



New planning rules a 'sleight of hand', says expert

Paul Melia

NEW rules will force local authorities to implement planning 'guidelines' introduced by the government without being allowed to make any changes to suit local circumstances.

The Planning and Development Amendment Act, signed into law in December, allows the government to issue 'guidelines' on specific policies, including housing, wind energy or childcare which must be fully enforced by the council and An Bord Pleanála.

The act changes the existing system where councils were obliged to have "regard to" national guidelines.

However, in many cases – particularly concerning those around development on flood plains – they were widely flouted.

The act was introduced after the Department of the Environment introduced new national apartment size standards, which are lower than those in Dublin City Council.

It allows planning authorities no leeway, and they cannot be

changed to suit local circumstances.

Housing expert Dr Lorcan Sirr, from **DIT**, said the changes were a "sleight of hand" and meant that planning guidelines would not be subject to indepth assessment.

Worms

"I think it's a sleight of hand here. The minister has opened a can of worms, where the department can issue guidelines without public consultation, which I think could have severe implications for rural Ireland

for wind turbines and housing," he said.

"If the Department decides the minimum set-back for wind turbines is not 500 metres, but 300 metres, there's nothing the local authority or An Bord Pleanála can do."

However, sources in the Department of the Environment insisted that the rules were brought in because some councils refused to enforce national planning legislation.

The legislation only affects apartment guidelines, and not guidelines already in place.