

We are here today to in the offices of An Bord Pleanala, the *planning* board, to discuss the proposal to build the National Paediatric Hospital at the Mater site. This board has been assigned an enormous responsibility by the people of Ireland; the responsibility of shaping the physical environment of our country, for all the people of our country. The mission statement of the Bord is to “To play our part as an *independent* body in ensuring that physical development and major infrastructure projects in Ireland respect the principles of *sustainable* development and are planned in an *efficient, fair and open manner.*”

It now falls to you, Inspector, as the representative of the Board, acting as an independent body for the people of Ireland, to examine the arguments put forward over the past few weeks for and against the application. *Is* this a sustainable development? Has it been planned in an efficient, fair and open manner? Is building this hospital in this location the right thing to do for the country?

We have heard many opinions on many different aspects of the application, from technical building issues, to city-wide architectural issues, to staffing issues, to economic issues, to human issues, to healthcare issues, to issues regarding the care and respect of children and their families. It is now time to pause and consider what we are trying to achieve here. We are aiming to build a hospital that will provide excellent care to the children of Ireland, a hospital that this generation of children will inherit from us, a hospital which they will be required to build upon and develop to serve the needs of their own children, and so on for generations to come. We have a great responsibility to act with clear and full consciousness of the impact of our actions on our children and grandchildren.

We have no vested interests in this project. We are here because we believe that a grave error of judgment is being committed if the National Paediatric Hospital is built on the Mater site; an error that will impact on all the children of our country in need of healthcare services, an error that will impact on their families, an error that will impact greatly on the city of Dublin.

We do not believe this is the best hospital we can build for our children. We do not believe that it is sustainable. We do not believe that it provides adequate green space, nor emergency access, nor car-parking, nor scope upon which to expand. Healthcare technologies develop with such rapidity that state of the art facilities easily become outdated within 10-20 years. Developments such as robotic surgery, that 10 years ago, seemed like science-fiction, are now part of main-stream medicine. It is not within our power to understand the healthcare needs of the next generation. To claim that the proposed site has adequate expansion capacity to act as the only tertiary hospital for the country, when it can not even accommodate its current needs, such as parking for its staff or the National Centre for Medical Genetics, is to be profoundly ignorant of the demands that will be placed on the hospital over the next 20-30 years. This is not PLANNING. This is not sustainability.

The Mater is not the best site for our hospital. Children were not consulted on the location decision, their families were not consulted, the public was not consulted, healthcare professionals were not

consulted. The location decision was not even discussed in the public forum of the Oireachtas. It was a private decision, made privately and all attempts at public debate on an issue of such National importance were obstructed. If the Mater is clearly the best site for the hospital, why then was the decision making process prevented from being openly debated in public, why did the Location Committee restrict examination to only co-located hospitals, why did Philip Lynch resign from the Chair of the NPH development board over the critical issue of location, why did the then-Leader of the Opposition, Enda Kenny, challenge the government to hold an independent review of the site selection process stating that he had 'grave misgivings' regarding the process of site selection? {pause}

Our new President, Michael D Higgins, when talking of his optimism for the future of Ireland spoke of a 'transformation' being under way, of a 'new thinking' developing involving 'inclusive citizenship', where 'full life at all stages of the life cycle is important'. This is a hope we are proud to share in. We want to be part of an Ireland that values all its citizens; an Ireland where the needs of families from Cashel and Claggan are considered equally with the needs of families from Clontarf and Clondalkin, where the opinions of an 8 year old boy with cystic fibrosis regarding his hospital will be listened to with as much respect as the opinions of a research body, where those granted the privilege of making decisions on behalf of the public make those decisions in the national, rather than local, interest and where those decisions are made unselfishly, in good faith, in the best interest of those whom they serve.

The Board has the onerous task of ensuring sustainable development, efficient, fair and open planning. We thank you, Inspector, for listening to our group over the course of this Oral Hearing. ...