

Rural

Real Understanding of Rural Affairs and Local Issues

Issue One

Autumn 2004



Did you know...

Nearly half of all people who live in Northern Ireland live in a rural area - that is nearly 800,000 people.

Source: NISRA

A home in the Country?



'There's no richer crop for any field than a crop of bricks for it to yield.'

One-off housing in the countryside has become a lively source of debate. Those arguing for it believe that it reflects a cultural distinction of Northern Ireland and that people should be able to exercise their right to live there; and those arguing against, contest that rural Northern Ireland is losing its character and is being relentlessly urbanised in a manner that is unsustainable.

The Northern Ireland Planning Commission initiated & facilitated by the National Trust recently called for a moratorium on all applications for single houses within the countryside. A radical step indeed but one that does recognise that things may have gone too far from a sustainable development point of view.

On the other hand the difficulty young people face in securing affordable housing within rural Northern Ireland has become a serious issue and one which a 'moratorium' would not solve. RDC highlighted the extent of the problem in its 'Picture of Rural Change' Reports (2002 and 2003) and raised particular concerns about areas such as South Down (Rostrevor) and parts of North Antrim. These lifestyle areas, emerging within some of the most scenic parts of rural Northern Ireland, are in danger of pushing out local people because of high land and building costs. This will bring an increased cost for us all as the fabric of rural society becomes eroded and changed in a way that will have long term impacts which as yet we do not fully understand.

In June of this year, Regional Development Minister, John Spellar, MP, launched a consultation paper on 'Sustainable Development in the Countryside'

Achieving this will not be an easy task for either policy makers, politicians or those of you who are trying to obtain planning approval for your 'dream home' in the countryside.

The task for farm families is made more difficult when reducing returns from traditional farming are factored in, particularly where profit margins have slipped.

'What crop would you plant to get the maximum return for your family?'

The short term gain from selling off a piece of land for building is obvious but the long term impact this will have on the countryside is another matter.

This simple dilemma illustrates more than anything else the interdependence between planning policy and agricultural and rural policy. If one of the impacts of a reformed agricultural policy is to squeeze some farm families to the point that they are forced to sell off their inheritance then something needs to be changed and changed quickly.

If we really do believe that rural areas present a positive asset base for the entire region then we can surely devise a planning policy which measures the contribution of the house and its occupants to the local area, its environment, its economy, its social fabric and community cohesion.

Rural planning policy also needs to make the links with urban planning policy. The fact that so many of our

DID YOU KNOW...

...that the number of single dwellings (in the countryside) being approved has increased from 1,790 in 1991/92 to 5,628 in 2002/03 and the number of replacement dwellings (in the countryside) being approved has increased from 607 in 1991/92 to 1,283 in 2002/03.

politicians have expressed concern about the inadequate housing targets within draft area plans will do little to relieve the pressure on the rural asset base.

Rural planning policy needs to be more than a single policy statement for all rural areas. There is no one single rural area but a sub-set of different regions with different assets and constraints. We need a policy which recognises that difference and seizes the opportunity it presents for us all.

Good and imaginative approaches to village and hinterland planning together with promotion of a 'rural design' for individual houses could add to the attractiveness of the countryside. RDC suggests the need for the identification, encouragement, promotion and full implementation of 'rural design' guidance suited to different rural areas. Practical guidance on how the design of new homes could link with the countryside is necessary both in relation to one-off build and housing developments.

RDC believes the devolution of planning powers to reformed public administration would begin to ensure local involvement in rural planning and ultimately local ownership. Only then might we all begin to recognise that: "The richest crop for any field may not be a crop of bricks for it to yield."

Welcome to Rural:

Welcome to RURAL, the new and exciting newsletter from the Northern Ireland Rural Development Council (RDC) published bi-annually bringing you up-to-date news and developments on rural affairs and local issues.

This very first and special edition brings together our annual report achievements for the year and looks at the current policy challenges facing rural life such as housing and the countryside; closure of rural schools; the review of rural development; the single rural fund and the recent announcements on water and rates reform. We bring you our views and understanding of the issues and how these and other developments may impact on 'rural'. We invite others to feed into the discussion and encourage feedback in helping to form a real understanding of the issues.

In this edition we focus specifically on the health and well-being of rural communities and share with you the work of agencies and groups across rural Northern Ireland. We bring you news on new developments and on the programmes and projects we are working with and how these benefit rural communities. We also use this edition to explain who we are and what it is we do. We do hope you enjoy reading RURAL.

If you wish to contribute an article or story to our next edition to be published Spring 2005 or provide feedback on this one please get in contact. Our details are listed below.

Thank you for reading.

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.

What We Do

We are involved in the delivery of support services, both financial and practical, to organisations involving people locally in planning regeneration projects that meet the real needs of rural communities. In addition, we are also involved in gathering and analysing data, research and information from a range of sources, sharing of information and building effective partnerships.

This unique combination of delivery and research by a broad partnership based organisation makes a significant contribution to rural policy development and delivery in Northern Ireland.

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Contents: 02 Rural Reality
Focus on Rural Retailing

03 Rural Agenda
Putting Rural Affairs first

4-5 Our Achievements
Annual Report 2003:2004

6-7 Rural Reality
Focus on Rural Health & Well-being

08 Rural Developments
What's new and what's on offer?

Rural Reality:

Takes a look at what is happening across rural Northern Ireland - helping to implement projects and programmes is the responsibility of our delivery side (Operations and Programmes). Here we look at Rural Retailing and on page 6 & 7 we focus on the Health & Well-Being of rural communities. We bring you examples of projects we have funded together with sharing the work of others.

The Local Shop... At the Heart of the Community



The local rural shop is recognised as having a central role to play in the commercial and social life of local communities. They each provide a focal point for the local population and assist in providing and creating a sense of community.

The RDC developed Rural Retail Support Programme, funded jointly by the EU Peace II Programme and International Fund for Ireland, aims to help the local rural shop to improve sustainability by offering business development support and grant assistance.

The Programme wants to help retain and develop retail services in rural areas. It recognises that the local rural shop has struggled to continue to provide basic services to their communities throughout the period of conflict. By encouraging and supporting the development of rural retail, communities will benefit from improved access to services and a strengthening rural economy.

The Programme is currently working with 52 rural retailers from across Northern Ireland with a second round of applications currently under assessment.



On Board...

In each edition we will introduce you to some members of the 13-member RDC Council. In this issue we feature our Chair and Vice Chair Caroline Breakey and Leslie Craig. We also present the first three Council members in alphabetical order.



Caroline Breakey (Chair)

Appointed by DARD in September 2000 Caroline was successor to the RDC Chair in December 2003.

cbreakey@rdc.org.uk

Caroline is a keen community activist who has been involved in the voluntary and community sector for over 20 years. She is Assistant Director with YouthAction NI and has particular responsibility for policy development and the management of projects focusing on young people in rural communities. Caroline's interests on Council cover women, youth, community development and community relations.



Leslie Craig OBE (Vice-Chair)

Leslie is a Director of the Food Safety Promotion Board and Dennet Interchange and is a former Chairman of NIAPA (1995- 1999). He is employed with Family Farm Development, which is engaged in reskilling and diversification of farm families in Co. Tyrone. Leslie's interests include agriculture, community development, community relations, education, farm families and social development.

lcraig@rdc.org.uk

In alphabetical order here are the first three...



Alison McCullagh

Alison is currently Head of Development at Omagh District Council. She is actively involved with individuals, groups and networks in rural areas. She has a broad knowledge and understanding of the Rural Development Programme. Alison's interests include arts, culture, community development, enterprise, training and women.

amccullagh@rdc.org.uk



Dr Arthur Mitchell MBE

Arthur worked as a rural general medical practitioner for almost 40 years. For the last 25 years he has been an active environmental campaigner throughout Northern Ireland. He is a former founding member of the Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (Northern Ireland) and is a former Chairman of both the Mourne Advisory Council and the Mourne Committee. At present Arthur is Chairman of the Mourne Heritage Trust and of the River Valley Development Association.

amitchell@rdc.org.uk



Brian Howe

Brian is Chief Executive of the Ulster Community Investment Trust (UCIT). He has an accountancy background with a career in banking. He was originally seconded from First Trust Bank for a two-year period to assist in the establishment and running of UCIT and is now working directly with the company. Brian's interests include community development, finance and enterprise.

bhowe@rdc.org.uk

Watch out for further profiles in our next edition.

On The Move...

We also use this opportunity to acknowledge those Council Members on the move. The following Members are recognised for their contribution and support to the Council over the past year.

Joanna McVey, Gerard McGuckin, Eileen McAuley, Issac Hanna, John Dallat

Rural Store of the Year Award

In recognition of the Rural Retail Support Programme a new category of 'Rural Store of the Year' was added to this years prestigious Neighbourhood Retail Awards. This was the first year 'rural' was recognised as a separate and specific award giving us cause for celebration.

Also celebrating were three of the Rural Retail Support Programme participants who beat off the competition to be short-listed for the title. These were Tom McGleenon, Armagh, Paul Holder, Fermanagh and Gortnaghey Community Association, Derry.

Tom McGleenon, Cranmore Stores

Tassagh Co. Armagh

Tom McGleenon is the owner operator of a small, yet significantly important, general grocers shop in Tassagh, Co. Armagh. The shop has existed for some seventy years in its current location having been run by three generations of his family. The locality and shop have suffered considerably throughout the Troubles, yet survived. The historical nature of the shop and provision of essential goods and services to the rural community gives it pride of place in the local area.

Paul Holder, Midway Service Station

Letterbreen Co. Fermanagh

Midway Service Station, located in Letterbreen, Co. Fermanagh is owned and operated by Paul Holder. The shop has existed in the location for some forty years and has been operated by a number of retailers but remained under developed and lacked investment. Since taking over Paul has undertaken a journey of improvements and investment ensuring that the shop remains a focal point in the community.

Gortnaghey

Community Shops Initiative

Gortnaghey is a small but energetic community located some 4 miles from Dungiven. The community created an association to address the social and economic needs of the area. Among the

objectives of the Community Association was the reopening of the local shop. The shop had been closed for almost a year and its closing left the community feeling more isolated and deprived, due to the lack of essential services. As a result of their commitment, energy and drive Gortnaghey once again have a shop that offers essential goods & services to the rural community.

This Programme will re-open. To be eligible, applicants must meet funding criteria and demonstrate that they are:

- Rurally based
- A fixed outlet
- Sole provider of service in an area
- Located normally at least 3 miles from any town/village with a population greater than 5,000

And the Winner is...

The overall award and title of 'Rural Store of the Year' went to Tom McGleenon, with Paul Holder and Gortnaghey finishing joint second. Congratulations all!

Winners of Rural Store of the Year Paula and Thomas McGleenon (Grocery Shop, Tassagh) with Helen Kirkpatrick, Board Member, International Fund for Ireland.



Stamp of approval for Broughderg Post Office

Another Rural Retail Support Programme participant had cause to celebrate. This time it was Anne McDermott of Broughderg Co. Tyrone who picked up the prestigious award of Community Post Office of the Year.

Anne who has been a postmistress since the 1980's was delighted to hear that she had won the Northern Ireland final and a place in the overall national award ceremony which will take place in London in November of this year.

What makes Broughderg Post Office special is the relocation of the service within a lettable unit of the new community centre. As well as supporting Anne on the Rural Retail Support Programme, RDC were able to support the development of this centre through its Local Regeneration Programme with funds from the EU Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme and the International Fund for Ireland.

This project is a good example of how one group is working to ensure that services remain at the centre of their community!

We congratulate Anne on her success and wish her well for November.

For more information on the Broughderg Community Resource Centre contact Michael Kelly on 028 867 66980

For more information on the Rural Retail Support Programme contact Teresa Canavan or if you wish to register an interest in applying to a future round contact Helen Ryan on 028 867 66980



Rural Agenda:

Putting rural affairs at the top of the agenda is a key priority for RDC and falls within the remit of our Policy and Innovation Research Unit. In this section we look at some of the key issues currently impacting on the rural agenda.

Hands Up For Rural Schools!



Some rural schools are facing the end of term as Government plan to close those low in numbers.

Commenting on the rural schools debate Caroline Breakey Chair RDC said:

"Rural schools are a part of rural community life. These schools are vital in encouraging families to stay in our smaller communities. Schooling in Northern Ireland is very different from that of the UK. Rural schools are part of our culture. The closure of a school can have a devastating impact on a community leading to a sense of lost identity and belonging.

We do recognise the tough decisions that have to be made however RDC would ask what other solutions have been considered in helping to keep rural schools alive?

Schools and school buildings are a great

rural asset. Alternative options for sustainability must be considered, for example introduction of breakfast clubs; after schools or sharing of resources.

RDC activities are based on the principle that local people are best placed to identify their needs and propose solutions. We believe this principle follows through and that local decisions on the future of local rural schools require local politicians and communities to engage in helping to find the right solution."

The 2003/04 Annual Rural Proofing Report, published by DARD sees the Department of Education confirm that there are 60 primary schools in Northern Ireland with enrolments of less than 40 pupils. The future of a number of these schools is under review and RDC would recommend that the review process is broadened to include meaningful consultation with a wider group of rural stakeholders. RDC would be happy to use its resources to assist in this process.

The minimum 'viability' figure, which the Department sets at 86 pupils for a primary school and 300 for a secondary school in a rural area, is too high a threshold for rural communities to achieve and we feel this needs to be critically evaluated.

Address Rural Disadvantage Through Rural Advantage!

DARD recently commissioned Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) to conduct a comprehensive review of governments approach to rural development policy. As well as examining how DARD might shape policy and delivery in the next round (when European monies will be much reduced from their current level) PWC were also asked to look across government to see how far rural needs were being met from the policies of other departments. This review is not the definitive answer to the future of rural development policy, but will be an important document influencing DARD's thinking. As such, the RDC and

other rural stakeholders have made substantial efforts to inform the document. Northern Ireland's rural areas represent an important asset base for the region as a whole. The natural, cultural and social resources of land, people and place represent considerable economic potential for a confident, distinct and competitive Northern Ireland.

A copy of the RDC response to the consultation is available on the RDC website - www.rdc.org.uk or alternatively a hard copy can be made available if you contact AnneMarie Loughran on 028 867 66980

Beacon Communities Initiative



The Beacons Initiative, a pilot RDC research project, seeks to provide a co-ordinated look at life in total in rural areas through the structured collection of primary data. In other words finding out from rural people themselves what it is like to live and work in a rural community.

To do this we established a number of Beacon Communities. We looked at the type of communities and tried to get a good cross section of involvement to include farm and non-farm interests; dispersed and village settlements; geographic spread and religious mix.

We sought to find out what makes a rural community healthy, not in medical terms, but ability to survive and be sustainable. Just how does a rural community survive? Is the local shop important, what level of services are required, is there too much or too little development and how is this managed, what do people say about culture and diversity of rural areas and what are their thoughts on the future of rural life.

We worked in 6 rural community areas across Northern Ireland with the Ballylaw Farmers Group in Strabane, Belleek village in west Fermanagh, Claudy near Derry, Dervock, near Ballymoney, Mullaghbawn in South Armagh, and seven hamlet communities in the south east of the region between Lisburn, Banbridge and Newcastle.

Nick Mack, Acting Director of Policy and Innovation Research Unit said:-

"The results of the work have proved very informative to RDC's policy thinking. The report is due out very soon and we will be discussing and promoting the key policy issues in future months with government departments and rural stakeholders. We look forward to continuing to work with our Beacon Communities in the future and to continue to inform policy, planning and programmes.

We believe that it is only through this process of research and listening to what rural communities have to say that we can truly begin to impact and shape rural development policy, rural proofing and new programme development."

The findings of this work will be published and made available shortly. For more information contact Martin Delaney on 028 867 66980



Flood of Fury Over Water and Rates

The recent announcement of the basis on which water charges will be set has been met with a flood of fury from politicians, trade unions, interest groups and the public.

Under the proposals household water and sewerage charges will consist of a standing charge of £55 each for water and sewerage plus a variable element, which will be based on property value. Bills to households will therefore vary depending on the value of their property. For example, a property with a value of £60,000 will have an annual combined bill of around £235 whereas a property valued at £250,000 will have an annual charge of around £620 or £1.70 per day.

The proposals include a number of measures to help low income households, however there is a widespread feeling that these do not go far enough.

For more information on both these consultations please contact Sharon McFlynn on 028 867 66980

A Policy Paper on the Reform of the Domestic Rating System has recently been issued for public consultation.

Traditionally domestic rates are calculated based on the rental value of a property. The new system will be an individual assessment of the capital value of each residential property using sales evidence from the housing market. Valuation is already underway and Government has stated that these valuations would not necessarily mirror estate agents' valuations and property selling prices. Values will be set in January 2005 for five years and published in 2006 ready for the introduction of the new system in April 2007.

It is intended that a rate relief scheme which will complement the current housing benefit system will be introduced. The scheme will help those on low incomes who are just above the housing benefit threshold. In addition, a standard 25% reduction is proposed for people with a disability whose property has been modified because of their disability.

Commenting on both proposed charges to water and rates Martin McDonald Chief Executive RDC, said:

"These are clearly major issues which will impact on households and indeed businesses. Details of both these reforms have generated much alarm and confusion among the general public. Both charges relate to the value of property and even though a relief system is intended we are concerned about how these charges might impact on those living in rural areas where residential property values can be very high for reasons beyond the control of home owners. In these and many other areas there may be little correlation between property value and ability to pay. A closer examination of how both systems will impact on the 43,000 registered farmhouses is also required. Furthermore the combined effect of the water, sewerage and change in rates policy could pose a threat to the sustainability of some businesses particularly rural businesses. An integrated impact assessment of both these proposals will be needed and we will undertake "rural proof" them. This will involve a thorough examination of the proposals to determine the potential impact in rural areas. **"**

Will the CAP fit?

The Single Farm payment - What will it mean to farming, farmers and the wider public?

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has undergone complete transformation. No longer will farm subsidies be paid on the production of stock or crop, indeed there is no compulsion to produce. Public monies

now payable to farmers will ensure not only that animal health and welfare are protected but importantly that the landscape and environment maintained by Northern Ireland farmers adheres to best practice and is compliant across the gambit of European Environmental and Welfare legislations.

The Single Farm payment therefore delivers what society increasingly demands; a clean green environment producing quality foodstuffs.

A transparent system of audit and checking is set in place through the cross compliance of 18 EU Directives.

Agriculture will forthwith operate in a free and global market scenario, no longer constrained nor indeed protected by the Single European Market.

Farmers will be free to produce and respond to what the market demands. In such context there undoubtedly will be casualties but also challenge and opportunity.

Single Rural Fund - Simplified Delivery for Rural Development

RDC is calling upon government to set up a new single rural agency to co-ordinate the delivery of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme.

RDC is calling upon government to set up a new single rural agency to co-ordinate the delivery of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme.

The draft EU Rural Development Regulation was published by the European Commission in July 2004. The proposal aims to reinforce the EU rural development policy and to greatly simplify its implementation.

The current review of rural policy in Northern Ireland is likely to make significant recommendations concerning delivery of any rural development aspect of the new Single Rural Fund.

RDC firmly believes that change is inevitable and the current raft of agents involved in rural development delivery is too complicated and not good value for money. RDC believes that government is best placed to develop policy but not deliver rural development.

Northern Ireland needs a single rural affairs agency outside government that can act between local players and

The Single Rural Fund proposals make suggestions about how future EU monies might be split across the three key priorities of:

1. Agricultural Competitiveness
2. Environment, and
3. Rural Development.

government at a regional level and relate fully to a future reformed local government system. RDC has an expertise in delivering rural development funds and can ensure money is being targeted where it is most needed and delivered within EU timescales. Our experience in the past has been that close co-operation between regional and local levels can be used to best effect the administration of rural development funds. This co-ordinated and partnership based approach can also be used to gather evidence to ensure policy is working properly and under an expanded single rural agency could add real value and make a difference to rural policy proofing in Northern Ireland.

RDC supports the ring fencing of specific funds for rural development but believes it needs to be greatly enhanced with additional regional aid monies to ensure adequate resources

are available to tackle the issues facing rural Northern Ireland in the years ahead. Farm families and the wider rural community should not be competing against each other in a bid to secure their future but working together to path find solutions to their mutual and interrelated futures.

It is important that sufficient funding provision is achieved for Northern Ireland. This cannot depend on Modulation (which should be directed at assisting farmers to diversify in providing a range of economic and social benefits from the countryside) and will require firm lobbying to ensure other sources of funding are included. What will also be important is that funds are available for both agri-environment (measures targeting the sustainable use of land) and wider rural development, so that one can complement the other in realising rural potential.

The European proposals also call for a 'rural forum' to provide strategic guidance to such an approach. RDC believes it can contribute uniquely to that forum through its delivery function where the learning from rural research, innovation and information gathering, can contribute significantly to the 'rural proofing agenda' in an objective and meaningful way.

A Message from the Chair



This is my first year as Chairperson of The Northern Ireland Rural Development Council (RDC) and I would particularly like to pay tribute to Joanna McVey who retired as Chair in November 2003. Joanna served as a member of RDC since 1996 and was Chair of Council from 1998 until 2003. She led Council and staff through some very significant changes during her tenure and left behind a strong and highly motivated organisation.

It has been a challenging and exciting first year in post. I have had the pleasure of engaging with colleagues within both government and social partnership based groupings. On the government side I have seen the major changes to the agricultural support system within Northern Ireland being debated fully within the Ministerial Stakeholder Forum. It is to the credit of those who participated within that Forum that constructive dialogue has led to the emergence of 'The Single Farm Payment' agreement. The impact of those changes will take some time to work through and we should not underestimate the likely impact and the need for continued support to farm families and the wider rural community.

Rural development has now been placed centre stage and will, I firmly believe, become one of the key drivers for sustaining rural areas into the next decade. The Rural Development Programme must now move beyond the narrow focus of European funding regimes to become a key player in overall regional policy within Northern Ireland. My fellow Council members and I have also had the pleasure of visiting many local community and voluntary organisations to both launch and celebrate a wide range of projects that will undoubtedly make a very valuable contribution to rural communities for many years to come. I am continually inspired and enthused by the commitment shown by our social partners to improving the quality of life for rural communities throughout the region.

RDC is a strong partnership based organisation representing a wide range of rural stakeholders and the voluntary effort of Board members combined with a very strong staff team has managed to deliver significant support – both financial and practical – to rural areas over the last year. Parallel to this has been the evidence-based analysis provided by our Policy and Innovation Research Unit to a wide range of interest groups. The 'Picture of Rural Change' reports have taken statistical data and converted this into meaningful trends and analysis, easily understood by our stakeholders. The learning from both the delivery and research sides of the organisation have combined to effect significant changes to what we do and will continue to shape how we move forward in the months and years ahead.

We have been calling for some time for government to commit to a Rural White Paper for rural areas in Northern Ireland and were particularly pleased that during our Rural Affairs Summit in October 2003 the major political parties within Northern Ireland agreed to 'pledge' their support for integrated government action through a Rural White Paper. Unfortunately the political momentum for such an approach has been somewhat diluted by the suspension of devolved government, however at the time of writing this foreword I see increased optimism in this regard.

The issues facing rural areas are complex and varied although the asset base provided by rural Northern Ireland in terms of economic potential, landscape resource, social capital and community and cultural assets provide an excellent launch pad to devise a new approach to rural policy within Northern Ireland. The Ministerial Stakeholder Forum in February 2004 moved to initiate the recruitment of consultants to review rural policy and while this fell short of a commitment to a Rural White Paper, we fully endorsed the review on the basis that it would take a broad and holistic look at rural affairs rather than have a single focus on any one rural sector.

We await with interest the outcome of that review and indeed the return to devolved administration. The combination of both can only serve to put the rural affairs agenda at the forefront of the political map and the Programme for Government. I strongly believe that we are at the dawning of a new age for rural Northern Ireland and this can only help to ensure that we maximise its assets for the benefit of those living and working there and indeed the whole region.

This newsletter, published in conjunction with this year's Annual Report serves to both summarise how we have met our targets over the last year while highlighting many of the issues faced by rural communities. It also shows how rural communities have used RDC support to pathfind their own solutions to their own problems and realise the potential afforded by Northern Ireland's positive asset base. The newsletter also brings together some of the key policy issues affecting rural life today and most likely in the years ahead.

Finally, I would also like to pay tribute to our highly motivated and energetic staff team and the leadership of our Chief Executive, Martin McDonald, as they have achieved another year of excellence in serving and supporting rural communities across Northern Ireland. I am also indebted to my fellow Council members for their support and hard work in helping us to meet our targets.

As Chair of Council I pledge my commitment and that of my fellow Council members to work closely with Government and everyone interested and committed to rural areas to ensure integrated government action and sustainable outputs that will help rural Northern Ireland realise its potential and make a significant and valuable contribution to the development of the region.

Caroline Breakey
Chair
Northern Ireland
Rural Development Council



THE YEAR IN PHOTOS

A Centre of Rural Expertise

RDC achievements against this priority are facilitated through the Policy and Regional Development Directorate. This Directorate has continued to seek better ways to understand and support the sustainable development of rural Northern Ireland, to promote its interests in policy submissions, and to build its capacity to help others through mapping, primary and action research, better evaluation, and a growing information library.

The Directorate (now known as the Policy and Innovation Research Unit) comprised a staff team of Nigel Flynn (Director), Julie Gilpin, Anne Marie Loughran, Nick Mack, Ruairi Maguire and Sharon McFlynn.

This year has been an important one for policy consultations in which we have invested considerable effort. During the year two key pieces of work completed were the Picture of Rural Change Report 2003 and the Access to Services Report in association with QUB. The launch of the Rural Change Report at Westminster saw RDC bring the issues affecting rural Northern Ireland to the centre of government in London. The Chairman of the Countryside Alliance Sir Ewan Cameron assured the invited audience, which included many of Northern Ireland's Westminster MP's that the issues of concern to Northern Ireland's rural communities were in many ways similar to those being raised at a UK level. These issues were further examined in public when RDC hosted a major rural affairs summit in Fermanagh in the Autumn of 2003 when Lord Haskins delivered a keynote speech on the future of rural development and agriculture within the UK.

We continue to explore better ways to understand and support the sustainable development of rural Northern Ireland and to build its capacity to help others through mapping, primary and action research, better evaluation and a growing information library.

An Efficient & Effective Organisation

RDC achievements against this priority are facilitated through Corporate Services, finance, audit and administrative systems. The Directorate continues to implement a system of internal control based on the principles of Cadbury, Turnbull, and Nolan to identify the principal risks to the achievement of the strategy, to evaluate the nature and extent of those risks and to manage them effectively, efficiently and economically.

RDC's internal control is based on a framework of regular management information, administrative procedures including the segregation of duties, and a system of delegation and accountability.

This Directorate is comprised of Joy Hadden (Director Corporate Services), Leigh Brown, Kirsty Burton, Esme Charles, Ruth Dallas, Alison Frizzelle, Dawn Gregg, Canice Mallaghan, Anne O'Neill, Marian Teague and Jane Thom.

It is refreshing to be able to report such positive news with regards to the financial situation of the Programmes within RDC. With continued hard work, tight controls, and a focus on objectives at all levels, such a healthy report should prove to be the norm rather than the exception.

Staff are recognised as a critical resource within the organisation and the most important aspect of the RDC's approach to this is its commitment towards achieving the Investors in People (IIP) standard. The organisation has also introduced a mechanism to manage and guide continuous improvement. This has been initiated through a formal benchmarking exercise completed by the Centre for Competitiveness.



Objectives

- To increase the RDC's influence in integrating rural development principles and values into regional policy and decision making through a process of Rural Proofing
- To consider and promote strategies for rural development through the establishment of a rural baseline initiative
- To strengthen rural development partnerships by the provision of strategic support

Achievements & Progress in 2003-2004

- Completion of an EQIA on the methodology for appointing members to RDC Council
- Completed Annual Review Report for submission to Equality Commission
- Preparation of case study report and third Picture of Rural Change report (2004)
- Rural Affairs Summit Oct 2003
- Launch of Services in Rural Northern Ireland Report 2003
- 49 internal GIS mapping exercises completed
- 54 external GIS mapping exercise completed
- Research and evaluation support to 5 partnerships or organisations
- Participation in 12 forums/steering groups, and a wide range of conferences and seminars
- 18 policy submissions
- Addition of 600 items to the RDC information library

Objectives

- To integrate the principles of quality, best value, equality and TSN into the planning and delivery of all activities
- To ensure a sustainable financial base for the organisation
- To manage and develop staff as a key organisational resource
- To ensure the highest standards of corporate governance and public accountability
- To disseminate information about the principles plans and performance of the RDC to all stakeholders
- To develop and implement an appropriate Corporate ICT strategy

Achievements and Progress in 2003/2004

- Grants committed £5,538,841
- Grants payments of £1,979,370
- Annual Statement re: Equality/TSN produced
- Implementation of Financial Procedural Manual
- Implementation of Financial MIS
- Deliverance of Finance Matters Training to recipient funded groups (63)
- Participation of CIPFA regional Northern Ireland Committee
- Implementation of Internal Human Resources Manual
- Commitment to Investors in People standard
- Staff/Council Residential
- 12 Council/Executive Sub-Committee Meetings held
- Council Members training against the Cadbury & Nolan Principles
- Audit Control Manual approved & implemented
- Implementation of Corporate Governance Manual
- Implementation of a Risk Assessment Management Programme
- Implementation of Audit Service Level Agreement Level
- Series of Press Releases
- Updating of Website
- Implementation of corporate ICT Strategy

...AND HOW WE PROGRESSED



A Diverse and Prosperous Countryside

RDC achievements against this priority are facilitated through the delivery and implementation of programmes and projects supported by the EU Building Sustainable Prosperity, Peace II and International Fund for Ireland Programmes.

A combined staff team of 14 working across the Programmes and Operations Directorates have helped to meet the objectives under this priority. They are:

Programmes – Teresa Canavan (Director of Programmes), Martin Delaney, Oliver Donnelly, Olga Gallagher, Albert Hunter, Joyce McMullan Helen Ryan and Robert Shaw.

Operations – Tracey McNally (Director of Operations), Aileen Donnelly, Eamon Gallogly, Michael Kelly, Gail Lees, Eamon McMullan and Valerie Stewart.

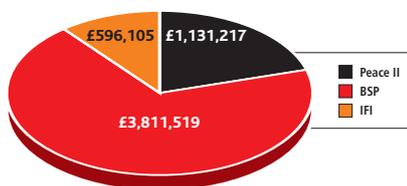
As we approach the end of the current funding commitments under EU Peace II and reach the half way mark of the Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme we begin to witness the results and impact of the work of the many rural communities across Northern Ireland, examples of which are featured in this newsletter.

The overwhelming response for funding from rural communities and retailers for a wide variety of projects continues to encourage us. We believe that in many ways this endorses the effectiveness and approach of RDC in delivering funds to rural communities.

Our partnership with the International Fund for Ireland has strengthened over the period providing much needed financial support and assistance in helping rural communities turn project plans into reality. We look forward to continuing our work with rural communities across Northern Ireland and in helping these communities to realise their potential.



Committed Grant Aid 2003/04 Grants committed during the period



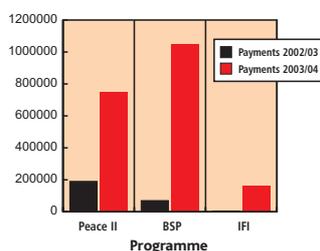
Objectives

- To contribute towards the development of a vibrant rural economy
- To increase capacity of local organisations to engage in rural regeneration
- To sustain the employability of disadvantage groups
- To promote peace and reconciliation in rural areas
- To contribute to enhancement of rural tourism

Achievements & Progress in 2003-2004

- 3 new Measures opened (rural retail, tourism and economic infrastructure)
- 200 applications received
- 109 applications to full assessment
- 200 groups assisted to develop & implement projects
- 59 Contracts issued
- 62 Retailers supported under the Rural Retail Support Programme
- 40.5 jobs created/sustained
- 63 groups attending Induction Day Training, Drawdown & Finance Matters
- Nominated Delivery Agent for the International Fund for Ireland's Rural Development Programme April 2003
- 1 Peace II Annual Implementation Report completed February 2004
- 1 Peace II Distinctiveness Report completed February 2004
- Celebratory conference and 'Picture of Rural Peace' report published February 2004
- 8 Best Practice Guides commenced
- Development of a rural communications platform (e-rural)
- 2 new programmes developed (Vibrant Villages, Rural Employability)
- 29 Project launches & associated press coverage
- TV and Radio coverage

RDC Grant Payments Grant payments during the period



Chief Executive's Review



Having reached mid-term in our strategy 2001-2006 we can look back on the past year with pride in our achievements and the focus of our work. The mid-term point is an important milestone in any strategy. It provides an opportunity to review and take stock of progress.

It was therefore appropriate and timely that our parent Department, the Department of Agriculture & Rural Development (DARD) should undertake an independent review of Council, its form, function and performance. PA Consultancy were appointed with work beginning in January and I am pleased to report that the Review Team concluded that RDC should 'consolidate its current position' within the rural development family.

This endorsement of Council, performance and achievements are welcomed. Council and staff have embraced the positive recommendations made by the Review Team and the Department, which will effect continuous improvement in the years ahead.

Our role as key delivery agent in the DARD Rural Development Programme is firmly recognised as both funding programmes (EU Building Sustainable Prosperity and Peace II) are well advanced and on target.

Reporting under the strategic priority of 'A Diverse and Prosperous Countryside' we believe the results of our delivery speak for themselves. You can see the level of jobs created and sustained, the number of projects supported and the extent to which our funding is committed.

Our work on delivery however doesn't just end at the contract stage. We believe in providing practical support and guidance to applicant groups and promoters. We also believe this should build on the wealth of good practice and knowledge of communities themselves. This development and learning process has embedded a system of best practice, which is demonstrated within a series of workbooks and online materials.

The Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) as Managing Authority for the Peace II Programme has worked closely with RDC and partner organisation the Rural Community Network (RCN) over the past year to ensure achievement against programme objectives. In February 2004 'A Picture of Rural Peace' was launched by RDC and RCN celebrating awards of some £3.65 million to 148 projects and support for 62 retailers. The event successfully showed that rural communities were willing to play their

part in contributing to a more peaceful and prosperous rural society.

Delivery of public monies requires strong and effective governance and risk management together with financial and human administrative procedures. RDC Corporate Services Directorate reporting under the strategic priority of 'An Efficient and Effective Organisation' has over the past year met its targets in this respect and this has been verified by independent audit and assurance statement by DARD Internal Audit Division.

The delivery and corporate services functions meet only part of our corporate strategy. The strategic circle is only closed through the outputs from the Policy and Innovation Research Unit. As a learning organisation both the delivery and research functions combine to effect policy change and new programme delivery.

RDC has also used its research and development function to inform government, politicians and interested parties on rural policy and programmes.

In June 2003 RDC launched its 'Picture of Rural Change' report and brought rural affairs to the heart of government in Westminster. The launch within Parliament Buildings, London saw the chairman of the Countryside Agency Sir Ewan Cameron endorse the RDC call for integrated government action at both a UK and Northern Ireland level to tackle the broad and complex range of rural issues. The message was received by an invited selection of Northern Ireland Westminster MPs.

In October 2003 RDC hosted a major Rural Affairs summit in Fermanagh where Lord Haskins, the UK governments rural advocate addressed a large gathering of rural stakeholders and left the key message of 'local solutions to local problems'.

Later that month RDC achieved a major breakthrough when the four main political parties – SDLP, Sinn Fein, DUP and UUP backed RDC's call for a Northern Ireland Rural White Paper. The culmination of this effort resulted in the Minister for Agriculture and Rural Development Ian Pearson MP initiating a major review of rural policy in Northern Ireland in Spring 2004 and we await eagerly the outcome of that study.

In writing this review of progress it strikes me as Chief Executive that rural development and rural policy have now moved centre stage. We must expect and hope that the ministerial review of rural policy builds upon the effects of the past to ensure the positive asset base of rural areas is both protected and enhanced for future generations.

In conclusion I would like to take this opportunity to thank both Council and staff for their continued support over the year. The European Union, Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the International Fund for Ireland have enabled us and many other stakeholders to make significant progress and we look forward to their continued support in the year ahead.

Martin McDonnell

Martin McDonnell
Accounting Officer & Chief Executive
Northern Ireland
Rural Development Council

Building New Relationships



up with RDC in an unique partnership aimed at benefiting the rural community of Northern Ireland.

Working together this partnership aims to support projects and programmes which contribute to the social, physical and economic regeneration of rural areas.

Speaking on behalf of The Fund, Mr William McCarter Chairman said:
"The Fund is very pleased to be working

in partnership with the Northern Ireland Rural Development Council, a partnership which is to our mutual benefit in that we can not only pool our resources in terms of finance, but also in terms of the expertise of our staff. The real beneficiaries, of course, are the local communities who work with us to develop projects which bring long term social and economic benefits to disadvantaged rural areas".

In April 2003 the International Fund for Ireland (The Fund) teamed

The full set of accounts and list of projects supported during the year 2003:2004 are available on the RDC website – www.rdc.org.uk or alternatively if you wish to receive a hard copy please contact Aileen Donnelly on 028 867 66980

Rural Reality:

We all consider good health to be a blessing but for many people in rural areas having access to services and facilities that support good health can be a challenge. Included below are just a few of the projects that we have supported under the EU Building Sustainable Prosperity, Peace II and International Fund for Ireland Programmes. We also share with you the work of others.

Rural Health Partnership

 In rural areas those experiencing mental health problems are often faced with additional difficulties in accessing social, training and employment opportunities and feelings of isolation and exclusion are heightened by their location.

Helping sufferers to combat and overcome these feelings is the objective of one Partnership group based in rural South Armagh.

The Rural Health Partnership is designed to target men and women between the ages of 16 and 65 with a particular focus on young men, carers, children living with mental illness and farming families.

The project, which is funded under the EU Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme by RDC, supports the needs of rural communities and access to services.

To date the project has facilitated 30 referrals and assisted 150 people through a range of 16 training classes such as health promotion and information initiatives including gardening (pictured above), computer training, reflexology, stress management, photography, yoga, basic English and Maths.

In addition staff are currently engaged in the development of a men's health screening clinic in the



area aimed at attracting the over 40-age group. So far the Partnership has dealt with 100 clients in roving health clinics at livestock sales and sporting clubs.

The project which has helped to forge links with the local doctors, community pharmacists, Health & Social Care Group and Newry & Mourne Mental Health & Social Services Trust, puts its success down to the 'people' centred approach.

For further information this Project contact Michael Kelly on 028 867 66980

Child and Parent Support Programme

 This two year pilot project was developed by Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health which has over 50 years experience in providing day care, supported housing and advocacy services in the community for those with mental health difficulties.

The Child and Parent Support Service (CAPPS), a collaborative project with the Children's Service Directorate of Homefirst Community Trust, offers support to families with children who have emotional and/or behavioural disorders and are living in rural communities within the Magherafelt

District Council area Co. Derry.

Families with children who have emotional or behavioural disorders are often socially isolated and have poor support networks; many have a range of complex family circumstances such as depression, other mental health issues or abuse experiences. CAPPS aims to help those families maintain the progress made during the statutory interventions by providing short-term support within the family home or the community and acts to help families develop long-term support networks. The service is tailored to meet the needs of each client family however the importance of building relationships through offering choice,

dignity, respect, developing trust and confidence between staff and the client is the foundation of the service.

The range of support available includes developing practical skills and assistance within the home, offering information and advice; encouraging the client to use the range of community services available, such as Rural Transport Services, women's groups, crèche facilities, leisure, recreational and educational opportunities.

For more information on this Project contact Michael Kelly on 028 867 66980

Healthy glows in Loughgiel

  The Community Association in Loughgiel, North Antrim is a great example of a rural community group making huge impacts within its locality.

In 2001 the Group Members looked on proudly as the Millennium Centre was officially opened providing a range of services to the community.

Today the Centre provides training to over 100 people on a weekly basis, with many full-time mums availing of the opportunity to learn new skills while their children are cared for in the playgroup. Youth provision is high on the agenda with children from the playgroup and out of schools club enjoying a varied curriculum of physical activity and music. The

children also have the opportunity to go on excursions and health promotion is incorporated into the daily routine with healthy breaks and lunch, along with site visits from the local dentist.

The Senior Citizens Club is also hugely popular, encouraging independent living with a luncheon club on a weekly basis and Meals on Wheels service for the housebound. A 'supporting people' scheme has started which is a befriending senior citizens service, which helps to ensure older people in the community have access to other services, for example ensuring access to hospital appointments.

Getting a healthy glow in Loughgiel is no problem where an average of 600 people use the fully equipped fitness suite and sports hall every week. The Loughgiel Community Association

approach to serving the whole community has helped local people gain valuable personal skills and an appreciation of their own potential and that of the community.

Access to employment and jobs locally are also important to the Group. The Centre houses a number of business units and currently employs 27 people. With the continued support of the EU Building Sustainable Prosperity Programme and International Fund for Ireland RDC is supporting the Group to develop new workspace with a further 12 jobs in the pipeline.

For more information on this Project contact Eamon McMullan on 028 867 66980

A 'Creel' Success

 Helping their community to keep active is the Derrygannon Craft & Heritage Society Co. Fermanagh.

The dispersed rural and mountainous nature of the area means that many people, particularly those older, feel isolated and lonely.

In recognising this, the Group sought to bring people together around a common interest helping to encourage locals to get active, learn new skills and develop new relationships. The 'Creel Project' was established with a focus on the revival of old traditional crafts. Workshops were run on creel making, woodturning, straw mats and the restoration of carts and traps.

Targeting the wider rural community including the unemployed, part-time

farmers, youth, women and older people, this project has enabled over 240 people to get active.

Getting involved has meant that local people were given the opportunity to mix with others and develop self-confidence. Neighbouring communities are no longer strangers as new relationships and friendships have formed. Already the community have taken part in exhibitions and parades showcasing their work and achievements.

This project has not only helped to revive the traditional skills of the area but to revive the cross-border contacts, relationships and friendships which once existed.

For more information on this Project contact Olga Gallagher on 028 867 66980

Lottery cash boost

Northern Ireland's most disadvantaged communities are set to get healthier and active thanks to a new Active Lifestyles Programme from the Big Lottery Fund which will provide £2.1 million to fund innovative physical activities to boost

the health of people across Northern Ireland. Local communities can apply for small, medium or large lottery grants to fund a range of activities such as walking history clubs for older people, dance sessions, wheelchair based activities and cycling clubs.

Application packs for the Active Lifestyles programme, which is open to community and voluntary groups, can be obtained from the Big Lottery website on www.biglotteryfund.org.uk or by contacting the information team on 028 90 551455.

Accessing Services... Transport and Health



  According to the RDC 'Services in Rural Northern Ireland' Report 2003 access to key health services such as the doctor, dentist, pharmacist and hospital accident and emergency unit were highlighted as a major issue for many people living in rural areas.

Building on the findings of this report and the needs of local communities through the Access to Services Measure

and the Rural Retail Support Programme, RDC have supported over 30 rural community groups and 50 rural retailers to ensure that those living in rural areas have access to a wide range of services.

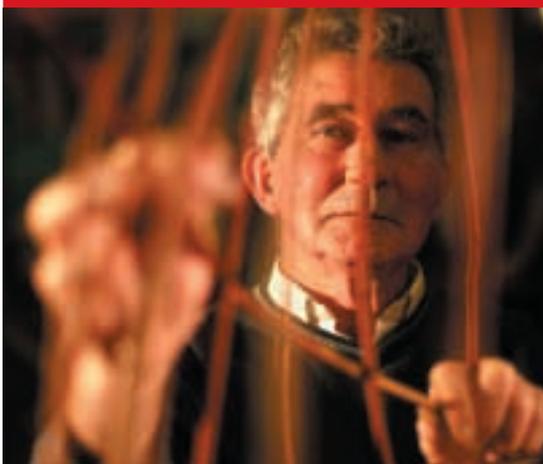
This has involved the provision of services locally through outreach projects and programmes; the innovative use of ICT in the delivery of products; the relocation of post office services within community buildings; access to ATM provision locally and the availability of local transport schemes in helping rural dwellers to access town based services such as health clinics.

One such transport scheme is the Cookstown Rural Community Transport Rural Routes Project. One of 9 rural projects funded this project provides low cost accessible transport to registered groups and individuals living within Cookstown district.

For many people this affordable and demand led service ensures that they attend vital health appointments. Patrons are collected at their home, taken to their appointment and taken home after their treatment. This service is sensitive to individual needs and trained drivers take care to ensure the comfort and well-being of their members throughout. Staff are certain that the service they provide impacts directly on the health and well-being of their users.

For more information on this Project contact Michael Kelly on 028 867 66980

For information on other such local transport services in your area contact the Community Transport Association on 028 90 403535



Rural Reality

Something to Bark About



Imagine the village green, children laughing and playing, then suddenly they shout "oh yuk... dog poo". Ruins the scene, doesn't it?

The issue of dog fouling in public places has become a major 'pet' hate for many local communities across rural Northern Ireland.

As well as being unsightly and unpleasant a major health risk is posed by the dogs' mess, especially for younger children. If the faeces are left on parks, paths, verges, sandpits or play areas they can be picked up on shoes, children's hands, the wheels of pushchairs, wheelchairs etc. The risk is that the parasite, toxocara, found in dog faeces can end up in the bloodstream, through minor cuts or other forms of ingestion. Serious symptoms can occur of which blindness is the most serious. This affects around 100 people per year. Other symptoms include headache, fever, sore throat, aching limbs, abdominal pain, sleep disturbance, listlessness, pneumonia and asthma.

ref: Linnagh Council - Environmental Health

One community, based in Newbuildings Co. L/Derry, identified the issue of dog fouling as a major community concern and decided to tackle the problem. The local community group, Newbuildings Community & Environmental Association, initiated plans to regenerate a 6-acre site in the village to include a walking trail (pictured) and 4 'dog toilets'. Not only does this address the issue of dog fouling but also promotes healthy living and encourages people to get 'on the move'. The group also intend to run a Responsible Dog Ownership Education Programme, which will cover canine issues such as dog fouling, identification tags and neutering.

The dog-walking trail was officially opened on 6th July 2004 and to date is a path well trodden. It is a good example of how a major health risk has been tackled at a local level.

For more information on this Project contact Albert Hunter on 028 867 66980



Armagh & Dungannon Health Action Zone (ADHAZ) provided free health checks for farmers attending Clogher Farmers Mart during last winter. The initiative was funded by the Armagh and Dungannon Local Health and Social Care Group (LHSCG).

Each week a nurse provided blood pressure, cholesterol and additional health tests together with advice. The Decent Food For All team covered healthy eating; Action Cancer provided Information / advice on gender-specific cancers and a smoking cessation clinic was on site. The scheme at Clogher not only provided a much greater awareness of health issues, but it also put farmers in a position to make positive changes towards a healthier lifestyle and encourage preventative action. ADHAZ are hoping, if funding is made available, to make a 'repeat prescription' available this winter.

For further information contact Wendy at Armagh & Dungannon Health Action Zone Tel: 028 8772 9017.



The Rural Health and Social Wellbeing Partnership was established in 1999 to promote local health and well-being and

improve the quality of life in the Cookstown and Magherafelt District Council areas. The aims of the partnership are to raise awareness, self-esteem and confidence in relation to mental health issues and to reduce levels of stigma around mental health issues.

The team have run a range of meetings so far including Schools Mind Out Module, Winning New Jobs, Farming Families Bureau, Outreach Support Service, Men's Health, ASIST Training, Community Health Programmes, IT Directory of Services (magherafeltconnect.com), Cross Border Programmes with Partner Mind Matters in Raphoe and Support to Ethnic Minorities.

The Rural Health and Social Wellbeing Partnership team are based in Magherafelt and can be contacted on Tel: 028 79 301334 mail to: wellbeing@rthswp.co.uk

World Mental Health Day

Mental illness is one of the largest single health problems in our society. World Mental Health Day, an annual event to raise awareness of various mental health issues, was held this year on October 10th in an attempt to de-stigmatise and promote mental wellbeing. This year focused specifically on the identification, treatment and prevention of emotional and behavioural disorder in children and adolescents.

According to the World Health Organisation 4,000 people take their own lives in the UK each year and over 250,000 people are admitted to psychiatric hospitals. (Source WHO 2004).

A recent report by the Northern Ireland Association of Mental Health (NIAMH) revealed that in addition to the pain, suffering and disability the estimated economic and social costs of mental illness in Northern Ireland amounted to nearly £3 billion last year – which is more than the total spend on health and social care for all health conditions. The report also showed that Northern Ireland has a higher overall prevalence of mental health problems estimated at 25% higher than England. (Source: Counting the Cost 2004).

To find out more about mental health visit the World Mental Health day website at <http://www.wmhd.net> or contact Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health Tel: 028 71 329836

Linking Housing and Health

Traditionally, housing has been seen as involving a 'bricks and mortar' approach, designed to provide shelter. However, the Housing Executive has always recognised that housing impacts on many aspects of our lives. In recent times, the relationship of housing to health and well being has been more widely acknowledged. Indeed, the Government's 'Investing for Health' programme recognises that decent housing is one of the main drivers in promoting the good health and well being of both individuals and communities. The Housing Executive is therefore working closely with others to contribute to health improvement. Through its rural

policy 'Places for People', the Housing Executive assists those living in rural areas, particularly more vulnerable households, to live independently for as long as they have the wish and capacity to do so. Work to achieve this includes:

- Provision of grant aid for home improvements. During 2003/4, this included assistance to 1170 private residents through Disabled Facilities Grants and over 2,400 major adaptations to Housing Executive properties outside the Belfast and Derry City Council areas.

- Through the Supporting People programme, the Housing Executive is also actively considering the housing support needs of rural dwellers and the development of 'floating support' services will offer significant potential to address the needs of vulnerable people in rural areas.
- Fuel poverty has a significant impact on the health of both urban and rural residents. As the Home Energy Conservation Authority for Northern Ireland, the Housing Executive is committed to improving the energy efficiency of homes of all tenures, so

helping address one of the main factors contributing to fuel poverty.

Further information on any of the above can be obtained by contacting one of the Housing Executive's local District or Grants offices, details of which are in the Phonebook, or by accessing the Housing Executive's website at www.nihe.gov.uk. (the website includes a specific section on Supporting People).

Don't Worry, B Happy

Encouraging and promoting positive mental health with rural teenagers was the key focus of a workshop funded under the Rural Development Programme EU Building Sustainable Prosperity entitled, Don't Worry, B happy, held recently by YouthAction NI in partnership with the Rural Health Partnership, Women and Family Health Initiative, Southern Area Health Promotion and the Community Development Health Network. The workshop used different methodologies including drama and art to help young people to explore and identify different ways of developing positive mental health. GAA player Paul Hearty, of the Armagh County team and Gareth Steenson, Ireland Under 21 Rugby Player both spoke about stress and how they cope with their own pressures whilst trying to achieve sporting excellence. They both then helped to introduce a 'fun' element into the programme by kick starting an It's a Knockout Competition.

For more information about YouthAction's "Creating Links" Project Tel: 028 30 868734

Seasonal Safety

Remember the clocks have gone back one hour. While that may mean an extra hour in bed it's also time to rethink your personal and domestic security. Use some common sense techniques in the dark evenings.

- Be a good neighbour – check regularly on elderly neighbours
- Household burglaries usually rise in the winter months so ensure your house is well secured: lock doors & windows; don't leave keys under a mat or plant pot; leave some lights on the radio so it looks and sounds like someone is home; secure outhouses and outbuildings to ensure they are not raided or tools in them cannot be used to break into your house.
- In these dark evenings remember to switch on lights on your vehicle
- Take extra care to watch out for pedestrians
- When out walking wear light reflective clothing and carry a torch – keep to main routes which are lit with street lights

Access All Areas

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 requires service providers to make changes to the way they deliver their services from 1st October 2004. Service providers are required to make reasonable adjustments to the physical features of their premises to overcome barriers to access.

Service providers include anyone who provides a service to the public or section of the public. Physical features include steps, stairways, kerbs, parking, building entrances and exits, toilets, washing facilities, lighting, ventilation, lifts and escalators.

For further information or advice on the implications of the DDA for service providers or employers, contact ADAPT Northern Ireland Tel: 028 90231211 Email: cshiels.adapt@ndnet.co.uk or Disability Action (Headquarters) Tel: 028 90297880 Email: hq@disabilityaction.org

Rural Developments:

Looks to the future and what new developments are in the pipeline for RDC along with information on what other organisations currently have to offer rural communities.

RDC Resources

RDC have a series of resources, many of which are accessible from our website www.rdc.org.uk

- A Picture of Rural Peace 2004
- A Picture of Rural Change 2003
- A Picture of Rural Change 2002
- RDC Strategy 2001 - 2006
- RDC Annual Reports
- Services in Rural NI 2003

RDC Workbooks:

- Learning Communities
- Finance Matters
- Good Group Guide
- Participatory Village Planning: Practice Guidelines Workbook
- Developing community based environmental projects
- Developing community based culture heritage and local identity projects

RDC have also recently responded to the following consultations:

- EQIA of a Proposed New Formula for Allocating Resources to GP Practices in Northern Ireland (DHSSPS)
- People & Place: Neighbourhood Renewal in Belfast (DSD)
- Causeway Coast & Glens Master Plan (DET)
- Equality Monitoring Beneficiary Data- Equal Opportunities Questionnaire (NI Interfaith Forum)
- Planning Policy Statement 14 - Sustainable Development in the Countryside (DRD)
- The Irish Central Border Area Network Strategy 2003 - 2008 (Central Border Area Network)
- Taking our Place in Europe - NI's European Strategy 2004 - 2008 (OFMDFM)
- Peace II Extension 2005 - 2006 Consultation (SEUPB)

Projects are online

A DATABASE featuring RDC projects which are helping rural communities across Northern Ireland is available on the RDC website - www.rdc.org.uk

For more information contact: Aileen Donnelly on 028 867 66980



Write to Reply

If you wish to respond to any of the articles in this edition or wish to contribute to further editions please contact Aileen Donnelly on 028 867 66980. Also contact Aileen for enquiries about editorial, inserts, advertising and circulation.

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Editorial Team

Teresa Canavan Director of Programmes & Aileen Donnelly Communications Officer

With the support of the RDC Communications Forum Members: - Kirsty Burton, Ruth Dallas, Martin Delaney, Olga Gallagher, Sharon McFlynn, Eamon McMullan, Gail Lees, Joyce McMullan & Anne Marie Loughran.

More Peace Money?



A recent consultation exercise into the possible two year extension of EU Peace II Programme funding asked, 'What should be funded, Who should benefit and How should the programme be implemented?'

Responding on behalf of RDC Caroline Breakey, Chair said:

"We wish to ensure that any future programme takes adequate recognition of the particular needs of rural Northern Ireland. Responding to this consultation was a priority and high on our agenda. Rurality is a key issue and needs to be addressed as a specific and targeted Measure within any future programme extension".

RDC believed it was also important for rural communities to have their say in this consultation process and therefore actively sought the views and opinions of rural clients. Copies of the responses received formed an important and valuable contribution to the submission.

Being able to demonstrate the successes and achievements of the Programme in rural areas to date was also important. In 'A Picture of Rural Peace' publication RDC and RCN provide examples of rural community actions funded under the EU Peace II Programme. Actions which involve women, young people, unemployed, farmers and their families as well as entrepreneurs and other professionals all working towards the creation of a more peaceful and stable rural environment. They are true examples of the contribution local people make in addressing the challenges of peace.

A copy of this publication and the RDC response to the consultation are available on the RDC website - www.rdc.org.uk or alternatively a hard copy can be made available if you contact Joyce McMullan on 028 867 66980.

Rural Proofing

DARD published the first Annual Report on Rural Proofing in September 2004 and is a welcome and important step in ensuring that consideration of the needs of rural communities is an integral part of government thinking.

Rural Proofing is a process to ensure that Government policies are examined carefully and objectively to ensure that they treat rural dwellers fairly and in particular to make public service accessible on a fair basis to people wherever they live in Northern Ireland.

Further information and copies of the Report can be provided by DARD's Equality and Rural Proofing Branch on 028 90 525057.

Cross Border Working – Funding Opportunity!

RDC is delighted to be represented on the steering group of the Groundwork NI and Leitrim County Partnership Changing Places – Transforming Communities Partnership Programme.

This Programme, which has evolved over the past 18 months, brings together a wide range of interests both North and South in rural environmental regeneration.

The Programme is designed to create opportunities for cross-border learning and understanding through the

development of community focused environmental regeneration projects.

A formal launch of the Programme will take place on Tuesday 23rd November in Armagh and on Thursday 25th November in Carrick-on-Shannon. Both events will run between 10.30 am and 1 pm.

The Programme is funded by EU INTERREG administered by Co-Operation Ireland.

For more information on how to get involved contact Mel at Groundwork NI on 028 90 749494

Vibrant Villages



Vibrant Villages is a new and exciting pilot initiative developed by RDC and funded by the International Fund for Ireland.

It is designed to encourage rural communities to take stock of their village and to identify what is important to keep it vibrant and healthy in terms of community, social and economic sustainability.

The pilot will work across 3 rural

villages initially and will seek to assist communities to work together to devise a collective action plan for the area. Communities will be supported to identify the priorities and may be assisted in securing funding to implement a range of practical projects to address the identified needs.

Work is underway to identify the 3 villages. We plan to bring you a more detailed update in our next edition.

For more information on Vibrant Villages contact Teresa Canavan on 028 867 66980.

Equality Impact Assessment:

Launch Of Consultation Document On The Rural Development Programme

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has published the consultation document of an Equality Impact Assessment on its Rural Development Programme 2001-2006.

It sets out the results of this evaluation which seeks to identify whether the RDP could potentially create differential impacts between

Section 75 groups or has the potential to enhance equality of opportunity. Copies are available on request and in alternative format eg large print, Braille disc, audio cassette or other languages.

For more information contact Karen Beggs, DARD on 028 9052 4347

Best Practice



Rural life is facing some tough challenges from the closure of local shops or other services to issues with transport, housing and local employment.

Rural Communities however are taking on many of these challenges and across the range of groups and projects supported RDC recognises there is a wealth of good practice emerging.

Sharing this best practice and helping support project promoters in the implementation and management of projects is important to us.

We have therefore made a commitment under the EU Peace II Programme to develop a number of best practice resources and guides. In progress are the 4 core resources of: -

- Managing People;
- Managing Profile;
- Managing Performance; and
- Managing Good Relations

Also in progress are 4 project specific resources on: -

- Managing a Community Business
- Managing Workspace
- Managing a Community Event
- Managing an ICT Facility

These will complement our existing suite of resources, which include workbooks, online materials and CD-Roms. Watch this space for further information on development and availability!

For more information on best practice contact Joyce McMullan on 028 867 66980

e-Rural



Using up to date Internet technologies, RDC is developing a new e-Rural initiative, which will act as a communications, research and e-learning platform for rural communities throughout Northern Ireland.

Participants of e-Rural will have access to online surveys, a rural policy discussion forum, regular electronic newsletters and exclusive community development e-learning resources. These facilities will act as a base from which to test findings from RDC research with rural communities. Each member group will also receive their own web page, which can be easily updated on a regular basis.

This system, which is initially exclusive to RDC funded organisations, is also aimed at promoting increased interaction and participation between project promoters. Work on e-Rural is ongoing at present and it is anticipated that the site will be up and running by the end of the year.

For more information on e-rural or if you would be interested in participating contact Martin Delaney on 028 867 66980.

£4.3m boost for Rural Development

Ulster Community Investment Trust (UCIT) has announced a new £4.3m funding package specifically for rural groups (awarded to the organisation under the EU Building Sustainable Prosperity programme). The Rural Development Sustainability Initiative is targeted at projects developed by non-profit taking rural community groups which address the economic, environmental or social needs of their area. As with all UCIT funds the money will be distributed as flexible and competitive loans coupled with free advice, support and mentoring. Any rural groups who would like more information about the Rural Development Sustainability Initiative should contact UCIT on Tel: 028 90 315003 or Email: info@ucitied.com

Cross-Border Training & Mentoring Programme

UCIT in partnership with Ardee Community Development Company and Tuath - Donegal Community and Local Development Centre have established a new cross border training and mentoring programme for community based enterprises.

For more information contact: Donal Traynor Tel/Fax: 00 353 (0) 41-6858637 or email: donal@ardeebusinesspark.ie

The Northern Ireland Rural Development Council (RDC) receives its core funding from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD)

RDC is also a delivery agent under the Rural Development Programme:



And administers funds on behalf of:



EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation



INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR IRELAND

We have flagged up the relevant Programme against the projects detailed in this edition to help you identify the source of funding.

