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**Ireland  
2040  
Our Plan**



NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK

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Ireland 2040  
**Our Plan**

**Executive Summary  
Issues and Choices**

February 2017



**An Roinn Tithochta, Pleanála,  
Pobail agus Rialtais Áitiúil**  
Department of Housing, Planning,  
Community and Local Government



# Minister's Foreword



What will Ireland be like in 20 years' time? It's a fundamental question that no one can answer for sure but, based on what we do know now, we can make informed and strategic choices now about what kind of challenges and opportunities we will face in the future. For example, we know that there will be more of us - as many as a million additional people in Ireland and we will be on average older, with the number of people over 65 double current levels. But where will they live? Where should they live? How will they access the services they need? How will they move around?

We can expect this and many other changes in the coming years, so it is essential to set out an overall long-term plan for the country. It's also clear that in addition to a greater choice of housing types and employment opportunities, our growing population will need more school and third-level places and better infrastructure of all kinds, including transport, energy, communications, healthcare and recreational facilities.

If we want our country to be the best it can be, we must ensure that development and services are located where all of our people can best be served. In other words, that the right development can take place in the right places, at the right time.

The fact is that we have not always grasped the opportunity that good forward planning can give. This has stopped us from reaching our full potential in economic, social, cultural and spatial terms. I firmly believe that if we continue to do things as we have over the past twenty years, we are almost certain to get more of the same over the next twenty, and compound many of the quality of life difficulties we currently face. A continuation of 'business as usual' will not deliver the national vision and goals we all share, such as improved living standards, a desire for people to live in safe, vibrant communities and to experience life-long health and well-being. Nor will we develop the capacity to meet our environmental obligations or be able to respond to climate change. Recognising that the same level or even type of growth can't occur everywhere, some degree of prioritisation and some hard choices will be necessary. So too will be the need to replace the concept of balanced regional development with the idea of effective regional development - playing to strengths rather than assuming that a single model suits all areas.

We have a unique and exciting opportunity now to plan for a better future for all - to start to move away from it will require some big decisions to be made that can be carried forward and implemented over a long period of time. This means that we first need to plan to do things differently.

As a nation, we have the opportunity to look ahead and shape long-term planning over the next twenty years or more, in the form of the Ireland 2040 Plan. The issues set out in this initial consultation paper prompt us to honestly ask ourselves some key questions about what should Ireland be like in 20 years' time. If we can envisage the type of outcomes that we would wish to see, then we can start to identify the steps that we might take to get there.

As well as considering what future we want for our people and communities, this process will have implications for the types of infrastructure that we may need in the future, how we relate to our environment and how we adapt to the pressures and costs of climate change. We must also consider interactions with Northern Ireland and our wider marine territory. It will be critical to identify what needs to be done to ensure that we can put a coherent plan into practice and to achieve success.

Whilst we can predict that much will change, the values we share as a society will largely remain intact. In an increasingly globalised but uncertain world, our sense of belonging to both community and place, our unique artistic and cultural inheritance and the value we place on social justice, a European model of inclusion and 'fair play' are key 'place-making' assets that set us apart. Our distinctive values and strengths - distinctly Irish, proudly European, outward looking, welcoming, dynamic, progressive, flexible, problem solvers, opportunity makers, community builders, cultural creators - will both inform and require a uniquely Irish approach to planning for our country's and our communities' future.

I encourage all of you to consider what kind of Ireland you want see in 2040 and give your views on the critical issues outlined in this paper and have your say on how we can best plan for Ireland's development out to 2040 and beyond.

**Simon Coveney T.D.**

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government

# 1 Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to set out the main issues and possible choices for the development of Ireland as a place, over the next twenty years or more, to 2040. This is the first major step towards the preparation of a new national spatial plan for the country, taking into account a range of social, economic and environmental factors, with the term 'spatial', meaning 'space' or 'place'.

It is intended that the National Planning Framework will be a high-level document that will provide the framework for future development and investment in Ireland, providing a long-term and place-based aspect to public policy and investment, and aiming to coordinate sectoral areas such as housing, jobs, transport, education, health, environment, energy and communications, into an overall coherent strategy. This will allow shared national development goals, including improved living standards, quality of life, prosperity, competitiveness and environmental sustainability, to be more broadly considered, as well as providing greater clarity for private sector investment. In order to ensure that positive outcomes arising from national growth can be shared by people throughout Ireland, the potential of all areas will need to be realised, relative to their capacity for sustainable development.

It is not possible to describe with absolute certainty the sort of place Ireland will be in 2040, but the long term nature of strategic planning is such that choices and decisions made now, will directly influence future outcomes. Accordingly, it is suggested that the most important question that needs to be asked at the outset of the National Planning Framework process is what the vision should be:-

What sort of place should Ireland be in 2040 and what do we need to do to achieve this?

This Issues and Choices paper is a consultation document that has been prepared in advance of drafting a new National Planning Framework, and has been designed to provide members of the public and all interested parties an overview of some of the main national planning issues that affect Ireland today and to prompt national debate and discussion in relation to the future spatial development of Ireland.

This consultation process provides the opportunity to submit comments and suggestions on the issues raised and other topics that are considered relevant to the National Planning Framework.

**Written submissions at this first stage of the NPF process can be made online through the dedicated NPF website [www.ireland2040.ie](http://www.ireland2040.ie)**

**by email to: [npf@housing.gov.ie](mailto:npf@housing.gov.ie)**

**or in writing to:**

**NPF Submissions  
Forward Planning Section  
Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government  
Custom House  
Dublin 1, D01 W6X0**

**by 12 noon on Thursday 16th March 2017.**

## 2 Ireland's National Planning Challenges

Ireland is now seen as an advanced, developed country, an established member of the European Union, uniquely positioned with strong economic, social and cultural links to both the UK, Europe and the US. The context within which we operate continues to change and it is important that Ireland continues to position itself for growth and success in an increasingly competitive global environment.

The principal purpose of economic success is to ensure sustained improvement in living standards and quality of life for all of our citizens. This also provides the best possible platform from which to pursue key social and environmental goals, such as tackling disadvantage and responding to climate change. Continued progress will require us to identify new ways to enable improved performance to achieve outcomes that make a difference at a national scale. Preparing and implementing a National Planning Framework that can influence the spatial pattern of development throughout the Country, presents such an opportunity.

The scale of Ireland's growth since the early 1990's has been unprecedented, notwithstanding the impact of economic recession and this growth and change is set to continue. There will be more people, who will be more diverse and older and will need more homes and more jobs, supported by new infrastructure, services and facilities. In order to address projected future growth and change in Ireland, the NPF will need to enable public and private policy and investment decisions with a place-based dimension, to be guided and prioritised in a manner that can benefit the Country as a whole.

Growth and change will occur irrespective of whether there is a National Planning Framework in place or not and will further impact the spatial pattern of development in Ireland. In the absence of an agreed and effective National Planning Framework, it is likely that current trends in terms of dispersed settlement patterns outside the main urban areas, an increasing concentration of population and economic activity in the East of the country and rural areas less accessible to cities and larger towns are more likely to experience population decline, will continue.

In contrast to settlement, the spatial pattern of employment is mainly focused on the urban hierarchy of cities and large towns as employers are increasingly likely to locate where there are larger pools of labour. Other factors driving the location of employment include scale, access to markets and suppliers, proximity to research and innovation and the availability of communications, transport, energy and water networks.

When combined with a decline in the numbers employed in more traditional sectors related to construction, agriculture or mining and in recent years, construction the location of employment growth has been more fixed than that of settlement growth.

Although continuation of current trends or 'Business as Usual' is a potential future scenario for growth and change in Ireland, we cannot rely on Business as Usual to deliver shared national goals. However, to move away from it will require some big decisions to be made that can be carried forward over a long period of time.

At this stage of the NPF process, it is timely to consider what the alternative strategies to Business as Usual might be. In order to enable improved performance and make a difference at a national scale, these must include objectives that:

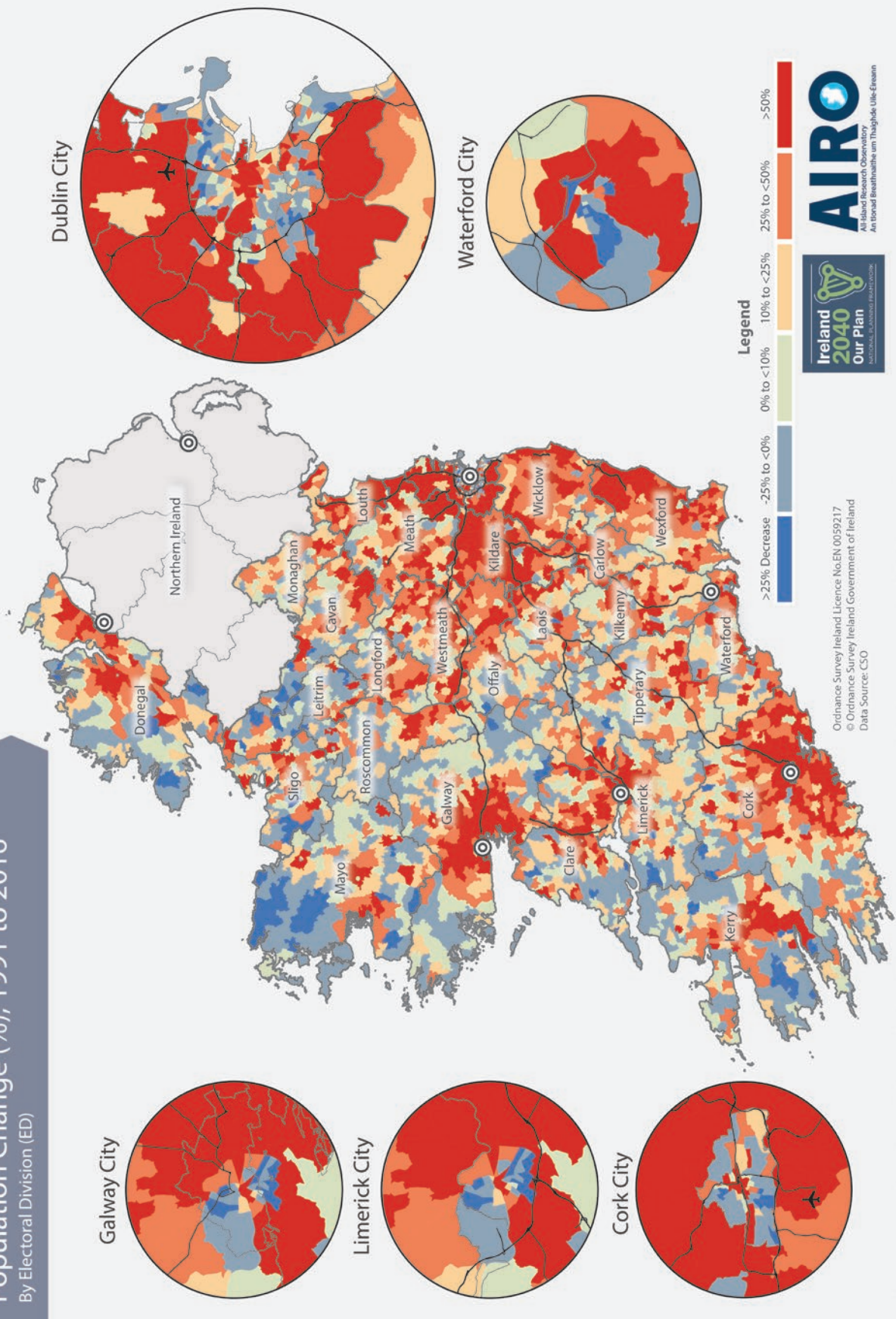
- Facilitate improvements to people's quality of life and well-being;
- Prevent further overdevelopment and sprawl;
- Encourage population growth closer to where employment is located and is likely to be;
- Identify and support employment potential throughout Ireland, including greater regional employment growth;
- Identify measures to encourage both rural and urban regeneration to address decline;
- Achieve effective regional development;
- Relieve development pressure on the Eastern part of the Country whilst protecting the key role played by Dublin;
- Ensure good environmental stewardship by avoiding any further deterioration and addressing existing deficiencies;
- Reduce carbon emissions;
- Prioritise the development of infrastructure that can deliver national benefit – including renewable energies;
- Harness the planning system in order to maximise the role it can play in relation to climate change;
- Manage the planning and development process so that the right development occurs in the most suitable places and at the right time, ensuring sustainability and best use of scarce resources.





# Population Change (%), 1991 to 2016

By Electoral Division (ED)



**Legend**

- >25% Decrease
- 25% to <0%
- 0% to <10%
- 10% to <25%
- 25% to <50%
- >50%



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 Data Source: CSO



## 3 People's Health and Well-Being

It is clear that we now enjoy a better quality of life than those who lived in Ireland in previous generations. In addition to advances in medicine and technology, greater access to healthcare and education, the reasons for this include significant improvements in living and working conditions. However, the consequences of some of the lifestyle choices impact on our own personal health and wellbeing as well as the overall health and wellbeing of places in Ireland.

The built environment is an important determinant of health – directly, through air pollution, road traffic, noise, floods and climate and indirectly, through accessibility, safety, mixed land-use, street design and green open spaces. How we 'make' places can have a huge influence on people's health and wellbeing. Modern indoor lifestyles are associated with reduced levels of exercise, increasing rates of obesity, diabetes and heart disease and higher incidence of depression. Whilst diet clearly has a significant role to play in tackling threats to human health, planning also plays an important part.

Population ageing is also one of the most significant trends of the 21st Century, with far-reaching implications for all aspects of society. These trends will accelerate in the near future, with more and more people living longer and living on their own, with social isolation constituting health risks in similar ways to those associated with smoking and obesity.

How we move around also impacts on our health and wellbeing. With our high car dependency rate, over two-thirds of commuters travel to work by car, and nearly one in ten workers spent one hour or more commuting to work. This pattern of car dependence means that many city and particularly town-based businesses and services require significant car parking to ensure viability, being reliant on an increasingly dispersed car-borne catchment, as well as resulting in a widespread physical move towards out-of-town or edge-of-town shopping, business, leisure and service activity, undermining the vibrancy of many historic main streets and urban centres.

Creating and maintaining environments that encourage people to make healthier, more active choices is central to making the healthy choice the easy choice. How future development in Ireland is planned will be a significant determinant of quality of life for people. Safe walking facilities, cycling paths and are some of the essential supports needed in communities to enable healthier outcomes for individuals. There is a need to consider the issue of community cohesion and a more healthy society and how we can better integrate people with services and amenities and promote sustainable travel i.e. walking and cycling.

A continuation of the pattern of development in Ireland over the last twenty years without intervention would more than likely cause quality of life and overall societal wellbeing to deteriorate. Although people in Ireland are now living longer than ever before, not all are living those longer lives in good health.

### Key Questions

- Are we prepared to make changes now so that a 'healthier places' legacy can be handed over to the next generation of Ireland's citizens?
- What policies can the NPF include to effect improvements to our general health, including physical and mental wellbeing, in Ireland over the next twenty years?
- Are there key priorities the NPF can identify to ensure better or improved health and wellbeing of people and places in Ireland?
- Are there facilities that the NPF needs to highlight for places in Ireland in order to enable greater participation in a healthy lifestyle?

## 4 A Place-Making Strategy

### 4.1 Our Capital, Cities and Towns

With Ireland having experienced a more spatially uneven pattern of regional and urban development than other similar OECD countries, we depend more on our largest city than other comparator countries and our 'next tier' of cities and their associated regions are comparatively weaker. Dublin plays a vital international role and continues to grow, having been a major part of economic success in recent decades. The Dublin City Region now accounts for 40% of the national population and 49% of economic output (2016).

Moreover, the spatial pattern of Dublin's influence now extends from Louth through Meath, Westmeath and Kildare to Laois, Carlow, Wicklow and Wexford, also partially affecting Cavan, Longford and Kilkenny. This spread of activity together with the objective of achieving more effective regional development elsewhere in Ireland makes it difficult to prioritise the needs of the Capital and our other cities. Dublin's success as a city-region is a double edged sword. While it has enabled Ireland to compete in an international context, such success has also given rise to pressures in areas such as housing, transport and infrastructural requirements, which affect competitiveness.

If Dublin is underperforming, Ireland is underperforming. Should the Dublin City-Region suffer a loss of competitiveness and become a less attractive place in which to invest as a result of housing and infrastructural bottlenecks, investment and influence will inevitably be attracted to other similar city-regions in Europe or elsewhere.

Ireland's regional cities appear to offer significant potential to be the focal point to drive growth and development in their regions. The regional cities are all major centres of employment, third-level education and healthcare and are accessible to the motorway network and other communications infrastructure such as airports and ports. Beyond the city catchments, there is a network of towns that can play a similar role.

Given the scale and important regional roles played by the four cities, all have significant potential to complement Dublin, to absorb some of the strain that the Capital has been subject to in terms of accommodating growth in employment, housing need and infrastructural requirements and drive their wider regions, which may also require cities to work in collaboration with each other and/or in conjunction with other towns, to borrow and share strengths.

At the tier below the cities, there are a number of towns which, due to their level of service provision and extensive catchments, serve an important role for those areas that fall outside the reach and influence of the cities. In some cases, they can complement the role of the city. However, lessons from the past suggest that if we continue to focus on multiple towns, this will continue to undermine the performance and potential of our cities and ultimately the wider regions.

Under the Business As Usual scenario, the current lop-sided pattern of development of the State will continue, which in the longer term will be neither beneficial to Dublin nor the Country as a whole.

## Key Questions

- Taking on board all of the relevant environmental and physical capacity issues, what role should our cities have as part of the NPF?
- How might we develop one or more strong regional complements to Dublin that can address their whole city-region, including interactions between settlements?
- Do we need to reform and strengthen administrative and governance structures so that they are capable of delivering the necessary alliances, collaboration and actions to build up our cities and their regions?
- How might we develop an urban policy that distinguishes between development within the existing built-up area of cities and towns and greenfield development sites?
- How might we distinguish between the role of towns within the wider hinterland of the cities and those located outside the influence of the cities?
- What measures could be used to examine potential densification scenarios that may be applied to parts of existing urban areas?

## 4.2 Opportunities for our Regions

There has been an increased focus on the regional dimension of national policy across Government Departments and State Agencies, including the Regional Action Plans for Jobs and the focus on regional policy within the IDA 'Winning' Strategy. In recent years, regional governance has been reformed, resulting in three new Regional Assemblies, whose principal functions are to co-ordinate, promote and support strategic planning and sustainable development of the regions and to manage EU programmes of assistance and their general impact in their regions.

Regional Assemblies has a leadership role to play in identifying regional policies and coordinating initiatives that support the delivery and implementation of national planning policy and to co-ordinate local authorities to secure shared national and local objectives, primarily through preparation and implementation of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs). These RSEs will provide a greater level of focus around the high-level strategic policies of the NPF.

Each Regional Assembly area shows evidence of regional strengths in a particular business sector, such as business services in the EMRA area, industrial products & services and pharmaceuticals in the SRA area and medical technologies in the NWRA area. An examination of business clustering patterns suggests that the largest cities in Ireland are the key focus for the knowledge and related business sectors. Sectors such as professional, scientific, technical, finance and insurance also tend to be more prevalent within the four largest cities. Indigenous enterprise is more broadly spread, but also primarily focused on cities and larger towns

The term balanced regional development (BRD) is a source of confusion and debate. It has led to a perception of diverting resources from one area to another to make up for an imbalance, or is seen as a form of equalisation. This has manifested itself as 'urban vs rural' and in particular 'Dublin vs Rest of the Country' with limited acknowledgement of the individual and collective decisions we make as a society that have assisted in shaping current trends.

Effective regional development is about reducing disparities by embracing the spatial development opportunities specific to each of the regions and in particular the Regional Assembly areas. This requires choices to be made that result in sustainable solutions and means that NPF policies may look different from one region to another. A more tailored approach to regional development requires an acknowledgement that in some cases building regional resilience is a priority, as opposed to an expectancy of high levels of growth everywhere. It also reinforces the need to move from a focus on legacy issues to future planning that can maximise the capabilities of the regions.

## Key Questions

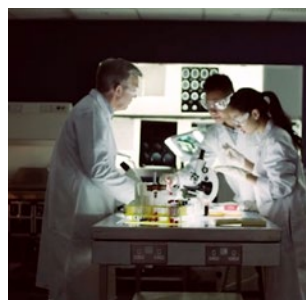
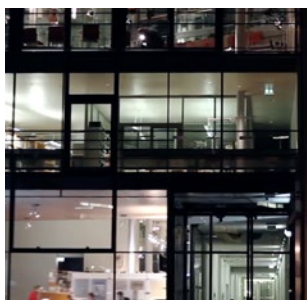
- What are the levers for effective regional development?
- What is needed to be done to increase human capital at a regional level?
- What regional 'value proposition' i.e. an innovation, service, or combination of measures and approaches can make the regions more successful and what are the means by which this can be achieved?
- Are there strategic issues (i) across local authority boundaries or (ii) on an inter-regional basis, that the Regional Assemblies can co-ordinate to ensure more effective sub-regional and regional outcomes?
- Are there funding opportunities than can support investment on a regional basis?

### 4.3 The Potential of Rural Ireland

The nature of Ireland's rural economy has seen a dramatic change in recent years. The current challenge is to achieve an appropriate balance between supporting Ireland's agricultural communities and other traditional rural-based economic activity, while simultaneously fostering sustainable economic diversification and development in rural areas.

Rural areas vary widely particularly in terms of remoteness, dependence on primary production and human resource capacity. Growing spatial, social and economic disparities between rural areas are a reflection of the fact that stronger rural areas are not only located in a geographically advantageous place, but also have the human and social capital to identify their needs and effectively engage with emerging strategies. Rural Ireland experienced unprecedented levels of population growth between 1996 and 2011, at a rate and scale that had not been experienced since before the Famine. However, rural population decline in areas that are less accessible to larger cities and towns in Ireland was masked by overall population growth in every County between 2001 and 2011.

It will be necessary to protect some rural areas from unsustainable growth pressures as experienced in the recent past, whilst ensuring that there are attractive alternatives to urban-generated rural development in the hinterland of cities and larger towns.



The realisation of more effective growth in Ireland's rural-urban hinterlands will require the variety of difference throughout Ireland, which is one of our unique strengths, to be brought into play. This key asset is built on a legacy of place-based cultural inheritance, which is so much part of us that we might overlook it. It has the potential to positively interact with technological change and improved connectivity, such as broadband, and in doing so, to further add to place-value.

This type of place-based approach will enable the National Planning Framework to address all parts of the Country, whether, rural, urban or in-between, at a time when all are more interdependent than ever. In contrast to a small number of large city-regions, there is a much larger number of rural-urban hinterlands throughout Ireland. Addressing that transformation is challenging as the nature of many rural communities has been fundamentally changed through the decline of traditional rural industries and growing connections between rural and urban areas.

## Key Questions

- How can the NPF capture (in a national, strategic policy context) the range and quality of resources that exist in rural areas that could be leveraged to support national economic growth, climate action objectives and the development of local communities?
- What are the solutions to maintaining population in those rural areas where decline has been experienced?
- What role should towns and villages in rural areas play in catering for Ireland's future growth?
- How can the rural parts of Ireland close to urban areas be protected from development pressures that are likely to arise to accommodate further population growth?
- What measures need to be in place to allow those who have a genuine need to live in the countryside to be accommodated?

## 4.4 Ireland in an All-Island Context

The UK's decision to leave the EU presents major challenges for the island of Ireland, in particular the potential implications for Northern Ireland and North-South relations. The Government and the Northern Ireland Executive have agreed, through the North South Ministerial Council, on arrangements to optimise North-South joint planning and engagement on key issues following the UK referendum result.

Cross-border co-operation between Ireland and Northern Ireland covers a range of mutually important issues across a range of sectors and governance structures. These include environmental management, enterprise development, joint investment decisions on infrastructure provisions and accident & emergency planning. Commuter patterns indicate 'hotspots' (high levels of interaction at a number of cross-border traffic crossings) between Derry/Londonderry and Donegal and between Newry and Dundalk (located on the Dublin-Belfast axis), as well as other noteworthy interactions include Cavan/Enniskillen, Lifford/Strabane and Monaghan/Armagh.

Although Brexit has created uncertainty, it is clear that the Governments of both jurisdictions wish to continue to work together and to retain existing levels of co-operation in areas of common interest. There is a mutual recognition of the need to understand the role and function of settlements.

Examples of cross-border approaches at a spatial level include the North West Strategic Growth Partnership, which seeks to deepen co-operation between Donegal County and Derry/Londonderry and Strabane District Councils. Other regional and local leadership initiatives include the Regional Strategic Framework for the Central Border Region and the Strategic Alliance between Newry and Mourne District Council and Louth Local Authorities to support and promote the economic development and competitiveness of the region.

As with interaction between places, sectoral development and clustering of enterprise does not follow administrative boundaries and requires a coherent approach to cross border networks and spill-overs where relevant. There are opportunities to identify sectors with potential for cross-border/all-island clustering to effectively brand and market such strengths.

Issues common to both jurisdictions include increasing energy demands, ongoing need to upgrade transport networks and a requirement for fast and effective broadband, especially for business users. The importance of a co-ordinated approach to national infrastructure on both sides of the border is evident, through for example the City of Derry Airport, the upgrade of the A5 Dublin-Derry/Londonderry road and other cross-border transport links such as other roads, the Dublin-Belfast railway line and proposed 'greenway' walking/cycling routes. In addition, co-ordination with Northern Ireland on energy matters is now embedded in Irish energy policy, supported by an all-island Single Electricity Market (SEM). Tourism also represents an important source for economic development, both in terms of attracting visitors (overseas and domestic) and providing job opportunities in the cross-border region.

There are also many shared environmental interests across the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland where co-ordination is required, through geographic catchment-based strategies and stewardship by both jurisdictions e.g. in the areas of:

- water quality
- river basin management
- flood risk
- maritime
- spatial planning
- designated habitats and sites.

It is possible that 'Brexit' from the EU may be a game changer affecting the manner in which we move, work and interact across our shared international border. However, it is expected that existing underlying place making drivers will continue to operate. Irrespective of the impact of Brexit, cross-border collaboration will be maintained. 'Business as Usual' could therefore be enhanced through co-operation to share resources and maximise opportunities to capitalise on potential to address cross-border challenges, such as infrastructure planning and delivery.

## Key Questions

- How can the NPF facilitate co-ordination between settlements that share connections across the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland and how should this be reflected in the document?
- What economic opportunities and sectoral clusters exist that can benefit economies within both jurisdictions and how can this be best captured and supported in the NPF?
- What mechanisms are needed to ensure a joined-up approach to strategic infrastructure and investment decisions that have a cross-border dimension and are there examples of best practice?
- How do we co-ordinate mutually beneficial ways to address common environmental challenges across shared catchments?



## 4.5 Integrated Land and Marine Development

Our islands and coastal areas contain some of our most vibrant and culturally distinctive communities. Our coastal islands are an integral part of the State's heritage and have a special significance in Irish culture. Whilst there are many hundreds of small islands off the coast of Ireland, approximately forty, mainly Gaeltacht islands support settled populations. These communities are distinctive and unique in an Irish context, due to the fragility and isolation of island life, but they have become adept at self-reliance and have a very strong sense of identity.

In considering how terrestrial and maritime planning processes might interact and integrate, it may also be useful to consider thematic areas of common interest to both processes, and in respect of which there may be overlap, either spatially or in terms of the economic, social and environmental impacts they generate. Such areas include but are not limited to areas such as: Fishing; Coastal protection; Flood risk management; Water quality; Landscape / seascape; Cultural heritage; Biodiversity; Nature conservation; Energy infrastructure; Communications infrastructure; Ports/shipping/harbours/marinas/dredging; and Tourism/Recreation/Leisure.

Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) examines how we use the marine area and planning how best to use it into the future. MSP will seek to balance the different demands for using the sea, including the need to protect the marine environment. It's about planning when and where human activities take place at sea and ensuring these activities are as efficient and sustainable as possible. Working together with the National Planning Framework, Ireland's first Marine Spatial Plan will provide the strategic policy framework to encourage sustainable development and use of the marine environment to deliver economic and social benefits for island and coastal communities.

The National Ports Policy that resulted in tiering Ireland's ports means that transport infrastructure has and is developing well in Ireland's three 'Tier 1' ports. Dublin, Cork and Shannon Foynes development plans, with related road and rail infrastructure upgrades, provide evidence of the progress being made.

Similar to other traditional skilled sectors, technological advancements over recent decades have led to the Marine sector having to respond to a changing working world. In addition to Ireland's membership of the European Union, these advancements have had implications for marine based employment, as highlighted in the 2012 'Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth', the Government's Integrated Marine Policy/Blue Growth policy initiative. The inter-relationship between land and sea will need to be enhanced in order to allow Ireland to excel and become world leaders in the Marine.

### Key Questions

- In thinking about what Ireland might look like in twenty years' time, what is the future for the Ireland's coastline, islands and offshore?
- How can coastal and island communities contribute to a national vision for Ireland, as part of the NPF?
- How can the goals of the integrated Marine Plan be spatially represented in a National Planning Framework?
- What policies, measures or actions need to be advanced to enable Ireland's marine resource to adapt to the effects of climate change (e.g. coastal erosion, flooding, sea level rise etc.)?
- What infrastructure investments need to be made in order to maximise the sustainable potential of our ocean resources?

## 5 Ireland's Unique Environment – Climate Change and Sustainability

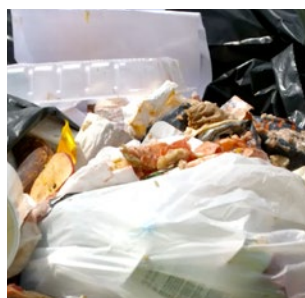
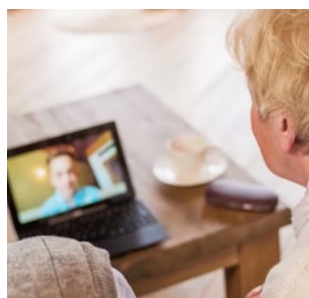
Ireland's environment and its diverse landscapes form part of our "green" persona and we have much to be proud of. In particular, we generally have good air quality and we have many rivers and lakes with good quality water. While the overall quality of our environment is good, this masks some of the threats we now face. Some of the key national environmental challenges include the need to accelerate action on climate change, dealing with air quality problems in urban areas, health risks to drinking water, treating urban waste water and protecting important and vulnerable habitats.

Good planning is important for the sustainability of our environment. The planning system has influence across a wide range of sectors, both directly and indirectly and interacts with many common issues related to effective environmental management including water services, landscape, flood risk planning, coastal and marine management, climate mitigation and adaptation and land use change.

The nature and rate of land use change indicates where future environmental pressures are likely to arise. Ireland has experienced a relatively high rate of land use change since the early 1990s. Recent population growth has led to an increase in the extent of dispersed residential and commercial development as well as new infrastructure, which have resulted in pressure on agricultural land, designated nature conservation areas and water quality. Meeting the increased infrastructure demands will require secure supplies of raw materials which may contribute to land use pressures.

Meeting the challenges for improving air and water quality requires policy co-ordination and a range of measures including but not limited to emission controls, improved technology and alternative fuel sources. Planning policy has a key role to play. More integrated land use and transport planning, green space provision and high quality urban place-making will complement other solutions to the improvement of air quality in our urban areas.

The planning process provides an established means through which to implement and integrate climate change objectives, including adaptation, at local level. If Ireland is to make up for lost ground in relation to carbon reduction targets and move towards the objective of a low carbon and climate resilient Ireland by 2050, it is necessary to make choices about how we balance growth with more sustainable approaches to development and to examine how planning policy can help shape national infrastructural decisions.



Climate change, energy security and competitiveness are inter-related challenges. Energy infrastructure, including electricity grid infrastructure, power generation and gas networks, is critical to support Ireland's future growth. If we are to reduce our national reliance on fossil fuels, increase our long-term energy security and decouple economic growth from emissions, our future energy needs will need to be delivered in a more sustainable way, whilst also providing retrofit solutions to existing development. The renewables sector will continue to become more and more central to meeting our national energy demands. This raises the issue of how we prioritise renewable energy projects at suitable locations across Ireland, balanced with the need to sustain the existing environment and amenity.

Ireland has a rich vein of heritage, ranging from the iconic historic buildings and sites within our towns and cities, to the natural heritage of our countryside. The NPF provides an opportunity to refocus on the sustainable and adaptive reuse of our existing and historic assets, regenerate existing areas and reduce pressure for unsustainable expansion on the edges of our settlements. In particular, Ireland's landscape offers a wealth of natural and cultural assets which support our quality of life and our visitor economy.

The benefits of green infrastructure or ecosystem services can be harnessed to create an attractive environment to encourage businesses and inward investment; more places for people to access nature, outdoor recreation or social interaction or physical activity by providing quality, linked green or 'blue' (water-related) spaces for walking, cycling and other physical activity and creating a sense of place and local distinctiveness.

## Key Questions

- How can the NPF help to ensure we get a sustainable balance between catering for a growing population and avoiding or addressing environmental pressures?
- How do we plan for growth in such a way that supports a transition to a low carbon and climate resilient economy and what planning policy measures are needed to achieve this?
- What strategic energy infrastructure is needed to support the economy and society and realise the transformation of Ireland's energy system to meet climate change and energy obligations and in what areas should it be located?
- Are there any other national environmental issues that you think should be included within the NPF and that are within the remit of planning policy?
- An SEA scoping document has been developed in tandem with this paper. What are the relevant significant issues to be addressed by the SEA, AA and SFRA and what environmental objectives should be used?
- What measures should be implemented in order to safeguard our landscapes, seascapes and heritage and ensure that Ireland continues to be an attractive place to live, visit and work?

## 6 Equipping Ireland for Future Development - Infrastructure

High-quality infrastructure is an important element of a modern society and economy. It strengthens economic growth through enhancing efficiency, productivity and competitiveness. It also underpins social cohesion through providing vital facilities for people in the form of schools, public transport, healthcare and housing.

Whilst macroeconomic decision-making regarding the availability of expenditure for capital investment is beyond the scope of the National Planning Framework alone, this does highlight the need for spending to be prioritised. The NPF will present a clear picture of the planning principles that will influence future priorities for determining where people should live and what types of economic and social activities are best suited to particular regions and localities.

Given that it is possible to make projections for population growth, household formation and anticipated housing requirements, it is timely to examine the relationships between housing demand, supply, location and supporting infrastructure as part of a strategic, long-term national approach to planning for people and place. The NPF offers an opportunity to do this and this will require a strategic view of likely housing demand and land supply at a national level to support coordinated investment across a number of Departments and Agencies.

The NPF will be relevant to strategic national infrastructure that can influence the spatial pattern of development and contribute to national objectives in areas such as transport, water, wastewater/ flooding, waste, climate action, broadband/ telecommunications, energy, health, education, community and tourism. This will include ensuring that critical infrastructure is adapted to the impacts of climate change and that future infrastructure investments are climate proofed. It will also involve developing the potential of green infrastructure and environmental networks that provide ecosystem services, to complement more traditional infrastructures.

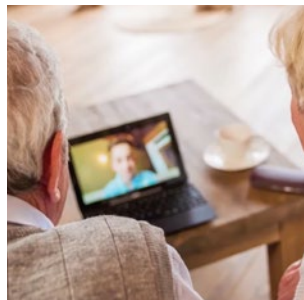
The provision of social infrastructure, commensurate to the location and scale of a settlement or locality, is also central to supporting sustainable vibrant communities that cater for all life stages. This is because it is apparent that development over the past twenty years has been widely dispersed, mainly outside established urban areas. In some instances, the rapid growth of small settlements has resulted in development at a scale and pace that has challenged the capacity of services and has led to requirements for new infrastructure, facilities and services, whereas in others, existing services and infrastructure in have become underutilised or redundant, serving diminishing and ageing populations.

This has meant that people in Ireland are required to travel longer distances for basic services, as these cannot be replicated everywhere that new populations have emerged. Dispersed development has also served to undermine planned strategic growth areas and key regeneration sites in many cities and towns. In combination, this has made effective service and infrastructure planning difficult.

To ensure a strategic approach to infrastructure provision at a national scale, the NPF will provide the spatial background against which investment decisions can be prioritised, to collectively form a strategy and enable a range of strategic medium and long-term projects to be aligned and sequenced. This will commence with the mid-term review of the current Capital Plan to 2021, which will overlap with the initial period of implementation of the NPF.

## Key Questions

- What are the nationally important infrastructure projects for Ireland that require delivery over the next twenty years?
- What do we need to do to make best use of existing infrastructure?
- How can we ensure that ensure that the provision of infrastructure can be planned to match future demand and how can the NPF reflect this?
- How can capital spending on new infrastructure be sequenced in a way that is affordable and equitable, while taking account of Ireland's Climate Change obligations?
- How do we ensure that existing and new development can be supported by the timely provision of social infrastructure?



# 7 Enabling the Vision – Implementing the National Planning Framework

Implementing the National Planning Framework will be as important as preparing it. The NPF will need to be clear on how it will be implemented, who will implement it and what the key implementation actions are, given that the geographical and organisational boundaries of the organisations central to achieving the goals of the NPF rarely coincide with everyday patterns of living, working and travelling to access services.

Learning from experience with the National Spatial Strategy, legislative support, backed up by wider political and institutional commitment is central to ensuring that the NPF will influence public policy across Government, the Regional Assembly and Local Authority administrations.

Structures will be developed and put in place to ensure that the NPF and its main proposals are given top-level commitment, including of a budgetary and investment nature and are therefore appropriately driven, including constant monitoring to measure progress and focus accordingly. A national-level development framework like the NPF will need to be strategic and highly focused in approach, meaning that it must be complemented by more detailed strategies, at a geographical level in terms of regional and local dimensions and at a sectoral level in terms of policies in relation to transport, energy, enterprise development or housing.

The key implementation arrangements that are therefore identified at this point of the development of the NPF include the following:-

- **Interdepartmental Drive: Through a NPF Management Team;**
- **Statutory Backing: Through the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016;**
- **Administrative Structures to Respond to 'Real-world' Issues, at regional and local levels:**
- **Investment: Capital Programmes of Government Departments and relevant public bodies and the use of 'bid' based systems that incentivise cross-authority/agency working in qualifying for targeted funding;**
- **Monitoring and Policy Feedback: Establishment of independent monitoring of the NPF to identify and put in place key data gathering systems that will measure NPF effectiveness and outcomes. Annual reporting to Government and to the Oireachtas could provide a formal oversight arrangement for the NPF.**

## Key Questions

- **When it comes to implementation and monitoring of the NPF, are there common goals that can be identified and apply to every place?**
- **How best can sustainable planning outcomes be recognised and rewarded?**
- **What barriers exist to implementation?**
- **What levers are needed to deliver greater efficiencies in administration and governance, when it comes to implementing and monitoring the NPF?**
- **What the key indicators for measuring the successful implementation of the NPF?**



This consultation process provides the opportunity to submit comments and suggestions on the issues raised and other topics that are considered relevant to the National Planning Framework. Written submissions at this first stage of the NPF process can be made online through the dedicated NPF website.

**website:**

[www.ireland2040.ie](http://www.ireland2040.ie)

**by email to:**

[npf@housing.gov.ie](mailto:npf@housing.gov.ie)], or

**in writing to:**

NPF Submissions,  
Forward Planning Section,  
Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government,  
Custom House,  
Dublin 1, D01 W6X0

**by 12 noon on Thursday 16th March 2017.**

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**Ireland  
2040  
Our Plan**   
NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK

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**An Roinn Tithíochta, Pleanála,  
Poball agus Rialtais Áitiúil**  
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Community and Local Government

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