



PAUL KEOGH RIAI INAUGURAL ADDRESS

It is a great honour to stand before you as president of the RIAI, and it is a great personal pleasure to address such a distinguished audience as yourselves this evening.

May I start with a little history?... Shortly after I set up practice in 1984, the *Architects Journal* did a feature on a number of young Irish architectural practices, including my own. It was titled “Irish Renaissance”. In the introduction, Gerry Cahill wrote that “it is refreshing to be an architect in Dublin at the moment...the economic boom that perpetrated the tawdry excesses of the late modern movement is over, allowing the profession pause for thought and redefinition of direction.”

Now just over 25 years later, as I start my term as president of the RIAI, we are once more in that landscape, and recession is again allowing us time for “thought and redefinition of direction.”

The many challenges and opportunities for architects today – and Ireland as a whole – were analysed during last year’s RIAI strategic review, an inspired initiative by my predecessor Seán Ó Laoire. Over 12 months, the council, director, executive, committees, a large numbers of members, and stakeholders outside the profession took part in discussions to analyse the issues which confront us, and to define a range of objectives and actions for the next three years.

The review has resulted in the RIAI Action Plan 2010-2013, which I am formally launching this evening. This sets out 11 objectives and priority actions aimed at promoting the value of quality and design in architecture and the built environment, and the role of the RIAI as the national body for the promotion, regulation and support of architecture in Ireland.

If there is one theme that came from last year’s review, it is a sense that while there may be less work today, architects should be no less active in producing plans and constructive proposals for the future.

May I take a moment to summarize just some of the activities which architects, and the institute, are engaged in just now?

Next month, over 100 practices will open their doors to the public and architects will give of their time voluntarily over a weekend to provide architectural consultancy services in return for a €50 donation to the Simon Community.

In collaboration with the Irish Architecture Foundation, we are promoting the “Space for Learning” project, where 120 architects are working with 1,200 secondary school pupils in a competition to design the ideal space for learning.

At the end of last year I attended the launch of Open House Galway, and an exhibition of the entries for the RIAI/Galway Harbour Authority ideas competition to revitalise the city's docks. This was a very inspiring initiative by the hugely active RIAI Western Group of architects.

In their award-winning Cigar Box building on North Great George's Street, Denis Byrne Architects have created DARC – a vibrant new space for exhibitions, talks and debates on contemporary architecture, and repositioning the construction sector towards sustainable development.

I have recently had meetings with Ali Grehan, the Dublin City Architect, to explore possibilities for the RIAI and the City Council to collaborate in developing a project to brand Dublin as a Design City in 2011, with the ultimate aim of applying for the World Design Capital designation in 2014.

Last week I met with Enterprise Ireland to discuss programmes to upskill architects in the export of services abroad. And in response to Government policy to develop export as a route to economic recovery, the RIAI and Enterprise Ireland are planning further programmes to brand Irish architecture internationally.

Two initiatives to which I am particularly committed are the setting up of joint RIAI/Government committees in education and health. The aim is to ensure that in the future roll-out of these departments' programmes the physical infrastructure is designed and built to the highest quality standards.

The institute is expanding its continuing professional development programmes, and the uptake for these courses will ensure that, going forward, the profession continues to have the expertise to deliver best practice in professional services – and consumer protection – to clients, end-users and the public.

Finally, I had the pleasure this morning of launching an RIAI open design competition for a new children's centre for Aoibhneas Women and Children's Refuge in Coolock. The brief for this life-enhancing project will no doubt attract a large number of entries, and hopefully and inspiring building for such a unique and important voluntary body as Aoibhneas.

These examples, I believe, show that there is a strong determination that architects should work our way out of this recession and contribute to the wider effort towards national recovery, or "Project Ireland" as President Mary McAleese described it last week.

And the recession will end. The World Bank has indicated that the worst is over internationally. There are also projections that Ireland will come out of recession next year, and that the economy will revert to strong growth levels in the years ahead. Therefore, we must use the time available now to plan for this recovery.

And we must learn from the mistakes of the past. The ESRI, the Construction Industry Council, the National Competitiveness Council and others have noted the infrastructure deficits which exist in Ireland today, and the importance of investment – in education, healthcare, transport, the environment, etc. – if Ireland is not to be placed at a serious disadvantage to our competitors in the years ahead.

At its simplest, international investment and high-tech industries – and the talented workforce required to drive knowledge-based economies – do not locate in places that don't provide first-class infrastructure and high quality living environments.

Forfás's recent report pulled no punches in saying that our past record of poor planning, and our failure to co-ordinate private development with public infrastructure, have affected both our quality of life and our economic competitiveness in the world economy.

It was not Roy Keane, but Benjamin Franklin, who first said "fail to prepare, prepare to fail."

But we are not. Notwithstanding the emphasis on investment in infrastructure in the Government's "Smart Economy" framework, up to 50% of architects, surveyors and engineers are unemployed; the construction industry is at less than two-thirds of its "sustainable" level, and one third of its 2007 size.

With the Republic's population estimated to reach five million by 2021, we simply cannot afford not to plan for the future, and this recession presents what may well be a once-off opportunity to get architects and construction working to make up deficits in the infrastructure which we so badly need – and to get it right.

And we can get it right. Contemporary Irish architecture is regarded as equal to the best in Europe; proven by completed buildings, and the international awards and prizes won by Irish architects of late.

I am reminded of that great afternoon in Croke Park in 2007 as Ireland played England in the Six Nations championship. It was an historic day for our two countries, with a full stadium of 80,000 reverberating to the refrain of "God Save the Queen." It was a great sporting day with Ireland memorably defeating the "old enemy"; but it was also a triumph for Irish architecture that we had, at last, a stadium ranked with the finest in the world, and designed by one of our own best architects – Des McMahon.

I also think of the night in 2008 when a large group of us gathered to watch the televised finale of the Stirling Prize, the Oscars or Booker Prize of international architecture. We had come together because the Glucksman Gallery in Cork designed by O'Donnell & Tuomey was strongly tipped for the award. It was like Italia '90 all over again, and it is a measure of the quality of John and Sheila's project that it was pipped only by a scheme of such major international and historic significance as the Scottish Parliament designed by the great, and sadly deceased, Enric Miralles. But what is interesting is that informed commentators said – and still say – that the Glucksman was the better building, and should have won on the night. Just like Italia '90!

At a more modest level, the RIAI and the Department of the Environment volumes on Irish housing – *The New Housing 1* and *The New Housing 2* – have been circulated throughout the world, and show the exceptional quality which Irish architects can deliver. As a result, international groups frequently come to see the best of our new housing. Only recently we had a visit from Design for Homes, the British housing think-tank, to see projects around Dublin, including Adamstown and our own sheltered housing projects for the St Vincent de Paul Society in Malahide and Gorey, Co Wexford.

I also think back to that night in Berlin some years ago when Ireland won not one, but two, prizes in the Union of International Architects Awards. Group 91 won the Abercrombie Medal for Urban Design for our work of regeneration of Temple Bar and Justin Kilcullen of Trocaire won the Human Habitat Medal for his work on homelessness in the Third World.

And, what an achievement it was for the Grafton Architects to win World Building of the Year at the 2008 Festival of Architecture in Barcelona. When we heard they were awarded the Best Education Project prize, nobody dared hope that they would win the supreme award – World Building of the Year. But they did. What a brilliant achievement!

Finally, I have no doubt that the showcasing of de Blacam and Meagher's work at this year's Venice Biennale will once again shine the spotlight on the standing of contemporary Irish architecture in the international arena.

These are just a few examples to show that Irish architecture is up there with the best in the world, and on a par with our other cultural offerings in literature, music, theatre, dance, film and the visual arts. And, as Dermot Desmond reminded us in his recent speech to the Farmleigh conference, culture is a significant economic driver in the world today, and Ireland should develop culture as part of our overall economic effort.

Over the next two years, my presidency will focus on the quality of Irish architecture and, most of all, championing the value of quality and design in architecture – and the importance of high-quality infrastructure and built environments – to Ireland's economic, social and environmental policy objectives.

As I have said, one of the mistakes we made in the past is that we did not plan for the boom, with the result that the urgent too often took precedence over the important. Now is the time to plan for – and deliver – the infrastructure and physical environment which the country needs, and will increasingly need as the economy returns to growth and the population expands as projected.

But we are not. Why, with so much to be done, are architects so massively underemployed? There are scarcely any new commissions, forward planning has come to a standstill, existing projects have been deferred indefinitely, and the public tenders website is virtually blank.

It was very interesting to visit Vienna at the end of last year and look again at Otto Wagner's plan for the Ringstrasse which encircles the medieval city. Just imagine that in 1892 Vienna planned the urban structure and the infrastructure to accommodate two million people, notwithstanding that the population then stood at one million and never greatly exceeded that figure. That is largely why Vienna to this day is so beautiful, and why it offers such an attractive quality of life.

That is also why it is so important for Ireland to plan for the future if we are not to be seriously disadvantaged going forward. A glimpse of the crises we are facing – and will increasingly face if we do not act now – can be gleaned from a few case studies.

Take, for example, the current debate regarding the number of empty homes in the State – is it 50,000 or 300,000? If we do not know how many vacant housing units we have, and where they are, how can we possibly know how many new homes we will need in the years ahead? What type of homes we will need? Or where we are going to put them?

And if we don't know the answer to something as simple as the number of new homes we will need and where we are going to need them, how can we possibly plan for the infrastructure – the schools, healthcare, leisure, culture, and the other services – required to support the fastest growing population in Europe?

The Department of Education's website tells us that 1,100 schools are currently seeking major capital works, yet only 52 are at detailed planning and construction. And, with pupil numbers estimated to rise by 30% in the next 20 years, we will require a further 5,000 places in every one of those years. That is on top of the renovation and retrofitting of the existing stock, not to mention removal of our disgraceful pre-fabs.

In healthcare, an Oireachtas committee recently reported that of 600 primary care facilities targeted by the HSE in 2001, only 220, or a little over 30%, have been delivered to date. This year, the capital funding for health is €245 billion, or 60% of what was projected in the 2007 National Development Plan. And we all know how outdated our healthcare facilities are. From our practice, I am aware of projects which have been deferred due to lack of funding and essential infrastructure.

Elsewhere, a recent interview with Minister Martin Cullen highlighted that we don't know what sport and leisure facilities we have, what condition they are in and what works might be required to bring them up to current standards. Can we be surprised then that not one country has signed-up to use Ireland as a training camp for the 2012 Olympics?

And notwithstanding major investment on projects like the Wexford Opera and the Convention Centre, funding continues to delay flagship projects like the National History Museum, Collins Barracks, the National Gallery, the Abbey Theatre and the Children's Museum. And there are similar roadblocks with projects to provide libraries, courthouses, fire stations, and local community-based arts, culture and creative industry developments.

If investment projects such as these are not progressing at a time when there is so much capacity in the construction sector, what chance have we got to get it right in the years ahead?

As stated in the Government's own "Smart Economy" policy framework: we simply cannot afford to provide less than first-class infrastructure and high-quality living environments if Ireland is to attract international investment and high-tech industries, and the talented workforce to drive them.

But we are not. Ireland is reeling from the credit crunch and a debilitating paralysis has gripped the country. We must – and urgently – overcome these crises and get on with planning for the future. As Brian Lenihan said so courageously in January "if I don't defeat it, it will defeat me." Is this not a metaphor for the challenge facing Ireland as a whole?

And we must invest, not just in buildings, infrastructure and the built environment – we must also invest in quality and design in architecture.

I am reminded of that anecdote from the American Civil War, and the criticism directed at Abraham Lincoln for proceeding with construction of the dome of the Capitol in Washington DC, and the money and resources it was diverting from the war effort. Lincoln insisted that construction would proceed because, as he put it, “if people see the Capitol going on, it is a sign that the Union will go on.”

Architecture, therefore, is not only about building the buildings we need today; it is also a statement of confidence in the future, it is about believing in a better future, planning for a better future, and nothing shows confidence in that future more than the making of architecture.

And planning is not just about permission to build, zoning, height, density, etc. Planning is about vision; it is about asking ourselves what kind of Ireland do we want, for our children, and our children’s children?

The buildings and the built environments we create impact on every aspect of our lives. Architecture not only provides shelter and accommodation; at its very best, it is one of the highest expressions of our culture and, indeed, of the human spirit. As Churchill said: “We shape our buildings, and afterwards they shape us.” In other words, architecture matters.

There is now a considerable body of research on the impact of environmental factors on human well-being, both physically and psychologically: well-designed schools produce better educational outcomes; well-designed healthcare buildings improve patients’ recovery times; well-designed workplaces lead to higher productivity; and well-designed neighborhoods reduce anti-social behavior and enhance civic spirit.

And we all know that even a small domestic makeover can improve quality of life beyond expectations. As Meryl Streep says to her architect Steve Martin in *Its Complicated* – “thank you for taking my fifty-six e-mails and turning them into something unbelievably beautiful.” Or something like that.

Seriously though; these findings are statistically proven. In polls carried out for CABA in the United Kingdom, 75 to 80 per cent of respondents agreed that design has a direct impact on quality of life.

And isn’t quality and design in architecture central to the concept of sustainability – handing the world on to the next generation in a better state than we inherited; and providing a better quality of life, not just for today, but also for generations to come?

The mention of sustainable development brings me to the central theme of my mission for the next two years.

We are now at a time of great change – even a seismic shift – in how we inhabit the world and, not least, this island of ours. As Richard Sennett has said “we are facing a moment of crisis as to where people live, and how they live. One is about population growth and the other is that we are just about to reach a peak oil moment. Everything about the form of cities will have to change; to spread out the city is going to be less and less possible, and we are going to have to learn new ways of living densely...there is going to be no choice about it.”

In Ireland, we also face these crises, and the question we must ask is: are we going to continue as we have done, and litter the country with another 500,000 houses in sprawling estates remote from shops, schools and workplaces; and consign yet another generation to debilitating lifestyles of commuting, car dependency and sub-standard services and amenities? Or do we want to plan for sustainable communities, in well-designed cities, towns and villages, well served with public transport, quality services and amenities, and built to the highest standards?

For me, the answer is self-evident. Just as the “Garden City” movement was a reaction to the overcrowding and unhealthy living conditions of the nineteenth-century city, we now need a new model: one based on the realities of population growth, urbanisation, climate change, and today’s world economy; and the inescapable evidence that well-designed cities and towns are central to the concept of sustainable development – environmentally, socially and economically.

Environmentally, the built form and higher densities such as we find in historic European cities lead to inherently greener lifestyles. A large percentage of inhabitants walk, cycle and use public transport, rather than drive. Living in townhouses and apartments, they use less energy to heat their homes. And people in cities share infrastructure, services and amenities more efficiently. On average, urban dwellers generate about half the emissions of people in lower density suburban and rural locations. In the United States, the typical New Yorker generates around a third of the US national average.

Socially, we know that higher density urban neighbourhoods are healthier, both physically and psychologically. The 2006 Institute for Public Health report *Health Impacts of the Built Environment* noted the negative health impacts of sprawl and car dependency - increased obesity, pollution, road injuries, stress and isolation. On the other hand, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented, neighbourhoods enable people to go about their daily activities without a car, and are therefore most likely to promote community spirit and social networks. And, it found that as traffic and car use increases, people’s sense of neighbourliness decreases!

Economically, international research summarised in the recent Forfás report *Cities: Drivers of National Competitiveness* tells us that cities, and not nation states, are the drivers of today’s world economy. The importance of urban quality to a city’s economic performance has long been highlighted by Richard Florida, and others. The “Creative Class” – those involved in the knowledge economies, the arts, media, law, etc. – choose to live in cities which offer good environments, good infrastructure, good social networks and good business opportunities.

In summary: cities are good for us; place matters today as much as ever; and urban quality, and the principles of sustainable urban development, are critical to the generation of wealth – environmentally, socially and economically.

This is as true in Ireland as anywhere; we therefore cannot afford to indulge in the make-believe view that we, the Irish, are not an urban people. At the start of the 20th century, 14% of the world’s population lived in cities, by the end 60% did. Ireland has also urbanised at an amazing rate; the percentage of our population living in cities has grown from 32% in 1926 to 60% in 2008.

International evidence all points to the fact that enhancing the quality and attractiveness of our cities, towns and villages must be central to Ireland's drive towards sustainable development, and economic competitiveness. If we don't, we will consign ourselves to an economic backwater from which we may never recover. We need to make urban living more popular, better organised, more affordable, more convenient, and most of all, more attractive.

We must not be distracted from this mission. The more our cities, towns and villages are all of these, the more people will opt for urban living as a preferred lifestyle choice.

Environmentally, the case is undisputable. Low density suburban and rural housing generates double the car use of housing in compact urban layouts, and sprawl, car dependency and long-distance commuting have been major contributors to the 174% rise in Ireland's transport-generated carbon emissions since 1990.

And I'm sorry, but the one-off passive house, even with triple-glazed windows, solar panels, heat pumps, hybrid cars, and suchlike, is still unsustainable. Why? Because you have to drive to work, to school, to the shops; and you have to be provided with post, deliveries, and services at great cost to support this supposedly "sustainable" lifestyle. "Wasted energy is wasted energy, no matter how its generated."

This is not to suggest that I am against rural Ireland. On the contrary, strong city economies will support the vitality of rural Ireland – and its towns and villages – in a way which will not be possible if development is not strategically planned. And those who know me will testify that I am a passionate advocate of our rural heritage and culture. Indeed, this year's RIAI conference will be in Westport, an exemplar of all that is best in planning and managing a small rural town.

But I challenge the anti-urban rhetoric of many of the "champions" of rural Ireland. Strong towns and villages are essential to supporting rural communities and local economies. Yet, market forces, unplanned sprawl, and popular taste are inadvertently conspiring to ensure that our rural towns or villages are dying before our eyes, and will become extinct unless decisive action is taken, and taken urgently.

Towns such as Kinsale, Athenry, Westport, and hundreds more, are an important part of our culture and our national heritage. If Irish urban life is not to vanish forever, we need champions with the vision and commitment to reconfigure these towns and villages as viable urban entities, and sustainable communities.

First of all, they need to be inhabited by a broad cross-section of households, ages, tenures and income groups; they need to be designed around attractive pedestrian-friendly streets and open spaces; they need to provide quality local shopping, services and amenities; they need to counteract sprawl by consolidating development within the town or village core; and they need to be separate, and clearly distinct, from their rural hinterland.

In short, well-designed cities, towns and villages are central to the battle against climate change, and the solution to many of the problems created by the oil-fuelled – and oil-dependent – sprawl which has destroyed so much of our beautiful countryside in the last half-century.

And, I ask, would people not trade their two cars in the driveway, and their often uncared-for gardens, for the convenience of living in compact mixed-use communities, in well-designed houses and apartments, with attractive streets and landscaped open spaces, in proximity to high-quality amenities and services. And all accessed by foot, bicycle or public transport?

The task for architects is to sell this vision of a new urbanism to the public. And, I believe we can. It was a great honour last week for my practice to win the Irish Planning Institute's Achievement in Planning Award for the Phibsborough Mountjoy Local Area Plan, which we did for Dublin City Council with John Spain & Associates. What was particularly gratifying was the praise in the citation for the public consultation process which we and the City Council conducted with residents, councilors and other stakeholders, who all bought into the plan, its urban form, its height, density and public realm proposals, making this the first local area plan to be adopted by the elected members of the City Council. So, I believe it can be done!

Which brings me to NESC's ground breaking *Housing in Ireland* report of 2004 and its conclusion that "the challenge of building high-quality, sustainable cities and towns compares with the greatest challenges which Ireland has faced – and met - in the past."

Notwithstanding the current crisis in the economy and our public finances, this challenge – I believe – still remains one of the greatest facing us today. Consider that the Government has programmed on bringing the public finances into order by 2013, and NAMA is believed to be a 10 to 15-year project. But if we get it wrong in planning and urban design – as we have done spectacularly in the past – we will be living with the costs for another 50 years and beyond. And these costs will be very significant – economically, socially and environmentally.

At a recent conference, I heard it said that the credit crunch – and NAMA – will result in the market reverting to the default typology of low density suburban and rural development preferred by the average homebuyer. How can we tell, when the market has not provided the choice, and quality, of home in urban locations which today's middle classes might aspire to?

On the contrary, I believe that the aftermath of the Celtic Tiger will seriously challenge the myth that we Irish are so attracted to sprawling low density development that we will not choose cities and towns as our preferred lifestyle choice. The disastrous legacy of poor planning, and an unregulated property market, are everywhere to be seen, and the type of developer-led planning which characterized the last decades is now totally discredited. We must not go there again.

Quality has to be prioritised. We have to choose between short-term market-driven solutions and well-designed living environments which will stand the test of time and leave a legacy to generations not yet born. To quote the often repeated Scandinavian proverb, "a poor man can only afford to build once."

Notwithstanding; one of the huge risks today is that the current economic crisis – and NAMA – will result in a return to the lowest common denominator, and that development at any price will be accepted to get construction going, to get sites off the balance sheet, and to stimulate the economy generally.

For these reasons, I particularly welcome the emphasis on urban design and sustainable development in the recently launched *Government Policy on Architecture 2009-2015*. This is a significant step forward by Government in recognising the importance of architecture, and the RIAI is fully committed to working with central and local government, the professions and the public to support the actions set out in the policy, and its objectives to deliver quality in the built environment, planning, urban design, heritage conservation and green procurement.

I also welcome the 2007 Building Control Act and setting up of the official Register of Architects. This ensures that the public can now be certain that the term “architect-designed” means what it says – it was designed by a qualified and registered architect with a minimum of seven years education and professional training, and not by someone passing themselves off as one.

The main beneficiaries of registration will not be architects, but clients, end-users and the public who will now have the benefit of greatly-increased consumer protection and accountability.

The recent Frontline programme on “ghost estates” was extremely instructive; the sight of a government minister, politicians, planners, engineers, developers and auctioneers all blaming each other for the mess they had created was quite extraordinary.

In the middle, however, were the consumers: ordinary people who invested everything and are now left high and dry. It illustrates so well the truism that those responsible for bad design are seldom those who pay the price. And it was notable that there was not one indication of an architect having been involved in the design of any of these developments.

Since 2004, the RIAI has been alerting Government to the pitfalls of our light-touch planning, building regulations and certification regime. We will continue to do so for as long as it takes to get improved accountability and consumer protection into our planning, conveyancing, building regulations, and public procurement procedures.

But the new Government Policy and the Register of Architects will be meaningless unless we start building again. There has never been better value in construction and the State should explore every avenue of funding to plan and deliver the infrastructure the country needs so badly today, and will increasing need as the economy recovers and the population grows.

There is the view that there are no funds for such investment. But up to €70 billion of Irish pension funds is currently invested in equities abroad. The Construction Industry Council recently put a proposal to Government to harness some of these monies for investment in upgrading our national infrastructure. Some have said that the cost of this option is too high and the State should follow a Keynesian model and invest directly to provide the infrastructure, generate employment and stimulate the economy. I am not an economist and I have no desire to lecture the Department of Finance on how to run the economy, but something must be done.

I know that pension fund investment in infrastructure is common in other countries, Norway and the Netherlands, for example. If it worked here, it would be a “win-win” situation: the funds would be invested in Ireland and not abroad, the nation would get the infrastructure it so badly needs, large numbers would be taken off the dole queues, both in construction and in the wider economy, and the investment in infrastructure and construction would benefit the country economically, socially and environmentally.

I also want to take a moment to share my concern for the large numbers of unemployed architects. While out-of-work graduates will go abroad – as they have always done – for experience and to broaden their horizons, those in their thirties and forties who have set-up homes and started families are in an especially difficult place. They contributed so much during the boom years and they find themselves now largely unemployed, in financial difficulty, in negative equity, and faced with all the psychological traumas which these crises induce.

Nor is it easy for established practices struggling with bank borrowings, lack of credit, staff redundancies, low-fee tendering and, most of all, fear for the future. The RIAI has been and will remain active in pursuing initiatives to deal with unemployment, and under employment, in the profession.

As I said at the outset, it is a great honour to have been elected as president of the Institute, and the calibre of people who have put themselves forward to sit on Council is a source of great personal satisfaction to me.

John Graby often reminds me that the health of an institution such as ours can be gauged by the quality of people who serve on its councils and its committees. Looking around the table at the first council meeting of this year, I have total confidence in the team around me. Every one is a distinguished architect in his or her own right, and Council is very well balanced in terms of youth and experience; public and private sectors; male and female.

I particularly note that eight out of 24 are female, which is well above the national average. I am sure that the intelligence, goodwill and balance which women bring to boards of this type will be a huge advantage to the work of Council over my two year term.

I would like to pay tribute to the work by John Graby and the executive. There is a saying that leadership is about doing the right things, and management is about doing things right. Whatever about the policies which Council has set out in the Action Plan, I have no doubt that John and his dedicated staff will ensure that things are done right, as they have been throughout his tenure here in Merrion Square.

May I also express my gratitude to Rachael, my partner, my daughters Alice and Lucy, and my ever-loyal team at PKA – Patrick, Kevin, Miriam, Brighdin, Brendan and the others. Every one has given their support to my nomination, and even at this early stage I thank them for commitment beyond the call of duty, without which I could not fulfill the duties of this office. They are the sponsors of my presidency!

The strategic review – and my presidency – will be judged by our success in delivering on the objectives set out in the 2010-2013 Action Plan. I firmly believe that Council, the executive, committees, and the general membership of the institute, have the energy and drive to work together on the challenges which face us as architects – and as a nation – and that we can provide answers to many of the questions facing us at this time of huge uncertainty, not least the big one – “what will Ireland be like when it’s finished?”

My manta, therefore, will be that “Architecture Matters” and I intend my presidency to focus on engaging the RIAI with Government, the professions, industry, clients and the public on the importance of quality and design in architecture, and planning, to the advancement of Ireland’s economic, social and environmental objectives, and not least the “Smart Economy” policy.

To conclude, there is an anecdote which I would like to share with you. After a gathering such as this some years ago, a young architect took my friend Derek Tynan aside and said “it was easy for you in Group 91; there was no work in the eighties, and you had time to develop your theoretical and philosophical positions in architecture” whereas he and the younger generation were so over-worked and burdened by the stresses of the Celtic Tiger years that they had no time for thought, or to develop new ideas!

We now have that time to reflect, time to plan for the future, and the time to get it right. So, let’s do it.

As Theodore Roosevelt said in his Labour Day address of 1903 – “Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard on work worth doing.” I look forward to working with you all on this project over the two years of my term here.

God bless and thank you.

Paul Keogh. PRIAI

18th February 2010