

Inquiry into Building a United Community:

Inquiry by Committee for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.
Response of the **Landscape Institute Northern Ireland (LINI)**.

9 Oct 2014

The Landscape Institute is the chartered institute in the United Kingdom for Landscape Architects, incorporating Designers, Managers, and Scientists, concerned with conserving and enhancing the environment. The Landscape Institute promotes the highest standards in the practice of landscape planning, design, management and research, and represents members in private practice, at all levels of government and government agencies, in academic institutions and in commercial organisations.

The Landscape Institute is an educational charity and chartered body whose purpose is to protect, conserve and enhance the natural and built environment for the benefit of the public. It champions well-designed and well-managed urban and rural landscape. The Landscape Institute's accreditation and professional procedures ensure that the designers, managers and scientists who make up the landscape architecture profession work to the highest standards. Its advocacy and education programmes promote the landscape architecture profession as one which focuses on design, environment and community in order to inspire great places where people want to live, work and visit. The Landscape Institute is committed to the principles of sustainable development by improving the quality of design of urban and rural environments and to the protection and enhancement of our physical and natural environments.

The Landscape Institute Northern Ireland branch (LINI) represents the professional membership within Northern Ireland and is particularly concerned with design, management and planning for the protection, conservation and enhancement of the natural and built environment of Northern Ireland.

NOTE:

As members of Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) we separately endorse and echo the comments and response prepared and submitted by that organization.

However we also include a number of further specific comments for consideration below.

Inquiry Terms of Reference

- Explore perspectives on sectarianism, division and good relations including:
 - an examination of theory and practice with regard to good relations, shared space and shared services;
 - consideration of best practice, both locally and internationally, in bringing divided communities together, and in developing shared space and shared services;
- Seek views on what good relations means and how sectarianism and division can be addressed, with a particular focus on the challenges at interface areas, both urban and rural. This might include:
 - seeking views on what issues need to be addressed in order for interface barriers to be removed;
 - examining the role of communities in policy and decision making in relation to community integration and particularly, the removal of interface barriers; and
 - consideration of the effectiveness of the Good Relations Indicators in monitoring and measuring the progress of government interventions.
- Make recommendations in order to support and enhance policy and decision-making with regard to building a united community, including on actions to tackle sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance, and to help deliver the Executive's commitment on removing interface barriers.

LINI Key Messages

1 **Expertise**

Landscape Institute Northern Ireland welcomes this timely Inquiry by the committee which clearly recognises that considered shared space forms an essential component in delivering a peaceful democratic shared future.

As design professionals specialising in external spatial design, Chartered Landscape Architects work in all areas of the outdoor environment, indeed it is members of our profess who are responsible for the creation and delivery of many of Northern Irelands most successful external environments and Shared Spaces.

Recent High Profile Landscape Architect led designs include:

- The Connswater Community Greenway, East Belfast
- Landscape Character Assessment NI
- FE McWilliams Sculpture Museum, NI
- Castle Gardens, Lisburn
- Omagh Town Centre.
- Belfast Streets Ahead.
- Custom House Square, Belfast
- Ebrington Barracks, Derry
- Belfast Waterfront.

LINI believe our chartered professionals are best placed to deliver the physical requirements of positive shared space through appropriate design development, consultation and community engage. Landscape Architecture is a cross cutting discipline focused on delivery of Green Infrastructure and sustainable places.

Our Institute has researched and published several valuable position papers in recent years which collectively focus on the benefits which good sustainable design and integrated spatial planning can deliver.

Recent examples include:

- Green Infrastructure (An Integrated approach to Land Use
- Housing (Creating good living Environments)
- Landscape and Public Health
- Water – (Sustainable water management)

2 **Resources**

LINI believe that in Northern Ireland when compared to the rest of the UK our profession is seriously under represented within public sector which weakens our potential to adequately address the issues raised in the Inquiry.

We consider RPA an oppportunity to reposition the profession to best assist with delivery of the majority of objectives set out within this Inquiry.

We would welcome endorsement at central government level to ensure that the new local authorities secure the resources (personnel) to develop strategies which would phase out contested space and in turn deliver positive shared future for all society.

3 Education

LINI are aware that greater education is required regarding the benefits of good spatial design and shared space; we seek resources and support to educate these messages at all levels, from communities and schools, through to civil servants and elected representatives.

We believe there is a significant gap at tertiary education level in Northern Ireland, with no school currently specialising in external spatial design and addressing the issues raised in the Inquiry. Those wishing to become professionals in this field continue to travel to mainland UK, Republic of Ireland or elsewhere.

4 Policy Framework

LINI welcome the recent publication of 'Living Places' – (which our members were instrumental in preparing)

This forms an excellent starting point for the development and stewardship of our urban environments, however LINI are concerned that this document needs to form part of an overarching strategy and cultural attitude towards all our the Landscapes and Places.

LINI believe it is essential that a 'National Landscape Strategy' similar to the Republic of Ireland is developed for Northern Ireland in support of planning (designing), managing and conserving our spatial environments.

NOTE: In this context the LINI adopt the definition of 'Landscape' as referred to in the European Landscape Convention to which Northern Ireland is signatory.

"Landscape" means an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors;

This refers to 'All Landscapes' from small scale despoiled urban landscapes and spaces, through to large expanses of designated rural landscapes such as AONBs

With a coherent and strong framework in place in the form of a National Landscape Strategy, combined with education and resources for community engagement, we believe that we can deliver better shared living environments.

LINI is celebrating its 50th year as a profession in Northern Ireland and over the course of that period have witnessed a significant demise of our public sector membership mirroring general government attitude towards the provision, maintenance & durability of our landscapes and quality external space.

However in the lead up to Local Government reform resulting for the RPA process, we believe there is potential to address obvious gaps which exist within the current structures by building capacity and recognition within the new local authority regime.

As a profession we are working very hard towards this, highlighting not only the valuable work which our members undertake, but emphasising the essential contribution experienced Landscape professionals have and can bring to the new authorities.

Landscape Institute Northern Ireland

Currently Belfast City Council and Derry City Council are the only local authorities which directly employ Chartered Landscape Architects. The Landscape Institute strongly believe that each of the new authorities should seriously consider the value of directly employing /engaging at least one experienced professional to be a 'Head of Profession' with a remit to assist preparation of development plans; to writing procurement briefs; to assist with community / neighbourhood planning; to prepare open space audits; to identify improvement projects and strategies as part of a spatial planning approach; to assist planning official assess applications for 'Good design' standards; to encourage development of local green infrastructure; to enforce permissions; to assist with community and neighbourhood level engagement and ultimately assist the new local authorities become an intelligent client.

5 Shared Space through Collaboration

Landscape Architecture is a unique profession at the interface between people and natural systems. It is rooted in an understanding of how the environment works and what makes each place unique. A key feature of the profession is its ability to deliver a range of social, environmental and economic benefits at the same time. This represents an approach to development and placemaking which makes the most of our landscapes and townscapes.

LINI believe that our design professionals working with planning officials, communities and other stakeholders have the necessary skill set to assist with the mediation of the difficult challenges set within this Inquiry.

We would welcome an opportunity to present our position papers directly to the committee and discuss specifically scenarios and case studies which have involved our members in the successful design and delivery of shared space and breakdown social, religious and racial division both locally and internationally.

We would specifically like to discuss further how our members could be better placed to assist with the Committees Inquiry objectives, and how limited resources can be best distributed to contribute positively to the delivery of potential solutions to these complex challenges.

The Landscape Institute Northern Ireland branch would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this Inquiry.

For further communication and future consultations, please contact:

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