

RESPONSE TO ISSUES IN IMPROVING QUALITY IN PRIVATE HOUSING

The Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS) is the professional body for chartered architects in Scotland. It has charitable status and offers a wide range of services and products for architects, students of architecture, construction industry professionals and all those with an interest in the built environment and the design process.

The Incorporation welcomes the opportunity to comment on this consultation.

The RIAS in general terms accepts the summary of the key issues without reservation.

The RIAS agrees that some privately owned housing is in a state of disrepair and is concerned that the conditions exist whereby owners are either unable to afford to maintain stock or do not have sufficient knowledge or incentive to maintain their homes adequately. The RIAS is also concerned that conditions exist where there is no incentive for owners to up-grade their property to modern standards. The RIAS also has concerns that the existing housing stock is difficult to up-grade to modern standards in terms of energy conservation and is further concerned that current standards of new build are likely to lead to a future legacy of inferior quality.

In terms of energy conservation the short-termism and short period of home ownership do not give incentive to make savings over an extended payback period, and this is to the detriment of initial capital expenditures. Ways should be sought to circumvent this situation.

The RIAS notes that the single most common feature linking houses in disrepair is age. This in itself is a symptom and not a cause, as causal features of disrepair should be given priority. Much of the traditional housing stock pre-1930s was substantially built with over-design in terms of structure and materials. It is to be regretted that the economic conditions applying have meant that many of these have fallen into disrepair.

The RIAS strongly supports the notion that the conditions applied to common ownership and management of property should be seriously examined to find better ways of maintaining the stock. The RIAS is not convinced that local authorities should be the prime movers in seeking to improve old housing stock, and it would be likely to be more effective if landlords were given the appropriate incentive to do the work for themselves.

The RIAS agrees that housing in multiple occupation presents a real problem in that these properties are usually treated as a cash cow by their owners, with little regard to future maintenance requirements. Mechanisms for controlling this should be examined. The RIAS takes the view that preparation of maintenance manuals by architects involved in new housing projects should be encouraged so as to promote effective and early maintenance at a future date. To some extent this is already required by the CDM regulations but ways should be sought of encouraging all house-builders and property developers to ensure that full and adequate manuals are prepared.

It is noted that it is not clear when the final task force report will be published.

The RIAS is also concerned that the principles of the Architecture Policy for Scotland and Designing Places do not achieve a mention in the report. We perceive this to be a serious shortcoming.