

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government

Opening Statement by

Paul Hyde, Deputy Chairperson of An Bord Pleanála

Tuesday, 22nd October 2019

A Cathaoirleach, Committee members, colleagues from the planning and development sectors, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee to discuss the important work of the Board in the context of the Strategic Housing Developments (SHD) Review, and to respond to any questions you may have of SHD.

I will just take this opportunity to introduce myself, Paul Hyde, Deputy Chair of An Bord Pleanála and Chair of the Strategic Housing Division. I am joined this morning by Ms. Rachel Kenny, Director of Planning Operations. With your indulgence, I may ask her to address some of the issues raised, as she may be more familiar with such matters.

The Board undertakes a critical role in considering and determining Strategic Housing Development proposals and we remain committed to delivering decisions as quickly and effectively as possible. The Strategic Housing Development legislation has been in operation for just over 2 years (since July 2017). In that time a total of just over 100 cases have been decided, two thirds decided in the last 9 months. All cases have been decided within the mandatory timelines provided for (i.e.. except for 2 cases, where oral hearings were held, this timeline is 16 weeks). The Board has also issued opinions on approximately. 230 pre-application consultations, again within the 9-week period provided for in the legislation.

The role of the Board is not merely to deal with cases as expeditiously as possible, but to promote the principles of proper planning and sustainable development. The National Planning Framework and the emerging Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, as well as the various section 28 Ministerial Guidelines published over the last decade, set a clear priority for appropriate development in the right locations to facilitate the sustainable and orderly growth of our cities, towns and rural

hinterlands, and the Board has a clear role in implementing such policies through the processing of case decisions.

In a constantly evolving and more complex legislative and legal context, where environmental issues and public participation are to the fore, it is also crucial that the Board has all the information it needs to make sound decisions and gives people time to feed in their views on proposals during the deliberative process, reflecting our core principles of integrity, independence and fairmindedness.

To give you a little background on the Strategic Housing Developments Division, the Board was on commencement of the legislation provided with 10 additional staff across planning inspectorate and admin, although during 2019 this was increased to 17 staff. 4 board members are assigned to the SHD Division of the Board, which is chaired by myself and the members of this division are required to prioritise these cases, as with all large-scale housing appeals that come to us.

The Board's performance in relation to Strategic Housing Developments (SHD) has been very strong. The Board as I have already mentioned have decided over 100 cases, with 67 of these being a decision to grant and 34 to refuse. As of 30 September, approx. 16,500 residential units have been permitted and 7,500 student bedspaces permitted. Pre-application consultation requests considered to date account for approximately 63,000 no. residential units and approximately 12,000 no. student bedspaces, so we anticipate significant and on-going applications. To date circa 5,460 no residential units and circa 1,360 student bedspaces have been refused consent. The Board remains committed to the right developments in the right locations.

The Board acknowledges the appointment of an independent panel to undertake a review of the performance, operation and structure of Strategic Housing Development provisions. Representatives of the Board have met with the independent review group to answer queries and provide statistical information, and to provide insight as required. Rather than go in to the detail of this now, as I am conscious that I am taking up members' valuable time to raise specific issues, so I will leave it there. We are happy to take any questions and answer specific queries as they arise.

Thank you.