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Jacqui Rose
Department for Enterprise, Trade & Investment
Strategic Planning, Economics and Statistics Division
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Dear Ms Rose

RICS response to IREP report

The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) Northern Ireland is the principal body representing professionals employed in the land, property and construction sectors and represents some 3,000 members. Our members practice in land, property and construction markets and are employed in private practice, in central, regional and local government, in public agencies, in academic institutions, in business organisations and in non-governmental organisations.

As part of its Royal charter, the Institution has a commitment to provide advice to the Government of the day and, in doing so, has an obligation to bear in mind the public interest as well as the development of the profession. RICS Northern Ireland is therefore in a unique position to provide a balanced, apolitical perspective on issues of importance to the land, property and construction sectors.

RICS welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Independent Review of Economic Policy (IREP) which deals with the economic development policies and programmes of the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI) and Invest Northern Ireland. RICS has considered the recommendations of the report and wishes to make the following response.

Skills

The review recommends that further study should be undertaken to determine how Northern Ireland can more rapidly shift the pattern of inward investment towards higher value sectors. RICS as a professional body is committed to providing professionals for Northern Ireland's development, to enable the region to attract and

retain the best skilled workers. RICS therefore recommends that the Executive must take steps to ensure that Northern Ireland has a highly skilled workforce and encourages professionalism at appropriate levels. Doing this should help deliver inward investment from higher value sectors. Increasing the number of students studying STEM subjects would help with this objective.

Focus on the economy

RICS strongly agrees that the economy should remain as the top priority of the Executive for many years to come. Environmental, social and economic sustainable development must be a key part of this to ensure economic growth is truly sustainable.

Energy

RICS members work within land, property and construction and as such play a vital role in ensuring that improved energy efficiency is factored into the construction and maintenance of buildings. RICS Northern Ireland concurs with the recommendations that greater energy efficiency should be encouraged and that energy conservation should be given a greater priority in the Strategic Energy Framework. At present Northern Ireland is too reliant on imported fossil fuels which currently accounts for approximately 94% of power generation in Northern Ireland. Climate Change, global shortages of oil and natural gas together with rising costs mean that Northern Ireland must take urgent action and move towards a low carbon economy.

Energy efficiency of existing properties should be treated as a priority if carbon emissions are to be significantly reduced. In order to successfully decrease the amount of carbon that we produce we must not only increase the amount of energy that we source from renewables but we must also reduce the amount of energy that we consume through greater energy efficiency.

The Strategic Energy Framework underpins the primary energy policy for the Executive which is "achieving of a competitive, sustainable, reliable energy market, at the minimum cost necessary in an all-island, UK and European context". It is imperative that the final Framework has a greater focus on energy efficiency as the long term cost of sustained levels of energy consumption will cost more in the long term.

Planning

RICS Northern Ireland has previously called for reform of the planning process to create a more streamlined system that is fit for purpose which can underpin and help deliver the economic objectives of the Programme for Government. In our public policy manifesto *Shaping Northern Ireland's Future* we welcomed the proposals to reform the planning system which were outlined within the Programme for Government. However we expressed concern that the target date of 2011 may be too late as the planning system must be reformed if we are to attract inward investment.

We concur with the proposal that the Planning Service should be given processing time targets which are comparable and competitive with other countries and regions. In the current downturn attracting inward investment is a key means of job creation, but it is getting increasingly difficult to attract. The Executive needs to develop a system that encourages inward investment. Growing a dynamic, innovative economy has been identified as a key priority of the Programme for Government and the

development of a fit for purpose planning system is a key means of achieving this.

As previously noted RICS have already indicated that it is imperative that a reformed planning system is in place as soon as possible. RICS Northern Ireland concurs with the recommendation that the Planning Service should work to ensure that the legislative timetable for reform is met. It is imperative that a new system is in place that meets with the Review of Public Administration timetable for reform of local government.

RICS agrees that a team should be created to deal with all applications relating to inward investment which is new to Northern Ireland. This will ensure consistency of approach and help facilitate better co-ordination between government bodies and departments such as the Department for Enterprise, Trade and Investment and Invest Northern Ireland. Similarly regionally significant developments, which do not require inward investment, should be afforded additional support and should be treated with the same consistency of approach.

It is imperative that the Pre-Application Discussion (PAD) process is as efficient as possible and the time allocated for such discussions is included when reporting on timings for all applications.

RICS looks forward to contributing to future consultation processes and workshops. In the meantime if you require any further details regarding any of the issues raised in this letter please contact Ann Stewart (t) 028 90 322877 (e) astewart@rics.org.

Yours sincerely

Ann Stewart
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