



Irish Rural Link
Nasc Tuaithe na hÉireann

A VOICE FOR RURAL IRELAND

Submission to Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government Statement of Strategy 2017- 2019

August 2016

Contact
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Irish Rural Link Submission to Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport on Statement on Strategy 2017-2019

Summary

| Issue | Recommendations |
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| Rural Strategies | The establishment of a cabinet committee to oversee rural regeneration as outlined in <i>Programme for a Partnership Government</i> and CEDRA report. |
| Regional Development Strategy | The Regional Jobs Strategy needs to be linked to an overall Regional Development Strategy with establishment of regional structures. |
| Planning and Development of Sustainable Communities | Proper planning of a rural setting could greatly help with the preservation of rural areas and communities. It is suggested that strategic planning of rural residents around a selected village setting as it could assist in creating demand for services such as schools, post offices, Garda stations etc. |
| Regional Economic Planning | Local Authorities should group together to form regions with populations of between 250,000-300,000 people. They need to work jointly together and plan in a co-ordinated way on job creation, industrial planning and using assets and resources that are already available within their region. |
| Planning of Rural Residential Sustainability | The clustering of housing around an existing village or town can help reduce the problem of rural isolation. Getting people back to living in or around towns and villages is more sustainable and will bring about more sustainable communities. |
| Support for Community and Voluntary Sector | The Community and Voluntary Sector plays a valuable role at local, regional and national level and has a vital role to play in protecting marginalised members of society; improving the rural citizen's quality of life. By international standards a significant number of services are delivered by the sector in Ireland. |
| Local Government | Better engagement of PPN's and LCDC's to implement economic and community plans for their area is needed. |

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| Rural Proofing of Policies and Strategies | All policies/strategies development by any Government Department must encompass all aspects of rural life and work with the new Department of Regional and Rural Affairs to ensure their policy/strategy is rural proofed. |
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Overview

Irish Rural Link (IRL) is the national network of rural community groups, representing over 600 groups and thousands of individuals committed to socially, environmentally and economically sustainable rural communities.

The impact of the recession is still being felt in many rural areas and have not seen the same level of economic growth or employment as more urban areas have over the past year.

The Department for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government's Statement of Strategy for 2016-2019 is an opportunity to put in place mechanisms that will help to develop the whole of the country so that no area continues to be left behind. There have been policies and strategies developed by the Department over previous years that had strong recommendations and actions outlined but were never implemented. These recommendations and actions should be re-examined and brought into the forthcoming strategy.

The following are some recommendations for the Statement of Strategy 2016-2019:

Overall Rural Strategies

Irish Rural Link welcomes the appointment of a Minister for Regional Development and Rural Affairs at cabinet level and will be charged with the implementation of CEDRA report and the Rural Charter.

The lack of any functioning overall strategy to inform Government policy on rural development has completely disadvantaged rural communities over the years. The demise of the white paper on rural development coupled with the ending of the National Spatial Strategy has meant that there is no overarching

strategy that can inform all departments on rural policy. National policies are then rolled out without any analysis of the unintended consequences for rural areas.

We propose that a white paper outlining a ten year strategy to achieve regional based growth, both social and economic, is developed and launched and that measures set out in the Programme for Government are implemented.

Regional Development Strategy

The success of the regional jobs strategy is dependent on regional development. There was an 8.6% decline in the number of active enterprises registered in Western Counties between 2008 and 2014¹. In other counties this figure was 1% below that of 2008.

The Regional Action Plans for Jobs Initiative aims to have a further 10-15% at work in each region by 2020. Regions will have to compete for funds and proper infrastructure to attract jobs into these areas. The high cost of transport and broadband and electricity in rural Ireland can deter companies locating to these areas. Local Authority rates are a major factor in determining location of a company starting up and planning permission causing delays.

Regional job strategy needs to take the issues outlined across; rates, planning permission, cost of electricity, transport, lack of broadband, etc. and look how they inform how policy works. There needs to be a regional structure, similar to that of the Gateways in the National Spatial Strategy. Regional Job Strategy must be linked to a regional structure and an overall Regional Development Strategy. Enterprise Ireland and IDA must play a part in funding these regions.

Planning and Development of Sustainable Communities

Proper planning of a rural setting can greatly help with the preservation of rural areas and communities. The decline of rural towns and villages over the past few years is demonstrated by the high closure rate of small businesses,

¹ Western Development Commission (2016) WDC Insights Blog <http://www.wdc.ie/no-of-enterprises-in-western-region-declines-8-6-since-2008/> The Western Counties include; Clare, Galway, Mayo, Roscommon, Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal.

often moving out to the outskirts of the area. With the introduction of the Towns and Villages Renewal Scheme IRL hope it will mean the return of economic activity back to the main streets of the towns and villages that will participate in the scheme. This scheme needs to be supported by whole of Government and joint up working with Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government is needed on this. IRL recommend that strategic planning of rural resident areas around a selected village setting as it could assist in creating demand for services such as schools, post offices, Garda stations etc.

Regional Economic Planning

There is an opportunity now for Local Authorities to group together to form regions with populations of between 250,000-300,000 people. This would enable them to work jointly together and plan in a co-ordinated way on job creation, industrial planning and using assets and resources that are already available within their region. They can collectively look at macro barriers to setting up enterprises or preventing companies locating in their region such as planning, cost of rates, investment in broadband and mobile coverage, energy requirements, etc. By three or four Local Authorities coming together, the cost of providing these services could be reduced. The Buchanan Report from the late 1960's and the National Spatial Strategy were broadly based on this idea. IRL feel that this idea recommendation should be looked at again and given full consideration as it can allow for more fundamental and sustainable planning in regions. The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government must support Local Authorities and other agencies to have the infrastructure in place to develop regions.

Planning of Rural Residential Sustainability

The clustering of housing around an existing village or town can help reduce the problem of rural isolation. Getting people back to living in or around towns and villages is more sustainable and will bring about more sustainable communities. Bringing back empty houses or dwellings above commercial units into use in rural towns and villages can contribute to the renewal of the towns and villages and bringing people back into the centre of these locations.

IRL believe that the recommendations outlined in “*Quality Housing for Sustainable Communities*” and “*Sustainable Rural Housing – Guidelines for Planning Authorities*” published in the mid-2000’s by the then Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government should be re-examined and implemented.

Community and Voluntary Sector

The Community and Voluntary Sector plays a valuable role at local, regional and national level and have a vital role to play in protecting marginalised members of society improving the rural citizen’s quality of life.

By international standards a significant number of services are delivered by the sector in Ireland. This sector needs to be adequately funded and resourced if the new Government are to deliver on their commitments of a ‘*Social Economy*’ and a ‘*Just and Fair Society.*’ Funding Programmes available to the sector to provide valuable services must be protected. Some of these programmes include:

- The **Community Services Programme (CSP)**, funded by the Department of Social Protection and managed by Pobal, provides funding to not-for-profit, social enterprises and community business that deliver services to communities where private and/or public services are lacking, due to geographical location or low demand for service. This is now closed to new applicants. This needs to re-open and be a rolling programme as so many services such as Meals on Wheels could be availing of necessary funding.
- The **Social Innovation Fund** is managed by Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and provides supports to social innovations in Ireland. It is welcome that the Government have committed to increasing the Social Innovation Fund from €5 million to €50 million in the *Programme for a Partnership Government* and this now must be honoured. Social Innovation now hopes to establish a health fund, which would be beneficial to services like Meals on Wheels. This fund must be established and application for the fund is simple and accessible for all to complete.

Local Government

The vision set out for PPN's and LCDC's in local Government was welcome. However, PPN's are working more efficiently in some Local Authorities than in others. More information sharing among Local Authorities on what is and what is not working for them could help those Local Authorities where they are not working as effectively. The Department could act as a facilitator for such information sharing.

As mentioned above, Local Authorities have a role in putting in place the necessary infrastructure and working together to enable regional development.

Rural Proofing of Policy

With the development of a Regional Development and Rural Affairs Minister and Department, IRL call for any policies/strategies developed to encompass all aspects of rural life and work with other Government Departments, including Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government to rural proof any policy being developed that can impact on people living in rural Ireland.

Irish Rural Link the Organisation

Irish Rural Link (IRL), formed in 1991, is a national network of organisations and individuals campaigning for sustainable rural development in Ireland and Europe. IRL, a non-profit organisation, has grown significantly since its inception and now directly represents over 300 community groups with a combined membership of 25,000.

The network provides a structure through which rural groups and individuals, representing disadvantaged rural communities, can articulate their common needs and priorities, share their experiences and present their case to policy-makers at local, national and European Level.

Irish Rural Link is the only group represented at the national social partnership talks solely representing rural communities' interests.

'Our vision is of vibrant, inclusive and sustainable rural communities that contribute to an equitable and just society'

Irish Rural Link's aims are:

- To articulate and facilitate the voices of rural communities in local, regional, national and European policy arenas, especially those experiencing poverty, social exclusion and the challenge of change in the 21st century.
- To promote local and community development in rural communities in order to strengthen and build the capacity of rural community groups to act as primary movers through practical assistance and advice.
- To research, critique and disseminate policies relating to rural communities including issues such as sustainability, social exclusion, equality and poverty
- To facilitate cross-border networking between rural communities

'Our mission is to influence and inform local, regional, national and European development policies and programmes in favour of rural communities especially those who are marginalised as a result of poverty and social exclusion in rural areas.'