



**Chambers
Ireland**
Advancing business together



Chambers Ireland Submission to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on the Housing for All Updated Action Plan

July 2024

About Chambers Ireland

Chambers Ireland is an all-island business organisation with a unique geographical reach. Our members are the Chambers of Commerce in the cities and towns throughout the country – active in every constituency. Each of our member Chambers is central to their local business community and all seek to promote thriving local economies that can support sustainable cities and communities.

Our Network has pledged to advocate for and support the advancement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and, in 2023, we were appointed to be an SDG Champion as part of the 2023-2024 SDG Champions Programme. Accordingly, we use the Goals as a framework to identify policy priorities and communicate our recommendations. We have a particular focus on five of the goals encompassing decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11), gender equality (SDG 5), industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9) and climate action (SDG 13).¹

In the context of the current consultation, decent work and economic growth, sustainable cities and communities, as well as industry, innovation and infrastructure are all relevant and applicable to the scope of the updated Housing for All Action Plan.

¹ The Chambers Ireland SDGs. Available at: <https://chambers.ie/sustainable-development-goals/>

Theme 1 – Scaling Up Supply

Scaling up supply is key to addressing housing shortages across the country, and particularly in urban areas where constraints are hindering economic growth by limiting labour mobility and making it more difficult for businesses to attract and retain talent.

Increasing the supply of housing needs a multi-faceted approach and a comprehensive and ambitious plan. We have seen the recent economic analyses by the ESRI indicate that housing supply would need to increase to between 35,000 and 53,000 units per annum in order to account for increased migration assumptions, however these figures do not include existing demand. Meanwhile, the Housing Commission have estimated an even wider range is needed, from 33,400 to 81,400 a year. These forecasts indicate that housing targets defined in the existing Housing for All plan are insufficient and we need to have a far-greater focus on ramping up housing delivery over the coming years. This should be the core priority for the updated Housing for All Action Plan.

In order to achieve this, however, we recognise the complexities of scaling up delivery in an industry that is confronted with high costs and capacity constraints. For this reason, the sub-themes of financing/ investment, cost of construction, MMC/ innovation, and construction sector capacity are all important contributors to increasing housing supply in the medium to long term.

Housing projects require significant upfront capital before building can commence and units can be sold. If we want to foster a buoyant housing market, we need to ensure there are viable financial supports and investment opportunities for developers. Modern Methods of Construction and innovation in housing development have the potential to expedite delivery by mitigating against some of the capacity constraints and resource-heavy requirements of traditional builds. There needs to be an extensive education and awareness programme on the benefits and best practices of MMC. Government needs to provide greater training resources and education programmes to help developers, planners, agencies, lenders and construction professionals learn about the potential opportunities of Modern Methods of

Construction. Enabling access to finance for MMC developers and innovators is also a key priority, as such development will have much larger upfront costs. Lastly, there needs to be increased investment in upskilling and apprenticeships in the construction sector to create sustainable employment opportunities and address skills shortages in the sector.

Theme 2 – Planning and Land Management

Housing delivery has been continually compounded by the failure of the planning system to deliver speedy coherent decision-making. Lengthy and complex approval processes, convoluted legal disputes and planning appeals, inconsistent application of rules across the country, and inadequate coordination between local and national authorities have all led to significant delays, spiralling costs and investor uncertainty. This impacts on our ability to build new homes, progress the objectives in the National Development Plan, and deliver essential transport, health, education, water, and energy infrastructure needed to meet the needs of our growing population and the demands of a modern, competitive economy.

The timely adoption and implementation of the Planning and Development Bill, along with any additional related Acts and regulations, represents the first clear step needed to give rise to the effective and clear reform of the Irish planning system.

Additionally, along with legislative reform, we have been calling for better resourcing and supports for planning authorities across the country. By providing additional resources and support to multidisciplinary teams, we can enhance their decision-making capabilities, ensuring comprehensive and well-informed choices. Improved resourcing of local authority planning departments is essential to achieve timely, consistent and integrated decisions across regions. This should be complemented by resourcing of the Courts and the judicial system, together with greater encouragement of the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution methodologies, including by the State and Semi-State sectors. The new

Environment and Planning Court must also be adequately resourced to improve efficiency in the system and ensure the swift adjudication on planning decisions.

Theme 3 – Infrastructure

At a time when increasing competitiveness is integral for futureproofing our national economic development, we need to ensure there is consistent delivery of essential infrastructure including transport, grid and water infrastructure. Developing sustainable and resilient infrastructure will rely on a more sustained and focused densification and urbanisation strategy.

The electrification of our transportation networks through projects like Metrolink, the Cork Suburban Rail project, and the Dart extension projects will ensure that increased housing development can be facilitated around urban centres resulting in job growth and more efficient distribution of public services, such as healthcare, education and community services.

At the Grid level, we need to reinforce and upgrade our grid infrastructure through front-loaded investment. Such reinforcements and upgrades need to scale to meet anticipated demand in future years based on expected population growth which will place increased demands on grid connections as we build more houses. So much of our necessary infrastructure development over the next 15 years is dependent on our continued strong investment in grid infrastructure. Energy reinforcements that integrate the regional grids will be essential in connecting all parts of the country as we expand our renewable energy generation capacity in order to ensure that energy can be transported from where it is generated to where it is needed.

To ensure sustainable supplies of clean water into the future and adequate wastewater treatment, we must increase investment in water infrastructure. Supporting the delivery of the Eastern and Midland

Regional Water Supply Project and the Greater Dublin Drainage Project will be critical in underpinning the development of affordable and sustainable housing into the future. Investing in our water systems now will bolster the resilience of our water infrastructure for future growth and development.

Increasing our national supply of housing is contingent on holistic, long-term, capacity-building of the essential infrastructure that is needed to not only build a house but to connect it to electricity, ensure it is serviced by reliable and clean water supplies, and that occupants have the potential to secure jobs, care for their families and contribute to sustainable and thriving local communities. For these reasons, there should be an increased focus on higher-density living and coordinated urbanisation, which will mean better connectivity, and more efficient distribution of public services and essential resources. However, it is important that the development of regional infrastructure is not neglected across the country and that a balanced approach to investment in transport, water and grid infrastructure ensures that all towns and regions across the country can benefit.