Irish Rural Link

27th September 2017

**Irish Rural Link broadly welcomes first Draft of National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040**

Irish Rural Link – the national network representing the interest of rural communities broadly welcomes the first draft of the new National Planning Framework Ireland 2040 – Our Plan, published yesterday, 26th September.

Irish Rural Link welcome that the objectives of the NPF will be applied on a regional basis through statutory Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES’s) so that more regional parity can be achieved. However, we are apprehensive about how the regions are divided. With just three regions being considered; Eastern & Midland Region, Northern & Western Region and the Southern Region, we are concerned that growth and development will be measured by each region as a whole, while areas or sub-regions within these may not be developing evenly.

Taking the Midlands as an example, recent unemployment figures showed an increase in the unemployment in the region to 8.3%, this compares to an unemployment rate of 6.3% in Dublin and 5.8% in the Mid-East. Also, Foreign Direct Investment has been unevenly distributed across the Eastern and Midlands region in the past number of years. Just 4,000 jobs were created by IDA clients in the Midlands region in 2016, compared to almost 100,000 in Dublin region. We would have similar concerns for the Northern and Western region, with counties in the North-West experiencing less growth than western counties.

We would like to regions more aligned to those used by CSO, so that larger towns with these regions can have more of an opportunity to expand and grow and that this will filter out to rural areas. As it stands in the draft, there is a risk that towns in the Midlands, which we are already seeing, will become suburbs of Dublin, with people have to commute long distance to access employment.

IRL continue to call for a Collective Approach to Regional Development whereby, Local Authorities within each region come together to form Regional Development Groups. This will enable them to look at the macro barriers to setting up enterprises or preventing companies locating in their region such as planning, cost of rates, investment in infrastructure etc. A collaborative society is alluded to in the document as one of the visions of Ireland 2040.

IRL will be highlighting these concerns in our submission on the Draft document and are happy to work with Government in the development of this plan.

Ends

**For further information, please contact (anytime):**

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**About Irish Rural Link:**

Irish Rural Link represents the interests of locally based rural groups in disadvantaged and marginalised rural areas by highlighting problems, advocating appropriate policies, sharing experiences and examples of good practice. It has a membership of nearly 600 rural community groups dedicated to sustainable rural development and represents rural communities at a national and international level