



Green Party Policy Document

Making the Connections

A Policy on Urban Development

Policy Summary

The last decade's economic boom has transformed urban Ireland. In 2006 around 95,000 houses and 20,000 apartments were built in the country. New residential and commercial areas have sprung up at the edge of towns and cities and older more established areas have experienced significant social and physical change.

Because of the pace and high level of development in the country, 'pressure points' have emerged that have serious implications for the future sustainability of urban areas. Urban sprawl, time poor communities, rising environmental emissions, critically overloaded infrastructure, community alienation and social fragmentation are all daily manifestations of policy failure in the management of Irish urban development.

The current urban planning framework is disjointed. It fails to make the connections between land use and transportation planning, and the real living and social needs of people in the design of new residential areas. It fails to tackle the issue of recouping the costs of service infrastructure from those who profit from development.

Planning in Ireland is grounded in policy rhetoric on 'Sustainable Development' that says that development should marry economic, social and environmental goals without diminishing resources. Yet the Government continues to set the agenda for a property-led approach to planning that ignores the social, economic and environmental consequences of rising private transport dependence and energy consumption. The model does not provide for the educational or social needs of new communities. Critically, because of the spread of urbanisation, quality of life and connectedness within communities has declined and a new time poor society has emerged.



Urban Policy Failure

Historically urban development in Ireland has taken place largely in the absence of a coherent and linked policy framework. Urban policy per se has been formed by a series of piecemeal actions.

- (a) A successive programme of area and site-based tax incentives has led to the formation of pockets of redevelopment within towns and cities, many of which are too large by comparison with the scale of existing areas. They have only provided for the short-term needs of residents. Many areas have not had the corresponding increases local community, leisure and educational facilities. There has been little integration between old and new communities and, as a result, long-term community formation has not occurred in these areas. (Urban Tax Renewal Acts (beginning 1986))
- (b) Higher density housing, apartment development and infill housing is now a prominent feature of Irish town and city planning. This is in line with the principle of Sustainable Development to make efficient use of land. However, the quality of the housing stock produced is questionable. Many new urban zones contain schemes where individual units are too small to provide for the needs of people who wish to raise families. Many contain fashionable hard landscaped open space areas that are not designed to cater for the needs for social, play or community interaction. (Residential Density Guidelines (1999))
- (c) Planning authority policy decisions and Development Plans do not fully reflect Sustainable Development. Planning authorities zone land in excess of population forecasts and critically, development is taking place without reference to the existing capacity of local sewerage, transport or social infrastructure and consequent environmental impacts. Planning authorities continue to fail to make the link between land-use planning and transportation, with planning being granted continuously for new commercial, retail and housing development in areas that don't have adequate services. (Sustainable Development - A Strategy for Ireland (1987) and Local Government (Planning and Development) Act (2000))
- (d) The new planning system, initiated by the Planning and Development Act, has placed limits on public participation that did not exist under previous legislation. New strict administrative, timing and cost requirements for planning submissions has made it difficult for people to freely take an active role in planning cases of concern, either locally or nationally. This has resulted in real distrust in the planning system. (Local Government (Planning and Development) Act 2000)).
- (e) Regional Planning Authorities responsible for NSS delivery have failed to call in planning authorities who exceed commercial zoning requirements and give planning approval for large-scale developments in towns outside the 'designated growth centres' laid down in the NSS. The NSS is not being reinforced at county level so that the goal of achieving Balanced Regional Development (BDR) is not being achieved. (National Spatial Strategy (2002) and Regional Planning Guidelines (from 1999))

The impact of having a succession of piecemeal measures without any overarching framework has led to a property-led approach to planning in Ireland. There is evidence that the quality of life in Ireland has declined as a consequence and a series of 'pressure points' have emerged that have serious implications for the future:

Urban Sprawl

The increased spread of towns and cities with new residential and commercial areas located at edge of towns and cities - and the knock-on impact on travel patterns, seepage of commercial activity from older areas and community integration.

Time Poor Communities

The increased travel to work time associated with distant commuting - and the knock-on effects in relation to quality of life as a result of reduced 'down-time' (e.g. less time for community or family involvement and voluntarism and correlated health impacts such as rising heart disease and obesity).

Rising Emissions

Lack of adequate and efficient public transport - leading to over reliance on private car transport, and longer travel to work times, increased energy use and CO2 emissions.

Infrastructure Deficiencies

Over expansion of urban areas in the absence of a parallel increase and delivery of municipal, transport and social services - resulting in infrastructure service capacity constraints in older areas, and problems of service provision and access in newly developed areas.

Community Distrust in Planning

Growing concern amongst residents' groups in relation to newer planning approaches to maximise land efficiency and use of higher density, infill and high building policies - resulting in increased levels of community distrust and frustration in the planning system.

Social Fragmentation

Changing social fabric of towns and city centre areas, with the emergence of new dormitory residential clusters, socially isolated high-density developments and a high level of transient private rental dwellings resulting in a loss of community and potential for social fragmentation.

The Green Party have been at the forefront of raising its concern about how planning works in Ireland and how it impacts on the quality of life of all Irish residents.

The current government is remote from the daily problems of residents and communities. It has consistently failed to tackle these problems head-on, although numerous advisors and economic experts have stated that if these areas are not addressed quickly, Ireland will decline both economically and socially and will face an energy supply crisis in the very near future.

Green Party Proposals

In Government, the Green Party proposes to fundamentally change this model. We will establish a new sustainable urban planning framework that makes clear connections between:

- Land-use planning and transportation
- People and planning
- Development and service provision
- Development and the environment

We propose to give local authorities the

power to raise revenue from developers that benefit from increased property values in areas benefiting from public sector investment. At institutional level, we propose to establish two new bodies, one to coordinate land-use and transportation planning and another to facilitate better public participation in planning.

Two new units will be established within existing agencies, one within the Department of Education and Science to ensure the timely delivery of educational facilities in new areas and another, within Sustainable Energy Ireland to drive forward energy efficiency and use of renewables in all buildings.

The Green Party will deliver the policy by:

1. Mobility Management Plans (MMPs)

Introducing a Sustainable Transport Programme that will ensure that the bias of public spending will shift from private to public transport. Under the programme local authorities will have more funding for transport investment in growth areas and will deliver local sustainable transport plans with corridors for cycle and walkways along existing rail, roads and waterfronts. Businesses will be obliged to take responsibility for their own transport problems with Mobility Management Plans (MMPs) becoming a key requirement for planning approval in all urban areas.

2. Linking Transport and Planning

Establishing a National Transport and Planning Agency to coordinate transport and land-use planning, and ensure that local planning approvals are not given to badly located traffic generating developments.

3. Listen to people's needs

Putting people at the heart of planning in the design of residential areas and in the promotion of more public participation in the planning system. The Green Party will ensure that the focus of urban residential planning is to create long-term sustainable communities.

4. Urban Design Guidelines

Producing new Residential Guidelines based on good Urban Design principles to ensure that areas are designed to cater for the lifetime needs of people. Local authorities will set down new standards so that developers will produce a greater number of styles within schemes. All areas will have units for single people, young couples, growing families, single families and older people.

5. Green space and playgrounds

Revising the Open Space Standards so that all green spaces provide both social and ecological benefits. Green Spaces will be designed to promote active use as meeting places, spaces for community events and designed with needs of children's play and observation in mind. Urban micro-forests must be planted, landscaping plans must enhance biodiversity and space must be provided for allotments within new residential schemes.

6. Remove the bottlenecks to affordability

Ensuring the delivery of 5,000 Part V social housing and 5,000 affordable housing units a year, until the social housing waiting lists are cleared, by insisting on a minimum of 20% social housing provision within new developments. New rules will also be introduced to limit developers from using land or financial transfer to opt out of building social housing units within new residential schemes.

7. Increase public awareness

Establishing a new National Planning Advisory Agency as a counter balance to the Strategic Infrastructure Bill. The agency will inform the public

about large planning applications in their local area and will have a role in providing technical services on national and local planning policy to the public.

8. Increase public participation in planning

Removing the €20 Planning Participation Fee and all administrative rules that act as a barrier to open participation in the Irish planning system.

9. A Regulator for Management Companies

Addressing the problem of Management Companies within estates and apartment buildings by allowing hand-over to Local Authorities upon completion of building work and establishing a Regulator to oversee the activities of management companies (see: Green Party Housing Policy).

10. Greater use of levies to fund Infrastructure

Making a direct link between public investment in infrastructure and increases in land value in areas benefiting from these investments. Local authorities will be able to recoup some of these costs in new section 49 zones.

11. Factor in the environment

Making it an explicit element of the Irish planning framework that environmental resource consequences must be factored into decision-making. Local authorities will be required to produce environmental accounts for the consequences of individual policies within Development Plans and for any subsequent zoning decisions. Planners will be required to map out local land-use issues against site sensitivities that must be considered within the context of setting out new County Development Plans.

12. Improve energy efficiency to address climate change

Amending the Planning and Development Act 2000 to allow County Development Plans lay down standards on energy efficiency and use of renewables in all buildings. A new Energy Audit Unit will be opened within Sustainable Energy Ireland to provide funding supports for making buildings more energy efficient and CDP training to those working in the building sectors.



The Green Party / Comhaontas Glas
16/17 Suffolk Street, Dublin 2
Tel: 01 6790012
Fax: 01 6797168
Email: info@greenparty.ie
Web: www.greenparty.ie