



# SP

Scottish Planner

[www.rtpi.org.uk/scotland](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/scotland)

ISSUE 203



**SHAPING OUR FUTURE**  
Healthy places & happy people



## Contents

- 02 **Editorial:** *Jenny Munro*
- 03 **Convenor's Comments:** *Laura Robertson*
- 04 **Article:** Picture this: a photovoice exploration of Partick, Glasgow – *Joseph Ashmore*
- 06 **Article:** Scottish Planners Welcome Malta! – *Sean Panton*
- 08 **Article:** Planifesto Priorities for Scotland – *Jenny Munro*
- 09 **Podlicious:** Recommended podcasts for planners – *Dr. Caroline Brown*
- 10 **Article:** Restorative Cities: putting mental health at the heart of city design – *Dr Jenny Roe*
- 12 **Article:** Healthy Places, Healthy People: why planning matters more than ever – *Irene Beautyman, Meadhbh Mguire, Rowena Statt and Margaret Douglas*
- 13 **Article:** Healthy Places Delivered by Happy Planners – *Elaine Campbell*
- 14 **Article:** Digital Planning: visualising the future – *Alex MacLaren*
- 15 **Article:** What's Perth got to do with it: health and happiness in the Fair City – *Kristian Smith*
- 16 **Article:** Sequential Townscape Sketching: seeing, understanding and sharing reflections on place – *Willie Watt*
- 18 **Article:** Healthy Planet: planning for net zero – *John Cooney, Jonathan McQuillan, Antony McGuinness and Professor Husam AlWaer*
- 19 **Update:** RTPI
- 20 **Update:** Scottish Government
- 21 **Update:** National Planning Hub
- 22 **Update:** Key Agencies Group (KAG); Scottish Young Planners' Network (SYPN)
- 23 **RTPI Contacts**

## EDITORIAL

WE'RE ALMOST AT the end of another year, and I'm delighted to be able to wrap up 2025 with this Winter Issue of Scottish Planner.

Once again, we have taken the opportunity to use this issue to document the key messages and learning outcomes from the RTPI Scotland Annual Conference, which took place at the end of September. We were delighted to welcome conference delegates to Perth to explore the theme of "Shaping our Future – healthy places and happy people". The conference is always a great opportunity to get together, showcase best practice and learn from each other. This year was no different. If you were unable to attend the conference, you can discover more about the day within these pages, starting with an overview from our RTPI Scotland Convenor on page 3 and continuing from page 10 onwards with articles by the conference contributors, including our keynote speaker Dr Jenny Roe.

In addition to the conference, another milestone for the RTPI Scotland team this year was the launch of our Planifesto on 12 November. Over the coming months, we will continue to further develop our ideas about how our Planifesto asks can (and should) be taken forward. Check out page 8 of the issue for a further article on the Planifesto, which includes a call for evidence, case studies and suggestions that can feed into this further work.

**Jenny Munro**  
*Policy, Practice and Research Officer*

**Scottish Planner Issue 203**  
ISSN 1353-9795

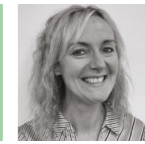
The RTPI is a registered charity.  
Scottish Registered Charity No. SC037841  
Registered Charity No. 262865

**Registered office:**  
Royal Town Planning Institute  
41 Botolph Lane  
London  
EC3R 8DL

**Design:**  
www.lucyreid.co.uk



## CONVENOR'S COMMENTS



**LAURA ROBERTSON MRTPI,**  
RTPI Scotland Convenor,  
Senior Planner at Aberdeen  
City Council

# Happy People, Places and Planet

This year's RTPI Scotland Annual Conference on 24th September in Perth was on the topic of 'Shaping our future – Healthy Places and Happy People', something that is very close to my heart and aligned with my theme this year, as RTPI Scotland Convenor.

**I**t was an absolutely wonderful day looking at how to deliver resilient and sustainable communities for the health of people, place and planet. I was delighted to have Dr Jenny Roe as our keynote speaker and the whole room was engaged to hear about the connections between the built environment and mental health. Dr Roe discussed the restorative environment theory and the research she has done on cortisol regulation in response to different urban environments; those with access to more green space had significantly better regulation of stress. It was fascinating to hear from her and find out about the evidence that has been gathered.

I always enjoy the panel discussions. They allow us to hear what people are passionate about and all the exciting things that are happening. The healthy places panel gave us an insight into the great adaptive work that is being carried out by the Gannochy Trust, the link between the availability and quality of food choices and health inequalities between areas, and the interesting public health perspective. The happy planner panel that followed made me smile. We heard from the Improvement Service and the progress Craig McLaren and the team are making. We then heard from the panel about what makes a positive planning environment. This highlighted the importance of respectful collaboration

and listening to each other.

Before lunch some of the delegates managed to get outside for really informative walking tours and sketching workshops. The weather shone on us for this. For those delegates who didn't venture outside, they had the benefit of hearing insights from Alex MacLaren of Heriot Watt University, and Aline Kirkland and Tom Janes of the Improvement Service at their digital planning workshop session.



In the afternoon, we heard about 'Balance' from Anderson Bell Christie and specifically the work in Montrose which employs a holistic evidence and place-based approach to justify and unlock the means to achieve net zero.

I was delighted to be able to end the conference with a lively panel discussion with Craig McLaren, Kevin Murray and Pam Ewen helping me to sum up the day. The main take aways were the importance of evidence and the need for a collaborative spirit at all levels.

The variety of speakers and the enthusiasm of the panels and attendees made for an insightful day. It was

wonderful to see so many students and the future planners in attendance, they really added to the positive vibe. Thank you to those that came and spoke to me throughout the day; your enthusiasm is infectious. There was lots of laughter, chatting and general positivity around the room. The support and welcoming nature of all there showed that if we talk to each other and ask for help, then we will likely find it. The importance of planning in 'Shaping our future – Healthy Places and Happy People' really shone through. I for one left the venue as a happy planner, thinking about the many topics covered throughout the day with a smile on my face. **SP**

## ARTICLE



**JOSEPH ASHMORE,**  
Graduate Planner and  
former Intern Project  
Officer at RTPI Scotland

# Picture this: A photovoice exploration of Partick, Glasgow

**Joseph Ashmore,** Graduate Planner and former Intern Project Officer at RTPI Scotland, discusses the research he conducted during his MSc City Planning at the University of Glasgow, which explored the use of creative methods to learn about how residents experience their neighbourhoods and contribute to community planning processes.

**Peoples' emotional reaction to their local area can provide a telling insight into how a neighbourhood operates. It can also show us the way people ascribe meaning to a place, and in turn what features of the built environment contribute to good placemaking as well as what policy interventions can be used to tackle local problems. However, this ascribed meaning, known as 'place attachment', is at present poorly embedded in local planning process, representing a missed opportunity to engage holistically with communities.**

As part of my City Planning master's research at the University of Glasgow, I was keen to explore why this important experiential aspect of place has been overlooked, how it could be better captured and its potential, through novel methods, to be used in practice.

I found that community planning in the UK had previously been squeezed by neoliberal, and later austerity, approaches to community involvement in planning. This ultimately manifested in 'tick-box' engagement, an over-reliance on volunteers to carry out public planning functions – often to their exhaustion – and a lack of resource or consideration for utilising creative and emotive approaches to shaping neighbourhoods.

The picture today isn't so bleak. In Scotland, community planning practices are growing and thriving, and in the context of emergent Local Place Plans I wanted to explore how new and creative methods might overcome

past practices and help planners and urban policy makers support residents to meaningfully enhance their communities.

But how exactly do you see through the eyes of residents, and build a true picture of how they perceive their neighbourhood? I found the answer to this question in photovoice. Photovoice is a research methodology where participants are asked to take photographs which are later discussed in semi-structured interviews. It has its roots in empowering groups and communities to, as some scholars describe it, "express the unsayable" through the images they capture.

**"how exactly do you see through the eyes of residents, and build a true picture of how they perceive their neighbourhood? I found the answer to this question in photovoice"**

In my research project I tasked 9 participants – each armed with a disposable camera – with capturing photos of their neighbourhood in Partick, Glasgow. The photos were to respond to a number of set prompts, such as "take a photo of a place in your neighbourhood that makes you happy/frustrated/excited", as well as asking for images of places they would, or wouldn't, show a visitor. These prompts were designed

to encourage participants to tap into the intangible feelings, emotions and experiences they assigned to physical places on their doorstep. A flurry of photos followed, each fascinating in their own way given the variety and crossover of neighbourhood buildings and spaces captured.

What was really remarkable, was the intensity of discussion in the one-to-one interviews that followed. Throughout the interviews, participants were able to use their photographs not only to highlight physical aspects of their neighbourhood that were good, bad or required improvement, they also communicated frustrations at institutional frameworks affecting the community, discussed how the use of neighbourhood spaces give them value, and revealed fascinating personal and local histories.

A spot in the neighbourhood that exemplifies this latter point well is Partick Cricket Club, photographed by four separate participants. Though varying in which prompt they were responding to, each separately mentioned in their interview that the first international football match in history, between England and Scotland, took place here – despite there being no plaque, acknowledgment or physical evidence at the site. This sense of common historic knowledge, despite no signalling of the event's occurrence, is emblematic of the notion that residents generally possess knowledge about their area that may go unnoticed by others – including planners.

Participants similarly converged on a derelict swimming baths, which for many represented the 'frustrated' prompt. Far from bemoaning the building's derelict state, participants were passionate about its future potential and were fluent in the attempts and efforts they and others had made to bring the site back into use. One participant cited the baths as being the reason they became civically active,

having joined the local Community Council in an attempt to effect change to the built environment in their neighbourhood.

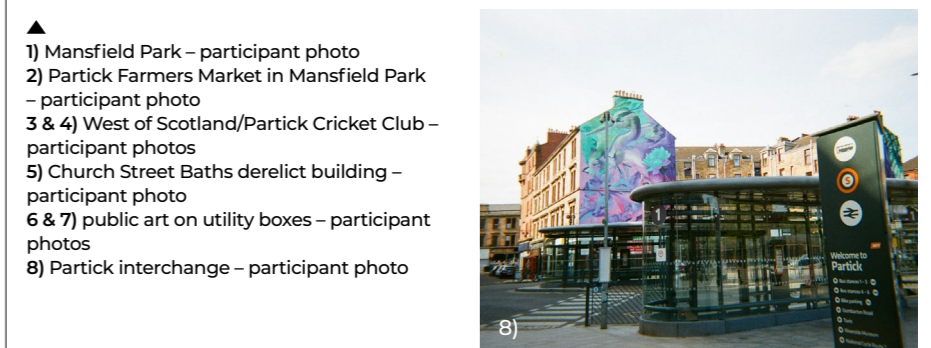
Another significant site – labelled by several participants as 'the heart of Partick' – is Mansfield Park. Participants celebrated not only the greenspace of the park, but also the lively and exciting businesses on its fringes, the bustling bi-weekly farmer's market and the busy basketball court which attracts visitors from across the city. From their photographs, they built a narrative of a public space that has inherent aesthetic appeal but is notably enhanced by the experiences and feelings they associate with an active, vibrant and busy place in the heart of their community.

**"By discussing their own creative output, residents are empowered to critique spaces and give feedback, suggestions and assessments of urban spaces that could be immensely useful to policymakers"**

Overall, I found that participants' positive experience with completing the photovoice exercise, the quantity of photographs, and the depth of their discussions demonstrates that photovoice methods with an emphasis on place attachment is a rich seam for the exploration of neighbourhood issues and opportunities. By discussing their own creative output, residents are empowered to critique spaces and give feedback, suggestions and assessments of urban spaces that could be immensely useful to policymakers.

Another proponent for considering creative methods is the simple fact that participants reported overwhelmingly that they enjoyed the exercise. After all, why shouldn't community planning be fun? **SP**

## ARTICLE



▲  
1) Mansfield Park – participant photo  
2) Partick Farmers Market in Mansfield Park – participant photo  
3 & 4) West of Scotland/Partick Cricket Club – participant photos  
5) Church Street Baths derelict building – participant photo  
6 & 7) public art on utility boxes – participant photos  
8) Partick interchange – participant photo

 ARTICLE

# Scottish Planners Welcome Malta!

**Sean Panton MRTPI**, Team Leader (Major Applications and Enforcement) at Perth & Kinross Council, recounts the insights and lessons learned during a visit from the Malta Planning Authority earlier this year.

**I**n October, Perth & Kinross Council were delighted to welcome the Malta Planning Authority to Scotland as part of an ERASMUS project aimed to enhance the planning system in Malta. Our Maltese guests shadowed colleagues at Perth & Kinross for a week, with a particular focus on planning enforcement. The bringing together of the warmth of the Mediterranean and the spirit of Scotland really did develop a week of shared learning, collaboration, and cultural exchange.

We had a busy week planned for our guests and took them on visits to some of our major development sites, including the on-going Comrie Flood Prevention Scheme, our new award-winning Cross Tay Link and the

Taymouth Castle redevelopment, which will become a world class 5-star resort upon completion. We also invited them to attend our Planning & Placemaking Committee, and even managed to squeeze in a DPEA appeal site visit regarding a high hedge. So they really did see a comprehensive amount for a single week!

**“Another thing that stood out as a good example in Malta is that they can issue daily fines for enforcement breaches, reaching up to €50,000”**

As some background to Malta, it is a small yet historically rich island in the Mediterranean and is known for its vibrant history, stunning architecture and unique culture. Whilst Malta may appear as a small place on a map, in reality it is an incredibly important European hub and is actually one of the most densely populated countries in the entire world, with over 520,000 residents living in an area of just 316 square kilometres. That’s almost a directly comparable head count population to Aberdeen, Dundee, Perth, Inverness, Stirling and Glenrothes, all combined, on an island! With a density such as this, there is a lot of construction ongoing to increase housing stock and improve infrastructure. And as we know in Scotland, with a lot of construction, comes a lot of planning enforcement!

We were surprised to learn that the Maltese planning system is actually very similar to what we have here in Scotland. The general principles and approach are broadly consistent, so we can absolutely see why ERASMUS chose Scotland for shadowing. The Malta Planning Authority is responsible for regulating land use and development across the islands. It operates under the Development Planning Act and is guided by a Strategic Plan for the Environment and Development (SPED) which, like NPF4, sets out national priorities. The system balances the need for sustainable and inclusive development with the protection of Malta’s environmental and cultural heritage, given the country’s limited land space and rich historical context. Like us, planning applications are assessed against local plans, policies, and design guidelines, with public consultation playing a key role in the decision-making process. Unlike us, however, Malta has a third party right of appeal for objectors to planning applications!

Although the trip was primarily for our Maltese counterparts to learn about us, we undoubtedly took a lot



**SEAN PANTON MRTPI**, Team Leader (Major Applications and Enforcement) at Perth & Kinross Council

 ARTICLE


from them too. For example, our guests couldn’t believe that there is no national validation standard with regards to the colouring of applications. They found our plans difficult to interpret at times. In Malta, in order for a planning application to be validated, all plans must follow a strict colour code. In essence, existing elements are shown in one colour, proposed elements in another, alterations in another, so on and so forth. This makes plans much easier to interpret and review. This seems like a great idea on the face of it, as in Scotland we are quite prone of having to play ‘spot the difference’ between plans from time to time. Is it time for Scotland to consider a national colour coding

**“All in all, we had a tremendous time hosting the Malta Planning Authority and I would encourage all local authorities in Scotland to take up opportunities like this in the future”**

validation standard to make things easier? It seems to be working very well for our counterparts in Malta so maybe we should take a colourful leaf out of their book.

Another thing that stood out as a good example in Malta is that they can issue daily fines for enforcement breaches, reaching up to €50,000. I can imagine if we had the power to do this then a lot of our planning breaches might end up being resolved quicker if the applicant knows they are liable to pay daily fines. The money they receive from these fines goes straight into resourcing the planning service. It sounds like a win-win, unless you are breaching planning regulations of course!

After a week of learning from each other, and to top off a great week by putting the icing on the cake, Perth & Kinross Council were also delighted to host the Scottish Planning Enforcement Forum (SPEF) on Friday 10th October. The event was well attended by most authorities in Scotland and had speakers from The Highland Council, Perth & Kinross Council, and the Cairngorms National Park Authority. Of course, we took the opportunity to allow our Maltese delegates to make a presentation too, which was great as it meant they could share their experiences of planning enforcement with our colleagues and friends from across the country. So it was great that other local authorities in Scotland were able to have benefit from our Maltese counterparts too.

All in all, we had a tremendous time hosting the Malta Planning Authority and I would encourage all local authorities in Scotland to take up opportunities like this in the future if they are ever posed. It was a pleasure for us to host such dedicated professionals whilst sharing insights, exchanging ideas, and learning from each other’s experiences. Maybe if we play our cards right there might be an opportunity for a return visit to Malta. Who’s in?! **SP**



ARTICLE



**JENNY MUNRO**  
ASSOCRTPI, Policy,  
Practice and Research  
Officer at RTPi Scotland

# Planifesto Priorities for Scotland

**Jenny Munro AssocRTPI**, Policy, Practice and Research Officer at RTPi Scotland provides an update on RTPi Scotland's Planifesto, launched on 12 November, including the Institute's key asks and next steps.

In the **last (autumn) issue of Scottish Planner**, we shared with readers the work of the RTPi Scotland team to develop our Planifesto in the run up to next year's Holyrood elections. We also highlighted some of the recurring themes that were raised with us during the various committee meetings, workshop sessions and separate discussions we have engaged in with members and stakeholders that have shaped the Planifesto – namely **resourcing, housing and digital transformation**.

RTPi Scotland's Planifesto was launched on 12 November and is now available to view on the [RTPi website](#). The Planifesto comprises a series of overlapping asks set under five key themes based on what Scotland needs to deliver our vision of a prosperous, resilient and equitable country, where everyone has access to safe, well-planned places and a healthy natural environment. These themes are:

- A fully resourced planning system that is plan-led, effective, accessible and empowered to deliver the homes, jobs, infrastructure and sustainable communities that Scotland needs.
- Infrastructure-led development to ensure services and infrastructure at all scales – national, regional and local – are in place at the right time for the people that need them, supporting sustainable development outcomes.
- Diverse and inclusive housing to meet everyone's needs and to deliver prosperity and growth.
- Ensure the future of rural and island communities by enabling access to

the infrastructure and services they need to thrive and achieve a just transition.

- Thriving and resilient places to ensure that Scotland's communities are prosperous, healthy and biodiverse, driven by an equitable approach to community-led placemaking that inspires, emboldens and empowers.

The asks under each of these themes are overlapping and interlinking. We believe that if delivered together as a whole they will bring forward a stronger and more resilient planning system and profession with the ability to drive forward, together with Scotland's communities, our net zero goals and create the places we need. As an example, we are asking for clear and robust digital planning leadership to drive forward Scotland's digital planning transformation. This will be key to pull together the skills and resources of the sector, maximise and share learning from innovation that is already taking place, and ensure that no area of Scotland is left behind. We are also asking for a stronger commitment to infrastructure first through the creation of a delivery body, which would recognise



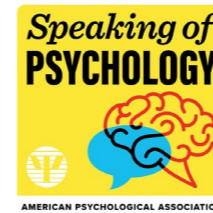
housing as critical infrastructure, and the prioritisation of regional planning by providing necessary support to local authorities wishing to prepare regional spatial strategies and create regional planning partnerships.

Over the coming months, the RTPi Scotland team will further develop the Planifesto, providing additional

evidence and justification for each Planifesto ask and setting out how we think the asks can and should be delivered in practice. We will continue to keep members updated through the Scottish Planner, our member bulletins, and

on our website. In the meantime, if you have evidence, case studies, or suggestions as to how the Planifesto asks can be taken forward then we would love to hear from you. Get in touch with us at [scotland@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:scotland@rtpi.org.uk). **SP**

**"The asks under each of these themes are overlapping and interlinking. We believe that if delivered together as a whole they will bring forward a stronger and more resilient planning system and profession"**



This issue of the Scottish Planner focusses on planning for health, so it makes sense that this should also be the theme for this Episode of Podlicious. First up is our keynote speaker Professor Jenny Roe talking about

her work on Restorative Urbanism. If you missed the conference itself, then this is your chance to listen to Jenny talking about her work. This episode [Designing cities to improve mental health](#) (21 Feb 2024) is a really nice recap of Jenny's research and the key concepts she discussed in her keynote speech including restoration, fascination and attention. The host podcast Speaking of Psychology has another more recent episode covering some similar ideas. This second episode features researcher Marc Berman reporting on the results of some recent studies, as well as discussing the underlying theories explaining the health-environment link: [Why nature is good for your brain](#), (3 December 2025).



You can't talk about cities and health without going into physical activity and the significance of active travel for helping people maintain their physical fitness. There's a whole host of podcasts dealing with cycling and

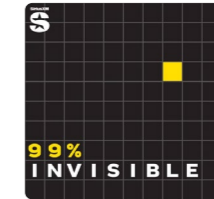
walking, but for this Podlicious I've picked the Global Health Matters podcast and their episode ['Walking the talk – advocating for healthy cities'](#) (20 Feb 2024). The speakers include practitioners from Guadalajara and Bangkok, reminding us that the challenges we face in Scotland are by no means unique and there are many hopeful stories from other places in the world! If anyone wants



an overview of the multiple benefits of enabling more people to cycle, then the [Reasons to be Cheerful](#) podcast episode 84 is a good starting point.

## Recommended podcasts for planners

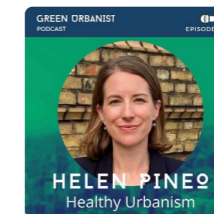
Ep 5 by Dr Caroline Brown, RTPi Director of Scotland and Ireland.



Now we've got back from a spin on our bikes, let's listen to this episode about [Sound and health](#) (17 May 2019) from the 99% Invisible series. Jenny Roe covers sound in her work, but 99% Invisible delves into sound in a bit more detail explaining the positive and negative impacts of sound on our lives.



Zooming out again to the big scale, I want to suggest some podcasts which link human health to the health of the planet and its systems. This concept is known as planetary health, and there are academics and practitioners from various fields – planning, public health, environmental psychology, landscape – exploring these linkages.



Both [Howard Frumkin](#) and [Helen Pineo](#) discuss their work in this area, linking health to climate and nature as well as outlining some of the supporting research evidence.



My final suggestion on this topic is the BBC World Service's podcast 'The Climate Question'. In an episode from October 2025, the presenter Jordan Dunbar asks ['Can we build better cities for mental health and the climate?'](#) That is a very good question.



ARTICLE



**DR JENNY ROE**, Emerita Professor in Design & Health, School of Architecture, University of Virginia, a Visiting Professor, Edinburgh College of Art, University of Edinburgh and Honorary Professor Research Centre for Urban Studies (RCUS), Heriot Watt University

# Restorative Cities: putting mental health at the heart of city design

**Dr Jenny Roe** is an environmental psychologist who studies, writes, lectures and consults for a wide range of academic and public audiences on human health-centred design for the built environment. Jenny was also the keynote speaker at the 2025 RTPi Scotland Annual Conference.”

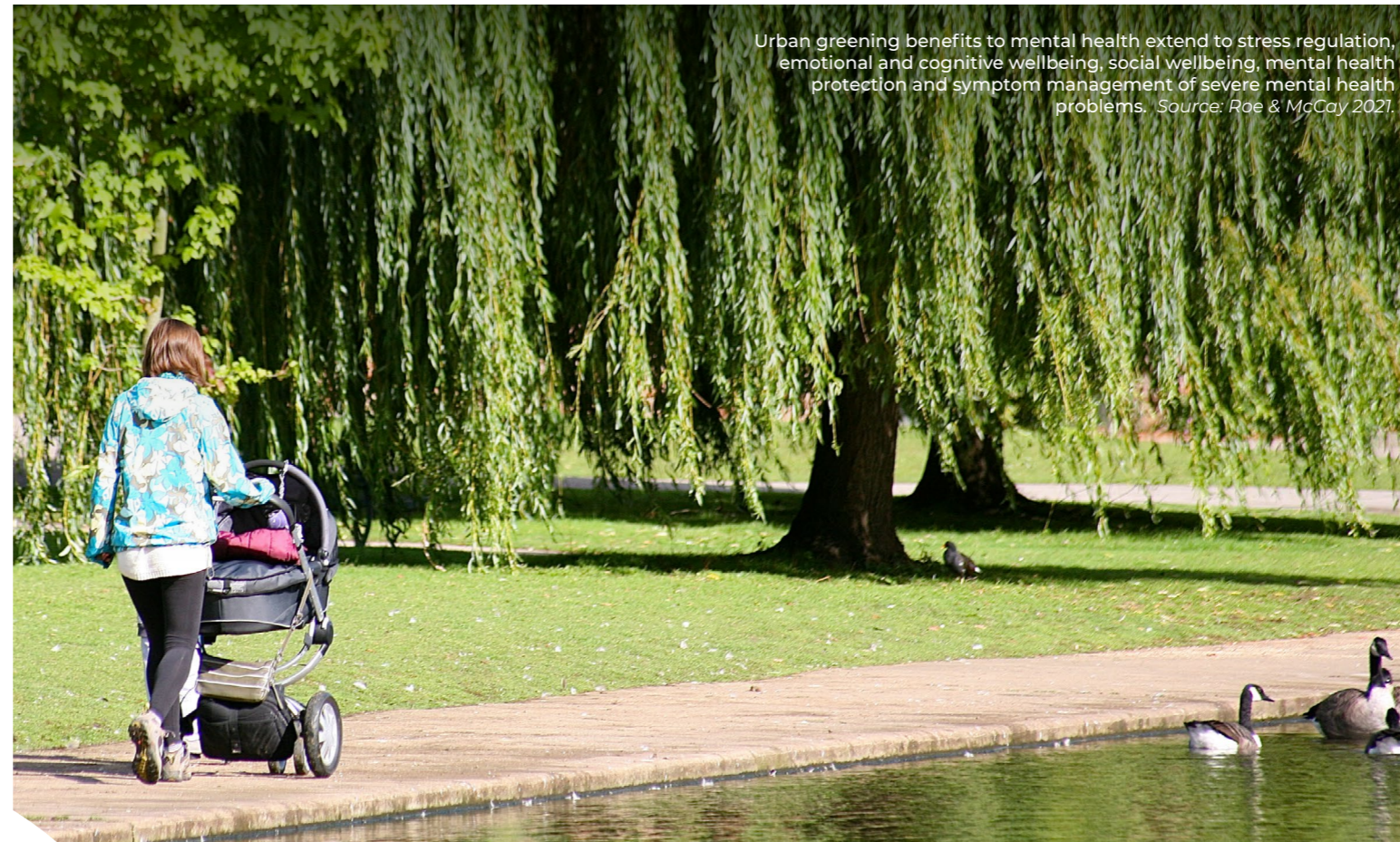
**T**he relative contribution of the built environment to our overall health is estimated to be around 10 percent. But this estimate overlooks the role the built environment plays in determining lifestyles and healthy behaviours, which are believed to contribute a further 20 to 50 percent towards health. Where we decide to put a park, or a school or a bus stop is as much part of our health system as where we locate our health care facilities.

In public health we talk about an ‘urban advantage’ in terms of offering more jobs, access to cultural and recreational opportunities, more people to mingle with and meet. But our cities also impose environmental stressors that exacerbate mental health problems including noise, pollution, overcrowding and crime. Rates of serious mental health problems, schizophrenia, for example, are much higher in cities than in rural contexts. But the patterns are not straightforward with some research suggesting larger cities are better for our mental health because they promote more opportunities for social interaction. This conflict has led me to ask in my research, how are cities good – and bad – for our mental health and what

is the role for urban design and planning? In the 1990s we thought we’d cracked the ‘mystery’ of the brain owing to advances in neuroscience. But thirty years later, there have been no breakthroughs in treatment, and some critics believe a drug-based approach to mental illness



▲ Above: Restorative City Framework. Source: *Restorative Cities: Urban Design for Mental Health and Wellbeing* by Jenny Roe and Layla McCay, Bloomsbury Publishing (2021).



Urban greening benefits to mental health extend to stress regulation, emotional and cognitive wellbeing, social wellbeing, mental health protection and symptom management of severe mental health problems. Source: Roe & McCay 2021.

has failed (Ramos, The Boston Review, 17 May 2022). Psychiatric medicine is simply not advancing with anything like the speed of cancer treatments, for example. We’re not making progress. In fact, mental health outcomes are declining. Around 1 in 4 of us live with a diagnosable mental health problem in any given year. This is extremely debilitating, not just at an individual level but also at a societal level. In *Restorative Cities*, published at the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, psychiatrist and public health specialist, Layla McCay and I argue for an approach that places mental health, wellness and quality of life at the forefront of city design and planning. The framework is comprised of seven pillars that build off years of scientific

evidence from a wide variety of areas including restorative environment research, psychiatry, geography, architecture, design, planning and public health. Key elements comprise the green, blue, sensory, play-able, neighbourly, active and inclusive city (Figure 1 opposite). The ‘green city’ for example, is about exposing people to natural environments or green space. Hundreds of empirical research studies now tell us that access to green space reduces depression and stress, improves brain function, and helps people manage symptoms of anxiety disorders, schizophrenia, ADHD, and dementia. This includes the amount and accessibility one has to nature, the type of nature involved, and its biodiversity value. The ‘blue city’ is about access to urban water, which research indicates is one of the most restorative properties available to us for mental health management. Water is a dynamic and multi-sensorial attribute that moves with light and wind; we can touch it, hear it, as well as see its myriad patterns, and it fosters curiosity and fascination in all of

**“Scotland is uniquely situated to use its natural resources to improve urban mental health owing to its extensive coastline, inland riverways (lochs and rivers) and biodiverse-rich woodlands”**

us. But water quality in a city is often not maintained. It becomes stagnant, dirty or polluted and fails to deliver any benefits. The ‘sensory city’ is another approach for improving mental health by offering pleasant sounds, aromas, and opportunities to interact with a city through touch and smell. Sonic refuges, for example, such as bird sanctuaries or kinetic sculptures that dynamically interact with the wind, provide ‘positive soundscapes’ that have been proven to promote restorative health. The key is in providing stimuli that are softly fascinating

– that is, they have the capacity to draw one’s attention effortlessly and without mental effort. Further dimensions of restorative environments include the quality of ‘being away’ (any environment that offers us psychological and/or geographical distance from our everyday, demanding routines), expansive spaces with ‘extent’ (a view to the horizon and/or sense of a ‘whole other world’) and ‘compatibility’ in terms of offering a good fit with our goals and aspirations (Kaplan and Kaplan 1989).

Scotland is uniquely situated to use its natural resources to improve urban mental health owing to its extensive coastline, inland riverways (lochs and rivers) and biodiverse-rich woodlands. Whilst it has made great strides forward in its pioneering ‘*Shaping Places for Wellbeing*’ programme, there is still much more to be done in improving access to natural resources, encouraging communities to interact with nature and using urban green space for play and child development. At a time when we are witnessing a surge in mental health problems and increasing pressure on our mental health care services, this new approach to urban design is essential.

I am extending this approach to architecture in a new book, *Restorative Architecture, the science of design for mental health and wellbeing* to be published by Bloomsbury (2027). More information on this forthcoming book, and ‘Restorative Cities, urban design for mental health and wellbeing’ (Roe and McCay, 2021) can be found on my website: [www.jennyjroe.com](http://www.jennyjroe.com) or by emailing me directly at: [jjr4b@virginia.edu](mailto:jjr4b@virginia.edu).

I’m often asked about what simple strategies a community can take to make a difference in the outdoor environment for mental health. If you have limited resources, one recommendation is always to increase the built environment’s curiosity and fascination, adding a colourful mural maybe, or planting a landmark tree that offers seasonal variation, or a tiny pocket park off a busy road that offers scope for ‘being away’. Restorative Cities is full of these types of simple suggestions. **SP**

**References**

Kaplan, R., & Kaplan, S. (1989). *The experience of nature: A psychological perspective*. Cambridge university press.  
Ramos, M.A. *Mental Illness Is Not in Your Head*, *The Boston Review*, 17 May 2022.

ARTICLE



**IRENE BEAUTYMAN FRTPI**, Improvement Service, **MEADHBH MAGUIRE MRTPI**, Highland Council, **ROWENA STATT**, Anderson Bell Christie, and **MARGARET DOUGLAS**, Public Health Scotland

# Healthy Places, Healthy People: why planning matters more than ever

**Irene Beautyman FRTPI**, Planning for Place Programme Lead at the Improvement Service, **Meadhbh Maguire MRTPI**, Principal Planner at Highland Council, **Rowena Statt**, Research and Development Director at Anderson Bell Christie and **Margaret Douglas**, Consultant in Public Health at Public Health Scotland, discuss how planning can shape healthier lives – the topic of their panel session at the RTPI Scotland Annual Conference 2025.”

**A**t the recent RTPI Scotland Annual Conference, the spotlight turned to an often-overlooked question: how can planning shape healthier lives? Chaired by Irene Beautyman the discussion, under the theme Healthy Places and Happy People, brought together experts including Margaret Douglas, Meadhbh Maguire, and Rowena Statt to explore the intersection of planning and public health.

### Planning as a Health Tool

Margaret Douglas opened with a powerful reminder: planning doesn't just shape streets and skylines, it influences physical and mental health. From housing design to transport systems, the built environment impacts wellbeing in profound ways. Tools such as the Place Standard Tool, the [Place](#)

and Wellbeing Outcomes and Health Impact Assessments (HIA) are now helping planners identify and address these impacts. These approaches combine hard data with community voices, ensuring that local development plans (LDPs) reflect real needs rather than abstract ideals.

### The Evidence Imperative

Meadhbh Maguire highlighted the importance of evidence-led policy in delivering a planning system in the long-term public interest. With LDP Evidence Reports underway across Scotland, planners are increasingly adept at sourcing and applying data. This shift is crucial because health has historically struggled to compete with louder priorities like housing supply or economic growth. National Planning Framework 4 sets an ambitious vision for “homes and neighbourhoods that are healthier, affordable and vibrant”. Translating that into reality requires robust evidence and collaboration.

Rowena Statt affirmed the value of this in the approach taken to extending the Gannochy estate in Perth.

“Ultimately, planning exists to serve the long-term public interest. And what could be more in the public interest than health?”

### From Silos to Synergy

One of the most striking reflections was how far we've come in connecting transport and health as an inspiration to what can be achieved in planning. Until the 1990s, these were separate worlds with transport focused on mobility and economics, public health on disease prevention. Today, we recognise that active travel infrastructure, greenspace, and play areas are not luxuries but essential for physical activity, mental health, and equity. Health impacts need more of a decisive factor in planning policy and decision rather than a “bonus reason” for developments already justified by climate or sustainability policies.

### The Fast Food Dilemma

This raises a provocative question: can planners refuse developments on health grounds alone? Many remain unsure, particularly when tackling commercial determinants of health such as the clustering of fast-food outlets in deprived areas. While England has seen success with policies limiting takeaways near schools, Scotland lags behind. Recent research with Nesta and Public Health Scotland (led by Meadhbh) reveals uncertainty about whether such interventions fit within planning's remit. Greater collaboration with public health agencies could bridge this gap.

### Looking Ahead

Ultimately, planning exists to serve the long-term public interest. And what could be more in the public interest than health? As Rowena Statt noted, understanding local population trends is vital, not just for creating healthy places, but for addressing broader challenges like the housing crisis. The message from Perth was clear: health must move from the margins to the mainstream of planning practice. Doing so will require courage, evidence, and partnerships. The payoff is a Scotland where every place supports a healthier, happier life. **SP**



ARTICLE



**ELAINE CAMPBELL MRTPI**, Operations Manager in Development Management at the City of Edinburgh Council

# Healthy Places Delivered by Happy Planners

**Elaine Campbell MRTPI**, Operations Manager in Development Management at the City of Edinburgh Council, captures the key messages that came out of the session she took part in at the RTPI Scotland Annual Conference 2025, together with **Craig McLaren FRTPI**, **Susan Rintoul**, **Rim Chouaib MRTPI** and **Kevin Murray FRTPI**.



“being trusted, alongside increasing levels of responsibility, is key to learning and growth.”

**A**fter hearing all about delivering healthy places and the importance of planning in this debate, the conversation at the RTPI conference switched to Happy Planners. Are we generally happy as a profession, do we celebrate our success?

Craig McLaren and Susan Rintoul from The National Planning Improvement team started the discussion on Collaboration and Respect within Planning. Susan reflected “over the last few years the National Planning Improvement team has been engaging with stakeholders through a call for ideas and the new National Planning Improvement Framework (NPIF). One of the things this highlighted was the need to change the perception of planning, work more collaboratively and

build more morale in planning authorities.

“As part of the NPIF the planning authorities have hosted a peer collaborative review session, bringing together key stakeholders and customers to discuss how we can improve. This led to planning authorities identifying improvement actions. Many of these are around workforce and customer care. From these sessions we have seen a willingness to work collaboratively and embed the values of respect and collaboration into the planning system.”

Also on the panel was Rim Chouaib (RTPI Scotland Young Planner of the Year) and Kevin Murray from Kevin Murray Associates. Rim reflected, “as a young planner, I feel being trusted, alongside

increasing levels of responsibility, is key to learning and growth. Being challenged with new tasks, while having the freedom to voice concerns without fear, has helped me build up my confidence, especially around engagement.

“When working with communities, building trust is key – therefore a listening mindset is crucial to ensure inclusion of perspectives, especially where a sense of scepticism or fear of change exists. Working on projects like Inverness Market, Fraserburgh Beach Masterplan and the Brighter Barrhead Masterplan have all demonstrated how bringing together residents, businesses and diverse groups, can enable inclusive yet influential discussion that address real needs and aspirations.”

As a senior officer I am all too aware of the responsibility to ensure that a healthy supportive planning workplace can be nurtured for all. However, this is not easy with the challenges of hybrid working, public expectations and the pressures to deliver. Sadly, there are one too many keyboard warriors who find it their mission to engage in some planner bashing. It is important to identify when a colleague might be having a bad day. This can be harder to spot when on the end of a Teams call. Small gestures to celebrate success,

a birthday or just a sharing coffee can make a real difference.

Respect and openness are particularly important in delivering successful schemes and

making the work of a planner feel valued. Working on the Futures Institute has delivered one of the most outstanding projects I have been involved in. This was the result of some uncomfortable and difficult conversations that challenged the proposals and the architect's design response. Respect from all parties must be at the centre of these conversations.

It is important to celebrate success and allow professional growth and reflection. I consider myself incredibly lucky in the role I have and the opportunities that my career as a planner gives me. A healthy work environment is essential to make sure you are a happy planner. **SP**

ARTICLE

# Digital Planning: visualising the future

**Alex MacLaren RIBA RIAS**, Associate Professor in Architecture and Associate Executive Dean for Education and Student Life, School of EGIS, Heriot-Watt University, recounts the key messages of the digital planning workshop session at the RTPi Scotland Annual Conference 2025. Alex contributed to this session together with Aline Kirkland and Tom James of the Improvement Service and Dr Caroline Brown, RTPi Scotland Director, who chaired the session.

**T**he digital world continues to move quickly, with innovations in automated data collection and smart data mapping, plus artificial intelligence (AI) tools for data analysis, image generation, even regulatory audit. That means – as ever – there was a lot of ground that a Digital Planning session could cover. This part of the conference combined two different examples of innovations in digital planning practice: one early-stage example from Heriot-Watt University (with University of Glasgow and Bentley Systems), and the other an innovation in data reuse from the Improvement Service.

The session began with a playful provocation; an interactive pilot ‘app’,

combining a photomeshed 3D digital urban environment (Dublin City, in this case) with local planning documentation. The app was the output of a two-day Hackathon event Bentley and Google’s ‘Urban Tech Challenge’, hosted in Dublin earlier in 2025 and involved academics from Heriot-Watt University. In the app users can apply planning concepts to a streetscape – either in plan or elevation, through a written prompt. For example, turn the parking into gardens; add 4 storeys to the buildings to increase density; add a cycle lane to the street and reduce the width of the roadway. These prompts direct an underlying AI tool to provide a personalised visualisation built on the bones of the current view.



**ALEX MACLAREN RIBA RIAS**, Associate Professor in Architecture and Associate Executive Dean for Education and Student Life, School of EGIS, Heriot-Watt University

Users can tweak their prompts and swipe between the world as it is now and how they imagine it to be.

The audience scanned the QR code and had their own go at transforming the streets of Dublin leading to much hilarity, alongside some awe and excitement. The AI wasn’t always able to sensibly adjust scale, materials or space leading to some laughable utopian/dystopian futures; but it has only had a very limited amount of development. Nevertheless, the audience could see how intelligent visualisation tools, trained on real environments, could be a fun and powerful way to boost community engagement, stakeholder awareness and enable more meaningful consultation and public contribution.

From the future to the present, the second part of the session saw Aline Kirkland and Tom James of the Improvement Service showcase a more immediately deployable use case for digital tools. Aline gave a whistle-stop tour through some of the dashboards developed to help local authorities to understand, map and visualise the latent data collected by councils. Overlaying geo-located data of vacant sites and EPC certificates for example provides a complement to other data sources on housing completions and can be combined into a housing dashboard to give additional insights. However, the increased automation and near real-time updating of this kind of information, enabled by some smart coding and indexing the digital collection of data, creates whole new opportunities. The Improvement Service had several examples of incidences like this, where realising the potential of latent data, combined with intelligent, automated queries and geospatial mapping, can transform decision-making with little additional resource required. A shout-out to Falkirk Council who are embracing GIS Open Spatial Data, and to City of Glasgow Environmental Mapping/Digital Twin; two cases volunteered from the audience as further examples in this vein. The session closed with a short update on the Digital Planning Working Group convened by the Scottish Government with HOPS and the Improvement Service.

A rich and varied workshop, with much to take away, and new contacts and synergies identified. We look forward to further exciting developments in this space! **SP**

“the audience could see how intelligent visualisation tools... could be a fun and powerful way to boost community engagement”



ARTICLE

# What’s Perth got to do with it: health and happiness in the Fair City

**Kristian Smith MRTPI**, Service Manager for Development Management and Building Standards at Perth and Kinross Council, discusses the past, present and future of Perth that delegates discovered on walking tours led by Perth and Kinross Council at the 2025 RTPi Scotland Annual Conference.

**T**he September sun shone on Perth and the delegates attending the 2025 RTPi Scotland Annual Conference. The large gathering began the day listening to presentations on and discussing the conference theme of ‘Shaping our future – Healthy Places and Happy People’.

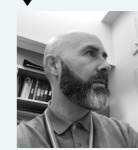
But just sitting around in the excellent Perth Theatre wouldn’t deliver a real and lived experience.

Getting out to discover our surroundings added to the learning and overall enjoyment of the day. This, to me, gave a much better understanding of the place of Perth, what has come before, what we have and what the future might be. So, drawing on planning past, present and future we headed out into the city streets. This saw Perth and Kinross colleagues set out in various directions, like piper pipers leading their eager followers, to see what Perth could offer.

As you’d expect, there was a lot to see, and it was difficult to narrow things down. But various landmarks gave the opportunity to show how and why the city has developed as it has, what it has to offer and what opportunities are still to come.

We passed the Scottish Geographical Society and the ‘Fair Maids House’ a historic B listed building now manned by volunteers and used as an education space on mapping, climate and exploration. We looked across the silvery Tay to Kinnoull and spoke about Sir Patrick Geddes and his formative years in Perth, as well as the importance of Kinnoull Hill and the Tay on his ‘Valley Section’ model illustrating the relationship between landscape, settlement and society.

The flood defences on North Inch showed how climate mitigation could still see a design that created spaces for people



**KRISTIAN SMITH MRTPI**, Service Manager for Development Management and Building Standards at Perth and Kinross Council

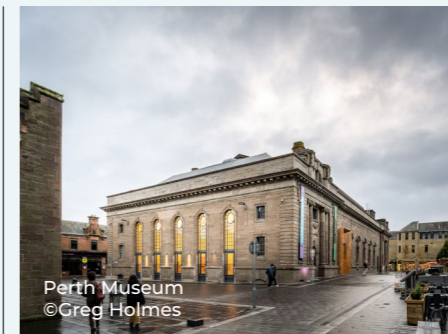
to enjoy, particularly on such a sunny day, but also through the incorporation of art in the more engineered aspects – a visual stimulus when not so warm. Sir Patrick I’m sure would’ve approved.

In the heart of the city we passed the award-winning Perth Museum, opened just last year. We witnessed how this had revitalised the city centre, drawing thousands of visitors and providing a new focus.

Then winding our way back to the Theatre, it was clear that there were still many opportunities to reinvigorate and revitalise buildings and public areas. The walking tours showed that our urban areas are struggling to keep pace with societal and environmental change. But also, that positives are emerging, with good understanding, planning and messaging.

It was a pleasure to show off the Fair city, its green and blue spaces and impressive urban architecture. But it also gave me a new perspective on what Perth is and how it can shine even brighter in the future.

Importantly the walk in the sun ended with smiles and helped us all get in some steps before lunch – health and happiness delivered! **SP**

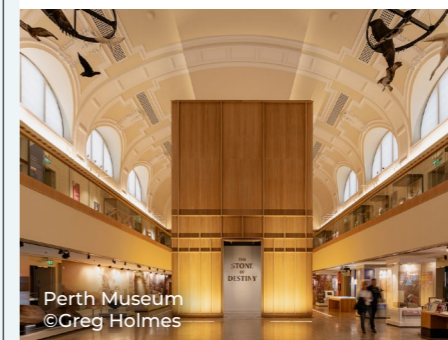


Perth Museum ©Greg Holmes

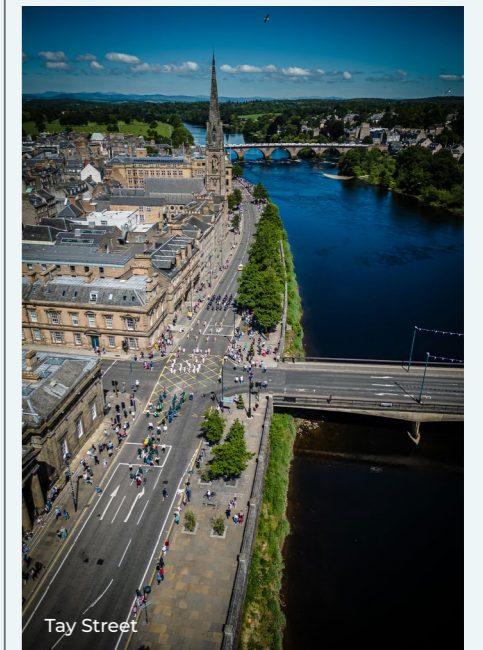


Kristian Smith Leading a walking tour at the RTPi Scotland Annual Conference in Perth

“various landmarks gave the opportunity to show how and why the city has developed as it has, what it has to offer and what opportunities are still to come.”



Perth Museum ©Greg Holmes



Tay Street

## ARTICLE

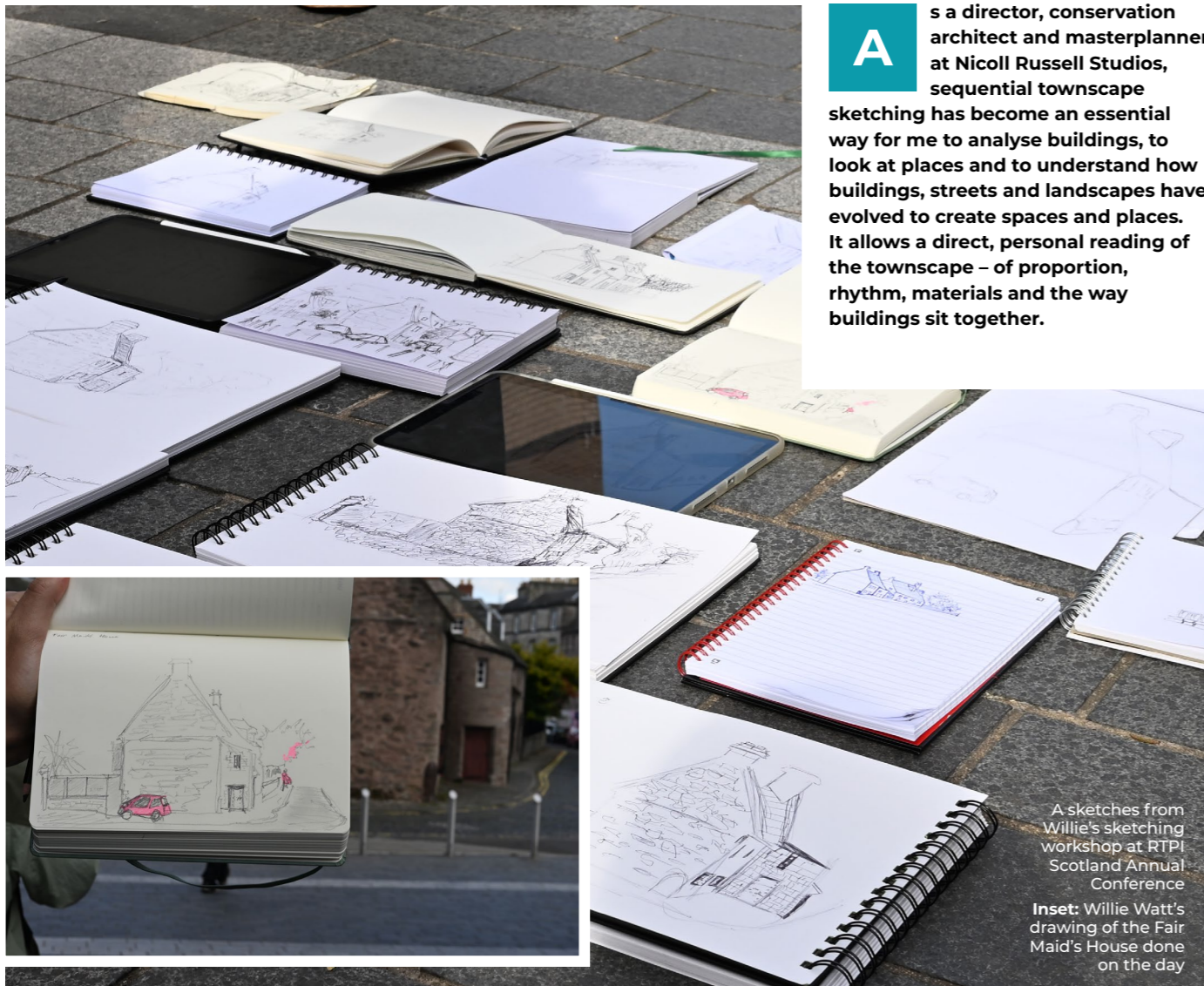


**WILLIE WATT**, Director & Accredited Conservation Architect at Nicoll Russell Studios

# Sequential Townscape Sketching: seeing, understanding and sharing reflections on place

**Willie Watt**, Director & Accredited Conservation Architect at Nicoll Russell Studios, discusses sketching as a useful tool to adjust perspectives, open up conversations and reveal what's special about Scotland's places.

**A**s a director, conservation architect and masterplanner at Nicoll Russell Studios, sequential townscape sketching has become an essential way for me to analyse buildings, to look at places and to understand how buildings, streets and landscapes have evolved to create spaces and places. It allows a direct, personal reading of the townscape – of proportion, rhythm, materials and the way buildings sit together.



A sketches from Willie's sketching workshop at RTPi Scotland Annual Conference

**Inset:** Willie Watt's drawing of the Fair Maid's House done on the day

## ARTICLE

"Walking and sketching along and around Union Street drew attention to its remarkable unity, its layers of history and topography and the variations in scale and detail that animate it."

Through a sequence of small, observational drawings taken along a route, I begin to trace how a place has evolved, what still works, and where change has unsettled its balance. It is a patient and reflective process – one that helps reveal the underlying structure, character and coherence of buildings and places in a way that maps or photographs rarely do. I use this technique for my own design, analysis, as a vehicle for public engagement and to interpret and disseminate the character of these places via social media etc.

My work with Aberdeen City Council, related to the Union Street Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme, used sequential sketching workshops to encourage local people to reflect upon the value and heritage of the street itself. Walking and sketching along and around Union Street drew attention to its remarkable unity, its layers of history and topography and the variations in scale and detail that animate it. The drawings prepared during the workshops became a way of underlining the street's essential qualities and to encourage others to see them afresh. The workshops proved to be a soft and accessible tool – one that encouraged local people, and officers to engage in a shared reflection on what makes the heart of Aberdeen special.

In Orkney, working with the islands' council and the North Isles Landscape Partnership, sequential sketching workshops offered a gentle way into wider discussions about heritage, settlement and landscape. Drawing with islanders in their own surroundings helped reveal collective folk memories and insights about how

people, businesses, buildings, fields and harbours have grown from the land and sea. Sketching together helped people articulate their sense of place and continuity – a quiet form of cultural mapping that values the relationship between people and their environment.

Reflecting upon their heritage, materials, building form, repair, change, appropriateness and sustainability, people were able to express what makes the places of Kettletoft, Whitehall Village, Balfour Village and Pier of Wall in Sanday, Stronsay, Shapinsay and Westray respectively so special.

In Buckhaven, for Fife Historic Buildings Trust, sketching workshops have again been used as a soft tool for community engagement, this time focussed on young people from Levenmouth Academy and Fife College. Sequential drawings of streets and buildings

helped to identify the characteristics that give the town its distinct identity – its grain, scale and materiality – and provided a shared reference during the workshops and public conversations.

The drawings opened discussion rather than closing it down; the young people could consider, recognise, respond to, or challenge their built environment, which created an opportunity to talk about change and value.

More recently,

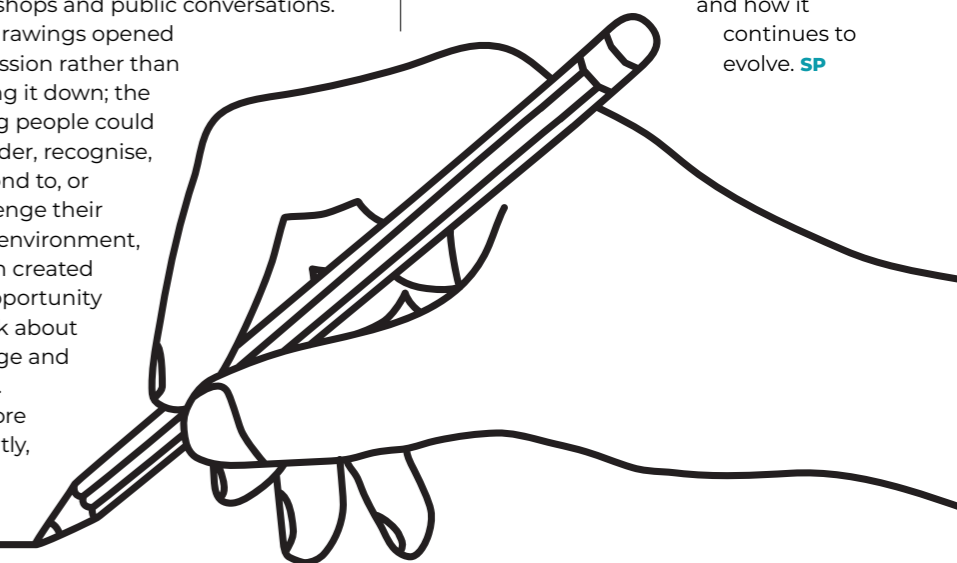
I have showcased the same approach in workshops for RTPi Scotland at their recent Perth Conference and the Heritage Network in Portsoy. Encouraging planners, conservation officers, heritage professionals, students and residents to walk, talk, pause, observe and draw together enables them to slow down, sharpen their observations, and connect professional analysis with lived experience.

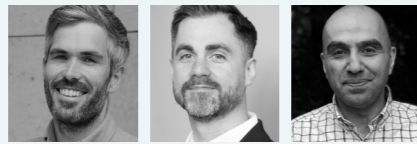
Prompted by my observations as both a conservation architect, masterplanner and artist, the approach encourages group discussions, with many remarking that they began to notice things they would otherwise have overlooked – the slight misalignment of a façade, the layering of change, repairs, or the way light or wind shapes the use of a space.

For me, sequential townscape sketching is both analysis and dialogue – a gentle, human way to understand, interpret and share reflections on buildings and place. It sits comfortably within conservation practice but reaches beyond it, creating space for reflection, memory and collective insight. Above all, it reminds us that the act of looking – carefully and together – is the starting point for any meaningful discussion about our built environment, heritage

and how it continues to evolve. **SP**

"sequential sketching workshops offered a gentle way into wider discussions about heritage, settlement and landscape"



 ARTICLE


**JOHN COONEY MRTPI**, Planning Officer at Perth and Kinross Council, **JONATHAN MCQUILLAN**, Director at Anderson Bell Christie, **HUSAM ALWAER FRTPI PHD**, Chair of Urban

Design at the University of Dundee and **ANTHONY MCGUINNESS MRTPI**, Service Manager – Development Planning and other Services at Angus Council

# Healthy Planet: planning for net zero

**John Cooney MRTPI**, Planning Officer at Perth and Kinross Council, **Jonathan McQuillan**, Director at Anderson Bell Christie, **Husam Alwaer FRTPI PhD**, Chair of Urban Design at the University of Dundee and **Anthony McGuinness MRTPI**, Service Manager – Development Planning and other Services at Angus Council take us through their key messages from the Healthy Planet session at the RTPi Scotland Annual Conference.

**I**n this session we were joined by speakers from Anderson Bell Christie's Balance project, Angus Council, and University of Dundee. Balance's practical application was showcased following its Spring white paper launch, whilst Dundee research challenged us to rethink urban growth density and local living, using Perth as an example.

## Achieving Balance

Balance is a service that quantifies both carbon emissions and potential for local sequestration, enabling communities to achieve net zero in a place-specific context. It translates national policy and complex datasets into tangible, spatial outcomes, supporting the vision of NPF4 and aligning fully with Policy 2: Climate Mitigation and Adaptation.

Achieving net zero by 2045 does not imply the complete elimination of emissions. Residual emissions – such as those from embodied carbon in materials and ongoing energy consumption – will persist. To offset these, we must actively remove carbon from the atmosphere through nature-based solutions. These include trees, peatlands, seagrass,

**“Balance promotes a place-based approach that fosters a symbiotic relationship between people and nature.”**

saltmarshes, and other ecosystems capable of sequestration, the process by which carbon is captured and stored in living biomass.

Balance promotes a place-based approach that fosters a symbiotic relationship between people and nature. Stewardship of these natural assets not only locks away carbon but also enhances biodiversity, spatial quality, and climate resilience in the places we live.

During this session, the Balance team presented their net-zero Local Development Plan pilot for Montrose, demonstrating that net zero can be calculated at a local level and achieved through nature-based solutions. The pilot evidences how Montrose could meet the requirements of the Climate Change Act from 2045 onwards.

## Reaching Net Zero in Angus

Angus Council is currently preparing their new Local Development Plan which will guide development over the next 10-20 years. To comply with the Climate Change Act, plans must demonstrate net zero from 2045 onwards. The Montrose pilot study identified a need to scale balance across the authority for a holistic approach.

The Council's focus is for all communities to benefit from and be involved in decision making to achieve a place-based approach to net zero, enhancing biodiversity, design quality, and climate resilience.

Planning should include embodied carbon considerations, with settlement growth patterns playing a key role. For example, lower-density development typically results in higher embodied carbon than higher-density alternatives. This insight must shape future planning decisions to support sustainable growth and climate goals.

## Local Living Needs Density

Research at the University of Dundee has identified a density “sweet spot” for thriving local living – typically around 50–80 dwellings per hectare. This level of density supports walkable access to amenities, public transport, and vibrant community life. It also requires incorporating alternative housing forms, diverse workplace types, remote working options, and varied tenures, all while reflecting 21st-century living patterns. Yet, few places in Scotland currently achieve this.

Post-war development in Perth and other Scottish towns and cities has resulted in densities closer to 25 dwellings per hectare – well below the threshold needed to sustain local services. With more housing planned and projected, Perth risks further unsustainable outward urban expansion at similarly low densities, rather than promoting the critical density required for local living. The latter approach is essential to support basic amenities, encourage active travel, and achieve climate resilience – key principles underpinning Scotland's planning future and net-zero ambitions. **SP**

Density should evolve in a way that correlates intensity of occupation and use, with accessibility and proximity to facilities and services. To express this, a simple equation of 'density x diversity = proximity' has been proffered.



Illustration: Jenny Mitchell from erz studio

 UPDATE

## RTPi update

### » RTPi Scotland's Planifesto

We launched the RTPi Scotland Planifesto on 12 November 2025. This Planifesto sets out our vision for planning in the next parliamentary term and outlines some key asks for the new government. The Planifesto is the culmination of months of hard work from our team at RTPi Scotland, together with our members and stakeholders, that began at the start of the year. More information about the Planifesto can be found on page 8 of this issue.

### » RTPi Scotland Intern Project Officer in 2026

We are delighted to announce that the RTPi Scotland team will welcome Anna Mitchell as our new Intern Project Officer towards the end of January next year.

Anna will be supporting the RTPi Scotland team on our policy work, including consultation responses and the Planifesto, the Scottish Planner, RTPi Scotland and SYPN conferences, and on our research initiatives.

We look forward to welcoming Anna to the team in the new year.

### » Policy Consultations

Consultations currently under consideration are:

- [Compulsory Purchase Reform in Scotland](#), closes 19 December 2025
- [The future of Scotland's high streets call for evidence](#), closes 23 December 2025
- [Draft Circular Economy Strategy](#), closes 13 January 2026
- [Draft Climate Change Plan](#), closes 29 January

### » RTPi Scotland Annual Members Reception

RTPi Scotland's annual members reception was held on 9 December, kindly hosted at the offices of Brodies LLP. During the evening, we took the opportunity to celebrate the achievements of the RTPi Scotland team and our members, including the announcement that Gillian Dick will be stepping up as Junior Vice Convenor in 2026.

We also celebrated the achievements of our Scotland members Fiona Simpson and Husam Alwaer, who were both elected as Fellows of the RTPi. And, we were pleased to be able to hand over the Award for Planning Excellence to SSEN Transmission who won in-house planning team of the year at the national awards in November.

### » New Members Elected to the Scottish Executive Committee for 2026

We are delighted to announce the outcome of this year's nominations for the Scottish Executive Committee.

Gillian Dick has been elected as the Junior Vice Convenor for 2026, Lucy Alston and Adebola Olowosegun have been elected as Corporate Members and Susan Rintoul and Euan Urquhart elected as licentiate and student members.

Congratulations to everyone joining the Committee next year.

We would also like to extend a very hearty thanks to everyone stepping down from the Committee: Pamela Clifford, Sepi Hajisoltani, Holly Gray, Kaustubh Wabale and Craig Iles. We really value your contributions and hope to see you again soon.

## Scottish Government update

### » Save the Date: Scottish Young Planners' Conference 2026

We are happy to announce that the 2026 Scottish Young Planners' Conference will be held in Edinburgh on 24 April 2026. Take a look at the SYPN update in this issue for further details and keep an eye out for bookings opening next year on the RTPi website.

If you are interested in sponsoring the conference, please contact [scotland@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:scotland@rtpi.org.uk) for further details about our 2026 sponsorship packages.

### » State of the Profession

66% of public sector planners say their teams lack the capacity to meet demand - this is the worrying picture painted for communities across Scotland, as highlighted in the latest RTPi Scotland State of Profession report.

Other statistics from the report state that:

- 60% of planners report being overstretched frequently or all the time
- 10% say they plan to retire
- 4% say they intend to leave the profession entirely

[Read the full report.](#)

### » Social Media

Keep updated with the latest news by following us on [LinkedIn](#).

### » Fellows elected for impact on UK and international planning

Fiona Simpson, Brendan O'Sullivan and Husam AlWaer have been elected as Fellows of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) for their wide-ranging contributions to the planning profession, particularly internationally.

[Read more](#)

### » Section 3F Repeal Order

[The Climate Change \(Local Development Plan\) \(Repeals\) \(Scotland\) Order 2025](#) came into force on 01 November 2025. This Order repealed Section 3F of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 and Sections 72 and 73 of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.

This Order followed on from the publication of the Section 3F [annual report](#) in March 2025. The report concluded that the requirement for local development plans to include policy related to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the use (or operation) of new buildings was no longer necessary, given that technologies are now well embedded in new development and the latest policy and regulatory position goes beyond what Section 3F can achieve.

Repeal of the legislation acts only on the requirement for planning authorities to include the Section 3F approach in their next local development plans. Repeal of the legislation does not alter or repeal any current adopted local development plan policies that are a response to Section 3F.

### » Future Planners Programme

We were delighted to accept the Best Apprenticeship/Graduate Programme Award for the Future Planners Programme, on behalf of the Scottish Government at the Herald and SIJobs Top Employer Awards 2025. The Future Planners Programme provides the opportunity to study part-time towards a planning qualification whilst undertaking a programme of work-based learning over two years in the Scottish Government, supporting the flow of talent and qualified planners into roles within Government, as well as the wider planning service.

### » Publications declutter

The Programme for Government, contained a commitment to *Remove all dated national planning advice to declutter the system*. To deliver this commitment we sought views from stakeholders on a wide range of planning advice in the form of Planning Advice Notes and other advice we have issued over the years. On 8 December we [published a blog](#) which outlined the review and listed the withdrawn advice and guidance.

### » Planning and Housing Emergency Delivery Plan update

We [published a blog](#) on 28 October, which provided a progress update on the actions contained in last year's Planning and Housing Emergency Delivery Plan.

### » Elected Member Training

On 25 November we [published a blog](#) outlining the next steps on Elected Member Training, this included information on how training would be delivered along with a list of some of the subjects it would focus on.

### » OurPlace Website

The OurPlace Website remains down, however we hope that it will be back online in the next couple of weeks. Content can still be accessed via the [National Archives](#).

## National Planning Hub Update

### Meeting shared challenges

**Work continues at pace with the National Planning Hub, which is on track to provide over £1m of additional resource to Planning Authorities through direct support and ongoing delivery of the Improvement Service programme.**

The National Planning Hub (NPH) is led by Scottish Government, working in partnership with the Improvement Service. It offers a flexible approach to support planning authorities to accelerate decision making and development delivery, including through providing direct additional resources and wrap around knowledge, practice and professional development support.

The Chief Planner [wrote](#) to all Planning Authorities in May outlining the Planning Hub offer and inviting proposals, with follow up engagement from the team to help shape and make support available. This was also used along with evidence from the National Planning Improvement Framework, to develop the Improvement Service Hub programme with Craig McLaren, National Planning Improvement Champion (NPIC).

The NPH priorities for 25/26 cover housing, renewable energy, and supporting local development plans where evidence shows there are challenges. The Hub is providing direct support to planning authorities from across Scotland. Highlights so far include:

- Additional staff resource to progress Local Development Plans and Masterplan Consent Areas activity.
- Resources to boost specialist workstreams to accelerate development delivery and support strategically important infrastructure.
- Support for land development, including studies and additional evidence in support of planning determination and local development plans.
- Creation of an Environmental Impact Assessment Training Programme to be delivered by Fothergill/Brodies.
- Learning and knowledge sharing events on housing promotion and delivery and embedding customer care, and publication of best practice case studies.

- On-going development and engagement on a programme of support for Local Development Plans;
- Further support for Hydrogen development, building on the initial planning hub programme, with resources supporting early engagement with Planning Authorities and improving understanding.

With more still to come...

Key to this approach is partnership working between Scottish Government and Improvement Service, along with taking a collaborative approach with Heads of Planning Scotland (HoPS) and planning authorities. This is enabling us to tackle the shared challenges of delivering investment and development through an increasingly complex and demanding planning system, within the context of on-going resource challenges and constraints.

The Hub's focus has so far been on supporting planning authorities 'here and now', although its remit and work include the wider planning system. The funding horizon is necessarily to the end of the financial year, although consideration is actively being given to how to build on progress made this year, to provide further support across the planning system.

You can keep up to date with our work at [www.planninghub.scot](http://www.planninghub.scot)

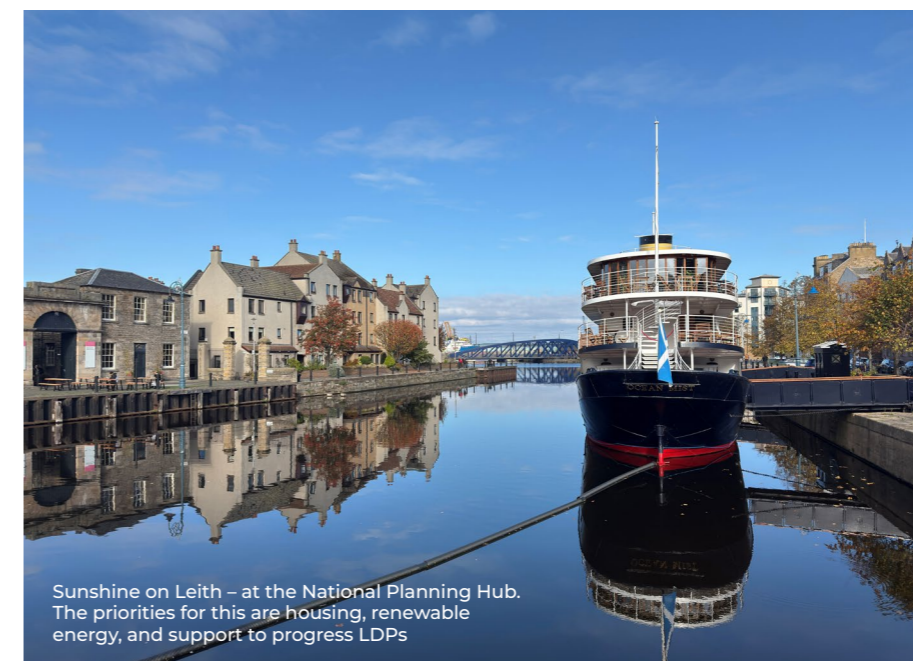
We also recently advertised for experienced professionals who may want to express an interest in becoming a Hub Adviser – you can find out more about this through the following [link](#).

#### Barry Stalker

Head of the National Planning Hub, Scottish Government

#### Craig McLaren FRTPi

National Planning Improvement Champion, Improvement Service



Sunshine on Leith – at the National Planning Hub. The priorities for this are housing, renewable energy, and support to progress LDPs

UPDATE

## Key Agencies Group (KAG)

### KAG Conference: Shaping Scotland's Planning Future

The Key Agencies Group (KAG) met for a rare face to face mini conference in November. Designed to foster dialogue, the event encouraged participants to share insights, challenges, and aspirations for the sector and focus on some of the topics currently facing planners from Scotland's key agencies.

The day opened with a focus on Development Planning, led by Katherine Lakeman of SEPA, who outlined KAG's recent collaborative work with local planning authorities on new Local Development Plans, including Evidence Reports and guidance on how best to involve Key Agencies on site appraisals. Work is currently underway on how the Key Agencies can contribute effectively to the plan preparation stage.

Development Management then took centerstage with Peter Noad (Chair of the Key Agencies Group) discussing the Group's engagement with Green Freeports and emerging issues for hydrogen and other renewable industries. Barry Stalker (National Planning Hub) then updated delegates on the progress made over the year and future activity.

The afternoon sessions addressed Resourcing and Skills, with Nikola Miller (Scottish Government) outlining the Future Planners Programme and Craig McLaren (National Planning Improvement Champion) updating on progress on the Planning Improvement Agenda.

Digital planning was the next topic in the spotlight, featuring updates from Liz Pringle (Scottish Government) and Daniel Rex (informed Solutions).

The conference concluded with reflections on the future from Dr Caroline Brown (Royal Town Planning Institute) and Nick Wright (independent consultant) who both helped focus a strategic discussion on the future of the Key Agencies Group.

The conference was an opportunity to discuss some, but no means all, of the issues facing planners in the key agencies as well as looking forward to future collaboration with both local authority and Scottish Government colleagues.

**Peter Noad MRTPI**  
Chair of the Key Agencies Group

## Scottish Young Planners' Network

### After a busy year, the Scottish Young Planners' Network (SYPN) Steering Group wishes everyone a restful and enjoyable festive break.

Looking ahead to 2026, we're excited to announce that the SYPN Conference will return on 24 April at Dynamic Earth, Edinburgh – keep an eye out for booking details early next year! We're also delighted that the European Council of Spatial Planners (ECTP-CEU)



will hold their Spring General Assembly the following day, bringing members from across Europe to Edinburgh for this occasion.

As we bring this year to a close, we're pleased to congratulate Anne Kripler on stepping into the role of Vice Chair in 2026 - her energy and enthusiasm will be a fantastic asset as we move forward. A huge thank you to Paul Lawson for his outstanding leadership as Chair throughout 2025. Paul's hard work has been a big part of the SYPN's success this year, and we're glad he'll stay involved as Past Chair in 2026, teaming up with Anne and Hannah Belford, who's stepping into the Chair role.

We also want to recognise and thank James Hewitt (Past Chair), Lenka Svorcova, John Cooney, and Ian Scott, who are stepping down after serving between three and six years on the Steering Group. Their hard work has helped shape SYPN events and socials, and we hope to see them at future gatherings!

Although we are sad to see James, Lenka, John and Ian step down, we are delighted to be welcoming new members to the Steering Group following our call earlier this year. Congratulations to Marissa Chizum, Ida Jonsson Gahnstrom, Madeline Watt and Usamah Iqbal who will be joining the Steering Group as ordinary members. Congratulations also to Emil Eleftheriotis-Pratt who will be joining the Steering Group as the student representative.

Here's to an exciting year ahead and we look forward to seeing you in 2026!

**Hannah Belford MRTPI**  
SYPN Vice Chair

CONTACTS



**Laura Robertson MRTPI**  
**Convenor**  
Laura chairs the Scottish Executive Committee

**Contact**  
[scotland@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:scotland@rtpi.org.uk)



**Pamela Clifford MRTPI**  
**Immediate past Convenor**  
Pamela convened RTPI Scotland in 2024

**Contact**  
[scotland@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:scotland@rtpi.org.uk)



**Maura McCormack MRTPI**  
**Senior Vice Convenor**  
Maura chairs the RTPI Scotland Policy Subcommittee

**Contact**  
[scotland@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:scotland@rtpi.org.uk)



**Duncan Smart MRTPI**  
**Junior Vice Convenor**  
Duncan chairs the RTPI Scotland Communications, Events and Lifelong Learning Subcommittee

**Contact**  
[scotland@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:scotland@rtpi.org.uk)

**Dr Caroline Brown MRTPI**  
**Director**

**Contact**  
[caroline.brown@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:caroline.brown@rtpi.org.uk)

**Jenny Munro AssocRTPI**  
**Policy, Practice and Research Officer**

**Contact**  
[jenny.munro@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:jenny.munro@rtpi.org.uk)

**Kirsten Waller**  
**Communications and Events Administrator**

**Contact**  
[kirsten.waller@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:kirsten.waller@rtpi.org.uk)

**Annette O'Donnell**  
**Office Manager**

**Contact**  
[annette.odonnell@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:annette.odonnell@rtpi.org.uk)

### RTPI Scotland Chapters

Central Scotland  
Dumfries & Galloway  
East of Scotland  
South East Scotland  
Grampian  
Highlands and Islands  
West of Scotland  
[scotland@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:scotland@rtpi.org.uk)  
Please include the name of the Chapter in the email subject line.

**Scottish Young Planners' Network:**  
[sypn@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:sypn@rtpi.org.uk)

### Other RTPI Contacts

**RTPI Membership:**  
[membership@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:membership@rtpi.org.uk)  
020 7929 9462

**RTPI Education:**  
[education@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:education@rtpi.org.uk)  
0207 929 9451

**RTPI Media Enquiries:**  
Simon Creer  
[Simon.Creer@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:Simon.Creer@rtpi.org.uk)

### Editorial Team

**Editorial:**  
Jenny Munro

Potential articles and photography are welcome. The Editors reserve the right to amend articles as necessary.

**Enquiries to:**  
The Editors  
Scottish Planner  
RTPI Scotland  
121 George Street  
Edinburgh EH2 4YN  
[scotland@rtpi.org.uk](mailto:scotland@rtpi.org.uk)

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

For further information, please visit  
[www.rtpi.org.uk/scotland](http://www.rtpi.org.uk/scotland)



**RTPI**

Royal Town  
Planning Institute

# BECOME A VALUED RTPI SCOTLAND PARTNER

Demonstrate your commitment to Scotland's planning profession by taking up one (or more!) of our sponsorship opportunities in 2026.



## The Scottish Planner

Get your advert included in the RTPI Scotland quarterly journal. Packages are available for one or multiple issues.

## 2026 RTPI Scotland Planifesto

Could you help us spread the messages of our RTPI Scotland Planifesto and support events with politicians and stakeholders?

## The RTPI Scotland Awards for Planning Excellence (launching in January)

Celebrating the best of planning practice in Scotland. This is an opportunity to support innovation, best practice and knowledge sharing across the planning profession by becoming a headline sponsor or sponsoring an individual award.

## The Scottish Young Planners' Annual Conference (April)

The key event for young planners from across Scotland that attracts a large audience. A range of sponsorship packages are available, including sponsoring free student places.

## The RTPI Scotland Annual Conference (Autumn)

RTPI Scotland's main event of the year, led and hosted by our Convenor. A range of sponsorship packages are available including headline sponsor.

Contact [RTPI Scotland](#) for more information