



GOVERNMENT OF NORTHERN IRELAND
MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS.

PRELIMINARY REPORT
ON
RECONSTRUCTION AND PLANNING.

by
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With a Memorandum by the Ministry.

BELFAST
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MEMORANDUM.

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This report was obtained by the Ministry of Home Affairs on the instructions of the Cabinet Sub-Committee which desired expert technical advice on certain particular questions that had arisen in the course of its deliberations. These were:-

- (i) What area should be taken into account in preparing a Town Plan for Belfast.
- (ii) What should be the nature and scope of such a plan.
- (iii) What machinery should be set up to produce the plan.

The Consultant, therefore, was not asked to express any views as to details of the manner in which the City should be rebuilt, or the means by which any works might be carried out, and his report, accordingly, is solely concerned with the procedure for the preparation of plans for a post-war programme to be carried out over a long term of years.

The Consultant, in his report, finds that a comprehensive plan for Belfast would necessitate consideration of the Counties of Down and Antrim, and that Londonderry City and County would also have to be considered together. The three sea-board counties should therefore be planned as well as the two cities. He considers, however, that the three inland counties offer great possibilities for development and he therefore recommends that the whole Province should be planned.

The machinery he proposes takes full advantage of the services available from local authorities and their officers, and recognises that valuable assistance and advice should be obtainable from various outside interests and professional associations.

He proposes that the Central Authority for planning should be the Ministry of Home Affairs, as at present, and its functions are to remain much as they now would be if the existing planning code was being widely operated.

A Planning Advisory Board composed of representatives of the Government the local authorities, industry and agriculture, professional bodies and other interests should be set up to guide and advise in matters of principle during the preparation of plans. When it comes to consider particular areas it would delegate its powers to its local members who would consult with the particular local authorities concerned in regard to particular schemes. The Planning Consultant would assist in the deliberations of the Board and act as a link between it and a Technical Planning Commission.

The direct technical supervision and co-ordination of local plans is entrusted to a Technical Commission consisting of the Architects and Engineers of the local authorities and Government Departments. It would, like the Advisory Board, delegate to the local members the consideration of local schemes and these members would co-operate with the officers of the local authorities concerned in making them. Thus local plans would normally be prepared in the first instance by the local authorities and their officers; but if a local authority failed or refused to prepare a plan or to co-operate in doing so, the Commission should be in a position to prepare one independently.

In all these operations the Commission, and through it the local authorities, would be provided by the Government with the advice and assistance of the Consultant and, concurrently, up-to-date information would be secured and made available to the Board and the Commission regarding existing natural resources, transport, industry and agriculture.

The Technical Commission as a whole would approve, and if necessary, amend the local schemes, prepared in the manner above set out, and when all local plans had been completed they would be co-ordinated into a State Plan which should then be placed before the Central Authority (the Ministry of Home Affairs) for approval and submission to the Government. The object of the plan would be to ensure that as money might become available it could be devoted to such ends as might, in conjunction with the proper control of buildings and the use of land, secure -

- (a) the fullest use of existing and potential resources,
- (b) the improvement and development of transport, industry and agriculture,

(c)

- (c) the improvement of living conditions, water supply and sanitation,
 - (d) the allocation of all land to its best use in the interests of the community.
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The Report of the Select Committee of Unemployment happens to have been made public almost simultaneously with this report being received by the Ministry of Home Affairs. The Select Committee in their report set out definite principles on which they consider planning should proceed and thus two entirely separate approaches have been made to the planning problem almost simultaneously from widely different starting points. The Committee's recommendations on the subject are on the following lines and it will be seen that they are in complete agreement so far as they go with the Davidge recommendations:-

- (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 of Parliament.
 - (8) Dispersal of industries, and co-operation in each main group of agriculture and industry are all matters to be considered and many interests would be affected and should be consulted.
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It will be understood that the problem of providing financial assistance for carrying the State Plan into effect is an entirely separate one. That problem must be dealt with in the light of the circumstances existing and the resources available after the war. The plan is simply a very necessary guide to the manner in which such resources as may be found to be available may best be utilised.

It is certain that the war will be followed by an acute shortage of building materials and that the question of rationing and awarding priorities in these materials will be one of the great problems of the reconstruction period. It is therefore essential that the Province should have its reconstruction proposals already worked out when this state of affairs arises so that it may be in a position to put forward its claims for a share of the available materials. It will be appreciated, therefore, that it is imperative that steps should be taken now, so that immediately upon the cessation of hostilities proposals may be clearly defined and the requirements of the Province definitely known.

Up to the present the problem of the financial assistance to be afforded for reconstruction has not been taken beyond agreement on certain broad principles which affect all parts of the United Kingdom equally, but when more detailed consideration is reached it is necessary that the particular requirements of the Province should be known in order that a case for a fair share in the available resources may be properly presented.

16th April, 1942.

GOVERNMENT OF NORTHERN IRELAND

PRELIMINARY REPORT

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RECONSTRUCTION AND PLANNING.

by

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5, Victoria Street,
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February, 1942.

The Rt. Hon. Sir R. Dawson Bates, Bart.,
D.L., M.P.
Minister of Home Affairs,
Stormont,
BELFAST.

Sir,

In accordance with the instructions contained in the Secretary's letters of the 19th and 27th January 1942 "to undertake the furnishing of a report recommending the area that should be taken into account in preparing a reconstruction plan for the City of Belfast and indicating what the scope and nature of such a plan should be and how it could be prepared", I have the honour to report that I paid a visit to Northern Ireland from 2nd February to 9th February, 1942 for the special purpose of advising on these subjects.

During that period I had an opportunity of making a preliminary inspection of the City of Belfast and surrounding areas, including the coastal districts of County Down and County Antrim and also of the area lying on the routes to Londonderry through Ballymena and Coleraine, Dungiven, Maghera and Antrim.

It will be appreciated that the above areas were selected for inspection on my initial visit in view of the instruction primarily to consider the city of Belfast and a surrounding area, pending an opportunity for fuller consideration of other areas where the need for immediate action is not so pressing.

I had the advantage of meeting several of the technical officers of the Corporations of Belfast and Londonderry, the County Surveyors of Antrim and Down, the Belfast Water Commission, the Belfast Harbour Commission and other authorities, as well as members of various professional institutions.

The need to consider the problems of reconstruction arising from the War damage which has occurred and to ensure that the future is not adversely affected by ill considered building either immediately after or during the War is a matter of immediate concern. It cannot, however, be divorced from the larger question of planning, and to a certain extent replanning, which must necessarily affect an area much larger in extent than that of the actual damage.

It is an important part, but a part only, of a problem not limited to the area of one administrative authority and should be considered in its relation to the future welfare and prosperity of the whole community.

Eventful further legislation will undoubtedly be necessary and the present time, when normal building is at a standstill, affords an opportunity for careful consideration of the whole problem of post war development, with a view to a considered policy and a definite plan being available as soon as possible, ready for application as opportunity permits.

PROTECTION OF WAR DAMAGED AREAS.

As a first step it would be wise for the Belfast Corporation to take advantage of the provisions of the War Damage Act which enable planning authorities to specify particular areas in which damage has occurred with a view of safeguarding such areas against ill considered or spasmodic redevelopment pending the preparation of a comprehensive reconstruction plan. The definition of such area or areas is a matter which should be determined at the earliest possible date. The detailed information is available at the City Hall and it is recommended that the Wards of the City in which any substantial damage has occurred should be protected as specified areas under the War Damage Act.

RECONSTRUCTION IN THE CITY OF BELFAST.

The War damage, although extensive is scattered widely over many areas and any plan for the rehabilitation of the centre will require most careful consideration, in which the co-operation of many interests will be essential. I find that there are certain matters in which there is general agreement such as the need for further open spaces, the relief of traffic congestion at certain points, the opening out of important buildings and the need for a general improvement in living conditions and ready access to the countryside.

All these have, of necessity, to be considered in relation to the future commercial prosperity, not only of the City, but of the whole of Northern Ireland.

The influence of Belfast extends far into the adjoining counties. It is clear that any commercial or industrial premises which may be removed from the centre will have to be accommodated elsewhere and that any replanning in the centre must at the same time provide suitable locations for replacement and expansion, either within the city or outside its boundaries. Any such transference would give a stimulus to adjoining areas as well as widen the beneficial influence of the capital city.

The immediate necessities are:-

- (i) a reconstruction plan for the central area of the City which will add to its efficiency, amenity and civic beauty;
- (ii) a comprehensive plan for the development of a much larger area than the City itself, ensuring the reservation of a green belt as a background for the City and indicating sites for new development and selecting existing centres suitable for expansion served by up-to-date transport facilities. This pre-supposes an area in which the adjoining counties of Antrim and Down are equally concerned.

In the case of the City of Londonderry, which so far has not suffered from enemy action, the need for a plan for the city and the adjoining county is no less apparent. In any case, therefore, the three seaboard counties must be considered in addition to the two large cities. The three inland counties, although at present largely agricultural in character, have great possibilities of improvement and potential development and I have no hesitation in recommending that the benefits of planning should be extended to the whole province.

In the light of this, I have reviewed the

PRESENT POSITION OF PLANNING IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

The Planning and Housing Act (Northern Ireland) 1931 is based largely on the model of the now superseded English Town Planning Act of 1925, but varies from it considerably in detail. The principal divergencies are as follows:-

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- (1) The Northern Ireland Act limits the planning powers of a Local Authority strictly to its own district.
- (2) It permits two or more Local Authorities to concur in the appointment of a joint committee, but leaves such appointment entirely optional.
- (3) The Local Authority may be a County Borough or other Borough or Urban District. Belfast Harbour Commission is especially empowered as a local authority. Elsewhere the County Council is prescribed as the Planning Authority and Rural District Councils can only act subject to the consent of the County Council.

There are thus:-

2 county boroughs
1 harbour commission
5 boroughs
27 urban districts
5 county councils
<u>41</u> possible planning authorities.

or

There is abundant evidence that the planning powers provided by the Northern Ireland Act of 1931 have not been utilised to any appreciable extent and that difficulties have arisen in their application, particularly on the boundaries of the large urban areas.

The City of Belfast and the City of Londonderry have made a commencement with the preparation of preliminary statements and maps for their respective areas. In each case tentative negotiations with a view to the formation of a Joint Committee with neighbouring areas have, however, not met with success.

It is understood that several Urban Districts and at least one County Council have considered the possibility of a planning scheme but have not proceeded with any definite proposals for submission to the Ministry.

It is clear that, with the multifarious duties of all Local Authorities, particularly heavy with special war-time requirements and depletion of staffs, no general planning progress can be expected unless it is sponsored and directed by the Government, in co-operation with all existing public authorities.

As a basic step, it is accordingly recommended that one Planning Authority should be constituted for the whole of Northern Ireland and that all land should be deemed to be covered by a planning resolution. The plan for the reconstruction of the City of Belfast will then fall into its proper place in the State plan to be prepared by the Government in co-operation and consultation with the existing planning authorities.

The City of Belfast holds a key position and the planning of the City and its surroundings should proceed simultaneously with the less detailed but essential outline plans required for the remainder of the province.

The State plan may be regarded as threefold, dealing with:-

1. The matters affecting the whole of Northern Ireland such as all forms of transport by road, rail, water or air, the development of natural resources, encouragement of agriculture and industry.
2. The reconstruction of the City of Belfast, involving surveys of extent of war damage, location of industry, commerce and residence, traffic congestion, distribution and densities of population, rateable values, open spaces and playgrounds, educational facilities, etc.
3. Other Counties, 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.

Note. Londonderry and other boroughs and urban districts would require surveys on similar lines to those for Belfast.

The Ministry of Home Affairs, in consultation with other Ministries, would appear to be the appropriate state department to take the necessary preliminary action as the Central Planning Authority. When the policy and general planning principles have been established, appropriate legislation to implement the plan will need to be introduced.

The machinery I would recommend is as follows:-

1. A Planning Advisory Board consisting of representatives of the Ministries concerned, with representatives of the two Cities and six County Councils and representatives of the Harbour Commission and of interested professional institutions. A Planning Consultant to be appointed by the Minister would assist in the deliberations of the Advisory Board and act as a link between the Advisory Board and a technical planning commission.

The terms of reference of the Planning Advisory Board would be -

to make suggestions and advise on matters of principle arising during the preparation of the plan.

The Planning Advisory Board would in practice sub-divide to consider local proposals affecting particular areas and representatives of Local Authorities would then be invited to collaborate

2. A Planning Commission entirely technical, consisting of the planning consultant, architects engineers and surveyors of the Government Departments dealing with local government, transport, agriculture, commerce, industry and finance, (one to be seconded whole time during the preparation of the plan with a small staff). the six County Surveyors and two City Surveyors, together with an Architect and Town Planning Officer for each city.

Town Surveyors would be asked to collaborate in local planning, and in drawing up proposals for their own district.

The terms of reference of the Planning Commission, working to approved timetable, would be -

to prepare outline proposals for submission to the Minister followed by recommendations as to any legislative or administrative action necessary.

The Planning Commission would meet as a whole in the first instance, but sub-divide into groups to consider particular areas and prepare proposals such as:-

- (a) Belfast City, County Antrim and County Down.
- (b) Londonderry City and Londonderry County.
- (c) Counties of Armagh, Fermanagh and Tyrone.

3. The General purpose of the plan will be to secure -

- (a) the fullest use of all existing and potential resources;
- (b) the improvement and development of transport, industry and agriculture;
- (c) the improvement of living conditions, water supply and sanitation;
- (d) the allocation of all land to its best use in the interests of the community.

4. Much information and statistical data are already available under the above heads, but further enquiry and research may be necessary in England by the Uthwatt Committee on Compensation and betterment and Lord Justice Scotts Committee on the possibilities of decentralisation of industry in regard to the welfare of rural communities.

5. It is suggested that, concurrently with the activities of the Planning Commission and Advisory Planning Board, up-to-date information should be secured, possibly by a cabinet Sub-Committee and the appropriate departments, on the following matters, amongst others:-

Existing natural resources.

Water power (if any) such as Bann River, Strangford Lough etc.,

Water supply and essential drainage (already put in hand).

Electricity supply - grid system and supply to rural areas.

Transport.

Creation of trunk routes, including scenic drives.

Possibilities of railway improvement and electrification.

Amalgamation of lines or stations. (Report by Sir Felix Pole might be brought up to date).

Civil Aviation - location of trans-Atlantic bases, and survey of aerodromes for eventual civil use.

Water transport - improvement of harbours, fishery and coastal trade, Definite policy as to inland navigation (Lagan Canal, Newry Ship Canal etc.)

Industries.

Possible extension of shipping and ship building

Linen, woollen, cotton and textile industries.

A Committee appointed by the Industries might well consider - (a) Possibilities of organised

decentralisation;

(b) Steps to be taken to secure proper balance of industries; possibilities of new industries.

Agriculture.

Soils and their best utilisation.

Afforestation, reclamation, sea defence.

There is a great opportunity at the present time for Northern Ireland to establish a policy and make headway in state and regional planning which would give a valuable contribution to the future welfare of the Empire.

I desire to take this opportunity of expressing my thanks to the Minister of Home Affairs, the Lord Mayor and Corporation of the City of Belfast, the Mayor of Londonderry and others for the hospitality, courtesy and ready spirit of co-operation evident on all hands during my visit and my appreciation of the wide public interest and civic spirit everywhere shown in the subject of planning as it may affect Northern Ireland.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

W. R. DAVIDGE.

PRESENT POSITION IN ENGLAND AND WALES.

For the purposes of comparison, it may be useful to summarise the present position with regard to planning in England and Wales.

The first town planning act in England was the Housing, Town Planning Act 1909, which was later amended in various details and consolidated in the Town Planning Act of 1925, the model on which the Northern Ireland Act was framed. Up to that time it was broadly only possible to deal with "land likely to be used for building purposes", but under the Town and Country Planning Act 1932, it became possible to bring all land, whether in town or country, under planning control, at the discretion of the Local Authority.

The results at the present time are that about two-thirds of England and Wales are covered by planning resolutions, comprising some 1175 Local Authorities and some 123 Joint Committees.

Restriction of Ribbon Development Act 1955 gave powers to Highway Authorities to control all means of access and development within a limited distance (220 feet) from the centre of all classified and other important roads.

The Trunk Roads Act, 1936, gave direct powers to the Minister of Transport similarly to control development along the frontages of all trunk roads of national importance and means of access thereto.

It will be noted from this summary that for the last ten years, Planning has been separated from the more detailed work of Housing. Latterly the word "Planning" has taken the place of Town Planning, as a wider and more appropriate description of what is covered by Town and Country Planning.

It will also be seen that there is a growing tendency for planning authorities to unite for planning purposes into County or Regional areas comprising groups of Local Authorities.

A particular weakness to be avoided at all costs is that, so long as planning is optional to particular districts, the surrounding areas uncontrolled tend to become the receptacle for all kinds of unfortunate and ill considered development.

The progress made with statutory planning in England and Wales through the agency of Local Authorities and Regional Committees has drawn attention to the need for national action to secure that there shall be constructive planning as apart from merely restrictive control.

There is general agreement that all land shall be so planned as to secure its best ultimate use from the point of view of the nation.

Further legislation is in contemplation, but meanwhile Lord Reith has announced in the House of Lords (26th February, 1941)

- (i) "that the principle of planning will be accepted as a national policy and that a central planning authority will be required."
- (ii) "that this authority will proceed on a positive policy for such matters as agriculture, industrial development and transport."
- (iii) "that some services will require treatment on a national basis, some regionally and some locally."

It is obvious that many matters will require further research and enquiry before a comprehensive national policy on all these subjects can be determined.

To advise the Minister on some of these aspects, various expert Committees have been set up, particularly -

- (i) The Uthwatt Committee to consider the general questions of compensation and betterment, especially in relation to land to be acquired by public authorities.
(An interim report on the latter was issued in July, 1941).

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- (2) Lord Justice Scott's Committee . . . to consider the possible decentralisation of industry and industrial populations and how such decentralisation can be effected with due regard to the prosperity of Agriculture and the welfare of rural communities (following on the previous recommendations of the Barlow Commission).

The Full reports of these Committees, when available have a bearing on similar problems likely to arise in Northern Ireland, but in these respects it is well that Northern Ireland is already a unified area, free from many of the complications which arise in England and Wales.

W. K. DAVIDGE.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS.

PLANNING
AREAS.

The immediate necessities are:-

P.3

1. A reconstruction plan for the City of Belfast, which will add to its efficiency, amenity and civic beauty.
2. A comprehensive plan for the development of a much larger area than the City itself. This presupposes an area in which both the adjoining counties of Antrim and Down are equally concerned.
3. In the case of Londonderry, the need for a plan for the city and adjoining county is no less apparent. In any case the three seaboard counties must be considered in addition to the two cities.
4. The three inland counties have great possibilities of improvement and potential development and the benefits of planning should be extended to the whole province.

PLANNING
AUTHORITIES.

No general planning progress can be expected unless it is sponsored and directed by the Government in co-operation with all existing public authorities.

P.4

It is recommended that one planning authority should be constituted for the whole of Northern Ireland and that all land should be deemed to be covered by a planning resolution.

The Ministry of Home Affairs, in consultation with other Ministries, would appear to be the appropriate state department to take the necessary preliminary action as the central planning authority.

The machinery recommended is:-

P.5

1. A Planning Advisory Board, representative of all interests, to make suggestions and advise on matters of principle arising during the preparation of the plan.

A Planning consultant to be appointed by the Minister would act as a link between the Advisory Board and a technical planning commission.

2. A Planning Commission, entirely technical, consisting of the consultant, architects, engineers and surveyors of the Government departments concerned, (one to be seconded whole time during the preparation of the plan, with a small staff), together with the County Surveyors of the province, the City Surveyors, Architects and Planning Officers.

Town Surveyors would be asked to collaborate in local planning and in drawing up proposals for their own district.

The duty of the Planning Commission, working to an approved time table, would be to prepare outline proposals for submission to the Minister, followed by recommendations as to any legislative or administrative action necessary.

/The

The Planning Advisory Board and Planning Commission would subdivide into groups to consider particular areas, such as:-

- (a) Belfast City, County Antrim and County Down.
- (b) Londonderry City and Londonderry County.
- (c) Counties of Armagh, Fermanagh and Tyrone.

CONTENTS
OF THE
PLAN.

The purposes of the plan will be to secure:-

- (a) the fullest use of existing and potential resources.
- (b) the improvement and development of transport, industry and agriculture.
- (c) the improvement of living conditions, water supply and sanitation.
- (d) the allocation of all land to its best use in the interests of the Community.

The investigations which the Cabinet Sub-Committee have put in hand with regard to water and drainage should be extended to cover natural resources, industries, transport, agriculture etc. as outlined in the report.

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