

Fianna Fáil
Submission Paper to the National
Planning Framework – Draft Plan

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Plan



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– Draft Plan

Overview

Fianna Fáil welcomes this opportunity to make a submission to the draft of the National Planning Framework (NPF).

Arising from this draft plan Fianna Fáil wishes to highlight a number of issues and build upon the topics raised in our submission to the Issues and Choices phase of the NPF consultation process. These issues include:

- **Lack of effective consultation on the draft plan**
- **Failure to effectively integrate balanced regional development**
- **Severe restrictions on rural housing**
- **Insufficient All Ireland mechanisms and Brexit preparation**
- **No National infrastructure Commission**
- **Absence of the National Development Plan to measure against**
- **Insufficient public transport and connectivity planning**

Fianna Fáil has highlighted concerns over a number of years about the weakening of local democracy and we are genuinely concerned that this National Framework draft could potentially disempower local communities more. We firmly believe that this should not happen.

While competition between regions is normal this draft plan as it stands now actually threatens to divide and conquer the regions more. This would be detrimental to Ireland's future prosperity and the goal to achieve balanced regional development.

There is a lot of vagueness and opaque language in the draft. It is also difficult to fully access its potential in the absence of the publication of the National Capital Plan so that in itself is a large deficit.

We have tangible concerns about infrastructure developments being way behind the predicted population growths outlined in the draft plan and reported by the ESRI. There seems to be a lack of ambition to address current problems and these have to be tackled to ensure we can plan for a better future.

This submission delves more deeply into these issues and looks to have them fully addressed in the final document. We hope the final document will more fully recognise the scale of the challenges facing both rural and urban Ireland.

Consultation

Fianna Fáil is particularly concerned around the amount of time committed to consultation in the draft plan. While a nationwide effort was undertaken in regard to the issues paper the actual draft document was not subjected to such engagement.

We are also concerned about the lack of time given to assessing the draft plan at local authority level where the NPF will be felt most acutely.

In addition to the above there was only a limited amount of time was committed to Oireachtas debate on the matter. We are concerned that the draft document is being presented as a fait accompli.

The final document cannot be the product of bureaucratic work rather than genuine consultation. While Fianna Fáil wants Ireland to grow and develop and reach its full potential this draft plan seems to be encouraging a hierarchical and selective approach and has enormous potential to increase the urban rural divide.

Rural Housing

An area of particular concern to Fianna Fáil is the uncertainty created over rural housing. Object 18b of the draft NPF raises a series of questions. The absence of social criteria for the basis for single housing permissions appears to be drawn from the 2013 ECJ Flemish case on rural housing.

Given that the department has yet to issue clear guidance on this matter and the 2005 guidelines remain in place this appears to be putting the cart before the horse. The final NPF should provide clarity on the acceptable criteria to be followed in single rural housing applications.

The draft NPF must not put in place a regime that penalises local residents with a clear social and familial link to a locality. That link is a crucial part of what infuses parishes, villages, towns and townlands across Ireland with their distinctive character and community strength. The use of the definition of economic need must be assessed not just in line with EU law but our broader national societal objectives.

It is important to recognise that communities are not defined by economic relations alone. Individuals with a clear social or familial link to an area make a rich contribution to the strength and vibrancy of a community. Retaining and enhancing that strength must be a clear goal for the draft NPF. It cannot be seen to prohibit or prevent families from selecting and securing a safe and secure future for their families in communities of their choice.

That distinctive social infrastructure of rural areas is a solid attraction for families. Unlike in many urban centres the ease of access to pre-existing social networks around sporting, religious or other activities is a key asset for an area. Helping to retain, protect and deepen those networks must be accommodated in any overarching planning framework. The current draft document does not encompass that concern. It seems to remove choice and this needs to be fully clarified and made clear.

The draft plan does not recognise the full breath of EU law which allows for planning restrictions based on appropriate measures. We believe the final National Planning Framework document should reflect that legal scope and the pressing social need to retain and strengthen the character of rural areas.

Learning from the National Spatial Strategy

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) 2002-2020 was the first ever national spatial planning framework in Europe following on from the European Spatial Development Perspective. The NSS was the inaugural regional planning and development framework, put in place by Fianna Fáil government in 2002.

The World Bank, IMF, EC and OECD have all been very complementary of the NSS in various reports, which was used as a blueprint by many other developed nations in drafting their own regional development plans. It was innovative as it set out high level goals for the long term physical, social and demographic development of the state.

As the draft plan recognises however and disappointingly it was ultimately undermined by a lack of joined up thinking and coherent planning at both governmental and local authority level. The extent to which the strategy was not fully embedded into national as well as local policy is now fully acknowledged.

The economic crisis compounded these fundamental problems, as did the premature abandonment of the Strategy by the 2011-2016 government. However it is misleading to suggest that implementation of the strategy was a complete failure. This needs to be objectively assessed.

The NSS lead to the development of a new evidence base that has gone a long way to enhancing policy and political understanding of the dynamics of local communities, their economies and the conditions that underpin success or stagnation.



As a result of the lessons from the original NSS, there is now a clearer understanding of the trends, positive and negative, which influence social and economic characteristics on the Island of Ireland. The strategic thinking in the NSS was driven by the objective of developing the socio-economic 'potential' of areas across different regions.

This was a significant conceptual innovation in the NSS, replacing more traditional methods and locally focused perspectives. We firmly believe that if spatial strategies are to help a region achieve its potential, there is a need to be cognisant and mindful of both historical identities and the reality of how people and communities function.

Undoubtedly, the scrapping of the NNS by Minister Hogan in 2012 was one of the many appalling bad choices made by that government. The decision was especially reprehensible as it was made just as the regional authorities were placed on a stronger statutory platform.

This party political decision displayed a complete disregard for the national planning process and has created a great deal of uncertainty in the regional and local planning process since.

It is vital to the future success of this National Planning Framework that the lessons of the NSS are fully learned from and implemented. Developing a comprehensive holistic approach is paramount to a NPF that delivers sustainable communities, vibrant economies and attractive quality of life across Ireland.

The Draft Plan acknowledges the role of the NSS and the requirement to draw on the lessons learnt from that experience to ensure the NPF has a decisive impact on the ground.

National Infrastructure Commission

Fianna Fáil has proposed that a new National Infrastructure Commission tasked with planning ahead over a 25 year period beyond the limited 5 year cycle of current capital plans should be established. This would be set up by reforming Transport Infrastructure Ireland and drawing from the Department of Transport, National Transport Authority, Sustainable Energy Authority and Local Authorities and it should set out a new framework for the development of transport in Ireland over the coming years. The commission should be tasked with overseeing long term plans for a series of targets.

- Achieving 4% of GDP Infrastructure Investment
- Decarbonising Ireland
- A strong transport network that balances regional development
- Making Ireland an IT nation with telecommunications connectivity
- A secure, balanced energy mix

In our view the work of the Commission should adhere fully to the objectives and targets set out by the National Planning framework and share the same time frame space.

The Commission's reports should be laid before the Oireachtas and subject to scrutiny. Government departments will be required to draw up plans based on the Commission's recommendations as passed by the Oireachtas.

The Draft plan makes no reference to such an idea and refers only to the ten year national development plan which is due to be launched in December. We believe this must be reviewed and changed when the final plan is published.

Balanced Regional Development

The NPF must take a balanced regional perspective on the future development of the country. This means developing economic counter weights to the increasing dominance of Dublin.

It is fully accepted that Dublin is our capital city and of course it should continue to grow and develop but it cannot be at the cost of the regional growth.

The need for investment in public transport infrastructure and greater connectivity is very evident in the already specially designated zones that will facilitate up to 50,000 homes over the next ten years.

The draft plan sets out housing targets with 50% of growth concentrated in five key cities and the remainder in our towns and rural areas. The decision to remove the concept of “Gates and Hubs”, which formed an essential component of the NSS, risks the draft NPF failing to have real clarity in its vision for future growth.

In applied terms the aim of the draft NPF should be to enable growth across all regions while reducing regional disparities. While there have been criticisms of the concept of ‘balanced regional development’ as being too diffuse, we believe the concept of reducing regional economic disparities while not hindering across the nation growth is well-defined and measurable.

In practice it means achieving growth in all areas, but attempting to reduce the share of national growth concentrated in high growth areas, such as the Greater Dublin Area.

While there has been much debate on regional policy in Ireland about the apparent trade-off between regional equity and national growth it is clear that there is need for both and also that balanced growth will benefit the whole country rather than just concentrating on the Dublin and greater Leinster area. The development in

counties directly neighbouring Dublin should not be ignored when it comes to looking at strategic development and investment. There are some parts of neighbouring counties like North Meath for example that have faced depopulation.

Given the spatial dispersal of the current population the NPF's emphasis on cities may deter future growth across the country. The Plan cannot be allowed to become a city only focused framework.

While a focus on existing Cities might be a good sound bite to the media, it would leave one third the geographic area of the country with no designated growth clusters. The North West appears particularly underrepresented in this plan. For example, Sligo is an obvious candidate for investment and focus as a driver of regional growth. In addition it is vital that the Letterkenny - Derry North West City Region is recognised as a unique cross border all island driver of national economic growth.

Fianna Fáil's view is that, in fact, reducing regional disparities would not entail a negative impact on aggregate output in Ireland, or in high growth areas like the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), but would have a positive impact on national growth and make overall growth more sustainable.

We believe – and this is supported by international evidence on regional growth disparities – that at Ireland's high level of development reducing disparities in economic terms should have a positive impact on overall national economic output. This is a powerful argument and should be at the heart of what the National Planning Framework is trying to achieve.

Reducing disparities will also improve economic efficiency and productive in the GDA. Without an effective plan to foster economic growth in other regional cities and towns, the GDA will suffer lost output due to problems of congestion in housing, transport and other areas.



Congestion - in terms of slower, back-logged public transport and traffic jams, for example - is, to a certain extent, a sign that more people have jobs to get to. However, while higher levels of congestion are initially associated with faster growth, above a certain threshold, congestion starts to become a drag on economic activity.

Within Dublin, as employment increases towards the levels last experienced in 2004-2008, we will approach this threshold where traffic congestion will have a substantially negative affect on people's daily lives and on economic movement. It also has a hugely negative impact on climate change and a concentrated as well as constant investment in public transport is essential to make the NPF successful.

Physical, social and educational infrastructure should be developed in other key cities to allow them to thrive as engines of growth. Improved and more responsive local governance will also play a key part in fostering growth centres.

In this regard, Fianna Fáil has also proposed a new Directly Elected Mayor model to help provide leadership to these cities.

The roll out of Broadband is the key technological development in enabling business in rural Ireland to develop. It is also a socially critical piece of economic infrastructure to connect homes to the country's cultural and social life. This will become ever more important over the timeframe of the draft NPF. The goals of the NPF must be to ensure that the whole of Ireland benefits from future economic and demographic growth.

There is a perception that Dublin's transport needs gets priority over other cities and towns. Access in Galway is of particular concern at the moment yet the draft plan predicts an increase of 50% in population when it now takes at least an hour to



access city from three miles out from the city .This has impeded on growth in the past and needs to be immediately and constantly addressed.

An almost over reliance on Dublin at the expense of its adjacent counties and the rest of the island is economically, environmentally and socially unsustainable. The NPF must broaden out growth to help build a regionally balance country into the future. It should also outline how it is going to absorb and implement County Development plans.

Fostering Economic Growth

The final draft of the NPF must help encourage further investment in the island from both a Foreign Direct Investment perspective and facilitating the growth and development of indigenous businesses. Linking population growth and infrastructure investment combined with a renewed focus on quality of life will play a critical role in attracting and retaining businesses.

The drivers of growth identified in the economic research literature are innovation, human capital, trade, infrastructure, availability of finance and social capital. Increasingly economic growth depends on development of services and high tech industry which in turn display a strong tendency to locate in large urban centres providing access to skills support services and appropriate infrastructure.

Therefore, the economic potential of the regions outside of the GDA will depend on their main urban centre's ability to stimulate or attract investment in such activities. This will mean the focal growth centre in each region acting as a gateway through which the region's interactions (including its flows of goods, people, money information etc.) with the other regions and directly with the outside world, are channelled.

We believe that there should be a core commitment to strengthening the links between growth centres in each region and their hinterlands, which will create a set of coherent and sustaining regions with more self-reliant integrated economies where people can find high skill employment and live.

This vision of so-called 'Balanced Polycentric' regional development – involves cities and towns in less developed regions pursuing a more self-reliant development path, rather than as primarily being residential hubs for larger employment centres, such as Dublin. Economic resilience is fostered by having a diversity and range of industrial and commercial activities in a particular area, rather than striving for specialisation.

In rural Ireland technological advances will continue to allow more diverse economic activity. Investing in adequate broadband will be critical to keeping rural communities' alive and prospering. While traditional policies aimed at encouraging regional convergence has been to provide 'hard' infrastructure as well as assistance to firms, on their own these current policies are unlikely to increase the competitiveness of lagging areas.

To develop high skill employment, in regional growth centres the focus has to be on supporting education, research and on human capital development. The role of Institutes of Technology – and potentially of Technological Universities – in having an enhanced role in their regard should not be underestimated.

We believe that a much better vision is required for IoTs as regional centres fostering high skilled and applied links with local businesses and FDI firms. These academic institutions should be valued benefits to local industries and the development to regional human capital.



It should not be the objective of government policy to remove these venerable local higher education institutions from the regions in which they are embedded. Fianna Fáil believes they should be developed and allowed to grow because of their contribution to local industry and commerce.

The draft NPF should be revised to expand on the role of IoTs in the target growth cities and regions.

Hierarchy of Plans

The NPF will be a statement of the government's objectives for Ireland's spatial development and it will form the top tier of the planning policy hierarchy.

The hierarchy of plans is the central pillar to uphold the entire planning process. Ensuring that the tread connecting one plan to the other is upheld and fully implemented must be subject to on-going review.

Ensuring it is effective on the ground and takes into consideration local needs and variations is the key test of any planning system. It must enjoy popular legitimacy and buy in if it is going to work.

The goals and objectives of the NPF must be clearly understandable so that the tiered plans are cohesive. The legislative powers underpinning this connection must be kept under review to uphold its effectiveness.

The Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2017 forms part of this but must be continually revised to ensure it is working on the ground. Hierarchical planning from the European Spatial Development Perspective to Local Areas plans must be fully adhered to with sufficient local flexibility to reflect on the ground realities.

If the future planning framework to deliver on its mandate it will have to be aligned closely with other plans, such as the Capital Plan 2016-2021, as well as various regional transport planning documents, such as the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area. As of yet, there is no evidence that this will be the case.

These plans were unfortunately drafted in virtual isolation of the national planning framework. The fact that the draft plan was produced in the absence of the new National Development Plan undermines any assessment of it.

The Draft NPF is clear on its status but will require continued vigilance and scrutiny to judge if it is actually working based on up to date information from the CSO. The Plan should be reviewed annually by an Oireachtas committee working in tandem with the Office of the Planning Regulator to measure and assess its success. This can then be used to amend and re-align the plan.

Independent Planning Regulator

The new independent planning regulator must be at the heart of holding the hierarchy of plans to account. Ensuring that each layer of plans is compatible and complementary to the other is fundamental to the overall success of the system.

The regulator, working in conjunction with the Minister, must be adequately resourced to hold the hierarchy in place. The implementation of the NPF should be subjected to on-going parliamentary review and scrutiny including the range of powers and resources at the disposal of the Regulator.

Fianna Fáil has repeatedly requested the implementation of the Mahon recommendations on improving transparency, consistency and good decision-making throughout the planning system. It is vital that we continue to put in place the recommended legal and institutional framework.



We believe that proposals for the new Office of Planning Regulator to oversee and assess decision-making and process in planning authorities strikes an appropriate balance in giving the new Office independence in its role, evaluating local and regional development plans while maintaining some democratic control over the body by the Minister and the Oireachtas.

However, we have a number of concerns about the large omissions in the proposals to reform the planning system in the Planning and Development Amendment Bill 2016, including many of key Mahon recommendations for improving transparency in planning such as the disclosure of political donations by planning applicants and the noting of all submissions by political representatives on planning applications.

We also believe that some of the OPR's functions and powers prescribed by the Bill may not make it an effective overseer of the national planning strategy. It is given no role in overseeing executive transport planning agencies, including the NTA and TII.

Since one of the rationales – given by Mahon – behind establishing the Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) is achieve greater integration between land use planning, such as local authority zoning decisions, and strategic transport planning; it is disappointing that the new OPR is not given any role in overseeing the development or implementation of plans by the NTA or TII.

There are also some concerns that the limitation of the OPR powers as prescribed in the Bill may make it toothless an anti-corruption watchdog in the planning process. The OPR should be able to prevent planning abuses in real time, and should be given powers to strike down particular planning decisions that it considers to be corrupt or contravening proper planning process.

One of the central functions of the new Planning Regulator will be to ensure a more consistent approach to the handling of planning applications across local authorities.

This is very important to help ensure that there is a relatively consistent approach to planning proposals taken across planning authorities. Consistency in the interpretation of development plan policies is essential if public confidence in the planning system is to be maintained.

It is disappointing that the draft NPF does not encompass these suggestions. This should be reviewed before the publication of the final plan as a matter of urgency. Given the current challenges to the planning process with delays and procedural burdens it would be prudent to take do a root and branch review to allow for much needed improvements particularly given the current housing crisis and also the planning delays that caused the Data protection Centre in Athenry to be jeopardised.

Whole of Government Approach

A coherent planning framework has to integrate the various strands of government policy into a coherent whole. This means adapting a whole of government approach rather than a silo driven, fragmented department by department policy.

Capital Plans must adhere to the vision set out by the National Planning Framework to ensure investment is matched up with the designated areas and focus of growth. Internal Departmental plans must reflect the broader objectives laid out by the NPF. Alignment of departmental plans to the National Planning Framework is of vital importance to it delivering on the ground.

Fianna Fáil wishes to re-emphasize the importance of aligning the forthcoming National Development Plan with the NPF.

Further clarity is needed on the Smart Growth Initiative, its funding sources and the criteria by which it will be selected in line with the NPF. Again the failure to produce the draft National Development Plan to allow the draft NPF to be assessed adequately significantly undermines this process.

All Island Approach and Preparing for Brexit

Brexit further underlines the importance of developing an all Island approach to long term planning. The island is acutely exposed to the hard edge of Brexit and needs to be able to work together to mitigate its worst ramifications.

The NPF must work in tandem with the Regional Development Strategy 2035 which charts out the path forward for Northern Ireland.

Aligning with spatial plans for Northern Ireland and utilising the institutional framework established by the Good Friday Agreement and subsequent documents will be vital to fully leveraging the overall potential for the whole island.

In the context of our vulnerability to Brexit this is more important than ever. The Draft NPF is unclear on this matter and should be further clarified. In particular joint planning initiatives in the aftermath of Brexit and cooperation should be set out. This needs to be done as a hard Brexit will have a significantly negative impact on the whole island but in particular the border counties.

Addressing Climate Change

The National Planning Framework is meant to be an essential tool in Ireland's efforts to decarbonise and meet our EU and international obligations. It must be a core guiding principle of the NPF in targeting population growth, creating sustainable communities and fostering and encouraging public transport use.

Achieving critical mass in key cities and urban centres, supporting sustainable building practices and maximising the use of public transport are indispensable to that goal and fostering sustainable development in rural Ireland.

The NPF and subsequent plans that flow from it must be focused on tackling this existential challenge.

Meeting Housing Demand

The importance of housing is recognised in the NSS, which reflects the fact that people require housing and so the supply and demand of housing is a key factor in determining settlement patterns.

However the strong link between housing costs, incomes and household formation was not adequately recognised. One of the core objectives of the NPF will have to be putting in place limits on sprawl and on the dispersion of settlement patterns around large urban centres.

The degree to which this happens depends crucially on zoning, the incentives to develop brown field sites and other development incentives. There is a need to plan for higher apartment blocks in suburban settings and the need for both affordable and social housing both cities and towns.

Brown field development

National Housing Strategies should focus on brown field development. For example, the massive unused potential Above the Shop spaces – which exist in huge numbers across Cities and Towns – can be converted for use as housing. The NPF should also involve strategy for encourage more central locating of employment and commerce.

Currently the disjointed approach across government encourages the hollowing out of town centres. For example, commercial rates including the system for valuation has a role in encourage the central location of businesses.

The expected increases in population and subsequent pressure on our infrastructure will be most acutely felt in the area of housing. This will also be exacerbated by the proliferation of household formation. Where people live is one of the most basic of human needs and is an integral part of the quality of their lives.

Targeting population increases into sustainable communities on the basis of plan led as opposed to development led construction will be the single most important outcome of a successful National Planning framework.

Balancing the need to focus growth in cities and urban centres to achieve critical mass while ensuring fresh life is breathed into rural Ireland is a major challenge for the plan to confront and address.

Meeting lifecycle requirements from students to the elderly must also be recognised in the plan. Our planning framework must be able to facilitate and people who have and rear active families. A sense of place and belonging is a positive feature of Irish life. It is important that plans work with local identity rather than been seen to impose top down solutions.

The NPFs targets for existing urban footprint development should be reviewed annually in order to assess if it is being effectively pursued on the ground.

Transport Planning

While it is true that both the TII and NTA are bound statutorily to ‘have regard’ to higher level master plans, such as the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) or Regional Planning guidelines, very often there is lack of coherence or even disagreement – whether it is perceived or real - between Local Authority Development Plans and regional transport strategies developed by the NTA and TII.

While it is acknowledged that public transport, rail in particular, requires critical densities within a short distance of rail lines to operate effectively, there is no recognition within the NTA strategy that rail services can also play a reciprocal purpose in land use policies, by encouraging growth in key population centres. The history of the Irish Railway network is testament to rail services’ ability to encourage critical population densities to develop along rail lines.

For the Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy, for example, local authorities and representatives in Wicklow, Kildare and Meath voiced concerns that the NTA was setting the rules on spatial planning, without due consideration to their regional and county plans.

Since one of the rationales – given by Mahon – behind establishing the OPR is to try to get a better level of integration between land use planning, such as local authority zoning decisions, and strategic transport planning; it is disappointing that the new OPR is not given any role in overseeing the development or implementation of plans by the NTA or TII.

It seems, from the current planning bill before the Oireachtas that the role of the OPR will be to ensure that there is coherence/ agreement on the part of county development plans and local area plans with regional transport plans developed by the NTA and TII.

It has to be recognised that bodies such as the NTA or TII, despite having a statutory obligation to comply with the NSS and regional guidelines, may not always make decisions that are consistent with regional planning guidelines. And in addition, there should not be an assumption that it is local authority development plans that are inconsistent with regional plans or national plans.

We believe a better approach would be to give the new Office of Planning Regulator the role as arbitrator between local authorities and bodies such as the NTA or TII, where disagreement arises over draft plans. When a local authority is of the belief that specific decisions by the NTA or TII run contrary to Development Plans, such complaints should be given an airing by the OPR, not simply cast aside. There will have to be a process put in place otherwise there will be widespread cynicism.

The final NPF should fully reflect this.

Implementation, Measurement and Monitoring

Key to the success of the National Planning Framework is an effective monitoring and implementation process. This must be founded on full democratic accountability.

A NPF implementation team and Independent Planning Regulator should publish an annual report to be laid before the Oireachtas for review and debate. Empirical measurement and quantification of the benefits of the NPF and its instruments would encourage greater levels of local buy-in and public acceptance to the national plan.



The annual report must be based around objective, verifiable data across the key targets of the plan. Regular engagement with the relevant authorities in Northern Ireland with regard to their implantation of long term planning must also be part of the monitoring and implementation process.

The report should also issues recommendations on outstanding areas or legislative weaknesses that need to be addressed in order to help guide debate around its implementation.

The final NPF should specify these mechanisms of implementation.

Conclusion

If the National Planning Framework is to be central to achieving sustainable development on this island over the next quarter of a century it is vital that the plan has a whole of government buy in and is fully engaged with by lower tiers of governance and citizens .It also needs to be deliverable.

Its on-going review and tweaks to ensure effective implementation on the ground is critical to its delivery. We are concerned about the lack of real engagement and consultation ,it's implementation plans given that the National Capital Plan has not be published yet , lack of Brexit based actions, rural housing rules and balanced regional development approach.

These issues should be addressed in the final draft.

Otherwise it risks being condemned to gathering dust on the bookshelves as opposed to the core, guiding framework of the physical development of the country.