

NIPA Chair candidate statement - Tom Carpen

Infrastructure planning is crucial in shaping where we live and how we live, and it is critical to how we respond to the demands of a complex and changing world.

I am nominating myself to be NIPA chair because I believe in infrastructure planning as a force for good, in working in the national interest, and in NIPA's purpose to represent those of us involved in the planning and authorisation of Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects.

My passion for national infrastructure and my leadership experience across key organisations and companies makes me uniquely placed to take on the NIPA chair role at this pivotal time.

I would bring the breadth of experience, vision, and trusted relationships required to strategically lead NIPA through the next three years. As an existing and former board member, with a track record of active involvement and engaging members, I understand what it takes to maintain the organisation and its reputation.

My track record (the perspectives and skills I would bring)

My experience in challenging roles across all facets and sectors of national infrastructure planning means I can see issues from the perspectives of a wide range of our members and stakeholders. I am driven by a commitment to using our planning systems to help tackle some of the biggest challenges, whether that's climate change, strategic connectivity or water resilience.

As a founder team leader at the original Infrastructure Planning Commission, then Planning Inspectorate NSIP team through to present day, I have lived the establishment and evolution of the NSIP process and led people through its changes.

In Government, I led the NSIP operational reforms and had a central role in the development of the 2023 NSIP Action Plan, setting up the next NSIP chapter whilst building further lasting relationships with a wide range of stakeholders in and outside Government.

However, my interests go beyond NSIPs and I bring a wider strategic perspective. As a former infrastructure planning consultant and now promoter of a portfolio of major infrastructure projects at Thames Water, I am also well versed in the practical and commercial realities of developing major projects. This includes the impact of factors internal and external to projects, and the diversity of skills, expertise and team spirit required to overcome challenges.

Equally, the NSIP process doesn't work in isolation, and strategic planning is back on the agenda. At the Greater London Authority, I led the successful implementation and further development of innovative renewable energy and spatial energy planning policy. I have the skills and experience to help NIPA partner with other organisations looking at the role infrastructure plays in strategic planning, the growth and nature recovery agendas and other critical priorities.

I also hold a Masters in Town and Regional Planning and an Executive MBA, meaning I understand and am interested in the fundamentals of good planning, organisational leadership and how we apply a business mindset to support people and places to fulfil their potential.

Drawing on all this experience, my approach is to combine in-depth planning knowledge with a compassionate, inclusive leadership style, to build creative team environments where people can thrive individually and collectively. This is what I would bring to the NIPA chair role and board, and the culture I'd look to enable across the organisation through NIPA's leadership teams.

My proposed approach (40 words)

“NIPA needs to evolve to stay relevant to changing national circumstances. My leadership would guide the organisation to be fit for the future, attractive to the wide spectrum of members and enhance the disciplines we are all passionate about.”

Recognising NIPA is a membership organisation, its future should be guided by what its members need. Therefore, my priorities would be to:

1. Collaboratively develop a **new 3-year vision and business plan** with the Board, Council and Early Years Practitioners Board, with member input, to set out how all members can play a part in the evolution of the Association.
2. **Prioritise an infrastructure delivery taskforce** and empower it to accelerate the learning from recent and emerging Government reform measures, supporting policy makers with real-time evidence.
3. **Focus on improving what you as members get** from your NIPA subscription, with an emphasis on skills development and cross-profession capability.

I would work with the Board, Council and Early Years Practitioners to establish more **visible, outward facing representative roles** including leadership in the following areas:

1. **Partnerships** with professional bodies, research and membership organisations with shared interests in better infrastructure planning for the greater good.
2. **Direct two-way communications with members**, including through a regular ‘all members’ call to share questions, practice, NIPA activity and get feedback on how well NIPA is delivering for members against our vision and business plan.
3. **Participation opportunities** for members and parent organisations to grow NIPA’s knowledge and impact.

NIPA’s mission and its future

There is no doubt that NIPA has established itself as the leading group of practitioners for nationally significant infrastructure projects. As chair, I would maintain NIPA’s central mission to be impartial and focused on effective consenting processes.

However, we need to look forward. The context in which NIPA was set up has changed significantly. There is a new ambitious Government, more pressing issues on climate, growth and nature, a very knowledgeable civil service and groups such as the Local Authority Centre of Excellence, and far more mainstream interest in infrastructure. I believe strongly that we have the passion, creativity and intelligence to adapt to our changing context. As chair, I would promote NIPA’s role in listening and engaging with a wider range of people and building a diverse membership through engagement.

Confirmation of requirements

The NIPA chair is a privileged role, and I would commit to the average time estimated, working with my employer to manage this appropriately. I confirm I will act in accordance with the guidance on conduct for election. I confirm I would be willing and am able to hold a statutory Director appointment, and to lead and engage in the board proactively in all the ways required for this application. I currently hold a fixed-term external advisory role on the National Trust’s Historic Environment Advisory Group (HEAG).