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Royal Town Planning Institute

RTPI 2020 President Sue Manns speech for Planner Live Online

29 June

It is 29th June 2020. The world that we live in today is, in so many ways, very different to the one that we were experiencing when we last met as a profession at the Planning Convention 2019.

Whilst global challenges such as climate change have not gone away, our focus has shifted over the last few months to respond to the immediate threat of the COVID 19 pandemic. Many lives have been lost, many families and businesses have been affected.

Although life as we knew it in 2019 will not return, the time has now come to think about and plan for the recovery. We need plans, policies and actions that together will support a greener, place-based recovery that responds not only to the lessons learned from the pandemic, but also to the challenges that we were grappling with this time last year, most notably climate change. These have not gone away.

Whilst it is important that we act quickly to support the restoration of our economy, we need to ensure that short term 'quick fixes' do not prejudice longer term actions. So, it is vitally important to plan for the world that we want and that we need. The future that we have, will be the future that we choose.

I am very proud to be launching today the RTPI's new campaign called Plan the World we Need.

This campaign is targeted at governments within the UK, the media, stakeholders, influencers and indeed anyone who has an interest in the future of our places and spaces. Its purpose is to promote the key role of planners and planning in creating a better, greener Post Covid 19 world - # Plan the World We Need.

Alongside this the RTPI is today publishing a report called 'Plan the World We Need'.



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This report reflects on the health and economic impacts of Covid 19, whilst reminding us that the climate and environmental crisis has not gone away.

It calls on governments to take a place-based approach to the recovery, strengthening planning so that it can play a central role in coordinating the deployment of resources and investment in a way that reflects the specific challenges and opportunities of different places.

The past few months brought into sharp focus the strengths and weaknesses of our places and way of life. What we must not do, is ignore what it has taught us about the importance of sustainable, resilient and inclusive places.

COVID-19 has impacted on everyone. Lockdown has changed the way that we live our lives and the way that we use our local areas. It has been an anxious time, but across our UK nations and beyond, communities have shown themselves to be innovative, adaptable and resilient.

However experiences of the pandemic have been very different, with many of these differences being a product of the place where people are living.

The pandemic has been a story of inequality. Its impacts have not been felt equally, with those living in our more disadvantaged areas suffering disproportionately.

Those who live in cramped homes with limited access to good quality outside space, have generally fared less well than those in larger houses with private gardens.

The way we travel and move around has changed. The use of public transport as a mode of travel remains severely restricted and is seen by many as the least safe option, at least for the time being.

Reductions in travel by road, rail and air as a result of lockdown, have however had positive benefits, with air quality improving and carbon emissions decreasing. We have seen new 'pop-up' cycle lanes and wider pavements appearing, with the support of local communities. All of which have shown people that the way we travel around can be different and that this can improve the health of many living in our cities. It has

reinvigorated the debate around a greener future and shown that things can change for the better and that they can change very quickly.

The pandemic has also shown the strength that comes from being part of a community and the importance of community support networks. Neighbours have mobilised and come together, using local knowledge and local resources to respond to the crisis.

As we plan for the future we need to listen to the local voice – they know what works and what doesn't work in their areas and we need to capture this and ensure they are fully involved in planning their future.

The very real threat of climate change has not gone away. Similarly, the need to address the crisis in housing supply has not gone away. The difference between the COVID-19 crisis and other crises is that we have been given ample notice of their arrival. We have an opportunity to address these before they reach a tipping point.

The post COVID-19 world must address the large and widening gaps in health and economic well-being and 'level up' life experiences across society. As we look forward, the stark reality of our economic situation is becoming more evident day by day. There is a desperate need to get the economy moving. But we need to show future generations that we learnt from our experiences and that we were bold enough and brave enough to be able to plan for the world that both we and they need. They will not forgive us if we do not take this opportunity.

To achieve this, we must adopt a place-based approach to decision making. Our approach must be both strategic and holistic. It must be one which maximises investment in public and active transport, healthy place-making, renewable energy and smart grid technology, resilient infrastructure, climate mitigation, investment in communities, a national programme of building-retrofit and delivering the right houses in the right places.

As spatial planners it is our responsibility to lead this place-based recovery. Spatial planners have the skills and expertise to bring together and balance competing needs and demands and create resilient, sustainable places that support strong communities, both for those alive today and for generations to come.

This includes supporting the green industrial revolution, prioritising healthy

and sustainable modes of travel, reducing pollution and co-ordinating the deployment of zero carbon infrastructure. The increased use of new technology will be key to this.

The RTPI is not just talking the talk, its walking the walk, with its own climate action plan.

So what do we need to do as a profession as we take on this leadership role? First and foremost, we need to listen and engage with the diverse communities that make up our society.

Tackling place-based inequality must be at the heart of the recovery. We must ensure that all voices are represented around the decision-making table and all voices are equally heard. We must build on the remarkable work performed by communities during the pandemic as they have stepped up to support the vulnerable.

We are not alone in our vision for a greener world. Earlier this month almost 200 top business leaders, from companies including HSBC, National Grid and Heathrow Airport, called on the Prime Minister to set out economic recovery plans that align with the UK's climate goals to help rebuild a resilient UK economy in the wake of the coronavirus crisis and to "deliver a clean, just recovery".

Governments need to set the direction of travel, the objectives and metrics that society wants to see delivered in a post COVID 19 world. Then, they need to provide the resources to achieve this. There is a new willingness for change, so long as that change is for the better.

So, in conclusion, the messages of the RTPI campaign 'Plan The World We Need' have a resonance across communities, across nations and across the world. The campaign is the start of a conversation with communities, businesses, stakeholders, the media and governments alike as we promote the vital role of planners and planning in creating a better, greener, place-based recovery.

Having read the report, I very much hope that you will be inspired to play your part in this campaign in the weeks and months to come, by amplifying our social media calls using the #plantheworldweneed. I would also ask you all to watch and share our short campaign film on this YouTube channel, so that each time we meet again whether it be in 2021, 2025, 2030 or beyond, we can look back on what has changed and say that we made a difference.