



PRESS RELEASE

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## **PLANNERS MUST BE LISTENED TO IN DRIVE FOR ECONOMIC RECOVERY – IPI PRESIDENT WARNS**

Planners are uniquely placed to aid economic recovery but it is vital that their advice is not ignored as happened in the past with overzoning, the President of the Irish Planning Institute (IPI), Mr Gerry Sheeran, stated today (Thur).

Speaking at the opening of the IPI National Planning Conference in Tullamore, he said: “The skills and talents of planners are essential to ensuring that we develop more sustainable, attractive and cohesive communities to live in, that we adopt more sustainable methods of travelling, that we build strong and vibrant town centres, that we address the issue of declining rural areas and that we enhance and protect our built and natural heritage.

“Now more than ever the core values of planning - the common good, sustainability and quality – need to be the yardstick for all planning decisions taken within the country. The advice of planners particularly at local authority level has often been ignored in the past. It is essential that professional planning advice be given adequate weight when critical decisions on our society’s future are being made,” Mr Sheeran stated.

Arguing that the planning profession remains a cornerstone to economic recovery, he told delegates: “Planners are uniquely placed to help drive recovery. The need for the profession in less ‘pressurised’ times is just as important and planners can help to develop the vision for a smarter, more sustainable Ireland.”

Dealing with overzoning and Ghost Estates, Mr Sheeran added: “Serious problems of unfinished and ghost housing estates have followed from the economic crisis. However, it is the underlying issues of land speculation and overzoning which are major contributors to this problem.

“Decisions of councils to zone large amounts of lands, which in many cases were multiples of the development land required for the projected population, may have been seen at the time as benign and without negative consequences in the booming economy but there are victims.

“These victims are those living in unfinished housing estates or those housed on land zoned on floodplains. The overzoning was not done in the interest of the common good but for sectoral interests, such as, landowners and developers and frequently against the advice of professional planners.”

Referring to NAMA, Mr Sheeran said this was an opportunity for a “plan led” rather than “developer led” approach adding: “Indeed good planning can increase the value of land by achieving a better use mix or by providing public infrastructure such as public transport or can ensure the provision of social infrastructure such as schools, community facilities, parks and social housing in a timely and coherent fashion.”

In his Presidential address, he stressed that in the development of land and property by NAMA on behalf of the State, it should not solely be driven by seeking “the best return possible”, which when pursued by landowners, developers and bankers had driven the economic bubble, but should be guided by proper planning and sustainable development, including social and community objectives.

These could include the provision of open space and recreational areas, land for a variety of community and educational facilities together with appropriate space for these facilities to expand in response to the changing needs of the community.

Speaking about recent incidents of flooding around the country, Mr Sheeran said that while climate change was playing a part, manmade interventions also played a part. These included damage to bogs which were natural sponges, by short-sighted river drainage schemes, by modern forestry techniques, which can result in very significant increased run-off, by large areas of impermeable surfaces such as tarmac and concrete and by inappropriate zoning of land which is on flood plains.

On biodiversity, he said: “We must be alert to the fact that degradation of ecosystems is often irreversible and extinction is forever. We must value and protect the riches of our own unique biodiversity heritage and reduce biodiversity loss.”

The National Planning Conference was opened today by the Minister of State for Planning, Mr Ciaran Cuffe TD.

Ends

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