Irish Rural Link
4th May 2017

**Irish Rural Link Calls for Protocol on Rural Services ahead of Annual Conference**
Irish Rural Link – the national network representing the interest of rural communities is calling for a rural protocol before any closure of rural services.

The threat to rural services continues to loom; with the closure of Bus Eireann routes on the cards and closure of more Post Offices being proposed. The axing of bus routes and closure of Post Offices and Banks in rural towns and villages over the years have meant these towns and villages have almost disappeared.

We have on the one hand, a new Action Plan for Rural Development, launched at the beginning of the year and a Town and Village Renewal Scheme also launched to rejuvenate and revitalise small towns and villages, while on the other, closures to the very services that are needed to keep these towns and villages alive.

IRL have called for many years for a structured consultation process to take place prior to any closures or loss of services in rural areas. This would involve not just an economic or value-for-money analysis, which is very often the case, but also a social analysis and impact assessment of the same. It would also allow input from the communities affected by closures and allow them to put forward proposals to avoid closures or put forward alternatives.

There needs to be more joint-up thinking by Government and stakeholder to avoid contradiction in policy and to ensure the full implementation of the Action Plan for Rural Development.

The focus of IRL’s Annual Conference this year is Micro Enterprise – A Key to Rural Employment. However, the necessary services need to be in place to ensure that these enterprises can survive and have the opportunity to grow.

IRL’s Annual Conference will take place on Friday 5th May in Sheraton Hotel, Athlone from 9.30am, with registration from 9am. The Conference will be opened by Minister Denis Naughten, Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment.

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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 over 600 rural community groups dedicated to sustainable rural development and represents rural communities at a national and international level.