your decisions with absolutely every variable and fact immediately presented to you. It is not only visually appealing to the planner but is so vital towards decision making and future planning of a city.

I had considered that the possibility of such aspects being present within a planning service were pipedreams that could never materialise until I attended RTPI Scotland's 2023 Annual Conference and discovered that the scope for what digital planning could

bring is so wide and open that there are really no limits provided there is adequate resourcing and interest.

My understanding of digital planning before the conference was quite limited. I had often considered that the transition from paper to laptop basically constituted the transfer to digital. Although there are plenty of examples of 3rd-party software planners use to conduct their work, I haven't seen a large degree of integration of the software into services. I personally have overused Google Earth's 3D mode and Google Street View to death throughout all my university projects and every single Listed Building Consent that I was assigned at The City of Edinburgh Council. I found it to be an invaluable tool, one which almost every planner seemed to rely on. Yet there were no formal integrations of the tools into the service, despite the fact it can save valuable time and resources.

The opportunities presented at the conference informed me on so many of the possibilities for further digital innovation to be embedded within the planning system to the benefit of planners and wider society. It was encouraging to see such a strong incentive by the Scottish Government towards digital planning.

Despite having quite an underdeveloped knowledge on digital planning, my main takeaway from the conference was that there are a lot of experienced and passionate people behind the shift towards digital that have open and enthusiastic expectations for what digital will be able to give to planning in Scotland. Aspects such as the prototyped planning application software for easily viewing applications, visual data presentations, and streamlined processes not only presents an ease of the planning process but would allow for planners to have a much more engaging and informed work.

Digital planning, to me, is the bridge between the existing process and all the prospective and existing digital innovations. It also represents a way in which some of my and my fellow student planners' aspirational notions of planning could be realised within realistic work expectations.

In an age of exponential software, UI, and hardware developments, I think there is a massive call to start bringing this into planning, and I am glad to see that there are already so many initiatives in place to make this a reality. Though I am still fresh in the planning world, my hope is that through the course of my career, I will witness the emergence of a revolutionary planning system that completely eclipses the capabilities of everything that came before it. ∎

# Q&A
# Public Enquiries

**Sarah Purves MRTPI,** Planner at Fife Council and RTPI Scotland's Young Planner of the year, answers our questions.



**Sarah Purves MRTPI,** Planner at Fife Council and RTPI Scotland's Young Planner of the year

**1 Who has been the biggest inspiration or influence on your career and why?**

My first manager has been a big inspiration for me as he started his career in a similar way, with no formal planning education. He has worked his way through the Service and is now in a Planning Lead Officer position. This inspired me to apply to the University of Dundee to gain the qualifications I needed to become a planner. I achieved my planning degree whilst working part-time for Fife Council's Planning Service. I am grateful for the opportunities and support I received throughout this time and continue to receive, from colleagues, friends and family.



Sarah Purves being awarded Scottish Young Planner of the Year by Joe FitzPatrick MSP at the RTPI Scotland Awards for Planning Excellence Ceremony in Glasgow

**2 What do you feel is the biggest issue facing planners and planning at the moment?**

The lack of planners is a major issue. All the other challenges we face in the profession will not be overcome without the people and knowledge in place to solve them. The Future Planners Report noted that approximately 700 new staff members will be required over the next 10-15 years to fill the gaps in Planning, which highlights the scale of the problem. However, RTPI Scotland are actively working towards apprenticeship schemes, as is common in other parts of the UK, which I think will help encourage young people into the profession. This is an attractive route as you can learn on the job and receive an income, all while gaining the qualifications needed to be a planner.

**3 Why is planning important?**

Planning impacts everyone in some way. As such, planners have the difficult job of carefully balancing social, economic and environmental needs to ensure that decisions are made in the public interest. Nonetheless, the more challenging cases are often the most rewarding. When you see developments being progressed on site, this is when the hard work of everybody involved pays off and the positive difference developments can make to a place and its people are realised.

**4 Where do you think best exemplifies planning's role in creating great places for people?**

I have always been interested in regeneration projects. I like to see brownfield sites and existing buildings being repurposed and reused. One of my key takeaways from this year's Young Planners Conference in Birmingham was the need for good quality sustainable buildings which have the ability to be repurposed throughout many lifetimes.

This can have a positive impact in response to the climate and nature crises, by making best use of embodied carbon and brownfield land. There are also various social and economic benefits to regeneration, as communities tend to take ownership of existing places which are of historic/cultural importance. Overall, these types of projects tend to create great liveable places.

> "One of my key takeaways from this year's Young Planners Conference in Birmingham was the need for good quality sustainable buildings which have the ability to be repurposed throughout many lifetimes"

**5 What steps do you believe should be taken to encourage and support young people to embark and continue on a planning career and why?**

I have represented the profession at local career fairs and schools to help spread the word about planning as a profession, which I think has a big impact. When I first started in planning, I hadn't heard of the profession or considered it as a career path, but I think if I was aware of it, I would have become involved sooner. There are lots of ways to involve and engage young people, by using maps, sketches and other interactive ways to keep it fun and interesting. ■

# Immaterial Considerations

## An irreverent look at the world of planning...

### Have a planner Christmas!

Given the time of year, we couldn't resist looking for the perfect Christmas gift for the town planner or planning enthusiast in your life. Much to our delight, there are quite a few options out there, but the ones that caught our attention include this framed definition of "town planner" advertised on Etsy.

And a stylish pair of socks advertised on Redbubble.com which enable the wearer to parade some sage advice: Don't argue with the town planner!

Get these on your Christmas list while there's still time...



TOWN PLANNER

[noun]

1. The art of shaping and guiding the physical growth of a town or city, while somehow managing to maintain positive relationships with all stakeholders involved.

2. Also known as the impossible.

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### Britain's Oldest Door

Have you ever wondered where you can find Britain's oldest door?

Well the answer (and the door itself) lies in Westminster Abbey – in the vestibule leading to the Chapter House to be exact. Dated in 2005 using a process called dendrochronology, it was discovered that the wood was felled after 1032 AD and the door itself was constructed in the 1050s. You can find out more interesting facts about this door on Westminster Abbey's website

### Where did you get that Bru!

One of our colleagues snapped this picture in Glasgow during a recent excursion. Although we question its veracity, it does make for a good read while wandering through the City. You can find out more about the Glasgow Information and Kultural Identity Taskforce on their website.
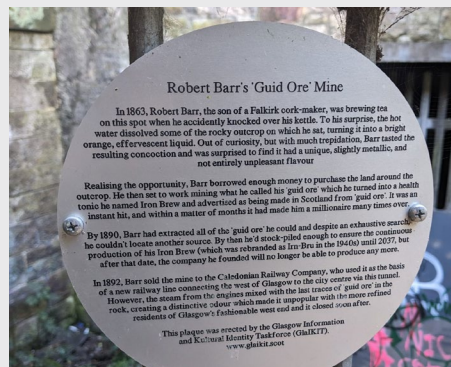
### Dessert Anyone?

Did you ever think that pastry chefs would need town planning skills?

We didn't...until we came across I dolci di Gulliver's desserts. From ski slopes to vast oceans to farming land, these are definitely creations that we feel require planning protection. Check it out on Instagram. ■

# In Focus:
# Helping planning authorities adopt a place-based collaborative approach to Local Development Plan preparations

**Kate Givan MRTPI,** Principal Design Officer at Architecture and Design Scotland

**Kate Givan MRTPI,** Principal Design Officer at Architecture and Design Scotland, explores how Architecture and Design Scotland is supporting partners to incorporate place-based approaches into planning.

Architecture and Design Scotland is providing a new resource package to help Scottish planning authorities gather evidence for new-style Local Development Plans (LDPs). This package is being offered following significant interest in the Key Agencies Group (KAG) Collaborative LDP pilot programme.

National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) sets out an ambitious national policy framework that calls for radical change from all sectors to tackle challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and inequalities. Guidance for new-style LDPs highlights the crucial role they play in shaping the delivery of sustainable, liveable, and productive places to address these complex challenges.

So how can planning authorities take a proportionate and meaningful approach to gathering the evidence needed to apply this new policy and guidance in their local areas?

At Architecture and Design Scotland, we believe that the answer lies in adopting a place-based collaborative approach.

Early LDP preparations provide an ideal opportunity to bring together those responsible for investing, providing services, and maintaining assets in a place, to work and plan together alongside communities to implement change.

### KAG Collaborative LDP Offer

Recognising the opportunities and challenges faced by planning authorities in implementing new policy and guidance, KAG launched the Collaborative LDP offer in early 2023. This offer invited planning authorities across Scotland to express interest in receiving support. From 22 applications, six authorities were chosen for the pilot work:

- Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (Western Isles)
- Dundee
- Fife
- Highland
- Midlothian
- Renfrewshire

The selected authorities were chosen for their diverse characteristics, offering a rich base to draw out learning for the benefit of other places.

### About the offer

The planning authorities are being supported through key stages in the evidence gathering process including:

- Establishing place-based collaborative approach with project and corporate teams
- Collective mapping and analysis of place-based evidence
- Developing a place-based evidence report

We are leading the focused support alongside KAG partners, including Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Historic Environment Scotland, NatureScot, Scottish Water, Transport Scotland, and Public Health Scotland.

### Sharing learning for the benefit of others

KAG was delighted by the high level of interest in the pilot offer. To support others to apply a similar approach, Architecture and Design Scotland has published the first part of a new resource package, Place skills for plan-making, which you can view on our website here: https://www.ads.org.uk/resource/place-skills-plan-making

Aligned with recent policy and legislation changes, this package provides good practice steps, templates, and case studies to help apply key elements of KAG pilot approach. While many of the steps will be familiar to those involved in LDPs, the greater emphasis on building collaborative support and being more place-focused at an early stage is expected to be useful for all.

### Benefits of a place-based collaborative approach

Early and ongoing support for the pilot authorities has yielded a positive response and recognition of initial impacts.

Feedback on the benefits of working this way include the sharing of expertise, knowledge and skills; understanding of opportunities to better align strategies, plans, activities and investments for community benefit; and reducing boundaries to collaboration that will support the next stages of the plan process.

The pilot programme demonstrates the effectiveness of a place-based collaborative approach in LDP preparations and provides valuable insights for other planning authorities.

*"[...] We appreciated all of your input and time on this process and we are not discouraged, but are more confident in our own abilities to produce a more deliverable Plan." – Feedback from pilot authority*

The support is expected to continue into 2024, and you can subscribe to our newsletter for the latest updates. ∎

# In Practice:

# The National Planning Improvement Champion – a new way of supporting a high performing planning system

**Craig McLaren FRTPI,** National Planning Improvement Champion, Improvement Service, discusses his plans to support those involved in planning to create a high performing planning system.

**Craig McLaren FRTPI,**
National Planning
Improvement
Champion,
Improvement Service

The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 formalised how to measure planning authorities' performance and how to support them to improve. Planning authorities will now be obliged to "prepare a report on the performance of their functions" which is to be submitted to Ministers and published. This builds upon the work previously taken forward

> "The often-contested nature of the planning process means that there are a range of organisations and people as stakeholders, often with differing perspectives and views on what constitutes success. This makes it particularly important to ensure that these voices can contribute to the discussion."

by Heads of Planning Scotland (HOPS) where planning authorities voluntarily published a Planning Performance Framework (PPF) each year, which included a number of key markers that Scottish Government graded. Allied to this, the Act introduced a National Planning Improvement Champion whose role is to monitor the performance of planning authorities and to provide advice to them (and others considered appropriate) in relation to what steps might be taken to improve.

I took up the Champion role in September

and am based within the Improvement Service. The Champion approach is a creative and relatively new way of working that will support those involved in planning to create a high performing planning system, framing good performance in the context of outcomes. There are no sanctions or powers to force people to do things, but rather an approach that will be built upon 'communication and convening'. In doing this I have three key roles.

Firstly, I will act as a 'critical friend' for planning authorities by supporting them to self-assess their performance, to identify areas for improvement and to act on these. This involves developing a new national planning improvement framework building on the best bits of the existing PPFs and the lessons learned from this approach. Key to this will be agreeing what the indicators of good performance should be and how they can be measured, and this will be informed by my recent 'call for ideas' which asked for thoughts on what a high performing planning authority looks like. Important to this will be exploring how to measure the outcomes planning provides through establishing a mixture of qualitative and quantitative indicators. This self-assessment process will be robust and we are exploring how I – and perhaps others – can provide the critical friend role as part of this. I also believe that it is important that the new framework can allow planning authorities to not only ask questions of

themselves but also encourage conversations between them and other functions that they depend upon to identify what is and isn't working well. Hopefully we can decide by the end of December on what practicably can be introduced in the 2024/25 year and thereafter.

My second role is to identify and evidence the strategic challenges affecting the planning system across the country and to act as a broker by bringing different stakeholders together to establish what the issues are, what can be done about them and who needs to do what. The often-contested nature of the planning process means that there are a range of organisations and people as stakeholders, often with differing perspectives and views on what constitutes success. This makes it particularly important to ensure that these voices can contribute to the discussion.

And thirdly, I will aim to support planners to identify, share and apply good practice. There is already a wealth of good practice gathered through awards, peer review and assessment tools such as the PPFs, but the challenge will be to establish a culture that embeds the idea of pulling out learning, sharing it and using it to support changes in the way organisations work. It also requires an infrastructure to support this coordination and to do this I believe we need to make better use of what we have. ■

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## Article:
# Embracing technology in Scotland's Planning system

**Euan Mills,** urban designer, digital specialist and co-founder of Blocktype, discusses why the digital transformation of our planning system is essential to address this century's global challenges .

**Euan Mills,**
Urban Designer,
Digital Specialists
and co-founder of
Blocktype

The planning of human settlements is central to many of the major global challenges we face over the next century. Issues such as climate change, rapidly changing demographics, housing shortages, and the evolving nature of work due to technological advancements are all closely linked to the places we live and work.

Yet, despite our best efforts, the planning system today struggles to meet even the current challenges, let alone those on the horizon. We struggle to ensure the right types of homes are built in the right places, to build to a standard that promotes health and wellbeing, and to a level of sustainability that doesn't exacerbate the damage we have done to the climate over the last century.

The reason for many of these shortcomings does not lie solely with the planning system. How we plan is heavily influenced by our existing regulatory framework, and market forces, which are both hugely influential in how our built environment is shaped. But

the planning system plays a central role, and there is a lot we can do better to make it more efficient, transparent and consistent. This is where technology can help. It won't be the silver bullet that fixes all of our problems, but it will shift the dial in the right direction. Not making use of the technologies and tools we have at our disposal today, is akin to running a railway network today, without using electricity.

The power of internet-era technologies is unprecedented. Many claim that the web is the single most influential invention of our civilization. More transformative than the printing press, electricity and the combustion engine. Yet, the impact it's had on civilization so far is only the tip of the iceberg. The emergence of various forms of Artificial Intelligence will make the changes we've seen so far seem quaint in comparison, and these changes are less than a decade away.

Over the last two decades the planning system has evolved from one where boxes



Euan Mills presenting at RTP|
Scotland's Annual Conference

of planning reports were couriered to local authority departments and most communication happened via letters; to one where all this information can now be emailed and saved on a USB stick. However, we have not adopted the fundamental changes internet-era technologies make possible.

Tens of thousands of planning applications are submitted every year in Scotland. Each loaded with information justifying and responding to a long list of policies, guidance and legislation published by government, local planning authorities and others. These applications are accompanied by a multitude of statements and assessments made up of hundreds of pages of text and tables each, not to mention a plethora of drawings, diagrams and renderings produced by architects. Yet, all this hugely valuable information is rendered useless, by being turned into semi-analogue PDF files, which are not very accessible to humans, let alone machines.

The irony is that much of this information is originally produced as machine-readable data at first. Whether it's data for environmental impacts, viability or footfall, or architectural CAD drawings, all are initially created as machine-readable information. Not only is this a wasted opportunity to create a significant body of data to inform future policy, it is also incredibly inefficient. Nothing exemplifies this more than the time spent by local authorities re-tracing planning application boundaries from PDF location plans that were originally created in CAD or GIS.

The same issue can also be seen in the production of planning policy. We laboriously search and collate evidence data, which is usually years out of date, to create evidence reports. We then write policies in language which can be widely open to interpretation and publish them in documents which are hundreds of pages long, in the same inaccessible format as our planning applications. Not only does this make them hard to find online, they are also hard to read on our most common devices, and are pretty much inaccessible for anyone who depends on screen readers or other accessibility devices.

This lack of easy access to planning information creates three significant issues: A reliance on an industry of consultants, experts in finding the most recent and relevant policy documents and knowing how they tend to be interpreted. It reinforces the



information asymmetries between a small number of large developers and the many small and medium-sized actors, impacting the diversity and makeup of property developers in the market. Lastly, it makes it hard for non-professionals and local communities to understand what can be built where, creating suspicion and opposition towards developers and planning authorities.

In response to this, we are starting to see the private technology sector becoming the gatekeepers of easy-to-find planning information. A range of savvy entrepreneurs are building easy-to-use software that gives you the information you need at the click of a button. From planning policy to planning decision. They do this by scraping local authority websites, standardising data, and carefully designing easy-to-use intuitive interfaces. All this is made available to anyone who can pay.

But we are also seeing the seed of change in the public sector. The UK government now has a dedicated team working on the digital transformation of the planning system in England. They have been funding start-ups, local authorities, building digital infrastructure and putting legislation in place. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act creates the legal framework to mandate that local authorities publish data openly and to nationally set standards, as well as giving them the power to ask for data to these standards from other bodies. The newly published data platform (planning.data.gov.uk) aggregates, indexes and publishes local authority planning information, making it easy for others to consume it on a national scale. A newly formed community of Planning Authorities, under the banner of Open Digital Planning, dissatisfied with planning software, are re-designing both application and back office systems.

Closer to home, the Scottish government also has an ambitious programme of digital transformation of the planning system. Here, the opportunity is even bigger, as some of the key infrastructure used to process planning applications is still in the hands of the public sector, unlike in England, where the national system to process planning applications was privatised.

This public sector-led innovation may not seem much in comparison to the exciting and glamorous technological advancements of artificial intelligence, augmented reality or 3D visualisations, but they create the very foundations for these and other cutting-edge innovations to flourish.

However, to avoid the problems of current technological adoption, like dependence on large, monolithic software systems and monopolistic and anti-competitive licensing and features, it's essential that as we adopt new technologies for planning we follow a few key principles: Above all, we need to ensure that planning data is made freely and openly available to anyone. Open data leads to better

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"The digital transformation of our planning system is crucial for it to better address global challenges like climate change, demographic shifts, and housing shortages."

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quality data, more innovation, and increased economic productivity. It also prevents software lock-ins, when moving between systems. We need to ensure that software is built to be compatible and interchangeable with others, using open APIs and short licensing requirements.

Fortunately, these ideas aren't new to planning. Planning legislation in Scotland already ensures we make most information available to the public. This is now also further emboldened by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act which unambiguously sets out the importance of making planning data available "under an approved open licence", and creating the power of "restricting or preventing a relevant planning authority from using software" which is not making their data open to the wider market.

The digital transformation of our planning system is crucial for it to better address global challenges like climate change, demographic shifts, and housing shortages. However, this transformation must be guided by principles of openness to avoid the pitfalls of current technological adoption. The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act, with its emphasis on open licensing, marks a hopeful step in this direction. All we need to do now is embrace these principles, and take the first steps towards creating a more efficient, transparent, and inclusive planning system, and start making use of some of the incredible technologies we have at our disposal today. ∎
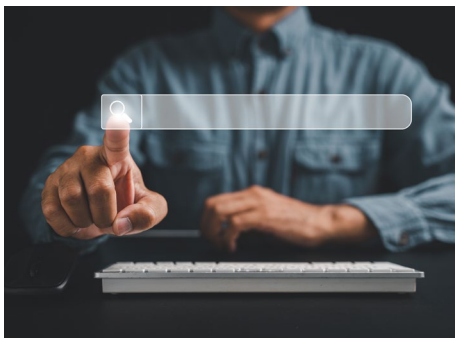
# Article:
# Planning disrupters



**Ross McFarlane,**
Student,
University of Dundee



**James Hewitt,**
Vice-Chair Scottish
Young Planners
Network

As part of the RTPI Scotland Conference programme, we heard from three Young Planners – Sarah Purves (Scottish Young Planner of the Year), Ross McFarlane (Student, University of Dundee) and James Hewitt (Vice-Chair Scottish Young Planners Network) on how Young Planners can serve as Disruptors and Champions. This article is a reflection of the day, and key takeaways, from **Ross** and **James**.

## Ross

As a young, student planner, attending the RTPI Scotland Conference for the first time, it was an eye-opening and incredibly interesting experience. Walking in with my fellow student, or recently graduated, planners, it was easy to feel the infamous 'imposters syndrome' amongst all the accomplished planners in the room, especially as someone speaking at the event for the first time. However, this feeling didn't last long and left me with several key takeaways from the event.

Speaking in the session on young planners as champions and disruptors in this new digital age, I talked from a student's perspective about how the Government's digital planning strategy is a great start to properly utilising the digital world to improve Scotland's planning system. However, I think it is key that, if young planners are to champion digital planning, the skills and tools to utilise its potential are taught before going out into professional practice. This will allow planning to stay ahead of the digital curve, reacting to, and incorporating, new tools safely to help reach the government's aims. Teaching can also be used to make young planners aware of the proposed champions and disruptors networks, like how I was made aware of the young planner's network during my time at university. Through teaching digital skills and making young planners aware of the resources and networks available to them, it will fully engrain the digital transformation that the government hopes to achieve.

As well as this, I highlighted that young planners are equipped with a great knowledge of digital tools already out there such as social media, something overlooked in the government's strategy. This knowledge could be used by young planners to show off the good work planners do, provide a place for the public to interact, engage, and consult with planning, as well as advertise planning programmes, networks, and projects, all whilst increasing awareness, and getting young people interested in the subject. I gave examples of social media accounts which have been credited with doing just that, being able to "demystify the field of urban planning itself, which has long been siloed, and encourage new voices to enter" (Bloomberg, 2023). Social media could be championed by young planners to move people away from a perception of an industry dominated by politics and inconvenience, to one of engagement, collaboration, impactful-ness, and creativity.

Giving a talk, in part, on the impact social media can have as a digital tool in the planning world, it was again easy for me to feel nervous about doing the classic

"The eagerness and openness to change and evolve with digital planning was evident with the number of discussions I had and the talks I attended. It felt like everyone was on the same page and was actively rooting for young planners to be the champions and disruptors digital planning needs to be successful."



Ross McFarlane receiving Student Planner of the Year Award from Kirsty Macari, RTPI Scotland Convenor, at the RTPI Scotland Annual Conference

young person thing by talking about social media. However, the reaction I got was one of openness and willingness to listen and learn more about it. This willingness to listen and learn wasn't just felt by me but was a key theme throughout the session and conference. The eagerness and openness to change and evolve with digital planning was evident with the number of discussions I had and the talks I attended. It felt like everyone was on the same page and was actively rooting for young planners to be the champions and disruptors digital planning needs to be successful. This, I believe, sets this digital transformation in good stead.

The number of these student and young planners who attended was great to see. This emphasised the care and passion there is for the subject and the willingness to learn and be those digital champions and disruptors the session focused on. Through giving a voice to student and young planners like me, James, and Sarah it creates a connection with government, companies, and other planners, opening doors to collaboration and opportunities which might not have been otherwise possible. Therefore, it is key in my opinion that these platforms continue to be given as it is the young planners of today who will face up this digital age for planning in Scotland.

### James

I was invited to participate in the Panel session through my role as Vice-Chair of the Scottish Young Planners Network – and what an experience it was. As a panel, Sarah, Ross and I are all unified in being Young Planners – but we are also each at a different stage of 'Young Planner' careers.

Listening to Sarah's journey into the profession, beginning through a trainee planning assistant internship, really provided a different perspective on who we are as a profession, and how they can join us here. But on a more topical side (Delivering a Digital Future for Planning) the mentions of a scale-ruler and mountains of paper plans at the beginning of her career were reassuringly familiar to my own experience when starting out.

Whilst Ross has summed up his own experience as part of this article, I couldn't help but be impressed at the insight he showed when talking about not only the power of social media, but the need for training to unlock its potential.

When I was asked to speak at this session and given the topic of Young Planners as Disruptors and Champions, I began to reflect why I was asked to be there – and it was through my participation in the Scottish Young Planners Network. I deliberately leant away from hard skills and technical innovation – we'd already heard from so many people, so much more qualified than myself to speak on the potential of AI and big data. Rather I focused on the role of the individual as a Disruptor and Champion. I reflected on the workforce challenges facing the profession, and how this creates a massive opportunity to unlock new skills through recruitment from a broader talent pool. However, we will only capture this opportunity if we Champion those individuals who seek to become planners and create better ways for them to become full members of the RTPI.

Thinking of what I took from the day, as Sarah and I both work for Local Authorities,

I found that her talk made me reflect on how approaches to technology have changed within my own workplace over the last 8 years – how we have moved to a (mostly) paperless service or embraced remote working and hybrid committees. These may seem small measures when compared to what could be done with AI, they have nonetheless been transformative. Ross has proved to be something of Oracle, his talk of the role of social media and the need for some form of professional training has been made all the more timely by the RTPI rolling out the 'It Takes Planners & You' initiative for World Town Planning Day a month later. ■



Sarah Purves, Ross McFarlane and James Hewitt at the RTPI Scotland Annual Conference

# Article:
# Digital Planning - Challenges, Opportunities and Vision

**Christina Cox,** Assistant Director at South Ayrshire Council, recounts her experience at the RTPI Scotland Annual Conference and the opportunities digital planning presents to the profession.

Christina Cox,
Assistant Director,
South Ayrshire
Council

Arriving in Dundee for the first time since before the pandemic, coming out on to a recently completed and transformed multi-modal interchange set within a comprehensively regenerated townscape, I couldn't help thinking that this provided a fitting start to a day that promised inspirational discussion on some of the most significant emerging changes and opportunities for the planning profession. The day did not disappoint.

I took part in a panel discussion along with Chief Planner, Fiona Simpson and Alastair Parvin CEO Open Systems Lab. We were well warmed up having already listened to all the informed and inspirational speakers and a range of good questions put to them. We were asked by Pamela Clifford (Senior Vice Convenor, RTPI Scotland) to speak about opportunities, challenges and our vision for digital planning. If we hadn't already thought about these questions, the morning sessions had prepared us well with a few key clarities already emerging.

One of the main take-aways from the morning sessions was the opportunities presented by digital planning both those being developed through the Scottish Government Digital Programme and more widely with existing technologies. Being a spatial profession, the opportunities that digital planning presents are unique and wide; from improving consistency of validation to transforming the public's perception and trust in planning.

I think most attendees had their eyes opened to the possibilities. What was also clear was that to realise these opportunities we need to be rethinking our approach to the data that we collect. Some data we consciously collect so that we can record, assess or share that information or data. However, it is probably the data that we don't realise we collect, such as the description of development on a planning application, that provides untapped potential.

However, to realise this potential the 3 of us spoke about the need for data to be agile.

"Being a spatial profession, the opportunities that digital planning presents are unique and wide; from improving consistency of validation to transforming the public's perception and trust in planning."

An example that had been provided by an earlier speaker was PDF data, this being a static type of data that you can only read, and you can only do that, when you know it exists. It is not a data form that enables analysis by any type of digital system. Data that has been collected with Application Programming Interface (API) enables different systems to communicate and exponentially increases the value of that data. Fiona spoke about the Digital Planning Programme recognition of this issue and its work on a Digital Strategy to guide us on how we collect and store data. To some that part of the programme may seem a bit dull/nerdy, the 3 of us made reference to this essential change in culture and practice and Alastair's evangelism convinced us it's anything but nerdy.

In terms of our vision for digital planning, we co-shared our thoughts even more than the opportunities/challenges. It might be expected that we would also have a vision around about creating time and resource to enable Planners to get on with the value added work. Perhaps a bit more surprising was our shared vision that digital possibilities will provide for better planning outcomes and better places. ■



Panel discussion on how we can make the most of digital planning with Christina Cox, Alastair Parvin, and Fiona Simpson at the RTPI Scotland Annual Conference

# Article:
# Digital Lab Missions 1 & 5: Data and Innovation

**1. Ian Gilzean**, Head of Digital Place and Innovation, Digital Planning, Scottish Government
**2. Tom Sharples**, Data Scientist, Digital Planning Team, Scottish Government
**3. Paul Dodd** Senior Associate Director, Infrastructure Technology at Scottish Futures Trust

**Ian Gilzean, Tom Sharples,** and **Paul Dodd** discuss the conference's Digital Lab session on Missions 1 and 5, which focused on understanding, improving, and drawing insight from data (Mission 1), and supporting a culture of digital innovation in planning (Mission 5).

### Ian Gilzean - Head of Digital Place and Innovation, Digital Planning, Scottish Government

For the workshop linking the two Missions together provided an opportunity to show how data can inform place. For example:

- building the Local Development Plan Evidence Report from data sets
- inter-active 3D visualisation of proposed developments and engagement with communities
- supporting the way in which NPF4 policies are implemented and monitored

Through the workshop, we were able to drill down further into practical examples via Tom Sharples and Paul Dodd

### Tom Sharples - Data Scientist, Digital Planning Team, Scottish Government

Unlocking the value of planning data is a daunting task, so it can be helpful to look to places where these foundations have already been established, to demonstrate how we can then use that data in the real world to help people plan.



Ian Gilzean introduces the Digital Lab session on Missions 1 and 5 at the RTPI Scotland Annual Conference

The Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land Register is a national data collection which identifies areas of Vacant and Derelict Land (VDL) in Scotland. The register is well governed, good quality, and published as open data. However, it has previously only been made available as an excel file, which makes it hard for people to explore. That is an issue, because supporting the reuse or areas of VDL is a key policy within NPF4.

We've been working with colleagues to create an open, accessible mapping platform to bring that data to life. It maps out the VDL register alongside supporting data, satellite imagery, and other tools. The platform will be launched to the public in the New Year.

### Paul Dodd – Senior Associate Director – Infrastructure Technology, Scottish Futures Trust

The role of visualisation within the planning system offers significant opportunity to planners and industry to support engagement and decision making and enable improved outcomes.

The design and construction sector has been on a journey to invest in skills and capability to develop enhanced visualisations within the planning process. Scottish Government's Building Information Modelling programme launched in 2016 supported this drive towards this new capability in 3D visualisation that has established a developing capability for the planning system to build from.

Visualisation in planning can take many forms from 3D models of buildings for applications through to city or regional visualisation of data to support strategic development planning. This new visual content is becoming more affordable and accessible and can be accessed through our phones or tablets. The key focus is to ensure it is applied in a proportionate manner and is purpose led and supports improved outcomes.

The Digital Planning programme has made progress in the exploration of the opportunity and application of visualisation in the planning system. In partnership with Scottish Futures Trust, two R&D projects have been delivered to explore visualisation in the planning application that considered the types, scale and use cases of 3D visualisations. The projects also developed prototype models and utilised this content to engage with planner, public and industry to understand the benefits and value of visualisations. ■
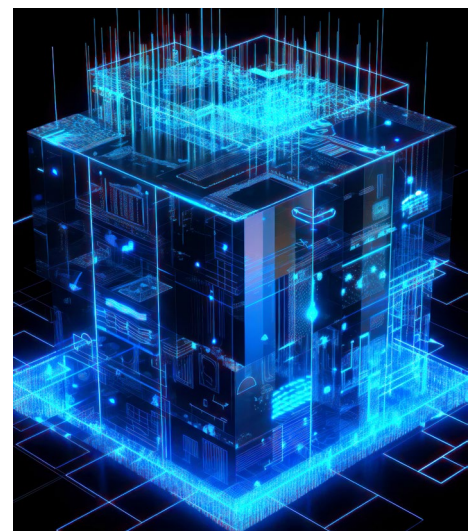
# Article:
# Digital Lab Mission 2:
# Digital Technologies

**David Hall,** Service Design and Delivery Lead, Scottish Government, and **Brodie Shepherd**, Product Owner (Smart Apps), discuss the conference's Digital Lab on Mission 2 which focused on digital technologies.

**David Hall**, David Hall, Service Design and Delivery Lead, Scottish Government

**Brodie Shepherd,** Product Owner, Smart Apps

For the teams designing and building Scotland's next-gen digital planning services, the focus on 'digital' during RTPI Scotland's annual conference gave us the perfect opportunity to highlight the strong progress being made on our exciting journey.

We loved hearing from everyone who came along to the break-out sessions on Mission 2, Digital Technologies and providing an update on where we are in developing new tech when applying for planning permission, paying for an application, and managing cases.

Transforming any sector digitally is never an easy task and that is why we are focused on a core set of principles to help guide our work and rise to the challenge of developing new public services that better meet the needs of those who use them.

Our starting principle is 'understand the user,' that could be:

- a member of the public making their first ever planning application and struggling to know where to start.
- a seasoned professional who has lots of experience and just wants to complete an application with the least amount of fuss.
- a planner in a Scottish local authority, trying to deal with an increasing case load who wants digital technologies to help ease some of the burden.

Each user's needs are different and by listening to people we develop a much better picture of the problem(s) we are trying to solve.

That takes us to our next principle 'design with, not for.' Collaboration is a vital part of our approach to building better services, and working with users at all stages of development helps to ensure we create services and process that work. Finally, we aim to succeed by adopting a 'fail fast' principle. That does not mean we aim to fail, instead it means we embrace and embed trial and error into the way we work, learning and adapting as we go to create services that continue to improve. An example of this is the prototyping work we do, building early (inexpensive) versions of new systems to test them with real people and ensure they work before we go on to build the full (costly) version.

Being able to showcase our work at the RTPI Scotland conference, not only helped to open up the conversation about delivering better user-focused public services it helped us to put our principles into action. ■
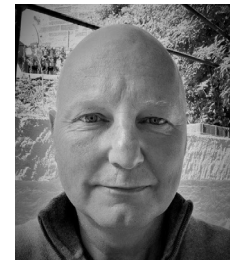
The speakers present on Mission 2 at RTPI Scotland's Annual Conference

# Article:
# Digital Lab Mission 3:
# Ways of Working | Digital Skills



**Susie Stirling,**
Digital Innovation
and Place Scottish
Government

**Derek Cahill,**
Digital Innovation
and Place Scottish
Government

**Susie Stirling** and **Derek Cahill,** Digital Innovation and Place Scottish Government, discuss the conference's digital lab on Mission 3 which focused on ways of working and digital skills.

This LAB session focused on 'Digital Skills' which sits within Mission 3 of the Scottish Government's Digital Programme. It was chaired and supported by Susie Stirling and Derek Cahill (Digital Innovation and Place) Scottish Government (SG).

By way of background, the aim of Digital Skills is to help improve confidence, amongst planners, in using and applying digital technology within their everyday roles. To deliver the SG's vision designed, for this work, the SG commissioned the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) to manage, and contract out, a range of projects under the Digital Skills umbrella. These included:

1. Research Report to better understand the quality of digital skills across Scotland;
2. development of a Diagnostic Tool;
3. easy read Handbook;
4. consideration to be given to creation of Networks and
5. new Digital Skills web portal

The portal will not only house all of the outputs listed, but will allow for a 'one stop' place to source training and good practice. Plus, building on the Research Report, time has been taken to develop a consistent structure across all of the outputs, that link everything together to create an efficient user experience.

After the session was introduced, Crea Barton (Digital Planning Programme Coordinator, RTPI Scotland) and Kirsty Holder (Digital Programme Manager, formerly RTPI Scotland) talked participants through progress whilst Cory Hughes (Strategic Design Director, Perago Wales Ltd) explained the approach to the web development which included the colours, graphics and 'user testing' process. In addition, time was built-in for a simple, interactive online exercise using MentiMentor. This allowed an opportunity for everyone to provide 'live' feedback. In particular, we were able to record what planners would like to see covered, with Digital Skills, as well as gathering other online resources that planners find useful.

Overall, through everyone's input, what came through strongly from the session was unanimous support for one, purposely designed place to focus on digital skills. Plus, to help ensure maximum accessibility, the portal will be jointly hosted by the SG and RTPI. Excitingly too, the development of the portal has taken place in tandem with a revamp of the SG's Transforming Planning website. Post the LAB session, we have been working hard to pull everything together. In doing so, we are grateful to our Delivery Partners – Ekos Consultants, Perago, LAS Planning and Arup for all their work. In addition, we are also looking at the suggestions put forward to see how we can further help address those areas. We will also be committing to regularly reviewing our websites to ensure an up-to-date resource for planners.

Finally, we would like to thank everyone who attended our LAB sessions – your wisdom was wonderful! We are looking forward to supporting planners as much as possible as we deliver the Digital Skills work early in 2024. Watch this space! ■

> "What came through strongly from the session was unanimous support for one, purposely designed place to focus on digital skills."


The speakers present on Mission 3 at RTPI Scotland's Annual Conference


Digital Skills Portal Logo

# Article:
# Digital Lab Mission 4: People and Place

**Daniel McKendry, Ailsa Anderson MRTPI, David McAllister,** and **Joshua Doyle** reflect back on the Mission 4 Digital Lab session and their experiences of using digital tools to enhance place-making and engagement practices.

1. **Daniel McKendry**, Principal Landscape Architect at Architecture & Design Scotland
2. **Ailsa Anderson MRTPI**, Team Leader at Aberdeenshire Council
3. **David McAllister,** Communications Manager at Planning Aid Scotland
4. **Joshua Doyle**, Place-making Coordinator at West Dunbartonshire Council

## Mission 4 Digital Lab: People and Place

Mission 4 of the Scottish Government's Digital Strategy for Planning aims to support greater digital participation and inclusion through the development of digital tools.

Below are some reflections from the speakers of our Mission 4 Digital Lab session.

## Digital Delivery of 20-minute Neighbourhoods - Daniel McKendry

Architecture & Design Scotland facilitated the Digital Lab and provided a reflection on our work in Stewarton.

Our collaborative work in Stewarton, in East Ayrshire, is considered an early adopter of using a place-based approach to create a Development Framework. Working with the Key Agencies Group, we are supporting the planning department to take a collaborative approach to their plan for Stewarton. Recommendations include testing the 20-minute neighbourhood approach when housing is developed. This is being progressed in partnership with the Scottish Government Planning Digital Strategy Team to use Stewarton as a live site to test the principles using various mapping techniques and data analysis.

Reflecting on the event, what is very clear is that we are on the cusp of monumental changes in the way we use data and digital tools in planning and design. Collaborative working is therefore more important than ever to ensure uniformity in standards of data collection, storage, use and sharing. The 'carrot' here, as described on the day, is the creation of more headspace for planners to plan and designers to design. This can be a key driver in embedding planning front and centre in public sector reform. Scottish Government, Key Agencies and local authorities need to work at all scales with communities and the third and private sectors to enable this step change.

## Digital engagement practices in the LDP process - Ailsa Anderson

Aberdeenshire Council was on the cusp of launching its Proposed Local Development Plan (LDP) for consultation, when in March 2020, the country entered 'lockdown' in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Utilising digital methods of engagement, the Authority managed to fulfil its statutory obligations, and in accordance with the direction given by the then Chief Planner, John McNairney, ensured that the Plan-making process did not stall. Three years on, there continues to be interest in the approach adopted and the lessons learned as all Planning Authorities seek to up-skill Officers and enhance their digital offering.

The Digital Lab allowed experience to be shared, with discussion particularly focusing on the use and value of social media in LDP consultation processes and how the pandemic further ignited an appreciation of place, and an interest in place-making. Notwithstanding advances in digital engagement, there is very much a role still to be played by non-digital means and ensuring that that those without access to the internet can still actively participate. Conclusions from the Lab were that balance is required, no one size fits all, and that a range of methods, digital and non-digital, are needed. Development of a Digital Consultation Toolbox, sharing good practice and investment to further advance the technology will lead to more opportunities and extend the reach, which can only be to the benefit of Plan preparation and delivery.

## Digital tools in Community-led planning - David McAllister

We were pleased to take part in the Digital Lab session focussing on Mission 4 (People and Place) given our focus on digital engagement tools, and an opportunity to share some initial thoughts on the Scottish Government's PlaceBuilder tool which we had recently tested.

This summer, we worked with the Struan community, on Skye, supporting them to create a community-led plan for their area. We chose to use PlaceBuilder as the digital hub for engagement in the project. Over and above the digital survey elements, PlaceBuilder offered us the chance to use interactive mapping, enabling respondents to mark specific locations on the map and link these to key issues they wanted to raise for the area. We combined the PlaceBuilder digital tool with mailouts (postcards to every property, with QR codes to the PlaceBuilder survey and map) and had a participation rate of about one third of the community, followed by a strong turnout at a series of in-person workshops over the summer.

We look forward to seeing how the PlaceBuilder tool develops and may be customised for different engagement scenarios in the future.

## Using digital tools to support decision-making - Joshua Doyle

As part of the Data Lab session, I presented work that is being progressed within West Dunbartonshire Council, using open-source data to map and measure the relationship between critical infrastructure and the homes of the residents it supports. This accessible digital tool has been developed to support decision making, in accordance with new national policy, across multiple service areas in the Council. A critical takeaway from the discussions were regarding the tool's ability to understand and measure the impact of a policy at scale. Whilst acknowledging that the tool does not provide a 'silver bullet' its scalability supports strategic planning across the council area, and enables more informed decision making at a hyper local level. ■

# Update:
# RTPI Update

## Policy Consultations

RTPI Scotland have submitted responses to the following consultations and requests for written evidence:

- The Improvement Services' Call for Ideas on Planning System Ambitions
- The mandatory training for elected members consultation
- The Human Rights Bill for Scotland consultation
- The Land Ownership and Public Interest Bill: Consultation
- The Effective Community Engagement in Local Development Planning Guidance

These are all published on the RTPI website. Consultations currently under consideration are:

- Tackling the Nature Emergency: Consultation on Scotland's Strategic Framework for Biodiversity
- Water, Wastewater and Drainage Policy consultation
- Democracy Matters
- Wellbeing and Sustainable Development (Scotland) Bill

## Apprenticeships

Apprenticeships are still on the agenda and discussions with the Scottish Government and Scottish Funding Council about a pilot project with the University of Dundee are ongoing. One of the key issues to emerge is about the extended timelines for agreement and implementation!

## Digital Planning

As part of our work on developing digital planning skills, RTPI Scotland is currently working with Scottish Government on the creation of a Digital Skills Portal and a Digital Skills Handbook. This work is now drawing to a close, and we expect to hand over all of the project outputs to the Scottish Government before the end of December. A final launch date is not yet confirmed, but is likely to be sometime in early 2024.

## Scottish Executive Committee 2024 Appointments

Congratulations to Maura McCormack MRTPI who will be taking up the position of RTPI Scotland's Junior Vice Convenor in January 2024.

Congratulations also to Craig Iles MRTPI and Sepideh Hajisoltani MRTPI, who have been appointed to sit on the 2024 Committee as Corporate Members.

We would also like to thank our current Convenor Kirsty Macari FRTPI for her hard work and dedication to the role throughout 2023. Kirsty will be moving into the role of Immediate Past Convenor next year.

Pamela Clifford MRTPI will become RTPI Scotland's Convenor for 2024, while Laura Robertson MRTPI will be moving into the role of Senior Vice Convenor.

## RTPI Fellow Announcements

Many congratulations to the following RTPI Members who have been awarded Chartered Fellowship of the Institute:

- Kirsty Macari FRTPI
- Michaela Sullivan FRTPI

RTPI Scotland celebrated their achievement at our annual members reception, sponsored by Brodies LLP on 6 December 2023.

## It Takes Planners &

The RTPI launched the 'It Takes Planners &' campaign on World Town Planning Day. The aim of the campaign is to tackle misinformation online by raising the awareness of the pivotal role planners play in creating liveable, healthy communities.

Campaign materials and resources are available from the dedicated campaign hub located on the Planning Your World site. Find out more about the campaign and get involved using our downloadable toolkit.

## RTPI Scotland 2023 Resourcing the Planning Service Update

Our 2023 update to our research on Resourcing the Planning Service is now available on the RTPI website . This update reveals that:

- Planning expenditure has continued to decline, being the only local authority service to see a reduction in funding on a national level between 2021-2022.
- The national planning department workforce is at its lowest level in five years and on a gradual trend of decline.
- Approximately 150 students graduated from Scotland's accredited planning schools in 2022. Research undertaken by Partners in Planning (2021) indicates that

between 2012/13 and 2016/17, around 68% of graduates in Scotland went into UK work. Assuming this remains an accurate reflection, 70%-75% of this proportion would be required to work in Scotland to meet the projected planning workforce demand over the next 10-15 years.

## RTPI Planning Excellence Awards

Congratulations to all the winners of the 2023 RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence, which were announced at an awards ceremony in London on 21 November.

Congratulations in particular to Net Zero Aberdeen for the Net Zero Routemap, which won the Award for Excellence in Plan Making Practice.

Congratulations also to the University of Glasgow, who were commended in the category of Excellence in Planning for a Successful Economy for the University's western campus development.

You can find out more about the winners, commended entries and finalists on the RTPI website.

## RTPI National Planning Conference

For two days in November, Birmingham became a hub for discussions, insights, and innovative ideas in planning, thanks to the National Planning Conference 2023 hosted by the RTPI and Planning Portal. The conference featured discussions on community engagement, a panel discussion on young planners' perspectives of the future, and a session with Chief Planners across the UK and Ireland. You can find out more about this year's conference on the RTPI website.

## RTPI Scotland Leavers

We recently said goodbye to Kirsty Holder (our Digital Planning Programme Manager) who finished up at RTPI Scotland at the end of November. As the digital planning skills project comes to an end, we will also be saying goodbye to Crea Barton (our Digital Planning Programme Coordinator) who will be finishing up with us at the end of the year. We would like to thank Kirsty and Crea for all their hard work and dedication to this project. You will both be greatly missed by the RTPI Scotland team.

## Social Media

The @RTPIScotland Twitter account has 5147 followers and the @ConvenorRTPIS account has 1778. ■

# Update:
# Scottish Government

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Since the adoption of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) our priorities have shifted from policy development to delivery. We are taking a collaborative approach to supporting implementation.

**Local Development Plans – Implementing the New System**

At six months since the new local development planning regulations came into force, we are taking a collaborative approach to supporting implementation. Timely preparation of the first round of Evidence Reports is key to having the next iteration of Local Development Plans (LDP) in place by May 2028. We are working with the Heads of Planning Scotland Development Planning Subcommittee and Key Agencies Group to support sharing of good practice.

During October we hosted an information sharing session with those planning authorities most advanced in the process. Early engagement between and within authorities, communities, developers and infrastructure providers is underway. This is influencing judgements on which areas of the Evidence Report will benefit from more focused information gathering and analysis.

We were pleased to hear how an early focus on delivery is raising the profile of development planning as a corporate tool.

The LDP guidance contains further detailed information to support the new system. It emphasises the need for a proportionate approach to information gathering, and the subsequent role for professional planning judgement in evaluating what the evidence means for the plan.

We look forward to seeing how the first Evidence Reports will communicate priorities for Scotland's places when they are published in the Spring.

### Climate Mitigation and Adaptation

The National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) Delivery Programme includes a commitment to develop guidance on planning and climate change. This work is underway, informed by an Expert Advisory Group. The guidance will support implementation of NPF4 Policy 2 (climate mitigation and adaptation) by aiding the integration of climate considerations into development proposals, helping to avoid maladaptation, whilst supporting emissions reduction and increased resilience to climate risks. Further updates will be provided as work progresses.

### Biodiversity

The Scottish Biodiversity Strategy sets out the Scottish Government's vision for tackling the nature emergency. We urgently need to accelerate and up-scale efforts to increase nature recovery in Scotland, and the planning system has a critical contribution to make towards achieving this.

Improving biodiversity is a cross-cutting theme which runs throughout NPF4. Our strategy and policies support development that helps to secure positive effects for biodiversity.

We have recently published guidance on NPF4 Policy 3 to support delivery and implementation. This guidance was produced with the support of a Technical Advisory Group (TAG) and has been published as a living document. It is our intention that it will be updated as practice beds in across Planning Authorities. We welcome feedback on how Policy 3 is being implemented across Scotland and how the guidance document is being used to assist implementation and delivery. NPF4 Policy 3c) is also supported by NatureScot's Developing with Nature Guidance.

The Scottish Government has published independent research undertaken by SRUC into 'Approaches to Measuring Biodiversity in Scotland'. We welcome publication of this research, the findings and recommendations of which set out pragmatic next steps to ensure a consistent and cross-government approach to measuring biodiversity at site level. NatureScot will shortly commence work to develop an adapted biodiversity metric suitable for use in supporting delivery of NPF4 Policy 3b, engaging closely with all relevant stakeholders. We will provide further updates and information on this work in due course.

### New Statutory Requirement to Consider Environmental Principles

The UK Withdrawal from the European Union (Continuity) (Scotland) Act 2021 introduces new duties on public authorities to have due regard to five guiding principles on the environment when developing new policies or making significant changes to existing policies. For public authorities, the duty only applies to projects which require a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). This new legal requirement entered into force on 16 November and authorities should give due regard to the guiding principles through the established SEA processes, including during the completion of an environmental assessment. Guidance on both the guiding principles and SEA can be accessed at: https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-guiding-principles-environment-statutory-guidance.

### Planning Convenors Event

Earlier this month we held our first planning convenors meeting since 2018. The in person meeting proved to be a really productive day where convenors valued the opportunity to discuss issues, share practice and ask questions about current workstreams and topical issues.

The Convenors heard from the Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning and the Chief Planner as well as having updates on the NPF4 delivery programme and some key topics such as housing, energy, nature and permitted development rights. They also provided input to the consultation on mandatory training on planning for elected members.

Chris Stark, the Chief Executive of the UK Climate Change Committee presented to Convenors about the importance of planning and their role in the transition to net-zero.

The day concluded with a lively open discussion covering a wide range of current planning issues.

### Resourcing the Planning System

On 20 November we brought together a broad range of stakeholders to discuss the Resourcing of the Planning System to help inform the development of a public consultation on resourcing and planning fees.

Delegates were divided into groups and asked to discuss issues around skills development, recruitment and retention, streamlining processes and planning fees and charging. The groups were tasked with identifying practical solutions which could be implemented collectively in the short, medium or long term. The groups were asked to identify 3 or 4 priorities and then complete a proforma outlining what action was required, who should be involved, the potential timeline for implementation and any perceived barriers which will need to be overcome. The workshop was incredibly productive with a variety of ideas being suggested. Further information is available on our website, and the consultation on Resourcing the Planning System will follow in the New Year.

### Cross-sector Housing and Planning Roundtable

The Minister for Housing and Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning hosted a cross sector housing and planning roundtable to identify significant planning issues affecting delivery of new homes and consider the actions the planning and housing sectors can take to accelerate delivery of quality homes to create quality places.

The group agreed to meet again to further discussions and progress work on agreeing a memorandum of understanding that will guide our future collaboration.

### Chief Planner and Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning Update Letter – Autumn 2023

Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning, Joe FitzPatrick MSP, and Chief Planner, Fiona Simpson, wrote to stakeholders to provide an update on the work programme in November, setting out the significant progress that has been achieved over the last few months.

### The National Development Strategy for North Macedonia

Fiona Simpson, Scottish Government Chief Planner & Director of Planning, Architecture and Regeneration and Andy Kinnaird, Head of Transforming Planning were delighted to visit Skopje in September, sharing stories of NPF4 to support the excellent work of United Nations Development Programme in helping create a National Development Strategy for North Macedonia. They met with a wide range of policy experts and planning professionals and held a positive session in the Parliament of North Macedonia.

To find out more information, please visit the United Nations Development Programme website.

### Staying In Touch

For the latest messages from the Planning, Architecture and Regeneration Division, follow us on Twitter @ScotGovPlanning and register to receive our Planning, Architecture & Regeneration news updates. ∎

# Update:
# Planning Aid Scotland

This has been an eventful year for Planning Aid Scotland, including a complete rebrand of the organisation (and return to our full name) and the celebration of our 30th anniversary.

Our new name is matched by a fresh logo and branded identity, updating the look and feel of the organisation to match the reality of who we are today, whilst staying true to our core values as an educational charity.

To mark our 30th anniversary in October, Sarah Boyack MSP lodged a motion in the Scottish Parliament (which received cross-party support), giving thanks to our volunteers for their immense contribution to improving public participation in planning over the last three decades.

It has been another busy year for our Advice Service, on course to have resolved over 1,000 cases in the course of 2023. Enquiries to the Advice Service come from members of the public, community groups and business start-ups seeking impartial, trusted advice on a wide range of planning matters.

This year also saw the successful pilot run of our Mentoring Scheme. The scheme supports early-career planners to gain skills and experience under the mentorship of experienced planners, whilst also enabling our mentees to resolve enquiries from members of the public through our Advice Service. Watch out for details of how to join the second cohort in 2024.

Training has been another strong area of activity throughout the year, delivering planning training for elected members, community councils, public bodies and others. Most recently we provided training for the Ethical Standards Commissioner's office to support them in their role engaging with elected members on planning matters.

As our 30th anniversary year continues into 2024, watch this space for details of our discussion events series launching in the spring.

**David McAllister, Communications Manager at Planning Aid Scotland.** ■

# Update:
# Scottish Young Planners Network (SYPN)

It's been an incredible year for the Scottish Young Planners Network in 2023. We reached a major milestone by celebrating 20 years of SYPN! This incredible achievement is a testament to the hard work and dedication of countless individuals over the past two decades. Past and present volunteers, including former SYPN chairs, as well as the exceptional staff at RTPI and RTPI Scotland, have tirelessly organised numerous events and worked to address the needs of young planners in Scotland.

We had a couple of occasions to celebrate this anniversary with young planners and our supporters. Our annual conference was held in Stirling in April and we were joined by a fantastic audience of young planners and students where we celebrated the past, present and future of SYPN through various

sessions and workshops. Joe FitzPatrick MSP - The Minister for Local Government Empowerment and Planning and Kirsty Macari Convenor RTPI Scotland joined us on the day with a very clear message encouraging young planners in Scotland to be bold and ambitious in decision-making.

We were also thrilled to hear that Monica Lennon MSP tabled a motion in the Scottish Parliament celebrating SYPN's 20th Anniversary recognising the value of the network in engaging, supporting, and giving a voice to young planners. This was followed by a reception at the Scottish Parliament in September where we were joined by students and young planners as well as many other planners who continue to support us in different capacities. It was a fantastic opportunity for me to thank all the volunteers

and companies who have sponsored our events over the years.

SYPN aims to expand this inclusive and supportive network for the professional development of young planners in Scotland who are in the first ten years of their careers and promote planning as a first career choice for young people. If you want to hear more about SYPN, please do not hesitate to contact the steering group members. We all love to have a chat about the network and meet other young planners.

**Sepideh Hajisoltani, Planner (Conservation) at Aberdeen City Council and Chair of the Scottish Young Planners Network.** ■

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For further information, please visit
www.rtpi.org.uk/scotland
Twitter.com/RTPIscotland

# RTPI Scotland **2023 highlights**
Royal Town Planning Institute

**Met with 13 organisations and spoke at 20 events**

**RTPI Scotland Awards for Planning Excellence organised with overall award going to Zetland Park**

**21 policy responses submitted to Scottish Government or agencies**

**Featured in 25 media channels**

**Celebrated 20 years of the Scottish Young Planners Network**

**Over 170 people attended the Scottish Young Planners' Annual Conference held in Stirling**

**34 events organised by RTPI Chapters, Young Planners' Network, International Group and RTPI Scotland office with 1870 people attending**

**Appeared before Scottish Parliament Committees on 4 occasions**

**Dr Caroline Brown appointed as new Director for Scotland, Ireland and English Regions**

**116 people attended Sir Patrick Geddes Commemorative Lecture given by Imandeep Kaur**

**4 editions of The Scottish Planner journal published**

**Published 2023 Resourcing update**

**Net Zero Aberdeen Routemap win RTPI National award for Excellence in Plan Making Practice**

**Said goodbye to one Director and hello to another!**

**Work coming to a close on the Digital Planning Skills programme with Scottish Government**

**Engaged in 18 committees, advisory or working groups**

**Over 100 people attended the RTPI Scotland Annual conference in Dundee**

**National Planning Framework 4 adopted in February**

**Sarah Purves named Scottish Young Planner of the Year**

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