

Urban Forum Calls For Review of the National Spatial Strategy

13 February 2007

Greater Dublin will soon occupy the same surface area as Los Angeles, but with less than a quarter of its population, the Urban Forum warned today (Tuesday, 13 February 2007). In this context, the Forum is calling on whoever forms the next Government to develop a review of the National Spatial Strategy with the central objective of developing the Atlantic Gateway to counter-balance Dublin.

The Urban Forum's proposals are outlined in a policy document entitled **A Better Quality of Life for All: Proposals for Creating a More Sustainable Built Environment** which was launched today. The Urban Forum is made up of five key organisations representing construction professionals in Ireland, namely Engineers Ireland, Irish Landscape Institute (ILI), Irish Planning Institute (IPI), Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) and Society of Chartered Surveyors (SCS).

The Urban Forum's Chairman, Henk van der Kamp, explained that the document is being published to stimulate public and political debate on the built environment in the run-up to the election, with a view to informing the policy of whoever forms the next Government.

A Better Quality of Life for All identifies a number of critical issues which the Forum believes need to be addressed as a matter of urgency:

- * **Increasing domination of the country by Dublin and its environs in terms of population growth and development, with 54% of the population now living in Leinster;**
- * **Rapid growth of the outer suburbs of our towns and cities, while the town and city centres are declining;**
- * **Explosion in the number of one-off houses – now accounting for up to 40% of our new housing stock.**

The Urban Forum believes that this outer suburban sprawl is having serious consequences such as:

- * **Growing pressure on physical and social infrastructure in our other suburbs – such as water supply and school places;**
- * **Increasing car dependency – the average car in Ireland travels 70% more than a car in France or Germany, 50% more than Britain and even 30% more than the USA – with Ireland now being the fifth most oil-dependent country in the EU;**
- * **Adverse impact on urban landscapes and greenspaces**
- * **Serious adverse health effects including increasing obesity levels with its knock-on effects of diabetes and heart disease, as well as higher incidences of psychological stress leading more cases of depression.**

Henk van der Kamp pointed out that the Urban Forum recognises that the recently announced National Development Plan (NDP) will help to address some of the issues raised by the Forum.

“However, the very fact that the NDP is increasing investment in infrastructure provision gives even greater urgency to some of our proposals, particularly those designed to address some of the systemic problems which beset the way our built environment is developing. For example the review of the National Spatial Strategy, the proper resourcing of our planning system and construction research will all be vital in order for Ireland to be in a position to deliver this vital infrastructure more effectively”.

Mr van der Kamp set out some of the key proposals contained in **A Better Quality of Life for All:**

- * **Update the National Spatial Strategy (NSS), with the central objective of supporting the growth of a second major conurbation of international significance centred on Cork, Limerick and Galway – the ‘Atlantic Gateway’;**
- * **Create the Greater Dublin Land Use and Transport Authority, and similar bodies for other larger cities, to integrate land use and transport;**
- * **Ensure adequate staffing for the country’s local authorities, including planning and architectural personnel, as well as landscape architects and parks superintendents to deliver quality services in greenspace planning/design, recreation provision, landscape management and landscape planning;**
- * **In relation to social and affordable housing, the provision of dwelling units or land by developers should be used in preference to the payment of financial contributions. In addition, the current exemption of one-off houses and small sites or developments from Part V of the Planning and Development Act should be ended;**
- * **Enact the recommendations of the All Party Committee on the Constitution to enable local authorities to acquire land they rezone at existing use value plus an agreed percentage – even if this requires a referendum;**
- * **Protect and enhance our urban parks by expanding the parks services countrywide, so that added value of services is of benefit to all and not just in a few local authorities;**
- * **Give consideration to our tax regime to encourage people to move into smaller and older houses instead of new houses;**
- * **Create a national body with responsibility for construction research;**
- * **Promote high speed railways connected with local suburban rail and light rail services;**
- * **Create a dedicated Department of Urbanism or a specific high level Cabinet Committee to coordinate the work of all state bodies responsible for the built environment.**

http://www.riai.ie/public/downloads/Urban_Forum_Manifesto.pdf<http://www.riai.ie/index.html?id=7219>