



Architect firm calls for flexibility in apartment design guidelines

By Dermot Keyes

Waterford City and County Councils should embrace a greater flexibility in its interpretation of the most recently approved apartment design guidelines, according to a leading firm of architects.

Douglas Wallace Architects has called for greater flexibility from local authorities should the guidelines themselves detract from the quality of living in new apartments.

"The new design guidelines are definitely a step in the right direction in the effort to create better quality and sustainable living environments," said Eimear Hanly of Douglas Wallace.

"However, there is a caveat in that meeting them does not mean that a development will actually offer better quality living spaces."

Added Ms Hanly: "The guidelines could simply become a 'ticking the box' exercise and lead to 'design with a calculator'. All designs should instead be assessed on a case by case basis because a literal inter-

pretation of the guidelines may have the effect of limiting innovation.

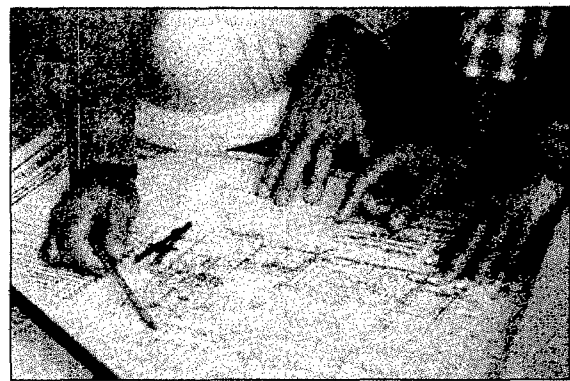
Speaking on Monday, Ms Hanly said that designers and developers must be "more innovative" when it comes to the types of suggested schemes.

She added: "but if they are, then the local authorities, the planning process and the general public will need to be tolerant and open to this requirement.

"The new design guidelines should also give rise to permissions for increased density in appropriate locations so as to achieve more commercially viable and sustainable urban design." The latest guidelines were introduced by Minister John Gormley's office last September.

Eimear Hanley said the mistakes of the past must not be repeated "where minimum standards had become targets for some developers whose sole focus is maximising return.

"The adoption of a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach to the design of apartment units



The latest guidelines for apartment design were introduced by the Department of the Environment last September.

should be encouraged," she continued.

"In a welcome development for buyers, the design guidelines stipulate that apartments should have adequate storage facilities and they outline the minimum sizes for bedrooms and balconies.

"They also place significant emphasis on the design of dual aspect apartments for better natural light and views and for more usable private open space."

"However, the minimum depth of 1.5 metres for private open areas will create

deeper balconies which could create a "shadow effect" on the living areas of the apartments below."

Ms Hanley said she was hopeful that the "spirit of the guidelines" would be applied as opposed to a "strictly literal interpretation".

She concluded: "Local authorities should use their discretion to take a more holistic approach to planning policy, combined with the flexibility afforded in the document itself, to assess each submission on its own individual merits."