



## **Planning Bill 2013**

The Northern Irish Retail Consortium (NIRC) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Planning Bill 2013. This paper sets out the NIRC's views on the proposed Planning Bill and outlines the sector's priorities in this area.

## **About The NIRC**

The NIRC represents multiple retailers operating in Northern Ireland, including large supermarkets, department stores, DIY, furniture and homeware, electricals, jewellery, pharmacy/health and beauty, fashion and shoe retailers, stationers and bookstores, fast food outlets and the Post Office. We also represent small retailers in Northern Ireland who are members of our constituent specialist retail trade associations. The retail sector in Northern Ireland employs over 80,000 people and our members invest millions of pounds each year in new stores as well as refurbishment. Through the Northern Ireland supply chain our members buy over £750 Million of agri-food produce making them a key player in the Northern Ireland economy.

## **Overview**

The NIRC broadly supports the aspirations and measures set out under the Planning Bill NI 2013 and welcomes the opportunity to set out the position and key concerns of the retail sector. The existing planning policy framework has often been complex and unwieldy and has led to a lack of confidence in the planning system in Northern Ireland for the retail sector. The NIRC therefore strongly welcomes efforts to streamline the planning process to enable swifter decision making for planning application and to enable a fair and simplified framework for Northern Ireland. Anything that brings clarity to the process and expedites planning to allow future investment must be welcomed

Retailers are continuing to invest during very challenging times in the economy. In this respect we strongly support the delivery of clarity within the planning process and recognise that this could deliver real confidence for the retail sector further contribute to economic growth in Northern Ireland.

While we welcome the overarching aspiration of the Planning Bill it will be the way in which it is implemented that will determine its success. As such we have a number of key concerns for the retail sector that we have outlined below. We do realise that this Bill is a facilitation Bill and the real detail will be contained in the regulations which we await with interest.

## **Enhanced Community Engagement**

Developers will be required to demonstrate that they have undertaken a series of community engagement consultations before submitting major planning applications. While we recognise the importance of an inclusive approach to development it is unclear as to what such engagement would need to address or which approach would be most appropriate. It is important that any such measure within the Planning Bill NI 2013 delivers certainty to developers and investors alike in order to remove ambiguity and to enable a level playing field. Any confusion in this regard could result in either significantly increased cost to the developer or in poorly implemented consultations. From



our discussions with the Department we do understand that our members as a matter of course go above and beyond the standards which are common throughout the UK. We would like to have clarity on the new standards that are being proposed for Northern Ireland.

### **Clear and Robust Enforcement**

We recognise the importance of a clear and robust enforcement and therefore welcome the approach taken under the Planning Bill to speed up and simplify enforcement within the planning framework. We are concerned however that multiple fees for retrospective planning applications could significantly increase costs for existing planning applications and could derail investment in the future. While we broadly support the enforcement measures under the planning Bill it is vital that they are implemented in a fair and proportional manner in reference to the severity of the infringement and the development size.

I hope that this letter helps to set out the NIRCs' position and outlines the retail sectors concerns in relation to the Planning Bill NI 2013. I look forward to working closely with you on implementation of the Bill.

Yours sincerely

**Aodhán Michael Connolly**  
**Director**  
**Northern Ireland Retail Consortium**