

RIAI Submission to the Joint Committee on Housing, Planning, and Local Government on the Land Development Agency Bill 2019.

Introduction

I am Kathryn Meghen CEO at the RIAI, and I would like to thank the Joint Committee on Housing and Local Government for the invitation. I would also like to introduce my colleague, John O'Mahony FRIAI, RIAI Spokesperson on Housing.

Founded in 1839, with 3900 members, the RIAI is the support and registration body for architects in Ireland and the membership and support body for architectural technologists.

The RIAI's mission is to drive excellence in architecture and the built environment and we focus on developing policy and contributing to legislation that supports a better-built environment. The RIAI works to ensure the safety of the public through the efficient and effective administration of the Register of Architects and the maintenance of standards within architectural education.

Commentary

The RIAI welcomes the development of the Land Development Agency (LDA) and believe it is a key pillar in the delivery of the National Planning Framework and Project Ireland 2040. The challenges that we face as a country: climate change, growing population, aging population and new patterns of work, leisure and retail, mean that we need new strategies and vehicles to deliver a coherent, quality built environment.

With the country facing so many critical challenges and having a number of great opportunities, we must now make decisions based on national long-term need. The LDA provides an opportunity to develop sites that meet the national need and moves from the inter county, intercity and inter parish debates that so frequently dominate discussions about where and what we build.

We need a coherent ambitious plan for state owned lands that focuses on delivering quality and helps to bring stability to the unpredictable housing market. The LDA give the State the opportunity to drive this change and to lead in delivering a new type of housing which supports quality and innovation. However, we cannot build housing in isolation.

The development of each land bank will require an informed study of existing and required infrastructure, the present condition of the site and a well-developed design strategy. The Institute recommends that such studies are undertaken prior to the sale of any public landbanks.

In the short-term, a pilot scheme should be funded to examine the optimum housing mix potential for each site to ensure that the homes, infrastructure and public realm that are developed are suitable for the people who will live there. The Institute believes that there is scope for developing housing schemes based on a multi-generational approach so that the needs of different cohorts of people (students, young families, and older people) would be met on an integrated basis on the same site. This will help foster a sense of community in new housing developments and encourage private investment in amenities that match the requirements for everyone living there.

The procurement processes that the LDA uses to identify architectural and other built environment professionals must focus on long-term quality and must provide a clear pipeline of the work to be commissioned.

The LDA could consider the principals set out in the RIAI's publication 'A guide to Smart Public Procurement' that provides for a procurement model focused on quality outcomes and ensures that businesses of a range of scales and locations are eligible to tender for the works. The RIAI strongly recommend the use of architectural design competitions to procure quality architecture. It believes they should be an integral part of the LDAs procurement processes.

The RIAI welcomes the draft legislation and makes the following observations –

- The objects of the LDA under Head 8 of the General Scheme of the Bill are comprehensive but we would recommend that Object (C) obtain a positive financial return for the State. Is interpreted as broadly as possible as the financial return may include stimulation of the development of the wider area which will bring long-term State benefit.
- The functions for the LDA set out under Head 9 of the Bill are comprehensive but we would recommend that Object 3(a) to establish and maintain a register of relevant public lands is broadly interpreted as the RIAI believes that a central register of all public owned lands is required to allow for informed decision making at national level
- In defining the role for the LDA in the proposed legislation, the State should consider developing protocols to enable any uplift in the value of public or private landholding consequent on rezoning to be either fully allocated to the State or to be equitably allocated between the State and any private owner affected by rezoning. The uplift in land value may then be used for the public good through infrastructure, public realm, community, amenity and other sustainable development. Precedents for this approach exist in Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Germany and elsewhere.
- To deliver on its functions successfully it is important that all of the powers and resources are made available. The goals of the LDA require sufficient staffing and resources to unlock the potential of sites for new housing. As has occurred with other legislation, the intent and ambition are detailed but the tools to deliver are not followed through. To be a success this cannot happen with the LDA.

The choices available to us as to how we develop as a country are reducing. We must take a long-term, holistic view of how and where we deliver our housing and built infrastructure we must meet new improved standards of building and deliver new models of increased density to ensure that our damage to the planet and our impact on climate change are reversed.

The RIAI welcomes the Government's initiative to bring forward the Land Development Agency and asks that the legislation be progressed as a matter of urgency.

Thank you.

16 October 2019