

An Rabharta Glas – Green Left
Dublin Branch

Observation on DRAFT DIRECTION IN THE MATTER OF SECTION 31 OF THE PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ACT 2000 (as amended) on the South Dublin County Development Plan 2022-2028 made 28th July 2022

1. RE: Direction (2) (b) –

Minister Daragh O’Brien’s decision to facilitate international capital at the expense of working people and the environment (data centres)

A chairde

We make this submission on the draft direction which is intended to be made by the Minister as set out in their draft notice dated 28th July 2022.

The intended direction is a misuse of the Ministerial direction mechanism that runs contrary to the interests of:

- the common good, proper planning or sustainable development;
- the environment of SDCC, the region and the country as a whole;
- balanced industrial development;
- the capacity of the electricity grid;
- the environmental and carbon reduction goals of us as a society and as set out in the government in the Climate Action Plan 2021; and
- the social and economic interests of the residents of West and South Dublin.

This direction is intended to ensure that data centres and the international financial interests behind them face no obstacle in extracting value from the Irish landscape.

This will not benefit working people. It will only benefit the narrow sector of Irish society which has made a deal with international finance and technology companies that ordinary Irish residents pay for – environmentally, socially and financially.

Condemnation of the OPR’s over-reach

We accept that the OPR are acting in good faith where they hold the opinion that on a procedural basis, data centre applications are capable of being dealt with on a case by case basis. They also argue that the decision of SDCC was made without evidence.

Firstly, we disagree on both points.

Secondly, and more importantly, that the OPR disagrees with the evidential basis for the decision or the outcome of the decision making process is not a significant enough reason for the OPR to issue the directions which they have done.

The OPR should only be getting involved where planning guidelines and proper processes are clearly not being followed. This is not the case here – the decision and processes used by councillors to come to this decision were legitimate and should be respected.

The OPR can be of the opinion that they would have made a different decision on the evidence before the Council, but councillors are entitled to evaluate and balance all relevant considerations and evidence and come to their own conclusion as to what is appropriate or not.

This is an undemocratic interference in the planning process that goes beyond the OPR's remit.

Condemnation of this direction

The Minister has taken up the direction of the OPR in this instance, but it is clear that whether the OPR had made a direction or not the Minister would have intervened on behalf of the interests of big tech irregardless.

The Minister cares not one iota for the evidence base, or whether data centres should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

The Minister wants free reign for big tech and damn the rest of us.

The primary stated reason of this direction is to ensure that the development plan supports a “national objective” to promote Ireland as a “sustainable international destination” for tech infrastructure.

This is a fiction. There is no national objective to promote data centres – only a big tech and IDA objective – and there is no such thing as a sustainable destination for data centres in Ireland any more (if there ever was).

The fact that central government has decided that this is a national objective cannot change the fact that there is no way to facilitate further growth in data centres in Ireland in a sustainable manner.

A blanket ban is the only sane and serious approach to data centres in Ireland and it's time the Minister came back to the real world, withdraw this draft direction, and make a direction to extend this ban to all local authority development plans.

Is muidne le meas

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