Irish Rural Link

10th November 2017

**Irish Rural Link makes Submission to Second Draft of National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040**

Irish Rural Link – the national network representing the interests of rural communities has made their submission to the second draft of the new National Planning Framework Ireland 2040 – Our Plan, today, 10th November.

Irish Rural Link in welcoming this plan feel that it is a real opportunity for Government to commit to and invest properly in more balanced growth and development ~~and~~ which would see the inclusion of all communities across the country. The NPF must allow for strategic planning in all regions through the statutory Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES’s) so that more regional parity can be achieved.

IRL and its members are concerned about how the regions are divided. With just three regions being considered; Eastern & Midland Region, Northern & Western Region and the Southern Region with some larger towns marked as drivers for growth, we are worried that growth and development will be measured by each region as a whole, while areas or sub-regions within these may not be developing evenly.

Taking the Midlands as an example, recent unemployment figures showed an increase in the unemployment in the region to 8.3%, this compares to an unemployment rate of 6.3% in Dublin and 5.8% in the Mid-East. Foreign Direct Investment has also been unevenly distributed across the Eastern and Midlands region in the past number of years. Just 4,000 jobs were created by IDA clients in the Midlands region in 2016, compared to almost 100,000 in Dublin region. The same is true for the Northern and Western region, with counties in the North-West experiencing less growth than western counties.

We would prefer regions be more aligned to those used by CSO, so that larger towns within these regions can have more of an opportunity to expand and grow and that this will filter out to the wider catchment area. As it stands in the draft, there is a risk that towns in the Midlands, which we are already seeing, will become suburbs of Dublin, with people having to commute long distances to access employment.

IRL continue to call for a Collective Approach to Regional Development whereby, Local Authorities, existing industries, third level institutes and training centres within each region come together to form Regional Development Group to drive economic simulation within each region which could then be linked to a Local Public Banking model and credit unions in the region. A planning mechanism should be in place to speed up development for each region.

Investment in rural transport should be an essential element of this plan but currently there is little mention of it in the draft plan. A transport system which is adequately funded and resourced in addition to high speed, affordable broadband are key to connecting rural communities to each other and to the larger towns and cities in regions and must be a priority in the plan.

Ireland has an ageing population and investment is needed now to ensure that people as they age can remain in their own home and own community. Reorientation of investment in primary care and care in the community is vital and a mix of housing is also needed in rural areas.

The NPF – Ireland 2040 can work, but it needs the will and commitment of all political parties, Government Departments, Local Authorities, Government Agencies and Community groups.

Ends

**For further information, please contact (anytime):**

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**About Irish Rural Link:**

Irish Rural Link represents the interests of locally based rural groups in disadvantaged and marginalised rural areas by highlighting problems, advocating appropriate policies, sharing experiences and examples of good practice. It has a membership of over 600 rural community groups dedicated to sustainable rural development and represents rural communities at a national and international level