

# Conversation about Architecture

## Consultation on the Policy on Architecture

The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government is currently developing a new policy on architecture, overseen by a Steering Committee appointed in 2007 by the Minister of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Mr John Gormley, T.D. The Steering Committee and various associated groups have been working towards identifying important issues that will be key to a future architecture policy.

The next step is to hear the views of the public on how architecture should develop in the coming years. The Irish Architecture Foundation is coordinating a series of nation-wide public meetings during May and June. These events are open to everyone to attend and will take the form of facilitated, round-table discussions.

### Minister's message

Minister of the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Mr John Gormley, T.D.

*'The onus is on us to respond to the changing nature of issues relating to the built environment and, it is in that context, that I approved the development of the new policy. The next stage in the process is this public consultation exercise, which I feel will be critical to the entire undertaking. This will provide the maximum level of public input into the key themes and issues which are emerging as the policy is being developed. A website will also be developed which will act as an additional forum for public engagement.'*

*'The Policy on Architecture will address issues which have arisen in the years since the publication of the first policy on architecture, Action on Architecture 2002-2005. It will place more emphasis on sustainable development of the environment and on urban design and will also aim at incorporating architectural heritage in a holistic, integrated manner. Finally, it will develop an action plan which will respond to, and promote awareness of all those areas.'*

The minister of Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Mr John Gormley, T.D.

## Before our Conversation

*Conversations about Architecture and the Built Environment*

### Introduction

A Government policy on Architecture sets out ways in which Government, through its own direct actions and through the support it can give to other

organisations, can improve the quality of the built environment that shapes many aspects of our lives. The Irish Government launched its first Policy on Architecture in 2002. It is now in the process of updating and revising that policy, to take account of the rapidly changing world in which we live.

The process of developing a new policy has several stages. The first stage involved bringing together a whole range of people with expertise in different aspects of the built environment: professional practice, academia, the public service, the media and specialist organisations, to brainstorm on the issues that the new policy should address. The second stage, which overlaps with the first, is to open the discussions to the public through a series of “*conversations*” and a dedicated website, aimed at seeing what the community thinks about the issues that affect the built environment. The third stage involves writing up a set of actions that the Government can take to bring about the advancement of good architecture. When these have been approved (the fourth stage) in draft form they will be published so that people can express their views on what’s proposed. We hope to complete these four stages by late October this year.

### **History of Government policy on architecture**

In September 1996 the Department of Arts, Culture and the Gaeltacht published a policy discussion document *‘Developing a Government Policy on Architecture: a policy framework and discussion of ideas’*. In May 1997 the Government adopted a formal policy statement in relation to architecture. Following consultation and development, the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands followed up the formal policy statement with a detailed policy document containing objectives and an action plan for architecture, published in April 2002 as *‘Action on Architecture 2002-2005’* .

In October 2007 Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Mr. John Gormley, T.D., announced the development of a new Policy on Architecture. This new Policy on Architecture follows the expiry of the previous policy Action on Architecture 2002-2005  
(*available to download as a PDF at: [www.conversationsaboutarchitecture.ie](http://www.conversationsaboutarchitecture.ie)* ).

The Minister has appointed a Steering Committee with representatives from a broad spectrum of the public and private sectors, who are overseeing development of the policy. The work of the Steering Committee is underpinned by three focus groups, which each specialise on one of the proposed three core themes namely *‘promoting awareness, education and research’*, *‘promoting quality in the built environment’*, and *‘promoting sustainability’*.

### **Promoting Awareness, Education and Research**

Architecture and the built environment as a whole – our buildings, towns and landscapes – have an inescapable effect on our lives. So “*Architecture*” is everyone’s business and we should all have a role in the quality of what gets built.

Good architecture is more likely to be built in a society where people are aware of their rights and responsibilities in its development, and have enough understanding of the process and the possibilities to be able to take part in a genuine dialogue with the people who make the decisions.

The Focus Group on Promoting Awareness, Education and Research will be trying to discover what people think about architecture and what improvements they would like to see in buildings or in the development processes that are changing our environment. We need to find out which existing sources of information people find useful and establish what other supports would be helpful to all the different kinds of people, including the general public, who have a stake in the quality of the environment we all have to live in.

### **Promoting Quality in the Built Environment**

Promoting quality in architecture, an aspiration common to the public and architects alike, means progressing towards a shared understanding of “*quality*”. In an increasingly interdependent, closely connected world, it is appropriate that a more rounded and holistic view is taken of the discipline and art of architecture than might previously have been the case. Architecture must give practical expression to the needs of individuals and communities through the design, organisation and construction of buildings and the conservation and enhancement of architectural heritage. Including both individual buildings and their context, this government policy is structured around the understanding, promotion and realisation of good architecture in that sequence.

Over the last 15 years of greater prosperity, architecture and urban design in Ireland has improved substantially. High standards have been achieved, particularly through public housing and schools programmes and several local authorities have procured very high quality civic buildings, however these form too small a percentage of the whole. Good architecture and urban design is a central issue in the quality of life we all enjoy. The development of a better understanding of architecture will encourage those who commission buildings, and those who are responsible for planning and regulation of the built environment to ensure that the highest standards are set and architecture of the highest quality is produced. This will promote a higher quality built environment to a very significant extent for the nation, enabling it to develop and be conserved for future generations.

### **Promoting Sustainability**

Sustainable architecture provides a challenge that is relevant to everyone. What we build today will be there for a long time to come. Sustainable architecture is about achieving the best in terms of planning, design, efficiency, equal access to all and durable solutions for future circumstances. Sustainable architecture suggests sustainable buildings: buildings that are well designed, energy efficient and that provide flexibility for the user. However, sustainability is as much about where we locate buildings as how we design them. It is about cultural, social and economic issues as much as about energy efficiency, and avoiding unwarranted waste of resources across those areas of life. One thing is certain: our architecture will change in response to new circumstances and priorities. For example, how to design good architecture is likely to depend on how our climate will change.

Case studies of exemplary, sustainable buildings can offer inspiration and can play an important role in increasing general awareness about good architecture. It could be argued, however, that the most sustainable building is the building that *‘does not have to be built because it is already there’*. Does sustainable archi-

tecture mean: buildings that last and that are flexible for different type of requirements in the future? Should there be a general presumption against demolition of existing buildings, even where the replacement building has a higher energy or density performance?

## Questions

Those attending the public '*Conversations about Architecture and the Built Environment*' are invited to consider the following questions:

1. What are the factors of importance in the development of good buildings and a good built environment, with the built environment including dwellings, infrastructure, public buildings and public spaces? And what are the factors that make the design of the built environment good or bad?
2. There is much talk currently about sustainability. What do you think this means in the context of architecture and the built environment?
3. What is your understanding of what architecture is?
4. How do you think personal choices impact on the built environment?
5. In Europe, more people are now living in urbanised areas than in rural areas. Why do you think this is?
6. What in your opinion would justify retaining or demolishing old buildings?
7. Over a 5, 10 or 20 year period, what can be done that will help to create a better built environment?
8. Any other questions or issues which you wish to raise?

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## Meeting dates

Thursday, 29th May	Galway Mayo Institute of Technology, Dublin Road, Galway
Tuesday, 3rd June,	Museum of Treasures, Waterford City
Wed, 4th June	Lewis Glucksman Gallery, University College, Western Road, Cork
Thursday, 5th June	Limerick City Gallery of Art, Pery Square, Limerick
Monday, 9 th June	The Dock, Carrick on Shannon, Leitrim
Tuesday, 10th June,	Athlone Civic Centre, Athlone, Co. Westmeath
Wed, 11th June	Fingal County Hall, Swords, Co Dublin.
Thurs, 12 th June	The Ark, Temple Bar, Dublin 2°

Meetings begin at 6.30pm and end at 8.30pm

Refreshments served at 6.00pm

° Dublin City meeting will begin at the earlier time of 5pm and end at 7pm

Refreshments served at 4.30pm

Places are limited for all of these events and must be reserved.

*For information, please call*

**Mary Colette Sheehan** Event Manager

*at the Irish Architecture Foundation: (01) 670 8621 or (087) 252 1469*

**Please refer to the web site for more information:**

[www.conversationsaboutarchitecture.ie](http://www.conversationsaboutarchitecture.ie)