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Choosing the kind of Ireland we want

**Introduction by
Michael Noonan, TD
Leader, Fine Gael**



This general election is not just about choosing a government. Far more importantly, it is about choosing the kind of Ireland we want for the future. The people now have the opportunity to choose between two kinds of Ireland.

In this election, Fine Gael offers the people a radically different vision to that of Fianna Fáil and the PDs.

For the past five years we have suffered from a government that has no particular vision at all – other than to cling on to power for as long as it possibly can.

They have no coherent view of the future they want to create for Ireland – except to wish for more of the same, to hope against hope that the good times will keep on rolling.

Their approach is driven by a fixation of looking after their friends among the rich and powerful – hoping that some of the wealth and privilege they lavish on the top of our society will somehow, willy-nilly, trickle downwards and solve all our problems

Over the past five years, Fianna Fáil and the PDs have squandered our boom.

We in Fine Gael do have a vision. And the reason we seek to be in government is to be able to make that vision happen.

First:

Fine Gael's vision is of a forward-looking Ireland, that plans its future with care.

- An Ireland that knows we must constantly extend our capabilities, all the time moving up the value-added chain, if we are to compete successfully in a fast-changing world.
- An Ireland that pays as much attention to raising the quality of our lives as to raising our standard of living.
- An Ireland that recognises both the need to change and the need to hold on to what is valuable from our past.

Second:

Fine Gael's vision is of a compassionate Ireland, fair and even-handed to all.

- An Ireland built on a sense of community – not one that has room only for individual selfishness.
- An Ireland that develops the full potential of every citizen – not one that divides people into haves and have nots, then widens the gap between them.
- An Ireland where everybody has a right to the best education, to put a roof over their head, to be looked after properly when they are sick, to enjoy their old age with dignity.

Third:

Fine Gael's vision is of a generous Ireland, that seeks to give to the outside world.

- An Ireland that keeps its commitment within the rules of the European Union, becoming once again a respected voice in contributing to the growth and expansion of the EU.

- An Ireland that champions the cause of countries less well-off than ourselves.

- An Ireland that stands up for our belief in a peaceful and just world order.

So the choice is stark: it is between an Ireland that is short-sighted, selfish, unfair and inward-looking and an Ireland that is forward-looking, compassionate and generous.

It is a choice between a philosophy that says money is all that counts, and one that puts money in the wider context of quality of life.

This manifesto gives an overview of the kind of Ireland Fine Gael believes in. Under 14 key headings, it sets out what we think needs to be changed, our vision of what we desire, and in each case the first six steps Fine Gael will take in government to make the vision a reality.

Later in the campaign we will publish a detailed Programme for Government which will include all of our specific proposals. But for now I invite you to focus on the vision of the Ireland we want to create. Because the choice in this election is, above all, a choice between two very different kinds of Ireland.

I hope you will share our vision, and choose to vote for Fine Gael.



Michael Noonan
April 2002



A Forward-Looking Ireland

Getting the economy back on track

A world-class education for all

Putting our children first

Moving environmental quality to the centre of our lives

Getting our transport moving

Agriculture at the heart of rural regeneration

Getting the economy back on track

What we must change

Fianna Fáil and the PDs have managed our economy badly:

- They have let public spending get totally out of control. Compared to a promise to keep growth to 4% a year, their actual annual spending growth averaged 15%. Then, as the boom slackened, they went on spending even faster last year, the growth hit a completely unsustainable 23%. This demolished an Exchequer surplus of €3bn in 2000, and public finances are now on course for a €6bn deficit in 2004.
- Not only have they spent excessively, they have spent badly. Budgets have been over-run (in some cases by several hundred per cent), there has been no pursuit of value-for-money, there have been many procurement scandals and irregularities. Often, despite massive spending, there has been no visible improvement in services.
- They have proved incapable of delivering infrastructural improvements to keep pace with the needs of the economy. The result has been a devastating negative impact, both on our national competitiveness and on the quality of life of everyone.
- They have pursued a narrow tax strategy under which many have not shared in the benefits of progress.
- They have failed to reform public service pay structures and will bequeath substantial pay problems to a new government.

Fine Gael's vision for the future

- **Public spending is back under control.**
- **Increased revenue from a slower growth rate is targeted on improving public services.**
- **Value-for-money is always delivered across a reformed public service.**
- **There is timely investment in the infrastructure needed to underpin growth.**
- **Everyone has long-term certainty about the levels of tax rates.**
- **Social partnership maintains competitiveness, with flexibility to respond to change.**
- **A competitive environment stimulates high-quality services.**
- **Everyone benefits from exceptional surpluses**

Fine Gael's first 6 steps to realise this vision

1. Hold current spending growth to nominal growth in GDP plus 2%, subject to a current budget surplus of at least €2bn. Major spending to be only in the context of far-reaching reform. Appoint a cabinet Minister to lead a value-for-money drive. Reform the public sector to embrace reorganisation, performance related pay, merit-based promotion and quality benchmarking.
2. Freeze rates of income tax, capital gains tax, corporation tax and value-added tax for the life of the government.
3. Accelerate implementation of the National Development Plan by 25% funding through public/private partnerships by 2006, and by inviting the National Pension Reserve Fund to fund projects where the financial return satisfies the trustees. To speed up land acquisition, a capital gains tax exemption will apply to land acquired by CPO provided agreement is reached quickly.
4. Put greater emphasis in Social Partnership agreements on maintaining competitiveness and on flexibility to change. Improvements in public services and social protection will be the foundation of a new contract.
5. Stimulate a competitive environment to improve service quality, through strengthened Regulators and the Competition Authority.
6. When there are exceptional surpluses, give everyone a stake in economic success through a national profit-sharing scheme. Every taxpayer will get a minimum share issue in years when a bonus applies; taxpayers will get an extra bonus in proportion to the tax they pay. When real GDP growth is over 5%, raise the amount put aside in the National Pensions Reserve Fund from 1% to 1.5%. When real GDP growth exceeds 5% we will raise the amount put aside from 1% to 1.5%, the extra 0.5% to cover general contingencies in addition to the 1% for the pension reserve fund.

A world-class education for all

What we must change

Fianna Fáil and the PDs have wasted the past five years in fighting fires, coping with internal strife in the education system.

Almost nothing has been done to address two basic problems – the need to make education genuinely open to all, and the need to equip our young people with the right mix of skills so they and our economy can thrive in a changing world.

Despite many pilot programmes over 20 years, the advantages of education are still not evenly spread. This is especially so at third-level, where entrance is still restricted to the better-off. But all through the system, those from lower-income backgrounds suffer:

- It is they who are most likely to drop out of the system, largely because failure to get the basics right is not properly dealt with by remedial teaching.
- It is they who are likely to start off formal education at a disadvantage, through lack of pre-schooling.

Fianna Fáil and the PDs have failed to recognise the need to strengthen local management and the capacity for innovation at school level. They failed also to develop proper systems of professional development for our teachers and others in the school system, or to develop systems of accountability. Above all, they failed to take responsibility for those left behind.

Because of their short-term focus in education as in every other sphere, Fianna Fáil and the PDs have not put enough effort into reforming our education to match a changing world. Our education system was the bedrock of the Celtic Tiger's success; it cannot continue to be so unless it keeps pace with change. In particular, the sharp fall-off of interest in science and related subjects needs to be urgently addressed.

Fine Gael's vision for the future

- **Everyone can go as far in education as their talents will take them, without money being an obstacle.**
- **Everyone leaves school with the competence in literacy, numeracy and information technology to participate fully in their community.**
- **Good teaching is prized, with regular renewal and professional development for teachers.**
- **We achieve world-class standards in the skills and knowledge needed in a fast-changing future.**
- **Education is the fountainhead of innovative business and service.**
- **Education does not end after school or college, but continues throughout life.**

Fine Gael's first 6 steps to realise this vision

1. Place a new focus on literacy and numeracy and the sciences. Will increase the scale and quality of remedial intervention and set targets to monitor progress in rectifying reading problems. Implement the recommendations of the Task Force on the Physical Sciences to ensure our economy has the right skills for continued growth.
2. Strengthen the capacity of schools to develop services by devolving a larger budget to them, and set up a school improvement process where they can draw on technical support from a new Educational Development Authority.
3. Reform the system for processing school building projects to halve the current 6 year wait. Reform will include increased capital allocation, new design and build contracts, use of public/private partnerships and devolution of power to Boards of Management.
4. Introduce an education youth wage contract for those at risk of early school leaving, and an education credit account of €6,000 for early school-leavers which they can use at any later time.
5. Raise income eligibility for higher education grants and increase maintenance grants by 80%, with higher payments for lower incomes.
6. Create a legal right for parents to an assessment of a child who exhibits significant learning difficulties, and a legal right to appeal if resources provided do not match the needs identified.

Putting our children first

What we must change

One of the greatest strengths in the Irish tradition has always been the way we cared for our children, focusing family life on preparing them to reach their individual potential as adults. Under Fianna Fáil and the PDs, the Celtic Tiger has put this tradition under serious stress.

- It is now the norm for both parents to work, often not from choice but to meet a mortgage.
- Traffic congestion makes for longer days away from home, added to by housing patterns that create longer journeys.

To this new age, Fianna Fáil and the PDs have been slow to respond. They have let things get worse by perpetuating an administrative maze that fragments services for children across seven government departments, and by badly thought-out policies that in effect (though not in intention) are hostile to children.

They have failed to see that today's economy has opened up a gap that our traditional values demand must be filled.

Fianna Fáil and the PDs do not realise that one of our top national priorities must be to close that gap, and to create again in Ireland the kind of nurturing that all parents want their children to have.

Fine Gael's vision for the future

- **A child-centred community, that always puts first the needs of young people as they grow towards being the citizens of tomorrow.**
- **More room and support for parenting, with a more active role for fathers.**
- **Quality childcare and pre-school options for part- or full-day in every community which suits the needs identified by parents.**
- **The young build "assets" in their lives to help them cope, instead of reacting only to crisis.**
- **Safe play and youth activities are available in every community.**
- **Participation in decision-making by young people is standard practice.**
- **Young people who get in difficulty always have a way back.**

Fine Gael's first 6 steps to realise this vision

- 1.** Strongly support the role of parents – through longer maternal leave, financial support for paternal leave, and enhancing the tax position of stay-at-home parents.
- 2.** Fund childcare and pre-schooling through a €1200 capitation grant and a 20% tax credit on childcare expenses. Provide community child centres, and ensure world-class standards in childcare, both public and private.
- 3.** Nurture all children equally – through free medical services for all, defeating educational disadvantage, putting remedial services at the heart of education, safe community play and recreation areas for all, and educating to cope with alcohol, tobacco, drugs and aggression.
- 4.** Focus the State's input – by streamlining services through fewer departments, and an independent Children's Commissioner to watch over their interests.
- 5.** Introduce a National Entitlement Card for all those over 18.
- 6.** Give young people in trouble a way back – with a local mediation service for early intervention, alternatives to custody for juvenile offenders, and immediate support to those who stop taking drugs.

Moving environmental quality to the centre of our lives

What we must change

Fianna Fáil and the PDs have a deplorable record in balancing the needs of the environment with our desire for continuing growth and prosperity.

- They have manifestly failed to bring sustainability into the development of economic policy.
- They have failed to set real targets for energy consumption, on the use of renewable resources, on water quality and water leakages, on greenhouse gas emissions.
- Their incineration proposals are a short-sighted, inappropriate and inadequate response to the growing threat to our national quality of life.
- They have consistently failed to implement EU environmental law and regulations, thereby bringing Ireland repeatedly to the European Court for unfavourable judgements.

Fine Gael's vision for the future

- **Environmental quality is a yardstick in every area of public policy, and sustainability is a central element in national planning and development.**
- **A vigorous policy of reduce, re-use and recycle will help achieve the zero waste objective – removing the need for incineration.**
- **Energy intensity of consumption is cut significantly.**
- **Ireland meets its international obligations on emission of greenhouse gases, and speedily applies EU law and regulations.**
- **Reliance on renewable sources of energy is increased significantly.**

Fine Gael's first 6 steps to realise this vision

1. Make recycling into a viable industry with capital grants and subsidies.
2. Give priority to waste reduction, by moving incentives to the point of waste generation rather than at the end of the pipe.
3. Discourage excessive packaging and encourage return of packaging and products at the end of their life.
4. Eliminate altogether the discharge of untreated sewage into inland waterways and the release of phosphorus into the water system.
5. Set up a National Waste Management Authority to develop a coherent strategy for the country, an independent Research Agency to guide policies, and a Waste Commissioner to report to the Oireachtas within six months on the operation of the Waste Management Act and on alternative disposal methods for residual waste.
6. Citizen participation to ensure there is a balanced assessment of waste management alternatives.

Getting our transport moving

What we must change

Under Fianna Fáil and the PDs, our transport system is in total chaos. We have only to look around us, anywhere in the country on any day of the week, to see the failure to match our infrastructure to our recent fast economic growth.

- Journey times to work or to shop take longer each month, as more and more of the road system is engulfed by congestion.
- Public transport is slow, inefficient and costly – manifestly failing to fulfil its proper role as an attractive alternative to private cars.
- The capital city has degenerated into constant gridlock, with no single body providing overall management of an increasingly complex environment.
- Rural regeneration and proper regional development is held back by inadequate infrastructure.

There have been no shortage of proposals and ambitions for transport from Fianna Fáil and the PDs, but a dismal record on actually getting things done.

For five years they failed to see that transport policy needs to be co-ordinated from a single source. They have failed completely to move on introducing competition to our public transport system, which is an obvious part of any complete solution.

They have been oblivious to the damage our inadequate transport system is wreaking on the quality of life of every citizen.

Fine Gael's vision for the future

- **The average urban journey time is cut, and goes on getting shorter.**
- **Public transport delivers high quality and keen value through vigorous competition.**
- **Road space is used to facilitate easy movement for the greatest number of people, with priority for public transport based on demonstrated performance.**
- **Integrated low-cost fares for public transport, with cashless access by everyone through a smart card.**
- **All paved surfaces for pedestrians, cyclists and motorists are maintained at a high standard.**

Fine Gael's first 6 steps to realise this vision

- 1.** Appoint a single Minister for Transport, to cut out the overlap and lack of focus that results from transport matters being spread across different Departments.
- 2.** A Dublin Transport Authority to deliver key infrastructures, manage traffic throughout the greater Dublin area, enforce the law through a new traffic corps, and introduce competition in public transport. An interim regulator will be immediately appointed to open up competition in Dublin bus services by inviting tenders for 20% of public routes. Car pools will be allowed to use certain quality bus corridors. Free use of Dublin buses during the off-peak periods (10.00am to 4.00pm).
- 3.** An independent commission to licence competition in public transport outside Dublin.
- 4.** Set targets to cut journey times on inter-urban rail, and replace all substandard trains within three years.
- 5.** Underpin a vibrant regional policy by strengthening the transport infrastructure outside urban areas. A new investment programme for county roads will bring them up to meet quality benchmarks in every part of the country.
- 6.** A new programme for regional airport development.

Agriculture at the heart of rural regeneration

What we must change

Pressure continues to mount on the European Union to align its agricultural prices to "world price" and to dismantle substantial parts of its agricultural support system.

This approach has not produced any worthwhile gains for developing countries, where world trading arrangements impoverish domestic producers.

The new EU policies have placed an increasing emphasis on heavy regulation of agriculture. The complexity has diverted too much time and effort into barren compliance.

Fine Gael's vision for the future

- **A competitive farming sector as the cornerstone of vibrant rural regeneration.**
- **Farm families have a decent living and can invest in developing the industry, and young people have the confidence to make their future in farming.**
- **Ireland's reputation for high-quality safe and healthy food is maintained and enhanced**
- **The organic food sector plays a key role in farm prosperity.**
- **A thriving farming community is seen as central to protecting and enhancing our landscape and physical environment.**
- **Rural Ireland continues as a precious part of our national life and culture.**

Fine Gael's first 6 steps to realise this vision

- 1.** Lead a more muscular policy at WTO to maintain a competitive agriculture within the EU, and to yield results to the developing world.
- 2.** Simplify the increasing regulation of agricultural subsidies and premia payments and make penalties more proportionate to the importance of infringement.
- 3.** Broaden area-based rural initiatives to encompass key services in transport, communications, health, education and housing.
- 4.** Introduce prompt payment rules to agriculture payments and develop clear and transparent systems of payment for livestock on a verifiable quality basis.
- 5.** Reform agricultural education to reflect today's conditions and reinforce links with technological and third-level institutions.
- 6.** Implement the second part of the Installation Aid Scheme for young farmers by introducing low-interest development grants, and remove the work unit ceiling.

A Compassionate Ireland

Ending the two-tier health service

Sharing the benefits fairly

An active and independent later life

Safety on our streets and in our homes

Affordable housing in a vibrant community

Ending the two-tier health service

What we must change

Despite five years of prosperity, Ireland has a deplorably underdeveloped primary care system.

Despite five years of prosperity, we still have to suffer an outrageous form of apartheid in our two-tier health service.

Despite five years of prosperity, there is a serious shortage of capacity in our hospitals and convalescent facilities.

Despite five years of prosperity, Fianna Fáil and the PDs have failed to develop proper management and information technology systems.

Despite five years of prosperity, there are deep-seated problems in the management of human resources within the health system, which has seen many qualified people leave their chosen profession.

It is unforgivable that this government has squandered five years. Reform should by now be well underway.

Fine Gael's vision for the future

- **Comprehensive primary care is available in your own community and money is not a barrier to access.**
- **Access to care in public hospitals is based only on medical need.**
- **No one has to wait more than 6 weeks for a diagnosis or wait more than 6 weeks for treatment in core specialities.**
- **The health service is patient-centred, with the rights of patients recognised and protected.**
- **Improvements in lifestyle contribute to better health and lower costs.**

Fine Gael's first 6 steps to realise this vision

- 1.** Strengthen substantially our investment in primary care by helping GPs to develop their practices and improving access by doubling the income limit for medical cards, and extending free GP services to the lowest paid 60%; all children up to 18 (and beyond while in full time education); all persons over 65; all those with serious disability.
- 2.** End the two-tier system in public hospitals through an insurance-based system of access to care based on medical need. The State will pay the insurance premium to cover a core basket of essential hospital services.
- 3.** Increase the number of beds in the different care settings to meet key shortages and ensure sufficient medical and nursing staff to meet patient need.
- 4.** Develop an annual health check for everyone, to identify illness early and to identify lifestyle options to improve health.
- 5.** Establish a Health Ombudsman to oversee the rights of patients and a Surgeon General to overcome vested interests and to report directly to the Dáil.
- 6.** Reform the management of health resources to get better value and amalgamate some health boards.

Sharing the benefits fairly

What we must change

Over the past five years, Ireland has become a much less fair society.

- The gap between the haves and the have nots has widened.
- Rampaging house prices have made it impossible for many families to own their own home.

This has not happened by chance. The clear, deliberate priority of Fianna Fáil and the PDs in each of their Budgets has been to favour the better off.

In income tax, in capital gains tax, in capital acquisitions tax and in the savings schemes, most benefit has been given to those who already have a substantial stake.

It has been a policy of survival of the fittest. This policy has certainly succeeded in fuelling stock values, house prices and land prices. It runs the boilers at full speed and never minds who gets caught in the backwash.

Fine Gael's vision for the future

- **Consistent child poverty eliminated.**
- **Relative-income poverty significantly reduced.**
- **All barriers to taking up employment in tax and social services removed.**
- **The proportion of earners paying the top rate of tax halved.**
- **Tax and welfare policies take full account of the varying pressures that occur at different stages of a family's life.**
- **Equity of treatment for families of different make-up and situation.**

Fine Gael's first 6 steps to realise this vision

- 1.** Confront exclusion by a wide-ranging reform in health and education designed to ensure fair access for low-income families to these services.
- 2.** Back up these reforms by maintaining the rate of Social Welfare increases ahead of inflation, providing free meals in all schools in disadvantaged areas, paying the family income supplement through the tax system to ensure it reaches all families who are entitled to it, and qualifying all widowers and widows for the married person's tax credits and tax bands and allowances.
- 3.** Give families financial support at key stages in their life cycle when financial pressures on the family are greatest. See "Affordable housing" (page 28) and "An active and independent later life" (page 24).
- 4.** Back up these supports with others targeted at key life stages – including a birth grant of €300, child payments to all in full-time education up to the age of 22, including widows and widowers under 66 in free schemes, giving dependent spouses a full pension in their own right.
- 5.** Reform the tax system to redress the imbalances created over the past five years – including a new 30% rate of income tax to take moderate earners out of the top tax bracket; relief for single-income families whose position has been eroded by individualisation; exemption from income tax for the minimum wage; and the indexation of bands and allowances. Individual investors in Eircom will be allowed to offset their losses against income tax, at the standard rate.
- 6.** Set a target to eliminate consistent child poverty completely by 2007.

An active and independent later life

What we must change

The number of people aged 75 and over will grow by 24,000 in the next 15 years. In the 15 years after that it will grow by a further 94,000.

Over the past five years of unprecedented prosperity, Fianna Fáil and the PDs have paid little attention to the real needs of older citizens. Still less have they begun to gear up services to cope with the challenge of an ageing population.

It is a declared aim of public policy to promote active retirement and to help people live for as long as possible in their own homes and their own communities. But on the ground, Fianna Fáil and the PDs have done little to make it a reality.

Their attitude is summed up in the situation regarding carers. Currently families and neighbours provide over 85% of the care required by dependent, elderly or disabled persons.

However more than half of all full-time carers at present receive no State support whatsoever.

Fine Gael's vision for the future

- Retirement marks a new phase of opportunity in a person's life.
- Primary and acute care offer timely intervention, without the stress of crudely rationed services.
- Financial and care options allow a person to control their care choices.
- Family care is recognised financially and as a partner with State services.
- A range of accommodation is available in a community setting.

Fine Gael's first 6 steps to realise this vision

1. A tax-free trust fund, into which people who continue working after retirement will be able to put aside money for their later use.
2. To promote preventive care, more services will be provided through GP surgeries and in the community. This will reduce the need for hospital or long-term care. Strong links will be built between improved facilities in hospital and in community care.
3. A contributory old age pension of €200 by 2006. GP services will be free to all over 65. Additional geriatricians will allow for the expansion of health services.
4. In hospitals priority will go to key procedures that support independence, with the aim of dramatically reducing waiting time. Rehabilitation and step-down facilities will ensure that older people are cared for in appropriate settings.
5. Caring will be supported by a non-means tested grant for independent living of up to €2,500 a year; by relaxing the means test for Carer's Allowance and entitling persons on social welfare to 50% of that allowance; by ring-fencing respite beds and developing a guarantee of respite to give carers a break. The Home Help budget will be doubled and out-of-hours services developed.
6. A maximum waiting time will be set for fittings like rails, ramps, alarms and bathroom facilities; to clear the present arrears the approval requirements will be eased so that up to €3,800 can be spent on the GP's recommendation.

Safety on our streets and in our homes

What we must change

Fianna Fáil and the PDs came to power on the slogan of zero tolerance. This slogan has now become a hollow joke. It is a sad fact that in many areas our laws are simply not being enforced. This has contributed to the very high level of unreported crime.

- Violence on our streets is growing.
- The viciousness of attacks is increasing.
- The age profile of those involved is getting younger.
- The need to fund a drug habit is a serious cause of crime, yet only 5,000 of the 13,500 drug addicts in Dublin are currently receiving treatment.
- Over-consumption of alcohol is a major contributory factor to public disorder and aggression.

Fianna Fáil and the PDs have quite simply failed to get to grips with these problems.

Fine Gael's vision for the future

- **Public confidence that a fair and effective justice system will protect us.**
- **Gardaí visibly working to prevent crime.**
- **Early intervention with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds cuts the numbers who get sucked into crime.**
- **Prison is used only as a last resort when other ways have failed.**
- **Victims have clear rights in law and their needs are addressed.**
- **Corruption and fraud are prosecuted as severely as other serious crimes.**

Fine Gael's first 6 steps to realise this vision

1. A concerted campaign to stamp out street violence – using expanded close circuit television, night courts, rapid response and high visibility policing, higher standards from private security firms, reforms in the Public Order Act, proper night schedules for public transport, a statutory identity card.
2. Safe Community Partnership Funds, setting aside special resources to support work in local communities to create safe environments.
3. Consultative policing committees at council level, where local Gardaí report back to local representatives and their communities.
4. A prison service board with a clear mandate, an independent prisons inspectorate and an independent parole board.
5. Expanded use of restitution orders, community service orders, probation orders, extended supervision, and diversion programmes. This will involve a much-expanded probation and welfare service, and more emphasis on rehabilitation and restorative justice.
6. Statutory protections for the victims of crime, including the right to be kept informed of the progress of an investigation and the right to submit a victim's impact statement to the court before sentencing.

Affordable housing in a vibrant community

What we must change

Ireland has all that is needed to create good living conditions both urban and rural – a low level of population, adequate land supply, a strong economy and high levels of public revenue.

But under Fianna Fáil and the PDs, it has all gone so wrong. They have displayed no ability to deliver a coherent strategy for infrastructure. Weaknesses in the planning system have abandoned large parts of the country to patterns of growth led by developers, while government infrastructural plans have been endlessly bogged down.

Under Fianna Fáil and the PDs, we still do not have a national spatial strategy – though all logic and common sense dictates that any National Development Plan should be based on it.

Under Fianna Fáil and the PDs, we always seem to be just one more plan away from action on transport.

Under Fianna Fáil and the PDs, it takes twice as long to bring infrastructural projects from planning to delivery as in other countries.

Fine Gael's vision for the future

- **A good home, in a neighbourhood that works, is within the reach of every family.**
- **A quality rented sector offers fair rents and security of tenure, with equitable support for the cost of rents.**
- **First-time buyers on modest incomes can afford to buy a home of their own.**
- **When new houses are built, the essential facilities for education and community service are built at the same time.**
- **The concept of the sustainable neighbourhood is the focus of housing strategy.**

Fine Gael's first 6 steps to realise this vision

1. Identify "Gateway Centres" for development, to take the pressure off existing growth centres and become the catalyst for development of clusters or necklace towns.
2. Build strong sustainable communities by regenerating neighbourhoods with key services and infrastructure. We will appoint a Minister for regional development, and invest in water and sewage networks to sustain growth in smaller villages.
3. Set up a National Housing Agency to short-circuit delays in delivering water and drainage services, and to integrate local authority housing strategies. Its target will be to rapidly expand the output of social and affordable housing.
4. Bring house purchase back within the reach of families on ordinary incomes through a house deposit saving scheme, double mortgage relief for the first five years, increased income ceilings to €50,000 for shared ownership and affordable housing, and increased income ceilings for shared ownership subsidy.
5. A new framework for the rented sector, with a right to a lease after 6 months tenancy, a rent tribunal to adjudicate on fair rents, and more than double tax relief on rent.
6. Complete the national spatial strategy to establish the essential framework within which development will occur across the country.

A Generous Ireland

Living up to our responsibilities as a developed nation

Playing a full part in Europe

Building on the achievements of the Good Friday Agreement

Living up to our responsibilities as a fully-developed nation

What we must change

Ireland has now taken its place as one of the fully developed nations of the world. This status brings with it new responsibilities, but so far Fianna Fáil and the PDs have shown little sign that they realise it.

For instance, they pursued an expensive and time-intensive global campaign to win for Ireland one of the rotating seats on the UN Security Council. Having achieved that aim, their lack-lustre performance in the potentially-valuable position showed up all too clearly their lack of a long-term strategy for Ireland in the world.

Under Fianna Fáil and the PDs, Ireland sends confusing signals to the outside world. For instance, we have increased significantly the amount Irish taxpayers devote to overseas development aid. At the same time the government continues to support and indeed to lead an EU trade policy that is inimical to the interests of the very countries we support with our aid.

Ireland's neutrality is another issue on which Fianna Fáil and the PDs seek to have it both ways. Having given a solemn pledge before the last election not to enter the Partnership for Peace without first consulting the people in a referendum, they not only signed Ireland up without holding a referendum, but also systematically sought to suppress debate on the issue in Parliament.

On that showing, people are indeed right to worry that Fianna Fáil and the PDs might eventually compromise our neutrality completely, without giving citizens an opportunity to discuss the matter thoroughly.

Fine Gael's vision for the future:

- The Irish people share a clear view as to the role of their country on the world stage.
- Ireland becomes known as a force for peace and reconciliation throughout the world.
- Ireland is seen as a friend by the developing world, not only as a dispenser of aid but as a champion of fair trade.
- On military neutrality, Ireland follows a clearly thought-out policy that has been arrived at by the people having carefully considered our place in modern Europe.
- Ireland is the champion within the EU of an immigration policy that balances the need to eliminate human trafficking with the need for a fair process that welcomes new people to share our prosperity.

Fine Gael's first 6 steps to realise this vision

1. Build a clear foreign policy based on solidarity with the outside world and seek to build cross-party support for it, in the interests of long-term consistency.
2. Increase the budget for overseas development aid to 0.7% of GNP by 2007, reflecting our growth in prosperity.
3. Develop an integrated approach to developing countries through a trade policy that is in the interests of both European farmers and those in the developing world, and become the champion for that policy at EU level.
4. Initiate a full national debate on Ireland's neutrality – beginning with a White Paper that examines what are the circumstances, if any, in which we would change the policy of not entering into binding commitments to mutual defence.
5. Develop a consistent policy on immigration to Ireland under which we welcome an agreed number of people through an open, fair and hassle-free process.
6. Champion at EU level a policy on immigration that balances the need to eliminate human trafficking with an openness to welcome new people through a transparent process.

Playing a full part in Europe

What we must change

Since we entered the EEC in 1973, Ireland had consistently pursued a pro-Community policy. We gained many friends from promoting the interests of Europe as a whole and our diligent application of European law. This approach brought us influence among our partners out of all proportion to our size, and financial supports that transformed our economy and our lives.

In five short years, Fianna Fáil and the PDs have destroyed that reputation.

- Irish policy positions have become narrow and selfish, short-sightedly pursuing only what delivers immediate benefit.
- Especially on the environment, Fianna Fáil and the PDs have dragged our feet in applying EU norms. This results in Ireland being regularly brought to the European Court, with unfavourable judgements against us every time.
- Ministers are casual about European commitments, with some hardly bothering to attend the Council of Ministers at all. They have even tried to make high-level European appointments on the basis of cronyism.
- Some Ministers have been allowed to speak out publicly against Europe, in the full glare of international publicity. One even bragged he had voted "no" on Nice.
- Fianna Fáil and the PDs, through their inept and lazy handling of the Nice referendum, have brought on Ireland the blame for holding up the expansion of the EU.
- Under Fianna Fáil and the PDs, Ireland has become "*the bad boy*" of Europe.

Fine Gael's vision for the future

- Ireland once again plays a full and active role in Europe, both in day-to-day matters and in shaping the EU's future development.
- Ireland once again becomes a role model in how a small country can defend its interests in an EU of bigger states, through a consistent policy of promoting the interests of Europe as a whole.
- Ireland's new reputation as a selfish, greedy country is decisively put to rest – for ever.
- Ireland is seen by fellow Members as one of those who always work to facilitate agreement and solidarity across the EU.
- Ireland sets a headline in the speedy application of all EU law.
- Ireland benefits, financially, commercially and politically, from its enthusiastic participation in the European Union.

Fine Gael's first 6 steps to realise this vision

1. Secure the clear support of the Irish people for EU enlargement by a vigorous campaign to secure the ratification of the Nice Treaty explaining its importance to Ireland and to Europe as a whole, and that enlargement inevitably involves changes in the EU's decision-making process to make way for new members. The success of this campaign by a united, fully-committed government is crucial to our entire future in Europe.
2. Help to shape a citizen's Europe by promoting more democratic ways of selecting the Commission.
3. Support the setting up a second Chamber of Member States to better represent the increasing diversity across Europe.
4. Seek to match new competences for the EU with clear boundaries to its powers, always pursuing the ideal of economic, social and political solidarity.
5. Support an enforceable Charter of Fundamental Rights and of the values and duties of the European Union to its citizens.
6. Support full Irish involvement in EU decisions on peace and security, participating in appropriate missions but reserving the right to decide on a case by case basis whether to participate.

Building on the achievements of the Good Friday Agreement

What we must continue

An important element in the significant progress that has been made on Northern Ireland in recent years has been the continuity in policy between the major parties in this jurisdiction.

The cross-party consensus has centred on two long-held Fine Gael principles:

- Firstly, the rejection of violence as a means of achieving the unity of the Irish people.
- Secondly, the requirement that there can be no change in the status of Northern Ireland without the consent of a majority of the people there.

These principles form the basis of the Good Friday Agreement. They were also the basis of Fine Gael's approach in government from 1994-1997. During that period, the Joint Framework Document and the ground rules for the negotiations involving the Northern Ireland parties and the British and Irish Governments were agreed, and Senator George Mitchell was appointed to chair the negotiations. Just as Fianna Fáil and the PDs in government have built on these foundations over the past five years, a Fine Gael-led government will continue to build on the Good Friday Agreement. Priority will be given to the achievement of the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms, a process which was to have been completed within two years of the referenda endorsing the Agreement.

Fine Gael's vision for the future

- **The Irish and British Governments continue to work closely together to achieve the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.**
- **Arms disappear forever, both as a reality and as a threat.**
- **Develop the areas already identified as appropriate for enhanced North South co-operation.**
- **The two traditions on the island achieve genuine parity of esteem.**
- **Promote bilateral co-operation between Dublin and London on all matters of mutual interest.**

Fine Gael's first 6 steps to realise this vision

1. Implement all aspects of the Good Friday Agreement.
2. Fully support all the institutions set up under the Agreement.
3. Give priority to achieving the decommissioning of all paramilitary arms – a process which was to have been completed within two years of the referenda endorsing the Agreement.
4. Focus particularly on the work of the North South Ministerial Council and develop the areas already identified as appropriate for North South co-operation.
5. Develop the British-Irish Inter-Governmental Conference, which was established to promote bilateral North South co-operation between Dublin and London on all matters of mutual interest.
6. Equally, work to bring to full fruition the British-Irish Council, which was established to promote the harmonious and mutually beneficial development of the totality of relationships among the peoples of these islands.

Costings

The gross cost of the detailed measures underlying this Manifesto and our full Programme for Government document to follow will, when all are fully implemented, amount to €5.7 billion in a full year.

The net cost of the taxation reductions will, in a full year, amount to €1.9 billion.

Capital Projects estimated at €8 billion over 5 years are also proposed in conjunction with our manifesto proposals.

The principal components of this new investment in developing the kind of Ireland we want are;

	Current €m (per year)	Capital €m (Over 5 years)
Health	1,400	1,500
Housing	200	1,500
Social, Family and Community Affairs	1,100	—
Active & Independent Old Age	900	100
Youth, Children, Education & Sport	1,100	1,500
Enterprise, Regional Development Infrastructure, Agriculture & Marine	280	2,500
Justice, Local Government, Environment, & Overseas Development	750	550

These proposals fit within the envelope outlined in our Economic Framework "Just Economics", and have been costed with the assistance of the Department of Finance and from information provided by individual Government Departments.



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