



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



National
Planning
Framework

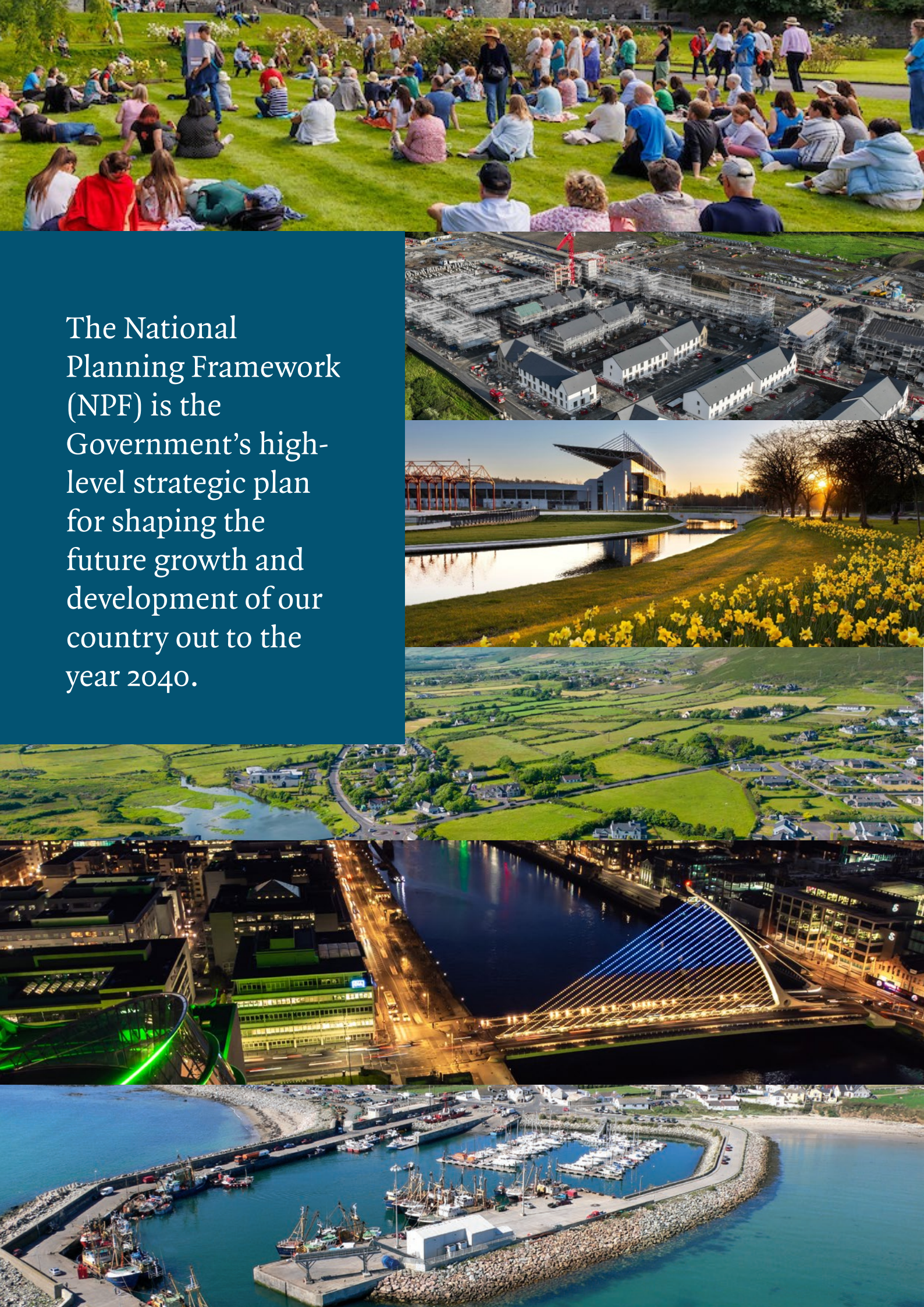
Project Ireland 2040

Draft First Revision to the National Planning Framework

July 2024



The National Planning Framework (NPF) is the Government's high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of our country out to the year 2040.



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1

The Vision

The National Planning Framework (NPF) is the Government's high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of our country out to the year 2040.

1.1 Setting out the Vision

The National Planning Framework (NPF) is the Government's high-level strategic plan for shaping the future growth and development of our country out to the year 2040.

The National Planning Framework (NPF), published in 2018, replaced the National Spatial Strategy as the overall spatial planning and development strategy for Ireland. Planning legislation provides for the Government to revise or replace the NPF every six years. Following a decision of Government in June 2023, the preparation of a revised National Planning Framework commenced.

This Framework is revised and updated to take account of changes that have occurred since it was published in 2018 and to build on framework that is in place. It is a framework to guide public and private investment, to create and promote opportunities for our people, and to protect and enhance our environment - from our villages to our cities, and everything around and in between.

In the period between 2022 and 2040 it is expected that there will be roughly an extra one million people living in our country. This population growth will require new jobs and new homes. If we fail to plan for this growth and for the demands it will place on our built and natural environment, as well as on our social and economic fabric, then we will certainly fail in our responsibility to future generations of Irish men and Irish women. That responsibility is to ensure their prosperity and happiness in an ever changing world.

Given both the scale of the challenge and the time horizon involved, the National Planning Framework is by necessity a framework document; it cannot determine every detail now, as to do so would limit our flexibility to adapt as circumstances change, as well as our ambition in the face of such change. In that regard, references to specific projects including infrastructure in this document are cited as examples and should not be taken to be a definitive list of such projects, which are contained in the National Development Plan and other publications. As a framework document it sets in train a process by which more detailed planning documents must follow: spatial planning, infrastructure planning, social and economic planning. It also outlines certain principles that these plans will have to follow, for example around sustainability, creativity and community.

Too often in the past our policies and actions have sought to elevate one idea over another; they have even in some instances pitted one area against the other. Our ambition is to create a single vision, a shared set of goals for every community across the country. These goals are expressed in this Framework as National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs). They are our shared successes which we believe this plan will deliver.

1.2 Making the Vision a Reality

We set about achieving our vision by:

- developing a region-focused strategy for managing growth;
- linking this to the Project Ireland 2040 National Development Plan;
- using public and private lands for certain strategic purposes with a more active approach to the management of land;
- supporting this with strengthened, more environmentally focused planning at local level; and
- backing the framework up in law, with oversight by the Office of the Planning Regulator in the overall context of Ireland's existing international and EU obligations and commitments.

A Strategy for Managing Growth

From an administrative and planning point of view, Ireland is divided into three regions: the Northern and Western, Southern, and Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly areas. We need to continue to manage more balanced growth between these three regions because Dublin, and to a lesser extent the wider Eastern and Midland area, has witnessed the biggest concentration of population, homes and jobs. We cannot let this continue unchecked and so our aim is to see a roughly 50:50 distribution of growth between the Eastern and Midland region, and the Southern and Northern and Western regions, with 75% of the growth to be outside of Dublin and its suburbs.

More balanced growth also means more concentrated growth. We have five cities in Ireland today in terms of population size (>50,000 people): Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford. In our plan we are targeting these five cities for 50% of overall national growth between them, with Ireland's large and smaller towns, villages and rural areas accommodating the other 50% of growth.

Of course, our five cities are not evenly distributed across our three regions. The Northern and Western region, as well as part of the Midlands, are located beyond the hinterland of cities. As such, Sligo and Athlone fulfil regional roles to a greater extent than elsewhere. Furthermore, our close relationship with Northern Ireland must be taken into account by recognising the key links between Letterkenny and Derry, and Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry.

The major policy emphasis on renewing and developing existing settlements established under the NPF 2018 will be continued, rather than allowing the continual expansion and sprawl of cities and towns out into the countryside, at the expense of town centres and smaller villages. The target is for at least 40% of all new housing to be delivered within the existing built-up areas of cities, towns and villages on infill and/or brownfield sites. The rest of our homes will continue to be delivered at the edge of settlements and in rural areas.

National Development Plan

The National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan published together in 2018 will continue to align and form a single vision for Ireland under Project Ireland 2040.

The implementation of the National Planning Framework will continue to be fully supported by the Government's investment strategy for public capital investment and investment by the State sector in general, with the National Development Plan (NDP) detailing key projects that will make our plans a reality.

As part of this investment, the Urban and Rural Regeneration and Development Funds have been established to drive and support the aims of the National Planning Framework, for both urban and rural areas. These Funds support the key principles of strategic growth and renewal across our communities. The separate rural and urban strands mean that places like Newcastle West do not compete for funding with Limerick City, to give one example.

Using State Lands for Strategic Purposes

The State, through local authorities, Government Departments and agencies and State companies, owns key parts of our cities and towns. The development of these lands will play a vital role in re-imagining and reshaping those urban areas, providing the homes, places of work and recreation that we need.

In the context of the overall management of the development potential of State lands to support implementation of the National Planning Framework, the Land Development Agency has been established to work with local authorities, public bodies and the business community, to harness public lands as catalysts to stimulate regeneration and wider investment.

In addition, the ongoing reform of planning and development legislation includes targeted land activation and land management provisions aimed at ensuring that the potential for urban development and regeneration in the built-up area of cities and towns can be harnessed.

Strengthened and more Environmentally Focused Planning at Local Level

The future planning and development of our communities at local level is being refocused to tackle Ireland's higher than average carbon-intensity per capita¹ and enable a national transition to a competitive low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy by 2050, through harnessing our country's prodigious renewable energy potential.

The NPF provides for more strategic and coordinated planning of cities and large towns across local authority boundaries, including statutorily backed Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans in the five cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford.

A new streamlined and integrated planning process has been introduced to more effectively manage our marine areas and land-sea interface to double the economic value we gain from our ocean wealth by 2030, and by more beyond that.

Backed by Legislation and an Independent Office of the Planning Regulator

The National Planning Framework has full legislative support within the planning system, including provisions for regular review and update, to reflect changing circumstances and make adjustments where necessary.

For each of the three regions, the National Planning Framework has been incorporated into Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSESs) in 2019 and 2020. The RSESs will be reviewed to be consistent with the revised National Planning Framework. County and City Development Plan review cycles will then fall in to line with their respective regional strategies, ensuring that the shared vision is carried through to the local planning level.

The planning legislation underpinning the National Planning Framework also led to the creation of an independent Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) in 2019, which is responsible for monitoring implementation of the NPF.

¹ Emissions per capita decreased from 12.4 tonnes CO₂eq/person in 2021 to 11.9 tonnes CO₂eq/person in 2022. Ireland's average tonnes of GHG/capita over the last ten years were 12.7 tonnes. Source: EPA

National Planning Framework and its National Strategic Outcomes and Priorities of the National Development Plan



1.3 Shared Goals – Our National Strategic Outcomes

Our ambition is to create a single vision, a shared set of goals for every community across the country. These goals are expressed in this Framework as National Strategic Outcomes.

They are the shared benefits which we believe this plan will deliver if implemented according to the objectives above.



Compact Growth

Carefully managing the sustainable growth of compact cities, towns and villages will add value and create more attractive places in which people can live and work. All our urban settlements contain many potential development areas, centrally located and frequently publicly owned, that are suitable and capable of re-use to provide housing, jobs, amenities and services, but which need a streamlined and co-ordinated approach to their development, with investment in enabling infrastructure and supporting amenities, to realise their potential. Activating these strategic areas and achieving effective density and consolidation, rather than more sprawl of urban development, is a top priority.



Enhanced Regional Accessibility

A co-priority is to enhance accessibility between key urban centres of population and their regions. This means ensuring that all regions and urban areas in the country have a high degree of accessibility to Dublin, as well as to each other. Not every route has to look east and so accessibility and connectivity between places like Cork and Limerick, to give one example, and through the Atlantic Economic Corridor to Galway as well as access to the North-West is essential.



Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities

Rural areas play a key role in defining our identity, in driving our economy and our high-quality environment and must be a major part of our country's strategic development to 2040. In addition to the natural resource and food sector potential as traditional pillars of the rural economy, improved connectivity, broadband and rural economic development opportunities are emerging which offer the potential to ensure our countryside remains and strengthens as a living and working community.



High-Quality International Connectivity

Crucial for overall international competitiveness, this will be achieved through key investments in our ports and airports in line with sectoral priorities already defined through National Ports Policy and National Aviation Policy and signature projects such as the Port of Cork - Ringaskiddy Redevelopment and planned investments at Dublin Airport, Dublin Port and Shannon Foynes.



Sustainable Mobility

In line with Ireland's Climate Action Plan and National Sustainable Mobility Policy, we need to progressively change the way we travel, by reducing dependence on cars and increasing the number of journeys taken by sustainable modes of transport, namely walking, cycling and public shared transport.

As well as significantly increasing the modal share of sustainable transport, we need to ensure that where car transport is required, this travel is increasingly taken by electric vehicle. Therefore, there is a need to complement these measures by increasing the proportion of electric vehicles (EVs) in our car fleet to 30% by 2030 which will improve the efficiency of the national car fleet, and to electrify our mobility systems for public transport fleets. By doing this, our cities and towns will enjoy a cleaner, quieter environment free of engine driven transport systems by 2040.



A Strong Economy, supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills

This will depend on creating places that can foster enterprise and innovation and attract investment and talent. It can be achieved by building regional economic drivers, by recognising and supporting enterprise specialisations and clusters which can drive economic activity in each region by strengthening linkages between companies of different sizes and stages of development, regionally, nationally and across the island and by supporting opportunities to diversify and strengthen the rural economy, to leverage the potential of places. Delivering this outcome will require the coordination of growth and place making with investment in world class infrastructure, including digital connectivity, and in skills and talent to support economic competitiveness and enterprise growth.



Enhanced Amenities and Heritage

This will ensure that our cities, towns and villages are attractive and can offer a good quality of life. It will require investment in well-designed public realm, which includes public spaces, parks and streets, as well as recreational infrastructure. It also includes amenities in rural areas, such as national and forest parks, activity-based tourism and trails such as greenways, blueways and peatways. This is linked to and must integrate with our built, cultural and natural heritage, which has intrinsic value in defining the character of urban and rural areas and adding to their attractiveness and sense of place.



Sustainable Management of Water, Waste and other Environmental Resources

Ireland has abundant natural and environmental resources such as our water sources that are critical to our environmental and economic well-being into the future. Conserving and enhancing the quality of these resources will also become more important in a crowded and competitive world as well as our capacity to create beneficial uses from products previously considered as waste, creating circular economic benefits.



Access to Quality Childcare, Education and Health Services

Good access to a range of quality education and health services, relative to the scale of a region, city, town, neighbourhood or community is a defining characteristic of attractive, successful and competitive places. Compact, smart growth in urban areas and strong and stable rural communities will enable the enhanced and effective provision of a range of accessible services.



Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act was enacted in 2021 with a commitment to a legally binding target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 51% and increase the share of electricity generated from renewable sources to 80% over the decade (2021 – 2030), and to achieve net-zero emissions no later than 2050².

This objective will shape investment choices over the coming decades in line with the National Climate Action Plan and the National Adaptation Framework. New energy systems and transmission grids will be necessary for a more distributed, renewables-focused energy generation system, harnessing both the considerable on-shore and off-shore potential from energy sources such as wind, wave and solar and connecting the richest sources of that energy to the major sources of demand.

² Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021

1.4 What Happens If We Do Nothing?

Learning from the Past – the 2002 National Spatial Strategy

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) was published in 2002 as a 20-year spatial plan to guide and direct future development and investment. Much of the focus on the document was on which cities and towns were designated as 'gateways' or 'hubs' to drive growth and build scale in their surrounding regions and localities. This gave rise to a perception of 'winners' and 'losers' that undermined the objectives that the NSS was seeking to achieve.

The NSS was not a statutory plan with legislative backing and while it did influence the 2007-2013 National Development Plan, the subsequent economic conditions from 2008 onwards substantially undermined Ireland's economic capacity to implement the NSS.

The report of an Expert Group that reviewed the NSS in 2014³ advised that:

- "While Dublin is at the forefront of international competition for mobile, inward investment, the potential of other locations must be harnessed;
- As the expertise that is needed to compete successfully internationally, together with supporting services and the increasingly important cultural offering, tends to concentrate in major urban centres, each part of Ireland needs to provide the opportunity for focused development;
- Without this focus and concentration, the wider area may suffer potentially irreversible decline, and failure to optimise regional performance will result in unsustainable pressures on Dublin, with national performance suffering as a result;
- The need for greater locations focus is matched by major resource constraints, which means that priority must be given to investments which produce the greatest cultural, economic, environmental or social benefits.

2023 Expert Group Review of 2018 NPF Strategy and Implementation

The Report of an Expert Group appointed to undertake a high-level review of the NPF and its implementation, published in 2023, provides valuable insight and has informed the preparation of the revised Framework. Through engagement with relevant stakeholders, the Group found that there is widespread support for the NPF strategy and the long-term and principles-based approach it takes. Overall, the Group recommended that the NPF revision could strengthen the Strategy in three broad respects:

- Compact growth targets should be more ambitious and more clearly defined;
- The roles of the bodies involved in its implementation should be clarified and strengthened (particularly in relation to the Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans) and mechanisms put in place for more detailed measurement and monitoring of its progress; and
- There should be greater coordination at whole of government level across all infrastructure projects (including the NDP) and new efforts made to generate broader support for national spatial planning across all of society.

³ The Government decided to review the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) in 2013 and asked an Expert Group to offer views on how the revised Strategy might be approached.

Analysis of development trends undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) in preparation of the 2018 NPF in projecting likely future development scenarios to 2040, suggested a range of negative outcomes in the absence of a more sustainable planning strategy for the Country, including:



Continuation of sprawling growth around but mainly outside our cities and larger towns.



Stagnation of inner city and older suburban areas, with missed opportunities for the utilisation of existing infrastructure and services.

Cities like Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford growing

but not at the pace or scale required to function as realistic alternatives to Dublin.



An ongoing shift in population and jobs towards the east and to the counties around Dublin in particular.



A degraded environment with, the loss of farmland and habitat to predominantly greenfield development and increased risk of groundwater pollution.



Greater distance between where people live and where people work, notwithstanding changes in technology, as many businesses are increasingly drawn to create the employment opportunities of the future in close proximity in urban areas.



Social disadvantage and inequality perpetuated by geographic location.

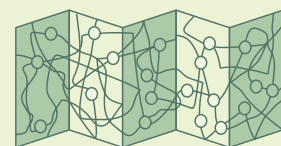


Duplication of new investment in services and infrastructure in rapidly growing areas.



Further decline of rural areas and towns remote from large urban centres of population.

Haphazard approaches to planning for infrastructure and climate action, reacting to trends rather than preparing for a low/no carbon future.



Some Key Facts and Figures



When economic output and stability are measured, Ireland is firmly within the top ten countries in the world, scoring highly in terms of gross domestic product or GDP per capita⁴ human development⁵ democracy⁶ and foreign direct investment (FDI).



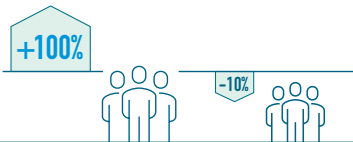
Ireland's comparison ranking in areas such as quality of life⁷ and environmental performance⁸ is not quite as high, placing us just within the top twenty-five countries in the world.



This will give rise to a need for approximately 50,000 additional households per annum to 2040.



The ESRI⁹ projects that the population of Ireland will increase by around one million people over 2022 levels, to approximately 6.1 million people by 2040.



The population aged over 65 will more than double to 1.3 million, or to 23% of the total, whilst those aged under 15 will decrease by around 10%, with numbers remaining at just below one million in 2040.



New ways of working, new trade partners and new relationships between producers and consumers will continue to transform the business landscape.



Overall demand for school places has currently peaked nationally but there continues to be strong demand for additional school places in areas where there is high population growth. Demand for special education provision also continues to grow strongly, reflecting the increased prevalence of autism. Demand for third-level education places are set to peak later in this decade.



In line with international trends, the ongoing shift to a knowledge economy, growing role of services and the growth of hybrid working models will continue to change the nature of work, sustaining demands for a more highly skilled and educated workforce.

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4 World Bank, 2022.
5 UN, 2023.
6 UN, 2023.
7 Economist Intelligence Unit, 2023.
8 Environmental Performance Index, 2022.
9 Bergin, A., and Egan, P. (2024). Population projections, the flow of new households and structural housing demand, ESRI Research Series 190, Dublin: ESRI

1.5 UN Sustainable Development Goals

Sustainability is at the heart of long term planning and the National Planning Framework seeks to ensure that the decisions we take today, meet our own needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. The challenge of creating a more sustainable future for Ireland is a collective responsibility on all of us.

Since 2015, Ireland has been a signatory to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which frame national agendas and policies to 2030. The SDGs build on the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and have a broader agenda that applies to all countries.

There is significant alignment between the UN SDGs and the National Planning Framework's National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs) in areas such as climate action, clean energy, sustainable cities and communities, economic growth, reduced inequalities and innovation and infrastructure, as well as education and health.



1.6 Environmental Assessments

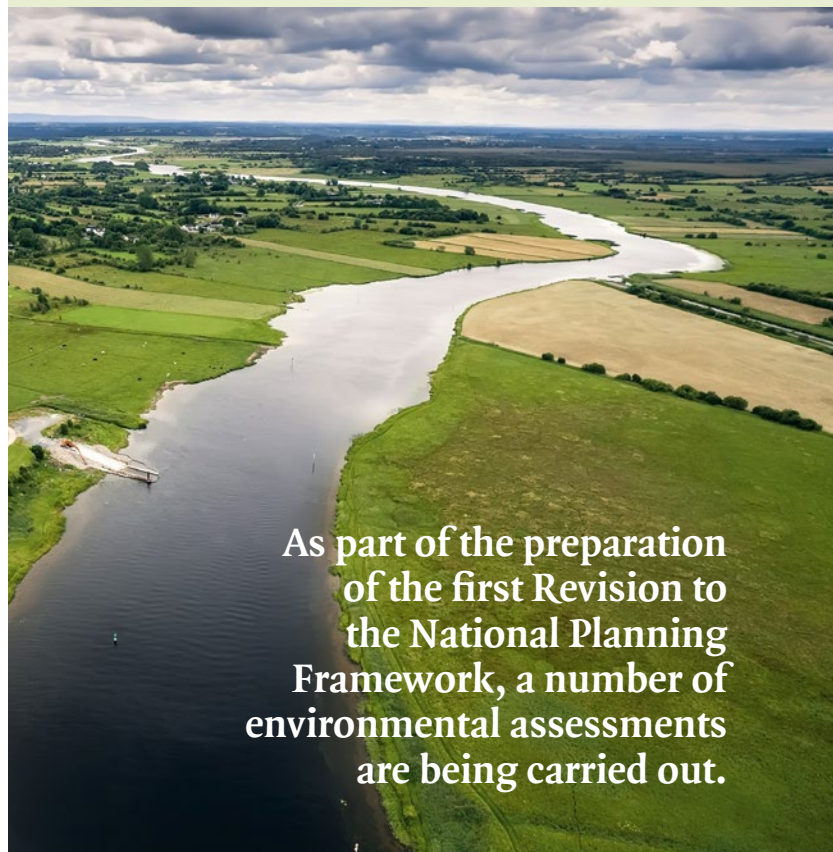
As part of the preparation of the first Revision to the National Planning Framework, a number of environmental assessments are being carried out. These include Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA) and also Strategic Flood Risk Appraisal (SFRA).

These assessments are being undertaken so that the high-level impact of the proposed National Policy Objectives and National Strategic Outcomes on the environment can be evaluated and used to inform the direction of the NPF revision.

This is to ensure that any objectives respond to the sensitivities and requirements of the wider natural environment i.e. the likely environmental consequences of decisions regarding the future accommodation of growth and development and how negative effects can be reduced, offset or avoided.

These three separate assessment reports detailing the legislative and policy background accompany this draft Revision.

As part of an assessment of the Framework, the SEA Environmental Report, AA Natura Impact Statement and Strategic Flood Risk Assessment have proposed mitigation measures and text alterations to the draft Framework and those NPOs/NSOs which have been identified as having potential impacts on the receiving environment.



As part of the preparation of the first Revision to the National Planning Framework, a number of environmental assessments are being carried out.

Strategic Environmental Assessment

The purpose of the SEA is to evaluate, at an early stage, the range of environmental consequences that may occur as a result of implementing the First Revision of the NPF and to give interested parties an opportunity to comment upon the perceived or actual environmental impacts of the proposal.

The European Directive (2001/42/EC) on the Assessment of the Effects of Certain Plans and Programmes on the Environment (the SEA Directive), was transposed into national legislation in Ireland by the European Communities (Environmental Assessment of Certain Plans and Programmes) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 435/2004) and the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (S.I. 436/2004), as amended.

As documented in the Directive, the purpose of SEA is *“to provide for a high level of protection of the environment and to contribute to the integration of environmental considerations in the preparation and adoption of plans and programmes with a view to promoting sustainable development”*.

Through the SEA, environmental considerations have been integrated into the Framework by:

- Development and evaluation of alternatives;
- Assessment and refinement of National Policy Objectives (NPOs) and National Strategic Outcomes (NSOs);
- Recommendation of mitigation measures to address the potential impacts arising from the alternatives, NPOs and NSOs considered; and
- Additional supporting text to strengthen the commitments in the NPF to protection of the environment.

In recognition of the potential for transboundary effects with Northern Ireland, through coordinated spatial planning, the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), which has responsibility for SEA in Northern Ireland, has also been consulted, together with the Northern Ireland Department for Infrastructure, as part of the Framework preparation.

Appropriate Assessment

Appropriate Assessment (AA) is a process for undertaking a comprehensive ecological impact assessment of a plan or project, examining its implications, on its own or in-combination with other plans and projects, on one or more European Sites in view of the site's Conservation Objectives, as referred to in Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive.

Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, known as the Habitats Directive, obliges member states to designate Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) to protect and conserve habitats and species of importance in a European Union context.

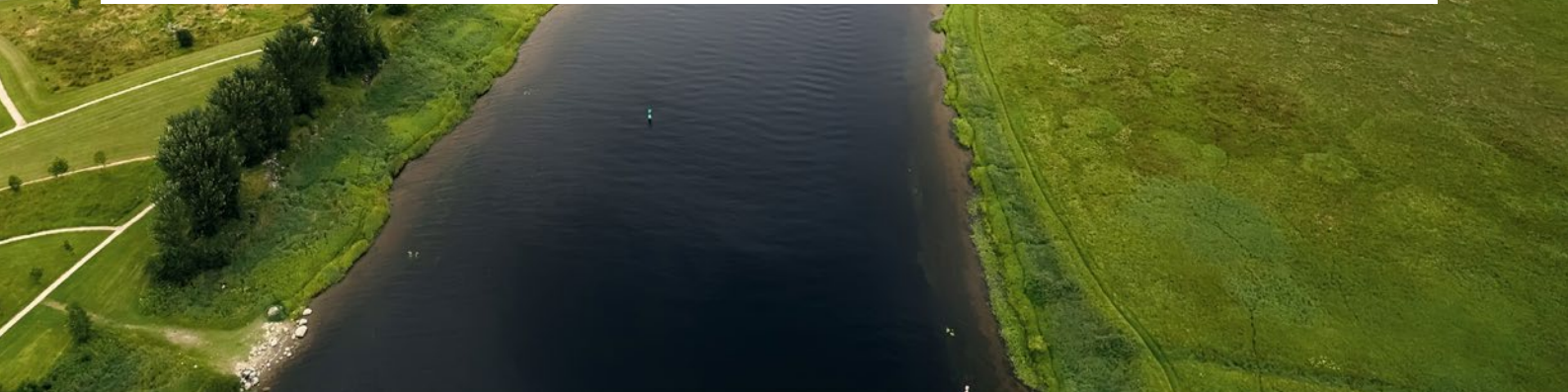
Special Protection Areas (SPAs) are designated under the Conservation of Wild Birds Directive (79/409/EC) as codified by Directive 2009/147/EC.

The Habitats Directive has been transposed into Irish law by the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 to 2021 (as amended). In the context of the draft NPF, the governing legislation is principally Regulation 42A of the Birds and Natural Habitats Regulations 2021, which sets out the duties of public authorities relating to nature conservation.

Public authorities are obliged, when exercising their functions, to take appropriate steps to avoid the deterioration of natural habitats and the habitats of species in European Sites, as well as disturbance of species for which a site has been designated insofar as this disturbance could be significant in relation to the objectives of the Habitats Directive. A Natura Impact Statement (NIS) has been prepared in support of the AA process having regard for the legislative requirements of EU and national law.

Strategic Flood Risk Assessment

Increased flood risk as a result of land use planning has, above all else, been one of the most costly (environmental, social and economic) legacy issues of previous national, regional and local land use decisions. The policy objectives and outcomes identified in the NPF will both assist the legacy issue and future proof future plans such as the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and County Development Plans developed under the NPF.



The objective of SFRA is to ensure planning policy takes account of flood risk in catering for future growth and can address planning and infrastructural needs required to facilitate projected growth.

The EU Floods Directive and the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines, 2009 have been key drivers in how Ireland manages flood risk. The Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) programme was developed in response to the requirements of these drivers and has both provided a comprehensive assessment of high flood risk areas and proposed plans to mitigate and reduce flood risk in Ireland. In parallel to the CFRAM programme, and to mitigate further inappropriate development in areas of high flood risk.

The Flood Risk Guidelines are core to the development of the SFRA. This key guidance document sets out comprehensive mechanisms for the integration of land use and infrastructure planning with flood risk management best practice. The Guidelines espouse the concept of the 'sequential approach' whereby, at all levels of the planning process, the principle of avoiding areas of high flood risk is the first consideration, and should this not be practical, then the consideration of an alternative, less vulnerable land use should be proposed.

Where avoidance or substitution is not possible, then a robust justification must be made, accompanied by sustainable mitigation measures, to ensure proposed development will not increase in flood risk both for the present day scenario or in the future, considering fully the predicted effects of climate change.

1.7 Integrating Environmental Considerations into the Planning System

The National Planning Framework is a strategic framework document which is supported by a robust tiering of regional and local level plans within an overall hierarchy. As detail is developed down through the hierarchy, further opportunity for focused assessment will be required to inform decision making at a level of granularity which cannot be undertaken at the national scale.

It is therefore important that where other strategies and plans undergo review or changes to reflect the national policy objectives and outcomes of the National Planning Framework, they should also consider any relevant environmental requirements. All investigative and feasibility studies to be carried out to support decision making in relation to this Framework should also include an environmental appraisal which considers the potential effects on the wider environment, including specifically, the Natura 2000 Network.

At the project level, all applications for development consents for projects emanating from any policies that may give rise to likely significant effects on the environment will need to be accompanied by one or more of the following, as relevant:

- An Ecological Impact Assessment Report; Environmental Report;
- An Environmental Impact Assessment Report if deemed necessary under the relevant legislation (statutory document);
- Natura Impact Statement if deemed necessary under the relevant legislation (statutory document).

National Policy Objective 1

Ensure that all plans, projects and activities requiring consent arising from the National Planning Framework are subject to the relevant environmental assessment requirements including SEA, EIA, SFRA and AA, as appropriate.

Relationships between the National Planning Framework and other plans/programmes

Key policy areas such as maritime and land use spatial planning, climate change, renewable energy, flooding, agriculture, water and wastewater services, waste and conservation have been explored in terms of relationships and interactions with the NPF.

For example, the SFRA for the Framework reinforces the key concepts of the precautionary principle and the sequential approach, and the connection with the National Climate Change Adaption Strategy and the EU Water Framework Directive.

In recognition of the potential for transboundary effects with Northern Ireland, through coordinated spatial planning, the Northern Ireland Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), which has responsibility for SEA in Northern Ireland, has also been consulted, together with the Northern Ireland Department for Infrastructure, as part of the Framework preparation.



2

A New Way Forward

The purpose of the National Planning Framework is to enable all parts of Ireland, whether rural or urban, to successfully accommodate growth and change, by facilitating a shift towards Ireland's regions and cities other than Dublin, while also recognising Dublin's ongoing key role.

2.1 Realising Ambition and Potential

The purpose of the National Planning Framework is to enable all parts of Ireland, whether rural or urban, to successfully accommodate growth and change, by facilitating a shift towards Ireland's regions and cities other than Dublin, while also recognising Dublin's ongoing key role.

The NPF is a long-term Framework that sets out how Ireland can move away from the 'business as usual' pattern of development. This means that it seeks to disrupt trends that have been apparent for the last fifty years and have accelerated over the past twenty-five.

Shifting a long-term trend will not be achieved overnight or even in a short number of years. It will require careful balance, that on the one hand is clearly focused, while on the other, enables realisation of the widespread ambition and potential that clearly exists throughout the country.

As the largest centres of population, employment and services outside Dublin, the four cities of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford, will continue to provide a focus for their regions. However, it will require the combined potential of all four cities to be realised at an unprecedented rate, to create viable alternatives to Dublin, which itself must also continue to accommodate growth.

Given the variety of rural and urban communities throughout Ireland, each with capacity for growth and development that can significantly influence their surrounding areas, this Framework also targets as much potential growth to Ireland's large and smaller towns, villages and rural areas as it does to the five cities.

The four cities and Dublin are geographically distributed, but their influence does not extend to all parts of Ireland, in particular the North-Western and Midland regions. It is critical that those regions also are served by accessible centres of employment and services that can be a focal point for investment and have the widest possible regional influence. On the basis of available evidence, it is apparent that Sligo in the North-West and Athlone in the Midlands, fulfil these roles to a greater extent than elsewhere.

It is also the case that there are significant cross-border interactions focused on key settlement networks, specifically Letterkenny-Derry in the context of the North-West Strategic Growth Partnership and Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry in the context of the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor. The growth potential associated with these interrelated networks is also important for regional development.

Notwithstanding these considerations, it is emphasised that a settlement that is not specifically identified or for which specific targets are not set in this national Framework, is by no means precluded from future growth or investment. This must be considered at a regional and local scale, for which statutory planning processes exist, taking account of the general context set by the NPF. This allows for decision-making at regional and local level, which will enable investment to be properly aligned with planning, in order to achieve the National Strategic Outcomes identified.

This means that an element of future growth must be identified to take place in Ireland's key regional centres and towns, to lead the development of their regions. The amount prioritised will be related to that targeted elsewhere and will have a knock-on impact, but this Framework also enables significant scope for ambition and balanced rural and urban development, supported by matching investment, throughout Ireland's, towns, villages and rural areas.

Choices therefore need to be made to support our regional centres and towns, and to ensure that there is an effective basis for planning and investment in infrastructure and services. In setting out a context for targeting future growth, this Framework does not seek to cap or limit the potential of places. It does, however, provide a common point of reference and co-ordination, based on the latest available evidence, to be applied nationally.

As the largest centres of population, employment and services outside Dublin, the four cities of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford, will continue to provide a focus for their regions.

2.2 Overview of the NPF Strategy

The key issue addressed in this Framework is where best to plan for our growing population and economy.

In doing so, it is necessary to learn from past experiences and outline a new way forward that can channel future growth. The NPF is aligned with and supported by new and improved investment and governance arrangements. As a strategy, all aspects are to be implemented together and are mutually complementary:

Ireland's Three Regions

- Targeting a level of growth in the country's Northern and Western and Southern Regions combined, to at least match that projected in the Eastern and Midlands Region.
- Improving access from the north-west to Dublin and the east and to Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford to the south.
- Improving access between Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford.
- Recognising the extent to which Sligo in the North-West and Athlone in the Midlands fulfil the role of regional centres.
- Recognising Letterkenny in the context of the North-West City Region and Drogheda-Dundalk in the context of the Dublin-Belfast economic corridor as important cross border networks for regional development.
- Enabling, through the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy process for each Regional Assembly area, regional centres of population and employment growth.
- Prioritisation of key enabling infrastructure in each region to promote growth where it is required.
- Recognising and supporting enterprise specialisations and clusters, which can drive economic activity in each region.

Ireland's Capital

- Supporting the future growth and success of Dublin as Ireland's leading global city of scale, by better managing Dublin's growth to ensure that more of it can be accommodated within and close to the city and in the metropolitan area.
- Enabling significant population and jobs growth in the Dublin metropolitan area, together with better management of the trend towards overspill into surrounding counties.
- Addressing infrastructural bottlenecks, improving citizens' quality of life and increasing housing supply in the right locations.

Ireland's Cities

- Supporting ambitious growth targets to enable the four cities of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford to each grow by at least 50% over 2016 levels to 2040 and to enhance their significant potential to become cities of scale.
- Enabling the four cities to be regional drivers and to lead in partnership with each other and as partners in regional/inter-regional networks as viable alternatives to Dublin.
- Focusing investment to improve the collective 'offer' within each of the four cities, i.e. infrastructure, quality of life and choice in terms of housing, employment and amenities.
- Recognising the impact of digitalisation in terms of city vibrancy, including changed shopping and working patterns, and to promote a responsive policy approach where needed.

Ireland's Rural Fabric

- Addressing town/village and rural population decline, particularly where it has occurred over time, by encouraging new roles and functions for buildings, streets and sites.
- Supporting the sustainable growth of rural communities, to include development in rural areas.
- Implementing a properly planned local authority-led approach to identifying, meeting and managing housing needs arising in countryside areas.
- Improving local connectivity to principal communication (broadband), energy, transport and water networks.
- Promoting new economic opportunities arising from digital connectivity, including remote working hubs, indigenous innovation and enterprise, as well as more traditional natural and resource assets (e.g. food, energy, tourism), underpinned by the quality of life offering.
- In the context of Ireland's transition towards a climate-neutral economy, to ensure just transition, within the wider statutory framework of climate action, enabling new employment and opportunities, while supporting those most negatively impacted.

Compact Growth

- Targeting a greater proportion (40%) of future housing development to be within the existing 'footprint' of built-up areas.
- Making better use of under-utilised land and buildings, including 'infill', 'brownfield' and publicly owned sites and vacant and under-occupied buildings, with higher housing and jobs densities, better serviced by existing facilities and public transport.
- Supporting both urban regeneration and rural rejuvenation through the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) and Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) and other programmes targeted at addressing vacancy, dereliction and supporting brownfield development.



Compact Growth

Targeting a greater proportion (40%) of future housing development to be within and close to the existing 'footprint' of built-up areas.

Ireland's Three Regions

Targeting a level of growth in the country's Northern and Western and Southern Regions combined, to at least match that projected in the Eastern and Midland Region.



Ireland's Rural Fabric

Reversing town/village and rural population decline, by encouraging new roles and functions for buildings, streets and sites.



Ireland's Cities

Supporting ambitious growth targets to enable the four cities of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford to each grow by at least 50% to 2040 and to enhance their significant potential to become cities of scale.



Ireland's Capital

Supporting the future growth and success of Dublin as Ireland's leading global city of scale, by better managing Dublin's growth to ensure that more of it can be accommodated within and close to the City.

The various policies of this Framework are structured under National Policy objectives (NPOs). Most NPOs are retained under the revised NPF, some have been updated and amended and a number are new NPOs have been inserted. They were developed as a result of extensive analysis and consultation and set a way forward for regional and local planning and sustainable development policy in Ireland. They are highlighted throughout the Document and are listed together in Appendix 1.

Integrating the Environment into Planning for the Future

In developing and revising the National Planning Framework there has been a strong recognition of the need to integrate environmental considerations into land use planning in a way that responds to the sensitivities and requirements of the wider natural environment. The delivery of the vision outlined in this Framework will give rise to development and infrastructure which has the potential to impact on the receiving environment.

To ensure that these potential impacts are considered at this strategic level and to signpost the requirements for lower tiers of planning, Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), Appropriate Assessment (AA) and Strategic Flood Risk Appraisal (SFRA) is being carried out as part of the preparation of this revised Framework and the results will be incorporated into the process.

These integrated environmental assessment processes have included the development and appraisal of a number of strategic options and the assessment of each of the National Policy Objectives that follow. The assessments are referenced in the accompanying draft SEA Environmental Report, which is published as a separate document together with the draft Natura Impact Statement and draft Strategic Flood Risk Appraisal Report.

2.3 Strategy Development

Projections

Projecting how Ireland's population will grow and change between now and 2040, based on demographic and econometric modelling undertaken by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)¹⁰, is a core element of this Framework. The 2018 NPF planned for population growth of 1.1 million people, and a total population of 5.85 million by 2040. Census 2022 recorded a population of 5.15 million (CSO) in Ireland. The ESRI has updated its national and regional population projections to account for Census 2022 and to take account of up to date economic, fertility, mortality and migration data. The updated projection is that the population of Ireland will increase to approximately 5.7 million by 2030 and to 6.1 million by 2040. Given the key role of international migration in shaping population growth in Ireland, the ESRI have also modelled a higher international migration scenario with a projected population of 6.3 million people by 2040 (baseline + 200,000). The ESRI projections form the basis for the revised NPF. This means that the NPF will now need to plan for a population of 6.1 million by 2040, an additional 250,000 people over that planned for in 2018.

To account for the possibility of higher net in-migration over the period to 2040, an allowance is made in the NPF to enable ambition and flexibility in planning for future growth. In effect, the Framework needs to plan to accommodate around 950,000 additional people in Ireland between 2022 and 2040, while also making provision for a higher in-migration scenario. Progress towards these targets will be subject to review and further detail on phasing is set out in Chapter 10.

In setting overall targets for future growth, it is a pattern of development that is being targeted, rather than precise numbers. From a long-term, national perspective, the targeted location, relative scale and proportionality of growth will assist in monitoring and assessing delivery and performance.

950,000

additional people in
Ireland between 2022
and 2040

¹⁰ Bergin, A., and Egan, P. (2024). Population projections, the flow of new households and structural housing demand, ESRI Research Series 190, Dublin: ESRI.

2.4 Growing our Regions

In developing the NPF a range of options were considered and applied to the three regions established in 2014. These range from 'business as usual', under which a majority of growth would occur in the Eastern and Midland Region if current trends continue, to 'regional dominance', whereby the combined Northern and Western and Southern Regional Assembly areas would grow at twice the rate of the Eastern and Midland Region.

It is evident from the analysis undertaken, that a regional dominance approach is neither realistic nor implementable given the significance of Dublin and would result in a diminished scale of overall national development. Similarly, a business as usual strategy would continue the pattern of over concentration of population, homes and jobs in around Dublin and the east and decline in other areas.

In accordance with the National Planning Framework vision, 'regional parity' was considered to be a more credible, reasonable and viable alternative scenario, whereby the targeted growth of the Northern and Western and Southern Regional Assembly areas combined would exceed that projected under a 'business as usual' scenario and would at least equate to that projected for the Eastern and Midland Region.

The revised Framework maintains the 'regional parity' approach, and in doing so, the additional population growth projected between 2022 and 2030 will be targeted on a pro-rata basis throughout Ireland. This means more targeted growth everywhere, including for the four regional cities. However, the scale of growth that is projected in Ireland to 2040 coupled with the need to transition to a lower carbon society requires an increased delivery of housing and the improved integration of land-use and transport.

Census 2022 and other indicators highlight significant unmet demand for housing in Dublin and the Mid-Eastern Region in particular. This has the potential to undermine national competitiveness and social cohesion. As a result, there may be a requirement to plan for population growth that would exceed the overall 6.1m projection, in line with the high migration scenario provided in the ESRI's Report. However, this can only be undertaken and delivered in line with longer term strategic planning for Transport Orientated Development (TOD) in Ireland's five Cities. The purpose of this is to support the delivery of new sustainable communities at brownfield and greenfield locations along existing or planned high capacity public transport corridors within the metropolitan area, with a particular focus on TOD opportunities along high-capacity rail corridors. The allocation for these new sustainable communities provide greater flexibility to plan for future growth and investment.

Accordingly, the NPF target in relation to growing our regions based on the 2022 baseline year is:

National Policy Objective 2

The projected level of population and employment growth in the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly area will be at least matched by that of the Northern and Western and Southern Regional Assembly areas combined.

In terms of Ireland's future population, targeting this pattern is significant because it represents a shift from current trends. In the context of around one million additional people in Ireland between 2022 and 2040, it means planning for:

National Policy Objective 3

- **Eastern and Midland Region:** approximately 470,000 additional people between 2022 and 2040 (c. 690,000 additional people over 2016-2040) i.e. a population of almost 3 million
- **Northern and Western Region:** approximately 150,000 additional people between 2022 and 2040 (c. 210,000 additional people over 2016-2040) i.e. a population of just over 1 million;
- **Southern Region:** approximately 330,000 additional people over 2022 levels (c. 450,000 additional people over 2016-2040) i.e. a population of just over 2 million.

In similar terms, seeking a shift in the pattern of development away from current trends, means planning for employment and jobs at locations that are integrated with the planned distribution of population.

The work undertaken for the National Planning Framework indicates that the key to securing the scale of regional population growth above and a commensurate level of employment and jobs growth, with population and employment distribution being considered in an integrated manner, is closely related to how we address the latter two questions in Section 2.2, in relation to concentration/dispersal and the physical format for future development.

2.5 Building Stronger Regions: Accessible Centres of Scale

Under ‘business as usual’, a continued focus on growth in and around Dublin and to some extent Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford without addressing the specific development challenges facing other regions, such as the accessibility and urban structure of the north-west or the economic underperformance of the South-East, would have negative consequences that would further add to growth pressures in the wider Dublin Region and inhibit more peripheral parts of Ireland from realising their full potential.

This is not a desirable scenario and in considering alternative options for the NPF in 2018, the two key variables were the scale of concentration of activity and the relative distance, or ease of accessibility, to larger centres of population and employment, i.e. ‘centres of scale’. There are therefore important twin elements of strategy required to address issues of scale and peripherality in Ireland. Both have significant influence on a wider geographic area.

The first, which is a concerted effort to focus on building internationally, nationally and regionally strong cities and towns, could deliver a lot of positive impacts and enhance overall national growth so that:

- future population and jobs growth would be geographically more aligned;
- future jobs growth would be geographically more distributed, but to a limited number of larger and regionally distributed centres, to include the North and West and Midlands;
- the significant growth potential of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford separate from Dublin would be realised, while at the same time enhancing and enabling Dublin’s unique role as an international city of scale;
- Ireland’s regions, and in particular the north and west and midlands, would be turned around to better achieve their potential for focused investment.

The second, complementary element of this twin strategy requires:

- Improved accessibility between centres of scale separate from Dublin, to ensure that levels of service (travel times per km) between the Capital and Ireland’s cities and larger regionally distributed centres are replicated and on key east-west and north-south routes;

- A particular focus on improving accessibility and connectivity northwards on the emerging Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) network, that links a network of major centres on the western seaboard;
- Improved accessibility and connectivity from surrounding regions, focused on key routes to a number of larger and regionally distributed centres.

To deliver the above means:

National Policy Objective 4

A target of half (50%) of future population and employment growth will be focused in the existing five cities and their suburbs¹¹.

National Policy Objective 5

The regional roles of Athlone in the Midlands, Sligo and Letterkenny in the North-West and the Letterkenny-Derry and Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry cross-border networks will be supported in the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and in Regional Enterprise Plans.

National Policy Objective 6

Accessibility from the north-west of Ireland and between centres of scale separate from Dublin will be significantly improved, focused on cities and larger regionally distributed centres and on key east- west and north-south routes.

As key elements of the strategy, the distribution of future growth between the regions, when combined with building scale and accessibility, serve to set a new way forward. However, the question of compact development or sprawl is also critical to this new course.

11 The five cities and their suburbs as defined by the CSO in the Census of Population.

2.6 Securing Compact and Sustainable Growth

The physical format of urban development in Ireland is one of our greatest national development challenges. Analysis undertaken in the preparation of the NPF in 2018, showed that more than anything else, getting the physical form and location of future development right offers the best prospects for unlocking regional potential.

The fastest growing areas continue to be at the edges of and outside our cities and towns, meaning:

- A constant process of infrastructure and services catch-up in building new roads, new schools, services and amenities and a struggle to bring jobs and homes together, meaning that there are remarkably high levels of car dependence and that it is difficult to provide good public transport;
- A gradual process of run-down of city and town centres and established suburban areas as jobs, retail and housing move out, leaving behind declining school enrolments, empty buildings and a lack of sufficient people to create strong and vibrant places, both day and night;
- The most development takes the form of greenfield sprawl that extends the physical footprint of our urban areas, and when it is the principal form of development, works against the creation of attractive, liveable, high quality urban places in which people increasingly wishing to live, work and invest, and
- A significantly higher carbon footprint than the EU average, in part due to higher transport and energy demand, mostly based on fossil fuels, that has worked against achieving agreed climate action targets.

The preferred approach involves compact development that focuses on reusing previously developed, 'brownfield' land, building up infill sites, which may not have been built on before and either reusing or redeveloping existing sites and buildings.

An increase in the proportion of more compact forms of growth in the development of settlements of all sizes, from the largest city to the smallest village, has the potential to make a transformational difference. It can bring new life and footfall, contribute to the viability of services, shops and public transport, increase housing supply and enable more people to be closer to employment and recreational opportunities, as well as to walk or cycle more and use the car less.

Along with transport demand, higher densities and shorter travel distances will also reduce energy demand and use.

Multi-storey and terraced buildings in close proximity require less energy and make renewables-based systems of energy distribution such as district heating, more feasible.

Creating compact development in Ireland has been traditionally more difficult to achieve than a continuous process of pushing development outwards, towards 'greenfield' locations and requires focus on four key areas:

- 1 The 'liveability' or quality of life of urban places** – how people experience living in cities, towns and villages. This includes the quality of the built environment, including the public realm, traffic and parking issues, access to amenities and public transport and a sense of personal safety and well-being;
- 2 Making the continuous regeneration and development of existing built up areas** as attractive and as viable as greenfield development. This requires greater certainty and cost equalisation as a result of a steady supply of sites and land and investment in infrastructure and amenities through more active land management in urban areas;
- 3 Tackling legacies** such as concentrations of disadvantage in central urban areas through holistic social as well as physical regeneration and by encouraging more mixed tenure and integrated communities;
- 4 Linking regeneration and redevelopment initiatives** to climate action, to support a reduced carbon footprint through greater energy efficiency and use of renewables.

In order to understand compact growth trends, development must be monitored across cities and towns in a consistent way. A new approach to monitoring urban growth will be developed, focussing on the built-up footprint of existing settlements comprising areas that are subject to existing urban land uses and the additional 'land take' associated with development outside of the built-up footprint. A tool is being developed to track and compare urban development trends across the main urban settlements.

In the long term, meeting Ireland's development needs in housing, employment, services and amenities on mainly greenfield locations will cost multiples of a compact growth based approach. Accordingly, subject to implementation of sustainable planning and environmental principles, the National Planning Framework sets the following urban development targets:

National Policy Objective 7

Deliver at least 40% of all new homes nationally, within the built-up footprint of existing settlements and ensure compact and sequential patterns of growth.¹²

National Policy Objective 9

Deliver at least 30% of all new homes that are targeted in settlements other than the five Cities and their suburbs, within their existing built-up footprints.

National Policy Objective 8

Deliver at least half (50%) of all new homes that are targeted in the five Cities and suburbs of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford, within their existing built-up footprints.

National Policy Objective 10

Deliver Transport Orientated Development (TOD) at scale at suitable locations, served by high capacity public transport and located within or adjacent to the built up area of the five cities or a metropolitan town.

A summary of the key national targets for structuring overall national growth, promoting regional parity, building accessible centres of scale and securing compact and sustainable growth is set out in the table below:

Table 2.1 | The NPF at a Glance: Targeted Pattern of Growth, 2022 to 2040

National Policy Objective	Eastern and Midland	Southern	Northern and Western
1. Growing Our Regions	Approximately 470,000 people (3m total) (690,000 people over 2016)	Approximately 330,000 people (2m total) (450,000 people over 2016)	Approximately 150,000 people (1m total) (210,000 people over 2016)
2. Building Stronger Regions: Accessible Centres of Scale	Dublin City and Suburbs: + 295,000 people (at least 1.56 million in total) Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy to set out a strategic development framework for the Region, leading with the key role of Athlone in the Midlands and the Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry cross-border network	Cork City and Suburbs: + 96,000 people at least 320,000 in total) Limerick City and Suburbs: 44,000 people (at least 150,000 in total) Waterford City and Suburbs: + 28,000 people (at least 88,000 in total) Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy to set out a strategic development framework for the Region	Galway City and Suburbs: + 36,000 people (at least 122,000 in total) Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy to set out a strategic development framework for the Region, leading with the key role of Sligo in the North-West, Athlone in the Midlands and the Letterkenny-Derry cross-border network.
3. Compact, Smart, Sustainable Growth	50% of new city housing within existing Dublin City and suburbs footprint 30% all new housing elsewhere, within existing urban footprints	50% new city housing on within existing Cork, Limerick and Waterford Cities and Suburbs footprints 30% all new housing elsewhere, within existing urban footprints	50% of new city housing within existing Galway City and suburbs footprint 30% all new housing elsewhere, within existing urban footprints

¹² This objective relates to all 'built up areas' as defined by CSO. For the purposes of NPO 7, 8 and 9 the built-up footprint is defined as the area given over to urban land uses (i.e. artificial surfaces relating to urban land uses). The built-up footprint shall be clearly defined for each settlement on the land-use zoning map as part of the statutory plan making process.

2.7 Translating the NPF to City and County Levels

In setting targets for planned future growth, the NPF sets out how we can achieve our overall national, regional and local objectives in a coherent and co-ordinated manner. To ensure that the shared vision is carried through from national, to regional and local level and that there is an effective process of alignment, an updated 'Implementation Roadmap' will be published to translate national and regional planned growth projections to city and county levels.

The revised targets will support a plan-led approach to NPF implementation at regional and local level, allowing NPF growth objectives to be incorporated into city and county development plans as they are reviewed. In this regard, matters related to the targeted population and housing numbers and the estimated capacity of each settlement for growth is determined at the plan-making stage, in accordance with the hierarchy of plans prescribed under the Planning and Development Act.

Planned growth at settlement level is to be reflected in the objectives of the statutory development plan, including land use zoning objectives, subject to an appropriate and proportionate element of flexibility in line with statutory guidelines, and will be required to have regard to matters such as appropriate densities to be applied, taking into account the particular circumstances and location.

Accordingly, while plan-led targets at settlement level will inform the plan-making process and thereby form the basis for decision-making, the consideration of individual development proposals on zoned and serviced development land subject to consenting processes under the Planning and Development Act will have regard to a broader set of considerations beyond the targets alone, including where there may be extant, but as yet unimplemented planning permissions.

National Policy Objective 11

Planned growth at a settlement level shall be determined at development plan-making stage and addressed within the objectives of the plan. The consideration of individual development proposals on zoned and serviced development land subject of consenting processes under the Planning and Development Act shall have regard to a broader set of considerations beyond the targets including, in particular, the receiving capacity of the environment.





3

Effective Regional Development

3.1 Strategic Development of Ireland's Regions

Regional governance and regional development are essential cogs for translating and delivering national policy at a local scale. The three Regional Assemblies are tasked to co- ordinate, promote and support the strategic planning and sustainable development of the regions.

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. The primary vehicle for this is the preparation and implementation of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, aligned with the National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027. These strategies provide regional level strategic planning and economic policy in support of the implementation of the National Planning Framework and provide a greater level of focus around the National Policy Objectives and National Strategic Outcomes of the NPF.

While each of the three regions is distinct, they do not operate in isolation from each other and there are many complementing and connecting assets shared between regions. For both the Eastern and Midland and the Northern and Western Regions, interaction with Northern Ireland is a critical consideration. Due to the strategic national and regional nature of some development proposals, a consistent policy approach to regional and economic planning will also be important.

Since the adoption of the NPF in 2018 significant progress has been made in the introduction of institutional and policy measures aimed at supporting effective regional development including the following;

- The adoption of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies for the three regional assembly areas, consistent with NPF policy;
- The adoption of Regional Enterprise Plans; and
- The publication of the National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation (2022), with a focus on specific regional strengths.

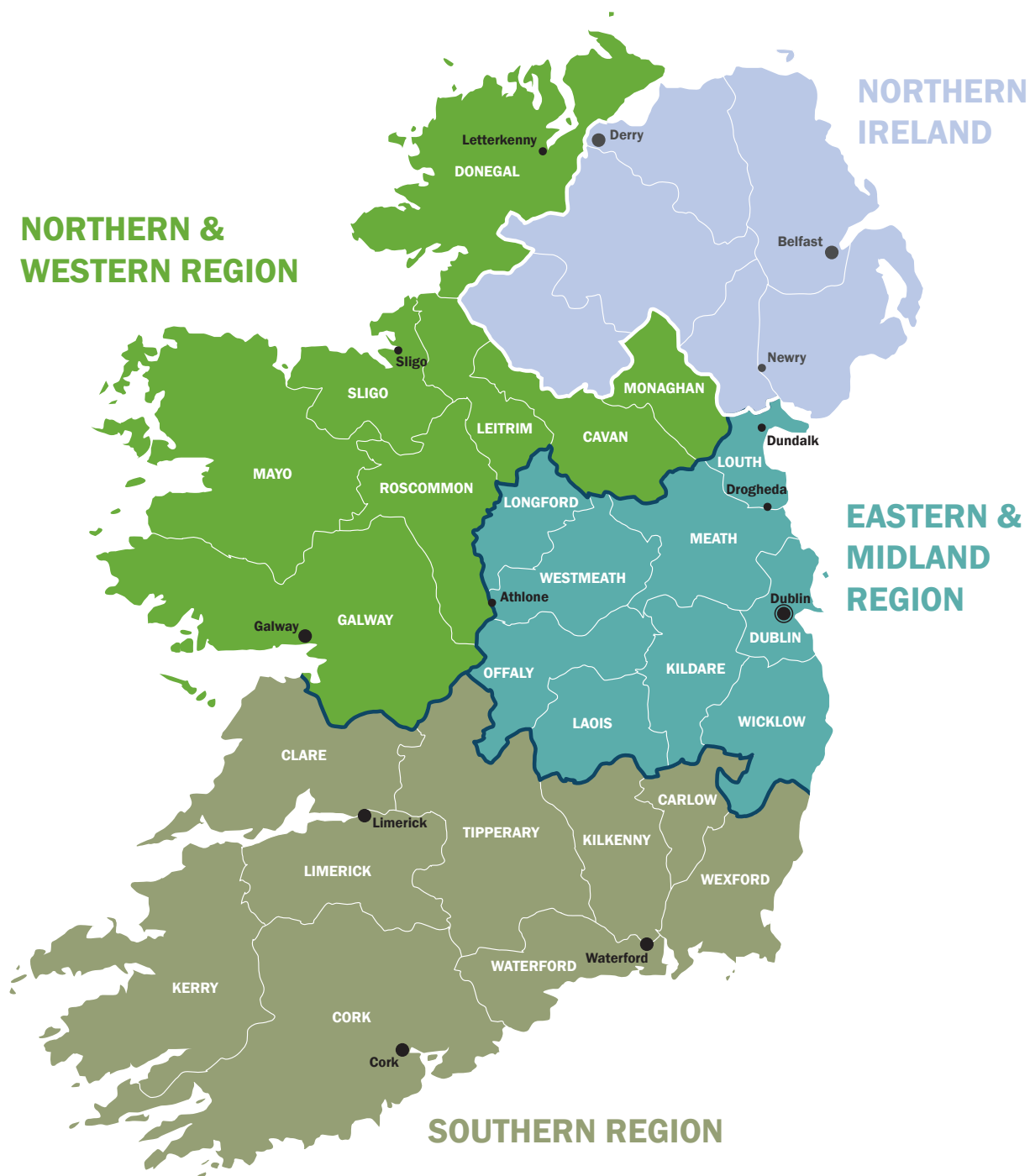
The imperatives of meeting the decarbonisation targets heighten the importance of achieving more sustainable growth patterns in the regions and cities. Within each region, the cities in particular play a key role in giving effect to the large scale transition to net zero required by 2050 and can support a move towards reduced carbon living e.g. through better energy demand management and alternative energy solutions, sustainable mobility and lower carbon buildings. Regional development goals must also ensure a just transition to carbon neutrality, within the wider statutory framework of climate action, supporting alternative employment in place of traditional industries, and supporting persons and communities that may be negatively impacted by the transition.

It is clear that a strengthening of institutional and governance arrangements to coordinate implementation of the NPF at national, regional and metropolitan levels, across all stakeholders involved, will be required if the strategy is to be delivered successfully. The broad range of stakeholders involved in delivering the social, community and 'hard' infrastructure elements required to facilitate transformative growth in metropolitan areas – including not just regional assemblies and county and city councils but also Government Departments and agencies such as Uisce Éireann, TII, NTA, OPW, port authorities - requires a level of coordination and interaction at the national, regional and metropolitan scale.

This section outlines high level planning and place-making policies and enablers to help shape the strategic development of our regions.

Since the adoption of the NPF in 2018 significant progress has been made in the introduction of institutional and policy measures aimed at supporting effective regional development

Figure 3.1 | Ireland’s Regional Assembly Areas and Northern Ireland





The Eastern and Midlands part of Ireland will, by 2040, be a Region of around 3 million people, at least half a million more than today.

Eastern and Midland Region

3.2 Eastern and Midland Region

The Eastern and Midlands part of Ireland will, by 2040, be a Region of around 3 million people, at least half a million more than today. The Region's most significant place-making challenge will be to plan and deliver future development in a way that enhances and reinforces its urban and rural structure and moves more towards self-sustaining, rather than commuter driven activity, therefore allowing its various city, metropolitan, town, village and rural components to play to their strengths, while above all, moving away from a sprawl-led development model.

This Region is one of significant contrasts, encompassing Dublin and its wider commuting catchment which extends into surrounding and nearby counties and towns, some of which have grown very rapidly in recent decades to significant scale, particularly where located along motorway and railway corridors. Beyond Dublin and the principal transport corridors, the Region is more rural in character, with variation both within the counties adjoining Dublin and between the Mid-Eastern counties and the Midlands. All counties within this Region together with their main towns are strategically placed in a national context.

One of the most significant spatial development changes in recent years is driven by the rising economic strength of Dublin, improving transport connectivity and issues relating to housing delivery and cost in the Capital. This has given rise to more intensive interactions between Dublin and towns along the key road and rail routes into Dublin, that function like a linear urban network.

This has created both self-sustaining economic and overspill commuter-driven development in these settlements. Data from Census 2022 indicates that an increased number of Dublin-based workers are now commuting longer distances, enabled by an increase in hybrid and remote working, extending the economic reach of Dublin.

In the wider Mid-East Region, the rapid growth experienced by many towns in recent decades was mainly driven by housing, rather than jobs-centred development. An integrated approach to the development of these and similar towns is a priority, but playing to local strengths and securing employment opportunities to drive self-sustaining, rather than mainly housing-led development.

Mid-East

The strategic location of counties Kildare, Meath and Wicklow, proximate to the Capital, has in part, resulted in significant development in a region characterised by the dominance of Dublin. The Mid-East has experienced high levels of population growth in recent decades, at more than twice the national growth rate. Census data indicates that this pattern is continuing with population growth in the Mid-East exceeding the national average rate in the 2016 to 2022 period.

Managing the challenges of future growth is critical to this regional area. A more balanced and sustainable pattern of development, with a greater focus on addressing employment creation, local infrastructure needs, including in particular social and community infrastructure in areas such as education and amenity, and addressing the legacy of rapid growth, must be prioritised.

This means that housing development should be infrastructure led and primarily based on employment growth, accessibility by sustainable transport modes and quality of life, rather than unsustainable commuting patterns.

Midlands

The Midlands Regional area comprises counties Laois, Longford, Offaly and Westmeath. These counties are not located immediately adjacent to Dublin, but the wider influence of the Metropolitan area is resulting in substantial population growth at an unsustainable rate in some settlements, while others have experienced decline.

The location of the Midlands is strategically important, bordering both the Northern and Western, and Southern Regions. Its central location in Ireland can be leveraged to enable significant strategic investment to a greater extent than at present, supported by a sustainable pattern of population growth, with a focus on strategic national employment and infrastructure development, quality of life and a strengthening of the urban cores of the county towns and other principal settlements.

Due to its strategic location and scale of population, employment and services, Athlone has an influence that extends to part of all three Regional Assembly areas. These important regional interdependencies are recognised in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies for the Eastern and Midlands and Northern and Western Regional Assembly areas. It will also be necessary to prepare a co-ordinated strategy for Athlone at settlement level, to ensure that the town and environs has the capacity to grow sustainably and to secure investment, as the key regional centre in the Midlands.

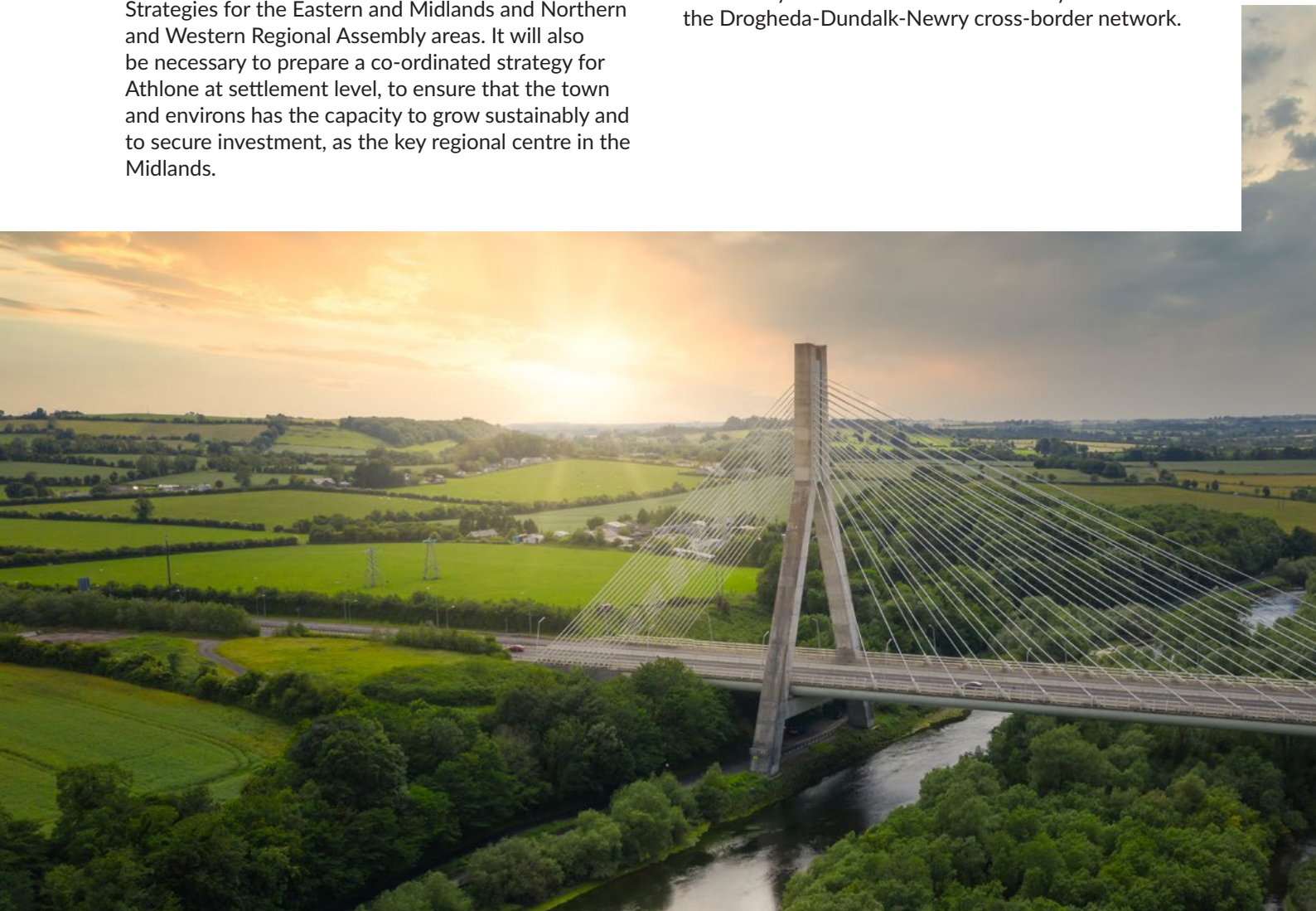
Louth/North-East

While County Louth is located in the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly area, the North-East is a functional area that comprises part of two Regional Assembly areas that also includes most of County Cavan and County Monaghan in the Northern and Western Region.

The key driver for this regional area is the Dublin-Belfast cross-border network, focused on Drogheda, Dundalk and Newry.

The significant influence of Dublin and the cross-border network extends to the county towns and other settlements within the north-eastern regional area as well as to Fingal and parts of County Meath. In identifying opportunities for leveraged employment and sustainable population growth, development must be supported by enhanced connectivity, quality of life, strengthened urban cores and more compact housing in urban settlements. This is to protect and manage the strategic capacity of transport infrastructure and to ensure that the distinctiveness of settlements and rural areas is maintained.

The important regional role of Dundalk and Drogheda is recognised in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly Area. It will also be necessary to prepare co-ordinated strategies for Dundalk and at settlement level to ensure that they have the capacity to grow sustainably and secure investment as key centres on the Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry cross-border network.



Key future planning and development and place-making policy priorities for the Eastern and Midland Region include:

- Enabling the complementary development of large and county towns in the wider Greater Dublin Area and Midland areas on the key strategic and public transport routes in a regionally co-ordinated manner, with an enhanced emphasis on measures to promote self-sustaining economic and employment based development opportunities to match and catch-up on rapid phases of housing delivery in recent years.
- More effective strategic planning and co-ordination of the future development of nationally and regionally strategic locations at points that straddle boundaries between this and neighbouring regions as in the example of Athlone, which is a focal point for an area reaching into much of this and neighbouring regions in economic and employment, transport, education and public service delivery and retailing terms.
- A focused approach to compact, sequential and sustainable development of the larger urban areas along the Dublin – Belfast economic and transport corridor, along which there are settlements with significant populations such as Dundalk and Drogheda.
- More emphasis on consolidating the development of places that grew rapidly in the past decade or so with large scale commuter driven housing development with a particular focus on identifying and prioritising infrastructure and local community and amenity facility provision in many of the larger commuter towns through targeted investment under relevant NPF National Strategic Outcomes.
- Tourism development and promotional branding to ensure that areas such as 'Ireland's Ancient East' and 'Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' are developed and promoted in such a way as to play their full part in tapping the economic potential of regional and rural areas in the region.
- Developing the potential of the region in renewable energy terms, in accordance with the capacity allocation targets set out in Chapter 9: Climate Transition and Our Environment, across the technological spectrum from wind and solar to biomass and, where applicable, wave energy, focusing in particular on the extensive tracts of publicly owned peat extraction areas in order to support a managed transition of local economies to greener energy.
- Building on the progress made in developing an integrated network of greenways, blueways and peatways, that will support the diversification of rural and regional economies and promote more sustainable forms of travel and activity based recreation utilising canal and former rail and other routes.



Case Study



The Old Rail Trail Greenway

The 'Old Rail Trail Greenway' between Athlone and Mullingar is a 43km long converted stretch of the Midlands Great Western Railway. The route links the River Shannon in Athlone with the Royal Canal in Mullingar, and passes through areas of unique biodiversity and heritage along the way.





Dublin City and Metropolitan Area

Dublin's functional reach extends beyond the four constituent local authorities and as a capital city competes internationally to attract talent and investment.

The continued performance of Dublin as a high quality international city of scale is critical to Ireland's overall competitiveness.

While Dublin has generally performed well in recent years, it is experiencing challenges in some key areas including housing delivery and affordability, transport and sustainable mobility, urban amenities and liveability.

In the future, Dublin needs to accommodate a greater proportion of the growth it generates within its metropolitan boundaries, while offering improved housing choice, transport mobility and quality of life. Dublin also needs to become a greener, more environmentally sustainable city in line with international competitors.

At a metropolitan scale, this will require continued focus on a number of large regeneration and redevelopment projects within the existing built up area, and a more compact urban form, facilitated through well designed higher density development.

It will also require significant development, on sites that can be integrated into the existing built-up area of the city and that are serviced by existing or planned high capacity public transport, with a focus on large-scale brownfield and greenfield Transport Orientated Development opportunities, particularly along high-capacity rail corridors.

There are significant opportunities within the Dublin metropolitan area, and further opportunities can come forward for development in the period to 2040 in conjunction with planned investment in the public transport network. Some areas are already designated as Strategic Development Zones (SDZs) or are identified in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and city and county development plans.

The future growth of Dublin requires a holistic approach to ensure that residential and employment development is better integrated and served by transport, infrastructure and amenities. It also means ensuring that smaller scale opportunities for infill and brownfield development are supported and incentivised in order to be realised.

The delivery of critical strategic infrastructure in areas such as transport, water, education, health and community services is essential to the sustainable growth of Dublin into the future. Key priorities include enhanced airport and port access and capacity; expansion of the public transport network including the delivery of DART+, MetroLink, Luas expansion and BusConnects; and enhanced water and wastewater capacity through projects such as the Greater Dublin Drainage Project and the Eastern and Midlands Water Supply Project. There are several national public service delivery projects, such as the Children's Hospital, that will also serve the country as a whole.

Case Study

City Edge Project, Dublin

The City Edge Project is a transformative initiative to reimagine the Naas Road, Ballymount and Park West areas of Dublin as a new urban quarter providing up to 40,000 homes and 75,000 jobs (Strategic Framework - Summary Booklet - The City Edge Project).

The City Edge lands straddle the Dublin City Council (DCC) and South Dublin County Council (SDCC) areas and the project is a partnership between the two local authorities in a collaborative effort to deliver this large-scale regeneration scheme. At 700 Hectares, the scale of the project makes it unique in Ireland and one of the largest redevelopment opportunities in Europe.

The brownfield lands are located at the western edge of Dublin City, within the M50 and only 15 minutes from the City Centre, creating a unique opportunity for sustainable compact growth. The area as now envisaged has the potential to make a significant contribution to the delivery of much needed new homes and jobs, while also generating significant economic, climate and social benefits for the country.

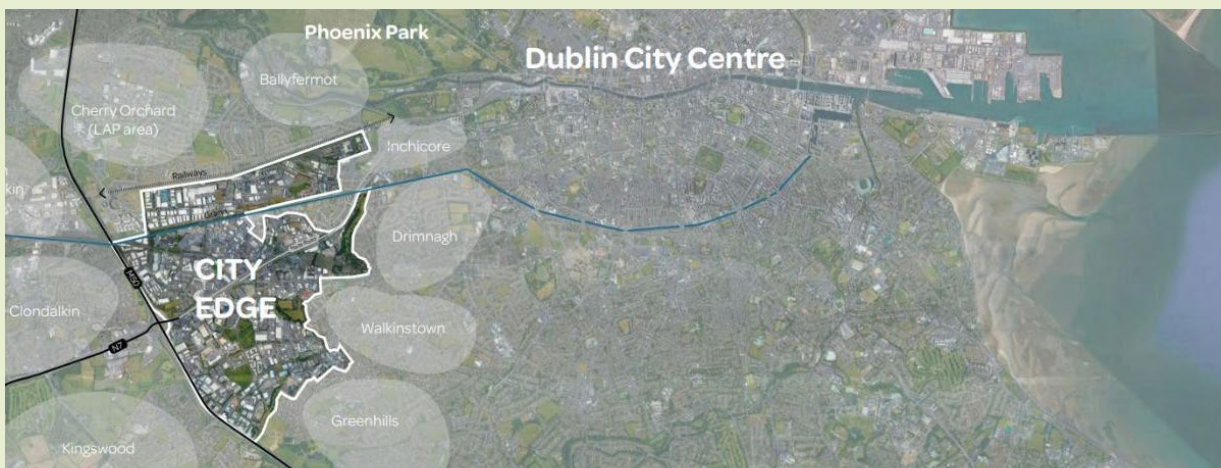
The project was awarded URDF (Urban Regeneration and Development Fund) funding for the preparation of a non-statutory Strategic Framework published in August 2022, which sets out a high level vision for the regeneration of the area to 2070.

[City-Edge-Strategic-Framework-August-2022-Final.pdf \(cityedge.ie\)](https://cityedge.ie/City-Edge-Strategic-Framework-August-2022-Final.pdf)

The City Edge project has a range of ambitious Strategic Objectives with climate resilience at its core including:

- **Compact growth and 15-minute city principles**
 - Create a compact urban environment with an active travel focus, that supports the health and wellbeing of residents, through access to opportunities, services, resources, and natural amenities.
- **Blue and green infrastructure**
 - Create and enhance multi-functional blue and green infrastructure for placemaking, recreation, biodiversity, sustainable urban drainage and to combat climate change impacts such as flood risk.
- **Active travel and public transport**
 - Ensure transport-orientated development by focussing new mixed-use and compact urban development on enhanced active travel and public transport corridors.

City Edge is a unique opportunity to achieve Government policies of compact growth and transport-orientated development at scale, to reach national climate targets, and to make a significant contribution to resolving the housing crisis, while also generating substantial employment opportunities.





Key future growth enablers for Dublin include:

- Identifying a number of ambitious large- scale regeneration areas for the provision of new housing and employment throughout the city and metropolitan area and the measures required to facilitate them as integrated, sustainable development projects;
- Progressing the sustainable development of new brownfield and greenfield areas for housing along existing and planned high capacity public transport corridors focusing on large-scale Transport Orientated Development (TOD) opportunities particularly along high- capacity rail corridors within the metropolitan area;
- Determining a limited number of accessible locations for significant people-intensive employment to complement the city-centre and docklands areas;
- Enabling enhanced opportunities for existing communities as development and diversification occurs, particularly through employment, learning and education support;
- Relocating less intensive uses outside the M50 ring in particular and from the existing built-up area generally;
- Delivering the key transport projects set out in the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area including DART+, MetroLink, Luas expansion, BusConnects Dublin and key elements of the metropolitan area cycle network, inclusive of commuter routes and urban greenways;
- Ensuring that key water supply and waste-water projects needed to support long term growth within the metropolitan area are delivered, including the Greater Dublin Drainage Project and Eastern and Midlands Water Supply Project;
- Improving sustainability in terms of energy, waste and water, to include district heating and water conservation;
- Public realm and urban amenity projects, focused on streets and public spaces, especially in the area between the canals and where linked to social regeneration projects;
- Measures to enhance and better link the existing network of green and blue spaces, including the Phoenix Park and other parks, Dublin Bay and the canals, in line with County and City Biodiversity Action Plans, subject to carrying out a routing study and any necessary environmental assessments;
- Improving access to Dublin Airport, to include improved public transport access, connections from the road network from the west and north and in the longer term, consideration of heavy rail access to facilitate direct services from the national rail network in the context of potential future electrification;
- Facilitating the growth of Dublin Port through greater efficiency, including improved rail freight transfer options, automation and technology updates, limited expansion into Dublin Harbour and improved road access, particularly to/from the southern port area;
- Improving sustainability in terms of energy, waste management and resource efficiency and water, to include district heating and water conservation.



Northern and Western Region

The Northern and Western region justifies a particular focus in this Framework. This is due to a historically lower level of urbanisation compared to other regions, proximity to the border with Northern Ireland and ongoing challenges post-Brexit.

3.3 Northern and Western Region

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The redesignation of the Northern and Western Region from a 'more developed' region to a 'transition' region by the European Commission for the European Regional Development Fund period 2021 to 2027 highlights the particular challenges faced by this region.

While all counties in the region increased in population in the 2016 to 2022 period, the region had the lowest rate of growth of Ireland's three regions at 6.3% relative to a national average of 8.1%. Within the region, the West (Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Galway City) grew by 6.7% while the Border Region (Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan, Sligo) had a lower rate of growth at 5.8%.

The spatial contrast between the five existing cities in Ireland, all south of a line from Dublin to Galway and cities in Northern Ireland such as Belfast and Derry emphasises this underdevelopment and the strategic imperative of building up the strength of this part of the Country.

Such an approach would recognise and build on the facts that the Region contains both the fastest growing city in Ireland over the past 50 years (Galway), as well as places that have far reaching positive effects on their surrounding areas, well beyond what might be suggested by their scale in population terms.

Significant towns such as Sligo function in their areas in a similar manner, but at a different scale to the bigger cities and their regions. Letterkenny, with Derry City and Strabane in Northern Ireland also functions as a polycentric cross-border city region.

These city and city-region functions will be supported and enhanced over the lifetime of this Framework through relevant policies and investment but with a strong emphasis on securing a compact-growth development approach.

Through such policies, by 2040, this will be a region of more than 1 million people, 150,000 more than in 2022, with the biggest challenge it faces being the identification and implementation of actions that will build up its urban structure, diversify and strengthen its rural areas as they transition from the more traditional activities towards a more broadly based mix of economic activities sufficient to underpin long term self-sustaining local communities. This will be complemented by improved accessibility.

The Atlantic Technological University, formally established in 2022 as a merger of three existing institutes of technology (ITs) – Galway-Mayo IT, IT Sligo, and Letterkenny IT – into a single university is an example of a collaborative network approach to regional development extending throughout the North-Western Assembly region as a whole.

Case Study

AIM Centre, Sligo

The AIM Centre (Advance Innovation in Manufacturing) is at the forefront of advancing technology for manufacturing and supply chain; supporting businesses across Ireland on their digitalisation journey, ensuring businesses stay competitive, increase productivity and grow the region's economic impact.

It opened in February, 2024, and represents the repurposing and regeneration of a landmark building in the Centre of Sligo Town (Market Place, Abbeyquarter) through €5.4 million in funding from Enterprise Ireland, through the Border Regional Enterprise Development Fund (BEDF).

The AIM Centre is an initiative brought to life through a collaborative partnership between the Atlantic Technological University, Sligo County Council, and Leitrim County Council. Together this trio is called the 'Sligo Leitrim ITS Regional Development Projects DAC'. The partnership is dedicated to leading funded projects, aimed at the development of the West and North-West Region of Ireland. The Hub will support regional SMEs over three years and be connected to a network of over 200 other EDIHs across the European Union. EDIHs offer a portfolio of free services to help companies become more competitive through the adoption of digital technologies. Businesses that engage these one-stop-shops for firms with digital challenges will be able to gain expertise on research and development in areas such as Artificial Intelligence, Robotics and Blockchain technologies. The Centre facilitates Co-Location spaces in addition to the aforementioned services.



Donegal

Donegal is spatially unique within the island of Ireland, due to its extensive coastline and proximate relationship to Northern Ireland. Historically, the North Western part of the island has demonstrated significant resilience in competing within its peripheral environment and is characterised by cross border dependencies, between Donegal and Derry/Strabane, related to employment, education, healthcare and retail activity.

Enhanced connectivity to centres in Ireland and Northern Ireland is a priority for this regional area, in addition to enabling growth and competitiveness to support the strong links that exist between Letterkenny and Northern Ireland. While a co-ordinated strategy exists through the collaborative approach of the North-West Strategic Growth Partnership, there is scope to further reflect this approach in a regional and local spatial planning context to ensure that Letterkenny and environs has the capacity to grow sustainably and secure investment in the context of the cross-border North-West Strategic Growth Partnership.

North-West

As a regional centre, Sligo serves a large hinterland that extends beyond County Sligo into surrounding counties, to include parts of Donegal, Leitrim, Mayo and Roscommon, supported in particular by nearby county towns. Sligo's significance as a centre of employment and services is much greater than its scale in terms of population.

The presence of strong employment sectors such as Pharma and Engineering, Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), cultural institutions and health services indicate latent capacity for Sligo to enhance its regional role. This can be achieved through building critical mass of population and further employment, in tandem with enhanced accessibility and quality of life. Given the importance of regional interdependencies, this must be in partnership with other places and institutions.

The important regional role of Sligo is recognised in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region. It will also be necessary to prepare a co-ordinated strategy for Sligo at settlement level to ensure that the town can grow sustainably and secure investment as a key regional centre



Cavan-Monaghan/North East

Within the Northern and Western region, most of County Cavan and County Monaghan have a more easterly focus than elsewhere. They comprise part of a North-Eastern functional area that also includes County Louth in the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly area. The key driver for this regional area is the Dublin-Belfast cross-border network, the influence of which, as well as that of the Dublin Metropolitan area, extends into Cavan and Monaghan.

Addressing economic resilience and connectivity will be strategic priorities for this area. The maintenance of seamless cross-border movement for people, goods and services, together with improvements in digital and physical infrastructure will create new opportunities to leverage employment and for sustainable population growth, focused on the county towns. Enhanced connectivity would result in this area being strategically located almost equidistant between the Dublin, Belfast and Derry City regions in terms of time, as well as distance.

West

Counties Galway, Mayo and Roscommon comprise the Western regional area. Galway City exerts a strong influence in much of the southern part of this area. The Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) prepared as part of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy process for the Galway Metropolitan area sets a strategic framework to guide development in the wider city region.

Improved north-south connectivity, focused on a network of regional assets such as Higher Education Institutes, the M17 and Ireland West- Airport Knock and a strengthening of the urban and employment structure of the wider North-Western region, will provide new opportunities, to be complemented by enhanced east-west accessibility.

The Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative (see case study) seeks to build on this potential, supported by developments such as the recently established Atlantic Technology University. Ireland West Airport Knock has a significant role in tourism and enterprise development, with potential for further growth taking particular account of its designation as a Strategic Development Zone (SDZ).

County Mayo functions with a high degree of self-containment, focused on several strong centres of employment and services, all of which could accommodate greater population as well as further jobs growth. Much of Roscommon functionally operates as part of the Midland region, focused on Athlone, which is partly located within the County, whereas the northern part of the County is influenced by proximity to Sligo and Leitrim.

Given the importance of regional interdependencies, this will require a co-ordinated approach at both regional and county/town level, to ensure that Athlone and its environs can grow sustainably and secure investment as the key regional centre in the Midlands, extending into parts of Galway and Roscommon.

More broadly for the West, tailoring policy approaches to capitalise on quality of life and current and emerging sectoral strengths such as agri-food, renewable energy, tourism and the marine, and to incentivise town and village renewal through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, will also be important.



Key future planning and development and place-making policy priorities for the Northern and Western Region include:

- Implementing the metropolitan area strategic plan for Galway city, to enable its continued strategic development in a transformational and urban rejuvenation focused manner, with a special focus on capitalising on the potential of underutilised and publicly owned and centrally located sites and activating their potential to boost the population and economic output levels of central areas.
- Enhancing the city-region like functions performed by Sligo in line with its statutory development plan, activating the potential for further rejuvenation and renewal of its core and further enhancing its connectivity in a national and regional context to ensure wider accessibility of relevant services and amenities.
- Further implementation of the strategic partnership between the Donegal and Derry local authorities in the context of the further enhancement of the North West City Region area, delivering a wide range of economic, infrastructural, community and public service functions in the wider north- west.
- More effective strategic planning and co-ordination of the future development of nationally and regionally strategic places, including points straddling boundaries with neighbouring regions, like Athlone and Letterkenny which are focal points for large geographical areas reaching into much of this and neighbouring regions in economic and employment, transport, education and public service delivery and retailing terms.
- Supporting the emerging and ongoing development, at both local and community levels, of the network of both urban and rural places working together for regional benefit under the Atlantic Economic Corridor initiative, including university and higher education and research alliances, and improved connectivity.
- Integrated planning, management and development of the areas traversed by the Wild Atlantic Way to maximise both the quality and integrity of the visitor experience and the added benefit in economic terms, especially for rural and local communities.
- Supported by the Rural and Urban Regeneration and Development Funds, shaping and informing delivery of city, rural town and village rural rejuvenation priorities, harnessing publicly owned land and other assets that are not being used actively at present, such as former healthcare, military, transport and other complexes and combining the potential of such assets with community and wider private and public sector support and investment, to bring about the transformation of both urban and rural areas in an integrated manner.
- Harnessing the potential of the region in renewable energy terms in accordance with the capacity allocation targets set out in Chapter 9: Climate Transition and Our Environment, across the technological spectrum from wind and solar, in addition to biomass and wave energy.
- Building on the progress made in developing an integrated network of greenways, blueways and peatways that will support the diversification of rural and regional economies and promote more sustainable forms of travel and activity based recreation utilising canal and other routes.

Case Study

Atlantic Economic Corridor

The Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) is the term applied to a linear network along the Western seaboard, stretching from Kerry to Donegal, which has the potential to act as a key enabler for the regional growth objectives of the National Planning Framework.

The corridor straddles parts of both the Northern and Western Region and the Southern Regions, with the potential to further extend its scope by building on the cross-Border relationship between Letterkenny and Northern Ireland, and into Cork City and County to the south.

The overarching objective of the AEC initiative is to maximise the infrastructure, talent and enterprise assets along the western seaboard and to combine the economic hubs, clusters and catchments of the area to attract investment, improve competitiveness, support job creation and contribute to an improved quality of life for the people who live there. The lack of high-quality connectivity between the regions within the AEC has been a major impediment to its development as a counter-balance to Dublin and the East coast.

The AEC Enterprise Hubs Network is a three-year project to create an interconnected community network from over 100 hubs from Donegal to Kerry identified as either operating or in development, in the AEC region.

The AEC is a collaborative initiative, driven by business representatives and communities and supported by national and local government, State agencies and Third Level Institutions. The Government recognises the contribution which the AEC initiative can make to achieving the objectives of the NPF and will continue to support the development of this initiative.





Galway City and Metropolitan Area

Galway has been Ireland's most rapidly developing urban area for half a century and is a key driver for the west of Ireland.

The City is located at a pivotal point on the Atlantic Economic Corridor, from where the influence of Ireland's southern Atlantic cities (Cork and Limerick) extends northwards.

The Galway Metropolitan area shares many of the challenges arising from growth and economic success with much larger cities. In common with Dublin, Galway needs to accommodate a greater proportion of the growth it generates within its metropolitan boundaries, in a greener and more environmentally sustainable manner. Challenges to be addressed include housing delivery and affordability, transport and sustainable mobility and urban quality and liveability, especially outside the core-city centre area.

To grow to its potential Galway needs to address recent legacy issues arising from urban sprawl and reliance on private cars and build on key strengths, including a world class med-tech cluster, third level institutions embedded within the City, a vibrant arts and cultural scene, year round tourism and an attractive natural setting. All of these factors contribute to a positive national reputation.

At a metropolitan scale, this will require a focus on the delivery of critical infrastructure required to meet the ambitious compact growth targets expressed in the NPF, including improved public transport and sustainable mobility options.

It will be necessary to focus on regeneration and redevelopment projects within the existing built up area, and develop a more compact urban form, facilitated through well-designed medium and higher density development. It will also be necessary to identify sustainable greenfield development sites that can be integrated with the existing built up area of the city and serviced by high capacity public transport.

Galway's key strengths, include a world class med-tech cluster, third level institutions embedded within the City, a vibrant arts and cultural scene, year round tourism and an attractive natural setting.



Key future growth enablers for Galway include:

- Delivering a number of regeneration projects to extend and intensify the City Centre, including the Station, Docks, Headford Road and Sandy Road areas;
- Identifying infill and regeneration opportunities to intensify housing and employment development throughout inner suburban areas;
- Progressing the sustainable development of new greenfield areas for housing and the development of supporting public transport and infrastructure, such as at Ardaun;
- Improving access and sustainable transport links to, and integration with, the existing employment areas to the east of the City at Parkmore, Ballybrit and Mervue;
- The continued expansion of the city's third level institutions and integration with the city and region;
- Development of strategic regeneration and development projects and proposals for the City including:
 - 'Galway Public Spaces and Streets Project';
 - Galway Innovation and Creativity District;
 - Galway Airport Site.
- Provision of a Citywide public transport network, informed by the development of a Galway Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (GMATS) with enhanced accessibility between existing and proposed residential areas and the City Centre, third level institutions and the employment areas to the east of the city;
- Public realm and urban amenity projects, focused on streets and public spaces, particularly in support of an extended city centre area and where residential and employment areas can be linked to pedestrian routes;
- Development of a strategic cycleway network with a number of high capacity flagship routes;
- Delivery of the Galway City Ring Road; Delivery of the Galway East Main Drainage Scheme as part of the wider Greater Galway Area Drainage Study;
- Ensuring that water supply and wastewater needs are met by new national projects to enhance Galway's water supply and increase waste water treatment capacity;
- Improving sustainability in terms of energy, waste management and resource efficiency and water, to include district heating and water conservation.



Southern Region

3.4 Southern Region

Key elements of this Region include the three cities and wider city-regions of Cork, Limerick and Waterford and their associated ports and the international airports at Cork and Shannon, a network of large towns, including county towns, many of which provide employment and functional roles much greater than their population scale, an extensive network of smaller towns and villages, many of which play regionally strategic roles, especially in remoter and peninsular parts of the region and a contrasting rural landscape that ranges from the Atlantic seaboard to rich productive agricultural lands and river valleys.

The three city regions, both individually and collectively are a key asset of the region and will play a major role in both driving and accommodating a significant proportion of the additional 300,000 people anticipated in the overall region between 2022 and 2040, taking its population to 2 million people.

The Southern Region increased in population by 45,000 persons (6.6%) during the 2016 to 2022 period and all counties in the region increased in population during this time. Within the Southern Region, the South East region (Carlow, Kilkenny, Wexford, Waterford) had the largest increase while the Mid-West region (Clare, Limerick, Tipperary) had the lowest rate of growth at 5.8%.

The big challenge for this Region in the period to 2040, will be to position its cities as more significantly scaled, while also more compact and attractive, acting as metropolitan drivers for the region as a whole and as effective complements to the economic strength of Dublin. Ensuring a balanced approach in activating and realising much underutilised potential in wider rural towns and dispersed communities will also be a priority.

Mid-West

Counties Clare, Limerick and Tipperary comprise the Mid-Western regional area, focused on Limerick City and the River Shannon estuary, also extending into the northern part of County Kerry. A Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) has been prepared for the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan area, incorporating Shannon, through the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy process.

Although focused on Limerick City and key employment and infrastructure assets at Shannon and Foynes, this regional area is supported by a strong rural economy and a varied network of towns and villages. Shannon Airport has an established role as a key travel and enterprise hub for the region, with potential for further growth. The independent Shannon Estuary Economic Taskforce's Report¹³, published in 2023 set out recommendations to government on the economic development potential of the Shannon Estuary region.

Future growth will be based on leveraging national and international connectivity, higher education capacity and quality of life to secure strategic investment. This must be underpinned by sustainable employment and housing development, focused on the broader Limerick- Shannon Metropolitan area and a strengthening of the urban cores of the county towns and principal settlements, as well as in rural areas.

South-East

Counties Carlow, Kilkenny, Waterford and Wexford, are included in this regional area. Although it has a strong urban structure, much of this area is rural in character and includes some of Ireland's most productive agricultural land.

13 <https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/shannon-estuary-economic-taskforce-report-july-2023.html>

A Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) has been prepared for the Waterford Metropolitan area through the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy process. Strategically located between Cork and Dublin, with a network of large towns, the south-east has capacity for improved growth, but has not had a focus sufficient in scale to drive the sustained development of the region as a whole.

Regional opportunities to leverage growth include national and international connectivity, especially via ports proximate to continental Europe, such as Belview and Rosslare-Europort, strengthening HEIs and further balanced employment and housing development in key settlements and county towns. This must be based on infrastructure and quality of life, rather than long distance commuting to Dublin, as is apparent in part of counties Carlow and Wexford in particular.

South-West

Counties Cork and Kerry and Cork City comprise the South-West regional area. A Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) for the Cork Metropolitan Area, including Cork Harbour, has been prepared through the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy process.

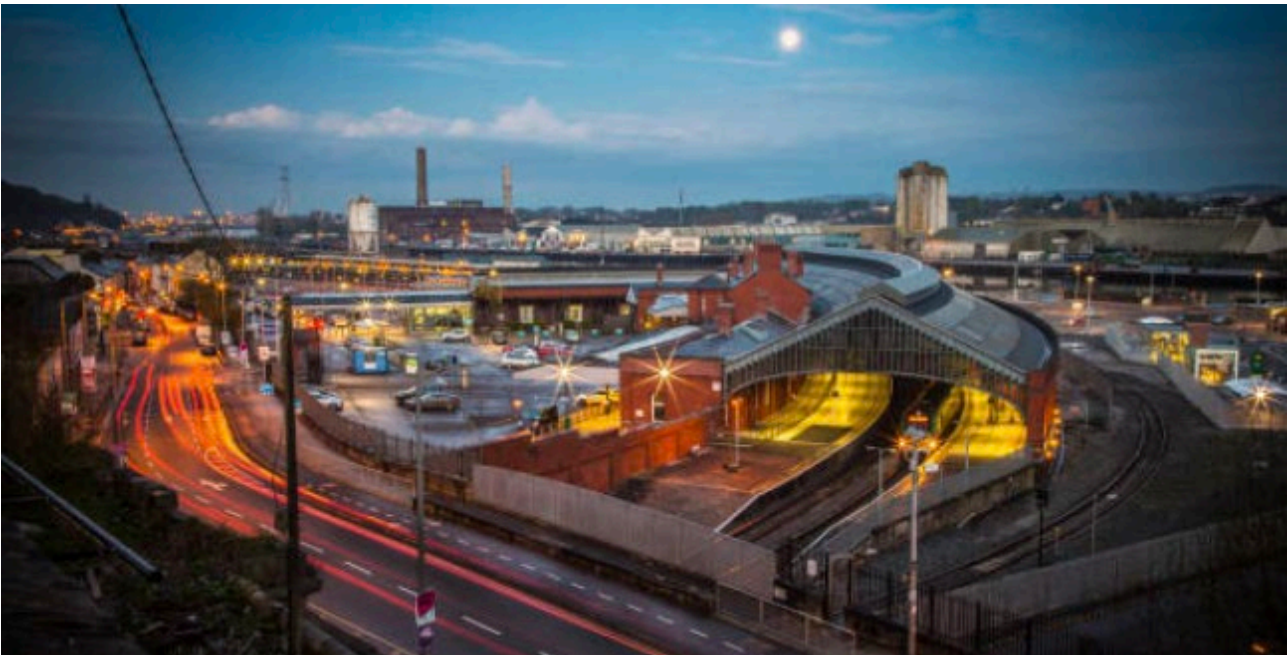
Located beyond the Cork City functional area, North and West Cork share similarities with neighbouring County Kerry, being more rural in character, with extensive coastline, supported by a variety of large and small towns. Many of these settlements have a high degree of self-containment, operating as significant local employment and service centres for a large rural hinterland.

While employment, infrastructure and strengthening of small towns and rural communities are priorities throughout this regional area there will also be a focus on more balanced and compact, connected growth. This means that housing development should be based on centres of employment and employment growth, higher densities, access to amenities and sustainable transport, in order to avoid long-distance commuting patterns and quality of life impacts.

This also applies to the larger towns in this regional area, but elsewhere, in common with other western seaboard counties, tailoring policy approaches to capitalise on quality of life and sectoral strengths such as agri-food, energy, tourism and the marine, and to incentivise town and village renewal through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, will also be important.

Key future planning and development and place-making policy

- Implementing the Metropolitan Area strategic spatial plans for Cork, Limerick and Waterford cities that secure long-term transformational and rejuvenation-focused city development, with a special emphasis on capitalising on the potential of underutilised and publicly owned and centrally located sites and activating their potential to boost the population and economic output levels of city centre areas as drivers for wider regions.
- Allied to strategies to deliver more compact urban development in the main cities, to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of transport links between the cities to enable them to function in concert with each other and harness their complementary strengths in an increasingly networked manner.
- Measures to support the integrated development of remoter parts of this region, particularly rural peninsular areas and towns on its western seaboard, including the ongoing investment in the transport and communications area, particularly in the roll-out of the national broadband scheme and further promotion and development of attractions to capitalise on underutilised potential in the tourism and local enterprise areas.
- Integrated planning, management and development of the areas traversed by the Wild Atlantic Way to maximise both the quality and integrity of the visitor experience and the added benefit in economic terms, especially for rural and local communities.
- Harnessing the potential of the region in renewable energy terms in accordance with the capacity allocation targets set out in Chapter 9: Climate Transition and Our Environment, across the technological spectrum from wind and solar, in addition to biomass and wave energy.
- More emphasis on consolidating the development of places that grew rapidly in the past decade or so with large scale commuter driven housing development with a particular focus on addressing local community and amenity facility provision in many of the larger commuter towns through targeted investment under relevant NPF National Strategic Outcomes.
- Developing a more integrated network of greenways, blueways and peatways to support the diversification of rural and regional economies and promote more sustainable forms of travel and activity based recreation.



Cork City and Metropolitan Area

Cork already performs well as a major urban centre in Ireland and the City has positioned itself as an emerging medium-sized European centre of growth and innovation. Building on this potential is critical to further enhancing Ireland's metropolitan profile.

This requires an ambitious vision for Cork, at the heart of which must be an internationally competitive, sustainable urban environment. In the future, Cork needs to accommodate a greater proportion of the growth it generates within its metropolitan boundaries, while offering improved housing choice, transport mobility and quality of life.

This means providing a range of critical enabling infrastructure to deliver large-scale urban growth - housing, transport, amenities and energy systems in a best practice European context.

At a metropolitan scale, this will require focus on a number of large regeneration and redevelopment projects within the existing built up area, and a more compact urban form, facilitated through well-designed higher density development. It will also require significant development, on sites that can be integrated into the existing built-up area of the city and that are serviced by existing or planned high capacity public transport, including large-scale brownfield and greenfield Transport Orientated Development opportunities.

One of the greatest challenges in achieving significant growth that will move Cork to the next level is addressing the long term decline of the City's urban population.

There is positive evidence that the City's urban population is growing in the 2016 and 2022 Census and it will continue to be important to attract additional people and jobs to existing, established parts of the City.

It is also necessary to grow and diversify Cork's employment base. This means creating the conditions to attract and retain talented innovators and entrepreneurs and to be accessible to investors.

A key part of addressing this is an enhanced urban environment, including better housing choice and quality, new employment locations, improved public spaces and enhanced public transport as well as safe and pleasant options for walking and cycling.

The development of the major URDF-funded regeneration project in the Cork City Docklands has the potential to provide homes and jobs for thousands of people in a new urban quarter in the heart of the City.

It is also necessary to improve regional connectivity in tandem with urban growth strategies for Cork, Limerick and Waterford. Average journey times per km by road from Cork to the Cities of Limerick, Waterford and Galway should be equivalent to those from Dublin. At present average journey times per km from Cork are slower per km travelled than from Dublin to the other Cities.

Further to completion of the Lower Lee Flood Relief Scheme, the issue of flood management must be addressed as part of any future growth strategy for Cork, particularly in relation to areas of the City adjoining the River Lee.

Case Study

Cork City Docklands

The URDF is helping to fund a number of strategic projects in Cork City and significant funding has been provisionally allocated for two projects; one for the Cork City Docklands and one for Grand Parade Quarter. These projects include important public realm and capital works which will transform these two areas of Cork City into vibrant, high quality districts.



POTENTIAL TO DELIVER....

- New homes for 20,000 residents
- 25,000 Jobs
- €5.1 bn private sector investment



POLICY & STRATEGY
Coherent strategy for regeneration of Cork Docklands



INVESTMENT
€471m+ Infrastructure Funding
€500m+ Private Sector Investment To Date



EMPLOYMENT
6,000 jobs created to date



HOUSING
Planning approved for 1,695 new homes
2,300 residential units in planning pipeline



SUSTAINABLE TRAVEL
Up to 80% of journeys walking, cycling or public transport



STAYING ON COURSE
M28 Port Relocation
LRT/Rapid Bus Service
Catalyst projects - Tourism/Education/Health

Key future growth enablers for Cork include:

- Delivering ambitious large-scale regeneration projects for the provision of new employment, housing and supporting infrastructure in Cork Docklands (City Docks and Tivoli) as integrated, sustainable developments, including relocation of two 'Seveso' sites from the City Docks;
- The development of a much enhanced Citywide public transport system based on the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (CMATS), to incorporate an east-west corridor from Mahon, through the City Centre to Ballincollig and a north-south corridor with a link to the Airport;
- Delivering BusConnects Cork and the Cork Area Commuter Rail Programme. Progressing the sustainable development of new brownfield and greenfield areas for housing along existing and planned high capacity public transport corridors with a particular focus on large-scale Transport Orientated Development (TOD) opportunities within the metropolitan area;
- Identifying infill and regeneration opportunities to intensify housing development in inner city and inner suburban areas, supported by public realm and urban amenity projects;
- Enabling enhanced opportunities for existing communities as development and diversification occurs, particularly through employment, learning and education support;
- Development of a new science and innovation park to the west of the City, accessible by public transport;
- The continued expansion of and integration with the City's third level institutions including University College Cork and the Munster Technological University, of which, three of six campuses are located in Cork City;
- Improved Ringaskiddy Port access;
- Enhanced regional connectivity through improved average journey times by road;
- Key enabling projects required to facilitate the regeneration of Cork City Docklands, including completion of the M28 Cork to Ringaskiddy project and delivering the Great Island Connectivity Scheme to improve transport connectivity from the mainland to Great Island and Cobh;
- Improved rail journey times to Dublin and consideration of improved onward direct network connections;
- Ensuring that water supply and waste- water needs are met by new national projects to enhance Corks water supply and increase waste water treatment capacity;
- Improving sustainability in terms of energy, waste management and resource efficiency and water, to include district heating and water conservation.

Limerick City and Metropolitan Area

Limerick is the largest urban centre in Ireland's Mid-West, which is focused on the lower River Shannon catchment. The region includes Shannon Airport and the port and energy-related facilities of the Shannon estuary, as well as adjoining parts of County Clare and County Tipperary.

As a well-located regional centre situated mid-way between Cork and Galway on Ireland's Atlantic Economic Corridor and with good connectivity to Dublin, Limerick has the potential to generate and be the focus of significant employment and housing growth.

It is necessary for Limerick to further strengthen its position as the principal focus within the Region and to continue to address the legacy of regional growth having occurred outside the City area. A series of innovative, practical and institutional measures have been put in place to achieve this in recent years and there is evidence of a positive turnaround in terms of both population and employment growth.

Limerick Regeneration, the amalgamation of Limerick City and County and the Limerick 2030 initiative, have all contributed to enhancing Limerick's growth potential. Working together with the City's third level institutions, Shannon Airport and bodies such as Shannon Development and the Shannon-Foynes Port Company, there is capacity to build on recent successes and add to the ambitious vision for Limerick.

This requires growing and diversifying the City's employment base and attracting more people to live in the City, both within the City Centre and in new, accessible green-field development areas.

At a metropolitan scale, this will require a focus on regeneration and redevelopment projects within the existing built up area, and a more compact urban form, facilitated through well-designed medium and higher density development. It will also require significant development, on sites that can be integrated into the existing built-up area of the city and that are serviced by existing or planned public transport. The delivery of critical strategic infrastructure in areas such as transport, water, education, health and other community services is a key enabler for the sustainable growth of Limerick and is necessary to grow the city region at the scale planned for under the NPF.

Regional connectivity, especially to Cork and Waterford must also be addressed and average journey times per km need to be improved.



Key future growth enablers for Limerick include:

- Implementation of the updated Limerick 2030 economic strategy to create modern, city centre office accommodation and a series of transformational city centre public realm projects;
- Limerick Directly Elected Mayor to deliver the functions prescribed under the Local Government (Mayor of Limerick) Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2024;
- Identifying infill and regeneration opportunities to intensify housing and employment development throughout inner suburban areas, including the regeneration of Colbert Station as a sustainable mixed-use city quarter with an enhanced transport interchange;
- Enabling enhanced opportunities for existing communities as development and diversification occurs, particularly through employment, learning and education support;
- Progressing the sustainable development of new greenfield areas for housing and the development of supporting public transport and infrastructure, such as at Mungret;
- The continued expansion of the City's third level institutions and integration with the wider City and region;
- Provision of a Metropolitan public transport network, in accordance with the objectives of the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (LSMATS) with enhanced accessibility connecting Colbert Station, UL, Shannon Town Centre and other metropolitan centres;
- Delivering BusConnects Limerick to improve bus and sustainable transport services throughout the Limerick City region;
- Build upon the existing Limerick Metropolitan Cycle Network Study to deliver a comprehensive cycle network for the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area;
- Enhanced road connectivity to Shannon- Foynes Port, including local by-passes;
- Enhanced regional connectivity through improved average journey times by road to Cork and Waterford;
- Ensuring that water supply and waste-water needs are met by new national projects to enhance Limerick's water supply and increase waste water treatment capacity;
- Improving sustainability in terms of energy, waste management and resource efficiency and water, to include district heating and water conservation.

Waterford City and Metropolitan Area

Waterford is the principal urban centre in Ireland's south-east and is unique in having a network of large and strong regional urban centres in close proximity within each of the surrounding counties that both complement the role of Waterford and perform strong regional and local economic and developmental roles for their own areas.

Given the unique urban composition of the south east and the objective to enable Waterford City to become a regional city of scale, an agreed development strategy is required to build Waterford's population and employment base substantially while enabling surrounding urban centres to perform complementary roles.

From a national perspective, the further development of Waterford City would lead to the development of the wider south-east, which has experienced economic challenges in recent decades.

The City is well-served by motorway and rail links to Dublin, but requires improved road links to other major urban areas, particularly Cork and Limerick, and also within the region to towns that are not served by motorway.

Waterford and the wider south-east region is also served by a regional airport and the Port of Waterford at Belview and Rosslare-Europort, which are geographically close to EU trading partners and are important in Ireland's post-Brexit response, and by the Technological University of the South East.

The key challenge for Waterford is to build scale and enhance urban quality through employment-led growth. The City's existing employment base includes pharma, med-tech and engineering/advanced manufacturing sectors, as well as emerging indigenous enterprises.

There is capacity to build on all of these strengths while enhancing Waterford's small-city attractiveness and quality of life. This includes capitalising on good and improved connectivity to Dublin and Cork in particular.

Waterford also offers opportunities as a location for support functions in areas such as financial or professional services that may wish to avoid larger urban areas. It is also an emerging tourist centre, located on the route from Rosslare to Cork and the South-West and as a destination for cruise traffic.

Key future growth enablers for Waterford include:

- Delivering the North Quays SDZ regeneration project for integrated, sustainable development to include an integrated transport hub, the relocation of Waterford train station to a more convenient location, and a new sustainable transport bridge;
- Identifying infill and regeneration opportunities to intensify housing and employment development throughout city centre and inner suburban areas;
- Enabling enhanced opportunities for existing communities as development and diversification occurs, particularly through employment, learning and education support;
- Progressing the sustainable development of new greenfield areas for housing and the development of supporting public transport and infrastructure;
- Public realm and urban amenity projects, focused on streets and public spaces, particularly in the city centre and inner urban area in support of urban intensification;
- The development and expansion of the South East Technological University (SETU) formed in 2022 from the amalgamation of the two institutes of technology in the region – Waterford IT and IT Carlow and its integration with the City and region;
- Provision of Citywide public transport in accordance with the Waterford Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy (WMATS), including the implementation of BusConnects Waterford and strategic cycleway networks;
- Enhanced regional connectivity through improved average journey times by road to Cork, Limerick and ports within the region;
- Ensuring that water supply and waste-water needs are met by new national projects to enhance Waterford's water supply and increase waste water treatment capacity;
- Improving sustainability in terms of energy, waste management and resource efficiency and water, to include district heating and water conservation.



4

Making Stronger Urban Places

4.1 Why Urban Places Matter

Through many centuries of growth and change, Ireland's urban areas comprise a rich variety of unique and widely distributed places. At all scales, our cities, towns and villages offer a range of opportunities for community and social interaction, potential for innovation and prosperity and support and enable their surrounding rural areas.

The National Strategic Outcomes in Chapter 1 and the National Policy Objectives in Chapter 2, set a Framework to make our cities, towns and villages the places where many more people choose to live, as well as to work and visit, by 2040.

Accordingly, this Framework aims to enhance people's experience of living and working in and visiting urban places in Ireland. Through the actions and policies set out below, our cities, towns and villages must become more attractive and 'liveable', and offer a quality of life that more people are willing to choose in the years ahead.

Community

Urban settlements are important places for trading goods, services and ideas, for information, learning and innovation, as well as for administration, entertainment, healthcare and worship. They offer choice and opportunity as well as connectivity and community.

Notwithstanding all of this, some parts of our cities and some towns are now perceived as unattractive places in which to live, seen as suitable only for certain sectors of society or for certain types of development. In other cases, the edges of cities and smaller towns within commuting distance of larger centres have been overdeveloped at a pace that has overwhelmed existing communities. In combination, this pattern has undermined many of our urban places.

The value and potential of our cities, towns and villages means that there are opportunities to change direction, especially in the context of an ageing population with smaller household size and new patterns of work and lifestyles. In this context, community interaction and support and access to a range of services will be increasingly important. It is therefore an objective of Project Ireland 2040 to:

National Policy Objective 12

Ensure the creation of attractive, liveable, well designed, high quality urban places that are home to diverse and integrated communities that enjoy a high quality of life and well-being.

Economy/Prosperity

The type of place-making set out above is also critical to economic prosperity as globalisation continues to have a concentrating effect. Employment trends indicate that increasingly, city regions are the focal point for internationally mobile investment. High-value added services are attracted primarily to urban areas, and cities are competing with other cities internationally.

This means that many sectors, but in particular those related to the information economy and knowledge development, tend to be very place specific. High skilled individuals are attracted together, as firms 'agglomerate' in the larger, denser, skilled labour markets found in urban areas.

In addition to scale and density, the quality and attractiveness of our urban places is a critical factor for inward investment and talent attraction as well as having a steady stream of local talent and innovation associated with third level research institutions. International connectivity is also important, where short travel times to an airport with a good choice of destinations is a critical factor.

Domestically trading companies tend to be more distributed and locate where there is a local/regional demand for their services, but changing global circumstances mean that they too need to be agile to adapt through early innovation. This highlights the need to focus on upskilling and life-long learning throughout the regions, as well as supporting sectoral specialisation that have emerged at different locations.

In an era when the nature of urban places is a critical factor in determining economic growth and regional development, we must ensure that there are a range of quality urban places in which people will choose to live, work and invest.

National Policy Objective 13

Develop cities and towns of sufficient scale and quality to compete internationally and to be drivers of national and regional growth, investment and prosperity.



Quality design and placemaking is critical for making places attractive and distinctive.

The Environment

One of the principal benefits of more compact urban development is that it will reduce harmful impacts on the environment by:

- Reducing land take, preserving agricultural land and habitats;
- Utilising existing infrastructure, buildings and sites and reducing the need to travel long distances, which will reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions;
- Improving the viability of public transport services and sustainable and electric mobility infrastructure;
- Improving the provision and viability of water services, and
- Enhancing public health by encouraging and facilitating more active lifestyles by creating a more walkable and cycling friendly urban environment.

All scales and types of urban place have synergies with their surrounding area and are integrated with their hinterland to some extent. They are in turn influenced by activity in the wider area, particularly in the case of smaller settlements.

Where close to cities or larger towns, many have become commuter-focused, but elsewhere there are enterprise opportunities in lieu of more traditional service functions, based on local assets, innovation and quality of life, e.g. servicing an emerging resource sector or a new tourist amenity such as a greenway, supported by improving connectivity.

Sustainable models of urban development and regeneration can deliver quality and maximise the advantages and opportunities of more compact growth, based on increased population and employment density. Quality design and placemaking is critical for making places attractive and distinctive. Sustainable and efficient movement, a mix and distribution of uses, the protection and enhancement of green and blue infrastructure, responsive built form and well-designed spaces can help to enhance our urban areas and create desirable places in which people want to live, work or visit and contribute to ongoing quality of life and well-being.

National Policy Objective 14

Regenerate and rejuvenate cities, towns and villages of all types and scale as environmental assets that can accommodate changing roles and functions, increased residential population and employment activity, enhanced levels of amenity and design and placemaking quality, in order to sustainably influence and support their surrounding area to ensure progress toward national achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

4.2 Ireland's Urban Structure

Population

The Census of Population 2022 provides a good indication of Ireland's urban structure¹⁴:

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) defines a settlement of more than 1,500 people as 'urban'.

- In 2022, there were 218 urban settlements (an increase of 18 or 8% of such settlements since 2016), which together accommodated 3.3 million people, or 63% of Ireland's population.
- The agreed EU/OECD definition of a 'city' is a settlement around a core centre with a population of at least 50,000 people.
- The five cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford and their immediate suburbs together comprised approximately 1.7 million people, or just over one-third (33%) of Ireland's population.
- Nearly three-quarters of Ireland's city dwellers are the 1.3 million people, or one-quarter (25%) of the population, who live in Dublin.
- Beyond the five cities, a further 1.5 million people, or 30% of Ireland's population, live in towns and villages with at least 1,500 or more people.
- There were 49 Towns with a population of at least 10,000 or more people (an increase of 8 or 16% since the 2016 Census), home to 18% of Ireland's population.
- Ireland's urban population is larger than ever before and more than half of the population, or nearly 2.7 million people, now live in cities or large towns of at least 10,000 people.
- The overall urban structure remains relatively weak and focused on Dublin and the south and east of Ireland. In particular, Dublin's population almost equates to that of the next 40 cities and towns combined.
- The Central Statistics Office (CSO) defines a settlement of fewer than 1,500 people as 'rural'.
- In 2022, 37% of Ireland's population lived in settlements of fewer than 1,500 people or in individual houses in rural areas.

The Role of Employment

Population only partly explains Ireland's urban structure. Employment, or more specifically, where jobs are located, is also an important factor and influences settlement patterns. A significant proportion, or more than half of Ireland's largest towns measured in terms of population, are located within the Dublin or Cork city regions. While these towns are economically active in their own right, many function as commuter settlements for employees working in Dublin and Cork and have a low ratio of jobs to residential workforce.

While there are few large towns in the Northern and Western Region north of Galway City, towns in the North-West and in other areas outside the larger city regions, such as the Midlands, tend to have more significant employment and service functions relative to their regional and local catchment.

Some also have very high ratios of jobs to resident workforce¹⁵, which means that they are attracting workers from a wide catchment area. Data for all urban settlements is included as part of Appendix 2.

It is significant that out of a total of 164 settlements in Ireland with fewer than 10,000 people in 2022, 41 of these had a population of more than 5,000, but only sixteen had more than 2,500 jobs. On the one hand, this highlights a number of locations where smaller settlements by reason of accessibility, employment and local services, fulfil important roles for a wider area, many as county towns, but on the other, it assists in explaining why the population of this category of town has either declined or stagnated in recent years¹⁶.

A number of larger settlements of more than 10,000 people are characterised by very low ratios of jobs to resident workforce, having around 2,500 jobs or fewer in 2016, mainly commuter settlements that have undergone rapid residential expansion in recent decades. This type of commuter-focused residential development is similarly apparent in respect of many smaller towns, located within the larger city regions.

There is also a category of historically larger towns, mainly in Leinster, that experienced significant commuter based residential growth during the same period, but not jobs growth, in part due a decline in traditional industrial and process-based employment. These include, for example, Balbriggan, Navan and Portlaoise, three of Ireland's fastest growing large towns between 1996 and 2022, where the population has grown rapidly, without equivalent increases in jobs.

¹⁴ Census of Population (2022) Profile 1 - Population Distribution and Movements - CSO

¹⁵ The 'jobs ratio' for a settlement is the total number of jobs divided by the resident labour force. A ratio of 1.0 means that there is one job for every resident worker in a settlement and indicates a balance, although not a match, as some resident workers will be employed elsewhere and vice-versa. Ratios of more than 1.0 indicate a net in-flow of workers and of less than 1.0, a net out-flow. The extent to which the ratio is greater or less than 1.0, is also generally indicative of the extent to which a town has a wider area service and employment role, rather than as a commuter settlement.

¹⁶ Census of Population 2022 Profile 7 - Employment, Occupations and Commuting - CSO

In contrast, there are a number of large settlements throughout Ireland, where the ratio of jobs to resident workforce has remained high, due to a more sustainable balance of employment and population growth. There were also some large towns with a good balance of jobs and population in 2022, but generally with a lower ratio of workers to jobs, for a combination of reasons ranging from proximity to larger centres of employment, to some loss of traditional occupations.

4.3 Planning for Ireland’s Urban Growth

The unique and complex nature of Ireland’s urban structure suggests the need for a range of complementary strategies in the context of planning for future growth. In order to achieve more balanced and sustainable development, some settlements will need to attract increased population, whereas others will need more jobs, amenities or better transport links.

Some require a combination of these, but all will require a tailored approach, that can be appropriately linked to investment, through the National Development Plan, including investment through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, both established in support of this Framework:

- As well as focusing on the role of Dublin and the significant potential of Ireland’s other four cities, there is a need to strengthen Ireland’s overall urban structure, especially in the North-West and the Midlands and to continue to enhance cross border networks;
- There is a need to encourage population growth in towns of all sizes that are strong employment and service centres, where potential for sustainable growth exists, also supported by employment growth;
- There is a need to reverse the stagnation or decline of many smaller urban centres, that may include the identification and establishment of new roles and functions and enhancement of local infrastructure and amenities;
- There is a need to address the legacy of rapid unplanned growth in expanded commuter settlements of all sizes, by facilitating amenities and services catch-up, jobs growth and/or improved sustainable transport links to the cities, together with a much slower, more sustainable rate of population growth than in recent decades;

- In more self-contained settlements of all sizes, with a good balance of people and jobs, there is a need to continue balanced population and employment growth.

It is therefore an objective of the National Planning Framework to:

National Policy Objective 15

Apply a tailored approach to urban development, linked to the Rural and Urban Regeneration and Development Funds, with a particular focus on:

- Dublin;
- The four Cities of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford;
- Strengthening Ireland’s overall urban structure, particularly in the Northern and Western and Midland Regions, to include the regional centres of Sligo and Letterkenny in the North-West, Athlone in the Midlands and cross-border networks focused on the Letterkenny-Derry North-West City Region and Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry on the Dublin-Belfast corridor;
- Encouraging population growth in strong employment and service centres of all sizes, supported by employment growth;
- Reversing the stagnation or decline of many smaller urban centres, by identifying and establishing new roles and functions and enhancement of local infrastructure and amenities;
- Addressing the legacy of rapid unplanned growth, by facilitating amenities and services catch-up, jobs and/or improved sustainable transport links to the cities, together with a slower rate of population growth in recently expanded commuter settlements of all sizes;
- In more self-contained settlements of all sizes, supporting a continuation of balanced population and employment growth.

Ireland's Cities

As a key element of the NPF strategy to grow Ireland's three regions, build more accessible centres of scale and to ensure more compact and sustainable forms of development that will be supported by focused investment, and new governance arrangements, it will be necessary to encourage proportionally higher levels of population growth in Ireland's five cities.

Dublin is Ireland's globally competitive city of scale and continues to drive much of the growth of the country as a whole. Cork is emerging as an international centre of scale and is well placed to complement Dublin, but requires significantly accelerated and urban-focused growth to more fully achieve this role.

The Dublin City and immediately adjoining suburban area should therefore plan to grow at a targeted rate of just above the projected national average to 2040, i.e. by around 20% to 25%¹⁷. The planned rate of growth in the Cork City and suburban area should be approximately 40%, over the same period.

Given Dublin's scale, this means planning for at least 296,000 more people in the City and suburbs by 2040, in addition to new sustainable communities at brownfield and greenfield locations along planned high capacity public transport corridors in the post-2030 period. The higher targeted rate of growth for Cork also means planning for significant numbers, i.e. at least 96,000 more people by 2040¹⁸.

The cities of Limerick, Galway and Waterford are also important drivers of national growth and key regional centres. All have international visibility to some extent and require greater scale. As part of the National Planning Framework strategy to accelerate the development of and strengthen these Cities, all three should also plan to grow by over 40% to 2040¹⁹.

National Policy Objective 16

To ensure that the targeted pattern of population growth of Ireland's cities to 2040 is in accordance with the targets set out in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 | Ireland 2040: Targeted Pattern of City Population Growth

City	Population 2022	2018 NPF	Population Growth to 2040 ²⁰		Minimum Target Population 2040
		% Range 2016-2040	% Range 2022-2040	People	
Dublin - City and Suburbs	1,263,000	20-25%	20-25%	296,000	1,560,000
Cork - City and Suburbs	223,000	50-60%	40%	96,000	320,000
Limerick - City and Suburbs	102,000	50-60%	40%	44,000	150,000
Galway - City and Suburbs	86,000		40%	36,000	122,000
Waterford - City and Suburbs	60,000		40%	28,000	88,000

¹⁷ For comparison purposes, the rate of population growth in Dublin City and suburbs was just under three-quarters of the national average between 1996 and 2022.

¹⁸ The rate of population growth in Cork City and suburbs was below the national average between 2016 and 2022.

¹⁹ The population of Waterford City and suburbs grew by 12% between 2016 and 2022, and Limerick City and suburbs by 9%, both ahead of the national average. Galway City and Suburbs grew by just 7%, below the national average.

²⁰ City population growth targets are at the minimum point of the range and are rounded to the nearest 1,000.



Ireland's Towns

There is scope for potential growth in all towns in Ireland. In the context of the National Planning Framework, this will largely be determined by the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for each Regional Assembly area, also taking into consideration the potential of smaller settlements and rural areas.

National Policy Objectives 5 and 15 recognise the key regional roles of Athlone in the Midlands, Sligo in the North-West, and the Letterkenny-Derry and Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry cross-border networks and will inform the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies. National Policy Objective 15 also recognises the need to encourage population growth in strong employment and services centres, supported by employment growth, including key towns. The extent to which these towns should target future growth will be determined at regional level in the context of the implementation of this Framework.

While targeted growth in the regional centres and key towns will take the lead in a regional and in the case of Athlone, inter-regional context, this must also be balanced with that targeted elsewhere.

In all cases, regional and local planning authorities must consider the varied growth potential of different types of settlement in accordance with National Policy Objective 15, as well as rural areas, and tailor a strategy to balance this accordingly. It is not expected that all towns, large or small, will each target the same level of growth to 2040 and targets set in accordance with the Framework and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies will be reviewed based on performance. But all towns can and must grow over this period and some will be identified as having capacity for higher than average levels of growth.

In each Regional Assembly area, where it is proposed to target significant growth, i.e. at a rate of 30% or more above 2022 population levels to 2040, in any settlement not identified in Policy 4 or Policy 5 of this Framework, for example where there will be major employment or infrastructure investment, this will be on an agreed basis, aligned with investment in infrastructure and/or the provision of employment, together with supporting amenities and services:

There is scope for potential growth in all towns in Ireland. In the context of the National Planning Framework, this will largely be determined by the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for each Regional Assembly area

National Policy Objective 17

In each Regional Assembly area, settlements not identified in Policy 4 or 5 of this Framework, may be identified for significant (i.e. 30% or more above 2022 population levels) rates of population growth at regional and local planning stages, provided this is subject to:

- *Agreement (regional assembly, metropolitan area and/or local authority as appropriate);*
- *Balance with strategies for other urban and rural areas (regional assembly, metropolitan area and/or local authority as appropriate), which means that the totality of planned population growth has to be in line with the overall growth target; and*
- *A co-ordinated strategy that ensures alignment with the delivery of investment in infrastructure and the provision of employment, together with supporting amenities and services.*

While the above planning considerations will generally apply to all urban and rural areas, this specific provision is intended to ensure that in settlements identified for significant population growth, it is aligned with the provision of employment and/or infrastructure and supporting facilities, to ensure a good quality of life for both existing and future residents.

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies for each Regional Assembly area shall address the potential of towns and their catchments in conjunction with consideration of growth targets for cities and rural areas. In applying a tailored approach to urban development, that can be linked to the Rural and Urban Regeneration and Development Funds, key considerations further to NPO 15 will include:

- The extent to which a settlement is located inside or outside one of the five defined City-Region catchments and may be characterised as commuter focused or as more self-contained²¹;
- The scale of employment provision and net commuting flows;
- The extent of local services and amenities provision i.e. administration, education – particularly higher education institutes, health, leisure and retail;
- The extent to which trips may be made by sustainable modes of travel, i.e. walking, cycling, or public transport, the provision of electric vehicle charging infrastructure and the scale of planned investment in such;

- The rate and pace of development from 2002-2022 and the extent to which there are outstanding requirements for infrastructure and amenities;
- Accessibility and influence in a regional or sub-regional context;
- Particular sub-regional interdependencies, for example, where a settlement may be located in relation to a number of nearby settlements and scope for collaboration and complementarity;
- Track record of performance and delivery, as well as ambition and initiative and scope to leverage investment;
- Commitment to achieve compact growth

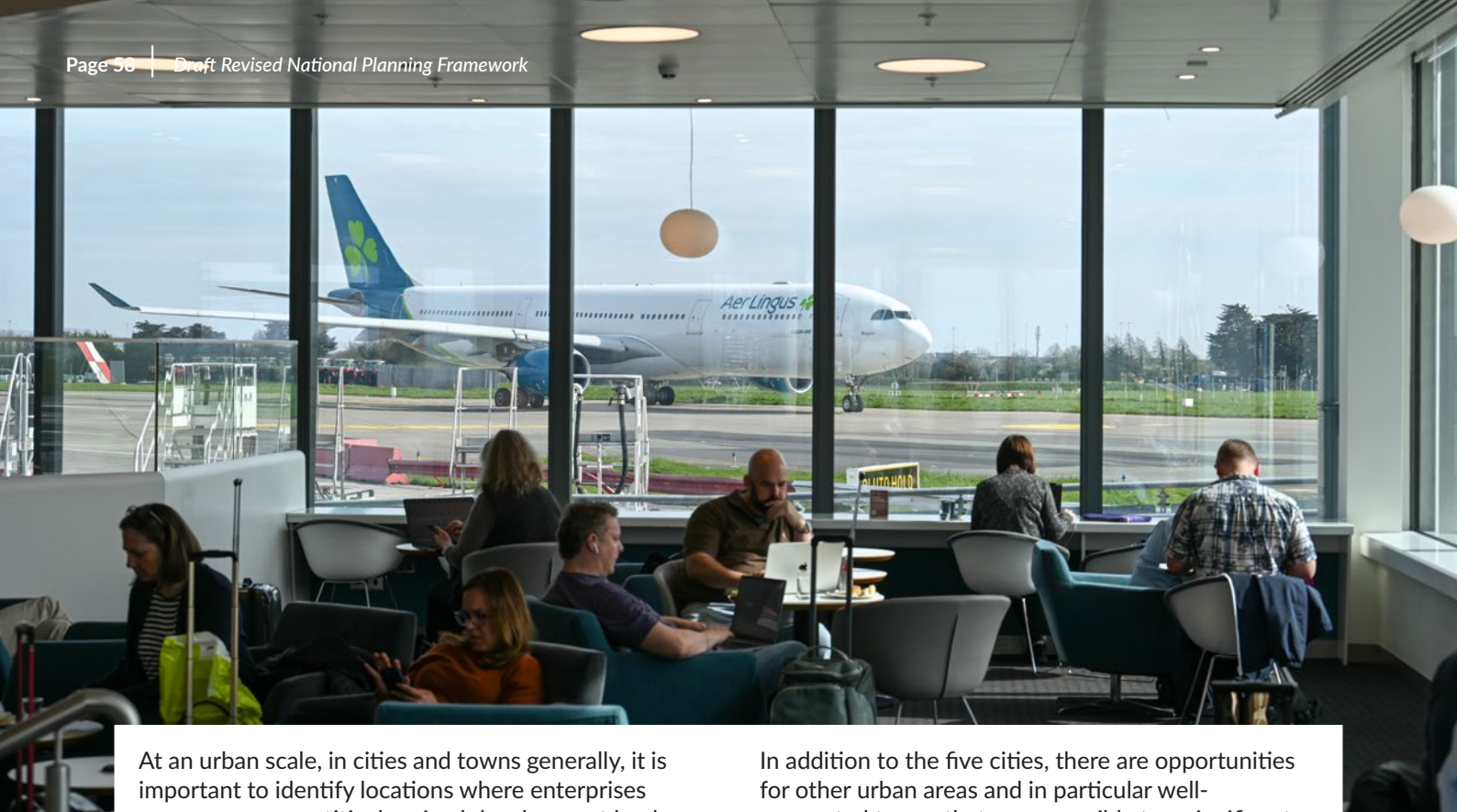
4.4 Planning for Urban Employment Growth

The pattern of urban growth targeted in the National Planning Framework is population and employment led, recognising that firms and enterprise development are drawn to urban locations by market forces such as agglomeration, migration and specialisation that depend on factors such as scale, accessibility, innovation supported by higher education institutions and quality of life.

Projected employment growth in Ireland to 2040, although significant, is subject to our capacity to accommodate it. Sustainable enterprise thrives in supportive business environments that enhance competitiveness and productivity with good supporting infrastructure. There are also critical links between the quality of urban place-making and business investment/ job creation. Place-making is identified as a key differentiator in the Government's White Paper on Enterprise 2022 - 2030.

The NPF strategy focusses a significant proportion of population growth in Ireland's Cities, while also seeking to improve urban infrastructure and amenities, liveability/ quality of life and the quality of the built environment. This approach intends to ensure that we continue to provide an attractive range of enterprise development opportunities in the face of changing employment activity and sectors.

²¹ The standardised EU/OECD definition of a city region is the commuter catchment from which at least 15% of the relevant city area workforce is drawn. This will vary from Census to Census, but has been expanding in recent years.



At an urban scale, in cities and towns generally, it is important to identify locations where enterprises can access competitively priced development lands, utilities and commercial properties to the highest standards available internationally. Planning to accommodate strategic employment growth at regional, metropolitan and local level should include consideration of:

- Current employment location, density of workers, land-take and resource/infrastructure dependency, including town centres, business parks, industrial estates, significant single enterprises and lands with high levels of public transport accessibility, including areas identified with potential for Transport Orientated Development (TOD);
- The size and scale of a settlement which will inform its capacity to accommodate enterprise development of appropriate scale;
- Locations for expansion of existing enterprises including availability of light industrial space for small business to scale;
- Locations for new enterprises, based on the extent to which they are people intensive (i.e. employees/customers), space extensive (i.e. land), tied to resources, dependent on the availability of different types of infrastructure (e.g. telecoms, power, water, roads, airport, port etc.) or dependent on skills availability;
- Locations for potential relocation of enterprises that may be better suited to alternative locations and where such a move, if facilitated, would release urban land for more efficient purposes that would be of benefit to the regeneration and development of the urban area as a whole, particularly in metropolitan areas and large towns.

In addition to the five cities, there are opportunities for other urban areas and in particular well-connected towns that are accessible to a significant population catchment and/or can offer a good quality of life, to accommodate employment growth.

National Policy Objective 18

Regional and Local Authorities to identify and quantify locations for strategic employment development in the cities identified in Table 4.1.

National Policy Objective 19

Regional and Local Authorities to identify and quantify locations for strategic employment development, where suitable, in urban and rural areas generally.

While regional and local plans should seek to anticipate and plan for jobs growth and economic development, new and unexpected opportunities for enterprise development are likely to arise for particular locational reasons, such as local resources, skills, assets, innovation or quality of life.

Regional and local planning policies should be sufficiently agile to account for these possibilities, to accommodate valid propositions for enterprise development that may emerge and for which there are strong locational drivers that do not apply to the same extent elsewhere.

‘Smart specialisation’ and ‘clustering’ policy provides an opportunity to build on local distinctiveness and regional strengths. Smart specialisation is a place-based innovation policy, aimed at promoting regional innovation and economic transformation by helping regions to focus on their key sectoral strengths. This may include unique characteristics or capabilities that provide advantages to that region in certain sectors. For example, this might include areas such as renewable energy, medical technologies, biopharma or ICT. It requires higher education, research organisations and business, along with government departments and agencies, to identify these strengths, build on competitive advantages and prioritise support based on where local potential and market opportunities lie. This aligns with the NPF’s focus on cities and regional centres as key drivers of sustainable growth. Smart specialisation also strengthens the relationship between the nine DETE Regional Enterprise Plans, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, and national enterprise and innovation policy.

In addition, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment intends to devise and introduce a centrally coordinated, cross-Government approach to clustering in 2024 that will encourage the formation and strengthening of national cluster organisations, leveraging the benefits of proximity and co-location to boost productivity. The identification of priority areas for enhanced clustering will be underpinned by an assessment of competitive strengths and potential opportunities against a range of factors, including the scale of potential impact, innovation intensity and research capability, as well as market direction.

4.5 Achieving Urban Infill/ Brownfield Development

The National Planning Framework targets a significant proportion of future urban development on infill/brownfield development sites within the built footprint of existing urban areas. This is applicable to all scales of settlement, from the largest city, to the smallest village.

This means encouraging more people, jobs and activity generally within our existing urban areas, rather than mainly ‘greenfield’ development and requires a change in outlook. In particular, it requires well-designed, high quality development that can encourage more people, and generate more jobs and activity within existing cities, towns and villages. This is provided that development meets appropriate standards to achieve targeted levels of growth. It also requires active management of land and sites in urban areas.

National Policy Objective 20

In meeting urban development requirements, there will be a presumption in favour of development that can encourage more people and generate more jobs and activity within existing cities, towns and villages, subject to development meeting appropriate planning standards and achieving targeted growth.

This means encouraging more people, jobs and activity generally within our existing urban areas, rather than mainly ‘greenfield’ development and requires a change in outlook.



Case Study

Urban Regeneration and Development – Sligo Town

As a key activator of the NPF, the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) supports projects that will secure sustainable compact growth and effective regional development and help to tackle legacy issues of underdevelopment such as in the Northern and Western Region.

The strategy for growing our regions focusses on building centres of scale, linking regeneration and redevelopment initiatives to harness the growth potential of our regional cities and towns. To deliver this, the URDF is helping to fund a number of public realm and public infrastructure projects in the key regional centre of Sligo, to regenerate and rejuvenate the town centre and to act as a catalyst for sustainable population and economic growth in the wider north-west region.

The URDF and Department of Transport are funding a new bridge connecting the communities north and south of the Garavogue River, a key policy objective in the Sligo Regional Growth Centre Strategic Plan in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES). The URDF is also supporting, with Fáilte Ireland and Sligo County Council, the redevelopment of Stephen Street car park into a fully pedestrianised public space known as Queen Maeve Square, which will provide for outdoor dining and cultural events overlooking the Garavogue River. Together with the development of the City Campus – Cultural and Learning Hub and the O'Connell Street Enhancement Projects, and the implementation of the Sligo Public Realm strategy the URDF is supporting the transformation, regeneration and redevelopment of strategic underutilised sites in the centre of Sligo.

Regeneration and Rejuvenation

Central to delivering the vision in the NPF is a more public policy directed approach to the delivery and location of future development, including housing that our economy and society needs over the next decade and beyond.

There are many areas in our cities, towns and villages that contain lands and buildings not developed or used to their full potential. A significant portion of these lands are in public ownership, such as the large city centre areas that were former docks or rail depots or other large areas in key locations (including the city centres of Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford) and along new public transport corridors opened up by infrastructure projects such as the Luas Cross City line in Dublin.

Investment in public housing on local authority and wider State lands will, at one level, be used to drive renewal and rejuvenation, meeting people's housing needs much closer to existing transport, services and amenities, rather than continually sprawling outwards, where both housing and supporting infrastructure must be provided from scratch.

At a time when many people wish to live close to where they work and to the services and amenities necessary to enjoy a good quality of life, they struggle to do so because the urban housing market has become constrained. More homes and more affordable homes must be provided in our urban areas as part of the creation of mixed-tenure communities.

Through targeted NDP investment in enabling infrastructure and services on publicly owned sites, leveraging the value of the land to provide mixed-tenure developments and providing flexibility on design and density, particularly in our urban cores, we can facilitate more cost-efficient construction and a variety of homes, within both new housing developments and re-development of existing built-up areas.

It is necessary to ensure that public policy can directly influence the strategic development of housing for the common good. To do this, Government will continue to put in place measures to better manage the supply of development land, to meet housing land requirements, ease pressure on building land and housing costs and to capture gains in land value from the development process for investment in necessary public infrastructure. Since 2018, land activation measures such as the Residential Zoned Land Tax and proposals to introduce Land Value Sharing measures have been developed to facilitate the active management of development land.



Shanganagh Castle – Land Development Agency

Shanganagh Castle is the first major Direct Delivery project undertaken by the Land Development Agency. In keeping with its mission to unlock state land and deliver large-scale affordable housing projects, the Agency partnered with Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council to build almost 600 homes in Shankhill in Co. Dublin.

Construction began on site in September 2022 and keys to the first homes will be handed over in autumn 2024. The LDA's core purpose goes beyond building homes, it is creating thriving sustainable communities, which deliver a positive social impact.

Shanganagh is designed to the highest international environmental standards and marks a new departure in sustainable construction methods. Once completed, it will be the largest development in Europe to be built to fully passive house standard.

Active travel and community integration is a key consideration, with a large focus on bicycle parking provision, working from home features, communal green and play spaces, and dedicated crèche, café and community facilities. The development is also well served by existing public transport on the N11 and will be within 10 minutes' walk of the proposed DART station at Woodbrook as well as a new BusConnects route.

The homes are made up of 546 studio, one, two, three and four bed apartments and 51 two and three bed terraces houses. These will be available under social, cost-rental and affordable to buy schemes.

There have been notable urban renewal and rejuvenation successes in Ireland. Dublin's Docklands, once one of the most disadvantaged and run-down parts of the City, today accommodates many thousands of people working and living in an attractive and desirable area that has been regenerated to a world class standard. There are many other good examples of urban, town, village and rural renewal.

Since 2018, the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) has part-funded regeneration and rejuvenation projects in Ireland's five cities and other large towns. Currently, the URDF part-funds 132 projects, comprising of almost 400 subprojects, across the country.

More compact and sustainable development involves a greater proportion of residential and mixed-use development within the existing built-up footprints of our cities and towns. This will ensure more parts of our urban areas become attractive and vibrant places in which to live, work, visit and invest.

Learning from our past successes, the Government established the Land Development Agency (LDA) in 2021 as a commercial, State sponsored body that has been created to coordinate land within public ownership to deliver affordable and social homes, and to work with local authorities and other agencies to drive strategic renewal opportunities and the building of sustainable communities across Ireland.

National Policy Objective 21

The Government will support the LDA, in association with Local Authorities, to fulfil its statutory mandate to deliver a significant number of homes on State lands in major mixed tenure developments, with a particular focus on brownfield and infill urban sites in the five main cities and regional centres as a priority.

Performance-Based Design Standards

Infill and brownfield development is more challenging to deliver than greenfield development for a variety of reasons, including land management but also the challenge of integrating with existing communities, who may have a preference for the status quo to be retained, even if that might reduce opportunities for rejuvenation and drive urban expansion outwards.

To enable brownfield development, planning policies and standards need to be flexible, focusing on design-led and performance-based outcomes, rather than specifying absolute requirements in all cases. Although sometimes necessary to safeguard against poor quality design, planning standards should be flexibly applied in response to well-designed development proposals that can achieve urban infill and brownfield development objectives in settlements of all sizes.

In particular, general restrictions on building height or universal standards for car parking, separation distances or garden size may not be applicable in all circumstances in urban areas and should be replaced by performance-based criteria appropriate to general location, e.g. city/ town/ village centre, urban neighbourhood, public transport interchange, suburban or edge location etc.

A more dynamic performance-based approach appropriate to location will also enable the level of public transport service to improve as more development occurs and vice-versa.

The Urban Development and Building Height Guidelines issued in 2018 and the Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines issued in 2024 under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act (as amended), provide detailed guidance and standards in support of NPO22.

National Policy Objective 22

In urban areas, planning and related standards, including in particular building height and car parking will be based on performance criteria that seek to achieve well-designed high quality outcomes in order to achieve targeted growth.

This more dynamic approach will also be applied to urban land use, where the existing character of land use in an urban area may be subject to change. This should generally be as part of an overall area or master plan and/or be suitable for application on an incremental basis.



5

Planning for Diverse Rural Places

5.1 Why Rural Places Matter

Rural areas make a major contribution to Ireland's identity and to overall national development in economic, social, cultural and environmental terms.

Rural areas, including Gaeltacht regions and Ireland's inhabited offshore islands, hold much of Ireland's natural resources, biodiversity, environmental qualities and landscape and contribute in a unique way to Ireland's culture. Well over a third of Irish people live outside cities and towns and this proportion increases to half of the population, if smaller towns and villages are included.

Rural areas are also a focus for working and for recreational activities. The agri-food and tourism sectors, which are particularly important for rural economies, employ in excess of 430,000 people (18% of the national workforce). Rural Ireland has faced challenges in recent decades, such as the loss of traditional industries and employment, emigration and poor connectivity. The emergence of new technologies and improved infrastructural connectivity provide opportunities for diversification into new employment sectors and to build on the success of many Irish and foreign-owned companies supporting employment in rural areas.

The National Planning Framework places a major focus on rural areas in relation to:

- Strengthening Ireland's rural fabric and supporting the communities who live there;
- Planning for the future growth and development of rural areas, including addressing decline, with a special focus on activating the potential for the renewal and development of smaller towns and villages;
- Putting in place planning and investment policies to support job creation in the rural economy;
- Addressing a range of connectivity gaps;
- Better co-ordination of existing investment programmes dealing with social inclusion, rural development and town and village renewal.

Since the NPF was published in 2018, recognising the importance of policy alignment across Government to deliver on the aims and objectives of the NPF, complementary policies including the Government's rural development policy *Our Rural Future 2021-2025* and islands policy *Our Living Islands: the National Islands Policy 2023-2033* were published by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD).

Our Rural Future sets out a vision for a thriving rural Ireland. That vision is built on the talent, skills and creativity of people in rural communities, on the importance of vibrant and lived-in rural places and on the potential to create quality jobs and sustain our shared environment. The framework recognises that towns and villages are at the heart of social and economic activity in rural Ireland. The regeneration, repopulation and development of rural towns and villages is a key policy focus particularly in relation to the reuse of vacant properties. To this end policy measures are being implemented in order to optimise digital connectivity, support employment, revitalise rural towns and villages, enhance participation, leadership and resilience in rural communities, enhance public services, transition to a climate neutral society, support the agriculture, marine and forestry sectors in a sustainable manner, and support Islands and coastal communities.

Our Living Islands reflects the ambition to ensure our offshore islands continue to support sustainable and vibrant communities and allow for a continuing sustainable tourism product. The policy's initial Action Plan 2023 – 2026, sets out numerous actions under the five strategic objectives:

- Revitalise population levels on the islands;
- Diversify island economics;
- Enhance health and wellbeing services;
- Empower Island Communities;
- Build smart sustainable futures.

5.2 Strengthening Ireland's Rural Fabric and Supporting Rural Communities

People in Ireland have a strong connection with rural areas 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.

There are many examples of vibrant rural communities right across Ireland, in towns, villages and the countryside as well as on our islands. There are clearly differences between types of rural areas and rural communities, including scale, accessibility, the influence of neighbouring urban centres, natural resource assets and access to infrastructure and services.

Our islands and coastal areas contain some of our most vibrant and culturally distinctive communities, with the majority of our inhabited islands lying off the western seaboard of Counties Donegal, Mayo, Galway, Kerry and Cork. They are an integral part of the State's heritage and have a special significance in Irish culture.

While there are many hundreds of small islands off the coast of Ireland, including Gaeltacht islands²² approximately 65 of these support settled populations. As a result of their location, they are highly dependent on tourism, agriculture and fishing but equally are adept at self-reliance and have a very strong sense of identity (refer to section 6.3: The Irish language and the Gaeltacht).

Safe and regular access to the offshore islands has been significantly advanced in recent years through passenger and cargo ferry services or new or significantly upgraded pier and landing facilities. This capital investment, in both infrastructure and services, continues to support the sustainability of island communities.

However, rural communities are also facing challenges. These range from urban generated pressures in some locations, to a declining and ageing population, the structure of the economy and lack of access to quality infrastructure and new technologies, in others. In response to some of these challenges, *Our Rural Future* and *Our Living Islands* policy document and Action Plans sets out the Government's approach for rural places and island communities in Ireland to grow and adapt through supportive measures which encourage innovation and build on the existing strengths of rural communities in Ireland.

The Government is strongly committed to providing all citizens with reliable and realistic sustainable mobility options, and public transport plays a key role in the delivery of this goal particularly for rural communities and older citizens living in more remote areas. The Department of Transport has established the Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan where over 100 rural villages will benefit from frequent public transport service (at least three return trips daily) for the first time. The Plan will also see a 25% overall increase in rural bus services, and over 60 new connections to regional cities from surrounding areas. TFI Local Link continues to be provided to address rural social exclusion. Funding for TFI Local Link has increased from €12 million in 2016 to €57 million in 2023. Passenger numbers have increased from 1.76 million passengers in 2015 to 3.2 million in 2023.

Rural communities, and particularly those engaged in farming, operate as custodians of the landscape by undertaking agricultural land management at varying scales. However, the viability of many landholdings is such that around 57% of farm families now depend on off-farm employment, much of which is focused on urban settlements²³. Alternative land uses such as forestry and renewable energy related development are also becoming more prevalent.

National Policy Objective 23

Protect and promote the sense of place and culture and the quality, character and distinctiveness of the Irish rural landscape including island communities that make Ireland's rural areas authentic and attractive as places to live, work and visit. Any successor policy documents relating to national policy for rural areas and the islands will ensure continued alignment and consistency with the National Policy Objectives of this Framework.

5.3 Planning for the Future Growth and Development of Rural Areas

Neither all rural areas nor all of the communities that make up the fabric of rural Ireland are identical. Rural areas are also distinct and separate to the urban and outer urban areas that exist in our towns and cities. As a result, they require a different approach to urban or suburban development.

The spatial, social and economic disparities between rural areas are a reflection of the fact that stronger rural areas tend to be located in a geographically advantageous place, and also have the human and social capital to address their needs and respond effectively to emerging opportunities and strategies. Rural communities across Ireland function well beyond their immediate catchments and have a strong interrelationship with adjacent towns and villages, often beyond county or regional boundaries.

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) defines rural as the areas outside settlements with a population of 1,500 or more people. This includes smaller settlements of fewer than 1,500 people, home to around 18% of the population of rural areas²⁴, and individual dwellings in the countryside, which together comprised approximately 36% of the population in 2022²⁵. This reflects Ireland's historic rural and village settlement pattern.


It is important to also recognise that there are many towns and villages with populations of more than 1,500 people that are intrinsic to sustaining viable rural communities and do not function independently of their rural hinterland.

²² The term 'Gaeltacht' is used to denote those areas in Ireland where the Irish language is, or was until the recent past, the main spoken language of a substantial number of the local population.

²³ Annual Review and Outlook for Agriculture, Food and the Marine 2023

²⁴ 350,461 people in Census 2022 (18% of the population of rural areas).

²⁵ 1,869,099 people in Census 2022 (36% of the population in 2022)



Rural towns function as local drivers for their surrounding areas through well-established economic, administrative and social functions. They support clusters of services, have a significant share of homes and jobs, and act as hubs for a much wider rural community.

In planning for the future integrated growth and development of rural areas, settlements with a population of 10,000 people or fewer, are eligible for investment under either the Rural or Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, subject to the nature of the proposal²⁶.

In support of the overall pattern of rural and small town development in Ireland, this Framework seeks to protect areas that are under strong urban influence from unsustainable over-development on the one hand, and to encourage population to be sustained in more structurally weak areas, that have experienced low growth or decline in recent decades, on the other, while sustaining vibrant rural communities.

National Policy Objective 24

Support the sustainable development of rural areas by encouraging growth and arresting decline in areas that have experienced low population growth or decline in recent decades and by managing the growth of areas that are under strong urban influence to avoid over-development, while sustaining vibrant rural communities.

Rural Towns

Rural towns function as local drivers for their surrounding areas through well-established economic, administrative and social functions. They support clusters of services, have a significant share of homes and jobs, and act as hubs for a much wider rural community.

There is a distinction between rural areas located within the commuter catchment of the five city regions and large towns and those that are outside commuter catchments. In rural areas accessible to cities and towns, commuter-generated housing has affected the character and cohesion of some locations. In other, less accessible rural areas, it has been challenging to retain and/or develop community and social facilities and local infrastructure as populations decline.

As a consequence of changing settlement patterns in Ireland, building vacancy in rural towns and villages has become increasingly prevalent, resulting in the demise of the historic vibrancy and vitality of town and village centres. The re-use and regeneration of these buildings are essential catalysts to transforming the capacity and potential of smaller towns and villages in Ireland.

Government is committed to tackling vacancy in both urban and rural environments and there are a number of initiatives now in place in order to support this. One of the key objectives of *Our Rural Future* is revitalising rural towns and villages by investing in projects which support economic activity, increasing footfall, encouraging town centre living and combatting vacancy and dereliction.

Case Study



An Ríoga, Boyle Co. Roscommon

The Boyle Regeneration project was awarded RRDF funding of €2,565,491 for a project costing €3,420,655 under the first call for applications to the RRDF.

The lead party is Roscommon County Council and partner organisations include Boyle Town Team and Boyle Chamber of Commerce, who provided the match funding towards the project.

The project aimed to address dereliction and create a vibrant town centre offering.

The project included the development of derelict Royal Hotel in Boyle into a multi-purpose space and works to adjacent Riverside Promenade. It has provided a community, cultural and business hub in the town's previously vacant Royal Hotel and the development of a new River Promenade adjacent to the building which includes outdoor space for events and performances.

The redeveloped three-storey Royal Hotel building includes:

- Exhibition space;
- Tourist information / Information hub;
- Outlet for craft /artisan products;
- 12 workspaces including meeting space and training rooms;
- Canteen and bathrooms.

The riverside promenade includes outdoor event / performance space.

This project forms part of a Masterplan for the town, "Boyle 2040". Currently there are two further RRDF projects under development in the town Energising Boyle Town Centre and King House and Boyle Community Library.



Town Centre First - A Policy Approach for Irish Towns provides a co-ordinated, whole-of-government policy framework to proactively address the decline in the health of towns across Ireland and supports measures to regenerate and revitalise them. It highlights how re-use and regeneration of vacant and derelict buildings can be an essential catalyst to transforming the capacity and potential of smaller towns in Ireland. The policy was launched in 2022 and 26 'Pathfinder towns' were identified nationally to develop a community based Town Centre First Plan that will set out a vision for their town, and identify priority regeneration projects for subsequent appropriate funding applications and delivery. Further to the funding of the pilot 26 towns, a new package of supports will be launched in 2024 to expand on the delivery of the objectives within *Town Centre First*.

In addition to the Rural Regeneration Development Fund (RRDF), the Department of Rural and Community Development also manages the Town and Village Renewal Scheme (TVRS) on behalf of local authorities. The TVRS Scheme, through both the main scheme and in the 2022 and 2023 Building Acquisition Measure, affords local authorities the opportunity to bring vacant and derelict buildings such as former Garda stations, schools, post offices, parish halls, restaurants, public houses and vacant sites back into use as multi-purpose spaces in our towns and villages.

The Vacant Homes Action Plan²⁷ also highlights the introduction of new schemes and grants that focus on the activation of vacant properties such as the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant and a pilot scheme to provide grants for expert conservation advice to owners of vacant farmhouses in private ownership, the Ready to Build Scheme and the Repair and Leasing Scheme.

As set out in National Policy Objectives 14 and 15, the National Planning Framework seeks to strengthen and diversify rural towns to be a focus for local housing and employment growth, based on regeneration and development that will include derelict site transformation and new technology, such as low carbon and energy efficiency and digital connectivity.

National Policy Objective 25

Target the reversal of rural decline in the core of small towns and villages through sustainable targeted measures that address vacant premises and deliver sustainable reuse and regeneration outcomes²⁸.

The qualities and character of our national built heritage in rural areas, including towns and villages, can add distinctiveness to place-making and over time can acquire special interest through its intrinsic quality. This 'sense of place' is also becoming an important factor in attracting foreign direct investment and individual talent to Ireland.

Ireland's built heritage assets are a non-renewable resource that merit being nurtured in a manner appropriate to their significance as an aid to understanding the past, contributing to community well-being and quality of life as well as regional economic development.

Our market towns and villages sit alongside more modern, but equally distinctive settlements that knit modern architecture with the existing historic urban heritage. Investment in our towns and villages through regeneration, public realm improvements and the appropriate adaptation and re-use of our built heritage, are key factors in developing, promoting and investing in a sense of place and aligning the objectives of creating high quality with that of spatial planning.

National Policy Objective 26

Enhance, integrate and protect the special physical, environmental, economic and cultural value of built heritage assets, including streetscapes, vernacular dwellings and other historic buildings and monuments, through appropriate and sensitive investment and conservation.

Rural town living requires a proportionate and tailored approach to residential development. This means that it is necessary to tailor the scale, design and layout of housing in rural towns to ensure that a suburban or high density urban approach is not applied to a rural setting and that development responds to the character, scale and density of the town.

Opportunities exist to create the conditions to support residential development in rural towns, whether through parking and streetscape improvements, traffic diversions, the provision of small-scale urban amenities such as open spaces or playgrounds, the acquisition of key sites and/or the opening up or amalgamation of 'backlands' for residential development and the provision of services such as waste-water treatment.

27 Vacant Homes Action Plan 2023 - 2026

28 Refer to [Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities](#)



National Policy Objective 27

Continue to support the proportionate growth of and appropriately designed development in rural towns that will contribute to their regeneration and renewal, including interventions in the public realm, the provision of amenities, the acquisition of sites and the provision of services.

In rural Ireland, many people seek the opportunity to build their own homes but find it difficult to do so in smaller settlements because of a lack of available sites and services. In order to assist this, the Ready to Build Scheme allows local authorities to make available serviced sites in towns and villages to potential individual purchasers (self-builders) for a discounted market value. Local Authorities are supported in undertaking the necessary land acquisition, site preparation and local infrastructure provision to deliver self-build development options in smaller towns/ villages.

National Policy Objective 28

Continue to support programmes for ‘new homes in small towns and villages’ with local authorities, public infrastructure agencies such as Uisce Éireann and local communities to provide serviced sites with appropriate infrastructure to attract people to build their own homes and live in small towns and villages.

In all types of rural settlement, new housing should be tailored to the scale, form and character of the settlement and the design should respond in a positive way to established context to ensure that a suburban or high-density urban approach is not applied within a rural setting²⁹.

Countryside

The Irish countryside is, and will continue to be, a living and lived-in landscape focusing on the requirements of rural economies and rural communities, based on agriculture, forestry, energy, inland waterways, marine, tourism and rural enterprise, while at the same time protecting the capacity of the receiving environment and avoiding ribbon and over-spill development from urban areas.

It is recognised that there is a continuing need for housing provision for people to live and work in Ireland’s countryside. Careful planning is required to manage demand in our most accessible countryside around cities and towns, focusing on the elements required to support the sustainable growth of rural economies and rural communities.

It is important to differentiate, on the one hand, between rural areas located within the commuter catchment of the five cities and our largest towns and centres of employment and, on the other hand, rural areas located outside these catchments.

It will continue to be necessary to demonstrate a functional economic or social requirement for housing need in areas under urban influence, i.e. the commuter catchment of cities and large towns and centres of employment. This will also be subject to siting and design considerations.

A more flexible approach, primarily based on siting and design, will be applied to rural housing in areas that are not subject to urban development pressure. This will assist in sustaining more fragile rural communities and in overall terms, will need to be related to the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements.

29 Refer to Section 3.0 Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities.

This arises because in some locations, almost all recent single housing in the countryside has been developed privately, with social housing provided largely in settlements. In many parts of rural Ireland, where a significant majority of housing output is in the countryside, this has contributed to spatial and social imbalance and the decline in population of smaller settlements. As a result, many key services have closed, in part due to population decline, leaving more marginalised and vulnerable citizens without access to those services.

National Policy Objective 29

Ensure, in providing for the development of rural housing, that a distinction is made between areas under urban influence, i.e. within the commuter catchment of cities and large towns and centres of employment, and elsewhere:

- *In rural areas under urban influence, facilitate the provision of single housing in the countryside based on the core consideration of demonstrable economic or social need to live in a rural area and siting and design criteria for rural housing in statutory guidelines and plans, having regard to the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements;*
- *In rural areas elsewhere, facilitate the provision of single housing in the countryside based on siting and design criteria for rural housing in statutory guidelines and plans, having regard to the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements.*

At a local level, the core strategy of county development plans accounts for the demand for single housing in the countryside. This is related to the local authority's overall Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA) that is required to be undertaken. Quantifying the need for single housing on an evidence basis assists in supporting the preparation of a comprehensive housing strategy and associated land use policies.

National Policy Objective 30

Project the need for single housing in the countryside through the local authority's overall Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA) tool and county development plan core strategy processes.

5.4 Planning and Investment to Support Rural Job Creation

Creating the environment to support job creation in rural areas will be a key enabler to rejuvenating rural towns and villages, sustaining vibrant rural communities and addressing population decline.

Rural areas support a mix of businesses of varying sizes, operating in a wide range of sectors from the traditional, such as agriculture and tourism, to more modern industries such as financial services and creative industries. Rural business also comprises micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), involved in non-traditional agricultural activities. All of these businesses serve a wide range of markets, from local to international level.

Local services sectors, including tourism and small-scale manufacturing, are a significant part of the rural economy and are also important local employers. However, supporting the diversification of the rural economy is essential, not just to create additional jobs in rural areas, but also to maximise the opportunity to link employment to issues such as climate change and managing sustainable land use.

Advances in technology and improvements in connectivity, particularly in rural areas, have changed how we live and work, opening up new opportunities through enhanced access to education, goods and services. Connectedhubs, ie brings together at least c.340 remote working and enterprise hubs across the country to support remote workers and businesses and the continuing roll-out of the National Broadband Plan, offer significant opportunities for rural communities.

For rural Ireland, broadband is essential enabling infrastructure that affords rural communities the same opportunities to engage with the digital economy as it does to those who live in our cities and towns. There are already a significant number of remote working hubs located across the country which provide the State with the opportunity to align these facilities with the development of electric vehicle charging, walking and cycling infrastructure. Alignment between remote working and town centre regeneration, health promotion and community volunteerism also present great opportunities.

Case Study



A co-working hub in Donegal

gteic@An Termon is a community and enterprise hub in Termon, a small rural village in county Donegal and is part of a thriving community centre that together with a co-working facility, also includes a crèche facility.

The co-working hub element opened in 2018 and joined the Connected Hubs platform in May 2021. Hub facilities include private office spaces, hot desks, co-working space and meeting rooms. Since opening in 2018 it has become a thriving hub with a mix of remote workers. One of the key benefits of working in a hub (as opposed to from home) cited by workers, is the social connection, especially in a dispersed rural location where it is difficult to meet other local people. The flexible payment options offered by this hub is also cited as an important factor.

National Policy Objective 31

Facilitate the development of the rural economy, in a manner consistent with the national climate objective, through supporting a sustainable and economically efficient agricultural and food sector, together with forestry, fishing and aquaculture, energy and extractive industries, the bio-economy and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities, while at the same time noting the importance of maintaining and protecting biodiversity and the natural landscape and built heritage which are vital to rural tourism.

National Policy Objective 32

Support and facilitate delivery of the National Broadband Plan as a means of developing further opportunities for enterprise, employment, education, innovation and skills development for those who live and work in rural areas.

Future employment opportunities in rural areas will require measures to support rural entrepreneurship and innovative rural small and medium enterprises (SMEs). The Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais, or [CLÁR](#), is an investment programme for small-scale infrastructural projects in depopulated rural areas. CLÁR supports the development of identified areas by attracting people to live and work there. Since 2016, the CLÁR Programme has supported a wide range of measures and funding of over €70 million has been approved for almost 2,400 projects.

Facilitating the development of enterprises and local economies to allow for the creation of a wider variety of employment opportunities will involve capitalising on local assets, including human, natural and cultural, through improved policy coherence to raise the potential of rural areas and contribute to local and regional growth.

Opportunities for upskilling, including through blended on-line, part-time or outreach courses, will be important to securing and accessing employment within rural areas.

Ireland's natural resources are some of our greatest assets and through the development of the agriculture, food, forestry, tourism, bioeconomy and renewable energy sectors, this will not only sustain rural employment, but will also contribute to playing a key role in supporting the national economy.

Rural areas have significant potential in these sectors, and as digital links and opportunities for remote working and new enterprises continue to grow, employment is likely to increase in areas such as agri-tech, ICT, multi-media and creative sectors, tourism, renewable energy and an added value bio-economy and circular economy.

Future employment opportunities in the rural economy require measures to support rural entrepreneurship and also innovative rural medium and small and medium enterprises. Building on diversification and modernisation strategies, improving governance models and supporting innovative food and non-food value chains can help boost economic development, ecosystem services and entrepreneurial innovation.

The development of a strong enterprise and innovation culture is central to the economic and societal vibrancy of rural communities as underlined by the National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027. The development of micro enterprises (those with less than 10 employees) is particularly relevant to the sustainability of smaller towns and rural areas. The network of Local Enterprise Offices, and national hub network established in recent years, offers dedicated supports to businesses operating in this sector.

Case Study



Castleblayney Enterprise Centre, Co. Monaghan

The Ridge Business, Enterprise and Technology Centre project was approved for RRDF funding of €3,418,127 for a project costing €4,351,484.32 under the first call for applications under the RRDF in 2019.

Monaghan County Council was the lead party for the project and Project partners included Castleblayney Enterprise Development Limited, Monaghan County Enterprise Fund, Castleblayney Regeneration Committee.

The Ridge Business, Enterprise and Technology Centre project aimed to provide high quality office space and remote working facilities for new and existing businesses. The project site is located in the centre of the town and the project includes the building of a new 1356 sq. /m community run enterprise centre, which will be constructed on a disused site adjacent to the town centre. The centre will provide:

- 18 Enterprise units between 23 sq./m and 35 sq./m in size;
- Four 46 sq./m light industrial/office units.

National Policy Objective 33

Enhance the competitiveness of rural areas by supporting innovation in rural economic development and enterprise through the diversification of the rural economy into new sectors and services, including ICT-based industries and those addressing climate change and sustainability.

Agriculture

The agri-food sector continues to play an integral part in Ireland's economy and is our largest indigenous industry, contributing 165,000 direct jobs and generating 9% of merchandise exports in 2023³⁰. Agriculture has traditionally been the most important contributor to rural economies and it remains important as a significant source of income and both direct and indirect employment. However, it must adapt to the challenges posed by modernisation, restructuring, market development and the increasing importance of environmental issues related to climate change impacts and biodiversity loss.

There are opportunities from a climate transition perspective for the diversification of farming enterprises to include a focus on areas such as biomethane production and forestry (refer also to Chapter 9).

Much of the economic benefits in the agri-food sector are dispersed throughout the country making it particularly vital to rural areas and economic development generally. Continued development of the agri-food sector will be supported through the implementation of Food Vision 2030.

The Food Vision 2030 Strategy is a ten year Strategy for the Irish agri-food sector (taken to include primary agriculture, food and drink processing and manufacturing, fisheries, aquaculture and fish processing, forestry and forestry processing and the equine sector).

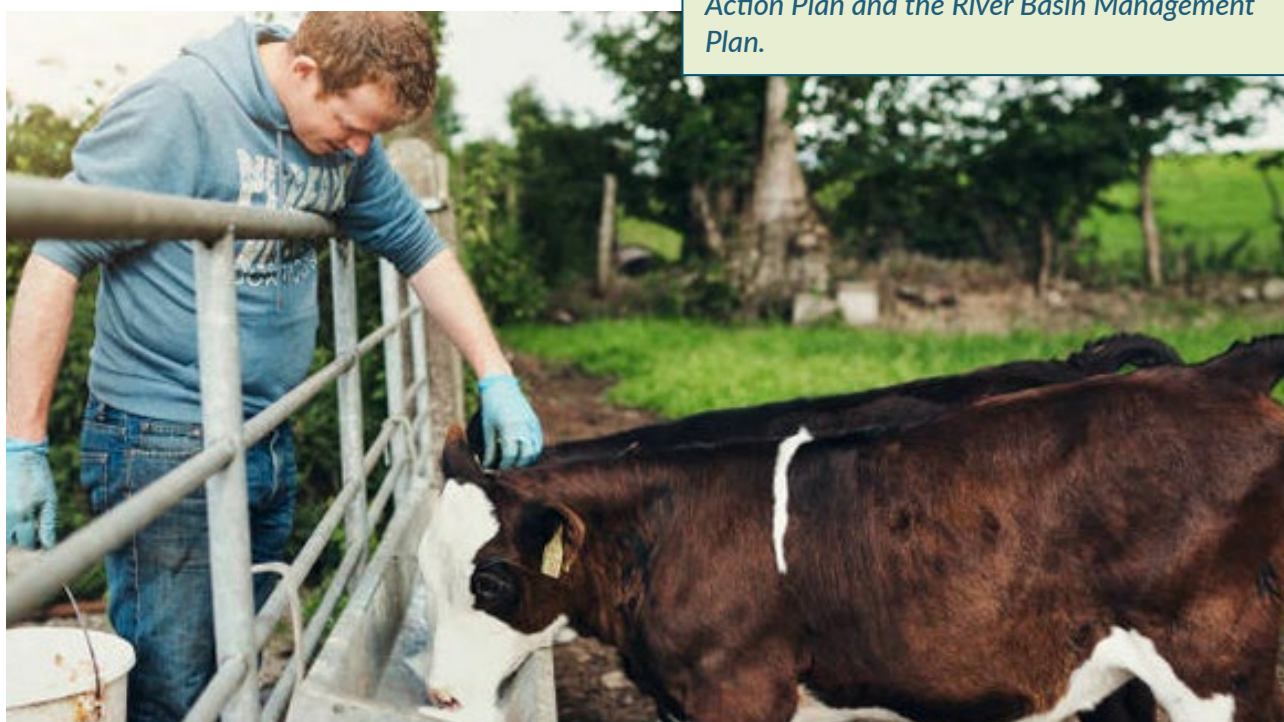
The Strategy consists of 22 Goals, grouped into four high-level Missions for the sector to work toward:

- 1) A Climate Smart, Environmentally Sustainable Agri-Food Sector;
- 2) Viable and Resilient Primary Producers with Enhanced Well-Being;
- 3) Food which is Safe, Nutritious and Appealing, Trusted and Valued at Home and Abroad;
- 4) An Innovative, Competitive and Resilient Agri-Food Sector, Driven by Technology and Talent.

Food Vision 2030 is a strategic framework, within which other policies, plans and programmes are being and will be developed.

National Policy Objective 34

Support the agri-food industry in promoting Ireland's continued food security in a manner that ensures economic, environmental, and social sustainability while ensuring progress in achieving targets in the National Climate Action Plan and the River Basin Management Plan.



30 Annual Review and Outlook for Agriculture, Food and the Marine 2023.



Forestry

The forest industry, comprising the growing, harvesting and processing of forest products makes a significant and increasing contribution to the Irish economy. The direct and indirect contribution to the economy has been calculated at just over €2 billion annually with some 9,500 jobs dependent on the sector³¹. Timber production currently stands in the region of 4.5 m³ per annum. Approximately 50% of the national forest estate is in private ownership.

As the quality of land is often a determining factor in the land-use decision-making process, lower quality land that currently presents challenges for economic agriculture may represent a resource that might be used for afforestation. It is likely that forest cover will continue to focus on suitable agricultural land which may be easier to convert to afforestation owing to more limited agricultural use.

The afforestation of agricultural land, supported by Government incentives, aims to increase long-term timber supply to support the development of a sustainable processing sector and offers significant carbon sequestration potential, thereby contributing to national greenhouse gas mitigation targets and the bio-economy.

The Forest Strategy and Implementation Plan, including the Forestry Programme 2023- 2027 produced and implemented by Department Agriculture Food and Marine proposes to incentivise increased afforestation to 8,000 ha per annum.

In 2023, the fourth National Forest Inventory (NFI) estimated the area of forest to be 808,848 hectares or 11.6% of the land area. Forest cover is estimated to be at its highest level in over 350 years.³² Increased planting and the attainment of afforestation targets will depend on the availability of land in general and, specifically, a change in land use from agriculture to forestry.

The development of attractive, accessible close-to-home woodlands designed for the use and enjoyment of local communities is also encouraged. Access to such facilities and the experiences they provide are shown to have a tangible impact on public health and well-being of both young and old. The woodlands can cater for a wide range of activities, e.g. evening family walks, fitness training, nature studies. The associated involvement of local people in design and management, and the celebration of local heritage using information signs, leaflets, etc., contribute socially to the local community and add to the 'sense of place'. Funding is available for the establishment of new amenity woodland, the enhancement of existing forest to ensure its suitability for use as amenity woodland, and the installation of various facilities appropriate to the woodland setting, to enable access by people of all ages and abilities.

A number of schemes administered by Department of Agriculture Food and Marine, including the Afforestation Scheme, Native Tree Area Scheme, Woodland Creation on Public Lands Scheme, the Environmental Enhancement Scheme Pilot Scheme and the Heritage Forests Pilot Scheme support these objectives.

Tourism

Tourism and agriculture are inextricably linked in rural areas, given that agriculture, in many places, creates and maintains the landscapes upon which tourism trades. The maintenance of access to our landscapes and the creation of new accesses are dependent on maintaining good links with the agricultural sector.

Likewise, the built, cultural and natural assets which constitute the 'raw material' of the tourism industry are also essential to the 'production capability' of the sector. Tourism has the capacity to directly and indirectly sustain communities, create employment and deliver real social benefits for rural Ireland.

³¹ COFORD study, 2021

³² Forest statistics Ireland 2023, Department of Agriculture Food and Marine.

The development of greenways, blueways and peatways offer a unique alternative means for tourists and visitors to access and enjoy rural Ireland. The development of a strategic national network of these trails is a priority and will support the development of rural communities and job creation in the rural economy, as well as the protection and promotion of natural assets and biodiversity. A *Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways* was published by the Department of Transport, and Sport in 2018 and a complementary Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme was established by Department of Rural and Community Development in 2022, which provides funding for the development of new outdoor recreational infrastructure and for the necessary repair, enhancement or promotion of existing outdoor recreation infrastructure in countryside areas across Ireland.

Due to the cross-sectoral nature, extensive reach and elements of land take associated with a national greenway, blueway and peatway strategy, the support and buy-in of local communities, landowners, local authorities and State agencies is critical to successful implementation, which must also be supported by an investment and co-ordination plan. Such a network would allow for greater access to more remote parts of the country and presents opportunities for associated tourism development to take place in rural areas.

Another type of tourism attraction that demonstrates how the potential of all areas can be harnessed, are ‘Dark Sky’ Parks and Reserves, focused on areas “possessing an exceptional or distinguished quality of starry nights and a nocturnal environment that is specifically protected for its scientific, natural, educational, cultural heritage, and/or public enjoyment”.³³ This is particularly true of mountainous and peatland areas where there is little or no light pollution, serviced by adjoining rural communities. There are currently two internationally recognised Dark Sky areas in Ireland, a Park located in County Mayo and a Reserve located in County Kerry.

National Policy Objective 35

Continue to facilitate tourism development and in particular a the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways, and a Blueways and Peatways Strategy, which prioritises projects on the basis of their environmental sustainability, achieving maximum impact and connectivity at national and regional level while ensuring their development is compliant with the National Biodiversity Action Plan, the national climate change objective and requirements for environmental assessments.

5.5 Rural Investment Coordination

Investment coordination, together with research and innovation coordination, is an important issue to prevent duplication of effort and inefficient use of resources. Rural development is a multifaceted policy area and accordingly there are several funding and investment structures that exist to support national, regional and local priorities.

At EU level, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has a significant role to play in the development and maintenance rural Ireland. Ireland’s CAP Strategic Plan 2023 – 2027 with an allocated €2.3 billion in national funds, underpins the sustainable development of Ireland’s agriculture sector by:

- (i) supporting viable farm incomes and enhancing competitiveness
- (ii) contributing to the achievement of environmental and climate objectives at national and EU levels, and
- (iii) strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas.

Since the publication of NPF 2018 significant investment programmes for rural areas have been established. The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) as administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development, provides funding for the development and construction of large scale and transformative capital projects in towns, villages and rural areas across Ireland. Under RRDF applications to date, funding of €413 million has been approved towards 215 projects costing €565 million.

Town Centre First: A Policy Approach for Irish Towns, published in 2022, seeks to align policies and co-ordinate a suite of supports and funding streams to re-imagine and revitalise rural towns. Under the policy, local communities are enabled to prepare a Town Centre First Plan, with the support of a dedicated local authority Town Regeneration Officer, which will set out specific actions and interventions and help unlock national funding such as the RRDF and the Town and Village Renewal Scheme.

The third round of URDF funding support, which is a key action in the Government’s Vacant Homes Action Plan 2023, is specifically designed to address long term vacancy and dereliction across eligible cities and towns, and the acceleration of the provision of residential accommodation. This initiative is also in support of objectives under the revised Housing for All and Town Centre First Policy. The focus of the RRDF fifth call in early 2024 is to support projects that help revitalise our rural towns and villages, in line with the Town Centre First policy approach.

33 International Dark Sky Association.



This will drive greater footfall and address vacancy and dereliction, and support projects to assist in attracting people back to live in rural areas and support local economic development.

The CLÁR programme and the Town and Village Renewal Scheme (TVRS) also support the regeneration of rural towns and villages.

Two schemes under the Croí Cónaithe Towns Fund are delivered by local authorities. The Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant provides people with a grant to support the refurbishment of vacant and derelict properties. Under the Ready to Build scheme, local authorities make serviced sites available to individuals or households who want to build their own home in a town or village, to provide a viable and attractive alternative for people who want to build their own home and live in a rural area, while still being able to walk or cycle to a range of local services and amenities, including schools, shops, community hubs and sports clubs. This, coupled with the refurbishment scheme for vacant properties, is supporting towns and villages across Ireland in delivering new homes that respond to the varying needs and aspirations of their communities.

LEADER will also continue to be an effective tool for supporting the economic and social development of rural communities, and for strengthening the socio-economic fabric of rural areas, by providing the resources necessary for communities to support their own sustainable development.

The Built Heritage Investment Scheme, Historic Structure Fund, and the Community Monuments Fund are investing essential capital in our archaeological heritage to help owners and custodians of archaeological monuments safeguard them into the future for the benefit of communities and the public all contribute to support our rural areas and historic structures.

National Policy Objective 36

The Department of Rural and Community Development, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and other relevant Departments and Agencies will continue to invest in rural Ireland, including through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, and will work together to establish a mechanism to co-ordinate structures for funding rural development to align with other national strategies.

Case Study



Before



Ireland's Global Garden Mount Congreve Estate, Co. Waterford

The Ireland's Global Garden - Mount Congreve Estate project was awarded RRDF funding of €4,975,838 for a project costing €6,859,406. The project was delivered by Waterford City and County Councils in partnership with Fáilte Ireland.

Aim

The project creates an iconic and immersive visitor experience bringing the story of Mount Congreve to life through guided tours, a new interactive visitor experience, wetland garden trail, along with illustrated multi-lingual interpretation and wayfinding. The works carried out consisted of:

- Refurbishment of the 'eastern wing' of the existing house creating a retail/visitor centre that will attract visitors year-round;
- Development of ancillary supporting visitor services to include world-class food and beverage and retail spaces. Creating a food and retail destination drawing local visitors, generating income, footfall and employment;
- Up-grading site infrastructure to include an improved visitor access, a new waste-water treatment facility and provision of new car/coach park for 200 cars and 10 coaches; and

- Reinvigoration of the gardens and restoration of the ornate Georgian Glasshouse (700m²). The Georgian Glasshouse is a key addition to the visitor experience, offering an immersive insight into the gardens and the unique plants grown there.

Outcomes

The number of paying garden annual visitors has risen to 70,000 (an increase on the previous pre-Covid high of 40,000 paying visitors in 2019). The overall numbers (i.e. including those visiting the retail/café only) for the period March to November 2023 is close to 150,000.

There are currently 28 full time employees, up from 12 prior to the commencement of the project. There are also 16 Horticultural students partaking in a newly established Level 6 Course.



After





6

People, Homes and Communities

6.1 Quality of Life and Place

In recent decades Ireland’s people have become more educated, outward looking, technologically focused, productive and diverse. This adaptability and change has enabled us to become more prosperous, successful, and resilient as a nation.

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

As our society changes, our needs and preferences will change, particularly as more of us become older. Quality of life varies depending on people’s circumstances, but in general terms, it reflects the elements in figure 6.1.

How future development in Ireland is planned will continue to be a significant determinant of people’s quality of life. Location and place have an important influence on the quality of life that people enjoy.

While the National Planning Framework cannot effect change in all of the dimensions that contribute to quality of life, there are some key elements that it will directly impact on, most importantly ‘the natural and living environment’.

This is why place is intrinsic to achieving good quality of life - the quality of our immediate environment, our ability to access services and amenities, such as education and healthcare, shops and parks, the leisure and social interactions available to us and the prospect of securing employment, all combine to make a real difference to people’s lives.

In making choices about where to live, work and invest, the level of service provision is an essential consideration. Figure 6.2 broadly indicates the level of service provision that applies to settlements of varying sizes in Ireland. It follows that our cities are where high level service provision is available across a range of sectors and where there is accessibility to these services. Equally, more local service provision is appropriately provided for at a small town or village settlement scale.

How future development in Ireland is planned will continue to be a significant determinant of people’s quality of life. Location and place have an important influence on the quality of life that people enjoy.

Figure 6.1 | Elements Supporting Quality of Life





6.2 Healthy Communities

Our health and our environment are inextricably linked. Specific health risks that can be influenced by spatial planning include heart disease, respiratory disease, mental health, obesity and injuries. By taking a whole- system approach to addressing the many factors that impact on health and wellbeing and which contribute to health inequalities, and by empowering and enabling individuals and communities to make healthier choices, it will be possible to improve health outcomes, particularly for the next generation of citizens.

Sláintecare and a universal health and social care system is the overarching vision and policy direction for Ireland's healthcare system. The objective is that everyone has access to "the right care, in the right place and at the right time".

Decisions made regarding land use and the built environment, including transportation, affect these health risks in a variety of ways, for example through influencing air and water quality, traffic safety, opportunities for physical activity and social interactions as well as access to workplace, education, healthcare and other facilities and services such as food and alcohol outlets.

The changing nature of society has resulted in greater car dependence and reduced levels of physical activity being undertaken by people over time. Physical design affects people's behaviour at every scale - buildings, communities, villages, towns, cities and regions. The places in which we live, work, and play can affect both our physical and mental well-being.

Communities that are designed in a way that supports physical activity, e.g. well connected neighbourhoods with services and amenities within a short walk or cycle of homes, generously sized footpaths, safe cycle lanes, and accessible recreation areas, all encourage residents to make healthy choices and live healthier lives. Countries with extensive cycle infrastructure report higher levels of cycling and lower rates of obesity. Healthy places in turn create economic value by appealing to a skilled workforce and attracting innovative companies.

National Policy Objective 37

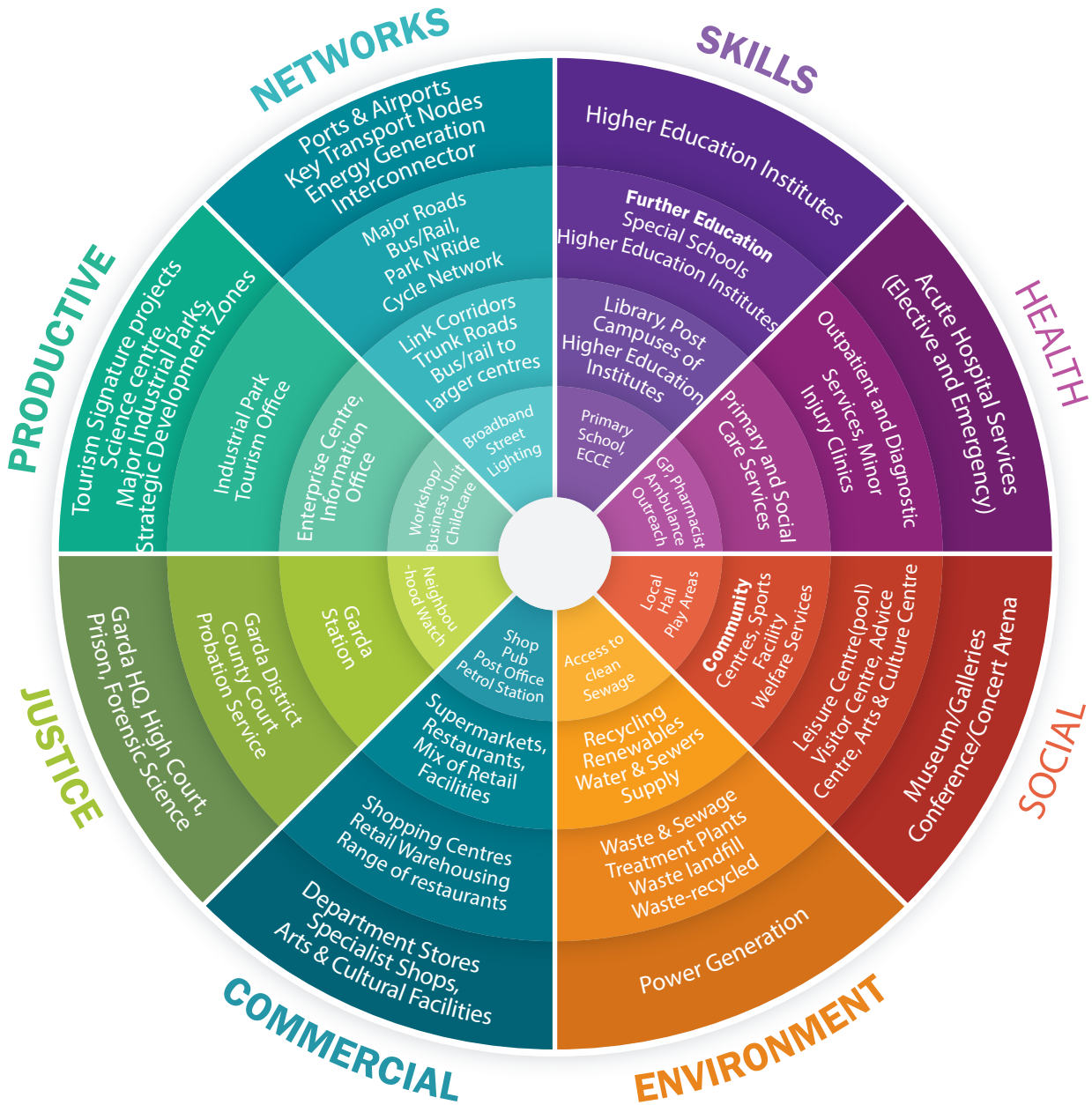
Support the objectives of public health policy including the Healthy Ireland Framework and the National Physical Activity Plan, through integrating such policies, where appropriate and at the applicable scale, with planning policy.

National Policy Objective 38

Ensure the integration of safe and convenient alternatives to the car into the design of our communities, by prioritising walking and cycling accessibility to both existing and proposed developments, and integrating physical activity facilities for all ages.

Figure 6.2

Hierarchy of Settlements and Related Infrastructure



Source: Derived from Strategic Investment Board Limited, 2008

6.3 Diverse and Inclusive Ireland

In moving towards a more diverse society over the last half century, Ireland's population is more varied than ever before, comprising a range of ethnicities and nationalities. Coupled with changing societal values that embrace inclusivity for civil marriage rights and family composition, Ireland's progressive efforts and actions to grant equality to all citizens as part of a fair and just society continue to be a priority.

However, providing access of opportunity to citizens of Ireland is not a finite exercise, particularly where distinct and tailored solutions are required to continually address the needs of our citizens, particularly those who remain vulnerable or marginalised.

Planning affords an opportunity to facilitate and deliver a more socially inclusive society through better integration and greater accessibility at all stages of the life cycle. Housing, education, health and transport are four key areas where social inclusion can be improved; for example, through universal design of buildings to deliver greater accessibility for all, or co-location of community facilities and uses to ensure communities are active during the day and into the evening.

The National Planning Framework supports continued progress towards achieving a more inclusive society that supports our citizen's basic human rights and assists in helping people to gain access to a better quality of life.

People with Disabilities

There were approximately 407,342 people with a severe and long-lasting disability in Ireland in 2022 with a further 702,215 experiencing disability to some extent comprising a total of 22% of the population. A significant proportion of the population will experience disability at some stage in their lives, particularly as the population ages.

Many planning-related issues relevant to disabled people are similar to those that affect older people, including the need to facilitate independent living, access and mobility in relation to buildings and the environment and full integration with society generally. As many people with disabilities are of working age, access and proximity to employment are also important.

In moving towards a more diverse society over the last half century, Ireland's population is more varied than ever before, comprising a range of ethnicities and nationalities.

The Travelling Community

Travellers are recognised as an ethnic minority. It is estimated that there are approximately 33,000 Irish people who identify themselves as travellers. While not all traveller lifestyles are the same, some travellers have particular housing needs, related to economic activity and kinship. There is also a requirement to accommodate nomadism, for at least part of the year in some cases.

Local authorities working with the travelling community will continue to address the specific needs of travellers, ensuring that targeted provision is achieved in line with those needs and that this is also incorporated into housing and traveller accommodation strategies, city and county development plans and local area plans.

National Policy Objective 39

Plan for a more diverse and socially inclusive society that targets equality of opportunity and a better quality of life for all citizens, through improved integration and greater accessibility in the delivery of sustainable communities and the provision of associated services.

The Irish Language and the Gaeltacht

Gaeilge, the Irish language, is the first official language of Ireland with a rich cultural history and has been afforded significant constitutional and legislative protection by the Irish State since its foundation. Once widely spoken throughout the island of Ireland, around 2% of Ireland's population now lives in Gaeltacht areas (Census 2022). The existence of areas where Irish lives as a community language is an important cornerstone in the building of a bilingual society in Ireland, and provides an environment where the language can evolve naturally in a modern setting.

The language planning process, prescribed in the Gaeltacht Act 2012, represents the primary driver in support of the Government's commitment to the achievement of the objectives set out in the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language 2010-2030. This involves the implementation of language plans at community level across designated Language Planning Areas with additional recognition of Gaeltacht Service Towns.

The Act further provides for the designation as Irish Language Networks of areas outside the Gaeltacht with a critical mass of language-related infrastructure such as naíonraí and primary and secondary level Irish medium schools.

It is vitally important for the maintenance of the Irish language as the vernacular of the Gaeltacht and for the promotion of the language outside the Gaeltacht that ongoing supports be provided for the language planning process and that support for the Gaeltacht development authority, Údarás na Gaeltachta, be strengthened.

National Policy Objective 40

Support the implementation of language plans in Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas, Gaeltacht Service Towns and Irish Language Networks.

6.4 Age Friendly Communities

Older People

ESRI projections indicate that the numbers of people aged over 65 will increase by around 66% to 1.3 million people by 2040, making up approximately 21% of the population. This compares to 15% in 2022. In addition, it is expected that the population aged over 85 will increase by over 140%. As people get older they are likely to have increasingly complex healthcare needs, with a requirement for services and facilities to support provision of suitable and necessary care.

The increase in population coupled with an ageing society will have implications for the health sector and the services required to facilitate this demographic.

Overall, there are more people in Ireland and we are living longer lives than before. This growing population will see an increase overall demand for healthcare services. The age structure of the population matters as health service use varies over the life cycle. Service needs tend to be higher at older ages, in the first stage of life and during maternity years for women. Persons aged over 65 increased to 15% of the population (776,315 persons), compared to 12% in 2011. These trends are set to continue into the coming decades.

As more people live longer lives, they will want to stay healthy and independent, live in their own homes and communities and keep to a minimum their use of in-patient and out-patient hospital services. Government policy is to support older people to live with dignity and independence in their own homes and communities for as long as possible.

In providing a more seamless and appropriate continuum of housing choices with appropriate supports for older people and a built environment that is attractive, accessible and safe, older people will be supported and motivated to enjoy more active, healthy and connected lives and to age confidently and comfortably in their community.

This further reinforces the need for well-designed lifetime adaptable infill and brownfield development close to existing services and facilities, supported by universal design and improved urban amenities, including public spaces and parks as well as direct and accessible walking routes. The provision of such accommodation can provide opportunities for older people to downsize from larger houses within their existing communities. This may be integrated with more supportive communal and specialist care accommodation that will be required by some older people.

The 'Age Friendly Ireland' Initiative provides leadership and guidance in identifying the needs and opportunities of an ageing population and is embedded within the local government system, which, with support from Government, is best placed to respond to change at a local level.

National Policy Objective 41

Local planning, housing, health facilities and services, transport/ accessibility and leisure policies will be developed with a focus on meeting the needs and opportunities of an ageing population along with the inclusion of specific projections, supported by clear proposals in respect of ageing communities as part of the core strategy of city and county development plans.

As more people live longer lives, they will want to stay healthy and independent, live in their own homes and communities.

Case Study



Front Elevation - 1:250

Castleblayney - Boyd Cody Architects



Kildare - Shay Cleary Architects



Roscrea - JFOC Architects

Social Housing Architectural Competition

In support of the Town Centre First policy, Minister O'Brien in January 2023, launched an architectural competition for social housing on town centre sites, which would act as exemplars to encourage private development of similar well located sites in Irish towns.



Sligo - TAKA Architects

Following an evaluation of submissions from Local Authorities, four sites were chosen in Castleblayney, Kildare, Roscrea and Sligo. The competition was run by the RIAI and attracted almost 100 entries, many featuring innovative design and with valuable insights for other town centre developments. Following comprehensive evaluation, the award winning schemes were announced by the Minister in July 2023. Always intended as real live projects, the winning design in each location is being further developed in consultation with the local Authorities with a number at or near planning approval stage.

When combined with the older population, the dependency ratio (those aged under 16 and those aged over 65) is projected to increase to 65% of the total population by 2040, up from 53% in 2016.



Children and Young People

ESRI projections indicate that the number of people aged 15 or under will decline slightly, by around 6%, by 2040, to comprise approximately 17% of the increased population. This compares to approximately 25% of the population in 2022, meaning that the average age of people in Ireland as a whole will increase, but the overall number of young people will not decrease significantly.

The number of people aged 15 or under will continue to increase until the mid-2020's and decline only slowly thereafter. This means that the continued provision and enhancement of facilities and amenities for children and young people, such as early learning and childcare services, schools, playgrounds, parks and sportsgrounds, remains necessary and will need ongoing investment to ensure alignment with future needs.

It also means that, if a significant proportion of future population growth occurs within or close to the current built-up footprint of settlements as targeted, it will be possible to maximise the use of existing facilities near where children and young people live. It will continue to be a requirement that proposals for residential development make provision for early learning and childcare and for children's play in accordance with local development plan policies.

The continued provision and enhancement of facilities and amenities for children and young people, such as childcare, schools, playgrounds, parks and sportsgrounds, remains necessary and will need to be maintained at similar levels for the foreseeable future thereafter.

According to the UNHCR, children's health, educational advancement and overall well-being are deeply influenced by the quality of housing that children live in. Housing is addressed further below.

When combined with the older population, the dependency ratio (those aged under 16 and those aged over 65) is projected to increase to 65% of the total population by 2040, up from 53% in 2016.

In making high quality places, the NPF seeks to support national policy and objectives for children and young people, including 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures' through integrating such policies, where appropriate and at the applicable scale, with planning policy.

6.5 Childcare, Education and Life Long Learning

Early Learning and Childcare

Access to affordable and high quality early learning and childcare is an essential requirement for an equitable society, a thriving economy and sustainable communities and is a critical part of our nation's infrastructure. Early learning and childcare provision in Ireland is reaching capacity for some age groups and in some parts of the country, and new planning approaches and sustained investment will be required, particularly in areas of disadvantage and population growth, and noting the promotion of infill and brownfield housing development in existing settlements as set out in this Framework, to increase capacity and enable existing services to meet regulatory and quality requirements.

Investment in high quality, affordable early learning and childcare is critical both as an educational support for children, and as an enabler of parental labour market participation.

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) are developing capacity in forward planning to monitor, analyse and forecast early learning and childcare demand and supply in order to identify areas of mismatch and develop approaches to best meet needs, including through capital investment. This function will examine data influencing demand, such as population growth and employment patterns, and supply, such as the forthcoming regulation of childminders. DCEDIY will also work together with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and local authorities to ensure appropriate levels of early learning and childcare provision are accessible to families as an integral element of the overall development process.

Education

Education has been critical to Ireland's transformation over recent decades. Education, training and life-long learning are key enablers, around which personal fulfilment, a fair society and a successful nation revolve. All are central to sustaining economic success and building strong communities.

In knowledge-based economies, education underpins growth as it is the main driver of technological innovation and productivity. Accessing a high standard of education is a priority now and in the future, having a major impact on people's quality of life. A lack of skills and competencies limits access to good jobs and economic prosperity, increases the risk of social exclusion and poverty, and may hinder a full participation in civic and political affairs.

The school system is experiencing significant pressures in catering for additional student numbers in certain parts of the country where a high level of population growth has occurred. Equally, the viability of some schools has been questioned in other parts experiencing population decline.

Schools play a vital role within the development of sustainable communities, acting as a key enabler for housing development, and therefore the integration of education and land use planning and delivery needs to be undertaken in a coordinated and strategic manner in order to avoid pressure on school places, which in turn may prevent housing development from taking place.

While national and regional level demographic trends are relevant, school place requirements are very much driven by local area demographics. Notwithstanding that the underlying enrolments at primary level have been falling nationally, this trend has not been experienced in areas where there have been high levels of residential construction activity in recent years. Equally, while national level enrolments at post-primary may peak around the middle of the decade, there will be a continued need for new schools and additional school places in high growth areas³⁴.

A further important consideration is the provision of appropriate school places for children with special educational needs. The need to ensure greater availability of appropriate placements in local areas, driven by increased prevalence of special educational needs, has been a significant driver of school infrastructure requirements, and the provision, in particular of special class places and expansion in the network of special schools plays an important role in underpinning sustainable communities. This is important as it not only reduces the requirement for children with additional needs to travel long distances to access an appropriate school place (which impacts on their ability to actively engage with their schools) but also assists in the provision of school transport for children with special educational needs who generally require bespoke transport solutions. Schools can also play an important role as hubs, particularly for new and growing communities, beyond the provision of education. This may include, for example, the potential for use of new school infrastructure (for sporting, general purpose facilities etc.) by the wider community. Where there is spare capacity in a school, schools can accommodate facilities such as crèche, childcare facilities or pre-school services. In recognition of this, the Department of Education has published updated procedures on the use of school premises and school sports facilities outside of school hours.

34 Source: Department of Education

The further education and training sectors have been reformed and consolidated to offer a broad range of flexible high-quality programmes to meet the needs of learners to enable them to develop skills leading to awards of levels 1 to 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications and to progress to employment and/or higher education. Provision offers learners the opportunity to up-skill, re-skill and acquire new skills to support career transition and progression. In the Higher Education sector, the development of Technological Universities is delivering greater opportunity to students in the regions served, to staff working in the institutions, and to the broader local economy and society. The Technological University legislation was enacted in March 2018, (Technological Universities Act, 2018). There are currently five established Technological Universities. By creating institutions of scale and strength, multi-campus technological universities will bring greater social and economic benefits to their regions through a strengthened role in research and innovation and the delivery of a broad range of high quality education and training in each of their campuses.

The provision of further and higher education and skills, including the new technological universities, supports the promotion of research, knowledge and innovation and the development of regional clusters as key anchors for sustainable regions. Through collaboration with industry and enterprise, and the development of clusters of technology and expertise, the higher education and skills sector opens up business opportunities regionally and nationally.

Strategic planning of and investment in the provision of childcare, education and training are central to reinforcing the delivery of sustainable communities, promoting inclusion and offering choice and accessibility to a high standard of education and employment. This means that the National Planning Framework will seek to prioritise the alignment of targeted and planned population and employment growth with educational investment:

National Policy Objective 42

Prioritise the alignment of targeted and planned population and employment growth with investment in:

- *A childcare/ECCE planning function, for monitoring, analysis and forecasting of investment needs, including identification of regional priorities;*
- *The provision and timely delivery of childcare facilities and new and refurbished schools on well-located sites within or close to existing built-up areas, including in support of infill and brownfield development, that meet the diverse needs of local populations and act as a key enabler for housing development, thereby contributing to the development of sustainable communities;*
- *The expansion and consolidation of Further and Higher Education facilities, particularly where this will contribute to wider regional development, and*
- *Programmes for life-long learning, especially in areas of higher education and further education and training where skills gaps are identified.*

In the Higher Education sector, the development of Technological Universities has the potential to deliver greater opportunity to students in the regions served, to staff working in the institutions, and to the broader local economy and society.



6.6 Housing

Homes are both the places where we live and the foundation stone from which wider communities and their quality of lives are created. There is a projected total requirement to accommodate approximately 50,000 additional households per annum to 2040.

Housing for All, the Governments Housing Plan for Ireland to 2030, was launched in September 2021 and encompassed the overall aim that “Everyone in the State should have access to a home to purchase or rent at an affordable price, built to a high standard and in the right place, offering a high quality of life”.

National Policy Objective 43

To target the delivery of housing to accommodate approximately 50,000 additional households per annum to 2040.

The long-term vision for Ireland’s housing future aims to balance the provision of good quality housing that meets the needs of a diverse population, in a way that makes our cities, towns, villages and rural areas good places to live now and in the future.

PRIORITIES AND PRINCIPLES

Nationally, the high-level policy priorities in the housing sector to 2040 are as follows:

- Location of Homes – Addressing the long-term spatial distribution of housing.
- Building Resilience – Re-use, adaptability and accessibility in our housing stock, ensuring integration to deliver vibrant sustainable communities.
- Need and Demand Profile – Charting national housing pressures to 2040.
- Reconciling Future Housing Requirements Effectively – Establishment of a comprehensive evidence base to support and inform housing policies and implementation measures.
- Creation of sustainable communities with a diversity of housing choice.

NATIONAL CORE PRINCIPLES ARE SET OUT TO GUIDE THE DELIVERY OF FUTURE HOUSING, AT EVERY LEVEL OF GOVERNANCE:

- Ensure a high standard quality of life to future residents as well as environmentally and socially sustainable housing and place-making through integrated planning and consistently excellent design.
- Allow for choice in housing location, type, tenure and accommodation in responding to need.
- Prioritise the location of new housing provision in existing settlements as a means to maximising a better quality of life for people through accessing services, ensuring a more efficient use of land and allowing for greater integration with existing infrastructure.
- Tailor the scale and nature of future housing provision to the size and type of settlement where it is planned to be located.
- Integrate housing strategies where settlements straddle boundaries (county and/or regional).
- Utilise existing housing stock as a means to meeting future demand.

The long term vision for Ireland’s housing future aims to balance the provision of good quality housing that meets the needs of a diverse population, in a way that makes our cities, towns, villages and rural areas good places to live now and in the future.

Location of Homes

Future homes are required to be located where people have the best opportunities to access a high standard quality of life.

In Ireland, the location of housing has taken on a dispersed and fragmented character, which has led to people living further away from their jobs and often being at a sizeable remove from important services such as education and healthcare. Development sprawl at every settlement level in Ireland has manifested as scattered development, 'leapfrogging', continuous suburbs and linear patterns of strip or ribbon development.

This type of development has made it costly and often unfeasible for the State to align and invest in infrastructure delivery where it cannot be justified. It has also hampered effective responses to climate change, compounded issues such as congestion and pollution, increased commuting times and has had an overall negative impact on people's health and well-being.

National Policy Objective 44

Prioritise the provision of new homes at locations that can support sustainable development and at an appropriate scale of provision relative to location.

Ireland's future homes will:

- be located in places that can support sustainable development - places which support growth, innovation and the efficient provision of infrastructure, are accessible to a range of local services, can encourage the use of public transport, walking and cycling, and support the transition to a lower carbon society;
- be delivered in our cities and larger towns (where large scale housing demand exists), where homes and the appropriate supporting services can be delivered more efficiently and effectively at less cost to the State in the long-run, and
- still be located in our smaller towns, villages and rural areas, including the countryside, but at an appropriate scale that does not detract from the capacity of our larger towns and cities to deliver homes more sustainably.

To promote the increased supply of housing in a planned and sustainable manner and to encourage the regeneration of vacant and idle lands in urban locations, the Residential Zoned Land Tax was introduced in the Finance Act 2021, as a new tax aimed at activating zoned and serviced residential development land.

The tax measure applies to lands, which are zoned within statutory land use plans as being appropriate locations for housing and that have benefitted from investment in the key infrastructural services needed to support housing delivery. The lands in scope for the tax are identified by local authorities on annually published maps. Liability to the tax, the management and enforcement of which will be undertaken by the Revenue Commissioners, is due to commence in February 2025.

The mapping process also facilitates the monitoring of land from the point of zoning to development, and the identification of lands that require investment in infrastructure to enable housing development.

Building Resilience in Housing

Building stock that is in a state of vacancy and dereliction has the potential to offer transformative options for housing and as part of the original fabric of some settlements can serve to further preserve the heritage and cultural identity of a place. Reuse of existing building stock must be accounted for and considered as part of any evidence basis for housing policy formation and at a local level, this will form part of development plan core strategies.

While the adaptive reuse of existing stock can present significant challenges, particularly in relation to capital costs and specific technical considerations, the longer term benefits of reuse is evident from a social, cultural and embodied carbon perspective. From a housing provision perspective, there are also wider advantages in terms of potential additional delivery, consolidation of existing vacant stock and wider urban regeneration benefits.

Any new home will have to accommodate changing needs over its lifetime. A liveable and adaptable housing development or house is one that is able to respond effectively to these needs without requiring costly and energy intensive alterations. Our population is changing rapidly, with average households becoming both smaller in size and older as an increasing number of people live independently in their later years. The balance between home and work life also places altering demands on our houses as an increase in remote and hybrid working since the COVID-19 pandemic allows more people to work from home.



National Policy Objective 45

Support the provision of lifetime adaptable homes that can accommodate the changing needs of a household over time.

Historically, low-density housing development has been a feature of Ireland's housing landscape in cities, towns, villages and the countryside. To avoid urban sprawl and the pressure that it puts on both the environment and infrastructure demands, compact housing and increased residential densities are required in our urban areas.

Well designed and located high and medium density housing will assist:

- Fast-growing urban areas to achieve much needed scale;
- Medium-sized urban areas to find a route to quality in a new competitive framework;
- All urban areas to increase vibrancy and vitality;
- Increased efficiency and sustainability in the use of energy and public infrastructure

The infill/brownfield targets set out in NPOs 7, 8 and 9 of this Framework will necessitate a significant and sustained increase in urban housing output including apartment development and medium density housing in appropriate locations, if we are to avoid a continuation of the outward expansion of cities and larger urban areas.

While apartments made up 13% of all occupied households in Ireland and 38% of occupied households in the Dublin City Council area in 2022 (Census data), we are a long way behind European averages in terms of the numbers and proportion of households living in apartments, especially in our cities and larger towns. In many European countries, it is normal to see 40%-60% of households living in apartments.

To more effectively address the challenge of meeting the housing needs of a growing and more diverse population in our key urban areas, it is clear that we need to build inwards and upwards, rather than outwards. This means that apartments and compact housing models will need to become more prevalent, particularly in Ireland's cities.

This is underpinned by on-going population growth, a long-term move towards smaller average household size, an ageing and more diverse population, greater mobility in the labour market and a higher proportion of households in the rented sector.

The Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines issued as Ministerial Guidelines in January 2024 demonstrate how higher densities and more compact and sustainable settlement patterns can be achieved through the interaction of residential density, flexible housing standards and quality design and placemaking.

National Policy Objective 46

Increase residential density in settlements, through a range of measures including reductions in vacancy, re-use of existing buildings, infill development schemes, area or site-based regeneration, increased building height and more compact forms of development.

Housing Demand

Between now and 2040, an average output of approximately 50,000 new homes will need to be provided in Ireland every year to meet people's needs for well-located and affordable housing, with increasing demand to cater for one- and two-person households. Within this figure, there is a wide range of differing housing needs that will be required to be met, recognising that not every home will be delivered on a greenfield site.

To meet projected population and economic growth as well as increased household formation, annual housing output will need to increase to approximately 50,000 homes per annum in the years to 2040 and will be subject to monitoring and review.

Social and Affordable Housing

The provision by Government of housing supports for those unable to provide for accommodation from within their own resources is a key social policy and it affects a significant proportion of the population. Actions taken by public bodies in relation to social housing can have a considerable impact on the overall housing market and, equally, fiscal or regulatory measures in relation to the housing market can have an effect on the availability of social housing.

The preparation by local authorities of Housing Delivery Action Plans since 2022 is assisting in the identification of the quantum of homes required to be constructed and the land available for such construction.

Case Study



Riverside Cottages, Templeogue, Infill scheme

Social Housing Development

Architects - South Dublin County Council Architect's Department

Case Study



17 – 20 Merchants Road Lower, Galway City

This is an example of regenerative City Centre consolidation and infill on a very constrained brownfield site.

A five storey mixed development is proposed, comprising a cultural centre and cafe on the lower floor with 11 social dwellings in a mix of one and two bed units above, at a scale more consistent with this prominent city centre location and adjoining properties, to replace the existing four two-storey houses, which are vacant.

Architects:- Hall and McKnight



Case Study



Curragower Corner, Limerick

Curragower Corner, an infill, affordable apartment scheme in Clancy Strand, Limerick City. 1 community facility unit fronting public space with 7 residential units above.

Exploring the potential for Light Gauge Steel construction, or a hybrid with CLT construction, with a presumed off-site manufacturing approach, the project aims to be marketed to developers post-planning without a predefined building system. This allows flexibility for developers to decide and detail the design, leveraging their expertise within Modern Methods of Construction (MMC).

Architects:- Limerick City and County Council in collaboration with the Housing Agency

Adding more properties to areas that are already dense with social housing, or to areas that are unable to support further population, can create serious problems within communities. Diverse neighbourhoods with a balance of public and private housing can create more sustainable and healthy communities.

The Affordable Housing Act 2021 provided the legislative arrangements for affordable housing, introduced a new form of rental tenure through 'cost rental' and expanded Part V requirements to increase the percentage contribution from 10% to 20% and applied this to affordable in addition to social housing.

Since the publication of Housing for All, a range of funding schemes have been developed to support the delivery of affordable housing, including the affordable purchase shared-equity First Home scheme for new-build homes in private developments, a new Local Authority-led Affordable Purchase Scheme and a newly expanded Local Authority Home Loan Scheme. The Land Development Agency (LDA) has taken a leading role in the delivery of affordable housing on public land alongside new initiatives, such as Project Tosaigh.

Funding is being provided to ensure that local authorities can provide homeless prevention services, emergency accommodation and other services to ensure people can exit homelessness to tenancies as quickly as possible. The Housing First National Implementation Plan for 2022-2026, published in November 2021, provides for an additional 1,319 supported Housing First tenancies over this period for people who have complex additional needs.

Vacancy

Maximising the use of our existing housing stock, especially in our towns and cities, is a critical element of a sustainable housing policy. Aligned with the implementation of the *Town Centre First Policy Approach for Irish Towns*, the Vacant Homes Action Plan was published in 2023 to consolidate strands of work to address residential vacancy.

A range of fiscal measures have been introduced to support the objectives of the Plan, including the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant Scheme and a Vacant Homes Tax which came into effect in 2023. The activation of vacant properties is the central objective of Call 3 of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, involving a new €150 million revolving fund for vacancy-related projects being undertaken by local authorities.

Homelessness

Increasing housing supply remains the principal solution to resolving homelessness. Housing for All provides four pathways to achieving four overarching objectives one of which is Eradicating Homelessness, Increasing Social Housing Delivery and Supporting Social Inclusion. Each of the pathways contains a comprehensive suite of actions to achieve these Housing Policy Objectives.

Changing Family Size

Currently, almost 50% of people in the State live in households of three people or fewer, with an average household size of 2.74 people. Household sizes in urban areas tend to be smaller than in the suburbs or rural parts of the country. In Dublin city, almost 60% of people live in one, two and three person households. Yet, the stock of housing in Ireland is largely comprised of detached and semi-detached houses with three to four bedrooms.

Students

Demand for student accommodation exacerbates the demand pressures on the available supply of rental accommodation in urban areas in particular. In the years ahead, student accommodation pressures are anticipated to increase. The location of purpose-built student accommodation needs to be as proximate as possible to the centre of education, as well as being connected to accessible infrastructure such as walking, cycling and public transport. Student accommodation also contributes to the financial, cultural and social fabric of regions, cities and towns. The adaptive reuse of existing buildings and brownfield sites for student accommodation can assist with the reduction of vacancy and dereliction, thereby promoting vitality and vibrancy in settlements, in support of Town Centre First principles. The National Student Accommodation Strategy supports these objectives.

Reconciling Future Housing Requirements Effectively

Since 2018, enhanced methodologies and statutory guidelines have been put in place to reconcile future housing requirements effectively, taking into consideration the varying housing needs that are required to be met, including the housing needs of older people, people with disabilities, the travelling community, social and affordable housing, families of varying sizes and income levels and students.

Managing the future location, typology and tenure of housing requires a robust evidence base and approach to implementation. Increasingly there is more and better housing data at national, regional, county and settlement level to assist policy makers in understanding housing conditions and the housing needs of people in Ireland, in order to develop informed, cost-effective, policies, programmes and funding initiatives.

National Policy Objective 47

Continue to develop methodologies and data sources to improve the evidence base, effectiveness and consistency of the planning process for housing provision at regional, metropolitan and local authority levels. This will include standardised requirements for the recording of planning and housing data by the local authorities in order to provide a consistent and robust evidence base for housing policy formulation.

Housing Need Demand Assessment

In order to ensure that the plan-making system continues to be supported by robust methodology and data to inform policies and funding initiatives around housing and associated land requirements, Housing Need Demand Assessments (HNDAs) developed by each Local Authority will be updated to align with updated data sources, in order to support the preparation of housing strategies and all related housing policy outputs, e.g. city and county development plans, local area plans, traveller accommodation plans etc.

The purpose of the Housing Need Demand Assessment tool is to:

- Assist local authorities to develop long- term strategic views of housing need across all tenures.
- Provide a robust evidence base to support decisions about new housing supply, wider investment and housing related services that inform an overall national housing profile.
- Inform policies about the proportion of social and affordable housing required, including the need for different types and sizes of provision.
- Provide evidence to inform policies related to the provision of specialist housing and housing related services.

The HNDA is a centralised spatial database, which allows local authorities to run a number of different scenarios to inform key decisions on housing need and supply. Local Authority HNDAs are designed to give broad, long run estimates of what future housing need might be, rather than precise estimates. The HNDA centralised spatial database is supported by a coordination and monitoring unit within DHLGH and will be updated to align with the updated ESRI Regional Demographic and Structural Housing Demand research which will be published in 2024.

There are a number of key evidence inputs which inform and drive the HNDA model, as follows:

1 Demographic trends, affordability trends and wider economic trends.

The use of economic forecasting or econometric work underpins this section. Data requirements include household composition/projections, house prices, rents, number of first time buyers (FTBs) and loan to value (LTV) mortgage rates, economic activity and employment rates etc.

2 2040 Housing Stock Profile Pressures (and existing need) and management issues.

Undertaking a detailed profile of local housing stock and stock pressures, including local authority housing, to identify the main pressures relating to supply and demand, ineffective stock and overall condition as well as priorities for future stock management. Information is required on dwelling size, dwelling type, dwelling condition and stock pressures (occupancy/under occupancy stock turnover etc.).

3 Estimating Future Housing Need and Demand.

This is broken down into: owner occupation, private sector, below market rent and social rent. Detailed guidance is provided on how to undertake this work, including how and on what evidence to base assumptions on wealth affordability, both in terms of home ownership and the different rental categories.

National Policy Objective 48

A 'Housing Need Demand Assessments' (HNDAs) undertaken for each Local Authority Area in order to correlate and accurately align future housing requirements:

- *to be undertaken by Local Authorities with coordination assistance to be provided by the Regional Assemblies, and also at a Metropolitan scale, particularly where inter-county and inter-regional settlement interactions are to be planned for and managed;*
- and*
- *to primarily inform housing policies, housing strategies and associated land use zoning policies as well as assisting in determining where new policy areas or investment programmes are to be developed.*



7

Realising our Island and Marine Potential

Ireland's economy, culture and society have strong links to the sea. Our marine environment is a national asset that yields a wide range of commercial and societal benefits

7.1 Integrated Land and Maritime Planning

Ireland's economy, culture and society have strong links to the sea. Our marine environment is a national asset that yields a wide range of commercial and societal benefits through activities such as commercial fishing, transport, tourism, recreation, renewable energy and cultural heritage, as well as playing a vital role in supporting marine life and biodiversity more generally.

Sustainable utilisation of Ireland's marine resources, will be influenced to a significant degree by how successfully we can align long-term spatial planning for our terrestrial and marine areas through the National Planning Framework and Ireland's National Marine Spatial Plan - the National Marine Planning Framework (NMPF). Published in 2021, the NMPF is the overarching strategic plan for the entire maritime area, comprising some 490,000 km². However, as the capabilities of the Marine Area Planning (MAP) Act are deployed, including Marine Planning Policy Statements and Designated Maritime Area Plans (planning frameworks that can be undertaken for particular uses, sectors or defined spatial areas and specific guidance), marine planning policy will reflect the sophistication needed to balance the range of uses, activities and environment in the marine area. There are many shared aims and overlapping areas of co-ordination and activity between terrestrial and maritime area planning, including the development of renewable energy and associated green industrial development, supporting the improvement of our port infrastructure, tourism and environmental co-ordination. (see figure 7.1).

Continued successful implementation will require working with neighbouring administrations, such as the United Kingdom and our EU partners, regarding transboundary and shared sea basin issues to ensure a consistent and effective policy and regulatory approach to marine and terrestrial planning. Such an approach is essential to harnessing the potential of our oceans and seas to support local communities, sustainably manage our marine resources and provide long-term investment predictability for development and activities in our maritime area, particularly developing our inherent potential for offshore renewable development in an integrated and sustainable manner.

Complex relationships between land and maritime activity require coordination of many different sectors and actors. Some sectors and activities, such as renewable energy, can have a presence both on land and in the maritime area and require facilities and infrastructure which traverse both areas.

The planning system plays an important role in permitting the infrastructure necessary to capture, store and transmit such energy to consumers, and in doing so, enable Ireland to utilise its vast and sustainable offshore wind and other energy resources. Offshore renewable energy production can also offer the potential to attract new green industries with high-energy needs to those locations.

In July 2023, the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA) was formally established under the provisions of the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 to assist with the sustainable management of Ireland's diverse maritime area. The Authority's functions include administering the maritime area consents process, marine licensing for scheduled activities, administration of the extant foreshore consent portfolio, and promoting co-operation between maritime regulators.



Continued successful implementation will require working with neighbouring administrations, such as the United Kingdom and our EU partners, regarding transboundary and shared sea basin issues to ensure a consistent and effective policy and regulatory approach to marine and terrestrial planning.

Figure 7.1 | Common Aims and Areas of Overlap of Terrestrial and Maritime Planning

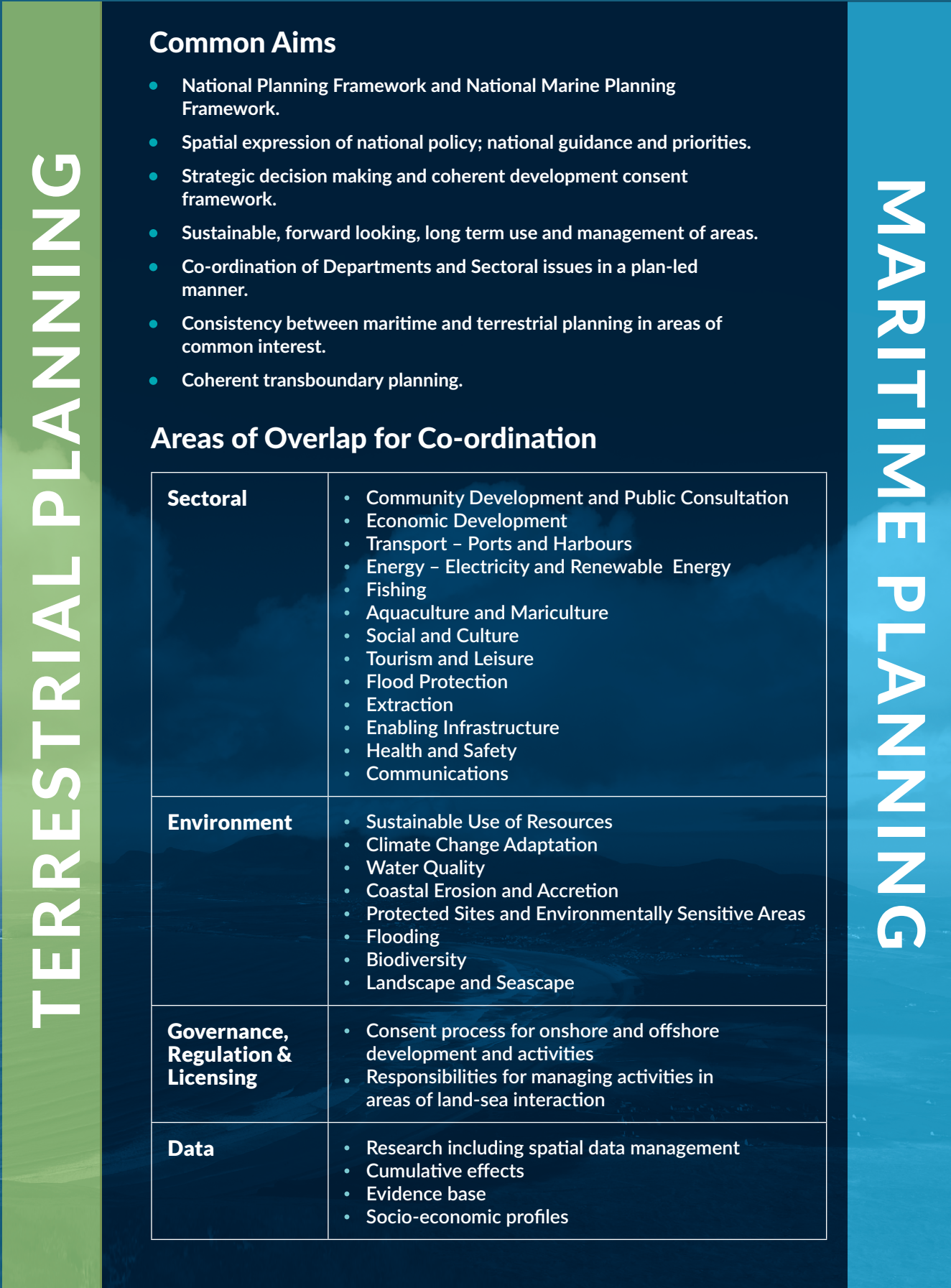


Figure 7.2 | Relationships between Planning Policy and Maritime Policy

Planning Policy	Hierarchy	Maritime Policy
National		
National Planning Framework	High Level Aims and Objectives National-Focus	National Maritime Spatial Plan
Regional		
Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies	Policies of Regional Significance and Focus for co-operation and implementation	Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPs)- provide a sub national framework for the making of decisions for particular uses in defined spatial areas
Local		
Development Plan and Local Area Plan	Detailed objectives and locally devised approaches	Localised land-sea interaction and the role of coastal local authorities to manage the nearshore (the sea area 5km or 3 nautical miles from shore). DMAPs may be prepared for the specified parts of the nearshore area

National Policy Objective 49

Regional, metropolitan and local development plans will take account of and integrate relevant maritime spatial planning issues.

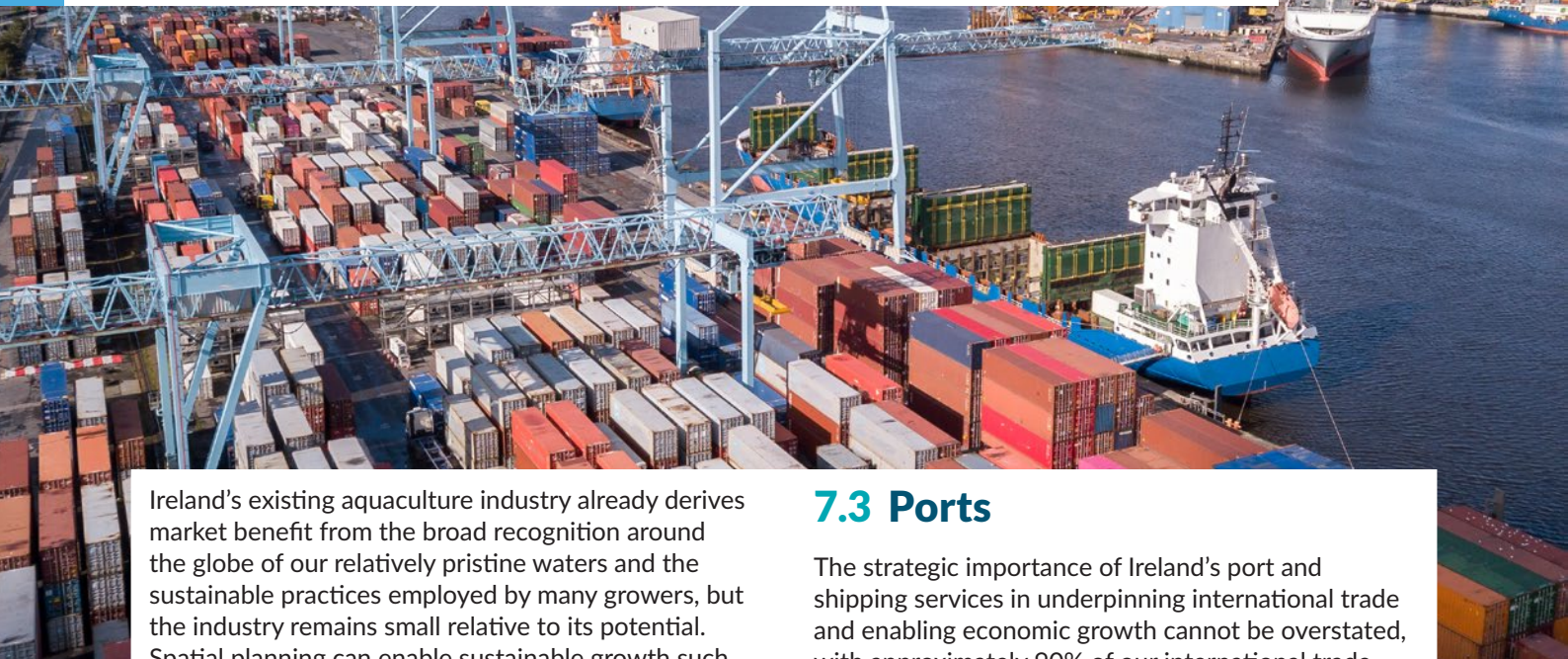
7.2 Maritime Economy

As an island nation, the maritime sector performs a critically important function within the economy by facilitating the movement of people and goods between Ireland and its trading partners. Other established ocean and coastal sectors include seafood related enterprise, such as commercial fishing and aquaculture, products of marine biotechnology and bio-discovery, marine tourism, energy exploration and production, maritime transport, shipbuilding and leasing. There are considerable opportunities for the future growth in sustainable jobs and inward investment to our regions and coastal communities in the offshore renewable energy sector and supply chain activities.

The seafood sector plays a vital role in the sustainable development of the economic and social fabric of coastal communities. Employment in this sector is particularly impactful as it maintains working populations in remote coastal areas where historically there have been fewer opportunities for commercial or industrial development. The Irish seafood sector supports the economic viability of many such communities, with BIM's Business of Seafood 2022 Report estimating that over 2,700 people are employed in fisheries and over 15,000 in direct and indirect seafood jobs.

In 2022 the seafood sector was valued at approximately €1.3 billion. The Government's Food Vision 2030 strategic plan foresees the seafood sector continuing on a path of sustainable economic and environmental development. The strategy aims to encourage investment in seafood communities to allow for growth and long term economic and social sustainability. This will support a vibrant and growing local seafood sector and support the economic and demographic vitality of rural coastal communities.

As an island nation, Ireland's ports are key national infrastructure assets and perform an indispensable role in facilitating the movement of both people and goods



Ireland's existing aquaculture industry already derives market benefit from the broad recognition around the globe of our relatively pristine waters and the sustainable practices employed by many growers, but the industry remains small relative to its potential. Spatial planning can enable sustainable growth such that habitat, water quality, and other marine resources are not compromised.

Ireland already has a number of strategically important Fishery Harbour Centres such as Killybegs, Castletownbere, Dunmore East, Dingle, Ros an Mhíl and Howth, as well as essential facilities at a range of smaller facilities around the coastline. Continued investment in Fishery Harbour Centres and related land-based infrastructure is required to enhance and further develop their capacity to optimise the contribution of our marine resources to rural and coastal communities. The planning system has an important role in ensuring that this occurs in a sustainable manner cognisant of the need to achieve an equitable balance that also meets the needs of other stakeholders in the maritime area.

National Policy Objective 50

Support the sustainable growth and development of the maritime economy and continue to invest in the seafood sector and our Fishery Harbour Centres, particularly in remote rural coastal communities and islands.

7.3 Ports

The strategic importance of Ireland's port and shipping services in underpinning international trade and enabling economic growth cannot be overstated, with approximately 90% of our international trade moving by sea. Ports also serve as key logistics and distribution hubs. The role of the ports and shipping sectors came into particular focus with the exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union as the sectors demonstrated their agility and resilience through new route development to continental Europe.

Port infrastructure involves development and associated activities on both land and the marine area (nearshore) and often in proximity to areas of environmental sensitivity. National ports policy³⁵ seeks to facilitate a competitive and effective market for maritime transport services and categorises Ireland's ports by tier according to the different strategic roles that each plays.

As an island nation, we depend on the quality and efficiency of our ports to a far greater extent than many of our trading partners. As a small open economy with a strong focus on international trade and export-led growth, we must be capable of delivering additional port capacity in a timely and predictable manner.

³⁵ National Ports Policy, 2013. The Department of Transport has commenced a review of its National Ports Policy. The objective is to present a new draft policy to the Government in 2025 following consultation.

National ports policy indicates that the three Tier 1 Ports of National Significance (Dublin, Cork and Shannon Foynes) have clear potential to lead the development of future port capacity in the medium and long term, when and as required. The Tier 2 Ports of National Significance (Waterford and Rosslare Europort) have been identified as having demonstrable potential to handle higher volumes of unitised traffic, and have the existing transport links to serve a wider, national marketplace beyond their immediate region.

In recent years significant investment has been made to position Ireland's ports for future growth and this has resulted in significant improvements both in terms of capacity and capability. The ports are largely guided by individual long-term plans and strategic visions which ensures a plan-led approach.

The five Ports of Regional Significance identified in the policy have been transferred to local authority control, to ensure that these assets can continue to meet local and regional needs. These ports and harbours play an important role in providing for regional employment and services and many serve rural and island communities. In addition to commercial activity, these facilities also support other marine sectors such as fisheries, renewable energy, and marine tourism.

The National Ports Policy indicates that the long-term international trend in ports and shipping is toward increased consolidation of resources in order to achieve optimum efficiencies of scale. This has knock-on effects in terms of vessel size, the depths of water required at ports and the type and scale of port hinterland transport connections. It is anticipated that over the next decade additional environmental, technological, demographic, and geopolitical challenges will arise.

Tier 1 and 2 ports are, in the main, located within close proximity to our cities and the role of these ports will be considered and addressed in tandem with long-term infrastructural requirements as part of the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and plan making processes at local level.

Strategic plans for relevant Tier 1 and 2 ports and corresponding city growth strategies should align and be consistent with the broader aims and policies for the effective growth and sustainable development of the city regions.

Furthermore, naturally occurring deep water at ports in the south and south-west, are capable of receiving the largest ocean going vessels and offer the potential for industrial and energy related developments that depend on the availability of suitable deep water berths.

Other ports of regional significance, such as Galway and Drogheda, have an important role for regional employment and services and many smaller harbours serve rural and island communities. In addition to commercial freight, such ports support marine sectors that are dependent of local natural resources, such as fisheries, marine renewable energy, and marine tourism.

Given the identification of offshore renewable energy as a key element of the approach to reducing carbon emissions across number of sectors, including transport and electricity generation, ports in our regions have a natural advantage with proximity to potential offshore renewable energy locations and will play a critical role in facilitating the development maintenance and operation of the sector through the accommodation of supporting infrastructure.



Government policy supports a multi-port approach to the development of necessary port infrastructure facilities to enable offshore renewable energy (Government’s Policy Statement on the Facilitation of Offshore Renewable Energy by Commercial Ports in Ireland (2021), which is supported by the NPF.

National Policy Objective 51

Ensure that the strategic development requirements of Tier 1 and Tier 2 Ports, ports of regional significance, State Fishing Harbours and smaller harbours are addressed as part of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, and plans at local level to ensure the effective growth and sustainable development of the city regions and regional and rural areas, including, where appropriate, infrastructure to effectively support the development and maintenance of off-shore renewable electricity generating developments.

National Policy Objective 52

Support the sustainable delivery of port and harbour infrastructure to facilitate the development, maintenance and operation of off-shore renewable electricity generating developments.

7.4 Coastal Environment and Planning for Climate Change

Given Ireland’s cities and largest towns are located in coastal locations, a very significant proportion of the national population lives in close proximity to the sea. This presents opportunities for recreation, and interaction with the natural environment, which are important for wellbeing and quality of life.

However, the Government’s Climate Action Plans 2021-2023 identify that increases in sea levels and storm surge will result in increased frequency of coastal flooding and erosion, with potential for significant impacts for coastal and heritage sites situated in proximity to the coast and on estuaries. The current evidence points to a gradual sea level rise of up to 1 metre to the year 2100 due to climate change.

This will further and significantly change our coastline and could adversely impact on our coastal economy, society, biodiversity, heritage, culture and environment, if such change is not managed appropriately. Ireland’s major cities, almost all populated coastal communities as well as infrastructure, protected habitats and species, amenities, industry and utilities are at risk from future coastal change.

Responding to the impact of climate change on Ireland’s coastal areas requires, broadly, a dual approach of both mitigation (tackling the cause) and adaptation measures (reduce the impacts and increase adaptive capacity and resilience).

Given the nature of the risks arising, the broad range of stakeholders with responsibilities to manage these risks, and the complex legal and regulatory framework within which this must be achieved, there is a requirement for an integrated and co-ordinated response which includes spatial planning.

In particular, as a result of climate change, sea levels and patterns of accretion and erosion are key issues for planning and flood risk assessment, especially in managing the ongoing development of our urban areas and with respect to infrastructure located along our coastline. Such climate change adaptation responses will entail plan-led interventions.

National Policy Objective 53

Ensure that Ireland’s coastal resource is managed to sustain its physical character and environmental quality.

National Policy Objective 54

In line with the collective aims of national policy regarding climate adaptation, to address the effects of sea level changes and coastal flooding and erosion and to support the implementation of adaptation responses in vulnerable areas.

National Policy Objective 55

Support the development of coastal management plans to address the likely effects of sea level changes and coastal flooding and erosion and to support the implementation of adaptation responses in vulnerable areas.

Case Study

South Coast DMAP

The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications is currently preparing the South Coast Designated Maritime Area Plan (SC-DMAP) for Offshore Renewable Energy (ORE).

The SC-DMAP is Ireland's first sub-national forward spatial plan under the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021. As the first sub-national forward spatial plan created under the State's new regime for plan-led future ORE development in Ireland, the establishment of the SC-DMAP marks a significant milestone in Ireland's continued energy transition.

The SC-DMAP will designate marine areas off Ireland's South Coast for sustainable and managed future deployments of fixed offshore wind. It will enable the accelerated realisation of Ireland's renewable energy potential, and provide a long-term secure, sustainable and cost-effective source of indigenous energy for future generations of Irish households and businesses. Harnessing the full economic potential of ORE and the marine economy is a significant opportunity for economic growth across the coastal counties on the south coast.

Features of the SC-DMAP process include the ecosystem-based approach with full consideration for the protection of marine environment and biodiversity and existing marine users and activities, including commercial fishing and tourism. Public consultation is central to the establishment of the SC-DMAP. Its development has been informed by a wide-reaching and meaningful process of public engagement since summer 2023. A Public Participation Statement outlining anticipated opportunities for public engagement throughout establishment of the plan has been published and is regularly updated.

The SC-DMAP supports the co-ordination of terrestrial and marine planning. The integration and alignment of land and sea planning will aid in delivering the onshore infrastructure and activity required to implement the plan, such as facilities for ORE in ports and harbours, transmission grid connections and supply chain enterprise activity. This will enable the full potential of the marine economy and renewable energy in a sustainable manner.

Following establishment of the SC-DMAP, Government will seek to procure up to 900 MW of fixed bottom offshore wind capacity within the SC-DMAP area via Ireland's next competitive offshore wind auction, to be connected to the onshore electricity transmission system. This project will be developed by the winner of Ireland's second offshore wind auction – known as ORESS 2.1 – to commence in 2024/25, and will aim for deployment by 2030, or as soon as possible thereafter, contingent on successfully achieving the required consents and planning approval.



7.5 Offshore Renewable Energy

Over the period to 2040, it is likely that technological advances will accelerate the commercial application, development and deployment of a marine renewable energy sector to assist Ireland to meet its commitments under the Climate Action Plan.

Under the Climate Action Plan 2023, Government has committed to generating 80% of our electricity demand from renewable sources by 2030, which includes achieving at least 5 GW of offshore renewable energy capacity by that date. Offshore renewable energy represents an emerging sectoral opportunity for coastal regions with the potential to support the delivery of Ireland's offshore wind ambitions being a particular economic development opportunity. Enabling infrastructure will be required to ensure that these regions are positioned to harness this growth potential.

As major capital infrastructure projects, offshore renewable energy developments, and offshore wind, in particular, typically have long lead-in times of several years from design to commissioning stages. The National Marine Planning Framework, as Ireland's first comprehensive marine spatial plan, provides a comprehensive policy framework to guide future development in this area.

The Maritime Area Planning Act 2021 also provided for a new licensing and development management regime in the maritime area known as Maritime Area Consent, to be administered by the Maritime Area Regulatory Authority (MARA). In line with the Maritime Area Planning Act 2021, future offshore wind developments will be located within Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPs) established by Government.

The development of offshore renewable energy is critically dependent on the development of enabling infrastructure, including grid facilities to bring the energy ashore and connect to major sources of energy demand as well as port infrastructure for the marshalling and assembly of wind turbine components. An Offshore Transmission Strategy and Offshore Renewable Energy Future Framework Policy will be prepared by the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications. Complementing these is *Powering Prosperity – Ireland's Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy* which has been developed by the Department of Enterprise, Trade, and Employment to ensure that Ireland maximises the economic benefit associated with the Government's offshore renewable energy targets. This Strategy includes a focus on the potential to develop new industrial demand for renewable energy, for which infrastructural development will be a key enabler. Furthermore, the National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027 identified the significant importance and potential of offshore electricity generation and decarbonisation in the context of the wider maritime economy.

National Policy Objective 56

To support, the progressive development of Ireland's offshore renewable energy potential, the sustainable development of enabling onshore infrastructure including domestic and international grid connectivity enhancements, non-grid transmission infrastructure, as well as port infrastructure for the marshalling and assembly of wind turbine components and for the operation and maintenance of offshore renewable energy projects.



8

Working with Our Neighbours

8.1 Ireland and the European Union

Implementation of the National Planning Framework must take account of and address Ireland's changing position in a European and global context.

The world is getting more diverse and more interconnected. Ireland is one of the most globalised economies in the world, with established trade and investment links with European, US, Asian and wider world markets. This has resulted in a transformation and rapid transition of our economy in terms of jobs, skills and innovation.

Ireland's membership of the European Union has greatly facilitated this transformation to an economy largely driven by hi-tech industry and global exports. Ireland is now a major investment destination into the EU from both US and wider global contexts because of our strategic position, economic agility, improving infrastructure and an English-speaking business-friendly environment.

Being an open economy means that Ireland is dependent on trade with our major trading partners and exports are a key component of economic growth. We will need to continue to improve the resilience of the economy to deal with potential changes in the global financial environment and interest rates, greater competition for foreign investment, and changes in the operating conditions of multinationals. To do this, we will need to position Ireland to be flexible to change and external influences.

How we interact with our partners in the EU as well as our nearest neighbours in Northern Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales, will also have a major bearing on our shared prospects for progression and development.

Ireland's direct links with other EU Member States by both air and sea and subsea energy connections are increasingly important, given their advantages in terms of resilience and ease of movement across internal borders. As a result, ports and airports facilitating faster transit times between Ireland and the EU need to be effectively connected into our land-based transport systems.

The withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union presented a range of challenges for Ireland but continued support of North-South cooperation and the all-island economy, as well as maintenance of an effective trading and cooperation relationship with Great Britain, has been at the core of the cross-Government approach to managing the implications of Brexit.

This presents both significant opportunities and challenges, including the potential for increased economic investment into Ireland, while at the same time continuing to harness the potential of the all-island economy and maintaining the trade, infrastructural and many other linkages with our nearest neighbours.

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8.2 Ireland and Northern Ireland

The National Planning Framework and National Development Plan set out a positive vision for the future of the island of Ireland.

In 2021, the revised National Development Plan³⁶ set an enhanced level of ambition for collaborative cross-border investment, to build a more connected, prosperous and sustainable island.

The Government is working through all-island partnerships to co-design, co-fund and co-deliver investments to enhance the shared island and address common strategic concerns. Partnership approaches with the Northern Ireland Executive and UK Government, through the PEACEPLUS programme, and working with local authority, education and civil society partners across the island, provide a strong basis for delivery on strategic planning and investment objectives.

For 2021-2030, there is a total all-island investment commitment of more than €4billion through the Shared Island Fund, the Project Ireland 2040 funds, the Government's annual funding for North/South cooperation and the PEACEPLUS programme, delivered with the European Union, UK Government and Northern Ireland Executive.

³⁶ Refer to 'Looking to 2040' section, page 161

Just over 7 million people live on the island of Ireland, 5.15 million people in Ireland (73% of total) and 1.9 million people in Northern Ireland (27% of total) (Census 2022, CSO and NISRA³⁷). By 2040, the island we share will be home to around 8 million people.

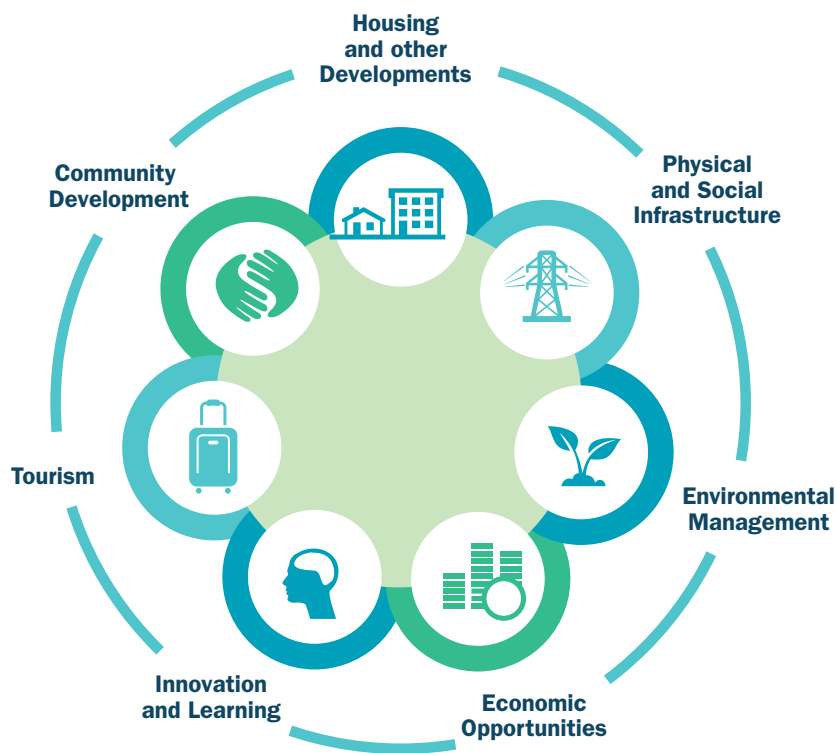
Planning for nearly 1.4 million extra people, their homes and places of work and the infrastructure required to support this growth, while at the same time ensuring good outcomes in terms of physical and community development and environmental quality, poses shared challenges and opportunities, including:

- Managing our growth strategically for long term benefit in terms of economic and social development and environmental quality; and
- Working together for mutual advantage in areas such as economic development and promotion, co-ordination of social and physical infrastructure provision, climate action, biodiversity conservation and other environmental management.

Implementation of the National Planning Framework in tandem with the Regional Development Strategy (RDS) for Northern Ireland assists in addressing these challenges. This collaborative work is supported by the Framework for Co-operation on Spatial Strategies between Ireland and Northern Ireland, which will be updated and reviewed as required.

In the context of ongoing North-South cooperation across a wide range of policy areas, including through the North South Ministerial Council and North South Implementation Bodies, there are three key categories of practical co-operation between relevant Departments and local authorities in Ireland and Northern Ireland that will both support and be supported by the continued implementation of the NPF.

Figure 8.1 | Shared Planning Challenges in Ireland and Northern Ireland



37 Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency

National Policy Objective 57

Work with the relevant Departments in Northern Ireland for mutual advantage in areas such as spatial planning, development and promotion of the all-island economy, co-ordination of social and physical infrastructure provision and environmental protection and management.

8.3 Working Together for Economic Advantage

Strong economic links and trade, across the island of Ireland and between Ireland and the United Kingdom bring significant benefits to both jurisdictions, helping to create jobs, enterprise and tax revenues that in turn contribute to prosperity and better services to society at large. These strong economic relationships and opportunities are significantly supported and developed through planning, investment and policy cooperation across a range of areas, both North/South and East/West, and this will remain a strong focus for the Government under the NPF, including through:

- Investment in Co-Centres for Research and Innovation led by Science Foundation Ireland, working with Northern Ireland and UK partners to bring researchers and industry together to perform world-leading research in areas of mutual economic, societal, health and environmental importance;
- Continuing and growing all-island research partnerships with the United States, including the US- Ireland R&D Partnership Programme;
- Supporting the expansion of Higher Education provision and deeper institutional cooperation in the North-West and across the island, including through investment in construction in a new teaching and student services building at Ulster University's Derry campus;
- Deepening cooperation between further education institutions and developing cross-border apprenticeship programmes;
- Developing inclusive exchange programmes for learners, staff, researchers and innovators of institutions in Ireland, Northern Ireland and the Great Britain, to complement Erasmus+ and building on research investment through the Co-Centre and North South Research Programmes;

- Supporting the work of InterTrade Ireland to help businesses across the island grow all-island trade and investing in inter-agency working on common enterprise policy objectives including female entrepreneurship, clustering and innovation and sustainability investment; and
- Supporting cross-border approaches to attract investment and pursuing all-island opportunities to promote sustainable development of Agri-Food sector.

Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor and East Border Region

The Dublin to Belfast Corridor is the largest economic agglomeration on the island of Ireland, with the cities and towns along the corridor home to a population of around 2 million people, exclusive of wider catchments. The corridor links the two largest cities and several of the largest towns on the island by high-capacity road and national rail links and plays a critical role in supporting economic growth and competitiveness.

The corridor is also the national entry point to the island through its airports and ports. Three major airports, Dublin Airport, Belfast International Airport and Belfast City Airport, collectively manage over c. 39.5 million passengers each year and this is set to continue to rise.

The Dublin-Belfast Economic Corridor was given fresh impetus with the launch in March 2021 of an initiative by the eight Councils with two Universities, to work collectively to realise the benefits of further development of the region as a whole.

In June 2021, the East Border Region (EBR) Councils agreed and published a Charter of regional priorities for cooperation, with the aim of positioning the East Border Region as “a smart, competitive, sustainable and inclusive cross-border region” and identifying a range of illustrative actions for delivering these priorities.

Case Study



Enterprise, cross-border rail service on the island of Ireland

Enterprise, as the only cross-border rail service on the island of Ireland, provides a valuable public transport link serving the island's two most populous cities.

Currently home to over two million people, the population along the Dublin-Belfast Corridor is expected to grow in the coming decades. The first short-term project under the Shared Island initiative, utilising existing trains on the system, will increase frequency of the service between Dublin and Belfast from roughly every two hours at present to an hourly service.

This increased frequency service will be later complemented by the related and more ambitious fleet modernisation project which will enable long-term positive environmental impacts, through a tri-mode and later all-electric service.

These projects will complement the Shared Island initiative by assisting travel between regions, boosting economies through faster journey times and offering a more attractive service.

The Enterprise Fleet Replacement Project is a collaborative project developed by Iarnród Éireann and Translink Northern Ireland Railways - with funding support from the European Union PEACEPLUS, the Department of Infrastructure (Northern Ireland) and the Department of Transport in Ireland.

Ensuring the increased frequency of service and the success of the Enterprise Fleet Replacement project will enable further strengthening of the economic links between Ireland and Northern Ireland, supporting the common travel areas, decongesting roads, reducing carbon emissions and promoting all-island tourism in line with the National Planning Framework and the Climate Action Plan.

As part of the National Planning Framework, the Government will continue to capitalise upon and further support and promote the inherent economic potential of the corridor, building upon existing strengths. To do this, there will be a focus on developing the corridor as a distinct spatial area with international visibility by:

- Effectively planning and developing large centres of population and employment along the main economic corridor, including in particular Drogheda and Dundalk;
- Improving and protecting key transport corridors and strategic function of the Dublin to Belfast road network from unnecessary development and sprawl;
- Introducing an hourly-frequency rail service between Dublin and Belfast, examining electrification of the route and investment in a new sustainable Enterprise train fleet, with funding under the PEACEPLUS programme and from the Government and Northern Ireland Executive.
- Examining the feasibility of a higher-speed rail connection between Belfast and Dublin and Cork, as identified in the Draft All-Island Strategic Rail Review;
- Protecting distinctive landscapes and rural activities which act as key green spaces and food producing areas between settlements; and
- Building the landmark Narrow Water Bridge to link the Mourne Mountains and Cooley peninsula, providing tourism and connectivity boosts in the region, and enabling improved cross-border active travel including greenways, walking trails and park amenities.

National Policy Objective 58

In co-operation with relevant Departments and Local Authorities in Northern Ireland, to further support and develop the economic potential of the Dublin-Belfast Corridor and in particular the core Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry network and to promote and enhance its international visibility.

North-West Strategic Growth Partnership

The development of the North-West city region, focused on Derry City, Letterkenny and Strabane, is essential to achieving the potential of the North West and maximising its contribution to regional and all-island economic growth. With Government support in Ireland and Northern Ireland, cross-border collaborative arrangements have been developed to provide strategic leadership in the development of the region.

The North West Strategic Growth Partnership, working with both Governments, local communities and the private sector, promotes regional co-operation on planning, environmental protection and management, public services and infrastructural investment, including:

- Building up the critical mass of key urban centres in the wider region;
- Promotion of trade and tourism, innovation, human capital, life-long learning and business development;
- Improving inter-urban transport infrastructure, including through a €600m investment in the A5 North-West transport corridor upgrade and advancing on related N2 and road upgrades in Monaghan and Donegal, and examining recommendations in the Draft All-Island Strategic Rail Review; and
- Better co-ordination of public services such as health and education facilities.

The North West City Region Councils developed an updated statement of regional priorities for the North South Ministerial Council in February 2021. Priorities for the North West City Region as outlined in the National Development Plan include:

- Enhanced high-quality transport links for the region by road, rail, air and sea;
- Investment in innovation and skills through strengthened third level education access and collaboration;
- Implementation of a Green Growth strategy, developing the region's potential in clean and renewable energies; and
- Enhanced cross-border healthcare provision including shared patient catchment and e-health opportunities.



National Policy Objective 59

In co-operation with relevant Departments and Local Authorities in Northern Ireland, support and promote the development of the North West City Region as interlinked areas of strategic importance in the North-West of Ireland, through collaborative structures and a joined-up approach to spatial planning.

Central Border Area

The National Planning Framework sets out a clear road map for the development of strong urban centres in the North West and along the Dublin-Belfast Corridor. Between these two areas, the central border area is predominantly rural in character, but includes a number of county towns and other settlements that fulfil important regional and cross-border economic and service roles for their wider rural hinterlands.

Significant improvements in digital and physical infrastructure, such as the N2/A5 in particular, will create new opportunities, with the central border area strategically connected, located almost equidistant between the Dublin, Belfast and North West City regions.

The NPF supports further growth and investment in the county towns in the central border counties and strengthening accessibility from and to the central border area. From a heritage and tourism perspective, the central border area offers unique, rugged backdrops encompassing drumlins, lakelands, upland bogs and forests, incorporating geology, literature, art, pre-Christian and industrial heritage together with a network of smaller towns and villages on both sides of the border.

The Irish Central Border Area Network of eight member Local Authorities published a Framework of Regional Priorities in March 2021, identifying five interlocking strategic pillars of: economic development; infrastructure and connectivity; human capital; liveable communities; and, greening the region. Key Irish Central Border Area Network objectives include the following:

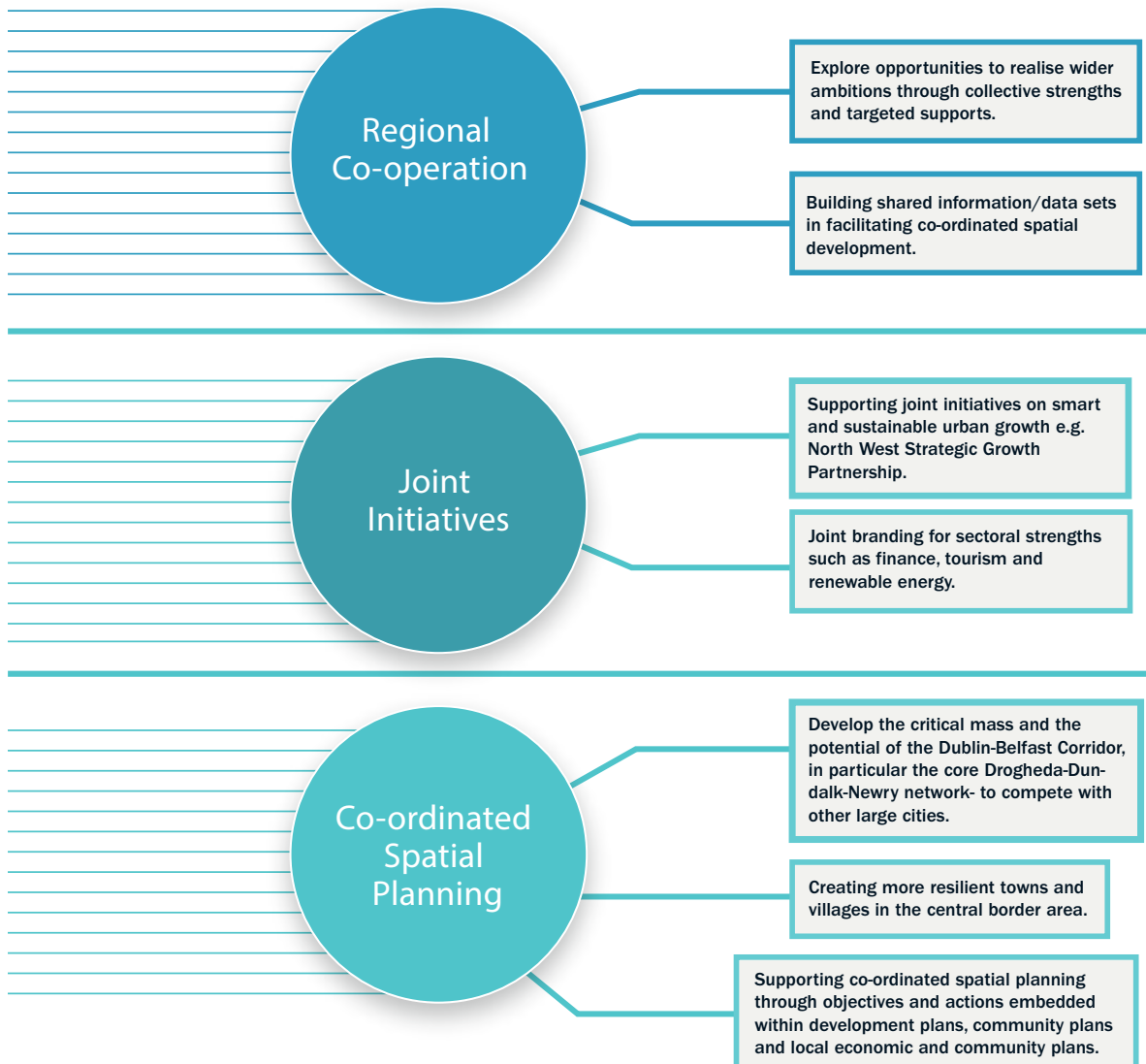
- Core infrastructure projects including road upgrades, enhanced broadband connectivity and regional digital hubs;
- Natural infrastructure initiatives and zones, enhancing the sustainable tourism and well-being potential of the region including through development of a network of cross-border greenways and blueways; mountain biking, food and heritage trails; and river catchment and water management projects.
- Enabling infrastructure to harness the region's capacity and potential, including in the bio-economy and agri-food sectors and sub-regional sectoral strengths³⁸.

Cross-Border Local Initiatives

Reconfiguration of local authority and council structures on both sides of the border presents opportunities for collaboration, in particular for areas such as the North West City Region, the Dublin-Belfast corridor and in central border areas. Building up the economic, infrastructural and developmental ties will be supported through local leadership and co-operation arrangements such as the co-ordination of statutory planning functions and corresponding infrastructural investment.

Three key areas of focus include:

- Regional co-operation arrangements;
- Joint initiatives; and
- Co-ordinated spatial planning.

Figure 8.2 | Areas for Cross-Border Local Co-ordination

8.4 Co-ordination of Investment

Both the National Planning Framework and the Regional Development Strategy for Northern Ireland provide a basis for long-term co-ordination on infrastructure development, including transport, energy and communications and social and community infrastructure.

The Government's Shared Island Fund, the EU PEACE PLUS programme, and partnership approaches with the Northern Ireland Executive and UK Government, provide a strong basis for delivery on strategic investment priorities for a shared island to 2030.

There is a total all-island investment commitment of more than €4billion through the Shared Island Fund, the Project Ireland 2040 funds and Government's annual funding for North/South cooperation, and the PEACE PLUS programme³⁹.

Healthcare and Education

There is the opportunity, in regards to healthcare and social care services, to increase regional access to diagnostic and other services on a cross border basis, deliver eHealth solutions through developing all-island network in digital health, provide specialist health services on an all-island basis and upgrade ambulance services facilities in border regions.

39 National Development Plan 2021 – 2030, Chapter 17 A Shared Island.

Case Study



Restoration of the Ulster Canal

Waterways Ireland is currently progressing the restoration of the 13.5 kilometres of the Ulster Canal from Upper Lough Erne in County Fermanagh to the original Canal Stores building in Clones, County Monaghan.

Phase 2 was completed and officially opened on 19th June 2024. Funding of €6m was provided from the Shared Island Fund, and €5.6m from the Rural Regeneration Fund. The work on this phase included a sustainable water source, a new slipway and marina infrastructure facilitating access to the canal for small craft, two new access bridges, repairs to an existing masonry arch bridge, flood relief culverts, provision of new service block facility, c.1km of restored canal and towpath with looped walk and amenity area.

Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and Monaghan County Council are collaborating on a visitor experience plan to animate and activate Phase 2.

The ambition is *"the development of a Marina that is a unique place to engage with the water and the local heritage: to create a key hub on the waterway, linking directly into the heart of Clones, offering a gateway to Co Monaghan"*.

The Government, through the Shared Island Fund, has provided funding of €40 million for Phase 3 with match funding from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Completion of all Phases of the Ulster Canal restoration project will deliver a landmark sustainable tourism and recreation amenity for the central border area.

The Government will seek to work with the Executive, including through the North South Ministerial Council, to together develop an overarching strategy for healthcare cooperation across the island.

The expansion and delivery of more all-island education connections is important for our shared island. Opportunities to share experience and resources on educational underachievement, special educational needs, early years and integrated education will be pursued. The Shared Learning Together Programme focuses on collaborative opportunities for disadvantaged education settings, use of technology in the classroom and post-primary school and youth based organization partnerships, in border counties north and south and across the island⁴⁰.

It is critical to continue to support collaboration and co-operation between higher and further education institutions on a cross-border basis.

National Policy Objective 60

Support cross border cooperation and funding for health and education services and facilities.

Transport

While there has been significant investment in transport over the past 20 years, the island's growing population together with the continued growth in tourism numbers and freight traffic will place further demands on transportation infrastructure, and the need to decarbonise the connected transport networks across the island will require significant and joined up planning and investment. Over the life of the NPF, increased transport connectivity, including bus and rail services, taking account of the Draft All-Island Strategic Rail Review, potential for increased air connectivity and facilitation of port expansion and maintenance, promotion of cross-border Electric Vehicle charging networks and infrastructure, blueways, greenways, peatways and walking trails will help to create a more connected island.

The Government has committed €600m for the A5 North West transport corridor upgrade, and advancing work on related N2 and road upgrades in Monaghan and Donegal to bring North-West road connectivity on a par with other parts of the island, North and South.

National Policy Objective 61

In co-operation with relevant Departments in Northern Ireland, enhanced sustainable transport connectivity between Ireland and Northern Ireland, to include cross-border road and rail, electric vehicle infrastructure, cycling and walking routes, as well as blueways, greenways and peatways.

Energy

Collaboration in the energy sector, driven by the single electricity market and combined with the development of interconnection such as the East West Interconnector (EWIC) in Ireland and the Moyle Interconnector in Northern Ireland has reduced energy prices, enhanced energy systems resilience and diversification away from a near total reliance on fossil fuels, and supported the island economy.

The need for a new interconnector between the electricity grids of Northern Ireland and Ireland has been acknowledged by the Irish Government and Northern Ireland Executive, and system operators are progressing this project. Delivery of the North/South Interconnector will enhance the performance of the Single Electricity Market, and facilitate the integration of renewable electricity into the power system. Ireland is also working with other countries such as France and the United Kingdom to develop electricity interconnection and will continue to support relationships with our European neighbours to enhance our international connectivity.

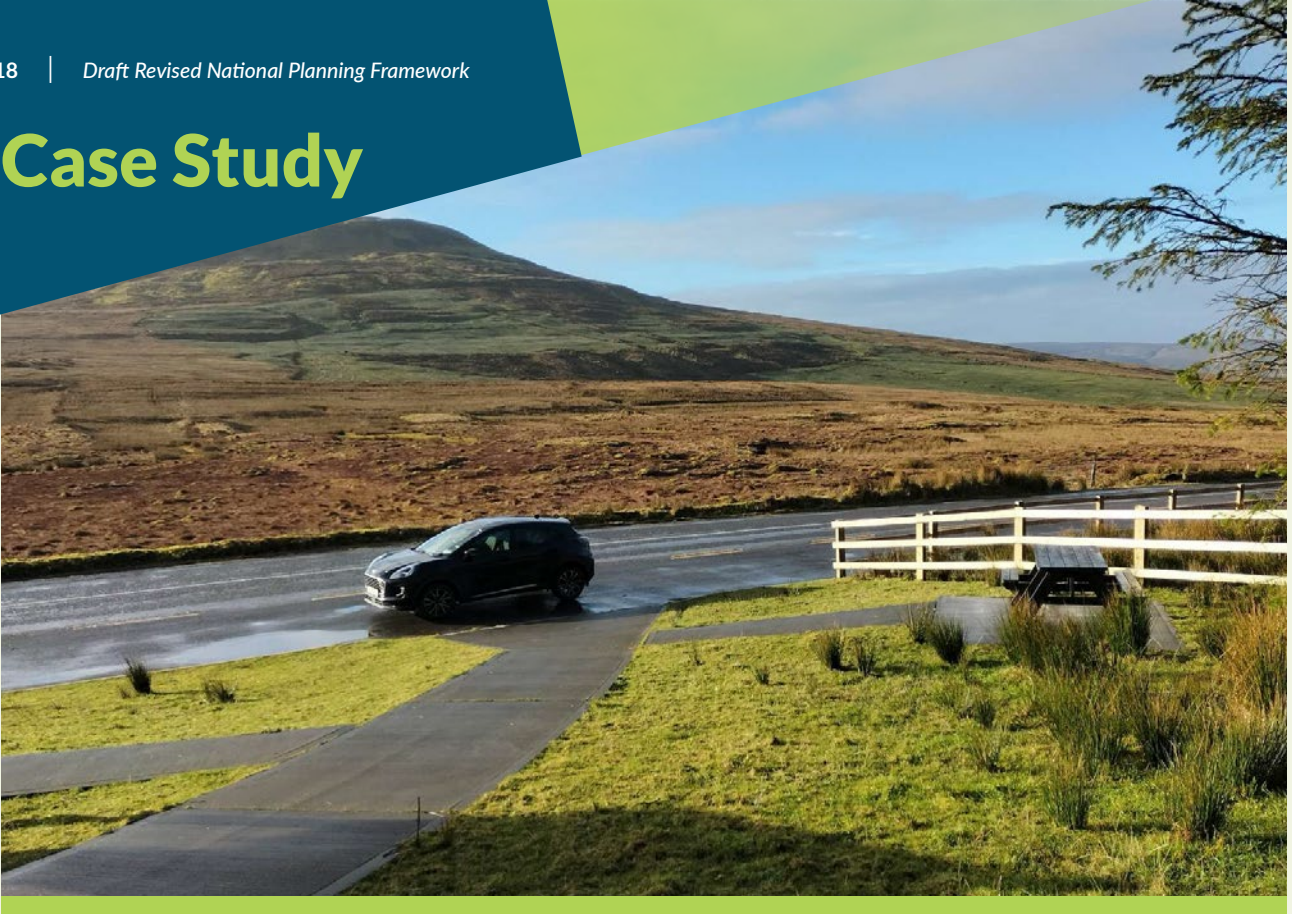
Similarly, increased interconnection to France, United Kingdom and other countries will also require upgrading and strengthening of the grid system. The Transmission System Operator, Eirgrid, are developing an offshore grid system, which will require extensive and ongoing land-sea development to support the National Planning Framework.

Realisation of our offshore energy potential requires a joined-up approach between land and marine spatial planning. New economic opportunities looking to capitalise from ORE need to be spatially aligned to ensure mutually supportive business case and investor certainty.

In order to support the National Planning Framework, additional electrical grid strengthening will be required for parts of the border subject to the necessary planning consents to enhance energy security through further reductions in dependence on fossil fuels, moving towards wind, gas with carbon capture and sequestration, biomass and other renewable sources.

⁴⁰ PEACE PLUS (2021 – 2027) is providing funding, in this regard.

Case Study



Cuilcagh Experience Cooperation Project

Cavan County Council on behalf of Cavan Local Action Group (LAG) developed and delivered in partnership with Fermanagh and Omagh District Council on behalf of Fermanagh & Omagh LAG.

Cuilcagh Mountain (666 metres) is the focal point for the UNESCO designated Cuilcagh Lakelands Global Geopark, which is jointly managed by Cavan County Council and Fermanagh and Omagh District Council. The Geopark covers a large expanse of West Cavan and West Fermanagh, 3,222km² in total and was designated the first cross border Geopark in the world. The ethos of Geoparks centres on a bottom up approach where communities are the drivers and benefactors of the designation.

This will result in a top class recreational and heritage tourism product for locals and visitors alike. It will encourage visitors to experience these lesser known areas of the Geopark and appreciate the natural heritage of this vast landscape. Central to this application was the development of a business engagement programme for the area. The result will be increased tourism provision, enhanced engagement with local communities, through the Geopark communications strategy and existing ambassador programme, and creation of a tangible and lasting engagement programme with local businesses to promote the sustainable development of this unique cross border location.

In the meantime, the South-North gas pipeline, enhanced East-West interconnection between the island, wider UK and European gas networks and ongoing work to harmonise gas transmission arrangements on the island support meeting EU requirements for gas market integration.

Future enhancement of energy security and resilience to support a population of 8 million people will also be supported through progression of further north-south interconnection of electricity grids (refer to Chapter 9).

National Policy Objective 62

In co-operation with relevant Departments in Northern Ireland, strengthen all-island energy infrastructure and interconnection capacity, including distribution and transmission networks to enhance security of electricity supply, and explore the potential for strategic cooperation on offshore wind energy development.

Communications

In the information age, telecommunications networks play a crucial role in enabling social and economic activity. The development of Project Kelvin, an extensive submarine and terrestrial cable deployment that directly connects Northern Ireland to North America, provides critical telecommunications infrastructure to towns and cities throughout the border region.

Further action to strengthen communications links in an island and border context will support the NPF, such as further enhancement of links between the North American continent and the island of Ireland and Europe, direct access to international backbone data systems and the continued roll-out of appropriate public policy and investment interventions such as the National Broadband Plan.

National Policy Objective 63

In co-operation with relevant Departments in Northern Ireland, develop a stable, innovative and secure digital communications and services infrastructure on an all-island basis.

Tourism

Both Ireland and Northern Ireland are attracting the same top four markets from visitors outside of domestic markets, with Fáilte Ireland, Tourism Northern Ireland and Tourism Ireland seeking to capture greater international interest by promoting strategic attractions of scale and signature tourist attractions such as the Wild Atlantic Way and the Titanic Quarter in Belfast.

Further opportunities to maximise market exposure exist through co-operation and themed 'branding bundles' including linking the Causeway Coast with the Wild Atlantic Way and the lakelands border region with Ireland's Ancient East brand. Development of blueways, such as the Shannon- Erne Blueway and greenways such as the Ulster Canal Greenway also offer potential for an enhanced tourism offering throughout the border area. The three tourism agencies are progressing a multi-year cross-border brand collaboration and marketing initiative supported by the Shared Island Fund.

Joint hosting of major sporting events, including of the UEFA EURO2028 Championship by Ireland and the UK, offers major opportunities to internationally showcase the world-class tourism and sports offering of both jurisdictions.

Two Cross-Border Greenway projects are expected to be completed in 2024, namely the Carlingford Lough Greenway between Louth and Down and the North West Greenway Network between Donegal and Derry. These projects, funded through Shared Island and EU funding schemes, will be the only long-distance cycling/walking routes which link Northern Ireland and Ireland. In addition, the Ulster Canal Greenway which runs through counties Monaghan, Cavan, Armagh and Fermanagh constitutes 12 sections primarily running adjacent to a disused canal. Sections are at differing stages of delivery with a 11km section between Clones and Clonfad opened in June 2024, funded by Shared Island fund and the Rural Regeneration Development Fund. There is the potential for existing way-marked trails within border areas in Ireland to link into existing established trails within Northern Ireland to create an island-wide greenway network.

Natural assets and landscapes such as the uplands and lakeland amenities stretching along the border, literary trails and the historic towns networks are also important not just for tourism but also for a shared built and natural heritage. The enhancement of these places and features is important for regional and local development in the border areas and the network of smaller towns and villages and hidden communities on both sides of the border.



Investment in the built and natural heritage of the island and projects that recognise the diverse community, cultural and linguistic traditions of the island will support a connected heritage tourism offering. A renewed visitor experience for the Battle of the Boyne site is being progressed to raise the heritage and tourism profile of the site which has unique historic and community significance on the island. Cross-border heritage parks like the Marble- Arch Caves UNESCO Global Geopark in Fermanagh and Cavan are being further developed and there is on-going work and collaboration between Irish and Northern Irish Authorities in relation to transboundary Royal Sites of Ireland World Heritage bid and Astronomical Observatories of Ireland transboundary World Heritage Tentative List application.

The Government will also continue to grow funding for a wide-range of cross-border initiatives in arts and culture and protect and develop the Irish language and Ulster Scots traditions across the island including through the North South language bodies.

National Policy Objective 64

Support the coordination and promotion of all-island tourism initiatives through continued co-operation between the relevant tourism agencies and Tourism Ireland, pursue the further development of sport, and invest in the diverse heritage, arts and cultural and linguistic traditions of the island.

8.5 Managing our Shared Environment Responsibly

The island of Ireland is a single ecological entity. Well-coordinated cross-border approaches are essential for effective planning and investment actions, in addressing the generational challenges of climate breakdown and the biodiversity crisis, and protecting the common environmental resources of the island.

The European Green Deal will continue to shape Ireland's approach to addressing climate change and environmental degradation, and the Government will work with the Executive through the North South Ministerial Council and with the UK Government to coordinate and optimise approaches for the island of Ireland as a whole.

The Environmental Protection Agency, Marine Institute, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and other agencies will continue to work in close partnership with their Northern Ireland counterparts. Wider engagement - including by researchers, environmental, economic and civil society stakeholders on the island - is also critical for the necessary whole of society action on tackling climate change and environmental conservation and will be supported.

Coordinated planning and cooperation on delivery of sustainable transport networks and renewable energy infrastructure are strategic priorities. The Government will also pursue coordinated all-island approaches including on the circular economy, protection of our shared marine and coastal environment and biodiversity protection. Ireland is a Party to the UNECE Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (the Espoo Convention), which, places an obligation on contracting Parties to consult each other on proposed development that may have transboundary environmental impacts. The Espoo Convention is a key tool for placing a greater emphasis on environmental protection by focusing on transparency, public participation, mitigation and monitoring of environmental effects.

Ireland has a longstanding transboundary environmental impact assessment (EIA) relationship with the UK as our nearest neighbour. Since the UK left the European Union, the relevance of the Espoo Convention has increased, as the UK is also a Party to the Convention, meaning that it is the main legal mechanism underpinning a continued transboundary EIA consultation relationship, which was previously underpinned by the EU EIA Directive.

The island-wide context for climate action, air and water quality and biodiversity conservation and the protection of our shared heritage assets needs to be supported for the necessary whole of society action on tackling climate change and environmental conservation. Delivery of island-wide electric vehicle and other sustainable transport networks and renewable energy infrastructure are critical in tackling climate change. It is also necessary to pursue coordinated all-island approaches to the circular economy, protection of our shared marine and coastal environment and biodiversity protection⁴¹.

Catchment- based strategies require management by both jurisdictions and a number of jointly funded North-South Implementation Bodies have roles and responsibilities in these areas in addition to co-ordination through the North South Ministerial Council.

With the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union there is no longer a requirement, as stated in the EU Water Framework Directive (WFD), to coordinate efforts between both jurisdictions in relation to international river basin districts with the aim of producing a single management plan. However, both jurisdictions are committed through their respective river basin management plans to carrying full responsibility for the implementation of all measures in their national territory, including any part of an International River Basin District that lies within their national territory. The island of Ireland is recognised as a single environmental unit where:

- substantial areas lie within cross-border river basins;
- some waters in each jurisdiction flow into or through the other jurisdiction;
- the rivers and lakes of the island of Ireland are designated as being within a single eco-region (eco-region 17) requiring a high degree of coordination between the authorities in both jurisdictions, to ensure consistent management of the entire aquatic environment;
- all coastal and transitional waters surrounding the island of Ireland are also included in one eco-region (eco-region 1) and their management must be closely coordinated; and
- there are also 37 cross-border groundwater bodies which are shared between the two jurisdictions and require coordinated management.

⁴¹ Strategic investment priorities for a more sustainable island are set out on page 167, National Development Plan 2021 – 2030.

In supporting environmental responsibilities under the National Planning Framework, shared action on our shared environment will ensure coordination between the two jurisdictions by:

- Aligning planning policies and river basin catchment management plans for whole river systems under the Water Framework Directive;
- Co-ordination in landscape character assessment including management and marketing of world heritage sites and candidate world heritage sites;
- Protection and enhancement of nationally important habitats including adjoining and cross-border protected sites;
- Co-ordination of relevant planning policies affecting shared coastal waters and seas; and
- Co-ordinated investment to conserve cross-border region peatlands to support biodiversity, provide valuable ecosystem services and act as carbon sinks.

National Policy Objective 65

In co-operation with relevant Departments in Northern Ireland, ensuring effective management of shared landscapes, heritage, water catchments, habitats, species and trans-boundary issues in relation to environmental policy.

8.6 Ireland and England, Scotland and Wales

Further to the European Spatial Development Perspective in 1999, Ireland was one of the first countries in Europe to publish a national-scale spatial plan through the National Spatial Strategy in 2002. Since then, such an approach to national planning has become the norm across Europe.

Each of our closest neighbours in the UK has spatial plans for their constituent administrative areas or is in the process of producing new plans. These include the Regional Development Strategy in Northern Ireland, and Planning Frameworks in Scotland, Wales and England.

In the face of multiple global challenges, cross-border working is of importance to greater territorial cohesion and highlighting opportunities for future growth and development. At a national level, the Irish Government is committed to working with our neighbours on national issues of common interest.

From a national planning perspective, the work of the British-Irish Council provides an important forum through which practical co-operation and information sharing amongst the respective Governments and devolved administrations is helping to co-ordinate development in areas such as spatial planning, infrastructure connectivity, transboundary environmental issues and renewable energy.

National Policy Objective 66

In co-operation with the United Kingdom Government and devolved Governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, Ireland will support mutually beneficial policy development and activity in the areas of spatial and infrastructure planning and other related sphere.



In the face of multiple global challenges, cross- border working is of importance to greater territorial cohesion and highlighting opportunities for future growth and development.



9

Climate Transition and Our Environment

Ireland's environment and its diverse landscapes form part of our 'green' persona and we have much to be proud of.

9.1 Climate and Environmental Capacity

Ireland's environment and its diverse landscapes form part of our 'green' persona and we have much to be proud of.

Key national environmental challenges include the need to accelerate action on climate change, health risks to drinking water, treating urban waste water, protecting important and vulnerable habitats as well as diminishing wild countryside and dealing with air quality problems in urban areas. It is also important to make space for nature into the future, as our population increases.

The manner in which we plan is important for the sustainability of our environment. Our 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, protection of designated sites and species, coastal and marine management, climate mitigation and adaptation, and land use change.

As part of the National Planning Framework, in line with the EU vision of living well, within our limits and in support of environmental policy at European and national level, Government will address our environmental challenges through the following overarching aims:

Resource Efficiency and Transition to a Zero Carbon Economy



Sustainable Land Management and Resource Efficiency

Adopting the principles of the circular economy to enable more sustainable planning and land use management of our natural resources and assets.



Zero Carbon Economy

Our need to accelerate action on climate change.



Renewable Energy

Our transition to a Zero carbon energy future.



Managing Waste

Adequate capacity and systems to manage waste in an environmentally safe and sustainable manner.

Protecting, Conserving and Enhancing Our Natural Capital



Sustainable Water Management

Consideration of flood risk in planning and development management and treating urban waste water.



Green and Blue Infrastructure Planning

Protecting and valuing our important and vulnerable habitats, landscapes, natural heritage and green spaces.

Creating a Clean Environment for a Healthy Society



Water Quality

Recognising the links and addressing on-going challenges between development activity, water quality and our health.



Promoting Cleaner Air

Addressing air quality problems in urban and rural areas through better planning and design.



Noise Management

Incorporating consistent measures to avoid, mitigate and minimise or promote the pro-active management of noise.

National Policy Objective 67

The planning system will be responsive to our national environmental challenges and ensure that development occurs within environmental limits, having regard to the medium and longer-term requirements of all relevant environmental and climate legislation and the sustainable management of our natural capital.

9.2 Resource Efficiency and Transition to a Zero Carbon Economy

Climate Action and Planning

The global climate is changing and the changes underway will have consequences for Ireland in the period to 2040 and beyond. It is necessary to address the long term causes of climate change through reducing our greenhouse gas emissions, while adapting to its impacts over the short, medium and longer terms.

The Government has committed to achieving targets underpinned by the adoption of a series of carbon budgets and national Climate Action Plans over the period to 2050, informed by UN and EU policy. These actions are also underpinned by other key national policies including the National Development Plan, National Adaptation Framework and by Sectoral Adaptation Plans.

In addition to legally binding targets agreed at EU level, it is a national objective for Ireland to transition to be a competitive zero carbon, economy no later than 2050.

Meeting our commitments will require investment and ambitious and effective action across all sectors, as well as societal behavioural change.

As an island, it is in our interest to ensure we respond to climate change and its impacts such as sea level change, more frequent and sustained rainfall events and greater vulnerability of low-lying areas to flooding. Our most densely populated areas, including our cities, are potentially vulnerable if we do not take the appropriate steps in flood risk management. Climate change also has significant consequences for food production and biodiversity.

If Ireland is to make up for lost ground in relation to carbon reduction targets and move towards the objective of a zero carbon and climate resilient Ireland by 2050, it is necessary to make choices about how we balance growth with more sustainable approaches to development and land use and to examine how planning policy can help shape national infrastructural decisions.

In addition, Ireland's forests play an important role in helping with climate change mitigation, through carbon sequestration in forests and the provision of renewable fuels and raw materials. Irish forestry is a major carbon sink and afforestation is the most significant mitigation option that is available to Ireland's land use sector.

The planning process provides an established means through which to implement and integrate climate change objectives, including mitigation and adaptation, at local level. Planning legislation also requires different levels of the planning process to address climate change.

The Environmental Protection Agency⁴² highlights that human activity has led to widespread and rapid changes in all components of the global climate system with recent extreme events in Ireland highlighting the vulnerability of individuals, communities, sectors and ecosystems to climate change and indicate an adaptation deficit. Solutions need to be implemented across all sectors and society. Ireland's environmental challenges cut across different environmental topics, such as climate, air, soil, water, biodiversity and waste, and across organisations and sectors, business and all levels of society.

Irish forestry is a major carbon sink and afforestation is the most significant mitigation option that is available to Ireland's land use sector.



⁴² Ireland's Climate Change Assessment, 2023 Environmental Protection Agency

Environmental and source capacity needs to be a key consideration when identifying growth areas. The capacity of the environment and the natural resource is critical to achieving sustainable development.

Since 2018, there have been significant responses to address the climate crisis in the form of EU Directives, national legislation and policy approaches, including the following:

- EU Action Plan: Towards Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil, 2021
- EU Fit for 55 package
- The recast Renewable Energy Directive (Directive EU/2018/2001 and amending Directive EU/2023/2413)
- Energy Performance in Buildings Directive (EPBD)
- The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021
- Climate Action Plan 2023 (subject to annual reviews)
- Phase 1 of the Land Use Review
- A Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy 2020
- Circular Economy and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2022
- Circular Economy Strategy 2022
- BioEconomy Action Plan 2023 – 2025
- National Adaptation Framework
- Sectoral Adaptation Plans
- Forest Strategy Implementation Plan including the Forestry Programme 2023-2027 (refer to Rural Chapter)
- European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 to 2021
- Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030
- Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023
- National Smart Specialisation Strategy for Innovation 2022-2027 [High Level Strategic Goal No. 5]

Emerging Legislation and Policy approaches include:

- Proposal for a Regulation of the European Critical Raw Materials Act, 2023
- Proposal for a European Net Zero Industry Act, 2023
- Proposal for a European Nature Restoration Law
- Proposal for a Directive on an EU Carbon Removal Certification Framework
- Proposal for an EU Soil Monitoring and Resilience (Soil Monitoring Law)
- Draft National Biomethane Strategy
- Phase 2 of the Land Use Review
- Climate Action Plan 2024
- The EU Action Plan for Grids, Actions to accelerate the roll-out of electricity grids (europa.eu)

This Framework can support the response to climate change by encouraging the reduction of greenhouse gases through a variety of measures including;

- the achievement of our compact growth objectives and the consequential reduction of overall land take;
- the interaction between land use planning and transport infrastructure, associated potential for carbon emissions reductions resulting from reduced commuting patterns associated with future growth;
- promoting re-use of existing buildings to reduce emissions associated with new construction;
- the continued reduction in dependency on imported fossil fuels and decarbonisation of the energy system as a whole and in particular the electricity sector through the identification of targets for renewable electricity and the accelerated roll out of on-shore wind energy and solar development;
- encouraging climate resilient planning policies;
- limiting inappropriate developments in areas where climate impacts are likely to be most severe;
- Providing guidance to local authorities on climate resilient planning practises including nature based solutions.

Sustainable Land Management and Resource Efficiency

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 and new infrastructure, which have resulted in pressure on agricultural land, designated nature conservation areas and water quality.

In catering for an additional one million people and a move towards renewable energy sources, increased demand for land is likely to include the identification of suitable locations for renewable energy and associated grid connections, bioenergy supply, waste management, agricultural food production, forestry, and other land services alongside the need to consolidate our existing cities, towns, and villages with the building of more houses, schools, industry, and other facilities while protecting the cultural heritage significance of the historic built environment and cultural landscapes and the conservation and restoration of nature. Competition for land resources needs careful management and the nature and rate of land use change indicates where future environmental pressures are likely to arise. It is important that synergies between utilities and infrastructure delivery partners are explored and that the environmental capacity of the receiving environment is considered in an integrated manner in policy and plan-making.

Land Use Review

The Programme for Government⁴³ committed to a Land Use Review to ensure that optimal land use options inform all relevant Government decisions. The Land Use Review seeks to optimise land use to achieve environmental objectives in relation to climate, air, biodiversity and water while also supporting the achievement of socio-economic objectives in rural and urban areas.

Phase I of the Land Use Review⁴⁴ provides an evidence base to determine the environmental, ecological and economic characteristics of land types across Ireland.

Phase 2 of the Land Use Review commenced on 26 October 2023 and seeks to identify the key demands on land (both public and private) to inform policies for land use across key Government objectives, improving socioeconomic, climate, biodiversity, water, and air quality outcomes.

Circular Economy

Ireland is advancing its development as a circular economy and bio economy where the value of all products, materials and resources is maintained for as long as possible and waste is significantly reduced or even eliminated. Further developing the circular economy will require greater efficiency with raw materials, energy, water, space and food by reusing natural resources wherever possible and where smartly-designed products based on alternative plastic feedstock and recyclable materials will form the basis of smart material cycles, in order to create less waste and reduce resource consumption. Buildings themselves form part of the circular economy, and measures which promote re-use over demolition or dereliction will reduce waste as well as retaining density and protecting heritage.

The European Commission adopted the circular economy action plan (CEAP) in March 2020. A recycling rate of 65% has been proposed by the European Commission for 2030 for the Circular Economy Package.

A focus of the circular economy approach is on reducing material resource consumption, the prevention and designing out of waste and to effect behavioural change at an individual, household, and business level.

The Circular Economy and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2022⁴⁵ provides a statutory framework for moving from a focus on managing waste, to a much greater focus on adapting patterns of production and consumption; preventing waste generation; and extending the productive life of all goods and products. The Circular Economy Strategy published in 2022 sets a course for Ireland to transition across all sectors toward circularity.

Bio-based material, such as wood, crops or fibres, can be used for a wide range of products and energy uses. Apart from providing an alternative to fossil-based products, bio-based materials are also renewable, biodegradable and compostable. At the same time, using biological resources requires attention to their lifecycle, environmental impacts and sustainable sourcing.

This circular economy approach is also applicable to land use management. This Framework sets out recycling rates for the reuse of brownfield land by requiring 40% of new housing to be built within infill and brownfield lands and encourages reuse of existing building stock.

43 Programme for Government <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/>

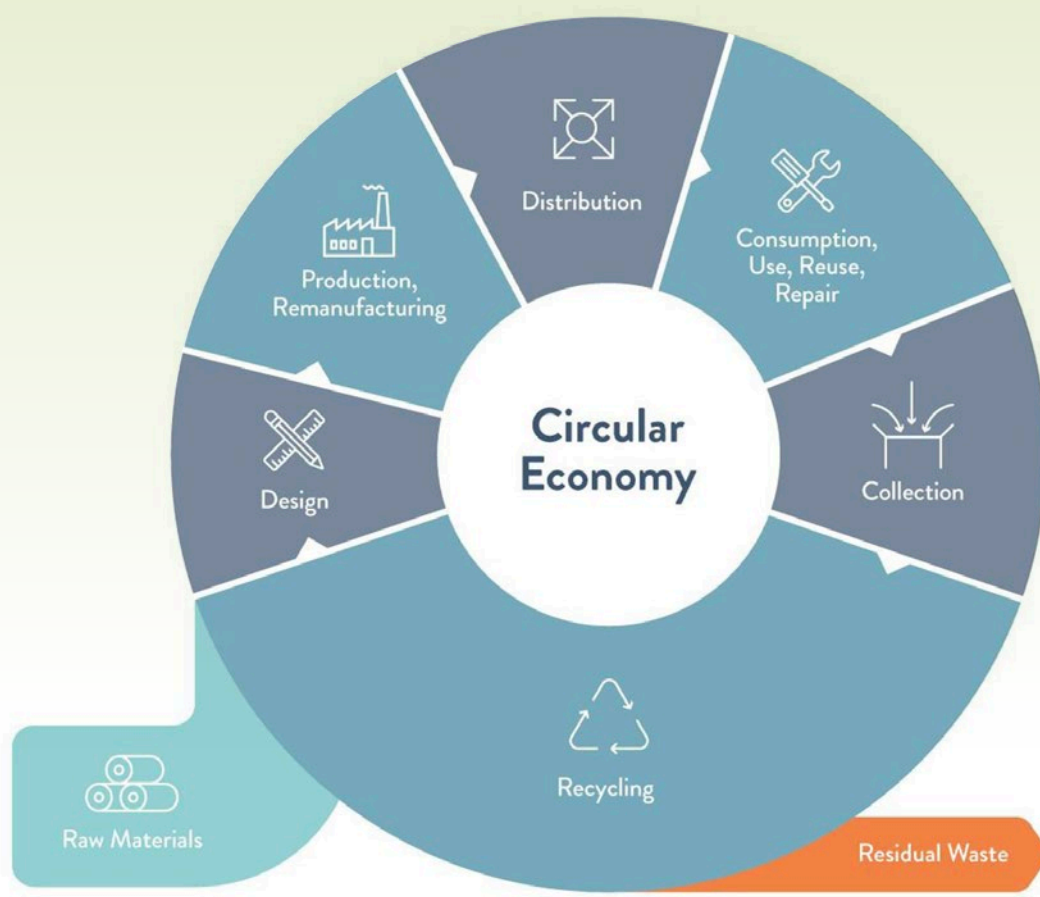
44 Land Use Review Phase 1 [gov.ie - Land Use Review - Phase 1 \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e05d-programme-for-government-our-shared-future/)

45 published by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications (DECC)

Circular Economy Programme

The Environmental Protection Agency leads the Circular Economy Programme, a Government of Ireland initiative, and a statutory programme under the Circular Economy Act, 2022.

The Programme's vision is an Ireland where the Circular Economy ensures that everyone uses less resources and prevents waste to achieve sustainable economic growth. The Programme delivers activities to implement, regulate and measure the circular economy.



Case Study

Bio-economy

The Shared Island Fund was announced in Budget 2021, with €500 million in capital funding available between 2021-2025 ring-fenced for investment in collaborative North-South projects.

As part of the Shared Island Fund, the government has awarded €7 million for a Bio-economy Demonstration Initiative Scheme to invest in sustainable, innovative, and circular bio-economy development on a shared Island basis, with the aim of transforming the agri-food sector and creating jobs in the rural and coastal economy and sustaining rural and coastal communities. The Department of Agriculture, Food and Marine (DAFM) is working in consultation with the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) in Northern Ireland to develop the opportunity on an all-Island basis to encourage the development of sustainable and circular projects for the agri-bio-economy and blue bio-economy across the Island of Ireland.

InterTrade Ireland and All Island Biomap <https://intertradeireland.com/innovation/synergy/all-island-biomap>. The Irish Bio-economy Foundation (IBF) is a cluster operating in Ireland to promote the conversion of natural resources to high-value products, for the development of a sustainable bio-economy.

The IBF developed a 'biomap' with the help of Intertrade Ireland to provide a view of the marketplace and the potential for a bio-economy in Ireland. The all-island biomap was able to document the value chain of 48 companies with a 50:50 ratio based across Ireland and Northern Ireland.

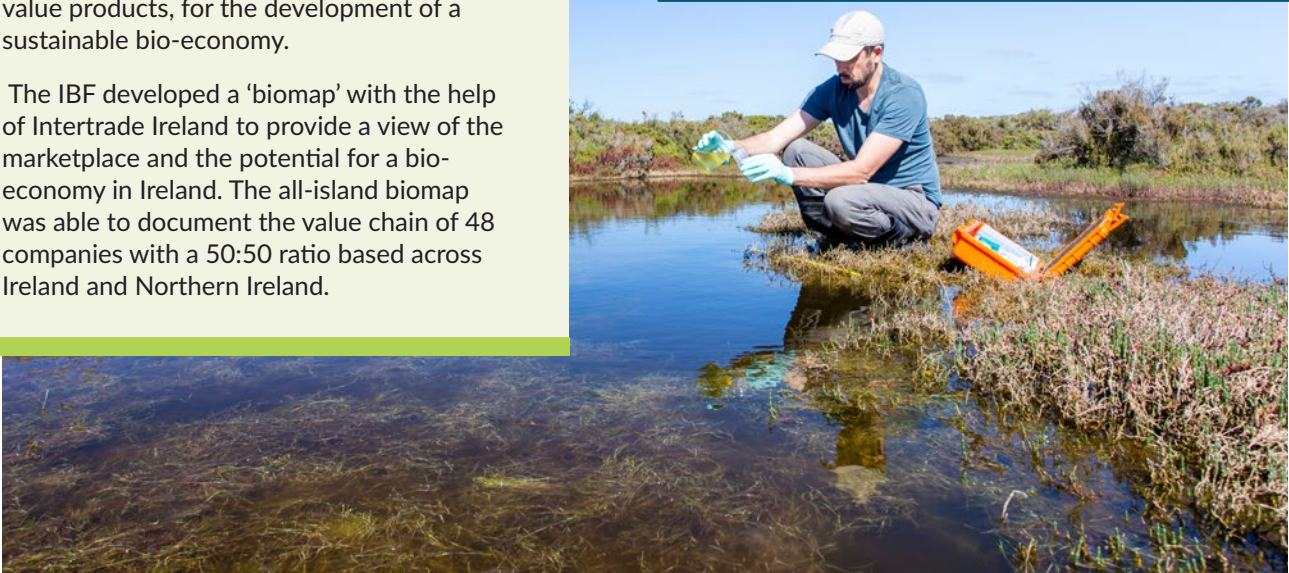
The extent to which we prioritise brownfield over greenfield use, encourage the use and reuse of buildings in urban and rural areas, and reduce sprawl, will all help to increase the efficiency of land use and the pace of soil sealing i.e. the covering of the ground by an impermeable material which can result in soil degradation. Other examples include co-location and clustering of uses and infrastructure such as schools and sports facilities, renewable technologies and large energy demand users, land intensive industry and enterprise.

Circular Bioeconomy

While rural and coastal areas have the potential for, and will develop, many types of economic activities, those activities associated with the bio-economy such as development of new bio-refining technologies represent a competitive advantage. The bio-economy comprises "the production of renewable biological resources - such as crops, forests, fish, animals, and micro-organisms and the conversion of these resources and waste stream residues, by-products or municipal solid waste into value added products, such as food, feed, bio-based products and bioenergy" (European Commission, 2012). The transition to a more circular and bio economy, where the value of bio-based products, materials and resources is maintained in the economy for as long as possible, and the generation of waste minimised, will provide an essential contribution to our national goal of developing a sustainable, low-carbon, resource efficient and competitive economy.

National Policy Objective 68

Support the circular and bio economy including in particular through greater efficiency in land and materials management, promoting the sustainable re-use of existing buildings and structures, while conserving cultural and natural heritage, the greater use of renewable resources and by reducing the rate of land use change from urban sprawl and new development.



Aggregates and Minerals

Extractive industries are important for the supply of aggregates and construction materials and minerals to a variety of sectors, for both domestic requirements and for export. The planning process will play a key role in realising the potential of the extractive industries sector by identifying and protecting important reserves of aggregates and minerals from development that might prejudice their utilisation.

Aggregates and minerals extraction will continue to be enabled where this is compatible with the protection of the environment in terms of air and water quality, natural and cultural heritage, the quality of life of residents in the vicinity, and provides for appropriate site rehabilitation particularly with respect to opportunities that may be provided for enhancement or restoration of nature in line with EU policies, such as the EU Green Deal and EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020, and legislative instruments.

Critical raw materials are of high economic importance for Europe while being also highly vulnerable to supply disruptions. Critical raw materials are confronted with a growing global demand, driven by the decarbonisation of economies. In March 2023, the EU Commission proposed the Critical Raw Materials Act, one of the three key legislative initiatives of the Green Deal Industrial Plan, to enhance the competitiveness of Europe's net-zero industry and support a rapid transition to climate neutrality. It provides for a set of Actions to ensure the EU's access to a secure, diversified, affordable and sustainable supply of critical raw materials.

Biomethane

Biomethane is a carbon-neutral renewable gas made from farm and food waste through a process known as anaerobic digestion. A National Biomethane Strategy has been published⁴⁶ which requires the development of policies with the primary objective of delivering the ambitious target of producing 5.7 TWh of indigenous biomethane by 2030.

It is estimated that over 80% of biomethane will be produced from grass silage and cattle slurry. This will require grass from 120,000ha (3% of total agricultural area) to produce the required feedstock.

To meet Ireland's target of 5.7 TWh of biomethane by 2030, a large number of anaerobic digestion facilities will need to be developed, alongside the related infrastructure necessary to support these facilities.

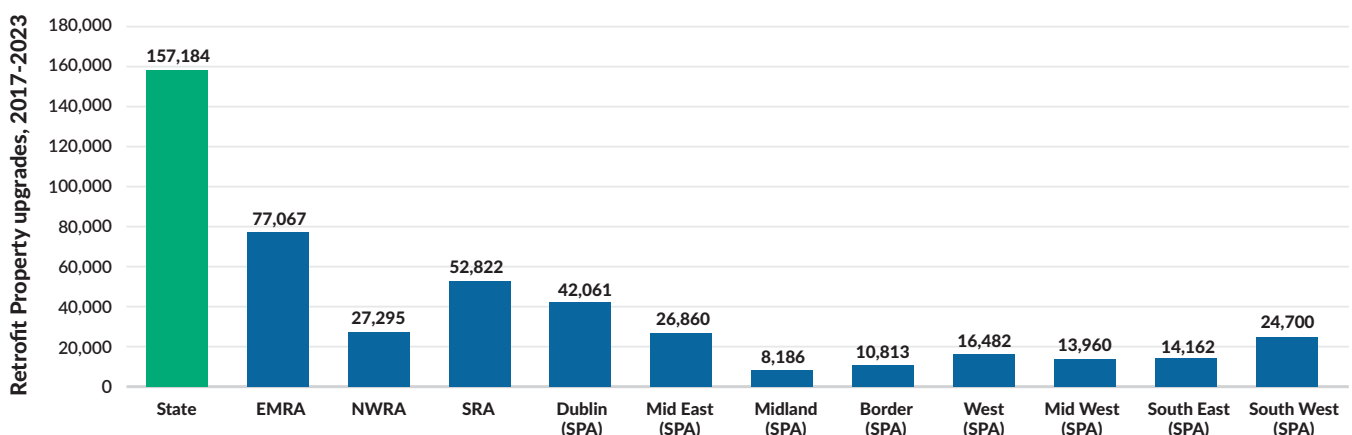
Forestry

Ireland's forests play an important role in helping with climate change mitigation, through carbon sequestration in forests and the provision of renewable fuels and raw materials. Irish forestry is a major carbon sink and afforestation is the most significant mitigation option that is available to Ireland's land use sector (refer to Chapter 5).

Built Environment

In relation to residential and commercial buildings, the built environment accounted for 11.1% of Ireland's greenhouse gases in 2022, down from 12.3% in 2021. This reduction reflects significant strengthening of the Building Regulations from 2006 onwards, improved efficiency through retrofit, the adoption of new low carbon technologies and fuel switching. Since the introduction of the Nearly Zero Energy Building (NZEB) standard in 2019⁴⁷, the proportion of new dwellings that use fossil fuels has their source of space heating has decreased from 50% to 11%.

Figure 9.1 | Number of Retrofit Property Upgrades 2017-2023 (SEAI retrofitting Programme)



Source: All Island Research Observatory (AIRO), Maynooth University

⁴⁶ Department of Agriculture Food and the Marine and the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications

⁴⁷ The revised Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD) makes zero-emission buildings the new standard for new buildings.

Heating

The National Heat Study Report 2022 identified that a combination of district heating, biomethane and heat pumps in homes, businesses and industry will play a vital role in fast decarbonisation. Through new building regulations, 90% of new build homes are now using renewable heat. The national retrofit programme will play a significant role in making older dwellings more energy efficient and support the deployment of heat pumps in older dwellings.

District heating can also play a key role in improving energy efficiency and reducing emissions in Ireland particularly in tandem with the delivery of largescale development and higher densities. It can offer flexibility in fuel choice and could therefore be suited to wide scale decarbonisation of heating systems, and in buildings that are difficult to retrofit. CAP23 has identified a target of up to 0.8 TWh of district heating installed capacity across both the residential and commercial building stock by 2025, and up to 2.7 TWh by 2030.

National Policy Objective 69

Support the growth and development of efficient district heating, electrification of heating, and utilisation of geothermal energy.

Net Zero Industry and Technology

A proposal for the Net Zero Industry Act (NZIA) was published by the European Commission in March 2023, and is a key element of Pillar 1 of the Green Deal Industrial Plan. The aim of NZIA is to scale up net-zero technology manufacturing in the EU to provide at least 40% of the EU's annual deployment needs for strategic net-zero technologies by 2030.

Under the National Planning Framework the Government will support:

- **Integrating climate considerations into statutory plans and guidelines** In order to reduce vulnerability to negative impacts and avoid inappropriate forms of development in vulnerable areas.
- **More energy efficient development** through the location of housing and employment along sustainable public transport corridors, where people can choose to use less energy intensive public transport, rather than being dependent on the car.
- **The roll-out of renewables and protection and enhancement of carbon pools** such as forests, peatlands and permanent grasslands. It is necessary to ensure that climate change continues to be taken into account as a matter of course in planning-related decision making processes.
- The development of **sustainable supply chains** in the bio economy.
- **Grey adaptation** which typically involves technical or engineering-oriented responses to climatic impacts, such as the construction of sea walls in response to a sea-level rise.
- **Green and Blue adaptation including nature based solutions** which seeks to use ecological properties to enhance the resilience of human and natural systems in the face of climate change, such as creation of green and blue spaces and parks and waterways to enable better management of urban micro-climates.



National Policy Objective 70

Reduce our carbon footprint by integrating climate action into the planning system in support of national targets for climate policy mitigation and adaptation objectives, as well as targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions as expressed in the most recently adopted carbon budgets.

Energy Policy and Planning

Ireland's national energy policy is focused on three pillars: (1) sustainability, (2) security of supply and (3) competitiveness. The Government recognise that Ireland must reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the energy sector by at least 80% by 2050, compared to 1990 levels, while at the same time ensuring security of supply of competitive energy sources to our citizens and businesses.

Our transition to a zero carbon energy future requires:

- **A shift from predominantly fossil fuels to predominantly renewable energy sources;**
- **Increasing efficiency and upgrades to appliances, buildings and systems;**
- **Decisions around development and deployment of new technologies relating to areas such as wind, smartgrids, electric vehicles, buildings, ocean energy and bio energy; and**
- **Legal and regulatory frameworks to meet demands and challenges in transitioning to a zero carbon society.**

Increases in population, economic growth, higher levels of food demand, transitioning to a more sustainable energy market and conservation goals will ultimately result in increased competition for suitable land to facilitate these accumulating pressures. Some parts of Ireland are more suitable than others for facilitating particular national sectoral aims by reason of physical factors, environmental sensitivities, land capacity and existing settlement patterns.

In the energy sector, transition to a zero carbon economy from renewable sources of energy is an integral part of Ireland's climate change strategy and renewable energies are a means of reducing our reliance on fossil fuels.

Renewable Electricity

Government has set ambitious targets to achieve 9 GW of onshore wind, 5 GW of offshore wind and 8 GW of solar by 2030, as well as supporting at least 500 MW of local community-based renewable energy projects and increased levels of new micro-generation and small-scale generation.

The accelerated delivery of additional renewable electricity generation is therefore essential for Ireland to meet its climate targets, reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, and improve its energy security by reducing reliance on imported fossil fuels and diversifying its electricity supply. A diversified energy portfolio from multiple sources is required, onshore wind, solar, and gas will remain a contributor for energy security) and this will require the upgrading and development of a range of key infrastructure, offshore and onshore, to support a secure and reliable energy supply amid projections of rapid electricity growth over the decade.

Renewable electricity generation cannot be considered in isolation from its means of connection to both the national electricity transmission and lower-voltage distribution grids. The wholesale electricity market operates on an all-island basis, coordinated by the Single Electricity Market Operator. It is imperative that the national grid is developed and upgraded to accommodate increasing levels of demand and supply. It is also necessary that strong interconnection continues in an all-island context to support a secure electricity supply and facilitate regional development.

As well as the national targets for the electricity sector, there are also regulatory and policy developments at an EU level that require Ireland to move towards a rapid reduction in reliance on fossil fuels. These include the REPowerEU Plan proposed by the European Commission, which seeks to support the expansion of renewable infrastructure through a number of measures such as streamlining the permitting processes for wind and solar projects and specific arrangements for the repowering of existing installed capacity. The recast Renewable Energy Directive III ("RED III") requires Member States to identify "renewables acceleration areas". This will have spatial implications in relation to where renewable energy developments can be prioritised for delivery.

In addition to installing new renewable energy plants, repowering of existing renewable energy power plants has significant potential to contribute to the achievement of national renewable energy targets and is a central component of EU accelerated renewable electricity policy strategy, including the REPowerEU Plan.

Rural Areas and Energy Production

Rural areas will continue to contribute to the energy needs of the country playing a strong role in securing a sustainable renewable energy supply. Renewable energy is being championed as a significant new source of jobs and rural growth in OECD countries.

In planning Ireland's future energy landscape and in transitioning to a net zero carbon economy, the ability to diversify and adapt to new energy technologies is essential. Innovative and novel renewable solutions have been delivered in rural areas over the last number of years, particularly from solar, and wind energy sources.

Development of renewable energy generation can include co-location with agricultural activities that supports both a reduction in carbon emissions and land-use diversification options for farmers in line with the carbon budget programme and the Climate Action Plan. Opportunities also exist for co-location of renewable technology in areas, alongside transport infrastructure corridors, within forestry lands, and on industrial and post-industrial peatlands. In addition, the co-location of future offshore renewable energy generation and green industrial demand is signalled as a significant economic development opportunity for rural and coastal communities in the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment's *Powering Prosperity – Ireland's Offshore Wind Industrial Strategy*.

While rural areas will continue to play a strong role in ensuring a secure energy future, there is potential to develop renewable energy projects and enabling infrastructure, on urban, commercial, and industrial sites – including on brownfield lands and along transport infrastructure corridors – where they can be successfully integrated with complementary uses in the same site and nearby compatible land uses. Taking this approach can potentially make more efficient use of land and existing infrastructure and unlock underutilised renewable energy potential in areas that are environmentally robust.

Renewable energy can greatly stimulate economic growth for communities through job creation, revenue generated through commercial rates, and Community Benefit Funds. Communities can benefit greatly through community benefit funds established by developers of renewable energy projects. Community Benefit Funds are used for the wider cultural, environmental, and economic well-being of the local community.

Making a Just Transition

In relation to peatlands, some of Ireland's cutaway bogs are suitable to facilitate the generation of energy, most notably wind/biomass. Considering the significant amount of peatlands in the ownership of semi-State bodies, a medium to longer-term strategic national land use plan for peatlands in State ownership will be prepared in order to manage their most appropriate future use, building on the existing National Peatlands Strategy and other national policy related to peatlands conservation and management.

Supporting the Just Transition meaning that local communities and citizens in particular in the Midlands region can participate in the transformations underway across society, including in the energy sector.

Peatlands cover 21% of our land area, and 64% of our total soil organic carbon stock; they are the largest store of carbon in the Irish landscape. Accordingly, a careful balance will be required between the realising the potential for renewable energy development to meet sectoral emissions targets, and the management of the potential for environmental impacts in terms of the protection and restoration of nature and cultural heritage in peatlands.



**Griston Bog,
Ballylanders,
Co Limerick**

National Policy Objective 71

Promote renewable energy use and generation at appropriate locations within the built and natural environment to meet national objectives towards achieving a zero carbon economy by 2050.

National Policy Objective 72

Support the development and upgrading of the national electricity grid infrastructure, including to support the delivery of renewable electricity generating development.

National Policy Objective 73

Support an all-island approach to the delivery of renewable electricity through interconnection of the transmission grid.

National Policy Objective 74

Support the co-location of renewable technologies with other supporting technologies and complementary land uses, including agriculture, amenity, forestry and opportunities to enhance biodiversity and promote heritage assets, at appropriate locations which are determined based upon the best available scientific evidence in line with EU and national legislative frameworks.

Regional Renewable Electricity Capacity Allocations

In order to facilitate the accelerated roll-out and implementation of renewable electricity infrastructure for onshore wind and solar generation development and to achieve the national targets set out in the Climate Action Plan 2023, this Framework indicates a range of regional renewable electricity capacity allocations. These allocations are to be integrated into the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and the associated Regional Renewable Energy Strategies and in addition are to be translated to county-level targets that will inform city and county development plans.

Having regard to this evaluation, each Region must plan for sufficient wind and solar energy development in order to achieve the regional renewable electricity capacity allocations outlined in Table 9.1, (and in addition to current installed energised capacity), in order to facilitate the 2030 national renewable electricity generation targets. The RRES roadmap will provide further guidance in this regard.

National Policy Objective 75

Each Regional Assembly must plan, through their Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, for the delivery of the regional renewable electricity capacity allocations indicated for onshore wind and solar reflected in Table 9.1 below, and identify allocations for each of the local authorities, based on the best available scientific evidence and in accordance with legislative requirements, in order to meet the overall national target.

Table 9.1 | Regional Renewable Electricity Capacity Allocations

Region	Energised capacity 2023 (MW)	Additional Renewable Power Capacity Allocations (MW)	Total % of National Share in 2030	Energised Capacity 2023 (MW)	Additional Renewable Power Capacity Allocations (MW)	Total % of National Share in 2030
	Onshore Wind			Solar PV		
Eastern and Midlands	284	1,966	25%	306	3,294	45%
Northern and Western	1,761	1,389	35%	0.3	959	12%
Southern	2,622	978	40%	138	3,302	43%
Total	4,667	4,333		445	7,555	

Each Regional Assembly will prepare a Regional Renewable Electricity Strategy (RRES), whereby additional detail will be outlined on how the regional renewable electricity capacity allocations for the region can be best achieved in a consistent and sustainable manner, including the identification of specific targets for each of the constituent local authorities.

National Policy Objective 76

Local Authorities shall plan for the delivery of Target Power Capacity (MW) allocations consistent with the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, through their City and County Development Plans.

Managing Waste

Ireland has actively improved its waste management systems, but we remain heavily reliant on export markets for the treatment of residual waste, recyclable wastes and hazardous waste. A population increase of around one million people, alongside economic growth to 2040, will increase pressure on waste management capacity, as consumption is still a key driver of waste generation.

While the ultimate aim is to decouple, as much as possible, consumption from waste generation over time, additional investment in waste management infrastructure, and in particular different types of waste treatment, will be required.

In managing our waste needs, the NPF supports circular economy principles that minimise waste going to landfill and maximise waste as a resource. This means that prevention, preparation for reuse, recycling and recovery are prioritised in that order, over the disposal of waste⁴⁸.

Soil contamination and degradation and water pollution can occur as a result of unauthorised waste-related activities, historical activities, leakages and accidental spillages of chemicals. Proposals to develop areas with potential or known histories of unauthorised waste related activities should include measures for remediation of these lands, and addressing these issues can be a lengthy and costly process.

National Policy Objective 77

Sustainably manage waste generation including construction and demolition waste, invest in different types of waste treatment and support circular economy principles, prioritising prevention, reuse, recycling and recovery, to support a healthy environment, economy and society.

9.3 Protecting Conserving and Enhancing our Natural Capital

Climate Adaptation

A new National Adaptation Framework was approved by Government⁴⁹. Adaptation requires locally specific, place-based responses, which address not only climate impacts but also integrate coherently with local social, economic and ecological systems. The NAF and existing climate legislation sets out a requirement for sectoral adaptation plans covering priority national level sectors. This includes many areas covered in this chapter including water quality and water services infrastructure, flood risk management, built and archaeological heritage, biodiversity, forestry, agriculture and electricity and gas networks.

In terms of nationally important priorities, integration of climate risk assessment, and actions to address climate change impacts will be critical to ensure the resilience of communities, housing and infrastructure in the context of more extreme weather events that lead to droughts, floods, and other storm damage. The EPA has commenced work on a National Climate Change Risk Assessment.

The planning process provides an established means through which to implement and integrate climate change objectives, including adaptation, at local level, in particular the identification through the zoning of land for appropriate land uses having regard to the risks associated with climate change and through integrating climate resilient practices into development at regional and local level. Planning legislation also requires different levels of the planning policy hierarchy to address climate change adaptation (refer to Chapter 7).

48 National Waste Management Plan 2024 – 2030.
49 5th June 2024.

Water Resource Management and Flooding

Planning is critically important to the management of water resources. The planning system both directly and indirectly influences effective water management. This includes water service provision, river basin management, landscape, flood risk planning, coastal and marine management and climate change adaptation. Accordingly, statutory regional spatial and economic strategies and development plans must ensure the integration of sustainable water management considerations. The objectives of the National Planning Framework must also be reflected in River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs).

The EU Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) (WFD) requires all Member States to protect and improve water quality in all water bodies in order to achieve good ecological status at the latest, by 2027. The Directive's objectives are delivered in Ireland through the river basin planning process. Ireland is currently developing its third cycle River Basin Management Plan (RBMP)⁵⁰.

Flooding is a cross-sectoral issue that can affect all aspects of life, and that can be influenced, positively or detrimentally, by actions in many other sectors.

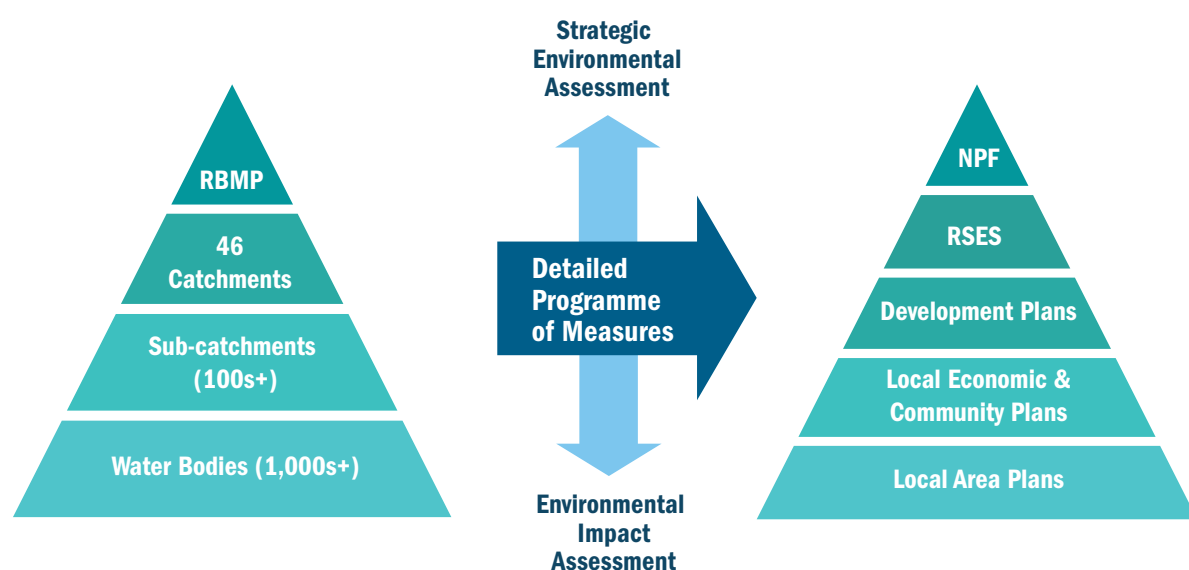
Of particular importance is the consideration of potential future flood risk in the area of planning and development management, and the planning and design of infrastructure and the development of nature-based solutions.

Flood risk management and in particular the design and development of flood relief schemes can also address the appropriate integration of archaeological heritage into these schemes⁵¹.

Urbanisation can increase both the rate and volume of runoff from rainfall events and therefore requires urban storm-water drainage systems to manage and reduce the risk from pluvial (rain) flood events and extreme rainfall events. Core objectives include⁵²:

- avoiding inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding;
- avoiding new developments increasing flood risk elsewhere, including that which may arise from surface run off;
- ensuring effective management of residual risks for development permitted in floodplains;
- avoiding unnecessary restriction of national regional or local economic and social growth;
- improving the understanding of flood-risk and ensure flood risk management in accordance with best practice; and
- prioritising nature-based solutions to manage water in terms of both quantity and quality and promote climate change mitigation strategies.

Figure 9.2 | Hierarchical Structure of RBMP and Planning Policy



⁵⁰ A Water Action Plan 2023 will be Ireland's third River Basin Management Plan and it outlines the measures the Government and other sectors are taking to improve water quality in Ireland's groundwater, rivers, lakes, estuarine and coastal waters, and provide sustainable management of our water resources. It is expected that this plan will be published in Q1 2024 and will be taken into account for this revision.

⁵¹ Archaeology and Flood Relief Schemes: Guidelines, National Monuments Service, DHLGH, 2023.

⁵² The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Planning Guidelines, 2009.

A separate but related issue is the effects of rising sea levels and its impacts on our coasts. Adapting to and management of this complex and long-term challenge requires a range of integrated responses that planning can contribute to. This issue is considered in Chapter 7 on marine issues.

National Policy Objective 78

Enhance water quality and resource management by preventing or mitigating the risk of flooding by:

- *Ensuring flood risk management informs place-making by avoiding inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding in accordance with The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities.*
- *Taking account of the potential impacts of climate change on flooding and flood risk and consideration of the Flood Risk Management Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan.*
- *Ensuring that River Basin Management Plan objectives are fully considered throughout the physical planning process.*
- *Integrating sustainable water management solutions, such as Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS), non-porous surfacing and green roofs, and nature based solutions, to create safe places.*

Nature-based solutions must therefore benefit biodiversity and support the delivery of a range of ecosystem services.

Sustainable urban development solutions, such as water sensitive urban design, can help to mitigate the potential for environmental degradation in the form of biodiversity loss, pollution of water bodies, and increased flood risk as the demand for urban development to accommodate a growing population continues to increase.

National Policy Objective 79

Support the management of stormwater, rainwater and surface water flood risk through the use of nature-based solutions and sustainable drainage systems.

National Policy Objective 80

Support the retrofitting of existing environments to cater for surface water run-off through the use of nature based solutions, including the implementation by Uisce Éireann of Integrated Drainage Plans on a prioritised settlement basis.

Nature Based Solutions

Population increase inevitably requires the necessary expansion of built areas. This can result in increasing pressure on our natural resources. Nature-based Solutions are actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural and modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously benefiting people and nature⁵³.

The European Commission defines nature-based solutions as:

“Solutions that are inspired and supported by nature, which are cost-effective, simultaneously provide environmental, social and economic benefits and help build resilience. Such solutions bring more, and more diverse, nature and natural features and processes into cities, landscapes and seascapes, through locally adapted, resource-efficient and systemic interventions.”

53 International Union for Conservation of Nature



Wexford Retention Pond

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage are leading out on the integration of Nature-based solutions for the sustainable management of surface water runoff.

The benefits of this approach for water quality and flood risk protection, biodiversity provision, amenity enhancement, placemaking and public health have been demonstrated internationally. Nature-based solutions are also key climate adaptation features providing additional protection during heavy rainfall events. An important co-benefit is the potential improvement in the quality of public spaces for public enjoyment.

Wexford Retention Basin has been designed to mimic natural wetland characteristics which function to slow the flow and filter surface water runoff from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage head offices in County Wexford, during rainfall events. Provision of an ornamental footbridge over the retention basin further increases the aesthetic and public access. Appropriate design and planting schemes maximise the biodiversity benefits supporting a wide range of plants and animals.

Nature-based solutions provide multiple benefits and a range of techniques which can be applied to developments at different scales addressing climate, water quality, biodiversity, amenity and placemaking objectives.

Green and Blue Infrastructure

Our environment is an asset that if planned for in the same way as for other forms of infrastructure, can provide long term benefits. Green and blue infrastructure provide a range of uses, goods and services and make the best use of land, water and help manage competing demands and can complement other sectors.

Green infrastructure is an interconnected network of green space that conserves natural ecosystem values and functions that also provides associated benefits to the human population. It is a strategically planned network of natural and semi-natural areas with other environmental features designed and managed to deliver a wide range of ecosystem services. It incorporates green spaces (or blue if aquatic ecosystems are concerned) and other physical features in terrestrial (including coastal) and marine areas including features of cultural heritage significance.

Connectivity between these spaces can also be beneficial for people to provide for improved permeability, thus supporting sustainable travel modes and recreational networks, in addition to clean air and better water quality. Implementing green infrastructure features creates a greater sense of community, strengthens the link with voluntary actions undertaken by civil society, and helps combat social exclusion and isolation. Green and blue infrastructure creates opportunities to connect rural and urban areas and provides appealing places in which to live and work.

An attractive environment is important for mental and physical health, tourism and a vibrant, well planned area with good amenities will contribute to attracting skilled employees and investment to underpin long-term development. Cultural heritage assets contribute significantly to the attractiveness of areas and provide a sense of identity and well-being to residents and visitors alike. Our natural assets are also valuable for carbon capture, which will assist in meeting climate mitigation and adaptation goals and national biodiversity targets.

Green and blue infrastructure planning will inform the preparation of regional and metropolitan strategies and city and county development plans by:

- Assisting in accommodating growth and expansion, while retaining the intrinsic value of natural places and natural assets;
- Providing increased certainty in planning by proactively addressing relevant environmental issues;

- Encouraging more collaborative approaches to plan-making by enabling examination of the interactions between future development requirements and the capacity of receiving areas; and
- Ensuring that sufficient and well planned green spaces, is commensurate in scale to long-term development requirements, are designated in statutory plans.

National Policy Objective 81

Integrated planning for Green and Blue Infrastructure will be incorporated into the preparation of statutory land use plans while maintaining ecosystem services and ecosystem functions and conserving and/or restoring biodiversity.

It is also important to consider the interrelationships between biodiversity, natural heritage, landscape and our green spaces.

Green Belts and Green and Blue Spaces

The importance of well-protected “green” and “blue spaces” such as parks, rivers, ponds and wild areas in the urban landscape is now recognised as a key part of urban landscapes that are needed for healthy communities and also offer the potential for climate adaptation co-benefits.

These spaces in our cities, towns and villages play an integral role as part of the fabric of our settlements, either through their use for community recreation and amenity purposes, supporting biodiversity or as a natural delineation of the settlement itself, forming the interface between urban and rural areas.

Green spaces and parks have a role in determining the quality of life in and sustainability of, our settlements. Green belts adjoining our urban areas also fulfil a strategic purpose, as a potential asset for future, planned development as an urban extension, particularly at a city scale.

National Policy Objective 82

Identify and strengthen the value of greenbelts and green and blue spaces at regional, city and local scales, to enable enhanced connectivity to wider strategic networks and prevent coalescence of settlements and to allow for the long-term strategic expansion of urban areas. Promote and support an increase in the provision of green and blue spaces and tree canopy cover in settlements.

Strategic Planning for Biodiversity

The Habitats Directive contains obligations to protect certain species wherever they occur, while the Birds Directive contains protections for all birds, and they may only be disturbed or controlled subject to licence or derogation, as appropriate. The Wildlife Acts also afford certain protections to aspects of Irish wildlife. The diversity of our biological communities is also important for the quality of our water, soils and as a source of food. The importance of our biodiversity is not restricted to legally protected areas and there are a range of measures in place to protect species and habitats more broadly in the wider countryside, including birds as required under Article 4 of the Birds Directive. The Global Biodiversity Outlook (UN 2020) has identified the importance of conservation measures undertaken to date in limiting species extinctions but also the lack of joined-up policies to prevent biodiversity loss, the extent of the biodiversity crisis and the need for immediate action to avoid irreversible losses. This includes managing land use change as a driver of biodiversity loss globally both within and outside of protected areas.

In recent years, there has been increasing awareness globally of the biodiversity crisis. Several reports have highlighted the further decline in biodiversity. Ireland's Sixth National Report to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity reported that 85% of protected habitats in Ireland are in unfavourable status and 46% are declining, while 14% of species assessed were considered as endangered. Ireland ratified the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (1992) and through the transposition of EU laws and Wildlife Act we are obliged to act to conserve biodiversity and prepare a National Biodiversity Action Plan.

Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030, was launched in January 2024. Implementation of actions within the Plan will contribute towards the 2050 vision that *Biodiversity in Ireland is valued, conserved, restored and sustainably used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people.*

In terms of national legislation, the Wildlife Acts 1976 to 2023 play an important role in underpinning biodiversity and nature conservation in Ireland. The Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2023 provides for the first time a statutory basis for our National Biodiversity Action Plans, with the commitment to produce a plan every three to five years.

The Environmental Impact Assessment Directive also requires that the direct and indirect significant effects of a project on biodiversity, with particular attention to species and habitats protected under the Birds and Habitats Directives are identified, described and assessed as part of the consent process.

It is also important to recognise the interconnection of climate and biodiversity from an all-Island perspective. The All-Island Climate and Biodiversity Research Network (AICBRN) brings together researchers from a wide range of disciplines across the island of Ireland who are undertaking research in climate and biodiversity topics.

By the end of 2026, all Local Authorities are to have a Biodiversity Action Plan in place, in line with the National Biodiversity Action Plan.

Nature Restoration

The EU Nature Restoration Law seeks to restore at least 20% of the EU's land and sea areas by 2030 and all ecosystems by 2050. 80% of EU habitats are in bad or poor conservation status. The EU Nature Restoration Law provides an opportunity to restore nature, both nationally and across the wider EU region. Nature restoration can also deliver substantial co-benefits for climate action such as carbon emissions reduction from the land use sector, as well climate adaptation and resilience through the enhancement of natural buffers against flooding and coastal inundation.

It is a target of the 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) to publish a National Restoration Plan by 2026, which is to set out the procedures for designation of nature restoration areas and corresponding policies.

National Policy Objective 83

In line with the National Biodiversity Action Plan and the forthcoming European Union Nature Restoration Regulation, and best available scientific information, regional and local planning authorities shall support the preparation of the National Restoration Plan.

National Policy Objective 84

In line with the National Biodiversity Action Plan; the conservation, enhancement, mitigation and restoration of biodiversity is to be supported by:

- *Integrating policies and objectives for the protection and restoration of biodiversity, including the avoidance and/or minimisation of potential biodiversity impacts, in statutory land-use plan.*
- *Retention of existing habitats which are currently important for maintaining biodiversity (at local/regional/national/international levels), in the first instance, is preferable to replacement/restoration of habitats, in the interests of ensuring continuity of habitat provision and reduction of associated risks and costs.*

National Policy Objective 85

In line with the objectives of the National Biodiversity Action Plan, planning authorities should seek to address no net loss of biodiversity within their plan making functions.

National Policy Objective 86

Enhance the conservation status and improve the management of protected areas and protected species by:

- *Implementing relevant EU Directives to protect Ireland's environment and wildlife and support the objectives of the National Biodiversity Action Plan;*
- *Developing and utilising licensing and consent systems to facilitate sustainable activities within Natura 2000 sites;*
- *Continued research, survey programmes and monitoring of habitats and species.*

Natural and Cultural Heritage

Ireland has an abundance of iconic natural heritage areas such as internationally recognised world heritage sites, turloughs and peatlands and cultural heritage sites of UNESCO world heritage importance such as Brú na Bóinne, Great Skellig. There are many other nationally distinct areas, that are not only a key part of our cultural heritage but also important to our tourism industry and for their contribution to quality of life and the attractiveness of places for economic investment.

Our national parks and nature reserves are also key natural assets that offer potential to further optimise the visitor experience of state owned lands, through delivery of quality outdoor activity infrastructure and essential ancillary facilities.

Ireland's archaeological heritage is a major cultural and scientific resource, enabling us to understand our history in all its aspects and how the peoples of Ireland have lived in, and interacted with, the environment. Archaeological heritage is also a vulnerable resource, which may be impacted on by a wide range of external factors. Ireland is party to the 1992 European Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage (the Valletta Convention), a key objective of which is the integration of archaeological heritage as a consideration in the planning and development process⁵⁴. The protection of archaeological heritage is recognised as a core component to achieving sustainable development.

National Policy Objective 87

Conserve and enhance the rich qualities of natural, cultural and built heritage of Ireland in a manner appropriate to their cultural and environmental significance.

Landscape

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. The protection, management and planning of the landscape is also interconnected with the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland, and a national landscape character assessment, which, when finalised, will provide consistency in how we characterise and connect with the landscape.

54 Refer to Framework and Principles for the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage and relevant standards and guidance.



Brú na Bóinne National Park

The purchase by the State in December 2023 of the 552-acre estate of Dowth Hall and Netterville Manor in County Meath was a once-in-a-generation opportunity to secure in the ownership of the Irish people one of the most significant such properties on the entire island given its archaeological, architectural, cultural, historic and natural heritage significance.

The lands contain the EU Habitats and Birds Directive Natura 2000 sites River Boyne and Blackwater Special Area of Conservation and Special Protection Area. They are of international importance, designated in 1993 as the UNESCO World Heritage Property of Brú na Bóinne, incorporating a remarkable landscape of Outstanding Universal Value, dominated by the Neolithic Passage Tombs of Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth. Comprising approximately a third of the total land area of the World Heritage Property, the purchase of Dowth creates the establishment of a new National Park- the Brú na Bóinne National Park- to be managed, cared for and operated by the National Parks and Wildlife Services, the Office of Public Works and the National Monuments Service.

With a large demographic catchment area in the Belfast-Dublin corridor, the establishment of the new National Park offer potential multiples in terms of heritage and biodiversity conservation, public benefit, sustainable access to the environment, health and well-being, educational/research resources, and economic, tourism and community benefits. The new National Park, for which a Masterplan is under development, will become another component in the remarkable heritage tourism offering of Ireland's Ancient East.

National Policy Objective 88

Facilitate landscape protection, management and change through the preparation of a National Landscape Character Map and development of guidance on local landscape character assessments, (including historic landscape characterisation) to ensure a consistent approach to landscape character assessment, particularly across planning and administrative boundaries.



9.4 Creating a Clean Environment for a Healthy Society

Water Quality

Ireland's rich water resources are of strategic importance and clean water is essential for creating a healthy society and supporting a growing economy. Our drinking water is primarily sourced from our rivers and lakes as well as from groundwater sources. It is essential that we have a resilient water supply to serve the existing population and for the additional 1 million people projected by 2040. Our water bodies are also a resource for leisure activities and for the tourism sector and the vast majority of our bathing waters are of very high quality⁵⁵.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) consider urban waste water to be one of the principal pressures on water quality in Ireland and the treatment and disposal of waste water in an environmentally sound manner is critical for human health. This means that we need to ensure adequate treatment and capacity, storm water overflows operating correctly and that we avoid direct discharges of untreated waste water.

Urban waste water treatment plant compliance and remedial actions are therefore a key short term priority. In the longer term, capacity issues need to be resolved to meet growing demand to 2040 and beyond.

In plan-making and decision-making within the planning system, decision makers should consider both the capacity of the receiving environment to accommodate the development of water and wastewater infrastructure in line with statutory environmental legislation, and the potential to align planned growth with existing water and wastewater infrastructural capacity, to the extent feasible.

Uisce Éireann publishes annual water supply and wastewater treatment capacity registers, which can assist with this process. At the household level, it will also be necessary to be more vigilant to the risks of contamination to private wells as a source of drinking water and failures in domestic waste water treatment systems.

National Policy Objective 89

Ensure the alignment of planned growth with the efficient and sustainable use and development of water resources and water services infrastructure, in order to manage and conserve water resources in a manner that supports a healthy society, economic development requirements and a cleaner environment.

⁵⁵ 97% of sites meeting or exceeding the minimum standard, of these, 79% had excellent water quality. (EPA, 2023)

Air Quality

Ireland benefits from prevailing weather patterns which typically bring relatively clean south-westerly Atlantic air over the country. Under certain conditions, typical weather patterns can be disrupted, and pollutant emissions build up in the air. These conditions can occur at any time of the year, but the impact on air quality can be particularly severe during winter, when the combination of cold, still weather, and increased emissions associated with a higher heating demand, particularly from solid fuels, can lead to high concentrations of pollutants with a consequent increased risk to human health.

Pollutants can be produced depending on how we travel, consume goods and heat our homes. In our largest urban areas, air pollution levels can be higher, primarily as a result of exhaust emissions from vehicles and from residential heating emissions. In some rural areas, particularly where there is no access to the gas grid, air quality can be poor during the winter due to a reliance on solid fuels such as coal, peat and wood for home heating. Port-related activities can also have localised impacts on air quality.

Air pollution can have negative implications for the health of our citizens and the attractiveness of cities and towns. Measures which seek a reduction in fossil fuel based energy sources will further reduce air pollution. Implementation of this Framework will assist in reducing emissions and help prevent people being exposed to unacceptable levels of pollution by supporting public transport, walking and cycling as more favourable modes of transport to the private car and the promotion of energy efficient buildings and homes and innovative design solutions. The careful planning of green spaces and vegetation are also important for air quality in urban areas, as trees naturally remove pollutants from the air and help better manage urban micro-climates. The Clean Air Strategy⁵⁶ provides the high-level strategic policy framework necessary to identify and promote the integrated measures across government policy that are required to reduce air pollution and promote cleaner ambient air, while delivering on wider national objectives.

National Policy Objective 90

Improve air quality and help prevent people being exposed to unacceptable levels of pollution in our urban and rural areas through integrated land use and spatial planning that supports public transport, walking and cycling as more favourable modes of transport to the private car, the promotion of energy efficient buildings and homes, heating systems with zero local emissions, green and blue infrastructure planning and innovative design solutions.

Noise Quality

Environmental noise is defined as unwanted or harmful outdoor sound created by human activity, such as noise emitted by means of transport, road traffic, rail traffic, air traffic, and industrial activity. It becomes a problem when it occurs in the incorrect place or at the incorrect time or at a level, frequency and duration that can give rise to annoyance, and sleep disturbance.

As we seek to promote more compact and efficient forms of development within our settlements, it is important to more proactively manage noise. In addressing these issues the NPF will support:

- **Noise Management and Action Planning**

Measures to avoid, prevent, mitigate, and minimise or promote the pro-active management of environmental noise, where it is likely to have significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life, through strategic noise mapping, noise action plans and suitable development plan objectives and planning conditions.

- **Noise, Amenity and Privacy**

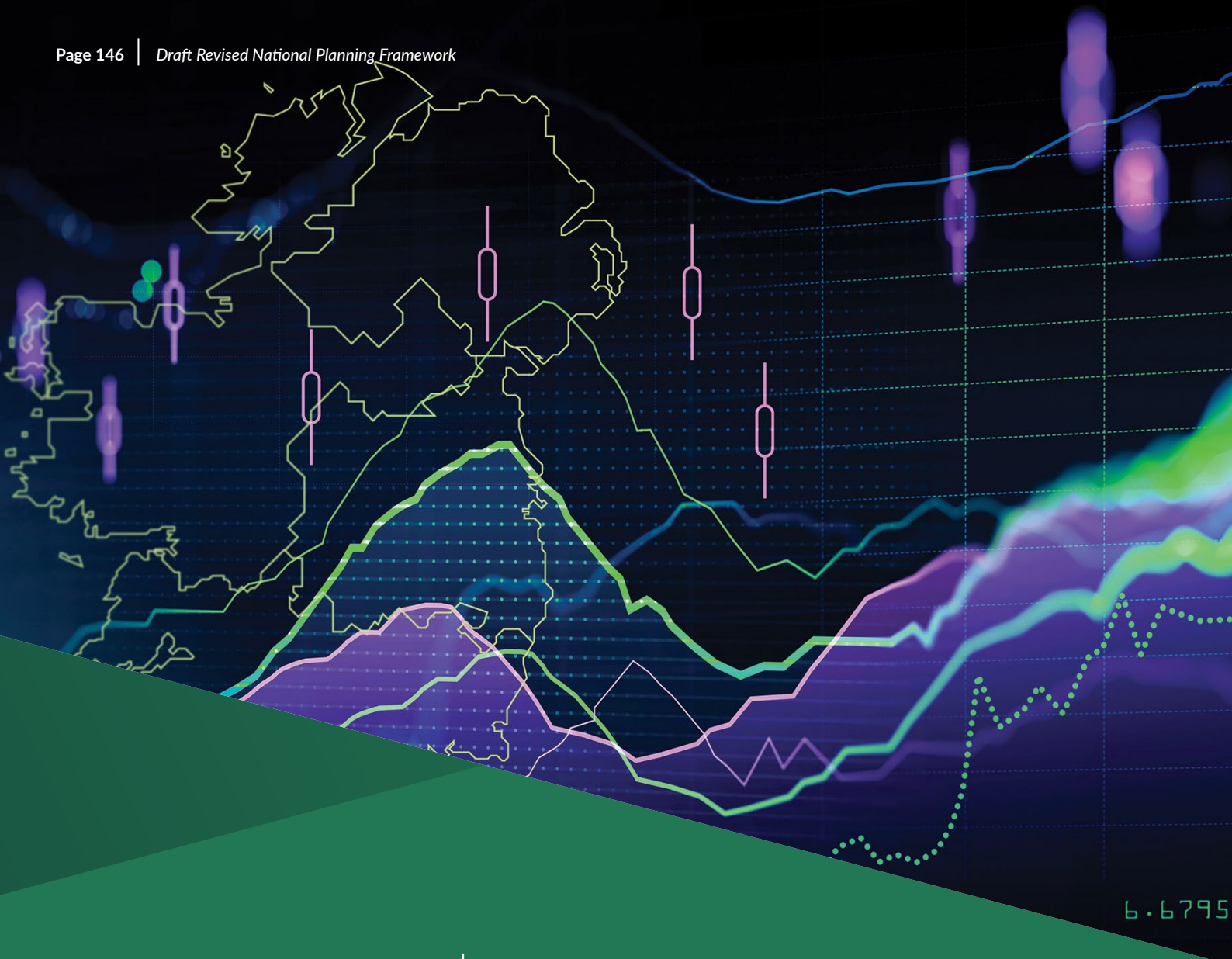
This includes but is not limited to, good acoustic design for proposed new developments, in particular residential development, through a variety of measures such as setbacks and separation between noise sources and receptors, good acoustic design of buildings, building orientation, internal layout, building materials and noise barriers and buffer zones between various uses and thoroughfares. Cognisance of competing demands between internal acoustics, ventilation and thermal comfort and the design of private external amenity areas is essential so that developments can be enjoyed as intended.

- **Quiet Areas**

The further enjoyment and protection of natural resources, such as our green spaces and sea frontage, through the preservation of low sound levels or a reduction in undesirably high sound levels, is particularly important for providing respite from high levels of urban noise. As part of noise action plans, an extra value placed on these areas, in terms of environmental quality and the consequential positive impact on quality of life and health, due to low environmental noise, can assist in achieving this.

National Policy Objective 91

Promote the pro-active management of noise where it is likely to have significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life and support the aims of the Environmental Noise Regulations through Strategic Noise Maps, Noise Action Plans and national planning guidance.



10

Implementing the National Planning Framework

The success of the National Planning Framework depends on its policy reflection and programme delivery at national, regional and local level. Implementation of the Framework will therefore be combined with streamlined governance arrangements and focused public capital investment priorities.

10.1 Governance and Oversight

The publication of the NPF in 2018 laid the foundations for balanced regional growth and enhanced regional attractiveness across Ireland.

It sets a coherent vision to drive coordination across national, regional and local levels. The alignment of the National Planning Framework with the National Development Plan through a shared set of National Strategic Outcomes or NSOs, provides a very solid foundation to deliver transformational change over the coming years, with consequential benefits for our quality of life and the built and natural environment.

However, investment alone is not sufficient to successfully implement this Framework. It will also require more effective planning and co-ordination processes at national, regional and local levels, to ensure that the NPF shapes the policies and deliverable actions of Government Departments and Agencies, State bodies, local government and infrastructure providers, working in conjunction with communities, civic society, the private sector and neighbouring administrations.

There is recognition that the key investments needed to sustain projected population growth and attractiveness to 2040, in areas such as housing, energy, climate, transport, healthcare and education, will give rise to coordination and capacity challenges. The Government is advancing a range of reforms and actions aimed at enhancing capacity and addressing constraints to NDP delivery. An ESRI report to Government titled 'The National Development Plan in 2023: Priorities and Capacity' (2024) also makes suggestions on how the timing and sequencing of NDP projects might be designed so that maximum benefits are derived.

The OECD Report 'Towards Balanced Regional Attractiveness in Ireland: Enhancing the Delivery of the National Planning Framework' (OECD 2023) explores existing institutional and governance arrangements in Ireland, making recommendations in relation to initiatives that could be introduced or scaled to support NPF delivery. One of the key observations is that the NPF strategy for more balanced regional growth sets a new way forward and that in turn, governance and institutional arrangements need to adapt to support a move away from 'business as usual'. The report sees a strong role for regional and local government, highlighting the need for greater clarity in relation to their role in NPF implementation. It highlights opportunities for greater leadership and competences at these levels.

At a national level, the OECD recommends more formalised mechanisms to support the coordination of projects of regional concern e.g. through the PI2040 Delivery Board. The OECD also recommend new governance arrangements at regional level to improve coordination between national, regional and local authorities, infrastructure providers and other stakeholders in order to secure the delivery of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans. These recommendations go beyond the scope of the NPF as a spatial planning strategy, but are relevant to the overall achievement of the NPF's objectives and will need to be considered in parallel, to ensure that the relevant mechanisms are in place to support NPF delivery.

Statutory Provision

Part 2 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) provides the legislative basis for the National Planning Framework, monitoring of its ongoing implementation and a statutory requirement for its periodic revision or replacement, as may be appropriate. The Planning and Development Bill 2023, once enacted, will replace this existing legal framework and retain the NPF at the apex of the hierarchy of national, regional and local plans and strategies.

The Office of the Planning Regulator will continue to play an important role in ensuring the effective implementation of the NPF at both local and regional level through its statutory plan evaluation and assessment function under the Planning Acts. Through its work in this area since its establishment in 2019, the Office has enhanced the quality of the statutory development plan-making process nationally by ensuring that planning authorities apply consistent and best practice approaches to the development of their areas while also working towards the achievement of broader regional and national policy objectives.

Phasing

The National Planning Framework is a long-term strategy and sets out national, regional and city-specific population targets, all informed by ESRI research, to secure more effective regional development. Achieving these targets will take time and their implementation will need to be adaptive to the inevitable changes in circumstances and unforeseen events inherent in a long-run Framework approach.

Therefore, in order to facilitate monitoring and review, phased regional population targets to 2030 and 2040 are set out in Table 10.1. These may be reviewed by 2030, based on updated Census data, to inform any periodic revision or replacement of the NPF and the next full ten-year cycle of the National Development Plan.

Based on projections, a significant proportion of additional population growth to 2040 is targeted in the period to 2030, which affords considerable ambition and flexibility to be built into Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, and which in turn will guide and influence city and county development plans and local area plans.

The targeted pattern of half of population growth in the five cities (NPO 4) will continue to apply, but phasing is not specified for the five cities. This will be addressed as part of the Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) that will be prepared for each city in the context of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies. This is to allow for a transition period, during which time investment to support compact growth and the National Regeneration and Development Agency will assist in opening up greater urban infill capacity.

10.2 The Planning System

The Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) supports a plan-led system aimed at ensuring proper planning and sustainable development through a hierarchy of inter-related and complementary plans and policies; from the NPF at national level, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (also known as ‘RSEs’) at regional level and development plans and local plans at city and county level. The development objectives of each lower tier plan are required to be consistent, as far as practicable, with the development objectives of the higher tier plans.

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies

To ensure better co-ordination in planning and development policy matters across boundaries, local authorities are grouped into three regional assembly areas Eastern and Midland, Northern and Western, and Southern.

Table 10.1 | National Planning Framework Phased Population Growth

Region	2030 Growth	%	2040 Growth	%
EMRA	270,000	49%	470,000	49%
NWRA	85,000	15%	150,000	15%
SRA	195,000	35%	330,000	35%
State Growth	555,000		950,000	
State Total Population	5,700,00		6,100,000	

Since the publication of the NPF in 2018, the three Regional Assemblies have prepared Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies. Preparation of the strategies involved the relevant local authorities, working together with stakeholders, including the Minister and Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and other interests, to put in place a regional co-ordination framework for statutory development plans at local authority level.

The principal purpose of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies is to support the implementation of the NPF, and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the regions. The RSESs support the growth strategy outlined in the NPF and seek to facilitate balanced regional development, focused on the five cities and five smaller regional growth centres, in order to support economic prosperity, environmental sustainability and climate action across all regions.

The RSES in turn form the basis for local authority development plans and Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), to ensure their consistency with national and regional policy.

Section 25A of the *Planning and Development Act 2000*, as amended (the Act), requires each of the three regional assemblies to prepare a report every two years on progress on delivering the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), and to submit the report to the National Oversight and Audit Commission (NOAC). The monitoring reports specifically identify the progress made in objectives of RSES by planning authorities, public bodies and their agencies and the relevant regional assembly.

The Draft Planning and Development Bill 2023 includes proposed statutory provisions to further align the planning policy hierarchy of plans by increasing the strategic lifespan of County and City Development Plans to 10 years, concurrent with the RSES 12-year period of implementation.

Metropolitan Area Strategic Planning

All five cities in Ireland incorporate more than one local authority area, with the metropolitan area of Dublin covering all or part of the area of seven local authorities. The multiplicity of plans addressing the individual and specific requirements of local authorities makes co-ordination of strategic development challenging.

While the three Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies have been developed to co-ordinate local authority plans at a strategic and regional assembly level, it is recognised that the area of the Assemblies is too broad to be able to sufficiently focus on city and metropolitan issues.

Accordingly, in tandem with and as part of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy process, metropolitan area strategic plans (MASPs) for the Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford Metropolitan areas have been prepared. In line with the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, the MASPs provide a 12-year strategic planning and investment framework for the city metropolitan areas, addressing high-level and long-term strategic development issues.

National Policy Objective 92

Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans for the Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford Metropolitan areas and in the case of Dublin and Cork, to also address the wider city region, shall be reviewed by the appropriate authorities in tandem with and as part of a review of the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

Given the ambitious levels of growth targeted for the five cities in this Framework, the wider metropolitan area around each will play an important role. In all cases, they are closely linked to or integrated with the nearby city, in terms of transport, employment, housing, amenities and services.



It would be reasonable in the context of a Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan and as part of phasing-in the transition to achieving urban consolidation and brownfield targets, that a proportion of up to 20% of the phased population growth targeted in the principal city and suburban area, could potentially be accommodated in the wider metropolitan area i.e. outside the city and suburbs or contiguous zoned area. This would be in addition to growth identified for the Metropolitan area. Planned growth in the metropolitan area would be targeted towards the delivery of new sustainable communities at brownfield and greenfield locations along existing or planned high capacity public transport corridors in accordance with the principles of Transport Orientated Development. In Dublin and the Mid-East, a proportion of post-2030 growth (+ 200,000 people) is specifically targeted for Transport Orientated Development within the metropolitan area with a particular focus on TOD opportunities along high-capacity rail corridors. These provisions will support the transition from the current pattern of development.

National Policy Objective 93

The Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans, shall include provision for large-scale Transport Orientated Development (TOD) opportunities and may target a proportion of planned growth in the metropolitan areas towards the delivery of new sustainable communities at brownfield and greenfield locations in the principal city and suburbs areas and in the wider metropolitan areas focused on opportunities arising from existing and planned major public transport investment, along planned high capacity public transport corridors and in accordance with the principles of Transport Orientated Development.

Integrating Spatial and Transport Planning

Planning and transport policies are interdependent. The integration of land uses with access to transport has cross-cutting benefits in terms of achieving compact patterns of development (through facilitating increased densities in accessible locations), transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society (through reduced emissions) sustainable mobility (through fewer journeys undertaken by car) and the transition to electric vehicles. Forms of Transport Orientated Development (TOD) in particular have the potential to locate a significant proportion of future population, housing, employment, services and amenities along high capacity transport networks and at transport nodes.

Responsibility for the integration of land use and transportation outside of central Government, is a joint responsibility of planning authorities, the NTA and other government agencies.

The NTA has responsibility for preparing a Transport Strategy for the GDA, the most recent of which was prepared for the period of 2022-2042. There is a statutory requirement for mutual consistency between the Transport Strategy, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midlands Region and local authority development plans within the GDA. The NTA Transport Strategy provides a clear statement of transport planning policy for the GDA, around which other agencies involved in spatial planning, environmental protection, and delivery of other infrastructure such as housing, water and power, can align their own investment priorities. It is an essential component, along with investment programmes in other sectors, for the orderly development of the Greater Dublin Area over the next 20 years.

The legislative requirement for a transport strategy is unique to the GDA and is not a statutory requirement in any other part of the country. However, the NTA has worked with regional and local authorities to prepare non-statutory metropolitan area transport strategies for Cork, Galway, Limerick and Waterford, and local transport plans for regional growth centres and key towns, in addition to delivering transport services and infrastructure projects. It is proposed to extend the statutory arrangements that are already in place for transport planning in the GDA to all of Ireland's cities, thereby strengthening the levels of integration between spatial planning and transport planning across the country, to the benefit of the economy and society.

National Policy Objective 94

Statutory arrangements between spatial and transport planning in the Greater Dublin Area will be extended to other cities.

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Department of Transport are working with the LDA, NTA, local and regional authorities and infrastructure providers to identify suitable opportunities for Transport Orientated Development (TOD) at scale in the five cities, aligned to planned investment in the public transport network. Transport Orientated Development supports NPF priorities for Compact Growth, Sustainable Mobility and Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society. Engagement with the relevant local authorities, LDA and NTA and infrastructure providers will continue to allow strategic planning for large-scale sustainable development projects to commence at the locations identified, and at locations that come forward during the NPF period. This work facilitates the identification and development of the necessary policy provisions at national, regional and local levels, and enhanced institutional and funding arrangements required to accelerate delivery.

The two Departments are also reviewing opportunities for better integration of land use and transport in the regional centres. While locations outside of the metropolitan areas may not be suitable for large-scale TOD, the principles of TOD can be applied at local level to support compact development, sustainable mobility and climate targets.

National Policy Objective 95

The Government will work to establish the necessary institutional and funding arrangements to support the development and accelerated delivery of Transport Orientated Development at suitable locations in conjunction with the ongoing programme of investment in the public transport network.

Better Strategic Planning for Urban Areas

Local area plans under the Planning and Development Act 2000 are proposed to be replaced, through the Planning and Development Bill 2023, by three new types of focused area plans. These plans will, subject to enactment of the legislation, enable planning authorities to provide a tailored response to particular contexts and development needs, informed by meaningful engagement with local communities. This will provide greater certainty for all stakeholders in respect of the expected outcomes from the plan making and consents processes.

The three types of area plans are:

- **Urban Area Plans** for regional growth centres and key towns that have been designated at in the regional spatial and economic strategy, and where in the opinion of the planning authority the scale of planned growth requires an integrated approach to land use and transportation planning for the entire urban area.
- **Priority Area Plans** for parts of towns and cities that have the capacity to deliver significant housing or other development or that have a particular need for a bespoke plan for regeneration and renewal.
- **Coordinated Area Plans** to be prepared jointly by two or more planning authorities for the development of a settlement or part of an urban area of a settlement that straddles their functional areas. Such a settlement or part of an urban area of a settlement will be identified in the regional spatial and economic strategy.

In addition, the introduction of new Urban Development Zones (UDZs) will empower local authorities to designate areas with significant potential for development, including housing, as Candidate Urban Development Zones and for the Government to designate such areas as a UDZ. These areas will be a focus of public investment in key enabling infrastructure in order to ensure that the potential for development can be realised in a timely manner.

National Policy Objective 96

Provision will be made for urban area plans and priority area plans to replace current local area plan provisions; coordinated area plans to be prepared where a town and environs lie within the combined functional area of more than one local authority, and the designation of areas with significant potential for development as Candidate Urban Development Zones and Urban Development Zones in order to facilitate focused investment in enabling infrastructure and accelerated development.

Strengthening Local Authority Planning: Plan Making and Core Strategies

Reforms of planning legislation in 2010 introduced a new approach to justifying land use zoning objectives in local authority plans so that enough land is provided to service projected development needs but not so much that development becomes difficult to co-ordinate or undermines compact growth objectives and the regeneration of existing, but under-occupied and run-down urban areas. The core strategy reforms have realised major benefits and support a more evidence-based and strategic approach to planning.

Since the publication of the NPF, further enhancements of the core strategy approach have been put in place through legislation and with the publication of the Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines on ‘Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning’ to support the implementation of the National Planning Framework and the three Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, to factor in dwelling vacancy and the balance between development in both urban and rural areas.

Coordinating Land Use Zoning, Infrastructure and Services

This Framework targets significant infill and brownfield development in order to achieve compact and sustainable growth that can act as a driver of urban regeneration and renewal in our cities and towns. Such an approach has the potential to revitalise traditional core areas while also ensuring that maximum benefit is derived from the very significant public investment that the State makes in services and infrastructure.

This means that city and county development plans will need to relate these targets to the quantum and location of future land-use zoning. Effective implementation will require substantially better linkage between zoning of land and the availability of infrastructure. The Residential Zoned Land Tax and the introduction of Land Value Sharing proposals will assist in incentivising the development of such zoned land in urban areas and ensuring that the necessary infrastructure is in place to facilitate development.

The Tiered Approach to Zoning will continue to differentiate between zoned land that is available for development and zoned land that requires significant further investment in services for infrastructure for development to be realised.

National Policy Objective 97

Planning authorities will be required to apply a standardised, tiered approach to differentiate between i) zoned land that is serviced and ii) zoned land that is serviceable within the life of the plan.

National Policy Objective 98

When considering zoning lands for development purposes that require investment in service infrastructure, planning authorities will make a reasonable estimate of the full cost of delivery of the specified services and prepare a report, detailing the estimated cost at draft and final plan stages.

National Policy Objective 99

When considering zoning land for development purposes that cannot be serviced within the life of the relevant plan, such lands should not be zoned for development.

Prioritising Development Lands

There are many other planning considerations relevant to land zoning beyond the provision of basic enabling infrastructure including overall planned levels of growth, location, suitability for the type of development envisaged, availability of and proximity to amenities, schools, shops or employment, accessibility to transport services etc.

Weighing up all of these factors, together with the availability of infrastructure, will assist planning authorities in determining an order of priority to deliver planned growth and development.

National Policy Objective 100

Planning authorities will use compulsory purchase powers to facilitate the delivery of enabling infrastructure to prioritised zoned lands, to accommodate planned growth.

National Policy Objective 101

Planning authorities and infrastructure delivery agencies will focus on the timely delivery of enabling infrastructure to priority zoned lands in order to deliver planned growth and development.

In addition, to ensure that infill and brownfield lands are being developed and that the compact growth targets set out in NPO 7 - 9 are being achieved, it is also important to develop and implement new approaches to measuring and monitoring compact growth in cities and larger settlements, aligned to greater digitalisation of the planning system.

National Policy Objective 102

Develop and implement new approaches to measuring and monitoring compact growth in cities and larger settlements aligned to increased digitalisation of the planning system.

10.3 Public Capital Investment – The National Development Plan and National Strategic Outcomes

The alignment of the National Planning Framework with the National Development Plan since 2018 is tangible evidence of Government commitment to supporting the NPF with appropriate investment. This approach has better influence patterns of development and contribute to wider national objectives in areas such as transport, climate action, water resource management, waste management, communications and energy network roll-out and social infrastructure development in areas such as health, education and community facilities.

National Policy Objective 103

Continue to ensure the alignment of the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan through delivery of the National Strategic Outcomes.

National Strategic Outcomes

As outlined earlier in Chapter 1, implementing the National Planning Framework is focused on policies, actions and investment to deliver the 10 National Strategic Outcomes set out in more detail below.

National Strategic Outcome 1

Compact Growth



From an urban development perspective, we will need to deliver a greater proportion of residential development within the existing built-up areas of our cities, towns and villages and ensure that, when it comes to choosing a home, there are viable attractive alternatives available to people.

Combined with a focus on infill development, integrated transport and promoting regeneration and revitalisation of urban areas, pursuing a compact growth policy at national, regional and local level will secure a more sustainable future for our settlements and for our communities.

Since the publication of the NPF in 2018, there has been significant investment in our urban areas aimed at supporting compact growth and progress has been made on land activation and active land management measures aimed at bringing forward brownfield and infill lands for development.

Urban Regeneration and Development Fund and Rural Regeneration and Development Fund

To secure the delivery of this objective, two tailored funding mechanisms have been established under the National Development Plan;

- The Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF); and
- The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF).

The purpose of the €2 billion Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) is to achieve more compact and sustainable development in Ireland's five cities and other urban centres based on the following overarching criteria:

- Enable urban infill development that would not otherwise occur;

- Improve 'liveability' and quality of life, enabling greater densities of development to be achieved;
- Encourage economic development and job creation, by creating conditions to attract internationally mobile investment and opportunities for indigenous enterprise growth;
- Building on existing assets and capacity to create critical mass and scale for regional growth;
- Improve accessibility to and between centres of mass and scale and better integration with their surrounding areas;
- Ensure transition to more sustainable modes of travel (walking, cycling, public transport) and energy consumption (efficiency, renewables) within an urban context;
- Encourage labour mobility to support employment-led growth, including affordable improved community and family services including childcare.

The fund does this by part-funding regeneration and rejuvenation projects in Ireland's five cities and other large towns. To date the URDF has committed to part-funding 132 projects, comprising almost 400 subprojects across the country. There have been a total of three calls to date. Call 2 in particular sought to facilitate a greater proportion of residential and commercial development, supported by infrastructure, services and amenities, within the existing built-up areas of larger urban settlements. The third round of funding support is specifically designed to address long-term vacancy and dereliction across URDF cities and towns (>10,000 population) and the acceleration of the provision of residential accommodation.

Call 3 identified the necessity to bring long-term vacant and derelict buildings and sites into use for residential and other purposes.

The URDF programme will continue to support the progression of approved proposals and projects through their project lifecycles.

The purpose of the €1 billion Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF), is to support sustainable growth in Ireland's rural areas, and subject to the nature of the proposal, smaller urban centres (<10,000 population), based on the following overarching criteria:

- Enhance the attractiveness, viability and vibrancy of smaller towns and villages and rural areas as a means of achieving more sustainable patterns and forms of development;
- Ensure transition to more sustainable modes of travel (walking, cycling, public transport) and energy consumption (efficiency, renewables) within smaller towns and villages and rural areas;
- Encourage and attract entrepreneurship and innovation in the context of the rural economy and its continuing sustainable diversification, particularly where low carbon outputs can be achieved;
- Cater for a niche or specialized development that is intrinsically required to be located in a rural setting and has wider benefits for the local rural and regional economy;
- Cross-boundary collaboration at county and regional level to achieve more sustainable outcomes for rural communities, e.g. applicable to shared settlements, landscapes and amenities as well as lands in state ownership;
- Enhance co-ordination of various funding streams for rural development that support the place-making policies of the National Planning Framework.

The large-scale capital projects supported by the fund assist in the revitalisation of rural towns and villages by addressing vacancy and dereliction, and positioning them for further growth through regeneration and town centre renewal.

Following four calls for proposals the RRDF is supporting 215 projects across Ireland. The fifth call for capital projects was announced in 2023. Further to the RRDF, the regeneration of rural towns is also supported by the Town and Village Renewal Scheme, which includes a Building Acquisition Measure for vacant buildings and sites, and the Town Centre First Policy 2022, which provides a coordinated whole of government framework to address the decline in health in towns of all sizes, and has established a suite of supports and measures to regeneration and revitalise them.

Land Activation and Active Land Management

The Government is advancing a number of land activation and active land management measures through legislation to ensure that the potential for urban development in the built up area of cities and towns, with proximity to services and good quality public transport, can be accelerated.

The Residential Zoned Land Tax (RZLT) introduced under the Finance Act 2021, will come into effect in 2025. The tax is aimed at encouraging the activation of development on suitably zoned and serviced land for housing.

Proposals for the introduction of Urban Development Zones (UDZs) are being progressed through the Planning and Development Bill 2023 in order to prioritise the planning and delivery of plan-led proposals for the development of areas with significant potential for growth, with an emphasis on the provision of the infrastructure required to support delivery. These zones will involve a focus on the creation of mixed-use neighbourhoods with high levels of accessibility having regard to existing or planned public transport links, including opportunities for Transport Orientated Development, in particular in the Dublin Metropolitan Region.

Proposals for legislation to support Land Value Sharing (LVS) are also being progressed to ensure that the State can secure a proportion of the uplift in land values that results from public decisions to zone or designate land for development. The intention is that the obligations secured will be used to provide the infrastructure needed to enable housing and related development to take place, in addition to providing the services and facilities that communities need.

National Strategic Outcome 2

Enhanced Regional Accessibility



Enhancing connectivity between centres of population of scale will support the objectives of National Planning Framework. Better connectivity between the four cities of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford and to the Northern and Western region is seen as critical to enable the potential of these centres to be activated.

The interurban rail network plays a key role in offering sustainable travel alternatives to private car travel and broadens labour catchments, benefitting the international competitiveness of our major cities. There is further potential, as identified within the Draft All Island Strategic Rail Review, to enhance rail links between our major cities (including an intercity spine connecting Belfast, Dublin and Cork) with increased capacity, line speed and frequency of service.

It is also important that vehicular traffic is removed from urban areas, where possible, to enable the efficient use of the national road network, in particular for commercial traffic. This will also increase user safety and remove traffic congestion in urban and rural centres.

Cycling will also play a role in enhancing regional connectivity, through the implementation of the National Cycle Network, published in 2024. This network will integrate greenways, the EuroVelo network and regional and local cycling routes and will support economic growth of regional urban areas of 5,000+ population as well as priority tourist destinations.

Inter-Urban Roads

- Maintaining the strategic capacity and safety of the national roads network including planning for future capacity enhancements;
- Improving average journey times targeting an average inter-urban speed of 90kph;
- Enabling more effective traffic management within and around cities and re-allocation of inner city road-space in favour of bus-based public transport services and walking/cycling facilities;
- Advancing orbital traffic management solutions, including the Galway Ring Road and the Cork City Northern Transport Project;

Accessibility to the North-West

- Upgrading access to the North-West border area, utilising existing routes (N2/N14/A5);
- Upgrading northern sections of the N4 and N5 routes and sections of the N3/M3 national primary route;
- Progressive development of the Atlantic Economic Corridor from Galway northwards by upgrading sections of the N17 north where required and upgrading the N15/N13 link.

Public Transport

- To strengthen public transport connectivity between cities and large growth towns in Ireland and Northern Ireland with improved services and reliable journey times, based on the findings of the Draft All-Island Strategic Rail Review.

Cycling

- Develop a safe and connected cycle network between cities, towns and key tourist destinations to reduce the carbon impact of transport, promote a healthy and inclusive society and promote economic growth.

National Strategic Outcome 3

Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities



Our Rural Future and Our Living Islands policy documents and investment programmes continue to drive the development and diversification of the rural economy, such as the national broadband scheme, and the national hub network.

The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, combined with wider urban and village renewal, housing and community development initiatives, creates a virtuous cycle of progressive planning for, investment in and economic diversification of our rural towns and villages, re-proposing them to meet the challenges of the future.

Continues investment in the agri-food sector will underpin sustainable growth as set out in Food Vision 2030 and provide for the development of our Fisheries Harbour Centres and research infrastructure. There is scope for the enhancement of ongoing co-funded EU Programmes that support rural development, seafood development and afforestation.

A strong start has also been made in the development of a national long-distance Greenway/Blueway Network. Such a network, including rural walking, cycling and water-based recreation routes, as well as 'peatways', has demonstrated major potential to bring new life to regional and rural locations through the "win-win" scenario of increased tourism activity and healthier travel.

Developing this network further will diversify our rural economy by embracing the potential for a major expansion in the demand for activity based tourism.

Rural Development

- Implementation of the policy measures outlined in Our Rural Future and Our Living Islands policy documents;
- Progressive development of rural broadband under the national Broadband Plan;
- Implementation of the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund to enable opportunities to secure the rejuvenation and re-purposing of rural towns and villages weakened by the structural changes in rural economies and settlement patterns;
- Provide a quality nationwide community-based public transport system in rural Ireland which responds to local needs under the Connecting Ireland Programme and similar initiatives;
- Invest maintaining regional and local roads and strategic road improvement projects in rural areas to ensure access to critical services such as education, healthcare and employment;
- Invest in greenways, blueways and peatways as part of a nationally coordinated strategy;
- Ongoing investment in the agri-food sector to underpin the sustainable growth for the sector as set out in Food Vision 2030.

National Strategic Outcome 4

High-Quality International Connectivity



As an island nation and a small open economy, Ireland relies heavily on international connectivity to enable export-led growth, support and develop our tourism sector and also to attract high value foreign direct investment. These sectors have been the cornerstones of successive Governments' economic and trade policies, and our ports and airports have played a critical role in facilitating their development over recent decades.

The key ports and airports are State owned commercial entities with the capacity to raise their own finance and operate profitably. Hence, the need for Exchequer financing of the key strategic projects does not arise. However, enhanced access to these national infrastructure transport services, which are of strategic importance for Ireland's connectivity, will require Exchequer funding. Capital investment plans of the State owned ports and airports must align with Government policy objectives including specific relevant sectoral policies and the National Development Plan.

The main airports (for which statistics are recorded by CSO) including Dublin, Cork, Shannon, Ireland West, and Kerry together with other regional airports, are key enablers of both economic and regional development.

Airports

- The development and enhancement of modern, technologically-advanced, cost-efficient infrastructure at our State airports to enhance safety and security, to reduce environmental impact, and to maintain and develop international connectivity;
- Enhancing land-side access, particularly in public transport terms, such as through the MetroLink and BusConnects projects and associated road network capacity in Dublin; and
- Careful land-use management of land-side areas to focus on the current and future needs of the airports

In terms of our port facilities, the long-term international trend in ports and shipping is towards increased consolidation of resources in order to achieve optimum efficiencies of scale. This effects vessel size, the depths of water required at ports and the type and scale of transport connections to serve ports and their hinterlands. It is evident that in the years ahead environmental, technological, demographic, and geopolitical developments will have a significant influence on how the sector evolves.

Tier 1 ports account for a very large proportion of national port freight traffic, and are located within close proximity to the cities of Dublin, Cork and Limerick respectively. Rosslare Europort, a Tier 2 Port of National Significance, has seen very significant growth in direct sailings to continental Europe as a result of Brexit. This surge in both passenger and freight traffic is likely to be a permanent feature. The respective role of each of Ireland's main ports will be considered in tandem with long-term infrastructural requirements as part of the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan processes. The long-term sustainable development of our ports also requires strategic transport connections. Nationally, the following infrastructure objectives have been identified:

Ports

- Maintain and enhance land transport connections to the major ports including:
- Facilitating the growth of Dublin Port and innovative land use models;
- Enhance road connectivity to Rosslare Europort and Shannon-Foynes Port, and
- Provide motorway access connectivity to Port of Cork's Ringaskiddy Port.

National Strategic Outcome 5

Sustainable Mobility



The National Sustainable Mobility Policy, published in 2022, provides the means for achieving the provision of a well-functioning, integrated sustainable transport system (walking, cycling and public transport), enhancing competitiveness, sustaining economic progress and enabling sustainable mobility choices for citizens, supports the overall Framework objectives.

Dublin and other cities and major urban areas are too heavily dependent on road and private, mainly car-based, transport with the result that our roads are becoming more and more congested. The National Development Plan makes provision for transformational investment in public transport and sustainable mobility solutions in the main urban centres that will progressively put in place a more sustainable alternative.

For example, major public transport infrastructure projects identified in the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area to 2042, such as the MetroLink and DART+ as well as the Luas and BusConnects investment programmes, will keep our capital and other key urban areas competitive.

The non-statutory Metropolitan Area Transport Strategies for Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford also highlight public transport infrastructure projects needed to sustain sustainable mobility in these centres.

The NTA's Active Travel Investment Programme is delivering integrated walking and cycling solutions and road space reallocation. This includes the development of segregated cycle lanes and widened footpaths, new walking and cycling bridges, and new pedestrian crossings. Sustainable mobility is also supported by demand management measures that seek to reduce traffic congestion and reallocate road space in favour of walking, cycling and public transport.

A focus on Transport Orientated Development that promotes the provision of homes, jobs, services and amenities along high capacity public transport will also be key in supporting sustainable mobility in cities and surrounding metropolitan areas. This alignment will be supported through the introduction of a new national demand management strategy for transport called 'Moving Together: A Strategic Approach to the Efficiency of the Transport System in Ireland'. The Strategy will aim to strengthen the implementation of transport demand management across the country.

Electric Vehicles will also have an important role to play in transforming the Irish transport system into one that is green and sustainable, as part of the wider transformation that will see people walking, cycling and taking public transport to their destinations. The Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2025 sets out the Government's pathway for delivering a publicly accessible EV charging network that meets citizens' needs.

Sustainable Mobility

Expand attractive public transport alternatives to car transport to reduce congestion and emissions and enable the transport sector to cater for the demands associated with longer-term population and employment growth in a sustainable manner through the following measures:

- Deliver key public transport objectives of the Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2022-2042 by investing in projects such as MetroLink, DART+, Luas and BusConnects in Dublin and Eastern Region and key rail and bus-based projects identified by the NTA in the other cities and towns;
- Provide public transport infrastructure and services to meet the needs of regional growth centres, key towns, large towns and smaller towns, villages and rural areas;

- Develop a comprehensive network of safe cycling routes in metropolitan areas to address travel needs and to provide similar facilities in towns and villages where appropriate, in line with the NTA's CycleConnects plan, due to be published in 2024. Improve connections and walking routes in accordance with the principles of universal design so as to optimise journeys undertaken by foot and enhance pedestrian comfort and safety;
- Enable more effective traffic management within and around cities and towns through demand management measures including the re-allocation of urban road-space in favour of bus-based public transport services, shared mobility services and walking/cycling facilities;
- Deliver Transport Orientated Development at scale at suitable brownfield and greenfield locations in cities and metropolitan areas, along high capacity public transport corridors with a focus on land management, institutional and funding arrangements needed to accelerate this type of development; and
- Support delivery of EV charging at a national level in line with Climate Action Plan targets to transition.



National Strategic Outcome 6

A Strong Economy Supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills



A competitive, innovative and resilient regional enterprise base is essential to provide the jobs and employment opportunities to enable people to live and prosper in the regions. The Government's White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030 sets out how this will be achieved by:

- Integrating decarbonisation and net zero commitments
- Placing digital transformation at the heart of enterprise policy
- Advancing Ireland's FDI and trade value proposition
- Strengthening the Irish-owned exporting sector
- Enabling locally trading sectors to thrive
- Stepping up enterprise innovation
- Building on strengths and opportunities

A key focus of the White Paper on Enterprise is to ensure the creation of jobs in every part of the country and facilitate balanced regional development. The enterprise agencies, Local Enterprise Offices and Regional Enterprise Plans play a significant role in strengthening the enterprise ecosystem across Ireland. This enables entrepreneurs, microenterprises, Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)⁵⁷ and FDI to prosper in all regions. Specifically, we want to achieve and maintain sustainable full employment and for unemployment not to exceed one percentage point above the national unemployment rate in any region, while also achieving greater productivity convergence across our domestic enterprise base. The work of Enterprise Ireland (EI), IDA Ireland and the Local Enterprise Offices will be critical to achieving this ambition.

Key areas of focus include:

- Supporting entrepreneurialism, small businesses and building competitive clusters;
- Attracting and sustaining talent and boosting human capital in all regions
- Digital and data innovation; and
- Promoting regionally balanced investment and jobs creation outside of Dublin.

Targets set out in the White Paper on Enterprise 2022-2030, seek to ensure that at least half of all FDI investments from 2021- 2024 will be to locations outside of Dublin and over two-thirds of new jobs created in Enterprise Ireland-assisted firms will be outside of Dublin.

Supporting Entrepreneurialism and Building Competitive Clusters

Supporting entrepreneurialism and building competitive clusterings in key sectors and activities through collaborative actions at regional and local level, by realising a significant uplift in the performance of indigenous enterprises in terms of innovation, export potential and productivity, supporting technology-led start-ups and by attracting further investment to the regions.

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment has committed to devising and introducing a centrally coordinated, cross-Government approach to clustering that will encourage the formation and strengthening of national cluster organisations, leveraging the benefits of proximity and co-location to boost productivity. The identification of priority areas for enhanced clustering will be underpinned by an assessment of competitive strengths and potential opportunities against a range of factors, including the scale of potential impact, innovation intensity and research capability, as well as market direction.

⁵⁷ SME and Entrepreneurship Growth Plan, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

- Supporting entrepreneurship and technology-led start-ups and increasing their survival and growth rates, through expanded activities of the Local Enterprise Offices, EI and competitive calls for regional enterprise collaboration initiatives to provide competitive places for enterprise to grown at local level.
- Transforming firms in the regions for long-term success through a focus on productivity, innovation and internationalisation and building competitive regional clusters in manufacturing and services, in collaboration with the higher and further education sectors.
- Promoting innovation and its diffusion, through support for firm-level innovation, developing research centres and gateways in key areas of relevance to the regions through SFI and EI, and ensuring our research system in the regions is internationally connected.
- Increasing the competitiveness of the business environment in the regions, through Regional Enterprise Plans, tailored responses for sectors exposed to external market shocks, regional enterprise competitive funding initiatives through EI and advance property solutions for new investment by IDA Ireland for inward investment and indigenous enterprise at suitable locations, integrated with planning for housing growth.
- Further developing challenge-based Disruptive Technologies initiatives to ensure that we stay at the forefront of technological innovation, market application and commercialisation and can spur the next generation of technology-led enterprises, drawing on R&D activities in the higher education sector and enterprise in the regions.
- Smart Specialisation will encourage the maximising of sectoral strengths through clustering and the scaling of Ireland's existing areas of research excellence.

Sustaining Talent and Boosting Human Capital in all Regions

The development of human capital is central to Ireland's success and our economic and social development. The availability of well-educated, skilled talent is a fundamental driver of national competitiveness at both national and regional level.

The role which the further and higher education systems can play in catalysing and supporting economic and social development in local communities, in regions and nationally is recognised.

Developing talent and skills takes place throughout the life cycle and through a variety of interventions. By providing initial education, skills training and lifelong learning, a dynamic and varied skills base is created to attract and sustain employment and improve the attractiveness of places for investment.

In order to future proof our competitiveness, we must develop a skills base that will move Ireland to the forefront of digital and innovative activity. Access to new technologies, knowledge and skills is crucial if Ireland is to develop its value-added segments and knowledge-intensive products and services. The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science is leading a whole of government approach to the implementation of Ireland's National Research and Innovation strategy, Impact 2030, so as to ensure the national research and innovation system supports key Government strategies such as the White Paper for Enterprise, the Climate Action Plan and Smart Specialisation of regions.

- **The development of skills, talent and innovation capacity is a key strategic pillar for the NPF.** Investment in building and sustaining skills, talent and innovation capacity will be prioritised to promote greater competitiveness and increase productivity at both national and regional levels through developing the skills base necessary to fully exploit digital technologies and sustain innovation and through greater alignment of research endeavour and human capital development between the education and enterprise sectors.

- **Investment in student accommodation within our universities.**
- **Competitive research and innovation through the expansion, upgrade and refurbishment of HEI's, support for multi campus technical universities with a strong regional focus and consolidation and modernisation of Further Education and Training (FET) provisions.**
- **Support regional development through continued investment in Education and Training to increase skills labour and supply on a regional basis.**

Digital and Data Innovation

The practical impact of digitalisation will only increase in the years ahead and this will pose both opportunities and challenges which will require a coherent and informed policy response.

Harnessing Digital – The Digital Ireland Framework seeks to position Ireland as a digital leader, driving and enabling digital transformation across the economy and society. The strategy identifies four dimensions with associated targets and work streams including the digital transformation of business, enhanced digital infrastructure and connectivity, increased digital skills, as well as the further digitalisation of public services.

Ireland's Industry 4.0 Strategy 2020-2025 and *AI - Here for Good: National Artificial Intelligence Strategy for Ireland* set out the Government's response to the scale of transformation posed by digital technologies and provide a roadmap to ensure that the State will be at the forefront of technological adoption.

In the short term, opportunities provided by access to high quality broadband services will be fully exploited through the roll-out of the State intervention segment of the National Broadband Plan, delivering a step-change in digital connectivity and ensuring that coverage extends to remoter areas including villages, rural areas and islands.

In addition, Ireland is very attractive in terms of international digital connectivity, climatic factors and current and future renewable energy sources for the development of international digital infrastructures, such as data centres. These factors help to underpin Ireland's international position as a leading location for ICT, which contributes to wider synergies in the economy as indigenous and multinational enterprises develop linkages and benefit from the potential of regional clustering.

Developing the potential offered by connectivity and the digitalisation of rural areas for the benefit of inhabitants and businesses, is important to ensure that a digital divide does not emerge between urban and rural areas, and between different regions. This can include e-literacy skills, access to e-health and other public services, innovative solutions, circular economy application to agricultural waste, promotion of local products supported by technology and ICT, implementing and taking full benefit of smart specialisation agri-food projects, tourism and cultural activities.

- **Implementation of the National Broadband Plan.**
- **Enhancing international fibre communications links, including full interconnection with fibre networks in Northern Ireland.**
- **Promotion of Ireland as a sustainable international destination for ICT infrastructure and associated economic activities.**
- **Promoting our cities as demonstrators of 5G information and communications technology.**

National Strategic Outcome 7

Enhanced Amenities and Heritage



Attractive places include a combination of factors, including vitality and diversity of uses, ease of access to amenities and services supported by integrated transport systems and green modes of movement such as pedestrian and cycling facilities. Appealing places are also defined by their character, heritage and sense of community. This includes attractive buildings and street layouts, civic spaces and parks and regeneration of older areas and making places feel safe through active use and design.

Amenities and Heritage

- Implementation of planning and transport strategies for the five cities and other urban areas will be progressed with a major focus on improving walking and cycling routes, including continuous greenway networks and targeted measures to enhance permeability and connectivity.
- The Rural and Urban Regeneration and Development Funds support transformational public realm initiatives to give city and town centre areas back to citizens, encouraging greater city and town centre living, enhanced recreational spaces and attractiveness from a cultural, tourism and promotional perspective.
- The European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) will support projects that promote the conservation and adaptive reuse of our vacant built heritage stock and drive the regeneration of cities and towns through the Town Centre First Heritage Revival (THRIVE) scheme for the period 2021 - 2027.
- We will conserve, manage and present our heritage for its intrinsic value and as a support to economic renewal and sustainable employment.
- Open up our heritage estates to public access, where possible.
- Invest in and enable access to recreational facilities, including trails networks, designed and delivered with a strong emphasis on conservation, allowing the protection and preservation of our most fragile environments and providing a wellbeing benefit for all.



National Strategic Outcome 8

Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society



Climate change is expected to have diverse and wide-ranging impacts on Ireland's environment, society, and economic development, including on managed and natural ecosystems, water resources, agriculture and food security, human health, and coastal zones. Our low-lying areas and cities and many rural areas are potentially vulnerable if we do not take the appropriate steps to better manage the impacts of climate change.

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act enacted in 2021 commits to a binding target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 51% and increase the share of electricity generated from renewable sources to 80% over the decade (2021 – 2030), and to achieve net-zero emissions no later than 2050.

The national climate objective is to achieve a competitive, low-carbon, climate-resilient, biodiversity rich, and environmentally sustainable and carbon neutral economy by 2050.

Sustainable land use management is required in order to achieve a balance between the built environment, natural environment, biodiversity and climate. The NPF is committed to the achievement of compact and sustainable growth, supporting the provision of sustainable transport options, water services delivery and the delivery of renewable energy development while protecting and where possible enhancing and restoring our natural environment in order to ensure sustainable development for our planet and future generations.

Adaptation measures will be required to respond locally specific, place-based responses, which address not only climate impacts but also integrate coherently with local social, economic and ecological systems.

The electricity sector faces a significant challenge to meet its requirements under the targets set out in Climate Action Plan 2023. Electricity will also play a key role in the decarbonisation of other sectors through electrification, including transport, heating, and industry. The accelerated delivery of additional renewable electricity generation is therefore essential for Ireland to meet its climate targets, reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, and improve its energy security by reducing reliance on imported fossil fuels and diversifying its electricity supply.

New energy systems and transmission grids will be necessary for a more distributed, more renewables focused energy generation system, harnessing both the considerable on-shore and off-shore potential from energy sources such as wind, wave and solar and connecting the richest sources of that energy. State-owned commercial enterprises are significant players in the energy market, which is subject to EU regulatory framework.

The diversification of our energy production systems away from fossil fuels and towards green energy such as wind, wave, solar and biomass, together with smart energy systems and the conversion of the built environment into both generator/consumer of energy and the electrification of transport fleets require the progressive and strategic development of a different form of energy grid. To this end, Smart Specialisation will increase the regional uptake of new advanced technologies to increase the reach of the green transformation across Irish enterprise.

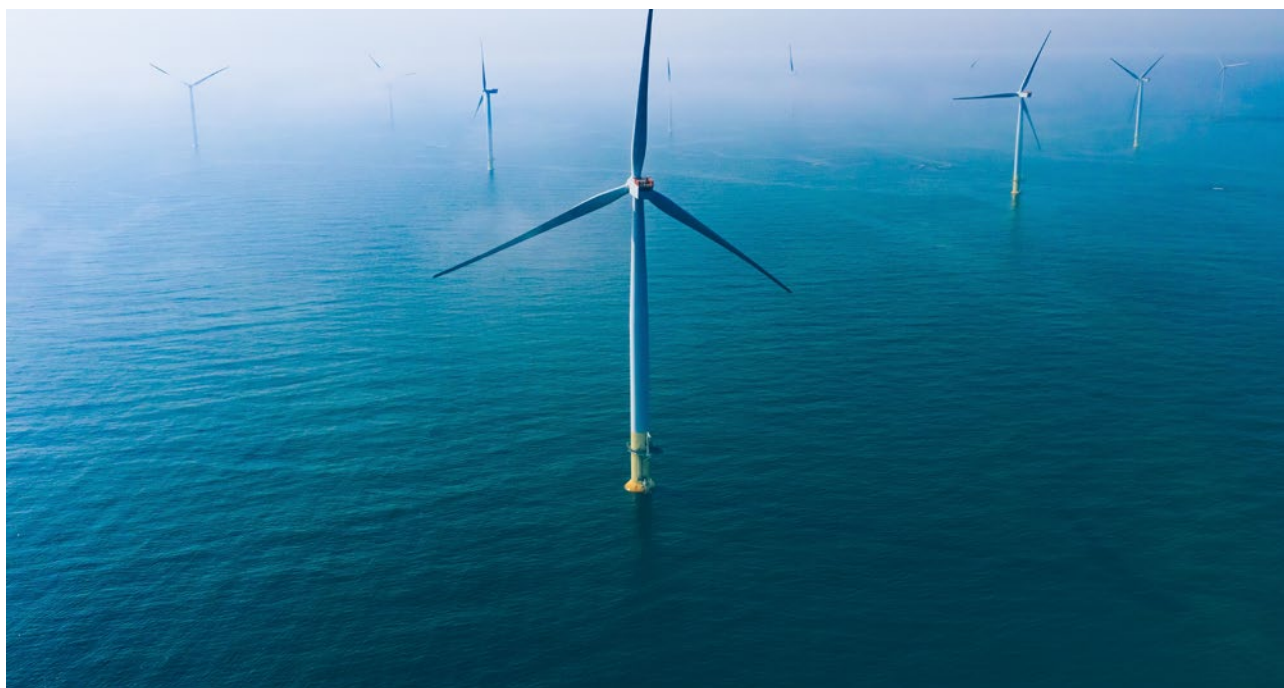
The development of onshore and offshore renewable energy is critically dependent on the development of enabling infrastructure including grid facilities to bring the energy ashore and connect to major sources of energy demand.

We also need to ensure more geographically focused renewables investment to minimise the amount of additional grid investment required, for example through co-location of renewables and grid connections.

Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030 was launched in January 2024. Implementation of actions within the Plan will contribute towards the 2050 vision that *'Biodiversity in Ireland is valued, conserved, restored and sustainably used, maintaining ecosystem services, sustaining a healthy planet and delivering benefits essential for all people'*.

Green Energy

- Deliver 80% of our electricity needs from renewable sources by 2030 with a strategic aim to increase renewable deployment in line with EU targets and National policy objectives out to 2030 and beyond. It is expected that this increase in renewable deployment will lead to a greater diversity of renewable technologies in the mix.
- Reinforce the distribution and transmission network to facilitate planned growth and distribution of a more renewables focused source of energy across the major demand centres.
- Strengthen energy security and resilience to support an island population of 8 million people through effective north-south electricity grid interconnection as well as exploring other EU interconnection options in the longer term to 2040.
- Consideration of carbon neutral electricity generation that would be facilitated through harnessing carbon capture and storage (CCS).
- National Interconnector (Sub-sea Ring around Ireland) or other solutions offer the potential to connect Ireland to the EU electricity grid System.
- Roll-out of the National Smart Grid Plan enabling new connections, grid balancing, energy management and micro grid development.
- District heating networks will be developed, where technically feasible and cost effective, to assist in meeting renewable heat targets and reduce Ireland's GHG emissions.



National Strategic Outcome 9

Sustainable Management of Water and other Environmental Resources



Water

The policy objectives and priorities of the Government regarding the provision of water services are set out in the Water Services Policy Statement 2018-2025 as provided for under section 32A of the Water Services (No.2) Act 2013 (as amended). These objectives focus on the themes of Quality, Conservation and Future Proofing. Priority objectives include:

- Substantial State investment, through Uisce Éireann and the Rural Water Programme, to improve compliance with public health and environmental standards, with particular reference to the River Basin Management Plan for Ireland.
- Bringing and maintaining public water and wastewater services to acceptable international benchmarks, verified by independent monitoring and reporting.
- Achieving improved outcomes in quality in respect of drinking water and in wastewater in relation to rural and private water services.
- Adopting forward planning and risk management approaches to minimise the impact of non-compliance with all relevant EU Directives and to safeguard against future compliance risks.
- Embedding conservation at the heart of water policy involves prioritising resource management, abstraction control, source protection, tackling leakage and encouraging behavioural change.
- The promotion of water conservation and water resource management is to be reflected in strategic investment planning by Uisce Éireann, to include work programmes around leak detection and repair, network improvements, cost effective metering, public awareness campaigns and funding to fix customer side leaks.

- Water conservation will inform the Working Group on the review of rural water services, and investment decisions in this area.
- Ensuring that public and private water services investment decisions are aligned with the broad strategic aims of the NPF.
- Adapting water services to withstand the impact of climate change and of such weather-related events.
- Improving the resilience of rural and private water supplies as part of the review of rural water services currently underway.

In relation to priorities for strategic investment planning, the policy statement recognises that implementation of the National Planning Framework requires that plans for public and private water services are aligned with the broad strategic aims of the Framework, which means:

- Ensuring the growth of our five cities of Dublin, Cork, Galway, Waterford and Limerick, together with the regional centres identified in the NPF, is supported by the provision of water services investment;
- Devising detailed network and capacity assessments to support the provision of water services infrastructure that facilitates housing and economic development in the priority towns and urban areas identified in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, in order to ensure plan-led development decisions are underpinned by coordinated investment plans and
- Supporting the growth of identified settlements where these are prioritised in development plan core strategies at a county/city level.

Uisce Éireann's investment priorities are evidence-based and plan-led supporting the strategic approach outlined in the National and Regional Water Resource Plans as well as other focused plans such as the National Wastewater Sludge Management Plan.

Effective Waste Management

Local Authorities are statutorily responsible for the preparation of waste management plans pursuant to the provisions of the Waste Management Act 1996. The Regional Waste Management Planning Offices are currently finalising a new National Waste Management Plan, informed by, inter alia, the National Planning Framework. The Plan will set out the required actions at local and regional levels to deliver on the Waste Action Plan for a Circular Economy.

The Circular Economy and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2022 strengthened provisions in relation to waste management plans, by requiring waste management plans to include indicators and targets relating to the use of products and materials that have been re-used, re-manufactured or repaired.

The new National Waste Management Plan will contain targets for reuse, repair, resource consumption and recycling, and address measures such as:

- enhanced use of civic amenity sites as circular economy hubs; and
- supporting the development of indigenous waste treatment capacity to reduce reliance on export.
- Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and the core strategies of MASPs and city and county development plans will support national and regional waste policy and the efficient use of resources;
- Biological treatment and increased uptake in anaerobic digestion with safe outlets for bio stabilised residual waste;
- Development of necessary and appropriate hazardous waste management facilities to avoid the need for treatment elsewhere;
- Adequate capacity and systems to manage waste, including municipal and construction and demolition waste in an environmentally safe and sustainable manner and remediation of waste sites to mitigate appropriately the risk to environmental and human health.

National Strategic Outcome 10

Access to Qualify Childcare, Education and Health Services



Our childcare, education and health systems will need to plan ahead in order to meet the implications of an additional one million people by 2040. In particular the health system will need to respond to the projected change to our population increase and age distribution, through the provision of services and supports for an ageing population.

Education

The provision of early childhood care and education (ECCE), schools, colleges and universities will be critical in the spatial development of cities and regions. They will impact on individual and community development, quality of life, social cohesion, availability of amenities and will be important influencing factors in the areas of research and innovation, inward investment and access to labour markets.

Given the changes in future patterns of labour market participation, there will be a need for increased analysis of capital requirements to support investment in childcare in particular.

Strategic planning of, and investment in, the provision of childcare, education and training remains central to reinforcing the delivery of sustainable communities, promoting inclusion and offering choice and accessibility to a high standard of education and employment. Planning for childcare, education and training infrastructure to meet increasing demand can be more effectively dealt with in the context of cross-government cooperation through a National Framework supported by strategic investment:-

Education

- Provide additional investments in the schools sector to keep pace with demographic demand and to manage increasing building and site costs so that new and refurbished schools on well-located sites within or close to existing built-up areas, can meet demographic growth and the diverse needs of local populations;

- Expand and consolidate third-level facilities at locations where this will further strengthen the capacity of those institutions to deliver the talent necessary to drive economic and social development in the regions.
- Investment in higher and further education and training will be a key driver of Ireland's competitiveness. The NPF is aligned with the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, and the Future FET: Transforming Learning, The National Further Education and Training (FET) Strategy. The development of programmes for life-long learning, especially in areas of education and training where skills gaps are identified by employers and the further and higher education and training system, working together through Regional Skills fora, in responding to the skills needs of their regions.

Health

The development of new healthcare facilities requires that consideration be given to the location, number, profile and needs of the population to ensure access to the most appropriate care, while also ensuring quality of care, particularly in relation to more complex acute hospital services. The ongoing implementation of Sláintecare and the Strategic Healthcare Investment Framework will have an important influence on the type and scale of regional healthcare services. Nationally, the following priorities are identified:

Healthy Communities and Healthcare Services in the Community

- A nationally overarching priority for the health of the population is achieving the objectives of Healthy Ireland and the implementation of the successor to the National Physical Activity Plan, to support active mobility and equitable access to physical activity opportunities, and Healthy Cities and Counties programme, delivered through local authorities.

- Health and Wellbeing Projects and prevention programmes including the BreastCheck Services and the ongoing fluoridation programme of works.
- Expanding Community and Primary Care is at the heart of the Sláintecare vision. The development of Primary Care Centres (PCCs) is an important part of this vision. This will include the appropriate provision of PCCs and accommodation based on local service and population needs. Expansion of primary care will involve refurbishments of existing buildings and where necessary new builds.
- Delivery of the Enhanced Community Care (ECC) Programme which aims to move greater levels of care out of the acute hospital system and deliver care close to peoples' homes, allowing patients to remain at home and in their community for as long as possible.
- Continue the transformation of the National Ambulance Service (NAS) from a service that has traditionally transported all patients to hospital for treatment, to a delivery model that is clinically led, where care is provided in the most appropriate place.
- Continuing the National Age Friendly Programme delivering a range of policy supports with local government including transport, walkable streets and community activities and supporting Age Friendly Towns. Delivery of long-term residential care developments based on local need and located centrally in proximity to the community and local services.
- Development of policy on the design and build for nursing homes, as well as other models of delivery of long-term care for older people to support them to remain living independently in their communities.

Integrated Health and Social Care Services

Services for Older People

- Health infrastructure is not just about property and buildings. It is also about the technologies, digital and data sharing capabilities that are needed to provide integrated care. These capabilities must be planned along-side infrastructure including how to leverage digital and technologies to include virtual and digitally enabled care built on a solid foundation of trust, privacy, and cyber resilience. The Irish health service is underpinned by a vast technology landscape which is the largest ICT operating environment in the State.
- Facilitating the transition of service users across services, providing multi-disciplinary care at the lowest level of complexity close to where people live. Focus on improving access to primary and community care services, including mental health, palliative care, services for older people, social inclusion and addiction support.
- Implementing Adult Palliative Care Policy and integrated palliative care with services available in the Regions to all those who need them.
- The Irish Government's strategic goal is to deliver a new model of integrated older persons health and social care services, across the care continuum supporting older people to remain living independently in their own homes and communities for longer in line with the Sláintecare. It is recognised however that care provided in long term residential care settings will continue to be an important part of the continuum of care for older person people into the future.
- Development of community-based housing with supports by moving to new models of 'home-first' care for older people and 'Housing with Support' purpose-built, non-institutional, 'own front door' accommodation with support or care services in conjunction with the Department of Housing.

Mental Health – A Vision for Change

- Implementing the national Mental Health policy "Sharing the Vision 2020-30" the national suicide reduction policy "Connecting for Life" and the upcoming revision of Mental Health Act. These policies are both in implementation phase and include the delivery of timely and accessible care that reflects a more whole-of-government approach, allied to person-centered and recovery orientated principles.

- Incorporation of the planned extension of Mental Health Commission regulation of community Mental Health services (under the new Mental Health Act) which will require significant built environment enhancement.
- Replacement and provision of additional acute mental health units, residential accommodation and modern facilities for adults and children on a national basis.

Acute Hospital Services

- Continued development of services and infrastructure (acute, cancer, trauma, maternity,) which will be informed by strategy and population requirements as outlined in overall approach to health service planning. There has been significant investment in services and capacity, with further investment and expansion of capacity being informed by population and service requirements across the country.
- Delivery of the national Paediatric model of care and, in particular, construction of the New Children's Hospital comprising of the main hospital on the shared campus at St James's and the now completed two Paediatric Outpatient and Urgent Care Centres at CHI Connolly, Blanchardstown, and CHI Tallaght.
- Implementation of the new Elective Care Centre Projects and Surgical Hubs, which will provide significant additional capacity and enable the separation of scheduled and unscheduled care.

Appendix 1:

Draft National Policy Objectives

Draft National Policy Objectives, 2024

National Policy Objective 1

Ensure that all plans, projects and activities requiring consent arising from the National Planning Framework are subject to the relevant environmental assessment requirements including SEA, EIA, SFRA and AA as appropriate.

National Policy Objective 2

The projected level of population and employment growth in the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly area will be at least matched by that of the Northern and Western and Southern Regional Assembly areas combined.

National Policy Objective 3

- **Eastern and Midland Region:** 470,000 additional people between 2022 and 2040 (c. 690,000 additional people over 2016-2040) i.e. a population of almost 3 million;
- **Northern and Western Region:** 150,000 additional people between 2022 and 2040 (c. 210,000 additional people over 2016-2040) i.e. a population of just over 1 million;
- **Southern Region:** 330,000 additional people over 2022 levels (c. 450,000 additional people over 2016-2040) i.e. a population of just over 2 million.

National Policy Objective 4

A target of half (50%) of future population and employment growth will be focused in the existing five cities and their suburbs⁵⁸.

National Policy Objective 5

The regional roles of Athlone in the Midlands, Sligo and Letterkenny in the North-West and the Letterkenny-Derry and Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry cross-border networks will be supported in the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and in Regional Enterprise Plans.

National Policy Objective 6

Accessibility from the north-west of Ireland and between centres of scale separate from Dublin will be significantly improved, focused on cities and larger regionally distributed centres and on key east-west and north-south routes.

National Policy Objective 7

Deliver at least 40% of all new homes nationally, within the built-up footprint of existing settlements and ensure compact and sequential patterns of growth⁵⁹.

58 The five cities and their suburbs as defined by the CSO in the Census of Population.

59 This objective relates to all 'built up areas' as defined by CSO. For the purposes of NPO 7, 8 and 9 the built-up footprint is defined as the area given over to urban land uses (i.e. artificial surfaces relating to urban land uses). The built-up footprint shall be clearly defined for each settlement on the land-use zoning map as part of the statutory plan making process.

Draft National Policy Objectives, 2024

National Policy Objective 8

Deliver at least half (50%) of all new homes that are targeted in the five Cities and suburbs of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford, within their existing built-up footprints.

National Policy Objective 9

Deliver at least 30% of all new homes that are targeted in settlements other than the five Cities and their suburbs, within their existing built-up footprints.

National Policy Objective 10

Deliver Transport Orientated Development (TOD) at scale at suitable locations, served by high capacity public transport and located within or adjacent to the built up area of the five cities or a metropolitan town.

National Policy Objective 11

Planned growth at a settlement level shall be determined at development plan-making stage and addressed within the objectives of the plan. The consideration of individual development proposals on zoned and serviced development land subject of consenting processes under the Planning and Development Act shall have regard to a broader set of considerations beyond the targets including, in particular, the receiving capacity of the environment.

National Policy Objective 12

Ensure the creation of attractive, liveable, well designed, high quality urban places that are home to diverse and integrated communities that enjoy a high quality of life and well-being.

National Policy Objective 13

Develop cities and towns of sufficient scale and quality to compete internationally and to be drivers of national and regional growth, investment and prosperity.

National Policy Objective 14

Regenerate and rejuvenate cities, towns and villages of all types and scale as environmental assets that can accommodate changing roles and functions, increased residential population and employment activity, enhanced levels of amenity and design and placemaking quality, in order to sustainably influence and support their surrounding area to ensure progress toward national achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Draft National Policy Objectives, 2024

National Policy Objective 15

Apply a tailored approach to urban development, linked to the Rural and Urban Regeneration and Development Funds, with a particular focus on:

- Dublin;
- The four Cities of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford;
- Strengthening Ireland's overall urban structure, particularly in the Northern and Western and Midland Regions, to include the regional centres of Sligo and Letterkenny in the North-West, Athlone in the Midlands and cross-border networks focused on the Letterkenny-Derry North-West City Region and Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry on the Dublin-Belfast corridor;
- Encouraging population growth in strong employment and service centres of all sizes, supported by employment growth;
- Reversing the stagnation or decline of many smaller urban centres, by identifying and establishing new roles and functions and enhancement of local infrastructure and amenities;
- Addressing the legacy of rapid unplanned growth, by facilitating amenities and services catch-up, jobs and/or improved sustainable transport links to the cities, together with a slower rate of population growth in recently expanded commuter settlements of all sizes;
- In more self-contained settlements of all sizes, supporting a continuation of balanced population and employment growth.

National Policy Objective 16

To ensure that the targeted pattern of population growth of Ireland's cities to 2040 is in accordance with the targets set out in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 | Ireland 2040: Targeted Pattern of City Population Growth

City	Population 2022	2018 NPF	Population Growth to 2040 ⁶⁰		Minimum Target Population 2040
		% Range 2016-2040	% Range 2022-2040	People	
Dublin - City and Suburbs	1,263,000	20-25%	20-25%	296,000	1,560,000
Cork - City and Suburbs	223,000	50-60%	40%	96,000	320,000
Limerick - City and Suburbs	102,000	50-60%	40%	44,000	150,000
Galway - City and Suburbs	86,000		40%	36,000	122,000
Waterford - City and Suburbs	60,000		40%	28,000	88,000

⁶⁰ City population growth targets are at the minimum point of the range and are rounded to the nearest 1,000.

Draft National Policy Objectives, 2024

National Policy Objective 17

In each Regional Assembly area, settlements not identified in Policy 4 or 5 of this Framework, may be identified for significant (i.e. 30% or more above 2022 population levels) rates of population growth at regional and local planning stages, provided this is subject to:

- *Agreement (regional assembly, metropolitan area and/or local authority as appropriate);*
- *Balance with strategies for other urban and rural areas (regional assembly, metropolitan area and/or local authority as appropriate), which means that the totality of planned population growth has to be in line with the overall growth target; and*
- *A co-ordinated strategy that ensures alignment with the delivery of investment in infrastructure and the provision of employment, together with supporting amenities and services.*

National Policy Objective 18

Regional and Local Authorities to identify and quantify locations for strategic employment development in the cities identified in Table 4.1.

National Policy Objective 19

Regional and Local Authorities to identify and quantify locations for strategic employment development, where suitable, in urban and rural areas generally.

National Policy Objective 20

In meeting urban development requirements, there will be a presumption in favour of development that can encourage more people and generate more jobs and activity within existing cities, towns and villages, subject to development meeting appropriate planning standards and achieving targeted growth.

National Policy Objective 21

The Government will support the LDA, in association with Local Authorities, to fulfill its statutory mandate to deliver a significant number of homes on State lands in major mixed tenure developments, with a particular focus on brownfield and infill urban sites in the five main cities and regional centres as a priority.

National Policy Objective 22

In urban areas, planning and related standards, including in particular building height and car parking will be based on performance criteria that seek to achieve well-designed high quality outcomes in order to achieve targeted growth.

National Policy Objective 23

Protect and promote the sense of place and culture and the quality, character and distinctiveness of the Irish rural landscape including island communities that make Ireland's rural areas authentic and attractive as places to live, work and visit. Any successor policy documents relating to national policy for rural areas and the islands will ensure continued alignment and consistency with the National Policy Objectives of this Framework.

National Policy Objective 24

Support the sustainable development of rural areas by encouraging growth and arresting decline in areas that have experienced low population growth or decline in recent decades and by managing the growth of areas that are under strong urban influence to avoid over-development, while sustaining vibrant rural communities.

National Policy Objective 25

Target the reversal of rural decline in the core of small towns and villages through sustainable targeted measures that address vacant premises and deliver sustainable reuse and regeneration outcomes⁶¹.

61 Refer to [Sustainable Residential Development and Compact Settlements Guidelines for Planning Authorities](#)

Draft National Policy Objectives, 2024

National Policy Objective 26

Enhance, integrate and protect the special physical, environmental, economic and cultural value of built heritage assets, including streetscapes, vernacular dwellings and other historic buildings and monuments, through appropriate and sensitive investment and conservation.

National Policy Objective 27

Continue to support the proportionate growth of and appropriately designed development in rural towns that will contribute to their regeneration and renewal, including interventions in the public realm, the provision of amenities, the acquisition of sites and the provision of services.

National Policy Objective 28

Continue to support programmes for 'new homes in small towns and villages' with local authorities, public infrastructure agencies such as Uisce Éireann and local communities to provide serviced sites with appropriate infrastructure to attract people to build their own homes and live in small towns and villages.

National Policy Objective 29

Ensure, in providing for the development of rural housing, that a distinction is made between areas under urban influence, i.e. within the commuter catchment of cities and large towns and centres of employment, and elsewhere:

- *In rural areas under urban influence, facilitate the provision of single housing in the countryside based on the core consideration of demonstrable economic or social need to live in a rural area and siting and design criteria for rural housing in statutory guidelines and plans, having regard to the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements;*
- *In rural areas elsewhere, facilitate the provision of single housing in the countryside based on siting and design criteria for rural housing in statutory guidelines and plans, having regard to the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements.*

National Policy Objective 30

Project the need for single housing in the countryside through the local authority's overall Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA) tool and county development plan core strategy processes.

National Policy Objective 31

Facilitate the development of the rural economy, in a manner consistent with the national climate objective, through supporting a sustainable and economically efficient agricultural and food sector, together with forestry, fishing and aquaculture, energy and extractive industries, the bio-economy and diversification into alternative on-farm and off-farm activities, while at the same time noting the importance of maintaining and protecting biodiversity and the natural landscape and built heritage which are vital to rural tourism.

National Policy Objective 32

Support and facilitate delivery of the National Broadband Plan as a means of developing further opportunities for enterprise, employment, education, innovation and skills development for those who live and work in rural areas.

National Policy Objective 33

Enhance the competitiveness of rural areas by supporting innovation in rural economic development and enterprise through the diversification of the rural economy into new sectors and services, including ICT-based industries and those addressing climate change and sustainability.

National Policy Objective 34

Support the agri-food industry in promoting Ireland's continued food security in a manner that ensures economic, environmental, and social sustainability while ensuring progress in achieving targets in the National Climate Action Plan and the River Basin Management Plan.

Draft National Policy Objectives, 2024

National Policy Objective 35

Continue to facilitate tourism development and in particular the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways, and a Blueways and Peatways Strategy, which prioritises projects on the basis of their environmental sustainability, achieving maximum impact and connectivity at national and regional level while ensuring their development is compliant with the National Biodiversity Action Plan, the national climate change objective and requirements for environmental assessments.

National Policy Objective 36

The Department of Rural and Community Development, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and other relevant Departments and Agencies will continue to invest in rural Ireland, including through the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, and will work together to establish a mechanism to co-ordinate structures for funding rural development to align with other national strategies.

National Policy Objective 37

Support the objectives of public health policy including the Healthy Ireland Framework and the National Physical Activity Plan, though integrating such policies, where appropriate and at the applicable scale, with planning policy.

National Policy Objective 38

Ensure the integration of safe and convenient alternatives to the car into the design of our communities, by prioritising walking and cycling accessibility to both existing and proposed developments, and integrating physical activity facilities for all ages.

National Policy Objective 39

Plan for a more diverse and socially inclusive society that targets equality of opportunity and a better quality of life for all citizens, through improved integration and greater accessibility in the delivery of sustainable communities and the provision of associated services.

National Policy Objective 40

Support the implementation of language plans in Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas, Gaeltacht Service Towns and Irish Language Networks.

National Policy Objective 41

Local planning, housing, health facilities and services, transport/ accessibility and leisure policies will be developed with a focus on meeting the needs and opportunities of an ageing population along with the inclusion of specific projections, supported by clear proposals in respect of ageing communities as part of the core strategy of city and county development plans.

National Policy Objective 42

Prioritise the alignment of targeted and planned population and employment growth with investment in:

- A childcare/ECCE planning function, for monitoring, analysis and forecasting of investment needs, including identification of regional priorities;
- The provision and timely delivery of childcare facilities and new and refurbished schools on well-located sites within or close to existing built-up areas, including in support of infill and brownfield development, that meet the diverse needs of local populations and act as a key enabler for housing development, thereby contributing to the development of sustainable communities;
- The expansion and consolidation of Further and Higher Education facilities, particularly where this will contribute to wider regional development, and
- Programmes for life-long learning, especially in areas of higher education and further education and training where skills gaps are identified.

Draft National Policy Objectives, 2024

National Policy Objective 43

To target the delivery of housing to accommodate approximately 50,000 additional households per annum to 2040.

National Policy Objective 44

Prioritise the provision of new homes at locations that can support sustainable development and at an appropriate scale of provision relative to location.

National Policy Objective 45

Support the provision of lifetime adaptable homes that can accommodate the changing needs of a household over time.

National Policy Objective 46

Increase residential density in settlements, through a range of measures including reductions in vacancy, re-use of existing buildings, infill development schemes, area or site-based regeneration, increased building height and more compact forms of development.

National Policy Objective 47

Continue to develop methodologies and data sources to improve the evidence base, effectiveness and consistency of the planning process for housing provision at regional, metropolitan and local authority levels. This will include standardised requirements for the recording of planning and housing data by the local authorities in order to provide a consistent and robust evidence base for housing policy formulation.

National Policy Objective 48

A 'Housing Need Demand Assessments' (HNDAs) undertaken for each Local Authority Area in order to correlate and accurately align future housing requirements:

- to be undertaken by Local Authorities with coordination assistance to be provided by the Regional Assemblies, and also at a Metropolitan scale, particularly where inter-county and inter-regional settlement interactions are to be planned for and managed;

and

- to primarily inform housing policies, housing strategies and associated land use zoning policies as well as assisting in determining where new policy areas or investment programmes are to be developed.

National Policy Objective 49

Regional, metropolitan and local development plans will take account of and integrate relevant maritime spatial planning issues.

National Policy Objective 50

Support the sustainable growth and development of the maritime economy and continue to invest in the seafood sector and our Fishery Harbour Centres, particularly in remote rural coastal communities and islands.

National Policy Objective 51

Ensure that the strategic development requirements of Tier 1 and Tier 2 Ports, ports of regional significance, State Fishing Harbours and smaller harbours are addressed as part of Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, and plans at local level to ensure the effective growth and sustainable development of the city regions and regional and rural areas, including, where appropriate, infrastructure to effectively support the development and maintenance of off-shore renewable electricity generating developments.

Draft National Policy Objectives, 2024

National Policy Objective 52

Support the sustainable delivery of port and harbour infrastructure to facilitate the development, maintenance and operation of off-shore renewable electricity generating developments.

National Policy Objective 53

Ensure that Ireland's coastal resource is managed to sustain its physical character and environmental quality.

National Policy Objective 54

In line with the collective aims of national policy regarding climate adaptation, to address the effects of sea level changes and coastal flooding and erosion and to support the implementation of adaptation responses in vulnerable areas.

National Policy Objective 55

Support the development of coastal management plans to address the likely effects of sea level changes and coastal flooding and erosion and to support the implementation of adaptation responses in vulnerable areas.

National Policy Objective 56

To support, the progressive development of Ireland's offshore renewable energy potential, the sustainable development of enabling onshore infrastructure including domestic and international grid connectivity enhancements, non-grid transmission infrastructure, as well as port infrastructure for the marshalling and assembly of wind turbine components and for the operation and maintenance of offshore renewable energy projects.

National Policy Objective 57

Work with the relevant Departments in Northern Ireland for mutual advantage in areas such as spatial planning, development and promotion of the all-island economy, co-ordination of social and physical infrastructure provision and environmental protection and management.

National Policy Objective 58

In co-operation with relevant Departments and Local Authorities in Northern Ireland, to further support and develop the economic potential of the Dublin-Belfast Corridor and in particular the core Drogheda-Dundalk-Newry network and to promote and enhance its international visibility.

National Policy Objective 59

In co-operation with relevant Departments and Local Authorities in Northern Ireland, support and promote the development of the North West City Region as interlinked areas of strategic importance in the North-West of Ireland, through collaborative structures and a joined-up approach to spatial planning.

National Policy Objective 60

Support cross border cooperation and funding for health and education services and facilities.

National Policy Objective 61

In co-operation with relevant Departments in Northern Ireland, enhanced sustainable transport connectivity between Ireland and Northern Ireland, to include cross-border road and rail, electric vehicle infrastructure, cycling and walking routes, as well as blueways, greenways and peatways.

National Policy Objective 62

In co-operation with relevant Departments in Northern Ireland, strengthen all-island energy infrastructure and interconnection capacity, including distribution and transmission networks to enhance security of electricity supply, and explore the potential for strategic cooperation on offshore wind energy development.

Draft National Policy Objectives, 2024

National Policy Objective 63

In co-operation with relevant Departments in Northern Ireland, develop a stable, innovative and secure digital communications and services infrastructure on an all-island basis.

National Policy Objective 64

Support the coordination and promotion of all-island tourism initiatives through continued co-operation between the relevant tourism agencies and Tourism Ireland, pursue the further development of sport, and invest in the diverse heritage, arts and cultural and linguistic traditions of the island.

National Policy Objective 65

In co-operation with relevant Departments in Northern Ireland, ensuring effective management of shared landscapes, heritage, water catchments, habitats, species and trans-boundary issues in relation to environmental policy.

National Policy Objective 66

In co-operation with the United Kingdom Government and devolved Governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, Ireland will support mutually beneficial policy development and activity in the areas of spatial and infrastructure planning and other related sphere.

National Policy Objective 67

The planning system will be responsive to our national environmental challenges and ensure that development occurs within environmental limits, having regard to the medium and longer-term requirements of all relevant environmental and climate legislation and the sustainable management of our natural capital.

National Policy Objective 68

Support the circular and bio economy including in particular through greater efficiency in land and materials management, promoting the sustainable re-use of existing buildings and structures while conserving cultural and natural heritage, the greater use of renewable resources and by reducing the rate of land use change from urban sprawl and new development.

National Policy Objective 69

Support the growth and development of efficient district heating, electrification of heating, and utilisation of geothermal energy.

National Policy Objective 70

Reduce our carbon footprint by integrating climate action into the planning system in support of national targets for climate policy mitigation and adaptation objectives, as well as targets for greenhouse gas emissions reductions as expressed in the most recently adopted carbon budgets.

National Policy Objective 71

Promote renewable energy use and generation at appropriate locations within the built and natural environment to meet national objectives towards achieving a zero carbon economy by 2050.

National Policy Objective 72

Support the development and upgrading of the national electricity grid infrastructure, including to support the delivery of renewable electricity generating development.

National Policy Objective 73

Support an all-island approach to the delivery of renewable electricity through interconnection of the transmission grid.

Draft National Policy Objectives, 2024

National Policy Objective 74

Support the co-location of renewable technologies with other supporting technologies and complementary land uses, including agriculture, amenity, forestry and opportunities to enhance biodiversity and promote heritage assets, at appropriate locations which are determined based upon the best available scientific evidence in line with EU and national legislative frameworks.

National Policy Objective 75

Each Regional Assembly must plan, through their Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, for the delivery of the regional renewable electricity capacity allocations indicated for onshore wind and solar reflected in Table 9.1 below, and identify allocations for each of the local authorities, based on the best available scientific evidence and in accordance with legislative requirements, in order to meet the overall national target. Table 9.1: Regional Renewable Electricity Capacity Allocations

Region	Energised capacity 2023 (MW)	Additional Renewable Power Capacity Allocations (MW)	Total % of National Share in 2030	Energised Capacity 2023 (MW)	Additional Renewable Power Capacity Allocations (MW)	Total % of National Share in 2030
	Onshore Wind			Solar PV		
Eastern and Midlands	284	1,966	25%	306	3,294	45%
Northern and Western	1,761	1,389	35%	0.3	959	12%
Southern	2,622	978	40%	138	3,302	43%
Total	4,667	4,333		445	7,555	

National Policy Objective 76

Local Authorities shall plan for the delivery of Target Power Capacity (MW) allocations consistent with the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, through their City and County Development Plans.

National Policy Objective 77

Sustainably manage waste generation including construction and demolition waste, invest in different types of waste treatment and support circular economy principles, prioritising prevention, reuse, recycling and recovery, to support a healthy environment, economy and society.

National Policy Objective 78

Enhance water quality and resource management by preventing or mitigating the risk of flooding by:

- Ensuring flood risk management informs place-making by avoiding inappropriate development in areas at risk of flooding in accordance with The Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities.
- Taking account of the potential impacts of climate change on flooding and flood risk and consideration of the Flood Risk Management Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plan.
- Ensuring that River Basin Management Plan objectives are fully considered throughout the physical planning process.
- Integrating sustainable water management solutions, such as Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS), non-porous surfacing and green roofs, and nature based solutions, to create safe places.

Draft National Policy Objectives, 2024

National Policy Objective 79

Support the management of stormwater, rainwater and surface water flood risk through the use of nature-based solutions and sustainable drainage systems.

National Policy Objective 80

Support the retrofitting of existing environments to cater for surface water run-off through the use of nature based solutions, including the implementation by Uisce Éireann of Integrated Drainage Plans on a prioritised settlement basis.

National Policy Objective 81

Integrated planning for Green and Blue Infrastructure will be incorporated into the preparation of statutory land use plans while maintaining ecosystem services and ecosystem functions and conserving and/or restoring biodiversity.

National Policy Objective 82

Identify and strengthen the value of greenbelts and green and blue spaces at a regional, city and local scales, to enable enhanced connectivity to wider strategic networks and prevent coalescence of settlements and to allow for the long-term strategic expansion of urban areas. Promote and support an increase in the provision of green and blue spaces and tree canopy cover in settlements.

National Policy Objective 83

In line with the National Biodiversity Action Plan and the European Union Nature Restoration Law, and best available scientific information, regional and local planning authorities shall support the preparation of the National Restoration Plan.

National Policy Objective 84

In line with the National Biodiversity Action Plan; the conservation, enhancement, mitigation and restoration of biodiversity is to be supported by:

- Integrating policies and objectives for the protection and restoration of biodiversity, including the avoidance and/or minimisation of potential biodiversity impacts, in statutory land-use plan.
- Retention of existing habitats which are currently important for maintaining biodiversity (at local/ regional/national/international levels), in the first instance, is preferable to replacement/restoration of habitats, in the interests of ensuring continuity of habitat provision and reduction of associated risks and costs.

National Policy Objective 85

In line with the objectives of the National Biodiversity Action Plan, planning authorities should seek to address no net loss of biodiversity within their plan making functions.

National Policy Objective 86

Enhance the conservation status and improve the management of protected areas and protected species by:

- Implementing relevant EU Directives to protect Ireland's environment and wildlife and support the objectives of the National Biodiversity Action Plan;
- Developing and utilising licensing and consent systems to facilitate sustainable activities within Natura 2000 sites;
- Continued research, survey programmes and monitoring of habitats and species.

National Policy Objective 87

Conserve and enhance the rich qualities of natural, cultural and built heritage of Ireland in a manner appropriate to their cultural and environmental significance.

Draft National Policy Objectives, 2024

National Policy Objective 88

Facilitate landscape protection, management and change through the preparation of a National Landscape Character Map and development of guidance on local landscape character assessments, (including historic landscape characterisation) to ensure a consistent approach to landscape character assessment, particularly across planning and administrative boundaries.

National Policy Objective 89

Ensure the alignment of planned growth with the efficient and sustainable use and development of water resources and water services infrastructure, in order to manage and conserve water resources in a manner that supports a healthy society, economic development requirements and a cleaner environment.

National Policy Objective 90

Improve air quality and help prevent people being exposed to unacceptable levels of pollution in our urban and rural areas through integrated land use and spatial planning that supports public transport, walking and cycling as more favourable modes of transport to the private car, the promotion of energy efficient buildings and homes, heating systems with zero local emissions, green and blue infrastructure planning and innovative design solutions.

National Policy Objective 91

Promote the pro-active management of noise where it is likely to have significant adverse impacts on health and quality of life and support the aims of the Environmental Noise Regulations through Strategic Noise Maps, Noise Action Plans and national planning guidance.

National Policy Objective 92

Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans for the Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford Metropolitan areas and in the case of Dublin and Cork, to also address the wider city region, shall be reviewed by the appropriate authorities in tandem with and as part of a review of the relevant Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

National Policy Objective 93

The Metropolitan Area Strategic Plans, shall include provision for large-scale Transport Orientated Development (TOD) opportunities and may target a proportion of planned growth in the metropolitan areas towards the delivery of new sustainable communities at brownfield and greenfield locations in the principal city and suburbs areas and in the wider metropolitan areas focused on opportunities arising from existing and planned major public transport investment, along planned high capacity public transport corridors and in accordance with the principles of Transport Orientated Development.

National Policy Objective 94

Statutory arrangements between spatial and transport planning in the Greater Dublin Area will be extended to other cities.

National Policy Objective 95

The Government will work to establish the necessary institutional and funding arrangements to support the development and accelerated delivery of Transport Orientated Development at suitable locations in conjunction with the ongoing programme of investment in the public transport network.

National Policy Objective 96

Provision will be made for urban area plans and priority area plans, to replace current local area plan provisions; coordinated area plans to be prepared where a town and environs lie within the combined functional area of more than one local authority, and the designation of areas with significant potential for development as Candidate Urban Development Zones and Urban Development Zones in order to facilitate focused investment in enabling infrastructure and accelerated development.

Draft National Policy Objectives, 2024

National Policy Objective 97

Planning authorities will be required to apply a standardised, tiered approach to differentiate between i) zoned land that is serviced and ii) zoned land that is serviceable within the life of the plan.

National Policy Objective 98

When considering zoning lands for development purposes that require investment in service infrastructure, planning authorities will make a reasonable estimate of the full cost of delivery of the specified services and prepare a report, detailing the estimated cost at draft and final plan stages.

National Policy Objective 99

When considering zoning land for development purposes that cannot be serviced within the life of the relevant plan, such lands should not be zoned for development.

National Policy Objective 100

Planning authorities will use compulsory purchase powers to facilitate the delivery of enabling infrastructure to prioritised zoned lands, to accommodate planned growth.

National Policy Objective 101

Planning authorities and infrastructure delivery agencies will focus on the timely delivery of enabling infrastructure to priority zoned lands in order to deliver planned growth and development. In addition, to ensure that infill and brownfield lands are being developed and that the compact growth targets set out in NPO 7 - 9 are being achieved, it is also important to develop and implement new approaches to measuring and monitoring compact growth in cities and larger settlements, aligned to greater digitalisation of the planning system.

National Policy Objective 102

Develop and implement new approaches to measuring and monitoring compact growth in cities and larger settlements aligned to increased digitalisation of the planning system.

National Policy Objective 103

Continue to ensure the alignment of the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan through delivery of the National Strategic Outcomes.

Appendix 2:

Population and Employment in Urban Settlements, Census of Population 2022

Settlement	Population 2022	Resident Workers	Total Jobs	Jobs: Resident Workers
Abbeyfeale, Co Limerick	2206	623	1204	1.93
Abbeyleix, Co Laois	1897	600	521	0.87
Allenwood, Co Kildare	1685	631	262	0.42
Annacotty, Co Limerick	3398	1350	1597	1.18
Ardee, Co Louth	5478	1738	2489	1.43
Arklow, Co Wicklow	13399	4437	3107	0.70
Ashbourne, Co Meath	15680	6342	4690	0.74
Ashford, Co Wicklow	1892	736	439	0.60
Athboy, Co Meath	2596	889	590	0.66
Athenry, Co Galway	4603	1752	1659	0.95
Athlone, Counties Westmeath & Roscommon	22869	7561	12505	1.65
Athy, Co Kildare	11035	3279	2474	0.75
Baile Chláir, Co Galway	1632	578	411	0.71
Bailieborough, Co Cavan	2974	832	862	1.04
Balbriggan, Co Dublin	24322	8210	4216	0.51
Ballaghaderreen, Co Roscommon	2387	529	681	1.29
Ballina, Co Mayo	10556	3345	5049	1.51
Ballina, Co Tipperary	2959	1113	551	0.50
Ballinasloe, Co Galway	6597	1743	3020	1.73
Ballinrobe, Co Mayo	3148	1027	1479	1.44
Ballivor, Co Meath	1870	648	273	0.42
Ballybofey-Stranorlar, Co Donegal	5406	1716	2152	1.25
Ballybunion, Co Kerry	1618	458	390	0.85
Ballyhaunis, Co Mayo	2773	719	1161	1.61
Ballyjamesduff, Co Cavan	2917	1033	646	0.63
Ballymahon, Co Longford	1714	499	743	1.49
Ballymote, Co Sligo	1711	542	445	0.82
Ballysadare, Co Sligo	1747	721	268	0.37
Ballyshannon, Co Donegal	2246	637	953	1.50
Balrothery, Co Dublin	2282	824	358	0.43
Baltinglass, Co Wicklow	2611	808	853	1.06
Banagher, Co Offaly	1907	576	549	0.95
Bandon, Co Cork	8196	2877	2693	0.94
Bantry, Co Cork	2929	933	1809	1.94
Bearna, Co Galway	2336	860	461	0.54
Belturbet, Co Cavan	1610	470	284	0.60
Birr, Co Offaly	4726	1458	1672	1.15

Settlement	Population 2022	Resident Workers	Total Jobs	Jobs: Resident Workers
Blarney, Co Cork	2779	1037	834	0.80
Blessington, Counties Wicklow & Kildare	5611	2097	1257	0.60
Boyle, Co Roscommon	2915	758	1191	1.57
Bray, Counties Wicklow & Dublin	33512	12292	9729	0.79
Bunclody, Counties Wexford & Carlow	2053	582	761	1.31
Buncrana, Co Donegal	6971	2142	2405	1.12
Bundoran, Co Donegal	2599	797	809	1.02
Caherconlish, Co Limerick	1569	487	206	0.42
Cahir, Co Tipperary	3679	1150	1260	1.10
Callan, Co Kilkenny	2678	884	800	0.90
Carlingford, Co Louth	1528	440	368	0.84
Carlow, Counties Carlow & Laois	27351	8522	9231	1.08
Carndonagh, Co Donegal	2768	778	1289	1.66
Carrickmacross, Co Monaghan	5745	1901	1896	1.00
Carrick-On-Shannon, Counties Leitrim & Roscommon	4743	1633	3145	1.93
Carrick-on-Suir, Co Tipperary	5752	1587	1397	0.88
Carrigaline, Co Cork	18239	7354	3050	0.41
Carrigtwohill, Co Cork	5568	2242	4538	2.02
Cashel, Co Tipperary	4805	1492	1997	1.34
Castlebar, Co Mayo	13054	4559	9911	2.17
Castleblayney, Co Monaghan	3926	1269	1732	1.36
Castlebridge, Co Wexford	1850	704	352	0.50
Castleconnell, Co Limerick	2488	912	384	0.42
Castledermot, Co Kildare	1685	570	331	0.58
Castleisland, Co Kerry	2536	806	1438	1.78
Castlemartyr, Co Cork	1603	634	242	0.38
Castlerea, Co Roscommon	2348	532	935	1.76
Cavan, Co Cavan	11741	3771	5774	1.53
Celbridge, Co Kildare	20601	8447	3297	0.39
Charleville, Co Cork	3970	1215	2079	1.71
Clane, Co Kildare	8152	3408	2094	0.61
Clara, Co Offaly	3403	1077	770	0.71
Claremorris, Co Mayo	3857	1380	1529	1.11
Clogherhead, Co Louth	2275	842	254	0.30
Clonakilty, Co Cork	5112	1857	2719	1.46
Clones, Co Monaghan	1885	639	493	0.77
Clonmel, Counties Tipperary & Waterford	18369	6164	7190	1.17
Cloyne, Co Cork	1967	760	244	0.32
Cobh, Co Cork	14148	5381	2066	0.38
Collooney, Co Sligo	1797	638	733	1.15
Convoy, Co Donegal	1702	492	328	0.67
Cootehill, Co Cavan	1856	623	617	0.99
Cork city and suburbs, Co Cork	222526	82837	113067	1.36
Courtown, Co Wexford	4365	1310	459	0.35
Crosshaven, Co Cork	3263	1321	564	0.43
Derrinturn, Co Kildare	1837	612	218	0.36
Dingle-Daingean Uí Chuis, Co Kerry	1671	525	1259	2.40

Settlement	Population 2022	Resident Workers	Total Jobs	Jobs: Resident Workers
Donabate, Co Dublin	9669	4243	1636	0.39
Donegal, Co Donegal	2749	900	2018	2.24
Drogheda, Counties Louth & Meath	44135	15354	14339	0.93
Dublin city and suburbs, Counties Dublin & Meath	1263219	469840	577835	1.23
Duleek, Co Meath	4899	1623	840	0.52
Dunboyne, Co Meath	7155	2904	1250	0.43
Dundalk, Co Louth	43112	13736	14209	1.03
Dungarvan, Co Waterford	10081	3221	3996	1.24
Dunleer, Co Louth	2143	738	951	1.29
Dunmanway, Co Cork	1964	583	851	1.46
Dunmore East, Co Waterford	1731	655	341	0.52
Dunshaughlin, Co Meath	6644	2945	1696	0.58
Edenderry, Co Offaly	7888	2501	1909	0.76
Edgeworthstown, Co Longford	2199	589	369	0.63
Enfield, Co Meath	3663	1430	763	0.53
Ennis, Co Clare	27923	9785	10628	1.09
Enniscorthy, Co Wexford	12310	3557	4861	1.37
Enniskerry, Co Wicklow	2000	754	408	0.54
Fermoy, Co Cork	6720	2351	2449	1.04
Fethard, Co Tipperary	1738	526	544	1.03
Galway city and suburbs, Co Galway	85910	30617	51211	1.67
Gorey, Co Wexford	11517	3924	4170	1.06
Gort, Co Galway	2870	844	1083	1.28
Graiguenamanagh-Tinnahinch, Counties Kilkenny & Carlow	1506	424	286	0.67
Greystones-Delgany, Co Wicklow	22009	8523	4181	0.49
Kanturk, Co Cork	2803	940	981	1.04
Kells, Co Meath	6608	2157	1669	0.77
Kenmare, Co Kerry	2566	821	1111	1.35
Kilbeggan, Co Westmeath	1575	483	634	1.31
Kilcock, Counties Kildare & Meath	8674	3586	1335	0.37
Kilcoole, Co Wicklow	4569	1751	1350	0.77
Kilcullen, Co Kildare	3815	1554	1185	0.76
Kildare, Co Kildare	10302	3745	2996	0.80
Kilkenny, Co Kilkenny	27184	9704	15479	1.60
Kill, Co Kildare	3818	1538	978	0.64
Killaloe, Co Clare	1666	571	665	1.16
Killarney, Co Kerry	14412	4941	7398	1.50
Killorglin, Co Kerry	2163	769	1467	1.91
Killucan-Rathwire, Co Westmeath	1574	553	333	0.60
Kilmallock, Co Limerick	1761	471	775	1.65
Kilrush, Co Clare	2649	620	1204	1.94
Kingscourt, Co Cavan	2955	1009	838	0.83
Kinnegad, Co Westmeath	3064	1133	596	0.53
Kinsale, Co Cork	5991	2106	2066	0.98
Kinsealy-Drinan, Co Dublin	7526	3212	866	0.27
Lanesborough-Ballyleague, Counties Roscommon & Longford	1733	544	342	0.63

Settlement	Population 2022	Resident Workers	Total Jobs	Jobs: Resident Workers
Laytown-Bettystown-Mornington-Donacarney, Co Meath	15642	5896	1748	0.30
Leixlip, Co Kildare	16733	6610	9166	1.39
Letterkenny, Co Donegal	22549	7762	13109	1.69
Lifford, Co Donegal	1613	397	841	2.12
Limerick city and suburbs, Counties Limerick & Clare	102287	31448	49871	1.59
Listowel, Co Kerry	4794	1435	2361	1.65
Longford, Co Longford	10952	2844	5800	2.04
Longwood, Co Meath	1685	637	168	0.26
Loughrea, Co Galway	6322	2099	2213	1.05
Lusk, Co Dublin	8806	3303	1048	0.32
Macroom, Co Cork	4096	1475	1518	1.03
Maigh Cuilinn, Co Galway	2279	920	541	0.59
Malahide, Co Dublin	18608	7194	3733	0.52
Mallow, Co Cork	13456	4426	4493	1.02
Manorhamilton, Co Leitrim	1667	541	1039	1.92
Maynooth, Co Kildare	17259	7139	6898	0.97
Midleton, Co Cork	13906	5417	4625	0.85
Millstreet, Co Cork	1722	647	1032	1.60
Mitchelstown, Co Cork	3744	1265	1770	1.40
Moate, Co Westmeath	3013	985	648	0.66
Monaghan, Co Monaghan	7894	2632	4198	1.59
Monasterevin, Co Kildare	5307	1992	1443	0.72
Mountmellick, Co Laois	4905	1543	989	0.64
Mountrath, Co Laois	2070	563	415	0.74
Muinebeag (Bagenalstown), Co Carlow	2945	895	1700	1.90
Mullagh, Co Cavan	1651	549	389	0.71
Mullingar, Co Westmeath	22667	7380	9828	1.33
Naas, Co Kildare	26180	11031	11690	1.06
Navan, Co Meath	33886	12326	9820	0.80
Nenagh, Co Tipperary	9895	3483	4846	1.39
New Ross, Wexford & Kilkenny	8610	2630	3681	1.40
Newbridge, Co Kildare	24366	9071	7337	0.81
Newcastle West, Co Limerick	7209	2369	2678	1.13
Newcastle, Co Dublin	4526	1656	4368	2.64
Newmarket-On-Fergus, Co Clare	1887	726	212	0.29
Newport, Co Tipperary	2183	810	529	0.65
Newtownmountkennedy, Co Wicklow	3539	1320	1071	0.81
Oranmore, Co Galway	5819	2676	3420	1.28
Oughterard, Co Galway	1846	650	498	0.77
Passage West-Monkstown, Co Cork	6051	2304	717	0.31
Portarlinton, Counties Laois & Offaly	9288	3013	1950	0.65
Portlaoise, Co Laois	23494	7575	9055	1.20
Portlaw, Co Waterford	1881	648	248	0.38
Portmarnock, Co Dublin	10750	4106	1882	0.46
Portumna, Co Galway	1690	510	759	1.49
Prosperous, Co Kildare	2413	896	431	0.48
Rathangan, Co Kildare	3263	1207	588	0.49

Settlement	Population 2022	Resident Workers	Total Jobs	Jobs: Resident Workers
Rathcoole, Co Dublin	5792	2193	1220	0.56
Rathcormac, Co Cork	1957	745	220	0.30
Rathdrum, Co Wicklow	2264	811	652	0.80
Rathnew, Co Wicklow	3482	1087	607	0.56
Ratoath, Co Meath	10077	4207	1445	0.34
Roscommon, Co Roscommon	6555	2107	4315	2.05
Roscrea, Co Tipperary	5542	1665	1688	1.01
Rosslare Harbour, Co Wexford	2247	665	537	0.81
Rosslare, Co Wexford	1795	525	444	0.85
Rush, Co Dublin	10875	4098	1547	0.38
Saggart, Co Dublin	4573	1318	773	0.59
Sallins, Co Kildare	6269	2712	778	0.29
Shannon, Co Clare	10256	3840	8185	2.13
Sixmilebridge, Co Clare	2832	1108	330	0.30
Skerries, Co Dublin	10743	4064	2060	0.51
Skibbereen, Co Cork	2903	901	1664	1.85
Sligo, Co Sligo	20608	6551	13562	2.07
Stamullen, Co Meath	3720	1589	719	0.45
Strandhill, Co Sligo	1982	780	440	0.56
Swords, Co Dublin	40776	17040	15082	0.89
Templemore, Co Tipperary	2005	614	1169	1.90
Termonfeckin, Co Louth	1983	702	289	0.41
Thomastown, Co Kilkenny	2305	836	757	0.91
Thurles, Co Tipperary	8185	2580	3066	1.19
Tipperary, Co Tipperary	5387	1486	2105	1.42
Tower, Co Cork	3300	1320	334	0.25
Tralee, Co Kerry	26079	7582	13336	1.76
Tramore, Co Waterford	11277	4046	2031	0.50
Trim, Co Meath	9563	3577	3419	0.96
Tuam, Co Galway	9647	2972	3801	1.28
Tubbercurry, Co Sligo	2307	648	758	1.17
Tullamore, Co Offaly	15598	5174	8513	1.65
Tullow, Co Carlow	5138	1619	1402	0.87
Tullyallen, Co Louth	1697	651	197	0.30
Virginia, Co Cavan	3211	1151	912	0.79
Waterford city and suburbs, Counties Waterford & Kilkenny	60079	19616	27704	1.41
Watergrasshill, Co Cork	1840	816	303	0.37
Westport, Co Mayo	6872	2500	4539	1.82
Wexford, Co Wexford	21524	7487	10458	1.40
Wicklow, Co Wicklow	12957	4925	3469	0.70
Youghal, Co Cork	8564	2674	1921	0.72

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