

Transcript: AESOP | 2025 Head of Schools Meeting – Introduction

University of Liverpool, 13 March 2025

Olivier Sykes (Local Organiser, University of Liverpool):

Welcome, everyone, to the AESOP Head of Schools Meeting. I'd like to begin by introducing our Dean, Doug Mayer, who will officially welcome you to Liverpool and present the context of our school and the role of planning within it.

Doug Mayer (Dean, School of Environmental Sciences, University of Liverpool):

Welcome to Liverpool, and thank you all for making the journey here. For some, this is your second day of meetings, and for others, your main day — either way, you are all very welcome.

Let me begin by thanking the local organising committee, especially Becca and Matthew from our professional services team, for their hard work behind the scenes in bringing this event together.

I am Dean of the School of Environmental Sciences, where our planning discipline is located. The school is home to a wide range of disciplines — human and physical geography, geology, geophysics, ocean sciences, marine biology — and planning plays a central role in this interdisciplinary environment.

Rather than viewing planning as a separate strand, we see it increasingly as central to both research and teaching. As societal demands grow in the face of climate change, environmental degradation, and urban challenges, planners are becoming more vital in shaping livable and equitable environments.

At Liverpool, our planners work across multiple research councils and contribute to a variety of teaching programmes. Their courses are taken not only by planning students but also by engineers, architects, and others who recognise the relevance of planning to their fields.

I strongly believe that natural scientists must understand social dynamics, just as social scientists must grasp ecological and physical realities. Planning sits at the intersection of these fields, and I hope that reflects your own institutional experiences.

Governments across the UK — and Europe more broadly — are slowly recognising the importance of planners in tackling complex societal issues, though this varies greatly. Meetings like this are essential for understanding different national contexts and exchanging valuable experiences.

I'm actually a glaciologist, not a planner, but I've seen firsthand that successful planning is based on strong partnerships, mutual respect, and personal connections. That's why events like this matter so much — they allow us to build those relationships. I hope your time here

is productive, enjoyable, and that you'll have a chance to explore the city a bit while you're here.

Maria Håkansson (President of AESOP):

Thank you, Doug, and welcome to all. On behalf of AESOP, I'd like to express our gratitude to the University of Liverpool, the Department of Geography and Planning, and the School of Environmental Sciences for hosting this meeting.

This is a key point in AESOP's annual cycle — a moment when not only co-representatives but also heads of member schools come together to reflect on planning education. It's an opportunity to share challenges, learn from one another, and discuss how we educate future generations of planners.

We have a promising programme ahead of us, focused on the themes of legitimacy and inclusivity in planning education. Thank you again to all involved in making this event possible. I'm very happy to see you all here.

Olivier Sykes (Local Organiser, University of Liverpool):

Let me now run through today's programme. We're expecting three keynote speakers: Nick Small, Lucy, and Jonathan. Later this morning, Yanis will present the PlanEd project, which looks at planning education in the context of climate change.

We'll also hear from Chris with the Quality Recognition Board report, which is an important part of AESOP's educational work.

After lunch, we'll have four parallel breakout sessions. Topics include legitimacy in planning, professional education in collaboration with the RTPI, inclusive education with the RCPI, and community engagement through the organisation "Placed," which will also introduce a participatory game.

Tomorrow, we'll hold two walking tours: one titled *Northern Lights*, focused on regeneration in Liverpool's northern fringe, and the other, *The Last Resort*, exploring soft densification and urban transformation in New Brighton. Both tours will depart at 9:30 from designated locations, and we've prepared maps in the event bags.

We hope you'll take this opportunity to learn, share, and connect with colleagues across Europe. Thank you again, and enjoy the meeting.