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Think Planning – Think Global!

An Opinion Piece by Clive Harridge

Think global! This is what planners are being asked to do. Has this passed you by? Did you notice what happened on 23-25 September? Planning has been recognised at a global level as a means to help tackle global challenges. Planning is now seen as centre stage in delivering sustainable urban development. It feels to me that planning has at last ‘come of age’ internationally.

If you haven’t guessed – the seminal moment in September was the United Nations’ adoption of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Commonwealth Association of Planners (CAP), along with the RTPI and a range of international organisations, had been pressing for the SDGs to include a focus on human settlements. We were highly successful in our campaign with SDG11 directly reflecting what we had been seeking. SDG 11 aims to “make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable” – quite a challenge. The aspirational targets supporting this goal refer to “… sustainable urbanisation, and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning … in all countries”. So planning is there – right at the heart of the SDGs.

The UNs adoption of the SDGs is just one of a number of hugely significant initiatives during 2015 which reinforce the global recognition of planning as a means to help tackle the world’s biggest challenges.

CAP is participating in the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta in November. Under the CHOGM theme of “Commonwealth - Adding Global Value” CAP will be meeting with Commonwealth High Commissioners and Foreign Ministers and urging governments to prioritise measures to implement the SDGs acknowledging the unique and substantial role of planning. With the Commonwealth representing over 2 billion citizens and one quarter of countries at the UN, having face to face meetings with Commonwealth leaders is a fantastic opportunity for planning.

The Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) meeting in Botswana in June this year recognised the crucial importance of planning at the local government level in achieving the SDGs. The CLGFs Gaborone Declaration calls specifically on Commonwealth local governments and ministries to help create sustainable cities through “new and locally based urban and rural planning approaches, to adequately plan for the many dimensions of urbanisation”. Once again, planning is at the forefront.
If these initiatives were not enough, in August of this year UN HABITAT published “International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning”. These inspirational Guidelines provide planners around the world with a framework to promote more compact, socially inclusive, better integrated and connected cities and territories that foster sustainable urban development and are resilient to climate change.

So there we have it. 2015 is the year for planning like no other. We all know that the need for effective planning cannot be over emphasised … wherever one is in the world. Planners across the Commonwealth and through the international work of the RTPI, the Global Planners Network and other organisations, have been promoting the value of planning to the world’s Governments over many years. We have now achieved huge success in securing this recognition – more so in 2015 than ever before in my view. The even bigger challenge is of course to deliver. Quite a responsibility – but the planning profession is up for the challenge and we can make a real difference.

Clive Harridge
Secretary-General, Commonwealth Association of Planners
Head of Planning, Transport and Design, Amec Foster Wheeler
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