

# River Basin Management Plans & Spatial Planning in N.Ireland

A land use planner's perspective

# Key issues relating to river basin management and land use planning

## 1. Environmental Base

- Landscapes
- Habitats and species
- Water quality and lough and marine environs

## 2. Economy Base

- Business environs
- Leisure and tourism
- Communication – Gateways and transport corridors

## 3. Social Base

- Public safety and flood risk
- Health and recreation
- People and places

# Prehistory-before modern day planning

Settlements located at key locations in river basins for defence, communication, trade and food but turning their back on rivers leaving a legacy of:

- lost habitats and quality agricultural lands
- development in flood areas
- disposing waste into rivers
- Development turning its back to water courses resulting in poor riverside environs

# The Dark Ages – Planning up to the 1990s

An understanding of and a desire to tackle the key issues through:

- Liaison with statutory bodies but lacking in
  - an adequate evidence base (e.g. Omagh)
  - a holistic strategic approach (focusing on individual sites, EIA approach)
  - Transparency and joined up governance (e.g. Cookstown)
- Engineered solutions but with drawbacks
  - Often solving one problem but creating a new one (i.e. environment impacts of flood defences) (e.g. Strabane flood defences)
  - Resource hungry (the public and not the polluter pays)

# Strabane's flood defences



# The Age of Enlightenment and Modernism— Planning in the nineties and noughties

## Sustainable development

Brundtland Report (UN, 1987) sets the agenda for sustainable development throughout the 90s leading to new legislation and new problems

- Habitats directive (92,43, EEC) – (Carrickmore Judicial review)
- Water Framework Directive (2000,60, EC)
- SEA Directive (2001,41 EC) – (Northern and BNM Plans judicial review)

Achieving sustainable growth has also led to a top down approach through the

- The Regional Development Strategy
- Planning Policy Statements, PPS2 Nature Conservation and PPS15 Planning and Flood Risk

## Progress made

- Northern Ireland Landscape Character Appraisal
- River basin management issues -
  - PPS2 Planning and Nature Conservation (under review)
  - PPS15 Planning and Flood risk
- Flood maps for settlements across NI (Rivers Agency)
- Greater transparency through ICT on habitats
- Greater use of EIA to assess impact of riverside development
- Daft River Basin Management Plans in place across N. Ireland
  - based on excellent, stakeholder consultation
  - Providing a firm foundation for future work

# Improving Enniskillen Riverside



# Planning and post modernism – its not what you do but the way that you do it

*Do the Draft River Basin management plans – informing development plans ?*

- Water basin management plans have not as of yet informed land use plans in NI. However, they will be taken into account when formulating future plans
- The Draft Plans currently available are of limited use to the development planner because they:
  - address primarily generic issues related to the overall work of NIEA
  - are not spatially driven identifying areas with specific problems.

How could they better inform planning decisions

By providing map based evidence identifying

- Areas of flood risk and important meadow/wetlands
- Areas of particular environmental sensitivity where change may impact on Habitats (SACs SPAs)
- Areas of poor water quality and associated risks including human health
- Areas where inadequate sewage/drainage is the cause of poor water quality
- Areas of particular environmental sensitivity where change may impact on Habitats (SACs SPAs) and areas which are not deemed particularly sensitive.
- Areas where there is capacity to absorb development including recreation
- Areas where SUDS may provide practical solutions