Councillors want one-off houses off the hook

Councillors have voted to write to the Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government to request that one-off houses be exempt from the new Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2014.

At last week’s meeting of Wicklow County Council, councillors James Ruttle and Christopher Fox put forward the motion on the belief that one-off houses would be the least likely have irregularities.

Councillors also voiced concerns that individuals building one-off houses would have to pay far more than the estimated €1,000 - €3,000 figure that’s been reported.

Cllr Pat Doran seconded the proposal, and it was passed by 12 votes to 5, with councillors John Byrne, Mick Glynn, George Jones, Conal Kavanagh and Derek Mitchell voting against it.

“From what I’m being told the €1,000 to €3,000 is way off the mark,” Cllr Fox said.

“People are already being quoted €10,000 and €12,000 and people have produced these quotes to me,” he added.

“If you take the one-off house, whereby someone is building it for themselves to live in, they are not going to build an inferior type house,” argued Cllr Fox.

“I think most people here have no problem with large multi-house developments or apartment blocks having to go through the rigours of certification, but for a one-off house I think we’re adding a layer of cost that is unnecessary,” he continued.

“We have to decide whether we support people who build one-off houses or don’t,” said Cllr Ruttle, who described the figures of €1,000 to €3,000 as “immensely conservative” and said that costs were instead escalating towards 10% of the build cost.

Echoing Cllr Fox, he said “the people who build to the highest standards are those who build their own homes on their own land with their own efforts.”

Cllr Pat Casey, who claimed to have recently seen a quotation for an extension to a community hall where the new building regulations put the cost of an assigned certifier at €5,500, said that “it might be €1,000 to €3,000 on a development of 100 houses, but definitely not in relation to one-off rural houses.”

Cllr Pat Doran added that he knew somebody “that had to pay €1,000 for somebody to draw a bit of a sketch for somebody to put a few trees around his house.”

“We’re just stopping people from building their own home. I think it has to be re-thought, and should be abandoned at this stage,” he added.

Cllr Jones, however, believes that proper standards are needed across the board to hold people responsible.

“We’re screaming at the Minister to bring in legislation about standards in building, you can’t have discrimination between 1500 houses and one house,” he said.

“I would certainly support amending the legislation if there was a flaw in it, but not abandoning it, that’s absolute madness,” he added.