

What Will Happen if We Do Nothing?

The hard evidence and trends tell us is that, if we don't plan to do anything differently and continue as we have been over the past twenty years, we are almost certain to get more of the same over the next twenty - with congested roads and city centres, ever expanding suburbs and a sense of a Country characterised by an over-heating East Coast and under-utilised potential regionally.

This is called 'business as usual' and what it means for us is that:

- Dublin will continue to dominate and potentially overheat drawing in more and more of overall national development, while at the same time sprawling into the surrounding Leinster counties;
- Regional cities such as Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford will grow but not at the scale needed to making any ground in relation to Dublin;
- We will continue to build our housing further and further away from where the jobs are tending to cluster, due to wider international and economic trends in both urban and urbanising rural "doughnuts" around the cities, leading to rising costs and impacts in terms of commuting, service provision, people's health and the environment; and

- Many smaller rural towns and villages outside the orbit of major cities will increasingly stagnate and decline.

'Business as usual' cannot deliver shared national values and goals such as maintaining a competitive and open trading economy and place, ensuring a decent standard of living for all citizens, creating safe, vibrant and inclusive communities, ensuring life-long health and well-being and meeting our environmental obligations and carbon emissions targets.

A new direction is needed and will require big decisions on a sustained basis over a long period of time. As a nation, we now have the opportunity to look ahead and shape long-term planning over twenty years or more, in the form of the National Planning Framework.



A Different Path

If the trends are telling us that Dublin and the eastern part of the country will tend to overheat as a result of under-used potential in other parts of the country and a lack of strategic planning to arrest and re-focus development that will otherwise sprawl, what are the alternatives?

Our National Planning Framework, which will emerge in draft form before the Summer and which will be considered and approved by Dáil Éireann later in 2017, will grapple with potential answers and identify a preferred strategy for dealing with the challenges and harnessing the opportunities in relation to our cities, regions and rural areas, including smaller towns and villages generally. This strategy will have to:

- Chart a path for the sustainable development of Dublin, not running ahead of, but running in tandem with, the rest of the country;
- Identify mechanisms to tap the considerable levels of under-utilised potential in the regional cities by carefully focused policies and investment as additional national/international level counter-balances to the Greater Dublin Area; and
- Ensure that the enormous potential of the rural parts of our country are maximised, including both the terrestrial and marine dimensions.

Moreover, the Framework will be outward looking too, recognising the opportunities for working within a wider Island context (with Northern Ireland), as well as on an east-west basis with the wider UK area, the EU and international context and in tandem with the national planning frameworks in neighbouring administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

What Happens Next?

On 2nd February 2017, the Government is publishing a strategic issues paper for citizens, stakeholder organisations, public bodies, indeed anyone with an interest in our country's future and willing to share their ideas, to inform and engage in creating this new Framework Plan.

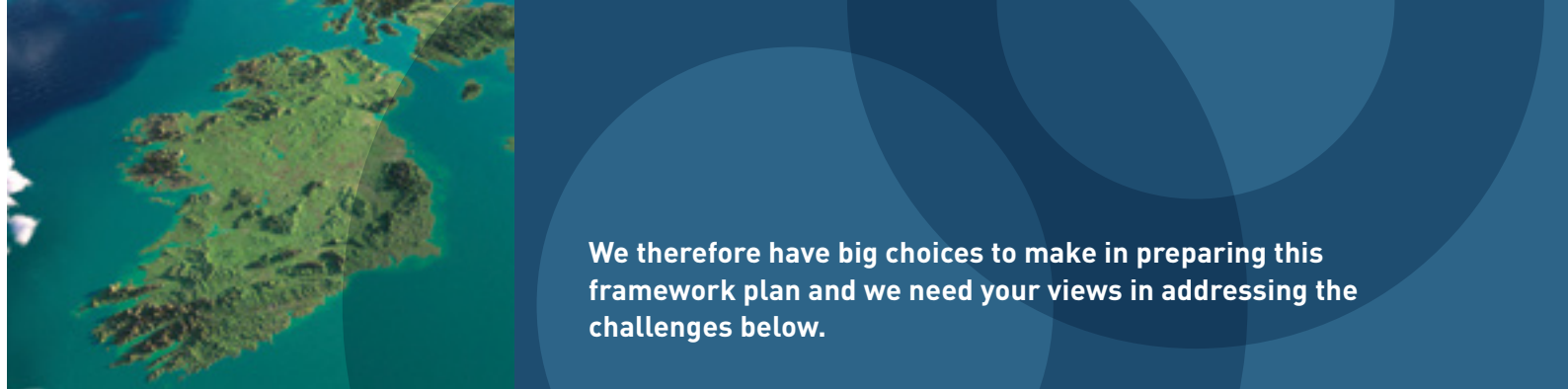
A draft of the document will emerge following Government consideration after Easter and after further public consultation on the full draft Framework, supported by national and regional events, a final version of the NPF will be discussed and considered by Dáil Éireann.

At the same time as the publication of the draft National Planning Framework, three Regional Assemblies of all 31 local authorities across the country will begin preparation of new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSEs), framed in the light of the NPF but extending its approach at more detailed levels to shape local planning and economic development in each local authority area.

Shaping Ireland towards 2040

What will Ireland be like in 20 years' time?

That's a question that no one can answer for sure but based on what we know, we must make key choices now to make Ireland the place we want it to be in the years and decades ahead.



We therefore have big choices to make in preparing this framework plan and we need your views in addressing the challenges below.

The Government is preparing a radical plan for our country for action and delivery between now and 2040 called *"Ireland 2040 - Our Plan"*. This plan - The National Planning Framework - is the Government's response to changes coming down the tracks, including:

- **Around 1 million extra people, almost a quarter of whom will be over 65 by 2040;**
- **More than 500,000 additional people at work, many of whom will be in high skilled jobs in and around cities;**
- **At least 500,000 extra homes needing to be close to services and amenities; and**
- **Major environmental challenges such as protecting air, water quality, biodiversity and climate change, transforming our energy and transport systems to move away from a dependency on fossil fuels towards green energy.**

If that wasn't enough, we know that present trends will take us to an Ireland where around three quarters of the extra population and homes will happen on the eastern side of the country, much of it *clustered around, but not necessarily happening in*, our capital city. This will further exacerbate massive and increasingly unmanageable sprawl of housing areas, scattered employment and car-based commuting, presenting major challenges around lop-sided development, under-utilised potential, congestion and adverse impacts on people's lives and the environment.

In fact, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that, if such a future were to come to pass, it would irrevocably harm Ireland's broader development from an economic, social and environmental perspective and the country would grind to a halt. In other words, do we continue to expand Dublin as the primary engine for the growth or do we enable a credible counter-balance to emerge to complement it?

Housing

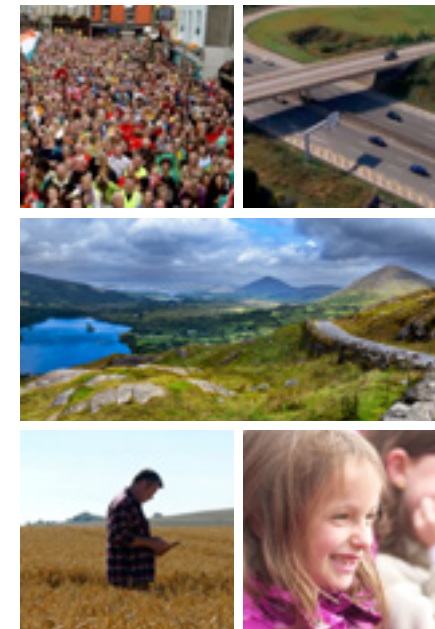
We will need somewhere between 25,000 and 30,000 new homes provided every year to meet people's needs for well-located and affordable housing, with increasing demand to cater for one- and two-person and older households. In terms of location, housing is increasingly linked to employment and bringing homes and jobs close together helps to minimise congestion and commuting and makes services and infrastructure much easier to provide.

Employment

Jobs will become more high-skilled and people are likely to change jobs more often. There are two million people at work in Ireland and we have every reason to believe that, notwithstanding wider economic challenges and taking long-run past trends into account, Ireland has the capacity to develop economically such that there could be an extra 250,000 people at work by 2040, with many of these being generated in or close to our cities and towns.

Infrastructure Services and Amenities

Ensuring our country's sustainable development means we must plan for the educational, health and community facilities that increasingly define quality of life and personal well-being as much as the "must-have" traditional physical infrastructure like water services, transport, communications, broadband and energy systems.



Place

Given that we all generally understand that the same levels of future development cannot and should not occur everywhere, at the same pace and at the same time, prioritisation and hard choices are needed. Internationally, as well as in Ireland, larger urban areas have become key economic drivers for their surrounding regions along with nearby towns and surrounding rural areas too. In the process, these urban areas have become an economic ecosystem incorporating various sources of employment that tap into the specific advantages of areas, its third-level and other cultural institutions as well as access to communications and transport networks, including advanced broadband, road and rail access, airports and ports.

Place-making is increasingly recognised as the key in creating such economic eco-systems in both urban and rural areas, where people want to live and work in, drawing on pools of skilled employees, a wide choice of housing and employment options, as well as a broad range of other 'lifestyle' opportunities, including leisure activities and a variety culture and entertainment options. We have seen this in Ireland with the regeneration of parts of our cities such as Dublin's Docklands and the vibrancy and draw of cities like Galway and Cork.

A place-making challenge that the National Planning Framework will also address relates to less developed urban centres and more peripheral, less accessible and rural places, from where many young people move away for educational purposes, but don't return to live or work.

Whilst there are exceptions to this, the remaining population in these remoter areas tends to be on average older and due to out-migration, can lose the capacity to be self-sustaining over time. Successful places, large and small, urban and rural, in Ireland and abroad, show that through planning and carefully targeted policy-led investment, under-performing policy locations can become really successful places that people are drawn towards.

Delivery

We have been here before. The previous National Spatial Strategy, launched in 2002, was a "mixed bag" in terms of its achievements and realising its vision. While the NSS brought about planning reforms and triggered capital investment in areas like transport, water services and housing to support it, the lack of its overall implementation coupled with the economic downturn in 2008 and afterwards meant the NSS never fully realised its potential as a framework for development. It is only now after the economic fortunes of our country have been stabilised, that we can think again about the long term.

A new National Planning Framework will therefore be different, a strategic and concise document on high-level planning and development objectives and targets for Ireland, its regions and places, with clear actions, responsibilities and timelines and resilient in adapting to economic headwinds, whether due to external factors like Brexit or otherwise.