



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

House of Lords Select Committee on National Policy for the Built Environment

Evidence from MAG

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HOUSE OF LORDS SELECT COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL POLICY FOR THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Evidence from MAG

MAG is Northern Ireland's Ministerial Advisory Group established in 2007 under the Architecture and Built Environment Policy to advise the Minister for Culture, Arts and Leisure as the government's design champion.

http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/index/arts.../ministerial_advisory_group.htm

MAG presents the following evidence in response to the questions posed by the House of Lords Select Committee on National Policy for the Built Environment.

Although devolution means that the Select Committee's findings and recommendations will relate primarily to England, MAG's experience in a recently reformed system of local government and planning may be of relevance.

Some principles that have been developed and promoted by MAG's work appear to resonate with issues identified by the Select Committee and may offer a different approach that may inform the Committee's work.

Providing evidence in relation to the Select Committee's questions is also useful to MAG in advising on the continuing review of the Architecture and Built Environment Policy for Northern Ireland, which is now over nine years old.

On behalf of MAG we present a six page summary of our answers to questions, including some internet links that amplify the answers.

MAG advises that we must '*Connect the unexpected – and sometimes the obvious – by **design***'.

MAG would be pleased to provide further detail and additional references about its evidence, upon request.

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Policymaking, integration and coordination

1. *Are the decisions that shape England's built environment taken at the right administrative level? What role should national policymakers play in shaping our built environment, and how does this relate to the work and role of local authorities and their partners?*

MAG Evidence 1A:

The Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) had a remit: 'Design, Manage, Maintain'. MAG invited CABE to present at a symposium in Navan, County Armagh in 2010, 'Planning for Places', and found psychological benefit in reversing the word sequence to 'Maintain, Manage, Design'.

MAG Evidence 1B:

Maintain + manage = 'stewardship' (defined by the Social Capital Group in Boston USA as 'active caring'). 'Civic' suggests people *and* places. The Social Capital Group offers us three techniques, '*action learning*', '*connecting*' and '*aligning*'. MAG used these with District Councils and launched an interim report at a Belfast symposium in 2013.

http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/civic_stewardship_symposium_-_interim_report_-_final.pdf

Stewardship can be tried out very quickly to inform and develop the '*software*' of a place. The software needs to be designed just as its '*hardware*' (its built form) is designed. The potential for change is rapid and universally accessible. Changing software is a quick, cheap, easy and reversible way to improve all places, from the worst to the best. Understanding the '*place software*' can then *inform* the physical design. This makes for better design briefs.

MAG Evidence 1C

Successful delivery of civic places requires wide-ranging organisations and individuals to have common objectives. For larger initiatives, this requires *alignment* of departmental and community priorities. Development of the Masterplan for Colin Town Centre, through the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) Urban Village Programme, demonstrated the benefit of a 'national' policy providing the context within which a number of public departments/authorities were required to work together to make the area a 'priority'. The active and passionate involvement of the community was galvanised by the expectation that the much needed changes were likely to be realised and that they as a community were central partners.

2. *How well is policy coordinated across those Government departments that have a role to play in matters such as housing, design, transport, infrastructure, sustainability and heritage? How could integration and coordination be improved?*

MAG Evidence 2A:

During a period of Planning Reform in 2008 an independent expert, Professor Greg Lloyd, advised the Minister for the Environment in Northern Ireland, calling on government, professions and society to adopt a more collegiate approach. MAG wanted to know more. After detailed experimental work, MAG defined collegiality as '*Organically changing leadership and support in pursuit of a shared objective, retaining the independence of all participants.*' The model is the geese crossing a great ocean in V-formation. All the birds are independent but in flight the flock is measured as 80% more efficient than a bird flying alone. It is physically not possible for a lone bird to make the journey, but by changing onerous leadership and less onerous support organically during the flight, a flock of birds flies non-stop for thousands of miles. *There is always one in the lead but it is not always the same one.*

MAG Evidence 2B:

MAG now uses *collegiality* to *lead* where appropriate and *support* where possible. Such leadership and support allows MAG to support organisations who have devoted much time to researching a particular topic (for example an urban road junction layout or a procurement issue) and to naturally lead on other areas (such as its work on civic stewardship with small, cheap or free interventions making a huge difference to places in even a single day). Mentoring on areas where MAG has demonstrated leadership can then be provided strategically to central government, local authorities and the private, voluntary and community sectors.

MAG Evidence 2C:

There is significant evidence that the application of joined-up policy requires strong leadership, not just of an organisation, but through the passion, skill and commitment of a '*champion*' who can come from the public, private or community sector. Northern Ireland examples include leaders, in places such as Laganside and Connswater and in the adaptive re-use of heritage buildings by the private sector, who have been prominent '*champions*'. All are adept at solving problems and removing impediments to projects, in a way that '*organisations*' are not. It is important to recognise that the energy required to be a '*champion*' is not unending and therefore the *collegiate* approach to succession is vitally important.

National policy for planning and the built environment

3. *Does the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provide sufficient policy guidance for those involved in planning, developing and protecting the built and natural environment? Are some factors within the NPPF more important than others? If so, what should be prioritised and why?*

MAG Evidence 3A:

Northern Ireland does not have a NPPF; instead it has a series of Planning Policy Statements which will gradually be replaced by a single Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) that was launched on 28 September 2015. MAG support for the NI Department of the Environment led to the inclusion in the SPPS of specific references to urban and civic stewardship. MAG's advocacy during the consultation on the SPPS recommended that a hierarchy of principles be adopted in the SPPS under the *Guiding Principle* – 'the Planning Authority must operate in the public interest', followed by a further *Hierarchy of Principles*, the importance of *firstly* eco-systems, *secondly* people, *thirdly* places and *only fourthly* policies, legislation and regulations, including economics and transport. This allows evidence for the decision to be measured to respect the public interest, which is of course *ultimately a political and legislative decision*. This approach may be helpful in considering the shape of any future NPPF. It is noted that there is currently a policy vacuum, in relation to the lack of a Land Strategy. This is considered important as the means of articulating a shared understanding of how competing and complementary land uses can be reconciled in spatial planning terms.

4. *Is national planning policy in England lacking a spatial perspective? What would be the effects of introducing a spatial element to national policy?*

MAG Evidence 4A:

Spatial planning is about the quality of places and how they might stay the same or change for better or worse. It depends on spatial appreciation. This is best achieved by *being there* – not only at times that specialised expert consultants may appear during the working day but also at other times – in the long summer evenings, on a rowdy weekend, during a cold spell when communications may be reduced, waiting for a bus, or helping a lost soul with directions when the satnav hasn't worked properly. In other words, local people are the experts. What is good in this place and should not be interfered with? What is bad here and needs urgent attention? What changes can happen immediately with a change of habits? Which changes need longer?

MAG Evidence 4B:

MAG has shown officials and elected representatives that change (including a change of attitude) can happen very quickly. A recent 'Six week Ward Vision' brought together local people to explore their place; they reported in 'six weeks'. They wanted a sensory garden to brighten the lives of children with autism. When they heard that normal timescale for a new public garden would be about 12 years they agreed that sensory *wheelbarrows* in the main street could be a good experimental start. By Week 2, the planted barrows were there with lovely signs saying they were a gift to the townspeople from the children's autism society. *Why wait?* Plants, including sensory plants, grow and reproduce. Perhaps there will be more sensory barrows or a sensory Main Street, well before the normal 12 year timescale because people '*just make it happen*' and '*don't take "No!" for an answer*'.

5. *Is there an optimum timescale for planning our future built environment needs and requirements? How far ahead should those involved in the development of planning and built environment policy be looking?*

MAG Evidence 5A:

All timescales can be taken into account. Action Learning happens in *a single day*. MAG's civic stewardship interim report describes over 30 techniques. Some already exist, some are new, instant and free and some are low cost but take a little longer. In many places, knowledge and skills have been gained from generations of good stewardship but designers often miss or dismiss these. They can instead be appreciated, encouraged and developed by design professionals – provided they take time to look for them. They can find out how places work, not by 'consultation' but by *involvement*, and by using the civic stewardship technique of '*connecting*'. Skilled designers can gain huge benefits by, for example, trying out a street closure to see how it feels to sit there. It might feel cold and windy most of the time, so maybe fixed benches are a waste of time; perhaps tables and chairs should only be brought out on great summer days. Now, with some direct action learning, can we talk to shopkeepers, councillors, officials and residents about this? Having *learned by action* and having *connected*, is there anything we now need to *align*? Were there obstacles that need a change of software? Do we need to involve the police, traffic wardens, street cleaners, event managers and restaurateurs? Do we need to change the by-laws or is legislation required to align experimental findings with policy and practice? Action learning is quick. Connecting takes a bit longer. Aligning may take months or years. But all create and build upon real evidence, not designers' surmises or their bright illustrations.

There is an urgent need for those tasked with delivering regeneration to think differently about the process of spatial planning and how to effect the desired changes. It is important to plan change relative to timing holistically. A Masterplan is important to inform strategic decisions, facilitating the delivery of meanwhile uses, interim uses and the long-term vision, recognising that at *any and every point in that process* there should be good stewardship that involves people and creates a *continuing* sense of place.

Buildings and places: New and old

6. *What role should the Government play in seeking to address current issues of housing supply? Are further interventions, properly coordinated at central Government level, required? What will be the likely effect upon housing supply of recent reforms proposed for the planning system?*

MAG Evidence 6A:

There are many empty houses in England and across the UK. Depending on their location they may have become affordable but unpopular. Civic Stewardship (active caring for people and places) can help. Firstly, by *using* and thereby *maintaining* places, often with simple cheap techniques that are implemented by local people with modest encouragement, the perception of a street, square or rural place can be changed. Suddenly places feel brighter, less intimidating, lose their 'run down' appearance and become places where people may actively choose to live and work. Secondly, by *managing* places, perceptions can change quickly. Belfast city centre is positively different during its annual 'Culture Night', for example. Two 'European Heritage Open Days' open a church at unexpected times – presenting true delight in places for little or no cost. Where districts with houses in public ownership have become 'unpopular', there are schemes such as 'homesteading' which have been successfully employed to avoid demolition and conditionally devolve responsibility for properties to new 'repairing owners' to agreed standards which can include sustainable renovation. Self-build housing can be encouraged. All this software has already been designed and is fully operable. The next design brief is to make the software available in a local and timely manner to people who care about their places. '*Housing crisis – 1 million new homes pledged*' is today's headline - but '*new home*' does not necessarily mean '*new build*'. Providing a million new homes may just need a *more intelligent use* of our huge stock of underused and empty existing buildings. Artists in lofts in New York showed us how.

Public authorities could give active organisations guidance on *removing obstacles*, such as how to obtain public liability insurance for just a pound or two per day on an annual basis. Designers can be encouraged to *appreciate* the software *that already exists* for events and activities and contribute to making it more widely available. Any physical designs that follow can be *informed* by appreciating the operational systems of the place, making possible designs that respond to *actual proven usage*. During this process, people learn to use places creatively and have been given *permission* and encouragement to do so. It is not hard to imagine that with such well used places, leading to better design, public and private sector employers will see a place in a new light and *want* to locate in attractive and perhaps *unusual* or previously 'unfashionable' places with plenty of land and even lots of empty houses. Not everyone needs to live in the 'hot spots' where demand exceeds supply. Jobs and other necessities of life locating in and beside places where there is an oversupply of housing (not because they are forced to but because they *want* to – *fashion* – remember?) naturally helps to *balance the supply and demand* for housing, creating greater affordability and reducing the inflationary pressures on currently popular housing areas because there are indeed *choices that work* elsewhere. Government in particular, as a large employer, can encourage far fewer people to sit in rows at computers in offices and can instead design new ways to use improved communications, including the vast scope for remote working, as part of place making. If a support (or 'back') office can be located in the Far East, it can certainly be located in the 'near north', west, or east of the country, where housing is available and affordable. Digital start-ups have taught us to work *differently*. Housing in rural communities requires careful consideration. Strategic decisions are required in relation to those places where population centres should be planned to grow, relative to sustaining or underpinning the case for a new facility, such as a school or health centre. This must also relate to the planning of and investment in rural public transport infrastructure, either public transport or one of the many schemes for sharing private transport by trusted friends and neighbours. So *building trust* is just as important as building roads or houses – '*active caring for people and places*'.

7. *How do we develop built environments which are sustainable and resilient, and what role should the Government play in any such undertaking? Will existing buildings and places be able to adapt to changing needs and circumstances in the years to come? How can the best use of existing housing stock and built environment assets be made?*

MAG Evidence 7A:

At normal rates of development, over half the built environment and almost all big infrastructure will still be here in 50 years' time. It is not therefore a question of *developing* built environments that are sustainable and resilient but rather of *using* our built environments better to *make* them sustainable and resilient. The government should creatively promote the multi-functionality of places at different times and seasons and simply not accept 'single function' anything. This applies equally to rural and urban areas and to large and small settlements.

MAG Evidence 7B:

MAG was asked to advise whether an upper floor of a former factory would offer a suitable location for a proposed 'Cultural Hub' in a community which had 'no resources'. Yes, MAG's architect found that the accommodation would meet the requirements. However, MAG advised looking at alternatives. Unbelievably, in spite of having 'no resources', there was a youth club just across the road which was *unused before 3.30pm* each weekday. Around the corner was a brand new school that was *not used after 3.30pm* on weekdays and on weekends. The local place *had* public resources but each was being managed independently, by a different public agency. Proper local management, along the lines of 'One Public Estate' could readily accommodate the proposed Cultural Hub with *no extra buildings*.

MAG Evidence 7C:

In complete contrast to 7B, another school was visited where the *school secretary* had identified an unused piece of land in the school grounds, contacted local people to find out their needs, applied for and obtained external funding, overseen the installation of a new floodlit artificial grass pitch with changing rooms, included a bowling place for older accompanying adults and set up the management system to have an employee available for evening and weekend use by the local community. This used *already available insurances* and is a community pitch with a small cost per user and a little extra for floodlighting at night. *Places must learn from each other's stories*.

MAG Evidence 7D:

MAG responded to a public consultation on the handover of 'Off Street Car Parks' (mostly in town centres) from central to local government during the recent reform of public administration.

http://www.dcalni.gov.uk/drd_off_street_parking_bill_consultation_-_mag_response_-_finalised.pdf

MAG pointed out that these are *not just* 'off street car parks' but are in fact valuable 'public open spaces', often in critical central locations, that happen to have been used to park cars for perhaps 60 of the available 168 hours per week. So if a place is needed for midnight soccer or to have a market or to run an art show or an exhibition, why are 'car park rules' applied for all 168 hours? The *natural* environment is not mono-functional and MAG has developed a principle of challenging single functionality in the *built* environment, saying 'No more single function **anything** please....'

8. *To what extent do we make optimum use of the historic environment in terms of future planning, regeneration and place-making? How can more be made of these national assets?*

MAG Evidence 8A:

Resources are devoted centrally in Northern Ireland every year to developing and enhancing the *software* to open hundreds of great buildings for two days for 'European Heritage Open Days'. Yet the software is not made available to local passionate communities of interest who could multiply the attendance at these historic places by many times throughout the year, all with voluntary endeavour or at a very low cost of some essential expenses only.

MAG Evidence 8B:

'City Tour £4' was printed on the back of his red anorak. People followed him, listened to his words of wisdom, charm and wisecracks and paid him £4 each. When he died recently, he had over 30 colleagues with similar anoraks and he had made a business out of the city and its ancient walls, enhancing the experience of the place for citizens, visitors and tourists alike. Some of this stuff is *really easy*, really obvious, but *missed* by serious public authorities in the melee of policies, projects and..... politics.

Skills and design

9. *Do the professions involved in this area (e.g. planners, surveyors, architects, engineers etc.) have the skills adequately to consider the built environment in a holistic manner? How could we begin to address any skills issues? Do local authorities have access to the skills and resources required to plan, shape and manage the built environment in their areas?*

MAG Evidence 9A:

The professions need to understand *collegiality* as described in MAG Evidence 2A and 2B. The essential requirement to maintain the detailed professional skillsets has to be augmented by developing a shared client and designer ethos that *encourages and rewards challenge* in the public interest. *Earlier deployment of design professionals* into projects enables creative challenge before the investment in a project has made it financially irreversible. Indeed government recognises that the 'million pound mistake is made on day one'. 'Day one' is often before the appointment of a *designer*. Procurement advice offered to clients needs to recognise the benefit of design input from the earliest recognition that a project may be forthcoming. Future terms of appointment should *require and include* sufficient funding for designers to challenge the brief as given. Currently, designers are often appointed *too late* to challenge and have little opportunity to look 'beyond the red line' of the site ascribed to the development. *Bad briefs lead to poor design quality*, frustrate designers and produce a downward spiral of aspiration, resulting in the all too typical disjointed and depressing environments which sterilise valuable land behind locked gates or barriers in the name of the single function of being a 'Health Centre Car Park' or a 'School Grounds'. Such places create fear after dark, encourage bad behaviour and cause ill health. Their underuse is wasteful and they do not inspire joy or delight. Mixed use schemes may appear to be more complex to initiate and manage but evidence shows that those parts of the city which

are mixed use areas, operational for perhaps 18 hours a day, 7 days a week, are safer, brighter, happier and more efficient than single use places that close up at 6.00pm and need 'security' – more costs and more waste because the real issues are not tackled and fences are seen as a 'solution'.

Procurement processes are inherently restrictive, seeking to avoid change and yet at the brief-writing stage it is unlikely that a Client will have a full understanding of the potential of a project. Procurement should facilitate flexibility to prototype, test, learn and inform designs in an iterative way that is currently not required or encouraged and therefore *unlikely to happen*. This would save time and money, but requires assured, experienced *clients* who understand the skills and benefits that the various professions bring to the project and who are capable of managing, rather than avoiding change. Local and central government authorities need to be those '*clients*', in the public interest.

10. Are we using the right tools and techniques to promote high quality design and 'place-making' at the national level? How could national leadership on these matters be enhanced?

MAG Evidence 10A:

MAG responses to government consultations indicate continuously that decisions are taken on a project by project basis with timing to expend funding within a certain financial year being a *most important determinant* of a project's perceived 'success'. This has led to a senior government official in regeneration stating that the application of funding is not to achieve regeneration but instead to account appropriately for funding expended during a specific period. Indeed the term '*accounting officer*' is often applied to the most senior person in a public sector organisation, confirming the perceived supreme importance of accounting for expenditure.

MAG Evidence 10B:

MAG discovered that one town is seeking the creation of a new public square while a similar town is saying that its new public square *should be taken away* because it is causing anti-social behaviour, including being a place for drug dealing. The reason is of course that the *hardware* of the new square was built (likely on time and on budget....) with a covered stage, stage lighting, storage, toilets, disabled access, natural stone walls and copper roofs, but without any associated development of *software, no programming, no events, no advice for users* about insurance etc. and prospective honest and well organised users were discouraged from using the square by being told that they *needed* £10 million of public liability insurance, *without being told how to get it*.

It is usual for a place to become a regeneration focus for a moment in time. A 'Masterplan' is developed, which supports investment in a priority project, subsequently delivered. There is a lack of stamina to continue the process, continually referring back to the Masterplan and the next steps. As the place changes, the Masterplan should be updated, to continue to be relevant. There is a tendency to not keep Masterplans up to date and they become forgotten and ultimately irrelevant, rather than continually evolving and providing the strategic vision for a place and its people. A Village Plan in Glenariff included a '*Village Handbook*' for people to keep, so like the '*Captain's Log*' it is updated. There is a reluctance to programme revenue funding for public realm projects. This can lead to projects being delivered, with the best intentions and with intended uses in mind, but it is essential that there is continued investment in the form of personnel and funding, to continue to care for the place and promote opportunities for uses, including ones which had not been foreseen at the outset. Such investment can most effectively involve *stewardship volunteers every week*, like the Audubon Society's work in USA.

Community involvement and community impact

11. Do those involved in delivering and managing our built environment, including decision-makers and developers, take sufficient account of the way in which the built environment affects those who live and work within it? How could we improve consideration of the impacts of the built environment upon the mental and physical health of users, and upon behaviours within communities?

MAG Evidence 11A:

MAG worked closely with Ulster University who analysed public consultation for a new public open space in Belfast. It was found that in just three hours of trying out the open space experimentally, over 30% of the reported responses were received. During this concentrated period of creative consultation, real people did ordinary things like having lunch, playing music, drawing and reading poetry. This compares very favourably with the remaining 12 weeks of 'normal' consultation when illustrative boards were placed in public places and written comments invited. The experimental real use of the space led to the identification of significant issues with the proposed design, including proposals for fixed seating in cold, windy places and a giant screen that blocked sunlight from the space. In effect, the conclusion of the experiment was that *the open space should be redesigned for more active uses*. This could have been discovered much earlier in the process; the design brief would have been realistic from the start, saving time, money and resources and producing a workable city place with a good chance of success.

MAG Evidence 11B:

MAG's creative consultation techniques achieved more responses in a single day than the standard illustrative boards achieved in 12 weeks and tested the actual effects on the town centre of closing a street on a Saturday afternoon.

MAG Evidence 11C:

MAG agreed with Northern Ireland's Strategic Investment Board that consultation processes were too static, too rigid, too unimaginative and too uninvolving to be of any real benefit to a project. SIB commissioned MAG to prepare a Creative Consultation Toolkit which is now available on line. It comprises a pdf document that simply describes good consultation and its methodologies, a section with exemplary case studies that is easily updated to a template, a check list for consultation requirements at various stages of a project and a calculator that allows financial and time resource costs of good consultation to be assessed early so that its cost can be properly allocated in total project cost estimates. <http://toolkit.creativityni.org/>

12. How effectively are communities able to engage with the process of decision making that shapes the built environment in which they live and work? Are there any barriers to effective public engagement and, if so, how might they be addressed?

MAG Evidence 12A:

MAG proved that consultation processes can be creatively adapted even a month before the consultation begins. The creative consultation process in a town centre public realm scheme indicated that people can be directly involved with their place with very positive effects. Finding over 400 passionate communities of interest (as distinct from local communities) in a town of 30,000 people was an immense realisation of the pool of interest and talent there is *everywhere*. Discovering that over 100 of these passionate communities of interest were arts groups led to a 150 event arts festival stretching across 4 months and allowing people to interact with their town centre in the evenings when it had been previously underused.

MAG Evidence 12B:

The nicest part was that the council arts officer's rather *beautiful chalk graphic design*, drawn on a plain blue background to announce the arts festival, was removed by another branch of the council, presuming it was *graffiti*.....

MAG Evidence 12C:

Blackboards improvised with sandpaper, primer and blackboard paint on existing display panels announced (and enabled *citizens* to announce) cultural and other events in a town centre. The blackboards won an all-Ireland award for arts marketing (total materials cost was under £40) and the blackboard chalk is washed off every time it rains (no cost for washing). <http://www.voluntaryarts.org/2014/03/24/creative-citizens-programme-launch-ballymena/>

MAG Evidence 12D:

'*Did you get permission?*' my wife (a former school teacher) asked when I told her I had been playing badminton outdoors with our grandson in the city centre pedestrian areas with a net strung up between bollards. Total cost was £10 for a kids' badminton set and net. Did we need permission? Who knows? Who cares? We did no harm; we had fun and entertained others too.

Financial measures

13. Are there fiscal or financial measures potentially available which would help to address current issues of housing and land supply? Are there financial or other mechanisms that would encourage better design and place-making by private sector developers?

MAG Evidence 13A:

'Housing' and 'land supply' issues are all *connected* to a much wider range of factors, vary dramatically across the country and are driven by people's perceptions of the desirability of places to live and work and the choices that they can make. Mobility varies according to circumstances. Many people in this country see themselves as fixed to their place because of history, family, work and other social reasons. Migration happens within countries, continents and beyond, affecting and being affected by housing and land supply. People move to find the best possible combination of good work and decent living conditions in acceptable places. Government can encourage *better places* as noted in MAG Evidence 6A. Technology means that people can work from more remote places where housing supply and land supply are not issues. Finding new ways to work is therefore a most significant financial opportunity. Reducing journeys to work can be achieved by devising systems that use electronic communications rather than physical travel. Living affordably in a good place (or in a place which can be *made good* by better stewardship) creates a fairer and better country with fewer 'crises'. Available and affordable connectivity is a significant investment opportunity for government and communities. No part of the country should have to struggle with low speed or no broadband. Satellite systems are unreliable, lack privacy and are expensive. Individuals in the north of England have produced a scheme known as 'Broadband for the Rural North' to help to remove the 'digital divide'. "*The purpose of the project is to take a new approach to the ownership, financial and deployment models used traditionally, and still proposed by, telecommunications companies.*" <http://b4rn.org.uk/#sthash.6nocDif2.dpuf> Installing fibre optic cables to 'remote' places in the north of England can help the 'housing crisis' in the south east – *connecting the unexpected – by design*.

**Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland
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