

Priorities for an Effective National Planning Framework

The history of Irish planning has been marked by successive implementation failures of plans and strategies. It is the biggest obstacle to achieving the goals of any policy. It is essential that the National Planning Framework provide for its own implementation, through being justiciable, as with other provisions of the Planning Acts. Terms like “have regard to” and “may” should be avoided. It is An Taisce’s considered opinion that local authorities and regional assemblies “shall comply with the National Planning Framework” is the standard necessary to avoid the mistakes of the past. Equally all Government expenditure needs to comply with the NPF

1. Sustainability and Quality of life

Quality of life for all citizens should be the foremost priority of the NPF, not just an economy through building of healthy communities and enhancement of well-being. Ensure all decisions are assessed against the broadest range of sustainability indicators as defined by the OECD, to guarantee that the planning regime advances national quality of life.

2. Community development and integration

Update and give effect to the six location- test standards for community integration for new housing in Box 5.2 of the National Spatial Strategy 2002, which were unfortunately largely ignored. Unlike sustainability/quality of life indicators these should be threshold standards without which no development should be permitted. This requires that zoning and decisions by local authorities and An Bord Pleanála for new housing be conditional on integration with existing communities, affordability and mix of housing types , walking and cycling access to local services and schools, public transport access to employment locations and availability of recreational facilities. The application of these criteria should be overseen by an independent Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR)

3. Guarantee balanced regional development.

Measures are necessary to curtail the primacy of Dublin and its sprawl into adjoining counties and boost development of cities outside Dublin. Beyond this, no town or village should be allowed to go into decline. An Taisce has consistently favoured regeneration of smaller towns and villages which will irrefutably necessitate an entirely different national philosophy towards ‘one-off’ rural housing which cumulatively has had a corrosive impact on the vitality of rural settlements and viability of the rural economy.

4. Climate Mitigation and Adaptation

The transition to a decarbonised society and adaption to the effects of climate change must be **the** overriding imperative over the period to 2040. All other objectives must simply be secondary to this and the NPF, as one of the few strategic long-term policy documents in Ireland, must show clear leadership. The NPF must be integrated with the National Climate Mitigation and Adaptation Plans currently being prepared under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 to provide measured targets to reduce transport generation and energy demand, and fully address increased flood risk, sea- level rise, storm impact and infrastructure vulnerability at all levels. This fundamentally affects all decision making from national strategic and infrastructure investment in transport including ports, to the local authority planning process. A complete rethinking of future development and growth trajectories will be required.

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5. Local democracy

Subsidiarity requires planning decisions should be taken at local level. To ensure no voice is left out, An Taisce favours the use of cross-sectoral roundtables directed by planners imbued with the ethos of the NPF. This is mandated by the UN's Local Agenda 21. Such groups should include local authority elected members and officials and commercial, retail, trade-union, environmental and community groups.

6. Prioritise development of strategic locations and public transport corridors

Measures are required in tandem with the NPF to ensure that unutilised zoned land in urban and village locations and on public transport corridors is developed as a first priority, with effective land value taxation disincentivising hoarding or leaving of such land undeveloped. Action by the three regional assemblies is required to ensure cooperation between local authorities in the focusing of expansion of major urban areas along public transport corridors.

7. New measures to secure affordable housing

The NPF will absolutely fail, in the same manner as the NSS 2002, if lack of affordable and available housing in proximity to existing family networks and employment continues. Any renewed development of long- distance commuter housing into inadequately serviced villages and smaller towns around major urban areas will increase the multiple adverse impacts of poorly integrated communities, service provision deficiency and traffic congestion and greenhouse gases. Since the 1974 Kenny Report measures and recommendations have been advanced by which the value uplift of turning agricultural into development land is captured by the State to support infrastructure, and affordability, using land value tax mechanisms.

8. Integrate all public investment with NPF objectives

Ensure that all public investment reinforces and does not conflict with NPF objectives, including transport, IDA supported projects, schools and other services, addressing appropriate balance in supporting role of Dublin city region, regional centers and rural communities.

9. Integrate NPF with Department of Transport Tourism and Sport "Smarter Travel"

Integrate new housing, employment, retail and other development with the objectives of Department of Transport's Smarter Travel - A New Transport Policy for Ireland 2009 -2020 . This requires that by 2020 "*the total kilometres travelled by the car fleet will not increase significantly from 2009 levels*" and "*work related commuting by car will be reduced from a current modal share of 65% to 45%*" and the parallel National Cycling strategy 10% target for all journeys by 2020.

This will require significant investment in public transport with particular focus on the large scale increasing of modal share in an around the major urban centres and for inter regional travel.

10. Fully integrate NPF with local authority land use and zoning policies.

Ensure the speedy translation of the NPF into review and updating of local authority Development Plans and Core Strategies, to comply with the key NPF provisions. This will include restricting over development of towns and villages in current car based commuter

catchments of the major urban centre's which do not have an adequate local service base or high level public transport access.

The NPF must exercise foresight and not simply extrapolate current perspectives on land-use into the future, particularly in the context of a post fossil fuel age. Ireland's unsustainable legacy of diffuse one-off sprawl has now created a major land-use conflict with renewable energy generation, which must be addressed/

11. Address rural housing dispersal by strengthening village settlement

Recognize that the rising service cost, and impact on an aging population, in continuing the current pattern of dispersed one off rural housing, is not in the interest of rural communities, or climate targets.

Address the decline of villages and smaller towns, by proactive measures to provide serviced sites for housing need in local catchments, integrated with community based plan led strategies.

This provides an alternative and affordable option to one off housing in the countryside for those wishing to self-build close to family ties.

12. Integrate international Biodiversity and other obligations with NPF

Ensure that the NPF addresses and ensures compliance with Ireland's obligations under the UN Biodiversity Convention, the EU Water Framework Directive Birds and Habitats Directives, Marine Strategy Framework Directive for marine spatial planning and Council of Europe Conventions for Landscape, Archaeology and Architectural Heritage.

Conclusion

Ireland has had a long history of sacrificing strategic planning to short-term political and economic expediency. The Government should not underestimate the challenge of this 'social gap'. There will be a need to clearly and effectively communicate the rationale for the proposed strategy and avoid the dichotomy of 'winners' and 'losers'.

A clear, bold and decisive NPF must be established to transition to a post-carbon society.