



RTPI

Royal Town Planning Institute

Lindsey Richards

Inauguration speech

January 24 2024

Good evening and thank you for joining me on the start of what will be, for me, a year like no other and one that builds on the successful year we have seen and just heard about in a great valedictory speech.

Sue, again congratulations on what has been a phenomenal year and for guiding and supporting me through my Vice-Presidential year so I can be ready for what will be the most significant and important year in my planning career. It's hard to believe that the future of Planning is in my hands, well it's not – it's in all our hands, including non-planners who are here this evening.

A warm welcome to my guests, including my husband, David and friends, and former colleagues who have become longstanding and dear friends, welcome also to the Board of Trustees, Members of the GA, Past Presidents, volunteers, and members watching this after the event and those joining us from abroad. And of course, a special thank you to Victoria, our Chief Executive, who has supported me this year as VP and to the rest of the RTPI team who have made all this possible.

I suppose at this point it would be only polite to say goodbye to Dave for the year, because it's going to be a busy year.

I have the honour of being the 110th RTPI President and when I look around the room and think about my predecessors, there are names which resonate all throughout my career and especially with my early planning education. Individuals who have had significant influence in the field of planning and on me. I suppose today we would call them Influencers; I will come back to the need for planning influencers in today's society.

Our **past presidents** include academics, practitioners, critical thinkers and indeed professionals from other Built Environment professions. Many of you will be familiar with **Thomas Adams** who was the first town planning advisor to the British Government in 1909 and became our first President in 1914-1915 when he (with others) launched what was then simply called the Planning Institute. This was recognition that planning had a place in society.

Adams was immediately followed by **Sir Raymond Unwin** whose focus was on the improvement of working-class housing and, of course, the creator of Letchworth Garden City, based on Ebenezer Howards utopian plan.

Sir Desmond Heap (President in 1955-56) produced what could be described as the first planning manual covering the new Planning Legislation and what was to become the Encyclopaedia of Planning Law.

I want to mention of course **Sylvia Law**. She was the first woman to be elected President in 1974. We may ask why it took so long, but in fact a female president was very forward looking for the early 1970s. And today we see a more

favourable gender balance. The RTPI State of the Profession survey shows that 40% of planners are women, and there is a greater gender balance in the younger half of our Membership. This is a great achievement when compared against many other built environment professions. Whilst an early advocate for women in the profession, Sylvia Laws focus was on the provision and value of community open space, something that remains as important today.

Another eminent planner from my university days was **Gordon Cherry**. I mention Gordon Cherry as he was the external examiner at Sheffield University, and I recall a rather pleasant conversation about rural depopulation. Cherry specialised in the history of planning and had numerous academic achievements on the role and value of planning, and he supported and motivated planning students.

These past Presidents, and the other 100 or so I haven't referenced, (you will be glad to hear) helped to raise the profile of planning and its contribution to creating a more equitable society at times when public health and poor housing needed addressing, they promoted the need for high quality housing with accessible services and facilities, they acknowledged the contribution of open space and in those early days of the profession understood the need to capture what I will call the 'art ' of planning into guidance and practice notes.

But we don't have to go that far back to see a cycle of what are emerging themes. Since the first President in 1914 we have seen significant improvements in housing standards, infrastructure, the provision of accessible open space, improved environmental standards, better housing quality, environmental protection, improved public health and well-being, but today we still face issues in many, if not all, of those areas. And there are the additional challenges that society faces today, including climate change, lack of infrastructure, poor public transport and the lack of access to it, and inequalities in communities where we see still deprivation and poor mental health.

You could be forgiven in thinking we have made little progress. As planning professionals, we have made strides but there remains so much more to do and planning is key to resolving many of those issues. Together we need to promote the key role that planning contributes in our communities, its contribution to the local and national economy, addressing environmental challenges and striving for a more equitable society. [RTPI Planning Your World](#) is a resource that aims to raise awareness of the planning profession and has a toolkit to support such conversations. We all need to be influencers.

Together we all need to promote planning as a career choice, in both early education and early career. I want young people to understand that they can be part of ' **Planning our Future**'.

But in the early stages of 2024 we face a year of further change, a general election where planning and housing supply will be key policy issues, we are certain to see further planning reforms, the potential 'threat of bulldozing through planning', climate change contributing to natural disasters, such as the flooding and the intensity and frequency of storms we have experienced over the past month. We are sharing these experiences globally. But are we as a profession resourced to tackle these issues? Because it's clear to me that we face a planning profession that is struggling, reduced resources in Local Authority planning departments who face unprecedented levels of vacant posts, and skills

shortages, experienced planning professionals leaving the profession and a shift from public to private sector.

This is hardly attractive to those looking to choose their career path.

Last Autumn the RTPI published the Planning Manifesto, aptly referred to as [The Planifesto](#). This was used at the Party Conferences to promote the profession, highlighting interventions which would address current challenges that a new party of Government would be likely to face. Adequately resourcing the planning sector is a priority and we saw some positive outcomes in last year's Autumn statement, funding Local Authorities, bursary schemes. But is that enough?

Whilst we look forward to 2024 and the prospect of a general election, we remind ourselves that the issues and challenges that our profession faces is all too familiar. And this is not only in Sues presidential speech last year, where she talked eloquently about challenges in resourcing and the misunderstanding facing the sector, together with the rise of misinformation feeding our minds, but we can look further back.

In 2003, 20 years ago, our past President, **Vincent Goodstadt**, raised the issue of unrealistic expectations, reduced staff numbers and deregulation. We united as an Institute in addressing unjustified criticism and looking at new ways to send out nationally a strong counter message proclaiming the quality, diversity and depth of planning. That was 20 years ago.

Ten years on in 2013, **Peter Geraghty** said that planners faced planning reforms like no other, with the introduction of the NPPF in 2012. The President stating, "A creative Planning system requires properly resourced planning services", and we saw at that time planners employed by LPAs dropped by 12.6% between Oct 2010 and 2012.

Does this sound familiar for the coming year?

20 years on we are still raising issues about resourcing the planning function, to a point where we can legitimately now claim that is Planning is in a real crisis.

We have continued to see reduced funding in planning departments, and I have mentioned increased number of vacancies and professionals leaving the profession. There are numerous reasons why this is happening, including salaries which haven't kept pace. Indeed, last year I met a senior planner working in a Local Authority in the North West of England. He has recently moved departments within that same Local Authority to the Housing Department as the pay was greater than that for Planning officers.

How can that be?

Last year **'The Planner 'Careers survey** highlighted a number of challenges facing planning professionals and whilst salaries were raised as an issue, one of the key stand out findings was that almost all planners felt that social media fuels misinformation about planning and has led to increased aggression and personal attacks. And this, together with media headlines around planning delays and planning reforms has increased **anti-planning** and I'll call it a movement. Hardly advocating planning as a career choice.

Last November the RTPI launched the **'It Takes Planners &' campaign**. This is a clear call to action to use the toolkit and case studies of projects to illustrate



RTPI

Royal Town Planning Institute

the beneficial impact of planning on local communities. We need to highlight and promote the work we do and the value we add. We want a wider understanding of our role, to encourage young people into the profession, and to address this anti-planning. I stress again we need to become influencers to address this current wave of anti-planning.

But Anti planning is not new.

I'm proud to stand here today as your 2024 RTPI President, and I want to share with you some of my early experiences in planning. I come from a family of small builders; I suppose today we would call it an SME. My grandfather set up the company with my father and uncle, initially building in the North West of England during the 1930's. But post war my grandfather moved the business to Ireland and the reason for that was he had a personal crusade against the 1947 Town and Country Planning Act and opposed the introduction of planning regulations and the need to obtain planning permission for development. My grandfather took his personal demonstration out of the UK, and basically continued to oppose the principles and purpose of planning.

So I come from a background routed in anti-planning. When my grandfather returned to the UK, I think he was probably banned from the local Planning office, or if not was not a welcome visitor. This was quite embarrassing when I did a placement at my local planning office in Lancaster. My father was more conciliatory, he supported me in my career choice and I know he would be proud of me today, as is my mother.

So against that background I often wonder what inspired me to consider planning as a career? Perhaps to put right the stance my grandfather took, maybe. But more likely an inspirational geography teacher and those early Burgess and Hoyt models of urban structure, maybe a love of the outdoors and a rural environment, walking, cycling, riding. Maybe an appreciation of safe spaces, efficient use of resources. Maybe appreciating life at a slow pace, time to consider architecture, and the finer detail of buildings, maybe thinking about what made a street lively and a pleasure to walk along. Who knows? but above all I wanted to be part of a profession who protects/ enhances and understands our environment.

I studied at **Sheffield University** under the guidance of the esteemed Professor Tony Crook, I wasn't a good student! But I knew I wanted to be a planner.

My first job was in the Midlands, starting at **Daventry Council** and moving all of 15 miles to **Northampton Borough Council** and there I remained for the next 15 years or so.

I remained married to the public sector and went on to marry a planner! But we failed to produce a planner. Max, our son, going into finance instead!

I joined **Milton Keynes Partnership**, a sub-Committee of English Partnerships in 2005 and stayed with the Agency through its merger with the Housing Corporation to form the Homes and Communities Agency (under the late Sir Bob Kerslake) and then subsequently its change to **Homes England** where my last roles were **Head of Planning and Head of Profession**. And it was the role as Head of Profession that was really important to me, promoting membership, co-ordinating CPD and ensuring planners had a voice in driving quality standards and sustainability.



RTPI

Royal Town Planning Institute

So a professional life wholly working in the public sector, but working for a Government Agency provided me with the experience in housing delivery, the ability to promote best practice, leading on Government initiatives, and working alongside both the public and private sector.

It's a career of nearly 40 years and as part of a profession which makes significant contribution in growing the economy, and ensuring social and environmental outcomes which support local communities. So why aren't we attracting enough people into the profession? And why aren't we retaining those professionals who initially make that career choice?

I made reference in my opening to Planning now being in a real crisis so I want to make the focus of my **presidential year** to build on Sue's work on resourcing and raising the profile of planning, it will build on our current campaigns and look to future campaigns to address these current issues.

My focus for the coming year is simply summed up as 'Planning our Future'. This is about ensuring planning is at the forefront in conversations on the built environment, climate change, the rural environment, safer streets and green spaces; ensuring the remit of planning is understood outside of the profession, fuelling curiosity with the subject and ensuring a pipeline of planners coming into the profession and also into the Institute as Members.

I want to specifically channel raised awareness and understanding of planning towards young people and achieve an early interest in planning as a career choice and building that pipeline of young professionals.

'Planning our Future' aligns with the thinking of our younger generation who are fully aware of the issues of climate change, environmental challenges and need for immediate action. We need to make the connection to the role that the planning profession undertakes, and the contribution planning makes in addressing these issues. We all have a role to play in this, as Influencers, and to support growing the pipeline of planners and that planning is a worthy career choice.

This coming year I will focus on what I call early intervention. A focus on understanding what careers advice is available and how we, as an Institute, can promote planning in schools and in higher education, we want diversity in our workforce so we maximise creativity and contribution, we want a range of backgrounds, disciplines and ethnicity to ensure our profession represents our communities. We need to reach out to communities where representation is lacking.

The coming year I want to increase our presence in schools and universities, where we can promote planning as a career choice and also make the important connection with other disciplines being a foundation to further learning. Last year we saw a record number of graduates becoming licentiates so we must build on this success.

I will support the BALANCE initiative, which supports the themes of education and attracting new talent as part of the Institute's CHANGE action plan on diversity and inclusion. BALANCE - Build A Legacy and New Community Equality - is a Corporate Strategy-funded project to develop a new outreach strategy for member engagement with young people.



RTPI

Royal Town Planning Institute

I can announce we have been working with an expert consultant towards the ultimate aim of a broader range of pupils from different subjects and under-represented areas becoming aware of planning education and the range of exciting careers it can bring. More specifically, the project seeks a renewed focus in areas where there is high demand for houses, or where new large-scale development is likely to be located. It will ask RTPI volunteers to focus on those schools of greatest educational need and diversity. I want this to bring a more diverse cohort into the profession, which will not only lead to better outcomes but to a more inclusive sector.

I will promote the continued growth of the Institute's successful Apprenticeship programmes and support alternative routes into planning education across the UK. This will be achieved by encouraging more employers to engage with the programme, and with a focus on increasing the number of local authorities taking on and supporting apprentices; I want to encourage more training providers to come forward; and of course continue to encourage governments to back our apprenticeship and bursary proposals. In building awareness in both what we, as planners, do and how to access the many pathways into planning, together we can build a pipeline of planners.

But we must also nurture the existing pipeline of planners. We need to understand why graduate planners are not entering the profession. I am pleased to confirm that last month the RTPI secured funding on behalf of the built environment Joint Institutes from the Academy of Social Science. This is to be used to fund research in understanding the gap between the number of students on accredited degree courses within the built environment and those moving into the six professions. For planning, I fear we lose numbers for some reason, but more worrying we are losing diversity. We are losing an important part of our pipeline and this needs addressing urgently.

There are further unanswered questions around existing experienced chartered planners who are currently seeking employment but remain unsuccessful at a time when we are calling out for resources. Support needs to be provided.

There are many challenges facing the profession and addressing this is no small feat, nor something that can be achieved in 12 months. But I tell you I am fully committed and I want to secure the foundation for future years so that, in the future, we might have increased numbers and diversity coming through our apprenticeship programme and additional education establishments looking to offer training. I want to see an increased number of students with an appetite to complete a planning degree and move to chartership, and an increased interest from a wider range of disciplines for post graduate training. And alongside that I want to be able to feel that there is a wider understanding around the role that planning plays in our economy and how it tackles social and environment issues. This is difficult to measure but as planners we might feel that change.

In closing I simply state: Planning is a worthy and rewarding profession, it is a creative art and a profession that protects, enhances and manages our scarce resources within both the built environment and the rural environment. It's collaborative and engaging, but its currently under resourced, misunderstood and lacks diversity and a pipeline which allows the profession to truly represent and work with, and as part of, our local communities. For those of us in this



RTPI

Royal Town Planning Institute

room and members who are watching online after the event I ask for your support in ensuring we are followed by a cohort of young planning professionals.

Please support me, be a planning influencer and engage with 'Planning our Future'.