

Ireland International NPF4 Event

3 September 2020

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This event was organised as part of a wider engagement programme undertaken by RTPI Scotland and commissioned by the Scottish Government for the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4). The three international events aimed to identify relevant planning practice across the world, which could help to shape the new NPF.

Context

The Ireland International NPF4 event looked at the National Planning Framework within Project 2040 Ireland, with a presentation from Dr Conor Norton from Technological University Dublin.

Presentation and Discussion

- Ireland first started to see issues in its regional planning strategy during the 1960's and as a result of this, The Buchanan Report was created to provide recommendations for change. These recommendations did not make it into planning policy but arose in industrial policy in the 1970's. Political decision making and the even spread of industrial development across the country meant there was very little regard to spatial planning and the recommendations' status was weakened.
- Planning legislation underwent a major overhaul in the year 2000, improving functions at both the local and national level as well as bringing in a regional plan-making process. The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) was the first spatial strategy for Ireland, setting out a structure for the eight regional areas in the country. It was ambitious in its targets for sustainable development and balanced regional development, however overall it was unsuccessful in achieving these targets for a number of reasons.
- Political 'buy in' to the NSS was minimal, as only one ministerial department worked to deliver it. It was also undermined by national policy and political intervention from the outset, as a decentralisation project was announced as part of the budget in 2003 that failed to consider the NSS. NSS implementation came after regional planning guidelines and local plans were adopted meaning that regional plans were out of sync and uncoordinated.
- Whilst the National Spatial Strategy was unsuccessful, it created a foundation for national spatial planning, from which evolved the National Planning Framework (NPF) in 2018. There was an attitude after the recession that better national planning was needed instead of scrapping a failed system.
- The NPF is key to Project 2040, which is Ireland's strategic government policy. The NSS was not linked to strategic spending so Project 2040 aimed to make the connection between Ireland's planning framework (NPF) and it's spending framework (National Development Plan 2018). There are several key features to the NPF.
- The NPF is an all-of-government planning framework, with strong political buy in and support as well as an understanding that previous failures were a result of deficiencies in planning, not bad planning. It is undergoing continuous review as a result of Covid-19, which has brought positive changes to the system from a planning perspective as it has

encouraged investment in public transport, local mobility measures and town centre improvements as well as encouraging the town centre first principle.

- The Delivery Board meets frequently and is co-chaired by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, which deals with planning and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, which makes strategic long-term investment decisions for Ireland.
- NPF aims to manage growth and balance regional development in Ireland by building around the prioritised five cities and five regional centres. There are restrictions on greenfield development, enforcing that 40% of development to be made in existing built up areas. Lastly, the marine planning framework is contained within the NPF.
- In terms of challenges, the NPF faces a few including reversing gravitational pull to popular areas i.e. Dublin, weakness of development in other regions and cities, issues of settlement patterns and underpowered regional assemblies. Implementation of NPF will require additional and new land policy, physical and social infrastructure investment, and a focus on development and growth.
- Ireland has learnt a lot from the inadequacies of the NSS, improving the strength of its national planning in particular, and as a result the system will continue to change over the next number of years. All sectoral plans in the country, at least on a policy basis, will need to adhere to and align with the NPF e.g. tourism, health and transport. This requirement has been evident and understood from the outset of preparing the document ensuring that a joined up approach in the cities and regional centres was achieved. Whilst there have been big improvements to the national level, planning at a local level will need to be strengthened to keep up with higher level plans and policy. Political commitment to the NPF will need to be maintained as planning policy at a national level is vulnerable to changes in political governance.

Learning for NPF4

- Political buy-in and support from ministers is necessary to deliver a national planning framework successfully. This suggests NPF4 should be an all-of-government document and should be continually monitored in terms of delivery strength.
- A joined up approach from different sectors should be enforced in NPF4 to connect cities and regional centres on a local level. Covid-19 should encourage a reshuffle of priorities for investment in NPF4, by highlighting the importance of the local context with a focus on active travel, town centres and the wider public realm.
- Link the NPF4 to a capital investment programme.

Read more

- [The Buchanan Report](#)
- [The National Spatial Strategy](#)
- [The National Planning Framework 2018](#)
- [Project 2040](#)
- [The National Development Plan](#)