

The Workers' Party

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Submission to: Ireland 2040 – Our Plan

Introduction:

The Workers' Party welcomes the concept of long-term, integrated planning which seems to be inherent in the discussion document published by Minister Coveney. We understand from the Minister's statement that this is the beginning of a process and, as the process develops, we intend to make very detailed proposals across the entire spectrum covered within the remit of Ireland 2040.

We believe that it is vitally important that during all stages of the consultation process that there is sufficient time which will allow smaller political parties, NGOs, community groups, and specific interest groups to have a meaningful involvement. Many of these groups rely largely or totally on voluntary effort. Therefore, the timespan allowed for each stage of public consultation and submission must be such as to allow these groups conduct the necessary research, consult with their own members, and submit commentary and / or proposals. If this time is not allowed then the consultation process is effectively restricted to the professional lobbyists and is the antithesis of democracy.

Ireland has a pretty abject history with regard to Government planning. Many departments have little or no history of any scientific advance planning. When planning did take place it certainly was not done on any systematic interdepartmental system. For decades major government departments, like Finance, Agriculture, Industry and Commerce, Education, Local Government seemed to operate on parallel tracks. Often it appeared that these departments were operating in competition with each other rather than operating with the unified purpose of advancing the common good and the economic and social well-being of the citizens.

The development and publication of a plan is, of course, completely meaningless unless there is an adoption of the plan and then the plan is implemented and monitored. There are instances, too numerous to mention, where plans were developed to deal with various situations and yet, on completion, were completely ignored by government, and left to gather dust on some shelf never again to see the light of day. We also have another scenario where the government, with pomp and fanfare, publicly endorse a plan, promise to implement every recommendation therein, and then promptly do the opposite. The most notorious example of this cavalier, gung-ho attitude is exemplified by the fate of the National Spatial Strategy.

The NSS was launched at a press conference on the 28th November 2002 by the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern TD, and the Minister for the Environment, Martin Cullen TD. Minister Coveney TD, who launched the present consultation, now sits in the office then occupied by Minister Cullen. The NSS received much media and political coverage. While there were many faults with the plan, and many of the assumptions underpinning the report were not sustainable, it was still one of the few serious attempts by the government to engage in any form of planning. The plan lasted exactly one year and one week. On 3rd December 2003, while

launching Budget 2004, the NSS was dismembered and buried by the then Minister for Finance, Charlie McCreevy TD. Hopefully government has learned from that debacle.

What should Ireland look like in twenty years.

There is both an impreciseness and overlap in many of the suggested key questions as set out in the documentation by the Department. If we take the question of 'How can we ensure that every place can realise its potential' to mean how can we ensure that the people who live in every area have access to decent homes, worthwhile employment, access to shops, modern social services like public transport, education and health, as well as adequate leisure facilities and open spaces then it is practically a definition of what Ireland should look like in 20 years.

Ireland will, undoubtedly, look very different in 2037 than it does in 2017. The steady increase in population of the last two decades is forecast to continue. This will be fuelled by a mixture of natural expansion through family formation, the limited reverse of some of the forced emigration of the last decade, and inward migration.

The continued, and indeed speed-up, rate of decrease in the number of viable farms will increase the trend of urbanisation. Whether that urbanisation takes place in smaller regional centres, or in the increased orbital spread of the greater Dublin region will be a function of both the nature and effectiveness of central planning.

The massive expansion of the greater Dublin area, both in its own expansion to the north and west, as well as the transformation of an entire swathe of region towns in a sixty kilometre radius of the city into mere dormer towns is not a viable long term social or economic model. On a smaller scale the development of greater Dublin has been mirrored in cities like Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford, and is equally non-viable.

We recognise that, undoubtedly Dublin, will remain an engine for economic growth for the coming two decades and so the emphasis on Dublin's growth must be accompanied by greater public investment in high frequency publicly owned rail, the nationalisation of tolled roads and a waste and water strategy that takes account of the marginality of the island within a broader European political space.

The developer-led, get rich quick model of development has failed this country and the consequences of the private banks funding this model has practically bankrupted the country and imposed an economic burden of the population which will have a negative and stifling effect for a full generation.

The Workers' Party believes that the planning of housing, industry, economic and social infrastructure must be integrated and seamless. However, as housing development has occurred on a vast scale on an unplanned basis then we are now forced to retro-fit infrastructure and employment into these population centres. We want to see an Ireland where people do not have to travel vast distances for employment. We want a reverse of the situation where the only viable transport option for the vast bulk of the population is by car

and this means a planned and sustained investment both in public transport infrastructure and the operation of public transport.

If place-making is to the centre of any new spatial strategy, the state needs to recognise that this requires denser living patterns in the medium and larger towns. This inevitably means that property development must be controlled tightly by local and regional democratic structures. The physical planning of towns and villages cannot be seen as an abstract thing that is slavishly following some abstract aesthetic sense but has a community's further material and social development at its centre. This means going back to the equivalent of the Buchanan report (1968) which, we might recall, "advocated the concentration of industrial development within 'growth centres' comprising, in addition to Dublin, two national growth centres in Cork and Limerick-Shannon; six regional growth centres in Athlone, Drogheda, Dundalk, Galway, Sligo and Waterford; and a further four local growth centres in Castlebar, Cavan, Letterkenny and Tralee." The Workers' Party is not advocating that these be the actual locations or that the number of locations is so limited, but, rather, highlighting the principle that towns and villages are places, first and foremost, where people live and thrive socially. Their economic life might be based elsewhere. This does not imply a moral hierarchy but a planning one.

Where will jobs be located and what will these jobs be.

In light of the major changes in technology and the presently unfettered expansion of capitalist globalisation it is not possible, with any degree of accuracy, to predict what the jobs mix in Ireland will be in two decades time.

What is possible however is to set out the parameters as to what our industrial development should be and the types of workplace we want to create as well as the working conditions for all future employees.

We also believe that sustainable employment must be created on a regional basis so as to ensure a balance of population and the maintenance of sustainable communities outside of the present greater Dublin urban sprawl.

The Workers' Party notes, and utterly rejects, the race to the bottom openly favoured by both the multinational businesses as well as by our own gombeen classes, which is actively supported by government. The mantra of that philosophy is that 'business must be competitive'. In reality this philosophy means that wages and conditions of employees are constantly depressed to the level of subsistence while the profits accruing to the owners of business constantly increase. Naturally, in the interests of 'competitiveness' and unlike workers' wages, these profits cannot be taxed under this model.

A sustainable economy in Ireland can only be build by, in the first instance, creating employment based on the country's natural resources. Ireland has a very poor history in taking this obvious step. In the interests of the rancher class our fishing industry was sold out to our EU competitors. Our mineral and oil and gas resources have, either through utter stupidity or corruption, in large measure been given away for nothing. Even our much vaunted food sector has been reduced to a very narrow beef and dairy sector.

As a country, Ireland must regain control of our own natural resources and build a sustainable industrial base from that platform. Also, we must look to the tourist and leisure sector, for sustainable job creation. This job creation can no longer be fuelled by low wages, poor conditions, black economy practices, or a manipulation of the normal tax code. If the industry is to be a viable, long-term industry then it must offer viable long-term employment with decent pay and conditions.

We recognise the importance of banking, insurance and insurance in a modern economy. However, we also recognise that much of the modern financial services industry is of no real economic value, and in reality adds to financial instability, and adds to the customer costs of normal domestic or commercial banking. We therefore believe that Ireland should no longer harbour banks or other institutions involved in what is now known as shadow banking.

As a matter of principle the Workers' Party objects to the use of tax manipulation and tax avoidance strategies by the State to encourage industrial development. This is morally wrong, it imposes an unfair burden on the existing tax payer, it impinges on the tax gathering abilities of other countries, and it is unsustainable.

Housing and Land in the *Ireland 2040*:

Context: The role of planning in delivering quality, public housing

Planning has the potential to play a significant role in enabling the delivery of public housing in Ireland, to tackle our housing crisis. Historically, however, it has done the opposite. There are endless examples of planners and local authorities, consciously unregulated by central government, mis-using planning processes in order to prioritise the creation of profit from private individuals and companies, over and above the public good.

Unfortunately, while the planning scandals of the past led to the implementation of copious nominal regulations and changes to local governance, the underlying problem – that land remains a speculative commodity in Ireland – continues to hamper the delivery of decent, public housing in Ireland. Instead, we are facing into another property bubble, with the average price of a family home in Dublin now at ten times the average household in the capital.

It is essential that *Ireland 2040* take cognisance of this fact, and put in place measures to take speculation, hoarding and profiteering out of land and housing once and for all. Without this, we will inevitably face into another two decades of housing crisis, bubbles and busts.

Land use in *Ireland 2040*

Insofar as the use of land is discussed in *Ireland 2040*, this is limited almost entirely to discussing environmental issues and land in rural areas. However adequate planning controls for land in urban areas, to prevent speculation, hoarding and profiteering is critical to enable public development and housing.

Ireland 2040 should include a full section which examines how hoarding and speculation of land in urban and suburban areas impacts on the delivery of housing and public infrastructure, and measures to combat this.

End vacancy and hoarding – control the price of land

There is effectively no disincentive from hoarding land in Ireland. This has led to an ability to hold onto land until such time as its value increases. The most recent measure of an introduction of a land tax in Dublin allows a large range of loopholes and exemptions to excuse land owners who leave their property empty, and the pace of introduction has been slow.

In terms of short term measures, “Use it or Lose it” legislation should be introduced to penalise landlords who leave properties empty, and allow for repossession where buildings are vacant for a long period of time. The Derelict Sites Act should be strengthened so as to stop dereliction and speed up the regeneration of brown field sites.

The use of Compulsory Purchase Orders should be expanded to implement these measures.

In the medium-term, a site value tax should be introduced into *Ireland 2040*.

Implement the findings of the Kenny Report

To ensure that land is used for the common good, and not for speculation and hoarding, the recommendations of the Kenny Report to control the price of land should be implemented. The failure to implement the Kenny Report and place controls on rezoned land prices has

resulted in a small elite politically connected elite becoming fabulously wealthy through land rezoning; to widespread and debilitating corruption in local authorities.

Public Investment is Key: Public land must be retained for public use and developed through public investment

Ireland 2040 does not distinguish in any way between public land and private land, or between public and private interests in how planning is implemented or land is developed. In effect, this absence of mention of where investment for development will come from, supports the status quo – that development should be private sector-led and that, as a result, planning should serve the function of facilitating private sector development.

This is out of odds with best practice in many European cities, where the state takes the lead in deciding how land should be developed. It is not a model which has served us well in the past.

Planning must be plan-led – that is led by a set of priorities for how land should be used as set down by democratically elected representatives – and not developer-led. It is not appropriate that decisions on land use follow a trail of profit, rather than need.

In spite of this, government policy is clearly geared towards reducing the amount of publicly-owned land, and seeking private developers to develop its land wherever possible.

Rebuilding Ireland effectively capitulates to developers who have stated that one of the major impediments to the delivery of housing is the cost of land. To address this, *Rebuilding Ireland* has placed the effective gifting of public land to developers at the centre of its plans for housing delivery. Public-Private Partnerships, in which public land will be made available at no cost to developers, will lead to the privatisation of huge swathes of public land.

Infrastructure and the Environment.

If the government is serious about a coherent 20 year plan then it is impossible to separate the issue of planning, infrastructure and the environment.

We have already outlined that the transport emphasis must change from a private transport led model to a model of sustainable, publicly-funded public transport model. Basis social facilities like schools, shops, crèches, parks and medical centres must be integrated into all new housing developments and must be retrofitted into many of the huge housing developments built over the last thirty years.

The workers' party agrees with the polluter pays concept but this cannot be translated by government into a consumer-pays policy. Domestic water supply must be supplied by the local authority and paid for by general taxation. At the same time there are very considerable steps that can be taken to manage and improve our water services. It should be a condition of all planning permission, whether residential or commercial, that a rain-water recovery system is installed. Mains leaks should be identified and repaired and the illegal siphoning of water from the municipal supply by companies, agriculture, or individuals should be identified, stopped and prosecuted by law.

Access to top quality broadband services, in all parts of the country, is another vital necessity. This improves the quality of life for the residents of those areas, allows business to be located in smaller regional centres, and prevents needless journeys by allowing people either to work

from home, or employees from the one company or department in different locations to be in instant and secure communications.

Ireland must also be mindful of its commitments regarding carbon emissions and increasing the use of green energy. Unfortunately the vast bulk of the green energy industry has been dominated by private profit operators who have placed the demands of shareholders above the needs and concerns of communities and without regard for the common good. We believe that all the different methodologies of green energy must be utilised but that these should be under public control, often under local municipal control where the community have both a meaningful input into the decision making and then reap a share of the benefits.

What will success look like.

We are presently at an early stage of consultation. This must be real consultation and not just a smokescreen to cover the implementation of an already-decided policy. All the further stages of planning and consultation must take place and a comprehensive plan must be introduced and adopted by government. These are the necessary preliminary steps.

Success will be self evident. We will have decent affordable housing; top class educational, health and social facilities; adequate green spaces and leisure facilities for all; proper communication systems including top class broadband and whatever may be developed in the next two decades; a comprehensive, publicly owned and managed transport system both within and between urban centres and also serving the hinterland of those centres; full employment in regionally dispersed centres with decent pay and conditions for all workers.

