

# CURRAN IS FRANK ABOUT DUN LAOGHAIRE RATHDOWN!

Following his move earlier this year to Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council from Wicklow, one of Frank Curran's first major roles as the new Chief Executive was to oversee the launch of the County Development Plan 2022-2028. He talks to Deirdre O'Flynn about the county's current strategies for housing, climate change, sustainable infrastructure and new ways of working.



**D**ún Laoghaire-Rathdown (DLR) covers a region that runs from UCD to the Wicklow border, bounded to the east by 17km of coastline and to the west by the Dublin Mountains. The county's vibrant community is focused across a necklace of villages, each with its own strong identity, such as Dalkey, Foxrock, Monkstown, Rathfarnham, Shankill, Sandyford, and Stepside.

Its current population of 218,000 is expected to grow to 250,000 by 2031. In the region of 95,000 people are employed in the district, based mainly in the Sandyford Business District and the larger towns of Dún Laoghaire, Stillorgan and Blackrock, with the council providing services ranging from homeless supports to libraries, transport to road sweeping, all from a budget of €218 million.

Frank Curran, DLR's new Chief Executive, stepped into this urban milieu in January 2022 from his previous post in Wicklow, with one of his first major roles – the launch of the County Development Plan 2022-2028.

**The new plan sets out a vision for the county with a five-pronged approach to create:**

1. A climate-resilient county.
2. A compact and connected county.
3. A network of liveable towns and villages.
4. An inclusive and healthy county.
5. A vibrant economic county.

## SOCIAL HOUSING

The County Development Plan ensures that there is enough land zoned to accommodate over 20,000 new homes over the lifetime of the plan. It encompasses growth in the existing built-up area, the new mixed-use district of Cherrywood, the strategic



Aerial view of the new Cherrywood Strategic Development Zone.

employment location of Sandyford and in new residential communities at Old Connaught, Rathmichael, Woodbrook Shanganagh, Kiltiernan Glenamuck and Ballyogan.

## CHERRYWOOD DEVELOPMENT

Ireland's largest urban infrastructure project is currently under construction in the Cherrywood Strategic Development Zone (SDZ). Cherrywood is projected to have a future population of 25,000 residents, more than 8,000 new homes, a retail-led town centre, six new schools and three major parks, as well as three LUAS stops.

"This will cater for the increase in population, particularly in new areas along transport lines," Curran told Council Review. "In addition, there are plans for

over 2,000 social housing units and 1,500 affordable units in five years. This will be partly by direct build and by Part V," according to Curran.

Part V refers to Part V of the Planning and Development Acts 2000 to 2021. This legislation provides for local authorities to acquire 20 per cent of residential development land at existing use value and to utilise this land to deliver homes to those households who qualify for social and affordable housing support.

The council's housing plans are not without their opponents. At the time of writing, the council has been issued a draft direction from Minister of State for Local Government Peter Burke TD over the plan's statement that "no increase in the number of residential buildings will normally

be permitted" in some areas, including Killiney and Dalkey, where "significant parts" are characterised by low density development.

The Office of the Planning Regulator (OPR) objected to this restriction on development. "The councillors had recommended zero development in the green areas, while the OPR had a different view," Curran pointed out.

A draft Direction has also been issued by Minister Burke to remove the requirement for

certain percentages of three-bed units in apartments in Build-to-Rent Schemes as this is inconsistent with government guidelines on the issue.

## NATIONAL PROPERTY AWARD

Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council was recently lauded for its first purpose-built cost rental and social housing development scheme in Ireland. The 'Woodside' scheme at Enniskerry Road in Stepside won the 'Social Housing Development of the Year' award at the National Property Awards ceremony on 29 April.

The scheme, which consists of 155 homes (50 cost rental and 105 social housing units), was delivered by Respond and Tuath Approved Housing Bodies, in partnership with the Council, who designed and tendered for the project. As part of a multi-agency approach, they were joined in this project by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the Housing Agency and the Housing Finance Agency.

The homes are a mix of one, two and three-bedroom properties. All the 50 Cost Rental homes are two-bedroom apartments. Cost rental is a new form of secure, long-term rental tenure in Ireland where homes are made available to middle-income earners at below open-market rates.

The Cost Rental apartments are let at a monthly rent of €1,200, representing a significant reduction compared to market rents for two-bedroom apartments in this location. The rent charged to tenants will cover the cost of delivering, managing and maintaining these homes and will not be driven by market movements.

## BOOSTING QUALITY OF LIFE

Located in the Metropolitan area of Dublin, the county includes what Curran described as "the economic jewel in the crown". He was referring to Sandyford Business District – a strategic employment location where 1,000 companies and businesses generate a €1 billion wage bill, among them 13 Fortune 500 companies. It is also home to 5,000 residents.

The County Development Plan includes a new land use zoning objective, 'Sustainable Neighbourhood Infrastructure', which seeks to protect, support, and encourage facilities and services such as



DLR Cathaoirleach Cllr Lettie McCarthy cuts the ribbon at the official opening of 'Woodside' on Enniskerry Road in Stepside, pictured alongside Housing Minister Darragh O'Brien, DLR Chief Executive Frank Curran, and local authority officials. The scheme won 'Social Housing Development of the Year' at the National Property Awards on 29 April.



*DLR's Chief Executive Frank Curran pictured at the new Harbour Plaza in Dun Laoghaire with An Cathaoirleach Cllr Lettie McCarthy and Tim Ryan, Operations Manager, DL Harbour.*

schools, healthcare, and community facilities that are considered to be central to sustaining and building healthy neighbourhoods.

This will include “upgrading the public realm in towns and villages, pedestrianising part of George’s Street in Dún Laoghaire, reviewing measures from the pandemic geared at increasing footfall for shops, measures to get people to live ‘over the shop’ in towns, reviewing derelict sites, and improving the night-time economy”.

In a county that stretches from Cherrywood to the coast, including the sea and mountains, parks and open spaces, there is a drive to boost quality of life. “This is underpinned by strategic county outcomes centred around the ten-minute neighbourhood concept. This aims to ensure that people can walk, cycle, or use public transport to access their day-to-day needs and services such as schools, shops, parks and employment.

“A total of €38 million has been allocated for cycling infrastructure this year. The Sandycove to Booterstown coastal mobility route has been a huge success, with 20,000 users per month,” said DLR’s Chief Executive.

## CLIMATE ACTION STRATEGY

The Smart Dún Laoghaire programme is a key element of the council’s climate action strategy. “It involves using technology to monitor environmental performance and to enhance the way we live,” Curran said.

Smart Dún Laoghaire is a collaborative research programme co-funded by the Science Foundation Ireland Enable Research

Programme through CONNECT, and Dún Laoghaire–Rathdown County Council.

The research focuses on mitigation through sustainable mobility and adaptation through urban resilience. The programme brings together academic expertise and local authority experience to work collaboratively with the local community to solve key climate challenges.

The Smart Dún Laoghaire Programme is also “the largest IoT accessible parking trial in Ireland”, with the programme winning three EU research projects. These projects will bring leading EU research to DLR, research funding worth €800,000 for DLR along with the latest technologies from across Europe.”

DLR’s Chief Executive points out that other initiatives promoted by the council include “buying electric vehicles where possible or, alternatively, vehicles powered by biodiesel. All street lighting is LED, and the council has achieved the ISO 50001 standard for energy efficiency”.

## NEW WAYS OF WORKING

The council also has plans to improve its own way of working. “We’re looking at providing opportunities for people to undertake blended working, to improve the quality of life of employees and contribute positively to the climate.

“We have also promoted Digital First, putting as much of our business and application processes online as possible. For instance, building control applications, planning and housing applications will all go online.”

The provision of infrastructure is very much a priority for Curran. This includes major roads infrastructure that will open up lands or housing development such as the Kiltarnan-Glenamuck Road (at tender stage) and the Black Glen Road (on site) but also social infrastructure such as a new library in Stillorgan and Ballyogan, a new leisure centre in Ballyogan and the soon-to-be-completed Dún Laoghaire Baths project.

Improvements in public realm are also a priority with a €4.5 million upgrade of Myrtle Square in Dún Laoghaire to commence shortly.

In the meantime, Curran is adjusting to working life in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown. “Our biggest challenges are climate action and housing. However, we have a realistic and achievable Climate Action Plan and a buoyant housing market delivering private, social, affordable, and cost rental units in our existing built-up areas and in new compact growth areas along transport corridors,” he concluded.



## FACTFILE ON FRANK CURRAN

Frank Curran was appointed as Chief Executive of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council in January 2022. He previously held the positions of Chief Executive in Wicklow County Council (2017-2022) and prior to that in Leitrim County Council (2014-2017).

The native of Waterford served as a Director of Services with Waterford County Council from 2007 to 2014, as Senior Executive Officer from 2004 to 2007 and Senior Executive Engineer from 2002 to 2004.

Prior to that he served in various management and engineering positions in Kilkenny, Tipperary and Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Councils.

He is a Civil Engineering graduate of UCD and holds an MSc in Environmental Protection, an MA in Local Government Management and a Diploma in Company Direction.