
Opening Statement
to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on
Housing, Local Government and Heritage
Consultation on the Draft Revised National Planning
Framework

11th July 2024

Good afternoon. My name is Paul Hogan and I am the Acting Assistant Secretary responsible for the Planning Division. I am joined by Alma Walsh, Senior Advisor and Karen Kenny, Senior Advisor. I welcome this opportunity to update members on the Draft First Revision to the National Planning Framework, which was published for public consultation on July 10th, with submissions being accepted from all interested parties up to and including 12th September.

In 2018, the National Planning Framework (NPF) replaced the National Spatial Strategy as the overall spatial planning and development strategy for Ireland. The NPF, together with the National Development Plan (NDP), combine to form Project Ireland 2040, the overarching policy and planning framework for the social, economic and cultural development of Ireland.

The NPF sets out high-level national planning policies and objectives as a long-term strategic vision to both achieve proper planning and

sustainable development and guide decision-making in respect of future development and investment in our Country.

Revision of the NPF

Government gave approval to commence the process of undertaking the First Revision of the National Planning Framework on 20th June 2023 and to publish a Roadmap outlining the process and timeline.

As indicated in the Roadmap, a number of key drivers for the revision were identified:

- Climate Transition – addressing sectoral emission targets and the Climate Action Plan.
- Regional Development – the reality of regional ambition and the challenge of transitioning from ‘business as usual’.
- Changing and Diverse Demographics – planning for uncertainty.
- Digitalisation – Impacts on work, retail, commuting and regions.
- Investment and Prioritisation - timing and delivery.

Since the publication of the NPF in 2018 there have been a number of significant and critical developments in relation to planning policy, guidance and legislation, as well as governance and institutional change. Many significant initiatives, strategies and programmes have been introduced which further support the strategy approach of the NPF since it was published.

An Expert Group was commissioned by Minister O'Brien in March 2023 to undertake a high-level review and consider the appropriate scope of the first revision to the NPF.

The Expert Group submitted their report to the Minister in August 2023, and the report was noted by Government and published in September 2023. 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 that it takes.

Stakeholder Engagement in the Revision Process

The revision process has provided for wide-ranging consultation and engagement with stakeholders to date, including the reconvening of the Planning Advisory Forum for the purposes of informing the revision process, chaired by Minister of State Alan Dillon (previously MoS Kieran O'Donnell).

A Cross-Departmental Steering Group was established in September 2023 as part of the NPF revision to enable consideration of the relevant issues. Bilateral meetings between the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and other Departments took place in Q4 2023 and input from the officials of all relevant Departments was provided through the revision process.

ESRI Research

The Economic Social and Research Institute (ESRI) were engaged to update their previous projections relating to population growth to 2040, based on demographic and econometric modelling and having regard to

the results of Census 2022 and other factors with potential to influence fertility, mortality and migration trends.

The ESRI projection is that the population will increase to around 5.7m people by 2030 and 6.1m by 2040. This projection forms the central, core trajectory of a lower and higher range of projected population growth and forms the basis for the Draft Revised NPF strategy.

Their paper also contains comprehensive analysis which provides valuable insights regarding national and local future housing requirements. This work is now being used to form the basis for revised housing projections that will inform the forthcoming update of *Housing for All*. In this regard, the Draft Revised NPF anticipates a need to plan for approximately 50,000 additional homes per annum to 2040.

NPF Revision Strategy

In effect, the revised NPF sets out a need to plan for a population of 6.1m people by 2040.

The draft revised NPF plans to apply the additional population on a pro-rata basis, relative to current NPF growth targets, throughout Ireland. The core objectives of balanced regional development and compact growth are proposed to be maintained and notwithstanding that the transition to balanced regional development is taking time to materialise, it is not proposed to change the overall approach to deliver this over the period between 2022 and 2040. Accordingly, the objective of a 50:50 split of growth between the EMRA and the NWRA/SRA Regions is maintained in the proposed Revision.

The promotion of city-focused population and employment growth remains an important element of the NPF strategy. This is based on ambitious growth targets for the cities of Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford, relative to their recent rates of development, with each projected to grow by at least 50% by 2040.

Notwithstanding the challenges to delivering on city-focused growth, it is not proposed to diminish the growth targets in the NPF and the strategy maintains this level of ambition, with a focus on the need for enhanced mechanisms to support delivery.

A new element of NPF strategy results from the requirement to plan for range of population growth, that may exceed the overall 6.1m projection, in line with the high migration scenario provided in the ESRI Report (6.3m). This is to be aligned with strategic planning for Transport Orientated Development (TOD) in and around Ireland's five Cities to support the delivery of new sustainable communities at brownfield and greenfield locations along existing or planned high capacity public transport corridors. In terms of identifying locations for such housing development at pace and scale, it is critical that planning for these opportunities commences immediately, aligned with phased infrastructure investment.

The approach to rural areas in the draft Revised NPF is largely focused on supporting the current policy approach, which promotes the development of rural areas, including through managed and sustainable growth. In particular, the alignment of policy and funding measures across

Government which promotes and supports rural areas, including Town Centre First and the vacant property refurbishment grant. Single rural housing based on social or economic need will continue to be supported as an important element of maintaining rural communities.

Climate Action and Renewable Energy Targets

There has been significant development in national climate policy since the adoption of the NPF and this is reflected in new and enhanced policy approaches proposed as part of the NPF revision.

New policies in relation to renewable energy development are proposed, including the identification of regional renewable electricity capacity in order to facilitate the accelerated roll-out and delivery of renewable electricity infrastructure for on-shore wind and solar generation development to support the achievement of the national targets set out in the Climate Action Plan.

As signalled in Climate Action Plan 2024, the Revised NPF will enable each Regional Assembly plan, through their Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies, identify targeted capacity in MW for new onshore wind and solar electricity development. The regional strategies will be required to break down the regional targets into county level allocations that will inform the updating/preparation of local level development plans. This will result in the identification of suitable areas for such development, on the basis of a consistent four-tier classification system (with the detailed requirements to be incorporated into the Draft Wind Energy Development Guidelines).

The Draft Revised NPF also acknowledges the clear link between the climate action response and the potential for investment generation and employment and jobs, including in connection with the offshore wind industry and green technology.

Timeline for the Draft consultation process

Public consultation on the draft is open from 10th July 2024 to the 12th September 2024. An information campaign (including broadcast, print digital and social media) is also being run to raise awareness of the consultation process and to encourage the public to engage with the draft revision.

Next Steps

All submissions received will be reviewed and considered ahead of the draft NPF being finalised for Government approval. The final draft of the Revised National Planning Framework will require the approval of each House of the Oireachtas before it is published.

Once finalised, the revised National Planning Framework will be incorporated into the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and the City and County Development Plans.

In conclusion, the first revision of the NPF builds on and updates the current NPF strategy. It retains many key elements of the NPF, such as regional balance, city-focused growth and the continued development of rural communities. It also incorporates revised population and climate targets and reflects a strengthened alignment of development and infrastructure as a matter of priority. The planning team are here to further

detail the draft revised NPF as we now commence the public consultation stage and we wish to thank the Committee for your time and engagement.