

Ireland publishes new Draft Sustainable Residential Development Planning Guidelines

11/02/08

Mr. John Gormley, T.D., Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, today (10 February) launched new draft planning guidelines on Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas which will act as a blueprint for the future sustainable development of Irish cities, towns and villages in the coming years.

The guidelines are accompanied by a best practice urban design manual, (pdf) which illustrates how the guidelines can be implemented effectively and consistently across the different scales of urban development around the country.

The guidelines are focused on creating sustainable communities by incorporating the highest design standards and providing a co-ordinated approach to the delivery of essential infrastructure and services. *“An ever-expanding footprint of our urban areas is not sustainable,”* Minister Gormley said. *“In line with the National Spatial Strategy and Regional Planning Guidelines, we must implement policies and practices to consolidate our urban areas by providing for high-density residential development in the right locations which are well-serviced in terms of public transport and community facilities and which are built to the highest possible standards. Providing for and supporting sustainable communities into the future can and will contribute to an overall better quality of life for people.”*

The objectives of these new guidelines are to:

- Set out stronger planning requirements to facilitate the development of sustainable communities through strengthening planning and the provision of necessary supporting services and amenities;
- help achieve the most efficient use of urban land through housing densities that are appropriate to the location involved and availability of supporting services and infrastructure, particularly transport; and
- set high standards in terms of space and facilities to meet the needs of the Irish context.

The Government's housing policy statement Delivering Homes, Sustaining Communities which was published last year sets out a vision to guide the transformation of the Irish housing sector over the next ten years, by delivering better quality houses and more sustainable communities. This will require that all new residential developments are based on excellent designs, which give people quality homes in quality neighbourhoods.

Within this overall policy context it is also intended to issue policy guidance to planning authorities very shortly in relation to the taking in charge of residential developments.

Ireland has experienced unprecedented economic and social change over the last 10 years or so. The rapidly changing demographics and settlement patterns has greatly increased demand for housing throughout the country, with consequential pressure on existing infrastructure and the proper expectation of a good quality of life. For example, by 2020, the population of Dublin City is expected to increase by 12% to almost 1.5 million, Cork City by 25% to almost 150,000 people, Galway City by 45% to 105,000 people and Mallow, which is currently a medium sized town, could double to almost 20,000 people over the period.

These guidelines add to and support the considerable work which has been done at central Government level and locally to plan for this anticipated growth in an appropriate manner that supports the creation of sustainable communities within a high quality living environment.

Minister Gormley continued: *“The creative and focused approach as set down in the guidelines and the best practice design manual should ensure that, in meeting new housing needs in the cities, towns and villages across the country over the next 20 years, this is done in a way that delivers more sustainable communities. This means more and better suited accommodation for families, higher quality urban design, high standards in terms of environmental quality and energy efficiency and a focus on locations that capitalise on our future transport plans. Well planned and properly designed higher density development at appropriate locations is a key part of building these sustainable communities.”*

These guidelines replace the Department’s 1999 Residential Development Guidelines, building upon the extensive experience gained in the intervening years and reflecting changing economic, social and environmental environments around the country. Importantly, for the first time, the guidance addresses specific issues and consideration for residential development not only in the larger urban areas but also in small towns and villages.

The urban design manual illustrates best practice in implementing sustainable development policies and urban design principles as set out in the draft planning guidelines. The design manual outlines the essential criteria for sustainable urban residential development, and demonstrates how new developments can be integrated and facilitated across a range of scale and locations. It sets out 12 criteria which should be used both in pre-planning application consultations and in assessing individual planning applications.

These two documents have been prepared in the wider planning/housing context, as part of the suite of inter-related guidance documents, which also include the Apartment Design guidelines that were issued last September, and Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities published in March 2007. They take account of, and knit with, other policy initiatives such as Housing Policy Framework: Building Sustainable Communities, and will be a valuable resource as the key policy reference document for local authority planners, as well as developers, architects and other interested parties when planning for new residential development.

Improved integration, which is driven and supported by effective and democratically mandated local planning, between the provision of housing and the necessary, supporting community and social infrastructure, such as schools, community amenities and child care facilities, is essential. This policy guidance further

reinforces the Government's Developing Areas Initiative, which is aimed at providing a holistic, and partnership approach to the integrated delivery of both hard and soft infrastructure, such as water and wastewater services, roads and public transport, schools and sports & community facilities.

Preparation of the draft guidance and the complementary urban design guide was overseen by a widely representative Steering Group, which comprised officials from the Department and planning authorities, along with representatives from the Irish Planning Institute, the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland, the Irish Home Builders Association and An Bord Pleanála.

The Minister highlighted the opportunity for all sectors and stakeholders within the community to engage with the consultative process and make their views known to the Department. *"This new guidance seeks to balance the needs and interests of all stakeholders and provide a robust structure within which future development can be managed. I urge you all to reflect on the draft guidelines during the 12-week consultation period. We have a chance to work together to improve not just the quality of housing developments themselves, but also to ensure that proposals add to the character of areas and reinforce the vitality of the local community and the services and amenities needed along with the residential development."*

The draft guidelines, together with the urban design best practice manual, are available to view and download from the Department's website: www.environ.ie

The closing date for receipt of comments and submissions is 4pm on 6 May 2008.

These guidelines are being issued as a consultative draft under Section 28 of the Planning and Development Act 2000. Pending finalisation of the guidelines, planning authorities should have regard to the recommended design standards for new residential developments, when preparing or varying development plans and local area plans, particularly where their current plans incorporate older standards.

Appendix

Key Policy Recommendations in the draft Guidelines

Role of Development Plans and Local Area Plans

- Development plans, urban local area plans and planning schemes for Strategic Development Zones schemes should contain policies and objectives, which will underpin the creation of sustainable residential developments.
- They should also include clear guidance on implementation measures, particularly with regard to the phased and co-ordinated provision of physical infrastructure, public transport and community facilities.

Role of Urban Design

- Development plans should include urban design policies which are capable of being expanded in more detail in local area plans
- Planning authorities should issue design briefs and receive design statements for particularly important, sensitive or large-scale development sites.

- Pre-planning application discussions should be encouraged, so that there is clarity around sequencing priorities of the development plan, the vision statement and phasing objectives of the local area plan (where applicable), and how they relate to the applicant's land.
- The best practice **Urban Design Manual** sets out the following 12 criteria, which should be used, both in pre-application consultations and in assessing individual planning applications.

Best Practice Design Guide criteria

1. **Context:** How does the development respond to its surroundings?
2. **Connections:** How well is the new neighbourhood / site connected?
3. **Inclusivity:** How easily can people use and access the development?
4. **Variety:** How does the development promote a good mix of activities?
5. **Efficiency:** How does the development make appropriate use of resources, including land?
6. **Distinctiveness:** How do the proposals create a sense of place?
7. **Layout:** How does the proposal create people-friendly streets and spaces?
8. **Public realm:** How safe, secure and enjoyable are the public areas?
9. **Adaptability:** How will the buildings cope with change?
10. **Privacy / amenity:** How do the buildings provide a decent standard of amenity?
11. **Parking:** How will the parking be secure and attractive?
12. **Detailed design:** How well thought through is the building and landscape design?

- The design of residential streets needs to strike the right balance between the different functions of the street, including a "*sense of place*".

Planning for Sustainable Neighbourhoods

- No substantial residential development should proceed without an assessment of existing schools capacity or the provision of new school facilities in tandem with the development.
- No substantial residential development should proceed without either adequate existing public transport provision or new public transport provided in tandem with the development.
- There should be adequate provision at convenient locations for retail, health and other community facilities.
- The development plan or local area plan should:
 - Promote and encourage cycling and walking.
 - Encourage more efficient use of energy and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.
 - Include the right quality and quantity of public open space.
 - Include measures to ensure satisfactory standards of personal safety and traffic safety within the neighbourhood.
 - Protect, and where possible enhance, the built and natural heritage.

Cities and Larger Towns

- Sustainable patterns of urban development should be promoted, particularly higher residential densities in locations, which are, or will be, served by public transport. Higher densities must be accompanied in all cases by high qualitative standards of design and layout.
- In general, minimum net densities of 50 dwellings per hectare should apply within such public transport corridors and should be specified in local area plans.
- Other appropriate locations for higher densities include city and town centres and some inner suburban locations.
- The greatest efficiency in land usage in outer suburban sites will be achieved by providing net densities in the range 35 – 50 dwellings per hectare.
- Particular sensitivity is required in relation to the design and location of apartment blocks, which are higher than existing adjacent residential development.

Small Towns and Villages

- Planning authorities should not consider extensive proposals for new development, including residential development, in smaller towns and villages in the absence of an adopted local area plan.
- New development should contribute to maintaining compact towns and villages. “Leap-frogging” of development at some distance from the existing built-up area should be avoided.
- In central sites, densities of 30-40+ dwellings per hectare may be appropriate for mainly residential or mixed-use schemes. At edge of town centre sites, under controlled circumstances, densities of 25-30 dwellings per hectare with a variety of dwelling types will be appropriate. At edge of small town/village, under controlled circumstances, densities lower than 15-20 dwellings per hectare may be appropriate as long as such low-density development does not exceed 20% of total new planned housing.
- The scale of new development should be in proportion to existing development, and such development should provide for easy connectivity, especially by pedestrians and cyclists, to existing facilities.
- Planning authorities should prepare Village Design Statements for sensitive locations in co-operation with local communities.

The Home and its Setting

- It is of fundamental importance to the acceptability of higher density development by the public that the quality of design and finish extends also to the individual dwelling and its immediate surroundings.
- Residents are entitled to expect that their new homes will offer decent levels of amenity, privacy, security and energy efficiency.
- The orientation of the dwelling and its internal layout can affect levels of daylight and sunlight, and will thus influence not only the amenity of the occupants but the energy demand for heat and light.

- Privacy is an important element of residential amenity, and contributes towards the sense of security felt by people in their homes.
- Where possible, designers should seek to create child- and pedestrian-friendly car-free areas, especially in higher density schemes, through the careful location of access streets and parking areas.
- All houses (terraced, semi-detached and detached) should have an area of private open space behind the building line. The provision of adequate and well-designed private open space for apartments is crucial in meeting the amenity needs of residents; in particular, usable outdoor space is a high priority for families.
- Circulation within housing layouts, including access to individual buildings, should have regard to the varying needs of occupants over their lifetimes, including needs associated with mobility difficulties and the normal frailty associated with old age.
- Adequate provision should be made for storage / collection of waste materials.
- The quality of finish and the maintenance arrangements of completed residential developments are intrinsic elements of their long-term sustainability. The quality of the finish of the public realm is of particular importance.

Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government

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