Ireland 2040
Our Plan
NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Ireland 2040
Our Plan
Issues and Choices

February 2017

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Minister's Foreword

What will Ireland be like in 20 years' time? It's a fundamental question that no one can answer for sure but, based on what we do know now, we can make informed and strategic choices now about what kind of challenges and opportunities we will face in the future. For example, we know that there will be more of us - as many as a million additional people in Ireland and we will be on average older, with the number of people over 65 double current levels. But where will they live? Where should they live? How will they access the services they need? How will they move around?

We can expect this and many other changes in the coming years, so it is essential to set out an overall long-term plan for the country. It's also clear that in addition to a greater choice of housing types and employment opportunities, our growing population will need more school and third-level places and better infrastructure of all kinds, including transport, energy, communications, healthcare and recreational facilities.

If we want our country to be the best it can be, we must ensure that development and services are located where all of our people can best be served. In other words, that the right development can take place in the right places, at the right time.

The fact is that we have not always grasped the opportunity that good forward planning can give. This has stopped us from reaching our full potential in economic, social, cultural and spatial terms. I firmly believe that if we continue to do things as we have over the past twenty years, we are almost certain to get more of the same over the next twenty, and compound many of the quality of life difficulties we currently face. A continuation of 'business as usual' will not deliver the national vision and goals we all share, such as improved living standards, a desire for people to live in safe, vibrant communities and to experience life-long health and well-being . Nor will we develop the capacity to meet our environmental obligations or be able to respond to climate change. Recognising that the same level or even type of growth can't occur everywhere, some degree of prioritisation and some hard choices will be necessary. So too will be the need to replace the concept of balanced regional development with the idea of effective regional development - playing to strengths rather than assuming that a single model suits all areas.

We have a unique and exciting opportunity now to plan for a better future for all - to start to move away from it will require some big decisions to be made that can be carried forward and implemented over a long period of time. This means that we first need to plan to do things differently.

As a nation, we have the opportunity to look ahead and shape long-term planning over the next twenty years or more, in the form of the Ireland 2040 Plan. The issues set out in this initial consultation paper prompt us to honestly ask ourselves some key questions about what should Ireland be like in 20 years' time. If we can envisage the type of outcomes that we would wish to see, then we can start to identify the steps that we might take to get there.

As well as considering what future we want for our people and communities, this process will have implications for the types of infrastructure that we may need in the future, how we relate to our environment and how we adapt to the pressures and costs of climate change. We must also consider interactions with Northern Ireland and our wider marine territory. It will be critical to identify what needs to be done to ensure that we can put a coherent plan into practice and to achieve success.

Whilst we can predict that much will change, the values we share as a society will largely remain intact. In an increasingly globalised but uncertain world, our sense of belonging to both community and place, our unique artistic and cultural inheritance and the value we place on social justice, a European model of inclusion and 'fair play' are key 'place-making' assets that set us apart. Our distinctive values and strengths - distinctly Irish, proudly European, outward looking, welcoming, dynamic, progressive, flexible, problem solvers, opportunity makers, community builders, cultural creators - will both inform and require a uniquely Irish approach to planning for our country's and our communities' future.

I encourage all of you to consider what kind of Ireland you want see in 2040 and give your views on the critical issues outlined in this paper and have your say on how we can best plan for Ireland's development out to 2040 and beyond.

Simon Coveney T.D.

Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government

1 Introduction

1.1   Purpose

1.1.1   The purpose of this paper is to set out the main issues and possible choices for the development of Ireland as a place, beyond 100 years of statehood over the next twenty years or more, to 2040. This is the first major step towards the preparation of a national spatial plan for the Country, taking into account a range of social, economic and environmental factors, with the term 'spatial', meaning 'space' or 'place'.

1.1.1   It is intended that the Ireland 2040 Plan will be a high-level document that will provide the framework for future development and investment in Ireland. It will be the overall Plan from which other, more detailed plans will take their lead, hence the title, National Planning 'Framework', including city and county development plans and regional strategies. The National Planning Framework will also have statutory backing.

1.1.2   The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government is leading the preparation of the National Planning Framework, or 'NPF', on behalf of Government, with input from other Departments and Agencies. It will be particularly relevant where there is a long term and place-based aspect to public policy and investment, including areas such as housing, jobs, transport, education, health, environment, energy and communications.

1.1.3   One of the principal purposes of preparing the NPF will be to co-ordinate all of these specific departmental or 'sectoral' areas into an overall strategy. This will allow shared national development goals, including improved living standards, quality of life, prosperity, competitiveness and environmental sustainability, to be more broadly considered. This will also provide greater clarity for private sector investment.

1.1.4   The National Planning Framework will also be a tool to assist the achievement of more effective regional development. In order to ensure that positive outcomes arising from national growth can be shared by people throughout Ireland, the potential of all areas will need to be realised, relative to their capacity for sustainable development.

1.1.5   By looking ahead in a co-ordinated and strategic manner, the NPF will seek to identify how best to work towards all of these shared goals for the benefit of the Country as a whole. To ensure implementation, the Framework will need to credibly connect these goals to places.

1.1.6   It is not possible to describe with absolute certainty the sort of place Ireland will be in 2040, but the long term nature of strategic planning is such that choices and decisions made now, will directly influence future outcomes. Accordingly, it is suggested that the most important question that needs to be asked at the outset of the National Planning Framework process is what the vision should be:-

What sort of place should Ireland be in 2040
and what do we need to do to achieve this?

1.2   Consultation Process

1.2.1   This issues and choices paper is a consultation document that has been prepared in advance of drafting a new National Planning Framework. Consultation a critical step in the preparation and drafting of the NPF and this initial consultation seeks to prompt national debate and discussion in relation to the future spatial development of Ireland.

1.2.2   This issues and choices paper has been designed to provide members of the public and all interested parties an overview of some of the main national planning issues that affect Ireland today. It also provides the opportunity to submit comments and suggestions on the issues raised and other topics that are considered relevant to the National Planning Framework. It is requested that submissions would be made in writing and would relate to matters that:-

- are of national significance;
- are strategic in nature; and
- have a 'spatial' or place-based focus.

1.3   Submissions

1.3.1   Written submissions at this first stage of the National Planning Framework process can be made between 9am on Thursday 2nd February 2017 and 12 noon on Thursday 16th March 2017.

1.3.2   You can make a submission by:

1. Going on-line:- just log on to our website www.ireland2040.ie and follow the instructions provided;

   Or,

2. Email to the following email address only npf@housing.gov.ie;

   Or,

3. Writing to the following address:

   NPF Submissions,
   Forward Planning Section,
   Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government,
   Custom House,
   Dublin D01 W6X0.

1.3.3   The deadline for receipt of all submissions is 12 noon on Thursday 16th March 2017. We cannot accept submissions for this pre-draft stage beyond that deadline. Please make your submission by one medium only, either electronic or hard copy.

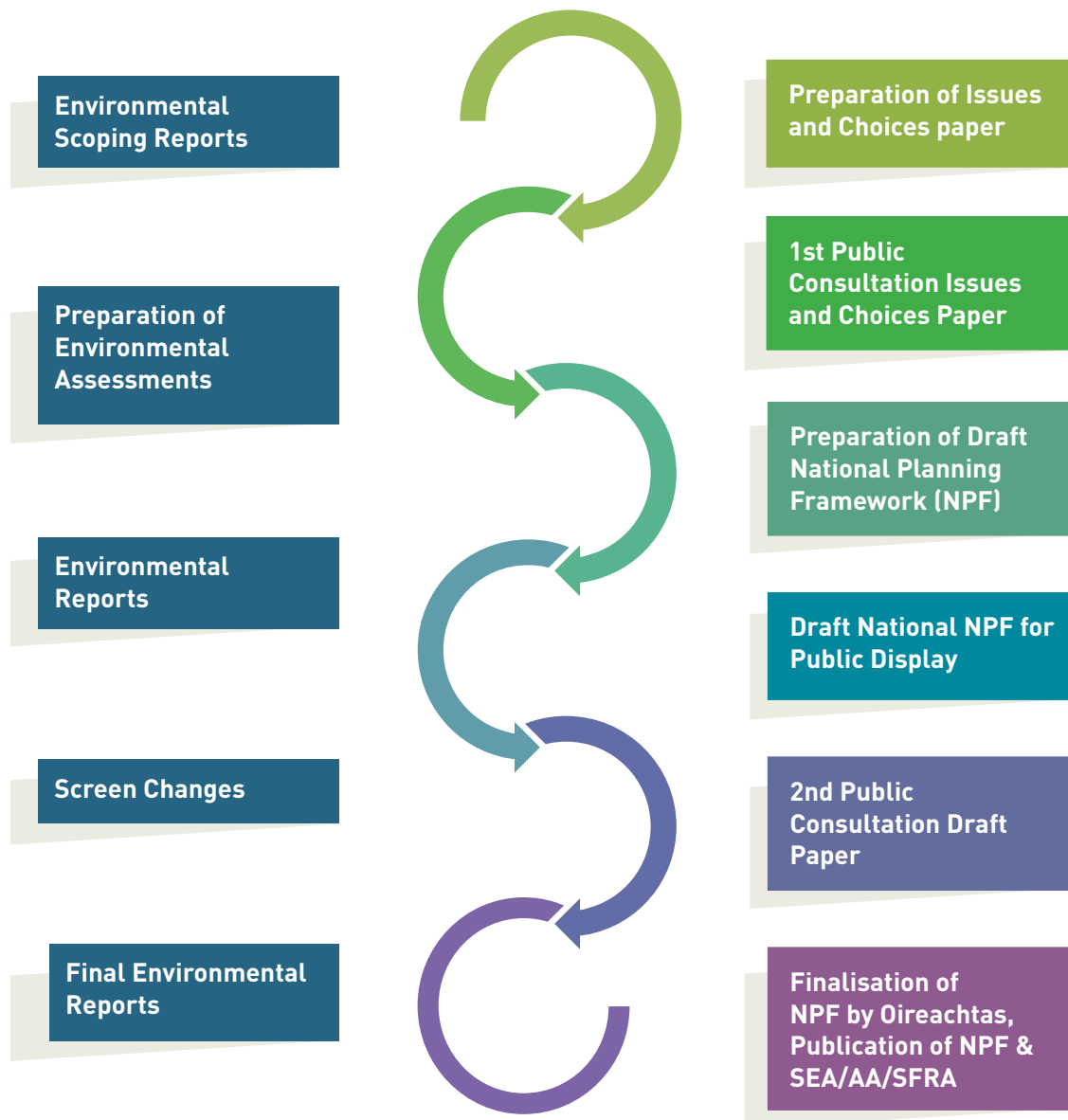All submissions must include the following:

- Your name and details of any organisation, community group or company you represent.
- An address for correspondence.
- Your submission on relevant planning issues for the National Planning Framework.

1.3.4   There will be further opportunities for the public and all interested parties to make a submission on the strategic planning and policy direction of the NPF, at a later stage in the process.

Please note submissions may be published on our website and subject to Freedom of Information. Receipt of submissions will be acknowledged but it will not be possible to issue individual responses.

Figure 1:

Key phases and milestones for preparing the National Planning Framework

Environmental Scoping Reports

Preparation of Environmental Assessments

Environmental Reports

Screen Changes

Final Environmental Reports

Preparation of Issues and Choices paper

1st Public Consultation Issues and Choices Paper

Preparation of Draft National Planning Framework (NPF)

Draft National NPF for Public Display

2nd Public Consultation Draft Paper

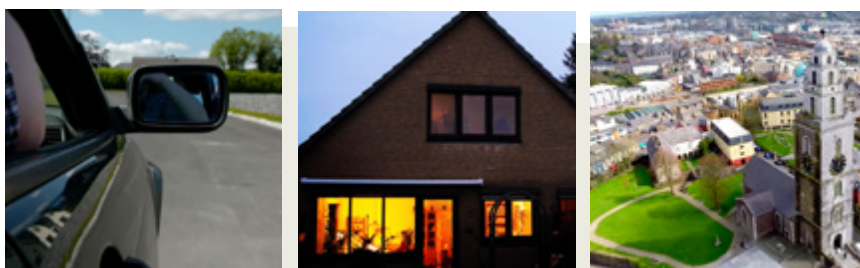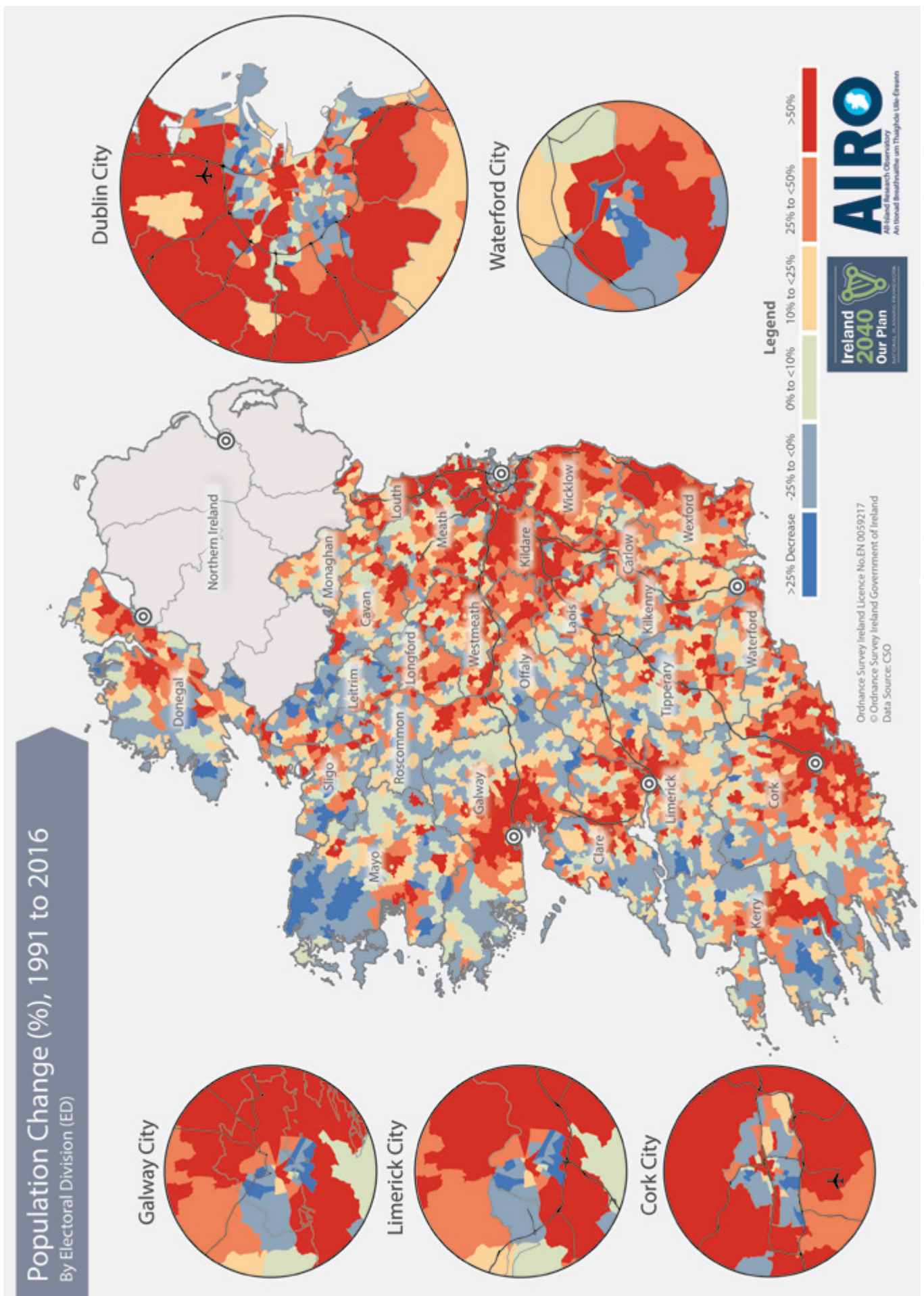Finalisation of NPF by Oireachtas, Publication of NPF & SEA/AA/SFRA

2 Ireland's National Planning Challenges

2.1 Future Change and Growth

2.1.1 Ireland's society and economy have been transformed in recent decades. Over the course of two generations, we have become a more educated, outward looking, dynamic, technologically focused and diverse Country. This adaptability and capacity for change has enabled Ireland to become relatively prosperous and successful, with the stability and resilience to overcome serious crises that have challenged us as a Nation.

2.1.2 Ireland is now seen as an advanced, developed Country, an established member of the European Union, uniquely positioned with strong economic, social and cultural links to the UK, Europe and the US. The context within which we operate continues to change and it is important that Ireland continues to position itself for growth and success in an increasingly competitive global environment.

2.1.3 The principal purpose of economic success is to ensure sustained improvement in living standards and quality of life for all of our citizens. This also provides the best possible platform from which to pursue key social and environmental goals, such as tackling disadvantage and responding to climate change.

2.1.4 Continued progress will require us to identify new ways to enable improved performance to achieve outcomes that make a difference at a national scale. Preparing and implementing a National Planning Framework that can influence the spatial pattern of development throughout the Country, presents such an opportunity.

2.1.5 The scale of Ireland's growth since the early 1990's has been unprecedented, notwithstanding the impact of economic recession. Our population has increased by more than 1.1 million people, to 4.75 million. Our housing stock has expanded by more than 750,000, to just over two million homes. Numbers in employment have also grown by more than 660,000, to more than two million people in 2017.

Population Change (%), 1991 to 2016
By Electoral Division (ED)

Dublin City

Waterford City

Galway City

Limerick City

Cork City

Northern Ireland

Donegal

Sligo

Leitrim

Mayo

Roscommon

Monaghan

Cavan

Longford

Westmeath

Galway

Offaly

Laois

Clare

Tipperary

Limerick

Kerry

Cork

Louth

Meath

Kildare

Wicklow

Carlow

Kilkenny

Wexford

Waterford

Legend

>50%

25% to <50%

10% to <25%

0% to <10%

-25% to <0%

>25% Decrease

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© Ordnance Survey Ireland Government of Ireland
Data Source: CSO

2.1.6   It is hugely significant that growth and change is set to continue. There will be more people, who will be more diverse and older and will need more homes and more jobs, supported by new infrastructure, services and facilities. In Ireland, over the next twenty years:-

- The population is expected to increase by more than three-quarters of a million people to around 5.6 million, but could be higher;

- The number of people over the age of 65 will double to be well over one million;

- The average number of people per occupied household, i.e. average household size, is likely to reduce to around 2 people per dwelling (it is currently around 2.7);

- There will be a need for an absolute minimum of half a million new homes, which is at least 25,000 additional homes, every year;

- There will be more people at work than ever before, exceeding the previous (Q1 2008) maximum of almost 2.2 million and with continued growth, likely to be more than 2.5 million in total;

- Demand for places in third level education will peak in the mid-late 2020s;

- Migration will shape how the population grows and changes;

- There will be an increased emphasis on health and well-being, including more active lifestyles and a focus on mental health, especially as people live longer;

- There will be a need to align development strategies with social strategies, including in relation to the integration of migrant communities and supporting access and opportunity for people with disabilities;

- Environmental requirements relating to improved air and water quality, soils, biodiversity and habitat protection will need to be met;

- There will be a need to adapt to climate change and meet targets for emissions reduction, energy efficiency and renewables, with a view to a low carbon and climate resilient sustainable Ireland by 2050.

2.1.7   In order to address projected future growth and change in Ireland, the National Planning Framework will need to enable public and private policy and investment decisions with a place-based dimension, to be guided and prioritised in a manner that can benefit the Country as a whole.

2.2 Recent Development Pattern

2.2.1   Growth and change will occur irrespective of whether there is a National Planning Framework in place or not and will further impact the spatial pattern of development in Ireland. In the absence of an agreed and effective National Planning Framework, it is likely that current trends will continue. The defining pattern of spatial development in Ireland in recent decades has been that:-

- Settlement, i.e. where people live, has generally become more spread out, and employment, i.e. where people work, has generally become more concentrated into a smaller number of areas;

- Whilst population growth has been focused on larger urban centres, it has mainly occurred in the surrounding 'hinterlands'. This means at the edge of the settlement or in the surrounding towns and rural areas;

- Employment growth has been most prominent in larger centres, but has mainly occurred at the settlement edge or closer to central areas;

- Decline has generally occurred in less accessible rural areas; smaller towns outside the hinterlands of the cities or larger towns; and in some of the more established, inner urban parts of cities and large towns;
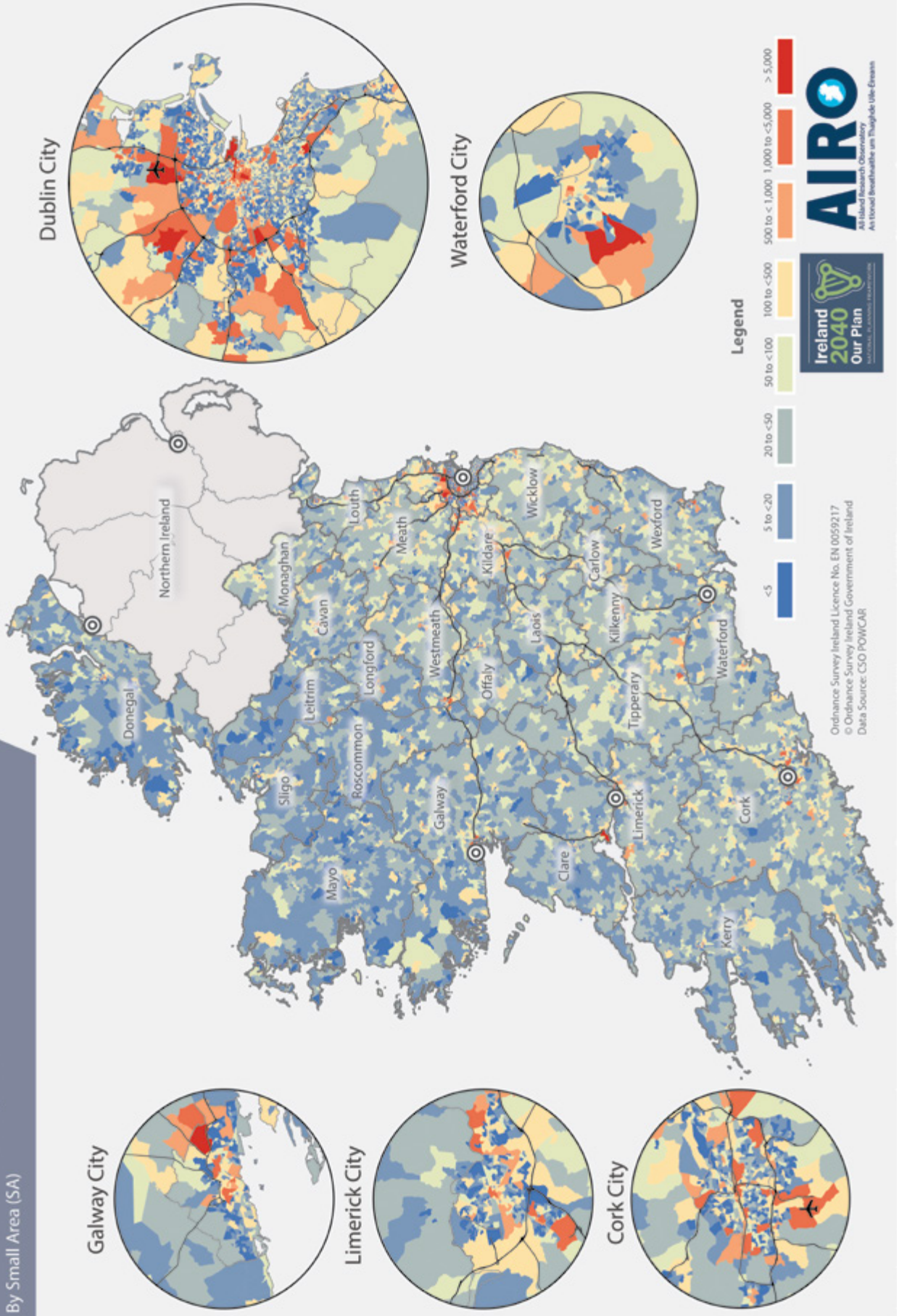
- There has been an increasing concentration of population and economic activity in the East of the Country, with much of the growth associated with Dublin being accommodated in ten other counties, extending from Cavan to Wexford.

A continuation of this spatial pattern is described as the 'business as usual' scenario.

2.2.2 The largest increases in population over the past twenty years have been in Fingal (North County Dublin), Cork outside the Cork City Council area), Kildare and Meath. Over the same period, Meath, Fingal and Kildare, together with Laois, have also had the highest rates of population growth in percentage terms.

2.2.3 Population growth in the five aforementioned Counties together with Galway County (i.e. excluding the Galway City Council area) accounted for just over half a million people, or 45% of the national total, over the past twenty years. This means that almost half of Ireland's additional people since 1996 have been accommodated in just six local authority areas, which together adjoin, but don't include the three Cities of Dublin, Cork and Galway.

Location of Jobs, 2011
By Small Area (SA)

Dublin City

Waterford City

Galway City

Limerick City

Cork City

Donegal

Northern Ireland

Monaghan

Cavan

Leitrim

Sligo

Mayo

Roscommon

Longford

Westmeath

Meath

Louth

Galway

Offaly

Kildare

Wicklow

Clare

Laois

Carlow

Wexford

Limerick

Tipperary

Kilkenny

Waterford

Cork

Kerry

Legend

<5	5 to <20	20 to <50	50 to <100	100 to <500	500 to <1,000	1,000 to <5,000	>5,000

Ordnance Survey Ireland Licence No. EN 0059217
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Data Source: CSO POWCAR

AIRO
All-Island Research Observatory
An tionad Breathnaithe um Thaighde Uile-Éireann

Ireland 2040 Our Plan

2.2.4   Taken together with six other counties that comprise the wider Dublin commuter belt, this means that over the past twenty years, more than 60% of all national population growth occurred in areas accessible to the Dublin, Cork and Galway hinterlands, but not in the Cities themselves. The trend has been towards an overall pattern of suburbanisation, that may be described as 'sprawl'.

2.2.5   In the same way as the population of settlements surrounding the larger urban areas has grown, so too has that of rural areas surrounding the cities and larger towns. Rural areas and small towns less accessible to cities and larger towns are more likely to have experienced ongoing population decline over the past twenty years.

2.2.6   Although there had been overall population growth in every County over the fifteen years prior to 2011, since then, the five adjoining north-westernmost Counties of Donegal, Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim and Roscommon, together with Monaghan, have experienced a combined net population loss. Falling or very low growth means that these six Counties experienced a net reduction of 1,300 people since 2011.

2.2.7   It is clear that the development of the national motorway network over the past twenty years has influenced the settlement pattern, particularly in Leinster, on which it is primarily focused. There is an emerging concentration of population and economic activity along the M1 Dublin-Dundalk and M7/M9 Dublin-Portlaoise/Carlow corridors, reflecting a concentration of larger towns and their hinterlands.

2.2.8   Factors influencing settlement dispersal outside larger urban areas include housing affordability, especially relative to dwelling size, density and availability/supply. There is also a perceived higher quality of life when measured against concerns related to anti-social behaviour, traffic, or access to some services in urban areas. These preferences are facilitated by the prevalence of significant lands zoned for residential purposes adjoining most settlements and supportive local planning policies.

2.2.9   Although enterprise has become more mobile, employers are increasingly likely to locate where there are larger pools of labour. It has meant that in contrast to settlement, the spatial pattern of employment is mainly focused on the urban hierarchy of cities and large towns. In addition, it is increasingly common for employees to change jobs more often and where both partners in a couple work outside the home, they may wish to access employment appropriate to both of their needs. These factors further reinforce the tendency towards accessibility to the greater range of employment that is more likely to be in and around the larger urban areas.

2.2.10 Other factors driving the location of employment include scale, access to markets and suppliers, proximity to research and innovation and the availability of communications, transport, energy and water networks. When combined with a decline in the numbers employed in more traditional sectors related to agriculture, mining and in recent years, construction, the location of employment growth has been more fixed than that of settlement growth.

2.3 Business as Usual

2.3.1   Although a continuation of current trends, or 'Business as Usual' is a potential future scenario for growth and change in Ireland, this is not desirable, for a variety of reasons:-

- It has led to overdevelopment in some places and decline in others. This has meant that services and facilities may be rapidly required in many different areas, while may be underutilised elsewhere. This makes it costly and difficult to plan for future needs;

- It has impacted on the efficient and timely provision of a range of services and facilities related to people's health and well-being;

- It has resulted in people travelling longer distances, often by car, which has contributed to car dependence and traffic congestion as well as wasteful time and energy spent commuting;

- It has made it difficult to provide viable, i.e. frequent, reliable, cost efficient and cost effective public transport in most places outside urban Dublin;

- It has not led to balanced rural or urban growth outcomes, especially outside the 'hinterland' areas surrounding the largest cities and towns;

- It has affected social cohesion and in some locations reinforced social disadvantage;

- It has affected the vitality, fabric and character of the established parts of many of our towns and cities, whereby commercial activity has relocated to edge locations in some cases or has withdrawn completely in others;

- It has led to the incremental loss of agricultural land, put pressure on water resources and on environmentally sensitive areas and contributed to increasing carbon emissions.

2.3.2   We cannot rely on Business as Usual to deliver shared national goals and it doesn't have to be inevitable, but to move away from it will require some big decisions to be made in the shorter term that can be carried forward over a long period of time. Through the NPF process, we now have the opportunity to look ahead and shape Ireland's future.

2.3.3   At this stage of the process, it is timely to consider what the alternative strategies to Business as Usual might be. In order to enable improved performance and make a difference at a national scale, these must include objectives that:-

- Facilitate improvements to people's quality of life and well-being;

- Prevent further overdevelopment and sprawl;

- Encourage population growth closer to where employment is located and is likely to be;

- Identify and support employment potential throughout Ireland, including greater regional employment growth;

- Identify measures to encourage both rural and urban regeneration to address decline;

- Achieve effective regional development;

- Relieve development pressure on the Eastern part of the Country whilst protecting the key role played by Dublin;

- Ensure good environmental stewardship by avoiding any further deterioration and addressing existing deficiencies;

- Reduce carbon emissions;

- Prioritise the development of infrastructure that can deliver national benefit – including renewable energies;

- Harness the planning system in order to maximise the role it can play in relation to climate change and renewable energy obligations;

- Manage the planning and development process so that the right development occurs in the most suitable places and at the right time, ensuring sustainability and best use of scarce resources.

2.4   Learning from our Experience

2.4.1   It has been almost fifteen years since the first national spatial plan for Ireland, the National Spatial Strategy, or 'NSS' was prepared in 2002. The NSS sought to achieve a better balance of social, economic and physical development through the identification of nine 'gateways' comprising twelve cities and towns and nine 'hubs' comprising eleven towns. Each was to be built up with critical scale and mass to provide a focus to influence wider regional development.

2.4.2   The NSS was important because it established spatial planning at a national level in Ireland, but was significantly hampered by a number of factors. These included proposals for the decentralisation of the civil service and some state agencies, a National Development Plan 2007-2013 that aligned with the NSS but was superseded by the economic downturn. It was not possible for a Đ300m NSS 'Gateway Innovation Fund' launched in 2007, to materialise.

2.4.3   Criticisms of the NSS include that it designated too many centres, created a perception of 'winners and losers', wasn't adequately supported by the political or local government systems or by a subsequent relaxation of controls on new rural housing, that it lacked an economic dimension and did not have statutory legislative backing.

2.4.4   It is striking that not one of the twenty-two fastest growing towns in Ireland between 2002 and 2016 was an NSS gateway or hub settlement. The level of actual population growth in the twenty-two fastest growing towns during this period and the level of population growth in the twenty-two NSS gateways and hub settlements, excluding Dublin, was almost identical.

2.4.5   This means that population growth in twenty-two designated NSS gateways and hubs from 2002 was replicated by the new population that emerged in twenty-two, completely different and separate non-NSS designated settlements, that were much smaller at the outset. The average 2002 population of the 22 fastest growing towns to 2016 was five times smaller, or just under 6,000 people, than the average 2002 population of the twenty-two gateway and hub settlements, which was just under 30,000 people.

2.4.6   In most cases the rapid growth trajectory of the fastest growing towns in Ireland over the past twenty years had commenced prior to the publication of the NSS. If implemented as intended, the NSS could have made a difference. The outcomes arising from these trends were identified in a review of the NSS undertaken by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government in 2010[1], by which time the legacy of a period of sustained growth in the absence of an effective overall plan had become apparent:-

   ○ Development-driven planning and urban-generated commuter settlement patterns are creating demand for uneconomic and inefficient infrastructure and service provision in suburban and extra-urban green-field locations;

   ○ Development has become more dispersed and fragmented geographically, with greater distances between where people live and work;

   ○ Dispersed land use trends are undermining the integrity of Ireland's key habitats and ecosystem networks and placing pressure on the quality of our water resources.

2.4.7   The introduction of new planning legislation in 2010 to address the issue of excessive land zoning resulted in the application of 'core strategies' to City/County Development Plans. This has led to a significant reduction in inappropriately zoned land and serves to highlight the critical importance of legislation to support national strategy. It has also been necessary to put measures in place to address the legacy of 'unfinished estates', 85% of which have now been resolved.

2.4.8   Whilst the experience of the previous National Spatial Strategy (NSS) didn't influence the pattern of development in Ireland as intended, it provides valuable lessons for future planning at a national scale. As a result, it has become clear that it will be necessary for the National Planning Framework to:-

   ○ **Be a statutory document, approved by the Oireachtas;**

   ○ **Be backed by Government, both in terms of the Executive and across Departments and Agencies;**

   ○ **Be aligned with and supported by public and private investment;**

   ○ **Be a strategy as opposed to a 'wish list', that will involve hard choices;**

   ○ **Address all parts of Ireland, avoid the perception of 'winners' and 'losers', but avoid unrealistically seeking to treat all parts of the Country in the same way;**

   ○ **Include an economic dimension, but not be solely based on economic considerations;**

   ○ **Include a particular focus on implementation and evaluation, with capacity for review.**

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1   Implementing the National Spatial Strategy: 2010 Update and Outlook Harnessing Potential, Delivering Competitiveness, Achieving Sustainability October 2010, DECLG.

Where to Next?

Ireland's growth trajectory is set to continue and will give rise to additional people, homes and jobs in the context of an ageing population, that will need to be supported by new infrastructure. In a Business as Usual scenario, this future growth and change is likely to be accommodated largely as it has been to date.

For a variety of reasons, Business as Usual is not a desirable option. Strategic intervention will therefore be required to counteract outcomes that will further impact on individual citizens and on society as a whole. An 'NSS' type scenario, whereby an adopted strategy is neither supported by nor consistently aligned with investment, would give rise to uncertainty, lack credibility and result in Business as Usual.

Additional resources and investment in the Business as Usual model may serve to alleviate pressures in the short term, but will not resolve them in the long run. A strategy that includes a fundamental shift in how we do 'place making' in Ireland is likely to be required if we are to make existing places better and create new places of outstanding quality.

To fully address the range of issues involved in ensuring our best response to future growth and change, the NPF will need to fully co-ordinate with other major Government policies, including the reviewed Capital Investment Plan, both in the current review period to 2021 and in the longer term thereafter. It will also need to integrate with the forthcoming National Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Strategies, which must take a similar, long term view.

To ensure success, the National Planning Framework will require Government support, broader political buy-in and ongoing alignment with policy decisions and capital investment plans. Statutory backing, subject to the legislative process, is also desirable, but should not be an impediment to progressing the NPF to approval stage.

The National Planning Framework process gives rise to a series of emerging policy choices, which are set out in the subsequent sections of this paper. At the outset, it is useful to reflect on a range of broad but interrelated considerations. These include:-

- Where the additional future population will live.

- How the needs of an ageing population will be accommodated.

- The types of housing that will be needed.

- The sort of communities that will be created.

- Where future jobs will be located and what type of jobs they will be.

- The services and amenities (e.g. education, health, leisure, shopping etc.) that will be required to meet people's needs.

- How people and goods will move around.

- The strategic infrastructure that will be required and how it will be prioritised.

- How key environmental challenges will be addressed, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to the consequences of climate change (e.g. flooding) as well as transitioning to a low carbon sustainable economy and society.

- How our governance structures will need to adapt to address national challenges.

The National Planning Framework process is a key opportunity to influence the spatial pattern of development throughout Ireland for the benefit of the Country as a whole, over the next twenty years and beyond.

3 People's Health and Well-Being

3.1 What does the NPF mean for Health and Well-Being?

3.1.1 There is a view that the National Planning Framework will be a Government document comprising policy measures that don't necessarily relate to people's everyday lives within our working, living or community environments. This issues and choices paper offers the opportunity for every citizen to consider whether change needs to take place, or if we are content as a nation to continue with Business as Usual?

3.1.2 During 2016, Ireland marked the centenary of the 1916 Rising and as a Nation, we reflected on our history, the Country's progress and societal changes that have taken place over the intervening one-hundred year period. It is clear that we now enjoy a better quality of life than those who lived in Ireland one-hundred years ago.
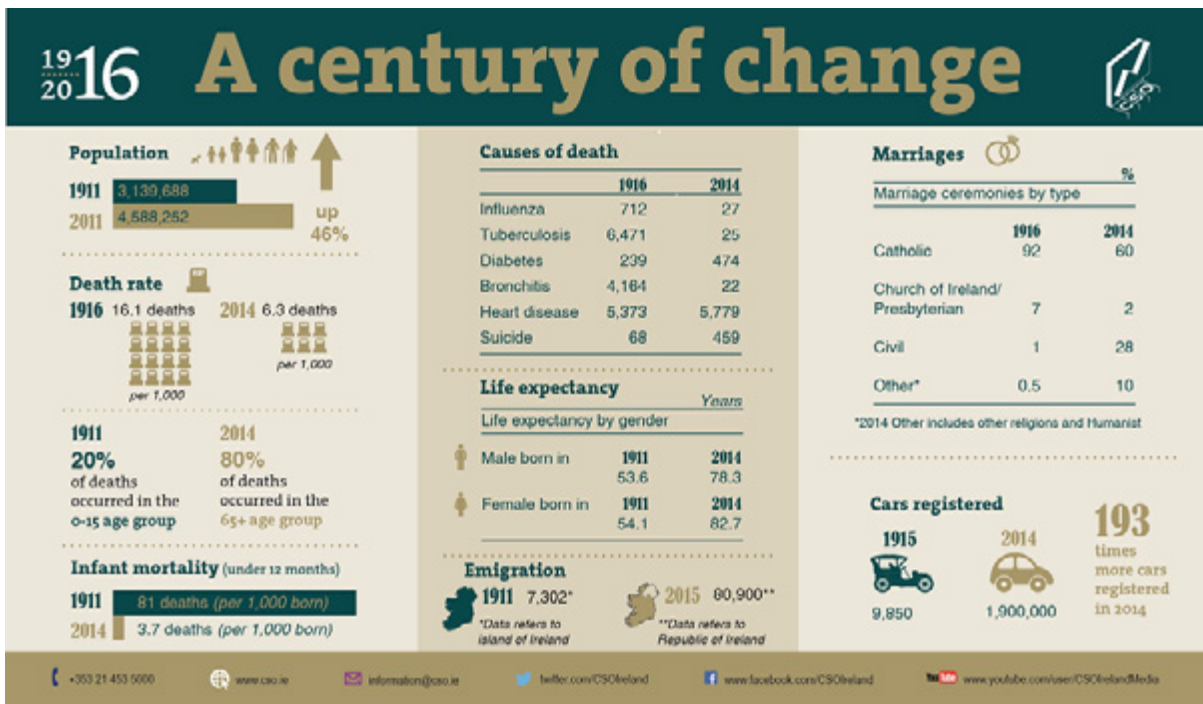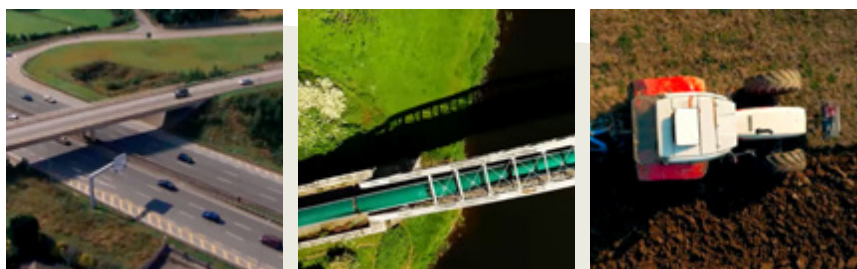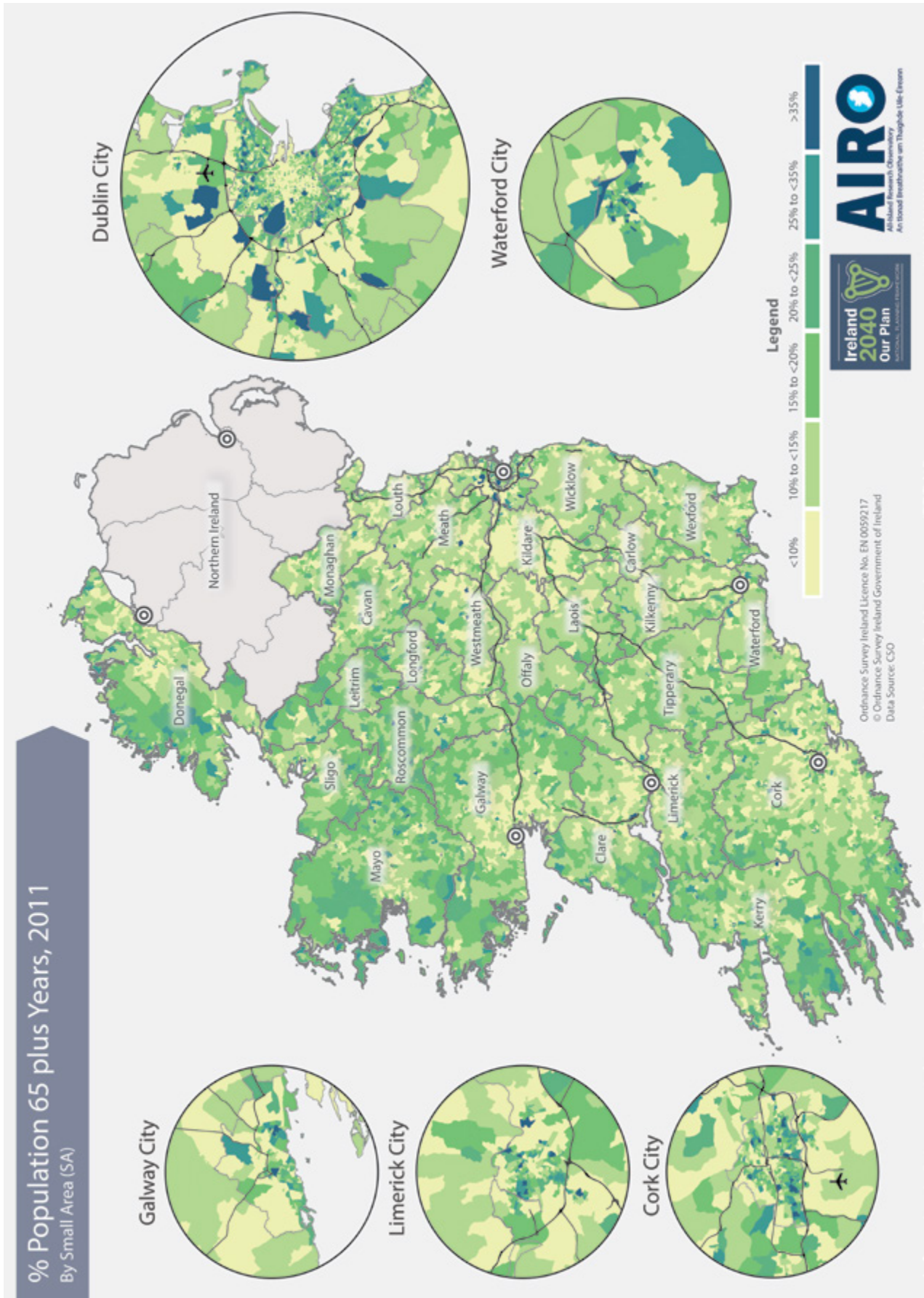

source: www.cso.ie

3.1.3 Accompanying these positive improvements are a range of lifestyle choices that are available to us now, in 21st Century Ireland. The consequences of some of the lifestyle choices that we are accustomed to are impacting on our own personal health and wellbeing as well as the overall health and wellbeing of places in Ireland.
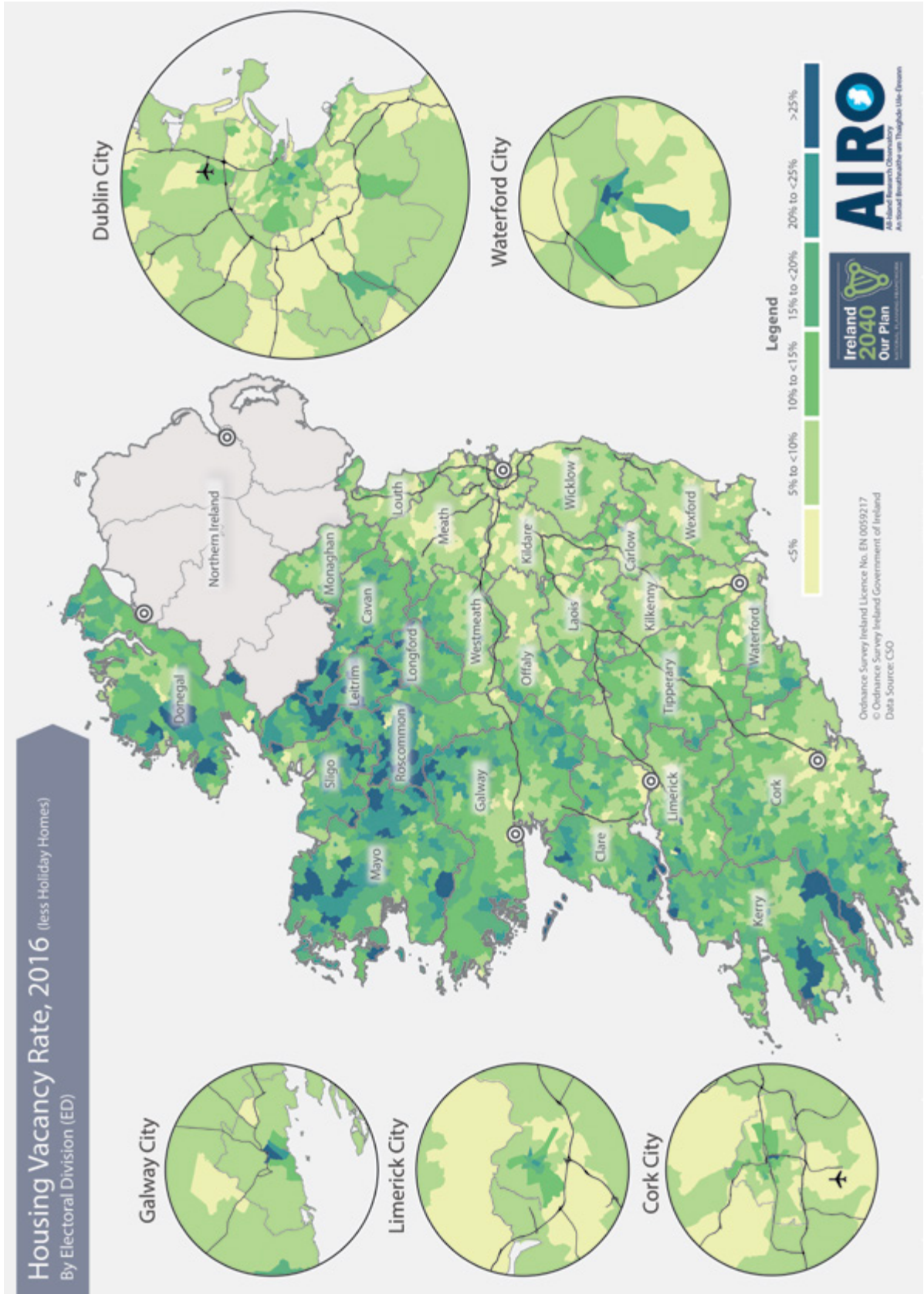
3.2 Trends Influencing our Health and Wellbeing

3.2.1   The built environment is an important determinant of health – directly, through air pollution, road traffic, noise, floods and climate and indirectly, through accessibility, safety, mixed land-use, street design and green open spaces. How we 'make' places can have a huge influence on people's health and wellbeing.

3.2.2   The Healthy Ireland survey conducted in 2015 indicated that 85% of the Irish population aged 15 and over report their general health as being 'good' or 'very good'. 'Social connectedness' and 'wellbeing' were included as topic areas within the survey, indicating that general health encompasses more than just physical well-being.

3.2.3   Enjoyment of health is not evenly distributed in society, with the incidence of chronic conditions and accompanying lifestyle behaviours being strongly influenced by socio-economic status, levels of education, employment and housing. Unsurprisingly, poorer people tend to live in poor quality built environments and have greater exposure to adverse environmental conditions. In turn this can exacerbate physical and mental health conditions, such as obesity-related diseases and depression.

3.2.4   Modern indoor lifestyles are associated with reduced levels of exercise, increasing rates of obesity, diabetes and heart disease and higher incidence of depression. Recent evidence indicates that 60% of adults and one in four children in Ireland is either overweight or obese[2]. Whilst diet clearly has a significant role to play in tackling threats to human health, planning also plays an important part.

3.2.5   Population ageing is also one of the most significant trends of the 21st century, with far-reaching implications for all aspects of society. While the number of people aged 65 or over in Ireland has effectively doubled since 1960, the proportionate increase in the population aged over 85 has been even greater and has nearly quadrupled during the last half-century. These trends will accelerate in the near future.

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2   Department of Health, Obesity Policy and Action Plan, September 2016

% Population 65 plus Years, 2011
By Small Area (SA)

Dublin City

Waterford City

Galway City

Limerick City

Cork City

Northern Ireland

Donegal

Sligo

Leitrim

Mayo

Roscommon

Longford

Cavan

Monaghan

Louth

Meath

Westmeath

Galway

Offaly

Laois

Kildare

Clare

Limerick

Tipperary

Kilkenny

Carlow

Wicklow

Wexford

Waterford

Cork

Kerry

Legend
<10%
10% to <15%
15% to <20%
20% to <25%
25% to <35%
>35%

AIRO
All-Island Research Observatory
An tSuirbhéireacht um Thaighde Uile-Éireann

Ireland 2040 Our Plan

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Data Source: CSO

3.2.6 Since 2008, very low levels of housing have been constructed, especially in the main cities and urban areas where most needed. Although the average household size had reduced to 2.7 people in 2015 in Ireland, the most common household type in the EU-28 in 2014 was the single person living alone (33%), and the trend towards this pattern is also occurring in Ireland, albeit from a much lower level of 22% (Eurostat, 2014). This means that with an expected reduction in housing occupancy in the future in Ireland, there will be more people living on their own.

Housing Vacancy Rate, 2016 (less Holiday Homes)
By Electoral Division (ED)

Legend

<5%	
5% to <10%	
10% to <15%	
15% to <20%	
20% to <25%	
>25%	

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Data Source: CSO

3.2.7   Social isolation can constitute health risks in similar ways to those associated with smoking and obesity. Moreover, the capacity for leading an active and healthy lifestyle is severely compromised in this scenario leading to a negative and costly impact on people's own personal health.

3.2.8   How we move around also impacts on our health and wellbeing. There are approximately two million cars registered in Ireland which is reflective of our high car dependency rate. In 2011 nearly one in ten workers spent one hour or more commuting to work while 69% of commuters travelled to work by car. More than one in seven commuters residing in Fingal, Laois, Westmeath, Meath, Kildare and Wicklow had travel times of an hour or longer to their job (2011).

3.2.9   This pattern of car dependence means that many city and particularly town-based businesses and services require significant car parking to ensure viability, as they are reliant on an increasingly dispersed car-borne catchment. As well as urban car parks, this has resulted in a widespread physical move towards out of town or edge of town shopping, business, leisure and service activity.

3.2.10   The physical move to out of town locations has resulted in loss of trade, footfall and vitality that has seriously undermined the vibrancy of many historic main streets and urban centres. It has made it more difficult to ensure that they remain attractive, viable places in which to do business, work, live, or visit and has undermined the concept of the town as a compact urban system.

3.3 Linking Health and Well-Being to Place

3.3.1   Creating and maintaining environments that encourage people to make healthier, more active choices is central to making the healthy choice the easy choice. Factors that are of relevance in promoting an active environment include location, density and mix of land use; provision of safe walking and cycling routes; street layout and connectivity; availability and density of open and green space; accessible sports facilities and proximity to public transport facilities and services.

3.3.2   Exposure to the natural environment has proven to have a positive impact on mental health. How future development in Ireland is planned will be a significant determinant of quality of life for people. Safe walking facilities and cycling paths are some of the essential supports needed in communities to enable healthier outcomes for individuals.

3.3.3   The current spatial pattern of development presents a challenge for improving both social cohesion and for healthy lifestyles. There is a need to consider the issue of community cohesion and a more healthy society and how we can better integrate people with services and amenities and promote sustainable travel, i.e. walking and cycling. There is a need for greater integration and joined up investment decisions across the planning, health and transport sectors which can all help to make sustainable and active travel a more attractive alternative to the private car.

3.3.4   In addition to new homes and additional jobs to accommodate future growth and change, the National Planning Framework will need to consider the quality of life offer that is central to sustainable communities. This is not only to ensure that places are attractive for living and working in, but also to build a resilience within people and places that allows for better outcomes, particularly in relation to our wellbeing.

Where to Next?

A continuation of the pattern of development in Ireland over the last twenty years without intervention would more than likely cause quality of life and overall societal wellbeing to deteriorate. Although people in Ireland are now living longer than ever before, not all are living those longer lives in good health.

Business as Usual' is a continuation of current patterns and approaches to the health and wellbeing of people and places in Ireland. Consequently:

- This approach is likely to reinforce existing trends in people's health resulting in an increase in the prevalence of chronic illnesses due to environmental factors. Coupled with increased levels of obesity which are prevalent in children as well as adults, our general health will deteriorate and compromise the quality of life that we can enjoy;

- This type of pattern would more than likely mean that the older built-up areas of cities would suffer further stagnation or population decline. In addition, the likelihood is that people in Ireland will spend even more time commuting, less time with family, be at risk of social isolation and be less inclined to participate in the communities they live in, all of which will impact negatively on our mental health;

- Without intervention, the exceptional relative scale of Dublin is such that hinterland population growth is likely to expand further. The Cities of Cork and Galway as well as Limerick and Waterford are also likely to exert similar influence on their surrounding County areas. This scenario does not support a healthy outcome whereby smaller settlements in city catchments will have to cater for exceptional demand at a scale that they are not equipped to deal with, leading to situations such as children not being able to secure a school place in their local area and pressure on basic facilities such as access to healthcare;

- The likelihood of further outmigration and consequent population decline in rural areas outside urban catchments would accelerate the ageing profile of the population, which in a negative feedback cycle, would hasten the process of decline. Many older people live alone and as services become less viable and withdraw due to falling population, they would as a consequence, also have less opportunity for social interaction. Areas with limited social interaction and community participation (including for older people), whether rural or urban, tend to stagnate and suffer from high real or perceived levels of anti-social behaviour and crime.

In order to move away from 'Business As Usual' it will be necessary for alternatives to consider the following:

- Support for the creation of sustainable communities that have good social interaction and networks and demonstrate resilience and a shared sense of civic pride and active participation in shaping their local environment;

- Greater policy integration and joined up investment decisions across the planning, health and transport policy sectors which are proven to help to make sustainable and active travel more attractive alternatives to the private car;

- Fostering an improved 'quality of life' offer for people through place-making and design that can be applied to every city, town and village in Ireland;

- Improving living environments for all so that social disadvantage is tackled and prevented rather than being facilitated;

- Ensuring that healthy-living options are available within communities in the form of access to sports and recreation facilities, amenities and green areas as well as walking and cycling facilities that can also assist in offering alternatives for travelling to school and work;

- Reducing car dependence;

- Plan-led development that can anticipate the needs of a community and make provision for that community.

Key Questions

- Are we prepared to make changes now so that a 'healthier places' legacy can be handed over to the next generation of Ireland's citizens?

- What policies can the NPF include to effect improvements to our general health, including physical and mental wellbeing, in Ireland over the next twenty years?

- Are there key priorities the NPF can identify to ensure better or improved health and wellbeing of people and places in Ireland?

- Are there facilities that the NPF needs to highlight for places in Ireland in order to enable greater participation in a healthy lifestyle?

4 A Place-Making Strategy

4.1 Our Capital, Cities and Towns

4.1.1 Ireland has experienced a more spatially uneven pattern of regional and urban development than other similar OECD countries and we depend more on our largest city than other comparator countries. (See tables below).

4.1.2 Dublin, which is both our largest city and Capital city, plays a vital international role and has been a major part of economic success in recent decades with the result that its primacy continues to grow. The Dublin City Region now accounts for 40% of the national population and 49% of economic output (2016). In the UK, where London as a globally significant City dominates, the London Metropolitan Area extends to 14 million people or 22% of the UK population and 32% of GDP.

4.1.3 Ireland is characterised by very strong growth of Dublin and an absence of comparative growth in any other urban centre. If Belfast, Derry/Londonderry and other smaller cities and large towns in Northern Ireland are included, a more balanced picture emerges, highlighting the importance of an all-Island approach, based on a combined population of 6.4 million people (2011).

4.1.4 A key difference between Ireland and the selected other small developed countries and our nearest neighbour the UK, is the comparative weakness of the 'next tier' of cities and their associated regions. The selected comparator countries have at least three next tier cities with more than 100,000 people as outlined in Table 4.1.1 below.

4.1.5 Moreover, the spatial pattern of Dublin's influence now extends from Louth through Meath, Westmeath and Kildare to Laois, Carlow, Wicklow and Wexford, also partially affecting Cavan, Longford and Kilkenny. This spread of activity together with the objective of achieving more effective regional development elsewhere in Ireland makes it difficult to prioritise the needs of the Capital and our other cities.

4.1.6 Dublin's success as a city-region is a double edged sword. It has enabled Ireland to compete in an international context but such success has also given rise to pressures in areas such as housing, transport and infrastructural requirements, which affect competitiveness.

4.1.7 If Dublin is underperforming, Ireland is underperforming. Should the Dublin City-Region suffer a loss of competitiveness and become a less attractive place in which to invest as a result of housing and infrastructural bottlenecks, investment and influence will inevitably be attracted to other similar city-regions in Europe or elsewhere.

4.1.8 Our capital city must be planned for in a way that ensures it can continue to play its international role, while being complemented by a significantly strengthened role for a next tier of cities and their broader regions. The National Planning Framework is an opportunity to address the orderly development of our cities in an integrated manner.

4.1.9 It is notable that of the five Cities (Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Waterford), only the Galway built-up area experienced consistent population growth in excess of the national average (31%) from 1996-2016, increasing in population by more than 23,000 or 41%.

4.1.10 In contrast, population growth in the Cork built-up area (28,300 or 16%), Limerick (15,600 or 20%) and Waterford (8,800 or 20%) have been significantly below the national average over the past 20 years, despite recent increases apparent in these three Cities and particularly in Cork, since 2011.

Table 4.1.1 Ireland and the Primacy of Dublin in comparison to similar advanced small Countries					
Country	**Ireland**	**Denmark**	**New Zealand**	**Scotland**	**Finland**
Population 2011	4.58 million	5.57 million	4.24 million	5.3 million	5.39 million
Largest City Region	Dublin	Copenhagen	Auckland	Glasgow	Helsinki
City Region Population- 2011	1.69 million	2.0 million	1.42 million	1.79 million	1.47 million
City Region as % Population	37%	36%	33%	30%	27%
City Region as % National GDP	48%	43%	35%	33%	37%

Source: OECD/Eurostat

Table 4.1.2 The Hierarchy of Cities and Towns in Ireland in comparison to similar advanced small Countries					
Country	**Ireland (incl. Northern Ireland)**	**Denmark**	**New Zealand**	**Scotland**	**Finland**
Cities →500,000	Dublin	Copenhagen	Auckland	Glasgow	Helsinki
Cities →200,000	(Belfast) Cork	Aarhus	Christchurch Wellington	Aberdeen Edinburgh	Tampere
Cities →100,000		Aalborg Odense	Dunedin Hamilton Tauranga	Dundee	Jyväskylä Kuopio Lahti Oulu Turku
Cities →50,000	(Derry) Limerick Galway (Lisburn (Newtownabbey) (Bangor) Waterford	Esbjerg Horsens Kolding Randers Roskilde Vejle	Hastings Napier Nelson New Plymouth Palmerston North Rotorua	Cumbernauld Dunfermline East Kilbride Hamilton Livingston Paisley	Hameenlinna Joensuu Kotka Kouvola Lappeenranta Mikkeli Pori Rovaniemi Salo Seinajoki Vaasa
Total Number of Cities	5 (5)	10	12	10	18
Number of Towns →15,000	25 (16)	35	15	41	36
Overall Total	**30 (21)**	**45**	**27**	**51**	**54**

Source: citypopulation.de

4.1.11   Ireland's regional cities appear to offer significant potential to be the focal point to drive growth and development in their regions. The regional cities are all major centres of employment, third level education and healthcare and are accessible to the motorway network and other communications infrastructure such as airports and ports. Beyond the city catchments, there is a network of towns that can play a similar role.

4.1.12   Give the scale and important regional roles played by the four cities, all have significant potential to complement Dublin, to absorb some of the strain that the Capital has been subject to in terms of accommodating growth in employment, housing need and infrastructural requirements and drive their wider regions, which may also require cities to work in collaboration with each other and/or in conjunction with other towns, to borrow and share strengths.

4.1.13   The 'Northern Powerhouse' concept, focused on an alliance of former industrial cities in Northern England, including Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool and Sheffield, is intended to be a counterbalance to London. This type of regional co-operation may be a potential model for a co-ordinated investment and development strategy to strengthen Ireland's 'next tier' cities and their associated regions.

4.1.14   It is significant that a recent EU ESPON study which tested future spatial development scenarios in Europe to 2050, identified such a 'second tier cities' approach as offering the highest level of territorial cohesion and competitiveness at a European level as compared to alternative scenarios that focused on the largest principal cities (which most closely equates with the current reality in Ireland) and a scenario that focused on the smallest cities and large towns.

4.1.15   At the tier below the cities, there are a number of towns which, due to their level of service provision and extensive catchments, serve an important role for those areas that fall outside the reach and influence of the cities. In some cases they can complement the role of the city. However, lessons from the past suggest that if we continue to focus on multiple towns, this will continue to undermine the performance and potential of our cities and ultimately the wider regions.

Where to Next?

Under the Business As Usual Scenario, the current lop-sided pattern of development of the State will continue, which in the longer term will be neither beneficial to Dublin nor the Country as a whole.

Any alternatives will need to consider the following:-

- Protecting the importance of Dublin as a national driver of growth by prioritising measures to address barriers to its international competitiveness;

- Enabling a city centre outwards process of renewal and regeneration and continued investment in transport and local infrastructure and housing policies to deliver more compact cities;

- The potential for a nationally significant step-change in the promotion of one or more of the four regional cities through co-ordinated planning and investment that would be long term and transformational;

- The future role and scale of development in our towns as successful places in the context of their regions.

Key Questions

- **Taking on board all of the relevant environmental and physical capacity issues, what role should our cities have as part of the NPF?**

- **How might we develop one or more strong regional complements to Dublin that can address their whole city-region, including interactions between settlements?**

- **Do we need to reform and strengthen administrative and governance structures so that they are capable of delivering the necessary alliances, collaboration and actions to build up our cities and their regions?**

- **How might we develop an urban policy that distinguishes between development within the existing built-up area of cities and towns and greenfield development sites?**

- **How might we distinguish between the role of towns within the wider hinterland of the cities and those located outside the influence of the cities?**

- **What measures could be used to examine potential densification scenarios that may be applied to parts of existing urban areas?**

4.2   Opportunities for our Regions

The Role of the Regions

4.2.1   Regional development is recognised as making an important contribution to national prosperity. In response, there has been an increased focus on the regional dimension of national policy across Government Departments and State Agencies, including the Regional Action Plans for Jobs and the focus on regional policy within the IDA 'Winning' Strategy[3].

4.2.2   In recent years, regional governance has been reformed[4], resulting in three new Regional Assemblies, namely the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly (EMRA), the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) and the Southern Regional Assembly (SRA). The principal functions of the Regional Assemblies are to co-ordinate, promote and support strategic planning and sustainable development of the regions and to manage EU programmes of assistance[5] and their general impact in their regions.

4.2.3   Each of the Regional Assemblies has a leadership role to play in identifying regional policies and coordinating initiatives that support the delivery and implementation of national planning policy. It is also the role of the Regional Assemblies to co-ordinate local authorities to secure shared national and local objectives.

4.2.4   The primary vehicle for this is the preparation and implementation of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs). The RSESs will provide a greater level of focus around the high level strategic policies of the NPF.

Figure 4.2.1

Configuration of Regional Assembly Areas in Ireland[6]

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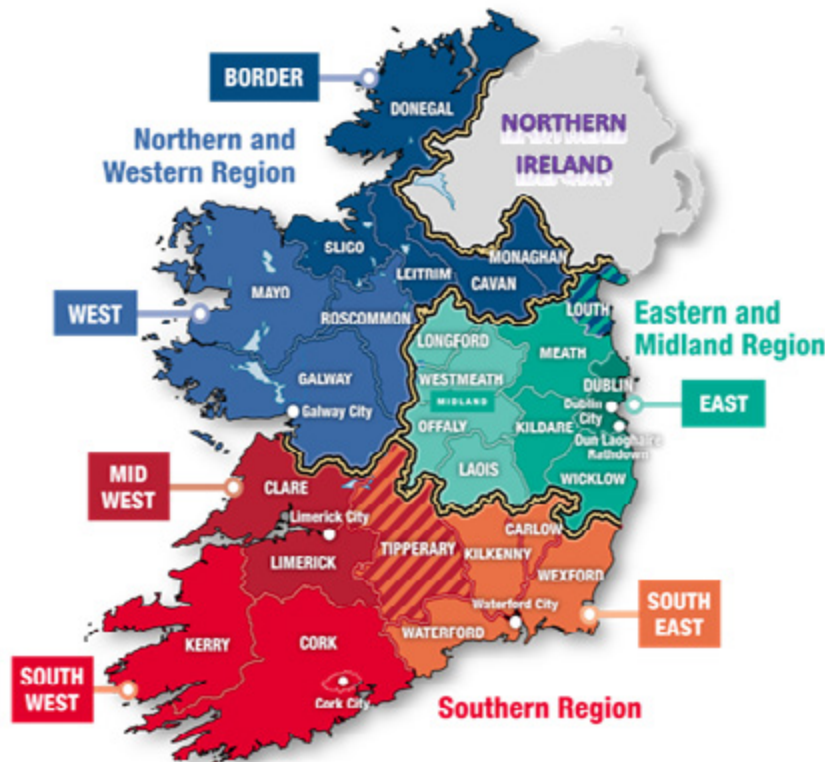
3   Available at: http://www.idaireland.com/docs/publications/IDA_STRATEGY_FINAL.pdf
4   Under the 2012 Government's "Putting People First" policy paper and the Local Government Reform Act 2014.
5   Regional Operational Programmes.
6   Map Source: Southern Regional Assembly

Regional Dynamics

4.2.5 The Eastern and Midlands Region has a population of 2.3 million people in comparison to 1.6 million in the Southern Region and 0.85m in the Northern and Western. The difference in population structures is also reflected in a significant divergence of population density across regions (with population density in the Dublin sub-region estimated at 1,401 persons per km^2 compared to 32 persons per km^2 in the West).

Table 4.2.1 Regional Assemblies and Constituent Areas for the purposes of Regional Planning		
Region Assembly (RA)	**Sub Region[7]**	**Local Authorities**
Eastern and Midlands RA	Dublin	Fingal, Dublin City, South Dublin, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown
	Eastern	Louth, Kildare, Meath, Wicklow
	Midlands	Longford, Laois, Offaly, Westmeath
2,325,122 people - approximately 49% of the population		

Region	**Sub Region**	**Local Authorities**
Southern RA	South-East	Carlow, Tipperary, Waterford (City and County), Wexford, Kilkenny
	South-West	Cork City, Cork County, Kerry
	Mid-West	Clare, Limerick (City and County), Tipperary
1,585,992, or approximately 33% of the population		

Region	**Sub Region**	**Local Authorities**
Northern and Western RA	Border	Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Louth, Monaghan, Sligo
	West	Galway, Mayo, Roscommon
846,862 people - approximately 18% of the population		

4.2.6 The economic productivity of each region has increased over the past 15 years, with the Eastern and Midlands Region having levels of regional productivity above the national average, the Southern Region largely in line with the national average, while the Northern and Western Region has been consistently below the national average.

4.2.7 Each Regional Assembly area shows evidence of regional strengths in a particular business sector such as business services in the EMRA area, industrial products and services and pharmaceuticals in the SRA area and medical technologies in the NWRA area. An examination of business clustering patterns suggests that the largest cities in Ireland are the key focus for the knowledge and related business sectors. Sectors such as professional, scientific, technical, finance and insurance also tend to be more prevalent within the four largest cities.

4.2.8 The sectoral spread of IDA assisted companies in Ireland indicates dominance in ICT, Biopharma and financial services, accounting for around half of all IDA supported sites. The evidence suggests a continued trend towards clustering and the emergence of large urban centres as focal points of national and global trade. It is apparent that cities are the key regional drivers for economic activity in the three regional assembly areas and that this trend is likely to continue. Indigenous enterprise is more broadly spread, but also primarily focused on cities and larger towns.

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7   This refers to Strategic Planning Areas (SPA's) which broadly correspond with the former Regional Assembly Areas (NUTS 111 classification)

4.2.9   Unemployment rates over the past 18 years (q2 1998-q2 2016) indicate that most of the sub regions (Strategic Planning Areas) where the unemployment rate was above the national average in 1998 remain above the national average in 2016 and those below the national average remained so in 2016, with the east and southeast performing better than areas such as the border and western parts of the Country. The two sub-regional areas with the largest cities i.e. Dublin and Cork had the lowest levels of unemployment, highlighting the importance of cities for job resilience.

Effective Regional Development (ERD)

4.2.10   The term balanced regional development (BRD) is a source of confusion and debate. It has led to a perception of diverting resources from one area to another to make up for an imbalance, or is seen as a form of equalisation. This has manifested itself as 'urban versus rural' and in particular 'Dublin v the rest of the Country' with limited acknowledgement of the individual and collective decisions we make as a society that have assisted in shaping current trends.

4.2.11   Issues such as the global influence on markets and the changing nature of employment locations and migration patterns have impacted on our ability to focus resources in such a way that they give maximum effect and return on investment within the regions. In response it would be productive for the NPF to examine effective regional development i.e. development that can make a difference, and to look at how urban-rural partnerships can work to the benefit of the regions.

4.2.12   Effective regional development is about reducing disparities by embracing the spatial development opportunities specific to each of the regions and in particular the regional assembly areas. This requires choices to be made that result in sustainable solutions and means that NPF policies may look different from one region to another. More specifically, this will require a more tailored approach to the regional development, which will need to be reflected in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs).

4.2.13   A more tailored approach to regional development requires an acknowledgement that in some cases building regional resilience is a priority, as opposed to an expectancy of high levels of growth everywhere. This is to ensure that weaker regions have the ability to recover more quickly from setbacks and to arrest impacts such as population decline and the economic shocks experienced in recent years. It also reinforces the need to move from a focus on legacy issues to future planning that can maximise the capabilities of the regions.

Realising Effective Regional Development

4.2.14   There is extensive research into the determinants of regional growth, including factors such as human capital, critical mass of population, density, frequency of large urban centres and infrastructure. In terms of realising the potential of the regions, some key considerations are set out below.

4.2.15   The OECD[8] suggests that human capital is a robust determinant of regional growth and that reducing the proportion of people in a region with very low skills seems to make more difference than increasing the share with very high skills. They also indicate that regional policy has often focused too much on physical infrastructure, particularly transport. Infrastructure is a necessary but not alone a sufficient condition for growth. Its impact increases where investments in human capital and innovation are present, hence the need for integrated policies.

4.2.16   The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 and the National Skills Strategy 2025 include an emphasis on the need for greater regional collaboration among education and training providers and this is being advanced through the regional clusters of higher education institutions and the Regional Skills Fora which involve further education and training providers, higher education institutions and employers. The National Strategy for Higher Education also recommended the consolidation of the Institute of Technology sector and the creation of a small number of multi-campus technological universities which has the potential to further strengthen higher education provision in the regions, supporting indigenous enterprise through skills development and innovation and becoming an important differentiator in attracting foreign direct investment. There is also significant potential for institutional collaboration on a North-South basis to advance cross-border regional development and strategically advance Irish higher education on an all-island basis.

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8   Supporting Growth in all Regions 2012 OECD

4.2.17 There is a correlation between large urban areas and regional economic productivity. This is partly due to global influences on economic markets and the changing nature of employment locations and migration patterns. An examination of business clustering patterns suggests that the largest cities in Ireland are the key focus for the knowledge and related business sectors. It is therefore likely that sectors such as professional, scientific, technical, finance and insurance will continue to be more prevalent within urban locations.

4.2.18 Outside urban areas, the further development of industrial clusters where natural comparative advantages exist, can be exploited, for example in the agri-food, creative, clean energy, marine and tourism sectors. Market functions suggest that business sectors have very specific locational requirements and existence of clusters in specific industry sectors/activities is important for regional economies. Ultimately it is the individual enterprise which will decide on the optimal location for their operations.

4.2.19 Strategic transport planning can help regions achieve their potential by identifying transport networks required to serve social and economic development. At regional level, there is a need for more formal integration between land use and transport, with the approach in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA) being a good example of how this can be achieved i.e. a requirement for mutual consistency between the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and the GDA Transport Strategy. An extension of this approach to other regional assembly areas would greatly strengthen levels of integration between land use planning and transport planning across the country.

Where to Next?

The 'business as usual' model is a continuation of current patterns and approaches to regional development. Consequently:

- This approach is likely to reinforce existing patterns and disparities amongst the regions;

- It is likely that employment patterns will show an increase in employment across all regions but with increased divergence between employment growth in the commuter areas surrounding Dublin with much lower rates of growth in places such as the border areas and western parts of the country;

- Regional investment will continue but will not be tailored to where it can make the most impact.

Any alternatives will need to consider the following:-

- A more tailored approach to regional development as a one size fits all approach hasn't worked.

- Potential to increase human capital in order to maximise the potential of the regions and reduce disparities.

- Regions collectively harnessing shared strengths, combining assets and providing co-ordination to improve regional performance.

- Aligning regional clustering with regional place making.

- Strengthening regional cities and towns as drivers of growth for the urban and rural areas of the regions.

- Aligning development with the need to transition to a sustainable, low carbon economy and society.

- Leadership, governance and the role of the Regional Assemblies.

Key Questions

- **What are the levers for effective regional development?**

- **What is needed to be done to increase human capital at a regional level?**

- **What regional 'value proposition' i.e. an innovation, service, or combination of measures and approaches can make the regions more successful and what are the means by which this can be achieved?**

- **Are there strategic issues (i) across local authority boundaries or (ii) on an inter-regional basis, that the Regional Assemblies can co-ordinate to ensure more effective sub-regional and regional outcomes?**

- **Are there funding opportunities than can support investment on a regional basis?**

4.3 The Potential of Rural Ireland

An Expression of 'Rural'

4.3.1   'Rural Ireland' has an historical resonance and a cultural depth that permeates Irish society, our economy and our environment. Our historic connection with land is complex and emotive. There is no single, universally preferred description of 'rural' that serves all policy purposes. Definitions vary and can be based on population density, settlement size and commuting distance. Rural areas vary widely particularly in terms of remoteness, dependence on primary production and human resource capacity.

4.3.2   Rural Ireland has changed and continues to change from its more traditional association with agriculture, as evidenced in the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA, 2014) Report and the more recent (2017) Realising our Rural Potential Action Plan for Rural Development. 'Rurality' is now associated with the idea of regions across Europe, with cities seen as the driving forces of regional economic development.

4.3.3   People in Ireland connect with 'rural' as a place for a number of different reasons. For some, it is the place in which they have chosen to live and work, where the land not only provides a home, but also provides an income. Rural represents a way of life for a huge number of Irish people, whereas it implies Irish culture and heritage to others with 'picture postcard' landscapes, historical buildings and towns and villages that are uniquely Irish in their built form. Rural also suggests a sense of remoteness and isolation which people actively seek out. Towns and villages across Ireland can be classified as rural due to their location and the role they serve in a wider rural hinterland.

4.3.4   Neither 'rural areas' nor the communities that live within particular types of rural area are identical. Growing spatial, social and economic disparities between rural areas are a reflection of the fact that stronger rural areas are not only located in a geographically advantageous place, but also have the human and social capital to identify their needs and effectively engage with emerging strategies.

4.3.5   Taken as a whole, rural Ireland experienced unprecedented levels of population growth between 1996 and 2011, at a rate and scale that had not been experienced since before the Famine. This level of growth was almost unique in Europe, where the trend has generally been that rural populations have declined, especially where located outside the catchments of large cities.

The Resilience of Rural Areas

4.3.6   The nature of Ireland's rural economy has seen a dramatic change in recent years. Many people who live in rural areas are now not directly involved in farming or farm-related activities. The current challenge is to achieve an appropriate balance between supporting Ireland's agricultural communities and other traditional rural based economic activity while simultaneously fostering sustainable economic diversification and development in rural areas.

4.3.7   Rural areas score highly in terms of qualitative, 'human', place-making factors such as the vibrancy of places and place-based leadership and stewardship. This differentiation can assist in overcoming challenges where more urban characteristics such as scale or infrastructure may be lacking. The National Planning Framework is an opportunity to co-ordinate these elements into integrated place-based strategies to activate and grow the full range of local strengths throughout Ireland.

4.3.8   Underlying trends indicate that many rural areas and small-medium size towns have not proven resilient to ongoing structural changes. These include the decline of traditional rural industries, the shifting nature and location of employment as well as the physical form of retail and commercial development.

4.3.9   The CEDRA report examined the factors that have led to a decline in the social and economic viability of many towns that has affected their capacity to attract and sustain investment. The report concluded:- "In general towns that have experienced sustained growth in population tend, regardless of their size, to be near or accessible to larger towns or the five Cities." The report also states that the ultimate consequence of unsustainable economic choices, i.e. migration, is most keenly felt in rural areas.

4.3.10   Unsustainable economic choices have had worrying consequences for rural areas. On the one hand, more accessible rural areas in the hinterland of strong performing urban areas have benefited from the rapid growth that has taken place over the last twenty years. However, in combination with adjoining settlements, growth has taken place at a scale that was never intended and has proven difficult and expensive to service in terms of amenities and infrastructure.

4.3.11   Rural population decline in areas that are less accessible to larger cities and towns in Ireland was masked by overall population growth in every County between 2001 and 2011, but has become more apparent since then. This is supported by the conclusions of the CEDRA Report where it was reported that during the period 1991-2011, rural areas close or accessible to the main cities and larger towns experienced significant population growth, whereas rural areas more remote or less accessible to towns and cities continued to experience significant population decline. This is also identified in the Action Plan for Rural Development.

4.3.12   There are policies in place across each of the local authorities in Ireland that currently facilitate living in the open countryside. Set out below is a visualisation of the number of planning permissions granted for houses in the countryside over a 14 year period, referred to as 'one-off houses' or single houses.
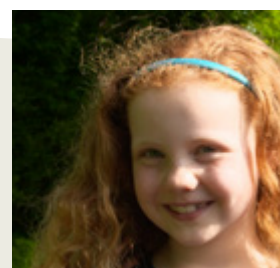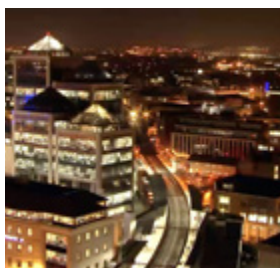
4.3.13 It will be necessary to protect some rural areas from unsustainable growth pressures as experienced in the recent past, whilst ensuring that there are attractive alternatives to urban-generated rural development in the hinterland of cities and larger towns. A different approach to rural development will be required in areas that are less accessible to large urban areas, but in the context of localised rural-urban hinterlands.

Rural-Urban Interdependence

4.3.14 Effective spatial planning has an important role to play in ensuring that Ireland plays to its strengths and delivers a strong dynamic between rural areas and urban concentrations, to deliver better standards of living for all. The interactions between urban areas and their rural hinterlands are key to harnessing rural potential.

4.3.15 The unprecedented scale of population growth in much of Rural Ireland to 2011 set an unsustainable standard. It also overshadowed underlying trends that appear to have accelerated and become prevalent in recent years. It is clear that there is an important relationship between the social and economic well-being of rural areas and their proximity and accessibility to viable towns and cities. The nature of the interactions between the different types of rural and urban Ireland, are critical to ensuring the resilience of rural places in Ireland.

4.3.16 Rural areas and towns retain distinctive place-based characteristics and many have historically generated populations far larger than those living in them today, with connections throughout the world. In the context of globalisation and sameness, such place-based considerations matter more than ever before. Notwithstanding recent trends, the authenticity and potential of places throughout Ireland are of immense value.

Figure 4.3.1

Planning Permission Grants, Houses 2001 - 2015

(Excludes Flats/Apartments) Source: CSO, Statbank BHA02
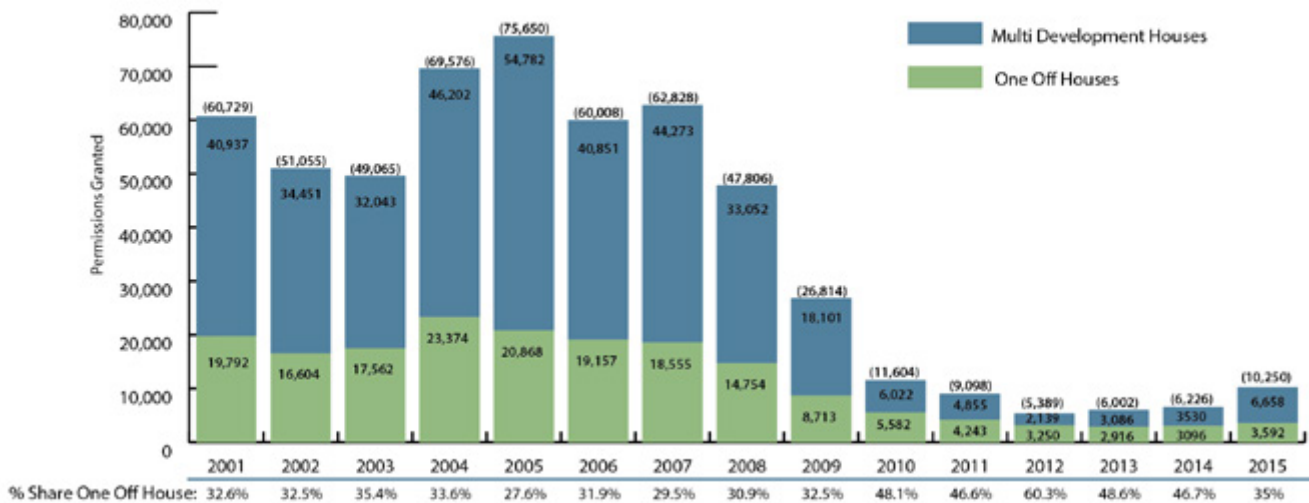
4.3.17 The realisation of more effective growth in Ireland's rural-urban hinterlands will require the variety of difference throughout Ireland, which is one of our unique strengths, to be brought into play. This key asset is built on a legacy of place-based cultural inheritance, which is so much part of us that we might overlook it. It has the potential to positively interact with technological change and improved connectivity, such as broadband, and in doing so, to further add to place-value.

4.3.18 This type of place-based approach will enable the National Planning Framework to address all parts of the Country, whether, rural, urban or in-between, at a time when all are more interdependent than ever. In contrast to a small number of large city-regions, there is a much larger number of rural-urban hinterlands throughout Ireland.

4.3.19 The National Planning Framework will seek to address urban-generated development in the hinterland of cities and larger towns and promote the development of integrated place-based strategies for rural-urban hinterlands. These will build on the unique and distinctive assets of localities throughout Ireland, in relation to food production and food, culture and heritage, landscape and tourism in the context of opportunities arising from new technologies and forms of clean energy production.

Where to Next?

Over the last twenty years in Ireland, some rural areas have benefited whilst others have been exposed not only to the consequences of the recent economic downturn but to long term trends that have undermined their viability. Addressing that transformation is challenging as the nature of many rural communities has been fundamentally changed through the decline of traditional rural industries and growing connections between rural and urban areas.

In the immediate short term, the three-year Action Plan for Rural Development (2017) will implement a range of economic and social initiatives across Rural Ireland. To build on this, the National Planning Framework will provide a strategic long-term vision within which future challenges for rural Ireland will be framed and addressed.

It is apparent that notwithstanding urban generated growth in some city hinterlands, in the absence of any plan or strategy, 'business as usual' is likely to lead to the further decline of those rural areas in Ireland that are less accessible to our cities and large towns;

- Without intervention, the scale of population growth in rural Ireland will continue to set an unsustainable standard, in certain areas. This is based on reliance on urban-generated single housing, which perpetuates car dependence, serves to undermine the viability and vitality of nearby villages and towns as places to live and leads to potential future legacy issues;

- Areas that are considered more peripheral will be characterised by an ageing population, leading to the challenges of living in social isolation as well as changing needs and the capacity of communities to meet those needs.

In order to move away from 'Business As Usual', it will be necessary for alternatives to consider the following:

- The interdependence of rural and urban areas, which serve to supplement and complement each other, rather than compete;

- The integrity of 'rural' as a viable entity where communities flourish and an excellent quality of life is on offer;

- To build on 'Excellence in Rural' – i.e. sectorally across agriculture, the marine, renewables, tourism etc.;

- To identify and further enhance the joint initiatives and collaborative approaches that deliver better outcomes for people and places in rural Ireland;

- To more sustainably manage the resource of land in rural areas – particularly where improvements on efficiencies of land use can be made as a means to achieving 'better places';

- The potential of 'rural' in a national context and how best to facilitate this potential through the NPF.

Key Questions

○ **How can the NPF capture (in a national, strategic policy context) the range and quality of resources that exist in rural areas that could be leveraged to support national economic growth, climate action objectives and the development of local communities?**

○ **What are the solutions to maintaining population in those rural areas where decline has been experienced?**

○ **What role should towns and villages in rural areas play in catering for Ireland's future growth?**

○ **How can the rural parts of Ireland close to urban areas be protected from development pressures that are likely to arise to accommodate further population growth?**

○ **What measures need to be in place to allow those who have a genuine need to live in the countryside to be accommodated?**

4.4 Ireland in an All-Island Context

The Cross Border Relationship with Northern Ireland

4.4.1   The UK's decision to leave the EU presents major challenges for the island of Ireland, in particular the potential implications for Northern Ireland and North-South relations. The Government and the Northern Ireland Executive have agreed, through the North South Ministerial Council, on arrangements to optimise North-South joint planning and engagement on key issues following the UK referendum result.

4.4.2   Cross border co-operation between Ireland and Northern Ireland covers a range of mutually important issues across a variety of sectors and governance structures, including under the auspices of the North South Ministerial Council. These include environmental management, energy, co-operation in education health and transport, enterprise development, joint investment decisions on infrastructure provisions and accident & emergency planning.

4.4.3   There is a mutual recognition of the need to understand the role and function of settlements on the island. This is encapsulated in the publication 'Framework for Co –operation: Spatial Strategies of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland' (2013), which seeks to examine the key planning challenges faced by both jurisdictions and opportunities as part of a co-operative approach to spatial planning.

4.4.4   The Framework for Co-operation together with strategic plans for both jurisdictions recognise that place making does not always follow boundaries, whether interregional or international. This is evidenced by the functional relationships between settlements on both sides of the border and by the movement of people between places. While exacts counts are not available, it is estimated that up to 30,000 people cross the border on a daily basis.

4.4.5   Commuter patterns indicate 'hotspots' (high levels of interaction at a number of cross border routes) between Derry/Londonderry and Donegal and between Newry and Dundalk (located on the Dublin-Belfast axis). Other noteworthy interactions include Cavan/Enniskillen, Lifford/Strabane and Monaghan/Armagh. These travel patterns suggest that a number of settlements on each side of the border have functional relationships with urban centres in the adjoining jurisdiction. The NPF provides an opportunity to establish a policy framework that supports joined-up approaches and the mechanisms to deliver co-ordinated growth in the border region.

4.4.6   Successful cross border approaches that provide a pathway for more effective performance at a spatial level include the North West Strategic Growth Partnership, which seeks to deepen co-operation between Donegal County and Derry/Londonderry & Strabane District Councils and with central government. This is a place-based approach to accelerate sustainable growth, driven by local leadership and supported and guided by central policy. A key output is to enhance the performance of the North-West metropolitan area which is key to both the NI Executive's and Irish Government's ambitions to realise the economic potential of the region.

4.4.7 Other regional and local leadership initiatives include the Regional Strategic Framework for the Central Border Region and the Strategic Alliance (MoU) between Newry and Mourne District Council and Louth Local Authorities to support and promote the economic development and competitiveness of the region.

Leveraging Economic Efficiencies

4.4.8 The UK is Ireland's largest trading partner, accounting for 17% of trade and cross border trade is an important aspect of this trading relationship, especially for Northern Ireland, with 33% of exports from Northern Ireland going to the South and 27% of imports coming from the South. The value of North South cross border trade in goods and services has been estimated by Intertrade Ireland at approximately 6 billion euro in 2014.
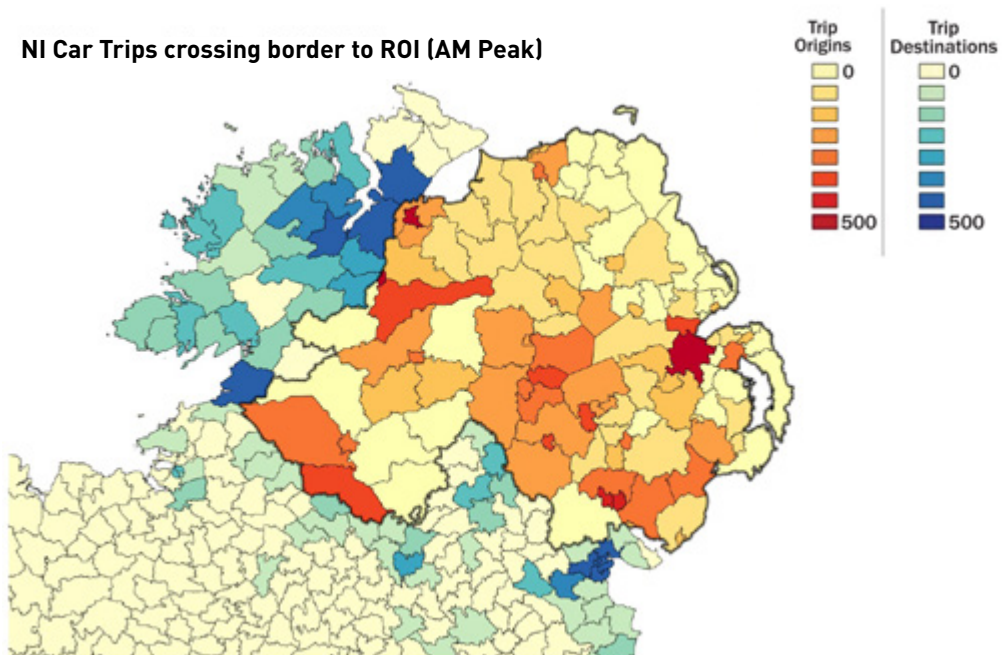
Figure 4.4.1

Cross Border Employment Commuting Flows

ROI Car Trips crossing border to NI (AM Peak)
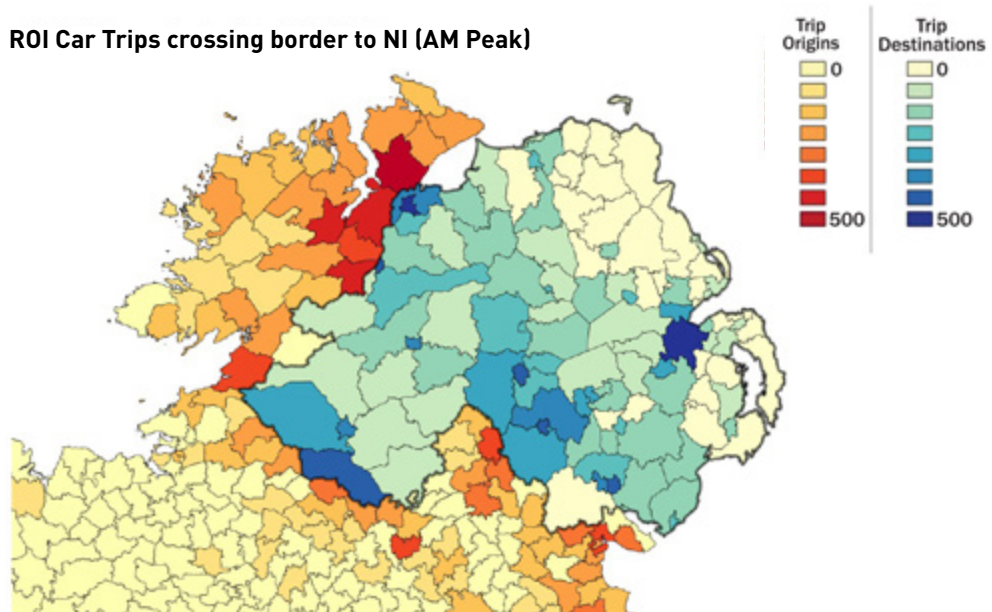
Source: Transport Infrastructure Ireland

NI Car Trips crossing border to ROI (AM Peak)

Source: Transport Infrastructure Ireland

4.4.9   As with interaction between places, sectoral development and clustering of enterprise does not follow administrative boundaries and requires a coherent approach to cross-border networks and spill-overs where relevant. There are opportunities to identify sectors with scope for potential for cross-border/all-island clustering, such as pharmaceuticals, medical devices and software development, to effectively brand and market such strengths. The Dublin-Belfast (Eastern Seaboard) Economic Corridor is one such cross-border 'branded' region.

4.4.10   Tourism also represents an important source for economic development, both in terms of attracting visitors (overseas and domestic) and providing job opportunities. Since 2008, the annual number of visitors travelling to Ireland from Northern Ireland has almost trebled to 1.7 million, while the numbers going north have remained at around 400,000 per annum.

4.4.11   Tourism figures indicate a high degree of interdependence between tourist offerings on both side of the border, with Irish airports and ports having a key role in this. This is demonstrated by the fact that 67 per cent of visitors to Northern Ireland from outside the UK or Ireland arrive via Ireland.

Connecting Places through Infrastructure

4.4.12   The importance of a co-ordinated approach to national infrastructure on both sides of the border is evident. In the past for example, investment in safety enhancements at the City of Derry Airport were jointly funded by both administrations. More recently, the Irish Government reaffirmed its commitment to contribute to the upgrade of the A5 Dublin-Derry/Londonderry road in Northern Ireland, which also serves North Donegal and the north-west. Cross border transport links include other roads, the Dublin –Belfast railway line and proposed 'greenway' walking/cycling routes, such as along the Ulster Canal.

4.4.13   Co-ordination with Northern Ireland on energy matters is now embedded in Irish energy policy, supported by an all-island Single Electricity Market (SEM). This gives rise to joint planning to meet future capacity and the interventions needed to achieve this, including electricity grid connections and interconnectors.

4.4.14   Issues common to both jurisdictions include increasing energy demands, ongoing need to upgrade transport networks and a requirement for fast and effective broadband, especially for business users. It is therefore important that where relevant, infrastructure interventions strategically complement both the NPF and Northern Ireland Regional Development Strategy to help realise the key drivers common to both. This will require regional and local leadership.

A Shared Environment

4.4.15   There are many shared environmental interests across the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland where co-ordination is required. In some cases, there is a statutory obligation e.g. the EU Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive regarding trans-boundary consultation in relation to spatial and land use plans. In other cases, geographic catchment-based strategies require stewardship by both jurisdictions e.g. in the areas of water quality, river basin management, flood risk, maritime spatial planning and designated habitats and sites. A number of jointly funded North South bodies have roles and responsibilities in these areas.

4.4.16   There are also other national commitments to reflect the transboundary nature of the environment and its stewardship. These include actions to develop a National Landscape Character Assessment in Ireland, which acknowledge the need to work on a trans-boundary basis and complement Northern Ireland's Landscape Charter.

Where to Next?

To be successful, policy responses to Brexit, including the NPF and our approach to infrastructure development, must reflect a volatile and changing external environment at global and EU level, as well as the more direct implications on the island of Ireland. The nature and terms of Brexit will be critical to determining both economic impacts and macro-economic and sectoral policy responses, such as the NPF. As the UK negotiation position becomes clearer, sectoral analyses will be revisited with the aim of honing policy responses. At this stage, however, it is clear that, in addition to the enterprise and retail sectors, the projected impacts of Brexit will be most significant in agri-food and fisheries, the transport and energy sectors and the Border economy.

The NPF must adapt to and reflect these underlying circumstances. The following issues, in particular, may need to be considered:-

o The strategic potential of the Dublin-Belfast (eastern seaboard) corridor and how it can be developed to better influence planning decisions between the two Capital cities on the island of Ireland;

o The need to look beyond administrative boundaries for effective development of regions by working together through structures such as the North West Gateway Initiative and the North West Strategic Growth Partnership in partnership with local government (Donegal-Derry/Londonderry & Strabane);

o Greater alignment of infrastructure planning which underpins the objectives of both the NPF and Regional Development Strategy in Northern Ireland to address mutual cross border spatial challenges;

o The potential for cross-border or all-island clustering of economic activity and how best the NPF can help build the long term economic resilience of areas along our borders;

o Joint thinking and management approaches to environmental management and protection.

Key Questions

o **How can the NPF facilitate co-ordination between settlements that share connections across the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland and how should this be reflected in the document?**

o **What economic opportunities and sectoral clusters exist that can benefit economies within both jurisdictions and how can this be best captured and supported in the NPF?**

o **What mechanisms are needed to ensure a joined-up approach to strategic infrastructure and investment decisions that have a cross-border dimension and are there examples of best practice?**

o **In terms of delivering cross-border infrastructure as detailed for example in the IBEC-CBI NI All Island Investment Project[9], what structures need to be developed to leverage joint financing, including through the private sector?**

o **How do we co-ordinate mutually beneficial ways to address common environmental challenges across shared catchments?**

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9   Ibec-CBI(NI_ Joint Business Council: Connected – All Island Investment Project, July 2016 https://www.ibec.ie/IBEC/Press/PressPublicationsdoclib3.nsf/vPages/Newsroom~ibec-cbi-set-out-ambitious-plan-for-all-island-economy-24-07-2016/$file/Ibec+CBI+all-island+report+WEB.pdf

4.5 Integrated Land and Marine Development

Ireland's Islands and the Marine – Influential Combinations

4.5.1   Ireland's position as an island nation on the western periphery of Europe has shaped not only the nation's landscape but has had a significant bearing on the history of the country, the settlement patterns that exist, our unique culture and heritage as well as influencing our society and economy.

4.5.2   Ireland has a vast and diverse marine resource – our seabed territory covers approximately 880,000km^2, more than ten times our landmass. Our coastline of 3,171km is longer than that of many European countries.

Figure 4.5.1

Designated Irish Continental Shelf Maritime Boundary
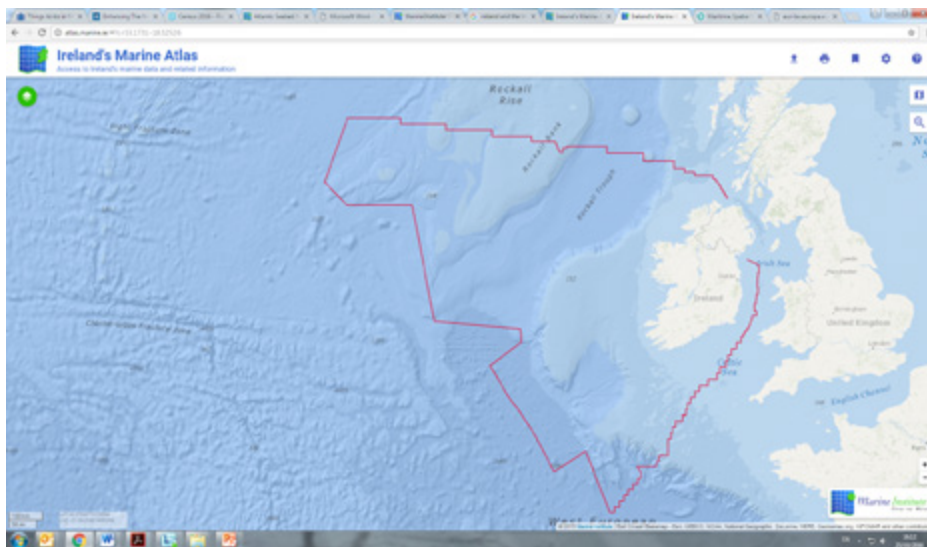
Source: Ireland's Marine Atlas atlas.marine.ie

4.5.3   Our islands and coastal areas contain some of our most vibrant and culturally distinctive communities. They are an integral part of the state's heritage and have a special significance in Irish culture. Whilst there are many hundreds of small islands off the coast of Ireland, approximately forty, mainly Gaeltacht islands, support settled populations. The majority of the Gaeltacht islands lie off the western seaboard of Counties Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Kerry and Cork.

4.5.4   These communities are distinctive and unique in an Irish context, due to the fragility and isolation of island life. As a result of their location, they become adept at self-reliance and have a very strong sense of identity. Fishing has been a core economic activity within the island communities of Ireland for generations. Ireland's coastline, inshore and offshore waters:

- Contain some of the largest and most valuable fisheries resource in Europe;

- Are the western gateway for shipping to Europe's busiest seaports;

- Are an ideal location for finfish, shellfish and seaweed aquaculture;

- Are among the richest and most accessible renewable energy (wind, wave and tidal) resources in the world;

- Contain significant oil and gas resource potential as evidenced by recent discoveries and ongoing research;

- Provide opportunities to develop new products and services;

- Offer tourism and leisure opportunities and a rich maritime culture and heritage;

- Support a rich and diverse range of ecosystems, habitats and species and unique land and seascapes.

Marine Spatial Planning

4.5.5   There is no widely accepted definition for land-sea interactions. The concept may be thought of in terms of human activities and uses both on land and in marine waters, and how they interact in ways that generate economic, social and environmental impacts.

4.5.6   In considering how terrestrial and maritime planning processes might interact and integrate it may also be useful to consider thematic areas of common interest to both processes, and in respect of which there may be overlap, either spatially or in terms of the economic, social and environmental impacts they generate. Such areas include but are not limited to:-

- Coastal protection;

- Flood risk management;

- Water quality;

- Landscape / seascape;

- Cultural heritage;

- Biodiversity;

- Nature conservation;

- Energy infrastructure;

- Communications infrastructure;

- Ports/shipping/harbours/marinas/dredging;

- Tourism/Recreation/Leisure.

4.5.7   Maritime Spatial Planning (MSP) examines how we use the marine area and planning how best to use it into the future. Ireland must have a Maritime Spatial Plan in place by March 2021 in accordance with EU Directive 2014/89/EU. MSP will seek to balance the different demands for using the sea including the need to protect the marine environment.   It's about planning when and where human activities take place at sea and ensuring these activities are as efficient and sustainable as possible.

4.5.8   Working together with the National Planning Framework, Ireland's first Marine Spatial Plan will provide the strategic policy framework to encourage sustainable development and use of the marine environment to deliver economic and social benefits for island and coastal communities.

Ireland's Marine Economy

4.5.9   'Harnessing Our Ocean Wealth' – An Integrated Marine Plan for Ireland, published in 2012, is a cross Governmental Integrated Marine/Blue Growth policy initiative. The central aim of the policy is to significantly develop Ireland's Blue economy, grow employment in the maritime sector and double its contribution to Ireland's GDP by 2030. The plan sets out 39 Actions across eight enablers aimed at creating the conditions for growth and investment. New approaches across a range of thematic areas were identified to be implemented, including the following:

- 'Marinising' existing enterprise sectors such as energy, ICT and food - extending their businesses into a range of new marine-related markets (ICT for the Sea, marine biotechnology and maritime commerce);

- Strengthening established marine industries; and

- Developing untapped natural resources or existing resources in new ways.

4.5.10   The marine economy in Ireland may be sub-categorised in terms of Ocean or Coastal markets:

Ocean

- Seafood: sea fisheries, aquaculture, seafood processing, marine biotechnology and bio products;

- Energy: oil and gas exploration and production; marine renewable energy: offshore wind, wave and tidal;

- Marine Tourism: sea-based and coastal tourism e.g. sailing, surfing, diving, sea angling etc., international cruise industry.

Coastal

- Maritime Transport, Shipbuilding and Services (MTSS): marine commerce and ship leasing, ports, shipping and maritime transport.

- Marine supported activities: marine manufacturing, engineering and construction, and marine retail services.

- Emerging/nascent activity: maritime commerce, high-tech marine products and services, ocean energy and marine biotechnology.

4.5.11   Seizing new opportunities in the marine sector such as those in the learning economy and the energy sector will help to deliver sustainable economic growth, attracting and retaining population and supporting services. This is particularly relevant to coastal communities. In terms of skills, the industry in Ireland requires technicians and general operatives as well as high-skilled technical staff and professions.

4.5.12   The sub-sectors with the greatest demand for skills are seafood, MTSS (Maritime Transport and Shipbuilding and services), and marine tourism. Core skills and knowledge relating to many occupations (e.g. accountancy, engineering, electricians) can be 'marinised' by acquiring additional training, or a top up qualification, that allows for their particular application in a marine context.

4.5.13   Positive trends have been reported across a number of key sectors such as seafood exports, shipping and tourism in marine and coastal areas. The total volume of traffic moving through Irish ports recorded a 7 percent increase in 2015, the highest level recorded since the beginning of the economic crisis.

4.5.14   The National Ports Policy that resulted in tiering Ireland's ports means that transport infrastructure has and is developing well in Ireland's three 'Tier 1' ports. Dublin, Cork and Shannon Foynes development plans, with related road and rail infrastructure upgrades, provide evidence of the progress being made.

Where to Next?

Related to the success or otherwise of the marine and island economies are Ireland's coastal communities, often located on the periphery of the island. These communities are central to the life and vibrancy of marine and island activity. As the more traditional elements of the sector depend on the skills of people located in these areas, a 'Business as Usual' scenario would see population decline in more remote rural areas of Ireland, including coastal and island communities.

Similar to other traditional skilled sectors, technological advances over recent decades have led to the Marine sector having to respond to a changing working world. In addition to Ireland's membership of the European Union, these advances have had implications for marine based employment.

The inter-relationship between land and sea will need to be enhanced in order to allow Ireland to excel and become world leaders in the Marine. In order to enhance this interaction, it will be necessary for alternatives to consider the following:

- Maximising the national opportunities for excellence in the Marine including infrastructure, energy, conservation and data technology;

- Future proofing the structures that govern the Marine Sector to strengthen capacity;

- Integrated management of marine assets;

- The role of marine environmental quality in the economy of Ireland and whether land based activities are complementing or compromising our surrounding waters.

Key Questions

- **In thinking about what Ireland might look like in twenty years' time, what is the future for Ireland's coastline, islands and offshore?**

- **How can coastal and island communities contribute to a national vision for Ireland, as part of the NPF?**

- **How can the goals of the integrated Marine Plan be spatially represented in a National Planning Framework?**

- **What, policies, measures or actions need to be advanced to enable Ireland's marine resource to adapt to the effects of climate change (e.g. coastal erosion, flooding, sea level rise etc.)?**

- **What infrastructure investments need to be made in order to maximise the sustainable potential of our ocean resource?**

5 Ireland's Unique Environment – Sustainability

5.1 Development and Land Use Change

5.1.1   Ireland's environment and its diverse landscapes form part of our green persona and we have much to be proud of. In particular, we generally have good air quality and we have many rivers and lakes with good quality water. The national effort regarding waste recycling and recovery are also testament to our ability to adapt to environmental concerns.

5.1.2   While the overall quality of our environment is good, this masks some of the threats we now face. A recent assessment of Ireland's environment by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) indicates that the choices we make will have implications for future generations. Some of the key national environmental challenges include the need to accelerate action on climate change and renewable energy, dealing with air quality problems in urban areas, health risks to drinking water, treating urban waste water and protecting important and vulnerable habitats.

5.1.3   Good planning is important for the sustainability of our environment. The planning system has influence across a wide range of sectors, both directly and indirectly, and interacts with many common issues related to effective environmental management including water services, landscape, flood risk planning, coastal and marine management, climate mitigation and adaptation and land use change.

5.1.4   A key policy instrument to ensure that plans, policies and projects are better aligned is the use of Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) at a strategic plan making level. A separate SEA 'scoping' document examines this issue in more detail alongside Appropriate Assessment in relation to protected habitats and Strategic Flood Risk Appraisal and is available to be read in conjunction with this discussion paper.

5.1.5   Land is a finite resource. In the relationship between land and people in Ireland, complex issues and varying interests have often embodied the interface between person and place. Management and stewardship of land as a resource can be a source of conflict, particularly where individuals or communities feel threatened by land use change.

5.1.6   The nature and rate of land use change indicates where future environmental pressures are likely to arise. Ireland has experienced a relatively high rate of land use change since the early 1990s. Recent population growth has led to an increase in the extent of dispersed residential and commercial development as well as new infrastructure, which have resulted in pressure on agricultural land, designated nature conservation areas and water quality. Meeting the increased infrastructure demands will require secure supplies of raw materials which may contribute to land use pressures.

5.1.7 Unsustainable land use change can affect human health and have a harmful effect on water, air, soils and/or biodiversity, especially when combined with poorly managed responses to development. For example, it is estimated by the EPA that approximately 30% of 17,000 private wells in Ireland are contaminated by E.coli.

5.1.8 From an urban development perspective, the proper treatment and disposal of waste water is a key challenge to the sustainable growth of our larger urban centres. The negative impacts arising from the discharge of untreated wastewater on the receiving environment and on our public health is a particular concern for the EPA. This arises in relation to more than 40 locations across the country, including our two largest cities.

5.1.9 In relation to air quality, our cities and large towns are increasingly experiencing air quality problems, largely due to emissions from vehicle exhausts and home heating. A recent European Environment Agency (EEA) report indicates that 1,200 premature deaths in Europe every year can be attributed to particulate matter exposure (which mainly arises from traffic emissions and the burning of smoky fuels for home heating).

5.1.10 Meeting the challenges for improving air and water quality will require policy co-ordination and a range of measures including but not limited to emission controls, improved technology and alternative fuel sources. Planning policy has a key role to play. More integrated land use and transport planning, green space provision and high quality urban place-making will complement other solutions to the improvement of air quality in our urban areas.

5.2 Climate Action

5.2.1 Ireland is committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and in this context has obligations at international level via the Paris Agreement and at EU level under the EU Effort Sharing Decision (Decision no. 406/2009/EU) (ESD). National policy and obligations is set out in the National Policy Position on Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (2014) and the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015.

5.2.2 In relation to greenhouse gas emissions reduction, Ireland has a target for each year between 2013 and 2020 under the ESD. For the year 2020, the target set is that emissions should be 20% below their value in 2005.

5.2.3 The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has reported that emissions for 2015 are estimated at 59.84 million tonnes carbon dioxide equivalent, which is 3.7% higher than emissions in 2014. While according to the EPA, these figures indicate that Ireland will be in compliance with its 2015 annual limit set under the ESD, it has cautioned that the 2015 emissions data suggests that achievement of our long-term mitigation goals will be difficult. In this context, the most recent EPA projections (March 2016) indicate that emissions for 2020 could be in the range of 6-11% below 2005 levels, rather than the -20% target.

5.2.4 In terms of putting in place the first of a series of plans to manage our transition to a low carbon economy and to meet our international and EU targets, a national mitigation plan will be submitted to Government for approval not later than 10 June 2017 in accordance with the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015. This will include sectoral mitigation measures.

5.2.5 The National Climate Change Adaptation Framework (published in 2012) recognised the critical importance of planning and development measures in the overall strategic approach to tackling climate change adaptation, including reducing risk and building resilience. The key role of spatial planning will be restated and renewed in the statutory National Adaptation Framework which is being developed under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 and will be the subject of a separate public consultation.

5.2.6 If Ireland is to make up for lost ground in relation to carbon reduction targets and move towards the objective of a low carbon and climate resilient Ireland by 2050, it is necessary to make choices about how we plan for future growth. A key role for the National Planning Framework will be to assist in reinforcing the structural changes required to transition to a low carbon sustainable economy and society. This will require us to make decisions about how we balance growth with more sustainable approaches to development and to examine how planning policy can help shape national infrastructural decisions.

5.2.7   The transport sector, which comprises approximately one fifth of carbon emissions in Ireland, has been the fastest growing source of emissions since 1990, showing a 120% increase between 1990 and 2014. This can be linked to rising car ownership, dispersed land use and car dependency, with a 140% increase in the numbers commuting to work between 1991 and 2011.

5.2.8   If we are to reduce emissions from sectors such as transport, it will be necessary to address the growing divergence between where people live, work and socialise and in doing so, to also recognise the importance of high quality place-making to assist the national effort towards a low carbon and climate resilient Ireland. It is relevant to consider, for example, the extent to which greenfield lands are considered to be the principal option to accommodate all forms of new development, given the increasing distances that people are travelling between home and work.

5.3   Re-Energising Ireland

5.3.1   Sustainability, energy security and competitiveness are inter-related challenges. In recognition of this, Ireland's Energy White Paper entitled 'Irelands Transition to a Low Carbon Energy Future 2015-2030' sets out a framework for energy policy which recognises that a radical transformation of our energy system is required to meet our national, EU and international climate objectives to be pursued through successive National Mitigation Plans.

5.3.2   Energy infrastructure, including electricity grid infrastructure, electricity generation and gas networks, is critical to support Ireland's future growth. Approximately 60% of our greenhouse gas emissions derive from energy related uses in the residential, transport, energy, industrial and commercial sectors, which remain primarily dependent on fossil fuels.

5.3.3   Energy cost is a critical factor for competitiveness. This is important to attract overseas investment and ensure affordable service provision to our people and businesses. Ireland's dispersed settlement pattern poses a significant challenge to costs. The extent of our electricity network is over 35 metres of electricity grid per capita, which is high in comparison to other EU countries.

5.3.4   If we are to reduce our national reliance on fossil fuels, increase our long term energy security and decouple economic growth from emissions, our future energy needs will need to be delivered in a more sustainable way whilst also providing retrofit solutions to existing development. Alternative energy sources are also required. Renewable energies provide part of this solution and are aligned with national policy regarding climate change and climate action.

5.3.5   The renewables sector will continue to become more and more central to meeting our national energy demands. This raises the issue of how we prioritise renewable energy projects at suitable locations across Ireland, balanced with the need to sustain the existing environment and amenity. In particular, some areas of the country are better suited to the generation of renewable energy and differing types of renewable energy infrastructure.

5.3.6   There is a need for a co-ordinated approach as to how these projects are delivered if we are to achieve a low carbon economy and carbon neutrality in various sectors. This raises questions about the type, scale and location of renewable infrastructure such as wind and solar renewables and on-shore and off-shore locations to meet renewable targets.

5.3.7   At a national level, it may be an option to create Strategic Energy Zones or Corridors, similar to Strategic Development Zones, as areas of national priority for renewable energy investment, as well as to provide a test bed for new technologies and developing solutions for carbon storage and capture.

5.3.8   At a regional level, Regional Economic and Spatial Strategies will have a role in this area through regional approaches to renewables such as wind farms, solar farms and district heating provision and coordination across local administrative boundaries. This may also address the overlapping policy area of landscape and landscape characterisation.

5.4 Heritage and Landscape

5.4.1 Ireland has a rich vein of heritage ranging from the iconic historic buildings and sites within our towns and cities, to the natural heritage of our countryside. The NPF is an opportunity to refocus on the sustainable and adaptive reuse of our existing and historic assets, regenerate existing areas and reduce pressure for unsustainable expansion on the edges of our settlements. There is also recognition of the value of our natural heritage not only for biodiversity but also for recreation, tourism and scientific purposes.

5.4.2 Ireland's landscape offers a wealth of natural and cultural assets which support our quality of life and our visitor economy. We have a duty to future generations to use these assets responsibly whilst making our existing infrastructure work harder to deliver more benefits. This must be related to societal values that include social cohesion and a sense of cultural heritage. It will also enable us to balance our strong relationship with the land with environmental protection.

5.4.3 The protection, management and planning of the landscape is interconnected with biodiversity and climate change, as recognised in the National Landscape Strategy (NLS) for Ireland 2015-2025. The ambitions of the NLS cut across a number of sectoral interests and policy areas including the NPF. This requires a balance between competing ambitions and the need to look at how policy integration can be implemented in order to underpin effective spatial planning.

5.4.4 Failure to protect our landscapes, seascapes and our cultural heritage will damage the attractiveness of Ireland as a place to live, visit and work. The NPF can help shape future economic development through setting an appropriate balance between ensuring the resilience of our natural resources and cultural assets, meeting climate and energy obligations and providing for sustainable economic development.

5.5 Green Infrastructure and Biodiversity

5.5.1 Green infrastructure (GI) is where natural and/or managed landscape features such as a watercourse and/or parkland is managed and enhanced as a multifunctional resource capable of delivering a wide range of economic, environmental and quality of life benefits, known as 'ecosystem services'.

5.5.2 These benefits can include creating an attractive environment to encourage businesses and inward investment; more places for people to access nature, outdoor recreation or social interaction or physical activity by providing quality, linked green or 'blue' (water-related) spaces for walking, cycling and other physical activity and creating a sense of place and local distinctiveness. They also generally include a holistic approach to developing the landscape inclusive of other influences, such as ecological development, improving air, water and soil quality and flood protection.

5.5.3 Ireland has a wide diversity of natural and semi-natural habitats such as mountains, bogs, wetlands, lakes, coastline, river and upland habitats that support a wide range of wild plant and animal species. Many of these areas are coming under increasing pressure as development intensifies.

5.5.4 The main issues that Ireland's habitats and species face are direct habitat damage. This can be caused by flooding, wetland drainage/reclamation or infrastructural development, water pollution particularly from nutrients and silt or unsustainable exploitation such as over-fishing and peat extraction. There are also threats from invasive species and recreational pressures. Climate change is also likely to give rise to additional pressures on a number of species and habitats in Ireland.

Where to Next?

The 'business as usual' model is a continuation of current patterns and approaches to environmental management and competing demands. Consequently, this approach is likely to result in:

- A continuation of existing growth patterns, putting increased pressures on the receiving environment and threatening public health;

- Continued threat to and decline in the status of habitats and species in Ireland;

- Failure to reach international climate and energy commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and meet legally binding renewable energy targets and the potential financial costs for the Exchequer if 'Carbon Credits' (greenhouse gas emissions) and/or 'statistical transfers' (renewable energy) have to be purchased in order to comply with the targets set, notwithstanding improvements in technology;

- Continued relationships of spatial dispersal resulting in to higher costs for energy services;

- Ongoing public dissatisfaction, costs and delays in relation to the delivery of renewable energy projects.

It is considered that any alternatives need to consider the following:

- Avoiding environmental harm through better planning that is co-ordinated with related investment;

- Less dispersed development that can contribute to more affordable energy costs and make it easier to provide infrastructure on a national scale to more people;

- Making the changes required to transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society and providing greater certainty regarding the type, scale and location of renewable infrastructure across Ireland;

- Developing a tool kit of options to ensure greater environmental coherence when planning for future growth such as inclusion of green infrastructure planning and coherent landscape classification as part of mainstream plan making.

Key Questions

- **How can the NPF help to ensure we get a sustainable balance between catering for a growing population and avoiding or addressing environmental pressures?**

- **How do we plan for growth in such a way that supports a transition to a low carbon and climate resilient economy and what planning policy measures are needed to achieve this?**

- **'What strategic energy infrastructure is needed to support the economy and society and realise the transformation of Ireland's energy system to meet climate change and energy obligations and in what areas should it be located?**

- **Are there any other national environmental issues that you think should be included within the NPF and that are within the remit of planning policy?**

- **An SEA scoping document has been developed in tandem with this paper. What are the relevant significant issues to be addressed by the SEA, AA and SFRA and what environmental objectives should be used?**

- **What measures should be implemented in order to safeguard our landscapes, seascapes and heritage and ensure that Ireland continues to be an attractive place to live, visit and work?**

<div style="color:red">**6**</div>

Equipping Ireland for Future Development - Infrastructure

6.1 Setting the Bar

6.1.1 High-quality infrastructure is an important element of a modern society and economy. It strengthens economic growth through enhancing efficiency, productivity and competitiveness. It also underpins social cohesion through providing vital facilities for people in the form of schools, public transport, healthcare and housing.

6.1.2 The EU Commission Country Report on Ireland published in 2016 identified that in 2010-2013, capital spending averaged 4.8 % of total expenditure, which was less than half the long term average during 1995-2008. The Report states that several years of reduced government investment have had a negative impact on the quality and adequacy of infrastructure.

6.1.3 Whilst macroeconomic decision-making regarding the availability of expenditure for capital investment is beyond the scope of the National Planning Framework alone, the NPF will present a clear picture of the planning principles that will influence future priorities for determining where people should live and what types of economic and social activities are best suited to particular regions and localities.

6.1.4 In setting out a strategy, the National Planning Framework will provide spatial clarity and co-ordination that will be aligned with future Capital Investment Plans. The actual choice of investment decisions and between specific projects as well as issues of affordability will be considered against the background of the NPF, with the most significant strategic projects nationally identified in the NPF.

6.1.5 This joined-up thinking will serve to assist in creating the conditions for new and additional sources of infrastructure funding and delivery. The National Roads programme is an example of successful implementation of an overall strategy, that set out to deliver high quality inter-urban motorways between Dublin and the principal centres of population.

6.1.6 It has been a particular issue that the relationship between infrastructure and land-use in Ireland is such that the spatial pattern of development has served to reinforce the predominant status quo. This is largely because infrastructural investment has followed development and population, in the context of constrained public expenditure and a market driven, development-led environment.

6.1.7 The status quo has also meant a recurring mismatch between population growth and housing supply in recent decades. Most recently, there has been an oversupply of housing across the Country, followed by a housing shortage in the main population centres. This cycle characterises the 'business as usual' approach and it has been necessary to prioritise putting in place the Rebuilding Ireland Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness to tackle the current challenges and accelerate delivery of housing solutions in the short term.

6.1.8 Given that it is possible to make projections for population growth, household formation and anticipated housing requirements, it is timely to examine the relationships between housing demand, supply, location and supporting infrastructure as part of a strategic, long term national approach to planning for people and place. The NPF offers an opportunity to do this in order to achieve a better alignment between population growth and housing requirements. This will require a strategic view of likely housing demand and land supply at a national level to support coordinated investment across a number of departments and agencies.

6.1.9 The NPF will be relevant to strategic national infrastructure that can influence the spatial pattern of development and contribute to national objectives in areas such as transport, water, wastewater/ flooding, waste, climate action, broadband/ telecommunications, energy, health, education, community and tourism. This will include ensuring that critical infrastructure is adapted to the impacts of climate change and that future infrastructure investments are climate proofed as well as developing the potential of green infrastructure and environmental networks that provide ecosystem services, to complement more traditional infrastructures.

6.1.10 The provision of social infrastructure, commensurate to the location and scale of a settlement or locality, is also central to supporting sustainable vibrant communities that cater for all life stages. This is because it is apparent that development over the past twenty years has been widely dispersed, mainly outside established urban areas.

6.1.11 In Ireland, primary school enrolments are projected to rise to a peak of over 574,000 in 2018, before beginning to reduce. This peak figure is reflective of primary enrolment levels last seen in Ireland in the early 1980s. Post-primary enrolments are also projected to rise until 2025, at which point enrolments at second level are expected to be in excess of 400,000 pupils for the first time in the history of the State.

6.1.12 The numbers enrolled in higher education have also been steadily increasing in recent years and are expected to peak during the late 2020's. Full time enrolments in particular have grown substantially, increasing by over 25% in the past 10 years alone. The highly educated nature of the population is such that in 2015, 52% of people in the 25-34 age cohort had secured a third level qualification, which is well above the EU average (42%). An ongoing need for lifelong learning and upskilling of the workforce will also contribute to future demand across further and higher education provision.

6.2 Scale and Impact

6.2.1 In some instances, the rapid growth of small settlements has resulted in development at a scale and pace that has challenged the capacity of services and has led to requirements for new infrastructure, facilities and services, whereas in others, existing services and infrastructure in have become underutilised or redundant, serving diminishing and ageing populations.

6.2.2 This has meant that people in Ireland are required to travel longer distances for basic services, as these cannot be replicated everywhere that new populations have emerged. Dispersed development has also served to undermine planned strategic growth areas and key regeneration sites in many cities and towns.

6.2.3 In combination, this has made effective service and infrastructure planning difficult. For example, many planned development areas are supported by public investment in enabling infrastructure, including public transport, the potential benefits of which cannot be realised.

6.2.4 It is indicative that the Census-defined built up areas of the four largest cities outside Dublin returned an average gross density of 13 people per hectare, whereas the equivalent area in Dublin had 35 people per hectare (2011 figures). This has significant implications for infrastructure and service provision. For example, it is generally accepted that the minimum figure required for the provision of economically viable public transport is in excess of 30 people per hectare.

6.2.5 To ensure a strategic approach to infrastructure provision at a national scale, the NPF will provide the spatial background against which investment decisions can be prioritised, to collectively form a strategy. This will commence with the mid-term review of the current capital plan to 2021, which will overlap with the initial period of implementation of the NPF.

6.2.6 Activities such as online trading require communications networks to be in place to support the requisite quality of connectivity. The successful delivery of the National Broadband Plan will ultimately play a central role for the regional development, to underpin job creation, promote social inclusion and reduce travel needs (and consequently fossil fuel consumption).

6.2.7 The long time horizon of the NPF will enable a range of strategic projects to be aligned and sequenced in relation to emerging spatial development and land use outcomes. Ongoing monitoring and review of spatial development outcomes will feed into periodic review of both the NPF and serve to influence future strategic infrastructure spending and sequencing.

Where to Next?

The possibility of linking spatial considerations to packaged and sequenced investment measures is what can differentiate the NPF as a strategy from a 'wishlist' of projects. Such 'joined-up thinking' will also serve to assist new and additional sources of infrastructure funding and delivery, but does require up-front decision making. This is in contrast to a more reactive approach that seeks to respond to problems as they arise or at best, to address imminent 'bottlenecks'.

This reactive scenario is more representative of 'business as usual' in Ireland in recent years and it is clear that significant pressures already exist, for example in relation to the availability and affordability of housing, urban transport, water supply and waste water, healthcare, the cost of childcare and securing school places at primary and secondary level.

To ensure best value for money and efficiency in terms of infrastructural expenditure and to realise the significant potential of existing embedded infrastructure, any alternatives will need to:-

- Identify nationally strategic infrastructural priorities;

- Promote the 'packaging' and sequencing of spatially related infrastructural projects on a phased basis to achieve optimal outcomes;

- Suggest where large-scale strategic urban extensions or new settlement types may be appropriate and what social infrastructure may be required;

- Identify mechanisms to capture the embedded infrastructural value that exists in many existing settlements and to support more attractive development at such locations;

- Enable greater policy integration and joined up investment decisions across planning, health and transport policy sectors, which are proven to help to make sustainable and active travel more attractive alternatives to the private car;

- Consider the availability of public and state lands for exemplar projects.

Key Questions

- **What are the nationally important infrastructure projects for Ireland that require delivery over the next twenty years?**

- **What do we need to do to make best use of existing infrastructure?**

- **How can we ensure that the provision of infrastructure can be planned to match future demand and how can the NPF reflect this?**

- **How can capital spending on new infrastructure be sequenced in a way that is affordable and equitable, while taking account of Ireland's Climate Change obligations?**

- **How do we ensure that existing and new development can be supported by the timely provision of social infrastructure?**

7 Enabling the Vision – Implementing the National Planning Framework

7.1 Commitment and Structures

7.1.1   Implementing the National Planning Framework will be as important as preparing it. The NPF will need to be clear on how it will be implemented, who will implement it and what the key implementation actions are, given that the geographical and organisational boundaries of the organisations central to achieving the goals of the NPF rarely coincide with everyday patterns of living, working and travelling to access services.

7.1.2   Learning from experience with the National Spatial Strategy, legislative support, backed up by wider political and institutional commitment is central to ensuring that the NPF will influence public policy across Government, the Regional Assembly and Local Authority administrations. It is therefore intended that the finalisation of the National Planning Framework will be followed up by strong national, regional and local level implementation.

7.1.3   In line with the recommendations of the final report of the Mahon Tribunal published in 2012, it is intended that a statutory process for the making of the National Planning Framework and its implementation will be put in place under the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016.

7.1.4   Structures will be developed and put in place to ensure that the NPF and its main proposals are given top-level commitment, including of a budgetary and investment nature, and are therefore appropriately driven, including constant monitoring to measure progress and focus accordingly.

7.1.5   A national level development framework like the NPF will need to be strategic and highly focused in approach, meaning that it must be complemented by more detailed strategies, at a geographical level in terms of regional and local dimensions and at a sectoral level in terms of policies in relation to transport, energy, enterprise development or housing.

7.1.6   The Local Government Reform Act 2014 established three Regional Assemblies, broadly covering the East and Midlands, the South and North-West of the Country. Alongside the National Planning Framework, the Regional Assemblies will also each finalise and adopt a Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) to outline in more detail how the NPF will be implemented in each Regional Assembly area and in the local authority areas that make up each assembly.

7.1.7   All three Regional Assembly areas include both rural and urban areas and coastal and inland counties and two border Northern Ireland. In the case of the East and Midlands, there is evidence to suggest that the area driven by or influenced by Dublin extends from southern Cavan to Wexford, which touches on all three Regional Assembly areas and multiple local authorities.

7.1.8   The thirty-one local authorities are critical implementers of a National Planning Framework because they are responsible for a broad range of local development functions, including economic development and planning, housing, mobility and traffic management, community development and environmental protection, that shape the places that will make the NPF happen on the ground.

7.1.9 Looking at local authorities more closely, a recurring theme from preliminary consultation arose in terms of how the NPF will be implemented across local authority boundaries given that built-up areas or 'footprint' of most cities and many towns will straddle local authority or even regional boundaries, such as Cork, Dublin, Limerick, Waterford, Athlone, Bray, Carlow and Drogheda.

7.1.10 Preparation of the NPF therefore needs to anticipate and prepare for the challenges in implementing the Framework, most of which stem from the fact that for a variety of reasons, geography, scale, historic administrative structures and more recently, EU reporting requirements, administrative and organisation boundaries may not always neatly coincide with the issues that a planning framework seeks to address.

7.2 Key Policy Considerations

7.2.1 The key implementation arrangements that are therefore identified at this point of the development of the NPF include the following:-

Interdepartmental Drive: Through a National Planning Framework Management Team;

Statutory Backing: Through the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill 2016;

Administrative Structures to Respond to 'Real-world' Issues:

- Preparation of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies to co-ordinate across local authority and wider public policy levels in support of the NPF;

- Implementation programmes developed on a cross-local authority basis within the Regional Assembly structure;

- Strengthened legislative basis for local authority co-operation on planning;

- Marine and North-South/East-West dimension.

Investment: Capital Programmes of Government Departments and relevant public bodies and the use of 'bid' based systems that incentivise cross-authority/agency working in qualifying for targeted funding;

Monitoring and Policy Feedback: Establishment of independent monitoring of the NPF to identify and put in place key data gathering systems that will measure NPF effectiveness and outcomes to feed back into further implementation, review and updating in line with the Planning and Development (Amendment) Bill proposals. Annual reporting to Government and to the Oireachtas could provide a formal oversight arrangement for the NPF.

Where to Next?

Careful consideration needs to be given to the implementation and monitoring of the National Planning Framework, to avoid current challenges becoming our future crises.

The National Planning Framework must strike a balance between delivering a strategic plan for Ireland over the next twenty years whilst also fostering the potential of places and the ambition of people. Central to achieving this balance is political will and ownership at local, regional and national level to allow places of varying sizes to complement each other rather than to compete with each other.

Reflecting on the capacity of existing governance structures at local, regional and national level to drive and support a National Planning Framework will also be required to achieve better outcomes for people and places.

Key Questions

- **When it comes to implementation and monitoring of the NPF, are there common goals that can be identified and apply to every place?**

- **What barriers exist to implementation?**

- **How best can sustainable planning outcomes be recognised and rewarded?**

- **What levers are needed to deliver greater efficiencies in administration and governance, when it comes to implementing and monitoring the NPF?**

- **What the key indicators for measuring the successful implementation of the NPF?**