

Chambers Ireland Submission on the General Scheme of the Housing and Planning Development Bill 2019

January 2020

Chambers Ireland is the largest business network in the State. With members in every geographic region and economic sector in Ireland, we are well positioned to represent the views of businesses and understand their concerns. Chambers Ireland is pleased to have the opportunity to submit our views as part of the Department's consultation on proposed changes to the planning system.

In September 2019, the Chambers Ireland organisation and our network of 40 Chambers pledged our support of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals which reflect the spirit and objectives of our work. Our network identified the goals we believe will best advance the sustainable economic development of our cities, towns and regions across Ireland. The chosen goals, several of which have relevance to this consultation process are as follows;

- Sustainable cities and communities
- Climate Action
- Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
- Decent Work and Economic Growth
- Gender Equality

Within the context of this Bill, our recent General Election Manifesto calls on the next Government to put place-making and balanced regional development at the heart of any new reforms and investments. In respect of planning and development, the priority of Chambers Ireland and our members is the efficient delivery and implementation of the National Planning Framework and Climate Action Plan.

Along with the need for the rapid delivery of housing in urban areas, improved public transport, broadband and water infrastructure, we must rapidly transition to a low-carbon economy. Our collective inaction on climate resilience measures to decarbonise our economy mean that we risk breaching our 2030 climate targets. Substantial investment is essential if we are to limit our impact on climate change. This involves making significant improvements to our energy grid, introducing a planning framework that supports offshore renewable wind energy, and financing research projects that support decarbonisation.

In order to achieve the above, we need a planning system that is effectively resourced and empowered to deliver these essential projects as efficiently as possible. We need to strengthen and resource the planning professionals in the Local Authorities and other relevant agencies. This includes planning departments in Local Authorities, An Bord Pleanála and the Office of the Planning Regulator. Resources need to be directed not only at improving efficiencies in dealing with planning applications, but also ensuring that effective, engaged public consultation is being supported at the earliest stage in the process. Should objections and disputes regarding infrastructure developments arise, our courts service need additional resources to improve the efficiency of dispute resolution.

In respect of the proposals within this Bill, measures to improve the efficiency of the process, as set out in Head 3, are welcome. With respect to Head 4, Head 5 and Head 6, we would welcome additional dialogue with the Department on these measures. The amount of infrastructure projects that need to be delivered in the coming decade will require community buy-in and public support, and these groups, including the business community, need to be supported to engage in the process. Ahead of any restriction or reconfiguration on costs or standing rights in Judicial Review, it

will be essential to show, through an impact assessment of the current regime, how the proposals in the Bill will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the planning system, while also ensuring that groups who have the necessary standing are not restricted from engaging.