

PRESS RELEASE

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CEF comments on NIAO report on Planning in Northern Ireland

Commenting on the publication of the NIAO report on Planning in Northern Ireland, Construction Employers Federation Director of External Affairs David Fry said:

“The findings of this detailed report will not come as a surprise to anyone in the housebuilding and construction sector. While not doubting the challenges of the establishment of our reformed planning system in 2015, there is now clear and substantive evidence of a system which has been unable to act as the economic driver many had hoped it would be.

“Crucially, we need a planning system that helps us meet the challenge of the infrastructure deficit that we all face. At its core it must be a system which, for instance, recognises the significant under supply of new build housing and how legislative and policy change can enable a significant uplift in the number of new home completions year-on-year.

“In that context, we have welcomed the Review Report of the 2011 Planning Act that was published by the Department for Infrastructure last week. In it, the Department has accepted the case that changes to the existing legislation, with the intent of making our planning system better, need to be made in the next Assembly mandate.

“Our Manifesto for the 2022 NI Assembly Election detailed the key planning reforms that we believe are crucial to drastically speeding up decision making processes. We look forward to advancing these as a key part of those proposed legislative changes”.

ENDS

1. Looking to May's Assembly Election, the CEF recently published its Manifesto. This is available to read via: https://www.cefni.co.uk/downloads/CEF_2022_Manifesto.pdf
2. With respect to reforming our planning system, the Manifesto had the following recommendations – the majority of which would require a new Planning Act to deliver:
 - Introduce a statutory requirement for pre-application discussions for major and regionally significant applications. All statutory consultees must be obliged to fully take part in PAD while it must also remain proportionate to the type and scale of application that is under consideration
 - On pre-application community consultation, the temporary changes to public consultation brought in because of the pandemic must be made permanent and be given equal weighting
 - Reduce the 12-week (minimum) PACC process for major and regionally significant applications to 8 weeks (minimum) where applicants have demonstrated to the relevant planning authority, within the Proposal of Application Notice that “meaningful engagement” with the community can be delivered
 - All planning authorities must develop mandatory application checklists through a matrix approach that is based on the type/scale of development
 - Processing agreements should be agreed by planning authorities and proposed applicants for all major and regionally significant applications, with these agreements clearly detailing a timetable from PAN to application decision to which all parties, including statutory consultees, are obliged to stand over
 - Put in place statutory timeframes within which statutory consultees must respond to major and regionally significant applications

- Where statutory consultees do not respond, or respond substantively, within the timescales that all parties have agreed to in a processing agreement, then the planning authority must have the right to determine an application without further delay
- Additionally, where statutory consultees seek to request further information from an applicant so to inform their own response, they must issue this request in no more than 8 weeks

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