

IRISH PLANNING INSTITUTE

Press Release

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PLANNERS SAY LOCAL GOVERNMENT REPORT “ALREADY OUT OF DATE”

The Irish Planning Institute (IPI) today (Fri) responded to the “Report of the Local Government Efficiency Review Group” by stating that it is already out of date arising from the significant amendments to the Planning & Development (Amendment) Bill 2010 as it was adopted by the Oireachtas.

The new Planning & Development (Amendment) Bill 2010 places significant extra responsibilities on planning authorities in relation to development plans, registration of quarries, Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Directive and a new procedure of Substitute Consent arising from court rulings in relation to unauthorised developments and retention permissions.

An additional 100 pages of amendments were introduced at the closing stages of the Bill. “These could not have been anticipated by the Review Group and must be taken into account in any decision to follow through on the recommendation to reduce planning staff”, said IPI President, Mr Gordon Daly.

The IPI – which represents professional planners in public and private sectors - also raise concerns that the Report seeks to cut planning staff “on the double” in more general cuts and a specific 10 per cent of planning staff mentioned for redeployment.

While the Report of the Review Group recognises that much important work remains in the areas of forward planning and enforcement, it states that the “current level of resourcing for planning staff and administrative support in the development management role should decline significantly.” The IPI would argue that this has already occurred and that planning staff are now working more in the areas of forward planning and enforcement.

“This rebalancing had to happen otherwise the planning system would not have been able to cope. An analysis of local government published by the IPI in 2007* showed at that time that 75 per cent of planners were working in development management with only 20 per cent in forward planning and 5 per cent in enforcement,” stated Mr Daly.

“We must not take a short-sighted approach to this. A lot of our planning difficulties have arisen from a lack of planning rather than bad planning and there is a considerable amount of catching up to do in terms of consolidating existing communities and putting plans and strategies for the future. These include those that will facilitate economic development and regeneration and mean that we get the most efficient use of existing and future infrastructure,” he added.

The IPI President also strongly stressed that there can be no “stepping down” of the planning system just because the Celtic Tiger years are gone. The IPI also point out that the number of planners in local government in Ireland is comparatively small compared to our European counterparts.

The IPI welcomed the proposal to increase planning fees with the IPI President stating that it was “long overdue but that it made sense to link it to efficiency improvements”.

The IPI also welcomed the proposed transfer of planning functions from Town to County Councils but have cautioned that this should only extend to executive functions. “In the interests of local democracy, the reserved functions of the Town Council in relation to planning including the making of a development plan must continue to rest with the town councillors” stressed Mr Daly.

The IPI also welcomed the introduction of an innovation fund and the bringing of local development bodies under the local government framework. “It makes a lot of sense to bring the areas of community development and enterprise into a wider planning function” concluded the IPI President.

* A Census of the Planning Profession in Ireland, IPI, 2007

Ends

Issued on behalf of IPI by Tony O’Brien Communications – 087.2438584