

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

October 2019

Founded in 1938, the Association of Consulting Engineers of Ireland (ACEI) is the representative body in Ireland of those professional engineering firms that offer their skills and experience in all branches of engineering, to clients requiring independent advice and judgement. Virtually all of the significant, independent consulting engineering firms in Ireland, who qualify for membership, are represented.

The objectives of ACEI are to: advance the interests of engineers in all disciplines of the profession, particularly those of consulting engineers; encourage the practice of engineering as a profession; increase the usefulness of the profession to the general public and safeguard the trust reposed in its members by clients. As part of its concern for quality of service, and value, ACEI promotes quality-based selection as the most appropriate method for the appointment of consulting engineers.

ACEI welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Land Development Agency (LDA) Bill. As Ireland is facing many challenges it is important that as many voices as possible are included. In this context ACEI also continues to strongly support the vision of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the plan to shape the future growth of the country to the year 2040. In particular ACEI commends the government for committing the funding for a number of strategic developments directly contributing to the Irish built environment sector including: Project Ireland 2040; the National Development Plan; Future Jobs Ireland and the Climate Action Plan.

The LDA as proposed is welcome in order to consolidate the requirements for land and sites over a longer term perspective. ACEI believes that the LDA bill provides an opportunity to deliver housing and other accommodation in an expedient and efficient manner. However, care must be taken that the relevant infrastructure is carefully reviewed and an appropriate development plan established.

In relation to housing in particular, the NPF is targeting the provision of 550,000 new houses for 2040 to cater for the additional one million people projected to be living in Ireland at that time. The ACEI recommends that Government should give consideration to some or all of the following initiatives to facilitate promotion of housing stock both in the short and medium term up to 2040:

- Assess the land banks retained by the local authorities and the Housing Agency for immediate suitability for social and private housing mix;
- Utilise the Part 8 Planning procedures where feasible to accelerate the planning process;
- Streamline Government funding approvals procedures to accelerate social housing provision;
- Provide funding for a new serviced land initiative to make available adequate utility services;
- Incentivise regeneration activities in urban areas;
- Expand the Living Cities Tax Incentive Scheme to urban areas outside of current designated cities.

The ACEI also recognises the challenges an increasing population will bring in terms of having the appropriate infrastructure delivered in a sustainable manner, as well as in harmony with the environment to meet the required needs. To that end, the Association strongly recommends that the Government prioritises the increased requirements and accelerates provisions of good quality affordable housing. Actions undertaken in this area should address, where possible, an appropriate mix of needs including social housing, together with the necessary associated utilities and services infrastructure.

As well as the above, ACEI recommends a long-term, sustainable strategy for the country in relation to the provision of housing and other accommodation as well as infrastructure in the wider built environment. Key to this will be the prioritisation of access to, and use of, natural resource assets from a number of perspectives including.

- Optimising the use of green and low carbon energy to provide a unique energy capacity;
- Integrating tourism, leisure and other sectors by developing sustainable agriculture and marine assets;
- Increasing and expanding the infrastructure/utilities available for the development of agriculture/marine related clusters in various sectors such as food, tourism and technology;
- Developing new tourism infrastructure specifically supporting the green and coastal 'Ways' as well as shared hinterlands with the relevant economic corridors.

In relation to quality-based selection and procurement, ACEI believes that a clearer definition of the service that is required of consulting engineers has the potential to significantly improve project outcomes. The association strongly supports the objective of ensuring detailed project briefs for the tendering process are provided to all consultant professionals. It is also suggested that the provision of a professional programme management function is very important. This could be resourced internally by the LDA or externally by the relevant consultants.

ACEI's view in relation to a sustainable low-carbon society is that Ireland can achieve significant tangible benefits by prioritising this as an objective. As outlined in the NPF, these include the creation of sustainable green jobs and sustainable food production as well as generally enhancing the environment. ACEI supports the overall government strategy in this area and considers that renewable energy, commercial and private sector investments and flood defences should be prioritised. In relation to housing, the association suggests that a minimum target of B1 BER is an objective that the LDA could aim to deliver for all houses developed under its remit.

In relation to specific recommendations for the LDA Bill, ACEI recommends:

1. In the initial stages, a reduced emphasis on achieving a positive financial outcome.
2. Sufficient, appropriate and long-term resources are provided to support the LDA, including the utilisation of appropriate digital technologies to promote efficacy and effectiveness.
3. A co-ordinated approach for LDA activities across all government agencies and departments, as well as consultation fora with the sector including the Construction Sector Group (CSG).
4. Consideration is given to the development of a single infrastructure body for the country, as is provided for in other jurisdictions. This recommendation, already provided to the government in other contexts and by other bodies, would be of huge benefit to the LDA.

In conclusion, ACEI welcomes the LDA Bill from the government and supports the associated legislation. It is hoped that the process can be completed expediently. The Association thanks the Department for the opportunity to make a submission at this time.

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