



**MINISTERIAL ADVISORY GROUP**  
FOR ARCHITECTURE AND THE BUILT  
ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

RAISING

EXPECTATIONS

JUNE 2009

RAISING EXPECTATIONS

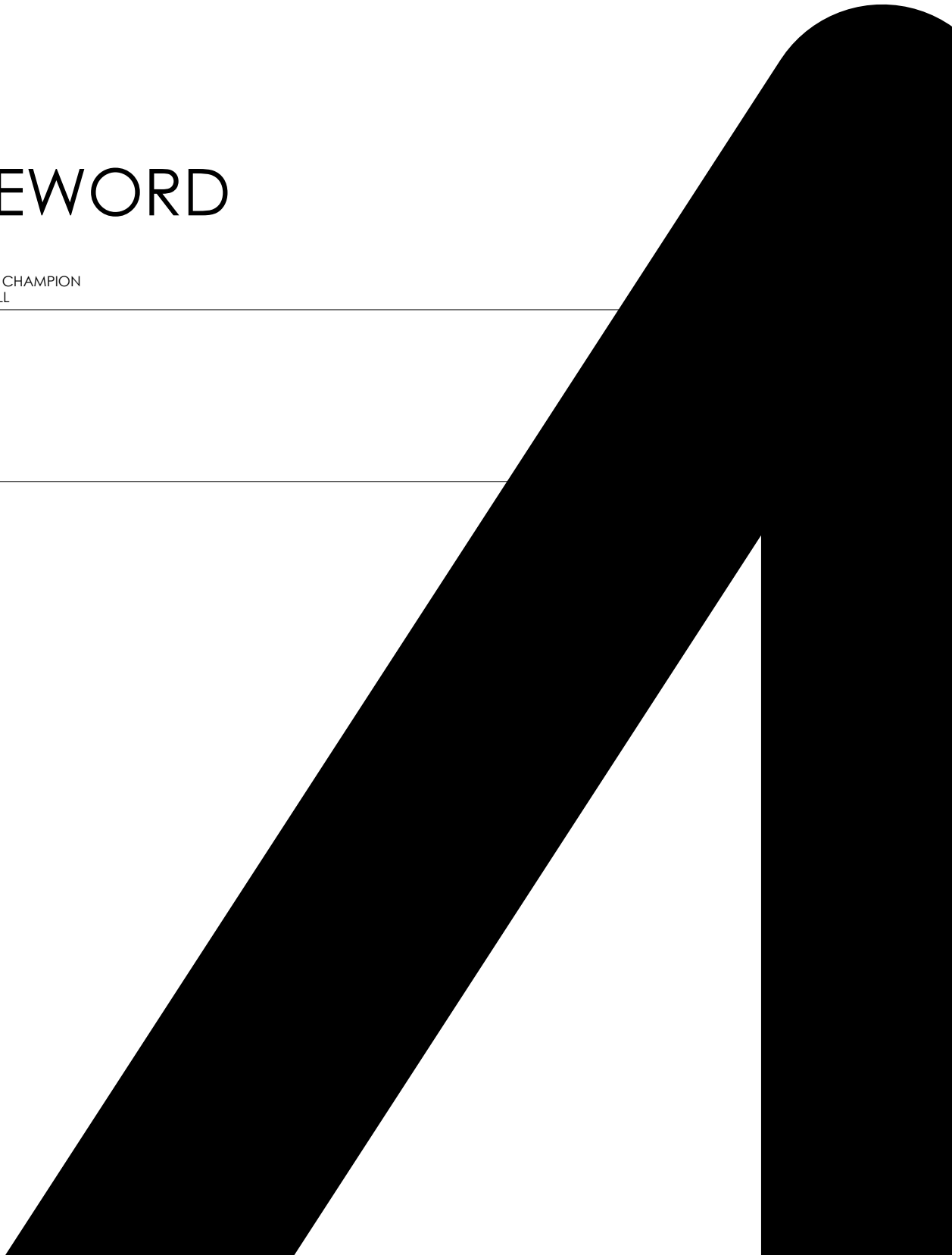
# FOREWORD

MINISTERIAL DESIGN CHAMPION  
GREGORY CAMPBELL

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CHAIR OF THE MAG  
BARRIE TODD

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The creation of buildings and public spaces that are attractive and serve the needs of the people who use them is a heavy responsibility for designers, architects, developers, investors and Government. Schools, hospitals, homes, streets and public spaces all impact on our lives. They are part of our culture and they are the legacy we will create for future generations to enjoy.



As Minister responsible for architectural policy and with the role of Design Champion, I want to make sure that I receive the best advice and that is why I welcome this first mid-term report from MAG, the Ministerial Advisory Group on Architecture and the Built Environment.

Given the scale of the publicly funded capital investment programme currently underway and private sector development, it is essential that we seek to influence the design quality of major schemes. There is no substitute for good design and for buildings that in themselves make a statement about us and please the people who use them. It is our duty to make sure we get value for money and that finite public resources are not wasted.

I would like to thank Barrie Todd, his team of advisors and all those who have contributed to this report and those who are helping in our drive to improve standards of design in architecture and the built environment.

**Gregory Campbell MP MLA**  
Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure

This is the first report on the work of the MAG set up in September 2007 to advise the Minister and the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure on the implementation and development of architectural policy. The Group is half way through its initial term of appointment and so I have given this report the title of 'Raising Expectations'.

We have achieved much in a short time and I have detailed our activities in the following pages.

We are a group of professionals with a passion and vision and our aim is to make MAG an influential group which will enjoy the confidence of the industry and the public.

I hope that you enjoy reading about the work that has been completed to date by the MAG and in doing so will be better informed about what we are about.

**Barrie Todd MBE**  
Chair of the MAG

RAISING EXPECTATIONS







# BACKGROUND

The Architecture and Built Environment Policy for Northern Ireland was published by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in June 2006.

The overarching thrust of this policy is to champion the provision and maintenance of the highest standards of design quality in architecture and the built environment in Northern Ireland.

A key element of the Architecture and Built Environment Policy was the establishment, by the Government, of a Ministerial Advisory Group [MAG] led by the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure in his role as Design Champion.

The main role of the MAG is to:

- Advise the Minister on the development and implementation of the Architecture and Built Environment Policy
- Review progress on key priorities identified by MAG
- Advise Government on policy implementation
- Conduct Design Reviews of pre and post planning applications; and
- Implement those actions set out in the Policy

The MAG also contributes its expertise in the areas of advocacy, communication, and education.

## THE MAG

The MAG was established in September 2007. It has a chair and eight members who are prominent individuals drawn from a range of disciplines and with specialist knowledge and experience relating to architecture and the built environment. The current members are:

- Alan Strong (Civil Engineer)
- Andrew Gault (Architect)
- Arthur Acheson (Architect and Town Planner)
- Emily Hadden (Landscape Architect)
- Ian McKnight (Architect)
- Marcus Patton OBE (Architect)
- Prof. Tom Woolley (Architect)

(One position is currently vacant)

Together they bring to the Group a diverse range of experience in the mainstream design disciplines as well as specialist expertise in architectural conservation, environmental issues, procurement and sustainable development

The MAG meets regularly every other month.

## EXPERT ADVISORS

A number of 'Expert Advisors' have recently been recruited and placed on a call-off list which the MAG can draw on as the need arises.

Their role is to contribute in the areas of advocacy, communication, design review and education.

The expert advisors enhance the disciplines, knowledge and experience already provided by the MAG members in architecture including architectural conservation, civil engineering, environmental issues, landscape architecture, procurement, sustainable development, town planning and urban design. The call-off list is as follows:

- Gordon Clarke (Landscape Architect)
- Grainne Cumming (Architect)
- Michael Hegarty (Architect)
- James Hennessey (Landscape Architect)
- Alan Jones (Architect)
- Mary Kerrigan (Architect)
- Trevor Leaker (Architect)
- Ciaran Mackel (Architect)
- Terence McCaw (Architect)
- Richard Partington (Architect)
- Paul Reynolds (Landscape Architect)
- Dr Taina Rikala (Urban Design)
- Dr Ken Sterrett (Town Planner)
- Alex Wright (Architect)

# ACTIONS

THE ARCHITECTURE AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT POLICY FOR NORTHERN IRELAND DIFFERS FROM OTHERS IN THAT IT SETS OUT ASPIRATIONS FOR EXCELLENCE IN DESIGN QUALITY AND INCLUDES A COMPREHENSIVE ACTION LIST.

THE MAG HAS PRIORITISED THE ACTIONS WHICH THEY CONSIDERED SHOULD BE ADDRESSED FIRST AND ESTABLISHED IMPLEMENTATION SUB-GROUPS. THE PRIORITISED AREAS CURRENTLY UNDER CONSIDERATION ARE:

- PUBLIC SECTOR CONSTRUCTION PROCUREMENT;
- EXISTING AND EMERGING PLANNING POLICIES INCLUDING PLANNING REFORM;
- CONSERVATION AND HERITAGE AND IN PARTICULAR, OVER DEMOLITION AND PUBLIC REALM WORKS IN CONSERVATION AREAS;  
AND
- SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.



## PUBLIC SECTOR PROCUREMENT

The MAG acknowledges that, through the Architecture and Built Environment Policy for Northern Ireland, Government is committed to being an exemplary client in the delivery of good design.

The delivery of good design should be determined at the outset of the design process. It is vital therefore that the public sector procurement process includes measures to enable good quality design to be delivered.

The MAG initiated discussions with the Central Procurement Directorate [CPD] in April 2008. These were followed by a seminar convened by MAG. An audience from the built environment professions listened to and asked questions of speakers representing the:

- Architectural Profession: Sunand Prasad, President of the Royal Institute of British Architects;
- Public Sector: Des Armstrong, Director, CPD and John Cole, Chief Executive of Health Estates; and
- Building Contractors: Andrew Bill, Graham

Since the seminar the MAG procurement sub group and senior personnel from CPD have been meeting to discuss issues relating to design quality and public sector construction procurement. At these meetings MAG set out their recommendations which CPD have considered and replied to.

## PLANNING POLICIES AND REFORM

MAG has made representations or is currently in the process of making representations on the following:

- The Antrim Glens and Causeway Coast Management Plan;
- Planning Policy Statement 21: Sustainable Development in the Countryside
- Tall Buildings
- The Planning Reform paper prepared by Professor Gregg Lloyd

The MAG through the planning sub-group is also actively supporting the creation of 3D Digital Models for key urban centres. The MAG considers such a tool to be important in the three dimensional planning of the urban spaces of Northern Ireland.

## CONSERVATION AND HERITAGE

The MAG is concerned that protection of conservation areas is weakened by:

- an over-cautious interpretation of case history regarding what constitutes 'no harm' which ignores the social and historic aspects of conservation areas and leads in practice to a rate of demolition that is little different from areas not so protected;
- the absence of 'Article 4' Controls that would protect details such as fenestration in domestic buildings; and
- insufficient consultation between the statutory bodies and organisations in the development of public realm schemes leading to inappropriate urban landscaping.

In response several representations have been made to the Planning Service, the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and the Heritage and Lottery Fund. These discussions and debates are currently ongoing.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable Development forms one of the 'Guiding Principles' of the Architecture and Built Environment Policy for Northern Ireland. MAG is keen to focus on the importance of sustainable development, to encourage those with responsibility for design, buildings and development to better understand the principles set out in the policy document.

As a consequence the MAG will host a workshop in 2009 to which key Government and Government Agency Stakeholders will be invited.

The purpose of the workshop will be to review how sustainable policies are being implemented. MAG will advise where deficiencies exist and use the opportunity to influence which measures should be introduced to balance the scales.

## OTHER DESIGN COMMISSIONS

Architecture and Design Scotland

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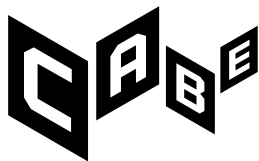
The Design Commission for Wales

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CABE, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, England

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### **The MAG has formed strong relationships with the above bodies**

During its growth the MAG has benefited greatly from the advice freely given by these bodies and we wish to acknowledge our gratitude in return. Every three months a 'design summit' is held with representatives from each body attending. The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, RoI, which has responsibility for architecture policy, also attends. One of the summits was hosted by MAG in the Belfast's Linenhall Library in April 2008. The MAG Chair has also attended sessions in Edinburgh, Cardiff and Dublin.





## PLACE

PLACE, the Architecture and Built Environment Centre in Fountain Street, Belfast represents an ideal vehicle for the promotion of the Architecture and the Built Environment Policy and the MAG's advocacy actions.

PLACE is a joint venture project between Belfast City Council and the Royal Society of Ulster Architects. The Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure contributes to the financial support of PLACE through the Arts Council of Northern Ireland.

The MAG is currently forming closer links with PLACE with a view to availing of their expertise and facilities to promote the aims of the Architecture and the Built Environment Policy.

The MAG has received two presentations from the Chair and members of the Board and we have agreed to reciprocate at future PLACE board meetings.

## DESIGN REVIEWS

Design Reviews form a major role and activity for the MAG. To gain experience every member of MAG has attended reviews in Edinburgh or Cardiff or London.

To date three forms of review have taken place; Pre-planning application, Post Planning application referrals and referrals by Government funders. Reviews have ranged from projects such as the Giant's Causeway Visitor Centre, through key inner city projects, and major master plans to major infrastructural works. By April 2009 the MAG has conducted fourteen Design Reviews.

The MAG in reviewing design proposals draws reference to the Architecture and the Built Environment Policy. A design review includes:

- Registration.
- Request for information from the MAG.
- Selection of the Design Review panel members most appropriate for the respective project.
- Dissemination of information to the review panel.
- Arrangement of display of information for presentation.
- Conducting the review.
- Preparation and issue of the Design Review Report
- Issue of 'feedback' pro forma

There is an increasing demand for Design Reviews with more Pre-Planning Applications being referred by consultants and developers.

The MAG is encouraged by feedback received where comments have complimented the usefulness of reviews.

## THE MAG SECRETARIAT

The members of the MAG are assisted by Richard Lutton and Ruth McNeill, Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure.

As an example of the importance the Department places on the activities of the MAG, its Deputy Secretary, Edgar Jardine frequently attends meetings and events.

## THE FUTURE

WITH A DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND THE LARGEST PUBLIC SECTOR BUILDING PROGRAMME SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR COMES MANY CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES TO ESTABLISH AND EMBED THE PRINCIPLES SET OUT IN THE POLICY ON ARCHITECTURE AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT FOR NORTHERN IRELAND.

THE MAG INTENDS TO ADDRESS THOSE CHALLENGES AND SEIZE THE OPPORTUNITIES TO ENSURE THAT THE AIMS OF THE ARCHITECTURE AND BUILT ENVIRONMENT POLICY ARE DELIVERED WITH THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF DESIGN QUALITY.

THIS WILL BE CARRIED OUT THROUGH ADVOCACY, INFLUENCE, PERSUASION AND MONITORING, WORKSHOPS, SEMINARS, PLACE; DESIGN REVIEWS, PUBLICATIONS AND ANY OTHER AVAILABLE MEANS TO ACHIEVE THE IMPORTANT GOAL OF DESIGN QUALITY.

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