



TOWARDS A NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK

A Roadmap for the delivery of the National Planning Framework 2016

DECEMBER 2015



Comhshaol, Pobal agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Community and Local Government

December 2015



Northern & Western
Regional Assembly



Tionól Réigiúnach an Deiscirt
Southern Regional Assembly



Tionól Reigiúnach Oirthir agus Lár-Tíre
Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly

Key: Ireland's 3 Regions and 8 Strategic Planning Areas
as per the Local Government Act 1991 (Regional Assemblies) (Establishment) Order 2014



**A Road Map for the delivery of
the National Planning Framework 2016**

DRAFT DECEMBER 2015

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SECTION 1: Introduction and Context

1.1 Purpose of this 'Road Map':

The purpose of this document is to:

- Inform all interested parties that a new national planning framework is being prepared for Ireland;
- to set out its scope and content; and
- to assist in identifying key stakeholders and interests to be kept informed of progress (with reference to communication and consultation strategies to be developed).

The new framework document will be the successor to the National Spatial Strategy 2002 (NSS) and will be known as the National Planning Framework (NPF).

The National Planning Framework will be the long-term, 20 year strategy for the spatial development of Ireland that will promote a better quality of life for all, with sustainable economic growth and an environment of the highest quality as key underlying principles. The NPF will influence regional strategies and county development plans as it will be the central planning policy document for the Country and through this it will provide a clear vision to guide future development and investment decisions.

1.2 The National Planning Framework & Government Priorities:

In publishing its '*Planning Policy Statement*' in January 2015, the Government has reaffirmed its "*strong belief in the value of a forward-looking, visionary and dynamic planning process because it will ensure that the right development takes place in the right locations and at the right time and in providing the social, economic and physical infrastructure necessary to meet the needs of our people in a way that protects the many qualities of our natural and built environment*".

The Planning Policy Statement confirms that a new National Planning Framework will be developed to provide the context for national planning for the next decade and beyond. This will involve reshaping and focusing our national

spatial strategy to meet today's and tomorrow's challenges.

In particular, the Planning Policy Statement sets out the following regarding the NPF:

The National Planning Framework will:

- *Identify national priorities with regard to future employment growth and development;*
- *Distinguish between the role of the larger cities in acting as our major international players and our regional towns in extending the influence of the cities; and*
- *Establish a clear policy framework within which there will be more dynamic participation by rural areas in overall regional development by re-emphasising the contribution from rural based enterprise in food, tourism, natural resource and innovation sectors.*

This new framework will provide the strategic context for, amongst other matters:

- *Investment in critical national infrastructure by both the public and private sectors in key areas like housing, transport, energy, water services, communications and waste management;*
- *Planning at regional and local levels for Ireland's requirements in relation to housing, commercial, office and industrial accommodation;*
- *Preparation of new Regional Economic and Spatial Strategies by the three new Regional Assemblies and the associated enhancement of the economic development focus of local authorities as provided for under the Local Government Reform Act 2014; and*
- *Interactions between the development of Ireland's land mass and its neighbours in the EU, including our territorial waters through integrated territorial and marine spatial planning.*

Extracts from the DECLG Planning Policy Statement, January 2015 (pp 5-6)

The National Planning Framework will co-ordinate the strategic planning of urban and rural areas in a regional development context to secure overall proper planning and sustainable development as well as co-ordination of regional spatial and economic strategies and city and county development plans.

The NPF will address the following matters:

- (i) Identification of nationally strategic development requirements for the growth of and investment in cities, towns and rural areas in terms of employment, future population change, and associated housing and commercial development;
- (ii) Identification of national infrastructure priorities to address the strategic requirements above, including transportation, water services, waste management, communications and energy networks and the provision of educational, healthcare, retail, cultural and recreational facilities;
- (iii) Promotion of sustainable settlement and transportation strategies in urban and rural areas including measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and address the necessity of adaptation to climate change;
- (iv) Conservation of the environment and its amenities, including the landscape and archaeological, architectural and natural heritage; and
- (v) Promotion of coordination of development between the terrestrial and marine sectors taking account of the provisions of the EU Marine Strategy Framework Directive and a future Marine Spatial Plan.

The NPF will also give effect to the EU European Spatial Development Perspective towards balanced and sustainable development of the territory of the European Union¹.

The NPF will also take full account of the provisions of the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland published by the Northern Ireland Assembly.

1.3 Where we were – National Spatial Strategy 2002:

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS), 2002, was the first national level spatial and territorial planning strategy in Ireland. It introduced the concept of spatial development into public policy (with regard to the location of people, their work and other activities and how different places relate to each other).

The aim of the NSS was to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development between regions. Its focus was on the relationship between people and the places where they live and work. The Strategy sought ways to unlock potential for progress, growth and development in a more balanced way across Ireland, supported by more effective planning.

The NSS identified 9 national level gateways, comprising the 7 biggest cities in the Country together with 2 'linked' gateways of 2 or more strong towns which have the role of promoting social and economic development in their region. The NSS encouraged the development of these gateway cities as engines of growth. The NSS also identified nine strategically located, medium sized hubs to support and be supported by the gateways and to link out to wider rural areas.

Many other county and larger sized towns were recognised as critical elements in the structure for realising balanced regional development, acting as a focus for strengthening their own local areas. The NSS also identified an important need to support the role of rural towns and villages at the local level, as a focus for investment, economic activity and housing development, which would at the same time support the vitality of wider rural areas.

Since 2002, the NSS has acted as the strategic context for spatial planning in Ireland by regional authorities in their regional planning guidance roles, for planning authorities in their statutory planning functions as well as influencing National Development Plan investment in transport, housing, water services and communications infrastructure.

¹ As adopted by the meeting of Ministers responsible for Regional/Spatial Planning of the European Union at Potsdam, 10 and 11 May 1999

1.4 *Where we are at now:*

Initial preparatory work on a successor strategy to the NSS has been underway since the end of 2013, when a technical expert group, comprised of three independent experts with extensive experience of spatial planning and economic and social development in Ireland, was established to scope for a successor to the NSS.

The primary focus of the Expert Scoping Group was to draw on the lessons from the first NSS and, more importantly, to consider how the successor to the NSS might respond to the challenges now facing Ireland in radically different circumstances to those in which the first NSS was drawn up.

The report recommended that a successor to the NSS, as a statement of the Government's objectives for Ireland's spatial development, should focus on spatial development issues and choices which are genuinely national in scope and scale, and that it should provide the direction and stability to guide key investment and policy decisions.

The Report of the Expert Scoping Group will be published as part of the initial scoping stage consultation on the preparation of the NPF.

Current context:

As an Island nation that is part of the wider European Union and with strong transatlantic and global trading links, a new National Planning Framework must take account of Ireland's wider spatial context, in addition to key transport and infrastructural linkages between Ireland and the UK, our nearest neighbour.

Significant environmental legislative and policy changes have also come into being since the initial NSS was published, including:

- Strategic Environmental Assessment
- Appropriate Assessment
- Flood Risk Assessment
- Climate Change Adaptation
- National Landscape Strategy
- Maritime Spatial Planning

These environmental requirements and considerations will be integrated as part of the NPF preparation process.

Other important changes since the NSS was prepared include the establishment of infrastructure delivery agencies such as Irish Water (IW), the National Transport Authority (NTA) and Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII), whose strategic investment responsibilities in relation to water services, roads and public transport, require a national strategic planning context to be provided through the NPF.

In addition, new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs) are to be prepared by the three new Regional Assemblies, established on 1st January 2015 under the Local Government Reform Act 2014. The new regional Assemblies can draw on advice from their constituent authorities to set out how smaller scale settlements and rural areas can realise their potential.

The 'framework' approach of the NPF will allow next tier plans and strategies (including the forthcoming Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies) to be developed in tandem with and feed back into the NPF process in a complementary and iterative process.

A further significant change since 2002, taking on board the recommendations of the Mahon Tribunal is that the NPF will be placed on a legislative footing under a forthcoming planning and development bill. This will mean that the final NPF will be subject to Oireachtas approval. In the meantime, work on the strategy can proceed.

1.5 *Where we are going - National Planning Framework (post 2016)*

The National Planning Framework will be long-term, 20 year development strategy for the place Ireland will become in terms of economic activity, social progress and environmental quality, through co-ordinated policy, investment and action at national, regional and local levels.

The National Planning Framework will be a statement of the Government's objectives for Ireland's spatial development and it will form the top tier of Ireland's planning policy hierarchy. It will build on the strengths of the former strategy while at the same time addressing newer challenges in relation to:

- Economic circumstances and an integrated, evidence approach to economic research and demographic forecasting (see Section 3 below);
- our new Regional Assembly structure the need to optimise the potential of the regional assembly areas (see Section 4 & 5 below); and
- the need for greater emphasis on environmental matters such as climate change and sustainability, as informed by European Union legislative requirements that have been introduced since the NSS was published (see Section 6 below).

In terms of sectoral economic strategies that will inform the NPF, the Government's Medium Term Economic Strategy 2014-2020 '*A Strategy for Growth*' sets out the actions being taken to consolidate Ireland's economic recovery and drive wider employment growth and through improved economic conditions and social progress.

This is further recognised in the Government's *Enterprise 2025* Strategy, which identifies *Optimising regional potential – placemaking* as a key objective: "*We will develop attractive places to invest, live and work throughout Ireland and to optimise the potential of our regions.*"

Integrated Bottom-up and Top-down approach:

While the NPF will adopt a strategic approach to spatial development, it will also be informed by the *Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies* (RSEs), which are to be prepared in tandem with the NPF process, by the 3 new Regional Assemblies, comprising the Northern and Western Region, the Eastern and Midland Region and the Southern Region.

Each Regional Assembly will develop its own RSEs. Recognising the large geographical area of the three assemblies, their overall strategy will be developed taking into account inputs from smaller sub-regional *Strategic Planning Areas* (SPAs) that relate to key economic catchments within each assembly area (refer to Section 4, Figure 2 below for details of the SPAs).

Together with the preparation of the three RSEs and the generally broadened role of local government in the economic and community development spheres, the National Planning Framework is part of a three-tiered approach to strengthen the capacity of the Irish planning process to create opportunities for the optimal development of Ireland. The three tiers (or levels) comprise the following:

1. National Planning Framework – higher level strategic plan led by the DECLG and informed by the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy process;
2. Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies – Prepared by the three Regional Assemblies, taking into account the sub-regional planning areas;
3. Local Authorities will implement local policies and actions under their statutory City and County Development Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans.

Figure 1 below, illustrates the future planning policy hierarchy.

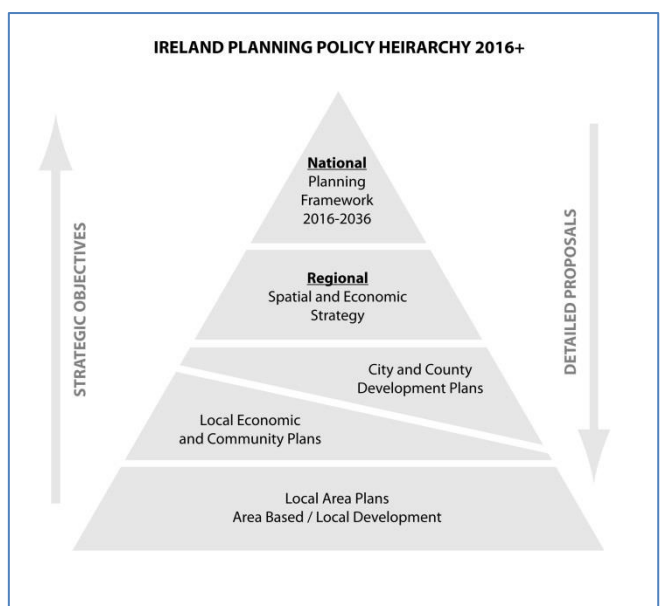


Figure 1: Ireland's Planning Policy Hierarchy post 2016

1.6 What the National Planning Framework will Address

The National Planning Framework will:

1. Represent Government policy on how nationally significant planning matters should be implemented by the relevant Government Departments and Agencies;
2. Be the spatial expression of the Government's wider economic and reform agenda as it applies to the key geographical areas of economic activity and their urban and rural components that drive the economic and social progress of our Country;
3. Identify national development and investment priorities as well as an action programme for progress;
4. Guide and co-ordinate the broadened functions of Regional Assemblies including RSESs and local government in local economic and community planning;
5. Address climate change issues in the context of physical planning at a national scale, including greenhouse gas emissions, adaptation and resilience;
6. Consider environmental conservation and amenity, including the landscape and archaeological, architectural and natural heritage;
7. Include a focus on delivery, implementation and monitoring;
8. Be developed taking account of the work supporting the development of the proposed Marine Spatial Plan;
9. Establish a framework for continued and enhanced co-operation on cross-border spatial planning and economic development; and
10. Together with the National Planning Policy Statement and other relevant policies, help the planning process deliver the Government's overall vision and outcomes for Ireland.

1.7 Implementation

Potential Content & Themes of the NPF:

The National Planning Framework (NPF) will be a succinct document that will adopt a more strategic approach than its predecessor, the National Spatial Strategy 2002. This will recognise the NPF's high level role as the national spatial planning framework, in conjunction with the more detailed Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) to be prepared by the 3 Regional Assemblies.

An outline of potential themes for the National Planning Framework is suggested below (and in more detail in Appendix II).

- 1: Maximising the potential of our cities, towns and rural areas to be successful, sustainable places;
- 2: Identifying infrastructural priorities;
- 3: Transitioning to a low carbon society;
- 4: Ensuring the resilience of our natural resources and cultural assets.

Challenges:

A number of important and strategic challenges are faced by Ireland from a planning perspective and the Government intends these will be addressed by the NPF. An indication of some of these challenges is outlined below.

A Two Speed Economy?

Ireland is firmly on the path to economic recovery. Strong growth in employment and economic output has been established in Dublin and other parts of the Country on the back of both inward investment and renewed regional and local competitiveness. Ensuring that competitiveness extends across the Country in order to tap local potentials is vital so that every part of the country can play its unique part in overall economic and social progress.

Suburban vs. Sustainable Growth

In recent times, Irish cities and towns have been growing more rapidly at their extremities rather than their centres resulting in increasing levels of vacancy and underutilisation of land within urban areas. In addition, rapid development of new suburban housing estates and urban generated housing within rural

commuter hinterlands contrasts with concentration of employment growth in and around the major urban centres meaning that frequently, where we live and where we work are being pushed further and further apart, not pulled closer, which is resulting in greater need for travel, higher energy costs and a reduction in overall quality of life.

Investing for the Future

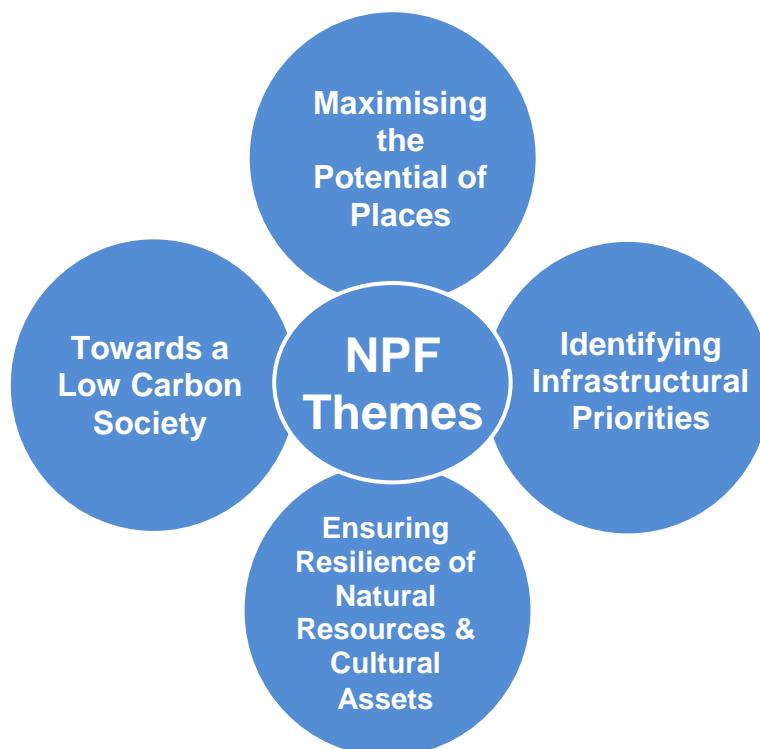
Ireland's physical infrastructure benefitted from major investment in the period from 1999 to 2009 with major transformations in transport, communications, water and other infrastructures. However, national and regional competitiveness requires continuous improvement in the stock of both physical and social infrastructure. The latter includes schools and the third level sector. At the same time, resources are limited so choices must be made in a way that co-ordinates investment to make better places, both urban and rural.

Addressing Climate Change

The planning process is recognised in EU and national policy terms as having a key role to play in the transition towards a low carbon society. A number of challenges exist including: the promotion of key cities and towns as exemplars of low carbon living through more sustainable mobility and energy efficiency; ensuring rural communities benefit from a well-planned approach to renewable energy development; and the potential for innovation and investment in remoter coastal and island communities in tapping the potential of the marine sector in line with the Government strategy "Harnessing our Ocean Wealth".

Enhancing our Environment

The quality of Ireland's environment and its inherent cultural value is a major part of both our identity as a people and the success of our urban and rural places. The Wild Atlantic Way is an excellent example of how our natural environment and landscape is a key asset to support rural economies into the future through tourism. Ireland's environment provides refuge for a uniquely diverse bio-diversity recognised and designated at EU level and which will represent a very important factor into the future to be incorporated into the NPF.



SECTION 2:

Stages of Preparation for the National Planning Framework

A cross-departmental team that will be responsible for the day to day preparation of the National Planning Framework will be established by the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Mr Alan Kelly TD and Minister of State with responsibility for Housing and Planning, Mr. Paudie Coffey TD.

It is intended that the National Planning Framework will be developed during 2016 and for subsequent adoption by Dáil Éireann, subject to the finalisation of legislation. This legislative provision will be set out in a legal mechanism to be brought forward as part of a planning bill.

In the meantime, preparation of the National Planning Framework can proceed and will take full account of relevant EU and national legislation requirements in relation to matters such as Strategic Environmental Assessment and other related EU Directives (as set out in more detail in Section 5 below).

Preparation of the National Planning Framework will follow three main stages as follows:

- (a) Start-Up,
- (b) Development and
- (c) Finalisation

Arrangements for public participation and stakeholder engagement will be put in place to build the Framework from the ground up while at the same time taking account of strategic realities at national level in relation to the public finances, the latest relevant information and datasets and environmental conditions.

(a) The Start-Up stage will run to the first Quarter (Q1) of 2016 and will involve the review and identification of information needed to underpin development of the Framework as well as commencement of any research/analysis required. It will conclude with the publication of an initial scoping stage public consultation paper as well as the commencement of EU Directive-required environmental assessments and a round of Regional Participation Events.

(b) The Development Stage will run from Q2 to Q3 2016 and will draw together key information and viewpoints from the public and interested groups and organisations as well as relevant public bodies and experts. All of this will feed into the identification and testing of options and the subsequent development of a preferred scenario as a recommended strategy, to be followed through in its finalisation.

(c) The Finalisation Stage will run from Q3 2016 to year end and possibly into Q1 2017. It will include consideration by Government of the recommended strategy followed by general publication of a draft National Planning Framework and supporting environmental assessments, followed by submission to Dáil Éireann and subsequent finalisation and publication of the National Planning Framework and for subsequent implementation by Government, the Regional Assemblies and Local Authorities.

An outline of potential tasks for consideration related to each stage in the preparation of the NPF is set out in **Appendix I** below.

SECTION 3:

Economic Research & Demographic Forecasting

A key input to the preparation of both the National Planning Framework and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies is the estimation of long-term economic development, demographic and development trends, recognising that the accuracy of projections falls off over the longer term.

There has been much research work carried out in recent years on economic modelling and demographic forecasting, including estimates on requirements for housing and property development generally.

This body of work includes research by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI). New infrastructure agencies like the National Transport Authority and Irish Water have also been carrying out statistical projections.

Therefore, one of the key functions of the preparation of the NPF is to draw together and co-ordinate these various estimates and projections to establish a set of parameters for the long term development of the Country, its regional assembly areas and key urban agglomerations as agreed between the key departments and infrastructure agencies.

As part of the wider delivery arrangements for the NPF, as set out in Section 5 below (see Figure 3), a co-ordination team will be set up to conduct this research, which will be chaired by the DECLG. It is anticipated that the first phase of this work will be completed by the end of Q1 2016.

This research will provide an evidence base to generate and test various scenarios to inform the generation of policies relating to population change and economic development.

Potential Stages of Demographic Economic Research & Forecasting Task:

1. Data Review

Draw together existing projections and modelling approaches including:

- Central Statistics Office demographic modelling;
- Department of Finance Medium Term Economic Strategy;

- ESRI economic and demographic modelling (HERMES and its planning successor COSMO);
- Relevant forecasting of Govt. Depts. and agencies including infrastructure providers (e.g. National Transport Authority, National Roads Authority, Dept. of Education, Dept. of Health, Irish Water); and
- Identification of information gaps, key trends and differences.

2. Scenario Development (also feeding into the Strategic Environmental Assessment process)

Develop a set of robust but plausible national and regional development scenarios, including:

- Continuation of current economic development, demographic and development trends;
- Exploration of the implications of the above bearing in mind physical, environmental, social, economic, infrastructural and planning considerations;
- Development of alternative scenarios taking account of longer-term national and regional economic development potentials; and
- Selection of a preferred scenario.

3. Forecasting (2016 – 2022 – 2028)

Working within the preferred scenario above, develop forecasts for economic output, employment, demography and key property development requirements for the 12 year period following 2016 in respect of:

- Ireland;
- The three regional assemblies including their constituent Strategic Planning Areas; and
- Metropolitan areas.

4. Longer Term Estimates (2028 – 2034 – 2040)

Working within the preferred scenario above and taking into account longer term considerations:

- Identify longer term trends.

5. Write-up of results and final report

SECTION 4:

Regional Aspect

The Action Programme for Effective Local Government *'Putting People First'* (2012) set out a vision for regional government that would provide greater coherence between national policy making and local action, particularly in relation to spatial and economic development planning. It also provided for consolidation of regional structures, from 8 regional authorities and 2 regional assemblies, into 3 new regional assemblies. This vision was set into law by the Local Government Reform Act 2014.

The 3 new regional assemblies for **the Northern and Western Region, the Eastern and Midland Region** and **the Southern Region**² incorporate the functions of both the former regional authorities and assemblies, with significant enhancement of some powers, particularly in relation to spatial planning and economic development, as follows. The regional assemblies will have:

- A stronger role in economic development through the adoption of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, which will replace the regional planning guidelines (RPGs), with participation by relevant agencies, including the national economic development agencies, in the formulation of, and adherence to, the regional strategies.
- A new role in linking local economic development with regional and national planning through oversight of Local Economic and Community Plans and involvement in regional economic fora in conjunction with relevant interests.
- An important role in promoting and supporting balanced regional development through management of EU structural funds programmes (ERDF) and securing EU funding for specific regional projects, in association with the relevant local authorities, and also linkage between these functions and spatial and economic strategy.

- Preparation of reports on aspects of local authority performance at the request of the National Oversight and Audit Commission.

Each one of the three Regional Assemblies will prepare their own Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), in tandem with the preparation of the National Planning Framework. Each RSES will be developed taking into account the sub-regional 'Strategic Planning Areas' indicated in Figure 2 below.

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies will provide a long-term regional level strategic planning and economic framework in support of the implementation of the National Planning Framework.

The RSESs will be specifically aligned with the economic policy objectives of the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation and will take account of role of the various agencies in economic development and enterprise support, including the Local Enterprise Offices within local authorities, as well as objectives of the Regional Action Plans for Jobs and the emerging Local, Economic, Community Plans.

Each of the three new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies will also be required to specifically set policies and objectives for their internal Strategic Planning Areas – See Figure 2 below.

Equally, as well as a top-down approach, the RSESs will embrace a bottom-up approach by taking account of the proposed spatial plans (i.e. Development Plans) and economic plans (i.e. Local, Economic, Community Plans) of local authorities to ensure issues raised locally feed into regional and national policy.

Concurrent with the preparation of the National Planning Framework, the new Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies will replace the current set of Regional Planning Guidelines which expire in 2016 and will have a 12 year lifespan from 2016 to 2028.

² The Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly, the Northern and Western Regional Assembly and the Southern Regional Assembly were established under the Local Government Act 1991 (Regional Assemblies) (Establishment) Order 2014. The Strategic Planning Areas of these regional assemblies (as indicated in Figure 2 below) will play an important role representing a consultative tier for local level input,

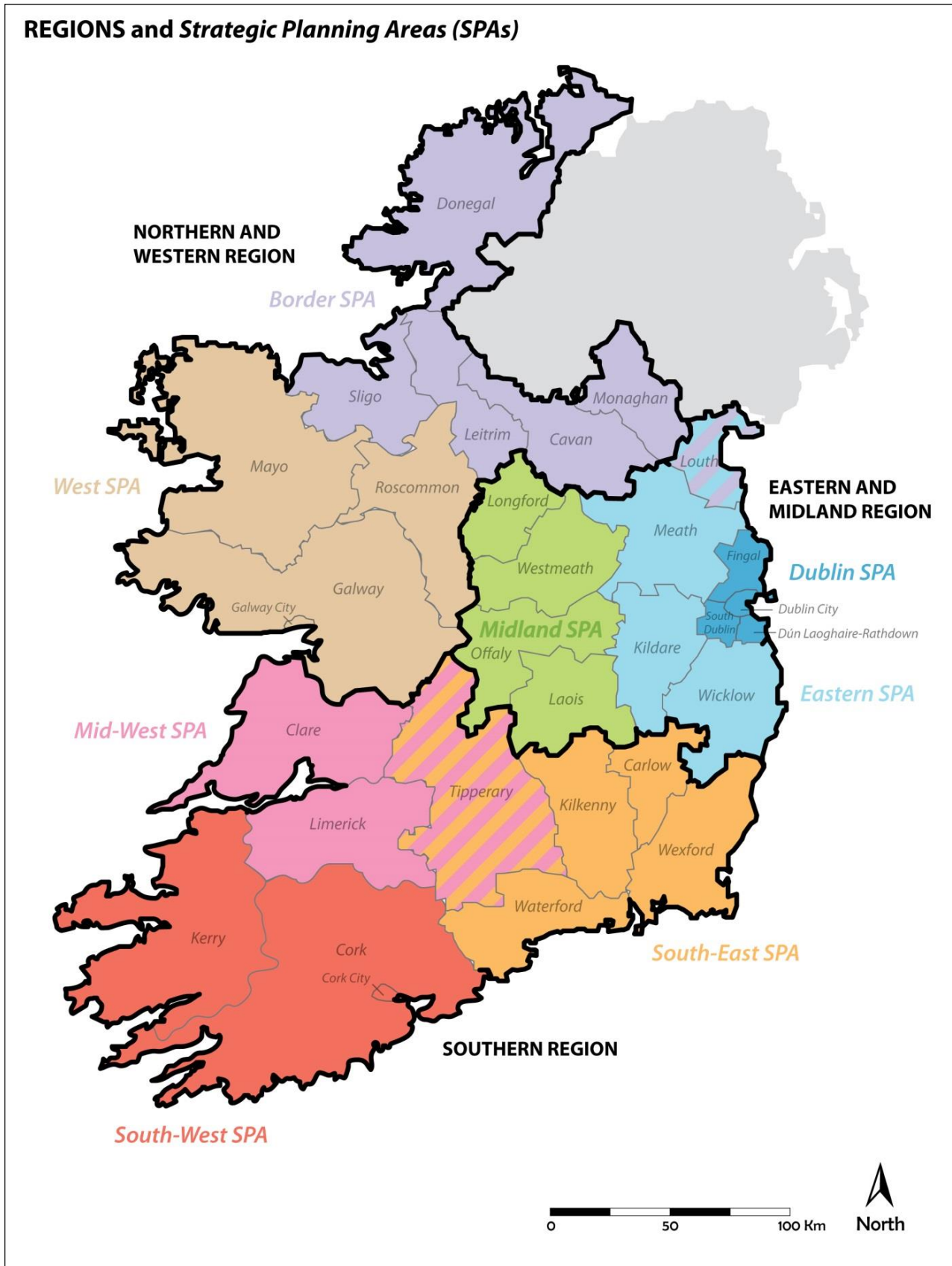


Figure 2: Ireland's Regions and Strategic Planning Areas (as per the Local Government Act 1991 (Regional Assemblies) (Establishment) Order 2014)

SECTION 5:

Public and Stakeholder Participation

The Ministers consider that the National Planning Framework (NPF) should be a strategic and concise document informed by effective public participation and wider stakeholder consultation. The production of the NPF will be overseen by cross-departmental and inter-agency structures to ensure buy-in and ownership with regard to its implementation.

The purpose of both the National Planning Framework (NPF) and Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs) is to set long-term national and regional development frameworks within which government departments and agencies, the regional assemblies and local authorities, as well as wider private sector and community interests will work together to ensure proper planning and sustainable development and the optimal development of the country as a whole, nationally, regionally and locally.

Public Participation and Consultation

Effective public participation and institutional buy-in will be critical in developing a dynamic and visionary planning policy framework in tandem with the development of RSESs. The NPF must both take account of and inform the Government's wider efforts to maximise Ireland's economic recovery and on-going growth at national, regional and local level.

Accordingly, the NPF should be aimed at agreeing the high-level spatial planning policies that will help to maximise the potential of various economic activity areas around the Country, drawing upon and improving their strengths to foster further economic development - for instance, by further developing linkages between existing industrial sectors and third-level educational institutions in specific locations.

Formal public consultation will be undertaken over two stages. The initial scoping stage consultation will be at the end of Q1 2016.

Scoping stage submissions will be facilitated by the publication of background scoping material and will be invited to consider:-

- The overall approach to the NPF;
- The four suggested 'Theme' areas;
- Any other relevant matters that might be addressed.

The type of questions posed as a starting point at scoping stage might include:-

- Where do you consider are good examples of successful, sustainable rural and urban places in Ireland, where people actively wish to live, work, visit and invest?
- Why do you think these places are successful, what do you think is necessary to sustain successful places and what can be learned from their success to assist improving other urban and rural places in Ireland?
- Do you consider there to be a national or regional infrastructure investment priority that would have the potential to significantly change your region and/or Ireland as a whole, i.e. would be a 'gamechanger' above all else?
- How do you think Ireland can best accelerate the transition to a low carbon society i.e. reduce both harmful greenhouse gas emissions and reliance on imported energy?
- What do you consider to be the best ways to enhance and make responsible use Ireland's natural resources and cultural assets?

The second stage of public consultation will be when a draft has been approved by Government for publication, which will be at the end of Q3 2016 at the earliest, although this could extend to year end.

NPF Proposed Organisation Structures

A core objective of the preparation of the NPF will be to ensure that as well as the wider public, all relevant stakeholders are consulted and encouraged to contribute to the process of the framework's preparation. Consequently, the consultative process must be structured to engage effectively in order to ensure meaningful, informative and timely contributions to its preparation.

To ensure an effective approach to the preparation of the NPF, the following arrangements are proposed:

- (1) A high-level level **Cross-Departmental Steering Group** will be established to lead and oversee the development of the NPF. This group will be made up of high-level representatives of government departments whose policies and functions are relevant to the Framework. The group will also contain one representative of each of the three regional assemblies, one representative on behalf of the local authority chief executives and one representative on behalf of the local authority members. To ensure effective communication around the new Framework, the steering group will develop a communications framework to maximise engagement in the Framework's preparation across all relevant media, including social media. It is proposed that this group will report to the **Cabinet Sub-Committee on Economic Infrastructure**.
- (2) An **Advisory Group** will be established to ensure the participation of relevant non-governmental organisations, professional bodies and technical experts in the process. It will be the effective link to facilitate the participation of the economic, environment and social pillars while maintaining flexibility to incorporate other sectors as appropriate within these consultative forums e.g. the third level education or knowledge sector etc.
- (3) The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government will establish a dedicated **NPF Sub-Unit** within the Forward Planning Section, staffed with the relevant technical and administrative personnel to service the proposed organisational structures above and to support the overall process

of preparing the new Framework, including compliance with legal requirements under the EU Strategic Environmental Assessment and Habitats Directives.

As it is intended that the NPF will be built from the ground up, together with the strategic oversight of its development at national level, it is necessary to construct the consultative arrangements to ensure delivery of a coherent Framework with broad ownership and buy-in from the local and regional level.

Accordingly, the broad structure for participation arrangements provides for an extensive participatory process designed to embrace local authorities including the elected members, regional assemblies, relevant non-governmental organisations and professional bodies, under the auspices of all government departments.

A key participation element of the NPF at Regional and Local level, in conjunction with the foregoing, will be:

- **Consultative Forums for the Regional Assemblies** (managed by the three new Regional Assemblies established from January 2015 having regard to their role in the development of RSES's in tandem with the NPF), which will draw the perspectives and experience of regional and local level bodies which could include public authorities, business representatives including from the agriculture and tourism perspectives, the Commission for Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) etc. into the preparation process. These may also comprise Strategic Planning Area consultative groups at a sub-regional level. While details of these forums will be elaborated upon by the new Regional Assemblies, the output envisaged will be high-level regional position papers informing the preparation of the NPF and the parallel RSES's.
- Four **Technical Working Groups** will input to the DECLG/ NPF Sub-Unit as required, to be based on the four emerging NPF Theme areas, and will comprise the **Potential of Places Working Group** (including representatives from the CSO and

ESRI), the **Infrastructural Priorities** Working Group (including representatives of infrastructure providers such as Irish Water, NTA, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (formerly NRA & RPA), EirGrid, Dept. of Transport, Dept. of Education etc.), the **Low Carbon Society** Working Group (including representatives of SEAI, DECNR etc.) and the **Natural Resources & Cultural Assets** Working Group (including representatives of environmental and heritage bodies such as the EPA, DAHG, and NPWS etc.)

Figure 3 below outlines the main elements of the overall organisational structure for development of the NPF.

Alongside the formal structures above, arrangements will be put in place for public to consultation through interactive web based arrangements including the establishment of a dedicated website
www.nationalplanningframework.ie

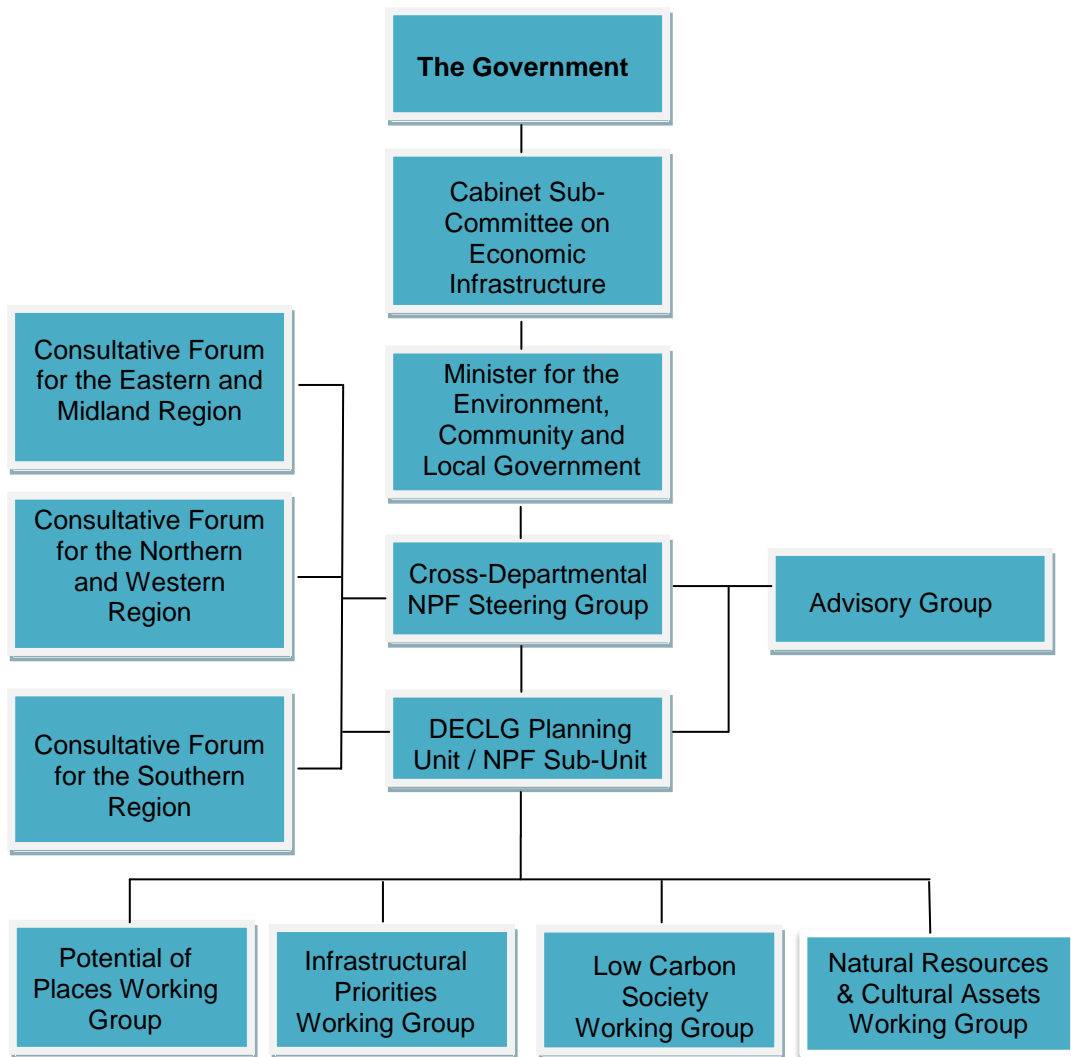


Figure 3: National Planning Framework – Proposed Organisational Structure

SECTION 6:

Environmental Considerations

As part of the preparation of the National Planning Framework, the Government is required to carry out a number of environmental assessments of the proposed Framework. These include a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), an Appropriate Assessment (AA) and also a Strategic Flood Risk Appraisal (SFRA).

These assessments are undertaken so the impact of the proposed National Planning Framework objectives on the environment can be evaluated and used to inform the direction of the National Planning Framework, to ensure that the built environment responds to the sensitivities and requirements of the wider natural environment. The assessments will commence jointly with the preparation of the National Planning Framework and will be published with the Draft National Planning Framework document.

Each of the three environmental assessments will interact and inform each other, and the policies of the National Planning Framework.

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA)

Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of national plans and programmes is required under the EU SEA Directive 2001/42/EC. The SEA Directive was transposed into Irish law under the 'Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004-2011'.

SEA is a statutory process, involving the systematic evaluation of the likely significant environmental effects of implementing the new plan of programme (such as the National Planning Framework) before a decision has been made to adopt it. SEA will be carried out as a parallel process to the preparation of the draft National Planning Framework.

The objective of the SEA process is to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to promote sustainable development by contributing to the integration of environmental considerations into the preparation of specified plans and programmes.

SEA is concerned with the likely significant effects of the National Planning Framework on the following:

- Population, Soil, Biodiversity, Water, Human Health
- Climatic Factors, Flora/Fauna, Material Assets
- Cultural Heritage including Architecture, Archaeology, Landscape
- and the interrelationship between each of these factors

The steps involved in the SEA process include:

- Screening (determining whether or not SEA is required)
- Scoping (determining the range of environmental issues to be covered by the SEA)
- The preparation of an Environmental Report
- The carrying out of consultations
- The integration of environmental considerations into the Plan or Programme
- The publication of information on the decision (SEA Statement).

When the Draft National Planning Framework is published, an Environmental Report on the SEA, as well as a Natura Impact Statement for Appropriate Assessment and a Strategic (high level) Flood Risk Appraisal for Flood Risk Assessment will also be published. The Environmental Report will set out the details of the environmental baseline, trends and environmental objectives. It will show how the National Planning Framework has been assessed against the environmental objectives during its preparation and seek opinions from interested parties. Where conflict occurs, it will show what alternatives were considered and demonstrate informed decision-making on these issues.

The Government will invite submissions on the Environmental Report (as well as the Draft National Planning Framework) at a later stage. The public may have an opinion on environmental issues and objectives at the NPF scoping consultation stage and will be invited to make submissions at that stage.

Appropriate Assessment (AA)

The National Planning Framework will also be subject to Appropriate Assessment, as required by the European Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC). The Directive aims to create a network of protected wildlife sites in Europe through the designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) and Special Protection Areas (SPAs) collectively known as Natura 2000 sites.

SACs relate to habitats and wildlife while SPAs are largely concerned with protecting bird species. The areas chosen as SAC in Ireland cover an area of approximately 13,500 square kilometres. Roughly 53% of the area of these SACs is land, with the remainder being marine habitats or large lakes.

Ireland's SPA network encompasses over 5,700 square kilometres of marine and terrestrial habitats. A number of areas enjoy protection under both designations due to their qualifying features.

Full details of the SACs and SPAs in Ireland can be obtained from the National Parks and Wildlife Service (www.npws.ie), where Qualifying/ Feature Interests and Site Specific Conservation Objectives can be sourced.

It is a requirement of the Habitats Directive to carry out an Appropriate Assessment (which may require the production of a Natura Impact Report) on any plan or project that is likely to have a significant effect on the conservation status of a protected site. Appropriate Assessment is a focused and detailed impact assessment of the implications of the Plan, alone and in combination with other plans and projects, on the integrity of Natura 2000 sites in view of the conservation objectives of the sites.

While the AA process is a separate process to the SEA, it runs in parallel with the SEA and the outcomes will feed into, and inform the SEA. It is also important to note that, while SEA is an advisory process which shall be taken into account during the preparation of the plan/ program, AA requires a conclusion that no adverse effects will arise from the plan in question.

If a Natura Impact Report is required, it will outline the impact of the National Planning

Framework on Natura 2000 sites and it will be made available with the publication of the Draft National Planning Framework, together with the Environmental Report for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) and the Strategic (high level) Flood Risk Appraisal. The Minister for Environment, Community and Local Government will be the Competent Authority in terms of appraising the Appropriate Assessment process.

Strategic Flood Risk Appraisal (SFRA)

The EU Floods Directive 2007/60/EC on the 'Assessment and Management of Flood Risks' requires member states to assess and manage flood risks. The Office of Public Works (OPW) is the lead agency in implementing this process. A National Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA) was completed to identify areas where significant flood risk exists. Areas of further assessment were identified throughout the country and were subject to more detailed analysis. These steps are being carried out as part of the National Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) Studies, which are on-going. The CFRAM Studies will contain objectives and actions and remedial measures to be taken for managing floods.

The Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government and the OPW prepared the 'The Planning System and Flood Risk Management – Guidelines for Planning Authorities' (published in 2009) in order to integrate the assessment and management of flood risk into the planning process. The Guidelines indicate that Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) should be integrated into the SEA process. Scoping of the SEA will normally include flood risk as an environmental criterion.

The preparation of the National Planning Framework will be informed by national planning policy such as the Guidelines on Flood Risk Management. A Strategic Flood Risk Appraisal will be published alongside the Draft National Planning Framework and the related Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment reports.



Appendix I

Potential Tasks for Consideration in the Preparation of the National Planning Framework

Phase 1: Enablement – Q4 2015

- (1) Outline of proposed work programme
- (2) Publication of initial roadmap document
- (3) Putting the Project Team in place
- (4) Establishment of High Level Group (HLG) and Consultative Panels
- (5) Liaison with 3 Regional Assemblies re co-ordination with their RSESs

Phase 2: Start-Up: Q1 2016

- (1) 1st meeting of Minister of State Chaired HLG to finalise scope and approach
- (2) Review of and identification of information needed
- (3) Co-ordination Meeting with 3 Regional Assemblies on RSESs
- (4) Commencement of any research/analysis required
- (5) Commencement of SEA / AA screening process
- (6) Publication of NPF Issues Paper/ EU Directive Notices
- (7) Round of Regional Participation Events

Phase 3: Development: Q2-Q3 2016

- (1) 2nd meeting of HLG to finalise approach to development phase
- (2) Data assembly/ synthesis/ environmental baselines
- (3) Engagement with LA Chief Executives: Preparation of Regional Position Papers
- (4) Option Development, Target setting, Assessment and Selection (by HLG)
- (5) Calibration of above with RSES development
- (6) Detailed drafting and SEA/ AA of options/ preferred option

Phase 4: Finalisation: Q3-Q4 2016

- (1) 3rd meeting of HLG to review draft NPF and cabinet clearance
- (2) General publication of Draft NPF and Environmental Reports (SEA/AA)
- (3) Submission to Dáil Éireann and debate
- (4) Consideration of responses and finalisation to reflect (incl. SEA/AA)
- (5) Publication of Final Document
- (6) Publication of following Regional Strategies by Regional Assemblies

Phase 5: Implementation – From Q1 2017 Onwards

- (1) Establishment of new NPF High Level Delivery Group and 1st Meeting
- (2) 1st Report to Statement of Government on Economic Recovery/Housing Planning
- (3) Quarterly reporting from Regional Assemblies into NPF reporting
- (4) Quarterly reporting by DECLG on NPF thereafter
- (5) Annual/Bi-Annual NPF Progress Report

Appendix II

Outline of a National Planning Framework - Chapters and Scope for Review

Potential Content & Themes for the National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework (NPF) will be a succinct document.

The NPF will adopt a more strategic approach than its predecessor, the National Spatial Strategy 2002, recognising its key role as the national spatial planning framework and that it will be followed by more detailed Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES) to be prepared by the 3 Regional Assemblies as set out under the Government's decision on local government reform.

Section 1: Overall Context and Framework

This section would define the purpose of the document, its strategic context in relation to matters including, inter alia, the Action Programme for jobs, Medium Term Economic Strategy and associated economic and infrastructure co-ordination issues.

The section would also place the framework in a strong outward looking context, acknowledging the linkages to Northern Ireland and its equivalent Regional Development Strategy 2035. The east-west context in terms of Ireland's links to the UK, as well wider EU and global contexts are also of importance.

Section 2: Maximising the potential of our cities, towns and rural areas to be successful, sustainable places

This section would set out high-level place-based objectives in relation to the main components of Ireland's geographical or spatial structure, i.e:

- maintaining and developing an internationally competitive economy at State, regional and local levels
- Cities as key drivers of regional performance including:

- The role of Dublin City, including its wider regional context;
- The roles of regional cities, including Cork, Limerick-Shannon and Galway and Waterford;
- Strategic regional towns; and
- Rural areas, including rural towns and villages.

This section would also set out high level policies in relation to the location of future development, co-ordination of development and the approach to identifying anticipated levels of future development requirements such as housing or property requirements for employment and/ or commercial development in places such as the cities to inform local planning and infrastructure delivery.

This section would depend on research and analysis of the spatial development issues facing each of the types of places mentioned above over the outlook of the Framework drawing from:

- Regional development indices prepared by regional bodies, including existing RPG Indicators;
- ESRI research on foot of the Construction Strategy;
- National Housing Development Survey/ Myplan GIS;
- EPA State of Environment Report; and
- Relevant policies of the Government and of Ministers.

Section 3: Identifying infrastructural priorities

Infrastructure is an essential prerequisite for overall national and regional development. Transport, water services, communications and energy systems are essential building blocks for place-making. Co-ordination in their provision and with wider economic and community development strategies are essential to positioning strategic locations as drivers of wider regional development.

This section would therefore describe the key elements of Ireland's internal and external transport, communications, water services and energy networks.

Reference would be made to sectoral investment strategies including, for example, the Strategic Framework for Investment in Land Transport, strategic investment plans of Irish Water, National Ports Policy, National Aviation Policy, Grid 25 and National Broadband Plan.

This section would also identify that access to social infrastructure and services, is a key determinant of the quality of life of people and as a consequence is also an important factor in attracting investment to an area.

This section would identify the main spatial planning implications of the relevant Government policies and to draw such policies into the overall spatial vision for the NPF and would also identify the implications for sectoral investment strategies from the objectives of the NPF in terms of both the connectedness of cities and strategic towns nationally and the accessibility of rural areas.

Section 4: Transitioning to a Low Carbon Society

The planning process is recognised in EU and national policy terms as having a key role to play in the transition towards a low carbon society.

In addition, the green economy is recognised as an area where Ireland could tap significant economic investment and employment opportunities.

This section would identify the main spatial planning challenges and opportunities arising from transitioning Ireland towards a less carbon intensive economy and society.

The section would identify a series of actions to address such challenges including (a) opportunities to promote key cities and towns as exemplars of low carbon living through more sustainable mobility and energy efficiency, (b) ensuring rural communities benefit from a well-planned approach to renewable energy development and (c) potential for innovation and investment in remoter

coastal and island communities in tapping the potential of the marine sector in line with the Government strategy "Harnessing our Ocean Wealth".

Section 5: Ensuring the resilience of our natural resources and cultural assets

Our natural resources include cycling and walking networks, national parks, forests and other amenity areas and open spaces, space for biodiversity, rivers and inland waterways as well as the marine environment and islands.

The inherent cultural value of our natural resources is a key part of Ireland's heritage and identity. There is also a growing international consensus around the value of green infrastructure and cultural assets as defining elements of the attractiveness and competitiveness of both urban and rural places. Clean air and water, a rich and high quality and attractive environment to enjoy leisure activities as part of an overall quality of life proposition can offer competitive advantage when allied to a high quality business environment.

National planning policies have a very important role in co-ordinating the development of green infrastructure and cultural assets. This section would set high level planning policies in protecting and making responsible use of natural and cultural heritage.

This section would also make linkage to wider policies, including the built heritage, UNESCO World Heritage Sites and the EU NATURA network of designated sites demonstrating a consistency of approach between the overall spatial vision and the requirements of relevant EU Directives including the Birds and Habitats Directives and Water Framework Directive etc.

Section 6: Delivery and Implementation

This section would outline the key actions, timelines and responsible bodies to support the objectives and policies in the preceding sections.

There would be a strong linkage between this section and preceding sections in terms of bringing together specific proposals from the individual chapters into a framework of "National Developments".

Such national developments would be accompanied by a broad description of the developments in question followed by a justification for their inclusion by reference to support for pillar objectives of the Framework.

National Developments might include:

- Key urban regeneration and investment projects;
- Energy generation and transmission infrastructure;
- Water Services infrastructure such as the Dublin Strategic Water and Wastewater projects;
- Green infrastructure networks such as long distance touring, walking and cycling routes;
- Strategic enterprise locations and tourism destinations;
- Innovation and knowledge corridors;
- Strategic transportation investments; and
- Other essential national developments in the social, cultural and/or healthcare sectors.

A list of national developments would be very important for An Bord Pleanála in the context of discharging its functions under the Strategic Infrastructure Act and could be subject to review and update over time in line with wider review provisions for the Framework.

Finally, this section of the Framework would contain an implementation schedule on the above developments as a mechanism to draw the various proposals together.

Supporting Documents

The Framework would be supported by technical appendices and by statements required under EU Directives in relation to Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment.

