

An
Bord
Pleanála

Strategic Plan 2018 - 2023

Planning for Our Future



Welcome

Our Ambition for this Strategic Plan

An Bord Pleanála's Strategic Plan 2018-23 provides a framework to guide the organisation for the next five years reinforcing our trusted reputation for impartiality, driving the highest standards in timely decision making and service to the public. It also sets out how we will support and develop an agile and high performing workforce in carrying out the important work of An Bord Pleanála.

1. Introduction

For more than 40 years, An Bord Pleanála has played a key role in the Irish planning system, independently deciding planning appeals and applications in a fair, equitable and timely manner. During this time, An Bord Pleanála has striven to uphold the principles of good planning and latterly of sustainable development which underpin the equilibrium between natural and built environments. It has also upheld the principles of integrity, independence and fairmindedness which characterise the organisation and are reflected in its values.



An Bord Pleanála has seen its role develop and grow from an almost entirely appellate body deciding appeals against planning authority decisions to being a decision maker of first instance for strategic infrastructure and strategic housing developments. A range of other functions have also been added and it seems likely that An Bord Pleanála will take on further new functions related to the foreshore and marine environment in the future.

Over the years, the legal and legislative environment has also seen a lot of change with the natural environment becoming a much more important factor in planning decisions, largely due to the influence of the EU and its environmental directives.

An Bord Pleanála is not a policy making body. Its role, firmly set out in statute, is to make planning decisions in line with government and EU policy and legislation, having regard to a range of specified plans, policies and guidance documents. As decisions of the Board are challengeable by judicial review in the Courts, a body of case law has also built up to which we must have regard. Nevertheless, decisions of the Board are seen as precedential and planning authorities and others give them due regard.

An Bord Pleanála has overseen the provision of much of the modern infrastructure of Ireland. The motorway network, national and regional roads, water and waste water, energy and telecoms along with health and education infrastructure have all been the subject of decision making by An Bord Pleanála, making it a body which touches on the everyday lives of almost all of our citizens. To deal with this, An Bord Pleanála has developed a wide range of skills and expertise to address the diverse disciplines involved in its portfolio of responsibilities.

Like all organisations within the public service, An Bord Pleanála has had to adapt to changes in society, customer expectations and new ways of working. Our ambition, over the course of this Strategic Plan, is to continue to be a learning organisation, communicating via modern channels while not losing the personal touch with customers. We have already embarked on a transformational ICT strategy which will see our business conducted using digital files rather than the current paper-based system and allow customers to submit and monitor applications and appeals online. The nature of this project has meant changes to the work processes of all staff and Board Members in An Bord Pleanála and their input and co-operation with this project is recognised and appreciated. Over the period of this Strategic Plan, the ICT project will be completed.



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This new Strategic Plan 2018 – 2023 is published at a time when Ireland has emerged from a difficult recessionary period following unprecedented growth during the Celtic Tiger period. Along with the welcome opportunities which we see now in terms of economic growth and infrastructural development, many challenges have also emerged, including the current housing crisis, an increase in homelessness and uncertainty over the impact of Brexit on the economy of Ireland.

A new national spatial strategy – the National Planning Framework – has been agreed and published by Government, along with a ten-year national development plan under one umbrella entitled *Project Ireland 2040*. These plans give a measure of certainty and, importantly, funding for the provision of infrastructure, housing, consolidation of urban centres, development of rural and other areas. *Project Ireland 2040* is the key plan which will inform An Bord Pleanála in its decision making over the period of our Strategic Plan.

Within the context of the mandate of An Bord Pleanála, our Plan aligns with the strategic goals of the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government, with particular emphasis on ensuring planning and building contributes to sustainable and balanced development, the supply of good quality housing, and to Government policy and goals.

This Strategic Plan was developed in a highly collaborative way, involving all staff and Board Members in An Bord Pleanála and consultation with our various stakeholders. It was also informed by an external review of the organisation commissioned by the then Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government and has taken many of its key recommendations on board.

Implementation will require a high level of commitment from all. I am sure that commitment will be forthcoming and that the outcome of this plan will be a smoothly running, efficient, effective and fit for purpose An Bord Pleanála which continues to maintain its values of integrity, independence and fairness as it contributes to a society which respects the principles of sustainable development.



Dr. Mary Kelly, Chairperson
An Bord Pleanála



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2. Who We Are

An Bord Pleanála plays a critical role in the Irish planning system deciding appeals of planning decisions made by local authorities and direct applications for major housing, infrastructure and other categories of development.



Our role is to carry out independent assessments of cases and make decisions which respect the principles of proper planning and sustainable development in a fair, equitable and timely manner.

The Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, provides An Bord Pleanála's mandate to ensure that appeals, applications and referrals are disposed of as expeditiously as possible. Planning decisions are made in line with government and EU policy and legislation, having regard to a range of specified plans, policies and guidance documents. Further, the legislation requires that An Bord Pleanála shall, in performing its functions, be independent while operating within the general framework of public policy.

Our Mandate

An Bord Pleanála was established in 1977 under the Local Government (Planning and Development) Act, 1976 and is responsible for the determination of appeals and certain other matters under the Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2018 and determination of direct applications for Strategic Infrastructure and Housing Developments. It is also responsible for dealing with proposals for the compulsory acquisition of land by local authorities and others under various enactments. An Bord Pleanála also determines appeals under the Water Pollution and Building Control Acts.

Our Mission

To play our part as an independent national body in an impartial, efficient and open manner, to ensure that physical development and major infrastructure projects in Ireland respect the principles of sustainable development, including the protection of the environment.

In carrying out its functions, An Bord Pleanála operates within a legislative framework that interfaces with EU legislation and policy and is constantly evolving particularly in the areas of environmental protection and sustainable development.

As an agency of the State, An Bord Pleanála also has certain obligations in terms of promoting participation and access to decision-making in the planning system under the various EU Directives, the Aarhus Convention, Freedom of Information, Access to Information on the Environment and Data Protection Acts.

Our Values

In seeking to fulfil its mandate and mission, An Bord Pleanála is guided by the following core values:

 <p>Independence and Impartiality</p>	<p>An Bord Pleanála is committed to preserving and protecting its independence in its decision-making functions and ensuring that all decisions made are based solely on an impartial assessment of each case.</p>
 <p>Professionalism and Integrity</p>	<p>An Bord Pleanála places great value and reliance on the professional expertise, integrity, dedication and public service ethos of its Board members and staff.</p>
 <p>Participation and Transparency</p>	<p>An Bord Pleanála is committed to providing the maximum degree of openness and accountability in its operations consistent with the quasi-judicial nature of its statutory functions and ensuring that its procedures facilitate effective participation by the public in the planning system.</p>
 <p>Respect, Dignity, Equality and Fairness</p>	<p>An Bord Pleanála is committed to a culture of respect, dignity, equality and fairness in all dealings with the public and with and between its own staff.</p>
 <p>Excellent Customer Service and Innovation</p>	<p>An Bord Pleanála is conscious of the need to ensure that its overall customer service is aligned to current expectations and best practice and is committed to being responsive seeking new ways to improve service delivery.</p>

An Bord Pleanála also has a public sector duty to ensure implementation of the principles of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act (2014) and this has been fully considered during the process of developing this new Strategic Plan.

3. Challenges Facing An Bord Pleanála

Context and Opportunities

Economy



The Irish economy has undergone a recovery over the past number of years resulting in an increase in construction and development activity and associated planning applications and appeals to An Bord Pleanála. An Bord Pleanála’s workload is impacted by conditions in the economy and while indications are that the economic upturn will continue, some uncertainty remains as to the effect of Brexit on Ireland and the EU.

Legislative framework



There is considerable complexity in the planning framework within which An Bord Pleanála operates particularly in the implementation of European Union Directives. Case law is developing at European and national level and some decisions of the Board continue to be challenged.

The introduction of the new strategic housing development function under recent legislation has demonstrated An Bord Pleanála’s ability to deliver on a key area of Government policy and wider socio-economic need facilitated by innovative systems, procedures and work practices from which longer term learning can be drawn.

In the initial years of this Strategic Plan, legislation is being enacted to:

- establish the Office of the Planning Regulator;
- provide a legislative basis for the National Planning Framework;
- enable acceptance online of appeals, applications and other submissions;
- transfer certain new and additional functions for marine and foreshore decision making to An Bord Pleanála.

Other new functions, roles (or changes to) and legislative changes are likely to occur during the lifetime of the Strategic Plan.

Context and Opportunities

Environment

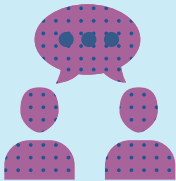


In recent years, the environment has become a much more important factor in planning decisions, largely due to the influence of the European Union and its Environmental Directives. Environmental Impact Assessment and Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Directive are now key assessments that must be undertaken for many projects where effects on the environment are considered likely to occur.

The volume of legal challenges to decisions in the planning system, particularly in its interactions with Environmental Directives has significantly increased in recent years.

Ireland has also become a signatory to a number of international conventions on environmental matters and public access to decision making on the environment.

Customer Expectations



Public consultation during the making of this strategy has underlined the demand for better digital/online services.

Subject to the adoption of legislation, An Bord Pleanála will launch a range of online services in 2019. A new website is being developed and will provide more information on how customers from all parts of the country can access services and participate in the planning system. Our website will also provide for the use of social media and other tools to communicate and respond to demands of customers and other stakeholders.

A key indicator of efficiency for An Bord Pleanála is the compliance rate with statutory objective periods for making decisions. While there can be particular pressures to decide cases within shorter timeframes, for most parties to a case, the critical issue is certainty as to when a decision will be made. For the majority of cases, An Bord Pleanála continues to work to 18 weeks, with different periods applying for certain other categories.

Context and Opportunities

Our Organisation



The upturn in the economy is creating a more competitive jobs market which may make it difficult to attract and retain staff in the public sector. Since the recruitment embargo was lifted in recent years, An Bord Pleanála has recruited a significant number of new staff and is adapting to having a more fluid workforce.

Ensuring we have the right expertise, knowledge and capability amongst staff and Board members is critical. Staff need the right skills to get the most out of new technologies to support our work and the customer. A structured and responsive workforce plan will drive high performance.

Critical to the performance of An Bord Pleanála is the need to have a sufficient complement of Board members and wider professional, technical and administrative staff at all times. Continuity and succession planning will continue to be critical factors contributing to the delivery of this Strategic Plan.

Instances of failures in corporate governance have framed public debate around agencies being held to account for their actions. A new Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies was published in 2016 and will guide governance matters in An Bord Pleanála.

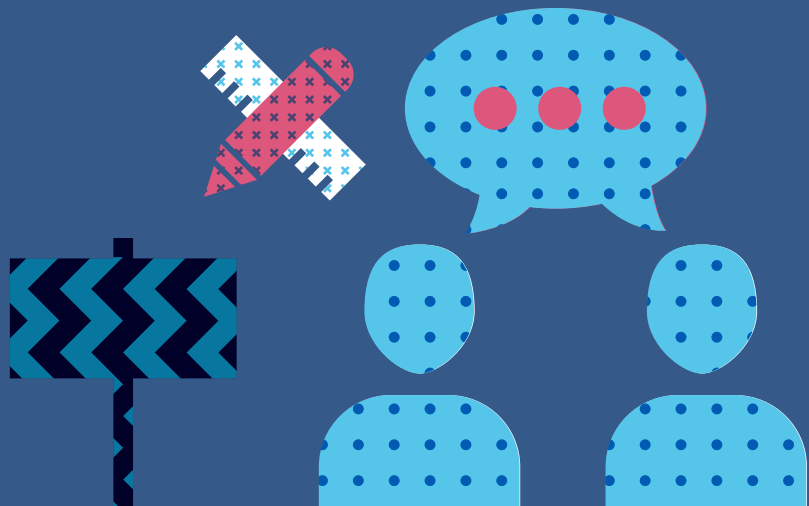
4. Consultation

The Strategic Plan was developed during 2017 in consultation with the Board and staff of An Bord Pleanála. As part of this work, we have reviewed our achievements to date, anticipated challenges facing the organisation in the years ahead and assessed areas in need of improvement.

A public consultation was undertaken by inviting the public to provide feedback on the draft Goals and Priorities proposed to guide the direction of An Bord Pleanála. In total, 47 responses were received to the public consultation from a range of organisations and individuals who interact with An Bord Pleanála.

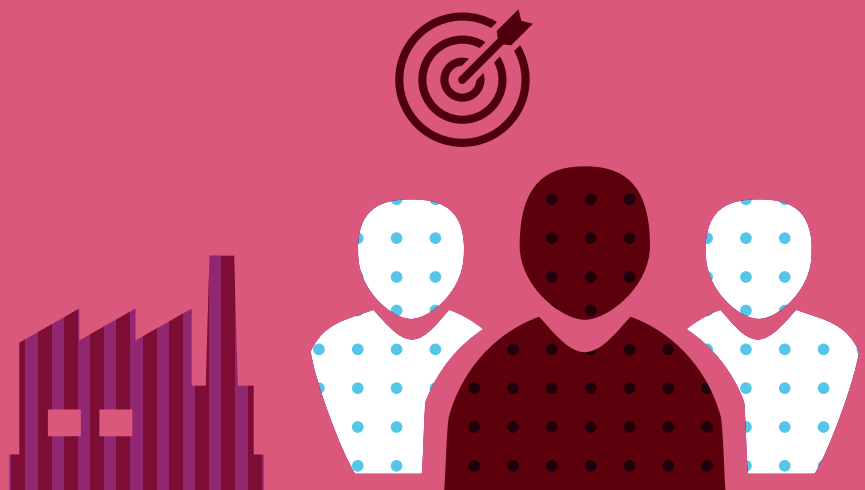
An Bord Pleanála would like to thank all who took the time and effort to make submissions which have been taken into account in the preparation of this Plan.

The Plan also takes into account the Organisational Review of An Bord Pleanála carried out in 2016. The Review included extensive consultation and the priorities in this plan address many of the key recommendations put forward.



5. Strategic Goals and Priorities

This part of the Strategic Plan sets out the areas where An Bord Pleanála will focus its attention and resources between 2018 and 2023 and the outcomes it expects to achieve. Four high level goals and specific priorities provide the framework for An Bord Pleanála's work plans for the five-year period and beyond. Detailed actions and timelines to achieve goals are included in an associated Action Plan with sample actions highlighted below.



GOAL 1 Protecting and enhancing our reputation for independence, impartiality, trust, integrity and transparency.

Our Priorities to Achieve this Goal:

- a. Remain vigilant in protecting structures and processes which support impartiality and independence of the decision-making system.
- b. Improve communications to reinforce awareness and understanding of An Bord Pleanála.
- c. Consistent with the legislative framework within which we operate, engage effectively with stakeholders.
- d. Enable effective participation and promote transparency across all stages of the decision-making process.

Sample Actions to Address Priorities:

Implement Communications Strategy including:

- Building awareness and understanding of An Bord Pleanála and its services.
- Achieving the Plain English standard in all of our communications.
- Increasing the level of outreach and engagement with our stakeholders.

Facilitate participation in the planning process including:

- Enhancing technical and other guidance to access our services.
- Reviewing the oral hearing and other processes in gathering information and facilitating public participation.

Outcome

By 2023, we will have strengthened the reputation of An Bord Pleanála maintaining and promoting a high degree of trust, understanding and participation by the public in the planning system.

GOAL **2** **Making robust, timely, transparent, high quality decisions which support proper planning and sustainable development.**

Our Priorities to Achieve this Goal:

- a. Ensure we are structured, equipped and resourced with the necessary skills, to make decisions in a timely manner and in accordance with statutory objective periods, based on sound legal and planning principles.
- b. Process and decide cases in a consistent and fair manner with a focus on efficiencies and streamlining of processes.
- c. Deliver objectives set out for An Bord Pleanála in Government strategies and policies including Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan on Housing and Homelessness and the National Planning Framework.
- d. Support our reporting and decision-making processes by enhancing capability for research, data analysis and assessment of trends which can also be made available to inform relevant stakeholders and wider policy development by others.

Sample Actions to Address Priorities:

Issue decisions in a timely manner focusing on:

- Using new ICT systems (including GIS and Case Management System) as one tool to drive and support efficiencies and process improvements.
- Continue and expand on implementation of streamlined processes for smaller cases to drive increased efficiencies.
- Delivering an increasing number and, ultimately the vast majority, of decisions within the statutory objective period over the timeframe of the Plan.
- Determining and clearly communicating timeline targets for certain categories of large or significant cases taking into account complexity or other events that may impact timelines.

- Improving communications generally in relation to timelines particularly ensuring early notification in circumstances where unavoidable delays may occur due to technical or procedural matters.

Ensure decisions are robust and informed focusing on:

- Enhancing internal quality assurance systems for reports and decisions.
- Supporting our core functions with data and information gathered through programmes of research, data gathering and analysis.

Outcome

By 2023, we will have maintained and reinforced our ability to make robust, fair and impartial decisions on cases in a timely and efficient manner consistent with statutory requirements.

GOAL 3 Improving our service to meet changing customer expectations.

Our Priorities to Achieve this Goal:

- a. Optimise the use of digital channels for service delivery.
- b. Provide a nationally available, user friendly and easily accessible service which meets customer expectations.
- c. Maximise use of new ICT systems and processes to support business operations.

Sample Actions to Address Priorities:

Provide a fully digital service for the making of appeals and submission of other documentation focusing on:

- Launching a new user-friendly website and providing for future use of social media.
- Making planning documentation available via our website as far as possible.
- Staying abreast of developing technologies and practices which support delivery of planning services online.

Deliver best in class service to customers focusing on:

- Providing face to face, telephone/email assistance and service to customers as required.
- Issuing planning decisions in an accessible format with clear reasons and considerations.
- Collecting feedback from customers on satisfaction levels on a regular basis.

Outcome

By 2023, we will provide improved and responsive services, tailored to meet the diverse needs of customers and public across Ireland.

GOAL 4 Fostering a motivated, resilient and responsive organisation.

Our Priorities to Achieve this Goal:

- a. Align organisation and structures to support achievement of strategic goals.
- b. Foster a positive, safe and healthy working environment for all where people are proud to work.
- c. Ensure sufficient resources are in place to deliver our remit.
- d. Build capacity and skills of our people through an increased range of learning and development opportunities to enable performance and meet emerging challenges.

Sample Actions to Address Priorities:

Implement programme of training, skills development and other supports focusing on:

- Promoting work-life balance and a healthy and friendly work environment through formal and informal channels.
- Rolling out a management development programme focusing on leadership, performance, and change management.
- Supporting professional development through continuous professional development and other relevant means.

Put in place structures and resource to support operations focusing on:

- Creating opportunities for mobility of staff internally and externally (for example secondments/ exchanges) to gain additional skills and experience with relevant organisations.
- Establishing a Development Support unit to manage change projects and promote collaborative working.
- Reviewing recruitment policy to encourage diversity and ensure compliance with central Government guidelines.

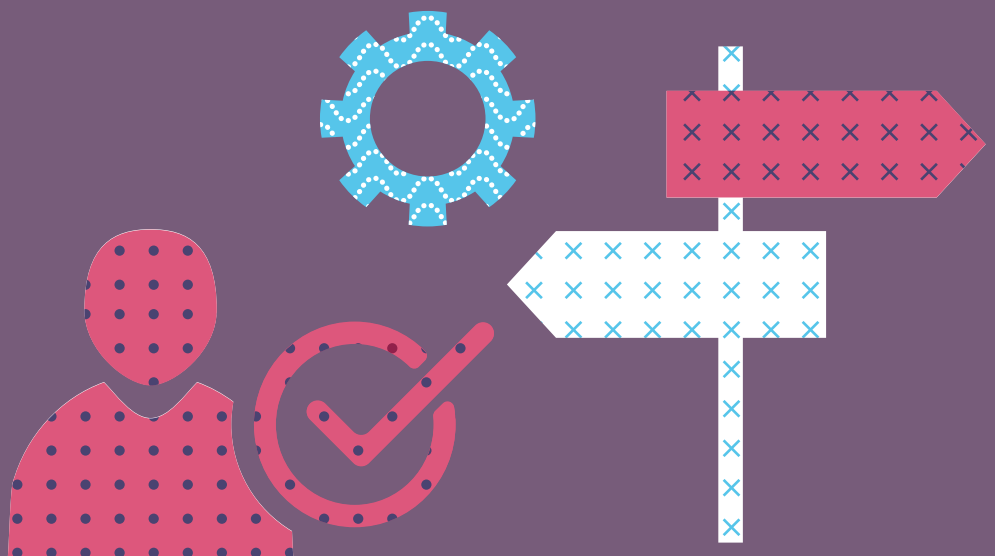
Outcome

By 2023, we will be an employer of choice of highly skilled and capable staff operating in a supportive, innovative and healthy organisation.

Performance and Evaluation

An Bord Pleanála's Strategic Plan 2018-2023 will be accompanied by an action plan which sets out actions to achieve goals and priorities within defined timelines. The plan will form part of An Bord Pleanála's annual work programme with key actions also included in our Performance Delivery Agreement with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

Performance in achieving project milestones and objectives will be evaluated and reported to the Board at an annual review of the Strategic Plan.





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