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AN BORD PLEANÁLA REFUSE PLANNING PERMISSION TO MOUNTBROOK GROUP FOR D4 HOTELS SITE

Mountbrook Group today received An Bord Pleanála's decision to refuse their proposed redevelopment of the D4 Hotels Site at Ballsbridge, Dublin 4. The proposed development would have broken the mould for Ireland in terms of providing a high class mixed use development on this strategic site.

The significant economic benefits and job creation opportunities of the proposed development would have created a much needed boost to Ireland in these current harsh economic times. The proposed development had a construction capital investment of €1 billion, would have provided 970 on-site construction jobs per year for seven years, with an equivalent number off-site and, when completed, would have created over 5,400 permanent jobs as well as contributing €400 million to the city's economy each year. The proposed development represents four years hard work, €15 million in professional fees including the commissioning of an international architectural competition resulting in a world class design by Henning Larsen Architects.

Eminent British architect Ian Ritchie (author of the Spire), who was the international juror who selected the winning design, said,

“For all good architects it is not our immediate pay-master that is most important, it is what we are building for the future and generations to come. When one has an exceptional client with a vision for the city beyond his own self-interest, it is a rare opportunity for the architect to contribute. Cities are built by acts of will and not simply remaining with the status quo.”

Mountbrook will consider An Bord Pleanála's decision before submitting a revised application in accordance with the primarily residential zoning (Z1). Mountbrook are very disappointed for the Ringsend and Irishtown residents as the proposed development provided for a new community centre in Ringsend including sports hall, 100 place crèche, day care centre, youth club, including offices and health services.

Meanwhile business continues to thrive at D4Hotels.com (the Ballsbridge Inn, Ballsbridge Towers and Ballsbridge Court Hotels) and the hotels will remain open for business for the foreseeable future. D4hotels.com has proved to be a resounding success and has revolutionised the Dublin hotel industry in terms of providing customers with value and quality in an unrivalled location.



Mountbrook very much welcome Environment Minister John Gormley's proposal to introduce new planning legislation as the current system is lengthy, expensive, confusing and unworkable. As the system stands, applying for planning permission has become a game of roulette. Local Authorities, politicians, residents, planning inspectors, Bord inspectors and An Bord Pleanála are regularly at odds with each other as to what constitutes proper planning and development on any given site. We particularly cite the following to highlight the problem.

Mountbrook Group has recently received a planning decision in respect of another major development at Charlesland, Greystones, Co Wicklow, where An Bord Pleanála granted the majority of the development but refused a district shopping centre and retail warehousing. In this instance a Local Area Plan existed, Wicklow County Council granted planning, the Bord Pleanála Inspector recommended a grant but An Bord Pleanála then refused the district centre and warehousing element, despite the proper zoning existing, a decision which took 19 months.

Similarly, with our application for a new district centre development in Kilcock Town Centre, Co Kildare, the local authority granted permission, An Bord Pleanála's Inspector recommended a grant, An Bord Pleanála itself requested three amendments to the plans which were complied with, and bizarrely proceeded to refuse the application. This planning application took 27 months to determine including 13 months with An Bord Pleanála despite the site being zoned for a district centre.

It is interesting to note that the Chairperson of An Bord Pleanála, Mr John O'Connor, on the occasion of the publication of An Bord Pleanála's 2007 Annual Report stated,

“Planning in this country must respond to the more difficult economic situation in the period ahead and, at the same time, face up to climate change.”

He called on local authorities, when reviewing their statutory Development Plan, to take stronger account of important new realities such as climate change, energy costs, the need to maximise the return on expensive infrastructural investment, increase concerns about heritage loss and about unnecessary sprawl into good agricultural land.

These apparent contradictions within our planning system are detrimental to the country's economic progress, job creation and development.

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