Rural Policy: A Coherent Approach or Mis-mash!

Eugene Cummins,
Chief Executive of Roscommon County Council

Rural Policy: A Coherent approach or Mis-mash

Rural Society in Transition! – to where?

• Have we a *Coherent Approach*?
• Or is it a *Mis-mash*?
• Many potential challenges
  • Herds of *Elephant(s)* in the Countryside!
• Do we continue to go backwards
• Or is it forward with a *plan* – what *plan*?
A Coherent Approach

Overview of NPF Strategy

• Reversing town/village and rural population decline
• Development in rural areas
• Identifying and meeting housing needs in countryside
• Connectivity: broadband, energy, transport and water / waste water networks
• Innovation: energy, food tourism (Linking)

A Coherent Approach – cont’d

• Regional Action Plan(s) for Jobs
• LECP, LEADER, SICAP, LCDC
• Town & Village Renewal
• REDZ, CLÁR etc, etc
• Fáilte Ireland – 4th Brand – “Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands” – everyone included - at last
• Greenways, Blueways, Peatways
• RSES
• Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines
• NDP
Mis-Mash?

• Political System – Democracy
• Democracy = People = East of Country
• NDF = Regional Infrastructure = easier to get to the Dublin?
• Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES)
• Town & Village Renewal / Growth
  - More People
  - More jobs
• One-off housing – Political influence – not enough people for towns.

Mis-Mash? – cont’d

• Local Government Reform Act (2014)
• PPN – community engagement – volunteerism – energising communities – increased capacity
• A lot expected from communities! – a lot given but we expect too much
• Town Centre Planning / Renewal
  - Where are the Plans
  - Where are the Resources
Mis-mash? – cont’d

• Wind Energy Guidelines
• Solar Energy Policy
• Audits, audits, more audits
  - Process more important than outcome?
• Town & Village Renewal Funding
  - To be spent tomorrow (or the day after at the latest)
• Community Planning V Spatial Planning
• Broadband
• City dominance
• Local Government Funding Model

Coherent Approach or Mis-mash?

• Overall there is very definitely a coherent approach and whereas it cannot be specifically defined in a singular legislative context, it is for the most part there
• Major alignment and realignment
• NPF aligned with NDP
• Action Plans for Jobs
• LEOs – very successful – with much success to follow
• PPN – Community activity
• LEADER, Government Funding
• RSES – all very positive, but
Challenges – cont’d

• Building / Creating community capacity
• New focus of Local Authorities – Community and Enterprise Development
• Tourism Development
  - Mid Ireland neglected in the past
  - Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands
• Roll out of greenways and blueways
• Town centre decay
  - New uses for commercial outlets
• New mindset from all

Challenges

• Town Centre Renewal
• Vacant Properties
• To encourage more people to live in Towns
• RSES not yet developed
• Job Creation
• Broadband
• Wind (Green energy policy)
• One-off housing
• To create a more appropriate Government funding model
Our biggest Challenge
How are we going to get rid of them?
(The elephants that is)

1. Urgently develop **Integrated Town Plans** encompassing all aspects of local culture, creativity, leisure, greenway, blueway

2. Local Authority Community & Enterprise Units need to be completely redefined / redesigned
   - Local Authorities must get more involved in all aspects of Community Development
   - A much more “hands-on” approach
   - A **Developmental Role** in every sense
   - Develop community schemes
   - More active role in Fairs & Festivals
   - Assist Communities to apply for grants
   - Help to prepare BoQs etc, etc

3. Dedicated Community Personnel to include Engineers and Architects
   - To plan and design public realm schemes
   - To plan cycle routes
   - To develop access points to fishing, walking etc
   - The supervision of works
   - Health & Safety – we cannot expect our communities to have this expertise or indeed understanding
   - Risk management and project management
   - Guidance and hand-holding (where necessary)
• Communities
  - Deliver a lot
  - Have changed significantly
  - Significant but limited capacity strengths
  - We sometimes make them feel isolated

• But we (Local Authorities) expect far too much from them
  - They cannot be expected to design realms
  - Complicated application forms
  - Health & Safety
  - Governance

• They need a lot more help
  - They need to see a lot more of us

• Let them do what they are good at
  - Tidy Towns
  - Pride of Place
  - Story Telling
  - Pubs, restaurants, craft shops
  - Food, crafts, heritage outlets
  - B&B’s, tours – “fáilte”
  - To be there – living and working
  - To nurture well-being and sense of family
  - To say hello or sing a song
Governance becoming an issue
- Municipal District structures need to be strengthened
- Stringent Accounting Procedures need to be adhered to
- Bureaucracy needs to be accepted rather than resisted
- The governance of *Town Team* becoming an issue
  - There comes a point in time when the town team have their work done – time for developers and investors to move in – with oversight / framework by LA
- MD Structure must get more involved in *development*
- Greater Administrative Support for Elected Members
- The pre- eminent role of the Elected Member to be embedded in Community Development

**Priorities**

- Continue to improve our Towns & Villages
- Continue to nurture and develop *Pride in every Place*
- Support Litter Control
- Public Realm
- Town Centre Renewal
- Greenways, Blueways, Peatways
- Continue to improve Visitor Experience
- More Local Jobs, Less Travelling
Key Messages

• The Developmental Role of the Local Authority to be fully developed, resourced and *accepted*

• Local Authorities must get more involved in all aspects of Community Development – far more *hands-on*

• Governance must be strengthened MDs to be the centres of administration – Town Team Model to be absorbed into the MD Governance Structure and Administration
  - If Governance is not fully perfected and adhered to we will all end up doing nothing else other than defending one legal challenge after another

• Local Government Funding Model (must be revisited)

Key Messages – cont’d

• Town Centre Development Units – to be established in LAs

• One-off Rural Housing – will have to be controlled
  - Not sustainable – damage in many respects

• Town and Village Water and Waste Water Infrastructure to be improved so as to more adequately allow for rural regeneration (in a sustainable and controlled way)

• LEO Supports to be enhanced (especially in rural counties so as to make them even more successful than they already are

• Broadband – will it ever be delivered?

• Green Energy – sound Guidelines
Thank You