

Heather Cooke

From: Joe B <[REDACTED]>
Sent: 23 January 2019 17:13
To: RSES
Subject: RSES
Attachments: RSES.docx

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Dear RSES,
I have attached a submission on behalf of the North Kildare Branch of the Green Party.

Regards,
Joe Buckley

A Preliminary Green Response to the RSES

The recently published Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Eastern and Midland Region offers a vision of the future for the Ireland of 2040. It addresses a wide range of socio-economic issues: Employment, Retail, Housing, Transport, Waste Management, Education, Health, Sports and Community Facilities, Environment and Heritage, Landscape, Sustainable Development and Climate Change. On these issues, it resonates well, not only with the Citizens Assembly Report on Climate Change, but also with the core principles of the Green Party Manifesto.

The strategy is aspirational in its vision and it uses abstract language in articulating this vision. From the Green Party perspective, abstract language can be the precursor to concrete detailed actions. The strategy speaks of 'sustainable growth', of 'high quality transport links', of a 'low carbon economy', of 'rural regeneration', of 'catch-up investment', of 'health and well-being', of 'smart specialisation', of 'innovation', of 'entrepreneurship', of 'circular economy', of 'self-sustaining regional drivers', of 'regional growth centres', of 'settlement strategy', of 'position hierarchy', of 'quality affordable housing', of 'brownfield development'.

All these concepts align very closely with current Green Party thinking. The challenge lies in the implementation of the strategy, however. Will it respond to the actual needs of living communities. North Kildare Greens, for instance, have an understanding of the concept of 'high quality transport links' which includes the electrification of the rail lines to, and westwards from, Maynooth and Celbridge/Hazelhatch and an improvement in the frequency of trains. But, of equal importance, it also includes the provision of orbital transport routes (probably bus, since the Metro West project is still on the shelves) that link the North and Mid-Kildare towns with one another and with the south-western and north-western communities of Dublin, such as Clondalkin, Tallaght, Blanchardstown and Swords. Commuters in Kildare who use public transport shouldn't have to pass through the city centre in order to get to their places of work in these communities.

A feature of the Strategic Plan is that it makes little reference to the serious socio-economic problems that the country has inherited from the disastrous crash in 2008 and to the fact that a great deal of concentrated effort needs to be focused in the early stages of the plan on the current social and economic deficits: the deprivation suffered by large sectors of the community in relation to proper affordable housing, adequate health care and access to and support in third-level educational institutes.

It is also notable that in lists of objectives for the Strategy, the last item on the list is invariably the climate action/environmental one. The Green Party's position, given the alarming series of events and symptoms of breakdown in climate world-wide, is that the climate-action agenda should be central to every aspect of socio-economic activity. If it involves transport, housing, agriculture, health, waste management, environment, industry, education, taxation and landscape, the impact on the climate must have a clear priority. To avoid or fudge the issues for the sake of short-term gain would be a risk too great to take. We do not have enough time. How can we plan for future transport needs without giving priority to the need for huge investment in switching from fossil fuel-based vehicles to electric vehicles and in the provision of charging outlets nation-wide?

There is much reference in the Strategy to the power to be given to Local Authorities in implementing the changes that will be required to realise the vision. This is very much in line with Green Party thinking, the core tenet of which is that local communities should have a say in matters that affect them. Local Authorities should be meaningfully involved in the provision of new homes, for example. Communities should also have a significant input into the construction of wind farms in their localities.

Many of the terms of reference in this document align with the Green Party's manifesto. The success of the Plan, however, will depend on the priority given to making our society a fairer one, in which the gap between the Haves and the Have Nots has begun to narrow. Climate breakdown attacks the poorest sectors of any society first. If, in 2040, the same levels of deprivation and poverty still exist in Ireland, then all the effort and resources spent on the Strategic Plan will have been wasted. Joe Buckley, North Kildare Green Party.