



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

**MINISTERIAL ADVISORY GROUP**

**THE FIRST THREE YEARS**

JANUARY 2011

RAISING EXPECTATIONS



## FOREWORD

In 2006 the publication of the policy on Architecture and the Built Environment was welcomed by public and private sector bodies as a significant step forward in the drive to raise design standards. Three things were recognised as essential to turning policy vision into reality. These are a design orientated culture, an implementation strategy and investment.

A key recommendation in the policy was for the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Group on Architecture and the Built Environment (the MAG). In the first three years the MAG has worked passionately to ensure that achieving excellence in design quality remains a constant focus of infrastructure procurement, planning policy and sustainable development. This work is all the more imperative in 2010 and beyond when public spending is under increasing pressure to provide maximum value for money.

Value for money and good design are synonymous with sustainable development which delivers quality of life, social cohesion, environmental protection and economic prosperity. The goal for everyone should be the creation of buildings and places that are valued by the people who use them. Those places that are highly valued become the heritage and strengthen the image of and regard for Northern Ireland at home and abroad.

MAG's founding Chair Barrie Todd MBE, appropriately gave MAG's mid term report the title 'Raising Expectations'. It is clearly evident from the following account of its first three years that the MAG team has lived up to this call by challenging policy which is failing to deliver good design, facilitating critical debate and conducting design reviews of significant infrastructure schemes. Looking forward I would encourage the MAG led by its new Chair Arthur Acheson to build creatively on this work. I would also urge construction clients, both public and private, to work closely with the MAG in cherishing and enhancing a built environment of which we can all be proud.

**Nelson McCausland MLA**  
**Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure**

## THE POLICY

The Architecture and Built Environment (A+BE) policy for Northern Ireland was published by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure in June 2006, and is available at [www.dcalni.gov.uk/published\\_document\\_with\\_illustrations.pdf](http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/published_document_with_illustrations.pdf)



Fig 1

The A+BE policy provides the main terms of reference for the Ministerial Advisory Group on Architecture and the Built Environment (the MAG). It includes an “Implementation Strategy” to ensure the realisation of the policy vision and objectives. The principles which underpin the policy are concerned with:

- (i) Creativity and innovation;
- (ii) The built and natural heritage; and
- (iii) Sustainable Development

The primary role of the MAG is to advise the DCAL Minister on the implementation of the A+BE policy in Northern Ireland of which Design Review is a key activity.

## MAG CHAIR



Professor Barrie Todd MBE was appointed as the inaugural Chair from 1 September 2007. He retired in 2010 having given generously of his experience, dedication and enthusiasm which encouraged the MAG to start work productively at a critical time and to create a reputation for integrity and expertise.



Arthur Acheson, an architect and city planner in private practice in Belfast, succeeded Barrie from 1 September 2010. Arthur takes a special interest in community participation in the planning and design of places. He was the founder chair of Belfast Civic Trust and has been a member of the MAG since its inception.

### **MAG MEMBERS AND DISCIPLINES**

In addition to the Chair, there are eight MAG members, who represent a comprehensive range of disciplines and specialised interests. Six of the original members from the first term of the MAG [September 2007 to August 2010] have been reappointed for the second term [September 2010 to August 2013]. Two of the original members have been replaced by new members. The Chair and members, their disciplines and specialised interests are listed in **Annex A** attached.

### **EXPERT ADVISORS**

The A+BE policy advocates that the “MAG will be assisted by experts with specialist skills including academics and practitioners”. During the first term, 14 ‘Expert Advisors’ were recruited to provide the main source of membership of Design Review panels. The Expert Advisors and their respective disciplines are listed in **Annex B** attached.

### **MAG SECRETARIAT**

The MAG is supported by a secretariat provided by DCAL.

### **A+BE POLICY ACTION PRIORITIES**

Shortly after commencement of the first term, members agreed certain priority areas for consideration. Subgroups, with a member leading each one, were set up as follows:

- (i) Marcus Patton      Heritage / Over demolition in Conservation Areas  
+ Public realm in Conservation Areas
- (ii) Arthur Acheson      Planning Policy representations
- (iii) Alan Strong      Sustainable Development
- (iv) Ian McKnight      Design Quality in Public Sector Procurement

## ACTION STATUS

### (i a) Over demolition in Conservation Areas

The Planning Service has taken satisfactory measures to arrest what was observed as being a detrimental trend which is a very satisfactory conclusion.



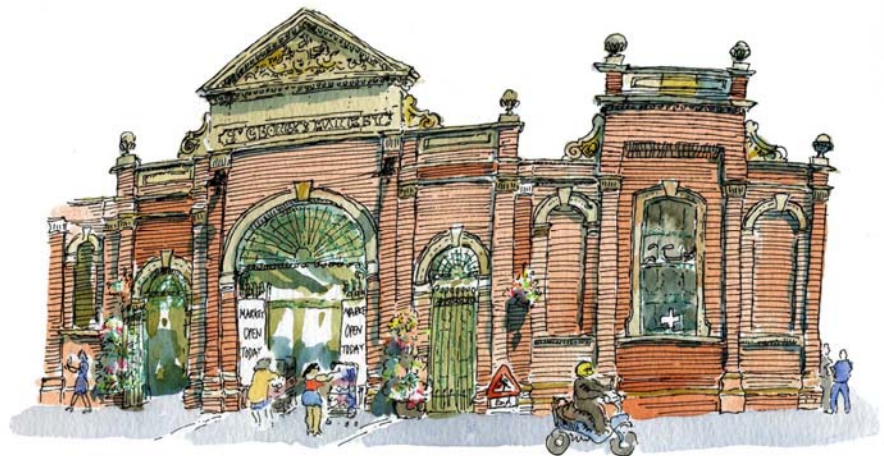
Fig 2

### (i b) Public realm in Conservation Areas

It was noted that there is a lack of control of public realm materials etc. in Conservation Areas. There appears to be no requirement to obtain approval from either the Planning Service or the Northern Ireland Environment Agency. Some work has been commenced to address this deficiency and the MAG aims to bring this area of concern to a conclusion.

### (i c) Criteria for Listing

The MAG responded to the public consultation on criteria for listing of buildings in July 2010.



By kind permission of Marcus Patton OBE

### (ii) Planning Policies

The MAG has made the following representations concerning Planning and Management Policies:

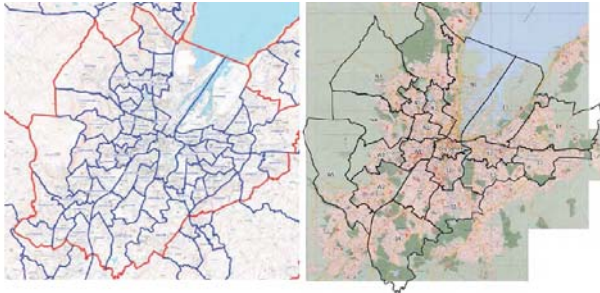
- Public consultation on PPS 21 Sustainable Development in the Countryside



Map 1 – NI Landscape Character Areas

Copyright acknowledgement - see Annex C attached

- Public consultation on Reform of the Planning System in Northern Ireland



Map 2 **Belfast City Places**      Map 3 – **Proposed Belfast Wards**

Copyright acknowledgement - see Annex C attached

- Public consultation on the Management Plan for the Antrim Coast and Glens Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- The draft building heights guidance for Belfast. MAG was invited to comment by the Planning Service which has responsibility for drafting the proposed guidance.



**Belfast from Glenmachan** Photographs by Arthur Acheson

### (iii) Sustainable Development



Fig 3

Sustainable Development is one of the Guiding Principles of the A+BE policy. Through Design Review and advocacy, the MAG is endeavouring to ensure that this principle is applied to all building projects. In October 2009, in Stranmillis University

College the MAG hosted a public symposium, 'Raising Sustainability Expectations' at which the following resolutions were agreed:

1. Sustainable development must be fully integrated into Northern Ireland Government Departments and across society in a structured way;
2. Sustainable development should be included in all planning applications, and thereby into design reviews;
3. Built environment professions should develop more inter-disciplinary working in the context of sustainability; and
4. Built environment professions should produce and disseminate more exemplars of 'the sustainable built environment'.

*MAG has put in place a number of initiatives towards the realisation of these resolutions.*

#### **(iv) Design Quality in Public Sector Procurement**

In 2008 the MAG hosted a symposium on Design Quality in Public Sector Procurement and over the past three years MAG has been engaged in dialogue with the Central Procurement Directorate (CPD).

*The MAG is working with CPD towards the objective of ensuring that procurement policies and procedures routinely deliver excellence in design.*

#### **Future Prioritised Actions**

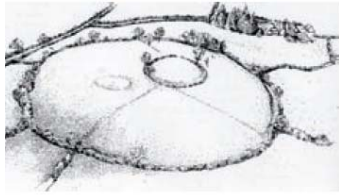
As each prioritised action draws to a conclusion, another will be identified for further action ensuring that the MAG continues to perform a key role in advocating the A+BE policy to Government Departments and agencies, the professional bodies and the wider public.

#### **SYMPOSIA**

Two symposia were held during the first term as noted above:

- i) Design Quality in Public Sector Procurement and
- ii) Raising Sustainability Expectations.

Both seminars were well subscribed. A third symposium, 'Planning for Places' focusing on the transfer of planning functions to councils had been scheduled for April 2010 at Navan, Armagh. However, due to the disruption to air travel caused by the Icelandic volcano eruptions this symposium was postponed to September 2010.



The Planning for Places symposium resolution called for the MAG to assist the DoE with the preparation of the Statement of Community Involvement required under the 2006 Planning (Northern Ireland) Order and co-operative work is in progress.

Fig 4 – **Navan Fort** Copyright and acknowledgement - see Annex C attached

## DESIGN REVIEWS

Design Reviews are described in the A+BE policy as being a key role of the MAG, which conducted twenty five Design Reviews during the first three year term.

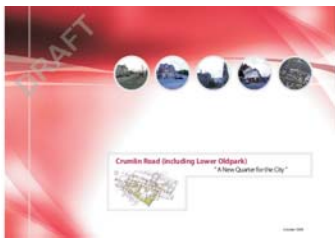


Fig 5 – **Masterplanning**

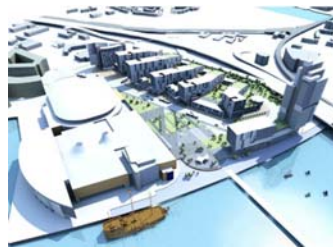


Fig 6 – **Design Review scheme**

Copyright and acknowledgement - see Annex C attached

A draft protocol agreement for Planning Service to consult the MAG on selected planning applications has been developed, under which the Design Unit of the Planning Service refers selected planning applications for Design Review. Other schemes are referred at Pre-Planning Application Discussions where Planning Service officers have recommended some potential applicants to offer projects for review by the MAG.

Pre-planning application requests for Design Review have also emanated from planning consultants, government departments and local councils. Over its first three years, the MAG has witnessed an increasing appreciation of the value of Design Reviews, especially with regard to pre-planning referrals.

Design Review reports on planning applications form part of the Planning Service open files and are accessible to the public. Pre-application referrals offer the project team the option of having the MAG reports restricted to the developer. In these cases, confidentiality is closely maintained.

## DESIGN REVIEW WORKSHOP AND RESULTANT PROCEDURES

During MAG's first term it was realised that the methodology of Design Reviews conducted by other Design Commissions did not necessarily suit Northern Ireland, which needed to tailor its own procedures and approach to Design Review. As a result, a day long Design Review workshop was held in March 2009 attended by MAG members, Expert Advisors and the architect in charge of the Design Unit in the Planning Service. The outcome was agreement on the procedures contained in *'Design Review, A guide to project teams'*, available on the MAG website at [www.dcalni.gov.uk](http://www.dcalni.gov.uk)



## RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER DESIGN COMMISSIONS

A close relationship has been established with Architecture and Design Scotland (A+DS), The Design Commission for Wales, The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) in England and the Department of Heritage and Local Government, Republic of Ireland. The five bodies have met approximately every half year to discuss issues of common interest.



## MID-TERM REPORT

Eighteen months into MAG's first three year term, a mid-term report was written by the Chair with a foreword from the then DCAL Minister Gregory Campbell MP MLA. The report outlined the activities of the MAG from its inception. The report, "Raising Expectations", was launched at a function in Londonderry and is available on the MAG website at [www.dcalni.gov.uk](http://www.dcalni.gov.uk)

## MAG REFORM RECOMMENDATIONS

As the first term drew to a close, the Chair convened a meeting of the MAG to discuss reform recommendations which are currently being considered.

## THE MAG + PLACE



PLACE has an integral role in delivering the A+BE policy action plan. It is the sole architecture and built environment centre in Northern Ireland and was established in 2004 by the Royal Society of Ulster Architects (RSUA) and the Belfast City Council (BCC). MAG member Emily Smyth sits on the board of PLACE to strengthen the connection between the MAG and PLACE. Twice a year the PLACE Director makes a presentation to a MAG meeting to enable the members to be aware of the activities of PLACE and explore potential joint ventures.

*MAG aims to make greater use of the available PLACE resource to advance progress in areas relating to the A+BE policy*

## CONCLUSION

In September 2007, the MAG was launched from a virtual standing start but within a very few months the members had quickly and effectively swung into action. Since then, members have worked with skill and relentless endeavour in pursuit of the promotion of a high quality of Architecture and Built Environment for Northern Ireland.

More important, perhaps, is the manner in which the MAG has gained extensive acknowledgement and respect from the wider community, a laudable achievement which is vital in establishing the effectiveness of its mission. This is probably most evidently, but not exclusively, manifest in the widening source and category of Design Review referrals as described above.

There is however much more to be done. The compelling passion with which the MAG members address their remit is exemplified by the willingness of existing members to serve for another three year term. In doing so they will not only ensure continuity but effectiveness of influence for the benefit of the people of Northern Ireland.

<b>MAG MEMBERS+ Chair</b>	<b>DISCIPLINE</b>	<b>SPECIALISED INTEREST</b>
Arthur Acheson Chair*	Architect & City Planner	Community involvement in design & placemaking
James Donnelly*	Architect	
Diana Fitzsimons*	Town Planner & Planning & Development Surveyor	
Andrew Gault	Architect	Design Procurement
Emily Smyth	Landscape Architect	
Ian McKnight	Architect	Design Review
Marcus Patton	Architect	Architectural Conservation
Alan Strong	Civil Engineer Chartered Environmentalist	Sustainable Development
Tom Woolley	Architect	Sustainable Development

\*Appointed September 2010

<b>EXPERT ADVISORS</b>	<b>DISCIPLINE</b>	<b>SPECIALISED INTEREST</b>
Michael Hegarty	Architect	
Alan Jones	Architect	
Terence McCaw	Architect	
Alex Wright	Architect	Architectural Conservation
Mary Kerrigan	Architect	Architectural Conservation
Gordon Clarke	Landscape Architect	
Grainne Cumming	Architect	Sustainable Development
Trevor Leaker	Architect	Sustainable Development
Richard Partington	Architect	Sustainable Development
James Hennessey	Landscape Architect / Urban Designer	
Ciaran Mackle	Architect / Urban Designer	
Taina Rikala	Urban Designer	
Paul Reynolds	Landscape Architect / Urban Designer	
Ken Sterrett	Town Planner	

## Acknowledgement of Illustrations

- Photograph of Nelson McCausland MLA, Minister of Culture, Arts and Leisure provided by the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure (DCAL)
- Figs 1,2 and 3 taken form the Architecture and Built Environment policy published by DCAL in 2006
- Photograph of Barrie Todd MBE provided by DCAL (Page 3)
- Photograph of Arthur Acheson provided by Arthur Acheson Chair of the Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment (Page 4)

Map 1



Maps 1, 2 and 3.

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Maps 2 and 3



MAP of Belfast City Council's SNAP City Place boundaries and proposals for Belfast Wards

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Note : In using the map of the Boundaries Commissioner's proposals no decision has been made on the boundaries and wards for the proposed 11 new local government districts

Fig 4



Illustration of the Navan Fort site reproduced by kind permission of the Northern Ireland Environment Agency

Fig 5



Illustration reproduced by kind permission of the Department for Social Development

Fig 6



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