Placecast Episode 28 – Transcript

00:00:06 Nicola Headlam

Welcome to Placecast, a Local Policy Innovation Partnership Hub production based at the University of Birmingham.

00:00:12 Nicola Headlam

Placecast is essential listening for those keen to explore the ins and outs of knowledge mobilisation for influence in central and local government, based on the view that it is only through animating the power of place-based leadership that the wicked problems of 2026 can become more manageable.

00:00:28 Nicola Headlam

Whether you are a researcher, a citizen scientist, an activist, a professional in the public sector,

00:00:34 Nicola Headlam

A civil servant, politician, analyst or entrepreneur, we think it's through our networks that most solutions can be assembled, tested and the learning shared before we go again, and that universities can act as the repositories and observatories of these efforts.

00:00:48 Nicola Headlam

We're based in City-REDI and rooted in the LPIP programme, funded by the ESRC, AHRC and Innovate UK.

00:00:56 Nicola Headlam

This podcast aims to highlight knowledge and evidence base, ways of working and the strategies needed to make a real impact on the decisions that shape our society.

00:01:04 Nicola Headlam

Our guests are change makers from across the UK with stories about the ways in which influence can be achieved.

00:01:08 Nicola Headlam

We focus in particular on some of the connective tissue within and between sectors for clues as to how to animate place-based leadership, as innovating is a team sport best done in the open.

00:01:20 Nicola Headlam

Please contact us with feedback on the episodes or if you would like to be a guest or have strong views on the processes of lobbying, advocacy, public campaigning and more.

00:01:30 Nicola Headlam

Unpacking how research and evidence connect with neighborhood, local, city, regional and national missions.

00:01:36 Nicola Headlam

I am Dr Nicola Headlam and I'm here today with one of the best.

00:01:40 Nicola Headlam

I was thinking on the list of if you've been this or this or this.

00:01:43 Nicola Headlam

I'm here with Rachel Fisher and Daniel Slade from the Royal Town Planning Institute.

00:01:48 Nicola Headlam

Good morning Rachel and Dan.

00:01:49 Rachel Fisher

Good morning.

00:01:50 Dan Fisher

Morning.

00:01:51 Nicola Headlam

So Rach, first, you're most associated with being an urbanista.

00:01:54 Nicola Headlam

Can you tell us what that is?

00:01:58 Rachel Fisher

So an urbanista, I think, is somebody who is curious and interested in places and people and how they work together.

00:02:04 Rachel Fisher

And back in 2012, you were at the inaugural founding Urbanistas event that Leanne Hartley pulled together, which was like 15 women in a room talking about why we got interested in places and coming at it from a completely broad range of different professions.

00:02:21 Rachel Fisher

So my background is in what I always think of as like small P planning.

00:02:25 Rachel Fisher

And now I am definitely interested in big P planning as the chief exec of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

00:02:32 Rachel Fisher

But I've got a kind of misspent youth doing all sorts of things from arts-led community engagement to urban design to the civil service.

00:02:39 Rachel Fisher

So yeah, I've kind of been around.

00:02:41 Nicola Headlam

You did a very good shift for Her, and later His, Majesty's governments and escaped last year, was it?

00:02:48 Rachel Fisher

I left officially at the end of February this year.

00:02:51 Rachel Fisher

So I'm six months out.

00:02:53 Nicola Headlam

Wowzers.

00:02:53 Nicola Headlam

And Dan, you worked for TCPA previously and RTPI now.

00:02:57 Nicola Headlam

What else have you done?

00:02:58 Daniel Slade

Yeah, before that I worked for the RTPI in a different role.

00:03:02 Daniel Slade

But my origin, the sort of way I began engaging with planning in the very first place is I'm a chartered planner, so I did a master's in planning at the University of Liverpool.

00:03:10 Daniel Slade

I did the master's in civic design course.

00:03:12 Daniel Slade

It's a fascinating sort of part of the story of the history of planning.

00:03:15 Daniel Slade

It's very focused on the kind of design side of planning.

00:03:18 Daniel Slade

I think it is the oldest defined planning course in the world, sort of self-contained planning course.

00:03:23 Daniel Slade

From there I did a PhD in planning also at the University of Liverpool that focused on policy making processes inside central government, which has sort of inspired my work since then in lots of different ways, thinking about how change happens inside central government and how that then shapes individual places in a systematic way.

00:03:38 Daniel Slade

And yeah, I worked for the TCPA, the Institute for Government, so on the think tank side as well.

00:03:43 Daniel Slade

And I've had little stints as well in Parliament and in government.

00:03:46 Nicola Headlam

Wow, you seem like a genuine wonk.

00:03:55 Nicola Headlam

I was at the Heseltine Institute for a couple of years and the civic design kind of tradition embodied by the Liverpool Planning School is a noble one.

00:04:03 Nicola Headlam

So my first question really is about the power of place.

00:04:07 Nicola Headlam

So I wonder if you imagine a world under which civic designers and planners are in charge of the world, what would that change?

00:04:16 Nicola Headlam

What might be the potential for place leadership and sort of spatial imaginaries coming to the fore?

00:04:23 Nicola Headlam

What would change as a result and what would the size of that prize be?

00:04:20 Nicola Headlam

Dan, if you can tell us about your big book, if you like.

00:04:29 Daniel Slade

Yeah, in the very first place, I think fairly arbitrary categories we use to make decisions about and to try and achieve certain outcomes dissolve.

00:04:38 Daniel Slade

They kind of break down as soon as they make contact with an actual place.

00:04:41 Daniel Slade

Part of that is about the lived experience of people who are actually in that place.

00:04:44 Daniel Slade

So that opens up a whole conversation about how you engage with people, how you collect their stories, how they interpret the world.

00:04:50 Daniel Slade

I think there's really fascinating work to be done

00:04:52 Daniel Slade

around deliberative democracy as part of that, as part of that information collection, but also engagement as well.

00:04:58 Daniel Slade

And then also thinking more about actual outcomes.

00:05:00 Daniel Slade

I think we're at risk a lot at the moment with thinking in terms of having solutions to problems and then finding the problems for those solutions, getting it completely the wrong way around.

00:05:10 Daniel Slade

I think thinking in terms of place, you can tangibly feel and see the outcomes of decisions.

00:05:14 Daniel Slade

It puts you more in touch with the kind of outcomes you're actually trying to achieve.

00:05:18 Nicola Headlam

That's a very good answer.

00:05:19 Nicola Headlam

I'm going to clip that up and put it on the manosphere.

00:05:21 Nicola Headlam

Rachel, what do you think, what would more power to planners look like?

00:05:27 Rachel Fisher

I think more power to planners would look like kind of actual planning, would look like actually being able to engage with places and engage with all of the different, as Dan was saying, like all of the different kind of like substructures that create and go into a place.

00:05:39 Rachel Fisher

One of the things that really drew me to coming to the RTPI was thinking about, well, what is planning for?

00:05:44 Rachel Fisher

Like, why do we do all of this stuff?

00:05:47 Rachel Fisher

And also just kind of real feeling coming out of central government where I'd spent the better part of the last decade working on really detailed planning policy and starting to think, well, actually, do you know what?

00:05:57 Rachel Fisher

We're getting kind of really bound up in all of the processes of planning with a capital P.

00:06:04 Rachel Fisher

We're getting really, really bound up in the latest iteration of the National Planning Policy Framework, the latest iteration of whichever planning bill, now act, we are kind of getting through the system.

00:06:14 Rachel Fisher

And that's not actually engaging with the fundamental questions that I got into planning to be able to kind of think about and solve and work through.

00:06:24 Rachel Fisher

It's not engaging with climate change except, in as much as like planning policy can engage with climate change, but like it's not kind of going, “well, actually, we are currently here and we need to be there and the there is going to look very different.”

00:06:37 Rachel Fisher

And so by only engaging as a kind of community of practice in the actual systems of planning, we're not actually able to make those changes in the outcomes that Dan was talking about.

00:06:47 Rachel Fisher

So I went back to the Royal Charter because I always like to go back to first principles.

00:06:45 Rachel Fisher

And this is all about the art and science of planning.

00:06:55 Rachel Fisher

So the RTPI exists to further the art and science of town planning.

00:06:58 Rachel Fisher

And then when you start to think about, well, actually, why are we doing that?

00:07:00 Rachel Fisher

Well, we're doing that because fundamentally, we think that places are where people live

00:07:06 Rachel Fisher

and therefore affect people's quality of life.

00:07:08 Rachel Fisher

And if you want to make better places, you need to have systems that support the making of better places.

00:07:14 Rachel Fisher

And that to me starts to be about the art of planning.

00:07:17 Rachel Fisher

So actually, how are you engaging humans in making their environment?

00:07:21 Rachel Fisher

And we happen to live in the built environment, right?

00:07:24 Rachel Fisher

And so that was kind of why I started to get interested in coming to the RTPI to start to think

00:07:29 Rachel Fisher

in a slightly different way about the role of professionals and institutions in changing not just kind of policy, but actually changing mindsets and really starting to change the way that people engage with the built environment, engage with the places that they live and the process, the systems, the science of planning that can kind of come after, right?

00:07:48 Rachel Fisher

Because it should be following what are the things we're actually trying to achieve.

00:07:51 Nicola Headlam

I think you're right.

00:07:53 Nicola Headlam

I think there's sort of

00:07:54 Nicola Headlam

People that don't know much about planning apart from the sort of headline kind of version always think that it's like the dead hand of proceduralism is just kind of what we.

00:08:04 Rachel Fisher

100%.

00:08:05 Nicola Headlam

But every planner that you ever meet, they're always either blue-green planners or justice planners or the planners that planned Canary Wharf are radicals in a sense.

00:08:17 Nicola Headlam

It's a funny profession because it does attract idealists

00:08:21 Nicola Headlam

in kind of number and then pushes them into kind of policy statements and procedures.

00:08:26 Rachel Fisher

Proceduralists

00:08:28 Nicola Headlam

And so I think in some ways it is about lifting our eyes and sort of almost the meta planning, the big why.

00:08:35 Nicola Headlam

But then equally I find that I've got a lot invested in the goodness of David Skaith in North Yorkshire and the new mayor up there.

00:08:44 Nicola Headlam

The minute the rubber hits the road of what a mayor wants to do, they need extremely visionary planners around them

00:08:50 Nicola Headlam

because one of his major benefits, as it were, is that he's got all this land and it looks like he's going to be able to do a lot more kind of green planning.

00:08:59 Nicola Headlam

The Manchester risk was absolutely killed for that kind of amount of land to be able to make real some of the...

00:09:04 Rachel Fisher

And it's about the choices that people need to be able to make and what's the kind of democratic accountability, what is the engagement process and how do you kind of engage people in those choices?

00:09:14 Rachel Fisher

I was in Earl's Court yesterday and we were having this amazing conversation with the brilliant Rebecca Paczek

00:09:20 Rachel Fisher

about the process that they've been through in engaging people in what the new Earl's Court development will look like, bearing in mind that this is a site that's been cleared for like longer than my children have been alive and the kids are 11, right?

00:09:34 Rachel Fisher

Like this is a site that has been effectively sterilized for an incredibly long time.

00:09:40 Rachel Fisher

And so being able to come in and imagine what could be there like is actually just an incredibly bold act

00:09:48 Rachel Fisher

and something that people don't immediately feel kind of invited into.

00:09:54 Rachel Fisher

And so Earl's Court have done a huge amount of work to actively go out and invite people in to that co-creation process.

00:10:00 Rachel Fisher

And I think that we have gotten into this kind of like planners as the almost gatekeepers.

00:10:04 Rachel Fisher

So they are kind of responsible for telling you can't have an extension, but you can have a tower block down the road, right?

00:10:11 Rachel Fisher

And that's not what planners are.

00:10:13 Rachel Fisher

That's not who planners are.

00:10:14 Rachel Fisher

And that's really even not even what they do.

00:10:16 Rachel Fisher

So there's a kind of like

00:10:18 Rachel Fisher

there's a sort of self-reinforcing loop that we need to somehow shift into, kind of like your built environment affects your quality of your life and you have every right to be engaged in it properly.

00:10:30 Rachel Fisher

And I think that's kind of the work that Dan's been doing on deliberative democracy and that kind of stuff.

00:10:33 Daniel Slade

I do.

00:10:34 Daniel Slade

A really important part of this are the stories we tell ourselves about what planning is and sort of where it comes from.

00:10:39 Daniel Slade

So you can pull the different threads apart.

00:10:41 Daniel Slade

There's like a thread which is around like public health and addressing the public health issues of like the Victorian era and industrialization.

00:10:48 Daniel Slade

There’s a thread around managing estates and sort of creating beautiful estates for the landed gentry.

00:10:54 Daniel Slade

I mean, that's an important thread and actually gives us a lot of our kind of inheritance now as planners, but it's definitely in there.

00:10:58 Daniel Slade

And there's a kind of less remembered thread, which is around social justice.

00:11:04 Daniel Slade

more of the Garden City sort of movement aspect of planning.

00:11:07 Daniel Slade

I think this particularly matters in this context because there's a fundamentally creative endeavour which existed before the regulatory version of planning.

00:11:14 Daniel Slade

There was no planning system when people were doing planning then and thinking carefully about what cities and towns and “The good life” looked like.

00:11:22 Daniel Slade

And I think trying to keep that alive, keep that thread running is like a really important job for us as an organisation, obviously for the Town and Country Planning Association, but also the wider profession, I think.

00:11:33 Daniel Slade

And that really matters.

00:11:34 Daniel Slade

And part of the challenge now, I think, and with some of the kind of points at which planners can get most frustrated and kind of come up against points in the system, which makes it harder for them to break through silos, is where a kind of conceptualisation of planning as a regulatory function has led to reforms which reinforce that regulatory function, kind of bringing itself into existence.

00:11:53 Daniel Slade

And to some extent, I think some planners have kind of drank that Kool-Aid as well and think in those terms in those silos and end up making the mistakes which we could talk about in terms of like poor quality development, very sort of rationalistic approaches to development which don't take into account the people that live in that place.

00:12:09 Daniel Slade

And I think that's storytelling thing I think is a really important part of this.

00:12:12 Nicola Headlam

I think as well, there's a certain aspect which is that the planning system can feel like gatekeepers of value, you know, the valve between

00:12:16 Nicola Headlam

property developer A, who wants a swimming pool in the sky, local authority B, who want increased amounts of social housing or affordable housing or housing for social rent and all those kinds of things.

00:12:34 Nicola Headlam

What goes into that valve is, it's quite difficult to kind of paint on a big scale what that means.

00:12:41 Nicola Headlam

And I always think when you read like the regulatory state, the liberation potential of planning and its sort of slightly poor representation as a profession.

00:12:52 Nicola Headlam

I think, you're talking about the gap between, so in some ways it's like meta public diplomacy planning, isn't it?

00:13:00 Nicola Headlam

It's that sort of the big “why?” stuff.

00:13:02 Rachel Fisher

And it's where so much of the kind of change in a community just, you know, properly hits the, you know, like people can suddenly engage in, oh crap, this thing is happening down my road, I must engage with it.

00:13:14 Rachel Fisher

And actually, there was a whole other conversation that they weren't part of, because they didn't know that they should be part of it.

00:13:20 Rachel Fisher

And so there's a whole kind of conversation about how do we start from where we are, which I think isn't where anyone would want to be, and yet it is where we find ourselves.

00:13:29 Rachel Fisher

And then how do you sort of make things better.

00:13:33 Rachel Fisher

And I do, I also keep using this phrase about kind of like the meta planning.

00:13:37 Rachel Fisher

Like what are the problems we are solving?

00:13:38 Rachel Fisher

What is the meta planning?

00:13:40 Rachel Fisher

Not the kind of like 47,000 word planning application.

00:13:43 Rachel Fisher

47,000 pages of a planning application!

00:13:45 Rachel Fisher

Like crazy stuff, right?

00:13:47 Rachel Fisher

Where are we actually having those conversations?

00:13:50 Rachel Fisher

And one of the things that's really interesting about the RTPI, and I've kind of been coming to terms with this, I've been sort of like de-White Halling myself.

00:13:57 Rachel Fisher

Is that like planning is a devolved competence, So completely different in Scotland and in Wales and in Northern Ireland where we have planners operating and we are responsible for, supporting them and it's kind of like, okay, this is quite different.

00:14:14 Rachel Fisher

And so working in Whitehall, you're able to kind of say, well, and obviously Scotland will do their thing and Wales will do their thing and we'll have some conversations about the borders and doo-doo-doo-doo, right?

00:14:23 Rachel Fisher

But actually,

00:14:25 Rachel Fisher

everyone is trying to solve the same really big picture problems and everyone is doing it with slightly different or sometimes quite different levers that they can pull, the kind of like systems and processes.

00:14:37 Rachel Fisher

And so I think as an institute, one of the things that I'm really excited about is that meta planning.

00:14:42 Rachel Fisher

How are we actually talking about placemaking?

00:14:45 Rachel Fisher

And I also think planning can be such a kind of like hindering word.

00:14:49 Rachel Fisher

It doesn't kind of say

00:14:52 Rachel Fisher

what we do.

00:14:53 Rachel Fisher

I remember like when I was in the civil service and I said to somebody that I was a planner and she was like, oh thank God you're here.

00:14:58 Rachel Fisher

And I was like, oh, excellent, because you know, planners.

00:15:00 Rachel Fisher

And then she basically thought I was a project planner and she was less happy when she discovered that I was really not a project planner.

00:15:05 Rachel Fisher

I mean, so.

00:15:07 Nicola Headlam

The best one I've had is event planning.

00:15:09 Nicola Headlam

The people...

00:15:13 Rachel Fisher

“oh, You're an event planner!” Yes, I can be.

00:15:15 Nicola Headlam

Yeah, I'm a long way from the mood board, I think.

00:15:19 Nicola Headlam

No, I think it's right.

00:15:19 Nicola Headlam

And I think that a cadre of people with more sort of spatial thinking have recently seized the castle.

00:15:27 Nicola Headlam

So that's got to be a good thing, I think, in general.

00:15:29 Rachel Fisher

I mean, one of the things that when I was working on the land use framework, I kept sort of saying more maps, fewer POAPs, plans on a page.

00:15:38 Rachel Fisher

It's just like, we keep having these conversations about spatial planning or spatial work, which have no mapping

00:15:46 Rachel Fisher

or physical representations of what is happening.

00:15:49 Rachel Fisher

And when you put a map in front of people, it's extremely confronting.

00:15:53 Rachel Fisher

And yet everyone loves a map and everybody's surprised.

00:15:56 Rachel Fisher

Every time I've ever taken a map into like a really big meeting with like ministers or senior civil servants, everybody's like, “oh, I love a map.”

00:16:03 Rachel Fisher

Yeah, now everybody loves a map.

00:16:05 Rachel Fisher

But everybody's surprised that they're not the only one.

00:16:06 Rachel Fisher

I'm just like, everyone loves maps.

00:16:08 Nicola Headlam

I tell you who does not love a map though, is the Greater Manchester Spatial Framework.

00:16:12 Nicola Headlam

So getting really granular, part of the reason that maps are tricky is because you can't fudge them and argue and we can talk like for a million years about what Manchesterism is and isn't.

00:16:24 Nicola Headlam

And you know, my PhD done was

00:16:26 Nicola Headlam

mechanisms for economic development in the Greater Manchester City region, which suddenly is getting lots of downloads now.

00:16:32 Rachel Fisher

Topical.

00:16:32 Nicola Headlam

But even with Manchesterism on the march, we never managed to achieve a 10 borough spatial framework that had a map in it that was a real thing.

00:16:40 Nicola Headlam

Yeah, you can't really lie on a map.

00:16:42 Rachel Fisher

You can fudge some things, but I think that's why maps are so valuable and why we need to not be afraid of them.

00:16:49 Rachel Fisher

And they are inherently political tools in the same way that everything is political.

00:16:53 Rachel Fisher

Like maps are inherently political tools.

00:16:56 Rachel Fisher

And as you say, you can't really lie on a map.

00:16:58 Rachel Fisher

You just, it's like, this is here.

00:17:00 Rachel Fisher

And this is the, as a former colleague of mine used to say, this is the biophysical reality.

00:17:05 Rachel Fisher

Like, this is what we've got.

00:17:07 Rachel Fisher

This is what we've got to work with.

00:17:08 Rachel Fisher

But actually also, I think the other thing that's really interesting is like what you've put on the map.

00:17:13 Rachel Fisher

Like, what are the layers that you're building up?

00:17:14 Rachel Fisher

What are the layers that you're putting on the map?

00:17:16 Rachel Fisher

And so one of the things that I know, Nicola, you and I both kind of share a love of is this kind of like asset-based theory

00:17:23 Rachel Fisher

of community regeneration and community engagement and being able to actually think about what is there, like what is there?

00:17:30 Rachel Fisher

What are the things in a place that people value?

00:17:34 Rachel Fisher

What are the kind of local landmarks?

00:17:35 Rachel Fisher

Also, what is the biophysical reality?

00:17:37 Rachel Fisher

Like, is this a floodplain?

00:17:39 Rachel Fisher

Shall we be thinking in terms of flooding?

00:17:42 Rachel Fisher

It's that kind of thing where actually being able to have a map, not necessarily as a decision.

00:17:47 Rachel Fisher

But as part of the decision-making process, how can you have maps that engage people in the trade-offs where you can say, actually, okay, so here are the outcomes that we all want to achieve, yeah?

00:17:58 Rachel Fisher

Here's the limited amount of land that we've got to be able to do that.

00:18:01 Rachel Fisher

Here are all of the things that we need to be able to do.

00:18:04 Rachel Fisher

Let’s start to talk about opportunities and trade-offs and also like where you can get, and I hate this word because it just feels like jargon, where can you get the co-benefits?

00:18:13 Rachel Fisher

But like, where can you make things do more than one thing at the same time?

00:18:17 Rachel Fisher

So where are we making interventions?

00:18:19 Rachel Fisher

And I think, high streets are a great example of this, of like multifunctional land use, right?

00:18:24 Rachel Fisher

Lots of co-benefits.

00:18:25 Rachel Fisher

You're getting good footfall. You're getting good, you know, transport corridors.

00:18:28 Rachel Fisher

You're getting, you know, you can get

00:18:30 Rachel Fisher

green space and green infrastructure, you can get community spaces, like all of these things, and it becomes a focal point.

00:18:36 Rachel Fisher

And that is also on a map.

00:18:38 Rachel Fisher

Here for maps.

00:18:45 Nicola Headlam

I was reading a thing the other day about neuro-affirmative planning of space and it's one of those classic things that if we make the space right for people whose brains work all kinds of differently then accidentally it'll be right for the elderly and it'll be right for younger people.

00:18:59 Nicola Headlam

It's like if we get the win then it just accidentally improves everything for kind of every category of person.

00:19:06 Rachel Fisher

Yeah.

00:19:07 Nicola Headlam

I've thought quite a lot about this, the ABCDE: Asset Based Community Development Engagement.

00:19:14 Nicola Headlam

It's another kind of utopian, but it's coming from the granular back to a different kind of utopia.

00:19:18 Nicola Headlam

It's like it's sort of...

00:19:20 Nicola Headlam

It meets in the middle in a way.

00:19:22 Nicola Headlam

It's sort of meta by micro, if that makes any sense.

00:19:26 Rachel Fisher

Yeah, so I, in preparation for this role, I reread Jane Jacobs, Death and Life of Great American Cities, because I had to read.

00:19:33 Nicola Headlam

21 minutes until we got to Jane.

00:19:34 Nicola Headlam

Come on then.

00:19:35 Rachel Fisher

I'm sorry, I just, you know.

00:19:36 Nicola Headlam

For a non-planning audience, can you give us the amazing Jane Jacobs in a nutshell, please, Rachel?

00:19:42 Rachel Fisher

Jane Jacobs in a nutshell was a journalist and mother who stood up to Robert Moses in New York City and the kind of entire idea of

00:19:50 Rachel Fisher

linear planning with lots of zones and won.

00:19:54 Rachel Fisher

Jane Jacobs, absolute hero, patron saint for Urbanistas.

00:19:57 Nicola Headlam

Also, who features in The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel.

00:19:59 Nicola Headlam

Does she?

00:20:00 Nicola Headlam

Yeah, she's in the waiting room.

00:20:01 Nicola Headlam

She never gets on air.

00:20:04 Nicola Headlam

She's bumped a few times.

00:20:05 Nicola Headlam

It's a kind of in-joke among the New Yorkie writers.

00:20:06 Nicola Headlam

I was going to say that also

00:20:07 Rachel Fisher

feels very like the fact that Caro cuts out the entire Jacobs chapter of The Power Broker.

00:20:13 Rachel Fisher

Also, I had reread alongside the 99% Invisible podcast thing.

00:20:17 Rachel Fisher

I'd finally read The Power Broker.

00:20:19 Rachel Fisher

And so then I was like, now I need

00:20:21 Rachel Fisher

to reread Death and Life.

00:20:22 Nicola Headlam

So that's text is Death and Life of American Cities.

00:20:25 Nicola Headlam

And a real tussle between kind of cities being remade for capital and cities that are kind of more human scale.

00:20:31 Rachel Fisher

And she talks about this kind of like cataclysmic money.

00:20:34 Rachel Fisher

And she talks about cataclysmic money.

00:20:36 Rachel Fisher

It's the phrase, she's a journalist, it's just beautiful.

00:20:39 Rachel Fisher

She talks about cataclysmic money coming into a place.

00:20:43 Rachel Fisher

And you can recognise that even now, right?

00:20:45 Rachel Fisher

You can recognise the cataclysmic money.

00:20:47 Rachel Fisher

And so this book is being written in the late 50s, early 60s.

00:20:52 Rachel Fisher

And she talks about these kind of big clearances and the cataclysmic money that comes in as opposed to gradual money that comes with the really fine-grained regeneration that communities can do with, for, and by themselves.

00:21:08 Rachel Fisher

But I think

00:21:09 Rachel Fisher

To take it out of the kind of utopian, one of the things that I like about asset-based regeneration, and I know this is a little bit Ezra Klein, but it's actually about abundance.

00:21:18 Rachel Fisher

It's about looking at what you have.

00:21:20 Rachel Fisher

So starting with what you have, not what you're missing.

00:21:23 Nicola Headlam

It's quite a profound shift, definitely.

00:21:24 Rachel Fisher

It is a huge mindset shift.

00:21:27 Rachel Fisher

I've been doing a lot of thinking recently about kind of regenerative design, which is based on that kind of like, how do you shift from a scarcity mindset to an abundance mindset?

00:21:34 Rachel Fisher

That is the really next big shift, I think, in placemaking is starting with where we are and what is there.

00:21:41 Rachel Fisher

And you can see it gradually and incrementally through kind of government policies.

00:21:46 Rachel Fisher

You can see it start to thread its way in and through, but you can also more importantly, I think, see it in practice.

00:21:52 Rachel Fisher

So you can start to see that happening in places.

00:21:54 Rachel Fisher

And I think

00:21:55 Rachel Fisher

One of the reasons that I listen to your podcast, Nicola, in addition to being a fan of Nicola Headlam, is because I think what's so great about the LPIP project is that it pulls out all of these stories of place and then it gives it the credibility and the wrapper of the academic.

00:22:12 Rachel Fisher

And actually it gives really good examples of like, here is what is possible.

00:22:16 Rachel Fisher

And we know it's possible because it's happening.

00:22:18 Rachel Fisher

And that's the thing that I just think so many people look at.

00:22:22 Rachel Fisher

And I don't like the frame about utopianism because utopias are de facto impossible.

00:22:28 Rachel Fisher

But we've got loads of things that are not utopia and you wouldn't want to live there anyway.

00:22:34 Rachel Fisher

You've got all of these kind of things that are actually happening that people can hold on to now and start to build on and take forward.

00:22:40 Nicola Headlam

We've established that Dan and I both have the town planning badges on.

00:22:44 Nicola Headlam

One of the things that we do not get hung up in planning is if you go theory first or practice first, because it doesn't make sense as a distinction.

00:22:51 Nicola Headlam

Hilariously, when you meet sort of less planner-ish people, then the notion that empirical reality is different to theoretical reality, it falls down exactly on contact with a map or a process, or God forbid, a decision maker.

00:23:06 Nicola Headlam

I wonder if, Dan, you could reflect on that fusion of theory and practice in the sort of almost like hour-to-hour work of planners.

00:23:14 Daniel Slade

Yeah, we've been thinking about this recently in relation to RTPIs wider role in the kind of ecosystem of planning, planning research, practitioners on the ground.

00:23:20 Daniel Slade

And we're in quite an unusual position with being directly involved in the generation of that theory and the planning schools we work with involved in that kind of knowledge exchange within those research communities as well through the conferences.

00:23:34 Daniel Slade

We regularly attend international and national conferences focused on those issues.

00:23:39 Daniel Slade

And at the same time, the majority of our members work really completely at the ground level, as in like processing planning applications or carrying out enforcement activities as planners.

00:23:48 Daniel Slade

And that link, that's a thing I think we can do a better job of taking advantage of, partly through this idea of impact and chasing impact.

00:23:54 Daniel Slade

But also, I don't know, I think there's something slightly beyond impact and this idea you can kind of feed backwards up the chain from the day-to-day experience of planners up to the level of theory.

00:24:02 Daniel Slade

I think that's really, really significant as an area of work.

00:24:05 Daniel Slade

It's one of the things which we try to do, particularly with our journal as well.

00:24:09 Daniel Slade

So we publish, alongside Routledge, Planning Theory And Practice.

00:24:13 Daniel Slade

And one of the ways we try to kind of get that perspective is by having what we call the interface section of the journal.

00:24:18 Daniel Slade

So these are comments which are publicly accessible, they're not behind the paywall, around a particular topic.

00:24:23 Daniel Slade

It's normally in the form of a dialogue.

00:24:25 Daniel Slade

And it's through that dialogue, that middle ground, that kind of connection where you kind of blur the distinction between theory and practice begins to happen.

00:24:32 Daniel Slade

So I think dialogue is a really important part of that.

00:24:34 Daniel Slade

And that's something we try to do through the journal as well.

00:24:36 Nicola Headlam

Very interesting.

00:24:37 Nicola Headlam

Okay, so imagine we are being governed by good planners.

00:24:40 Nicola Headlam

That's the solution that we've achieved.

00:24:42 Nicola Headlam

You mentioned the Earls Court example is a very grounded example.

00:24:45 Nicola Headlam

Obviously, we're talking about New York and Jane Jacobs.

00:24:48 Nicola Headlam

Can you think of a place that has worked well in this space and that the characteristics of places that change have either got embedded resource?

00:24:58 Nicola Headlam

Is it about a kind of activist class of people that wanted something different?

00:25:02 Nicola Headlam

Is it about political commitment, about longevity, profile?

00:25:06 Nicola Headlam

What would be the characteristics of a place that was changed by good planning?

00:25:10 Daniel Slade

So this is research we set out on about a year and a half ago and we published towards the start of this year.

00:25:15 Daniel Slade

The project's called Future Proof New Towns.

00:25:17 Daniel Slade

And we were feeding into this national debate about the government's new towns programme, what it should look like, what does good look like as part of that as well.

00:25:24 Daniel Slade

But we were particularly really, really keen to get away from a very kind of Anglo-centric perspective on what successful new towns look like.

00:25:31 Daniel Slade

So we looked at case studies from the Global South, from the Americas, often neglected as part of these conversations, I think, about new towns.

00:25:36 Daniel Slade

And we had a particular focus within that on flexibility and adaptability.

00:25:42 Daniel Slade

This idea came from a kind of acknowledgement that a lot of the new towns in the English context.

00:25:47 Daniel Slade

Particularly, but also across the UK, embedded assumptions about how people wanted to live in the future, kind of crystallised them in place.

00:25:54 Daniel Slade

And then as a result, really struggled to change and evolve over time.

00:25:57 Daniel Slade

And the examples of success from around the world, which we looked at, were examples where that flexibility was kind of there.

00:26:02 Daniel Slade

And then the question was, why was that there?

00:26:04 Daniel Slade

Like how did that manifest?

00:26:05 Daniel Slade

Sometimes it was community activism.

00:26:07 Daniel Slade

That definitely appeared in a couple of the cases.

00:26:09 Daniel Slade

But other times it was where there was a kind of looser approach to planning, where there was a baked in principles about how development should happen, like

00:26:16 Daniel Slade

core principles, like the pillars of development for that place.

00:26:19 Daniel Slade

But the actual kind of rules around that and then how that was achieved were really flexible and could bend in shape as new technology appeared, as ways of living shifted over time.

00:26:28 Daniel Slade

So part of the answer is that kind of relationship with flexibility and uncertainty.

00:26:33 Daniel Slade

I think that's a really important part of it.

00:26:35 Daniel Slade

But I'd also mention that the first place that came to mind as being a place which was in some ways well planned or had that kind of placements which really matters was Liverpool.

00:26:44 Daniel Slade

We referred to Liverpool earlier.

00:26:45 Daniel Slade

Part of this is about the layering together of lots of different types of planning from different perspectives and different voices.

00:26:50 Daniel Slade

So there's a kind of really powerful civic identity, like stronger than anywhere else I think, and I've lived in Kingston upon Hull.

00:26:57 Daniel Slade

I spent the last few years in London.

00:26:59 Daniel Slade

I grew up in Lancashire as well.

00:27:00 Daniel Slade

And compared to Liverpool, that sense of place coming from the kind of civic identity just wasn't quite the same.

00:27:06 Daniel Slade

And that produced the kind of activist planner in the city as well, who worked on things like community-led regeneration of particular streets.

00:27:13 Daniel Slade

The kind of artistic interventions which were kind of along those lines as well, community bakeries, that form of creating places.

00:27:18 Daniel Slade

But what I thought was really fascinating about Liverpool and created a certain sense of beauty is how that knocked against its history.

00:27:24 Daniel Slade

So you had this kind of incredible waterfront, like vast waterfront.

00:27:28 Daniel Slade

Of beautiful architecture with a really dark history to it, like a kind of imperial colonial history.

00:27:33 Daniel Slade

And it was the interplay of those things created this kind of, this sense of beauty and place, I think.

00:27:37 Daniel Slade

So that would be my two answers, I think.

00:27:39 Daniel Slade

Liverpool is this kind of coming together of different forms of planning and architecture and urbanism, but also that need for kind of flexibility and change, which I think emerged really strongly through our future-proof new towns research.

00:27:50 Nicola Headlam

One of my favourite Heseltine stories was when he came up on the train in the famous kind of coming to sort out the riots and all the rest of it.

00:27:57 Nicola Headlam

He was taken to the waterfront and he looked at the Three Graces and he just said, “I had no idea, I'm from Surrey.”

00:27:59 Nicola Headlam

And I think everybody who's not of Liverpool has that moment, particularly actually, and they've both the museum and Mann Island, very radical modern buildings right next to the Three Graces.

00:28:18 Nicola Headlam

It was immediately obvious when they did sort of capital of culture and things like that and had more external eyes on the city.

00:28:24 Nicola Headlam

I think everybody has that moment when you're just like, no one told me how beautiful this is.

00:28:28 Daniel Slade

I agree.

00:28:29 Daniel Slade

I really like it whenever party conferences are held there.

00:28:31 Daniel Slade

So in the past, you have all the kind of policy wonk types coming off the trains, seeing the waterfront, being amazed by it, and at the same time, it's just, it's raining so heavily that they're soaked.

00:28:41 Daniel Slade

Like the rain's coming sideways, they're being blown over, and that is like the quintessential Liverpool experience.

00:28:45 Nicola Headlam

Oh my God, that combined authority building, I've watched weather come from North Wales all the way down the river and out.

00:28:52 Nicola Headlam

It's really quite amazing stuff.

00:28:53 Nicola Headlam

And of course, Labour are back there in September.

00:28:55 Nicola Headlam

Those are brilliant examples.

00:28:57 Nicola Headlam

I'll tell you the other thing about new towns is I shared an office with somebody that was from Brasilia and just couldn't quite understand.

00:29:05 Nicola Headlam

It was like as if she'd come from Milton Keynes, you know, but was really proud of it.

00:29:08 Nicola Headlam

But then equally her work took her into all sorts of heritage and kind of post-mining contexts.

00:29:14 Nicola Headlam

It was fascinating.

00:29:15 Nicola Headlam

And Brasilia really is the sort of, in some ways, it's the king of the kind of global South utopian experiments in a way.

00:29:22 Nicola Headlam

Rachel, can you think of some good examples?

00:29:24 Rachel Fisher

So I was thinking, the 1st place that came to my mind actually was Bradford.

00:29:28 Nicola Headlam

Yeah!

00:29:29 Rachel Fisher

Just going back to the kind of city of culture.

00:29:26 Rachel Fisher

And well, this is the thing.

00:29:34 Rachel Fisher

And to connect back to LPIP, it was at the launch of LPIP that you introduced me to Kirsten England in Bradford.

00:29:41 Rachel Fisher

And I was then working on the government's food strategy.

00:29:46 Rachel Fisher

The number one thing that I wanted to do when I started that role was I was just like

00:29:50 Rachel Fisher

“We must launch this in a real place where culture is, fundamental and that food is fundamental to culture” and all this kind of like intangible stuff, these intangible assets.

00:30:04 Rachel Fisher

And it was really interesting because you, so I kind of reached out to Kirsten.

00:30:07 Rachel Fisher

And then she put me in touch with Shanaz, who was running the City of Culture and all this stuff.

00:30:11 Rachel Fisher

And then lo and behold, after much Whitehall wrangling, I get off the train with the then Food and Farming Minister, Daniel Zeichner, to launch the food strategy at the Darley Street Market.

00:30:22 Rachel Fisher

And I had no idea all of the amazing work that had happened in the town centre regeneration.

00:30:27 Rachel Fisher

Like the team had been up, the team had looked at Darley Street Market, the team had cleared all these things.

00:30:31 Rachel Fisher

And I was like, that's great. The market looks fantastic. It's all good.

00:30:34 Rachel Fisher

We get off the train and we start walking through and the landscape design, the way that they integrated kind of green infrastructure, heritage buildings.

00:30:42 Rachel Fisher

I was just, I literally was just like, Minister, this is amazing.

00:30:47 Rachel Fisher

And he was like, it is amazing.

00:30:50 Rachel Fisher

It was very much that kind of Heseltine, “you'll have to forgive me.”

00:30:52 Rachel Fisher

I'm from, I mean, in this case, Cambridge.

00:30:53 Nicola Headlam

Darley Street is a brilliant spotlight and a solution.

00:30:56 Nicola Headlam

As you know, I'm a 30 year Bradvocate and having watched.

00:30:59 Rachel Fisher

Bradvocate, I love it.

00:31:01 Nicola Headlam

Having watched

00:31:03 Nicola Headlam

Kirsten actually, when she was chief executive of the council, bring in all those starchitects and reimagining kind of Centenary Square and wanting to sink it and all that malarkey.

00:31:11 Nicola Headlam

And Capital of Culture was so emotional for me because always actually the Liverpool example, you know, is really interesting about using the kind of what can be quite scattered forces of a Capital of Culture year to really focus on like, this is what we've been doing here for a very long time and we're inviting you in.

00:31:32 Nicola Headlam

Exactly, that was a real moment when you came, with the minister and I understand that there are food halls in London and you can kind of fake it, but that I'd seen it on a dot 30 years previously, which is why I get so emotion whenever I'm kind of there, like it's really special.

00:31:48 Rachel Fisher

I get very emotional just thinking about that whole time and what the Darley Street Market is looking to do and the space that it's creating.

00:31:57 Rachel Fisher

My 2 great loves, right, are food and places.

00:33:02 Rachel Fisher

I mean, also my children, but, well anyway. That kind of process of sort of thinking about, okay, actually the culture of bringing people together around food in a place.

00:32:14 Rachel Fisher

And then the work that they're doing to kind of support local farming industry, to support local healthy eating, to really make the connection between people that live in the city and the people that are growing the food and the skills that both need.

00:32:26 Rachel Fisher

Like it's just, it's an absolutely beautiful kind of “Ahhh”.

00:32:30 Daniel Slade

I kind of want to defend the honor of Milton Keynes, but also...

00:32:33 Rachel Fisher

Also Milton.

00:32:34 Rachel Fisher

No, I also like Milton Keynes.

00:32:35 Nicola Headlam

I do. I do.

00:32:37 Nicola Headlam

But you just don't get people going, I'm from Milton Keynes with confidence.

00:32:42 Nicola Headlam

It's A British thing.

00:32:44 Rachel Fisher

But I've met a bunch of people who said, I live in Milton Keynes and I really like living there.

00:32:48 Rachel Fisher

And they do it as a kind of like, “and now what are you going to say?”

00:32:52 Rachel Fisher

I'm glad you like it.

00:32:53 Rachel Fisher

Great.

00:32:54 Nicola Headlam

I mean, I grew up in Malton, which was a village in Northamptonshire up till about age 12.

00:33:05 Nicola Headlam

And it was about 40 minutes to get to the Point Cinema and where I went to see Batteries Not Included.

00:33:11 Nicola Headlam

And it was like going to the future.

00:33:13 Daniel Slade

That's the fascinating thing about it.

00:33:14 Daniel Slade

It's very consciously over like a number of decades now positioned itself as an urban laboratory as well. Running experiments and like dealing with uncertainty in really interesting ways.

00:33:23 Daniel Slade

We recently had an event on drones, the future of drones,

00:33:27 Daniel Slade

what that means for placemaking.

00:33:28 Daniel Slade

It deals with planners using drones, but it also deals with how they're going to shape cities and how planners can make sure they're deployed sort of in the public interest in ways that improve places.

00:33:36 Daniel Slade

We've published guidance on it and we'll be relaunching it soon in a designed form.

00:33:41 Daniel Slade

But, hearing from the story of Milton Keynes of those kind of experiments and how they thought about where the drones can fly, what that means for the environment, like non-human actors as well as the local population, trialling those kind of things and then testing and changing and testing and changing.

00:33:54 Daniel Slade

I think Milton Keynes is a fascinating example of that type of planning and thinking about the future of it.

00:33:57 Nicola Headlam

It's fascinating. My uncle actually worked for Lang's in the 80s

00:34:03 Nicola Headlam

and was involved in the first flyover of Milton Keynes, i.e. when it was farmland.

00:34:07 Rachel Fisher

Amazing.

00:34:08 Nicola Headlam

And was then involved in trying to get an international airport in Buckinghamshire.

00:34:12 Nicola Headlam

Now, if you can imagine everything you know about Buckinghamshire and everything you know about international airports, it's another very noble planning failure.

00:34:20 Nicola Headlam

The best game is think of the best place to eat in the best city and then to kind of organise your life around it, basically, Rachel. That's what I've done for a number of years.

00:34:30 Rachel Fisher

I mean, it's my entire holiday strategy.

00:34:32 Nicola Headlam

Yep. But there is also, we've said, I'm a Bradvocate.

00:34:36 Nicola Headlam

I love Newcastle upon Tyne. I love Liverpool. I love Manchester.

00:34:40 Nicola Headlam

I've got so much pent up love for all these places, both of the ones that you're supposed to love and the ones that you aren't.

00:34:47 Nicola Headlam

Now we can all geek out on kind of good UK planning, but where do you think is the most important international lesson that we can import or steal?

00:34:56 Rachel Fisher

As opposed to cautionary tales that we could learn from.

00:35:00 Nicola Headlam

Yeah, we're trying to keep it peppy.

00:35:03 Rachel Fisher

Because all I've got in my head is just like, “well…”

00:35:05 Nicola Headlam

It's very easy to get into a very negative mindset that all we're doing is policy mobility is about disaster upon disaster.

00:35:12 Nicola Headlam

But can you think of an international lesson that you'd like to have?

00:35:15 Rachel Fisher

Do you know what I think is interesting though?

00:35:17 Rachel Fisher

One of the things that's been really refreshing about this bit of the conversation is talking about all the places in the UK that we love.

00:35:23 Nicola Headlam

Yeah, definitely.

00:35:24 Rachel Fisher

So as may not be obvious to the listeners at home, I am not from England.

00:35:30 Rachel Fisher

I know.

00:35:31 Nicola Headlam

You're an international lesson.

00:35:33 Rachel Fisher

I'm an international lesson. I'm an international cautionary tale, Nicola.

00:35:38 Rachel Fisher

But so I grew up in Texas, which is a very different context, I think, than England.

00:35:45 Rachel Fisher

But when I moved to London 25 years ago to do my master's at UCL, I was really, really struck by how all of the examples of best practice that people were talking about in my master's were not English. Were not UK.

00:35:59 Rachel Fisher

They were all international examples like Freiburg, Almira, Malmo.

00:36:06 Rachel Fisher

But it was all these kind of like Scandi German examples of places that we should all aspire to be like.

00:36:14 Rachel Fisher

And I remember thinking, “but come on guys, you're not that bad.”

00:36:19 Rachel Fisher

So I feel like over 25 years I've gone from it's not that bad to being able to have conversations where people like, this is great.

00:36:25 Rachel Fisher

This is really interesting.

00:36:27 Rachel Fisher

Like it feels like we're kind of in a moment of flipping from all the cautionary tales being like, “so we should talk about the ring road in Birmingham.”

00:36:36 Rachel Fisher

Like, you know, like we've moved into, I think, a different space where there are some really, really good examples of stuff that are happening here.

00:36:42 Rachel Fisher

And I just kind of want to pull that out.

00:36:46 Rachel Fisher

And also, yes, there are really good examples of kind of international best practice that we should absolutely learn from.

00:36:52 Rachel Fisher

It's just, it's been a really interesting kind of thing to watch shift because places respond to local context because they are the local context.

00:37:03 Rachel Fisher

And I think that one of the things as an American cautionary tale that I always find really interesting about the kind of conversation about like international learning is that there's a kind of assumption, particularly in government, particularly in policy terms, that I can just

00:37:15 Rachel Fisher

take a thing and move it from here to here and that kind of transplant, like the context won't matter.

00:37:22 Rachel Fisher

But planning is all about context. Places are all about context.

00:37:25 Rachel Fisher

They are the context.

00:37:27 Rachel Fisher

So yes, we can definitely learn.

00:37:28 Rachel Fisher

But I just, I don't know.

00:37:29 Nicola Headlam

Dare we say a 10 borough kind of political geography is not England whatsoever. It's not even Manchester, but let's leave that there.

00:37:38 Nicola Headlam

Dan, where helps you lift your eyes in the international context.

00:37:42 Daniel Slade

I'm going to interpret the question extremely liberally and say, I think what I'm really quite inspired by is something the American Planning Association has started to do a bit more over recent years.

00:37:52 Daniel Slade

And that's focused on foresight in a really sort of structured way.

00:37:56 Daniel Slade

And I think that's got real consequences for real places in the way that they kind of raise issues, advise their members.

00:38:02 Daniel Slade

So this is really built around just a really simple set of like three sets of themes or questions or like things to focus on.

00:38:02 Daniel Slade

So trends to act on now, trends to prepare for, and then trends to learn about and watch.

00:39:13 Daniel Slade

And then within them, there's just really simple topics, but then it's made very, very clear how that relates to planning practice.

00:38:20 Daniel Slade

So trends to learn about and watch covers things as diverse as the space debris crisis and vertical farming.

00:38:26 Daniel Slade

But there's real consequences of planning practice in the future.

00:38:29 Daniel Slade

The space debris crisis could take out a lot of satellites, which planners now really rely on quite fundamentally to be able to do their work effectively.

00:38:35 Daniel Slade

And it just affects the way that we think about planning and the tools you've got to do planning in really quite important ways.

00:38:41 Daniel Slade

So I think that is something which I think we can really learn from and think about a bit more.

00:38:42 Daniel Slade

If you sort of burrow down to the consequences of thinking about things like foresight more, it's really important for planners' sense of agency.

00:38:50 Daniel Slade

Right back at the start of this conversation, we were thinking of planning as like a regulatory kind of endeavour rather than one which is creative.

00:38:56 Daniel Slade

And that sense of agency is really important there too.

00:38:58 Daniel Slade

So there's a kind of cultural shift that thinking like that does and effects on actual planners, but it also creates genuine kind of practical insights for places that need to think about that kind of thing.

00:39:09 Nicola Headlam

I think in the same way that the theory/practice dichotomy doesn't really exist in planning because they are connected.

00:39:15 Nicola Headlam

the sort of future now dichotomy doesn't exist either because the minute that you either draw a line or build a wall, you're kind of, you're living in the future.

00:39:25 Nicola Headlam

The foresight future of cities process, which was more than 10 years ago, I was a classic me, I was some kind of in fellow on it for a whole year of getting together.

00:39:35 Nicola Headlam

It was a disaster, it never ever saw the light of day and

00:39:39 Nicola Headlam

it was another, that is a real notable failure, but I can talk about it because everybody's kind of retired or gone, but Mark Walpole and Alan Wilson and others.

00:39:46 Nicola Headlam

In fact, one of the great stories about it was that Michael Edwards, may he rest, wrote in the most extraordinary denunciation of everything that it was from a radical housing perspective and put it into the public.

00:39:58 Nicola Headlam

Like, thank you, Michael Edwards.

00:40:00 Nicola Headlam

You're absolutely right, futures thinking, noble failures in terms of making it too kind of techie and too kind of complicated.

00:40:09 Nicola Headlam

I never got to the point with that process, which was to bring it back to something simple.

00:40:13 Nicola Headlam

And again, you know, the report never did see the light of day.

00:40:16 Nicola Headlam

It was a long process and the kind of well resourced one from government, but we got totally snarled up in

00:40:23 Nicola Headlam

kind of some of the how of the future, it was kind of really messy and I completely agree that if you can pull out some future proofing and some foresighting tools that can help you in a very sort of practical way, then that is really helpful.

00:40:38 Nicola Headlam

The other thing that of course was taking 60 sulky hungover undergraduates to Almira.

00:40:44 Nicola Headlam

British planning was so in love with Dutch planning for a lot of years

00:40:49 Nicola Headlam

And there were, genuinely things like, “my God, the rubbish comes out of this bin underground and whizzes along.”

00:40:55 Nicola Headlam

And we do have that sort of urban heat project in Manchester as well.

00:40:58 Nicola Headlam

It's sort of inspired by it.

00:41:00 Nicola Headlam

It's difficult to imagine certainly a lot of the city making of this sort of Blair onward period without looking at that sort of Scandi kind of obsession, not least because again, a lot of the starchitects, a lot of the kind of city makers, the MIPM crew, trying to get those Scandinavian benefits while spending not a lot of money.

00:41:20 Nicola Headlam

And again, back to your context, Rach, like the thing about...

00:41:24 Nicola Headlam

The Dutch are good at planning because they had to pull half their country out of the sea.

00:41:27 Nicola Headlam

Consequently, you don't need to start from a place which is when one mediates between market and state, one has these guys that have got better glasses than you.

00:41:35 Nicola Headlam

It's just not that kind of thing. It's much more intuitive.

00:41:38 Nicola Headlam

I think Almira has come into its own actually. Again, it is working as a suburb.

00:41:43 Nicola Headlam

But I'm going to ask you, what are you working on next?

00:41:45 Nicola Headlam

But not in the context of the RTPI. Imagine then you've got a dream project, what would it be and where would it be?

00:41:52 Rachel Fisher

Like an actual building type project.

00:41:54 Nicola Headlam

I think that's what's interesting is that we're talking about Darley Street.

00:41:58 Nicola Headlam

You know, the scales of planning, global all the way down to neighborhood, an actual building can change the life of the street, can't it?

00:42:05 Nicola Headlam

Like, so that's the one that we spoke about.

00:42:07 Nicola Headlam

So, okay, you're allowed a magic building or you're allowed a project that would be your kind of dream project.

00:42:12 Daniel Slade

I think I will mention an RTPI thing because it links to a much grander ambition, I think.

00:42:17 Daniel Slade

I've got to some extent, but also we can have as well.

00:42:20 Daniel Slade

And it is that thing around deliberative engagement and actually making it a really, like just part of the toolkit that planners have and they feel confident about using and that they can use that in knowing when not to use it and knowing when to use it within planning processes.

00:42:33 Daniel Slade

So much of what we've spoken about earlier in this conversation, so we mentioned talking about maps and the power of maps and that the trade-offs become visual on the map.

00:42:44 Daniel Slade

They're very, very present.

00:42:45 Daniel Slade

You kind of can't escape them.

00:42:46 Daniel Slade

One of the natural questions following that is who made those trade-offs and do they have legitimacy as decision makers?

00:42:53 Daniel Slade

And there's this, we know this is wider crisis of legitimacy of public sector decision making, perceived or real, it kind of matters there as well.

00:43:01 Daniel Slade

And so this is part of a project to try and address that as well.

00:43:03 Daniel Slade

So in a very micro way, it's about just helping planners to make better decisions.

00:43:08 Daniel Slade

In a macro way, there's something there about democracy and thinking about planning as a democratic process, as well as being like a spatial decision making process.

00:43:14 Daniel Slade

I think it's quite important to have that kind of frame for thinking about planning sometimes.

00:43:18 Daniel Slade

You've got representative democracy and that kind of regular flow of chances you get to kind of have a say about who your local representative is and who your national representative is.

00:43:28 Daniel Slade

But the planning process is that kind of everyday thing, which Rachel was talking about earlier.

00:43:33 Daniel Slade

So that project, we're kicking it off now.

00:43:36 Daniel Slade

We're going to begin with an evidence review of what good use of mini publics and deliberative processes look like within planning.

00:43:42 Daniel Slade

And then we're going to provide guidance to the sector in spring next year.

00:43:45 Daniel Slade

And then from there, I think it's amazing.

00:43:47 Daniel Slade

I think we could grow the work and ideally cross it over nicely with that foresight stuff.

00:43:52 Daniel Slade

So thinking about the future from the perspective of communities using deliberative models. And that's the big thing.

00:43:58 Daniel Slade

I think that's the prize at the end of it.

00:43:59 Nicola Headlam

Amazing. Rach?

00:44:02 Rachel Fisher

So a very quick one from me, I think.

00:44:04 Rachel Fisher

I'm kind of still in a dreaming space because I'm kind of working on what is here.

00:44:09 Rachel Fisher

So I've spent the last six months getting to know the RTPI, getting to know the team, getting to know the members, kind of just, and starting to think about, okay, like, what is the change that I want to see as we kind of, and what is the role of the RTPI?

00:44:21 Rachel Fisher

But one of the things that keeps kind of circling back for me, and particularly given the kind of newish government is this thinking about town and country planning.

00:44:33 Rachel Fisher

So I'm really, really interested in the way in which cities and their hinterland interact.

00:44:40 Rachel Fisher

And I'm really interested in kind of how do we bring together the people who are really expert in development in towns and cities and all of that kind of generative creativity that happens kind of, and that I've sort of seen happen off the back of like, you know, going back to the, you know, the Rogers task force in ‘99 and then kind of through this kind of like most recent phase.

00:45:00 Rachel Fisher

I think the last 25 years has been kind of the legacy of that Rogers' Urban Task Force.

00:45:04 Rachel Fisher

But what we didn't have that sat alongside that was the same imagination capturing for the rural areas.

00:45:11 Rachel Fisher

And when I moved to DEFRA from MHCLG, it was really clear that the urban people talk to the urban people and the country people talk to the country people.

00:45:20 Rachel Fisher

And that's kind of how it works.

00:45:22 Rachel Fisher

And I'm so interested in how we talk to each other and what kind of magic comes out of those conversations.

00:45:30 Nicola Headlam

I've just written a thing called We Have Never Been Urban, which is about the shallow roots of urbanism in this country, because however you dress it up, we view success as: you move to the country.

00:45:41 Nicola Headlam

There is a really deep class-based thing of you have got, you buy space.

00:45:47 Nicola Headlam

In fact, I listened to a podcast yesterday about how the fall are much more northern than either Oasis or the Beatles.

00:45:54 Nicola Headlam

Both of whom, as soon as they could, got as far away as they could from Penny Lane, et cetera, and lived suburban, rural lives the minute they had the money to get out.

00:46:04 Nicola Headlam

And I just find that such a useful,

00:46:07 Nicola Headlam

useful, imaginary in terms of what we think, you know, good lives look like, which, as you know, Rachel, I think underpins so much of...

00:46:16 Nicola Headlam

we hide our class politics as spatial dynamics in this country.

00:46:22 Rachel Fisher

And yet you're much more open about class politics here than, for example, in America, where we hide our racism under class politics.

00:46:29 Nicola Headlam

I mean, basically, you can hide whatever hurts you in your built environment. That is always true.

00:46:34 Rachel Fisher

Oh, that is the caption for this. “You hide whatever hurts you.”

00:46:45 Nicola Headlam

I'm always reminded of this with the Brazilian example with Andresa, my friend.

00:46:48 Nicola Headlam

If you come from order, you think that freedom is freedom from rules.

00:46:54 Nicola Headlam

And if you come from a very rule-bound setting, you think that freedom is much more chaotic.

00:47:00 Nicola Headlam

And I think often when you talk to people about good societies or good places, some of that stuff lurks quite deep in people.

00:47:08 Nicola Headlam

Again, the rural-urban split.

00:47:10 Nicola Headlam

Can you think of a specific person who is a really good broker?

00:47:15 Nicola Headlam

And I need to be clear, brokerage in my formulation is kind of knowledge, right, so knowledge moves across people, as we know it's an embodied function.

00:47:24 Nicola Headlam

So you're allowed to say Rachel Fisher, Nicola Hedlam, other urbanistas.

00:47:30 Nicola Headlam

But maybe there's something about what makes somebody good at ideas that move is the broker.

00:47:35 Nicola Headlam

But then like a Lego brick, your broker needs to fit neatly onto a good place leader.

00:47:39 Nicola Headlam

And a really good formulation I got recently was all place leaders are brokers, but not all brokers have the mandate to be place leaders.

00:47:47 Rachel Fisher

I like that.

00:47:48 Nicola Headlam

We're thinking in public here.

00:47:49 Nicola Headlam

So brokers and place leaders, please.

00:47:53 Nicola Headlam

Yeah, you can name people, you've already named Kirsten and Bradford, completely agree.

00:47:57 Nicola Headlam

Can you think of other brokers that are doing God's work?

00:48:01 Rachel Fisher

I think Katrina Rudell, the planner, who is, you know, an absolute powerful force

00:48:08 Rachel Fisher

to drive forward the kind of reintroduction of strategic spatial planning.

00:48:12 Rachel Fisher

Absolutely amazing.

00:48:14 Rachel Fisher

And I think she's been very, very canny at how to kind of dock into those places, those place leaders, and also national leaders to be able to make that happen.

00:48:26 Rachel Fisher

And I've been thinking about this because I think

00:48:29 Rachel Fisher

ultimately, the thing that you need to be a good broker is just curiosity and the ability to communicate that curiosity.

00:48:37 Rachel Fisher

So if you've got a great idea, you need to be able to communicate that to somebody who may not immediately understand why planning is the solution to their problem, but actually, by being curious about their problems, you can come back to, and here's why this is actually a problem of planning or local government reform or whatever.

00:48:54 Rachel Fisher

There's just lots of different ones.

00:48:56 Rachel Fisher

But it's just, it's that kind of constant questioning that I think makes really good brokers.

00:49:00 Nicola Headlam

Dan, have you got a broker in mind?

00:49:02 Daniel Slade

Yeah, very honestly, top of my list was Katrina as well.

00:49:04 Daniel Slade

I think there were a couple of really

00:49:07 Rachel Fisher

The planner's planner.

00:49:08 Daniel Slade

Yeah, very much so.

00:49:09 Daniel Slade

I mean, there's a couple of reasons, I think, as a kind of story of how policy change happened, her work's been particularly interesting.

00:49:16 Daniel Slade

One is that she was doing the work when strategic planning was seen as deeply unsexy, that it wasn't what the government was interested in, the government of the day.

00:49:24 Daniel Slade

More widely, there wasn't a massive amount of research happening on it as well.

00:49:27 Daniel Slade

And so it's that consistency of like caring about the topic, putting thinking into the topic, and then keeping that going was the political winds change.

00:49:35 Daniel Slade

And then I think linked to that, but slightly separately, there's something around, I think to build on Rachel's point as well, around almost

00:49:42 Daniel Slade

maybe this is the wrong word, but a sense of naivety almost.

00:49:44 Daniel Slade

So I've seen them in Parliament and in relation to government many, many times where you have a senior decision maker, parliamentarian perhaps, and you can see the lobbyists who've got an agenda to push, the formal professional lobbyists have that kind of slick thing.

00:49:59 Daniel Slade

And the decision makers who actually care about what they're doing run a mile in many situations because they're so obviously

00:50:05 Daniel Slade

focused on the power rather than the actual outcome at the other end and like what you're trying to achieve with it.

00:50:08 Daniel Slade

I think people like Katrina have that much greater sense that they care about the thing, that perhaps they're geeks about the thing as well and that really matters as kind of part of that effectiveness.

00:50:17 Rachel Fisher

It's that authenticity point.

00:50:19 Nicola Headlam

You're so right.

00:50:20 Nicola Headlam

Being a little bit messy is very important for brokerage, I think.

00:50:23 Rachel Fisher

And the other person is Pooja Agarwal from Public Practice, the ultimate place broker, right?

00:50:30 Rachel Fisher

So she is absolutely incredible at placing people in the right places.

00:50:35 Rachel Fisher

And so through the work that Public Practice does in building up this cohort and this cadre of basically new planners, small and capital P.

00:50:43 Rachel Fisher

Like she's doing an incredible piece of work with that.

00:50:46 Rachel Fisher

And also just on that same one, Nicola Mathers and Lisa Taylor, both kind of Future of London, Future of Manchester, incredible, just sort of like operators and understanders, both of kind of people and place and the dynamics and how you kind of play through that.

00:51:02 Rachel Fisher

Like I just, all of them are absolutely world class.

00:51:05 Nicola Headlam

Yeah, and just in case people haven't come across it, the Future of London, Future of Manchester cohort,

00:51:10 Nicola Headlam

take people that are working, doing things, and build them so they can work across the context that they're currently in, imagining the future of the place.

00:51:18 Nicola Headlam

And it is exactly the kind of model, because then those people become a resource to one another as their careers kind of go on.

00:51:25 Rachel Fisher

They build brokerage.

00:51:26 Rachel Fisher

Those sort of like future of leadership models, leadership cohorts, they're building brokers.

00:51:31 Rachel Fisher

They're making both brokers and place leaders and place leaders who are brokers.

00:51:34 Nicola Headlam

Exactly.

00:51:35 Nicola Headlam

So place leaders, the clear example is the Prime Minister is a place leader of a city as well as the Prime Minister.

00:51:44 Nicola Headlam

Can you think of people that have got the mandate for place that are doing it particularly well?

00:51:46 Rachel Fisher

Tracey Braben, another good example of a mayor.

00:51:49 Nicola Headlam

In fact, we can say I've already named the Mayor of North York.

00:51:53 Nicola Headlam

David Skaith is got a lot of energy.

00:51:55 Rachel Fisher

Absolutely.

00:51:57 Nicola Headlam

Tracey Braben. In fact, most of the northern mayors have got a certain amount of energy under them.

00:52:04 Rachel Fisher

Yeah, and they're the ones that are sort of in the spotlight, right?

00:52:07 Rachel Fisher

Because I think they're the ones that need to make this experiment work.

00:52:12 Nicola Headlam

And they're on the National Economic Council, which as you know, will make my nerd heart sing.

00:52:16 Nicola Headlam

Have you got a place leader for us, Dan?

00:52:18 Daniel Slade

Mine went straight to the cohort of mayors as well as a starting point, the Metro Mayors.

00:52:22 Daniel Slade

My sort of starting reference point though, I think was reference to Steve Rotheram.

00:52:26 Daniel Slade

Particularly with him, I think a kind of willingness to think differently about stuff.

00:52:30 Daniel Slade

I spent some time in the Combined Authority there when they were beginning to develop their spatial development strategy, when it was the only kind of show in town when it came to spatial development strategies.

00:52:39 Daniel Slade

And the willingness to think more broadly around things like social value, thinking about environmental sort of value, but much more broadly, and then having sort of city-level conversations about things like the history of the city, both the darker and the brighter sides of the history of the city, I thought was very impressive.

00:52:55 Daniel Slade

And had an obvious kind of mandate to it.

00:52:57 Daniel Slade

There was a kind of energy behind it and linked to that kind of civic identity as well.

00:53:01 Nicola Headlam

Yes, Steve Rotherham, as we saw on the steps of Downing Street with his little grandson, the mayors are coming!

00:53:09 Nicola Headlam

I was just thinking actually when you were talking about, that's what I was going to say, consultations being less procedural and more kind of animating.

00:53:15 Nicola Headlam

There's a line in the Rewiring Whitehall document which says something extremely tough about we're not doing performative consultation

00:53:23 Nicola Headlam

which I think just in case anybody has failed to read the seven pages of the document, there is something in there for everyone that's ever tried to make things better.

00:53:32 Rachel Fisher

Having worked on whatever we call subnational policy, place policy, like having worked on this from inside government, I was so impressed by that.

00:53:42 Nicola Headlam

It's radical.

00:53:43 Rachel Fisher

It's one of the best.

00:53:44 Rachel Fisher

It is, you know, I would honestly say not since the coalition agreement of 2010, has there been such a kind of like profound statement of intent from an incoming government

00:53:55 Rachel Fisher

Just clear, articulate, “this is what we're doing. I'm not messing around” and then deliver. So I mean, again, we will watch with excitement about the delivery, but like, but actually it's a statement of intent.

00:54:07 Rachel Fisher

It's extremely good.

00:54:08 Nicola Headlam

It's crazy.

00:54:11 Nicola Headlam

I'm going to be spending my autumn and winter talking to all audiences about what does rewiring mean for this sector and what does rewiring mean for that sector because as soon as the rubber hits the road it's going to be very difficult.

00:54:22 Nicola Headlam

But if you don't know where you're going, you don't know where you're going, right?

00:54:25 Rachel Fisher

But it sets it out so well.

00:54:27 Rachel Fisher

And I think then it's a thing that you can kind of then say, okay, right, in the budget, like when the budget comes out at the end of October, how are we helping the rework?

00:54:33 Rachel Fisher

Like it just feels so much clearer than anything I've seen in a long time.

00:54:37 Nicola Headlam

And also, given that our audience is only kind of spatially aware folk, I just need to say as often as possible.

00:54:44 Rachel Fisher

Not everyone is.

00:54:45 Nicola Headlam

The reception of John Healy as Chancellor being kind of, “meh, he's not Ed Miliband” is so wrong because again,

00:54:52 Nicola Headlam

back to 20 years ago, his local government secretary and shadow work is essentially bearing fruit now.

00:55:00 Nicola Headlam

And it's very, very clear to a localist and to a subnational and to devolution that John Healy is a radical chancellor, not in a straightforward left-right way, but in a localist way.

00:55:12 Rachel Fisher

Did he commission the Bichard Total Place work?

00:55:15 Nicola Headlam

Yeah.

00:55:16 Rachel Fisher

Which I always come back to.

00:55:17 Nicola Headlam

Total place is still in the system and will rise again.

00:55:22 Daniel Slade

I've got a lot to thank John Healy for because going right back to the very, very, very beginning of my PhD, I was at a Heseltine event in the Baltic Triangle in Liverpool.

00:55:32 Daniel Slade

And I managed to get half an hour with him for a chat over like a coffee and a sandwich.

00:55:36 Daniel Slade

He helped me get my head around the idea that the civil service and government in general is not some kind of monolith that you can't access.

00:55:42 Daniel Slade

That they're actual people and you can go and talk to them and find things out about them.

00:55:45 Daniel Slade

And it's all kind of porous and there's like a very loose membrane around it.

00:55:49 Daniel Slade

And that inspired the whole sort of starting point for where my PhD ended up going as a result.

00:55:55 Rachel Fisher

Well, I'm now feeling like I need to do a PhD.

00:55:57 Rachel Fisher

Oh, and they're a little bit outclassed, guys.

00:55:59 Nicola Headlam

Step away, step away from it. No way.

00:56:02 Nicola Headlam

I mean, it's really interesting that, having organised those events in the Baltic, we were then having a pint quite soon after and somebody at the bar was like, oh my God, the Baltic Triangle is so over.

00:56:14 Nicola Headlam

We've had, you know, Tories trotting through here kind of thing.

00:56:18 Nicola Headlam

So in terms of a good place leader, if John Healy offered you that time, I mean, he was shadow local government secretary at the time, I mean, that's our good place leader, isn't it?

00:56:26 Rachel Fisher

Yeah, that was a good place leader engages,

00:56:30 Nicola Headlam

Yeah, definitely. So, thank you so much for joining us.

00:56:32 Nicola Headlam

We set out to mine insights from Rachel and Dan, real experts.

00:56:37 Nicola Headlam

Talk about their real world case studies, yep, lots of that.

00:56:40 Nicola Headlam

Practical tips and career advice.

00:56:42 Nicola Headlam

Stay curious and the rest will follow.

00:56:44 Nicola Headlam

And to spotlight some solutions and we have.

00:56:48 Nicola Headlam

Thanks guys.