



Údarás na Gaeltachta

Submission to the published draft of

**‘Ireland 2040, Our Plan’ –
National Planning Framework.**

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Údarás na Gaeltachta welcomes the publication of the ‘Ireland 2040, Our Plan - National Planning Framework’ document (NPF). We appreciate the opportunity to participate in the consultative process which will contribute to the finalisation of the new national Spatial Planning Framework which is being managed by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government.

1.0 The Gaeltacht as a Planning District

The Gaeltacht districts include predominantly rural districts and off-shore islands for the most part located on the Southern and the Atlantic coast (www.udaras.ie). The 2016 census returned an overall Gaeltacht population of 96,000 (Census, 2016). The spatial profile and character of the Gaeltacht districts embrace some of the most remote, peripheral and marginalised rural areas in the country in terms of economic development, service provision and infrastructural endowments. Traditionally, the socioeconomic and sociolinguistic viability of these districts have been undermined by mutually reinforcing processes of outmigration, population imbalance and higher than average dependency ratios. The evidence of the concomitant and relatively higher rates of unemployment and lack of participation (in terms of the regional and national context) further amplify the prevailing development challenges for public policy planning and funding interventions in support of these districts.

Against this, these same districts are home to an abundant and diversified natural resource containing significant environmental and ecological assets and a rich and biodiverse terrestrial and marine landscape. These districts are also endowed with a unique linguistic and cultural heritage and demonstrate significant capacity and capability in terms of its highly developed forms of social capital and community resilience. These dynamic social and communal features represent at once an important socioeconomic and sociolinguistic differentiator and also act as a key regional development asset which can contribute to efforts in achieving balanced regional development objectives within a national planning framework.

There is a marked lack of urbanisation in the Gaeltacht. Small towns, villages and isolated homesteads characterise the rural nature of the Gaeltacht in planning and settlement terms. Some districts centering on Gaoth Dobhar (Gweedore) in county Donegal, Cois Fharráige in county Galway and Dingle in county Kerry have a relatively dense population, when compared with the more general demographic and settlement profile in evidence across the Gaeltacht. However, these settlements lack much of the basic infrastructure typical of larger settlements and towns of a more urban character.

2.0 Údarás na Gaeltachta (An tÚdarás)

Údarás na Gaeltachta acts as the statutory regional development authority responsible for the socioeconomic and sociolinguistic development of the Gaeltacht. Its statutory responsibilities are set out in the Gaeltacht Act, 2012 (<http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2012/act/34/enacted/en/html>).

The organisation discharges a wide range of development functions and its development and investment programme forms an integral part of the economic, linguistic, cultural and social sustainability of the Gaeltacht. These investment and development measures provide key supports (financial, enterprise accommodation, training, skills development) to the local enterprise base and to community sector development initiatives.

Impact of Údarás na Gaeltachta's Investment Strategy

Independent economic assessment of the client-companies' contribution to the Irish economy in 2009 is summarised in the following indicators and performance measures. The portfolio of Údarás-supported enterprises:

- Supported 7,472 full-time jobs and 1,089 part-time seasonal jobs
- Contributed over €421 million in direct expenditure in Irish economy
- Contribute over €311.7 million to Irish economy value added or GDP
- Estimated €42.2 million in tax payments to Irish exchequer
- Over €365 million in export sales (almost 50% of total output)
- Údarás na Gaeltachta client companies invested €19.9 million undertaking Research and Development in 2009

(Source: Indecon International Economic Consultants, (2011) 'Assessment of the Economic Impact of Údarás na Gaeltachta Client Companies - A Report Submitted to Údarás na Gaeltachta')

3.0 The Rationale for this Submission

This submission recognises the critical role of the NPF as a macro-level spatial planning framework. The analysis upon which our specific recommendations are based seeks to engage with the macro-level spatial planning considerations which will determine the strategic orientation and the necessary co-ordination measures which will drive sustainable development interventions over the coming decades.

It also recognises the fundamental importance of the NPF in establishing the spatial, thematic and sectoral priorities which will be more fully operationalised

through the RSEs and the county and local-level planning interventions. These sub-national planning and governance structures will be developed in a coherent and systematic manner in order to achieve alignment with and in order to deliver upon national objectives at a regional and local level.

Accordingly, this submission does not provide a detailed response to each of the national policy objectives as set out in the current draft. While we fully recognise the importance of urban forms of development, the role of city regions, of national energy infrastructure and of interregional transport networks, for example, we contend that there are other key stakeholders who are better placed to contribute to the more fuller articulation of these vital issues and to provide more comprehensive sets of analyses and recommendations.

By the same token, we do not provide an exhaustive list of potential development projects and planned interventions in support of Gaeltacht and regional development which could contribute to the realisation of the NPF objectives. Our proposals are based on a sectoral and territorial interpretation of development across the Gaeltacht districts the sustainable development of which represents our core statutory responsibility.

The statutory provisions of the Gaeltacht Act (2012), along with the strategic orientation of An tÚdarás's development strategy, provide the context and the rationale for the recommendations which are set out below for consideration under the NPF framework. Our specific recommendations are set out against the main thematic and sectoral issues around which the draft NPF document is structured and, in general terms, are structured against the relevant policy objectives which are set out in the draft document.

4.0 Strategic Alignment between the NPF framework and the Gaeltacht Act (2012)

National Policy Objective, 25: *'Facilitate the promotion and creation of sustainable community development and support community organisations in their work to provide for a more sustainable future'*.

The Gaeltacht Act (2012) sets out the statutory responsibilities and functions of An tÚdarás. The provision of the Act provide for a more comprehensive and integrated view of regional and territorial development of the Gaeltacht.

In planning terms, the introduction of a new dimension to the local planning hierarchy through the establishment of Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas (designated by order under Section 7 (2) of the Act), and of Gaeltacht Service Towns (designated under Section 9 (1)), represents a new order of responsibilities for public agencies and for local communities alike.

These statutory provisions set out the bases under which local, area-based planning interventions are to be drawn up in support of local communities.

These plans will include development measures to support the viability of the Irish language in the “[...] family, educational, public, social, recreational and commercial life of the area concerned” (Section 7 [6]).

They also represent a significant new opportunity for different public sector and state agency stakeholders operating at a regional level (NUTTs 2) and at a Local Government-level to more effectively integrate their services and development programmes within the new statutory planning framework as envisaged under the provisions of the Act. The prioritisation and deployment of strategic planning interventions across different sectors and policy domains by different public authorities, as well as the targeting of relevant public investment measures within the Gaeltacht, should respect the overall provisions of the Act.

In order to make operational the strategic objectives as set out in the NPF, such regional and local-level planning and development measures should be fully aligned within the NPF objectives. They **must** also become integral in a structural and operational sense to the overriding rationale and prioritisation measures to be prescribed through the RSEs which will follow in order to bring about the necessary convergence through the realisation of the planning objectives enshrined within the different spatial tiers constituting the overall planning hierarchy. The Gaeltacht plans will fall within the functional footprint of the NPF, the RSEs and the count-level planning interventions and provision for them at the macro-level planning framework is the key intervention which is required at this stage.

In regional development terms, the concept of development which is envisaged under the Act envisages a more comprehensive and integrated model of economic development. In response to this, Údarás na Gaeltachta’s current development strategy recognises the interdependency and integration of different regional development variables and functions - economic, industrial, socioeconomic, sociolinguistic, natural resource, land-use, infrastructure and spatial planning. In so doing, its strategy seeks to invest public resources across a range of sectoral programmes which are integrated at a regional and local level.

National Policy Objective, 31, *‘Facilitate fostering and protecting the Irish language, particularly within Gaeltacht region’*. The draft NPF framework is committed to supporting the maintenance of a vibrant Gaeltacht community which can be developed against different criteria for sustainability in both socioeconomic and sociolinguistic terms.

In general terms, the realisation of this commitment will necessitate continued funding to secure a solid economic foundation within the Gaeltacht and through providing access to appropriately scaled housing developments and social amenities throughout these rural districts.

In terms of land-use planning, spatial development and rural housing policy, the NPF framework should fully endorse the strategic orientation of the Gaeltacht

Act (2012). It should also set out the context for and be explicitly committed to giving practical effect to the provisions in support of the Gaeltacht Language Planning Areas. At a macro, strategic level, these new planning interventions should be afforded special recognition from a spatial planning perspective.

Local Authorities in particular have a key role to play in supporting the sustainable development of Gaeltacht communities in their regional and rural contexts. This is particularly so in terms of their responsibilities for infrastructural development, programmes for settlement planning, housing provision and the provision of a broad range of services and development programmes to Gaeltacht communities.

In terms of settlement strategy and housing policy, new housing development **must** be on an appropriate scale and sensitive to the needs of the local resident population – its human and built environment, its linguistic and cultural heritage. In the context of the Gaeltacht Act (2012) and the **Local Language Plans** considered emphasis **must** be assigned to the impacts of proposed developments and their impact on the community of language and its socialisation networks.

Policies and development programmes prepared under the strategic direction of the NPF, and through its attendant delivery strategies, should enable and facilitate the development aims of local Gaeltacht communities. They should support and resource the implementation of effective measures whereby settlement planning and provision reflects the articulated needs of the local community whilst safeguarding their social and linguistic development requirements.

The increasingly central and strategic role of Local Authorities in socioeconomic development interventions, most fully articulated through the Local Economic and Community Plan and the ongoing work of the SPCs and the Local Community Development Committee (established under the provisions of the Local Government Reform Act, 2014), is of critical importance for sustainable Gaeltacht development.

The NPF framework should recognise and support the key influence of such development structures, and their attendant strategies and funding measures at regional, county and local-levels, in terms of their influence on the development of local Gaeltacht districts. The necessary strategic context and direction provided for in the NPF will be critical in ensuring the co-ordination and integration of development efforts at a regional and local level.

5.0 ‘Planning for Diverse Rural Places’ (NPF: 62) – A Gaeltacht perspective

Planning, Co-ordination and Integration

Under the auspices of the Gaeltacht Act (2012), some 26 Local Plans will be prepared by local community organisations across the different Gaeltacht districts working in close collaboration and on a partnership basis with key public sector stakeholders, including the Local Authorities.

The NPF framework should explicitly recognise these local plans as a key dimension in the overall planning hierarchy. These plans set out a range of development interventions and investment measures which need to be managed to ensure the viable and sustainable development, in economic, socioeconomic and sociolinguistic terms, of the Gaeltacht communities.

Such measures are integrated within a planning model that addresses the complex of interdependent factors which impact on the resilience and the capability of local communities to protect and extend the use of the Irish language as the community vernacular locally. These measures focus on the ‘community of language’ in their local and regional contexts. This operational context is fully informed by the economic development, employment and enterprise needs of such communities; by their housing, planning and local service requirements; by the educational, health and other social and public services upon which they are dependent.

The strategic objectives of the NPF framework, further reinforced and operationalized through the RSEs and the relevant county development plans, provide a unique opportunity to recognise in coherent and practical terms, the particular differentiated development requirements of the Gaeltacht communities and to provide for development and planning interventions which are fully aligned with their particular economic, social and sociolinguistic needs.

6.0 Economic Regeneration – the role of the Gaeltacht in Building Regional and National Competitiveness

National Policy Objective, 20: *‘Enhance the competitiveness of rural areas by supporting innovation in rural economic development and enterprise through the sustainable diversification of the rural economy into new sectors and in particular those with a low or zero carbon output’.*

These specific proposals look to the more general rural and regional development policy framework as set out in the CEDRA report, ‘Realising our Rural Potential – Action Plan for Rural Development’, and the Action Plan for Jobs Initiatives.

The NPF framework, and the RSEs which will follow from it, should provide the policy guidelines to prioritise funding measures and development programmes

which build on the particular and regional competitiveness capability of the different Gaeltacht regions.

In order to build the employment base and to strengthen the capability of productive sector enterprises to compete regionally, strengthen productivity and value outputs, and to gain export share through accessing international markets, the planning framework should:

- prioritise the strategic orientation of funding programmes to target the development and upgrading of regional enterprise infrastructure. This will create a mixed portfolio of enterprise accommodation of different scales appropriate to the development potential of diverse rural areas. Such measures will combat the recognised infrastructure deficits which constraint growth and erode local development potential. The provision of appropriately zoned land resources, enabled through the provision of the necessary utilities, services and infrastructure (hard and digital), should become a key objective for the NPF, the RSEs and the local, county-level planning frameworks
- ensure that distinctive and differentiated competitive advantages of the Gaeltacht are recognised and supported through the different tiers of the national, regional and local planning hierarchy. The bases of these sectoral and territorial comparative advantages relate to marine and natural resource development; cultural tourism development; energy and bio-resources; niche manufacturing in different productive sectors; and in a mix of internationally-traded services
- in the Northwestern region, and specifically as it relates to Donegal and its Gaeltacht districts, such measures will assist in mitigating the impact of Brexit in trade and economic development terms and the potential instability and insecurity which will result from the reintroduction of a 'hard-border' regime
- support the creation of local enterprise eco-systems combining training and mentoring; tailored re- and up-skilling development programmes for different sectors; incentivise funding and technical support services and applied research programmes – all crucial factors in enabling new start-ups in enterprise formation including micro-businesses, freelancers, home-based and remote workers, while also securing the development opportunities for established SMEs, and for growing new HPSU enterprises
- such an ecosystem-led approach is central to the development of the Gaeltacht Network of Digital Hubs which is currently being developed by An tÚdarás in association with local enterprise companies, private sector investors and the relevant Local Authorities. This strategic

initiative will provide a focused range of local development interventions, linked through an interregional network

- the network of digital hubs will address many of the critical structural causes which drive processes of rural decline, deliver innovative, scalable and cost-effective solutions to population decline and unemployment and facilitate the spatial distribution of growth opportunities to more remote and marginalised rural areas
- the network of hubs will also provide the requisite facilities and supports to allow regional enterprises of scale to establishing hub activities away from their core operational locations. They will also facilitate remote and home- working options as a viable alternative for residents of rural Gaeltacht locations

7.0 Connectivity and Enterprise Infrastructure

National Policy Objective, 22: ‘Support and facilitate delivery of the National Broadband Plan as a means of developing further opportunities for enterprise, employment, education, innovation and skills development for those who live and work in rural areas.’

Connectivity

The NPF **must** provide a coherent range of planning and development supports to accelerate and consolidate the implementation of the National Broadband Plan. The NPF **must** ensure its effective and expeditious roll-out in the Gaeltacht and in other rural districts which have traditionally suffered from significant structural handicaps in terms of economic and communications infrastructure.

The overriding need to secure access to world class, high-speed digital infrastructure is a key development imperative in ensuring the competitiveness of the Gaeltacht as a key contributor to regional and national economic performance. Such digital infrastructure needs to be future-proofed and demonstrate sufficient resilience and capacity to accommodate projected future needs across the lifetime of the proposed planning period.

In terms of investment projects of regional-scale significance, the importance of developing the Atlantic Economic Corridor and its supporting transport infrastructure linking the North West through Galway, Limerick, Cork and Waterford is crucial in two respects. First, it can act as a complementary interregional development zone and provide a focus for the creation of a balanced and effective model of regional development at a national scale. In such a way can it complement national objectives, both in terms of economic efficiency and spatial equity through redistribution, through counterbalancing the growth potential of the metropolitan Dublin region? Second, such an interregional ‘corridor’ project is vital to underpinning the capability and the prospects for

securing greater enterprise investment and attracting entrepreneurial skills and talent to the rural catchments which such a ‘corridor’ development will support. These regional rural catchments or hinterlands provide the spatial context along the Atlantic coast within which development measures targeting the Gaeltacht districts need to be secured.

8.0 The Gaeltacht Economy and Marine Resource Development

National Policy Objective, 40: *‘Regional and local development plans will take account of and integrate relevant maritime spatial planning issues’*, and National Policy Objective, 41: *‘Support the growth and development of the Maritime economy, particularly in remote coastal communities and islands’*.

The NPF is committed to the sustainable development of the marine resource. The current draft framework refers to ‘[...] ocean and coastal sectors include seafood related enterprise such as commercial fishing and aquaculture, products of marine biotechnology and bio discovery, marine tourism, energy exploration and production’ (NPF: 93)

Such a commitment is far-reaching and strategic in its orientation and represents a significant contribution to creating the policy and funding environment which can link planning and research outputs to key development and investment opportunities in the marine sector. It has significant potential for the sustainable development of the Gaeltacht in terms of socioeconomic and enterprise regeneration.

The marine economy is a key component within the regional and Gaeltacht economic structure. Through the NPF, and in the supporting RSEs, there is an opportunity to develop new coalitions amongst productive sector enterprises, coastal communities and public agencies. Such a partnership approach can potentially support the sustainable development of the marine resource and to identify new international markets for regional products and services. There exist also new opportunities to identify and support convergent industries in marine-related health sciences, marine-pharmaceutical products and services, added-value marine bio-products and marine technologies supporting the general marine farming sector.

Given the planning and governance framework within which An tÚdarás operate, we particularly welcome the commitment to partnership and collaboration and the pooling of expertise and resources. An tÚdarás is currently preparing a Marine Development Strategy for the Gaeltacht. This will be developed in collaboration with the Marine Institute, BIM, marine-based enterprises in different sectors and of different scales, the Department of Agriculture and Food, the HEIs and the Local Authorities.

It is imperative that the NPF, and the RESEs which follow from it, support these partnership models which focus on a longer-term research and planning

processes. Such partnership approaches can examine the interrelationship and interaction effects of different factors (economic, social, linguistic, environmental), and develop a range of new skills and competencies in the marine sector amongst statutory agencies, private enterprises and local community structures within the Gaeltacht. Support programmes should also commit to engaging with a process which recognises the importance of experimentation and flexibility, one which is underwritten by various forms of 'social learning', and the facilitation of local community involvement to the greatest extent possible.

For example, An tÚdarás are committed to developing a research action programme which will assist in establishing the parameters of a spatial planning model which could identify and quantify the development potential, or the 'carrying capacity', of the marine and coastal resource at different spatial scales within the Gaeltacht and in the broader regional context. Such a model could form an important diagnostic and planning instrument which would help public bodies, private enterprises and local communities alike determine the form and scale of development which might be undertaken in the marine and coastal sector in a progressive, innovative and sustainable manner.

It might, for example, through systematic analysis and comprehensive, integrated planning measures; support the existing natural resources productive sector to increase its income, productivity, innovation and output measures. In a similar fashion, it could identify new routes to mapping latent development potential within underutilised resource sectors including marine, coastal and 'blue' tourism, community enterprise initiatives and new training and skills development interventions in the marine sector.

In such a way could a model of this type identify a form of localised development which might realise both material efficiency objectives while also striving to address in a co-ordinated manner, important equity objectives in alleviating structural problems of outmigration from the coastal areas, longterm under- and unemployment, diminished social capital, and community dislocation and fracture at local level. It goes without saying that these longstanding development issues represent formidable challenges for policy interventions and the institutions which are charged with their implementation. It is for this reason that the concepts of partnership, co-operation and developing new models of learning in support of regional development should become touchstone concepts in the NPF framework.

From our experience, the operating environment particular to this form of sectoral and spatial planning is often complex and uncertain. This is particularly true given the range of institutional and interest-based stakeholders which are implicated in this type of development process. This is true in terms of the prescriptive and regulatory dimensions of the overall statutory governance and planning regime, the public administration hierarchy and the functional competencies and responsibilities of different development organisations. It is

also inherently complex in terms of the challenge of integrating development and investment interventions in the different Marine sub-sectors as to provide the fullest possible return to the local community and to the regional and national economy.

In this context, there are two short-term opportunities which are highly relevant to design and the future implementation of the proposed NPF.

The first relates to examining how such a diagnostic model for marine spatial development might be developed and deployed based on international best practice and drawing on the expertise within the state planning and policy agencies and the HIEs with a focus on the marine sciences, geography, economics and rural /coastal development. Given the Gaeltacht context within which we operate, we argue that it is reasonable to contend that such an approach is merited given the particulars of local circumstances within the coastal communities and the significant development potential of the marine resource. Such an approach needs to be set within an overall Atlantic-coast framework, given the statutorily designated districts within which An tÚdarás operate, but should be sufficiently capable of intervening in localised spatial areas.

The second refers to our commitment to developing Páirc na Mara at Cill Chiaráin, located in the very heartland of the Conamara Gaeltacht. Investment in access and services infrastructure has already been undertaken. The thirty-acre site represents a significant platform for development where core services, facilities and infrastructure will be developed which will create new research opportunities, enterprises and products, extend employment opportunities locally and within the broader region and generate new measures of socioeconomic welfare. The conceptualisation, design and implementation of the investment and development plan which we are committed to holds out real opportunity to build an exemplar project of scale which can act as a demonstration project in its own right.

9.0 Cultural Tourism as a Driver for Regional and Rural Development

National Policy Objective, 51: *‘Support the coordination and promotion of all-island tourism initiatives through continued cooperation between the relevant tourism agencies and Tourism Ireland’*

The development of the Wild Atlantic Way (Section 6.4 of NPF: 95) planning and development framework represents a key, strategic initiative for the development of the tourism economy along the west coast. It is complemented by the sister framework, Ireland’s Ancient East.

The NPF provides an opportunity to incorporate the further development and consolidation of such strategic initiatives within its own terms of reference and to extend the potential reach of such initiatives through to the RSEs and the count-

level planning interventions. By doing so, dedicated public sector investment through the national, sectoral and regional agencies will function to leverage further rounds of private funding and of community investment and to do so in such a way as to deepen and diversify the quality and range of the tourism infrastructure and the differentiated services and products which it supports.

Such an approach will intensify investment in the product offering at a regional and local level and will contribute to foreign earnings through attracting a greater share of the mobile international tourism market and encourage them to spend time and resources in the rural districts.

The Gaeltacht is significantly well positioned strategically to both benefit from and to contribute to successive rounds of future investment in the regional and national tourism sector. Product and service offerings within the broad market sector referred to as 'Cultural Tourism' which have significant development potential for the Gaeltacht include heritage and 'green tourism'; soft infrastructure investment in green ways and rural access routes; experiential and educational tourism; cultural and language; gastronomy and artisanal products; artistic and performance-related activities; 'blue tourism' celebrating the coastal and island experience.

At a macro- and strategic level, the NPF framework should put in place mechanisms to ensure that the development goals and funding priorities of sectoral agencies and territorial development structures (at a regional and local, county level) are fully aligned so as to maximise the development potential of the Gaeltacht districts.

10.0 Planning for Renewable Energy Potential (Section 7.4: 104)

An tÚdarás are committed to developing coherent and systematic programmes in recognition of the challenges and opportunities which exist to reduce carbon footprint, to maximise the renewable energy potential resource at local and regional level, and to assist in the implementation of regional and local mitigation plans.

Currently, An tÚdarás work in close collaboration with the SEAI in developing local capacity to engage with progressive planning interventions such as the BEC and SEC initiatives. Further strategic alliances have been developed with ESB Networks (through their Innovation Strategy) and with the HEIs to provide advice, technical mentoring, funding and training supports to community and social enterprises, to public bodies operating locally within the Gaeltacht and to productive enterprises trading from Gaeltacht locations. These initiatives seek to promote the efficient use of natural, bio-resources to the extent possible to achieve efficiencies and savings and to assist in testing and adapting new technologies.

The agency is also involved with an EU INTERREG –funded programme where it is working within a transnational coalition of partners in support of designing new approaches and models of development which can support sustainable and resilient approaches to energy planning within local rural districts. The LeCO project will be rolled out over the next three years to 2020.

11.0 Education and Skills Development

National Policy Objective, 32: *‘Programmes for life-long learning, especially in areas of higher education and further education and training where skills gaps are identified’.*

The NPF framework (Section 5.6: 84) should identify the key role of the RSEs in developing action plans and delivery mechanisms to facilitate and increase access to training and development programmes within the Gaeltacht. Support should also be prioritised for the development of mediated access through localised centres (including the Digital Hub Network) to increase participation rates in flexible learning and distance education. Such investment in improving access through capital investment and through tailored programmes of support should recognise prior and work-based learning in the development of skills at a regional and local level. The range of such programmes should include business and entrepreneurial capability and further support social capital measures through targeting community, civic and local development skills.

A key dimension of such forward planning should focus on the regional development role of the HEIs as they relate to the rural districts, including the Gaeltacht. Standing at the conflux between education, research, training and innovation, the HEIs have a key role to play in supporting enterprise, employment, economic regeneration and local development initiatives. Their role in producing quality, skilled graduates which can meet the employment needs of local, regional and national enterprises is complemented by the critical range of supports they can offer to emerging entrepreneurs, to micro-enterprises and to established SMEs.

The RSEs, working with the strategic objectives and funding priorities established under the NPF, should introduce programmes and development measures to assist the Regional Skills Fora in identifying regional skills shortages and forecasting future industry needs and tailoring provision accordingly. Such analyses should focus on a mix and range of sectors and include bespoke and transferable skills and competencies.

12.0 Conclusion

The challenge of developing the Gaeltacht as a particular and differentiated development zone is fundamentally one of spatial planning, management and governance. The planning challenges which are currently faced are multi-faceted and integrated, complex and deep-rooted. Given the historical experience and the learning gained from experiences of the different regional and rural planning and development strategies which have been undertaken over recent decades, the NPF framework now provides a critical opportunity to address past weaknesses in ‘systems-wide’ implementation mechanisms in support of integrated development and planning for the Gaeltacht.

This submission argues that the type of spatial model which the NPF needs to advocate and insist upon with regard to the Gaeltacht districts, **must** engage with the interrelated spatial and sectoral objectives which represent different stages in the development process. These include ‘quality of life’ dimensions, critically including sociolinguistic and socioeconomic factors, the productive and socioeconomic base, social infrastructure, institutional capacity and community coherence.

In its pragmatic form, such a planning model rests on a continuum process striving for progressive and effective development built on local and regional resources, competencies and local capacity. Building on such a framework as proposed by Cawley and Keane¹, this submission argues for a strategic approach to regional and rural development to be incorporated within the NPF which sets out to realise gains for the community through productivity enhancement and the creation of local assets (rather than an overreliance on redistributive transfers); which addresses market failures in the local/regional economy; which emphasises the process, participation and potential of different stakeholders and their resource bases; which utilises systematic analyses of local internal dynamics and their linkage to broader, external processes and dynamics.

The Gaeltacht development challenge, therefore, is centered on community and territory – the Irish-speaking language community and the integrated and comprehensive development of the territory that sustains this community. Notwithstanding the fundamental nature of the economic development challenges which are faced by the Gaeltacht community, the NPF and the attendant structures and strategies which will be introduced to give affect to its strategy, **must** give full recognition to the social, linguistic and cultural dimensions of the lived experience of the Gaeltacht community.

In such a way should the NPF explicitly recognise the particular and differentiated development needs of the Gaeltacht. Through such priority setting, the NPF framework needs to clearly explain how explicit support and alignment

¹ Cawley, M. and Keane, M.J. (1999) ‘Current Issues in Rural Development’, in Davis, J. (ed.) *Rural Change in Ireland*. The Queen’s University of Belfast: The Institute of Irish Studies.

of its own objectives are to be structured within the RSEs and the county-level plans. Furthermore, these regional and local plans need to be structured, aligned and operationalised to comprehensively support the implementation of the development objectives set out under the Gaeltacht Act (2012).

It is imperative, therefore, that the current draft of the NPF framework be refocused so that the particular and differentiated needs of the Gaeltacht are recognised formally within the new national spatial planning framework. Such an approach will also generate significant new opportunities for consolidating institutional alliances between the different agencies operating within the Gaeltacht and for creating resilient collaborative projects with industry and with the local community.

The statutory designation of the Gaeltacht as set out in the Gaeltacht Act (2012) needs to be fully incorporated within this framework. Failure to do so within the macro-spatial planning objectives enshrined within the NPF will adversely affect the credible and effective implementation of the statutory provisions of the Act. It will, in turn, undermine the potential reach and operational functioning of Údarás na Gaeltachta's development strategy.

Based on prior experience, failure to include the Gaeltacht designation within the explicit terms of reference of the NPF will most likely result in a poor spatial articulation of the Gaeltacht districts within the RSEs and within the local authority plans which will follow at county and local level. Without such a commitment in the NPF, it is inevitable that there will be no proper alignment across the different functional planning tiers (national, regional, county-wide and local), nor will there be an appropriate prioritisation of the detailed planning and development measures which are crucial to supporting the Gaeltacht as a differentiated development zone.

Such a potential scenario will, in turn, have profound and far-reaching consequences for the viability and long-term vitality of the Irish-language communities within the Gaeltacht. In practical terms, the potential role and function of the local Language Development Plans which are currently being prepared under the auspices of the Gaeltacht Act (2012) will be very seriously undermined. These will inevitably mean that such plans will remain as isolated and highly localised attempts to address the complex development challenges which face Gaeltacht communities.

These development challenges need to be addressed in a comprehensive and integrated manner, recognising the interaction and interdependence between economic, social, sociolinguistic, planning, infrastructural and educational factors. Our pragmatic and rational assessment of these core concerns takes full account of the current and historical patterns of community dislocation and linguistic fracture within the Gaeltacht districts.

Unless the current opportunity offered under the NPF is fully realised, the continuation and intensification of such deleterious patterns in socioeconomic and sociospatial terms will become the inevitable outcome of the weaknesses and omissions in the planning and governance interventions at a regional and local level as they relate to the Gaeltacht. Such an outcome will copperfasten the existing structural defects in the regional and county-level planning interventions where prioritisation of the particular and differentiated development needs of the Gaeltacht are not currently adequately planned for.

These core concerns need to be addressed in the first instance within the NPF framework and, thereafter, through the RSEs and the county and local-level plans which will follow. The NPF spatial planning framework offers a unique opportunity to arrest these longstanding patterns of decline and can introduce a transformative and structural change which will assist local Gaeltacht communities in securing their viability and resilience as communities of language. Realising this opportunity should become a national priority under the NPF.

We are grateful for the opportunity to make this submission to the Department in relation to the current draft. We will be available to provide any additional supporting information or clarification as may be necessary to the Minister and his officials from the NPF co-ordinating unit.

7th November, 2017.

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