

Shaping Rural Policy

Towards a new rural policy: the next 10 years



Northern Ireland Rural
Development Council

Fact...

- Rural areas account for 96% of our land mass.
- Nearly half of all people who live in Northern Ireland live in rural areas - that is nearly 800,000 people.



Future Taking Shape for Rural Northern Ireland

A number of important policy developments are taking shape which will determine the way rural Northern Ireland is supported in the future, and the role it will play in the region.

The Northern Ireland Rural

Development Council (RDC) believes its vision can help contribute to a successful rural policy able to meet the challenges of the next 10 years. This leaflet is designed to contribute to current policy discussions impacting on

rural development. It sets out a number of key principles that RDC believe to be core to the future shape and direction of rural policy and delivery. These principles are supported by the results of a rural stakeholder

survey and conference hosted by RDC and the Northern Ireland LEADER Network (NILN).

The potential for a positive, forward looking policy for rural areas is there, and RDC will work to ensure it is achieved.

Who We Are

The Northern Ireland Rural Development Council (RDC) is an independent organisation operating at a regional level across rural Northern Ireland.

The RDC was established in 1991, under the DARD Rural Development

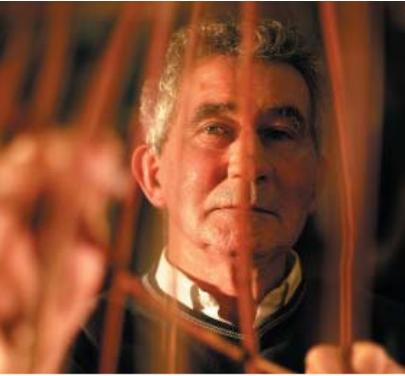
Programme, and is presently managed by a 13-member Council comprised of rural community representatives drawn from the private sector, local government, ministerial appointees, environmental interests, community banking and the agriculture industry. This voluntary

input provides strong corporate governance to a staff team of over 30.

As a Council RDC wants to encourage a flourishing and sustainable rural Northern Ireland and believe that rural communities play a vital and significant role in achieving this. Our activities are based

on the principle that local people are best placed to identify their needs and propose solutions.

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The Basis of a New Rural Policy

Northern Ireland's rural areas represent an important asset base for the region as a whole. The diversity of natural and cultural resources they contain, if properly nurtured and their use carefully encouraged, represent considerable economic potential for a confident, distinct and competitive Northern Ireland.

The need to foster a common and imaginative vision for rural communities and local development which makes better links between farmers and non-farming members of rural communities and between indigenous community members and incomers is of particular importance.

Proactive, vibrant local communities mean a flourishing productive countryside. Rural policy needs to ensure that rural communities continue to flourish with access to a full range of services, facilities, housing, education and jobs. This calls for better integration across government in progressing rural development issues. No one department has responsibility for rural Northern Ireland and thus, all departments have powers and functions, which affect those in the countryside.

Delivery of support to rural development has tended to be complex with a wide range of partnerships and organisations involved.

An important challenge in taking forward rural development will be the way these different organisations work together to benefit rural communities.

Rural policy should continue to recognise the value of a strong community infrastructure and the need to support local delivery actions through a bottom up approach. Equally important, rural policy must also find a way to link the grass roots bottom up approach with top down policies and practice, ensuring local development actions are a key part of the wider regional vision for a confident, distinct and competitive rural Northern Ireland.

RDC Principles for Shaping Rural Policy

Rural in the Region

- Rural should be seen as an Asset to the region not a liability
- Rural Policy should seek to integrate rural as part of wider regional development not as a separate concern
- Rural policy should be cross-governmental

A Broad Vision for Rural Development

- Rural is not just agriculture: Rural Policy, particularly in marginal agricultural areas, should encourage greater

diversification of rural economies and rural enterprises

- Rural Policy should encourage stronger links between farming and non farming stakeholders
- Rural Policy should value and promote sustainable rural communities and community infrastructure

Clear roles and a Strategic Focus for Delivery

- There should be a separation between policy and delivery (but good working links between the two)

- Actions should be evidence based but innovative
- Effective rural development can best be achieved through a partnership between local delivery and a regional body facilitating the links from bottom to top and across government



Meeting the Challenges:

Responding to the Review of Rural Development Policy

The Northern Ireland Rural Development Council (RDC) and Northern Ireland LEADER Network (NILN) sought views from a range of rural stakeholders through a combination of survey and conference to help inform current rural policy discussions.

Survey results indicated:

- 68% of respondents think the needs of rural areas are not being met by current arrangements for delivery and support
- 65% of respondents support the view that the development of policy and delivery of funding should be separated
- 89% of respondents believe that rural development actions should not be delivered centrally by Government
- 61% of respondents support the suggestion that rural development actions should be delivered locally with support from a regional organisation
- 63% of respondents support a regional body operating outside Government providing strategic direction to local delivery structures
- 70% of respondents believe that the delivery of rural regeneration and development measures should be separate to the delivery of agriculture, forestry, land management and agri-environment measures

Conference feedback indicated:

- There was total agreement that the key principles outlined by RDC were appropriate and relevant
- Participants were particularly supportive of the concept of a rural asset approach with the provision that this was managed in a way that recognised and supported marginalised groups
- There was support for the idea of equitable distribution of intervention across urban and rural
- It was agreed that new farming and non-farming relationships needed to be forged with a better balance reflecting broader rural development aspirations
- Participants voiced strong support for cross-governmental buy-in although some felt that this would only happen under a central directive, with authority
- All discussion groups recorded overwhelming support for the idea of an independent regional body and in particular that there should be a separation of policy and delivery

The Northern Ireland Rural Development Council (RDC) receives its core funding from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. RDC is a delivery agent under the Rural Development Programme.