

# OPR-AILG Planning Training Webinar for Elected Members July 2021

## ‘Delivery of High Quality Housing Appropriate to its Setting’ Q&A Responses

### Introduction:

A number of questions that elected members raised during the course of the July 2021 training webinar could not be answered during the ‘live’ Q&A session due to time constraints. However, responses to all questions have been collated and responses are set out hereunder. We would stress that the Minister and his Department are responsible for planning policy and responses should be considered in the context of the explanations of same.

### Section 28 Guidelines:

Question from Elected Member	Answer
Is there a timeframe for the forthcoming new sustainable settlement guidelines?	In the circular letter issued by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in April 2021 (i.e. <a href="#">NRUP 02/2021</a> ), the Department confirmed that updated sustainable settlement guidance would be published later this year.

### Compact Growth and Density:

Question from Elected Member	Answer
<p>Building typologies in historic city, town, and village centres: terraced houses, two stories-plus, etc., could achieve densities approaching and exceeding 50 units per hectare. Why not extend these typologies for all settlement types rather than allowing lower density semi-detached development to take place in smaller settlements, with apartments-only for larger settlements?</p> <p>Density is in the compact form, be it one or two units, rather than in the volume, and we may be left with small settlements which grow into larger settlements, with a ring of lower-density development which needs to now be surrounded by higher-density development.</p>	<p>There is a lot of merit in this approach.</p> <p>Under current guidelines, there is good scope for the adaptation of traditional development typologies from historic urban locations to meet contemporary requirements and still achieve both good quality of accommodation and usage of land.</p> <p>Close study of the circular referred to above, <a href="#">NRUP 02/2021</a>, will confirm that Government policy favours a tailored approach that aims to match desired densities in various city, town and village settings to the characteristics of those settings and within various bands of densities rather than insisting on specific typologies.</p>

<p>In Cork, as has recently been seen, apartment dwelling in the city centre isn't viable. So how can large scale high density be justifiable in metropolitan towns? Some high density is needed but not the volume being proposed. This will result in an unbalanced community structure and development from the outside in rather than the other way around.</p>	<p>Current industry indications are that apartment developments, particularly for sale to individual purchasers, are challenging to progress from a viability perspective in city and suburban locations albeit that they are more viable for purpose built rental accommodation and in certain infill situations that appeal to downsizers in attractive locations.</p> <p>Government policy is focused on securing a viable path for more apartment delivery in major urban areas particularly and will likely be the subject of initiatives under the forthcoming "Housing for All" policy.</p> <p>CSO data (See OPR Annual Reports) indicates that the vast majority of new homes being developed in metropolitan towns, including in Cork, are not high density but more medium to low density.</p> <p>Planning authorities are encouraging some level of higher densities in metropolitan towns e.g. along the Middleton Rail Corridor, to ensure the maximum benefit from the high level of public transport accessibility that has been provided along such corridors through public, i.e. taxpayer, investment.</p> <p>Some developers are indicating that such densities are not viable at the current time. If this is the case, experience from other locations after the economic crash such as Adamstown in Dublin show that it is likely to change over time as demand builds.</p> <p>It is possible through careful masterplanning and phased development to ensure a step-by-step and viable approach to the development of such areas.</p>
<p>Local Authority schemes in DLR, Fingal etc. are highest standard and brilliant design. However, S28 Building Heights Guidelines for private developments are generating high rise vertical sprawl, unaffordable, inefficient developments 200/300 units per h/a and more alongside residential areas. 'Missing middle' concept needs to apply to high rise as well as low rise. Human scale living should be a requirement surely in urban areas and brownfield sites. Can the panel comment please?</p>	<p>It would not be accurate to say that Section 28 building height guidelines are generating high-rise vertical sprawl and densities as stated.</p> <p>The key is design. Similar standards and approaches should apply to all housing developments regardless of whether they are public or private.</p> <p>High quality, desirable and affordable housing provision within urban cores is essential if we are to meet housing, urban regeneration and</p>

	<p>climate etc., targets and advanced urban design that is at human scale is essential here.</p> <p>The OPR intends to prepare further video and other material illustrating successful examples of place-making, planning and architectural design that both achieve reasonable densities and result in highly desirable living locations.</p>
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## Permeability/Networks

Question from Elected Member	Answer
<p>Permeability networks are obviously proposed and promoted for the reasons stated. However locally we have huge concerns where our existing housing estates weren't designed in this manner and there is concern about opening out these? The main reason for this is antisocial and it is a real concern. For example we have the second highest ratio of people to Gardaí in Ireland and a Garda Station that's only open 2 hours twice a week. Previous Local Area Plans have borne out this concern.</p>	<p>These concerns are familiar ones in the context of local area planning aimed at reversing years of car-based and cul-de-sac type developments that work against a sense of community and connectedness.</p> <p>Very careful design and consultation with all parties is the key in the design and implementation of improved pedestrian and cycling linkages in communities that are evolving, especially if existing developments are involved.</p> <p>It is critical that representatives from residents associations, councillors and the Gardaí are consulted and that there is community buy-in. Community policing networks should be consulted in designing-in what is termed as <i>passive surveillance</i> – where the footfall by the public through an area and the visibility of public spaces becomes the very deterrent to antisocial behaviour. In addition, permeability should not be over-provided to the degree that it makes policing and crime-prevention more difficult.</p> <p>The evidence shows that by improving the connectedness of new and existing communities side-by-side in terms of pedestrian and cycling infrastructure that is safe and secure, local traffic congestion can be transformed and more direct access routes can be provided to local shops, public transport, parks and playgrounds, while protecting community safety.</p> <p>The key is having the capacity for careful and sensitive local area level masterplanning and consultation to tease out the issues and find solutions that will transform local transport networks.</p>

<p>There is huge resistance to improved permeability in my area (Waterford), due to problems with and fears about antisocial behaviour. This opposition comes from residents, councillors and, at times, the Gardaí. Have any other counties successfully dealt with this?</p>	<p>See Above</p>
<p>Design with high pedestrian and cycling permeability is attractive to antisocial behaviour and open drug dealing as there are many escape routes. How do we avoid this?</p>	<p>See Above</p>
<p>How can we get the public transport to coordinate better and faster?</p>	<p>A co-ordinated approach to multi-modal public transport provision in terms of planning and service delivery is being advanced by the National Transport Authority – see <a href="http://www.nationaltransport.ie">www.nationaltransport.ie</a></p> <p>Proper planning and sustainable development – through effective public transport centred development plan and local area plan preparation is also key – see the consultation draft of updated <a href="#">Ministerial Planning Guidelines on Development Plans</a>.</p>

**Housing/Development:**

<b>Question from Elected Member</b>	<b>Answer</b>
<p>Should high quality housing not mean building beyond benchmark standards?</p>	<p>No, high quality housing should be the benchmark- meaning a high quality for all housing in terms of planning, design, delivery and performance in areas like energy usage and sustainability.</p>
<p>If a small infill project takes away a place for local children to play would it not be better to put a small development on the edge of a larger green area?</p>	<p>These are matters best worked out at the local area planning level. Local amenity spaces and play areas that are properly provided for and managed should ideally be identified as such at the plan level and zoned accordingly.</p> <p>This is not to say that areas that have been properly zoned for residential development and are required for same in the context of meeting housing targets should be prevented from being developed on the basis of potential or even occasional amenity usage. Again, the local area plan or development plan, as appropriate, should be the place where the balancing of development versus amenity and wider service needs are addressed.</p>

<p>Will the State intervene to unlock and bring to development hoarded sites in small towns and villages to enable sustainable communities aligning with all of the principles you have outlined? Unless this intervention occurs little will change as most of the housing policy seems to be (rightly so) heavily focused on social housing lists and demand but we need a balance to align with our Rural Future and small towns and villages which I believe would deliver major success and aligning outcomes</p>	<p>The State, through its policy and legislative functions, has moved to put in place new and stronger mechanisms that can be used by local authorities to unlock locations whose development would greatly assist in achieving long term planning and regeneration objectives.</p> <p>The Vacant Site Levy is one such mechanism but to date its implementation has been mixed given wider pressures on local authorities and the complexities of the system, which requires a systematic and thorough approach procedurally.</p> <p>Many of the recent policy and legislative initiatives are seeking to bring about a significant shift in the role and functions of local authorities in the planning and place-making sense, adding a much more dynamic role in the enablement of proper planning and sustainable development. This will take time to build up as local authorities move from the traditional regulatory and service provision roles.</p> <p>The Government's forthcoming 'Housing For All' initiative may also contain additional measures in this area.</p>
<p>Any comments on how we could fast track/encourage people back into empty houses lying derelict in our rural towns?</p>	<p>A key aspect of this is to take the multi-pronged actions that make our rural towns the kinds of places that people will be attracted back to living in, compared to alternatives like dispersed rural housing or city and large town locations.</p> <p>The OPR website contains video and other resources that show innovative examples of towns that have turned themselves around from the difficulties of the past (e.g. <a href="#">Clonakilty</a>) or are embarking on new initiatives (e.g. <a href="#">Boyle Co Roscommon</a>).</p> <p>The National Planning Framework has an objective to secure at least 40% of future housing in existing urban centres and this objective is being translated into local development plans.</p> <p>Successful achievement of this objective is possible through local authority and community led action on demonstration projects. This would include adaptation and re-use of empty buildings and driving the redevelopment of</p>

	<p>derelict and/or vacant sites and general visual and amenity improvements of key town streetscapes including public realm improvements.</p> <p>Government is developing a Town Centre First strategy to put in place an overall policy and implementation framework for town centre vitality.</p> <p>Substantial exchequer funding is also being made available under the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) to enable local authorities to unlock the economic and development potential of strategic locations.</p> <p>On a practical level, as mentioned in previous responses, the repair and lease initiative enables property owners to access grant aid up to a maximum of €60,000 for repairs and upgrades to empty properties that they might purchase, subject to terms and on condition that said properties are leased to the Housing (local) Authority for a minimum of 5 and maximum of 20 years.</p> <p>Please refer to:  <a href="https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d32c4-repair-and-leasing-scheme-rls-further-information/">https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/d32c4-repair-and-leasing-scheme-rls-further-information/</a></p>
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## Reimagining Irish Towns

Question from Elected Member	Answer
Is the Irish Times magazine still available? I would like to receive same if still around.	If you have a subscription to the Irish Times you may be able to access the supplement online. Jennifer O'Connell's article from the supplement is currently available via this link: <a href="https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/we-ve-got-a-real-chance-to-reimagine-our-cities-20-ways-to-improve-urban-life-after-lockdown-1.4282480">https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/we-ve-got-a-real-chance-to-reimagine-our-cities-20-ways-to-improve-urban-life-after-lockdown-1.4282480</a>

## Case Studies

Question from Elected Member	Answer
<p>Fingal, thanks for the presentation, very interesting. I think I spotted, and I could be wrong, on the Rolestown development, laurel hedging? Low biodiversity value, it is important to incorporate wildlife considerations into the landscaping.</p>	<p>Ensuring that new housing will support and or encourage a high level of biodiversity is an important part of securing proper planning and sustainable development.</p>
<p>What lessons have been learnt from the past, Balbriggan, Blanchardstown /Mulhuddart come to mind and how can you rectify the mistakes of the past in those areas? Also funding, Fingal have a lot more money than counties like Meath that are underfunded for decades.</p>	<p>A considerable amount has been learned from these and other examples or what might be considered not to be in alignment with the principles of proper planning and sustainable development.</p> <p>There has also been much learning from successful examples of plan-led place-making.</p> <p>Compared to ten or twenty years ago, there are now integrated national, regional and local planning policy tiers, over 30 statutory planning guidelines, multi-billion euro capital funding streams and oversight and support by the OPR.</p> <p>Though the capacity of some parts of the local authority sector that are responsible for fast developing areas of the country is an issue, there are also choices that those authorities can make to ensure that their capacity to manage the pace and extent of development is sustainable.</p>