

Charter for Rural Ireland



A statement of Government commitment to support Rural Ireland's
regeneration and to underpin the future sustainable development of
Ireland's rural communities

January 2016

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Comhshaol, Pobal agus Rialtas Áitiúil
Environment, Community and Local Government

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Vision



Ireland's rural areas and communities are a critical part of Irish society. A large percentage of the national population continues to live in rural communities and rural areas are the location of some of the most important activities of the Irish economy. The strong linkages and interactions between urban and rural Ireland are both complex and critical. This was recognised in the 2014 report of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA), which outlined a vision for rural Ireland that saw a *“dynamic, adaptable and outward looking multi-sectoral economy supporting vibrant, resilient and diverse communities experiencing a high quality of life with an energised relationship between rural and urban Ireland which will contribute to its sustainability for the benefit of society as a whole”*.

The widespread perception that “rural” is synonymous with “decline” is simply wrong. The positive role for rural areas in the development of the Irish economy is unquestionable. However, rural communities involve more than the rural economy and it is important that they provide a nurturing social and cultural environment for their residents, in addition to enterprise and employment

opportunities. During the recent difficult economic circumstances rural communities have felt under particular pressure, with a loss both of economic activity and of many of the services and structures which provided them with social cohesion.

This Government recognises the need for strong support for the country's rural communities and is now making a specific and public commitment to support the achievement of a vision of rural Ireland which reflects its social, cultural and economic needs.

This Charter for Rural Ireland contains specific commitments that will establish frameworks and practices to support the rejuvenation of the rural economy and rural society. The objective of the Charter is to support and accelerate rural Ireland's regeneration and it will be rolled out in tandem with other initiatives supporting overall national development, and in cooperation with relevant rural stakeholders and rural communities. These commitments will be implemented within the context of the national and EU framework for agriculture and rural development, and in particular will work in tandem with the implementation of the Common Agriculture Policy in Ireland, including the Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020.

The commitments in this Charter will ensure that the frameworks and systems are in place to support enterprise creation and development, maintain and restore the rural cultural heritage, support and protect existing towns and settlements, facilitate safe and secure rural communities, and foster an increased quality of life for all rural dwellers.

Full participation of rural communities in decision-making which impacts on them will be supported and encouraged. This will be aimed at ensuring that the people who live and work in rural Ireland are heard and considered at all stages of policy making and implementation. This will not only facilitate a better quality of life for those that live in our rural communities but will also ensure that the rural economy and society is facilitated in maximising its contribution to the sustainability of Irish society as a whole.

In addition to the commitments outlined below, the Government is also reiterating its on-going commitment to individual sectoral policies and strategies that have wide impact. This includes the industry led Food Wise 2025, which sets out a strategy for the Agri Food sector, a sector that has long been recognised as vital to the economy as a whole, and the rural economy in particular. Also specifically included is the National Broadband Plan (NBP), which is a good example of an initiative where the circumstances and needs of rural areas are particularly considered. The

Government's commitment to the NBP is overarching and long-term, and will ensure that all citizens and businesses, including those in rural areas, have access to a modern and reliable high speed broadband network, capable of supporting the economic and social activities of current and future generations. In terms of facilitating and delivering safe and secure rural communities, the work of Joint Policing Committees and national initiatives focussed on rural areas, led by An Garda Siochana, will be critical to tackling issues of rural crime.

The Action Plan for Jobs (APJ), in tandem with the Regional Action Plans, is another critically important vehicle for supporting rural renewal. The Government is committed to the implementation of the action plans throughout the country, including in rural areas, and the commitments outlined here will inform and support the implementation of the actions outlined as part of the Action Plan for Jobs framework.

A National Framework: Rural Development Policy



The Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas recommended the development of a Rural Economic Development Policy Statement. While such a policy statement is important, it is vital that the development of rural areas should encompass wider social and environmental considerations as well as economic issues. Support for rural development requires a multifaceted approach, with full consideration of existing policy frameworks, including and specifically the multi-annual Common Agriculture Policy (CAP)/Rural Development framework. This Government commits itself, therefore, to the development of an integrated Rural Development Policy framework, on which work will commence immediately and be completed by end 2016.

The process for the preparation of this framework will include full and comprehensive public consultations, as well as the involvement of Government Departments, State Agencies and other relevant stakeholders. The aim of the policy framework will be to create systems to support the economic, social and cultural development of rural Ireland. The framework will provide a basis for

all relevant stakeholders to work together to support sustainable enterprise development, job creation, and a high quality of life generally for rural communities. It will include a requirement that all Government Departments ensure that the impact on rural Ireland is fully considered as part of the process of the development of all relevant policies and strategies in the future. Current policies and strategies will also be reviewed and amended if their implementation is shown to be giving rise to a substantial negative impact on rural areas. The outputs from the consultation process will also be channelled into the National Planning Framework process, which is due to commence in early 2016, in order to ensure co-ordinated, effective and focussed rural stakeholder input in relation to both processes. The National Planning Framework will be the long-term, 20 year strategy for the spatial development of Ireland that will promote a better quality of life for all, with sustainable economic growth and an environment of the highest quality as key underlying principles. It will influence regional strategies and development plans as it will be the principal planning policy document for the Country and through this it will provide a clear vision to guide future development and investment decisions.

To kick start the process of developing this integrated rural development framework, the Government will host a National Rural Development Forum in early 2016. Consideration will also be given to hosting this Forum on an annual basis as a method of facilitating structured communication between Government, rural communities and all those interested in the development of Ireland's rural areas.

We undertake that:

- 1. A wide-ranging Rural Development Policy Framework will be developed by end 2016 and will feed into the development of the National Planning Framework due to be completed by end 2016.*
- 2. A National Rural Development Forum will be held in early 2016. This all-inclusive Forum will highlight key issues needing to be addressed in the new policy framework and identify both the opportunities and challenges that lie ahead for rural areas and rural communities.*
- 3. The Policy Framework will include a mandatory system of assessment to ensure that future Government policies are designed with full and stated consideration of their impact on Rural Ireland. In addition, the Policy Framework will seek to maximise current and future opportunities for sustainable linkages between rural and urban Ireland, for the benefit of both, with a view to ensuring that the role of rural areas is fully recognised. This will be accompanied by a commitment to review current, relevant, national policy frameworks in this context, with a view to their amendment if necessary.*

A National Conversation: Effective Communications



The development of policies, strategies and actions to respond to specific issues can be a slow process. Even when there is no apparent tangible progress, this can often be the result of complex statutory or EU requirements that require time to complete.

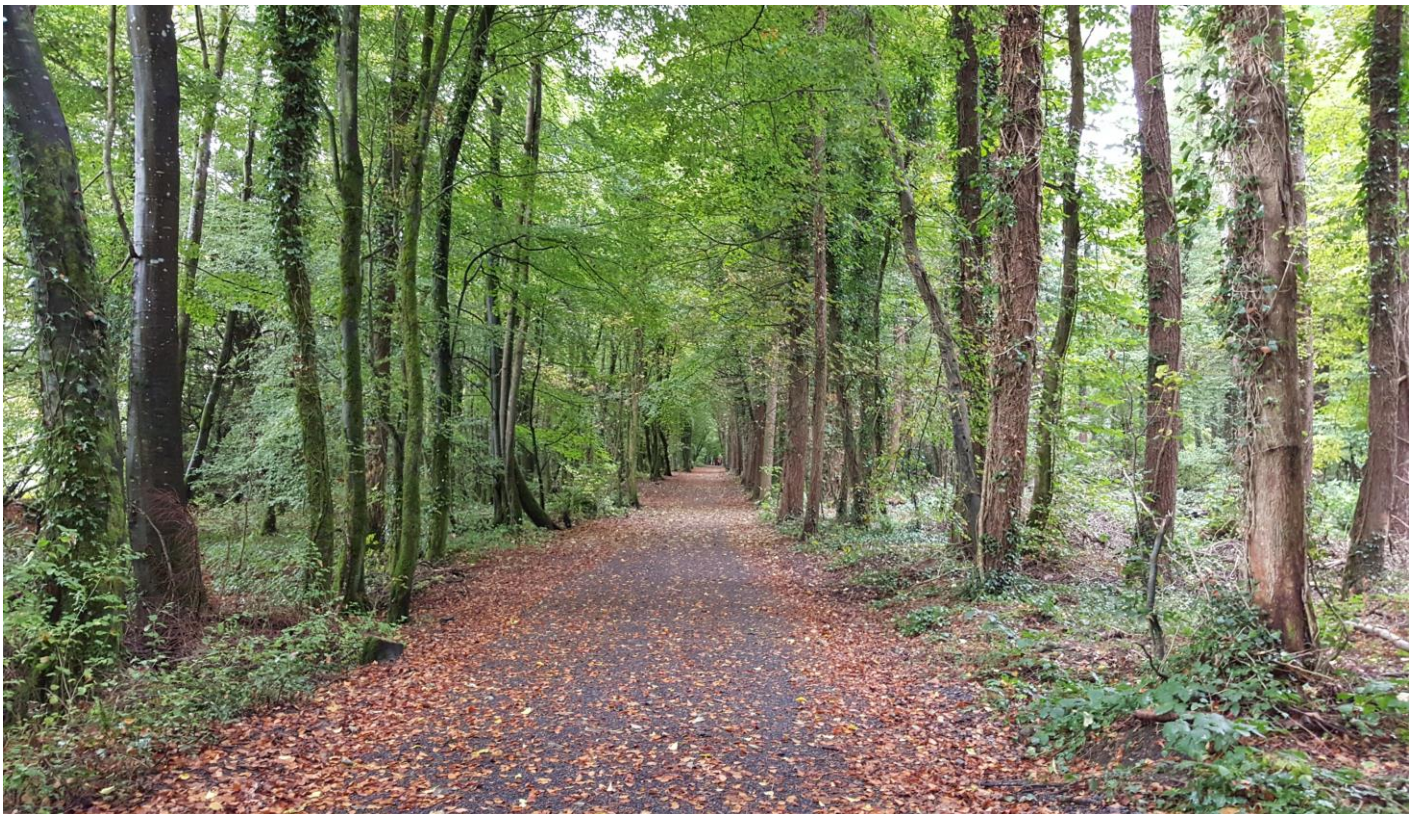
The Interdepartmental Group (IDG), which was established on foot of the CEDRA report, meets on a regular basis and is representative of all relevant Government Departments. While there is a significant level of work being done in different Departments on various aspects of Government policy which affect rural Ireland, progress is often not widely known. It is important to heighten awareness of areas where progress is being made as well as those areas where continuing challenges persist.

Systems need to be put in place, therefore, to communicate to the public what is happening with regard to the development of rural areas. A centralised portal where all aspects of rural development policy and implementation will be brought together, and where progress made is reported on a regular basis, will be established.

We will

4. *Put in place a robust reporting mechanism in early 2016 that will require each Government Department to report on tangible actions and outcomes and challenges as they relate specifically to rural Ireland, on a regular and transparent basis.*
5. *Develop the www.ruralireland.ie website as a central portal for rural issues in early 2016.*

A Local Conversation: Local Authorities and Local and Community Development Committees (LCDC)



The Government has made significant progress on the actions outlined in its policy platform for local government reform, *Putting People First – An Action Programme for Effective Local Government*, particularly as it relates to a more coordinated approach to development at a local level, including the development of rural areas. The vision for local government outlined in *Putting People First* sees it as the “*main vehicle of governance and public service at a local level – leading economic, social and community development delivering efficient and good value services, and representing citizens and local communities effectively and accountably*”.

In this context, Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) have been established in all sub-regional areas and are actively working on their planning frameworks for the coming years. This process will be supported by the publication of a Framework Policy on Local and Community

Development that will work in tandem with the processes at national and local level to maximise the impact of local and community development initiatives.

The aim of the LCDC structures is to develop, coordinate and implement an integrated approach to local and community development which includes the development of rural areas. The LCDCs are independent of the Local Authorities in the context of decision making and are fully representative of their local areas, including elected members of the local authority; local authority staff; representatives of public bodies which provide services in the area; local community representatives and representatives of publicly funded or supported local development bodies. The majority of members must be from the non-statutory sector.

The Government is committed to the full implementation of its local government reform programme, particularly as it relates to a more efficient and effective delivery of supports and services for local and community development, including in rural areas.

The Government is also committed to the development, delivery and roll out of programmes at local level, which will enhance and revitalise rural communities. This includes, the Rural Economic Development Zone (REDZ) pilot scheme, the LEADER element of the Rural Development Programme 2014–2020, which will provide €250 million in financial resources to support the development of sustainable rural communities, and an additional €30 million investment package for rural Ireland, which will be rolled out over the coming months. This funding will support the revitalisation of towns and villages with a view to improving the living and working environment in communities and enhancing their potential to support increased economic activity into the future.

We will

6. *Publish guidelines for LCDCs, which will ensure full and active participation of rural dwellers in initiatives to support economic and community development, and will monitor the implementation of these guidelines. This will be facilitated through structures such as the Public Participation Networks and initiatives such as the Rural Economic Development Zones, the Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs), Local Development Strategies and other ongoing consultation actions.*
7. *In the context of the provision of specific support for enterprise in rural areas, ensure that all LCDCs, Local Enterprise Offices, rural Planning Authorities and other stakeholders collaborate effectively to support enterprise in local areas, including Social Enterprise, and review and seek to eliminate such barriers to rural enterprise as currently exist.*

8. *All LCDCs will be required to actively communicate their work on an ongoing basis. This will include engagement with the central rural development portal, thereby ensuring that their work is represented and communicated at both a national and local level.*
9. *Develop a national database of best practice examples of grant aided rural development projects that are available to the interested parties.*

The Common Agriculture Policy and Rural Development: The International Dimension



The development of Ireland's rural areas is significantly influenced by the international environment. The EU's rural development policy, the "second pillar" of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), is one of the mechanisms which helps the rural areas of the EU to meet the wide range of challenges and opportunities of the 21st century – economic, environmental and social. In line with [Europe 2020](#) and the overall CAP objectives, three long-term strategic objectives for EU rural development policy in the 2014-2020 period are:

- fostering the competitiveness of agriculture;
- ensuring the sustainable management of natural resources, and climate action; and
- achieving a balanced territorial development of rural economies and communities including the creation and maintenance of employment.

The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine is the Managing Authority for Ireland's Rural Development Programme and the Programme is co-funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the national exchequer. EU support for the Rural Development

Programme will average €313 million annually or an aggregate sum of €2.19 billion over the 7-year Programme lifespan. The Irish Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 will be a key support in enhancing the competitiveness of the agri-food sector, achieving more sustainable management of natural and cultural heritage resources, and ensuring a more balanced development of rural areas including their economies and communities.

We will:

10. *Fully implement the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 measures to address environmental, climate change and biodiversity needs at both national and local level, to provide support for the continued viability and competitiveness of the agricultural sector, and to address structural issues such as the age and gender profile of the sector.*

Conclusion

This Charter is a statement of the Government's Commitment to ensuring that the systems and frameworks of Government fully consider the unique nature of Ireland's rural communities when designing and implementing policy frameworks and action plans. Government believes that this will see the vast potential which lies within rural communities being fully realised, thereby delivering improved quality of life in rural communities, and supporting those communities in making a valuable contribution to the recovery of the national economy and the enhancement of social and cultural life in the country as a whole.

