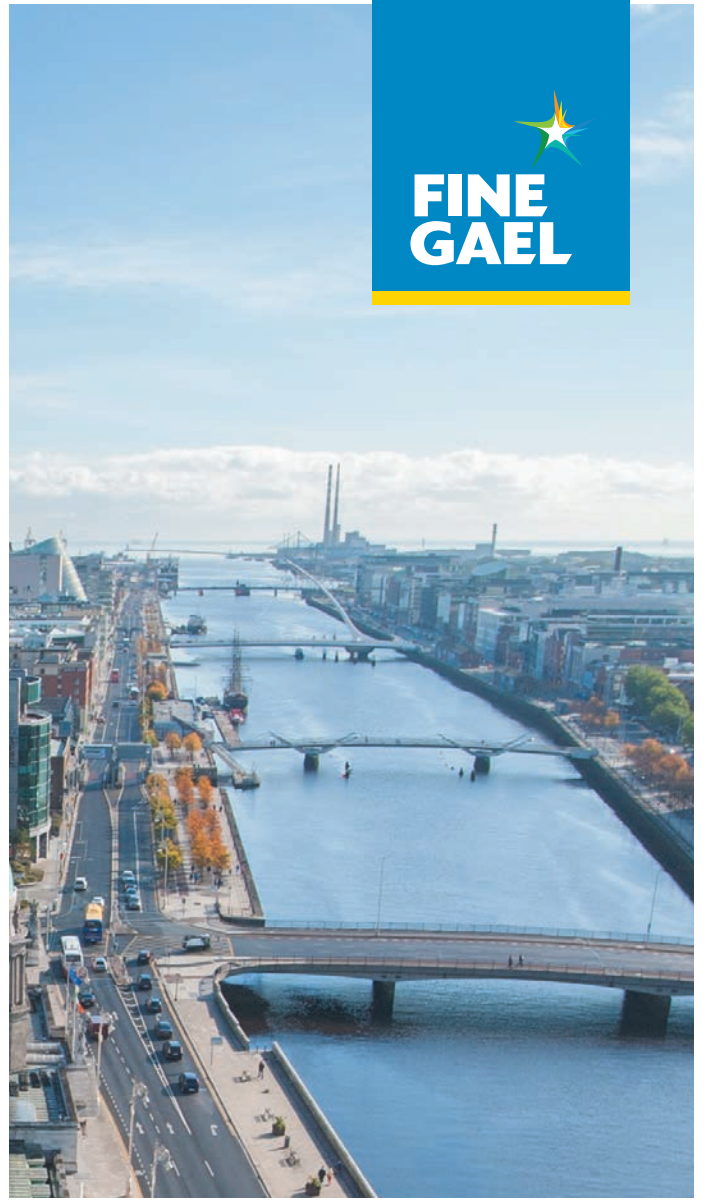




**FINE
GAEL**



Building a Better Dublin





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Dublin is home to 1.45 million people and a tourism destination for over 8.6 million people across the world.

Executive Summary

Dublin is a city of great potential. It's growing fast, attracting global companies, and offering a vibrant culture. But it also faces serious challenges - housing shortages, public safety concerns, weak local government, and underused public spaces.

This document sets out Fine Gael's vision to tackle these problems head-on, through bold ideas and local engagement. The establishment of the Dublin City Taskforce by Simon Harris was an important moment for Dubliners. It showed that Fine Gael is serious about tackling the serious challenges that Dubliners deal with on a daily basis.

However, Dublin is home to 1.45 million people and a tourism destination for over 8.6 million people from across the world.

Over the coming months, we will consult with communities across Dublin to shape practical solutions to bring the Taskforce's vision to life.

Some key measures are:

- The full implementation of the Dublin City Taskforce with a group in the Department of An Taoiseach to drive delivery of the recommendations.
- Strengthening local government and accountability through the introduction of a directly elected mayor.
- Radical measures to tackle dereliction and increase housing supply.
- A national initiative asking one big question, "What should the GPO become?". Inspired by the 2009 Ideas Campaign, this project will invite people across Ireland to submit creative proposals to reimagine the GPO as a landmark multi-visit destination.
- Improving public spaces and transport.
- Leading the world as an autism-friendly capital which champions neurodiversity.

Strengthening Local Government in Dublin

Dublin has 1.45 million people, but decision-making power is unclear and often unaccountable. Councillors and voters are often sidelined once decisions are made.

We propose:

- A directly elected Mayor for all of Dublin with powers over housing, transport, waste, and safety -similar to London.
- A new Dublin Assembly to oversee the Mayor's performance.
- More power for councillors, including legal rights to be consulted before key decisions are made.
- Greater financial control, including examining the introduction of a Dublin tourism levy.

Making Dublin Safer

Parts of Dublin feel unsafe. Garda visibility has improved, but we need more than boots on the ground.

We propose:

- Expanding CCTV and simplifying Garda access to footage.
- Designing safety into streets, with expert input at the planning stage.
- Accelerating Community Safety Partnerships, giving locals a say in policing.
- Devolving policing plans to councillors, so local crime gets local attention.

Tackling Dereliction and Boosting Housing

Dublin has too many vacant homes and derelict sites—wasting space in a housing crisis.

We propose:

- Reforming Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPOs) to speed up and simplify taking over derelict sites to tackle vacancy, increase our social housing stock, and tackle homelessness.
- Using utility data to identify empty homes more accurately.
- Revamping above-the-shop living, by easing regulations and funding small landlords to convert units.

Fine Gael is proposing a new national initiative to ask one big question. What should the GPO become?

- Inspired by the 2009 Ideas Campaign, this initiative will invite people across Ireland – and the diaspora – to submit creative proposals for transforming the GPO into a must-visit destination.

Better Public Realm

Despite beautiful parks, Dublin lacks clean, attractive, welcoming public spaces that are accessible for all.

We propose:

- Decluttering footpaths and removing ugly or unnecessary infrastructure which act as barriers for physical disabilities and are unsightly.
- Improving shopfront design, especially in heritage areas, through licensing, guidance, and stronger enforcement.
- Greening the city, with more trees, rooftop gardens, and wall-mounted plants.
- Expanding social spaces, like pedestrian streets and covered outdoor areas.
- Piloting underground bin systems and using CCTV to catch dumping.

Becoming the World's First Autism-Friendly Capital City

We want Dublin to lead the world in neurodiversity.

We propose:

- Clearer accommodation guidance for employers and public services.
- Enforcing disability hiring targets in the public sector.

- Designing quieter, more accessible public spaces, using sensory gardens and better signage.
- Encouraging assistive tech and autism communication cards in shops and public services.
- Publishing public building maps, so autistic people can navigate spaces more easily.

Improving Transport for Everyone

Dubliners want a cleaner, safer, and more reliable transport network. But current plans are too focused on buses.

We propose:

- Accelerating Luas extensions to Lucan, Finglas, Poolbeg, and more.
- Reassessing demand forecasts using updated population data.
- Delivering MetroLink faster via dedicated laws and delivery bodies.
- Allowing on-street EV charging, with changes to planning rules and safety guidelines.

Next Steps: Shaping This Plan With You

Over the coming months, we'll be holding meetings in every Dublin constituency with our councillors and TDs. We want to hear your views and ideas on all of the themes in this paper.

.Together, we can make Dublin a safer, cleaner, and more inclusive city.



Fine Gael's Oireachtas team in Dublin



Introduction

Dublin is a great city. Its population has never been larger, the number of people visiting has never been greater, and its economy is home to some of the world's most innovative companies.

But our capital city is also faced with real problems, as was highlighted by the Dublin City Taskforce commissioned by Simon Harris.

The Taskforce highlighted a number of key issues that must be addressed. In my view, these challenges drive and compound other problems that negatively impact our quality of life.

There is not enough affordable housing, and dereliction is all too prevalent. Parts of the city do not feel safe, and sometimes are not safe. We lack public spaces in which to socialise, leaving many areas empty and lifeless during the evening time. Our public transport options are currently too limited to make non-car travel viable for many groups, while cycling can still feel dangerous. And people feel that there is not only too little accountability for how decisions are made, but that their voices are not heard when changes are being designed.

Some of these challenges were exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, while others are the consequence of structural changes in our economy and society.

These problems are not unique to Dublin. All of them can be solved.

Fine Gael possesses both the talent and ideas to develop a new vision for Dublin. But we must embrace the bold policies needed to bring this vision to life.

Within government, we can champion a Dublin that is safe, clean, connected, and full of life. On the ground, we have a team of outstanding public representatives to implement the bold changes our city needs.

As Fine Gael's spokesperson for Dublin, I want our party's values reflected in this vision for Dublin. The Fine Gael party can find solutions to the challenges highlighted by the Dublin City Taskforce. I am a firm believer that a bottom-up approach to policymaking is the best way to do this. Through this process, we can develop specific policies that will bring the Taskforce recommendations to life.

That is why I want to engage with you over a number of months to develop policies that will set out the party's approach to transforming Dublin.

In this initial scoping document, I have identified 6 themes. These are non-exhaustive and will serve to inform our engagement across the four Dublin local authorities. Under each theme, I have suggested some possible ideas, based on initial feedback from our public representatives in Dublin and examples of international best practice.

By developing policy from the ground up on these key issues, I am confident that Fine Gael can lead the debate on how to deal with the most pressing problems Dubliners face. We can transform our capital city into the safe, thriving city we all want it to be.

Strengthening accountability in Dublin

Dublin needs stronger local government. Almost 1.5 million people live in the four Dublin local authority areas, yet Dubliners cannot hold those most responsible for how decisions are made accountable at the ballot box. Once policies are voted on by Councillors (or TDs), elected representatives have limited say over how these decisions are implemented on the ground.

As the Citizens' Assembly on Dublin noted, most people are unsure about where responsibility and power lies, how decisions are made, and how their tax contributions are allocated. As a result, when people vote at elections, they may not be clear about who has been responsible for particular changes that impact their lives.

That is not a transparent system of local government.

I believe that Fine Gael should champion policies that remedy this situation. If the changes that people want and deserve – a cleaner, safer, more vibrant city – are to be realised, then policymakers should be given more power to enact those changes, and people should be able to throw them out of office at elections. No political party should fear being held to account by the people that elect us.

In saying this, I am aware that we need a debate on the powers of local government across the country more broadly. People constantly report a desire for more decisions to be taken closer to source. Some potential ways of strengthening local government and accountability in Dublin are:

1. Holding a plebiscite for a directly elected Mayor and new model of local government

The Citizens' Assembly on Dublin recommended that powers for 15 policy areas be devolved to a directly elected Mayor, in a manner similar to the London model. The Dublin City Taskforce also emphasised the need for unique governance structures for the capital. These reforms would involve changing local government structures.

- Under this model, it was recommended that the Mayor, in conjunction with elected local representatives, is granted powers to raise revenue and borrow.
- The Mayor's competencies would include Housing, Homelessness, Transport, Infrastructure/Roads/Footpaths, Water, Policing, and Waste Management. For each area, policy developments, standards, and curriculum would continue to be set at a national level, but the Mayor and local government would have responsibility for local implementation.
- The Mayor would be elected with a Deputy Mayor on the ballot, with a Cabinet of elected councillors.
- A new Dublin City and County Assembly would be established. The role of the Assembly would be to make policy proposals to the Mayor, to approve the budget of the Mayor and to scrutinize the activities and performance of the Mayor.
- Assembly members could be elected either directly, selected by councillors, or via a combination of election and selection.
- The four local authorities would be retained.



2. Strengthen the influence of local councillors

The Citizens' Assembly also noted that Ireland has one of the weakest systems of local government in Europe. Despite local authorities delivering over 1,100 services in Ireland, Councillors report being excluded from key decisions, and felt that their powers are unclearly defined. One public representative described the current role of Councillors as being something akin to an "ambassador to the Chief Executive". The result is that services delivered by local authorities and state bodies are not responsive to the needs of communities.

The Government has recognised this, and recently established a Local Democracy Taskforce to examine how local government can be strengthened in Ireland. Some potential measures that the taskforce should consider are:

- Putting Area Committees on a statutory footing to ensure that decision making is brought closer to councillors' local electoral authority areas.
- Conducting a review of other powers that could be devolved from plenary council level to strengthen the role of Area Committees.
- Devolving more powers to ensure greater Councillor – and therefore voter – input into the delivery of key services. For example, transportation powers could be devolved to Dublin's councillors, enabling greater scrutiny of how particular projects are designed, and whether they are suited to the electorate's needs.
- Amending the Local Government Act to give Strategic Policy Committees a statutory right to be consulted before relevant decisions about policy implementation are made by the Executive. The Minister for Housing would have to issue statutory guidelines to define which decisions require mandatory consultation.

- Creating cross-agency taskforces (similar to Community Safety Partnerships) with obligations to deliver on council-set priorities. These groups would bring together key community and sectoral stakeholders when designing and implementing policies based on pre-defined strategic priorities that are developed by councils. The leadership of these groups could present an annual work plan based on the strategic priorities developed by councils, and report to strengthened Strategic Policy Committees which monitor progress.

3. Providing greater fiscal autonomy to local councils

The Local Democracy Taskforce has recognised that councillors should have greater input and control over the development and implementation of local authority budgets. Our local authorities cannot deliver services in a way that is responsive to the needs of the public if they cannot decide how money is raised, and how it is spent. We should consider:

- Examining the introduction of a Dublin tourism levy, as used in cities like Rome and Barcelona. As Councillor John Kennedy noted in a recent letter to the Irish Times, a levy of 5% on tourists staying in the approximately 25,000 rooms in the Dublin region would raise over €100 million if implemented.



Our local authorities cannot deliver services in a way that is responsive to the needs of the public if they cannot decide how money is raised, and how it is spent.





““”

We can reduce crime and antisocial behaviour through better design. Natural surveillance and factoring safety in the early design stage of a project can make certain behaviours less likely, therefore reducing the need for more active policing.

Safety

Parts of Dublin do not feel safe and are plagued by antisocial behaviour. Measures introduced by the last government have started to bear fruit, with a noticeably increased Garda presence in the city centre. But increasing Garda numbers alone is not enough. People expect to feel safe as they walk in the streets of our capital, and we must do more as a party to help address this.

1. Expand CCTV coverage

There are only 209 Garda-operated CCTV cameras in all of Dublin. Although Gardaí can access council-operated traffic cameras, the process is onerous. We need to streamline Garda access to all forms of CCTV in public spaces. Some potential methods of improving this situation that this consultation will consider are:

- Rapidly expanding coverage and reducing barriers to erecting temporary cameras in antisocial behaviour hot spots. The government should exempt CCTV installation by public authorities in public areas exempt from planning, provided:
 - They are below a specified height
 - They do not intrude on private property
 - They are subject to a standardised privacy impact procedure, pre-defined for antisocial behaviour and dumping hotspots (see section on Waste Enforcement below).
- Inserting a specific provision under the Data Protection Act 2018 to allow automatic access to publicly-funded CCTV when it is for the purpose of crime prevention. This may also be done through a Statutory Instrument under the GDPR derogations.
- Amending the Circular Economy & Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2022 to explicitly allow sharing of footage between councils and Gardai without additional Data Processing Agreements.
- Establishing a dedicated CCTV Deployment Unit within the local authorities to break down silos between public bodies responsible for CCTV networks.
- Requiring, either in law or regulation, that all council and state-funded CCTV systems record video in the same file format. Even getting a piece of recorded CCTV to play on screen can hold up investigations. Research on the UK shows that as much as 5% of all police time is spent dealing with difficult file formats.

2. Design safety into the public realm

We can reduce crime and antisocial behaviour through better design. Natural surveillance and factoring safety in to the early design stage of a project can make certain behaviours less likely, therefore reducing the need for more active policing.

- Accelerate the Programme for Government commitment to establish a Safe Public Places Unit within An Garda Síochána. The purpose of this unit will be to advise Local Authorities, Community Policing Groups, planners, and architects on best practice for designing safety into the public realm via lighting, CCTV placement, etc. The Minister for Justice should draft terms of reference and an organisation model for the Unit before the end of this year.
- Amend the Planning Act to mandate that councils integrate CCTV and related passive surveillance

measures into the design stage of public realm and regeneration projects, in consultation with the relevant Local Community Safety Partnership (e.g., when preparing development plans or local area plans). This approach is used in New South Wales, where local governments must consult with Community Safety Committees before installing or relocating public CCTV.

- Alternatively, the Ministers for Housing and Justice could issue a joint circular requiring all major regeneration and pedestrianisation to include consultation with LCSPs on safety design (including CCTV) and make funding from central government schemes contingent on this consultation.
- Dublin should establish formal partnerships with cities like Rotterdam and Copenhagen, which have integrated urban safety design units.

3. Community Safety

Local communities should have more input into how local policing plans are developed. This will make policing responses across Dublin more responsive to problems identified by the public. Fine Gael has already led the way on this issue, establishing Community Safety Partnerships during the last government. We must continue to build on this progress. Some ideas to improve community safety in Dublin that we will discuss:

- Establish a clear timeline for the rapid rollout of Community Safety Partnerships across Dublin, with priority being given to areas that suffer from the highest rates of crime.
- Amend the Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024 to devolve oversight of local and community policing to Councils. This could require councillors to approve annual Local Policing and Community Safety Plans prepared by the Garda Superintendent for the area, in consultation with community safety stakeholders.
- Amend the Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024 to require local authorities to facilitate the establishment and operation of local policing forums at the neighbourhood or ward level, in coordination with AGS and relevant community safety stakeholders, to connect individuals to their Community Gardai.



Housing

We need bold reforms if we are to make Dublin a truly living city. It is currently too difficult to build homes where we most need them, and this is stifling Dublin's growth.

We cannot accept this. People who want to live in Dublin should be able to afford a warm, safe home – whether that is to rent or to buy. Living in our capital should not be out of reach. And no one should be forced to live on the streets or in unsafe temporary accommodation. Increasing supply and addressing the drivers of construction costs are the only way we can solve this.

We also need to make Dublin a more pleasant, liveable city. Dereliction and vacancy are a scourge. The thousands of unused units across our capital are a waste of the country's most valuable space. Our public realm must also be improved if Dublin is to compete with other European capitals as an attractive place to live and visit.

Despite these issues, people still want to live in Dublin. That is why demand for housing is so high. It is a great city and much of what we need to do is clear. Some actions will be more difficult than others, but these problems can be solved. I believe there are a few key areas for action that can be improved.

1. Ending dereliction and vacancy

Dereliction and vacancy are too prevalent in Dublin. The number of derelict sites in the Dublin City Council area has increased by 75% over the last four years, in the middle of a housing crisis. We can meaningfully tackle this form of negligence within the lifetime of this government. Some ideas to consider during this consultation are:

Reform our CPO laws to streamline and de-risk the process.

CPOs have an important role to play in addressing dereliction and vacancy in Dublin. However, the process is slow, costly, and legally risky. CPO powers are fragmented across multiple statutes, which creates uncertainty over procedures, timelines, and the speed of compensation payments. We constantly see CPOs being held up in judicial review. To address this, a Bill that creates a single, clear framework for the compulsory acquisition of land or interests in land could be introduced. Such a Bill would:

- Contain definitions and rules about time periods, notices, and the commencement of claims. It should also clarify the roles, processes, and land categories involved in CPOs.
- Make advance payments of compensation (At least 90% of the agreed or estimated amount) a formal part of the CPO process, to reduce the property owner's concern about non-payment.
- Assign responsibility for compensation assessments, timelines, disputes, and resolutions to The Valuation Tribunal.
- Repeal the outdated and fragmented legislation that currently underpins the CPO process, in particular the Acquisition of Land (Assessment of Compensation) Act 1919.

In the meantime, adopt a "buy first, CPO second" policy.

Until these changes are implemented, CPO will remain a slow and costly measure. Once vacant and derelict premises have been identified more accurately (see below), say within two years, then an alternative approach can be taken to move the dial and bring these units back into use. As the Dublin City Taskforce notes, we must urgently address the deficit of public housing if we are to tackle

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homelessness in a meaningful way. These acquired properties could be refurbished and used to significantly increase the social rent or cost-rental stock, potentially by thousands of units in a short period of time. One approach would be to:

- Establish a dedicated commercial State Acquisition and Refurbishment Agency consisting of experienced personnel, seconded from Local Authorities who know the CPO process well, and construction experts. The benefit of this approach, versus ramping up Council CPO operations, is that this body could borrow two-thirds of the capital required from the European Investment Bank at low interest rates and off books, while Local Authorities could not. This could also be done by strengthening the LDA.
- The capital required for refurbishment could be borrowed in the same way. It is likely that the rental yields of refurbished buildings would cover the borrowing costs.
- Streamline the CPO process by adopting an initial 'voluntary' approach to purchase with an advisory note that a Derelict Sites Act notice will follow within 8 weeks and be put in train immediately thereafter.
- The acquiring agency's policy should be to offer 10% above the open market rate. This would likely be cost neutral, as it would avoid significant time lags and the costs of the CPO process.

Upgrade our derelict and vacant sites register

Countries that successfully implement vacancy and dereliction taxes share a common feature: they employ accurate, data-driven identification systems. Our current system of logging derelict and vacant properties is manual, and clearly fails to accurately capture the number of properties lying idle. To improve this, we could learn from the following cases:

In Vancouver, property owners must self-declare if the home is vacant, and this is cross-checked against utility data. Inspectors review declarations and if anomalies are detected, can apply the highest tax rates if owners fail to declare.

In France, the vacant homes tax is administered by the national tax office. Low or zero utility consumption triggers investigations by the tax office, which reduces the burden on local councils compared to Canada.

In Ireland, the Derelict Sites Register is usually updated as a result of public complaints. To move towards a more modern system, I think it is essential that this consultation considers:

- Amending relevant Electricity Regulation and Water Services Acts to require utility companies to share data with public authorities (in a similar vein to how Revenue already receives some property data). This would require us to define utility data as necessary for the performance of a public task, and include other safeguards that ensure GDPR compliance.
- Amending the Finance Act 2022 (Vacant Homes Tax), which currently relies on self-declaration, to presume vacancy if utility use is below a pre-defined level. This could be used to trigger a vacancy investigation by expanded Vacant Homes Units within councils. A minimum turnaround target of 4 months for vacant houses should be introduced before the vacant property tax is imposed.
- This mechanism could also be used, if legislated for, to identify groups of buildings with particularly high energy usage that might be suitable for community energy upgrades (which are currently being explored by government).

Remove barriers to above-the-shop conversions

The difficulties faced when attempting to convert empty premises above shops into residential units has been a longstanding challenge in Dublin. Not only would addressing this help us tackle the housing crisis, but it would enliven our streets and make them safer through increased passive surveillance.



Fine Gael in government has introduced a range of grants to incentivise above the shop living, but uptake has been quite low and people still report that conversions are untenable. However, there is demand for accommodation above shops in Dublin. We are not so different from the Dutch or the French, where such arrangements are common.

Based on my engagements, there are two main barriers to above the shop conversions: burdensome regulations and a lack of fit-for-purpose funding schemes for small property owners.

- To address funding issues we have to bridge the financing gap for above the shop conversions (and refurbishments more generally). Grants are available but not in installments.
- Providing councils with revolving loan funds so they can offer a low interest credit scheme (of up to €80,000) to complement existing grants and bring units above shops into use. Similar schemes are available in France, Germany and the UK.
- Encouraging banks via a credit guarantee scheme to lend at low interest rates to commercial property owners who convert to residential. Models for this exist in Germany and elsewhere.
- Reduce development levies for people or groups who convert units over the shop.

Building regulations (generally relating to Fire Safety and Access requirements) are significant barriers

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to above the shop living. They can be addressed with some of the following measures, specifically for above-the-shop conversions:

- Replacing the requirement for a completely independent and fire-separated escape route (i.e., a private stairwell) with an allowance for shared protected staircases.
- Reasonable relaxation of fire resistance requirements if a converted unit has early warning systems and sprinklers.
- Flexibility for existing stair widths and gradients in change of use cases is required. Installing a new, code-compliant staircase is often impossible in existing buildings.
- Access standards (like doorway widths, lift access, and bathroom requirements) are often not feasible in older buildings. Small upper-floor conversions should be exempted from elevator requirements, and variances should be permitted for other standards where compensating safety measures are used.
- Many potential above the shop units are in protected structures, and installing things like new stairs or fire safety systems often requires planning permission. This can be addressed by developing a design code – via Ministerial guidelines -- that outlines the necessary exemptions and requirements for protected structure conversions. A standardised design template should be considered.

In suggesting these changes, I am recognising that while above the shop living is essential if we are to enliven our city and increase supply, it is not for everyone. Our regulations should reflect that.

2. Reimagining the GPO – A National Ideas Initiative

The Dublin City Taskforce identified the GPO as one of the most underused and underappreciated assets in the heart of Dublin city. It called for the GPO to be redeveloped as a major public building that would become a focal point for O’Connell Street and the wider city centre. The report did not prescribe a single use but noted that potential options could include a world-class museum, a flagship cultural institution, a new government department, or even a relocated national broadcaster.

The Taskforce was clear: redeveloping the GPO is essential to reviving O’Connell Street and could serve as a catalyst for economic, civic, and cultural renewal. But for such a historic and symbolic building - deeply embedded in Ireland’s national story - any decision about its future should be made with genuine public input.

To that end, Fine Gael proposes a nationwide initiative inspired by the 2009 Ideas Campaign, but focused entirely on one goal: what should the GPO become? This public engagement drive would invite citizens, communities, schools, businesses, designers, artists, and diaspora groups to submit creative proposals for how the GPO could be reimagined as a must-visit attraction of national and international significance.

Submissions would be gathered through a dedicated website, promoted via media and civic partners, and reviewed by an independent advisory panel of historians, architects, tourism experts, community leaders, and cultural figures. The best ideas would be shortlisted for public exhibition and consultation, with the most viable concepts advancing to a formal feasibility and implementation stage.

This initiative would not only bring the public into a meaningful national conversation—it would harness the same creative spirit that the GPO itself represents. At a time when we are reimagining the heart of our capital, what better place to start than the building where our Republic declared itself to the world?

Improving our public realm

Dublin has some of the most beautiful parks in Europe. But our streetscapes lack coherence, are often unkempt, and rules go unenforced. We also have a lack of public spaces in which to socialise, which are essential to creating a sense of vibrancy in our city and town centres.

As a result, too few people are spending time in our city centre. The 2024 Canal Cordon Report found that despite Dublin's population growing by roughly 8.5% since 2016, the number of people crossing into the city centre during the morning peak has declined by 11.5% since 2019. While this trend is partially caused by changes in work patterns, there is also undoubtedly less of a desire among people to travel into the city from the suburbs for leisure.

I believe we can make Dublin a more pleasant and enjoyable place in which to walk spend leisure time. Some ideas this consultation will discuss are:

1. Decluttering our footpaths

- Conduct an initial public realm audit in Dublin 1 and Dublin 2 and remove any outdated, duplicative, or unnecessary signage as provided for by the Roads Act 1993.
- Legislate to require that all new or replacement utility servicing units (e.g., electricity boxes) are placed underground. This can be done in several ways, most obviously by amending Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993, which establishes that utility companies must obtain consent from the local authority for any installation on or under a public road. Initially, this could be done as part of the pedestrianisation of College Green and other public realm improvement projects. Cities like Paris, Seoul and Barcelona all have varying forms of legislation that require underground utility boxes.

2. Improving our shopfronts

Dublin City Council has developed guidelines to manage shopfront signage and maintain the visual character of our streets. Unfortunately, these guidelines leave too much room for interpretation and blatant violations generally go unenforced. As a result, many of our streets lack any kind of visual coherence. Beautiful streets are not created by accident. We need active urban management to prevent a few unsightly shopfronts from upsetting the visual character of an area. There is much to learn from other cities:

- Shopfronts should be licensed like street furniture in specific heritage and high footfall areas, renewed every 5 years based on visual compliance. Clear processes for appeals and supports (like the Shopfront Improvement Scheme) should be made available to assist businesses.
- Dublin's shopfront design code lacks specificity, particularly in heritage areas. Tailored, visual signage guides should be developed for specific areas, with uniform signboard height, font styles, etc. Bath in the United Kingdom is an example of a city that has done this well and improved the visual quality of streets that contain a variety of architectural traditions.

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- Edinburgh and Paris both impose fines and stop notices for unauthorised alterations. Once clearer design codes and approval processes are established, this should be done in Dublin under Planning and Development Act powers.
- In designated heritage areas of Paris, all visible facades must be signed off on by city architects in heritage areas. In Edinburgh, a design panel reviews all shopfront changes. Non-compliant applications have their permits refused and must implement mandatory design corrections.
- Dublin City Council should establish a citizen reporting portal for non-compliant shopfronts, similar to Paris's DansMaRue.

3. Greening the city

Despite us having so many incredible parks, many of Dublin's streets are devoid of greenery. A greener urban environment is one with cleaner air, less noise, and a more pleasant social atmosphere. A 2021 study from the EPA found that while there are more than 300,000 trees in the DCC area, parts of the city centre have about fifty percent fewer trees per person than the suburbs. While not surprising, it highlights that there is much we can do to improve the quality of nature available in our city. I believe that Fine Gael should aim to see at least 10,000 more plants and trees growing in the city centre over the next five years.

- As per the EPA's 2021 report, key development hotspots should be identified. This can be done using GIS heatmaps, measuring foliage coverage, and undertaking comprehensive footpath audits to identify high potential, high impact opportunities for greening.
- Footpath space for new trees is an issue in much of Dublin city centre. DCC could identify an area to pilot as a "green quarter" with narrow footpaths, suitable sidewalks, lampposts, and laneways for wall-mounted greenery. In Paris, the city opened up over 100 public rooftops and facades to be greened by local businesses and residents. DCC should study this approach, which is recognised as an example of best practice, and identify how it can be piloted for above eye level greening of our streets.
- DCC should develop design guidelines that encourage green facades, as done in Islington, Hackney, and Melbourne.
- Tax incentives could be offered to businesses that embed greenery into their designs. For example, in Tokyo, the Metropolitan Government set minimum standards for rooftop and wall greening for all large new developments. Buildings that exceed these standards receive property tax reductions.

4. Expand social space

Dublin has a lack of suitable, dedicated social spaces.

- Continue identifying permanent pedestrian areas that emulate the best outdoor social spaces in other European cities. The College Green area should have dedicated public seating and other amenities.
- Implement the Fine Gael manifesto commitment to pilot the full covering of selected small streets or laneways, as has been done on Monck Street in Wexford Town. This €1.5 million, 80-metre long retractable roof canopy provides a year-round outdoor social space.
- Introduce clear guidelines for the 'meanwhile use' of vacant space, with specific incentives to provide spaces for social and community activities. The Greater London Authority, for example, supports the short-term use of empty properties for community and business use by providing a dedicated framework and toolkit for Councils and landlords, business rate relief for charitable



or public benefit use, and simple lease templates, legal guidance, and planning advice. Similar policies are employed in Berlin and Paris.

- Introduce a meanwhile use levy for vacant commercial premises on selected high streets. This could be done in several ways.
- For example, the Local Government (Rates) Act 2019 could be amended to allow local authorities to introduce a vacant premises levy on commercial units vacant for longer than six months, and permit a rates relief or exemption if the owner leases the space for a “meanwhile use” period. Additional reliefs could be made conditional on partnership with public schemes that encourage specific uses (e.g., DCC’s Smart Dublin, DCC’s Art Office). Minor capital grants could be channelled to fund fit outs, while enforcement would be assisted by this paper’s proposals to improve monitoring of other vacant properties in Dublin.



A more general issue with waste in our city is that dumping and littering often go unpunished. People who dump should expect to be heavily fined.

5. Waste Management

Perhaps the most obvious and unpleasant source of clutter is scattered binbags and bins throughout the city. When suggestions for how to address this are offered, we are generally offered excuses for why the status quo – an unsightly and disruptive waste collection system – cannot be changed. For example, concerns about underground utilities, conservation, and incompatibility with current waste management systems are often cited. This attitude should be rejected out of hand. If other countries can do it, then so can we. It is unacceptable that many of our high streets are degraded by waste. This issue is one that our consultation will take seriously.

- While DCC's ban on plastic bin bags is coming into force, underground waste collection targeted at commercial and public waste, could be trialed in 3-5 high footfall locations in Dublin 1 and Dublin 2.
- The government should amend existing planning regulations to designate underground bin infrastructure delivered by local authorities as exempted developments. A ministerial directive could be issued to provide technical guidelines, standardised designs, and other guidance to Dublin City Council. Coordination with utility providers and waste collection companies will also be essential.

A more general issue with waste in our city is that dumping and littering often go unpunished. People who dump should expect to be heavily fined. Some solutions the consultation will consider are to:

- Triple the rate of on-the-spot fines for dumping.
- The current Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) requirements are too onerous for dumping, which delays the erection of temporary cameras. Pre-approved "high-risk zones" with standing DPIAs should be established, to allow for rapid deployment of CCTV in dumping hotspots without a full reassessment. Expedited fining processes, which bypass case-by-case enforcement, could also be explored in these areas (similar to as is done in Berlin).
- Emulate Melbourne by requiring Councils to publish annual waste enforcement maps to highlight to the public where dumping is most prevalent, and the rate of successful detection in each area.

The world's first autism-friendly capital city

Dublin has the potential to be a world-leading city in so many ways. Becoming the world's first autism-friendly capital city is something that we can achieve in the lifetime of this government.

1. Update reasonable accommodation guidance

Current reasonable accommodation policy is vague, with many employers ignoring or not understanding it. There is uncertainty around what employers have to offer, when they can refuse to offer reasonable accommodations, and how to navigate reasonable accommodation policies. Rulings have provided guidance, but this remains mostly unknown to many employers.

- A potential new policy could expand on reasonable accommodations guidance and provide a greater spotlight on the issue.

2. Enforce public sector disability targets under the Disability Act 2005

There is no accountability for the statutory minimum apart from research carried out yearly by the national disability authority. The current minimum is 6% across all public bodies. There are no penalties for bodies that fail to comply, and the research carried out by the NDA is hampered by poor data collection methods within departments and bodies.

- New policies could focus on improving accountability of the statutory minimum mechanism, giving more incentive for public bodies to engage with it.

3. Making urban design autism-friendly

As with all disabilities, urban design poses a significant challenge to the autistic community. The built sensory environment can often be difficult for an autistic person to navigate. Some points include:

- Acoustics of a location: some architectural styles are particularly bad at minimizing echo.
- Greater foliage can help dampen sounds out, making a pedestrian location less overwhelming.
- Sensory Gardens and outdoor sensory spaces can be of particular benefit, especially in the city centre.
- While the fonts of Irish road signs are generally considered to be accessible, the same cannot be said of other signs around the city centre. These are often in serif fonts, which are generally less accessible and harder to read. Dublin's councils could consider this as they consolidate signage styles in the city.
- Overall, a new policy in this regard could form part of updated planning regulations, such as making it easier to get planning permission for initiatives or public realm improvements that focus on autistic people or updating the area to make it more sensory friendly.



The urban environment of a city can be quite tough to navigate, even for non-autistic people. For autistic people, this becomes even more challenging.



4. Improving communication in urban settings for autistic people

Communication is a major challenge for autistic people in navigating the city. More businesses, and especially services, should have greater autism awareness and acceptance training to ensure that autistic people's communication styles are adequately catered for.

- The use of assistive technology or communication cards could be encouraged among businesses and services across the city to ensure non-speaking, selectively speaking, and autistic people suffering meltdowns or shutdowns can be communicated with effectively.
- Engagement with local businesses on the adoption of communication cards or assistive technology to aid autistic people would further these goals.

5. Improving accessibility tools available

The urban environment of a city can be quite tough to navigate, even for non-autistic people. For autistic people, this becomes even more challenging.

- Maps: knowing areas beforehand and visualising the space they are going to can aid the anxiety that some autistic people have about going to new places, such as shops, restaurants, parks, or public buildings. Floor maps could be a useful tool to help autistic people familiarise themselves and aid them in navigating spaces.
- Policies or regulations on this could come particularly through the councils, who can engage with businesses and services, particularly larger ones, to make publicly available floor plans.

6. Promote autism identifiers

Many autistic people have discreet ways of informing others they are autistic, which are usually provided by charities like AsIAm or Neurodiversity Ireland. By far the most well-known one is the sunflower lanyard for hidden disabilities.

- Dublin's councils could engage to create partnerships with organisations that create identifiers like this are crucial to helping autistic people be accepted in their environment.

Transport

Our desire to create a more people-centric city centre, along with better public and active travel options more broadly, are both popular and supportive of our environmental policy goals. But the public transport options currently available make non-car travel unviable for some groups. We must address this. Some important proposals that we will consider during this consultation are:



1. Prioritise expanding the Luas network

The National Transport Authority's (NTA's) Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy 2022-2042 identifies and prioritises the transport projects that the State will deliver over the next twenty years. I believe that this plan is far too focused on expanding the bus network. While the expansion of our bus network has been positive, they also take up road space that is shared with cyclists, and they can endanger pedestrians.

I am a strong proponent of expanding our Luas network. Luas extensions provide good value for money, and we have a track record of success at building Luas lines. By providing a clear pipeline of work for the coming years, we can get better value for money on projects that will happen in the future anyway, while also improving connectivity and reducing congestion.

However, the NTA have identified many Luas projects as not being required until after 2042 because of insufficient demand. I believe these projects should be re-evaluated. Aside from the NTA's preference for buses, we have seen population growth estimates for many parts of Dublin that were far lower than actual population growth. Higher population growth scenarios should be factored into the future demand forecasts that inform our decisions about which transport infrastructure to prioritise:

- Plans to extend the Luas to Poolbeg, Lucan and Finglas should all be accelerated as part of the ongoing National Development Plan review. Each of these projects are currently at different stages of development but should be prioritised by the Minister for Transport. We need to see construction begin on each of these projects within five years.



- The Luas Orbital line, which would connect areas surrounding Dublin city, is not planned to begin until after 2042. A recent KPMG report found that 78% of business owners said this project should be a priority of the government. Ahead of the Greater Dublin Transport Plan review scheduled to begin in 2027, the Minister for Transport could direct the NTA to conduct a new demand forecast assessment that uses high population growth scenarios, rather than relying on figures that have proven to underestimate population growth in the past.
- Several other Luas extensions (e.g., to UCD, Knocklyon, and Balgriffin) will not be considered until after 2042. The Minister for Transport should direct the NTA to conduct new demand forecast assessments for these projects. Feasibility studies for these extensions should also compare the estimated impact of these extensions on traffic congestion to the impact of expanded bus services.

2. Deliver MetroLink

We need to be bold and creative in how we deliver the Metro. Cost estimates have already risen immensely. This is not unique to Ireland. The Transit Costs Project, which gathered data from almost 950 metro projects across 59 countries, found that construction in English-speaking countries costs three to four times more per kilometre than in non-English-speaking countries.

Some proposals outlined in this document, like CPO reform, could assist with preventing significant time-consuming legal battles.

We should consider:

- Passing a dedicated Metrolink Act in the Oireachtas that enhances the State's powers to deliver the Metrolink project, as was done for Ardnacrusha by the Shannon Electricity Act 1925 and for other infrastructure projects in the past. This Act could give the State powers to bypass ABP, enhance powers for land acquisition, place limitations on judicial review scope, and address other key barriers.
- Exploring methods to incentivise landowners near the MetroLink to co-develop with government. This is commonly done in Japan, where land is pooled and re-parcelled in collaboration with landowners. Although the re-parcelled plots tend to be smaller, they become more valuable. This offers an incentive for communities disrupted by infrastructure delivery to co-design their changed neighbourhood while also benefiting monetarily. If CPO is a stick, land readjustment is a carrot. This could be piloted with a Luas extension, for example, before being rolled out.

- In a similar vein to the benefits provided by a clear pipeline of work for Luas extensions, the government should commission an independent feasibility study into continuing MetroLink from the city to Southwest Dublin.


3. Relax planning regulations for on-street EV chargers

Cars will continue to be a part of our lives, as our EV strategy makes clear. Car-based travel is not unsustainable, as many claim. Yet people without a driveway are essentially excluded from buying EVs. The current rules governing where chargers can be placed make it impossible for people who park on-street to charge their car. Charging arms and under-the-pavement charging solutions are banned.

Our current solution of communal chargers has not worked, as EV purchase figures demonstrate. This undermines our transition away from combustion engines.

The previous Minister for Transport stated that there is no consideration being given to under-the-pavement (or gully) charging solutions, which I believe are the less visually obstructive solution. He cited three main obstacles that can be easily addressed. We could:

- Amend Section 37 of the Electricity Regulation Act 1999 to accommodate a definition of 'private wires' for under-the-pavement EV charging.
- Develop a standardised, streamlined planning process for residents to obtain excavation permissions from Dublin councils for charger installations. Zero Emissions Vehicles Ireland (ZEVI), which is responsible for developing the EV charging network, should provide guidance to local authorities on implementing cross-pavement charging solutions based on international best practice.
- Require residents participating in on-street charging trials to obtain public liability insurance, as is Swansea and Milton Keynes. Councils could also require participants to sign indemnity agreements, as was done in North Port Talbot, Wales.
- Councils should issue an invitation for neighbourhoods to participate in a pilot.
- Another barrier to EV adoption is that management companies are not legally permitted to install EV charging infrastructure in apartment blocks. This is an unnecessary barrier to EV adoption and prevents companies that could provide several chargers to residents from doing so.
- Explore whether EV charging points in apartment blocks could be considered for planning permission exemptions as part of the government's ongoing review. I will make a submission to this review's consultation over the summer period.



Make your voice heard

This discussion document presents a non-exhaustive set of ideas for consultation, not final policy. I look forward to receiving your feedback and engaging with you all over the next few months.

We plan to engage with each constituency in Dublin, in tandem with your local representatives and TDs, to host roundtables and discussions on issues that matter to you in Dublin.

YOUR REPRESENTATIVES IN DUBLIN



Minister Jennifer Carroll-MacNeill
Minister Paschal Donohoe
Minister of State Colm Brophy
Minister of State Emer Higgins
Minister of State Neale Richmond

Grace Boland TD
Emer Currie TD
James Geoghegan TD
Naoise Ó Muirí TD
Maeve O'Connell TD
Barry Ward TD
Senator Evanne Ní Chuilinn

Cllr Marie Baker (Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown)
Cllr Sarah Barnes (South Dublin)
Lord Mayor Emma Blain (Dublin City)
Cllr Caroline Brady (South Dublin)
Cllr Jacqueline Burke (Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown)
Cllr Danny Byrne (Dublin City)
Cllr Dan Carson (Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown)
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Cllr Luke Corkery (Fingal)
Leas Cathaoirleach Pierce Dargan
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Cllr Kieran Dennison (Fingal)

Cllr Maurice Dockrell (Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown)
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Mayor Baby Pereppadan (South Dublin)
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