

# Landscape Institute Northern Ireland

## **POLICY CONSULTANT REPORT - LINI AGM 7<sup>th</sup> May 2015:**

Dear Members

As many of you will be aware it has been another busy year for LINI Committee and for myself as LINI Policy Consultant. In recognition of this ongoing workload, LI have agreed to increase all 3 devolved nation policy consultants from 30 days to 45 days per annum, coming into effect for LINI from the beginning of this financial year (April 2015).

Whilst a new contract is being prepared by LI- the role will continue to fulfil the 3 main policy task areas as outlined below, however the increase in days will now provide sufficient time to be allocated to crucially important advocacy of the profession directly to the 11 new councils officially formed in April 1<sup>st</sup> 2015.

NI Policy Consultant Key Tasks

**Task 1 Respond to appropriate Policy Consultations on behalf of Devolved Nations**

**Task 2 Disseminate LI Policy and Position Papers and themes in Devolved Nation.**

**Task 3 Provide LI with lessons learned from Devolved Nation.**

Due to the unpredictable nature of policy development, the role of Policy Consultant can be somewhat adhoc, requiring a high degree tolerance and flexibility to respond spontaneously to policy consultations as and when they emerge. In addition, the cross cutting nature of the profession can also result in a high proportion of public consultations having relevance, therefore it is quite common for several consultations to emerge from various departments simultaneously, whilst other periods can have little or no activity in relation to policy.

This year due to the launch of the 11 new authorities in NI, Westminster Elections and the significant focus on Welfare reform, there has been a lower number of relevant consultations than normal. However when the dust settles post-election and the new authorities begin to find their feet, it is expected that an exponential number of opportunities requiring LINI input will emerge.

This will not only include responding to Departmental consultations and Inquiries as normal, going forward it will also include requirement to respond to local guidance, policy and plan making emerging directly from each of the 11 new local authorities.

It is important to re-emphasise that consultation responses represent only one aspect of the Policy Consultants role and that during periods of low consultation activity attention is turned to advocacy (Tasks 2&3).

Close contact is maintained with LI centrally to ensure our professional position in relation to policy is consistent with the rest of the membership. (2No Policy and Communications meetings attended in London since last AGM)

In addition the LINI Chair(s) in particular and the committee in general are kept abreast of all current policy work streams, matters arising, and potential opportunities.

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## Policy Activity Report between AGM 2014 & May 2015 - Pete Mullin LINI Policy Consultant.

For simplicity this report has been divided into the 3 main work tasks as outlined above:

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### **TASK 1 Policy Consultations (completed)**

#### **Committee for the Environment**

1 Inquiry into Wind Energy – Attendance of Stakeholder workshop in Stormont 12 June 2014

This event was a follow up to a letter written on behalf of LINI, with all responders to the Inquiry invited to contribute to a roundtable workshop. This was attended by Shanti McAllister and myself.

Find below link to recording of evidence

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/Assembly-Business/Committees/Environment/Meetings/12-June-2014/>

Find below final Committee report and recommendations

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/environment/reports/report-on-the-committees-inquiry-into-wind-energy/>

In summary this was a well attended event with 5 tables of approx. 12-14 persons. Each table was attended at all times by two Environment Committee MLAs who rotated between tables each session.

Attendees at each table were broadly divided into the following categories:

- Table 1 Wind Developers
- Table 2 Councillors and Local authority officials
- Table 3 Planners and Industry Professionals (LINI Table)
- Table 4 Rural Community Representative's
- Table 5 Urban Community Representatives.

#### **Department Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht ( Rep of Ireland)**

1 LINI Response NLS Ireland – Consultation Response 08 August 2014

#### **Committee for Office of First & Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM)**

1 Inquiry Together: Building a United Community 09 October 2014

A submission was issued on behalf of LINI to this Inquiry offering to present directly to the Committee should they request. This offer was accepted and a joint presentation given along with Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) on 18 March 2015.

Below is a link to the full transcript of this presentation.

<http://aims.niassembly.gov.uk/officialreport/minutesofevidencereport.aspx?AgendaId=12736&eveID=7462>

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## **TASK 2 Disseminate LI Policy and Position Papers**

### **Landscape Futures – TBUC – Shared Space Design and Delivery**

The stand out opportunity for dissemination of LI Position on various work themes this year was the 'Landscape Futures Event in The Long Gallery Stormont on 9 February 2015.

Whilst a number of relevant themes for this important conference were explored early on and may be returned to for future events– it was considered that the T:BUC Inquiry (as described above) offered an excellent window of opportunity to highlight the importance and relevance of the Landscape profession in relation to the executives current Programme for Government.

Speaking at this event provided an opportunity to directly promote and disseminate the LIs various work themes and positions papers, ensuring that copies of Green Infrastructure, the Client Guide and the new Landscape and Public Health papers were issued to all 80+ delegates.

Whilst very time consuming to coordinate and organise, the conference was well attended and considered a great success. Recordings of each guest speaker have been made and will be uploaded on the new LINI website shortly.

### **NIEL Northern Ireland Environmental Link – Land Matters Task Force**

The Land Matters Task force has continued to pursue a Land Use and Landscape agenda. The Land Matters Task Force (LMTF) is a coalition of sectoral organisations seeking to:

- influence and inform appropriate management, planning and protection of Northern Ireland's finite land and landscape resource.
- provide a forum to shared understanding best practice approaches to land and landscape policy development;
- identify and monitor current landuse pressures and discuss future trends likely to generate change and effect.
- support and contribute to guidance land and landscape guidance which on suitably guide potential change and the mitigation of impacts on our land and landscapes.
- promote the need for a high level cross-cutting, strategic approach to landscape and land use planning, management and stewardship in Northern Ireland.
- Establish shared understanding of matters relating to land, landscape and land use related matters and clarify position to encourage their incorporation into the legislative framework.
- encourage an outward looking and inclusive approach which situates landscape related policy development within the local regional, national and international context.

With the resignation of Professor Greg Lloyd it was agreed that I would take over as chair of the group.

The most notable output from the group (occupying a considerable input from myself) has been the production of:– Towards a Land Strategy for Northern Ireland.

Whilst this paper does not exactly reflect our position – it does emphasize the need for a strategic level policy relating to Land & Landscape planning.

Publication of this paper will be complete this week, with circulation and advocacy a priority.

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### **ARK Policy Round Table Event - 30/09/2014**

Invited on behalf of LINI to attend round table discussion hosted by ARK (Access Research Knowledge NI) on 30/09/2014 titled 'Critical Urban Space', where professionals, policy makers, NGOs and academics explored the ambition for place quality in Northern Ireland including the recognition of existing assets, the policy framework, procurement, implementation, and stewardship.

Participants explored the challenges and opportunities to work with communities to transform the most contentious public spaces, including temporary spatial interventions, such as 'meanwhile uses' for interface and other contested areas.

A Policy Brief providing background and highlighting the issues discussed at the event will be available on the ARK website soon.

### **University of Ulster - Issues Now**

Presentation along with President of RSUA and Belfast Healthy Cities to students and various stakeholders covering current topics and themes of interest to LI

### **Other matters**

#### **Challenge Fund Applications**

Assisted with the preparation of a DOE Challenge Fund Application for financial support to undertake a programme of innovative participatory workshops across Northern Ireland, building and expanding on the debate arising from consultation responses received on the Draft NI Landscape Charter.

The application was unsuccessful.

#### **Urban Villages – DSD Meeting**

During the presentation to the Committee for OFMDFM, the subject of Urban Villages was briefly discussed. This is a new OFMDFM initiative to deliver Shared Space objectives outlined in the Programme for Government. Five such villages have been announced in recent months, however remains unclear what in fact the initiative will deliver.

Given the early stage of this programme a meeting was held with SIB (Strategic Investment Board) to discuss how LINI members could assist with delivery. It was clarified that landscape architects are already taking a key role.

#### **Kess Presentation**

Met with Emily Smyth University of Ulster to discuss LI current policy position with particular focus on NI.

This assisted with a presentation she was preparing for the KESS (Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series) at Stormont on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2015 – below are link to this presentation.

[http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge\\_exchange/briefing\\_papers/series4/kess\\_es\\_policybriefing\\_landscape-planning-for-sustainable-development-.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge_exchange/briefing_papers/series4/kess_es_policybriefing_landscape-planning-for-sustainable-development-.pdf)

[http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge\\_exchange/presentations/series4/kess-presentation\\_landscape-planning-for-sustainable-development-.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/knowledge_exchange/presentations/series4/kess-presentation_landscape-planning-for-sustainable-development-.pdf)

<http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/research-and-information-service-raise/knowledge-exchange/knowledge-exchange-seminar-series-4-2014-2015/landscape-planning-for-sustainable-development/>

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## **Belfast City Council – Berlin Wall**

It is 25 years since the Berlin Wall was dismantled – pieces of this wall are now spread out across the globe. It remains a poignant symbol of hope and the futility of division.

At the beginning of the year I contacted the Berlin Senate on behalf of LINI to request if they had a full wall panel available to bring to Northern Ireland (indeed this would be the only official panel in Ireland)

After various correspondence, it was confirmed and following a recent meeting with the Heads of Development and of Tourist in Belfast City Council it was agreed that BCC would happily take over the project and pursue its delivery to the city later in the year.

This is a positive story and LINI will potentially gain good PR through interviews and media outlets when things have progressed.

## **TASK 3 Provide LI with lessons learned from NI**

### **Landscape Futures – Shared Space in Post Conflict Environments**

All public space (particularly in urban environments) can be considered conflicted at some level, however ethno-nationally divided places and cities such as Belfast can easily mask such 'ordinary conflict', such as socio-economic disadvantage.

Whilst it is 20 years since the Good Friday agreement, Northern Ireland remains a largely polarised society which is unique to the British Isles (in fact globally)

Responding appropriately to this highly complex situation faces local Landscape professionals on regular basis, indeed it is a layer of complexity which we can often take for granted when going about our daily work of designing and delivering projects here.

Much globally respected research has emanated from studying the conflict and post conflict environment of NI and whilst the Landscape Futures event was considered a good starting point to highlight the importance of the profession in this context, there is much more potential to explore the unique and valuable experience of the profession in NI. There is potential to further explore and ultimately to disseminate this knowledge and experience further afield.

## **Going forward – 2015 / 2016**

### **RPA Capacity Building:**

- This item was proposed as working going forward in the previous AGM Policy report – however it was not progressed in the last year for 2 main reasons.

Firstly it was generally considered that CEOs and Heads of Development would be more willing to meet and consider suggestions regarding capacity building of our profession services once they had a better understanding of the primary structures associated with this major organisational change;

Secondly LINI simply did not have the time resource available to pursue this area directly in the past year.

However as described above, an increased Policy Consultant time allowance has now been agreed making it realistic to proceed meaningfully with this action.

Capacity building within the 11 new local authorities remains is an essential strategy for our sector. With the new councils now in place and an emerging understanding of administrative structures and hierarchy it is now considered an ideal time to formally pursue workshops and meetings with COEs and senior officials from the 11 new council groupings. The objective is simply to promote the profession and urge Councils to consider employment/ engagement of Landscape Professionals - in particular it has been suggested that each new council should secure a 'Head of Profession' to input into development plans and local policy, prepare and guide project briefs with landscape relevance, consult regarding planning applications and to follow up and assist with enforcement of landscape conditions.

- Preparation of a 'Landscape Checklist for NI' – essentially a simple guidance document outlining landscape best practice and issues for local authorities to consider. It is broadly considered that this should in fact be guidance prepared by the Department to direct the new councils, although at this time it is not clear if the resources and commitment are available within the department to deliver such guidance.
- LINI must determine if organisationally we too have the resources to prepare such a document and what if any weight such a document might exert if not official. Further discussion on this item is required.

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## **Landscape Strategy for NI**

- Whilst considerable time and energy has been expending assisting Northern Ireland Environment Link - Land Matters Task Force produce 'Towards a Land Strategy for Northern Ireland' – which is an important and useful paper, it continues to be LINI formal position that what is in fact needed is a National Landscape Strategy. This has become increasing evident with the completion and formal adoption of a National Landscape Strategy in the South in recent months – A similar strategy would be very appropriate and achievable here also.

## **Landscape Futures Event**

The Landscape Futures Event in Stormont was well attended with very positive feedback – Strategically it has been considered a very useful and positive piece of policy positioning.

Going forward due to the success of the first series, it is understood that the LI wish to roll a second series later in the year. The theme has not been finalised, however we would hope again to secure a high profile venue and focus on a subject of popular interest in NI

One suggestion is that we focus on Landscape Strategy – utilising the experience in the South, alternatively consider something surrounding 'Agriculture' – especially as it is now confirmed that DARD will assume many functions from DOE when it ceases as a department by 2016

## **Policy and Consultation Responses**

- Policy response work and advocacy will continue as and when appropriate and relevant policy consultations and opportunities emerge.
- Public consultation for the new Northern Ireland Regional Landscape Character Assessment (NIRLCA) has opened for consideration – there is a standard 6 week consultation period ending on 9th June 2015, LINI are requesting interest members to led this response.

<http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/nirlca-update-14-april-2015.pdf>

**Kind Regards Pete Mullin CMLI - LINI Policy Consultant**