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STRATEGIC HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Submission on Strategic Housing
Developments from the Irish Planning
Institute to the Joint Committee on
Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- November 2020



**IRISH PLANNING
INSTITUTE**

Institiúid Pleanála Na hÉireann

The Irish Planning Institute

The Irish Planning Institute is the largest professional membership body for spatial planners operating on the island of Ireland. Irish Planning Institute Members work right across the planning system – in planning consultancies, for developers, in Planning Authorities, semi state organisations, An Bord Pleanála, and central government. As a broad church of professional Planners, collectively and indeed uniquely, the membership of the Irish Planning Institute has developed great expertise through its interactions with various stages of the Strategic Housing Development Process (SHD). As a professional membership organisation with Members working right across the Planning System, the views concerning Strategic Housing Developments represented by Members to the Irish Planning Institute are, by definition, quite diverse.

Strategic Housing Development

The management and decision-making for Strategic Housing Development (SHD) will revert to Planning Authorities in 2022. The concept and processes of SHD was introduced as a temporary measure to address delays in the delivery of housing within the Planning System. During its operation, new development management processes were introduced, with some innovative arrangements that have served the Planning System well and raised the quality of planning applications. Many of these processes were placed on a statutory footing. The process also benefited from consistency in decision-making within a single organisation, particularly having regard to the then context of changing national planning guidance. These successes were facilitated by the support of Planning Authorities, and increased resourcing and expertise of a larger staff within An Bord Pleanála.

The return of SHD to the Planning Authorities ensures that decision-making remains as close as possible to the places and communities most affected by those decision (the core principle of subsidiarity, which is embedded in the Irish Planning System). It will also restore and improve levels of public confidence in the development management process as An Bord Pleanála will revert to their appropriate and much-needed role as a review body of local-level planning decisions (a central aspect of Irish Planning System).

Proposed Review on Lessons Learned from SHD

Given that SHD will revert to Planning Authorities in 2022, the Irish Planning Institute is calling for an in-depth review of the SHD Process to be undertaken by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage as soon as possible. This review should identify the positive aspects of the SHD process and inform changes and improvements in the quality and consistency of the development management for larger planning applications at local level.

The Irish Planning Institute is very keen to engage with this review with a view to taking a proactive role in identifying and supporting changes which will improve the quality and consistency of development management outcomes at local level. The Institute has already engaged its membership (which spans the public and private sectors) about key learnings from SHD. Members who have had considerable exposure to different aspects of the SHD Process are happy to participate in a formal review.

Important areas for consideration in a Department led review include:

- More streamlined and consistent development management processes for larger scale development proposals including mandatory multidisciplinary pre-planning consultations, statutory timelines, etc.
- Alternative planning processes at local level which could provide greater certainty of planning and development outcomes for larger scale development proposals (planning schemes)

- Adequate resourcing of planning function, both plan and development management, with access to specialist expertise (e.g. urban design, ecological and transport expertise within Planning Authorities or provided, for example, by Regional Assemblies or as part of regional Local Authority shared services model.)
- Statutory timelines for pre-planning meetings and planning appeals on larger scale development proposals.
- Other barriers to the delivery of housing

Conclusion

The return of SHD applications to the normal development management system (Section 34) offers a unique opportunity to transfer many of the key innovations of the SHD system to the Section 34 process. This will require careful management and transition. With this there is a significant opportunity to improve the quality and consistency of development management outcomes for larger development proposals at local level. A thorough and timely review of the SHD processes and outcomes will inform recommendations for changes to development management processes, and these may need to be underpinned by policy guidelines and statutory provisions.

The Irish Planning Institute will work to support the smooth and effective transition of large-scale housing applications back to Planning Authorities.