



Housing Unlocked – Making it Happen

9:30am-1pm on Friday 31st March

Lambay Hall, Chartered Accountants House

Background

In October 2022, the Irish Architectural Foundation and The Housing Agency launched the Housing Unlocked exhibition. Running until mid-February 2023, this exhibition showcased eight innovative ideas to unlock housing delivery in Ireland. With over 25,000 visitors, this was a very popular event with practitioners and the general public.

This event aimed to investigate the possibility of translating these ideas into practical actions that could provide new homes. The 'Housing Unlocked - Making it Happen' event involved presentations of each of the eight ideas to a targeted audience of housing practitioners. The presentations were followed by panel discussions and audience contributions to discuss the potential of realising these proposals.

The eight exhibitions can be viewed on the [Housing Unlocked](#) website.

Housing Unlocked projects:

Presented to Panel 1

[Building Societies](#)

[Eco:Cube - A Modular Living Concept](#)

[Home4Community](#)

[Thirty-Three Churches](#)

Presented to Panel 2

[The Working Home](#)

[Urban Horticulture](#)

[Start Spreading the Mews](#)

[Join the Dots](#)



Introduction – Bob Jordan

Bob Jordan, CEO of the Housing Agency, officially opened the event. He discussed the background to the exhibition and the opportunity it presented for public engagement with towns and villages on the areas of vacancy and dereliction. He praised the exhibition for allowing innovative ideas to be brought into the mainstream housing system. He then discussed the Making it Happen event, which aims to put these ideas to action, along with introducing the speakers for the first panel session.

Panel 1

- Robert Burns – Director of Services, Housing, Fingal County Council
- Sarah Neary – Principal Advisor, Built Environment, DHLGH
- Joan McMahon – Senior Architectural Advisor, DHLGH
- Karen Kenny – Senior Advisor, Planning, DHLGH

Bob Jordan chaired the panel discussion and took questions from the floor. Panellists were asked about the potential of the ideas presented, as well as the costs associated with carrying out the proposals. The projects require various measures under four core themes: planning/regulation, fiscal, sustainability and regeneration.

The panellists responded positively to the presentations and stressed the importance of bringing vacant buildings back into use, which several of the ideas address. The [Repair and Leasing Scheme \(RSL\)](#) was mentioned as an avenue to address **vacancy** issues. Under the scheme, owners of houses or apartments/bedsits that have been vacant for at least one year and which require repairs to bring the property to the required standard for renting. Panellists pointed to the importance of sustainability in terms of communities, development, and mobility. A sustainable form of **compact growth** was also mentioned as an important factor for future developments due to current car-dependency in many regions of the country. Panellists advocated for low-rise, medium-density development, for which new draft [guidelines](#) have been published by the DHLGH. Modern methods of construction were discussed, along with the potential of this model to contribute to zero carbon goals and modular living concepts. The panellists commented that **training** across the sector is needed to produce good quality results in the form of best practice delivery and sustainable development. The panellists believe **pilot projects** will be an excellent avenue to explore these ideas further and move the ideas forward. Speakers from the session also promoted the [“Town Centre Living” Architectural Design Competition](#) which aims to encourage innovative design for social housing within town centres and progress the government’s Town Centre First policy objectives. The RIAI and Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage have jointly



launched a competition for the design of social housing for Castleblayney, Kildare, Roscrea, and Sligo. A second round of this competition could be held for any of the 8 proposals in targeted locations. Delivery of the [Town Centre First](#) policy will be supported through new and existing funding streams such as the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF), Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), Croí Cónaithe (Towns) fund, Active Travel Fund, Town & Village Renewal Scheme, Historic Towns Initiative and investment supports from the forthcoming ERDF programme for Towns via the Regional Assemblies.

Panel 2

- Claire Feeney, Director of Services and Inclusion, The Housing Agency
- Tom Gilligan, Director of Services, Housing, Mayo County Council
- Cllr. Dermot Lacey, Dublin City Council
- Stewart Logan, Senior Planning Advisor, DHLGH

Bob Jordan also chaired the second panel session and took questions from the floor. Panellists were asked their thoughts on the presentations, including the living over the shop model and mews development. Panellists responded positively to the presentations, highlighting the importance of preserving the existing fabric of the built environment and developing **sustainable communities**. The “Spreading the Mews” project was discussed with the potential to target a particular market by catering for age-friendly and universally accessible housing. A demonstration model and **pilot project** were suggested as ways to move this idea forward. The impact of vacancy and dereliction on society was stressed by panellists, who believe projects could be piloted in local authorities. When asked about **urban regeneration** expertise in local authorities, panellists highlighted the appointment of Town Regeneration Officers but suggested that some Local Authorities may not have the necessary inhouse expertise required for regeneration projects..

When asked about what they can do to assist with bringing these ideas to life, panellists pointed to the [Urban Regeneration and Development Fund](#) (URDF), which aims to deliver more compact and sustainable development, as envisaged by Project Ireland 2040. Some panel members expressed an interest to run pilot projects for some or all of the projects within their Local Areas. Panellists mentioned the role of the Housing Agency in supporting and providing networking avenues to local authorities and [Vacant Homes Officers](#), and the role of Councillors in bringing these ideas to local authorities. Panellists also believe **collaboration** and **leadership** is required by local authorities and Government bodies to explore ideas further and move projects forward.



To read the official **Housing Unlocked – Making it Happen document**, which outlines the eight proposals and summarises the actions required to turn these ideas into reality, please visit this link: [Housing Unlocked – Making it Happen](#)