

Speech by Ian Tant at the RTPI Parliamentary Reception

Good evening colleagues, Lords, Ladies, members of parliament and Minister.

Thank you, Bob (Neill MP), for the introduction and for your tireless support as our Parliamentary sponsor. The planning profession is very grateful to you.

There is a continuing and urgent housing crisis in the UK – something we only need eyes to know with so many homeless people on the streets and with so many young people struggling to access housing beyond the parental home.

The number of new homes with the benefit of planning permission now stands at over 400,000 but people can't live in planning permissions – the homes need to be built. Planning shouldn't be and isn't about putting obstacles in the way of building – it's about identifying the constraints and finding ways of working around them to enable building to take place.

Part of this is about ensuring that the delivery of housing is planned and coordinated with access to schools, transport networks and the services and infrastructure which go to make a good quality of life. Doing so, also ensures that the homes we build are readily useable. For example, new homes without adequate and timely access to school places are unlikely to be attractive to buyers and tenants.

Planning is also about taking a longer term view to ensure that the new homes are of a high quality of design so that they contribute to making great places and to environmental sustainability.

And we need to ensure that new homes have access to jobs – that we plan for new and refurbished business space in accessible and sustainable locations. That’s one reason why the RTPI is concerned about the extension of permitted development rights: we need to ensure that we are able to maintain adequate space for future businesses just as we need to be able to coordinate housing delivery with services and infrastructure.

Planning is also a contributor to international trade: the RTPI is an international organisation with members in 88 countries and we are readily aware of the high regard that British town planning and master planning is held in. Our planners and designers already punch above their weight in winning work to deliver sustainable development across the globe. We can do more.

To maintain our leading position in sustainable design and delivery, we need the UK after Brexit to maintain its high environmental standards in laws and regulations. We won’t remain world-beaters in consultancy unless we continue to be world-leaders in environmental standards.

Delivery depends on the adequate resourcing of our local planning authorities. This is in part about ensuring they have the right staffing levels to be able to be to deliver the local plans that are the cornerstone of our planning systems and to process the planning applications and discharge of conditions required for building to get underway in a timely

manner. Sadly, at this crucial time, we have allowed our local authority planning teams to decline, both in terms of their strategic role and in terms of resourcing.

That's why the RTPI is campaigning for local authorities to put planning back at the top table of corporate decision-making and why we keep making the case for better resourcing. Our research last year showed that 83% of local authorities no longer have a chief planning officer.

Leadership is essential to encourage and support high professional standards amongst authority planning staff. It also enables local authorities to spot and to take the opportunities that planning presents to enhance places and enhance values, enriching the economic performance of our towns and cities. Scotland is currently considering a change to its planning laws to require each authority to have a chief planning officer. We would ask the UK Parliament to consider following suite.

This evening we are launching our report: **[‘Serving the public interest? The reorganisation of UK planning services in an era of reluctant outsourcing.’](#)**

The authors; RTPI and Newcastle University, find that many planners in both the public and private sectors feel that austerity has undermined planning's ability to serve the public interest.

The combination of under-resourcing and the necessary focus on housing and economic growth, has limited the ability of many local planning authorities to deliver across a wider range of social objectives and in particular to consider the environment and climate change, and social and cultural needs.

Planning shouldn't be allowed to be just a reactive, regulatory function. But many English local authority planners feel that they are only able to be reactive and have little time for professional discretion or strategic thinking - that the planning function has been limited to "box ticking".

There is also scepticism about the value for money that outsourcing offers in the long term.

We shouldn't however think that the picture is one of a universally demoralised profession: planners in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland overall remain confident about their role in local planning and the opportunities it presents. But there is widespread dissatisfaction in the public sector with resourcing levels, the prevalence of 'box ticking', and low levels of support for accreditation and professional development.

We must give credit to Local Planning Authorities across the whole of the UK, who have adapted to survive the harsh conditions of austerity, developing flexible arrangements for providing services and becoming more efficient and business-like, using their planning services as a source of revenue while finding new ways of collaborating with neighbouring authorities.

But planning is central to the economic, social, and environmental policy objectives of the Government, the devolved nations and our local authorities. We believe that now, more than ever, is the time to use our planning system and our highly qualified planners to fully deliver in the public interest on jobs and infrastructure, to mitigate climate change and much-needed, high quality homes.