

Major National Focus Required for Irish Villages

Ireland's villages are under threat. Many villages in Leinster and near large cities are losing their character and being turned into dormer towns or are being swamped with suburban developments, others are being over-developed with tax efficient holiday homes while some remote rural villages are under threat from neglect and population loss.

Speakers at a conference organised by the Heritage Council called for urgent action to be taken so that the development of villages can be more carefully planned. Planners attending the conference called for a movement away from current developer-led proposals that will have costly long-term financial, environmental and social implications for future generations.

"We are going through a period of unprecedented development and we are not paying enough attention to the long-term implications of how we are allowing our villages to develop", said Michael Starrett, Chief Executive of the Heritage Council. "We need to join up our thinking and policies, and plan for the development of villages so that they benefit communities and can maximise their potential for rural enterprise, tourism and amenity."

Mr Starrett, calling for new and specific legislation which allows us to fully consider villages in their rural landscape setting, told the conference that Ireland is out of step with the rest of Europe in that it does not have specific landscape legislation and policy. This needs to be urgently developed and would provide an essential tool for evaluating the setting, design and environmental impacts of village development. It would also help greatly with the promotion of sustainable rural development

"You cannot disengage a village from the landscape it sits on and yet this is what we are doing at the moment. We need new policy and sharper planning tools and guidelines which local authorities can use, and we need to involve local communities fully in planning the future development of villages", he continued.

Dr Edgar Morganroth from the ESRI said the current development patterns of villages, especially in Leinster and around other cities have long-term cost implications that will affect quality of life and the economy. *"People are moving further and further away from their work and we are creating car-dependent communities that are facing ever-increasing gridlock on our roads and longer commuting times. Many people spend the equivalent of 55-80 working days a year commuting to and from work. This time comes from their family and leisure time and the effect will have long-term implications from a personal and financial point of view".*

Dr Mary Corcoran from NUI Maynooth said that *"Heritage, the built and natural environment, village-feel and community spirit give a village character and this contributes greatly to the quality of life of the communities that live in villages. We need to get much better at planning urban strategies and stop taking such a piecemeal approach. National leadership and a more holistic approach is required if we are to provide the framework for good quality of life and community spirit in the future", she continued.*

Planners, councillors and community representatives across the country attended the conference and commented on the endless number of planning applications for un-zoned land in villages within commuting distance of major cities. Many commented on the extreme development-pressure facing small villages and that there is a recent trend for developers to lodge planning applications for housing developments of 150-200 houses in a small rural village. *“There is a big problem with services and we are very often depending on developers to put in sewage treatment plants and water – the majority of newly developed villages have inadequate services and we are billions of euros short of proper village development”*, said one planner attending the conference.

The Heritage Council has introduced a community-led tool for developing plans for villages called a village design statement and framework plan. Cork County Council has taken the lead in producing plans for its villages and a number of other local authorities are also developing plans. The scheme is being promoted by Local Authority Heritage Officers in conjunction with the Heritage Council.

The Heritage Council has received an unprecedented level of support from planners, local communities, architects and local authorities to develop initiatives that focus on providing better development in villages and improve the decision making process when planning for development. Accessing the built and natural fabric of the village and improved public participation on shaping the future of villages play an important part in Village Design Statements <http://heritagecouncil.ie/>

Who Has Designs on Our Villages? Village Design Conference 2005

http://heritagecouncil.ie/planning/design_on_our_villages.html

Villages in their Landscape Setting - Michael Starrett

http://heritagecouncil.ie/planning/Villages_M_Starrett.pdf

Participatory Village Planning in Ireland - M. Murrey, J. Greer, K. Starrett

<http://www.qub.ac.uk/ep/research/span/resources/ex4.pdf>

Local participation in Village appraisal and local planning

<http://www.fao.org/sard/static/leader/en/actions/M06En.pdf>

Village / Parish Appraisals & Parish Plans

<http://planning.rudi.net/BIBS/COUNTRY/35.HTM>

Participatory Planning for Sustainable Communities

<http://www.adr.civiljusticecouncil.gov.uk/updocs/client0/PPP.pdf>

Rural Development Review - The Irish Leader Support Unit Newsletter

<http://www.ilsu.ie/Newsletter/Ed9/RDNews.html>

Multilevel governance and Village development planning - Kieran Lynch

http://www.villagedevelopment.eu/files/Microsoft%20PowerPoint%20-%20Multilevel%20governance%20and%20village%20development%20planning%20C_Lynch.pdf