



SUBMISSION BY THE **DRINKS INDUSTRY GROUP
OF IRELAND (DIGI)** TO THE
NATIONAL PLANNING FRAMEWORK 2040

31 March 2017

INTRODUCTION

Over the last 25 years, Ireland has experienced substantial population and economic growth: the population has expanded by over 1.1 million people, over 2 million are at work in the economy, and the housing stock since 1991 has grown by approximately 750,000. This has consequences for Ireland's development, both at national and regional level, in ensuring we have the correct infrastructure in place to meet our changing needs.

The Drinks Industry Group of Ireland (DIGI), whose membership spans manufacturers, distributors, retailers, pubs, hotels, restaurants and the off-licence sector, has

witnessed across the country the impact these demographic changes have on local communities in rural Ireland.

In this context, DIGI welcomes the Government's move to design a sustainable planning framework that will assist Ireland's growth in a balanced and progressive manner over the coming years. The National Planning Framework (NPF) 2040 will set out the Government's response to national challenges, ensuring we have a robust development strategy in place as Ireland's population and economy continues to grow, and as external challenges like Brexit land on our doorstep.

THE CHALLENGE

We have seen the negative impacts of urban sprawl in Ireland. Many people endure long commutes to work and live in communities that are not adequately serviced, both in terms of physical and social infrastructure.

The NPF clearly identifies the need to implement a reversal of this trend. Key to achieving this is enacting policies that ensure our rural towns and villages are equipped with the necessary services to grow and develop. A central element in achieving this is concentrating on the main streets of our rural towns and villages. These

streets can and should be vibrant centres for business and trade, and for culture, tradition and community spirit. Since the recession, this has not been the case. Many retail premises closed leaving vacant units dotted along our main thoroughfares.

Placing an emphasis on rural Ireland's main streets will serve to reinvigorate and rejuvenate towns and villages. It will bring workers back to rural parts of the country, encourage locals to engage and socialise in the community, attract people to relocate from urban areas, and boost regional tourism.

DIGI'S ROLE IN SOCIETY AND THE ECONOMY

DIGI is the umbrella organisation for the wider drinks industry in Ireland. Over 92,000 people work in the sector, the majority from rural Irish towns and villages. Our members include the Alcohol Beverage Federation of Ireland; the Irish Hotels Federation; the Licensed Vintners Association; the National Off-Licence Association; the Restaurants Association of Ireland; and the Vintners' Federation of Ireland.

DIGI's members are located in every city, town, village and rural hinterland across the length and breadth of the country. Together, they play a significant role in rural development:

- DIGI members create employment in all regions across the country
- The regional spread of the industry (public houses and other licensed premises) facilitates and supports the geographic spread of tourism
- DIGI members provide venues in every town in Ireland used by community groups and individuals to meet and socialise, facilitating community integration
- The industry provides significant investment in terms of sponsoring events locally

THE NUMBERS

The numbers clearly demonstrate the scale and breadth of this industry across Ireland, representing:

- **7,193** pubs
- **983** licensed hotels and other
- **2,406** licensed restaurants
- **3,232** off-licences in Ireland
- **178** wholesalers
- **57** producers

Our members support:

- **Over 204,000** jobs in the Irish economy across the hospitality industry in every town and village in the country
- **92,000** jobs in the Irish economy across the drinks industry in towns and villages across the country
- **5%** of all the jobs in the economy
- **€1.1bn** worth of Irish inputs purchased by the industry annually
- **€1.25** billion worth of produce exported by the industry every year
- **Pubs and the pub culture**, which was one of the top ranked attractions for tourists who visited Ireland in 2016, with 21% of the vote
- **9.6 million** overseas visitors came to Ireland in 2016, a sector which is worth **€6.5 billion** to the Irish economy



DIGI'S SUBMISSION TO THE NPF 2040

The Government's National Planning Framework is a plan for the next twenty-five years and beyond. To deliver sustainable growth to towns and villages across Ireland, it must ensure that balanced regional development is at its heart.

During the last recession, the drinks industry was severely affected. Thousands of local venues closed – 1,442 pubs between 2005 and 2016 – causing untold damage to the social fabric of local communities. This resulted in job losses, fewer places for local communities to gather, a significant impact on social cohesion, and a reduced appeal of Irish towns and villages to overseas visitors.

DIGI is keen to play a part in assisting the Government achieve the core aims of the NPF. In response, we have developed a nine-point plan with clear actions that will serve to rejuvenate rural Ireland, economically and socially.

DIGI'S 9 POINT PLAN

1

The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government should liaise with the Department of Finance to ensure that the necessary financial instruments and financial policies are designed to support key industries central to rural development.

RATIONALE:

There is huge potential for sustained economic activity and job creation in rural Ireland. Increased Government investment in key industries in rural Ireland, including the drinks and hospitality industry that supports employment regionally, is required to unlock this potential. Investing in this industry, which is integral to rural Ireland, will boost local economies and act as a clear indication of the importance Government places on developing rural Ireland.

2

Department of Transport should consider piloting a late-night rural transport scheme for pub-goers in rural communities that are not currently serviced by public transport.

RATIONALE:

This proposed scheme would help to ensure that rural dwellers, who may not have access to transport links, are accommodated, particularly at night. This would encourage social inclusion, facilitate community engagement, support local business and lead to safer roads and rural communities throughout Ireland. This initiative would assist in strengthening local communities and making them more sustainable—a key objective of the National Planning Framework.

3

Government must consider growth areas of the drinks industry that support regional economies and deliver balanced development.

RATIONALE:

The Government should use the agencies of the state such as Local Enterprise Offices, Enterprise Ireland and Tourism Ireland, to support and promote emerging growth areas of the drinks industry, including distilleries and microbreweries. In particular, supporting the creation of an Irish Whiskey Trail, as set out in the Irish Whiskey Association Tourism Strategy. In prioritising these growth areas, the Government will support jobs in communities across the country and improve Ireland's tourism offering, boosting rural and regional economies.

4

The Government should develop a scheme to bring 'over-the-shop' units back into use to assist in increasing the population in town and village centres.

RATIONALE:

Occupancy of units on main streets, whether commercial or residential, should be encouraged and incentivised to deliver more opportunity for people and business. This will serve to cater for and increase economic activity on our main streets.

5

The Government should look to increase the funding available under the Village and Town Renewal Scheme to improve the streetscapes of our towns and villages, making them more attractive to work in, live in and visit.

RATIONALE:

Increasing the attractiveness of rural areas commercially and socially increases the sustainability of our towns and villages as places to live and work. Equally, it encourages tourism, spreading overseas spend beyond our major cities. In addition, the Government should fast-track the commencement of the urban regeneration fund to assist in enhancing amenities and the local environment, in the interest of residents, businesses and visitors.

6

The Government should review the Derelict Sites Act to ensure that sites that have fallen into a state of dereliction are brought back into use.

RATIONALE:

Derelict sites are not only an eyesore across our countryside—they serve to project a poor image of our towns and villages. Reviewing this act will lead to increased awareness of the issue and encourage action.

7

Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs) should be encouraged to build/buy housing units through the Capital Acquisition Scheme, in urban centres that can be used for an ageing population, to encourage better social inclusion in towns and villages.

RATIONALE:

Rural isolation is an ongoing concern and housing in isolated areas contributes to what is a huge social problem in Ireland today. Providing and encouraging residential spaces in urban centres for our ageing population will serve to reduce rural isolation and improve sustainable communities and rural development.

8

Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government should review planning regulations that allow for 'out of town' retail developments.

RATIONALE:

Town centres are the hubs of local communities. They are the heart of the social, economic and cultural lives of people in Ireland. These centres should be protected and developed as far as possible. The recent trend of 'out of town' retail developments did untold damage to urban centres across Ireland, and drove economic activity away from town centres. The Government should review retail planning regulations to ensure the number of these developments are restricted in order to support the development of rural and regional economic hubs.

9

Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment must ensure high-speed broadband access in rural Ireland to support business.

RATIONALE:

It is critically important that rural businesses have the necessary infrastructure required to remain competitive, grow and develop their business, and create jobs in rural Ireland. Access to high-speed broadband is essential for our industry to innovate, to develop their offering, to attract customers and tourists, and to provide services and venues for rural dwellers.

CONCLUSION

DIGI believes that these actions will help to support the growth and development of rural Ireland, with economic, social and cultural benefits for many years to come.

DIGI and its members are tightly woven into the social fabric of Ireland. We want to be a positive partner to the Government in the delivery of sustainable and vibrant rural towns and villages.

It is in DIGI's interests to see the National Planning Framework succeed; we will continue to engage with the process and with Government to ensure that the plan delivers as it intends.

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Support Your Local is a campaign of
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