

plaNIIt

Ryan Walker named RTPI's Young Planner of the Year

At the RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence on-line ceremony on 29th April 2021, Ryan Walker MRTPI was announced Young Planner of the Year.

Ryan is a Planning consultant with a strong drive for high quality design and sustainable placemaking, currently working at The Paul Hogarth Company and delivering transformative projects across the UK and Ireland.

Ryan is a strong advocate for the planning profession and the positive role it can play in reducing inequalities and creating inclusive growth. Until recently Ryan has been the Chair of RTPI Northern Ireland Young Planners, and is Vice-Chair of UK-wide Young Planners network and Corporate Member of RTPI NI Executive Committee.



The judges' comments:

"Ryan's enthusiasm, experience and personality shone throughout his interview, displaying his skills as both a planner and a leader. He understood the need to be collaborative with a wide range of professions outside of planning to keep moving forward on key issues, such as climate change, and to improve lives and opportunities for all. The judges were impressed by Ryan's volunteering and reflective approach on his own career to date to helping others develop in theirs. The judges believe Ryan will successfully use the platform that winning this award provides as a springboard to elevate the work he is already successfully doing in local communities, with the RTPI and reaching the next generation of planners."

Left: Ryan Walker MRTPI, Young Planner of the Year

Welcome to the Spring edition

Welcome to the Spring edition of PlaNIt! We hope you enjoy the articles in this edition which show that Planning has been continuing apace, despite a year of lockdowns and working from home.

The pandemic has afforded an opportunity to reflect on how to improve the planning profession and ensure that any post-COVID recovery is equitable and sustainable. The Department for Infrastructure and Community Places have set up a Planning Engagement Partnership with the aim of reporting to the Minister for Infrastructure in the summer on how community engagement in the planning process can be improved. You can read more about that in this edition.

In this edition, we also hear from Rachael Black of Queen's University Belfast about their 'Planning the Post-Pandemic City' seminar series, and the session on 'Her City' / 'Making Space for Girls' which Rachael chaired.

There have been two governmental consultations which RTPI NI has responded to, which are crucial to the future of the planning system. The first was the draft Programme for Government, which sets out nine outcomes and their key priority areas. Planning is key to achieving many of the desired outcomes which focus on wellbeing and prosperity for all. The second was a Call for Evidence to support a Review of the Implementation of the Planning Act (NI) 2011. The changes introduced in Northern Ireland in 2015 as a result of the Planning Act represented a significant step forward in the design of the planning service to deliver sustainable development for and with communities. However, after six years, now is a good time to review how the system is being implemented and where improvements can be made.

The RTPI's Awards for Planning Excellence were hosted online on 29 April. The full ceremony can be viewed on YouTube. Congratulations to Northern Ireland's Ryan Walker for winning RTPI Planner of the Year! This recognises Ryan's significant achievements in his dedication to the profession, raising the profile of planning, and encouraging enthusiasm in his fellow planners. Well done Ryan!

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

Joanna Drennan, Editor

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Congratulations to our newest Chartered Town Planners



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:

- Alicia Leathem
- Nick Salt
- Anthony Sloan
- Luke Vogan

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

For further information and to keep updated, please refer to our website: www.rtpi.org.uk/membership/

The website includes resources to support you make the step to becoming a Chartered Town Planner, including guidance, podcasts, FAQs and dates for briefing events (currently held online).

RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence

The RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence were announced at an on-line ceremony on 29th April 2021. You can view all of the Winners, Commended and the category finalists in the [Winners' brochure](#).

Join the conversation [#RTPIAwards](#)



Above: Image by Christopher McKay

“The quality of entries in the awards was outstanding and it was a pleasure to read them and see the quality of work that is occurring on ground. The judges were confident that at a time when the Planning profession and the concept of Planning is even more important than ever before as the world faces significant complex challenges, the judges were confident of the future of the profession.”

Chair of the Judging Panel
Dyan Currie HonMRTPI

The Om Dark Sky Park and Observatory, Davagh Forest submitted by Mid Ulster District Council Planning Department

Congratulations to Mid Ulster District Council Planning Department for the Davagh Dark Sky Park, which was named as a Finalist in the Excellence in Planning for the Natural Environment category.

Davagh Dark Sky Park is an internationally accredited signature tourist attraction which promotes the conservation of our dark skies, Sperrins AONB and peatland habitats.

RTPI Events Programme - Access the RTPI's webinar programme from home, the office or even the park!

The RTPI has converted its event programme to an on-line offer, meaning you have access to a whole range of webinars offered across the UK and Ireland - most of which are free for RTPI members. For further information view our [Events Calendar](#).

Review of the Implementation of the Planning Act (NI) 2011: RTPI NI's Evidence

RTPI NI welcomes the Review of the Implementation of the Planning Act (NI) 2011. The changes introduced in Northern Ireland in 2015 as a result of the Planning Act represented a significant step forward in the design of the planning service to deliver sustainable development for and with communities. However, after six years, now is a good time to review how the system is being implemented and where improvements can be made. This does not mean that the planning system in NI is broken but, like any system or policy, review enables adaptation to changes which may have happened since the spatial planning system was

first designed. Reflection is a positive activity.

The consultation focuses on the legislation and, whilst there are changes which could usefully be implemented, other improvements which would add value do not require legislative or regulatory changes and these should also be explored. Planning is an important public service and, if properly implemented and resourced, can deliver positive outcomes across public services and reduce the negative impact of development. It is essential that planning, as a valuable public service, has the confidence of the public and across all communities in Northern Ireland. We would

welcome the opportunity to support the Department for Infrastructure and Councils, along with our members in Northern Ireland, to support the review of planning in NI.

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the urgent need for a digitally-focused overhaul of Northern Ireland's entire planning service.

We have also highlighted the planning system needs increased resourcing if it was to deliver outcomes efficiently, effectively and equitably.

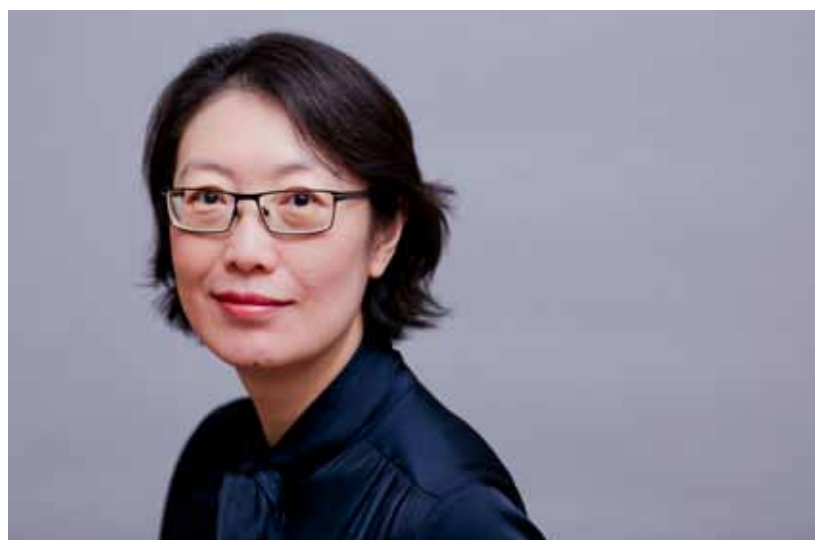
The full response can be viewed here: www.rtpi.org.uk/consultations/2021/april/review-of-the-implementation-of-the-planning-act-ni-2011/.

RTPI President Wei Yang: The first 100 days in office

To mark her first 100 days in office, RTPI President Wei Yang published a [blog](#) to report on her activities and learnings so far.

You can read more about the work of the RTPI's Presidential Team on their [dedicated pages](#).

RTPI NI looks forward to welcoming President Wei Yang to Northern Ireland (either in person or virtually, depending on the public health situation) later in the year.



Championing the very best examples of planning & planners in Northern Ireland



The RTPI Northern Ireland Awards for Planning Excellence celebrate outstanding planners, plans and projects that demonstrate the power of planning. Entries for the Northern Ireland Young Planner of the Year are also open - who are our future leaders?

The awards highlight exceptional examples of how planning and planners have a positive impact on our quality of life in creating exceptional places and protecting our environment. In recognising and rewarding excellence we aim to inspire others to achieve the same high standards.

Get the recognition you deserve and get started on your entry now!

Further details of how to enter on our new on-line application platform and tips on how to win are available on our [website](#).

Planning places for Women, Children and Families

The global pandemic put the world on pause, daily routines, norms and movement options altered overnight. For urban dwellers that meant having to view their immediate surroundings with a new lens. Travel restrictions meant families had no option other than to use any open space near their homes in the city, regardless of spatial quality. As a result, the visual impacts of exclusion in the planning and urban development process were made all the more apparent. This period has highlighted the failures caused by excluding women, children and young people and limiting capacity globally to influence their cities.

My own research is focused on one such group, children, and this resulted in an opportunity for me to chair the Her City and Make Space for Girls seminar as part of the Planning the Post Pandemic Online Lecture Series. I am fascinated by the work and ethos of Her City to increase equality and inclusion in urban development. Her City seeks to provide operational tools and methods which can be translated globally. Her City really sang to me as a bold, clear initiative to transform cities reflecting and led by the needs, aspirations and hopes of women. My research seeks to explore regeneration of interface sites in urban post conflict Belfast. The communities housing such interfaces face economic, health and educational disadvantage. Yet changes, either real or imagined, to the interface sites can stimulate fear based on historic and in some instances more recent sectarian conflict. In dense urban housing estates, any open spaces are used by children including those near interfaces. Existing problems were

compounded by travel restrictions during the pandemic, but children and young people have had no say in altering this landscape and have been excluded from the process.

I was super excited to have the golden opportunity to hear from the world experts first hand as to their experiences in engaging women and girls in urban planning. The breadth of experience internationally in one virtual room was awe inspiring. The sheer volume of knowledge and expertise within the seminar and underpinning goals of inclusion generated frank discourse on best practice. Crucially the discussion enabled consideration of challenges, key issues and learning from where things did not go so well.

Living examples of ill-conceived family urban spaces were highlighted indicating flaws in the planning system whereby the views of women and girls are crossed over. The illustration of such cases stimulated a plethora of ideas as to how such simple mistakes can be, not only undone, but avoided. This is where the Her City initiative shines as a leading light in tool kit provision, vision generation, empowerment and quality participatory processes to create cities which work for all people. Her City is taking a modern approach to challenge a historically embedded societal problem, including utilisation of open and digital platforms.

Creating vibrant, safe, useable urban spaces must be guided by the real views of women and girls. For too long have assumptions been made and traditional routes followed as to what represents a supportive urban environment. Outdoor urban facilities have been designed with gender

stereotypes in mind rather than a genuine effort to understand the needs of women and girls. This has created an imbalance in the activities which can take place at such sites. The women involved in the seminar fanned the flame of hope in what can be achieved in urban planning through inclusivity. These women are visionaries in what a new urban society can look like, but are also realists, developing the tools in how to get there. More importantly they seek to share such tools and create a global practice of fully engaging girls in urban and development planning processes.

The sheer diversity in attendance and volume of attendees reflected the demand for women and girls to have a stronger role in determining their cities, their spaces, their lives. The rich tapestry of knowledge was shared freely at the seminar, in an online environment of mutual respect and understanding. The level of empathy across all attendees as to lived experience and challenges from the female perspective was striking. This further evidenced the need for girls and women to be centrally placed in urban planning, regardless of the country. The utility of urban spaces can only be realised by genuinely engaging the views of women and girls. By not doing this urban planning is effectively overlooking half of the world's population. The arrogance of not reaching out to excluded groups in planning has severe long-term ramifications. Groups who have not been given the opportunity or empowerment to engage face physical exclusion and barriers to use. This has a negative impact on the quality, appearance and relevance of urban spaces, including limiting the capacity of excluded groups

to use such spaces openly, freely and safely.

The pandemic has shown the glaring societal inequalities and the dangers of not hearing or choosing to ignore the voices of excluded groups. Now more than ever we need to hear and see each other and to care. The Her City and Make Space for Girls seminar felt like a coming together and a safe space to showcase the glorious potential of what an inclusive future can and will look like.

Rachael Black
PhD Researcher at QUB

‘Gender mainstreaming’ key to planning places that work for all

A gender dimension should be incorporated into all stages of the planning process to ensure benefits for all, a new research paper from the RTPI has concluded.

Women and Planning: creating gender-sensitive urban environments post-Covid-19

argues for the implementation of urban planning policies sensitive to gender-specific needs - known as ‘gender mainstreaming’ - into all policy, legislative and decision-making practices.

This approach, the report says, would help to ensure that future built environment solutions have equal regard to the experiences of all people irrespective of gender, particularly as the world moves into a post-pandemic recovery period.

However, the study found that the integration of gender mainstreaming into spatial policy-making has been held back by a range of different factors including inadequacies of both the education and planning systems, which has resulted in gender inequalities going largely undiscussed and hidden from view.

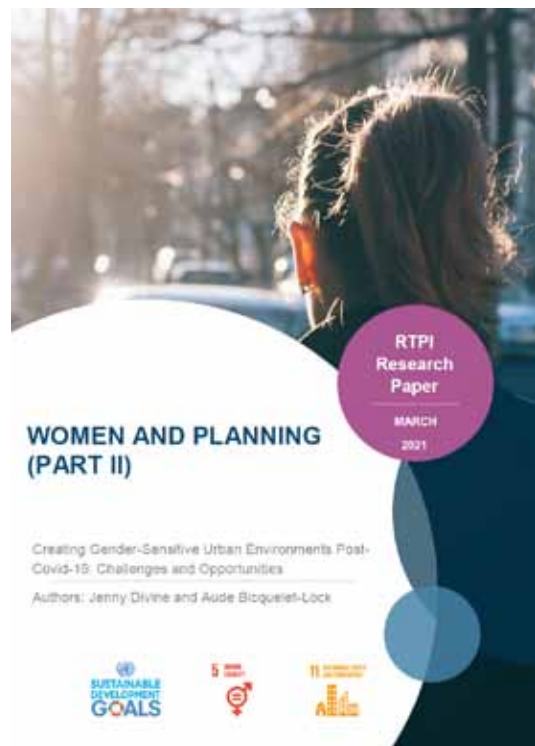
The report, published on International Women’s Day 2021, was co-authored by RTPI Policy and Networks Adviser Jenny Divine and Deputy Head of Policy and Research Professor Aude Bioquelet-Lock.

RTPI President Wei Yang FRTPi said: “The implementation of gender mainstreaming into every stage of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of urban planning policies, programmes, and projects will ensure that gender equality is enhanced and that all people benefit equally.

“There is much work still to be done. Systemic inadequacies in the planning and education systems which were uncovered by our research continue to hinder women’s ability to shape policies and progress decisions that have positive implications for gender equality attainment.

“However, as we begin the recovery from the pandemic, there is huge potential to integrate a gender dimension into the place-based initiatives that UK governments are increasingly exploring to facilitate a joined-up and collaborative approach to planning. Incorporating a gender dimension will create opportunities to expose hidden inequalities, break down the gender biases that have been present for too long in the built environment, and create solutions that have regard to the experiences of all people.”

Qualitative data was collected for the research via questionnaires



and semi-structured interviews with 50 female and 2 male planners. The majority of respondents were based in the UK but the study also includes the views of respondents based in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the US.

The new report is the second in a series from the RTPI. **Women and Planning: An analysis of gender-related barriers to professional advancement** was published in February 2020.

Northern Ireland Programme for Government: Framework Consultation

The 'New Decade New Approach' (NDNA) document set out the process and approach for developing the Northern Ireland Executive's Programme for Government (PfG). The key points were that the Programme should be developed through engagement and co-design, using an outcomes-based approach; focus on prosperity and wellbeing for all; establish a shared and ambitious strategic vision for the future; and provide for accountable and transparent monitoring and reporting arrangements. The Executive's approach to the PfG begins with a draft Framework of Outcomes – statements of societal wellbeing which, taken together, are intended to capture the range of things that experience and research suggest matter most to people. It is these Outcomes and their Key Priority Areas which were consulted on in 2021.

In our response we drew attention to the fact that planning can support many of the key priority areas and deliver outcomes but planning as a valuable public service was not acknowledged.

Our response to the consultation can be viewed here: www.rtpi.org.uk/consultations/2021/march/northern-ireland-programme-for-government/



The role of town planning in protecting mental health

To mark World Mental Health Day on October 2020 the RTPI published new practice advice for our members on Mental Health and Town Planning: Building in resilience. The Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on our lives over the last year. However well we overcome the physical impacts of the virus, the long-term impact on our collective mental health is likely to be significant. The lockdowns have thrown into stark relief the disparity between the living conditions for people across the UK.

Our advice highlights the role of town planning in protecting and enhancing mental health. The impacts range from secure housing, to access to services and proximity to greenspace. Whilst there are currently few links to mental health in planning policy in the UK nations, the links are clearest in Wales. 'Together for mental health' is the Welsh Government's strategy to improve mental health and well-being. It applies to all parts of government in Wales, including town planning. The strategy makes a direct link to Planning Policy Wales. The intentions are further reinforced through the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act.

Read the full advice at [Mental Health and Town Planning](#)

Sarah Lewis MRTPI, RTPI Planning Practice Officer



Apprenticeships essential for diverse planning profession in Northern Ireland

The introduction of a town planning apprenticeship in Northern Ireland would help to make the profession genuinely representative of the society in which it works.

In an **open letter to Economy Minister** Diane Dodds MLA to coincide with **Northern Ireland Apprenticeships Week**, the RTPI said that a degree-level Chartered Town Planner Apprenticeship should be considered as part of a strong, well-resourced planning service delivered through the Department for Infrastructure and the 11 Councils and supported by private sector planning consultancies.

Director of RTPI Northern Ireland Roisin Willmott FRTPI said: "The RTPI wants to demonstrate that planning is a

profession that is open to all, regardless of background and believes that the single most influential way to do this is through the education system.

"The traditional route to becoming a Chartered town planner is via university. However, with this route prohibitive to some in society, the introduction of a degree-level planning apprenticeship is an essential step in creating a truly diverse and inclusive profession in Northern Ireland.

"Our experience of the recently-launched **Chartered Town Planner Apprenticeship in England**, where more than half of current apprentices come from a non-degree family background, has confirmed just how successful the scheme can be in opening

up the profession to all."

In our response to a consultation on the Northern Ireland Executive's proposed Programme for Government, we highlighted that planning can support many of the Executive's key priority areas, but that planning 'as a valuable public service' was not acknowledged.

The RTPI believes that increased resourcing is needed to equip and strengthen planning services in Northern Ireland, enabling the system to deliver outcomes efficiently, effectively and equitably.



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www.rtpi.org.uk/profile

Furthering Community Engagement in Planning

Before Easter, the Planning Engagement Partnership, which was convened last October by Nichola Mallon, Minister for Infrastructure, held two practitioner focused workshops to help inform its work. The Partnership is tasked with improving the quality and depth of community engagement in planning at both regional and local planning levels, and delivering a Report with recommendations to the Minister by the summer.

The two workshops held on the 25th and 30th March brought together a cross-section of key planning stakeholders involved in planning in Northern Ireland to reflect on a key aspect of the reforms to the planning system, namely, improving community engagement in the planning process. Using case studies to illustrate ‘reflections on practice’, workshop participants heard about and discussed good practice as well as learning points in development management

and forward planning.

Case studies ranged from: the development of Place Plans in Wales; early engagement in regeneration and place shaping plans in Balbriggan, Ardoyne and Armagh; digital Pre-Application Community Consultation processes; early and ongoing engagement throughout the development of the Belfast Transport Hub; and engagement at each of the stages of the development of Belfast City Council’s Local Development Plan, including their Youth Friendly Preferred Options Paper.

The discussions were lively and wide-ranging, and also reflected upon the recent challenges and opportunities that the Covid-19 pandemic brought to engaging communities in planning. Participants shared their experiences from various sectors of planning practice. The development industry, consultancy, environment, community and voluntary organisations, academia, representative bodies, councils

and the Department were all represented and discussed what is working well, what needs improved and potential barriers to - and ideas for - achieving effective community engagement.

The Partnership is planning a third, public facing event to be held at the end of May, which will explore the role and importance of community engagement in successful place-shaping and planning processes. This event will inform the final Report for the Minister for Infrastructure. The event will present innovative engagement techniques in planning processes and examine issues such as engaging with young people, inclusive approaches, digital engagement, and tactical urbanism, amongst others.

Angus Kerr, Chair of the Partnership, said, “If we can improve community engagement in planning, it will be of huge benefit to society as a whole – to our communities, the economy and the environment. This

work will also inform the current Review of the Implementation of the Planning Act.” He added, “Minister Nichola Mallon is enthusiastic about community engagement in planning, and sees the Partnership as part of our ongoing work to improve the planning system, and people’s experience of the planning system.”



The Planning Engagement Partnership is chaired by the Department and assisted by **Community Places**, an organisation which has provided support for over 35 years to people and communities engaging in the planning process.

If you would like to find out more about the work of the Partnership or how to get involved, please visit the Department's website at: www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk/articles/planning-engagement-partnership-pep

*Catherine McKinney, Department for Infrastructure and
Dr Louise O'Kane, Community Places*

One or two words which reflect what good community engagement in forward planning processes can achieve?



Planning for Biodiversity in Northern Ireland

Online 20 May 2021 at 10:00 am - 11:30 am

The event is free for RTPI members and £25+VAT for non-members

Book Your Place



There has been a significant decline in biodiversity for the last hundred years, with damaging implications for future wildlife and humanity.

This webinar will explore how the planning system can deliver biodiversity and how it can be integrated into developments and not tagged on as an afterthoughts.

The webinar will be chaired by RTPI NI Chair, Gemma Jobling and we will hear from Mark Hammond, DAERA Natural Environment Division and Mark Whittaker, Belfast City Council and Christine Doherty, Derry and Strabane District Council will discuss the blue and green infrastructure approaches by their Councils.



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