



Submission to the OECD review of the Public Service in Ireland by the Urban Forum

1.0 Introduction.

The Urban Forum represents the five principal professional institutes in Ireland concerned with physical planning and development:

- the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland (RIAI),
- Engineers Ireland,
- the Irish Planning Institute (I.P.I.),
- the Irish Landscape Institute (I.L.I.), and
- the Society of Chartered Surveyors (S.C.S.)

The Urban Forum published a manifesto on planning and development prior to the General Election, and discussed the issues raised with key representatives of the main political parties. Many of the proposals received their support. A copy of the manifesto is included with this submission.

The Planning System is crucial, given the prescribed focus of the present OECD review on “connectivity between different sectors, including between the central level and the wider sectoral areas”.

Social Partnership is at the core of public policy formation in Ireland, but does not include local government or professional institutes in its stakeholders. Despite more than 60% of the population now living in urban areas, the Social Partnership includes the rural sector, but not the urban sector.

However, in the NESC’s 2004 Report *Housing in Ireland: Performance and Policy*, the social partners have published a key work of policy research which asserts the centrality of better physical planning to the future well-being of cities, neighbourhoods and regions; and to future competitiveness and sustainable development of the country as a whole. Part of the NESC’s abstract of the Report on its website reads as follows:

Two general findings inform these recommendations. First, the instruments that can address the core challenges are to be found more in the areas of planning, urban design, infrastructural investment, land management and public service delivery, rather than in manipulating tax instruments to alter the supply or demand for land or housing. Second, increased housing quantity and better quality neighbourhoods can be complementary and, indeed, mutually reinforcing. This requires a clear vision of the kind of high-quality, integrated, sustainable neighbourhoods that are worth building.

The magnitude and significance of the challenge of sustainable neighbourhoods and social balance needs to be recognised. It bears comparison with two other great challenges that Ireland faced and met in the past half century—the opening of the economy in the early 1960s and the creation of a new economy through partnership in the mid-1980s. It is similar in three ways. First, it is essential to the social and economic future of Irish society. Second, it requires a widely shared understanding and consistent action by numerous organisations, both public and private. Third, it challenges not only established behaviour but also the self-perception that underpins that behaviour. Achievement of the new principles of urban development and social

integration seem to be blocked, more than anything else, by the belief that Ireland is so attached to dispersed development and so divided between different social groups and interests, that we cannot make quality, sustainable, socially-cohesive cities and towns. Since earlier self-perceptions were confounded by the emergence of a prosperous society and a world centre of engineering and information technology, there is no reason why we cannot prove ourselves wrong again.ⁱ

This submission relates mainly to planning and implementation processes under the Planning and Development Act 2000. It stems from experiences in the construction industry; in the planning and delivery of infrastructure; and in the planning and delivery of urban places. These processes interact with so many areas of the public service that the comments herein relate to the entire of that public service. The recommendations need further debate.

The document is set out under headings as follows:

- 2.0 Planning Horizon;
- 3.0 Governance and stakeholders;
- 4.0 Measurement of outcomes and benefits against those Projected inadvance
- 5.0 Implementation Strategies.
- 6.0 Structures for Coherent Planning and Delivery of Infrastructure .
- 7.0 Resourcing of Authorities
- 8.0 Recommendations.
- 9.0 Reference documents.

2.0 Planning Horizon.

The design life of strategic infrastructure is generally of the order of 120 years (roads, bridges etc.). The expected life of other strategic developments, such as schools, hospitals etc., can be expected to exceed one hundred years.

The strategic planning horizon should therefore be at least fifty years, extending to perhaps one hundred years in some cases such as ports, for example.

The horizon for tactical plans, which is what National Development Plans (NDPs) are, should be extended from six to twenty years.

To illustrate this point, the study being undertaken by the Dublin Institute of Technology for the Urban Forum, on the future of the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) gateway cities, is based on a conservative projection of a national population of 6 million. It estimates that each gateway needs to double its population in order to hold Dublin to 40% of the total 6 million. Even then Dublin would see a population growth of 700,000.

Such growth needs urgent regional planning. Dublin itself needs to expand by 500,000, and a further 200,000 people are needed in order to double the population of the region's other towns. Even with ambitious targets of 150,000 within the inner city and docks involving the moving of Dublin Port, and 90,000 in suburban infill, the urban fringe and Swords need to

expand by 260,000, which equates to 10 Adamstown. Adamstown will take at least 25 years from initial planning to completion, so it is clear that plans should already be underway for the equivalent of another nine. Some large-scale town and neighbourhood plans are underway, but nowhere near enough. More resources are needed to plan the full complement.

Doubling the size of the gateway cities and the regional towns is an even more daunting challenge. If that fails to meet targets, the Dublin Region's problems of unsustainable sprawl will be even greater.

If the planning horizons were to be extended as suggested, then different planning methods would have to be employed. Scenario based planning would need to be introduced in order to cope with the wide range of possible outcomes within the planning horizon.

3.0 Governance and Stakeholders.

Planning processes within various arms of central and local government appear to take place with little reference to each other. The current debate regarding the location and size of a national children's hospital is a prime example. The Department of Health should ascertain the most probable population distribution and demographic over the life of the hospital; should assess ease of access, and should be consulting with other agencies such as the National Roads Authority, Central Statistics Office, etc., before a location or building type is chosen.

Strategic infrastructure should be planned and designed with the beneficiaries in mind. If infrastructure is to benefit our society, the beneficiaries as well as other stakeholders must be included at planning stage. This suggests that a much more holistic approach should be taken to long term planning. It also requires a new tiered approach to governance as set down at 7.0 below.

A recent special report on cities in London's *Economist* newspaper shows how pervasive around the world the problems of governance are. It says: "Not all happy cities resemble each other, but each unhappy city is at least partly unhappy for a single reason: misgovernment." While no Irish city is mentioned, it concludes about Mumbai (Bombay), whose problems of infrastructure and sprawl seem like Dublin's writ large, that "it needs a completely different form of government, one that would ideally be led by a mayor [elected like that of Chicago or Curitiba] who could give his authority to all the endeavours that the city requires and be held responsible for both their successes and their shortcomings."ⁱⁱ

4.0 Measurement of outcomes and benefits against those projected in advance

The Urban Forum acknowledges the commitment in the NDP to carry out a cost benefit analysis for all projects with a capital value in excess of €30 million. Notwithstanding this we consider that the current methods of measuring project value are almost exclusively financial. Financial measures are excellent for apportioning costs, but not for measuring the value to society of any particular project. Since net value is benefit minus cost, the social benefits of projects must be measured and evaluated in order to inform decision making regarding projects competing for scarce resources.

This measure of societal value can include "soft" costs as well as benefits, e.g. the social cost of disruption and congestion: to industry and to other stakeholders during implementation of a project. What, for example, is the social cost of disruption during the current upgrading of the M50? Would the original M50 project have had different phasing if this social cost were considered in the original design?

The concept of social value can be extended to post implementation project evaluation. Have the benefits to society been achieved by the project? If not, why not? What can be learned? This post implementation evaluation provides needed feedback to inform decision making for further projects.

The idea of social value can be extended to all areas of the public service, perhaps including areas such as finance, stakeholder relationships, metrics relating to activities and processes and measures of how well a particular organisation is preparing for the future needs of its stakeholders. This "balanced scorecard" then becomes a method of measuring how well any particular organisation creates social value or capital.

The methods of measuring social value need not be precise but they must be transparent so that the methods are understood and widely agreed.

5.0 Implementation Strategies.

Because of the wide range of possible outcomes in the extended planning horizons recommended above, implementation strategies will need to accommodate a wide range of scenarios.

A range of contingencies must be catered for. A large degree of versatility will need to be incorporated into strategic plans. Phasing and reversibility will become key issues. Social cost of delays during implementation will need to be incorporated into the project evaluation process.

6.0 Structures for Coherent Planning and Delivery of Infrastructure.

The current structures for planning and delivery of infrastructure and settlement are less than optimal, some would say dysfunctional. These problems stem, on the one hand, from over-emphasis at national level on micromanagement of infrastructure and public projects, even those of local significance, and on the other hand by an apparent lack of responsibility and accountability at local level for working towards national priorities and policies. For example, local social infrastructure, such as schools and social housing, are controlled at central level, and local infrastructure such as sewerage treatment goes through successive steps of approval at central level. At the same time, national settlement priorities, such as the Gateway designations set out in the NSS, are ignored in the zoning decisions by local county councillors, resulting in a mis-match between national policy and local delivery, the consequences of which are already apparent in the 2006 Census Results. Regional Planning Guidelines are merely advisory, and are often ignored at local level (as confirmed in a High Court case, *Smith & McEvoy - v - Meath County Council*), to the detriment of logical and evidence based planning.

What is required is a strengthened Regional Tier, to which power and responsibility for non-national infrastructure and planning should be devolved from central level. Such a regional Tier should in turn set binding, rather than advisory, policy directions for the county/local level. Such a hierarchy of decision making and planning is a common feature of most developed European Countries, but is sadly lacking in the Irish context.

An example of current ineffective regional policy is the role of Dublin City as the water authority for the former county of Dublin, which no longer relates to the whole Dublin region and has resulted in a major shortfall in water supply for the region, which cannot be remedied in some areas for more than a decade.

The Urban Forum proposes a system as follows:-

National Level:-

- Preparation of national development planning, settlement and infrastructure policy (Government, and Government Departments), which would be binding at regional level. National strategic planning should be based on the considerations set out above.
- Approvals for national strategic infrastructure (An Bord Pleanála, under the 2006 Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act).
- Funding of national infrastructure (Dept of Finance and other Government Departments).

Regional Level:-

The reconstruction of the existing Regional Authorities into Regional Planning and Infrastructural Authorities. These would be composed of directly-elected Regional Senators, and headed by a directly elected Regional Mayor, both with five-year terms. A corps of administrative and professional staff would be provided, on a full-time basis, to staff such authorities. Staff and elected members would work directly for, and govern, the regional authorities, and would not be swayed by their county council employers/memberships, as currently is the case. The functions of the regional authorities would include:-

- Adoption of regional infrastructural and settlement plans, which would be binding on the local authorities at county and sub-county level subject to periodic review/updating. These plans would define the location and scale of all settlement expansion/new settlements, county by county. Short and medium term forecasts and allocations would be provided, to cover non-national roads, rail transport at sub-national level (e.g. suburban rail and bus services), and all water and sewerage infrastructure.
- Approval for all non-national strategic infrastructural projects (i.e. devolution of this function for non-national infrastructure in 2006 Act from An Bord Pleanála to regional authorities). Provision for appeal to An Bord Pleanála.
- Funding of all non-national infrastructure, except any infrastructure “called-in” at national level. This means a general devolution of funding allocation from central government by means of a general (non-itemised) block grant, to be spent at the discretion of the regional authority based on its regional plan, subject to overall compliance with national policy set out in NSS/NDP.

- Fire certification and building control inspectorate. This means regionalisation of these functions away from local authorities, which are too poorly resourced in most cases to fulfil them. This work is better done at regional level, since the criteria are generally not locally distinctive, but are more technical in nature.
- Preparation of landscape characterisation and protection policies, subject to confirmation by An Bord Pleanala. Such plans are appropriately made at regional level, intermediate between county and national levels.

The boundaries of the Regional Authorities should be those of the present planning regions, with boundary alterations to reflect the hinterlands of Gateways.

An Bord Pleanala should be required to vet all regional settlement and infrastructural plans, to confirm compliance with national plans and policies, so that coherence within the national planning hierarchy shall be maintained.

Local Authorities

Councils should continue to carry out development control/development management of planning applications, with appeal in the normal way to An Bord Pleanala (first and third party), except for those classes of strategic national or regional infrastructure development that are reserved for the national and regional levels. Decisions on applications should be an executive function only. The current S.140 provision allowing elected members to direct the County Manager should be removed, but there should be a statutory right for an elected member to appeal a decision of the Manager to An Bord Pleanala.

County Development Plans should also continue to be prepared by county councils, but should now have to conform to the settlement locations and allocations of scale to be defined at regional level. Adoption of Plans should remain the function of the elected members, as at present, but An Bord Pleanala should vet Plans for compliance with national and regional plans and policies so as to maintain coherence within the planning hierarchy. The Board should have the power to amend the plans, or to remit them back to the councils for amendment. The key issue is that local councils should not be able to propose development areas, or infrastructure, that does not conform to the regional allocations and settlement locations.

Social infrastructure and physical infrastructure at a local level should be planned and funded by county councils. Consideration should be given to the replacement, if necessary on a phased basis, of the current stamp duty and rating systems by a land value tax (LVT), with the valuations and rates assessed and collected centrally, but with all of the revenue going to the county to which the tax was ascribed.

Local Area Plans (LAPs) should be prepared by County Councils as at present. However, the option should be given to the Councils to prepare them in the form of Strategic Development Zones (SDZs), without the current necessity for Central Government designation. If prepared as SDZs and confirmed by An Bord Pleanala subject to an oral hearing, then the current rules for SDZs, which prohibit appeal on individual projects to the Board, should apply. (The Adamstown SDZ oral hearing illustrated the

benefit to all stakeholders of key objectives, particularly for phasing of physical and social infrastructure, being discussed in making the Plan, instead of being retrofitted in an ad hoc manner through conditions of planning

permission.) If prepared as conventional LAP's, then the current planning legislation and other arrangements, would continue to apply.

Preparation of LAP's for all urban areas and villages must be a priority.

7.0 Resourcing of Authorities

Adequate staffing consisting of professional planners, with appropriate architectural, landscape architectural and engineering input, would be necessary for all county councils and regional authorities, in order for them to meet these new responsibilities. Hence the "blunt instrument" of the public service recruitment ban / controls should not apply to professional staffing in local authorities, and staffing levels should relate to population growth and to the level of new development required.

In addition, inconsistencies in applying those resources need to be addressed:

- The DEHLG has prepared Development Management Guidelines which have not yet been issued in final form. The standards of best practice set out in these guidelines need to become the norm for all Local Authorities, and the DEHLG needs actively to ensure these standards are adhered to.
- An example of best practice is validation by the local authority of planning applications 'across the desk' as they are being submitted by the applicant. A small number of Local Authorities provide this service which results in a dramatic drop in invalidations, and so maintains public trust and confidence in the local planning system. It also saves the Local Authority (as well as the applicants and their agents) the cost of dealing with resubmission of invalidated applications.
- A further example, highlighted in the brief for the OECD review is "The utilisation and impact of Information and Communication Technology having regard to its potential to improve quality customer service and to achieve productivity gains." The progress made by some authorities in this field needs to be rolled out across all authorities.

The incoherence of resourcing, communication policy and administration arrangements, across all planning levels, sectors and bodies is reflected in the constant day-to-day frustrations and inconsistencies met by the members of the institutions represented by the Urban Forum and by their clients, i.e. by public bodies, private developers and the public at large.

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss these issues further with the review body.

8.0 Recommendations.

The following summary of recommendations is based on the above discussion:

1. Ireland's Strategic planning horizon should be extended to at least fifty years,
2. Tactical horizons such as in the NDP should be extended at least to twenty years,
3. Planning methods should include scenario planning as well as extrapolation of historical data,

4. The planning process should incorporate improved governance and stakeholder analysis,
5. A method or methods of measuring the value to society of particular plans or projects should be developed in order to provide a holistic measure of social value or capital, and routine assessment of outcomes against plans and projections.
6. Measuring social value should be extended to measuring the performance of public services.
7. National development planning should be binding at regional level.
8. Restructured regional authorities should have directly elected mayors and senators, and appropriate staffing.
9. Regional Authorities should make plans for strategic land use and regional infrastructure, which should be complied with by local authorities' Development Plans.
10. Local Authorities to continue their current roles, but An Bord Pleanala would vet development and local area plans for compliance with national and regional plans; with new powers to amend them or remit them back to Councils for amendment.
11. Local Area Plans to be adopted for all urban areas and villages, with the option of converting them in SDZs without referral to the DEHLG, subject to the current An Bord Pleanala approval procedure.
12. All planning authorities should have appropriate staffing across all disciplines, to a level set by the DEHLG proportionate to their population and planning needs.

9.0 Reference documents.

In support of these recommendations, a number of reports are referred to below:

The City and County Architects Association is in the process of finalising a report and recommendations on the role of architects in Local Authorities.

The Irish Planning Institute is preparing a detailed census of the planning profession in Ireland, in all sectors (public, private and education), and this includes recommendations on the appropriate levels and composition of staffing for Central Government and Local Government, and the need for independent planning research to support policy-making.

The I.L.I. has prepared a manifesto on landscape issues, a copy of which is included with this submission.

Policies are constantly being developed by all the Institutes, and the Urban Forum has a programme of colloquia on key issues with representatives of key stakeholders from the public and private sectors.

Within the short time available since announcement of the OECD review, it has not been possible to arrange such a colloquium on the planning and development system as a whole before making this

submission. However, such a colloquium is now planned for June 18th 2007, and it is proposed to forward the results of this colloquium to the review body for its assistance.



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ⁱ National Economic and Social Council, Report 112, December 2004 *Housing in Ireland: Performance and Policy*. Quotation from website www.nesc.ie.

ⁱⁱ *The Economist* Vol. 383 Number 8527. London, May 5th 2007.