



# Submission to Cork City Development Plan Consultation 20<sup>th</sup> August 2020

**Cork Equal and Sustainable Communities Alliance (CESCA)** is an alliance of eighteen diverse community and voluntary organisations in Cork City, coming together with a common goal of social inclusion and social justice. The alliance partners with and is supported by the HSE Social Inclusion Services in Cork and works to address issues of disadvantage in Cork city. The alliance was established in 2014 to work together across the nine equality grounds and a tenth ground of socio-economic status. This innovative collaboration also aims to progress as well as protect the vast experience and excellent work of these front-line organisations that are at the heart of social inclusion services in Cork City. For more information see CESCA's [Facebook page](#).

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## Introduction

CESCA welcomes the opportunity to respond to the initial consultation document 'Our City, Our Future' as part of the development of the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028. CESCA as an alliance of community organisations are particularly keen to emphasise the importance of ensuring that Cork city is a city that provides an excellent quality of life for all, particularly the deprived and marginalised communities we support.

We know from the work we do that the issues that continue to be of concern to communities we support in Cork City are equitable access to housing, ensuring Cork city and its neighbourhoods provide a good quality of life for all and a need to address the far reaching implications of climate change. We also know from our experience working together and across the city that the best response to these and wider issues is interagency and collaborative working.

## 1. City Profile

It is of course a positive and ambitious statement for the consultation document to outline proposals to increase the existing population and housing base by over one third and the existing jobs base by over 50% by 2031, however at CESCA we believe there is much to be done in the interim that takes account of the fact that access to a home, a significant issue in Cork city, first needs to be addressed. The percentage of people in employment and on the Social Housing Waiting List for Cork city has close to trebled since 2013 and now stands at 33%, <sup>1</sup>indicating people's increasing difficulty in accessing the housing and the rental market.

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<sup>1</sup> Cork Simon Community Homeless Watch <https://www.corksion.com/about-homelessness/homeless-watch/>

Furthermore 371 adults were recorded as staying in emergency accommodation in Cork during the week of May 25 – 31, 2020. This represents an increase of 18% over 24 months.<sup>2</sup>

**2 What types of housing (e.g. houses, apartments) and tenures (e.g. owner occupied, private rental, social) should be provided to meet population growth targets for Cork City? Where and how should they be planned for.**

Cork, in our opinion, is in the midst of a housing and homelessness crisis. Increasingly unaffordable house prices in Cork city are driving more people to look for, and stay longer in, rental accommodation, further increasing demand in the private rental sector. The Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) in Ireland, compiled by the CSO, found that 61% of people in rental accommodation are at risk of poverty. 27% of people seeking support at the Soup Run operated by the Cork Simon Community live in private rented accommodation, indicating this poverty trap – when rent and bills are paid, there is little left for food.<sup>3</sup>

Solving the housing crisis in Cork is a viable option but access to housing cannot in our view remain firmly embedded in private sector provision. If just 1.3% of vacant properties in Cork City were ‘repaired and leased’, 60 people – the number of people on average staying each night in the Cork Simon Emergency Shelter – could be housed. If just 8.5% of vacant properties in Cork City were ‘repaired and leased’, 385 people – the number of adults in Emergency Accommodation in Cork – could have a home of their own.<sup>4</sup>

We believe that the next Cork City Development Plan needs to take account of these issues and make commitments to the following in order to ensure that marginalised communities do not get left behind in the midst of the ambitions outlined:

- Commit to the model of providing housing and support to those who have been long term homeless
- Ensure that sustainable housing policies are implemented, making the best use of vacant properties and land
- Recognise the importance of access to green spaces and the quality of a built environment for people’s long-term health outcomes
- Ensure that the number of social housing and low-income units made available reflect population growth and local need
- Ensure that housing policies reflect and address the specific needs of marginalised communities.

## **2. Tackling Climate Change**

We recognise and support the importance of the *Cork City Council Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024*, designed to address climate change and bio-diversity issues for the city. This constitutes a significant step towards the national goal of transitioning to a low carbon society and in CESCA we particularly welcome the fact that it is set within wider policy frameworks, in particular the United Nations [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDG’s\)](#). The SDG’s are a series of 17 high level goals which address issues such as inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice. The Goals interconnect and

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

are interdependent. CESCA is strongly committed to playing its part in the implementation of these SDG's in Cork city and beyond, where appropriate.

### **Key Questions:**

#### **8. What other actions and policy changes could be made to help mitigate and adapt to climate change?**

It is important that the commitments made in the Cork City Council Climate Change Adaptation Strategy to ensure climate action is aligned with the SDG's is fully implemented. SDG goal 13 is specifically mentioned in the strategy, which has an objective to ensure we "take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts by regulating emissions and promoting developments in renewable energy." However, it is important we look at some of the broader goals and bear in mind their interconnected nature. Of note in particular include SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 14 (Life Below Water), SDG 15 (Life on Land) and underlaying all goals SDG 17 (Partnerships)

It is equally important that as per the SDG's, actions and policies on climate change are seen in the broader context and as interconnected with commitments to equality, peace and justice. This will require climate change and sustainability to be a consideration in other elements of the Cork City Development Plan and likewise will need climate justice and sustainability to be a core component of broader policies regarding how liveable our city can be. This will require strong interagency working and deep commitment to SDG 17; Working in Partnership.

#### **3. Creating a liveable city**

As the consultation document 'Our City, Our Future' quite rightly highlights Cork is a growing city with a changing population and community profile. As both the consultation document and the Socio-Economic Profile highlight the city is becoming more diverse with 44% of the population living in the city centre born outside of Ireland, 13% of the total population in the city aged 65 years or older and noting that Cork is much higher than the national average in terms of deprivation, particularly in some areas of the city and suburbs.

As an alliance of organisations, we support a variety of marginalised communities including but not limited to members of the traveller community, refugees and migrants, homeless communities, people with disabilities, communities living in the most deprived parts of Cork city and victims of sexual violence. From many years of working with these communities and across CESCA we are acutely aware of the impact that the built and natural environment can have on an individual's quality of life and health outcomes. In more recent times we have also seen the impact that the Covid 19 crisis and prior to that austerity has had on the communities we support. Indeed, the inequalities that many face in terms of their living conditions, poverty, access to housing, access to health care and access to childcare and family support have in many instances been thrown into sharp focus during the Covid-19 emergency. It is vital therefore that the next Cork City Development Plan not only take account of the changing demographics of the city but also the changing needs of the communities that live here.

## **1. What can make your community more of a 'liveable' place?**

Who you are, where you live and what you do has a significant impact on your quality of life and your overall health outcomes. The link between physical and social environments and the wider determinants of health/health inequalities is now clearly evidenced through the work of many, including [Micheal Marmot](#) in the UK. In this regard the liveability or the health of a community is not only the responsibility of the health sector but is determined by the actions and policies of many others including councils and local authorities.

It is therefore crucial that the next Cork City Development Plan includes considerations of the needs of the communities and their physical and social environments at all levels. Access to green and public spaces, suitable housing, community facilities and the availability of education and healthcare supports to meet the needs of a community is vital. This will require effective planning and collaboration across the city and a recognition that population health and wellbeing will be largely determined by policies and actions of all involved in the development and delivery of the development plan.

In CESCA we would suggest that through Cork Healthy Cities, the PPN, the Interagency Groups in the city and indeed ourselves in CESCA, amongst others, that work is undertaken to better understand the changing needs of marginalised and diverse communities and what is needed on a neighbourhood by neighbourhood basis as well as a city wide basis to ensure that Cork is the welcoming and liveable city for all that it can be.

## **2 How can we accommodate the increasing diverse community needs within the City?**

We believe it essential that for any plans for the future of the city that provision is made to ensure Cork adapts and changes to its growing and changing population as well as the changing circumstances we find ourselves in. To achieve this, we believe that the strong interagency cooperation and partnership evident across statutory and community sectors is fostered and supported in the city. By doing so we can ensure that the we collectively better understand the needs of our communities but can also work effectively together to address the issues arising.

There are already many existing programmes and initiatives in place that should be supported and integrated into the development plan for the city as well as strong commitments to continue working collaboratively with the community and voluntary sector in the city.

Many of the CESCA members are involved individually or collectively in many of these programmes and believe that the answers to meeting the needs of our communities lies in the ability of Cork to provide pioneering work and programmes when working collaboratively across sectors and with common goals in mind. Some examples include:

- **Cork Healthy Cities.** Healthy Cities is based on a recognition that population health is not merely a product of health sector activities but largely determined by policies and actions beyond the health sector.
- **Cork Learning City:** Notably Cork has been awarded the UNESCO Learning City award which recognises good practice in promoting quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all.

- **Cork Rainbow City** Cork City is the first and only city on the island of Ireland to have become a member of the International Rainbow Cities Network, who pledge to protect and enhance LGBTI+ rights and inclusion.
- **Cork Sanctuary City** The Cork City of Sanctuary (COS) movement is committed to making Cork a place of welcome, support and safety for Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Migrants and persons of migrant origin, where diversity is recognised and celebrated.

**6. What policies could be implemented to improve access to education and lifelong learning at a neighbourhood and community level?**

The Programme for Government “Our Shared Future” makes commitments to further promote a culture of lifelong learning within the workforce, focusing on increasing the lifelong learning rate from 9% currently to 18% by 2025. This would indeed be a positive development and one we hope will also be reflected in the Cork City Development Plan.

We also believe that there should be continued commitments to the Cork Lifelong Learning Festival and the Lifelong Learning Neighbourhoods given the positive impact they both have in raising awareness of lifelong learning opportunities and enhancing opportunities for inclusive education and in promoting learning in communities and learning throughout life.

However, in implementing these and other policies it is essential that we remain vigilant of the impact that Covid-19 is having on how lifelong learning opportunities can be accessed. We as an alliance in Cork are becoming increasingly concerned about the ‘digital divide’. As many members are moving their supports and training offers online, we are becoming acutely aware of those who do not have access to digital devices or the skills to utilise technology where it is available. This risks causing further inequalities in terms of access to training and support, particularly for the communities who need it most.

We believe it essential therefore that the next Cork City Development Plan ensure that there are clear commitments to mitigating any such digital divide, ensure that the city is inclusive and connected and that isolated individuals and marginalised communities are supported to access lifelong learning opportunities in a way that is suitable and accessible for them and their circumstances.

We thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the development of the next Cork City Development Plan and we hope we can continue to work in partnership in both the development and delivery of the plan.

**CESCA is made up of:**

