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The Art of Placemaking

Past, present and future – time well spent



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EDITORIAL

WELCOME TO THE Winter issue of the Scottish Planner – the final issue of 2024! It's been quite a year – and a busy one for our new RTPI Scotland Director, Dr Caroline Brown, who celebrated her 1-year anniversary in the role at the end of October.

Also in October, we welcomed over 100 delegates to Clydebank Town Hall for the RTPI Scotland Annual Conference, kindly sponsored by Objective Keyplan. The theme was "The Art of Placemaking: Past, Present and Future – time well spent". It was an excellent day with sessions on digital placemaking, place-based approaches, and the future of planning, as well as walking tours of the Clydebank Town Centre and Queens Quay Heat Pump.

If you were unfortunate enough to miss this year's conference – have no fear! We've got you covered in this issue of the Scottish Planner with articles focusing on each of the sessions from the perspectives of our excellent conference contributors and delegates, including our keynote speaker Lord Best.

It was a stimulating day of learning and knowledge sharing. We hope you enjoy this issue as we revisit the conference's central themes, and that it encourages you to add this event in your diaries as one that is not to be missed in 2025.

Jenny Munro
Policy, Practice and Research Officer
Co-editor

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CONVENOR'S COMMENTS



PAMELA CLIFFORD MRTPI,
RTPI Scotland Convenor,
Chief Planning Officer at East
Ayrshire Council, Chair of Heads
of Planning Scotland

Championing Placemaking

As 2024 comes to the end, this is my final act as Scottish Convenor. It has been a real privilege to be the Scottish RTPI Convenor for 2024 and to champion the theme of Placemaking and Resources – very fitting on the 170th birthday year of Sir Patrick Geddes. What a fantastic year to be Convenor!

We started the year with the disappointing news about the closure of the Scottish Government Digital Planning Programme. However, we end the year in a much more uplifting place with investment by Scottish Government of £2.6 million for increased resources in the planning system. This investment is very welcomed by the public, private and third sectors. It is the settled view that Planning cannot perform without adequate resourcing, recognising the important role that Planning plays in facilitating housebuilding, economic growth, addressing climate change and energy requirements. This is being recognised both at the UK and Scottish levels.

Placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent the places at the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking is a collaborative process by which we can shape our places to maximise their value. By promoting good urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use through the physical, cultural, historical identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution. Quality design and good placemaking can improve health and well-being by encouraging people from all walks of life to interact with each other and their community and to create a long term legacy.

Placemaking was the theme of the annual RTPI Conference in October – The art of Placemaking – past, present and future, and it is also covered in this issue of the Scottish Planner. I was proud to welcome over 100 delegates to Clydebank to hear inspiring speakers, discussion, networking and sharing good practice.

At the Conference Lord Best inspired us about his work and experience from the Rowntree Foundation at New Earswick

Garden Village and encouraged us to take forward the guiding principles of Joseph Rowntree who did not want to establish communities bearing the stamp of charity. He wanted residents of the model village to develop a sense of civic responsibility and a "civic spirit".

"Each house had a garden with fruit trees and enough ground to grow vegetables and there was protected community open space. A Chief Town Planning Inspector produced a Housing Manual and the prototype plans from the Manual were widely adopted for use on future Council housing. Roads were named after trees and houses built of local brick from the nearby brickworks and the local Primary School had a novel open design".

The principles of Placemaking are still of relevance today and together with the use of digital tools, these can provide an understanding of places and to ensure that Planners have the right skills to create the Quality Places of Tomorrow.

I hope in my year as Convenor I have provided encouragement to plan boldly and step out of your comfort zone seeking out new experiences and skills in your daily work. Throughout the year I have encouraged you to get involved in the RTPI whether through the Chapters, Scottish Executive Committee, the General Assembly and other RTPI Committees and Panels. Without volunteers

"Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking is a collaborative process by which we can shape our places to maximise their value."



the RTPI would not be the strong Institution that it is today. Maybe in 2025, think of volunteering your time for the RTPI. I can guarantee it will be an enjoyable experience.

Kevin P Gilday who presented the Annual Sir Patrick Geddes Commemorative Lecture on the Poetics of Planning : How art can shape the future – certainly challenged and inspired us as Planners during a lunchtime lecture where he encouraged us to write a poem and referred to Town Planners as the unacknowledged poets of the physical world.

As I sign off as Scottish RTPI Convenor I feel that Planning is in a strong position, and I am looking forward to being part of a strengthened planning system in 2025 and what Planning will bring in 2025. I will continue to champion the importance of placemaking and to ensure it is embedded in our daily work and in the places that we plan.

As the "bunnet" is transferred over to Laura Robertson, I would like to thank all the people who supported me throughout the year and in particular thanks to Caroline, Jenny, Annette and Kirsten at RTPI Scotland. A fantastic team who support and promote the planning profession. To Lindsey Richards RTPI President for 2024 who took the time to attend the Conference in October and chair one of the sessions. Best wishes to Laura, Maura and Duncan – Scottish RTPI Team for the year ahead.

Wishing you all a relaxed festive break and I look forward to Planning going from strength to strength in 2025. **SP**

ARTICLE



CLARE SYMONDS,
Chief Officer of Planning Democracy



Beyond Bat Boxes

Clare Symonds, Chief Officer of Planning Democracy, discusses the organisation’s recent research to assess how well NPF4’s nature policies are working on the ground and the need to better understand the cumulative impact of decision making on Scotland’s biodiversity.



“There is currently only minimal consideration being given to positive biodiversity enhancements”

Photo: Karl Wallendzsus

Planning Democracy is a grassroots community organisation with a wide network connecting people throughout Scotland, many of whom are concerned about the impacts of development on nature. The most recent Government report on the State of Nature highlights that our biodiversity is being lost at a rate faster than ever before in human history. Scotland’s natural environment is heavily degraded, with continued declines in biodiversity across much of our land and seascapes.

As the rate and scale of changes to our land continue, we often hear from distressed communities concerned at the loss of nature they are experiencing.

Our network very much welcomed the new National Planning Framework 4 because we felt it heralded a long-awaited change in emphasis, away from a predominant focus on economic growth at all costs towards giving ‘significant’ weight to nature restoration and climate change.

This new direction needs to be supported by a wider transformation of culture and practice. Biodiversity policies need to go beyond environmental reports, benefits to nature need to be realised on the ground. Whether or not policies are successful will require a lot of monitoring. Planning Democracy believe this provides an opportunity for planning authorities to work with communities using citizen science approaches.

Are NPF4 Biodiversity Policies and Guidance being referred to?

To demonstrate this, we carried out community led research to assess how well the new nature policies were working in the first year of NPF4. Using a methodology designed for lay people we built a picture of how planners are interpreting and citing NPF4 policy 3 and using the new planning with nature guidance.

Our study, conducted by 12 volunteers, analysed Reports of Handling of 347 planning cases in 12 local authorities between

February and December 2023. The majority were local housing applications.

We found that Policy 3 was mentioned in the documentation in 86.4% of cases. By contrast, where Policy 3 had been considered only 4.6% cases referred to the “Developing with Nature Guidance”. And biodiversity officers, Ecology officers or Nature Scot were mentioned as consultees in only 3.4% of cases.

The language in the reports we analysed implied there is currently only minimal consideration being given to positive biodiversity enhancements. On occasions there were statements such as “no significant impact on greenspace biodiversity is envisaged”, leading to no biodiversity measures being considered at all, yet we often found no justification given for this conclusion.

Death of Nature by a Thousand Cuts

One key finding from our study was that consideration of cumulative impact remains elusive. For example, a number of vole translocations were noted in conditions on applications in one local authority. It led the volunteers to discuss how many voles in total were being translocated, and if so where to? There seemed to be little consideration of what happens if these are unsuccessful or whether anyone was monitoring the cumulative impact on this threatened species.

The risk here is death of nature by a thousand cuts, a slow but systematic destruction of what we have left. With 1000’s of local applications being granted every year, each may seem to have an individually insignificant impact on biodiversity and habitats, but the cumulative impact is likely leading to the gradual loss of places to find food and clean water, the whittling away of edges of reserves and greenspaces, the fragmentation of habitats, new barriers and obstructions to wildlife corridors.

Biodiversity Conditions

A more detailed look at reports on biodiversity showed that many appear to be focused on mitigation rather than enhancement. There did not seem to be much evidence of the creative or transformational approach we hoped might arise from these new policies, or that biodiversity was being given significant weight. Nature policies rarely seem to overturn the principle of development. Instead, nature



Photo: Karl Wallendzsus

“We desperately need to give Scotland’s biodiversity the significant weight in decision making that it deserves”

protection and enhancement are becoming reliant on planning conditions. Whether these actually work is questionable.

The measure most frequently stated in biodiversity-orientated conditions was tree planting, which on many occasions appeared merely to replace more mature trees lost during the construction phase.

Conditions often recommended the installation of bat and bird boxes to provide roosting and nesting opportunities. Crucial specifications about siting seemed to be missing. There were no measures suggested to enhance other aspects necessary for survival, such as optimising foraging opportunities or providing shelter cover from predators. And little uptake of important suggestions in the Nature Scot guidance, for example conditions on wildlife friendly lighting, which are often necessary to mitigate against impacts on bat movements and foraging. This example illustrates the level of detail required to get biodiversity conditions right. Their ultimate success also requires significant long-term maintenance and monitoring.

A research team at the Universities of Sheffield and Oxford have just conducted an audit of English planning cases, in which they discovered that

around 50% of the ecological mitigation and enhancement measures that developers signed up to deliver in the conditions of their planning application are not present onsite. The full report will shortly be published by Wild Justice. We hope Scotland can learn from this and do better.

Communities can be part of the solution

In a culture of austerity where planning teams are over-stretched and under-resourced, we appreciate how hard it must be with the huge increase in workload and knowledge gain required to fully realise the new NPF4 policies.

There is an overlooked source of expertise that lies within our communities. A key recommendation of our research is that communities should be recognised as key players in the delivery of these policies. We would like to see conditions requiring developers to set up liaison groups with local wildlife and community groups to include them in delivery and monitoring of biodiversity measures.

Planning Democracy are running a series of winter webinars with Action to Protect Rural Scotland (APRS) encouraging communities to get involved in monitoring wildlife in their areas. The aim is to broaden knowledge on how to build baseline information to add to existing biodiversity datasets used by planners and developers. In time volunteers can help demonstrate whether or not the planning system actually achieves any real improvements to Scotland’s nature by monitoring the impact of enhancements, including those set out in conditions.

We desperately need to give Scotland’s biodiversity the significant weight in decision making that it deserves. My fear is that in a few years’ time the potential for

transformation that NPF4 heralded is not realised and all that we have to show for it is a plethora of empty bat boxes. I urge all planners to look beyond this to our collective future, it is incumbent on us all to work together to restore nature. Our future absolutely depends on it. **SP**

Click [here](#) for more information about our winter webinar series.



ARTICLE

Meet our Future Planners: 2023 Bursary Recipients

In 2023, RTPI Scotland secured funding from the Scottish Government to grant bursaries to several planning students in Scotland. **Graeme Brown**, Bursary Recipient at the University of Dundee, **Caitlin Arbuckle-MacLeod**, Bursary Recipient at the University of Glasgow, and **Tilly Mason**, Bursary Recipient at the University of Glasgow, reflect back on their studies over the last year, including how the bursary has helped them to achieve their goals.

Q What prompted you to study planning?

GRAEME – With over 15 years in the built environment sector, specialising in public realm and transport, I've seen firsthand the transformative power of planning. My career has given me the opportunity to work closely with planners, and it's been incredibly rewarding to witness how their expertise can help shape vibrant, sustainable communities. I'm particularly passionate about the planner's role as an advocate, ensuring that all voices within a community are heard in the development process. I thrive at the strategic, master-planning level, laying the groundwork for projects rooted in sustainability. A planning

qualification is the next step to deepen my impact, from small-scale developments to city-wide initiatives.

CAITLIN – I studied architecture from 2014-2021 and was working as an architectural assistant at Collective Architecture – we are involved in a lot of masterplanning and strategic design work in our practice, and I had been reflecting for some time on the potential value of having someone specifically trained in spatial design/planning alongside our architects to benefit this particular strand of our work. I therefore decided to work part-time at Collective while studying City Planning full time in order to fulfil this role!

TILLY – I studied geography at LSE for my undergraduate degree and developed an interest in the relationship between people and place. I think urban design and planning are the most important factors affecting sense of place, with tangible impacts on community and sustainability. I have always been politically active and see planning as central to building justice and equality into space. Finally, my undergraduate dissertation was on field recording and planning, to see how the 'sensory city' can better inform policy and development. I loved this research, and wanted to further study the relationship between sound, sense of place, and planning.

Q What have you gained (or achieved) over the last year of your studies?

GRAEME – Over the past year, I've gained so much knowledge and have truly enjoyed collaborating with my fellow students in group projects. Completing this year felt like a major accomplishment, especially with the support from the fantastic staff at Dundee University. Balancing full-time work and a young family was no small feat, but their flexibility made all the difference, allowing me to progress through the coursework successfully. I was eager to deepen my skills and gain hands-on experience, particularly in design and visualization, and I found these aspects of the modules incredibly engaging and rewarding. It's been an exciting journey!

CAITLIN – Studying planning involved some familiar challenges and fields of expertise – those relating to spatial design, for example – but also some new and surprising ones; I learned much more about the processes and logistics of planning that sometimes occur outwith the architects' traditional scope, particularly those related to land acquisition and assembly, economics, and even the wider political, social and cultural drivers for planning processes and outcomes. I also

I am incredibly grateful for the bursary, which made a tremendous difference for both me and my family... This support has truly enabled me to make the most of my studies and embrace every learning opportunity”
Graeme Brown



got the chance to study a course dedicated to Community Engagement, which has long been a professional focus of mine, which gave me new tools and fresh insights into this core aspect of our practice.

“The bursary has made me feel more confident and assured of my place in planning and further education: I belong here!”
Tilly Mason

TILLY – I have gained knowledge and experience of planning in theory and practice. From learning how to write policy papers, to AutoCAD, I have developed a range of new practical skills. Meanwhile, I have gained research skills, completing both individual and group projects. In my dissertation, I could explore my more creative interests in planning, about how field recording can inform planning decisions and priorities. I'm so happy to be graduating with a distinction, including getting 100% in the module Housing, Inequality and Society, and winning 2nd prize for my group's project proposing a spatial plan for a neighbourhood in Glasgow.

Q How has the bursary helped you over the last year?

GRAEME – I am incredibly grateful for the bursary, which made a tremendous difference for both me and my family. As a mature student, balancing the financial demands of full-time study was daunting, and this additional support eased a significant burden. The bursary allowed us to cover extra childcare and travel expenses, which meant I could spend more

time on campus, especially during group work sessions. Without this funding, attending these sessions and fully participating would have been challenging. This support has truly enabled me to make the most of my studies and embrace every learning opportunity.

CAITLIN – Going from full time work to part-time hours as a mature student meant taking a significant payout, which was likely to provide a significant financial challenge for me over the year. Fortunately, I was awarded the RTPI bursary, and was able to use the funds from this to keep my working hours to a minimum and allow myself sufficient time to dedicate to my studies. I'm extremely glad for this, as the course involves a lot of reading and personal study in order to get the most out of each subject, which I was able to do.

TILLY – It has allowed me to put all my energy into the course, and not have to worry so much about finding a part time job while studying. Beyond concrete financial support, the bursary has motivated and empowered me to feel confident in taking on a new subject in a new city. The bursary has made me feel more confident and assured of my place in planning and further education: I belong here!

Q What are your hopes for your future planning career?

GRAEME – I hope to continue working alongside communities, contributing in my own way toward a more sustainable future. Eventually, I'd love the opportunity to work abroad, experiencing the unique challenges of developing cities and towns outside the UK. One of the most important lessons I've learned through my university course is that no matter where we are in the world, we all face similar challenges - limited resources, climate concerns, and a rapidly growing population. My aim is to use my career in planning to support communities in adapting to these challenges and to be part of our collective journey toward sustainability.

“I hope to be a useful asset to the team and continue to contribute to the sustainable and socially-responsible work of the practice as a whole by utilising my new (and old!) skills”
Caitlin Arbuckle-MacLeod

CAITLIN – I'm continuing to work at Collective Architecture, where we have recently set up a specialist division called 'Collective Strategy' that is dedicated to large-scale spatial design and other strategy work. I hope to be a useful asset to the team and continue to contribute to the sustainable and socially-responsible work of the practice as a whole by utilising my new (and old!) skills, including an in-depth knowledge of local and national planning policy guidance and procedures, expertise in spatial design strategies, and new perspectives on processes of community engagement and collaboration.



TILLY – In the past year, I have learned the importance of the local scale, whereby communities can feel empowered in their neighbourhoods. I want to do work that focuses on the local, to build an urban future based on the genuine needs of people. I have started working for Living Rent, Scotland's tenants' and community union, where I'm learning the real-life impacts of planning policies and decisions on the local scale. I want to continue doing work I care deeply about, and make the planning system fairer for those that need it most. **SP**

 IN FOCUS


CAITLIN ARBUCKLE-MACLEOD
Graduate Planner at Collective Architecture

Who owns the Clyde, and why does it matter?

Caitlin Ar buckle-MacLeod, Graduate Planner at Collective Architecture, discusses her work and research to answer the question of “who owns the Clyde?” and, importantly, “who should own the Clyde?”

When I first started working with Jude and Louise of the Empire Café in 2021, they had tasked me with helping them to map land ownership along the River Clyde. The question of ‘who owns the Clyde?’ had previously been raised by others, including Glasgow City Council leader Susan Aitken in 2017. However it quickly became apparent as to why this question had not yet been fully answered – getting a full picture of the Clyde’s ownership was expensive, time-consuming and difficult.

Having shifted focus somewhat in the years since to consider ways to engage with this issue and question more broadly and publicly, Jude and Louise embarked on making the podcast ‘Who Owns the Clyde? A Citizen Investigation,’ which was featured in the new ‘Podlicious’ column of Issue 198 of the Scottish Planner. The work aims to consider the role of ownership dynamics in perpetuating the problems associated with the Clyde at present, for example its ‘untapped potential’, lack of public accessibility, and prevalence of vacant and derelict tracts of land along its banks, and to ask what a better future for the river might look like should these paradigms be challenged. In parallel, I completed my masters dissertation for the University of Glasgow under the same title, adopting a qualitative approach to document and site analyses to demonstrate that existing conditions of opaque, fragmented, and privatised landownership are likely to significantly impede Glasgow City Council’s stated objectives for improving the River Clyde Development Corridor. The work concludes by recommending that “greater awareness, consideration, and interrogation



“...the Clyde ‘belongs to all of us’, which may be culturally or aspirationally true, but as yet legally inaccurate”

of landownership be embedded in future local and national planning guidance as a potential constraint to development, conservation, and climate adaptation,” both in the RCDC and across Scotland.

I also called for greater “citizen awareness of and engagement in landownership issues, as is our ‘democratic’ right...and in line with good practice in other countries”. It was therefore encouraging to have so

many (around 100) attendees at the Empire Café’s public event held on the 22nd October at Collective Architecture’s Glasgow studio. Billed as a “convivial and informed conversation,” the format of the event allowed a number of contributors, including myself, to put forward a ‘provocation’ to the audience; I opted to simply show an image (featured in this article)...” of one of many signs at Mavisbank Quay prohibiting public access to the riverside, and to ask the audience whether this was acceptable, or even publicly known about. What followed was a broader discussion of what ‘public’ space means and the distinction between ‘ownership’ and ‘rights’. For example, numerous attendees discussed their experience of the strangely quasi-public quality of the Barclays campus on the Clyde’s banks, where members of the public have been ‘moved on’ by private security guards for simply dwelling in an ostensibly public space.

This was only one of many threads spun over the course of the evening, but a particularly pertinent one – the podcast makes the claim that the Clyde ‘belongs to all of us’, which may be culturally or aspirationally true, but as yet legally inaccurate. Jude and Louise have therefore concluded their project by putting forward a motion to Scottish Parliament to grant the River Clyde the rights to legal personhood. It may sound odd, but other countries such as Canada, New Zealand and Ecuador have already enshrined the rights of rivers and other natural assets in law in order to protect them from exploitation and harm, and as contributor and land reformer Andy Wightman explains, there is precedent in granting legal personhood to non-living entities in the form of private corporations and companies. Should their motion be successful, we may begin to consider what rights the Clyde can be granted to ensure its future flourishing, and how these can be enforced regardless of who owns the parcels of land along its banks, shifting the question from ‘ownership’ to one of ‘stewardship.’ **SP**

 PODLICIOUS

Recommended podcasts for planners. Ep 2 by Dr Caroline Brown, RTPI Director of Scotland, Ireland and English Regions

For this Podlicious episode, I’m taking a thematic approach to this collection of listenings, and focussing on the issue of food and urban growing. Some of you may remember – as I do – Carolyn Steel giving the RTPI Scotland Geddes Lecture in 2011, when she discussed her book ‘Hungry City’. Let’s revisit that theme now through this group of podcasts on food, urban agriculture and community growing.



Carolyn Steel followed up her first book with a second ‘Sitopia’ on the same overall theme of cities and food. There are several podcast episodes where she discusses the new book, but the one I’ve picked out is an episode of [Urban Forecast \(07 July 2024\)](#)

as this covers links into planning with bonus mentions of Ebenezer Howard, Jane Jacobs and Le Corbusier.

Any discussion of urban food growing has to include the humble allotment, their fascinating history, as well as more recent resurgence – particularly during the 2020 pandemic lockdowns. There’s an obvious planning angle to allotments of course, plus fascinating threads to pull on in relation to our histories, cultural and societal roots.



Then there’s the social capital and health benefits of community growing. JC Niala crops up in several podcasts on this topic, sharing her work as a poet, anthropologist and activist. In [BBC Radio 4 – Thinking Allowed, Garden Utopias](#) from 28 May 2024, Niala discusses her

lockdown work recreating a WW1 allotment in the city of Oxford, as well as the role of allotments in creating places of hope. As we all grapple with the climate emergency, growing is a practice of optimism – a useful commodity to nurture across communities. Niala also appears in this



episode of [The Conversation – Women on allotments: soil in the city – BBC Sounds 27 May 2024](#) discussing the popularity of allotments amongst women. It’s a reminder that land uses can be very gendered – and that pattern can change over time.



Moving away from allotments, why not catch this lovely pod on the inspirational tale of Todmorden (West Yorkshire) which has used food as a powerful tool to generate hope and community spirit, to tackle poverty and social exclusion, to

stimulate economic development and to reimagine the very fabric of their town. [Incredible Edible Todmorden](#) began in 2008, and is discussed in this episode of [Sustainable World Radio from 18 Jan 2019](#). It’s an astonishing story of community and resilience, and has inspired a global movement of Incredible Edible projects around the world.



Finally, to complete that theme of reimagining, I suggest episode 3 of the [From What If to What Next \(20 July 2020\)](#) which asks the question ‘what if cities intentionally localised their food production?’ Something for us all to chew over.





LORD RICHARD BEST OBE DL
Member of the House of Lords

The Promise of Planning

Lord Richard Best OBE DL, Member of the House of Lords and Keynote Speaker at the RTPI Scotland Annual Conference, discusses the fall, promise, and future of town planning in England.

In October, it was a pleasure to join others to speak at the Royal Town Planning Institute Scotland's Annual Conference in Clydebank. The Conference was held at a significant juncture. It was three months after a new government in Westminster had been elected on an ambitious platform to deliver 1.5 million new homes over the parliament, reform the National Planning Policy Framework, and bolster the resources for Local Planning Authorities. The Conference also marked 170 years since the birth of the eminent Scottish sociologist, Sir Patrick Geddes, widely hailed as the 'father of modern town planning'.

The central argument of my address – and I apologised for only covering England – was that, for far too long, planners and planning departments have been underappreciated and under-resourced. However, under conditions of anaemic economic growth and a national housing crisis – evident through acute shortages, significant increases in the numbers of people in temporary accommodation, and inflated house prices and rents – planning has become more politically salient. The new Labour government has emphasised its value in delivering positive social change and boosting GDP. History and numerous examples from across the world inform us that positive planning, combined with thoughtful placemaking and careful design, has the capacity to enhance health, wellbeing and overall satisfaction.

The fall of planning

Before recognising the progressive potential of planning, it is worth examining where things have gone wrong in England. As I expressed in my Conference address, the planning profession has been denigrated and had to cope with depleting resources for many years. The demise of new council house building

contributed to a breakdown in the synergy between housing and planning. For decades, the planners' main partner was the council housing department. But the share of all new builds delivered by local authorities collapsed from around half in the 1950s to virtually zero today.

In recent years, planning departments have had to do more with less. According to RTPI, there was a 43% reduction in the net expenditure by local authorities on planning between 2009/2010 and 2020/2021, meaning reductions in staff numbers. Furthermore, intense workloads and higher pay in private sector consultancies were contributory factors explaining why 25% of planning professionals left the public sector between 2013 and 2020. With fewer planning officers to process applications, backlogs have become inevitable.

“for far too long, planners and planning departments have been underappreciated and under-resourced”

These pressures have occurred while there is a growing number of responsibilities Local Planning Authorities need to undertake and enforce. These cover environmental regulations, including requirements for biodiversity net gain (BNG). Ensuring higher standards and decarbonising new builds, through the proposed Future Homes Standard, will only add to planning professionals' list of priorities. This is compounded by skills shortages, which will make meeting new standards more challenging. Meanwhile, the problem of undercapacity has meant public sector planners are more vulnerable to developers seeking to water down their Section 106 obligations.

The promise of planning

The importance of the planning profession in many parts of Europe offers a stark contrast to the situation in England. This was made clear to me in a study visit to Groningen in the Netherlands, where I met the chief planning officer, who I was told was the 'most important person in this city'. Groningen has become famous for using its planning system to reduce car dependency, incentivise active travel and consequently improve air quality. I have witnessed many other notable cases of town planning being used to enhance quality of life in Scandinavia, Germany and, perhaps especially, Slovenia.

It is worth remembering that planning was not always so undervalued in the UK. Sir Patrick Geddes saw town planning/placemaking as a vehicle to incorporate the natural environment, nurture community links and foster cultural opportunities. Geddes' holistic approach, combining sociological research and a sensitivity towards the importance of the natural world is now recognised as being ahead of its time. Geddes' proposals for Dunfermline at the beginning of the 20th Century were akin to the Garden Cities vision of Ebenezer Howard. His study in 'City Development', published for the Carnegie Dunfermline Trust, considered the role of gardens, museums, a crafts village and even a zoo in facilitating civic progress.

At the same time as Geddes' plans, the equally lauded town planner, Raymond Unwin, was working with the architect Barry Parker, on the garden village of New Earswick, just outside of York. Commissioned by Joseph Rowntree, the new community was created in 1903, following Parker and Unwin's masterplan, managed as a partnership between residents and the Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust. New Earswick has offered affordable rents, abundant green space and opportunities for community involvement for over a century.

A hundred years later, the Joseph Rowntree



“Sir Patrick Geddes saw town planning/placemaking as a vehicle to incorporate the natural environment, nurture community links and foster cultural opportunities”

Housing Trust partnered with City of York Council to develop Derwenthorpe, a new sustainable community of 550 homes. Designs were set out in a masterplan by PRP Architects. Derwenthorpe learnt from Joseph Rowntree's emphasis on having a mixed income community. This urban extension embraces green spaces and creative use of sustainable urban drainage. Active lifestyles are promoted through areas for play and exercise. The site's Super Sustainability Centre provides energy for the whole settlement and serves as a meeting place for residents. Over 30% of the homes are available for affordable and social rent. While many residents remain dependent on their cars, efforts have been made to incentivise the use of public transport, including offering a free bus pass for one year. A Sustrans cycle track leading to the city centre also serves to promote active travel.

Prospects for the future

The new Labour government has seemingly grasped the urgency of England's housing crisis, and planning reform has been identified as the key to deliver new homes. These reforms include proposed changes to the NPPF, identifying 'Grey Belt' land within designated Green Belts, strengthening the resources for planning departments by increasing some planning fees, and establishing a New Towns Taskforce to identify new sites for development.

But the government should go further. While the October 2024 Budget sets out an additional £46 million to support plans to recruit 300 graduates and apprentice

planning officers, this amounts to less than one for each of England's 326 Local Planning Authorities. Furthermore, we must make progress with capturing land value to enable good placemaking and higher levels of affordable homes. One promising model is to use publicly owned Development Corporations to acquire new sites and parcel out plots within a Masterplan.

Maybe in England, a corner has been turned. This seems to be an opportune moment to move beyond the short-term speculative housebuilding model, which has prioritised the maximisation of profits, to one based on using planning to deliver the homes and places we need. **SP**



IRENE BEAUTYMAN FRTPI, Place & Wellbeing Partnership Lead at the Improvement Service & Public Health Scotland, **JOHANNA BOYD**, Chief Executive at Planning Aid Scotland, and **JOSHUA DOYLE**, Principal Planner at Urban Intelligence

Perspectives on place-based approaches

Irene Beautyman FRTPI, Place & Wellbeing Partnership Lead at the Improvement Service & Public Health Scotland, **Johanna Boyd**, Chief Executive at Planning Aid Scotland, and **Joshua Doyle**, Principal Planner at Urban Intelligence, capture the key messages of their panel session at this year's RTPI Scotland Annual Conference on what taking a place-based approach looks like and what is required.

The panel session on place and place-based approaches stood apart from the main theme of the Conference of placemaking. Irene Beautyman began by explaining that taking a place based approach goes beyond placemaking to include 3 key components.

First, the approach must begin with considering what is happening to the people using the place. Many will be thriving but, in Scotland, a growing number are not. The difference in the length of our healthy lives is a growing gap we can all have an impact on when we understand the population groups being impacted and what they need from their place.

The second part of any approach is to create places that exhibit all the features a place needs for those using them to thrive. For the places we create to play their part in reversing inequality, Irene explained that we need to embed the evidenced interventions in Scotland's Place and Wellbeing Outcomes into our everyday thinking.

The final element is to bring what we know about people and place into our decision-making processes. Placemaking is a decision-making process but when we bring what we know about those impacted by inequity and what we need to get right in a place into those decisions, then we have a place-based approach.

Johanna Boyd explained that Planning Aid Scotland's vision is to foster an inclusive society where communities play a central role in decision-making about their environments.

An important part of Planning Aid Scotland's work is to support a facilitation-based approach to community-led planning where inclusive



"...to support the growth and evolution of our places we must truly understand the unique attributes of each"

participation (working to ensure all voices are heard), reducing poverty and addressing the climate crisis are key objectives.

Johanna described recent involvement supporting the co-production of [West Dunbartonshire Council's Local Place Plan How To Guide](#), designed to support community groups producing LPPs. Working alongside local community groups and the Council's planning and community development teams, the How To Guide empowers communities to prepare a vision for their place, giving them a stronger voice to influence and shape the future of their area.

Johanna also raised the importance of local decision-makers (including locally elected members) having robust evidence, knowledge and understanding to make informed decisions that lead to more inclusive and empowered communities. Mandatory

elected member training for councillors exercising planning functions will be one element of building public trust and confidence in the planning process. Johanna also emphasised the importance of communities influencing other decision-making processes in forums such as community planning partnerships and burgeoning regional economic partnerships where the community voice can be notably absent.

Josh Doyle echoed the points raised by both Johanna and Irene, and referred to his experience of working within public sector planning teams and now within the private sector at Urban Intelligence. One key takeaway Josh noted was that to support the growth and evolution of our places we must truly understand the unique attributes of each. At Urban Intelligence, his work assists planning officers across the country to further understand and analyse the complex spatial and socio-economic make up of their council area, enabling decision-making that addresses the unique needs of local communities. This echoes the visionary work of Patrick Geddes, yet modern tools allow us to achieve similar results more efficiently and at greater scale.

Another significant takeaway is the power of data not only in supporting better decision-making but also in promoting transparency with local residents and communities. Using data in an accessible way allows for clearer communication with the public, fostering trust within what is a complex system.

Lastly, the discussion underscored the critical need for skills and resources within the planning sector. Josh echoed the need for further resources, but also noted that by embracing digital tools, we can streamline processes so officers can focus on the complex challenge of planning. In doing so we can empower planners to help shape sustainable places. **SP**

More information on place based approaches can be found on the [Improvement Service website](#). And on community-led planning on [Planning Aid Scotland's website](#).



JAMES T. WHITE MRTPI
Professor of Planning and Urban Design at the University of Glasgow

The future of placemaking in Scotland: moving beyond 'planning-by-concession'

James T. White, MRTPI, Professor of Planning and Urban Design at the University of Glasgow, offers his reflections on the conference panel session 'Placemaking into the future?' and the need to move away from 'planning-by-concession' on the journey to resilient future placemaking.

Scotland's planners stand at a critical crossroad on the journey to net zero and face a stark choice between two pathways. One could lead to a future where resilience takes centre stage and radically reshapes placemaking. The other charts a familiar course where much is said about planning and developing places in more sustainable ways, yet little changes.

Planning often appears stuck on this second, well-trodden path and many planners share in the frustration that new development often fails the resilience test yet receives planning permission. This modus operandi has created a wide gap between planning policy, which is clear that current development must change if Scotland is to meet its net zero goals, and implementation, where calls for more sustainable places fall on deaf ears and low-density development continues to be approved on greenfield land only accessible by car.

A root cause of this malaise is that Scotland's planners often feel powerless to challenge unsustainable development. Local authorities fear saying 'no' lest their decisions antagonise elected members intent on supporting growth-at-any-cost or precipitate a planning appeal where targets, such as accelerating housing delivery, trump environmental concerns. To make matters worse, the perpetual funding crisis in Scotland has stymied the resources and expertise that planners can harness to implement net zero goals locally.

The impacts of this 'crisis footing' on future placemaking cannot be understated. First, the opportunities planners once had to enforce

their decisions are restricted because they no longer have the resources to consistently monitor outcomes after consent. This allows private interests to more easily dilute their public obligations through 'value engineering'. Second, the out-sourcing of core planning functions to the private sector, including elements of plan-making, have blurred the lines between private interests and the public good. Third, developers' financial viability calculations have a strangle-hold over many planning decisions which severely limits the contributions new places can make to Scotland's net zero goals.

I term this troubling situation 'planning-by-concession' with the aim of highlighting that local planning authorities are often stuck in a loop of ceding too much ground to the private sector during planning. Frustratingly, planning-by-concession occurs despite the best efforts of planners: their valiant attempts to improve unsustainable development before permission is granted are rarely seen or acknowledged. As a planner I spoke to recently about a new housing development said: 'if you think this is bad, you should have seen the proposal during pre-app; we had to work really hard just to get here!'

This frustration underscores that planning for net zero under planning-by-concession is an uphill struggle and correcting course

to the less-trodden path of resilient future placemaking will be bumpy. Yet, there are reasons to be hopeful that a course correction is taking place.

First is the policy roadmap in NPF4. Its comprehensive focus on net zero via initiatives like '20-minute neighbourhoods' and 'masterplan consent areas' are encouraging. NPF4 arguably sets the stage for proactive local place leadership and thus a potential move away from the reactive decision-making that characterises planning-by-concession.

Second are the myriad climate-orientated funding opportunities available to local authorities, communities and universities. These present new ways of accelerating climate change-focused planning, forging new future placemaking relationships and supporting innovative place-based research and practice.

Third, and most important, is the palpable energy and passion for net zero planning among Scotland's planners – something that

stretches across the public and private sector domains and which was clearly on show at the RTPI's conference in Clydebank this October.

Capturing this energy, dovetailing it with the ambitions of NPF4 and linking it

"...correcting course to the less-trodden path of resilient future placemaking will be bumpy. Yet, there are reasons to be hopeful that a course correction is taking place."

to the array of projects and initiatives taking places across Scotland is the surest way of correcting course. If Scotland can move away from planning-by-concession and forge a pathway towards future placemaking that is confident in its ambition and clear in its goals, then a radical transformation might just be possible. **SP**

James was joined on the panel by Fiona Simpson, Chief Planner at the Scottish Government, Alan Anthony, Architect and Managing Director of Threesixty Architecture, and Heather Claridge, Director of Design at Architecture & Design Scotland



JACQUELINE STABLES MRTPI
Senior Planner at Arup

What is the future for Digital Planning in Scotland?

Jacqueline Stables, MRTPI, Senior Planner at Arup, discusses what the future of digital planning in Scotland could look like by taking a collaborative approach between the public and private sectors.

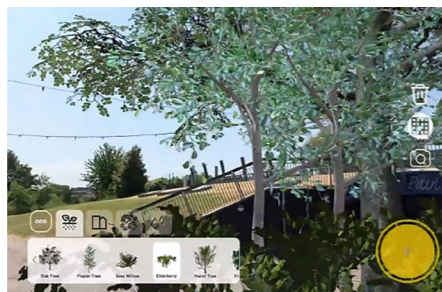
What is the future for digital planning in Scotland? I took the opportunity to explore this question with my co-host Joshua Doyle (Principal Planner, Urban Intelligence) at the RTPI Scotland conference this year. Bringing my experience at Arup as a Senior Planner and North Digital Lead, I opened our session by taking stock on progress and considering how digital can enhance the way that we design and shape our places.

The launch of Scotland's Digital Strategy for Planning in 2020 firmly established the Scottish Government's goal to embed a culture of digital innovation across how we operate, engage communities and manage data in the planning system.

Four years on, we have seen the preparation of a data-driven National Planning Framework 4, the launch of the RTPI's [Digital Planning Skills Portal](#) and a proliferation of interactive plans and engagement tools. Arup has also recently been involved in a ClimateXChange project, collaborating with six Scottish Local Authorities to enhance how spatial data is used to plan and address local climate risk.

Yet, both myself and Joshua reflected that we continue to grapple with two parallel realities: one that espouses all the possibilities of digital tools and innovation to streamline planning; the other with a more pragmatic view of what can practicably be achieved by Local Authorities with restricted budgets and limited digital skills. In our conference session, one audience member highlighted the challenges of sourcing GIS specialists in a rural Authority area.

As a potential solution, across the border in England, MHCLG has propagated a culture of digital innovation in Local Authorities, sponsoring projects through its PropTech Programme. Now in its fourth year, the Programme has firmly demonstrated the



Testing tree options using YARD (Arup & the LEGO Group (2023))

"...digital transformation can be formed of small, targeted interventions. These can gradually build momentum for change and, along the way, allow opportunities to iterate and co-create tailored solutions with communities"

benefits of working in partnership with the private sector to accelerate the adoption of digital tools.

Arup is currently engaged by Tandridge District Council in Surrey where we are gradually helping to streamline and strengthen key planning processes, using systems mapping and targeted digital enhancements. We have also helped drive a shift in the quality of data management, which underpin many key Council decisions.

Urban Intelligence is also supporting multiple councils across England with its digital local plan software, PlaceMaker. Designed by their team of planners and data scientists, the

platform enables planning officers to understand and analyse the complex spatial and socio-economic make up of their area. It enables data-driven decision-making that addresses the unique needs of local communities.

The success of our respective projects with Local Authorities illustrates that a digital transformation can be formed of small, targeted interventions. These can gradually build momentum for change and, along the way, allow opportunities to iterate and co-create tailored solutions with communities.

Arup recently collaborated with LEGO on our YARD placemaking tool, an immersive mobile app that allows users to test local public realm enhancements. We co-designed a new feature with secondary school students, enabling experimentation with design interventions to rewild urban spaces. We have since been able to repurpose the Augmented Reality capability of YARD for engagement on Hounslow's Local Plan, supported by PropTech funding.

Also supported by PropTech, Urban Intelligence is enabling officers at Newcastle City Council to innovatively assess and measure residential density, at a granular level. The methodology is supporting multiple assessments, including urban capacity studies and local design codes, and is now being rolled out to all PlaceMaker users across the country.

Considering Scotland's relatively small scale, with 34 Planning Authorities, we feel that there is a real opportunity to create collaborative networks and jointly address common challenges with agile digital solutions. By investing in an innovative, partnership approach, this could pave the way towards Scotland's digital planning transformation. **SP**

This article was written with input from Joshua Doyle, Principal Planner at Urban Intelligence



SARAH HAMILL (left), Contaminated Land Officer at West Dunbartonshire Council, **SUSAN FULTON** (right), Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland, **GAYE MCKAY**, Environmental Quality & Resilience Division at the Scottish Government

Collaborative Placemaking

Sarah Hamill, Contaminated Land Officer at West Dunbartonshire Council, **Susan Fulton**, Mobility and Access Committee for Scotland, and **Gaye McKay**, Environmental Quality & Resilience Division at the Scottish Government, recap the key discussion points of their afternoon breakout session on placemaking at this year's RTPI Scotland Annual Conference.



"Inclusive Engagement is key where as many members of the community as possible are asked for their opinions and included in any engagement events."

The theme of the 2024 RTPI Scotland conference this year was 'The Art of Placemaking – Past, Present & Future.' Clydebank, with its infamous past, its innovative present and future opportunities, made the perfect venue. As we all know, placemaking is more than just how a place looks and so it was great to have speakers from out with planning come along to not only share their experiences on other areas that feed into Placemaking but to also participate in the full day.

It was clear from listening to many of the speakers in the morning session that collaboration is the key to successful Placemaking. Whilst Planners play a central role, others must take responsibility to develop great places, and so early engagement and a

partnership approach throughout the project is key to its success. In our afternoon breakout session, we provided presentations on the importance of early engagement and collaboration to deliver for land contamination, inclusion and flood resilience. Sarah explained the importance of considering land contamination from the outset and highlighted examples of what can happen when this is not addressed. The issue of contamination does not go away and so if

it is not considered early enough it can result in excessive costs and significant delays as well as public concern and in many cases unwanted media attention. Sarah used a case study within West Dunbartonshire to demonstrate how early engagement and collaboration between landowner, consultant, contractor and regulator resulted in the successful and sustainable remediation of a former oil terminal. Key to this was an open and transparent dialogue between all parties throughout the project.

Susan spoke about how to design inclusive places that enable rather than disable people. She explained the differences between the Medical and Social Models of Disability. The former focusses on the individual and their disability as the cause of not being able to get out and about as they would wish, and the latter places the spotlight on society. If barriers are not designed out, or worse, if they are designed into the environments we negotiate on a daily basis, it is these that disable people and not their individual disability. As Sarah has stated, early engagement and collaboration resulted in a successful outcome and the same can be said for Inclusive Placemaking. Inclusive Engagement is key where as many members of the community as possible are asked for their opinions and included in any engagement events. It goes without saying that these events need to be accessible. This engagement needs to be a continuous conversation from the concept of the scheme through to its completion with post completion visits. As Sir Patrick Geddes stated, his aim was to "see life whole" and "to achieve a better understanding of human beings in their natural, built and social environments".

Gaye then finished the session with a presentation on the Queensland Gardens project, which was an underused greenspace in Cardonald, transformed into a vibrant community park. This case study is included in the Scottish Government's Flood Resilience Strategy, to be published in December. She explained that in the future it is likely that managing flood risk will be as much about the design of our places as it is about flood protection. Creating flood resilient places will mean a broader range of partners working collaboratively to progress projects that will reduce exposure to flooding, as well as delivering other benefits. **SP**

ARTICLE



ALINE KIRKLAND
Digital Planning Data Project Manager at the Improvement Service

Considering Data and Placemaking

Aline Kirkland, Digital Planning Data Project Manager at the Improvement Service, discusses the data challenges Scotland faces to deliver the right development in the right places – the subject of the second Digital Placemaking Workshop at this year's RTPI Scotland Annual Conference.

For me, Digital Placemaking will always be about the data that allows us to make thoughtful, evidence-based decisions. This is the question we face in Scotland: how can we use data to encourage the right development in the right place?

Mapping and data analytics offer clear opportunities to translate National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) policy into practice. This is particularly relevant in the context of new requirements for Evidence Reports for Local Development Plans. Architecture and Design Scotland's new digital place and innovation programme, (led by Ian Gilzean on secondment from Scottish Government) is exploring ways in which placemaking, design and planning can be supported by data and digital technology. Examples include the application of a 20 Minute Neighbourhood mapping tool highlighted by Tom Sharples, Senior Geospatial Data Analyst in the Digital Directorate of Scottish Government.

The pilot of the National Planning Improvement Framework has highlighted the need for planning authorities to make more use of digital and data-based approaches and better recognise the potential of digital approaches to support their business functions in the longer term. Spatial data was also identified as a key element in taking a "place-based" approach by the Shaping Places for Wellbeing programme.

Data also feeds into the planning of house building: a particularly critical issue right now. Each Scottish local authority produces annual housing land audits to track available land and anticipated housing completions. The approach taken countrywide to gathering this

information is varied, making it complex to make comparisons between local authorities or to aggregate data to a national level. How can we effectively plan for a housing emergency without a clear national picture of housing land availability and expected completions? How can we measure the success of national policies without the data required to benchmark them? Beyond housing, how can we plan the infrastructure capacity to support development without consistent national information?

"How can we effectively plan for a housing emergency without a clear national picture of housing land availability and expected completions? How can we measure the success of national policies without the data required to benchmark them?"

Planning applications present similar issues. Monitoring planning applications is challenging because there are variants in the data capture process for each local authority. For example, small differences in how a wind farm development is described in planning systems make it challenging to identify these development types nationally without significant data cleansing. This makes it time consuming to produce development statistics in Scotland and get the necessary insight to inform decisions quickly.



These information challenges are not unique to planning, nor to local government, but are felt keenly at a time when staffing levels and budgets are constrained.

The Improvement Service's (IS) National Planning Improvement team has identified this as an area where planning authorities need more support. To take some steps towards addressing some of these challenges, the IS has begun delivering standardised housing land and planning application datasets to increase the national consistency in this data. We are also working to produce practical guidance on how to carry out analytic processes like network analysis to identify access to services, underpinning 20-minute neighbourhood and local living policy.

IS is also aware that training in information management, analysis and GIS is not always a feature of a planning education. To support planners who wish to develop these skills we are piloting a day long data and GIS training event in 2025 focusing on the common data challenges planners face, including data design, access, and visualisation so that evidence can be readily used. IS want to support planners to use the evidence they have to make the best decisions possible, to deliver places people want to live, work and learn. **SP**

ARTICLE



SUSIE STIRLING MRTPI
Skills Development and Innovation at the Scottish Government

Inspiring through Placemaking

Susie Stirling, MRTPI, Skills Development and Innovation at the Scottish Government, captures the highlights from the placemaking workshop she chaired at the RTPI Scotland Annual Conference which showcased three award winning projects.

Clydebank is a place that is dear to my heart. Right from my very first visit, eight years ago, it packed a 'placemaking punch' with me. The vastness of the area combined with the giant's presence of Titan's Crane – still standing proud and guarding over its territory – is a vision that has stayed with me. Since that time, tremendous transformation, led through the Council's masterplan, has taken grip. It has always been a pleasure, therefore, seeing the place change as well as bringing Designing Places' students to immerse in the history of the place and draw new futures. The opportunity, therefore to attend this year's Annual RTPI Scotland conference, in the Town Hall, and Chair a Workshop on Quality and Skills was very welcome.

After being inspired by the previous Workshop and, in particular, Susie Fulton (Mobility and Access Committee Scotland) who

talked about the granular-level of thinking when delivering places, we invited our Workshop delegates to get closer and, literally, take to the stage (!) by grabbing a chair and huddling, together, for their learning experience. Thereafter unfolded three wonderful Award winning stories.

First up was Laura Robertson Senior Planner (Aberdeen City Council and Senior Vice Convenor RTPI Scotland). She described the planning process to delivering Union Terrace Gardens and her images did not disappoint. The beautiful visuals took everyone to a new place! The positive reaction from the delegates was instant and readable. There was no doubt that the commitment given to the successful revitalisation of this historic area to a safe, accessible and usable green space, in the heart of the city, was impressive. Without doubt, it provided inspiration to both current and emerging talent amongst the delegates.

The second project focused on engaging

with young people to accommodate for Play Sufficiency. This project was led by Glasgow City Council through Heather Drake (Project Officer Neighbourhood Design – Centre for Civic Innovation), Eive Currie (Senior Planning Officer) and Gillian Dick (Manager of Spatial Planning) who, unfortunately, was unable to attend. Eive kick-started by reminding us all how important 'play' is for everyone – not just children. Heather then impressed with the depth of consultation that she had gone through, with school children, to capture how young people 'think' and 'feel' about their play spaces as well as requirements for the future. The level of care and co-design carried out by the team, to achieve the outcomes of this work, was absolutely superb. It was easy to pick-up, too, from the delegates how refreshing the innovative model of participation felt – especially in the use of language. Here's to more play!

The final presentation whisked us off to 'the beach' – Fraserburgh. This presentation was led by Rim Chouaib (Senior Planner) and Emma Churchyard (Urban Designer) both from Kevin Murray Associates. They talked us through their community-driven, co-design, masterplan process. What stood out from this talk was the consideration of thought that had gone into future proofing Fraserburgh – not only to encourage young people to stay but for visitors to stay 'longer' and explore. By coincidence, it was only over a year ago that I had visited Fraserburgh, via a Ministerial Tour of the town and harbourfront. On a personal note, therefore, it was great to hear how work was progressing. Likewise, everyone appreciated learning more.

Overall, the Workshop didn't feel like work. Instead, it felt proud. Seeing eyes sparkle and encouraging smiles, as each story unfolded, was a delight. Plus, through my Skills Development and Innovation role, it opened up an opportunity to allow people to fill out the type of skills they would like to learn more in the future. The results ranged from understanding the visual impact of development, to creativity and getting involved in large infrastructure projects. A bright outcome from bright stars! Congratulations on everyone's Award Winning Work. **SP**



"Overall, the Workshop didn't feel like work! Instead, it felt proud."

ARTICLE



ALAN ANTHONY
Architect and Managing Director of Threesixty Architecture

Clydebank Town Centre: Exploring what could be

Alan Anthony, Architect and Managing Director of Threesixty Architecture, reflects back on the RTPI Scotland Conference Walking Tour of the Clydebank Town Centre and its future as envisaged in the Clydebank Town Centre Development Framework. Alan led this walking tour with Magda Swider, Regeneration Co-ordinator, Economic Development Clydebank Council, and Lead on Clydebank Long-Term Plan.

A walk around the centre of Clydebank to explain a vision of what could be is a tricky task!

With a view to planting images of the future in the minds of the tour attendees, we kicked off with a brief presentation on the Vision for the town centre. In this we explained the town centre is dominated by The Clyde Shopping Centre which is predominantly inward looking, and surrounded by a sea of parking with minimal greenspace. We then summarised the ambitions to give the town centre an identifiable heart surrounded with activities and uses that would drive footfall and extend the times of activity.

Appraised of current challenges and armed with optimistic visions of the future, we emerged onto Dumbarton Road and into the stunning sunshine – a good start.

An ambition within the vision is to create a number of defined and legible routes that encourage the community (and visitors) to move through the town all passing through the key elements of the town centre and stimulating activity. For this walk round, we chose to follow the heritage trail through the more historic civic fabric and towards the expanse of river frontage vacated by industry.

A key ambition for the town has always been to better connect the river

to the centre through the north/south 'layers' of road, railway, to the Canal and beyond. Queens Quay, is an important move towards this; particularly the central boulevard/ square framing the A listed Titan Crane and connecting north across the main road. There was a bit of debate about the amount of ground floor double height units for active street facing uses – most currently awaiting inhabitants. Fully let, this central space would be a vibrant heart for the community – but would this displace the centre of gravity from the real heart of the town? This was something we tried to grapple with throughout the process of producing the

framework – we needed to create real active streets and spaces around the natural heart of the town but a number of the key uses that might stimulate footfall and activity (health, leisure, education) were already embedded in and around Queen's Quay.

We continued through to the previous Playdrome Site – where consent is now in place to deliver mainly 2 storey family homes – a mix and scale at odds with the Vision and the layout of north south connecting greenspace. There was again some debate in the group – was this an inevitability given the numbers of flatted units in Queens Quay? Was it a symptom of the pressure on the council to maximise a receipt for the land? In any event, it realises families living close to the town centre with the positives that brings.

Moving through to the canal edge, the group got a real appreciation of the unique sense of place almost hidden in the heart of the town and there was discussion of how much the surrounding space could be improved

by opening up blank facades, creating green space, curating events and creating activities with multi-generational appeal. These are all proposals being taken forward from the Vision framework and into the Long-Term Plan which scopes how £20M of

levelling up funding might best be used over coming years.

We then threaded back through Sylvania Way, the open-malled south end of the centre, and past the handsome Co-op building proposed as the backdrop to a future public space – the heart of the town.

Hopefully this brief tour and introduction to the town's ambition has stimulated an interest that will have the attendees keeping an eye on developments over the coming years. **SP**

View the Development Framework [here](#)

"...the group got a real appreciation of the unique sense of place almost hidden in the heart of the town"



ARTICLE



Stewart Robson
MRTPI
Consultant Town Planner at WSP:

I chose to attend the walking tour because of my interest in sustainable development and the decarbonisation of heat. I am currently working on other district heating projects, so it was great to see an exemplary project in action. The use of a Water Source Heat Pump was particularly interesting, as this offers the potential for the heat network to be zero carbon as our electricity grid decarbonises. What struck me the most was the integration of the energy network into the overall masterplan for the site, with the main heat supply pipes also designed with future extension in mind. The key takeaway for me was the importance of stakeholder engagement and collaboration in the successful implementation of such projects. The insights gained from the tour have certainly influenced my approach to planning, and I look forward to more schemes like this being put in place across Scotland as we move towards net zero.

Queens Quay Heat Pump

The Queens Quay Heat Pump, developed on the site of the former John Brown Shipyard in Clydebank, is the largest of its kind in the UK and the first major water source heat pump in Scotland. Conference delegates got an opportunity to take a walking tour of the Heat Pump, led by Rachel Moir of West Dunbartonshire Council, and have shared their insights and reflections with us below, including how the tour has influenced them.



Mohadese Safdari
Planning Graduate at the University of Dundee:

Attending the Queens Quay Energy Network walking

tour was a positive experience for me and it underscored the innovative role of Scotland toward sustainable urban planning. The project, featuring the UK's largest water-source heat pump, is a good example of how city planning can integrate with renewable energy to address both environmental and social challenges.

Our group split into two teams during the tour, allowing for a close observation of the system's operation. One team explored where water from the River Clyde enters the heat pump system, while the other team

examined the technical processes and infrastructure required to transform this resource into sustainable heating. Witnessing these operations firsthand deepened my understanding of how such technology works seamlessly with city planning.

What struck me most was the network's ability to deliver affordable, low-carbon heating to a diverse community, including private housing, care homes, and affordable housing. Learning that the heat pump reduces approximately 60% of carbon emissions in Glasgow highlighted its significance in Scotland's journey toward net zero.



Jamie Leadbeater
MRTPI
Senior Town and Country Planner at SSEN Transmission:

The afternoon walk was a really insightful way to see how West Dunbartonshire Council have been able to bring forward an industry-leading heat networks facility integrated into an area of Clydebank which has been regenerated following industrial decline on the banks of the River Clyde.

Based on my experience, it has

become more clear to me that Heat Networks are going to be an important component in the Net Zero just transition as we continue to try to mitigate the adverse affects of climate change alongside

other forms of renewable energy generation and associated expansions and upgrades to the national grid. Policy 20 (Heat and Cooling) in NPF4 reaffirms support for heat networks.

One of the critical takeaways from the site visit was that local authorities cannot deliver these heat networks on their own. It is vitally important for these projects to be financially viable and deliver the greatest possible public benefit, that these projects also involve private industry and developers who will build new housing and other buildings that rely on heat networks as their primary source of heating.

"What struck me most was the network's ability to deliver affordable, low-carbon heating to a diverse community"



Sohail Ahmad, PhD
MRTPI FHEA FRGS
Senior Lecturer in Town Planning at the University of the West of Scotland:

While researching heat pumps at the UK Collaborative Centre for Housing Evidence (CaCHE), I developed a strong interest in sustainable energy solutions. The Queens Quay Energy Network, presented at the RTPI Scotland's Annual Conference, intrigued me as a community-scale initiative integrating renewable energy into urban regeneration. Its innovative use of river-sourced energy, combined with resilient backup systems ensuring a sustainable supply to local communities, underscored the critical role of thoughtful design in efficient district heating. This reinforced my belief in the transformative potential of heat pumps for community energy solutions. This experience showcased how partnerships and forward-thinking policies enable transformative projects, benefiting both the environment and local communities. The evolution of the project inspired me to explore similar strategies for sustainable energy supply elsewhere.

UPDATE

RTPI

» Tribute To Professor Tony Crook CBE, FRTPI, RTPI Trustee

by Stefano Smith FRTPI, FRSA



Professor Tony Crook made an indelible mark on the planning profession, particularly through his significant contributions to the Royal Town Planning

Institute (RTPI). As a Board Trustee and Chair of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee (ELLC) for example, Tony was instrumental in shaping the future of planning education and professional development. His leadership within the RTPI helped ensure that the planning profession remained responsive to evolving societal needs and challenges.

Tony's passion for education was evident in his efforts to enhance the quality of planning training and lifelong learning opportunities for practitioners. He championed initiatives that bridged the gap between academic research and practical application, ensuring that planning professionals were equipped with the skills and knowledge required to navigate complex urban and regional issues.

Under his leadership, the RTPI's ELLC focused on fostering greater access to planning education and supporting the career progression of planners at all stages of their careers. His work helped elevate the RTPI's role in advocating for high standards of planning education and continuing professional development.

Tony's dedication, wisdom, and commitment to the RTPI's values left a lasting legacy, that also endures through his extensive body of academic research and work. His contributions to planning education and professional practice continue to inspire and shape the future of the profession. I am honoured to call Tony my colleague, my mentor, my friend.

» RTPI Scotland Annual Members Reception

RTPI Scotland's annual members reception was held on 5 December, kindly hosted at the offices of Brodies LLP. This was an evening of celebration as we announced the results of this year's elections and the appointment of Duncan Smart as our 2025 Junior Vice Convenor. Duncan will step up to the Convenorship in 2027.

Congratulations were also given to Gillian Dick, Stefano Smith, John Cooney and Julie Robertson who have been elected as Corporate Members of the Scottish Executive Committee for 2025/26.

As our current Convenor, Pamela Clifford, prepares to step into the role of Past Convenor this was also an opportunity for her to hand over the planning 'bunnet' (pictured below) made for us by former RTPI Scotland Convenor Barbara Cummins. Laura Robertson will be our Scotland Convenor in 2025.

» Policy Consultations

RTPI Scotland have submitted responses to the following consultations and requests for written and verbal evidence:

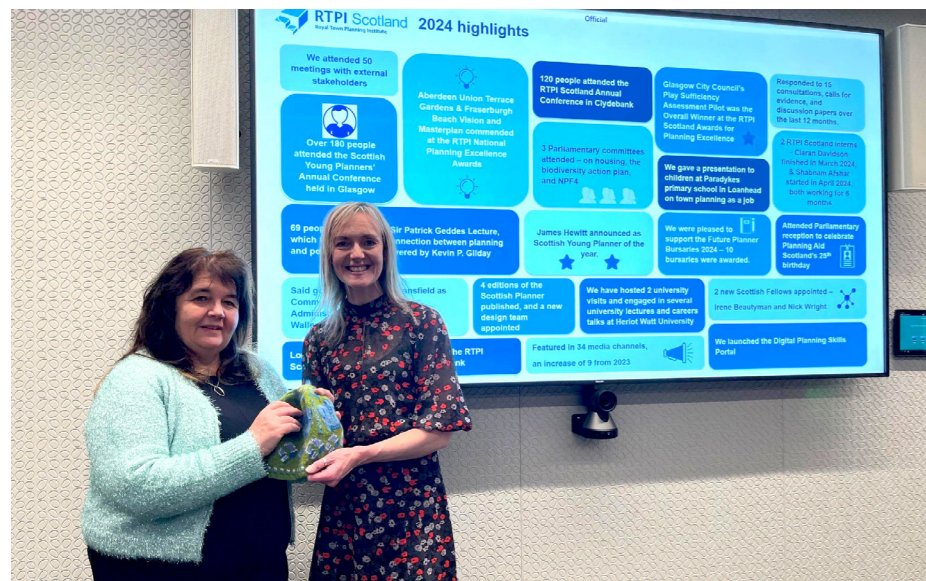
- The UK and Scottish Governments' consultation on Electricity Infrastructure Consenting in Scotland
All RTPI's written responses are published on our website.
Consultations currently under consideration are:
- Scottish Government consultation on National Marine Plan 2 Planning Position Statement, deadline 28 January 2025
- Scottish Government consultation on Equality and Human Rights Mainstreaming Strategy, deadline 5 February 2025
- Scottish Government Proposals to Amend Scottish Government Policy on the Protection Afforded to Certain Ramsar Features, deadline 7 February 2025.
- Scottish Government call for ideas on how Permitted Development Rights could help address the housing emergency, deadline 14 February 2025

» RTPI Intern Project Officer

RTPI Scotland received 72 applications for the Intern Project Officer position. We are pleased to announce that we have appointed Niamh Nicholls to the position. Niamh is a current University of Glasgow student doing an MSc in City Planning. We are looking forward to welcoming Niamh to the RTPI Scotland Team in January 2025 on a nine-month contract.

» Social Media

We will be closing our twitter accounts in December. But don't worry, you can keep updated with the latest news by following [Caroline Brown](#) and [Jenny Munro](#) on LinkedIn.



UPDATE

Scottish Government

» From Division to Directorate

Tuesday 5 November 2024 saw Planning Architecture and Regeneration Division become Planning, Architecture and Regeneration Directorate. At the same time we moved from Directorate General (DG) Communities to the DG Economy family with [Gregor Irwin](#) becoming our new Director General. The team will continue to be led by Fiona Simpson, as Director and Chief Planner. Our elevation to Directorate status and the move to DG Economy reflects the pivotal role we have to play across government, amplifying our influence and ensuring the work we do remains fully aligned with broader Scottish Government priorities.

We will continue to deliver our existing commitments and maintain our focus on existing and cross-cutting priorities. This is an exciting time for planning in Scotland, including our team, and we are confident these changes will further enhance our ability to deliver on Ministers' key priorities and support our stakeholders.

» Housing Emergency Delivery Plan

On 12 November 2024 the Minister for Public Finance announced in a [statement](#) to Parliament, the publication of the [planning and the housing emergency: delivery plan](#) in response to the housing emergency. The plan has a focus on four key areas:

- Policy: a strong and consistent planning and policy framework for investment
- Delivery: actively enabling and facilitating development
- Efficiency: an end-to-end approach to improving the efficiency of the system
- Capacity: investing in capacity with access to excellent professional skills and expertise
Keep an eye out on our [Planning and Architecture blog](#) page as we will be running a series of short articles that will provide an in-depth look into some of the topics the plan contains.

» Permitted Development Rights

One of the commitments made in the Housing Emergency Delivery Plan was to take another look at Permitted Development Rights (PDR) and explore the potential to expand it to streamline the delivery of homes. This does not mean allowing development at any cost: our starting point is to consider whether, and if so how, this can be done in a way that is consistent with policies in the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) – and its themes of supporting sustainable, liveable and productive places. We are particularly interested in thoughts on the potential role that PDR could play in helping to support town centre living and rural communities and promoting the reuse of vacant or underused buildings.

We have written a [blog](#) which explains how you can get involved and make your views heard.

» Regulations and guidance

This has been a busy period with a number of regulations coming into force since the last edition of the Scottish Planner.

Masterplan Consent Areas (MCAs)

MCAs are a new consenting mechanism allowing planning authorities to take a leadership role in the planning of high quality places by proactively granting consent for development they wish to be delivered, subject to any conditions. MCAs offer potential to provide a coordinated, holistic approach to consenting, with scope for four different consents to be authorised in a MCA scheme.

[The Town and Country Planning \(Masterplan Consent Areas\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2024](#) and [The Masterplan Consent Area Scheme \(Environmental Impact Assessment\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2024](#) came into force on 5 December 2024. Guidance will also be published to support the Regulations coming into force.

Development Plan Amendment Regulations

The aim of the amendment procedures is to have a responsive and streamlined version of the full review processes, incorporating appropriate checks and balances as necessary to ensure transparency and fairness. The regulations aim to balance the need for a clear statutory framework whilst allowing flexibility.

The [Amendment of Local Development Plan Regulations](#) and the [Amendment of National Planning Framework Regulations 2024](#) came into force on 5 December 2024. The amendment of NPF and LDP provisions in the 2019 Act [were also commenced](#) on 5 December, in line with the regulations.

Planning Fees

Planning fees [regulations](#) have been laid and are due to come into force on 12 December 2024. An updated circular will be issued to accompany the new regulations. The current ePlanning Fee Calculator is to be replaced and a new one due to be in place for the new fees coming into effect on 12 December 2024. PARD Contact: Chris.Sinclair@gov.scot and Nikola.Miller@gov.scot

» Recruitment 'Inspo' Days

The first of two planned 'Inspo' days took place on 14 November 2024, where we welcomed over 20 young people to Victoria Quay, to hear more about planning as a career and the work we do in Planning, Architecture and Regeneration Directorate. The Minister for Public Finance and Scottish Government's Chief Planner spoke to our delegates along with a number of colleagues from the Directorate. The afternoon was spent on a walking tour of Edinburgh's waterfront, led by Lesley Carus from the Council, to provide an overview of how land use planning can be used to inspire and innovate in the places we live. Everyone received a Certificate of Attendance at the end of the day.

These events have been timed to coincide with Scottish Careers Week. Places are still available for the 6 March 2025 event, so if you know a young person (must be 16 and over) that's interested in planning or the environment, as a career, then please encourage them to sign up by emailing Susan.Stirling@gov.scot, stating your name, current role and age.

UPDATE

» Bursaries

This year's 10 bursary students will have experienced their first term of study. It was exciting to meet them for a 'First Impressions' session at Victoria Quay to hear their thoughts on both their studies and the profession. Likewise, we are delighted that, in November, the Minister for Public Finance announced his commitment to trebling the number of Bursaries in 2025/26. More information to come.

» Town Planning as a Green Career: Refreshing thoughts for young people

Read our [blog](#) which marked the anniversary of World Town Planning and Green Careers Week in November 2024. The blog details how important a green future is for us all and how you can become one of Scotland's future planners.

» Scottish Vacant and Derelict Land

The Scottish Government has collected and published Scottish vacant and derelict land (SVDL) data for many years. A SVDLS map was published earlier in the summer showing sites in Scotland. This has now been [updated](#) with more recent data. An [SVDLS Information Hub](#) has also been created on the Our Place website to keep all the information in one place.

» NPF4 Delivery Programme 2024 update

The NPF4 Delivery Programme 2024 update was published on 28 October 2024. In this third annual update, we have focused on clear actions to be progressed by the Scottish Government, many in partnership with stakeholders that will enable and accelerate delivery of development in line with NPF4. The actions focus on three wider Scottish Government priorities, which are:

- enabling investment in Scotland
- tackling the climate and nature crises by streamlining consenting and
- responding to the housing emergency

To find out more, visit www.gov.scot

» Follow us & keep up to date

Keep up to date with what's happening within the Scottish Government's Planning, Architecture and Regeneration Directorate by connecting with us on [LinkedIn](#), [X](#) or sign up to our regular [e-alerts](#).

Scottish Young Planners' Network

I always enjoy the slight contrast that as soon as the temperatures outside start to drop and winter sets in, this is when the planning for the next SYPN annual conference really starts to heat up. This year's conference was really well received, and we'll make sure that next year's is no different. We're delighted to be able to announce that next year's conference will be held in Edinburgh on 1 May, so make a note in your diaries. More details will follow soon!

Speaking of events, we have a few CPD events in the works for early 2025. But we are always keen to hear what type of events you would be interested in attending. So, if you've got any suggestions for topics or even if you would like to run a joint event with us next

year – please do just reach out and we'll be more than happy to try and make it work.

As always, the SYPN would like to offer a huge congratulations to all of those who have become Chartered in 2024. As anyone who has gone through the process will tell you – it is certainly no mean feat and you deserve to be proud of what you have achieved.

The SYPN hope that you all manage to have a well-deserved break over the festive period and we look forward to having a chance to catch up soon.

Paul Lawson, MRTPI
Vice Chair, RTPI Scottish Young Planners' Network

National Planning Improvement Team

There has been lots happening since our last update in The Scottish Planner. We are progressing work with the new National Planning Improvement Hub. In the first instance it is focused on supporting planning authorities to plan for hydrogen projects through providing them with the specialist expertise they need; supporting their learning; and providing insights that give them a better understanding of challenges and opportunities faced.

We published our [Annual Report](#). This outlines all the work that has taken place over the last year, from the call for ideas to piloting the National Planning Improvement Framework and taking on the National Planning Improvement Hub. We have outlined the emerging strategic issues coming through the National Planning Improvement Framework reports and discussions so far in cohort 1. Alongside this we have identified several actions for partners, while also sharing where we will be taking action. After

the pilot has been completed, we will be providing further analysis and will continue to communicate about any further issues arising.

The National Planning Improvement Framework pilot is still underway. Cohort 1 has completed all of their peer review workshops, cohort 2 has started the process and cohort 3 will be starting in December.

On the 18th November we launched our first national Customer and Stakeholder survey for planning authorities, which was open for 3 weeks. There was an interest in developing a national survey, as was undertaken for Building Standards, as it was felt that this would provide consistency as well as having minimal resource implications for planning authorities if it was taken forward by the NPI team. We are aiming to publish a national report outlining the strategic trends next year.

Watch our webpages for updates.
Susan Rintoul
Improvement Lead, Improvement Service

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