



**Department of Rural and
Community Development**



*An Roinn Forbartha
Tuisithe agus Pobail*

Eoghan Murphy TD
Minister for Housing, Planning and Local Government
Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government
Custom House
Dublin 1
D01 W6X0

9 November 2017

Re. National Planning Framework

Dear Eoghan

DRCD SUBMISSION: NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Following its formation in July 2017, the Department of Rural and Community Development has been working through the IDG and relevant Senior Officials Group to inform the development of the draft NPF. In the context of the finalisation of the Plan, the Department now wishes to submit its views on the draft NPF as part of the formal public consultation process.

In broad terms the Department welcomes the approach taken in the draft NPF. Whilst the sustainable growth of our cities is an essential objective of the plan, the NPF also reflects the equal importance of towns and rural areas in ensuring balanced growth and providing opportunities for all of our citizens. Specific objectives such as ensuring enhanced regional accessibility, developing an Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC), a strong digital economy, and the empowerment of rural communities align strongly with the work of this Department and the Action Plan for Rural Development.

Nonetheless, the Department is of the view that the final NPF needs to be strengthened in terms of how it communicates the importance of regional and rural development, and how this balanced development will be achieved in practical terms. To address this, the final plan requires (i) an increased emphasis on how regionally important settlements can drive the growth of each region as a whole and a more balanced national growth path; (ii) clarity on how the NPF will be implemented on the ground, through the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies (RSES); related to this (iii) specific detail on how the RSES will be developed and the issues to be addressed in strategy development – including specific issues of concern for regional and rural development; and (iv) further consideration on the role of communities and the role for local democracy in the NPF, and informing development and implementation of the RSES.

THE REGIONS & THE ROLE OF TOWNS AND VILLAGES IN REGIONAL GROWTH

On the first point, the draft NPF singles out the 5 cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway. The final plan however must also consider how growth will be driven both north of a Dublin-Galway axis and inland/removed from these large coastal settlements. To address this, emphasis should be given to those regionally important settlements in areas which will not benefit from the growth of the 5 cities. For example, achieving growth in settlements such as Sligo is clearly a critical objective of the NPF and yet this is implied rather than clearly stated. Related to this, the role of the AEC in driving balanced growth needs to be significantly strengthened in the final NPF. As previously submitted by this Department, the AEC concept aims to connect the enterprises, people and economic and education hubs along the corridor to drive innovation and growth. Achieving this will be critical to the success of the NPF and will unlock the economic potential of the corridor and improve opportunities and quality of life.

Furthermore, the final plan should identify the settlements within the population thresholds identified in the draft NPF (perhaps as an appendix, and based on CSO figures); thereby clearly demonstrating the extent and spatial distribution of the many settlements in Ireland which will be central to both regional and local development. In the draft NPF, Chapter 3 covers "Making Stronger Urban Places" in Chapter 3. This is focussed mainly on our 5 cities. This is followed by "Planning for Diverse Rural Places" in Chapter 4. There is a need for these two considerations to be bridged – potentially with a further chapter outlining the links between the urban growth and rural growth; the spectrum of settlement types in between; and the importance of the RSES identifying those different drivers of growth in different areas within regions. For large parts of Ireland it will be small and medium size settlements that have potential to drive sustainable growth in local areas, and ensure more balanced growth for Ireland as a whole.

IMPLEMENTATION AND THE REGIONAL SPATIAL AND ECONOMIC STRATEGIES

On the second point, the final plan needs more clarity on how the NPF will actually be implemented on the ground. If we are to achieve balanced development the RSES must be the core to the implementation of the NPF. However, this is not clearly stated in Chapter 9 of the draft NPF which frames future implementation. The importance of the RSES, and how future capital investment will support the objectives of those strategies, needs to be central to communicating how the NPF will be implemented in the final document.

The third point is strongly related to this. If the RSES are to be the main tool to ensuring balanced growth, the final NPF must be clear on how these RSES will be developed and what they should consider and contain. Without such direction at national level the RSES may not provide the necessary strategies or focus to ensure the objectives of the NPF are met. From the viewpoint of this Department, key issues which the RSES should be directed to address include:

- identifying regional strengths and weaknesses
- identifying regional policy and investment priorities to build on strengths and address weaknesses in a prioritised manner and consistent with the NPF

- identifying the future growth and development plans for specific areas in the region, in line with the population objectives of the NPF
- ensuring consistency with the other RSES, for example, with regard to the development of the AEC which will cut across two regions
- ensuring intra-regional issues are also addressed – in particular addressing issues such as intra-regional connectivity and economic inequalities within regions
- specifically consider how rural areas can best benefit from the growth of urban areas and how the sustainable development of smaller settlements and rural areas can be facilitated – for example through addressing bottlenecks such as water and wastewater services provision in settlements well placed for sustainable growth.
- future-proofing the region, for example by protecting currently dis-used transport assets and ensuring that investment supports sustainable growth in the region.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT STRUCTURES AND PROCESSES

The fourth issue is with regard to a need for a stronger focus on the role of communities, community development, and local democratic structures both in terms of the NPF and subsequent development and implementation of the RSES. Local Economic and Community Plans are intended to be the primary mechanism at local level to bring forward local actions arising from national policies such as the Action Plan for Jobs and the Action Plan for Rural Development. It will therefore be important that the final NPF clarifies how LECs will inform the RSES, and indeed how a collaborative approach could be adopted between these two processes. With regard to community development, whilst Chapter 5 of the draft NPF has a strong focus on "Shaping Sustainable Communities", it will be important that the final document ensures that this element of the framework can become a reality; and that the social aspect of "sustainable communities", which is at the heart of our communities, is understood to be just as central to our future as economic and environmental sustainability. This will require both a strong focus in the RSES on the community based objectives, but also clear acknowledgement that funding from the National Investment Plan will be required to support the achievement of these objectives.

I trust the above points can be taken on board in finalising the NPF and the Department of Rural and Community Development is available to discuss these issues in further detail in advance of plan finalisation. Please find also enclosed my Department's reply to the Department of Finance and Public Expenditure in relation to the National Investment Plan.

Yours sincerely,



Michael Ring TD
Minister for Rural and Community Development

CC Minister Sean Kyne



**Department of Rural and
Community Development**



*An Roinn Forbartha
Tuaiche agus Pobail*

8 November, 2017

Robert Watt
Secretary-General
Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
Upper Merrion Street
Dublin 2

**Department of Rural and Community Development:
Additional Submission in Respect of the National Investment Plan**

Dear Robert,

I refer to your recent correspondence in of 27th October last relating to the National Investment Plan.

The Department of Rural and Community Development made a general submission with regard to development of the National Planning Framework (NPF) in October 2017.

I note your further request regarding significant 10 Year Infrastructure / investment priorities for your sector on a thematic basis aligned to the Strategic Outcomes in the Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework. In this regard, the Department has further considered longer term investment and infrastructure planning which relates to initiatives beyond the current range of programmes and schemes which the Department currently has responsibility for and which have cross-departmental aspects in terms of remit.

We are agreed that it is essential that the National Investment Plan provides a clear picture of how the implementation of the objectives and priorities of the new National Planning Framework under the Ireland 2040 Plan is aligned with and will be underpinned by public investment priorities in key sectors. I am enclosing the Minister's submission to Minister Murphy in respect of the draft National Planning Framework. In that context, the Department would like to make a further submission relating directly to how towns and villages can be equipped to plan their role in regional

development, if the National Planning Framework is to be a success in driving more even regional growth. This is against the backdrop that:-

1. Many of the objectives in the draft NPF such as ensuring enhanced regional accessibility, developing an Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC), a strong digital economy, and the empowerment of rural communities align strongly with the work of this Department and the Action Plan for Rural Development.
2. From the viewpoint of this Department, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategies will be central to framing future capital investment priorities. To ensure this occurs, it is vital that the NPF provides sufficient clarity on how the RSES will be developed and the issues to be addressed in strategy development – including specific issues of concern for regional and rural development.

Of particular concern to this Department is that the investment priorities, while being based on the priorities identified in the RSES, should facilitate the regions, settlements, and rural areas realising their full potential. This clearly requires greatly increased investment in strategic infrastructure for the regions, but it also requires that the National Investment Plan support capital improvements in smaller settlements to facilitate sustainable growth, and the community based objectives of the NPF. To do so, the National Investment Plan should:

- Ensure an appropriate level of investment is targeted to those regionally important settlements that can drive the growth of each region as a whole and ensure a more balanced national growth path. This is particularly true north of the Dublin-Galway axis and inland/removed from the 5 coastal cities of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Waterford and Galway which are specifically identified in the draft NPF.
- Investment should be targeted at ensuring **regional transport connectivity** that can facilitate economic growth and the regions realising their full economic potential. This includes both interregional but also intraregional connectivity and should address shortcomings in infrastructure required to facilitate economic growth and attract inward investment.
- Related to this, there should be a strong capital commitment towards the investment required to support the development of the **Atlantic Economic Corridor**, which has the potential to ensure a greater balance of population and economic growth in Ireland. This investment should ensure world class connectivity along the corridor (both in terms of transport and communications), and also that energy and water infrastructure is future proofed to support growth. The investment should also focus on business supports, strengthening education/skills infrastructure, investment in apprenticeships, and a specific fund for developing and promoting the concept of the AEC.

- A continued investment focus on the **digital economy** can support economic growth in all areas of the country, and indeed make rural areas more attractive for investment and sustainable settlement.
- With regard to **water infrastructure** in smaller settlements there is a specific need for a capital provision to Irish Water targeted at addressing bottlenecks in water and wastewater services provision in settlements which are otherwise well placed to facilitate sustainable growth. Without this the focus will be on addressing issues in larger settlements only.
- The investment within regions must also take account of intra-regional differences. For example, the Eastern and Midland Region contains the most developed, but also some of the most deprived, counties in Ireland. It is vital that appropriate investments can be targeted to address these imbalances within regions. This could include, for example, a **focus on tourism infrastructure and tourism product development and promotion** where that industry has potential that is not currently maximised.
- Similarly the investment planned in the National Investment Plan must support sustainable rural development. An appropriate level of investment should also be targeted to rural areas, in particular to deal with **transport infrastructure and increased investment in local transport schemes to improve access to transport**. Furthermore, all planned investment should consider how it can best impact on rural areas within the broad area for investment.

Of particular concern to this Department is ensuring that the 154 towns with populations of between 1,500 and 10,000 people have a fair proportion of investment to drive sustainable growth and support their rural hinterlands. In addition to the existing capital and current programmes in place across Departments, it is proposed that an envelope of at least €200m per annum should be set aside within the National Investment Plan to ensure targeted capital investment within these towns. Such a dedicated set of funding streams, additional to larger scale infrastructural investments by relevant Departments, will ensure that these settlements can contribute to sustainable development across Ireland by removing the constraints on some of these towns - making them attractive places to live, and feasible for businesses to locate to.

The details and delivery mechanism for this fund would need to be agreed across Departments in line with the responsibilities of each Department and their agencies in areas such as transport and water infrastructure. Initial thinking would be that the €200m per annum might be directed as follows:-

- Removal of infrastructural bottlenecks and capital works on town improvements i.e. intraregional transport connectivity and water infrastructure (circa €100m),
- Dedicated fund for the development of digital enterprise centres and related business initiatives (circa €40m),

- Targeted development of tourism projects related to regional "brands" e.g. Lakelands initiative (circa €30m), and
- Support for community development initiatives i.e. local transport (circa €30m).

In summary, the key issue for the Department of Rural and Community Development is that the National Investment Plan must support investment that can address the challenges around regional balance (in particular through the AEC), intra-regional imbalances, and unlocking the potential of medium and small settlements and their rural hinterlands. Without this investment the NPF cannot achieve its objective of more balanced development and sustainable communities.

These cross-government proposals are additional to those contained in our recent submission (enclosed) relating to existing schemes currently within the direct remit of the Department, namely Rural Recreation (including CLAR), Town and Village Renewal, Libraries Development and the Local Improvement Scheme (relating to private roads).

I trust the above points can be taken on board in finalising the National Investment Plan. The Department is available to discuss these issues in further detail in advance of plan finalisation.

Yours sincerely,



Elizabeth Canavan,
Secretary General (Acting)

