Revitalising Small Towns on the Island of Ireland: The Role of Local Government

Revitalising our Towns: Why Now?

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Revitalising our Towns: Why Now?

- Because, there has never been a better time
  - Now is the first time, that there has been an overall policy alignment across Departments and Local Authorities.

- Local Government Act 2014 directs Local Authorities to re-focus on Community & Enterprise Development.

- The last decade in particular has highlighted the huge dereliction that exists in some of our Local Towns.

- But – it’s not just about dereliction.
Not just about dereliction!

- Many of our small towns have been “suffering” from dereliction for years.
- Exacerbated by the economic downturn / collapse.
- Emigration.
- New reality of www, with online sales, changing needs and demands of society.
- Closure of commercial units – and with them overhead living quarters.
- An obsession with living in the Countryside.
- The slow, painful removal of the “heart’s of towns”

Not just about dereliction! – cont’d

- During the recession – people concentrated on survival
  - Emigration of loved ones
  - Disposable income – at best limited
- People lost interest.
- Sometimes community spirit / hope faded.
- Broader social / economic / cultural need of towns sometimes not developed / promoted.
- Stronger towns – moved ahead and took advantage.
- Debt and desperation.
So what has changed?

Everything

• People / communities - see some light at the end of the tunnel.

• Focus of LAs changed - Community & Economic Development.

• Policy alignment.

• But above all
  - Communities have started to help themselves
  - Power of the people – new energy
  - Available funding matched with voluntary contribution – (both with energy and interest ).

Policy Alignment

• Putting People First – Action Programme for Effective Local Government.

• The Local Government Reform Act 2014.

• Local Community Development Committee (LCDC).
  - Brings a more joined-up approach to the implementation of local and community development programmes and interactions, pursuing an integrated approach to local community based services across providers and delivery structures.

• Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP).
  - Promote the local and community development through a more coordinated and collaborative approach.
Policy Alignment - cont’d

• Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)
• Public Participation Networks (PPNs)
  - Primary means of civic society to engage with County Councils at the Municipal District Level.

Vision Statement
• Rural Ireland will become 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.

Policy Alignment - cont’d

• Rural Economic Development Zone (REDZ)
• Town and Village Regeneration Scheme
• Town Teams – Roscommon County Council
• County Development Plans
  - Local need
  - Finite ground water assimilative capacity.
  - Sustainability.
  - Town centres / villages – ideally placed.
Action Plan - For Housing & Homelessness

• Pillar 5: Utilise Existing Housing

  Key Objective: Ensure that existing housing stock is used to the maximum degree possible – focussing on measures to use vacant stock to renew urban and rural areas.

• Housing Agency - Vacant Housing Purchasing Initiative

• Vacant Housing Repair and Leasing Initiative (RLI)
  - RLI will be a new mechanism for Local Authorities to provide up-front grant aid to prospective landlords to meet reasonable regeneration works to upgrade the properties to current rented standards.

Action Plan - cont’d

• Removing regulatory barriers to re-use
  - A commitment to review the planning legislation framework around conversion and re-use for residential purposes, with a view to allowing change of use of vacant commercial units in urban areas, including vacant or under-utilised areas over ground floor premises without having to go through the planning process.

• Village and Rural Renewal
  - “.......... a requirement to facilitate a sufficient supply of houses for purchase, rent and social housing throughout Irelands towns and villages.

• Unfinished Estates
Conclusion

• A real opportunity to revitalise our towns and villages.
• All the pieces of the jigsaw are in place.
• Communities are ready, energised and want to improve their towns and villages.
• A great sense of “Pride of Place” exists throughout our communities.
• Several funding opportunities available.

Finally

• All of this will require a different mindset.
• A coordinated, integrated approach by Local Authorities especially in Planning and Housing Units.
• Establishment of “Town Centre Planning Units”.
• A singular focus;
  - For Roscommon - A Clear Purpose - to make a difference to every small town and village in the County.
• An acceptance that “one-off” housing will be the exception rather than the norm.
Thank You