

# plaNIIt

## Reflections from Angus Kerr RTPI NI Chair 2020

When I took over the role of Chair from Emma, little did I realise what lay ahead of me! Some Chairs will have a story about their year as chair, some will leave a legacy – I had a pandemic!

On a serious note, it certainly has been a very challenging year for many of us and I in no way want to play that down or to make little of that. I believe however that once again the role of planners and planning as a profession has come to the fore.

The way we live and work has changed significantly this year. I'm sure like me, many of you now spend your days on a series of Zoom calls; we're now more conscious of the need for social distancing and queues outside shops have become more commonplace.

My theme for the year was the integration of land use and infrastructure planning. As we continue to deal with the challenges presented by Covid and move to a "new normal," I think this theme is as important as ever.

*continued on page 3 ...*

*Below: Members join the Annual meeting, and the 'virtual' handover of the chain of office.*



## RTPI NI Executive Committee 2021

Following a call for nominations the RTPI NI Executive Committee for 2021 was confirmed at the Annual Meeting on 19th November.

- Chair:** Gemma Jobling
- Senior Vice Chair:** Mura Quigley
- Junior Vice Chair:** Catharine McWhirter
- Immediate Past Chair:** Angus Kerr
- GA\* Representative:** Carol Ramsey
- Student / Licentiate:** Adam Trafford
- Corporate Members:**

- Alistair Beggs
- Chris Bryson
- Sharon Mossman (Nations and Regions representative)
- Michael McQuiston
- Emma Walker
- Ryan Walker (Chair of Young Planners NI)
- (\*GA is the RTPI's General Assembly)

There is a vacancy for a Student / Licentiate member of the Committee - so if you are an RTPI Student or Licentiate member and are interested in finding out more please get in touch with Julie Sullivan [julie.sullivan@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:julie.sullivan@rtpi.org.uk)

If you would like to be involved, in the RTPI NI Executive Committee look out for nominations in the summer of 2021 for 2022.

# Welcome to the Winter edition

Welcome to the Winter edition of PlaNIt! 2020 has been a year full of challenges. As well as the personal toll some people have experienced, there have been massive changes to our ways of life, such as online learning and working from home. One of our contributors, Adam Trafford, shares his experience of learning remotely on his planning course and the steps he had to take to build his resilience. The importance of access to green and blue infrastructure, and connecting with our community, has never felt more pertinent.

The pandemic has also offered us some opportunities. The RTPI NI Planner Live conference would have been hosted on one day in September, but instead we had a week of webinars. Whilst we missed out on chance conversations in person, we benefited from speakers and delegates participating from all across the UK. All sessions can now be viewed on YouTube for those who missed them. Charlotte Irwin has provided her thoughts on how the event went and what she gained from it.

Even with working from home, it has been business as usual for many of us. Planners have been working hard to keep momentum going in development and policy making. Planning will underpin any sustainable and equitable recovery from the impact of COVID-19. It is in this climate that Belfast City Council's draft Plan Strategy will go to independent examination - the first in Northern Ireland to do so. One of our contributors offers some reflections on this process.

We hope you enjoy the articles in this edition of the newsletter, and please be in touch with ideas for the next.

A very Happy Christmas from all at RTPI Northern Ireland!

*Joanna Drennan, Editor*

## Congratulations to our newest Chartered Town Planners

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The opinions expressed are contributors' own, unless otherwise stated. RTPI NI is not responsible for statements made or views expressed in this Newsletter.

It is with great pleasure we welcome the RTPI's newest Chartered Town Planners in Northern Ireland.

The most recently elected Chartered Town Planners in Northern Ireland are:

- Kyle Elder
- Jonathan Martin
- Mark McEvoy

(Note those more recently being awarded Chartered status will appear in the next edition of PlaNIt).

The RTPI continues to see the Assessment of Professional Competence (APC) as a key priority and every step has been taken to ensure that the published assessment schedule dates are adhered to.



For further information and to keep updated, please refer to our website: [www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/assessment-of-professional-competence/covid-19-and-apc-assessment-schedules/](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/assessment-of-professional-competence/covid-19-and-apc-assessment-schedules/)

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As a profession, we have a vital role to play in the future development of the places in which we live, work and enjoy our leisure time. In these uncertain times, planners are well placed to guide, encourage and promote a more sustainable and integrated approach to land use and infrastructure development and to look for innovative and locally agreed solutions to the challenges we continue to face. Integrating land use and infrastructure planning can create spaces and places that can be used positively to enhance wellbeing for all.

As I reflect on my theme for the year and on my experience as Chair, I'm pleased to say that despite the many challenges we have faced over the last number of months, we have still been able to deliver some of our usual events, just in a slightly different way. Some of my key highlights include this year's conference which we moved to an online platform and a virtual visit from the President, Sue Manns.

I think this year's conference was a great success. Entitled "Seizing the Chance for Change" a series of sessions were run across a week in September

each with a focus on a different element of integrated land use and infrastructure planning. The online platform enabled us to engage with a much wider audience and gave us access to a much wider range of speakers. We have seen a huge number of hits on YouTube to watch the webinars and had over 1,000 delegates watching live. It also provided an opportunity for participants to be involved as suited them rather than commit to a one-off day-long event. We had a number of great speakers across the week on topics as diverse as Connected Neighbourhoods, to the role of legal agreements in delivering integrated infrastructure.

In early October we were also lucky to host a virtual Presidential visit. This year the Rathlin Development & Community Association welcomed Sue Manns and a number of RTPI NI representatives virtually to Rathlin Island. While we avoided the risk of a bumpy sea crossing, we certainly didn't miss out on all that Rathlin has to offer. It was great to hear about the work that has been taken forward by the community working alongside the NI Executive and to hear about their ambitious and future plans for the Island's East Light site and

for a green/carbon neutral island by 2030.

I also this year had the honour of presenting the first NI Young Planner of the Year Award – well done to Ryan Walker again! I was also pleased to be able to recognise the work by Erin Donaldson who was Commended.

I would like to acknowledge the support I have received during my time as Chair. Thank you to Emma - last year's Chair, the Executive Committee and Roisin and Julie. I am very grateful for the support.

*Angus Kerr*

*RTPI NI Chair 2019/2020*

## Dementia and Town Planning: Creating better environments for people living with dementia

The RTPI has published an updated version of our practice advice for our members. Evidence has shown that good quality housing and well-planned, enabling local environments can have a substantial impact on the quality of life for someone living with dementia. It forms part of our Plan The World We Need Campaign. The advice identifies the important role town planners can play.

The advice summarises expert advice, outlines key planning policy, good practice and case studies from around the UK. The policy context applies to England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It is endorsed by Alzheimer's Society and Public Health England.

Find it here [www.rtpi.org.uk/dementia](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/dementia)



## Finding a Path Through the Pandemic

*In this article, we hear from Adam Trafford about his experience of the pandemic as a planning student. Adam is an ambitious and passionate planning student with an interest in post-conflict regeneration who enjoys promoting the planning profession.*

*Having recently completed a Bachelor's degree at the University of Ulster in "Planning, Regeneration and Development" he is continuing his studies with a Master's in "City Planning and Design" at Queen's University Belfast.*

*Adam co-founded and chaired Ulster University's UPLAN Society, a student-led planning society. Alongside his committee, he organised a successful conference in March 2020 based around the theme of "Planning for a Resilient Future".*

Confused? Nervous? Anxious?... Probably panicked! One of those best describes how I felt reading that email in early March. COVID, the butt of most jokes at the time, the "awk wind your neck in, it's only a cold" virus had closed the country and with it my time on campus. Yes, I know some of you will call me dramatic; students don't have it too bad, all we do is drink and party anyway I hear some of you say? Unfortunately for most, we do more work than partying, but this was definitely the start of a hangover.

UPLAN Society had pulled off a stupidly successful conference and I was on top of the world (see photo right). I was proud as punch of my "wee" committee, thinking that the only way was onwards and upwards, riding that high for the whole week ... Boy did that shock bring me right back down. The email, in short, stated that the University was moving online for the remainder of the academic year. My immediate thought was: where do I go? In the end I closed shop and retreated home to the North West of NI, leaving the University, the City and my friends behind me.

*Wake up, coffee, stare at the same four walls, attempt to do work, sleep, repeat.*

A shock indeed. Pre-recorded lectures, video seminars and endless emails replaced the comfort of the planning studio in Jordanstown. Replacing the casual dander to knock on the



*Above: (from left to right) Grainia Long, Linda McElduff, Gavan Rafferty, Lauren Coulter, Adam Trafford at the Ulster University Conference: Planning for a Resilient Future*

open door at 4B06 (the UU planning staff room) to chat with Gavan (Rafferty) about my literature review or to discuss new events for the society, to talk to Linda (McElduff) about placement or spend some time discussing all things marine spatial planning with Heather (Ritchie) but more or less just to have a cup of tea and a chat. The accessibility and the open-door policy gave all planning students comfort and the greatest of reassurances about any issues they might have. With that email, the ease of access that was at our fingertips disappeared, the team were still available, but they were spread thin, under immense pressure to quickly get all learning materials online and to convert the remainder of the semester online.

No short task!

*Wake up, coffee, stare at the four same walls, do work, sleep, repeat.*

The pressure ramped up as the semester progressed and deadlines drew near. This was when issues began to bubble to the surface. The monotonous daily structure began to adversely affect my mood, staring at the same four walls left me feeling dejected and lethargic. Usually, you could head to O'Briens with your mates and grab some lunch, take your mind off things, gather your thoughts... reset. The 10 second walk to and from your kitchen doesn't really have the same effect.

*Wake up, coffee, walk outside, work, phone a friend, sleep, repeat.*

As this was all going on, I got another shock... an email, I scanned it, holding my breath. My placement with Belfast City Council as a planning assistant had been terminated. All that work, pouring over my CV, mock interviews, the stress of it all and then to actually secure the placement, just for it to be ripped away. The alarm bells started ringing. This was part of my plan, I was going to do a year's placement, earn some money (and save it for a change!), then

*"The pandemic has forced a paradigm shift, both in the way we act and in the way we think. The initial shock is over and the opportunity to build back better has presented itself, now we just need to capitalise on it."*

return to the fold with buckets of experience and finish my masters. What in the hell do I do now?

*Wake up, coffee, walk outside, surf, work, chat to a friend, sleep, repeat.*

So, I finished my bachelor's at Ulster University and got a 1st class honours in Planning, Regeneration & Development. Thanks to Gavan, Linda and Heather for reassuring me,

slapping me around the ear when I needed it and pushing me to new heights.

*Wake up, coffee, read, walk outside, work, surf, phone a friend, sleep, repeat.*

Following this I decided to complete my master's at Queens University Belfast, in City Planning & Design. The main enticement was the potential for face to face learning (and not through a monitor!). It started well, the whole experience was surreal, wear a mask at all times when inside, stay two metres away from everyone at all times, endless hand washing, but it was face to face and it definitely was more effective than staring at a screen in your room for two hours. However, this has since changed. With the 4-week lockdown being implemented, all face to face contact is being moved to online until after Christmas. Unfortunate, but sadly unavoidable given the circumstances.

*Wake up, coffee, read, walk outside, lecture in Belfast, work, surf, phone a friend, sleep, repeat.*

Throughout the summer, teaching staff had more time to prepare online materials, lectures and seminars so this time the transition was smoother. The first lockdown prepared me somewhat

to know what I needed to do, in order to keep myself sane and maintain my workload. It isn't a sustainable method for learning - we are conditioned from pre-school to work in "learning" environments. Throw that together with learning at such a high level and it was destined to cause issues.

The pandemic has forced a paradigm shift, both in the way we act and in the way we think. The initial shock is over and the opportunity to build back better has presented itself, now we just need to capitalise on it.

So that's it; one student's warped view of the world for the last six odd months. The headache is still there but I think we can weather this hangover.

*Wake up, coffee, read, online lecture, walk outside, online seminar, work, surf, group meeting on teams, phone a friend, talk to a lecturer, smile, sleep, repeat.*

Thanks for reading!

Adam Trafford

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## So what did I think of that?

As planners, the year 2020 has brought many challenges, driving us as a profession to adapt to ensure projects and development continue to be delivered. The RTPI's annual Northern Ireland conference was no different. Rather than the usual one-day conference, the RTPI delivered a week-long programme of digital sessions under the theme, Integrated Land Use and Infrastructure Planning in a Post-Pandemic World.

The digital conference was kicked off by Nichola Mallon, Minister for Infrastructure, who set a positive tone for the week ahead through her reassurance that the Department's focus remains on investment, particularly in green and blue infrastructure.

Improved wellbeing through access to green and blue infrastructure and active travel has undoubtedly been a welcomed focus as a result of the pandemic. I was interested in the seminar 'Integrated approach to future development through the development plan' and how the aforementioned priorities are being considered in the context of longer-term plan delivery. Alistair Beggs (Department for Infrastructure) and Aidan Thatcher (Belfast City Council) both discussed the importance of how a solid evidence base and good place-making objectives

(established in the SPPS) are critical to ensuring local plans are resilient to future shocks and stresses. Again, the theme of partnership working between central and local government in the context of a Regional Infrastructure Plan was emphasised. Personally, I believe this plan is a priority and I am optimistic that it will finally start to address the regional imbalance in Northern Ireland.

As a young planner, I found the public sector's flexibility and quick response to implement social distancing measures, such as the temporary removal of car parking to extend footpaths and enabling businesses to utilise street space, a refreshing change from the usual drawn out sign off process. I was therefore interested to understand Helen Quigley (Inner City Trust), Marie Ward (Newry Mourne and Down District Council) and Lean Doody's (Arup) perspective of the future for town centres in a post pandemic world, and the role of the public and private sector in this. Although there was an overall sense of agreement that town centres will always be required, there was a lot of uncertainty around their

function and questions regarding how the shift in focus from the retail/ office model to residential and leisure is truly adaptable in practice. In my view, I think the pandemic has provided an opportunity for a well-funded and imaginative approach to ensure the revival of town centres which should be intrinsically linked with Minister Mallon's drive to address the climate emergency.

Overall, the RTPI delivered a very successful conference. The online format enabled a more varied, dynamic perspective from the range of speakers from throughout the UK and Ireland, which would not normally be achievable. However, expanding my network, chance conversations and sharing feedback was always as much of a reason for attending the conference in person as the themes or speakers. Perhaps a 2021 conference mixing both in person and digital aspects would provide a truly inclusive experience, bringing together both young and experienced planners.

*Charlotte Irwin, Arup*



*Above: Joanna Drennan, opening the Transport webinar at Northern Ireland Planner Live*



*Left (Clockwise from top left): Gavan Rafferty (chair), Charlotte Irwin, Adam Trafford and Erin Macdonald, who were joined by Ryan Walker at Northern Ireland Planner Live*

## RTPI NI Announces its first Young Planner of the Year

This award seeks out the brightest RTPI members in the early stages of their careers (first 10 years). The Award recognises Young Planners who demonstrate a contribution to planning or significant career achievements in recent years in Northern Ireland.

In 2020 RTPI NI completed the search for the first Northern Ireland Young Planner of the Year.

Young Planners are important for the profession and the Award seeks to celebrate our young talent and their contribution to the profession.



Above: Ryan Walker, RTPI NI Young Planner of the Year 2020

“Ryan is an extremely able and articulate young planner, who enthusiastically appreciates the need to pursue collaborative ways of working and strive for a more inclusive profession.”

Angus also congratulated Ryan for organising a successful online writing competition during lockdown using the hashtag #LockdownUplift, encouraging students and young planners to share their perspectives of a post-Covid world.

Ryan will now go through to the Young Planner of the Year category at the RTPI’s national Awards for Planning Excellence, which will be staged as an online ceremony in April 2021.

The judges also Commended Erin Donaldson MRTPI, a planner at Turley in Belfast and a founding member of Women in Planning in Northern Ireland.



*“Ryan is an extremely able and articulate young planner, who enthusiastically appreciates the need to pursue collaborative ways of working and strive for a more inclusive profession.”*

Ryan Walker MRTPI has been named as the inaugural winner. The announcement was made by RTPI NI Chair Angus Kerr MRTPI during Northern Ireland Planner Live in September.

Ryan is a Chartered Planning Consultant at The Paul Hogarth Company in Belfast and is also chair of RTPI NI Young Planners and Vice Chair of the RTPI’s national Young Planners network.

Angus Kerr said: “Ryan is an outstanding champion not only for his passion for planning in Northern Ireland and beyond, but also for his drive and commitment to the work of the RTPI and the wider profession.

“He has achieved so much in his short career to date, having worked in both public and private sectors, having showed great tenacity and innovation in the way he promotes planning, and having nominated himself to sit on the RTPI’s General Assembly.



Above: Erin Donaldson, Commended in the RTPI NI Young Planner of the Year Award 2020



## Recognising outstanding projects, plans and people in these categories:

### People

Young Planner of the Year  
Planning Heroes in a Pandemic

### Teams

Small Planning Consultancy of the Year  
Planning Consultancy of the Year  
Planning Authority of the Year  
In-house Planning Team of the Year

### Projects

Excellence in Plan Making Practice  
Excellence in Planning for Heritage and Culture  
Excellence in Planning for the Natural Environment  
Excellence in Planning for Health and Wellbeing  
Excellence in Planning to Deliver Homes - large schemes (50 or more homes)  
Excellence in Planning to Deliver Homes - small schemes (up to 50 homes)  
Excellence in Planning for a Successful Economy  
Excellence in Tech within Planning Practice  
International Award for Planning Excellence

All categories are free to enter!

**Entries will close on 14 December 2020.**

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Please contact:

[julie.sullivan@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:julie.sullivan@rtpi.org.uk)



## RTPI NI Awards for Planning Excellence - Old Mill Court Wins 2020 Award

The Awards champion the very best examples of planning and planners in Northern Ireland. They demonstrate the positive impact planning has on our quality of life and celebrate professional expertise. Winning or being shortlisted is a clear demonstration of high quality work and professionalism.



Rural Housing Association's project occupying the site of a disused builders' yard has been named as this year's winner of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) Northern Ireland Award for Planning Excellence. Old Mill Court in Sion Mills features 14 new social dwellings which reflect careful consideration of local character while also meeting the needs of rural residents.

The award was announced during a session of Northern Ireland Planner Live 2020 in September.

RTPI NI Director, Roisin Willmott said: "Old Mill Court is a worthy winner of the RTPI NI Award for Planning Excellence 2020, having regard to local social and economic culture and the landscapes and environments that have shaped distinct places.

"Sion Mills is a designated conservation area and a village rich in architectural heritage. The judges were particularly impressed that Old Mill Court's design, by GM Design Associates, was part of a wider regeneration masterplan which took this heritage into account.

"Design cues for the new houses, including the use of red brick, white render, hardwood doors, grey windows and slim profile fibre cement slates, were taken from a cottage that used to occupy part of the site. There is even a nod to adjacent agricultural buildings through fibre cement corrugated profile sheeting."

Also shortlisted by the judges was a 'zero waste' circular economy project for the Derry/Strabane district, submitted by Zero Waste North West.



*Above: Old Mill Court, Sion Mills*

## Plan the World We Need: *How can planners help create the world we need post-COVID-19?*

The RTPI is calling on governments across the UK and Ireland to capitalise on the expertise of planners to achieve a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our Plan the World We Need campaign aims to raise awareness of the vital role planners have in every aspect of the recovery in order to revive the economy, tackle inequality and meet net-zero targets by 2050.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought into sharp focus the strengths and weaknesses of our places and our way of life and it is now vital that we plan 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 long before COVID, most notably climate change.

We believe that governments must capitalise on the expertise of spatial planners to tackle place-based inequality, enable a green industrial revolution, prioritise healthy and sustainable modes of transport and coordinate the rapid deployment of zero carbon infrastructure.

The campaign details and accompanying paper can be found at: [www.rtpi.org.uk/plantheworldweneed](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/plantheworldweneed)

The RTPI's Plan The World We Need paper examines how planning can contribute to calls for a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the current health and economic crisis. It complements our ongoing work to understand how planners are responding to the immediate challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic.

A further paper focusing specifically on Northern Ireland was published alongside the research report. The planning system has a vital role to play in the development of the places we live, work and enjoy. Particularly at this time of uncertainty, planners and the planning system are well placed to support the recovery by encouraging a positive, collaborative, and integrated approach.

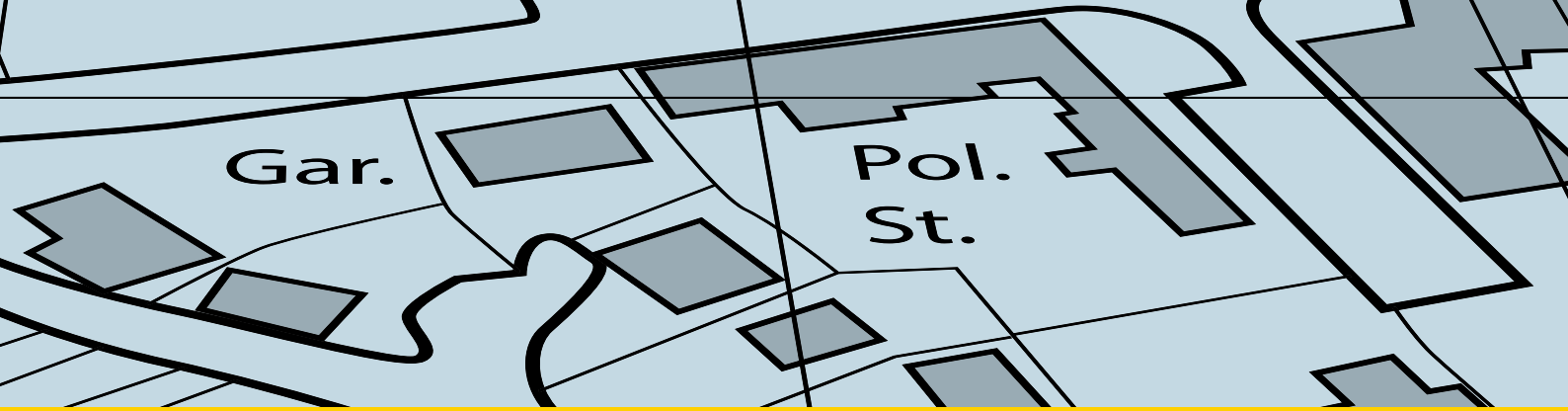
At this critical stage in the recovery, we need a strong, proactive and plan-led system to help communities and businesses navigate through uncertain times and to direct economic stimulus measures towards place-based interventions, which deliver multiple benefits.

Our paper examines how planning can contribute to calls for a sustainable, resilient and inclusive recovery from the current health and economic crisis in Northern Ireland.

The [Northern Ireland Plan the World We Need Report](#) can be downloaded from the RTPI's website.



# Plan The World We Need



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Royal Town Planning Institute

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## Belfast Local Development Plan – Draft Plan Strategy – Independent Examination

At the time of writing\*, Belfast City Council is preparing for the start of the Independent Examination (IE) into its draft Plan Strategy. It is set to be a first for NI in more than one sense: it's the first Local Development Plan document to reach this stage since the new planning system was introduced in 2015, it's the first soundness-based examination to happen and the first plan examination to take place in an online environment.

Consequently it may set the precedent for the plan examinations that will follow. The overall process will need to be both robust and collaborative to achieve the best outcomes. But, what does a round-table discussion look like in an NI context? How will it differ from previous examination approaches? How will it be affected by the online setting?

Whilst Covid19 has made aspects of life difficult for many, looking at experience in other jurisdictions, it may be that the forced move to an online environment for this first IE is a blessing in disguise.

Those who have experience of soundness-based examinations in other UK jurisdictions have recently been able to see the same hearings in an online format too and the good news is there seems very little difference in the approach as a result. In each setting the Inspector asks written questions in advance and then listens to all interested parties, one at a time. Practically, it's more like multiple one-on-one conversations on a topic for everyone else to listen to. The Inspector ensures they understood each view correctly without necessarily stating whether they are minded to agree

or disagree. The only person who asks any party questions directly is the Inspector.

In NI, part of the challenge may be to move to this style of collaborative discussion on a draft Plan, avoiding the more adversarial tone that has sometimes occurred in the past. The PAC have clearly been learning from experience elsewhere too and have already begun to mirror the Planning Inspectorate's approach in England and Wales, with a list of topics and questions published three weeks in advance for all to see. However, the pre-hearing documentation is formal, and it's difficult to gauge the tone from written questions and answers.

It's interesting that the soundness-based approach in other jurisdictions has become more structured and centrally managed than may have originally been envisaged with the concept of a 'roundtable' discussion. However, the fact that the limitations of an online context seem to make no difference to this is encouraging, particularly if the remote video hearings actually make a structured conversation easier to achieve.

It is notable from examinations elsewhere that the hearings themselves last for only four or five weeks in total, with many of the 'strategic' issues – such as growth, the spatial strategy and strategic infrastructure – covered during the first couple of weeks. The remaining time is then usually devoted to site-specific representations. The conversations that flow from this are therefore necessarily high-level, supported by written documentation before, during and after the hearings.



In the NI context, where most site-specific matters are to be left until the Local Policies Plan stage, the level of scrutiny seems far more substantial. The first two weeks of the IE programme in Belfast devote a day to procedural issues and then the remaining time to nine topics that generated over 100 individual questions between them – and that seems to be without considering some of the traditional strategic issues, such as growth and infrastructure, which represent, in many cases, long-standing challenges for NI as a whole.

With such topics in mind, it will be vital that the robust examination necessary will be balanced against the need for creative solutions. A major difference between NI and other jurisdictions is that the Councils aren't the statutory bodies with responsibilities for many of these policy areas. Pragmatic, collaborative solutions are therefore paramount, but are not necessarily easy to achieve.

*Continued on page 13 ....*

## Hugh McKay Memorial Award

Hugh McKay was a Graduate of the Planning School at Queen's University Belfast. He began his planning career with the Antrim and Ballymena Development Commission before joining the Department of the Environment where he progressed to become the Chief Executive of the Planning Service. He was a man of considerable stature and total integrity. His premature death in 2002 was a great loss to the planning profession in Northern Ireland.

RTPI NI gives this award annually in his name to the Queen's University student who attains the highest marked final dissertation.

In 2020 there were joint recipients of the Hugh McKay Award for their dissertations:

**Errin Marshall** for "To what extent does integration of affordable housing have social impacts for residents in mixed tenure housing developments in Chelmsford, Essex?"

**Ethan Smyth** for "Smart Mobility in the Transition to Low-Carbon City Transport: A Case Study of Belfast."



Left: Ethan Smyth



Above: Errin Marshall

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## RTPI NI Student Project Prize

This award is presented annually to the student with the highest mark on Ulster University's MSci in Planning, Regeneration and Development.

In 2020 the Award has been made to Sarah Hamilton for her Research Project: The Value of Green Infrastructure: Planning for Cross-border Contexts.

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... continued from page 12

So, many questions remain heading into this first IE, but one *continued from page 12*

thing that is certain is that it marks a crucial milestone, not only for Belfast's LDP, but for the new plan-making system as a whole. Fitting though it is that the Region's capital city takes this first step, its implications in terms of the process and outcomes may be felt broadly. It's perhaps therefore also fitting that the restrictions that have resulted from Covid19 also offer potentially unprecedented access for anyone to tune in and learn from the Belfast experience.

\* At the time of PlaNIt's publication the initial public hearing sessions of the Independent examination, were underway (Monday 16th November to Friday 27th November 2020 inclusive). For the latest updates see the Planning Appeals Commission website: [www.pacni.gov.uk/local-development-plans](http://www.pacni.gov.uk/local-development-plans)

## Measuring Planning Outcomes – what does it mean?



The RTPi's **Measuring What Matters: Planning Outcomes Research** has the potential to help influence the focus of policymakers away from a statistical numbers game when measuring the impact of planning (how many applications; how much floor space; what investments were made), towards decision-making based more on long term indicators that measure outcomes such as health, well-being, climate, people and the economy.

The use of a planning outcomes tool at a local level could have significant value in informing local policy discussions and planning for higher value places. It could also give national authorities a snapshot of local performance.

To give a local example, the combination of influences that shape the scope of measurable outcomes for Donegal and the wider North West is different to other parts of Ireland. The influences and potential indicators for the Greater Dublin area (GDA) are different from those applied to County Donegal's community and environment or to those of the North West City Region. The old tourism adage of "up here it is different" is grounded in truth and speaks of a very different set of challenges and opportunities to those that exist elsewhere on the island or Ireland.

Any tool that can provide a shared space (centred on the quadruple helix framework of government-academia-industry-civil society) to consider what we want for County Donegal and the North West is where I see the real benefits to achieving scale, choice and variety - not least in helping to tackle the inequalities that exist in environmental, social, geographic and economic contexts.

Unashamedly adopting Eirling Fossen's equation for the regeneration of Oslo, the equation for the North West may, for example, focus on cross-border vitality, natural beauty, demographic profiles, affordability, education opportunities, culture, heritage, diaspora, and strong regional leadership; all of which shape a highly valued place that has the capacity to provide a meaningful north-western contribution to regional, national and all-island growth.

But adopting such a tool across local and national governments will require a significant culture shift in terms of how planners use the information generated to improve the impact of planning on communities and places. Focusing on outcomes and utilising this information in a way that provides a baseline on future needs or the investment required within a 'place' (local, regional, national, community, economic, environment, etc) has up until now been missing. At the core of this lies the value of planning in creating prosperity and wellbeing in our places. If the focus is on only one of the parameters, or if those parameters focus solely on measuring turn-around times or percentages, then the results will not meet wider expectations and the measurement of outcomes risks becoming meaningless.

The toolkit must be useful at a number of levels. The value nationally of having a defined set of common outcomes is clear. For place-making to be effective the toolkit must allow local and regional authorities to first identify the current strategic context before deciding on specific outcomes.

The modelling of a toolkit for planning outcomes to reframe the discussion around planning and the function it plays in creating value is an opportunity that local authorities should not let pass. The alternative is for local authorities to continue to react to circumstances with a distinctly singular, short term and centrally focused viewpoint – and from my perspective, this is not an option. Where this process is welcome is in its contribution to the value of investing in planning as a local and regional activity.

Developing strategies, making decisions and assessing outcomes are the three core underpinnings to using a toolkit such as this, and I believe that if its use is not locally focused in the first instance then the public discourse will continue to be negative and dominated by short term development goals and voting cycles.

*Eunan Quinn*

*Eunan Quinn is senior planner at Donegal County Council having graduated from Queen's University Belfast's School of the Built Environment in 1990. Eunan is an active member of the Irish Planning Institute, having previously served on its national executive, and has a MSC in Innovation Management in the Public Service (jointly conferred by Ulster University & Letterkenny Institute of Technology).*

## Mental health and town planning - Building in resilience

In the UK and Ireland, the rates of mental health illness are high. It is estimated that around one in four people will experience a mental health condition. This places a huge burden on individuals, their families and on society. Where someone lives can have an impact on their mental health. The quality of the wider built environment is also a determining factor for mental health, with noise, pollution levels, quality of green space, access to services and even 'beauty' all playing a part. Therefore, town planning decisions can have an impact on mental health. Creating an accessible, inclusive built environment that enables everyone to play an equal role in society is important in protecting and enhancing everyone's well-being and mental health.

The RTPI has published a practice note which gives advice on how planners can work within the current UK planning systems and with other professionals to take account of mental health when making changes to the built environment. It summarises expert advice, outlines key planning policy, good practice and case studies. The policy context applies to England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Ireland, but the principles of good practice apply wherever you work in the world.

Download the full report at [www.rtpi.org.uk/practice/2020/october/mental-health-and-town-planning/](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/practice/2020/october/mental-health-and-town-planning/).



## Royal Town Planning Institute to achieve net zero emissions by 2025

During Welsh Planner Live in September, RTPI immediate past president and Board of Trustees climate action champion, Ian Tant MRTPI, announced the RTPI's aim to be the world's first "net zero" membership body by reducing its own net carbon emissions to zero by 2025.

Ian Tant said: "For many years, planners around the world have been leading the way in providing solutions to tackle climate change. The RTPI in its 'Plan the World We Need' report and campaign argues that planners should be supported to ensure that our infrastructure and our towns, cities and rural environments work harder to reach the vital carbon net zero goals set by our Governments.

"As the largest Institute for professional planners, the RTPI is now "walking the walk", setting ourselves the ambitious target of becoming fully carbon net zero by 2025 – we believe we will be the first membership organisation to achieve this.

"The actions included in the Institute's Climate Action Plan are based on a thorough-going assessment of the Institute's carbon footprint in 2019 and include switching to green energy providers and requiring that our suppliers to join with us in reducing carbon emissions. Savings in travel are an important part of the Plan: we will be looking to adapt our offices and working practices to reduce the need for staff, members and visitors to travel in order to attend meetings and events and conduct institute business. And we'll be looking to offset unavoidable carbon emissions in the course of the Institute's work.

"This is an exciting step and forms a key part of the RTPI's visionary Corporate Strategy 2020, underlining our commitment to the thought-leadership of the planning profession in tackling climate change."

The RTPI's Climate Action Plan can be viewed here: [www.rtpi.org.uk/news/corporate-strategy-hub/climate-action/read-our-climate-action-plan/](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/news/corporate-strategy-hub/climate-action/read-our-climate-action-plan/)



Royal Town Planning Institute  
Climate Action Plan  
2020



*The RTPI's 2019 emissions were 175.6 tCO<sub>2</sub>e*



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