

PUBLIC AFFAIRS

RICS Northern Ireland manifesto

Effecting positive change in the built and natural environment.



Introduction

On May 5th, Northern Ireland elects a new Assembly to form a new Executive. The incoming Executive has the opportunity to transform the built and natural environment in Northern Ireland – to support economic recovery and growth, to create sustainable and beautiful places to live, and to use public spending to help decarbonise our society as we move towards net-zero carbon targets. Ahead of these important elections, RICS has set out eight calls to action and our profession stands ready to support the Executive to deliver positive change in the built and natural environments.

Calls to Action

1. **Embed net-zero carbon targets at the heart of decision making on all issues – including the built and natural environment – to kick-start the transition to net-zero carbon.**

To deliver a net-zero transition, accurate, consistent carbon measurement and reporting must become central to government policy. Procurement approaches need to embed industry standards and embrace [Whole Life Carbon Assessment](#), [International Cost Management Standard](#), and [Built Environment Carbon Database](#). The [Social Value Toolkit](#) can also help procuring authorities better define, understand and manage the value created throughout the whole life-cycle of projects.

2. **Recognise the role of the built and natural environment in promoting a healthy, sustainable, and productive regional economy**

The built and natural environment impacts every aspect of our lives – it's the world we live in. Delivering safe and warm homes for our citizens, with easy access to essential services and future-proofed digital and physical infrastructure, will drive up living standards and unlock our collective potential. Buildings which are [people-centred](#) can transform places of work and study and elevate the productivity of their inhabitants.

3. **Provide greater planning capacity and efficiency and realise a holistic approach to place making in Northern Ireland**

The planning system in Northern Ireland urgently needs reform and targeted investment in order to support economic growth, facilitate deeper community engagement, and deliver the objectives of our policymakers. A reformed planning system should make greater use of digital technologies and provide timely, consistent, and predictable outcomes for stakeholders.

4. **Rise to the challenge of improving housing supply and the futureproofing of existing stock, ensuring people have access to a range of safe, warm, high quality, and affordable homes**

The draft Housing Supply Strategy recognises that primary policy responsibility for housing delivery is too fragmented in Northern Ireland and RICS would welcome a specific outcome for Housing in the Programme for Government. Investment and consistent and reliable decision-making is needed to provide more affordable homes for purchase and rent, and upskilling the industry to meet demand for retrofitting of existing public and private stock is necessary. Greater use of digital technology and modern methods of construction (MMC) can support an innovative and vibrant construction sector.

5. **Drive investment in the built and natural environment to unlock economic growth and raise living standards**

The draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland (ISNI) is welcome both for its long-term focus and its recognition that future investment will have to support sustainability objectives and regenerate Northern Ireland's High Streets. Unlocking the potential of [Commercial Real Estate \(CRE\)](#) to increase productivity and improve placemaking will be key. An incoming Northern Ireland Executive should agree the Strategy and commence delivery.

6. **Recognise, encourage and invest in the upskilling of built environment professionals to create a highly-skilled local workforce.**

There is a significant skills gap in the built environment. To meet the future needs of communities, we need to attract and retain a larger, more diverse workforce, and we need to upskill them in retrofitting solutions. RICS is calling on the NI Executive to support more apprenticeships and to work with industry to deliver training which will close this gap.

7. **Work with stakeholders across government, industry, academia and professional bodies to deliver policy priorities**

As a professional body, RICS strongly encourages collaboration to address complex challenges and seize new opportunities. Across the built environment, we believe a more collaborative approach will help deliver government priorities, particularly in construction and procurement, and we have designed the [Conflict Avoidance Pledge](#) to reduce the potential for lengthy and costly conflict in the delivery of public works.

8. **Recognise and protect the role of the built environment in maintaining Northern Ireland's rich heritage and history.**

Protecting Northern Ireland's heritage assets is vital to place-making and brings substantial economic and social benefits. The Northern Ireland Executive should improve the stewardship of these assets for future generations by embedding industry best practice [Planned Preventative Maintenance \(PPM\) Guidance](#), undertaken by competent and regulated professionals.

To discuss any of the proposals in this document, or for further information about RICS in Northern Ireland, please contact our Senior Public Affairs Officer, Emmet McDonough-Brown at emcdonoughbrown@rics.org.