

Sue Manns FRTPI

Valedictory speech

20 January 2020

Serving as President of the Royal Town Planning Institute has been one of the most wonderful things that I have had the privilege to do.

Representing my profession at the highest level has not only been an honour but has also been an immensely enjoyable experience. I can scarcely believe that 12 months have now passed by since the inauguration in January 2020.

To say that the past 12 months have been like no other is perhaps an understatement. The world we live in today is so very different to the one that most of us envisaged at the start of 2020.

I certainly did not have a global pandemic on my list of challenges that planners and the planning profession would need to grapple with during 2020.

Back in March, when the first lockdown arrived, the RTPI transformed itself almost overnight to become a digital organisation, providing up to date information for members on its COVID 19 Hub, with links to legislation and other advice.

I hope that you will join me in thanking our Chief Executive Victoria Hills, the Senior Executive Team and all those at the RTPI for their amazing efforts in making this happen and for their support for the profession throughout 2020 – their hard work has not gone un-noticed – thank you all.

2020 at a glance



As you will see from the above graphic, 2020 was undoubtedly a year of many achievements for the RTPI – too many to mention individually, but I hope that what will follow will give you a flavour for the depth and breadth of what has been taken place.

As the pandemic started to impact on our lives, the planning profession showed itself to innovative, resilient and adaptable – not only did we step up to keep the planning system functioning throughout the pandemic, but we found new ways of doing things and as a result we learned some interesting lessons.

Our experiences of lockdown brought into sharp focus the strengths and weaknesses of our places and our way of life and as we look to the future, we must not forget what it has taught us about the importance of sustainable, resilient and inclusive places.

2020 was a year in which planning was rarely been out of the news. Debates focused not only on the how to deliver better places, health and well-being, better designed housing, affordable housing, the decline of the high street – I could go on – but also on how the planning system should do it.

It was a year in which we witnessed a growing appreciation of the importance of investing in place, refocusing planning on 21st century issues, tackling place based inequality, enabling a green infrastructure revolution, prioritising healthy and sustainable ways of life and

accelerating the deployment of zero carbon infrastructure. We must ensure that this continues into 2021, and beyond, and that as we return to a more normal way of life, we do not lose sight of what we have learned.

When I launched the RTPI's Plan The World we Need campaign in June 2020, I felt sure that it would resonate with governments, the media, stakeholders, influencers and communities across nations and across the world – and it has. Its central message regarding the key role of planners and planning in creating a better, greener Post Covid 19 world was heard far and wide and its impacts are already being felt. Indeed, a real highlight for me was a broadcast interview that I did for South African planners, hoping to take forward the messages of Plan The World We Need in their country. I very much hope that when we look back to 2020, we will not only see what has changed but we will and be able to say with some pride that the Plan the World We Need campaign made a real difference.

2020 saw the RTPI on the front foot in terms of its research and publications, covering an enormously wide range of topic. From Measuring What Matters in a way that extends beyond simple metrics such as the speed of processing applications and the number of housing units delivered, to capture outcomes in terms of placemaking and social, economic and environmental value ... through to the provision of practical advice on Planning and Mental Health.

The RTPI across our nations and regions responded to a raft of government consultations on the future of planning, to the Spending Review and to other related matters. It felt as though a new report or response was being released every week – my thanks to everyone in the Policy team and to all those members who supported this work in one way or another – your involvement in the sharing of knowledge and best practice across the profession and beyond is what makes the RTPI very special.

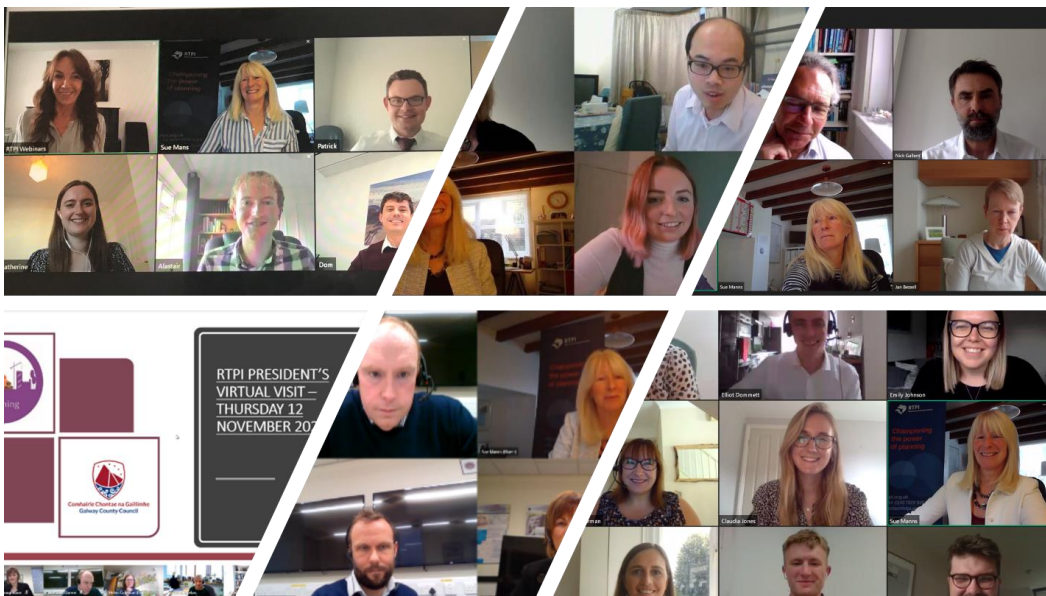
A survey of members a couple of years ago revealed an overwhelming view that the Institute needed to be more visible and become more campaigning. Well in 2020 we most certainly did both and I think it is fair to say that throughout the pandemic the RTPI has never been caught 'on mute'.

The digital world into which we were thrust enabled us to reach out well beyond our own profession. Through social media, it has been possible to share our open letters to politicians and key stakeholders, news releases,

member blogs, and the reports and publications that I mentioned earlier, with an audience that far exceeded anything in previous years.

Although like many, I yearn for a return to face to face meetings, I also recognise that for those with access to technology, it has been a more inclusive world. I know just how much members appreciated the online access to CPD events, many of which they would otherwise not have been able to participate in. Audiences for RTPI webinars and conferences have been higher than traditional events, sometimes by a factor of ten.

I would like to thank all those who have given their time to make this digital world work, and to give a special mention to the Have I got Planning News For You Team – their weekly sessions have brought the profession closer together and I for one very much look forward to Thursday evenings at 5pm. Long may it continue.



The digital world also meant that I was able to share with Members, and indeed all those with an interest in planning, my 'virtual' Presidential Visits to our nations and regions. Most of these were recorded and are available on the RTPI You Tube channel – I know that many have viewed these and as a result have shared the learning that comes from witnessing some of the very best examples of planning practice. I would like to thank everyone who was been involved in the organisation of these virtual visits – together you shone the brightest of lights on what we can achieve as a profession.

As many of you will know, when I put myself forward for the role of President of the RTPI back in 2018, I did so because I wanted an opportunity to speak out about the importance and value of good planning to all who will listen – and to persuade those who wouldn't previously have listened. I wanted to leave no-one in any doubt that planning and planners must be centre stage in shaping a healthy, resilient and sustainable future that works for everyone, and that all members of our communities have a positive role to play in helping us to shape that future. After who are we planning for?

For a future that works for everyone, we need to involve everyone in shaping that future.

And this brings me to something that is very close to my heart and which the role of President has allowed me many opportunities to speak about – that is equality, diversity and inclusivity – not only within our profession but also in the way in which we engage with communities.

Taking the profession first. Back in the 1980s when I became a Chartered Planner, women made up only 15% of the RTPI membership. In January 2020 it was 39% - heading in the right direction, but still some way to go. Our BAME members are equally under-represented – there is much to be done.

The lack of diversity is greatest at senior levels. In essence – the higher you climb, the wider the gap. This is true both within the profession as whole and in terms of our membership classes - only 16% of RTPI Fellows are female.

This cannot be right and must not be allowed to continue. Talent does not rest disproportionately within one section of our profession or our membership. This imbalance matters and it matters deeply. Lack of diversity at a decision-making level materially affects decisions.

You can tell that I feel very passionately about this and so it was a very special moment when I launched the Change action plan in February 2020. This action plan is part of the Corporate Strategy and is aimed at guiding both members and employers as they work to achieve a more balanced profession.

By the end of 2020 one of the key actions identified had been put in place – the recruitment of a new EDI manager for the RTPI. Having met with Machel Bogues I can tell you that he has already hit the ground running and that you will hear a lot from him in the coming year. Change is happening and in doing so will greatly enrich our profession for the benefit of society.

As equality, diversity and inclusivity has risen up the agenda, so planners have themselves stepped up to raise awareness of the issues and to make a difference.

Many of you will have heard of the Women in Planning Network which was founded in 2012 and has already made a massive difference through the CPD and networking events that it has delivered.

Well, 2020 saw two new diversity networks make an appearance – the BAME planners network was launched in September and was followed at the end of October by the launch of the neurodiversity in planning network.

As outgoing President, I have the honour of being able to present a very special Award – The President’s Award for Planning Achievement.

RTPI President’s Award 2020



Co-founders:

Charlotte Morphet
Alison Mackay



Founder: Helen Fadipe

Supported by co-founders:

Olafiyin Taiwo
Judith Onuh
Lubaina Mirza
Ransford Stewart
Gavin Chinniah
Abraham Laker
Lap Pan Chong



Co-founders:

Jennifer Offord
Atefeh Motamedi Keeley
Mitchell
Layla Vidal-Martin
Sarah Zengaya

This year, the recipients of this very special Award are the founders of these three networks – Women in Planning, the BAME Planners Network and the Neurodiversity in Planning Network - who came together to deliver the change that we all want and need to see.



RTPI

Royal Town Planning Institute

I am so pleased to be able to present each of you with this award which recognises the leading role that you have played in support of equality, diversity and inclusivity within the profession.

My congratulations to you all.

We all use spaces and places, but we all do it differently, and the way that we do it changes throughout our lives. With complex issues, such as those tackled by planners, it is simply not possible for one person, or a group of people from similar backgrounds, to have all the relevant insights.

Seeing things from different perspectives leads to more informed, and sometimes different, decisions. This means that the principles of equality, diversity and inclusivity should equally apply to our approach to community engagement. We are planning for everyone. This is a topic on which I have spoken at length and, looking back, I hope what I have said will have resonated with audiences and that we will start to see what we now hold up as 'best practice' becoming the bar below which engagement with communities should not fall.

2020 will undoubtedly be spoken about by historians for years to come – and I hope that when they do, they will say that this was the year when planners sowed the foundations for recovery, and that it was a greener, place-based recovery which not only responded to the lessons learned from the pandemic, but also addressed the challenges that we were grappling with this time last year, most notably climate change. These have not gone away.

It has been a very great honour to serve as your President for 2020. I hope that I have lived up to your expectations.

Thank you and my very best wishes to you all.