



Measuring the climate impact of spatial planning



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Because of its broad reach, spatial planning plays a key role in the transition to a zero-carbon society and economy. The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies are a lever for accelerated climate action in the Irish Regions and provide a long-term spatial framework for sustainable development - and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions - in local development plans in Ireland.

Global to Local – Spatial Planning as a lever for tackling climate change

Climate change is a global challenge that requires a coherent response at national, regional and local level. As an island in the north Atlantic, Ireland is already feeling the effects of climate change, with more frequent extreme weather events, rising temperatures and sea levels, and towns and cities at heightened risk from flooding.

As it stands, Ireland is not on the right trajectory, even with COVID, to meet our EU emission reduction targets of 40% by 2030. In response, the Irish Government has declared a “climate emergency” and the National Climate Action Plan sets out a decarbonisation pathway to 2030, and a net zero target by 2050.

Spatial planning plays a key role in putting Ireland on the right path. By planning properly, we can promote more efficient use of land, increase public and active transport, build sustainable communities and a green economy. Project Ireland 2040 – the National Planning Framework integrates climate action into all regional

and local land use planning policies, supported by Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies and the current review of local City and County Development Plans.

Comparing pathways to zero carbon: Case Study County Meath Ireland

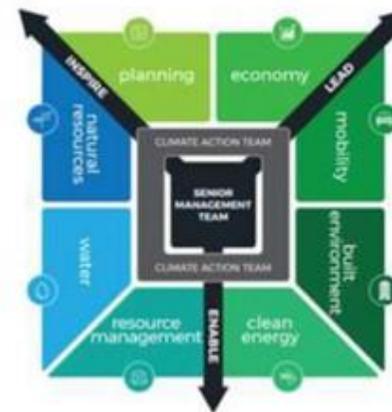
County Meath is in the commuter catchment of Ireland's capital city of Dublin and has experienced rapid population and economic growth with increased commuting patterns and traffic congestion, leading to

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increased emissions from transport and land use change. Meath's Climate Action Plan highlights the need for good planning if the County is to achieve its national emissions reduction targets and is integrated into the Draft Meath County Development Plan, which will set out a spatial framework for future development to 2027.

“If you can't measure it, you can't improve it.”

Meath is one of 12 local authorities in the Eastern and Midland Region. The Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly (EMRA) is committed to tackling climate change and prepared the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, which sets the spatial policy framework to 2031 in our Region and requires that local authority Development Plans undergo assessment of their impact on GHG emissions and include measures to monitor progress towards



reduction targets.

But how can we improve what we cannot measure? There are many ways to measure GHG emissions with no universally agreed method for quantifying the climate impact of spatial planning policies across different territories. EMRA launched the QGasSP project to learn from the latest research and develop a methodology that will allow planning authorities at national, regional, and local levels to quantify and forecast the GHG impact of their spatial planning policies in a consistent manner.

The project will deliver a web application and modelling tool for planners that can be integrated into the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA). This integration will allow development of alternative scenarios to support the plan making process.

The service providers are working with stakeholders in Meath, Dublin's Energy Agency Codema and Ireland's National Transport Agency (NTA) to develop the QGasSP tool with a focus on quantification of emissions from buildings, transport, and land use change.

Once the local baseline data is available, the GHG quantification of different policies can then be completed by planners in Meath to test climate mitigation strategies in their spatial plan, to identify and monitor new 'Decarbonisation Zones' and to avoid 'locking in' unsustainable high carbon land use and transport patterns.

Climate action as a driver for growth

The outputs of QGasSP are eagerly awaited in Ireland, where a recent National Climate Objective sets a more ambitious roadmap of 7% emission reductions per annum up to 51% by 2030. The tool will be used by planning authorities to compare alternative pathways to climate neutrality, to build political will for the transformative change that is needed over the next decade and to position climate action as a driver for growth.

By integrating climate action and aligning spatial plans at all levels with EU priorities, it is hoped to leverage European Green Deal opportunities and advance the creation of 'green' jobs and sustainable food and energy production and ensure a just

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Photos: Meath County Council
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