

Joint Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government

Opening Statement by Joe Corr MIPI, President of the Irish Planning Institute

Tuesday 22 October 2019

Chairman, Deputies and Senators. Thank you for inviting the Irish Planning Institute to be with you today. I am Joe Corr, President of the Irish Planning Institute and I am joined today by Dr. Conor Norton, our Vice President. We will do all we can to assist you with the views of Planners regarding the Strategic Housing Development Review.

By way of brief background, the Irish Planning Institute is the all-island professional body representing planners engaged in physical and environmental planning in Ireland. Our mission is to advance planning in the interest of the common good by serving, improving and promoting the planning profession. We are the largest professional membership body for spatial planners operating on the island of Ireland. Our Members work right across the planning system – in planning consultancies, for developers, in Planning Authorities, semi state organisations, An Bord Pleanála, central government. We are a broad church of Professional Planners and collectively our membership has developed great expertise through its interactions with various stages of the Strategic Housing Development Process.

As a membership organisation with Members working right across the Planning System, the views represented by Members to the Irish Planning Institute are quite diverse. Our Institute has long argued in favour of the principle of subsidiarity in planning where, insofar as practical, local planning decisions should be made by competent authorities at the local level. Nonetheless, the Institute acknowledges and supports the overall purpose of Strategic Housing Development to accelerate the delivery of much needed housing in accordance with the principles and objectives contained in Rebuilding Ireland, as a temporary measure.

Over 16,172 housing units and 7,573 units of student accommodation has been granted through this process by An Bord Pleanála since SHD was rolled out. This is a considerable achievement. Despite the changes facilitated in the planning system and increasing numbers of planning applications, our Institute shares the concerns of many here, that figures for building on the ground remain modest.

There are of course numerous hurdles developers have to jump after planning permission has been granted before they can actually start building. The post permission period is increasingly more complex with numerous compliance conditions that must be fulfilled on each site before construction can start.

We have consistently argued that local authority planning departments are not adequately resourced to carry out their range of functions and responsibilities. We have pointed to areas where problems still exist in terms of process. For example, we have suggested greater resourcing for matters of compliance with conditions of permission, and we have suggested to the Strategic Housing Development Review Group that these compliance certificates could be secured if necessary from An Bord Pleanála. And, as with all permissions delay can still result from the judicial review processes, post-permission.

Delivery is critical, and it must be driven at local level. At our recent Autumn Planning Conference I called for Planner-led delivery teams to be created in all local authorities to bring forward urban regeneration in urban centres, to engage in active land management, and to assist in unlocking strategic lands where planning permissions have been granted.

In summary I would like to highlight here today, as I have on other occasions, that the successful roll out of Strategic Housing Development shows that planning per se is not the roadblock to delivery of housing. Our Membership is anxious to avoid a scenario where planning permissions granted under the Strategic Housing Development process will be used by Developers or Speculators to increase the value of land, rather than the delivery of housing. We very much want to be part of the solution in working with other professions in the construction sector to deliver the housing our citizens so badly need.

Cathaoirleach, thank you again, for the opportunity to come before the Committee today. We will endeavour to respond to all of your questions. However, if there is any additional information required arising from this meeting, we will be pleased to provide that information in a prompt manner.

Thank you.