

Purpose of this Consultation Paper

This paper seeks the views of a wide range of bodies, interests and members of the public on the issues which the National Spatial Strategy should address. These views will be taken into account in the preparation of a report, which will set out the detailed scope and content of the National Spatial Strategy and provide a brief for its preparation.

Background

Ireland enters the 21st Century experiencing an unprecedented phase of growth, development and economic opportunity. Having established a strong economic performance as a nation, attention is now turning to how that performance is maintained and geographically distributed within the country in a balanced and sustainable manner.

As a response to this issue, the Government's objective for regional policy in the National Development Plan is to achieve more balanced regional development in order to

- reduce the disparities between and within the Border, Midlands and Western Region and the Southern and Eastern Region, and
- develop the potential of both regions to contribute to the greatest possible extent to the continuing prosperity of the country.

It is also stated that policies must ensure that this development is sustainable in terms of the quality of life, social cohesion and conservation of the environment and the natural and cultural heritage.

The National Spatial Strategy

To support the realisation of these objectives, the Government has mandated the Department of the Environment and Local Government to prepare a National Spatial Strategy. This will be completed within two years and will translate the broad approach to balanced regional development into a more detailed blueprint for longer-term spatial development over a twenty year horizon. The National Spatial Strategy will

- identify broad spatial development patterns for areas and set down indicative policies in relation to the location of industrial development, residential development, services, rural development, tourism and heritage, and
- develop and present a dynamic conception of the Irish urban system, together with its links to rural areas, which recognises and utilises their economic and social interdependence.

The National Spatial Strategy will be a strategic spatial planning blueprint for the country as a whole and, inter alia, will provide a basis for long-term co-ordination and co-operation in policy formulation and decision making on major investment in infrastructure including public and private transport infrastructure.

The National Spatial Strategy will also take account of the European Spatial Development Perspective (ESDP), published in May 1999, and its statement of the fundamental goals of European policy in relation to:

- economic and social cohesion
- conservation of natural resources and cultural heritage
- more balanced competitiveness of the European territory, and

the policy orientations for spatial development:

- polycentric or multi-centred spatial development and a new relationship between urban and rural areas
- parity of access to infrastructure and knowledge
- wise management of the natural and cultural heritage.

Defining the Issues – Your Role

This consultation forms the first part of widespread consultative procedures, which will characterise the preparation of the National Spatial Strategy. For the present, we are seeking only responses in the form of the issues and questions that you consider should be addressed in the National Spatial Strategy.

In order to assist debate on the scope of such matters at this preliminary stage, the following section sets out an initial interpretation of

- (a) *Overall objectives* for the National Spatial Strategy,
- (b) *Key challenges* that the strategy should address, and
- (c) *Issues* arising in response to these challenges.

These have been derived from the National Development Plan and recent studies and reports.

In particular, you are invited to:

- (1) Identify any additional issues that you think should be addressed.
- (2) Modify or amplify any of the issues.
- (3) Indicate the relative importance of a given issue or group of issues.

The comments received by the Department will be analysed and used in the preparation of a report setting out the scope and brief of the National Spatial Strategy. The aim is to initiate the main components of the strategy's preparation by early spring 2000.

Objectives, Challenges and Issues

The overall purpose of the National Spatial Strategy is to set out the pattern of future development in Ireland that best meets, in a sustainable way, the following objectives:

- Continuing national economic and employment growth.
- Continuing improvement in Ireland's international competitiveness.
- Fostering balanced regional development.
- Improving the quality of life for all sections of society.
- Maintaining and enhancing the quality and diversity of the natural and cultural heritage.

In attempting to achieve these objectives through spatial planning, a number of challenges will emerge. These challenges will arise not only from the process of addressing individual objectives, but also from reconciling elements of different objectives which may be at variance or in conflict with each other. It is suggested, at this stage, that there are seven key challenges for the National Spatial Strategy to address:

- (1) To set out a development strategy which distributes new industrial, service and other enterprise development within Ireland in a manner that maintains our competitive position internationally and at the same time assists the development of the regions in a balanced way.
- (2) Taking account of (1), to identify the strategic needs of the country in terms of transportation and telecommunications links, internally and externally, which optimise conditions for economic growth and sustainable development.
- (3) Taking account of the need for adequate provision of housing, to strengthen our settlement pattern (including residential, commercial and social facility uses) in a way which better distributes economic growth and its benefits

between and within the regions and which creates resurgence in rural areas and smaller urban centres.

- (4) To ensure that the principles of sustainable development are applied in order to safeguard the environment, including the cultural and natural heritage, in this process of regional development.
- (5) To identify ways in which deficiencies, including accessibility, in terms of social inclusion and knowledge-based human resources and their spatial spread might be addressed in the process of balanced regional development.
- (6) To ensure that the broad development strategy for the country builds upon dimensions which include the relationship between the two political entities on the island of Ireland and between Ireland and its EU partners.
- (7) To identify the institutional and implementation arrangements necessary to realise the National Spatial Strategy.

Addressing these key challenges will necessitate the exploration of a wide range of interrelated and sometimes competing issues. An indicative list of these issues is set out below, grouped under a series of headings which are presented in no particular order.

Urban Ireland and Balanced Regional Development

- *The likely scale of development in the context of demographic trends and housing needs.*
- *Identifying where balanced and sustainable urban growth is feasible.*
- *The role of Dublin in Europe - and its infrastructure needs in this context.*
- *The relationship between Dublin and the rest of the country – applying development restraints and the form these might take.*
- *Developing other major urban centres with the critical mass that can attract inward investment and the infrastructure necessary.*
- *The development of a spatial structure of smaller urban centres with links to major urban centres and rural hinterlands – and major infrastructure needs to sustain this.*
- *Creating positive linkages between urban and rural areas to achieve self-sustaining rural and village communities.*

Rural Ireland and Balanced Regional Development

- *Identifying key economic and social changes in differing types of rural areas and the spatial planning implications, such as developing off-farm employment and distinguishing between rural generated as opposed to urban generated development needs.*
- *Offering a development strategy which takes account of the links between town and country and which sets out strategies for rural development.*
- *Utilising the resources of rural areas, such as land, landscape, natural and cultural heritage and water resources, by defining their potential and setting out the necessary management requirements.*
- *Defining the distinct yet complementary roles for urban and rural areas and maintaining the social and physical integrity of each.*

People and Balanced Regional Development

- *Providing an everyday living environment for people that is safe, pleasant and healthy, with easy access to social, educational and leisure facilities. This can also be an important factor in attracting inward investment.*
- *Utilising the linkages between human resources, skills and spatial development patterns in order to employ educational, training and research infrastructure as an integral component of balanced regional development.*
- *Identifying ways in which a spatial development strategy can deal with key needs in terms of education and training to address regional imbalances.*
- *Achieving greater equity in terms of accessibility for people to the mechanisms of self-development, education and training and thereby aiding balanced competitiveness.*

Communications Infrastructure and Balanced Regional Development

- *The co-ordination of development strategies with transport needs assessment to predict key needs and arrive at efficient, effective transport systems.*
- *The case for high-speed public transport linkages between the regions and linking the regions to Dublin and other points of entry, and the settlement structure needed to sustain them.*
- *The opportunities for releasing development potential in remoter areas utilising communication networks and e-commerce - and key actions needed.*
- *The spatial development patterns and infrastructure that would permit enterprises to overcome logistical difficulties where these result in competitive disadvantage.*
- *Ensuring effective accessibility links to international markets as an integral component of national competitiveness.*
- *Identifying parallel infrastructure needs in other related sectors such as the production and distribution of energy.*

The Management of the Environment and Balanced Regional Development

- *The identification of spatial development patterns that would contribute to efficient energy usage and waste minimisation; and would reduce the impact of traffic and maximise opportunities for sustainable transportation.*
- *Integrating the capacity of the environment to accommodate development and settlement into spatial planning strategies and selection of options.*
- *Maintaining and enhancing the quality and diversity of the natural and cultural heritage, including landscape.*
- *Ecological networks as a resource to develop and a heritage to conserve.*
- *Matching the requirements of extensive and intensive land uses in rural areas with landscape and environmental considerations. Such land uses might include renewable energy, forestry and intensive agriculture.*

Delivery Mechanisms for Balanced Regional Development

- *The identification of the most appropriate political and administrative arrangements between government departments, state agencies and regional and local authorities, which would ensure the development and co-ordination of policies and activities to promote balanced regional development in the context of a National Spatial Strategy.*
- *The identification of new or the improvement of current structures which would promote the full and effective implementation of the National Spatial Strategy across the country at local, regional and national level.*
- *The recommendation of appropriate changes to, or consolidation of, current administrative areas and boundaries, where necessary, to facilitate a more effective co-ordination of policies relevant to spatial strategy.*

Send your views by 21 March 2000

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