NATIONAL AND REGIONAL PLANNING
OF TOWN AND COUNTRYSIDE

L'AMENAGEMENT SUR LE PLAN NATIONAL ET
REGIONAL DES VILLES ET DE LA CAMPAGNE

NORTHERN IRELAND
Introduction

Northern Ireland as a political entity comprises the six counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry and Tyrone, with the county boroughs of Belfast and Londonderry. It has an area of 5,238 sq. miles and a population of approximately 1,350,000.

Although Northern Ireland is an integral part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, returning members to the House of Commons at Westminster, it has a Parliament of its own, federal in type, which, apart from certain excepted and reserved matters, is fully responsible for legislation pertaining to Northern Ireland.

Government administration is carried out by several Ministries and the manner in which the State, through the various Government departments, deals with planning is dealt with in greater detail below.

In common with most countries, Northern Ireland has experienced the phenomenon of greatly increased urbanisation during the past 100 years, and the drift of population to towns still continues, although at a reduced pace.

The most striking increase in urban population has taken place in Belfast, the capital city, which now has a population of 450,000 within the city boundary, with a further 50,000 persons residing in the surrounding areas.

The increment of population in Belfast in the last intercensal period—1926-1937—about 23,000, was almost equal to the total population increase in Northern Ireland within the same period.

By reason of its geographical position, an undue proportion of the country's commerce and industry is concentrated in Belfast, where approximately two-thirds of the workers engaged in industry, other than agricultural workers, are employed.

The extent of the dominance of Belfast in Northern Ireland can be measured by the fact that the second urban community in point of size is the city of Londonderry, with a population of 50,000, and thereafter, excepting for Bangor, a dormitory satellite of Belfast with a population of 20,000, the population of no other town exceeds 15,000.

The decrease in the proportion of rural to urban population has not been so marked in Northern Ireland as in England, and about 47 per cent. of the total population still reside in the open countryside and are engaged in agriculture.

The farm structure is largely the outcome of the operation of the various Land Acts whereby the majority of the farms are owner occupied, subject to the payment of purchase annuities. The result of the form of tenure is that large agricultural holdings are practically non-existent, the average farm being about 25 acres in extent. Many holdings are very small, 17 per cent. being less than 5 acres in area and a further 14 per cent. being
between 5 acres and 10 acres. These two categories of holdings together occupy only 6.6 per cent. of the total acreage under crops and pasture.

The small average size of farm causes a considerable proportion of Northern Ireland’s agriculture to be merely subsistence farming, giving little opportunity for employment in the countryside for farmers’ families, who tend either to congregate in Belfast or emigrate.

The equable and humid climate enjoyed by Northern Ireland has fostered an increasingly flourishing livestock industry and the value of livestock and livestock products amounts to 75 per cent. of the total value of the gross output of farms, and it would appear that the future prosperity of the countryside will be largely dependent on the encouragement of the industry and those linked with it.

**Failure of Pre-war Planning**

Planning legislation for Northern Ireland was first introduced in 1931, twenty-two years after the passing of the first English Planning Act. The Planning and Housing Act (Northern Ireland), 1931, is based largely on the English Town Planning Act of 1925, although in some respects it anticipates the English Act of 1932.

The Act enables planning schemes to be made for any land and neighbouring lands, or in connection with the redevelopment of already developed land. It did not impose any obligation on local authorities to prepare schemes and, in common with former experience in England, the powers given were not used, and indeed, only the councils of the County Boroughs of Belfast and Londonderry resolved to prepare schemes. Neither of these authorities made much progress in the preparation of schemes, and the intervention of the war suspended further activity.

Although the Act gave authority for the voluntary establishment of joint committees, none was set up, and in the case of Belfast, even the harbour area, which is an integral part of Belfast and an important factor in the city’s economy, is under the control of a separate planning authority.

**Government Considers Position**

The Northern Ireland Cabinet, recognising the unsatisfactory nature of planning control, appointed a Cabinet Sub-Committee to consider how matters could be improved in anticipation of large-scale development in post-war years, and the sub-committee instructed the Ministry of Home Affairs, then the Government department responsible for planning, to obtain expert technical advice on pertinent questions.

Mr. W. R. Davidge, the well-known Planning Consultant, was engaged to report on the existing situation and to make recommendations as to the manner in which, and the machinery whereby, the necessary improvement could be secured, particularly with reference to the Belfast area.

Mr. Davidge, in reporting to the Ministry in 1942, reviewed the weaknesses of the then existing planning legislation, with particular reference to the multiplicity of local planning authorities and the absence of joint committees. He drew attention to the abundant evidence that the planning powers provided were not utilised to any appreciable extent and of the difficulties which had arisen in their application, particularly on the boundaries of Belfast and Londonderry.
He considered it clear that no effective planning can be expected unless it is sponsored and directed by the Government, in co-operation with all existing public authorities.

His recommendations are of considerable interest, and in some respects the machinery by which he proposed to formulate and carry out a State plan is in advance of that existing in most other countries.

The principal recommendations were:

As a basic step, one Planning Authority should be constituted for Northern Ireland and all land should be deemed to be covered by a planning resolution.

The State plan should deal with:

1. The matters affecting the whole of Northern Ireland such as transport by road, rail, water or air, the development of natural resources, encouragement of agriculture and industry.

2. The reconstruction of Belfast, involving detailed basic surveys of extent of war damage, location of industry, commerce and residences, traffic congestion, distribution and densities of population, rateable values, open spaces and playgrounds, educational facilities, etc.

3. Northern Ireland generally, including surveys of existing public services and desirable extensions, sites for new communities or expansion of existing, reservation of green belt and regional open spaces.

It was further recommended that the Ministry of Home Affairs, in consultation with other Ministries, should be the appropriate State department to take the necessary preliminary action as the Central Planning Authority, and it was emphasised that when the policy and general planning principles have been established, appropriate legislation to implement the plan will need to be introduced.

Of particular moment are the recommendations that two complementary advisory bodies should be set up to assist the Ministry in collecting information and formulating the State plan:

1. A Planning Advisory Board consisting of representatives of the Ministries concerned, the two principal cities, the six counties, the Belfast Harbour Commissioners and interested professional institutions.
   The functions of this body would be to make suggestions and advise on matters of principle arising during the preparation of the plan.

2. A Planning Commission entirely technical, consisting of architects and engineers of Government departments, the six county surveyors and the two city surveyors, the Commission to prepare outline proposals for submission to the Ministry, followed by recommendations as to any legislative or administrative action necessary.

Almost simultaneously with the submission of the Davidge Report, the Parliamentary Select Committee on Unemployment issued its report. The Committee's recommendations strongly supported those made by Mr. Davidge. They were:
(1) Northern Ireland should be planned as a whole.
(2) A Central Authority should be set up with powers to ensure the carrying out of all schemes.
(3) This authority should have power to approve schemes, amend schemes, and, if necessary, to make schemes.
(4) It would co-ordinate all schemes into one plan.
(5) Government assistance would be required to help local authorities in the preparation of their plans.
(6) Plans should be made on the basis of regional divisions, each division being composed of smaller groups.
(7) Planning should be carried out by a body of experts who would be responsible through a Ministry to Parliament.
(8) Disposal of industries, and co-operation in each main group of agriculture and industry on all relevant matters.

**Government Action on Recommendations**

On receipt of these very important reports the Minister of Home Affairs took immediate action to implement the recommendation regarding the establishment of the two Advisory bodies by the appointment of the Planning Advisory Board and the Planning Commission.

The Advisory Board, under the Chairmanship of the Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University, Belfast, set to work without delay and to date have issued interim reports on Water and Sewerage, Location of Industry, Housing, Amenities, Recreational Facilities and the Tourist Industry. It is understood that further reports will be made on Transport and Rural Planning.

The Planning Commission have been no less active and have reported on the planning of the Belfast Area and Road Communications. A report on the Londonderry area is nearing completion.

The Government also has taken action towards implementing the recommendations of the Advisory Board by setting up the Northern Ireland Housing Trust, a publicly financed body given the duty of providing houses in areas where the local authorities had not the resources to erect sufficient houses to meet requirements, and by introducing the Water Supplies and Sewerage Act which, by reason of its financial provisions, encourages the formation of joint water authorities and enables proper water supplies and sewerage installations to be provided for areas without such facilities.

Less satisfactory progress has been made towards implementing the recommendations relating to planning legislation, and the only additional enactment has been the Planning (Interim Development) Act (Northern Ireland), 1944, which brought all land under planning control. This Act is very similar to the English 1943 Act, but has certain points of difference which are of some interest.

The Act leaves the position in regard to local planning authorities as it was under the 1931 Act, and does not give powers to the appropriate Ministry compulsorily to set up joint committees, but it takes account of the Davidge Report by providing that the Planning Commission shall be consulted where interim development applications are reported to their
authorities by planning officers as being applications which would affect
or require to be co-ordinated with a plan for the development of land
situated in the district of some other authority.

It will be appreciated that while Northern Ireland has the opportunity
to plan effectively on a State basis by reason of its convenient size, well-
balanced position as regards the relative strengths of industry and
agriculture and well-devised advisory machinery, it still lacks the impetus
which can only be given by advanced legislation.

In practice, the dead weight of obsolete legislation retards any effective
progress.

The foregoing account gives in broad outline the background against
which the day-to-day planning control takes place, and the following is a
more detailed statement of the present position.

Towards a National Plan

Responsibility for National Planning falls on the Cabinet and the
coordination of policy takes place at Cabinet level. The administration of
Government policy devolves on several departments, each dealing with
matters which particularly concern itself, but contact takes place at all
levels within the various Ministries on matters of common interest.

In practice, the result is often unsatisfactory, for almost inevitably
each Ministry tends to place undue importance on matters falling within
its particular sphere without regarding fully the national position.

By reason of a redistribution of functions between Government
departments, the central administration of Local Government services,
including planning, now rests with the Ministry of Health and Local
Government, but planning in its broad aspect comes under the control of
the following Ministries:

(1) Ministry of Finance: Treasury, Public Works and Buildings,
Valuation and Survey, Public Record Office, Registrar-
General, etc.

(2) Ministry of Health and Local Government: Central control
of Local Government services, including planning, housing,
public health and sanitary matters, hospitals, water and
sewerage schemes, etc.

(3) Ministry of Commerce: Commercial intelligence, industrial
production, development of new industries, power undertakings,
transport matters generally, including construction
and maintenance of roads, railways, etc.

(4) Ministry of Agriculture: Improvement and development of
agriculture, forestry, dairying, livestock breeding, etc.

(5) Ministry of Education: Control of elementary, secondary and
technical education, training of teachers, distribution of State
grants, etc.

(6) Ministry of Labour and National Insurance: All matters
relating to employment, national insurances, etc.

The Government, while taking into account the recommendations
made by its advisory bodies, has not made any official statement on planning
policy and its aim, therefore, is to attempt to give guidance and encourage-
ment to local authorities to direct development within their areas towards a plan conceived on a national scale.

Without more positive control, this rather vague Government direction exerts comparatively little influence on development in the absence of even regional planning committees.

Broadly speaking, it can be said that the department most responsible for planning is unable consistently to secure that local authorities, concerned largely with increasing the rateable values of their areas and being under considerable pressure from landowners, operate their limited powers to the national advantage.

In some directions the Ministry of Health and Local Government is able to ensure the establishment of planning standards, particularly as regards residential development. By its administration of the Housing Acts, very strict control is maintained on all questions of layout, density, standards of accommodation, etc., over a considerable proportion of housing being carried out by private enterprise, as well as that by local authorities and the Northern Ireland Housing Trust.

The Ministry of Commerce also has been able to direct industry by the establishment of Government-built factories, but the attraction to industrialists of the large labour pool available in Belfast and its advantageous geographical situation have often overridden national planning considerations.

The Government plans for new trunk roads follow closely the recommendations of the Planning Commission and consultation with local authorities is constant and advantageous.

It can be seen, therefore, that the results achieved are by no means negligible, but so long as the whole liability for payment of compensation rests with local authorities and each authority continues to plan as a separate entity, little advancement is possible towards a national plan.

To recapitulate briefly, Northern Ireland as a whole is the natural planning region; the State, at present mainly by advice is, attempting to correlate the plans being prepared by the separate local planning authorities; while the reports of the two advisory bodies provide the data upon which a national plan could be based.

It is understood that a new Planning Bill is in preparation and all concerned with planning in Northern Ireland eagerly await its publication.
L'AMENAGEMENT SUR LE PLAN NATIONAL ET REGIONAL EN IRLANDE DU NORD

L'Irlande du Nord, d'une superficie de 5238 miles carrés et d'une population de 350,000 habitants, constitue une région idéale pour l'Aménagement.

Le gouvernement de l'Irlande du Nord a la responsabilité de l'Aménagement régional, c'est-à-dire que l'administration de la politique nationale de l'Aménagement incombe à plusieurs services, le Ministère de la Santé Publique et les Autorités locales jouant le rôle de coordonnateurs.

Le gouvernement a l'avantage de définir la politique des fonctions de deux Corps Consultatifs : le Conseil Consultatif de l'Aménagement se composant des représentants des principales Autorités Locales, des services gouvernementaux et des institutions professionnelles, et la Commission de l'Aménagement composée d'architectes et d'ingénieurs, des Autorités Locales et des services gouvernementaux.

Ces organismes ont été créés repectivement pour recueillir tous les renseignements nécessaires à la rédaction d'un projet d'Etat et pour préparer les grandes lignes des projets d'Aménagement concernant des régions déterminées, y compris les deux villes de Belfast et de Londonderry.

La concentration du commerce et de l'industrie à Belfast—500,000 habitants—est un des principaux problèmes qui confrontent les responsables de l'Aménagement en Irlande du Nord, et un programme national d'urbanisme, pour être efficace, doit prévoir toutes nouvelles exploitations en dehors de Belfast.

Le Gouvernement a créé le Syndicat de l'Habitation en Irlande du Nord pour aider à la construction de maisons dans des régions où les Autorités Locales disposent de moins de fonds et a encouragé la création de systèmes de canalisation et d'égoûts dans les campagnes et dans les petites villes.

Par l'octroi de subventions d'Etat au Bâtiment, le standard des quartiers d'habitation est surveillé et des usines contrôlées par le Gouvernement ainsi que de nouvelles grandes routes sont prévues suivant les besoins nationaux.

Une législation désuète, copiée de la loi anglaise existant avant 1944, fonctionne à l'encontre de tout programme efficace de l'Aménagement, car la crainte d'encourir des dettes pour compensations—pour lesquelles aucune aide financière de l'Etat n'est accordée—and la crainte de perdre des augmentations potentielles sur les revenus taxables tendent à empêcher les Autorités Locales de prévoir des programmes d'Aménagement d'intérêt national.