I am delighted to receive this honour. To be acknowledged in this way by my professional institute means a lot to me.  And to receive it from an alumna of the university where I served as Deputy Vice Chancellor has brought a real poignancy to the occasion.

Allow me to make two other points about the things I have learned about planning during my career.

First, I came into planning to make a difference, believing that planning could help make societies more socially just, ones that were economically competitive, socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable. I did this initially in local government and later in a portfolio career where I have been able to combine university leadership and research, especially my work on the economics of developer contributions and on the supply side of the private rented sector,  with a series of non-executive roles, doing planning by chairing and sitting on boards of planning and planning related organisations such as Shelter, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust,  the Construction Industry Council, the National Housing Federation, the Orbit Housing Group, the Architects Registration Board, the council of the Academy of Social Science and many many more, not the least the RTPI. Whether I and my colleagues have made a difference and helped create better places and spaces is a moot point, but one thing I have learned - and it is important for our understanding of planning - is that we pragmatically do help to make things better by doing this step by step recognising the uncertainty that surrounds us. This is a much better way to make progress than search for that unrealisable perfect ideal. Here is an important lesson for us…let us get on with things and not waste time perfecting the unperfectable local plan. Better to have a plan in place than a void that gets filled by national policy and inspectorate decisions This is not just me talking: it is key message from some of the most important writers on political and moral philosophy when discussing how to address injustice including John Rawls and Amyrta Sen, writers probably too neglected by most planners but I hope I am wrong.

Second, because my career has combined leadership, research and policy making I have seen the significant role that good research can play in policy.  Of course there is no direct liner relationship between knowledge and action: it is non-linear, fuzzy, and does not have an immediate impact. But it does make a difference and I see this at first hand, for example, when giving evidence to parliamentary committees. So this is why I have a plea: that RTPI will continue to maintain its role as a learned society as well as a professional institute. Without sustaining that, it loses the injection of fundamental thinking about the nature of planning. To do this it needs to strengthen its research links with universities.  Its partnership approach to accreditation works well from the perspective of recognising good planning courses at universities but it has tended to neglect the research side of this. This is one of the reasons why, with past president Vincent Goodstadt, I set up the informal group of chartered planners working in academic practice to act as a ginger group of leading academics responding to government and parliamentary inquiries and feeding ideas into RTPI. Part of the reason we are doing this is that there are now perilously few academics who are chartered planners, working on planning research in universities and teaching our young planners. Vincent and I wanted to ensure that those of us with significant experience of both policy research and planning practice working in universities were giving voice to research in policy debates. So an additional plea to those of you who chair accreditation and partnership boards: take far more note of research and push hard to get more academics into chartered membership…..and if they won’t we should remind them that they risk their accreditation since it a criteria for being an effective planning. We do after all have a big lever of influence.

So let me conclude by saying once again what an honour this is. It will take pride of place in my study at home.