

Joint Oireachtas Committee on Housing, Planning and Local Government

Opening Statement by

Paul Hyde, Deputy Chairperson of An Bord Pleanála

Tuesday, 10th November 2020

A Cathaoirleach, Committee members, colleagues from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee to discuss the operations of the Board in the context of Strategic Housing Developments (SHD) , and to respond to any questions you may have in respect of SHD.

I will just take this opportunity to introduce myself, my name is Paul Hyde, I am the Deputy Chair of An Bord Pleanála and also serve as Chairperson of the Board's Strategic Housing Division. I am joined this morning by Ms. Rachel Kenny, Director of Planning Operations. With your indulgence, I may ask her to address some of the issues raised, as she may be more familiar with such matters.

The Board undertakes a critical role in considering and determining Strategic Housing Development proposals and we remain committed to delivering decisions as quickly and effectively as possible. The Strategic Housing Development legislation has been in operation for just over 3 years (since July 2017). In that time a total of 265 cases have been decided. All cases have been decided within the mandatory timelines provided for (i.e. 16 weeks, except for 5 cases, where oral hearings were held, which extends the mandatory timeline to 24 weeks). An Bord Pleanála has also issued opinions on over 400 pre-application consultations on potential strategic housing proposals.

The role of the Board is not merely to deal with cases as expeditiously as possible, but to promote the principles of proper planning and sustainable development. The National Planning Framework and the recently adopted Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, as well as the various Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines published over the last decade, set a clear roadmap for appropriate development in the appropriate locations to facilitate the sustainable and compact growth of our

cities, towns and rural hinterlands beyond. The Board has a clear role in implementing such policies through the processing of case decisions received.

In a constantly evolving and more complex legislative and legal context, where environmental issues and public participation are to the fore, it is also crucial that the Board has all the information it needs to make sound decisions and gives citizens and all interested groups the appropriate time to input their views on proposals during the deliberative process, reflecting our core principles of integrity, independence, impartiality and fairmindedness.

To give you a little background on the Strategic Housing Developments Division, the Board was on commencement of the legislation provided with 10 additional staff across planning inspectorate and administrative teams, although during 2019 this was increased to 17 staff. Furthermore, there are 4 Board members assigned to the SHD Division of the Board, which is chaired by myself and the members of this Division are required to prioritise these cases, as with all large-scale housing appeals under Section 34 that come before the Division.

The Board's performance in relation to Strategic Housing Developments (SHD) has been very strong. As I have already mentioned, the Board have decided 265 cases, with 183 of these being a decision to grant and 79 to refuse (3 withdrawn). As of 30 September, approx. 40,000 residential units have been permitted under SHD provisions. (29,000 apartments and 11,000 houses, with approximately 4,000 social houses incorporated) and a further 10,100 student bedspaces permitted. Pre-application consultation requests considered to date account for some 63,000 residential units and approximately 12,000 no. student bedspaces, so we anticipate significant and on-going applications in the near future.

To date around 30% of applications have been refused. The Board remains committed to approving the right developments in the right locations and to the highest design standards.

Rather than go into any further detail, as I am conscious that I am taking up members' valuable time to raise specific issues, I will leave it there.

We are happy to take any questions and answer specific queries you may have as they arise.

Thank you.