

## **Minutes of Hybrid Meeting Held on 28<sup>th</sup> April 2022 with RSUA and RTPI Members**

### **Topic: PADs and LDP General Principles Policy**

#### Attendance

Denise Dickson (Head of Planning) (DD) - Cloonavin Offices

Sharon Mulhern (Development Plan Manager) (SM) - Cloonavin Offices

Karen Dickson (Senior Planning Officer, Development Plan) (KD) - Cloonavin Offices

Murray Bell (Local RSUA Rep MB) – Bell Architects Ltd - Cloonavin Offices

Emmet Doyle (RSUA Public & Policy Affairs Officer) (ED) - Remote

Julie Sullivan (RTPI Northern Ireland Administrator) (JS) - Remote

Roisin Wilmott (RTPI Director for Wales and Northern Ireland) - Remote

Damien McLaughlin (HERE Architects) (DML) - Remote

Nathan Armstrong (NA) – Remote

Leanne Mills (GM Design) (LM) – Remote

John Hutchinson (Hutchinson Irvine Partnership) (JH) – Remote

Eoighan Farren (Farren Architects) (EF) – Remote

Nigel Jones (Nigel Jones Architects) (NJ) – Remote

Gemma Jobling (JPE Planning Ltd) (GJ) – Remote

Jordan Mitchell (Bell Architects) (JM) – Remote

Carol McIlvar (C McIlvar Ltd) (CMI) - Remote

Scott Caithness (Montgomery Irwin Architects) (SC) – Remote

Chris Bell (Kevin Cartin Architects) (CB) – Remote

Alana Durrent (Valley Architects) - Remote

Apologies: Una Somerville

- 1.1 DD opened the meeting and welcomed attendees. She advised the purpose of this meeting is to discuss the Pre-Application Discussions (PADs process); and the LDP General Principles Policy.
- 1.2 DD outlined the agenda for the meeting.

### *Pre-Application Discussions (PADs)*

- 2.1 DD advised that an issues paper had been circulated. She went through a powerpoint presentation to outline the current PADs process and examples of the process in other jurisdictions. Discussions covered:
  - Issues with current process
  - Comments submitted to DfI as part of review of the Implementation of the Planning Act
  - Examples from other jurisdictions
  - Way forward
- 2.2 DD referred to the current process within Northern Ireland highlighting that Belfast City Council are the only council in Northern Ireland currently charging for the PADs process.
- 2.3 DD advised that LPAs in England and Scotland charge for the PAD process and went through the details of examples of the process. She advised in Wales the charge is set nationally.
- 2.4 DD queried what members hoped to get out of a fee-paying PAD process?

### *Comments from those in attendance*

- 3.1 Clients do not mind paying for a service. However, it must be a useful resource, robust and reliable.
- 3.2 Small application discussions can be a very beneficial training/CPD resource for junior planning officers. However, agents are there to secure permission for clients, not to train officers as professional agents and planning officers should already possess these skills.
- 3.2 The small application process could be through an office meeting or sending information in and getting a written response. The issue is more about the medium to large scale proposals.
- 3.3 For major applications the initial engagement with Planning is critical. By the time the application is lodged they want to have established the principle and general approach of the application. However, acknowledge that it can't prejudice the normal planning process, 3<sup>rd</sup> party engagement etc. Agents generally know what needs to be submitted with an application, including surveys etc. input from some consultees may be necessary on occasion depending on the particular issues but its more about the planning aspect.
- 3.4 It was agreed that the turnaround time is a concern. Agents want a quick turnaround for response. PAN Scheme could be well-advanced at this stage and therefore want the PAD to run in tandem with the PAN. However, do not want to burden planning staff with paperwork regarding written responses.

- 3.5 In Republic of Ireland PAD meetings are normally held within one to two weeks of request. There is a half hour meeting with narrative around the proposal.
- 3.6 Managing client expectations is important. Very helpful if they also hear from the Council, as the decision maker following which the client can decide if they wish to proceed with the formal planning application.
- 3.7 In terms of discussions at the meeting it was agreed that it is for the agent to clearly indicate the issues to be discussed at any meeting and this should be detailed in the PAD form. PAD process could help establish if the principle is acceptable in planning terms, rather than client cost providing reports etc only to be informed at late stage that it is not. Highlighting specific issues is appropriate to steer meeting in right direction with focus on the key issues.
- 3.8 Senior planning officer's attendance at the meetings as they must be able to make decisions and give views rather than refer back to policy. For continuity the case officer should also be at PAD meeting although accepted that this may not be possible to allocate at that stage. The PAD process is not binding but instead a direction on the assessment of the application should it be submitted.
- 3.9 It was agreed that by working together we can improve the process and the PAD process can greatly assist in the timely processing of planning applications.

### *LDP General Principles*

- 4.1 DD provided a background to the LDP General Policies. She went through a powerpoint presentation to outline examples of the General Principles contained within the draft Plan Strategy of other Councils. Discussions covered:
  - Overarching development management policies
  - Extensive list of policies covering issues such as air quality, design, access and movement, sustainable development, waste etc.

### *Comments from those in attendance*

- 5.1 It was considered that the list of policies was very extensive covering a wider variety of issues. However, the policies should be high level and non-topic specific.
- 5.2 It is important to ensure that near zero approach to development is included. Consideration of the energy used for new development and that renewable energy is more than just solar panels on a roof. Need to future-proof the policy for future technological advances.

- 5.3 Clear reference to Council's Community Plan is necessary.
- 5.4 Causeway Coast and Glens Economic Advisory Group may have comment to make.

*Actions*

- 4.1 DD to consider timeframe for Dfl bringing forward review of PAD process.
- 4.2 LDP Team to consider comments from Causeway Coast and Glens Economic Advisory Group.

*AORB*

- 5.1 Next meeting – full joint meeting on 15 June 2022.
- 5.2 Minutes of key points will be placed on Planning section of council website.