

Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government & Heritage

9 September 2021

Opening Statement by Dr Conor Norton MIPI

President of the Irish Planning Institute

Chairman, Deputies and Senators. Thank you for inviting the Irish Planning Institute to be with you today. I am Dr Conor Norton, President of the Irish Planning Institute and I will do everything I can to assist you with the views of Planning Professionals regarding the proposed legislation for Large Scale Residential Development

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 this island. Our Members are working right across the planning system – in planning consultancies, for developers, in Planning Authorities, semi-state organisations, An Bord Pleanála, the Office of the Planning Regulator and for Central Government. We are a broad church of over 900 Professional Planners and collectively our membership has developed great expertise in preparing, considering and determining Large Scale Residential Planning Applications, including through our interaction with various stages of the Strategic Housing Development process.

The principle of subsidiarity is central to governance in planning. We have always defended this principle, where insofar as practicable, local planning decisions are made in an open and consultative way by competent authorities at the local level. In this regard we have welcomed the new measures for Planning Reform outlined in this legislation as an important and necessary step in rebalancing the Planning System in Ireland and restoring this important subsidiarity in decision-making.

As President of IPI, I was pleased to have an input into the initial working group established by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to consider issues pertinent to this replacement legislation for SHD. The Institute notes that many of its key recommendations to this group about incorporating successful elements of the SHD process particularly around more certainty in timelines and improved pre-application consultation processes, are incorporated in the General Scheme.

It is important also to note that the legislation being discussed today needs to be considered within the broader context of a general recalibration of our planning system. As with all legislation in planning, it is important that these change to development management processes ultimately delivery greater efficiency and consistency in development management processes across different local authorities. Along with the new proposed legislation we contend that revised Planning Guidelines for Development Management are now urgently needed.

We also need to continue our transition to a democratic and collaborative plan-led system. Better and more detailed plans at the local level in particular will provide greater certainty for development management and reduce the often adversarial nature of the process. This will require much greater planning effort.

The improved and extended processes required for Large Scale Residential Planning Applications, combined with more resourcing for plan-making will have significant resourcing implications. While as an Institute we welcome all new measures to increase efficiency and improve quality of Planning Applications and Planning Decision Making, our Institute is acutely aware of the chronic under resourcing of Planning Departments in Ireland. Twenty-eight out of twenty-nine Planning Authorities who responded to our recent survey on planning resources cite under resourcing of Planning Departments as the single biggest challenge facing Planning in Ireland. This view is equally shared by the vast majority of Planning Consultants working in the Private Sector. We strongly urge the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Local Government Management Association and other relevant bodies to prioritise the resourcing of Local Authority Planning Departments as a matter of extreme urgency to ensure the smooth implementation of this new legislation.

In summary, we broadly welcome the legislation as a larger process of recalibration of our planning system. We highlight the urgent need for adequate resourcing of our Planning System and particularly our Local Authorities. As an Institute we restate our desire to work proactively towards solutions for pressing problems in planning and housing, along with our colleagues in other built environment professions. We will continue to collaborate at every possible level with all stakeholders and support every effort at national, regional and local level for a properly functioning and efficient planning system that works for all our citizens.

Cathaoirleach, thank you again for the opportunity to come before the Committee today. I 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.