



RIAS

The Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland

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Infrastructure Strategy Consultation Team
Scottish Government

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Dear Colleagues

Draft Infrastructure Strategy 2027–2037: RIAS Key Concerns, Opportunities for Improvement and Offer of Collaboration

The Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland welcomed the opportunity to respond to the Draft Infrastructure Strategy 2027–2037 and the chance to highlight matters of professional concern arising from its current framing. In our response, we recognised the importance of establishing a long-term, outcome-led framework to support net zero, inclusive growth and resilient places, with a strong focus on placemaking and place-based investment. However, we consider that the Strategy requires substantive further development. This letter therefore summarises our principal concerns, as set out in our response, and sets out our offer of constructive support in addressing them.

Our observations are informed by professional experience and a shared commitment to the delivery of robust, safe and durable infrastructure outcomes. It is with regret that RIAS considers the Strategy, in its current form, to be insufficiently developed to meet its stated purpose. A major concern is its failure to engage with the strategic challenges facing the construction sector, including those relating to building safety, quality, professional capability and procurement reform.

The architectural profession has extensive experience of the long-term consequences of misaligned strategic decisions for delivery outcomes. In this context, we are keen to work with the Scottish Government in addressing the omissions highlighted. We believe that doing so would help to mitigate foreseeable adverse outcomes, including risks to building safety and resilience, while better supporting the development of Scotland's design sector and the resilience of the indigenous SMEs that underpin construction delivery.

Key areas of concern

1. Absence of building safety and quality as strategic risks

RIAS is deeply concerned by the absence of any explicit reference to building safety within the Strategy or the accompanying Scottish Futures Trust assessment. This omission is difficult to reconcile with the findings of major public inquiries in Scotland and the UK, including the Edinburgh Schools Inquiry, the Scottish Hospitals Inquiry and the post Grenfell

regulatory response. These are not legacy issues. They are contemporary, systemic risks that should be recognised at a national strategic level.

An infrastructure strategy that does not acknowledge safety, design quality and professional oversight risks perpetuating a narrow compliance-driven culture that prioritises lowest cost rather than safe, durable and adaptable assets. The consequences of this approach are now well evidenced and should inform future strategic direction.

2. Design sector marginalised to a supporting role

While the Strategy acknowledges placemaking in principle, design is largely positioned as a downstream technical activity rather than a critical driver of value, risk management and long-term performance. Decisions about scope, risk, procurement route and affordability are repeatedly taken before meaningful design input is secured. This undermines whole life value, adaptability and the delivery of safe, robust buildings that align with the government's placemaking policies.

Infrastructure investment that treats architecture, engineering and urbanism as advisory inputs rather than strategic capabilities will continue to struggle to deliver resilient places, particularly in schools, healthcare, housing renewal and climate adaptation.

3. Procurement and governance weaknesses unaddressed

The Strategy underestimates the extent to which existing procurement and governance models actively undermine its stated ambitions. Scotland's construction sector is dominated by SMEs, yet current procurement practices favour scale, lowest price and risk transfer. These conditions encourage sub-economic bidding, suppress innovation and marginalise professional judgement, contributing to insolvency, delay and disputes, and eroding quality in placemaking.

Without explicit recognition that procurement reform and professional capability are enabling conditions for success, improved alignment between plans and budgets alone will not deliver better infrastructure outcomes.

4. Insufficient focus on adaptation and reuse

The Strategy does not adequately embed retention, adaptation and reuse of existing assets as core infrastructure activities, despite their central importance to net zero delivery, the circular economy and whole life carbon reduction. Too often, demolition continues to be treated as a default choice rather than a last resort, resulting in avoidable carbon emissions and loss of economic and cultural value.

Seizing opportunities for improvement

RIAS believes the Strategy could be significantly strengthened through the following targeted measures:

- Explicit recognition of building safety, design quality and professional oversight as national strategic risks and priorities for urgent reform.
- Mandating early design leadership within infrastructure appraisal and business case development, aligned with RIBA Stage 0 or equivalent strategic definition processes.
- Reforming procurement to prioritise quality, competence and outcomes, with proportionate routes that enable SMEs and specialist practices to contribute meaningfully.
- Strengthening design governance to keep continuity between early intent, procurement, delivery and long-term stewardship of infrastructure.
- Embedding whole life value, embodied carbon retention and adaptability as decision making criteria from the outset.

These measures are not regulatory burdens. They are practical mechanisms to improve certainty, control risk and deliver better value for public investment.

Supporting the design economy and delivery capability

The Strategy presents a missed opportunity to recognise infrastructure delivery itself as a design-led economic sector. Architecture and related professions contribute significantly to productivity, skills development, innovation and export potential. However, current commissioning and procurement models limit the ability of Scottish practices to work at a strategic level, increasing long-term reliance on external providers and weakening domestic capacity.

Strategic investment in design capability would strengthen Scotland's construction ecosystem, support skills retention and improve infrastructure outcomes across housing, renewables and natural capital.

RIAS offer to collaborate


RIAS is eager to work collaboratively with the Scottish Government, the Scottish Futures Trust and delivery partners as the Strategy is refined. The profession can contribute through:

- Practical development of design governance and early engagement models.
- Input to procurement and business case reform informed by professional experience.
- Improved engagement with SMEs and local practices to support innovation and respond effectively to emerging infrastructure opportunities and challenges.
- Capacity building for public sector clients and commissioners, including better understanding of project lifecycle stages and risk management.

Our aim is to help ensure that Scotland's infrastructure investment delivers safe, climate-resilient, high-quality places while sustaining a capable and responsible design and construction sector.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss these issues further and to contribute to the next stage of the Strategy's development.

Yours sincerely



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