

# Revitalising Ireland's Towns The RIAI Perspective

By Carole Pollard, RIAI President



## Presentation Overview

- RIAI **Policies** for Revitalising Towns and Villages
- RIAI **Initiatives** for Revitalising Towns and Villages
- The RIAI **Town Colloquium** Series
- The RIAI **Town and Village Toolkit**



Westport, Public Realm and Sculpture – Winner of the RIAI Public Choice Award 2016

## Why Thriving Towns Matter

*All Irish towns have the potential to be beautiful places. Places where families can thrive and go about their daily lives as part of a vibrant community. For towns to survive we need to live in them, and that in turn will make them live.*

*Beautiful towns bring inward investment, attract shoppers and day trippers, bring in tourists and generate a strong sense of community. The common driver of purpose and of beauty is the occupation of the town's buildings by shops, by cultural uses, by commercial enterprises, but most importantly by people.*

## RIAI Policy for Thriving Towns

*To create sustainable communities in our cities, suburbs and in small towns and villages, we must look to create 'urban villages', making greater use of vacant land or under-utilised sites for new housing or community services. The key is variety.*

(RIAI Policy 1 'Create Sustainable Communities', *RIAI Housing Policy*)



Clonalkilty, Emmett Square –  
Winner RIAI Public Choice Award 2014



## Reasons for Town Decline

- Inertia in the face of the erosion of our traditional urban fabric is one of the key contributing factors to the current housing crisis.
- Vacant and redundant buildings – as a result of consolidation of retail centres on town peripheries and the migration of families to homes outside town centres – has resulted in much of our built heritage being consigned to a ghostly existence.
- Complexity and conflicting regulations regarding the adaptation of existing buildings.

## RIAI Policies for Thriving Towns and Villages



POLICY

2016

### A NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE STRATEGY FOR IRELAND

RESEARCHED AND PUBLISHED BY THE RIAI





## ***RIAI Policy – A National Infrastructure Strategy for Ireland***

### **RIAI Calls for Architects in all Local Authorities**

- The quality of our built environment has significant impact on the quality of our lives.
- Improving quality of life, social cohesion and the integration of communities is already part of government policy.
- Architects must be kept at the heart of the decision-making process throughout all stages of the delivery of infrastructure, to ensure that good design is not overlooked in the rush to achieve short-term efficiencies.

## The Benefits of a Thriving Town

- Quality design can be a driver of regional growth, improved economic competitiveness, city and urban regeneration and a supporter of small businesses.
- Towns that employ municipal architects punch above their weight: Westport, Castlebar, Clonakilty and Waterford.
- Well planned towns function efficiently and that efficiency underpins purpose and drives new purposes.
- A thriving town can help support the strength and unique characteristics of local place or community.

## REVITALISING IRELAND'S TOWNS THE RIAI PERSPECTIVE

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## Challenges and Obstacles

- The re-use of our existing building stock is not without its challenges.
- Current building regulations need special consideration by local authorities when it comes to re-use and refurbishment of older buildings, infill development on brownfield sites needs to be encouraged, and owners of unoccupied buildings need to be incentivised to sell or to re-establish their purpose.



## RIAI Initiatives: The RIAI Town Colloquium Series



RIAI Colloquia in Mallow, Drogheda and Cavan (2017)



## RIAI Initiatives: The RIAI Town Colloquium Series

- Developed by the RIAI Urban Design Committee
- Colloquia held to-date in Mallow and Drogheda; Cavan (2017)
- The RIAI Colloquium Series provides the tools for local authorities and communities to come together and examine the fabric of their town.
- Using the particular skills of the architect, the unique potential of a town can be explored and exploited; difficult problems identified and overcome; and new solutions discovered so as to re-imagine the future of a community's most valuable asset – its town.



## RIAI Initiatives: The RIAI Town and Village Toolkit

- **Audience:** The RIAI Town and Village Toolkit is architect and design-led and aimed at those who play an active part in the development of Irish towns and villages
- **Objective:** The Toolkit will empower architects and their communities in their endeavours to improve the quality of their town or village.
- **Guidance:** The Toolkit will provide guidance on urban design and quality of place – including the elements of a fully functioning town centre.
- **Advice:** It will provide advice on national and community-led development, stimulating local enterprise, and tapping into local knowledge and expertise.
- **Case Studies:** The Toolkit will draw on best-practice exemplars from Ireland and Europe.

## RIAI Initiatives: The RIAI Town and Village Toolkit

- Developed by the RIAI Urban Design Committee
- Funded by the Government Policy on Architecture
- Objective: to inform, inspire and guide towns and villages throughout Ireland in creating sustainable and vibrant places to live, work and do business in.
- Available for free download from the RIAI Website (Summer 2017)



# RIAI Initiatives: The RIAI Town and Village Toolkit

## Toolkit Components

- Toolkit Objectives for Thriving Towns
- Toolkit Methodology – Analyse, Assess, Engage, Cooperate and Communicate
- Develop Design-led Solutions
- Identifying and Improving Management and Governance Support Structures
- Case Studies and Exemplars

# RIAI Initiatives: The RIAI Town and Village Toolkit

## Toolkit is a design-led Assessment

- Urban Form and Character
- Variety and Viability
- Accessibility and Movement
- Management Coordination and Governance
- Environmental Sustainability
- Health and Happiness

## REVITALISING IRELAND'S TOWNS THE RIAI PERSPECTIVE

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### Workshop on the RIAI Town Toolkit in the RIAI

National 'Pilot' Town Centre Health Check (TCHC) Training Programme Workshop, 16 March, Dublin Castle

## Revitalising Ireland's Towns

- Purpose is the key component for future survival of Irish towns.
- **Well-designed towns** function efficiently and that efficiency underpins purpose and drives new purposes.
- Unless the **design quality** of the environment is equal to and worthy of the purpose, the town will not succeed.

*“Making places without architects is like having hospitals without doctors.”*

(The RIAI Housing Policy)



# Thank You !

**Carole Pollard, RIAI President**

