



DublinTown political manifesto priorities

Executive Summary

1. This is a time of rapid change. Technology is driving an industrial revolution. We must respond adequately to climate change by investing in sustainable options and incorporating them into our lifestyle choices.
2. Planners need to engage with the business community, ideally through Business Improvement Districts to better understand how changes to leisure spend is changing the appropriate business mix for town centres.
3. For reasons of economic and environmental sustainability, Ireland must adopt a town centre first policy similar to that pertaining in Scotland.
4. Internationally, people wish to live within or adjacent to towns centres and have the ability to walk or cycle to work. To remain relevant Irish town must accommodate this.
 - a. We need to review the living city and living over the shop initiatives and correct the weaknesses which have led to a low level of take up. We must bring under-utilised spaces within town centres back into productive use
 - b. We should consider compulsory sales orders, similar to that operating in Scotland, to bring derelict properties, together with those in danger of dereliction back into productive use. This may require constitutional change.
 - c. High accommodation costs are impacting retail and hospitality spend. All available solutions to addressing the housing crises need to be utilised. This is likely to require significantly increased direct housing provision by the state through local authorities. This includes direct investment in Housing First options.
5. We need to invest heavily in public transport for both economic and environmental reasons. The NTA plans for Dublin will make a significant contribution. However, we cannot wait until 2035 for delivery. We need to integrate land use and transport policies. To achieve required residential densities, we need increased use of rail, and in particular, underground rail options. A metro can carry 20,000 passengers per direction per hour. Bus Connects can carry 3,500.
6. We need to plan for a EU wide consolidated corporation tax basis. Our current Corporation Tax windfall cannot be anticipated to last indefinitely. These windfall receipts must be used for infrastructural investment or reduction in the national debt rather than meeting additional current spending.

7. We should prioritise reductions in VAT before reductions in income tax. Irish retailers compete against businesses around the world on-line. There is significant anecdotal evidence that a lot of on-line purchases are avoiding Irish VAT and customs charges. The hospitality sector is struggling, with reduced tourist spend. We believe that the standard VAT rate should be reduced to 20% and the hospitality rate reduced to 10%.
8. We need a total upgrade of Dublin's water infrastructure to meet the needs of the 21st century.
9. Infrastructure requirements should be established and invested in. National needs must inform infrastructural investment. The decision by Dublin Port Company to severely restrict cruise visits to Dublin and Ireland, because freight is more profitable for it than passengers, without consideration for the wider economy highlights the need for integrated national planning.
10. Ireland is experiencing significant skills shortages across a range of industries, including the catering industry. We need to promote vocational training and opportunities across trades to young people and provide appropriate access to industry led training.

Introduction: A time of Change

This election comes at a time of great upheaval and uncertainty. Technology is driving an industrial revolution, while climate change is necessitating a fundamental rethink of how we live. These changes will determine how and where we live and how we spend our leisure time and money. Similarly, the retail and hospitality sectors are set for significant adjustment. When one considers that 8.6% of the European workforce works in retail and that almost two-thirds of these are women, the potential significant economic and social consequences are obvious. Approximately 15% of non-food retail in Ireland is conducted online, a percentage that is likely to increase. Of this, roughly 70% is purchased through sites based outside of Ireland. Internationally, it has been found that out of town shopping centres are more vulnerable to changes in purchasing behaviour than town centres. [25% of US malls are expected to close by 2023](#).

There is much that Ireland could learn from the [Scottish Town Centre First policy](#). It makes economic and environmental sense that retail developments within town centres are favoured and planned for. As increased spend is devoted to experiences and entertainment, we are likely to see greater hospitality uses within our towns and cities. We must therefore plan for increased mixed-use development within our towns and cities. This will include much needed residential use.

Internationally, we are seeing people opt to live within or adjacent to town centres with the option to walk or cycle to work. For Irish towns to be relevant for the 21st century, this preference must be planned for and accommodated. This is essential in order secure environmental and economic sustainability.

Consumer sentiment and spend

Irish headline economic statistics are encouraging, however, throughout 2019, Dublin city and other retail destinations experienced a softening in consumer spend. Much of town centre spend is driven by young adults in both the hospitality sector and fashion retail. This demographic, including Generation Z and Millennials, is challenged to find appropriate and affordable accommodation. In Ireland, the [average household net-adjusted disposable income per capita is US\\$25,310](#) a year,

lower than the OECD average of US\$33,604. There can be little doubt that the housing crisis is having both an economic as well as a social impact. Additionally, businesses are experiencing wage increase demands from employees who require remuneration increases, to retain a roof over their head.

Investment in the Evening & Night Time Economy

As retail retrenches, we are seeing a marked increase in the number of units accommodating hospitality uses. While the market is likely to correct imbalances arising, it may prove prudent to ensure that local districts retain a sustainable business mix with property owners and business operators co-operating through Business Improvement Districts. This progress is a clearly visible trend across the world.

23 Irish towns achieved Purple Flag status. [Purple Flag](#) is an award that acknowledges excellence in the management of the Evening & Night Time Economy. It involves private and public sector stakeholders working together to create and sustain vibrant and safe evening destinations.

However, more needs to be done. Locations require greater management and planning, something that is being increasingly achieved through night managers. Again, Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are fulfilling an important function internationally in this space. One key issue arising is managing potential conflict. As more people chose to live in cities and cities also grow their evening economies, there is potential for conflict between the two uses. Towns and cities around the world are establishing mechanisms for avoiding such conflict and growing both uses. Irish towns and cities must do the same and learn from best practice available to put appropriate structures in place.

Night workers and those using our towns after dark, deserve adequate public transport. Evening workers deserve the same transport access as their daytime colleagues. The [success of two piloted 24-hour bus routes](#) shows public appetite for transport at night.

The development of the evening and night time economy requires enhanced perceptions of public safety. Many of the issues that give rise to public concern simply do not happen when there is a uniformed Garda presence on the street. To maintain successful town centre economies, we need to invest in enhanced Garda presence and recruit sufficient Garda to police our towns and cities, both day and night. It is the view of town centre and BID managers that there is simply insufficient Garda presence on our streets at present and that we are at a disadvantage when compared with competitor destinations.

Tax

It is right that Ireland has clearly declared its future within Europe. However, the exit of the UK from the EU is a reality and we need to be ready for all its consequences. It can be anticipated that pressure will grow for the introduction of an EU wide consolidated tax base. We need to start planning for this potential.

The state is experiencing windfall corporation tax receipts at present. It is essential that these receipts are used to meet capital investment or reduction in the national debt rather than increasing current expenditure.

Given the challenges facing the retail sector, and the fact that the sector faces competition from establishments around the world, we recommend that the general VAT rate is reduced to 20% from the current 23% to bring Ireland into line with the UK and prominent EU economies. Similarly, the hospitality sector experienced a challenging year in 2019, while the applicable VAT rate has increased from 9 to 13.5%. We recommend that this rate is also brought into line with EU averages and is reduced to 10%. We recommend that the loss of revenue to the state from such measures are offset in part by increases in carbon taxes which will encourage a migration to more sustainable energy use. We recommend that reductions in VAT are prioritised over reductions to income tax rates.

In order to assist smaller, independent retailers meet the challenges of Brexit, we recommend that supports be provided to assist them in engaging more fully with EU distribution networks. This will enable them to avoid the cashflow impacts of a potential re-introduction of VAT at the point of entry, in relation to UK sourced goods, and also assist them avoid tariffs and increased regulation, that may apply to trade from UK.

It is clear that domestic retailers are facing unfair competition from online traders based outside of Ireland. Goods purchased online are regularly arriving in Ireland from overseas, but often slip through ports and airports without being subject to VAT at the point of entry, or through other customs and tariffs. Similarly, there is growing evidence of high-end goods, including jewellery and watches, circulating in Ireland that have been sourced abroad. These goods are being sold without Irish VAT and are placing Irish retailers at a significant disadvantage.

Investment in infrastructure

Ireland did not have the resources required to invest in its infrastructure during the recession. Our poor infrastructure is curtailing Ireland's development from both a social and economic perspective. We must now catch up on competitor economies.

Water

Dublin continues to use its Victorian era water infrastructure, when Dublin's population was considerably smaller than it is today. Much of the network is now simply obsolete and beyond repair. On a daily basis, Dublin uses at least 96% of its treated water. This is not sustainable. We must decide how the required investment is to be paid for and enable Irish Water to make the necessary investment.

A key deficiency of our antiquated water system is the fact that the drainage system feeds into the sewerage system. This means that excess rainwater can cause leakage from the sewerage system. This happened twice in August 2019 when we experienced raw sewerage leaking into the River Liffey and Dublin Bay. With symptomatic increases in rainfall, as a direct result of climate change, we can

expect such incidents to become a regular occurrence. The installation of Green Infrastructure such as Green Walls, Green Roofs, and on street planting will assist in reducing the flow of such excess water into our antiquated water systems, further reducing the possibility of overflow. This investment must be prioritised.

Housing

We need to integrate our land use and transport strategies in Dublin. We have a housing crisis which is leading to devastating social and economic consequences.

Dublin's population will continue to grow. Seeking to limit Dublin's capacity will not benefit either Dublin or the rest of the country. Allowing Dublin to reach its potential will not limit our ability to also grow other key urban centres such as Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Sligo.

In order to facilitate this growth, we need to increase residential densities in Dublin and provide adequate public transport to allow for efficient conveyance of people in and out of the city.

Dublin needs to increase its housing density. To do this we need to repurpose under-utilised spaces. These include vacant space above shops throughout the city centre, which can be brought back into productive use. We believe that previous schemes aimed at achieving this have failed because they did not address the conflict between modern housing standards and conservation policies. Other cities, notably within the UK which has a similar building stock to Dublin, have overcome similar challenges. A decision has to be made. Do we allow buildings to remain derelict and under-utilised or do we adopt policies that allow them to be brought into productive use while respecting their original use and design? Similarly, we have significant space along back lanes which were originally built for stable access. Many of these contain derelict and under-utilised properties that could be repurposed for residential use, such as the [Reimagining Dublin One Laneways](#) proposal.

Scotland has a system of [Compulsory Sales Orders](#) for under-utilised premises. Ireland should consider a similar scheme that would enable Local Authorities to force property owners to bring sites into productive use or lose control of them. While this solution may require constitutional change, it is worthy of consideration.

Across the world there is a renewed interest in city living. People want to walk or cycle to their place of work. They also want living, vibrant city-based communities with schooling and recreational opportunities for themselves and their children. If our towns and cities are to remain relevant for the 21st century, and if we are to continue to attract and maintain foreign direct investment, we must ensure that our urban centres meet the demands of the educated worker. Higher density will involve utilising currently redundant space. However, we do not need to increase heights above 8 stories throughout the city. As evidenced by Jane Jacobs' insightful analysis (in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*), excessive heights mitigate against the creation of functioning communities and designs must keep this in mind.

In a housing crisis it is inevitable that all will suffer. However, those most vulnerable will suffer most. The plight of the homeless is a shocking indictment on our society and while it is commendable that many citizens seek to assist, it is incumbent on the authorities to ensure that this is achieved in a manner that respects the dignity of all and that efforts are deployed where they can achieve most. In this context, there is a strong argument that the efforts of voluntary groups are co-ordinated

under a license agreement with the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive (DRHE) to help avoid the duplication of supports and to ensure that appropriate standards such as food safety are met. Personal services such as hair cutting and dental hygiene and the provision of clothing should be done in discrete indoor venues to respect the dignity of those in receipt of supports. The locations to do this exist and support should be directed to them. There is no reason why people should be expected to change their clothing on public streets or have children sitting down to eat in degrading circumstances.

We need to appraise our supports and ensure that they are meeting all the needs of our people.

Transport

We have simply under-invested in our public transport systems. The schemes planned by the NTA in their [Transport Strategy for the Greater Dublin Area 2016-2035](#), are sufficient to meet many of our needs. However, the timescale for delivery, which runs to 2035, is simply too long. The plans must be fast-tracked and the funding made available to enable speedier delivery. Dublin Town would also argue that greater use must be made of underground options. This would include bringing the Metro to Rathfarnham which would allow for significantly increased residential densities to be achieved along its route. Similarly, the decision to halt the Metro at Charlemont must be reversed to allow the creation of greater residential densities along the route to Sandyford and onwards towards Cherrywood. Additionally, the Luas Green Line must be extended to Finglas and towards Ballymun to meet the Metro to create efficient access to the airport for a large swathe of the northside.

The reason why other cities have invested in underground transport and why we should do the same is simple. A metro can carry 20,000 passengers per direction per hour while the extended Luas can carry 11,000 and Bus Connects corridors 3,500. If we are going to maximise our residential densities with efficient access to the city, we need to look to rail options and increased underground options.

In Ireland we discuss proposals at length. We plan investments, then we review them again and again. We do not implement the plans efficiently. At some point infrastructure must be delivered and not merely discussed. We are suffering the consequences of inaction and the Irish public rightly expect to have infrastructure consistent with our status as a progressive EU state. We need to get on with delivery.

Similarly, we need to determine who decides our infrastructure priorities. Is it the state at national level or the infrastructure provider? This point was brought into sharp focus when Dublin Port Company took the decision to restrict the number of cruise ships welcomed in Dublin. The knock-on effect is that other ports in Ireland will lose cruise visits. This will have significant impacts on retail and hospitality nationwide.

Dublin Port Company can readily justify this decision in the context of its own finances. However, Dublin Town believes that the national interest should also be considered when such decisions are arrived at.

Vocational Education

Ireland needs to develop its vocational education sector. Traditionally we had a societal preference for academic qualifications over vocational training and education. However, this approach is not meeting the needs of employers or potential employees. The lack of investment in vocational training has contributed to staff shortages in key trades. Within Dublin city centre this is most acute in the catering trade. There is a need to invest in people who wish to take up opportunities in the industry. As such, we are calling for a practical and pragmatic programme. The focus should be on the practical requirements of the industry and provision of training to allow entrants to progress within the trade. DublinTown stands ready to facilitate this training and to match potential employees with employment opportunities.