

## INAUGURAL SPEECH by Vincent Goodstadt President RTPI 2003

May I first of all thank you **all** for endorsing me as president of the RTPI

It is **my good fortune** that I pick up the baton of office at a time when there is renewed commitment, new hope and a better prospect for planning in the British Isles.

This optimism arises not just from our efforts to renew the Institute itself  
..... but from the efforts that are now being made in all the territories to renew their planning frameworks in ways that relate to their diverse social and political needs.

The principles of “promoting the science and art of planning “which underpin our Charter are being given added weight

..... by the growing concern for the quality of place and design witnessed by the growing desire for a new urbanism and for example in the work of CABE  
.....and by the renewed interest in city regions and national planning that seek a more rigorous analytical context to policies, better related to the true social and economic geography of Britain.

These changes, if we get them right, should set out a clear direction for decades to come,....

.....and strengthen our capacity, as professionals, to make the major contribution we should be making to improving the wellbeing of our society

I also want to take this opportunity to thank the many who have helped me at various stages in my professional development, giving me the confidence to stand for this office.

I would like to acknowledge Grahame Buchan and Robert Maund who are here today and have suffered me more than any soul deserves without prospect of parole.  
.....Robert’s first meeting with me was when I had temporarily lost my ability to speak and he could not understand a word I said - many, including Grahame, will say that nothing has changed!

.....Their support over the last 20 years has been vital.

There are also many others planners like Mike Sutcliffe and Stuart McNidder, as well as my colleagues in Scotland too numerous to mention. Some of these people are well known for their work within the Institute and profession - such as Phil Turner and Urlan Wannop.

All these colleagues have the common quality of being guided in their actions by values which differentiate the professional from the 'quack' who pedals instant remedies to all ills

.....In particular, they have shown a concern for the common good which lies at the heart at all professions

...and have not been driven solely by the needs of the client whether this be individual, organisational or local interest.

We have all been entrusted with this same responsibility of ensuring that, when change does take place in society, it results in progress which is to the long-run benefit of **all**.

This is why the planning processes must become more accessible to those for whom they are intended to serve, empowering people and engaging local communities.

This is also why the tests that are now being applied to the performance of the profession in the public sector should not be driven merely by what is measurable in terms of efficiency and 'value for money'.

In saying this, I am not challenging the right of government to require the public-sector profession to be accountable

.... but such external measures of accountability are necessarily selective and limited, ..... unable to deal with issues related to justice, care and quality.

..... the future of this vital sector of the profession therefore must not be dominated nor determined by the need for us to meet a few selective performance targets relating only to administrative efficiency.

.....The need to meet external measures of performance must be balanced by strengthened self-regulation and greater support from the Institute in terms of what qualities should be expected of planners and of the planning system.

In this context, the drive to change the profession that you as a Council have sought over the last few years, has had at its core...

..... our wider responsibility to ensure that through planning we, public, private and voluntary sector alike, can help deliver a more caring, equitable and enriched society in terms of its standards of housing, health and safety, free from poverty, ignorance and injustice...

..... And a commitment to an improved quality of life to meet the aspirations of all whether they live in town or country, whether they work in high street or high-tech, or whether they have yet to be born or (like me) are experiencing 'senior moments'.

Our capacity to address these matters as professionals, individually or through our Institute, is however challenged on three fronts, all of which require a changed culture in planning and for planning.

**Firstly, the public sector has had placed upon it unrealistic expectations** as a result of reduced staff resources, loss of powers to intervene because of deregulation, and inappropriate geography of areas used for planning which increasingly reinforce parochial interest. This challenge will in part be met by freeing the experienced and trained professional from the more technical and administrative functions. It however in the long term this will only be resolved by mainstreaming planning, so that most planning issues are reflected in the corporate decisions of government, its agencies and private business, They will not be resolved in the time consuming and adversarial context of public inquiries, with planners playing a increasing and critical role well beyond the confines of local government.

**Second, we are faced with unjustified criticism** -not just from the negative spin that is placed upon vital activities like development management and which ignores the work of consultant planners, but also from the negative culture which pervades our media particularly where good news stories do not sell newspapers, in which planning is seen quite wrongly as regulatory, constraining and counter-creative; We must find new ways to send out nationally a strong counter message proclaiming the quality, diversity and depth of planning that is being achieved throughout the British Isles.

**Thirdly, we are challenged by the sound bite culture which is fed by single issue politics and short-term policies which dislike the balanced longer-term judgement that planners seek to offer -**

.... this does however mean that we have to be clearer about where we stand on the key issues of the day, such as housing needs

....and not be driven by the conflicting interests of our members.

As someone put it to me recently we need more one-armed planners who cannot equivocate saying 'on the one hand this' and 'on the other hand something else'.

The need for change in the profession and the Institute is now accepted, - in fact, it is already underway through the initiative and leadership, particularly of my three predecessors, Mike, Nick and Kevin, to whom I am indebted

This last year alone has been especially demanding but we have come a long way. ....in the life span of four council meetings (as Mike has outlined)

- We have merged with ROOM
- Strengthened our devolved system of administration
- Drafted a new constitution
- Set out a new agenda for education and planning aid

The credit for this progress must in large part go to you (as members of the RTPI General Council) for your willingness to engage in the debate and take hard decisions

You have grasped nettles which have too long blocked our progress

- A planning system which is not fit for its purpose
- RTPI Branches who have been struggling to deliver member services with all the pressures on staff and volunteer time
- And even a General Council which was divided and focussed on its naval

To those within the Institute who fear the changes that we promote, I say to you that the values you seek to preserve need a new medium in which to flourish

To those sister organisations who question our intent, I say, that you of all people have most to gain by a planning system secured by a renewed profession

It is however one of the ironies of life that we rarely recognise the importance of what we are doing

.....Let us therefore be under no illusion we are at a defining moment in planning

The world is very different from the Institute's pioneering days....

Our Society in general has unrivalled prosperity **but** without effective planning there is no guarantee of the quality of life for all that this wealth promises;

In contrast within our cities there is a growing stratum of our society, especially young people, alienated from the common good, yet for these communities planning can provide the hope of change.

We must value what we have and what we can achieve

... - from my contacts elsewhere, in Europe and beyond, I can tell you that planners and politicians look to what we have and to our experience

This is especially so for the new democracies emerging in Europe and elsewhere .... where a planning system which we take for granted, and some even sneer at, is seen for what it is - a necessary component of a just society.

We must stop being defensive and collaborating unwittingly in the culture which seeks to undermine communal interests to promote individual gain.

As you know I have been teased for saying that we need to include assertiveness training in all CPD courses. Yet I believe .....

We must be less modest about what we are achieving in urban renewal or rural regeneration - those achievements are even more remarkable given the odds stacked against us

We must have the courage to be honest about the gap between the rhetoric of policy and the reality of action - this particularly applies to the woolliness in thinking about sustainable development;

In this context I would like to consider a question raised by Professor Sir Robert Grieve who was

- one of the pioneering thinkers and practitioners of planning in the last century
- a co-author of the great post war Abercrombie plans in the 1940s which have guided us through so much of the last half century

50 years on, he asked the following question .....

Do “we *any longer* have the knowledge or education, the philosophical or ethical wisdom necessary to implement something such as .. the Abercrombie Regional Plans?

When Sir Robert Grieve wrote this in the 1990s I would have had difficulty saying anything but ‘**NO**’

My answer today is ‘**YES**’ but it is in our hands to unlock that potential

- By the power of our arguments
- By our commitment to action and
- By new alliances - since **alone** we cannot succeed

I therefore take up the baton from Mike with even more confidence than I could have expected when I was asked to stand for presidential office 2 years ago.

It will take more than the 356 days that I will hold office to implement our new agenda but I hope that by the end of my period of office the momentum of change will have been sustained, the message spread and that I will have deserved the trust you place in me today.

Thank you