Healthy Urban Planning in Northern Ireland:
Opportunities and Constraints

Geraint Ellis

School of Planning, Architecture and Civil Engineering

Queen's University, Belfast

Overview

- ☐ What are the conditions needed to promote Healthy Urban Planning?
- ☐ How are these represented in Northern Ireland?
- ☐ Aim is to promote reflection and discussion.
- ☐ Note: Discussion is primarily from a land use planning perspective.

What is needed to achieve Healthy Urban Planning? [1]

- A conducive institutional framework:
  - Inter-disciplinary…
  - Inter-sectoral ….
  - Shared sense of problem definition …
  - Ability for joint responses …

- A sympathetic policy environment:
  - Open to innovation …
  - Willing to take policy "risks"..
  - Learning from others…
  - New forms of evidence…
  - Novel mechanisms for implementation…

What is needed to achieve Healthy Urban Planning? [2]

- Leadership:
  - Professional. Which professionals?
  - Political. Which politicians?
- Sufficient skills capacity:
  - Generic: communication, negotiation, visioning, problem solving.
  - Technical: planning, public health, transport, env. health, urban design, waste management
- Others?

The Northern Ireland institutional framework [1]

- ☐ Many critical functions (planning, transport etc) currently centralised at regional level (at present).
- ☐ Key services isolated from local democratic control and community engagement.
- ☐ District Councils narrow range of functions.
- ☐ Planning Service responsibilities tightly defined as being to regulate land use… and, now, to promote sustainable development.

The Northern Ireland institutional framework [2]

☐ Planning prime concerns tend to be development focussed.

☐ Government structures do not encourage holistic responses and corporate responsibility.

☐ Opportunities at local level from Review of Public Administration… How much of an opportunity?

☐ Standing of Belfast Healthy Cities?

The Northern Ireland policy environment [1]

- No specific planning policy guidance on health and planning.

- Planning policy slow to evolve and often outdated.

- Statutory duty to promote sustainable development.

- Key target in NI Sustainable Development is:

  - "By 2009 ensure that planning policy and guidance… Integrates health objectives …"

The Northern Ireland policy environment [2]

- ☐ SD seen as a government concern, with poor engagement with other sectors.
- ☐ Opportunities emerging from:
  - ◼ Equality legislation
  - ◼ Reform in:
    - ☐ Community Planning
    - ☐ Bill of rights?
    - ☐ Health sector?
    - ☐ Planning system?
    - ☐ Others?
- ☐

Leadership issues

- Local champions of HUP?
- Political culture:
  - At Assembly level…
  - At District Council Level….
- Professional attitudes…
- Opportunities arise from:
  - RPA
  - Bedding down of Assembly

Skills capacity

- ☐ Substantial capacity in community development
- ☐ Substantial technical planning capacity, with leakage to the private sector.
- ☐ Planners may be weak on "generic skills" – negotiation, communication, visioning etc.
- ☐ Poor inter-disciplinary skills

Recap

- ☐ Key opportunities…
- ☐ How to work around constraints?

- ☐ Identify three key messages for public health in planning …
  (ie how should the health objectives be integrated … ?)