

# Sustainability and Nature and Rural Landscapes

## SD9

Ireland's countryside represents a rich mosaic of natural areas, and semi-natural areas which are the result of human activities over the centuries, which have now acquired an importance in their own right as habitats for our wild flora and fauna. General development pressure resulting from our economic prosperity have put increasing pressure on many of these areas in recent years.

### **SPECIES THREATENED**

The Irish Red Data Book for Vascular Plants (plants with vessels for carrying sap) published by the then Wildlife Service in 1988 is a register of threatened plants with an indication of the degree of threat. Of the 1,309 species of such plants in Ireland the Red Data Book recorded 159 species of which 10 are now thought to be extinct.

Six further species are in danger of extinction, i.e. marsh saxifrage, serrated wintergreen, meadow saffron, cottonweed, rough poppy and meadow saxifrage. Causes of decline include destruction of the peatland habitat, loss of habitat due to intensive farming, climatic reasons, increased use of herbicides, decline in tillage in favour of pasture and silage making and pressure from amenity use of land.

The Irish Red Data Book 2: Vertebrates (animals with a backbone) including mammals, birds, amphibians and fish was published in 1993. Of the 230 vertebrate species which have regularly occurred in Ireland the Red Data Book features 68 species, including 7 extinct, 42 threatened and 19 others.

The eight endangered species of birds are common scoter, hen harrier, grey partridge, corncrake, red-necked phalarope, nightjar, roseate tern and corn bunting. The three species of endangered fishes are allis shad, Killarney shad and pollan. The only endangered species of amphibian is the natterjack toad. Causes of decline include habitat loss, reduction in food supplies, predation and poisonings from pesticides, new farming practices including increased mechanisation and the cutting of silage instead of hay, and recreation and tourism developments.

Further information is available in the above Books or Chapter 12 of the State of the Environment Ireland Report published by the Environmental Protection Agency in February, 1996.

### **HABITATS THREATENED**

8% of the world's blanket bog is found in Ireland. Ireland is the most important country in Europe for blanket bog. One type of blanket bog, lowland blanket bog, is found only in Ireland and Scotland. Ireland has some of the best raised bogs remaining in Europe and are probably the most extensive of their type in the

world. 80% to 90% of Ireland's blanket and raised bogs have been degraded or destroyed.

Turloughs or seasonal lakes in limestone areas are unique to Ireland - at least a third have been destroyed by drainage.

#### **ONGOING AWARENESS RAISING ACTIVITIES**

National Heritage Day- organised by Dúchas;

National Tree Week and Tree Day for Primary Schools organised the Tree Council of Ireland;

National Wildflower Week - organised by Conservation Volunteers of Ireland, Heritage Council and ENFO (the Department of the Environment and Local Government);

Esso Schools Wildlife Challenge - organised in association with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds;

Henry Ford European Conservation Awards;

Millennium Farm Landscape Initiative - organised by the IFA in co-operation with the ESB and the Farmers Journal to encourage farmers/rural dwellers to landscape a farmhouse, farm building or roadway.

#### **Future plans include:-**

1. A Wildlife (Management) Bill, 1999, to enhance the legal protection afforded to wild species and habitats, will be published shortly;
2. A Heritage Plan, which will define directions and priorities in all areas of heritage, including natural heritage, for the coming years, is in the course of preparation;
3. Further Special Protection Areas will be published in 1999;
4. A National Biodiversity Plan will be published in 1999.

Machair and sand dunes, of which Ireland has a significant proportion of what remains, are under threat from golf courses, overgrazing and agricultural intensification.

The limestone pavement of the Burren and the Aran Islands is vulnerable to bulldozing/clearance, reclamation and to some extent to other damaging agricultural practices.

#### **ACTIONS IN SUPPORT OF SUSTAINABILITY INCLUDE:-**

Nature Conservation is the responsibility of Dúchas, the Heritage Service of the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands.

The EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) requires Member States to designate as Special Protection Areas (SPA's) places that are most important to our wild birds, particularly those considered to be most threatened. Over 100 such SPA's have been designated in Ireland, and the State has undertaken to protect their ecological status.

The EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) similarly requires the protection of areas considered important for their general wildlife interest, through their designation as Special Areas of Conservation (SAC's). This Directive was transposed into Irish law on 26 February, 1997, and over 200 sites have been proposed as SAC's and already enjoy statutory protection.

**Areas protected include-**

Blanket bog (c. 240,000 ha)  
Raised bog (c.10,000 ha)  
Sand dunes (c. 25,000 ha)  
Machairs (c. 9,000 ha)  
Turloughs (s, 3,000 ha)  
Limestone pavement (c. 30,000 ha)  
Fens (c.15,000 ha)  
Grasslands (c.8,000 ha)  
Woodlands (c. 1,000 ha)  
Salt marsh/meadows (c. 20,000 ha)  
Estuaries/mudflats/cliffs (c. 90,000 ha)  
Shallow bays (c. 40,000 ha)  
Lakes/rivers (c. 100,000 ha)

The Rural Protection Scheme (REPS) provides incentives to farmers to farm in an environmentally sustainable way, with enhanced levels of payment applying in SPA's and SAC's.

The Local Government (Planning and Development ) Acts, 1963 - 1998, were amended to require the inclusion of objectives in relation to the protection of wildlife habitats in county and city developments as a result of new regulations under the Wildlife Acts for the protection of such areas;

The Heritage Council gives grant assistance for community projects which promote interest in, or education, knowledge or appreciation of the natural heritage;

The European Community ratified the Convention on Biological Diversity on 21 December, 1993. On 4 February, 1998, the European Commission adopted a communication on a European Community Biodiversity Strategy in relation to those policies for which it is responsible and which aims to complement local and national initiatives.

## **WHAT CAN I DO?**

Our natural heritage belongs to everyone and its protection and conservation depend on action by, and the behaviour of, business interests, communities and individuals as well Government and public authorities.

### **FARMERS / LANDOWNERS**

Be aware of any environmental designations that may apply to your land, and of the implications if any of these. Local officers of Dúchas will help as much as they can with advice and information. Do your best to protect important wildlife habitats, such as hedgerows.

### **CONSUMERS / HOUSEHOLDERS**

Have you participated in any of the wide range of awareness raising activities listed above? Find out if there are other local initiatives organised in your area.

Have you considered joining one of the many voluntary organisations which are interested in protecting the various forms of wildlife?

### **INDUSTRY**

Are you aware of the impact of your activities on local flora and fauna?

### **TREKKERS / HILLWALKERS / NATURE WATCHERS**

Stick to established paths, etc. in sensitive areas - walking or climbing on new areas can often cause disturbance or damage.

Respect private ownership of land.

Avoid disturbing wild birds or animals, by for example, trying to get too close, particularly to nests.

Do not leave litter in the countryside - bring it with you to where you can properly dispose of it.

Take great care not to light fires, or even to discard matches or cigarette ends in areas where there is a danger of fire spreading.

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# Sustainability and Urban Landscapes

SD19

## **Sustainability in the context of urban and the built environment**

Among the key elements of more sustainable urban/built environment policies are a more integrated approach to the physical, economic, social and environmental regeneration of urban areas, improved accessibility to areas in need of regeneration, environmental up-grading, flexibility in the application of planning policies to encourage a better mix of activities, encouraging the use of upper storeys for residential purposes, the conversion of outmoded buildings to new uses, new emphasis on the environmental and ecological value of open space provision, mechanisms to overcome barriers to regeneration and a partnership approach, involving cross-sectoral consultation and participation.

## **Sustainability issues in relation to the urban environment and built heritage in Ireland.**

The centres of cities and towns have been subject to depopulation with a consequent fraying of the urban fabric. The trend towards less intensive urban patterns together with the resulting increasing separation between home, work and town centre have exacerbated the growth in private car traffic. This has led to increased energy use and emissions of air pollutants, and has militated against the effectiveness of public transport networks.

## **Actions to support sustainability**

The part EU funded Urban and Village Renewal and Conservation Grant Schemes of the Local Urban and Rural Development Operational Programme has enabled grant assistance to be given to local authorities and voluntary conservation bodies to finance a range of measures which are designed to rejuvenate the social and economic life of our cities, towns and villages, rehabilitate the built environment, restore and conserve important elements of Irish architecture and develop Dublin's Temple Bar area as a cultural quarter.

A major flagship urban renewal project which is concentrated on a single area in most need is being funded in each of the five main cities of Cork, Dublin, Galway, Limerick and Waterford.

In towns and villages throughout the country grants are also being used to carry out renewal works which are designed to improve the physical environment of these centres, attract and sustain an enterprise base and support tourism and living conditions generally. Grants are also being provided for the conservation and restoration of buildings of architectural and heritage merit. Many landmark

buildings with historic features which were in need of restoration have now been preserved for future generations to enjoy.

Overall investment under the Sub-Programme will amount to in excess of £103 million in the 1994 - 1999 period. This investment will help create more attractive environments and underpin and encourage investment in enterprise creation and commercial and residential activity in towns and villages and their hinterlands.

### Integrated Area Plans for Urban Renewal

- \* The new Integrated Area Plan based approach to urban renewal incorporates a number of sustainability principles:
  - o a more targeted approach to the application of urban renewal tax incentives, both in terms of their scale and the way they will be applied;
  - o the addressing, in the context of the Plans, of issues not just of physical development but also a wide range of local social and economic matters.

\* The Government has approved 49 of the Integrated Area Plans submitted by local authorities, covering 43 cities and towns around the country. Residential incentives under the approved plans apply with effect from 1 March, 1999 - 28 February, 2002. Commercial incentives will be brought into effect as soon as the terms of the scheme as it relates to commercial development have been approved by the EU.

### Townscape Restoration Scheme

\* The Government has decided to introduce a new scheme of tax incentives aimed at the restoration and conservation of townscapes in smaller towns, including the restoration of old mills, warehouses etc., which have fallen into dereliction and other improvements to the fabric of buildings e.g. shopfronts. New build development of an infill nature to restore gaps in the urban streetscape will also qualify. Guidelines to assist local authorities in preparing Urban Townscape Plans for the purposes of this new scheme are being drawn up at present. Sustainability principles will be fully taken into consideration in establishing the principles which will underpin this new scheme.

\* Tidy Towns Committees have been circulated with a new Handbook which is published by the Department of the Environment and Local Government and sponsored by Irish Shell to assist and support them in various aspects of their work.

\* The Dublin Urban Forum for Sustainable Development is part of a 20 city network throughout Europe working to promote understanding and information about the urban environment. In Dublin the Forum is based in the Environmental Institute, UCD, Richview, Clonskeagh, Dublin 14, tel. 01 269 7988. A number of ongoing information exchange initiatives are organised by the Institute.

\* The European Commission has published "Sustainable Urban Development in the European Union: a Framework for Action" ISBN 92-828-5697-6 which is

aimed at better co-ordinated and targeted community action for urban problems and is organised under 4 interdependent policy aims -

- o Strengthening economic prosperity and employment in towns and cities.
- o Promoting equality, social inclusion and regeneration in urban areas.
- o Protecting and improving the urban environment towards local and global sustainability.
- o Contributing to good urban governance and local empowerment.

## **CONSTRUCTION**

- \* A "Sustainable Building" award was introduced as part of the annual "Construction Excellence" awards for 1999, which are sponsored by the Department of the Environment and Local Government.
- \* The Department of the Environment and Local Government is also examining the scope for promoting sustainable building via:
  - o Building Regulations Part L (Conservation of Fuel & Energy) is currently under active review in the light of Ireland's obligations under the Kyoto Protocol. Part M (Access for Disabled Persons) will be amended by end 1999 to make new houses accessible to disabled visitors - this is a step towards Lifetime Adaptable Housing (an element in sustainable building);
    - o Housing Grant Conditions i.e. construction standards for First Time Purchasers Grant (£3,000);
    - o Specification for Social Housing.
- \* The report of the Strategic Review Committee on the Construction Industry "*Building Our Future Together*" (June, 1997) contained a number of recommendations in relation to environmental sustainability. The Minister for the Environment and Local Government established a Forum for the Construction Industry in October, 1997, charged with the task of overseeing the implementation of all recommendations (86) made by the Strategic Review Committee. The Forum, in turn, established sub-committees (4) and Task Forces (16) to advance the implementation of related groups of recommendations. Two Task Forces are considering separate aspects of sustainability.

## **HOUSING**

The basic principles of sustainability in building increasingly inform decisions in regard to

- \* the design, quality and location of new housing and
- \* the maintenance, refurbishment and improvement of existing housing stock.

## **EXISTING HOUSING STOCK**

### **Private housing**

There are currently a number of targeted schemes in operation to assist the carrying out of necessary improvement works in private housing to meet special category needs such as the elderly or disabled persons. House improvement loans are made available by local authorities to low income households for the

carrying out of necessary works to improve, repair or extend their existing houses.

### **Local authority housing**

Physical renewal of local authority houses is facilitated through a number of programmes. Some £193m has been paid to date to local authorities for the refurbishment of over 9,500 substandard dwellings under the Remedial Works Scheme. A further £19m is available for the Scheme in 1999.

£20m was provided in the 1998 estimates to get the redevelopment of Ballymun underway in the context of an integrated strategic plan for the economic and social regeneration of the area. £21m has been provided in the 1999 estimates for the continuation of the redevelopment of Ballymun. In addition, £6.5m has been provided in 1999 to commence a major redevelopment of Dublin Inner City flats which will cost some £90m over the next five years.

### **Management of local authority housing**

Sustainability in housing requires that good housing management convey to tenants their genuine stake in their home and neighbourhood. A specialist Housing Unit has been established in the Institute of Public Administration to assist local authorities to develop a more effective overall approach to housing management including the promotion of best practice with an emphasis on tenant participation and a multi-agency approach to estate management.

Funding of £200,000 was available to support suitable projects in 1998 under the Housing Management Initiative Grants Scheme. This scheme assists local authorities to undertake pilot projects aimed at improving the management of their housing stock and £200,000 has again been provided for it in the 1999 estimates.

### **NEW ERA FOR ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE**

There is Government commitment to sustainable development by encouraging the use and re-use of the existing building stock so that those buildings which have been in use for many decades, or even centuries, will continue in use for years to come - not as museum pieces but as buildings which adapt and change as society and life itself adapts and changes.

The Local Government (Planning and Development) Bill, 1998, on the protection of the architectural heritage was introduced in the Seanad on 10 December, 1998. The main features of the Bill provide that -

\* all planning authorities will have a clear obligation to create a record of "*protected structures*" which are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, scientific, social or technical interest. This record will form part of the local authority development plan. Planning authorities will also be obliged to preserve the character of places and townscapes which are of interest;

\* where a structure is protected, the whole structure, interior and curtilage will be subject to that protection and all works which would affect the character of a protected structure will require planning permission;

\* it will be a criminal offence to damage a protected structure with fines of up to £1 million and the owners and occupiers of protected structures will be obliged to ensure that they do not become endangered;

\* planning authorities will have wide powers to ensure that these structures are protected and will be entitled to direct that works are undertaken to preserve or restore a protected structure.

To ensure that the legislative provisions are fully effective, the Bill is accompanied by two critical supporting measures:

- \* a new scheme of grants for protected buildings in 1999 at a cost of £3.9 million to be administered by the principal local authorities,
- \* conservation expertise will be deployed in the local authority service to enable them to carry out their functions under the Bill and to administer the grant scheme. The Government has allocated £300,000 towards this service in 1999.

Local authorities will be assisted in their functions of protecting buildings by using the resources of the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage which is administered by the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands.

What can I do?

### **BUSINESS / CONTRACTORS / ARCHITECTS / PLANNERS / HOUSEHOLDERS / PROPERTY OWNERS**

To what extent is sustainability taken into account when commissioning or designing new buildings or extending or renovating existing ones? Issues to be considered include-

- distance of site from services and activities, e.g. public transport, shops, schools, work and entertainment;
- once-off house with separate septic tank facilities or facility to avail of public waste water treatment facilities;
- insulation standards and other energy saving design features, e.g. passive and active solar energy;
- need for artificial lighting, automatic temperature and appliance controls
- water conservation, especially flush toilets;
- use of durable materials;
- avoidance of non-renewable materials and reuse of recycled materials, including demolition spoil, where possible;
- renovation of existing buildings and or maintenance of or sensitivity to the existing urban landscape;

- impact on nature and the landscape;
- flexibility in design for adaptation to many uses;
- maintenance of open spaces;
- respect for protected buildings and fittings.

### **What is ENFO?**

ENFO is a public service which provides easy access to wide-ranging and authoritative information on the environment, incl. sustainable development. It was established in 1990 by the Department of the Environment Heritage, and Local Government.

### **Aim of ENFO**

The aim is to foster increased environmental awareness and thereby facilitate a broad partnership in efforts to promote sustainable development including protection of the environment for the benefit of future generations.

The importance of ready access to relevant information on environmental protection was reaffirmed in the UN/ECE Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, which was signed by the Minister for the Environment Heritage, and Local Government in Aarhus, Denmark in June, 1998.

### **What does ENFO do? / Services**

ENFO collects and maintains up-to-date information on all aspects of the environment and sustainable development and makes it readily available to anybody who wants it.

- \* **Write to 17 St. Andrew Street,  
Dublin 2,  
Ireland.**
- \* **Telephone Number:** + 353 1 888 2001  
or 1890 200 191 (calls at local rate).
- \* **Fax. No.** + 353 1 888 3946
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*\* Visit the drop in centre at 17 St. Andrew Street, Dublin 2 and see the current exhibition, play in the children's corner, watch an environmental video in a viewing booth, play an interactive game on one of our p.c.s, use the reference library or have free access to the Internet for environmental research.*

*ENFO is open Monday to Saturday 10:00am till 5:00pm*

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