

plaNIIt

RTPI NI Chair Promotes Planning for Climate Outcomes

2020 was the year of great intentions, this year was the 'is this ever going to end'? What will next year hold? One thing's for certain, and that's that we can't be certain...

As I take over as Chair of RTPI NI I want to start with some reflections on the past year and some inspiration and ideas for what I would like to focus on in 2022.

Reflecting back, we have had a busy year all things considered. We have been part of a moment as we saw from the fantastic delegation attending COP26 last week. We need to take the opportunities from that moment to progress agendas for health and wellbeing, economic resilience of our towns and cities and rural communities, and play our part in delivering places that are responsible in terms of their carbon footprint, and resilient to the impacts of climate change we now know that we will see in this country in our lifetime.

Having been thrown into the world of climate change when it was a faint whisper here 12 years ago, I saw an obvious link between urban form and carbon consumption, placemaking and social cohesion that is needed to create communities that will be strong and help one another when times get tough.

Looking forward - I was privileged enough to attend COP26 and one thing stood out for me was the amount of noise there now is in this area from polluters themselves, to companies claiming this territory, when in fact it is simply greenwashing. There is a danger we will allow the opportunists to dominate the narrative. Glasgow taught me that as planners we are absolutely key to tackling this challenge, and it is imperative that we make sure we are heard through the noise.

I think that recently published guidance by the RTPI and the Town and County Planning Association (TCPA) states what our proposition as planners is to the world: "Planning is a key part of our national survival system. It should embed the principle at all levels, nothing should be planned without having successfully demonstrated it is fit to take its place in a net-zero emissions future."

If there's one thing the past few weeks has shown us, it's the need for us all to do our bit and be ready for change.

And so my theme for 2022 is going to be **PLANNING FOR CLIMATE OUTCOMES**.



Above: Mura Quigley MRTPI, RTPI NI Chair

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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.

RTPI NI Executive Committee 2021

Following a call for nominations the RTPI NI Executive Committee for 2022 was confirmed at the Annual Meeting on 18th November.

Chair:	Mura Quigley
Senior Vice Chair:	Catharine McWhirter
Junior Vice Chair:	VACANT
Immediate Past Chair:	Gemma Jobling
GA* Representative:	Carol Ramsey
Student / Licentiate:	Justin McHenry
	VACANT

Corporate Members:

Alistair Beggs

Chris Bryson

Sharon Mossman

Emma Walker

Erin Donaldson (Chair of Young Planners NI)

(*GA is the RTPI's General Assembly)

There is a vacancy for a Junior Vice Chair, Corporate Member and Student / Licentiate Member of the Committee - so if you are interested in finding out more please get in touch with Julie Sullivan 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 2022 for 2023.

Welcome to the Winter edition

Welcome to the Winter edition of PlaNIt.

This edition features articles and news which show that planning has been continuing apace, despite a second year of the pandemic.

Despite the pandemic we have continued with a full programme of events, and our outgoing Chair - Gemma Jobling - details these. We were very pleased to hold our first face to face event in November, albeit on a small scale and this has provided us with some images beyond the now all too familiar screen shots.

We welcome in our new Chair for 2022 - Mura Quigley - and Mura sets out her ambitions for the coming year and for long term planning.

This year's Young Planner of the Year was announced at the Northern Ireland Planner Live in September by Michael Graham of Tetra Tech sponsors of the Award and NI Planner Live. The Conference, also sponsored by TLT Solicitors, proved to be popular again this year, delivered on-line. In 2022 we hope to bring back a face to face event - keep 21st September free in our diaries.

In the meantime, have a lovely Christmas and New Year.

Roisin Willmott, Editor

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:

- John Bronte, Turleys
- Sarah McCorry, Blue Clarity Design Service Ltd

(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 on-line).

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In planning that looks like:

- Following the good work in joined up thinking that our community planning processes have developed and building collaboration and shared outcomes for places across different stakeholders; I've witnessed truly joined up thinking and green shoots of change in some of the work in community planning and I've been lucky to be involved in place shaping plans where real silos are being broken down and joined up thinking is happening.
- Supporting the delivery of climate mitigation and adaptation plans that are starting to come forward from our local councils and making sure they align with LDPs.
- Ask ourselves as planners in the work we are doing - are we locking in behaviours that are adding to the problem of climate change (e.g. car dependency)? How could we improve decision-making so that the right outcomes for climate and people are being made?
- Maximising the economic benefits of a climate focus - helping support growth of green jobs, retrofitting buildings, supporting growth of new sectors that will have many of the future solutions we still need to find to solve the climate crisis.
- Building in resilience, adaptability and preparedness for the places that will suffer the strongest impacts of climate change - towns and city centres, areas of deprivation, coastal areas, areas prone to flooding, areas with a high reliance of jobs linked to fossil fuel industries etc.
- Shaping places that are walkable, places that are sociable, streets that prioritize people over cars, and the strength of community needed to tackle uncertainties (like we saw during covid).
- Communicating the value of planning in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, creating walkable communities, strengthening towns and city centres, making places liveable and resilient in the face of change.
- Improving how we engage in civic conversations and the public (I always baffle at the little echo chambers we very easily fall into, not being afraid to speak out about how planning helps, not hinders - cutting through the lazy rhetoric from those with an agenda to throw the planning system out with the bath water) etc.
- Being prepared and having the right vision for a place, the appropriate infrastructure in the right place - collaboration
- Supporting the right kind of development in the right places, and being able to articulate why well designed places are more climate friendly and resilient, and make economic sense too for the place. We all deserve decent places to live, work and play.
- Helping inform where infrastructure investment goes and working across the professions to ensure we are looking holistically at places, and secure their future.

So what's coming up in 2022....

- Covid - Recovery and reorganisation - be bold, reach out, work together - building on Gemma's theme in 2021
- Continuing our work and advocacy across the nations and regions, as well as our policy and research, in good design and placemaking, and in sustainable development in the countryside
- Elections - I want to be clear on our asks and would like RTPI members to tell us what they see as needing to happen. Some early thoughts include:
 - Progression of the regeneration bill and creating local government that has the powers it needs to be place leaders - Lyons review 2007, place shaping
 - Making sure our departments have the resources to deliver quality planning service and the balance of private profit and community benefit is struck as well as it can be.

- Get more planning professionals at the head tables in government, business and advocacy
 - Recognising planning can bind together the different built environment professions, collaborative spatial planning is what is needed now...
 - Place at the heart of our Programme for Government
 - Build community wealth and resilience
 - Progress integrated thinking between land use and transport planning
 - Manual for Streets for NI - places for people not cars.
 - Regional balance - as a girl who grew up in Strabane, who always felt at home in Derry (we do really like each other, we promise), on the edge of town and country, with a family life that straddled the border and its complexities, and the last 18 years in Belfast, a city with such great potential and opportunity, I am keen that we get the regional balance right, and so I will be reaching out to see how we can do that, as well as progress our MOU with ROI
- Standard events, and a few celebrations as well
 - Young people - opportunity there for encouraging more people into the profession - helping take on climate challenge

I'll be exploring areas of the above and more over the coming months and call on everyone to give me a call, send me an email, feed into that process - together we are louder and more effective.

So all that's left for me to say is thanks to Gemma, our outgoing Chair, for her agility to adapt into the uncertainty of this year and rise to the challenge of blended events. I have big shoes to fill.

So go back to topic, we have a moment now, let's put it to good use and progress the profession into the board rooms, senior management teams and political debates and shape new governance, agendas and leadership, let's use our expertise to create the places that will help support healthy and active lifestyles and offer good livelihoods and quality of life and opportunities that this country has in abundance.

I just want to finish on an extract from Wei Yang's recent article on the RTPI website. She pointed out that when Thomas Adams (1871-1940) initiated the Town Planning Institute in the 1910s, he wanted the Institute to act as a forum for all of the environmental professions and as a sponsor of research into planning problems. A professional institute in planning would "re-integrate the sharply divided environmental professions" (Simpson, 1985). Adams saw no fundamental distinction between professionals and amateurs, and in the view that both needed education in the appreciation of environmental problems and possibilities. I believe this is the approach we still need to take now – to welcome anyone with a shared vision to work together with us.

*Mura Quigley MRTPI
Chair RTPI NI*



Congratulations to Joanna Drennan, RTPI NI Policy Officer, who welcomed her daughter in the summer. We wish Joanna and her family every happiness and look forward to welcoming her back later in 2022.



Coming soon... 

Our 2022 awards will open in January

www.rtpi.org.uk/excellence

Awards opening soon with a refreshed approach

Now in their 45th year, the RTPI Awards for Planning Excellence continue to recognise and reward the brightest talent in the profession; the most outstanding projects, teams and people helping to transform economies, environments, and communities. Entering the Awards for Planning Excellence is a fantastic opportunity to celebrate your professional achievements and showcase your work.

For 2022, we're refreshing the awards to provide a more seamless entry process. The open for entries and closing date are the same across all nations and regions. As across the rest of the UK, the Northern Ireland entries will be judged locally with the winners being announced in the summer.

The top scoring entries across all categories will go through to the UK and Ireland finals, culminating in a national ceremony towards the end of the year where we will announce all our overall category winners, as well as award the Silver Jubilee Cup to the project deemed the most outstanding of all the project category winners.

The Awards for Planning Excellence are free to enter. You can start your entry on our online platform from 10 January, saving and making as many changes as you like until the entry deadline.

Visit www.rtpi.org.uk/excellence for more details. For the latest news, check #RTPIAwards on social media. We look forward to receiving your entries and wish everyone the best of luck.

RTPI NI Chair 2021 Reflects on a year of Planning for Renewal

When I took over as Chair from Angus Kerr last November we talked about how his year in 2020 had been such a challenging year due to the far reaching impact of the COVID Pandemic - while we expected restrictions to continue for some time, I don't think any of us foresaw this continuing through to now.

None the less the Committee has remained active and I think we have been able to deliver a packed programme of events – and while we haven't been able to meet in person or celebrate our planning profession (our annual dinner) - we have been able to deliver for our members a considerable programme of events.

When I took over as Chair I set out my ambitions for the year. I was aware of the challenging time it was for our planning sector and I was mindful

of the need to deliver focused engagement that builds upon the extraordinary events of last year. I wanted to deliver a beneficial programme for our members and I was also cognisant of the very important role that the planning profession plays in helping to shape the places that we live and work. As a result of this my theme for the year was Planning and Regeneration. Not in the traditional sense, but I wanted to explore and promote the role of planning in rebuilding our society post-COVID- such as:

1. The role of Design in Regenerating our spaces - The way in which we live, use our homes and the importance of our outside space;
2. The role of planning in tackling climate change And how we can work towards a biodiversity net gain - particularly relevant in light of the COP 26 conferences and the agreements to be made;
3. How Planning and Regeneration can aid in the economic recovery – Brexit/ challenges;
4. And how we can PLAN FOR RENEWAL.

My theme also sought to build upon the RTPI's 'Plan the World We Need' campaign which has been successful in raising awareness of the role planners play in creating resilient, sustainable and inclusive communities.

I am happy to say that I think we have delivered a robust programme which has investigated these important topics and highlighted the far reach planning has:

In March we had the Urban Design Webinar – which included Max Tolley on design principles, Justin Webber on contextual challenges and opportunities, Mura Quigley on implementing design principles in Northern Ireland and Dima Zogabe and Sogol Lazi from ARUP discussing their project on urban childhoods in Belfast City Centre.

Then in April 2021 we had the Rural Design Webinar - we heard from speakers here in Northern Ireland also welcomed speakers from Scotland including Ruth Montgomery, Rural Housing Association – on the RTPI NI Planning for Excellence Award winning scheme at Sion Mills, Paul McTernan, SLR Consulting and Scott Dalgarno, from The Highland Council.

In May we had the Planning for Biodiversity Webinar with Dr Mark Hammond from Natural Environment Division of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, Christine Doherty, Derry City & Strabane District Council's Lead Officer for Green Infrastructure and Mark Whitaker, senior planning officer from Belfast City Council.

Then in September we had the Annual Conference – Northern Ireland Planner Live. Reflecting



on my theme for the year – Planning Renewal for the Future – the Conference was designed to provides us with an opportunity to reflect as a profession and on our priorities moving forward – this was split into 5 Plenary Sessions covering:

- Planning for Climate Action
- Sustainable infrastructure
- Creating sustainable neighbourhood
- Spatial implications
- Tech

The innovation of tech planning and digitisation of the planning system and it has also placed a focus on the spaces within which we live, while events globally continue to highlight climate change. NI Planner Live offered a day of discussion and debate on these topics to reflect on positioning the role of planning and the profession

In November we had the Heritage event at the beautiful setting of Royal Hillsborough – our first face to face event since the pandemic started. Speakers included Helen Harrison, Juno Planning, Shane Quinn, Successful Belfast, Brian McKervey, Historic Environment Division in the Department for Communities, Conor Fegan, Francis Taylor Building, Donal Regan, Director of Service Transformation at Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council, Philip Stinson, Turleys and Shane Kelland Regeneration Manager with Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council.

And finally wrapping up the year we had the Annual Planning Law event with William Orbinson QC, Maria O’Loan Tughans and Andrea Kells and Rosemary Daly from the PAC.

I was delighted to award Donna Lyle as Young Planner of the Year. And I must reflect that the recipient of the Award in 2020 was Ryan Walker and he has gone on to be the RTPI Young Planner and has been impressive in the profile he has given – and he was made in Belfast!

I must say a few thank yous – all who have assisted in the organising of these events and to the contributors and speakers who kindly gave up their time and spoke so passionately and informatively about matters critical to use. And of course I would also like express a massive thank you to Roisin and Julie for all their work. It’s been an extremely busy year generally – it’s probably been my busiest year in practice, so that coupled with taking on the role of Chair meant that your help and assistance really was very much needed and appreciated.



2021 Northern Ireland Young Planner of the Year



The Northern Ireland Young Planner of the Year is a prestigious award that seeks out the brightest RTPI members in the early stages of their careers. Potential candidates can work in any area of the industry. The Award is made to outstanding Young Planners (in the first 10 years of their Planning Career) who can demonstrate a contribution to planning or significant career achievements in recent years in Northern Ireland.

RTPI NI is pleased to announce its second Young Planner of the Year as Donna Lyle.

Donna is a Senior Planner at TSA Planning. She has had a varied career from which she has benefitted and gained a range of experiences. Donna is passionate about her position as a role model and leader amongst female planners, having been a founder of Northern Ireland Women in Planning.

The judges commented “Donna is clearly an excellent role model for young planners, and had a very accomplished start to her career which has allowed her to further influence and promote females in the profession.”

Through, Women in Planning, “she has provided a forum to encourage discussion and support within the profession here in NI, and the events run through the network have offered something different to other planning events that take place in NI.”

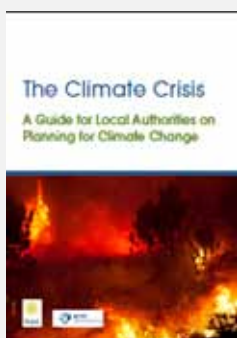
“Donna is an excellent role model to both men and women, as shown through her dedication to all types of development control and forward planning in her work in England and now in NI.”



The RTPI Northern Ireland Awards for Planning Excellence are sponsored by Tetra Tech Planning.

The Climate Crisis

A guide for local authorities on planning for climate change



Jointly produced with the Town and Country Planning Association this guide shows how the planning system can help communities face the climate crisis. With the climate science clearly warning of the catastrophic impacts of climate change this new guide seeks to place Governments’ ambitions for net zero as well as building community resilience to severe weather at the heart of the planning system. The guide makes clear the vital importance of the planning system in designing places which cut carbon through the promotion of energy efficiency, sustainable transport and renewable energy.

This guide is intended as an introduction to some of the key issues. It is a starting point on the vital journey to put in place practical solutions which will halt the rise in temperatures and begin to reverse the climate crisis.

The Guide can be downloaded from: www.rtpi.org.uk/practice/2021/october/the-climate-crisis/



Planning's Digital Future – is it time to let the intelligent machines in?

In the legal sector, we are seeing a rapid rise in the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to replace or supplement a variety of processes and streamline our work. This is not a replacement for a human legal mind, but the efficiencies that are being gained, for example through bulk review of documents is game changing.

Many other sectors are increasingly adopting AI-driven processes, so is there scope in the planning sector for such technology?

A 'new digital system'

This is a pertinent question in many ways, but perhaps the government's recent budget promise of £65 million for a 'new digital system' to 'improve planning' brings this question into sharper relief.

In reality, this only represents around £150,000 per planning authority. Obviously, such additional funds will be welcome, but it may not strike many as being a transformational amount of money. But what might it achieve if aimed at reaping the rewards of digitising the planning system? With the right direction and some out-of-the-box thinking, £65m could actually result in significant changes to the system.

In theory, machine learning could be used to determine planning applications. Machine learning is a process whereby an AI is trained by being fed a series of known data inputs and their resulting outcomes. The AI 'learns' the key factors behind the decision outcome. This then enables the algorithm to be fed a new set of inputs and use its 'learning' to determine the outcome.

The more data the AI receives, the better it becomes – in theory – at reaching rational decisions. That vast database of inputs for planning decisions is readily available on planning authorities' planning portals, potentially providing the 'big data' that machine learning needs. They also contain the binary outcomes: approved or rejected.

Blue-sky thinking

Once trained, there are a variety of tasks that machine learning could be applied to. AI could validate applications and automatically inform applicants of defects, recommending the steps needed to achieve validation. Machine learning could also quickly identify those types of application that need special treatment, such as EIA development, or applications that need referring to the Secretary of State. In addition, it could be used to deal with the administratively heavy statutory requirements of the notification and publication of applications.

In each case, the determination could be so fast that an applicant could ask for a 'pre-determination'. Also, akin to checking a credit score online, the system could politely – inform you that your application has zero prospects of success, but if a determined developer still wanted to progress and pay the application fee they are free to do so. Perhaps AI could go so far as to take over the delegated decision-making process for small-scale applications.

Managing the risks

Of course, allowing a computer to make planning decisions would be controversial, at least until the technology became more mainstream. Instead, the machine learning output could stop short of making the decision and simply provide a recommendation, allowing the planning officer to have the final say on the planning application. This is similar to the way that AI is being used in the legal sector; the machine learning flags issues that then require expert consideration and appropriate advice to the client. Importantly, the AI is not replacing the human, but is stripping out the tasks that are time-consuming and routine, allowing the expert advisor to focus on exactly that – the expert advice.



And what if the decision is a refusal? The appeal system also has a huge database of historic decisions that could lend itself to machine learning, providing a valuable tool to supplement decision-making.

As a planning lawyer, wherever decisions are made, thoughts inevitably turn to the potential challenge of those decisions through judicial review. If a planning determination is churned out of an AI-driven process, where does that leave us in terms of challenging that decision? Can AI be Wednesbury irrational? How do we know what 'material considerations' were taken into account within the machine learning black box? Can AI produce an affidavit to justify its decision? Clearly not.

There still has to be a human at the end of the process, and in many cases a planning committee. The point is that AI could be used to streamline significant parts of the planning process and help to improve the final human decision-making process. This is not replacing the need for expert determination, but who would complain if their job was made easier, that backlog of undecided planning applications was reduced and high quality decisions were issued more quickly?

Conclusion

Seismic changes like these are inevitably met with concern and alarm. But what we have seen in the legal sector is not a reduction in the need for trained professionals; rather, significant efficiencies that both make a lawyer's job more interesting and reduce costs for clients.

Going back to the £65 million pot of money for digitising the system; chances are this will be used for smaller efficiency gains that will be helpful but perhaps miss the opportunity for something more revolutionary.

The question is now whether we choose to go for a small step forward by further deploying existing tools or a leap into the future by embracing new machine learning capabilities. The longer we wait, the more examples there are of AI delivering transformational change, and the harder it becomes to ignore the possibilities and not use these funds to deliver these kinds of improvements.

Andrew Ryan and Fergus Charlton

Andrew is a Partner and Fergus is a Director in TLT's national Planning & Environment Team.

A version of this article was first published in The Planner

Hugh McKay Memorial Prize

The Hugh McKay Memorial Prize for 2021 has been awarded to Jordan Campbell for Outstanding Dissertation in the final year BSc (Hons) in Environmental Planning at Queens University Belfast.

This Award is presented by RTPi NI in memory of the late Hugh McKay, Chief Executive of the Planning Service.

RTPi NI Student Project Award

The RTPi NI Student Project Award for 2021 has been awarded to Lisa Curran, who achieved the highest mark in the Research Project module on Ulster University's MSci in Planning, Regeneration and Development, for her research into Competition or Cooperation? Evaluating Cross-border Planning and Delivery of Greenways on the island of Ireland.

Use, Reuse, Regenerate

A Policy Proposal for High Street Regeneration

It is universally accepted that places should be designed to meet human needs:

- Affordable housing where people from all walks of life can live together.
- Green and blue spaces to gather, relax, and play in, no matter our age.
- Infrastructure that encourages a green economy and builds density.
- Good schools and educational institutions for life-long skills.
- Excellent health facilities that support prevention as much as cure.
- Accessible local services, from supermarkets to dentists to arts venues.
- Skilled jobs where people make a decent living.
- Transport that enables multi-modal choices.

Good places also feel local. It should be like you couldn't find it anywhere else. That means the character of place needs to be front and centre of how we shape our places.

Belfast Buildings Trust (BBT) believes that vibrant places are rooted in:

- using what is authentic about people and place for connection and opportunity,
- reusing existing assets in relevant ways, meaning 21st Century uses that deliver financial and social value and enhance our environment,
- regenerating places to be resilient, through involving communities and meeting their needs and using quality design.

None of this means being trapped in the past. We want our places to change. It is not a question of 'future or past' but 'how do we make what our places have to offer relevant for people in the 21st Century?' And, in the era of climate emergencies, the old adage of "the greenest building is the one that already exists" has never been more true. Reusing these assets in new ways is a cornerstone of environmental sustainability. It increases urban density and capitalises on embodied energy to reduce carbon emissions.

Making the most of what we've got

Our region's future economic and social prosperity relies on local people, with our stories and skills, and the places we have created, shaped, and valued for generations.

International research consistently shows that strong and distinctive urban cores depend on a rich mix of uses and experiences: vitality is about encouraging diversity, not about retail, office, hospitality, or housing development in isolation. They also prioritise people, not 'tourists' or 'audiences', both in design and practice.

Successful places are where people want to spend time (and money) because:

- they evoke a sense of place that has evolved over time,
- they offer something relevant for people from all walks of life,
- they prioritise high-quality and inclusive urban design,
- they continually involve people in what's happening.

Existing assets do not impede change in our cities, towns, and villages. They make change possible. Rather than a binary choice of old versus new, the future of our places lies in asking how we use what we already have in creative ways.

Imaginative thinking about how this is delivered in ways that genuinely involve people informs and leads change. It recognises that character and distinctiveness, the touchable and untouchable elements that tell us where we are and create a memorable experience, do not magic themselves out of thin air.

The use and reuse of our existing assets is the lynchpin for delivering strong and distinctive places, with skilled local economies, healthy and resilient citizens, and a connected multi-modal transport system.

How do we deliver this?

- Give priority to the reuse of existing and historic assets within planning and regeneration policies.
- Develop a cross-sectoral Place Investment Strategy, including incentives for developers and community organisations creatively reusing existing buildings.
- Support pilot schemes that encourage experience-based development, creative adaptation of space, and involve people in their design and delivery.

Give priority to the reuse of existing and historic assets within planning and regeneration policies

Current planning policy and development practice ignore place. They fail to exploit the value of existing assets. They often presume a cleared site, undermining and eroding the identity of our cities, towns, and villages. Giving priority to reusing what's there enhances our places' distinctiveness. Crucially, it delivers value for money and social value. It contributes to community wealth building and mixed urban populations by focusing on peoples' needs, nurturing small businesses, and new housing opportunities. It also supports climate change targets by boosting urban density, capturing the embodied energy of existing buildings and reducing landfill.

Develop a cross-sectoral place investment strategy, including incentives for developers and community organisations creatively using existing buildings

A new cross-sectoral fiscal model is needed to shape places rather than simply deliver developments. A place-based approach that focuses on well-being and how our places impact on quality of life will require cultural and social outcomes to be weighted in equal terms as established economic indicators. We need to overcome misperceptions of existing assets and cultural uses as liabilities; the experience of lockdowns demonstrated their heightened and demonstrable value to our everyday lives and societal well-being.

Appropriate fiscal incentivisation, available to both private and community-led regeneration, will be needed to support the repurposing of existing buildings for the benefit of communities. Sectors perceived as operating in separate silos – central government, local authorities, the arts and heritage, voluntary, community and social enterprise sectors, and private developers - will be enabled to collaborate on a shared goal: enhancing place.

Development of pilot schemes that encourage experience-based development, creative adaptation of space, and involve people in their design and delivery

There is no single 'solution' to the challenges facing our high streets. Nothing in our places is static. Whether buildings, stories, music or art, our distinctive assets must adapt to remain relevant for people. How they adapt needs to be informed by people from various backgrounds, using a collaborative approach, because places should not be designed for a single demographic or a single use. Failing to involve people is shaping spaces, not places.

We must encourage a flexible reuse model, as needs and desires change over time, through a series of pilot schemes. The value of pilot and meanwhile use initiatives to creatively use underutilised space is now well established, leading to more meaningful uses in time.

Cross-sectoral mechanisms that test ideas and accept risk support entrepreneurial and experimental action. They enable the high street to act as a 'living lab', linking innovation and skills policy with economic development and social regeneration. Supporting people to test ideas empowers enterprise, whether social or private, whilst involving them in the future of the places they value.

Belfast Buildings Trust is a charity that delivers physical, social, and economic regeneration by reusing Belfast's landmark buildings. Founded in 1996, its work includes a mix of capital regeneration such as the former St. Patrick's School, Christ Church, Carlisle Memorial Church, and engagement projects including The Belfast Opera, Successful Belfast, Ormeau Parklet, and 'The Streets Where They Lived' podcast.

Geothermal Energy and the involvement of Planners

At a time when innovation and technology is thriving it is alarming that we are still not on track to meet climate change targets that will help protect our future generations. Climate activist Jane Goodall (1971) said “What you do makes a difference, and what you have to decide is what kind of difference you want to make”. As a young and newly qualified planner who is concerned about future sustainability, I want to make a difference not only in my personal life but in my professional career to help promote the transition from fossil fuels to clean energy.

We rely on fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and gas as the main fuels to heat our homes and we know that this is a major contributing factor to increasing greenhouse gases. There has been a larger focus on decarbonising the electricity sector and less of a focus on decarbonising the heat sector. It is critical that there is more emphasis on creating innovative methods to heat our homes sustainably, and this could be achieved with the promotion of geothermal energy. Recently, I completed a master’s research study on geothermal energy. The initial motivation for this research came from a personal interest in looking at how to promote the decarbonisation of the heat sector.

Many countries around the world are tapping into geothermal energy. Geothermal energy is a renewable energy that extracts heat from the layers of the earth’s surface [1]. In Ireland, the most common access to geothermal energy is the use of a shallow geothermal ground source heat pump, which accesses the heat from the earth’s surface through a loop system installed in the ground, that absorbs the heat and acts as a heat exchanger [2]. The benefit of geothermal energy is that it is a constant energy source that is reliable and efficient and is not affected by weather conditions or seasonal changes. In Ireland geothermal energy is greatly untapped and a less competitive renewable energy source, however, Ireland has great potential for the development of geothermal energy, with its suitable geological location and conditions [3]. The advancement in technology means geothermal energy can be accessed anywhere around the world.

Whilst studying geothermal energy in Ireland, it became clear that the key barriers are a lack of knowledge and awareness, funding, and gaps in policy [3]. It could be suggested that geothermal energy has been misunderstood as a reliable renewable energy that could offer great potential from small scale domestic projects to large scale deep geothermal energy projects. The data collection process for this research involved interviewing homeowners to ascertain and understand their personal motivations and aspirations for installing geothermal energy systems in their homes, and to discover whether it was from an economic or environmental viewpoint. This was then used to explore how geothermal energy could be further promoted in Ireland and how policymakers could learn from the example of homeowners in relation to helping to mitigate against climate change, and in helping to decarbonise the heat sector in Ireland.

The research looked at how more awareness could be created, promoting stakeholder engagements to further advance understanding and exploration. This could be achieved through the promotion of shallow geothermal energy and stronger marketing within this field, providing equal opportunities for people willing to make a change to help mitigate against climate change. The research studied how local councils could become more involved and become active role models in the promotion, by taking the lead to include geothermal energy in current climate change reports and local policy. It could be argued that there needs to be a larger focus on mitigation than adaptation measures, to help fight against climate change and secure a safe future. Technology and innovation are growing day by day and this must be used as an advantage in helping people live greener and more sustainable lives.

The research continued to look at how planning could be more involved in promoting geothermal energy, encouraging the transition in a proactive and practical manner. A level of trust is

necessary to promote transition and change and in terms of geothermal energy, community engagement and participatory planning is vital to help bridge gaps, through knowledge exchange and encouraging more mitigation measures. Peer learning and demonstration is key. People learn from example and planners can implement conversation with key and relevant stakeholders to aid the transition [4]. Planning should actively seek to learn from best practice around the world, translating it to deliver the best outcomes locally, such as the implementation of new housing developments that incorporate geothermal energy. There must be a more robust connection between different sectors, and it must be continually highlighted that climate change is not an individual matter. With growing technology and an evolving modern society, planners of today must be provided with the correct tools to be ready to deliver and grow with innovation.

Geothermal energy has huge potential that must be explored further. To promote the movement, leadership must be stronger, individuals must be proactive and financial support and investment must be provided to create more inclusive and equal societies. Planning must be promoted as a solution and not an obstacle to progress development towards future resilience and sustainability. As planners we should be confident in our education, knowledge, and skills, so that we can confidently help make positive change.

Hannah Flynn

Hannah undertook this study whilst on a student placement at Donegal County Council.

1. <https://www.irena.org/geothermal>
2. https://secure.dccae.gov.ie/GSI_DOWNLOAD/Geoenergy/Reports/GSI_Assessment_of_GeoDH_for_Ireland_Nov2020_v2.pdf
3. <https://europeangeothermalcongress.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/CUR-15-Ireland.pdf>
4. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1533015X.2017.1304838?needAccess=true>

Chief Planners of Tomorrow

The RTPI's Chief Planners of Tomorrow scheme is now open for RTPI Young Planners to apply.

Chief Planners of Tomorrow is a work-shadowing scheme offering RTPI Young Planners the chance to step into the shoes of a Chief Planning Officer for the day.

The aim is to give participants opportunity to:

- Learn from the best - those who currently hold senior leadership roles in Local Authorities
- Understand what it's like to be 'at the top table' – the challenges and opportunities
- See how strategic decision making processes are made at top level

The initiative builds on work undertaken by the RTPI to champion good leadership in Planning and to provide our Chief Planners of the future with development opportunities.

To apply follow this link www.rtpi.org.uk/find-your-rtpi/networks/rtpi-young-planners/chief-planners-of-tomorrow/ or contact: chiefplanners@rtpi.org.uk



What I learned at COP 26

I've monitored climate negotiations from afar since the 1990s and this year I had the opportunity to attend – well not quite, I was in the 'Green Zone' across the river from the negotiations taking place in the 'Blue Zone'.

What did I learn in my four days in Glasgow?

Did you know it's not the flatulence of cows that is the problem, it's their burping? - Do I have your attention now? Washing hands in warm water is the equivalent of driving 3.3 billion miles (although that did come from a Dettol executive, so I assume for washing hands in cold water you need to use certain products?) 7 million people die of air pollution every year. And apparently two electric vehicles use the same energy as one house (obviously depends on the size of both ... but on average), so they aren't the panacea.



There were many astounding – and alarming - facts given out across the convention, but they all point to one thing, inaction is no longer an option.

My headline takeaways can be distilled to:

- Listen. The groups most affected by climate change are young people and those minority developing countries, who are already suffering the effects. They are not being listened to by the negotiators.
- You can only achieve effective change if you offer the right choices.
- Preaching won't deliver change – you need to inspire, educate, incentivise (and dis-incentivise).
- When assessing the cost of making changes for climate action – set this next to what the cost of not taking action is. One session said that “accountants can save the world” and this is a point for them to take away.
- Data is an essential tool.

There was an abundance of information about tech solutions and something that caught my attention was the use of bioacoustics by Rainforest Connection. Using mobile phone transmission to transmit real-time sound recordings of the rain forests in Sumatra and the Amazon, with added sophisticated computer ability, sounds made by the wildlife in the forest have been ‘learned’ and interpreted to enable predictions to be made as much as five days in advance of illegal logging taking place. Rainforest Connection is a real Dr Dolittle service which interprets what the wildlife is saying to each other, picking up indicators of the loggers’ scouts. This gives the local wardens the time to reach these remote locations to prevent or reduce logging.

Whilst this is exciting, as a planner, I know we hold many of the answers. Planning our world to reduce the carbon we all use and to promote bio-diversity - carbon reduction is only part of the story – is essential.

For me, the ‘Green Zone’ offered so much; whilst it wasn't part of the negotiations, which the world needs to be successful, it was in my view where the real value sat. There were wider perspectives and experiences shared, and opportunities for exploring independent action.

I'll give the last word to young people: Ellie, Youth Climate Ambassador for Wales, said “the value of COP is what goes on outside, sharing experiences and values.” Shenona – another Youth Climate Ambassador - observed whilst visiting the Blue Zone “Leaders making the decisions overlook the people being affected.” Exclusion is clear.

Roisin Willmott, Director, RTPI NI

Elsewhere at COP26

During our time at in Glasgow the RTPI team was able to attend a wide range of official events in the Blue and Green Zones and also a number of ‘fringe’ events held in Glasgow and elsewhere in Scotland.

This included holding our own fringe event on World Town Planning Day (8th November) The Race to Net Zero: Why we need to plan the world we need. The RTPI organised the event in partnership with the Global Planners Network, Commonwealth Association of Planners and the International Society of City and Regional Planners. We had speakers from across the globe both joining us in Glasgow and some with video messages. We were particularly pleased to be joined by the Executive Director of UN Habitat, Maimunah Mohd Sharif (see right).

On the night, our audience was a mixture of in-person and on-line. You can view the video of the event at: rtpi.livevideostream.co.uk



Images: Opportunities to meet, discuss planning and joint working, and in case you wondered - yes I took the train(s).





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