

# AN TAISCE NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 7  
DECEMBER 2011

[An Taisce Shop here](#)

## A Message from An Taisce

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continuing support.

We could not do what we do without the practical commitment of those who support An Taisce financially and through voluntary effort. Unfortunately we face a major funding crisis which severely threatens our operations.

We thought it might be appropriate to provide a tangible but symbolic gift in return for your donation which you can give to someone who values our heritage as you do. Though initially intended as a Christmas gift catalog of symbolic gifts, our 'Treasury of Gifts' is still available to you throughout the year. The recipient of your gift will receive a certificate outlining the significance of your donation choice.

We hope that some of these ideas in An Taisce's 'Treasury' of gifts appeal to you as a novel way to support An Taisce and maintain our ongoing contribution to Ireland's built and Natural heritage.

Your support is genuinely appreciated in these trying times because it our joint strength that makes it possible for us to continue to protect the environment of Ireland for the people of Ireland.

[An Taisce Shop here](#)

## Important

Please note these gifts are intended as symbolic reflections of how your donation supports the work of An Taisce. Where subscriptions do not match required expenditures or critical needs are identified - actual contributions will be allocated where most effective to sustain our operations.

[An Taisce Shop here](#)

[An Taisce Update](#)

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[INTO's Victoria Declaration on Climate Change.](#)



## In this issue:

**A transitional update from Attracta Uí Bhroin, acting Chair of An Taisce.** Following the resignation of Charles Stanley Smith after nearly 5 years as our esteemed chairman, the Council resolved to defer the election of a new chair. In the interim, Vice-Chair Attracta Uí Bhroin has been asked to serve as Acting Chair and here writes an update on organizational matters and transitional arrangements in the next phase of An Taisce's development. [read more here...](#)

**The "Nature's Way – The Wonder of Peat Bogs" and "Natures Way – Pollinators in Ireland" booklets produced in 2012:** An Taisce's Natural Environment Department has produced two booklets. One titled "Nature's Way – The Wonder of Peatlands" and the other "Natures Way – Pollinators in Ireland". [read more here...](#)

**Proposed changes to retail guidelines will cost jobs and cause more dereliction.** Weakening the current guidelines will result in mega-retailers gaining more monopoly power, a loss of community and more money leaving the country. Research shows that 1.4 jobs are lost in town centres for every new job created in out-of-town 'megastores'. Because of their failure to engage with local suppliers and re-circulate money back into local economies, each new out-of-town 'megastore' results in a net jobs loss of 270 full-time positions. [read more here...](#)

**INTO's Victoria Declaration on Climate Change and COP 17 was agreed last month in Durban.** "For the sake of future generations, we must collectively tackle climate change not just because of changes in the physical environment, not just for reasons of sustaining human health and welfare, but to recognise that the core strength and connectivity of all the socio-economic systems of human-kind, lies in maintaining cultural sustainability". [read more here...](#)

**National Landscape Strategy:** Ireland's distinctive yet diverse landscape is a key resource providing the physical setting for everyday life, it gives a sense of place and belonging to individuals and communities. Biodiversity and natural heritage are integral elements of the past and present landscape. This should not be forgotten in the future, where dominant human activity threatens the natural integrity of the landscape. Last November An Taisce made a submission to the Strategy Issues Paper for the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland [read more here...](#)

**Walks and talks** The Natural Environment Office has received funding under the Local Agenda 21 initiative for two projects. One will involve two guided walks along the Boyne navigation which runs through a heavily visited world heritage site at Bru na Boinne. The walks will bring people on a guided walk providing information on both the cultural & archaeological heritage of the area as well as importance of the surrounding environment. The other project will involve three talks at the Booterstown Marsh Nature Reserve. [read more here...](#)

**Septic Tank Debate:** A risk to human health through polluted groundwater is the key issue in the septic tank debate. Minister Hogan's approach on septic tanks is not unfair or unreasonable, according to the National Trust. The stark reality is that the major drinking water crises of recent years are linked to inappropriately sited or poorly maintained septic tanks. [read more here...](#)

**Future projects from the natural environment section** [read more here...](#)

**Rural Housing – updating An Taisce policy.** Whilst professional and academic planners generally share An Taisce's attitudes towards the negative social, economic and environmental impact of a widely dispersed rural settlement pattern, it seems that the campaign by a number of rural dwellers continues to gain ground and the percentage of housing now being built outside of towns is growing. It is time for An Taisce to review its rural housing policy and a draft policy will be drawn up in the next couple of months for approval by the Council. [read more here...](#)

**Draft Framework for Sustainable Development for Ireland published just before Christmas for Public Consultation** [read more here...](#)

**Peatlands** Images of endangered species or threatened wild habitats usually evoke distant locations like tropical rain forests but Ireland also faces a particular challenge in reversing the decline of our raised and blanket bogs which are an internationally significant habitat. The recently published EPA report "Boglands" is invaluable in complementing international research on the multiple values of boglands, as habitats, as carbon stores or sinks which have accumulated over thousands of years, in water filtration, flood attenuation, as areas of wild landscape and as records of environmental change. [read more here...](#)

**In memory of Richard Douthwaite** [read more here...](#)

**The AA5 Alliance.** An Taisce has been continuing its campaign for more rational road planning. Several members visited the 2010 Climate Camp Ireland in 2010 to hear more about the proposals for a new dual carriage way through Co Tyrone from Aughnacloy in the south up to Newbuildings in Co Derry, duplicating the existing A5. Following this James Nix and Attracta Uí Bhroin were able to assist the local Alternative A5 Alliance in Tyrone and make a submission to the Northern Ireland enquiry into the matter. Whilst the road is now delayed, money from the Republic is still promised for 2017/17 and the Enquiry Inspectors report is awaited. Lynne Smyth tells the full story here. [read more here...](#)

National Landscape Strategy

Walks and Talks

Septic Tank Debate

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Draft NSDS

Peatlands

Richard Douthwaite

The AA5 Alliance

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## An Taisce Update

As you are all aware, Charles has signalled for over a year his intention to stand down as Chair of An Taisce, having served almost 5 years in this position. At the Council meeting on Saturday 10th December 2011 Charles Stanley-Smith resigned as Chair of An Taisce. I am sure you will join with the Board, and the many Council members present on the day in acknowledging his extensive service to An Taisce, and our gratitude for the support both he and his wife, Elizabeth, have given to the organisation directly and indirectly.

Further to the deliberation of Council it was resolved to defer the election of a new Chair and revisit this at the Council meeting in February. Therefore in the interim, Vice-Chair Attracta Uí Bhroin has been asked to serve as Acting Chair. Attracta has indicated her awareness of the big shoes she has to fill at what is a very difficult time for An Taisce. Attracta has asked for us to bear with her, as she endeavours to assist us steer our way together through these challenging times; and has emphasised that it has never been more important for us to work together in order to grasp each of the opportunities ahead, and to build a sustainable operation which can continue An Taisce's positive contribution across all of its many functions: education, advocacy, research, consultation, challenge and properties.

### Transition Update from the Vice-Chair:

I am delighted that my first update on this difficult transition time for An Taisce – is filled with a thousand thank-yous – reflecting how well our organisation is pulling together to ensure An Taisce continues our positive contribution to the protection of Ireland's Built and Natural Heritage.

The first 'thank-you' must be to our members and supporters whose response to the Appeal Letter has been truly unprecedented. We are still processing this but clearly have exceeded last years response, with discretionary donations of varying amounts for which we thank-you most sincerely.

- Our Oak Appeal, for donations of over €1,000 targeted to reach €20,000 by the end of January is just shy of that target - and December isn't over yet!
- To those of you who have committed to our An Taisce's Spring programme – you provide us with an invaluable certainty for our future, by committing to donations for 3 or more years.
- Many of you chose the 'Acorn' donation programme. We hope you will enjoy sharing with your chosen gift recipient the lovely and informative booklets from our Natural Environment Unit over the coming year – and inspiring a love for our natural heritage.

These financial contributions have been matched by offers of people's time with both Board members and volunteers committing to continue the essential work of the office. The administrative office work can no longer be performed by paid staff members. All of this volunteer work on phones and email is essential to maintaining a low cost base – and protecting our core business and professional staff who are so critical to our prescribed, advocacy and research services – which are carried out jointly between the Heritage & Natural Environment Offices, together with our Properties and Conservation Office.

Others have offered help with our membership management in local associations in the new year, and James Leahy at [membership@antaisce.org](mailto:membership@antaisce.org) will be co-ordinating this.

Many of you also took time to respond with a whole range of advice and suggestions and we will be reviewing all of these in the new year.

A lot of work has still to be done to streamline our processes to facilitate the re-organisation. I am personally indebted to the extent of hands-on effort and commitment from colleagues on the Board, both old and new – in sharing out the workload; and for the ongoing support and advice of Charles, with whom I have always worked so closely since joining the Board.

We are in the process of training volunteers, and January should see new voices on the phones and on email. I have no doubt you will be understanding and supportive of these volunteers who are key to making it possible to plan to continue our operations. As while the response to the appeal has been so wonderful we are deeply conscious of the new economic environment in which An Taisce has to survive and operate in the coming years. All the different agencies and organisations that would have contributed financially to our work have all been cut, and there is increased competition for those reduced resources. In the face of this An Taisce also has still significant operational costs, and liabilities, and we need to balance our focus carefully and create a sustainable operation.

Finally, I have to thank our remaining staff who provide with our members an essential continuity, and who have been so supportive and understanding of our current difficulties, and the limitations of a volunteer board of management. It was very difficult to say goodbye to part of An Taisce's family as roles had to be made redundant, and our best wishes and thanks go to these staff members.

It is to 2012 and its challenges we now must turn jointly, and I will do my best to manage the organisation with the support of colleagues, in advance of our crucial meeting in February 2012. Nollaig shona agus Athbhliain faoi shéan is faoi mhaise daoibh go léir

Attracta Uí Bhroin, Vice-Chair An Taisce

## Nature's Way

### The "Nature's Way – The Wonder of Peat Bogs" and "Natures Way – Pollinators in Ireland" booklets.

Following on from the successful booklet "Natures Way – Biodiversity & Ecosystems in Ireland" An Taisce's Natural Environment Department has produced two more booklets. One booklet is titled "Nature's Way – The Wonder of Peatlands" and the other "Natures Way – Pollinators in Ireland". These booklets are due to be printed at the beginning of January and a copy will also be put on the An Taisce website. It is also hoped to have a launch for these booklets.

Funding to produce the booklets came from the IEN Biodiversity fund and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The booklets aim to be fun and informative through brilliant illustrations and engaging, accessible text. The cartoons and illustrations are amusing in places and help readers to remember some of the issues and concepts, as well as inviting them to read the booklet in the first instance. The messages are crafted so as to be readily understood, appealing, and memorable. This is particularly important as the booklet is specifically designed to reach out to new audiences, with a fresh look at messages that are often difficult to digest. The booklets aim to be a first step in enticing people to see the natural world around them in a new light, addressing how that natural world is valued; as well as to encourage a combination of interest, positive action, and a feeling of wanting to get involved.

The booklets foster an understanding of and engagement with Ireland's Bogs and Pollinators, their value and relevance to people. The messages will be carefully designed to engage the public and those with no previous understanding of pollinators or bogs and to inform about the Irish situation.

See [here ... \(large pdf file\)](#) for the Natures Way – Biodiversity & Ecosystems booklet or else ring 01 7077063 if you would like hard copies of any three of the booklets in 2012.

## Retail Planning Guidelines

**Proposed changes to retail guidelines will cost jobs and cause more dereliction.** Minister for the Environment, Phil Hogan needs to reject the proposed changes to increase the size of large stores. Weakening the current guidelines will result in mega-retailers gaining more monopoly power, a loss of community and more money leaving the country."

Research shows that 1.4 jobs are lost in town centres for every new job created in out-of-town 'megastores'. Because of their failure to engage with local suppliers and re-circulate money back into local economies, each new out-of-town 'megastore' results in a net jobs loss of 270 full-time positions, according to US research (see submission for details).

We have no reason to believe the situation is any different in Ireland. Indeed, Forfas in its report to the Minister on the Retail Planning Guidelines could only make guestimates because of what it called "a lack of timely and detailed data".

It makes absolutely no sense to increase the floor space of hypermarkets. The reality is that mega-retailing in Dundrum has destroyed shopping in Dun Laoghaire, while edge-of-town shopping has also put Waterford and Limerick city centres in jeopardy.

US experience also shows that locally based shops return twice as much money to the local economy as out-of-town retailers. Fact: locally-based shops return 32 cents of every euro spent to the local economy, but large out-of-town retailers only return 16 cents of every euro in revenue back into the local economy (according to the research; see detailed paper).

Further, locally owned businesses employ more staff and pay better. Employees in 'superstores' earn 20% less according to research on what hyper-retailer Wal-Mart pay staff. The undermining of traditional town centres by big and out-of-town stores has to stop – not be made worse.

An Taisce advocates a two prong-strategy to stem the erosion of town centres.

1. A hypermarket levy: An Taisce supports the hyper-market tax being brought in for the 76 largest stores in Northern Ireland and calls for introduction here and applied to the 300 largest stores in the Republic. As proposed in Northern Ireland, there should be a 15 per cent surcharge on their rates bill and finance rates-relief for small business, the use of empty shops for non-commercial purposes, and public transport.
2. An out-of-town retail parking levy: An Taisce is also recommending an out-of-town retail parking tax with 20 to 25 cents would be collected for every 2 or 3 hours of parking at major retail outlets where parking is currently free. The charge is not prohibitive – and it does provide much-needed revenue for public transport alternatives so that we can wean ourselves off our over-reliance on imported oil in the medium to long term. Some revenue would need to go to back the retailer initially to pay for installing the car park charging system, but over time the money would be sent to local government to provide sustainable transport such as new bike sharing schemes.

The submission, which can be read on the website [here](#), contains many facts and figures that might be useful for local groups who wish to confront proposals and planning applications for large stores in their own areas.

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## INTO's Victoria Declaration on Climate Change and COP 17.

Delegates from 193 countries met for the 17th Climate Change Conference in Durban, South Africa from 28 November to 9 December. On the agenda was a 'pathway' towards a cut in carbon emissions, a fund to help poor countries deal with the effects of climate change and protection measures against the effects of deforestation. This time once again INTO was represented by a high level delegation, including senior officers from the Australian, English and American members. The team mounted a stand in the Green Peace Tent and also ran a Side Event with international speakers. This was made possible due to volunteers from the South African Heritage Trust, the local INTO member and international sponsorship.

After the huge disappointment following the much-hyped Copenhagen Conference two years ago, the prognosis for Durban is more modest. Yet the scientific evidence of global warming and climate change is now overwhelming and the need for action more urgent.

It is not too dramatic to state that if global warming continues on its upward path, and if climate change is not mitigated by reducing greenhouse gas emissions, Ireland will be, at best, largely unrecognisable from the island we know today and, at worst, one of the few places in Europe to continue with some kind of a sustainable agriculture.

No one can predict the outcome of climate change, or its effects, with complete certainty. There are, indeed, legitimate concerns over particular details and effects. But scientists now know enough to understand the risks. Global warming is no longer a theoretical phenomenon. Its potential damage is no longer an abstract proposition.

Global warming will affect Ireland in many ways. The impact of climate change will lead to more extreme and haphazard weather patterns, with prolonged Saharan-style heat waves, more intense rainy periods leading to flooding, strong winds and longer dry spells. The escalating rise in temperature will be accompanied by severe water shortages as rainfall at times of the year over parts of Ireland is drastically reduced by as much as 30%.

The biggest impact will be to exacerbate our problems with our water table, which is already not being replenished quickly enough. Lack of water and moisture in the soil and rising sea levels will lead to increased salinity and certain crop yields will be diminished. The effects on our natural heritage landscapes, flora and fauna will be devastating- literally changing the physical appearance of our island.

The acceleration of climate change will sweep away the near-perfect climate to which we have become accustomed. Put starkly, climate change threatens the basic elements of life for people around the world, effects from which Ireland will not be immune: access to water, food production, health, use of land, the economy, security and the environment itself.

I have recently had the privilege of representing An Taisce in Victoria, Canada as a member of the Executive Committee of the International National Trusts Organisation (known in short as INTO). INTO occupies a unique role within the global heritage movement, bringing together natural and cultural heritage organisations from around the world, representing a constituency of well in excess of six million individual members across some forty-five countries, and growing. Through alliances and affiliations with other organisations sharing a common concern for the global environment, the INTO voice speaks for tens of millions of people globally.

In Victoria, we returned to the issue of climate change which we had last addressed in Dublin two years ago, in preparation for the presence of a delegation from INTO in Durban. Our discussions focused on the aspect of climate change which we felt had hitherto been ignored by world leaders. This was the essential need for a necessary reform of United Nations procedures to incorporate far more effectively into the language of climate change a firm recognition that the integrity and survival of the cultures of all the peoples and nations around the world are threatened by climate change.

In the course of climate change debates and descriptions of its possible effects, world leaders frequently speak of consultation and seeking community consensus. Yet invariably climate change is simply expressed, as I have just done in this article, in terms of impacts on the physical environment (even though efforts are sometimes made to draw links to human health and welfare). But this is to miss the wood for the trees. As a consequence of this limited perspective, communities are disconnected from understanding the full implications of climate change.

If the threat of climate change is largely described in terms of impacts on the physical environment, then the prospect of achieving global consensus for action to avert climate change will always fall short. However, if the effects of climate change are also couched in terms of culture – of societal values, customs, civilisations and achievements of particular peoples – then there is likely to be greater responsiveness across the global community.

Put in terms of cultural heritage and sustainability, the path to wider community understanding, and thus support for climate change action (be it mitigation or adaptation), should be more achievable. There will be a greater willingness to embrace essential reforms if the effects are seen in terms of the cultural, human and societal impacts.

In the light of the realisation that the failure hitherto to communicate the threat of climate change in terms which describe the dire implications for cultural sustainability and that this fundamentally weakens the prospects for global reform to combat climate change, the Victoria Declaration on the Implications for Cultural Sustainability of Climate Change ([www.internationaltrusts.org](http://www.internationaltrusts.org)) was adopted by members of INTO, including An Taisce, in order to underline to world leaders assembled in Durban in December that what is at stake is not just economic and political, but that cultural heritage is in jeopardy and social sustainability is at risk.

We would not be Irish if we did not recognise intellectually the likely physical effects of global warming while, at the same time, being unwilling to acknowledge that our own lives will alter, and that if climate change goes unchecked our way of life and the very culture of Ireland would be profoundly altered. We might be afraid of the impending disaster if the world does not change its ways, but are also confident that, through the grace of God who has always preserved us so far, we can somehow be spared the worst consequences of global warming.

But the reality is that climate change will affect social sustainability. It will fundamentally jeopardise cultural practices, in our case practices which are uniquely Irish. It will undermine connectivity with place – what makes Ireland what it is. If the integrity of the world's cultures is destabilised then social dislocation and social instability will follow.

In the words of the Victoria Declaration: "For the sake of future generations, we must collectively tackle climate change not just because of changes in the physical environment, not just for reasons of sustaining human health and welfare, but to recognise that the core strength and connectivity of all the socio-economic systems of human-kind, lies in maintaining cultural sustainability".

"John Ducie is the Properties & Conservation Officer of An Taisce and the Chairperson of INTO's European Region. He writes here in a personal capacity"

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## National Landscape Strategy

An Taisce's submission to Consultation on the Strategy Issues Paper for the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland November 2011

An Taisce supports the European Landscape Convention in its aims to increase awareness of the value of landscapes; to improve training and education about the landscape; and to provide a procedure of landscape identification, assessment, protection and quality objectives. In Ireland there is currently a lack of integrated and comprehensive study to characterise, analyse and document the physical and historic landscape and seascape. There is the need for national consistency in characterisation and valuing of the landscape. An Taisce support a National Landscape Strategy that should unite the landscape and override local administrative boundaries. Landscape must become a mainstream political concern and demands a forward-looking attitude. National policy should recognise the ecosystem services set in the natural landscape upon which humans rely for everyday life.

In recent years Ireland has had the fastest population increase in the EU. The unprecedented physical and infrastructural investment, which occurred between the mid 1990's and 2007, has put extreme pressure on our landscape both urban and rural.



Photo of the summit of Crocnafarragh (An Taisce Property) by John Ducie Properties Officer

Ireland's distinctive yet diverse landscape is a key resource providing the physical setting for everyday life, it gives a sense of place and belonging to individuals and communities. Biodiversity and natural heritage are integral elements of the past and present landscape. This should not be forgotten in the future, where dominant human activity threatens the natural integrity of the landscape.

Download full submission [here...](#)(pdf file)

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## Walks and Talks

The Natural Environment Office has received funding under the Local Agenda 21 initiative for two projects. One project will involve two guided walks along the Boyne navigation. The Boyne navigation runs through a heavily visited world heritage site at Bru na Boinne. The same stretch is also a proposed NHAs and SAC thus, its environmental significance has also been recognised. The purpose of the walks will be to bring people on a guided walk providing information on both the cultural &

archaeological heritage of the area as well as importance of the surrounding environment.

The other will involve three talks at the Booterstown Marsh Nature Reserve. The purpose of this project is to highlight the ornithological and botanical importance of this nature reserve, as well as also highlighting the ecosystem services that are provided by the marsh.

The dates and details of these walks and talks are still to be confirmed so keep an eye out in future Ezines for details.



## Septic Tank Debate

**A risk to human health through polluted groundwater is the key issue in the septic tank debate.**

Minister Hogan's approach on septic tanks is not unfair or unreasonable, according to the National Trust

The stark reality is that the major drinking water crises of recent years are linked to inappropriately sited or poorly maintained septic tanks. For example, Galway's large-scale outbreak of cryptosporidium in 2007 (where more than 250 people became seriously ill) was traced in large part to sewage from poorly-maintained and wrong-sited septic tanks getting into Lough Corrib, from where drinking water is sourced.

Irish households have a right to safe drinking water that meets EU health standards, but this will continue to be undermined until such time as there is proper regulation and maintenance of the 500,000 septic tanks in Ireland.

The current situation is so remiss and dangerous that the European Court found against Ireland in 2009 and fines will be levied in 2012 unless a system of registration and maintenance is put in place.

For the small minority of poorly-informed politicians trying to drum up opposition, the truth is clear and simple: septic tanks can pose a risk to human health and there is a cost to ensure that risk does not materialise.

The €50 fee for a five year registration is fair and reasonable. County Cavan went it alone - being the only county to properly implement EU rules on water quality by introducing a septic tank inspection system from 2004 - and had to charge €100.

1.5 million houses are linked to public sewers while up to 500,000 are connected to septic tanks and similar wastewater treatment systems.





Any claim that people in rural areas are being charged for something that was not charged in urban areas is again based on the avoidance of facts. Purchasers of houses connected to public sewers paid for those connections as part of the development contributions put up by house builders and passed on in the purchase price. And pre-1977 sewer connections were funded under domestic rates which were foolishly abolished, and which are, in effect, only now being re-introduced).

Risks to groundwater are posed by individual septic tanks and similar wastewater treatment systems and it is not unfair or unreasonable to place those costs on their users.

See An Taisce Press Release "Risks to human health through polluted groundwater the key issue in septic tank debate" [here ...](#)

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## Future projects from the Natural Environment Section

Two applications were also submitted to the Heritage Council. However, it will not be until February 2012 that we will hear if we have received the funding for these projects. One application is to produce the fourth booklet in the successful Natures Way series. The booklet is going to be another fun illustrated booklet explaining the negative impact of Alien Invasive Species on the environment and economy of Ireland.

The second application submitted to the Heritage Council is to fund the Natural Environment Office carrying out a survey of An Taisce's property in Killaha West, Kerry in order to produce a management plan. The plan will include a habitat map as well as measures and actions required to ensure to protection and enhancement of the site's habitats. This plan will be used to underpin future management and potential further designation of the site within the SAC.

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## Rural Housing – updating An Taisce policy

Whilst professional and academic planners generally share An Taisce's attitudes towards the negative social, economic and environmental impact of a widely dispersed rural settlement pattern, it seems that the campaign by a number of rural dwellers continues to gain ground and the percentage of housing now being built outside of towns is growing.

It is time for An Taisce to review its rural housing policy and a draft policy will be drawn up in the next couple of months for approval by the Council. If you have anything to contribute or would like to be included in the development of this policy please email Judy Osborne from Wicklow at [judydaleosborne@gmail.com](mailto:judydaleosborne@gmail.com) who will work with Catherine McMullen from Kerry and Gavin Daly from Dublin to coordinate the report drawing on their own experience, from staff and from contributions from members.

A great many facts and figures can be found on the outspoken website <http://oneoffireland.wordpress.com> which you may find helpful to inform yourself as the debate will undoubtedly continue.



We are also drawing together a lot more facts and figures relevant to the debate around inspections for Septic Tanks. An Taisce has considerable experience of how the current regulations have been failing us and it is hoped to prepare a report for members to better understand the facts in the near future.

The debate currently raging on new taxes such as household charges together with water rates and septic tank inspection charges are frequently mis-directed (see the attached photograph) and it is hoped to provide members with additional information on these environmental charges soon.



See An Taisce Press Release "Risks to human health through polluted groundwater the key issue in septic tank debate" [here ...](#)

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## Draft Framework for Sustainable Development for Ireland.

The Draft Framework for Sustainable Development for Ireland was published just before Christmas for Public Consultation.

The Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Mr. Phil Hogan T.D published a new Draft Framework for Sustainable Development for Ireland for public consultation just before christmas. .

The official notice states that Sustainable development is a continuous, guided process of economic, environmental and social change aimed at promoting wellbeing of citizens now and in the future. While considerable progress has been made in integrating sustainable principles into public policy making in Ireland since the first national strategy in this area was published in 1997, significant gaps remain across a range of economic, social and environmental policy areas. Drawing on the model established by the EU Sustainable Development Strategy, the draft Framework for Sustainable Development concentrates on gaps where limited progress has been made and which still present formidable challenges.

The draft can be seen on the DOECLG website [here ...](#) and An Taisce's work on its submission [here...](#)

A submission on the draft will be prepared and more information on this will be sent in the next ezine.

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## Peatlands

The EPA publishes the Bogland Report suggesting a Peatlands Park in the midlands and An Taisce prepares its submission on a National Peatland Strategy

Images of endangered species or threatened wild habitats usually evoke distant locations like tropical rain forests but Ireland also faces a particular challenge in reversing the decline of our raised and blanket bogs which are an internationally significant habitat. The recently published EPA report "Boglands" is invaluable in complementing international research on the multiple value of boglands, as habitats, as carbon stores or sinks which have accumulated over thousands of years, in water filtration, flood attenuation, as areas of wild landscape and as records of environmental change.

53 raised bogs in Ireland are designated as Special Areas of Conservation in order to protect this vital and rare resource but turf cutting has only stopped because of the threat by the EU to follow legal action with fines. Now NGOs are reporting further systemic breaches of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive and Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Directive in relation to peat extraction, including large scale horticultural.

The Peatland Council established by the Government in April 2011 includes representatives from An Taisce and is mandated to address the immediate issue of the designated raised bogs as well as advise on a National Peatland Strategy. Our contribution will make good use of the Bogland report which provides significant research to inform the strategy as well as set out recommendations including additional designation to

Regional report, which provides significant research to inform the strategy, as well as several recommendations including additional designations to reflect habitat value. The report also suggests a National Peatlands Park in the midlands.

## Richard Douthwaite



In memory of Richard Douthwaite, author of *The Growth Illusion* in 1993 and many other books and papers over the past 30 years, founder member of Feasta and a great thinker who has inspired so many An Taisce members. Richard died on 14th November 2011 but will be remembered with great fondness and respect. His ideas will live on in his writings to inspire many more. see [www.feasta.org](http://www.feasta.org)

## The AA5 Alliance

An Taisce has been continuing its campaign for more rational road planning. Several members visited the 2010 Climate Camp Ireland in to hear more about the proposals for a new dual carriage way through Co Tyrone from Aughnacloy in the south up to Newbuildings in Co Derry, duplicating the existing A5. Following this James Nix and Attracta Uí Bhroin were able to assist the local Alternative A5 Alliance in Tyrone and make a submission to the Northern Ireland enquiry into the matter. Whilst the road is now delayed, money from the Republic is still promised for 2017/17 and the Enquiry Inspectors report is awaited. The full story is told here by Lynne Smyth.

### The Battle against the proposed new A5 'White Elephant' dual carriageway.

Definition – White Elephant: a valuable but burdensome possession of which its owner cannot dispose and whose cost (particularly cost of upkeep) is out of proportion to its usefulness or worth. (Wikipedia)

In September 2009 news filtered through to us out in the backwoods of Co Tyrone that a new road was being planned by the 2 governments of Ireland. This was the first we had heard of it! We investigated the matter and were shocked to find that there were plans afoot, in fact very far advanced plans, to build a new dual carriageway through Co Tyrone from Aughnacloy in the south up to Newbuildings in Co Derry. It was to be a continuation of a road that was to be built from Dublin to the border just south of Aughnacloy. We were invited to a public 'Consultation' with Mouchel, the road engineers, where they revealed to us the extent of the environmental degradation they intended to inflict on our beloved county. We were all horrified. It seems that there had been another 'Consultation' in April/May 2008 but the key stakeholders were not personally informed.

In November 2009 [politicians] Tom Elliott and Lord John Laird organised a public meeting at the Silver Birch Hotel, Omagh to inform the public and gauge the strength of feeling for and against the project. There we learned that this scheme was not the result of a planning decision based on the needs of the people, but rather a political scheme to spend over £1 billion on an unnecessary road scheme to which no alternatives had been given. This was not only wasteful but, according to environmental law, illegal, as alternatives are required to meet EU regulations.

And so the battle began! Lord Laird encouraged those of us who were interested to form a pressure group. We met at Newtown Stewart Centre and volunteers were appointed to fill various roles. Following this a name was chosen – The Alternative A5 Alliance – and a website was launched. The group has convened on many occasions since its inception and it has spearheaded many publicity events to raise the profile of this 'white elephant' road in the minds of the public both north and south of the border. One particularly exciting event was the hosting of the 2010 camp for Climate Camp Ireland who supported us in our objections to this destructive and wasteful road plan.

As there were over 2000 objection letters, a public enquiry would have to be held and this commenced in June 2011. Many of the AA5A presented evidence along with others who were affected. One high profile objector was An Taisce which presented a fantastic defence of our natural environment. The enquiry concluded and we are still awaiting the outcome of the inspector's report.

However, since then another development has impacted upon these governmental plans – the economy of the Republic began to collapse and TDs there admitted that it was effectively in receivership. How could the Republic provide £400 million worth of funds for this unnecessary road when they could not fund their own roads – or their hospitals and schools for that matter? This meant that plans for the southern part of the the N2 which linked to Dublin were abandoned, making a nonsense of the northern part. Finally in autumn 2011 the offer of this funding was withdrawn and the plans for the road collapsed. Or so it would seem. Some politicians and Chambers of Commerce[,] who seemed to have a vested interest in seeing the project get underway, made strenuous efforts to revive funding from the beleaguered Irish coffers. Eventually £25 million was promised for 2016 and another £25 million for 2017. However, the clauses surrounding this commitment would lead one to wonder how concrete the offer really is.

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