

METICULOUS PLANNING AND A GOOD DESIGN TEAM

Led by an experienced team, Cairn plc, Ireland's largest homebuilder and the recent winner of 'Excellence in Planning' for Marianella, Rathgar at the KPMG Irish Independent Property Excellence Awards, tells us how they build high quality new homes with an emphasis on design, innovation, sustainability and customer service. Cairn's Planning and Development Manager, John Grace, takes us through its meticulous planning process.

How does Cairn approach the planning process for a new development?

There's a lot more to it than simply giving the construction team a set of drawings. Our multi-disciplinary Planning and Development Team helps set a viable brief and budget and manages the design team, which includes architects, surveyors and engineers.

Appointing some of the best designers, engineers and planners delivers the best results. Professionals with a diverse bank of knowledge will offer a range of options for consideration, working within any site-specific constraints to provide the most economic and appropriate designs.

How important is the design and innovation in the planning process?

Design and innovation has become integral to the planning process in recent years. Lessons have been learned from the past, and local authorities and An Bord Pleanála insist on high quality design. We have embraced this, and consider each project as a neighbourhood and not just a development. We do this through high quality green spaces, good amenities, and architectural character.

Our in-house landscape and urban design experts help guide the design process using a range of innovative, practical solutions which achieve both variety and efficiencies in each development. Every site has its own unique story and identity, and its redevelopment forms part of that journey.

What are the key challenges in submitting a planning application, and how does the Cairn planning department overcome these?

Challenges vary considerably from site to site. The best strategy is to start with solid baseline information for the site and have as much of this in place as possible for the design team.

Each project begins with a site walk by our team. We then brief our land surveyors, and commission any expert surveys needed. Even if they are not strictly required for planning, we always like to know about the flora and fauna, archaeology, heritage and tree cover before committing to a planning approach.

But perhaps most importantly of all, a successful planning outcome is often best achieved through dialogue with the



Cairn's planning team (l-r): John Grace, Daibhi MacDomhnaill, James Donlon, Padraic Ward, Emma Flanagan, Conor Mullen and Aiden McLernon'.

planners, residents, utility companies and state bodies to identify issues and problems up front, and to work through them before the application is lodged.

How does the landscape, and conservation impact the overall planning process? for a development?

In every development, it's vital that the site planning delivers good urban layouts and meaningful green spaces. A project always starts with a identifying important site features, trees and hedgerows, and to get a feel for the character of the site and its locality.

Right from the outset, we're looking at how a site can be developed whilst respecting the existing environment, and where possible we'll try to use any existing gradients, features, and boundaries to enhance the scheme.

How important is sustainable planning?

We're committed to building developments that create and enhance communities for generations to come. Elegant architecture and high-quality materials are used to create visually pleasing homes, but just as much care and attention goes into the streets and green spaces.