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General Assembly

COP26

Report from the Director of Scotland, Ireland and English Regions

SPOTLIGHT ITEM

1. COP 26

The 26th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 26) to the UNFCCC is planned to take place in Glasgow on 1 – 12 November 2021, though there is a possibility that it may move more towards a virtual format. It follows on from COP 25 which was held in Madrid. COP26 is mandated to resolve over 40 negotiated issues and is the first opportunity for countries to upgrade their Nationally Determined Contributions towards meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement. The climate talks will be the biggest international summit the UK has ever hosted; bringing together over 30,000 delegates including heads of state, climate experts and campaigners to agree coordinated action to tackle climate change. COP26 is being run in partnership with Italy.

Alok Sharma MP is COP26 President. The themes of COP26 are:

- Adaptation and resilience
- Energy transition and clean growth
- Nature based solutions
- Accelerating the move to zero-carbon road transport.
- Financing the transition

2. Objectives for RTPI

This work is being taken forward in conjunction with the RTPI Climate Action champion Bernadette Hillman. The Institute's objectives for COP26 are to:

Primary

- increase understanding of the role planners and planning can play in tackling climate change internationally and across each of the 4 UK Governments, the Irish Government and other national government internationally
- influence the COP26 discussions and debate, elevating the position of planning in tackling climate action
- increase the profile of planning, planners and the RTPI
- identify and highlight good planning practice to international audience and UK governments

Secondary

- enhancing engagement with governments, stakeholders and partners
- informing and supporting our Members to respond to what comes out of COP26
- informing RTPI's climate emergency plan

- enhancing civic engagement
- informing planning schools' curriculum
- attracting the next generation into a professional career in town planning

Our key policy asks will focus around the Plan the World We Need research and campaign which is being pivoted to a more international audience. These include:

High Level
COP26 agrees that:

- Governments pledge tougher emission cuts by 2030
- Governments publish plans on how they will reach 2050 net zero carbon which recognise the role that planners, planning and planning systems can play in this.
- Richer nations fulfil their pledge to help poorer countries to protect themselves against climate impact and decarbonisation

Specific Asks of Governments
These should be based upon the recommendations put forward in Plan the World We Need (PTWWN) and research published on Net Zero Transport. As part of this we are currently recasting the PTWWN research and campaign to ensure that it has a more international outlook and audience. This will promote the key roles of planning in:

- **Listening and engagement –** a strong focus on social and climate justice, with the needs of vulnerable people and disadvantaged communities at the heart, will be needed to deliver an inclusive recovery that works for those most affected by the health and economic crisis.
- **Place-based vision and leadership -** An effective recovery requires a common purpose among a wide range of stakeholders, coordinating decisions about land use, infrastructure, resources and investments to create places that shape markets, stimulate innovation and encourage behaviour change over the medium and long-term.
- **Integrated and strategic planning -** Preferred options can be delivered through high-level strategic policies which guide places as they change and adapt, and supported by the development of integrated strategies which cover housing, employment, connectivity, regeneration, climate change and the environment.
- **Flexibility and adaptability -** place-based vision and strategy should provide businesses, developers, investors and communities with confidence about the direction of travel, the presence of complementary investment, and the non-negotiable contributions required from individual developments.

For each of COP26's themes:

- **Adaptation and resilience**
  National infrastructure spending should be closely aligned with the delivery of long-term visions and objectives for place, with upfront investment to reduce travel demand and encourage public, active and shared modes of transport, enable sustainable land use, support urban regeneration, accelerate progress towards net zero carbon, increase resilience to risk, and improve health and wellbeing. There should be a strong focus on social justice prioritising long-term human wellbeing and equality through capacity building within communities and policies which reduce vulnerability to climate and other risks, taking into account socio-economic status. Planning can support this through:

    - Improving the quality of existing homes and neighbourhoods
    - Delivering high quality and affordable housing in the right locations
    - Improving access to green spaces
    - Embedding 'climate justice' in plan-making.

- **Energy transition and clean growth**
  There is a need to protect existing climate and environmental regulations and policies, and invest in infrastructure. Recommended measures include the deployment of low carbon energy production and storage infrastructure, modernising the electricity grid to enable higher penetration from renewables and accommodate the electrification of heat and transport, higher standards for new homes, and financial support for households installing insulation and other energy efficient improvements. Planning can contribute to this by:

    - Minimising energy and transport demand in local plans
    - Delivering smart energy infrastructure through local and strategic planning.
    - Providing certainty through ambitious and consistent local planning policy.
    - Directing growth towards sustainable locations.

- **Nature based solutions**
  Cross-departmental strategies should provide clarity on the legislation, regulation, policy and investment needed to decarbonise heat and transport, and deliver national environmental priorities. These should remove barriers to planning for networks of active travel, district heat, smart energy and multifunctional blue/ green infrastructure, ensuring that investment is directed to solutions which have local support and deliver multiple benefits. Planning can support this in:

    - Ensuring that nature based approaches are embedded in development plans
    - Embedding green and blue infrastructure approaches in preference to 'grey' infrastructure through national, regional and local plans
    - Promoting biodiversity in planning policy
    - Ensuring that the reuse first principle - where previously used land, buildings, places, materials and infrastructure are given preference to new - is applied across all of planning for places.

- **Accelerating the move to zero-carbon road transport**.
  Transport decarbonisation is a central component to the zero carbon and post COVID-19 recovery. It requires investing in low and zero carbon infrastructure, incentivising uptake of electric vehicles, introducing policies to reduce car use, and encouraging uptake of public transport. To lock-in more sustainable travel patterns, and accelerate progress towards net zero carbon, closer integration is required between transport and land use planning. Planning can support tis through:

    - Integrating measures to enable walking and cycling into wider strategies for place, locking in long-term shifts in travel behaviour.
    - Engaging with communities and businesses to ensure that changes meet a range of mobility needs.
    - Collaborate on measures to support sustainable mobility in car-dependent locations.
    - Design and locate new development to maximise accessibility by public, active and shared modes of transport.

- **Financing the transition**
  There is a need to recognise the key role that planners, planning and planning system can play in supporting the move towards net zero carbon. This requires investment in:

    - Effective leadership from elected mayors and councillors will be critical to the recovery, and should be informed by the expertise of Chief Planning Officers

- Robust strategic planning arrangements aligning infrastructure investment and other stimulus measures with the needs of businesses, and the economic, social and environmental priorities of multiple local authorities.
- Investment in proactive planning to allow for meaningful participation with local communities and close collaboration between council departments, developers, businesses and infrastructure providers.
- Resources for community participation in planning.

In advance of the COP26 event we are presenting these core messages to the UK Governments and Irish Government to inform their engagement in the negotiations that will take place before and during the summit discussions.

4. Activities at COP26

We plan to engage in a number of activities around the COP26 summit:

The Green Zone

The Green Zone is managed by the UK Government, and is a platform for the general public, youth groups, civil society, academia, artists, business and others to have their voices heard through events, exhibitions, workshops and talks that promote dialogue, awareness, education and commitments.

We have submitted an expression of interest through the UK Government portal for an event to be held in this area called *The Race to Zero: How to Plan the World We Need*. This event will be led by the RTPI with support from the American Planning Association and in partnership with the Global Planning Network and the Commonwealth Association of Planners. It comprise a series of presentations and discussions that highlight the critical role of, and opportunities for, towns and cities across the globe to address climate change and achieve zero carbon places and will showcase where planners and planning have and can play a vital role in redesigning our places and spaces, in minimising the need for travel through cohesive and holistic place-based approach to development and through driving forward the delivery of low carbon design and mainstreaming the use of renewables energy in new development. We should hear if we are successful in May but at the time of writing no decision has been communicated to us.

We have also given support to, and highlighted our eagerness to be involved in, proposals submitted by:

- the Construction Industry Council event and exhibition “Reinventing design and construction professions to decarbonise buildings and cities: How a new pan-industry action plan will to help deliver net zero”.
- the RIBA and UK Built Environment Advisory Group Global Future Cities Programme event

We are exploring how best to make opportunities to meet with key policy makers, influencers and partners at the sessions and during our time in the green zone and how RTPI members can get involved.

We are aware that we may need to plan for possible online only activities in case COP26 becomes virtual due to COVID.

Host City Zone

As the host city Glasgow City Council aims to create a hub that allows them to reach out to other cities, city networks and sub-national groupings, sell Glasgow to the world as a leader in the race to net zero and a place where green business can be done. They also want to provide a platform for the city's cultural sector and communities to exhibit their involvement in, solutions to and response to the

city's climate emergency as well as showcasing their activity to COP visitors in an authentic and eye-catching way. We are looking to discuss possible involvement in this through Glasgow City Council.

Fringe

There will also be opportunities to hold or be involved in fringe events in Glasgow during the COP26 period outside of the official zones. Activities that are being explored include:

- organising RTPI's The Planner Live events as a virtual fringe event which will provide a focus for member engagement in the discussion.
- using the RTPI Scotland annual conference The Scottish Planner Live as a discussion point on the green recovery and the role of planning in supporting the ambitions of COP26
- signing up to be involved with the UK Green Building Council (UKGBC) virtual pavilion, including its exhibition space and virtual conference. UKGBC is closely involved, through World GBC, in preparation for a Built Environment Day at COP. This is a global initiative with a range of global NGOs involved.
- involvement a joint Institutes debate panel
- a joint event with the Landscape Institute, who have expressed an interest in this
- articles in The Planner and/ or a themed issue
- tying events in with World Town Planning Day, which happens during the event
- badging relevant RTPI events across the UK and Ireland as part of our COP26 activities in the run up to the summit.

6. Resource Implications

COP26 has been embedded as a project to be supported in a number of Service Plans across the Institute including those from the RTPI Nations, Communications, Public Affairs, Policy and Research.

7. Communications Implications

To be agreed.

8. Legal implications

None.

9. Jurisdiction and devolution implications

This covers all jurisdictions though there will need to be caution applied in dealing with the UK and devolved governments given that they can have different priorities.

10. Equality and diversity implications

The activities on COP26 provide opportunities to promote the ambitions of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity Strategy and to stimulate debate and discussion around the issues faced by minority groups. In particular, the proposed Green Zone event will be a collaboration of partners from the Global North and the Global South and will enable diversity and inclusivity to be a golden thread throughout our activities.