

OPR-AILG Planning Training Webinar for Elected Members September 2022

‘Planning that Revitalises Ireland’s Towns and Villages- Addressing Vacancy and Dereliction’ Q&A Responses

Introduction:

A number of questions that elected members raised during the course of the September 2022 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.

Question from Elected Member	Answer
Are towns below population of 1500 classed as rural in line with the NPF and will they fall under the rural policies rather than urban policies?	As described in the Town Centre First (TCF) Policy there are over 500 settlements in Ireland with >400 inhabitants. The principles of TCF apply to all these settlements. There are some funding distinctions including generally where the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) applies to settlements >10,000 population and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) applies to towns and villages below that threshold.
Can the affordable housing fund be used in conjunction with funding streams for town centre in order to make a housing development economically viable?	Existing social and affordable funding schemes are available to assist in new housing development and mixed-use regeneration within towns, where appropriate.
Under the Town Centre First plan- pathfinder projects. Can you outline what that involves? Do they need to be completed in 2 years?	The 26 pilot towns receiving funding are intended to assist in developing knowledge and know-how in undertaking a TCF Plan that can then be spread to other towns through the local authority. Further pathfinder projects for TCF will be developed by the National TCF Office.
Is the Grants scheme for vacant and derelict properties being extended to rural areas? If so, when will the documents be updated on the website? Local authorities are getting many queries since the Ploughing Championship.	The Croí Cónaithe Towns Fund Scheme is being reviewed to extend it to cities and rural areas. Local authorities will be directly informed of the revised scheme shortly.
With spiralling costs is it likely that TCF plans will be put on hold?	TCF Plans are essentially local community based strategies – they are important in assisting local regeneration. Funding will continue over the initial 3-year programme.
Can a list of all the funding streams for Town Centre Regeneration be made available on a list please?	Appendix 5 of the TCF Policy provides a list of available funding streams. There is a multiplicity of funding streams across various government

	<p>departments and agencies available for town regeneration. The National TCF Office as part of its work will assemble a resource of funding opportunities and programmes.</p>
<p>In our local authority the vacancy officer role is spread among a number of staff. However we need someone who works with environment re dereliction and planning re developmental CPO. At the moment it is too fractured to be effective. Will the regeneration officer pull them together or will that role be spread over different people?</p>	<p>Each Vacant Homes Officer will be required to work closely with the Town Regeneration Officer specifically on tackling the issue of vacancy as part of the TCF agenda including on relevant funding schemes, vacancy surveys, CPO/ownership issues, etc.</p>
<p>A lot of our towns are struggling with heavy noisy traffic running through the town. Has there been any interaction with the national roads offices to look at redesigning the roads that run through our high streets?</p>	<p>Issues of traffic management, increasing pedestrianisation, enhanced public spaces, etc are all key issues in town regeneration. There is excellent guidance on improving streets available at https://www.dmurs.ie/</p>
<p>Probably a question for Stewart and an ongoing concern in my town: what about car parking? None of this vision can be achieved without car parking, whether in a designated area in the town centre or at edge-of-centre locations as in Sligo. My town (and I'm sure it's not the only one) has NO car parking at all. It is incredibly difficult in the current climate (excuse the pun!) to get funding for car parking, yet it is possible to achieve so little regeneration without getting rid of on-street parking.</p>	<p>Car parking is not precluded and it is acknowledged that it is a necessary element that needs to be considered in a plan-led approach. Each town will have its own challenges and solutions; as demonstrated by the case studies in Monaghan and Sligo through effective engagement and a plan-led approach, solutions are often available. A strategic approach, whereby appropriate car parking can be provided balancing this against priority for pedestrians and local amenities, is key.</p>
<p>In local villages, businesses feel they have the right to park in the village and yet want to have more parking for customers - how can we engage bar a change of life style for all which businesses do not want to listen to?</p>	<p>As noted in the response to the previous question, no one size fits all, sometimes an incremental approach to change is necessary, engagement with communities and an overall vision are essential. The expectation is that the Town Centre Plans can crystalize the local vision and solutions for such challenges.</p>
<p>Am very aware that there are 33 towns in County Cork whilst, for example, there are only 5 towns in County Monaghan. The towns in County Cork need as much uplifting as those in smaller counties but the potential impact of the Town Centres First policy will be smaller and slower in a bigger county. Can the Department fund and apply the policy over the three administrative divisions in Cork County: North, South and West. That would begin to</p>	<p>Local authorities with towns are being provided with a dedicated Town Regeneration Officer at a senior level who will lead Town Centre First implementation at a local level including supporting local Town Teams (assisted by the wider local authority). Local priorities and timescales will need to be established by each local authority, working with towns and their local communities.</p>

<p>align my larger county with most other counties.</p>	
<p>Am interested to know if the buildings frontages and internals refurbished by the local authority as part of these renewal schemes were in public or in private ownership?</p>	<p><u>The following response was provided by Monaghan County Council:</u></p> <p>With reference to the Heritage Council’s Historic Towns Initiative grant funding scheme award for Dublin Street 2022/23, the eight no. properties referred to are all within private ownership (eight individual property owners). The project includes for façade enhancements to eight properties and for internal refurbishment to two of these properties. The application is complimentary to the URDF funded Dublin Street Regeneration scheme in addressing buildings and use, an objective to support low carbon development through reuse/adaptation. The project will act as a demonstrator, addressing regulatory problems (such as fire and disability access certification issues), barriers to historic street living by sharing of information of the processes involved in bringing properties that have been long term vacant back into use, and how ‘living over the shop’ can be successfully achieved, in conjunction with other uses that help to sustain the vitality of the town centre.</p> <p><u>The following response was provided by Sligo County Council:</u></p> <p>The buildings refurbished on O’Connell Street, Sligo were all in private ownership. These streetscape enhancement works were funded through the Historic Towns Initiative which is a joint undertaking by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht and the Heritage Council which aims to promote the heritage-led regeneration of Ireland’s historic towns.</p>