



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.
- Report of the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas - **CEDRA** Report – Energising Ireland’s Rural Economy.

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

