

# Planning Policy

*December 2023*



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# 1 Summary & Key Points

This document sets out the Green Party's proposals for planning policy. Our current planning system must be re-orientated to more properly promote the wellbeing of citizens, the protection of our environment and the restoration of nature. These policies are needed because of the importance of the planning process to achieving social equity, to meeting greenhouse gas reduction targets, to restoring our natural world, to protecting our heritage and to enabling individuals and communities to flourish.

It is hard to overstate the significance of the planning process. It is the conduit through which private and public sector development activity is channelled to the common good. It is the mechanism through which the welfare of current and future generations and the interests of property owners and developers are reconciled. The Green Party's vision for planning is a system which:

- adheres to the principle of 'One Planet Living' and living with planetary boundaries: fitness, not growth
- changes the ethos of planning from one of authority to service
- serves community rather than profit
- makes climate-change resilience integral to planning
- applies developed methodologies of participation from the start
  - provides sustainable connections between the places people live and work and the places they relax and recharge (green-blue grid)
- recognises that heritage and sustainability are synergistic

The Green Party proposes the following reforms to achieve this vision:

- Make tackling the climate and biodiversity emergency and fostering well-being rather than economic growth, the central aims of the National Planning Framework.
- Enhance the role of citizens and councillors in plan making through new models of public engagement.
- Protect and enhance public participation and access to justice in planning matters by reducing fees and costs and resisting any attempt to materially restrict such participation.
  - Properly resource the planning service at both national and local level to fulfil its functions across plan making, development management and enforcement with skill, care, integrity and efficiency.

- Mandate Local Authorities to monitor development and to take enforcement action against planning violations.
- Adopt policies which prioritise re-use of existing buildings, re-generation of town centres, transport oriented development and compact settlement patterns and which severely restrict further urban sprawl.
- Repeal the provisions of planning legislation which allow central government to mandate detailed planning rules.
- All new construction must incorporate features to mitigate the impact of higher temperatures, more intensive rainfall and more frequent major weather events.
- Removal of trees and hedgerows to be treated as development for planning purposes. There should be a presumption against permission for the felling of healthy mature trees.
- Require that developments deliver a net gain in biodiversity of at least 10%
- Introduce limitations on the level of embodied carbon in construction and enhanced controls on demolition and the recycling of construction waste.

## 2 Introduction

### Introduction

Our overall vision is of a proactive, creative planning policy, consensually striving towards a flourishing<sup>1</sup> island of Ireland.

We believe in sustainable planning:

- A planning system which is truly democratic, that serves people and communities, rather than capital, respecting our environment as a fragile, finite resource, as well as for its intrinsic value. In a spirit of social equality, planning should reflect a progressive ethos toward social justice equality.
- A planning system that keeps social needs and quality of life to the forefront as critical priorities
- A future-orientated planning system that yields to planetary boundaries.
- A planning system that fully integrates climate-change objectives and ecological awareness.
- Prioritises education of planners, communities & data collection.
- Focuses on improving administration procedures.
- A planning system which works, fluently and efficiently.

Finally, but fundamentally, it will require that planning rules be properly enforced. In this policy document we have identified some of the various elements that would be required to put all this in place as progressive vectors of change.

### Bringing a Green service ethos to planning

The Green Party believe that Ireland's Planning Policy needs to urgently reflect and respond to the global climate and biodiversity crises and respect planetary boundaries.

The Green Party has an ethos which it can bring to planning policy. Rather than just legislating change, we could foster the change - look to self-generated examples that flourish and can inspire and use Green-Party values to generate a culture shift and a change in the ethos of planning in Ireland.

Looking to exemplars from elsewhere: eg 'One Planet Living ' / Lammas Community in Wales for lessons learned.<sup>2</sup> Or from The Netherlands: the concept of planning as a

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.flourish-book.com/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/technical-advice-note-1-an-6-planning-sustainable-rural-communities>

service. e.g. that a municipality might even provide the land, and infrastructure / services and proactively encourage innovative development. 3

Looking at exemplars from elsewhere, which have a performance specification approach, not a legislative approach – where the planning authority actually learns from the project.

Plan-led as opposed to developer led development

This firstly asks the question ‘What is the will of the Community? And how is that translated professionally into a Plan, that has been formulated through community involvement?’.

Plan-led development avoids the many harms which have come from development which is driven by the priorities of private sector developers. These include over-development of sites, SHD/ BTR towers, a preference for greenfield urban sprawl, communities which are isolated from public transport and other services and poor quality housing.

We favour sustainable compact development, which facilitates active travel, public transport and avoiding car dependency. The current lack of plan-led development supported by the State has created a vacuum that has been filled by speculative inappropriate and rural sprawling development.

Plan-led development must be supported and driven by adhered to by the agencies of the State, for example Irish Water, NTA, Local Authority etc. Green policy must be to remove the obstacles that are impeding compact urban development through the provision of the services and infrastructure (for example water and sewerage) in our villages, towns and cities.

However, policies promoting compact development must be allied to greater state intervention in the urban land market. Without this, market forces will drive up the value of urban land, displacing less advantaged communities and forcing middle income home buyers into the commuter belt.

If the state steps up and evaluates infrastructural investments over 60 year plus timeframes and not the usual commercial criteria, then huge possibilities become available under Environmental, Social and Governance principles. “We need to evolve from the obsession with developer led planning”.

Our concept of Planning needs to evolve toward predominantly pro-active action-planning, significantly driven by elected Governments to realise social and environmental objectives.

Change of Planning Culture

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.urbangreenbluegrids.com/projects/eva-lanxmeer-results/?s=lanxmeer>

There's a huge problem in Irish Planning on the ground, whereby we have an top-down view of development led planning. It's crucial the ethos of historic local government legislation dating from the 19th Century<sup>4</sup> changes to a 2023 service-based act. This will allow the will of people and communities to be realised in a professional format. We have some superb personnel in forward planning– but they are not always conferring with development control staff or the public (e.g. having to wait for 8 weeks for a pre-planning consultation).

### Safeguarding and improving public engagement

There is an elitist bias in technocratic decision-making antithetical to liberal representative democracy which invites legitimate voices on legitimate issues. Public participation can restore legitimacy, give recognition of citizenship, ensure that the widest range of views are heard and deliberated on to escape the bias of particular interests and perspectives and gives responsibility to participants to gain knowledge of the issues.<sup>5</sup>

In line with the Aarhus Convention of 1998, to which Ireland is a signatory, and EU Directive 2011/92/EC, we support the rights of public access to information, participation in decision-making, and access to justice in environmental matters. We believe that the right to consultation should not be tied to property rights. But more than this, we believe that public participation is crucial to successful planning and development, and of benefit to all parties. Therefore, our aim is to maximise participative planning at all stages of a transparent, democratic and accountable planning process. This will require a significant cultural shift, but one which we feel is already underway.

Professional skills in strategic stakeholder participation methodology facilitating and encouraging uptake are essential; examples here are the Town Regeneration Officers (TROs) and Vacancy Officers now proliferating throughout the Republic and the UK model of 'Planning Aid'<sup>6</sup>.

This is crucial to engagement uptake and success in this area as e.g., multiply, at Nijmegen NL where a process analogous to our citizens assemblies was successful. Citizens who give up their time over a protracted period, in a methodical templated process, need encouragement and rewards<sup>7</sup> .

While participative planning is complex and fraught with difficulty in finding consensus and the best balance of advantages, there is no short-cut and attempts to find such have led to even greater difficulty and delays.

<sup>4</sup> \_\_\_\_\_  
1898 Local Government Act

<sup>5</sup> Fischer, 2018; Fischer, 2001; O'Neill, 2006; Motherway, 2003; Fiorino, 1990

<sup>6</sup> \_\_\_\_\_  
<https://www.rtpi.org.uk/planning-advice/>

<sup>7</sup> eg <https://twynstra.com/stakeholder-participation-alliance-management-room-river-nijmegen/>





### 3 The Planning System

#### Introduction:

The planning legislation will continue to be in place and this cannot be changed quickly. But we can articulate an ethos underlying the existing structures to transform the use of that structure. A series of steps that gets to the delivery of a transformed planning process will be developed.

- Planning rules should rigorously support the 15-minute city/10-minute town principle.
- Pass legislation to facilitate “one stop shops” for planning, fire safety and other approvals to enable refurbishment and change of use for vacant, under-utilised or derelict buildings
- The State should assume a greatly strengthened role in deciding when and where development takes place. Tools to support such active land management include:
  - Where owners are failing to develop land, the Planning Authority should have enhanced CPO powers to acquire the land.<sup>8</sup>
  - Large scale urban regeneration projects should be supported by adequately funded State-owned Development Agencies
  - Land hoarding should be penalised through an escalating Zoned Land Tax
    - An effective mechanism for capturing the ‘development gain’ accruing to landowners from zoning should be implemented. The value captured in this way should be used to provide community infrastructure and public housing.

#### Policy Points

##### Community Centric Planning: Community engagement at the centre

We believe in sustainable planning which is truly democratic, that serves people and communities while respecting our environment and recognising its invaluable and finite resources. We also believe in social equality. Planning should reflect a progressive ethos toward equality, not just kowtowing to the market.

We want to see sustainable development, through planning that creates places that facilitate a sustainable low carbon (and eventually zero carbon) circular economy, with actions to mitigate and adapt to the climate emergency to reduce our ecological footprint in order to live within our ecological means and protect biodiversity.

All this will require planning service professionals who are properly informed and guided, and a public that is more informed and engaged, at all parts of the process. This makes for a proactive not reactive planning system.

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<sup>8</sup> Louth County Council has lead on this

- Ministers shall enact the intentions of 'Putting People First' 2012<sup>9</sup> and the 2014 Local Govt Reform Act<sup>10</sup> to enhance participatory community action in conjunction with more empowerment of elected Members in relation to Development Plans and their realisation. This should advert to implementation of neglected aspects of the 1991 Barrington Report.<sup>11</sup>

### National Planning Framework

The first tier of our planning framework is recognised to cascade from the Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework (NPF).

- In order for Ireland to act proportionately with regard to the climate and biodiversity emergencies, the language of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and National Development Plan (NDP) must be revisited. All references to 'growth' must be replaced with 'sustainable development' where economic growth does not maintain its primacy over action to mitigate and adapt to environmental breakdown. The NPF and NDP must also address the biodiversity emergency proportionately through consistent reference to nature-based solutions, conserving and regenerating degraded ecosystems and protecting trees and hedgerows. Language in the CDP must then be adjusted accordingly. The plan must recognise the increasing pressure development places on our natural habitats and land, in particular from extractive industries. It is imperative that we aim to reduce reliance on these finite resources /dynamic equilibrium Models of the environment should replace obsession with unsustainable growth. <sup>12</sup>

### A planning system that integrates climate-change objectives and ecological awareness

The Green Party, in line with National Policy Framework Objectives 52 & 58, supports environmentally-conscious infrastructure, and a planning system that is responsible to the natural environment.

Information campaigns on various biodiversity issues and the role of development in them help in this regard. This policy is designed to enable implementation of Green Party policy, in particular around policy statements clarifying how seriously climate change will affect Ireland in the coming decades, and which otherwise will not be implemented fast enough, or fully, or at all.

- Developments must adhere to the National Planning Framework 2040 on design and site-choice for residential development.

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/5655c2-putting-people-first-action-programme-for-effective-local-government/#>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/2631c-local-government-reform/>

<sup>11</sup> <http://opac.oireachtas.ie/AWDData/Library3/Library2/DL044112.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Daly, Georgescu Roegen , Schumpeter , Polanyi et al

- The language of the NPF must be to ‘accommodate sustainable development’ not ‘growth and expansion’. The language of growth and expansion does not address the climate and biodiversity crises. This must continue into CDPs. The language of ‘fitness’ is well understood culturally, involving effort, reductions in excess and greater capacity for well-being and flourishing. Less is more.
- The Department of Housing and local planning authorities must adhere to the National Spatial Strategy (NSS), that the location of new housing be integrated with re-use of under-utilised land and buildings as a priority, rather than extending green field development. The Guidelines for Planning Authorities include the “prioritisation of development that either re-uses brown field development land such as central area sites and back-lands.
- We must improve the interaction of Irish Water with current planning applications. Their goals are laudable, in seeking to identify a cohesive drainage strategy and design guide for the entire country, but their current systems are cumbersome and opaque, causing delay throughout the planning and construction process. Flood defence schemes should include provisions for protection and regeneration of wildlife habitats, especially coastal protection schemes. There is a lot of best practise information available in this area.
- All developments ensure they should minimise displacement of water.
- Zoning of lands for development must prevent inappropriate development on National Parks, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, natural habitats of local, regional, national or international importance, sites of special scientific or archaeological interest, and ancient woodlands.
- Development Plans must take into account infrastructure required for internet and digital technology, and its impacts.

#### Environmental standards within developments

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- Applications large and small must provide detail of the environmental impacts of the development.
- There should be set standards (with measurable criteria) on including grass, trees, and parks in urban planning.
- We must set standards aiming to minimise tarmac and concrete use in both urban and rural housing, maximising green blue assets.
- We must set national guidance on reducing car-parking in developments that have good transport links. Some local authorities e.g. Dublin City Council, have policies to remove minimum parking requirements

– We must promote measures to aid biodiversity (e.g. sustainable drainage systems, such as surface water storage, ponds and swales, rather than tanks; green roofs; roof tanks; living walls; habitat creation; low-mow green areas). Planning requirements for environmental building-standards

– County and City Councils should be required to use in their developments as much low carbon technologies and timber products that are certified as being manufactured from forests that are sustainably managed as possible. Land use planning should encourage indigenous sustainable timber product with low kgs/km. Development Plans (County Development Plan (CDP) and Local Area Plan (LAP))

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– Development Plans will be first drafted with inputs from the community and elected representatives through open workshops, design workshops (charrettes) and other forms of active engagements. The public should be encouraged to make an input to the plan making process at the earliest possible stage i.e. within the preparation period for the draft and this should be facilitated by planning authorities. This could mean drawing up proposals outlining how the Plan would affect:

- (a) the lived environment,
- (b) the natural environment and all species,
- (c) social and economic wellbeing,
- (d) the Local Authority budget,

– This process of submission must be transparent and accessible, with clear guidance on how to make an effective submission.

– To enable community engagement and consultation the following strategies may be deployed:

- i. Outreach to communities in the very early stages of the drafting process, including stakeholder meetings.
- ii. Citizen Assembly protocol is a tried and tested method for this kind of consultation nationally, which could be tailored to Development Plan research and vectors prior to initial drafting.
- iii. The use of 3D modelling whenever possible.

Once drawn up in an accountable way, these Development Plans will be made integral to the actual planning decisions.

Consultation on individual developments,

– All pre-planning consultations should be open for public engagement to ensure early and meaningful engagement with communities for new developments.

– The local community needs to be aware of planned developments in their area.

Therefore, notice of planning intention cannot be restricted to a site notice and newspaper advertisement, but should involve the direct informing of stakeholders.

Any planning application should require the demonstration by the developer of steps taken to inform and consult stakeholders.

– For smaller developments this could be a statement of having spoken to neighbours about the plan.

– For larger developments above certain thresholds of scale or environmental impact, the following approaches would ensure proper and transparent engagement with the local community. To comply with EU Directive 2003/35/EC, these consultative meetings must have some agency in the planning process. The successful outcome would pre-empt many of the problems faced by developers in what has become a particularly adversarial system:

i. Holding of public meetings (with a design team, if already in place). Such

discussions and public meetings would be useful to all parties. Good practice of this type of engagement will follow the Draft Wind Energy Planning Guidelines 2019. This requires developers to demonstrate how they

consulted with the local community prior to submitting a planning application.

These guidelines could be copied or adapted, either as an informal approach or as mandatory in certain circumstances.

ii. Community Councils based on the Scottish model. These bodies would have a right to consider planning applications in their local area and be consulted as part of the planning process. Similar models also exist in France, Switzerland and the Netherlands

Safeguarding access to justice in planning matters

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– We must safeguard public participation in the decision-review process for individuals and NGO's, regarding rules on standing, prior involvement, eligibility, and costs. We are opposed to the kinds of changes proposed in General Scheme of Housing and Development Bill of December 2019, which would limit access to the review process for public and NGO's)

– For planning law enforcement, public participation is vital. Regarding unauthorised developments, the current opportunities open to the public are good; however, plans to limit public participation in other aspects of enforcement are in motion and should be considered.

– Retain the right for 3rd parties to seek a Section 5 Declaration from a Local Authority on whether a development is exempted or not.

Enforcement to protect the Community

~~Planning rules only exist to improve the~~ outcome of development and give form to the desire of the legislature to preserve, protect and improve the quality of the lived environment. But without consistent and scrupulous enforcement, these rules will have no effect, and their possible benefits lost. Enforcement is therefore an essential part of a good planning process, and we believe that planning authorities and public both have a vital role

to play. Enforcement will enjoy community support if there has been real participation in the plan being enforced.

- There should be a greater emphasis on the part of local authorities to ensure that conditions attached to planning permissions are carried out. Amendments to planning after permission is granted should be discouraged. 13
- We must enforce the rules on planning permission for short-term rental apartments.
- The “retention” planning facility should be removed.
- That Local Authorities only be allowed trade with businesses (e.g. quarries) which have full planning permission, not just “pending” permission.
- Existing development plans need to be adhered to. 14
- Costs are a huge barrier to enforcement. In line with the Aarhus Convention recommendations, we must find a way to avoid prohibitive costs in the planning review processes. As a minimum, the costs of submissions on planning applications must be reduced.

There is a varied list of costs for an individual or group to make a submission to either the local authority or An Bord Pleanála. The cost to make a submission for an individual to a local authority is €20 (as of Nov 2022). However, the cost to make an appeal to An Bord Pleanála is €220. This is disproportionate and effectively a barrier to participation or justice.

- It is suggested an appeal fee should be in line with local authority fees.

- Making a Judicial Review. Applying for JR in relation to a planning decision from An Bord Pleanála is given 8 weeks from the date the board review. All other applications for JR are between 3 and 6 months. JR applications in relation to planning decisions should also be afforded at appropriate period of time to state the case fully.

- Amend Section 250 of the PDA 2000 by Statutory Instrument so that inability of the ABP to contact the owners of a development, after reasonable attempts to do

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<sup>13</sup>

Eg an unsuccessful attempt in Naas to alter permission for housing plus a crèche - the developer attempted to remove the crèche aspect of the development through a subsequent application in favour of additional housing units. While this attempt was unsuccessful, there have been many others which were successful and this is a practice which has served to deny promised services.

<sup>14</sup>

E.g the recent concentration of transient developments (hotel and purpose-built student accommodation) in certain areas of the city contravenes the guidelines in the DCDP.

regarding their property, does not allow the owners to evade planning orders and regulations. 15

– There must be harsher penalties for destruction of protected structures and environments.

#### Curbing the harms of land speculation

We are opposed to the ever-growing deregulation of planning. Speculation on property values is harming Irish planning and development. This speculation is fostered by the deregulation of planning, whereby developers get permission, and then reapply under different, more profitable specifications. This deregulation needs to be halted. This practice reduces incentive to actually build, since developers are more likely to wait for more beneficial terms in their planning, while increasing land speculation, since land values may increase markedly beyond what current permission would allow.

- In order to put a brake on this speculation, and to bring back to the public the benefits of increased land values based in fact on the presence of infrastructure provided from the public purse, there should be an 80% rezoning windfall tax.

- We should empower planning authorities to refuse permission over past failures to comply. Any New Build proposal by a builder, investor, or individual who owns a derelict or abandoned property in the State or has had an association with an unsuitable substandard project complaint in the past should not be allowed to have any further approval until they have completed all necessary repairs, have paid the tax deficit for what that property should have been, compared with neighbouring properties over the years of neglect and disrepair, and shown to be again in good standing on these matters.

#### An Bord Pleanála

– Allow An Bord Pleanála to regain a more independent status. That An Bord Pleanála be properly resourced, and its members properly appointed, and properly led, to really operate to its function of ensuring full compliance with the planning laws.

#### Education of Planners & Data collection

– ~~Planners must proactively nurture~~ the change we need. We must work with the OPR and others in practical research and education of planners and public towards a participative culture. Planners must be set to work planning, not just facilitating investment-and-profit-led development.

<sup>15</sup>

See the Supreme Court Case Friends of the Irish Environment v ABP [2020] IESC 14, especially §§69 & 74. 21.



- Planners and decision-makers must be trained to be more attentive to environmental concerns and be advised of and implementing up to date environmental legislation and innovations. Planners must be up to date on environmental risk-assessment for new technologies, and not hindered by lack of awareness, still implementing out-of-date guidelines and practices.
- Planners must receive proper training on how to write SEA Reports, for the purposes of monitoring, and for communication. The OPR must be supported in this work.

### Improving Planning administration procedures

We need to speed up our planning procedures, while losing none of the safeguards. This is becoming all the more pressing with the need for the construction of additional waste-sorting-and-recycling infrastructure, but we can do it with an eye to the Green Party's twin goals of environmental protection and social justice.

- The planning system needs to be adequately resourced across all its constituent components both local and national including Local Authorities, An Bord Pleanála, the OPR, Regional Assemblies and the Planning and Environmental Division of the High Court.<sup>16</sup>
- All local authorities should create a Housing Department that considers long term planning, the implementation and monitoring of construction, and the long-term management of their housing sector, without division across the authority.
- Each local authority should be obliged to have a County Architect (as they have a County Engineer). This type of role has been shown to work extremely well, for example, in Counties Cork, Mayo and Kildare. They should also have a County Heritage Officer, Transport Planner, Landscape Architect and a County Environmentalist, part of whose remit would be Climate Change. These personnel could be shared between smaller counties.
- The input of local councillors in these areas should require a minuted protocol, with obligatory reporting.
- Regulations, created during the Covid crisis, that all planning application documents be available on planning authorities' websites within 5 days after receipt, need to be maintained and strengthened. This will help achieve transparency at all stages of planning decisions and allow the public to express opinions before the decision on the request for development consent is taken. The cultural change from making 'objections' to 'observations,' which is already in train, is important, and a positive concomitant of participation and consultation.

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<sup>16</sup> The Local Government Management Agency estimated in 2022 that the Local Authorities, whose total Planning Staff was then 1,600, would require an additional 541 staff to properly fulfil its functions. See <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2023-05-11/216/>



A National Planning Information Agency.

- A National Planning Information Agency within the remit of the Office of the Planning Regulator should be mandated to respond to requests from the public to provide information in relation to national and local planning. This would improve the standard of public observations on developments and engagement with the planning process, to the benefit of both public and developers.

## 4 Creating sustainable and liveable communities

### Introduction

The population of the Republic of Ireland is anticipated to grow to between 5.7 and 6.7 million by 2050. In addition, the average household size will fall. Together these trends will require us to develop a significant volume of new housing, schools, hospitals, community facilities, retail, office, and industrial facilities and to make better use of our existing built infrastructure.

Decent homes in decent communities, and public transport, must be affordable and accessible to everyone now and for future generations, and be delivered within climate change and ecological obligations. This means synergy in all aspects of planning, including construction, housing, energy, transport, food, water, waste, health, the economy and natural habitats. It means avoiding monocultures of housing concentrations, and services provided in tandem with development, the synchronous provision of local shops, social and community facilities, streets, parks and open spaces, and local services.

Planning, by its nature, is complex, since it is about all the aspects of how we live, and what quality of life means. That awareness of well-being and its multifaceted nature is what the Green Party hopes to bring to the planning process in this country. We want to see planning that enhances the quality of life for everyone in society, and so an awareness of social needs built into the planning process. In recent years, planning has become increasingly unpopular, disconnected from the public and increasingly beholden to developers rather than the people it is meant to serve. We need a paradigm shift 'from a planning for capital' to 'planning for society'. This is a planning system that keeps social needs to the fore, well-being in its fullest sense, encompassing the social and environmental factors that affect how we live, must be at the heart of what we build, and so must be at the heart of the planning process. Planning should seek to offer everyone the best possible chance of health, well-being, and social, economic and civic engagement, regardless of age, with reciprocal intergenerational support. This means planning that really is planning: holistic, long-term, and public-interest led.

### Policy Points

#### Where should residential development take place

- At all times pursue planning policies which allow us to maximise the value to the community of the existing built environment.

- We need to recognise that our capacity for an ever-increasing expansion of building stock and infrastructure into the future will be constrained. Policies need to facilitate change of use, repurposing and re-configuring of existing buildings. Where large scale development is needed it should happen within the existing footprint of cities and large towns near high frequency low carbon public transport and in conjunction with active mobility measures.

- Development on the edge of existing urban settlements should only occur where there is strong linkage to existing public transport and other services and where the vision of “15-minute cities, 10-minute towns, 5-minute villages” can be realised.
- Any such development should be at a density which supports the location of key services within easy walking or cycling distance. If we want to change how we live in an area, we must ensure improved walking and cycling permeability within and between developments.
- Local development plans must recognise that compact development cannot be achieved if we continue an over reliance on detached or semi-detached housing, especially urban generated ‘one-off’ housing. It will be necessary to include provision for high quality apartments, duplexes, terraced houses, and maisonettes within towns as well as cities.
- ‘Town Centre First’ initiatives can revive dying towns and villages. Town Centre First means putting the health of town centres at the heart of decision-making processes. It means that any development, a sports-centre, a hotel, a hardware shop, or new houses, must look first to the already-built area of a town, and not to the cheaper and easier alternative on the edge of the town or village, which ultimately detracts from the town or village, as we have too often seen all around the country. It means multi-functional, high-quality building and space within the pre-existing built fabric. One good example was the Market Lane in Westport. This unavoidably implies an expanded role for the State in unlocking brownfield sites and in site assembly e.g., the Land Development Agency.
- We need long-term infrastructure plans guiding development, especially around the use of brownfield and central sites. We must plan the provision of services and infrastructure around this town centre model: water, sewage, electricity, broadband. This means, among other things, that Irish Water services are provisioned to support higher densities and compact growth.
- New rural housing should be within or adjacent to existing settlements. To facilitate this, local authorities need to ensure that sufficient serviced housing capacity is available within existing villages. In the first instance, this should be done by bringing vacant and derelict buildings and sites within the existing urban footprint back into use. Where greenfield development is required, it must take place in locations which are within easy walking distance of schools, public transport links and other essential services. Additional once-off rural housing should only be granted permission for households actively engaged in farming or other land stewardship activities. The Welsh’s Government’s “One Planet Development”<sup>17</sup> guidelines on planning for sustainable rural communities are an excellent example for Ireland to follow:
- Voluntary Intentional Communities link social, economic and environmental activism, and can act as working exemplars, catalysing transition toward universal

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/technical-advice-note-tan-6-planning-sustainable-rural-communities>  
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one-planet-living. Examples are the Camphill Communities, or the Eco-village in Cloughjordan.

- But they are often stymied by planning requirements which do not take into account the aims of the Communities and resort to settled practise stultifying innovation. We should look at introducing planning protocols for the benefit of these communities, in keeping with sustainable development principles.

#### What type of housing should we build

Communities must be provided with a mix of housing types so that residents' changing housing needs can be met while staying within the locale. Among other things, over-concentration of studio, one or two bed apartments in single schemes must be very carefully considered. Well-being is social but is also about the homes we live in. We must resist any attempt to lessen building standards as regards, space, light, access, facilities, and other factors influencing well-being. The erosion of planning standards which has taken place over the last decade needs to be reversed.

- Mandatory ministerial guidelines which have reduced standards for apartments, removed Planning Authorities ability to regulate building heights and introduced lower standard Build to Rent schemes must all be withdrawn. Specifically:

- The deregulation of apartment and building height standards introduced since 2016 should now be reversed by repealing the Specific Planning Policy Requirements brought in under Section 28 (1C) of the Planning and Development Act. The power of the relevant Minister to make further mandatory regulations in relation to development management should also be revoked.

- No State funding for lower standard Build to Rent developments.

- Withdraw the mandatory ministerial guidelines on apartment sizes and building heights. Restore the national 2015 guidance standards as a benchmark datum for guidance.

- Reform our planning laws to give Planning Authorities a more directive and interventionist role in the development process. Enable them to use CPO and other powers to force delivery of local area plans in a timeline and sequence which aligns with community need.<sup>18</sup>

- To avoid institutional investors monopolising supply, empower Local Authorities in areas of high housing demand to set planning conditions which reserve a percentage of homes in new development for owner occupiers.

#### Creating Communities

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<sup>18</sup>Louth and Waterford local authorities are exemplars in regard to 'Lease and Repair' and the use of CPO.

- Development should only occur where its realisation coincides with the delivery of essential community infrastructure including public realm, parks and green spaces, schools and sporting facilities, cycling and walking infrastructure. To enable this Planning Authorities must be given a more interventionist and directive role in the development process.

- Planning must aim to create not just housing but communities. This applies not just to new developments. Existing housing developments were often built in ways which make it difficult for them to thrive: lack of community facilities, public realm, parks, support for active mobility and public transport linkages. Planners must actively seek to take interventions which can address these shortcomings.

- Developments need to maximize permeability to cycle lanes and pedestrian friendly, car-unfriendly roads e.g., through noisy surface textures, while also ensuring roads create minimum barrier effects for wildlife or wildlife roadkill.

- There must be room for artistic, cultural and creative multivalent space in all new public developments. They would include market venues, and outdoor meeting spaces.

- Rather than playgrounds with every development, more natural play areas should be encouraged, for the benefit of children as well as for the environmental benefits.

- All contracts to build new primary schools in the state should include a social benefit clause to provide an all-inclusive playground which provides opportunities for children to engage in free play, climb, balance, learn, explore and socialise in a safe environment. These all-inclusive playgrounds can also be used also for the benefit of the local community where the school is located. This would be outside of school hours to benefit the residents of the locality where the playground is revamped.

- We must encourage sustainable communities, as in the Transition Towns movement. Kinsale is an example of a town working consciously toward sustainability.

### Conserving heritage, healing nature

- We must make every effort to protect our built heritage. This means prioritising its protection in any development plans and enforcing the orders for their upkeep. The register of protected structures must cover vernacular buildings. It should by default include all buildings built prior to 1900, though recognising that not all are suitable or in a condition for inclusion in the Register of Protected Structures. Conserving our built heritage enhances communities by keeping a strong sense of place.

- Social significance, historic resonance, folklore, community usage and even plot size are undervalued and underreported in current planning decisions. These aspects of planning should be given increased significance in the new local authority housing and planning departments.

- We must chart trees and hedgerows and protect them from removal by developers. Every planning application must display trees and hedgerows to be retained and to be removed. There must be a requirement for native tree and hedgerow planting, whereby every development will have a net gain in biodiversity (four trees planted and brought to maturity, for one lost). Biodiversity, at layered levels of scale, should be mandatory; a Biodiversity Statement should be part of every planning application which achieves a net biodiversity gain. Future legislation to underpin this will be supported.
- To support sustainable communities as a principle, the development of walking and cycling trails should be integrated into future housing developments that are built on a greenfield site. In essence this means making it mandatory as part of planning permission that a walking pathway or trail no more than 2 metres wide, constructed from environmentally suitable material with bug-rated lighting, be allowed along the perimeter of the greenfield site. This will ensure an alternative way to travel and take walkers off the road and enhance safety. It will also support future walking routes that can be joined with existing or new walking routes (tracks and trails), joining other villages or towns. (This will encourage people to walk rather than drive). This small amendment to planning will support all parts of our communities to ensure walking on the road is not required, delivering better safety and enhancing our tourism experience. They can be linked to future and other walking routes. Default presumption of retention of hedgerows (unless with good reason) will also conserve existing wildlife corridors and dwindling habitats.

## 5 Adapting to our changing climate

### Introduction

We need to plan and design for increased frequency and intensity of hot weather events, cold weather events, storms, and flooding. There will be droughts and both floods and reductions in levels in our rivers and lakes and rising sea levels threatening coastal areas. We should expect very large net immigration because of inhospitable environments in the global south.

Our planning systems both in terms of our overarching development plans and any proposed development within needs to withstand and accommodate our changing climate. Forward planning should also identify projects that will build resilience in the face of changing climate.

Our core principles of climate adaptation in Irish Planning are as follows:

- All plans need to be able to withstand a one in two-hundred-year weather event.
- No new development should displace water and all drainage systems should be designed to withstand a one in 25/50/100/200-year rainfall event.
- There should be a net gain of biodiversity in every development to build climate resilience and future adaptive capacity against climate change.
- Our building regulations should be updated to ensure that adequate ventilation and cooling measures are included to mitigate against the need for air-conditioning in warmer months, such as cross venting, night purging, deciduous shading Moreover heating from fossil-derived sources, which may be demanded if the Atlantic interconnector /gyre further fails, must be averted . AMOC has failed by 18% to date. 19
- Wetlands which were previously drained for agriculture, peat harvesting, and forestry should be restored. These can act as important biodiversity and water reserves in the face of our changing climate. Farming on re-wetted peat (paludiculture) should be explored as part of the Just Transition economy in these regions.
- An all-island approach is necessary to land use planning and river basin management plans, to stop cross border pollution and deliver a common approach to the climate and biodiversity crisis.

### Policy points

#### New Development build

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.epa.ie/news-releases/news-releases-2023/epa-climate-change-lecture-series--ocean-circulation-tipping-points-and-the-public-climate-debate-.php>

- New developments need to ensure there is no displacement of water in the development using impermeable paving systems. Calculations should be carried out for large developments and works in sensitive areas or with historic flood risks.
  
- Smaller developments where no study is carried out need to limit the quantity of impermeable surfaces and incorporate rainwater harvesting systems and/or green roof construction.
  
- Inclusion of a rainwater harvesting system in all developments. This gives greater capacity for water storage on site as well as providing the development with a reserve of water for periods of drought. Nature based primary technology employing gravity systems rather than pumping is preferred.
  
- Solar shading whilst not traditionally required in Ireland may now be necessary in warmer months. Developments must be designed to include passive means of temperature reductions through shading or natural ventilation and limit the need for air-conditioning systems in warmer months. Overheating calculations and evidence of mitigation should be a requirement of all building types, especially where passive solar devices are employed for the winter season.
  
- Semi-mature tree planting should be a requirement for all new developments. Trees can provide natural water absorption and habitats for many animals, birds and insects and provide deciduous shading, avoiding overheating as above. Trees also provide shading through summer months both to the external street or park and internal to a building, as mentioned: up to 10 degrees centigrade of free cooling is possible outdoors.
  
- Each local authority should progress a programme of urban tree planting to reduce the mean temperature of streets and footpaths and provide additional water absorption. This has the added benefit of improving the streetscape, calming traffic and creating a more pleasant environment for walking.
  
- With climate change affecting the global south on a much greater scale than Ireland we must prepare for an increase in mass immigration in the coming decades. This will mean an increased pressure on our population centres. The housing needs identified in the county development plans should reflect this.
  
- Housing, schools and centres of employment and town centres should all be accessible with alternative options to car use.

## Flood Events

Development plans must acknowledge the risk to homes and businesses of flood events and rising sea levels. Building on flood-zones should not occur; while such practice is currently discouraged, this is not reflected in reality. The need for proper, long-term housing solutions cannot be addressed by construction in areas prone to flooding. The



Green Party would like to see an increase in the flood zone to protect against future shocks.

Urban areas will need more flood defences as climate change worsens. These should balance the ecological needs of complex waterways and the needs of local economies and places of heritage importance. This requires creative design and engineering. Wonderful habitats can be created, in synergy with flood defence. Flood defence projects should also be seen as an opportunity to enhance our urban and rural landscape socially, economically, and environmentally, for example in the reduction in Ireland's carbon footprint and restoration of biodiversity.

- No development should occur within 1m height of an existing flood risk zone and this zone should be mapped out on all our development plans. (See OPW and other flood analysis protocols) Site specific flood assessments in flood zone adjacent lands in the absence of this mapping. Where possible this land could be CPO'd by local authorities to provide biodiversity areas and amenity zones around our lakes, rivers, and seas, in synergy with civil engineering design of flood control measures.

- Due to the complexity of flood defence projects, and the need to integrate various services and concerns, interagency design work should be mandatory as a condition of funding and budgetary control.

- Projects should follow guidelines in the EU Floods Directive, the Aarhus Convention, and the Granada Convention, including the active involvement of interested parties.

- Early engagement with the insurance industry will ensure the long-term viability of these projects and will ensure that private and commercial buildings will be accepted for flood insurance under normal underwriting criteria.

- Flood defences must consider the aesthetic and social fabric of our towns. We must enhance as well as preserve our lived environments. This will require macro-thinking and interagency overview.

- Existing surface car parking can provide a big risk to localised flooding during high rainfall. These are typically designed in impermeable asphalt surfacing. Works by the local authority to insert a permeable surface to these locations should commence incorporating SUDS.

- Equally central reserves on roads could be converted into planted areas to enhance biodiversity in the area and provide additional water absorption/solar shading, including winning back medians as underway by Dublin City Council eg at Bridgefoot Street.

## 6 Respecting our natural heritage and restoring biodiversity

### Introduction

Ireland is known globally as a country with incredible biodiversity and natural heritage. However, there are multiple stressors that are having impacts on biodiversity, all over the world including in Ireland, such as over-exploitation; pollution of air, water and soil; spread of invasive alien species and habitat fragmentation and loss. Good planning policy can ensure that no further destruction of our natural habitats occurs and restore and establish new areas for our natural heritage to replenish.

### Policy Points

#### Planning and the Environment

- Planning near Special Areas of Conservation: The competent authorities engaged in making planning decisions today are required to ensure proper regard is made to all environment laws (Irish and European). However, this is often not the case due to lack of competence in the area of environmental law. Given both Climate and especially our Biodiversity crisis, it is becoming more important that this is addressed. Therefore, our planning processes must ensure full and transparent adherence to and application of the EU Habitats Directive 93/43 EEC and Environmental Impacts Assessment Directive 2011/92.
- We must reform our national planning process and procedures to ensure the Habitats directive (as transposed into Irish Law in Part XAB of the Planning and Development Acts, 2000-2021), is adhered to robustly. In essence, the competent planning authority must “take appropriate steps to avoid, in the special areas of conservation, the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species” (Art.6.2 and s.177S(1) of the 2000-2021 Act), and can agree to a plan or project “only after having ascertained that it will not adversely affect the integrity of the site concerned.” (Art. 6.3 and s.177V (3) 2000-2021 Act).
  - Moreover, as proper practice the competent authority must encompass a full and transparent Environmental Impact Assessment Report (as required by the EU Habitats Directive) in relation to all projects which are likely to have significant effects on the environment. To do this we need to examine parts of the current criteria that undermines the application of proper environmental assessment. For example:
    - We need to recognise the integrity of an area of land for EIA purposes, at the moment of zoning, notwithstanding any subsequent division of the area for discreet developments.
    - We must move from our current EIA threshold of 10 hectares or 500 units for housing developments (as per Planning and Development Regulations, 2001

Schedule 5 Part 2 (10)(b) to 2 hectares or 100 units, or where there may be an impact on environment and biodiversity.

This requires investment in education and expertise.

- Planning and independence of experts: The consultants who draft environmental reports (and all other consultation reports that are part of the planning application), to be drawn from a pool of independent consultants formally selected by the Competent Authority. The cost and associated fees will be borne by the developer. This is to ensure transparency and impartiality in the planning process.
- Information shared during consultations between the applicant and decision-makers (e.g., Council planning department or An Bord Pleanála), for example minutes of meetings, should be made available to the public during the consideration of the application. This should relate to both formal meetings and “walk about meetings on site”.
- Where the applicant is applying for a project that may have a material impact on an SAC /SPA a public consultation must be carried out at the start of the process.
- The National Parks and Wildlife Service can potentially play a crucial role in environmental protection within planning applications, in ensuring adherence to the EU Habitats Directive; it should be made an independent body on a statutory basis and be adequately funded. An Environmental / Bio-diversity officer to be aligned to each (or cluster of smaller) County Councils to support and ensure correct implementation of required Habitat Directives in material aspects of planning from CDP to local development permissions. Reporting line for Environmental / Biodiversity officers to have a matrix line to NPWS.
- Prescribed bodies (such as the Heritage Council etc), when asked for input on planning applications which reach certain assessment-requirement thresholds, must give a considered reply as part of the submission process, or give adequate rationale for not submitting an opinion.
- Availability of Environmental Impact data from EIA and EIS has improved hugely. But local detailed data in EISs are often still held within organisations. Access to detailed data must continue to improve, to inform future SEAs and EIAs, to enhance knowledge and monitoring as well as to optimise resources by sharing information.
- Local authorities should review their green belt on a periodic basis where they are failing to achieve sustainable development, for example where they are causing development sprawl and commuting beyond their bounds, Reviews should seek to achieve the policies set out above to ensure no net loss in the quantity and quality of green belt land.
- Currently there are inadequate requirements for reporting, oversight, or enforcement of monitoring of the effects of any project subject to a Strategic

Environmental Assessment. This in turn creates fines from the EU and reputational loss. We must change this:

- Better and appropriate penalties for infringements of environmental regulations around planning.

- Require Local Authorities to produce environmental accounts for the consequences of individual policies within Development Plans and for any subsequent zoning decisions.

- Planning permission for afforestation beside wetland areas that are populated by wading birds needs to be reviewed and effectively ensure appropriate planning permission is first required. This is due to the impact afforestation causes to endangered wading birds, for example curlew.

#### Biodiversity Net Gain in construction and planning

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) describes how planning improves a site's biodiversity value so that once finished, by using habitat creation and/or mitigating harm the site will have a positive ecological value. It means ensuring that developments provide lasting benefits for wildlife and to people's wellbeing through the ability to experience nature where they live and work.

- It should be a requirement of planning permission that all significant development projects product a Biodiversity Net Gain of at least 10%

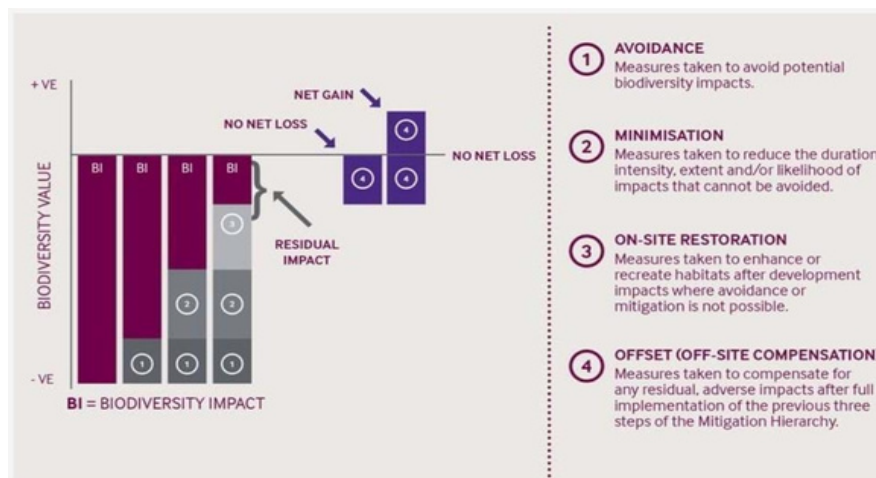
- A robust system for measuring biodiversity loss, gains and offsets should be developed to enable the implementation of Biodiversity Net Gain into planning regulations.

#### Background note:

A requirement for projects to deliver a biodiversity net gain entails conducting a biodiversity baseline study at the beginning of any project that measures the biodiversity value of a site – although it is notoriously difficult to put an economic or other mathematical value on ecosystem services and biodiversity value.

This is an example of a biodiversity accounting tool

<http://nepubprod.appspot.com/publication/6049804846366720>



Biodiversity Net Gain (UK example, refer to document in research folder-'Biodiversity in new housing developments).

This is a new concept that is already being applied in some areas and will become mandatory in England from November 2023. It is a mechanism for ensuring that the impacts of a development on biodiversity are overall positive. It requires a minimum of 10% net gain for biodiversity against a baseline assessment. This is effectively achieved by habitat replacement and or enhancement to the tune of 110% of that lost or damaged.

A qualified ecologist will undertake a desk study and a Preliminary Ecological Assessment (PEA), which will identify whether there is a need for specialist surveys. The data gathered will inform the mitigation hierarchy (to be developed), and to score features using a Net Gain Biodiversity Metric Calculator to identify (as per example used in the UK, Defra) the scale of impact (damage or loss) and inform the scale at which measures will be needed to remediate and to ensure a net gain in the final development.

The greenspace within a development can be used to provide some of the remediation and or gain. Design should pay close attention to features that can suitably be created in the greenspace and then use the metric calculator to determine how many "credits" these are worth.

This will then identify whether sufficient credits are achieved within the development or whether there will be a need to go outside the site to 'offset' the shortfall. As offset credits owned by a landowner are likely to be tradeable, it is probable that optimising the credits that can be gained from greenspace enhancement for biodiversity within the development redline will be highly cost effective.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) should be considered at the outset of planning a development as costs of implementation, including of any necessary offsetting, will need to be factored into budgets. Also, where offsets are required, the offset mechanism will need to be identified in order to demonstrate that net gain can be achieved. Meanwhile, the net gain measures will need to be maintained for at least 30 years following establishment and

ideally in perpetuity. There is a range of guidance on how to approach BNG. The Construction Industry Research and Information Association (CIRIA) (UK) published a good practice guide for development. However, expert guidance will be essential to correctly interpreting the BNG mechanism at a site level.

### National & Regional Greenways

The Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways risks adding further degradation to ecosystems.

- All stages of the planning of greenways must be preceded by an EIA and managed by a Biodiversity Officer. The materials used to construct greenways must be sympathetic to the local ecology. We must not end up with the equivalent of roads driven through areas of natural heritage, with amenity and active travel being given priority over the conservation and enhancement of biodiversity.

### Trees and Hedgerows

- Legal protection to all hedges and trees that appear on OSI maps pre 1920
- All healthy trees to be protected, as a presumption. Tree Protection Orders to include protection of hedgerows as part of an action strategy for de-carbonization, as well as to protect biodiversity. Hedgerows in particular are recognised as foraging lanes for wildlife.
- Creation of guidelines within planning documents relating to biodiversity. Development of a suite of biodiversity standards to accompany current planning design documents. The objective is to encourage developers to design in a more imaginative way to protect trees and hedgerows.
- Felling of any tree over 10 years old is forbidden without a felling licence, in line with regulations that currently apply to felling of trees outside of town boundaries. There must be stiff penalties for felling mature trees. Developers should be required to work around the trees and conserve them, especially when developers are 'preparing the site.'
- That planning permissions for developments shall include provisions for the planting of fruit bushes and trees on the site. The number and location of fruit bushes and trees shall be determined in consultation with the local authority and shall take into consideration the site layout, local soil and climate conditions, and the needs and preferences of the local community. The planting of fruit bushes and trees shall be carried out in accordance with good horticultural practice and shall be maintained for a period of not less than five years from the date of planting.

- The removal of trees and hedgerows, or other vegetation to be included as part of development for the purposes of planning. There should be a statutory duty/role of the Authority in relation to Enforcement. This will require the amendment of Part VIII of the Planning & Development Act 2000, as amended.

- The Planning Authority has a statutory function/role, and it does not extend into the enforcement of other legislation e.g., the removal of hedgerows during the closed season contrary to the Birds Directive is not a matter for the Planning Authority. Other agencies, e.g., IFI, NPWS, and the Council via Water Pollution legislation have powers. These agencies need to be afforded proper resourcing to enforce legislation.

- Currently, the planning process cannot deal with the ongoing maintenance and operation of certain activities, e.g., protection of trees, maintaining pollinator friendly areas, irrespective of whether objectives in this regard are inserted into the County Development Plan. Resourcing and proper processes that support communities for protection of trees etc. CDPs relating environment activities must be realistic to implement and protect and proper planning should be included as part of the CDP.

#### Bogs

- The use of our peat lands to be managed in a very diverse way that employs lots of people including high-end craft work and eco-tourism near rail heads, for example. Paludiculture<sup>20</sup>. We can't afford to treat bogs solely as a nature reserve and we need to be allowed to interact with bogs as part of our habitat.

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<sup>20</sup> <https://www.moorwissen.de/paludiculture.html>



## 7 Towards progressive carbon-conscious planning

### Carbon Assessment at Planning stage

“The greenest building is the one that already existing.”

Through better planning and development, we need to bring our consumption of natural resources down from requiring two and a half planets to below one planet.

Of our total carbon emissions, building accounts for circa 37% overall. Of that about 1/3 is from embodied carbon i.e., the carbon emissions related to the materials and activities associated with construction.

### Policy Points

- A whole life carbon methodical preliminary evaluation shall be submitted for all planning applications of proposed developments.
- Such evaluation shall be readily legible to Development Control Officers, indicating later more precise metrics to be applied and verified at Building Control Stage.
- Any proposed demolition shall be fully justified or presumptively refused.
- Any permitted demolition shall, by condition, require recycling / upcycling of salvageable elements.
- Current system of BCAR & self-certification shall be replaced with a system of verifiable local authority building control, iteratively interlinked with Planning.
- Development levies shall apply to all permitted projects, if any, that do not contribute significantly to our carbon reduction goals.
- Rapid upskilling at trade and professional levels shall be rolled out, at second & third levels engaging industry in the carbon reduction process e.g. know-how in the details of sustainable timber building.
- An Irish Sustainable Building Research Institution shall be rolled out incorporating or synergising with excellent existing resources such as IGBC, correlating the industry with public purpose.
- Existing metrics shall be applied to life-cycle analysis of Carbon in building / development eg <https://www.igbc.ie/lca>



– Carbon Tax provisions shall be widened to include building materials, taxing on a graduated scale from zero up to a sustainability threshold to maximum for the worst offenders like Ordinary Portland Cement and newly smelted aluminium.

### Height Issues in relation to Sustainable Planning and Carbon

Above six storeys, buildings emit more Carbon per square metre. Reaching higher than six storeys is a less than optimal solution to energy use and carbon emissions, with rates per square metre nearly doubling by the time you get to 20 storeys.

Professor Philip Steadman, of University College London- Bartlett, has advised Dublin City Council on building height/ energy-use and CO2 emissions based on his extensive research. Building more densely up to six storeys decreases the rate per square metre of energy use and CO2 emissions. This occurs due to inherent efficiency in land use, infrastructure, substructure (foundations), shared building services. Psychological and well-being factors are also optimised, including daylight/ overshadowing, wind regime and social encounter, critical mass for shared retail and facilities, including transport, and optimisation of the green-blue grid.

The 'ground as datum' is an important consideration in human liveability terms. Jan Gehl and others have researched the issues of, for example, loss of contact/security with children playing in defensible green zones, as height increases above 6 storeys.

Building height shall be decided and permitted depending on ambient context, the appropriate density to that context in UPH (units per hectare) terms. There shall be a preference for 'Low Rise Medium Density' (as described by the RIAI) designs in existing neighbourhoods and building heights up to 6 storeys where appropriate, and acceptance that in some circumstances heights above six storeys are acceptable."

## 8 Costings:

### Staffing of our planning system

The policy proposals outlined above would involve a major expansion in the numbers employed in the planning system locally and nationally. These additional staff would be needed to improve the quality of plan making and public engagement, to bring specialist expertise (e.g. ecologists, heritage officers) to bear in development control, to speed up decision making and to improve enforcement, among other things.

Currently Local Authorities employ 1,600 planning staff. An Bord Pleanála employs approximately 300 people. There are other small staff compliments across the Office of the Planning Regulator, the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority and the Regional Assemblies. The direct salary and overhead cost of the planning service is likely to be in the region of €150m. <sup>21</sup>

In 2022 the Local Government Management Agency estimated that there was a shortfall in planning staff of 541 across the Local Authorities. The annual cost of employing this number of additional staff is estimated at €40 million.<sup>22</sup> The Green Party proposals would require that the current shortfall is addressed as a baseline. However, our proposals, particularly in the area of public participation, would involve a further expansion of employment in the planning service. While a precise figure is impossible to establish, we consider that an overall increase in cost of €50m is to be expected.

### Non-Staff Costs

Beyond the need for additional staff, we don't believe that any other changes will be material. There may in fact be scope for a reduction in some costs (for example An Bord Pleanála legal fees<sup>23</sup>) because of greater public engagement and better decision making at earlier stages in the process.

<sup>21</sup> Based on 2,000 staff at an average all in cost of €75,000. See note below.

<sup>22</sup> <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2023-05-11/216/>

<sup>23</sup> Current of the order of €10m per annum.  
[https://www.oireachtas.ie/ga/debates/debate/joint\\_committee\\_on\\_housing\\_local\\_government\\_and\\_heritage/2023-07-06/2/](https://www.oireachtas.ie/ga/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_housing_local_government_and_heritage/2023-07-06/2/)