

Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland



Abridged Version

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.



Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk



**INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE**

This document is also available on the DAERA website at:

<http://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations>

You can get a copy of this document in other formats, such as:

- Paper Copy
- Large Print
- Braille
- Other Languages
- Easy Read

To get a copy of this document in another format contact:

Rural Policy and Delivery Branch
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Rural Affairs Division
2nd Floor, Ballykelly House
111 Ballykelly Road
Ballykelly
Limavady
BT49 9HP

Or alternatively, by:

Email: ruralpolicydelivery@daera-ni.gov.uk

Tel: 028 7744 5113 (This is a voicemail service and a member of the team will call you back)

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Ministerial Foreword | 4 |
| Introduction | 5 |
| Purpose of this Document | 6 |
| Key Statistical Rural Issues Findings - NI Region | 7 |
| Stakeholder Engagement (pre-consultation) | 9 |
| The Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland | 10 |
| Next Steps | 20 |
| Rural Needs Considerations | 20 |
| Equality Considerations | 20 |
| How to Respond | 21 |
| Publication of Responses | 22 |
| Annex 1 - Summary of Consultation Questions | 23 |

Ministerial Foreword



I am delighted to present the draft Rural Policy Framework for public consultation and I look forward to hearing your views. This Framework has been developed in partnership with a wide range of stakeholder organisations in the context of formulating a policy response to the cessation of the NI Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 and identifying rural needs and opportunities going forward.

As a rural dweller myself I am very aware of the challenges facing our rural communities today. I am also greatly encouraged by the ingenuity, resilience and drive of rural people. I know with targeted investment we can sustain and grow the rural and Northern Ireland Economy. These have been challenging times, but we must now look to a post Covid-19 future and embrace the opportunities that green growth, globalisation and technological innovation present.

I hope that, with your support and input, a new Rural Business and Community Investment Programme will emerge from the Framework and this will succeed the current RDP 'LEADER' and Rural Tourism schemes when investment ends in 2022. Of course the wide range of challenges facing rural society are not for DAERA alone to address. We will work in partnership with other Government Departments, Statutory Bodies, Councils and the private and community/voluntary sectors to ensure that they continue to focus on addressing the needs of rural dwellers and businesses.

I encourage you to respond to this consultation so that we can support a sustainable rural Northern Ireland going forward where people want to live, work and be active.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edwin Poots". The signature is stylized and cursive.

Edwin Poots MLA
Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Introduction

The Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) has a vision for sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone. Around 670,000 people, i.e. over a third (36%) of the population live in rural areas in Northern Ireland (NI). The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 provides a statutory duty on public authorities to have due regard to rural needs which should deliver better outcomes for people in rural areas and help make rural communities more sustainable. The impact of a policy or the delivery of a public service can be different for people in rural areas to those in urban areas and a one size fits all approach may not always be appropriate.

Development work on the Rural Policy Framework for NI including extensive stakeholder engagement commenced prior to COVID-19, however, we have since taken into account feedback received throughout the pandemic including outcomes from a number of pilot schemes we launched. Whilst we are still in the midst of the worst global health pandemic in 100 years, there have been a number of emerging positives. It is clear that there is a renewed appreciation for access to nature, Green Growth, and sustainability in a post COVID-19 world. It has been reaffirmed to us that partnership working, not just across central government but also including local government, the private sector and the community and voluntary sector is fundamental to fostering sustainability within rural communities and ensuring the best possible outcomes for people in rural areas. The pandemic required quick and decisive responses to emerging need in rural areas, which would not have been possible without partnership working across all sectors. We have experienced a true willingness to work in new and innovative ways and will continue to nurture this going forward.

Funding via the Priority 6¹ (LEADER and Rural Tourism) of the European Union (EU) approved Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2014-2020 (hereinafter Priority 6) is coming to an end. Priority 6 has provided around £80 million over the course of its lifetime attributed to non-agricultural activities supporting wider rural development. This includes ongoing work that currently supports rural businesses, rural tourism, basic services in rural areas, rural broadband and village renewal. It is clear that new opportunities now exist to proactively respond to rural needs in a flexible way going forward. The need for a highly flexible yet responsive approach has been magnified further with the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

¹ Priority 6 (promoting social inclusion, poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas) includes LEADER and Rural Tourism aspects of the EU approved Northern Ireland Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 and any subsequent EU Common Agricultural Policy development post 2020.

A Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland provides rural communities an opportunity to review its approach to rural policy and what is needed to support rural communities within the context of the following main strategic drivers:

- The impact of COVID-19 on rural communities, in particular the need for flexibility to respond quickly to emerging needs;
- Green Growth including the need for access to nature whilst ensuring sustainability in a post COVID-19 era;
- Opportunities for new ways of working and funding post priority 6 funding under EU Rural Development Programme;
- The priorities set out in the draft Programme for Government (PfG); and
- The New Decade, New Approach Deal.

The Rural Policy Framework for NI is ambitious in regards to both its scope and remit, recognising rural areas as places of opportunity. The Framework sets a challenging vision and aim for rural NI, complementing any future Green Growth Strategy, focusing on sustainability. The Framework has also taken into account City and Regional Growth Deals. Whilst a living document, in so far as possible, consideration has been given to current emerging needs impacting on rural areas, such as the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Our rural areas and rural communities make an important contribution to the social and economic life of the region and it is important that governments, rural communities and the voluntary and community sector continue to work together to help sustain rural communities; support balanced regional growth; and to help tackle rural disadvantage.

Purpose of this Document

This consultation exercise gives you the opportunity to articulate your views on whether you consider the proposed Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland to be relevant and appropriate from your organisation's; your sector's; your community's; or your own perspective, as a means of creating a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active. This exercise will inform the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland and the subsequent interventions and Programme of support stemming from it. The Department encourages you to share your views with us.

NB: this document is an abridged version of the Rural Policy Framework for NI. Detailed information including the evidence and need identified that led to the development of thematic pillars and priority interventions can be found at: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/daera/20.21.043%20Rural%20Policy%20Framework%20NI%20-%20Consultation%20Final.PDF> A full list of consultation questions are available in Annex 1.

Key Statistical Rural Issues Findings - NI Region

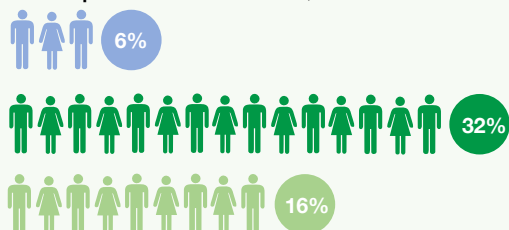
Around 670,000 people (36%) of the NI population live in a rural area, and although their circumstances are in many ways very similar to those of urban dwellers, there are also distinct urban/rural differences which tend to be more pronounced in rural areas outside of Belfast. Rural industry and employment differ in nature from that of towns and cities, and difficulties with accessibility and connectivity, social and digital are almost uniquely rural. The cost of living tends to be higher in rural than urban areas and rural households are more likely to experience fuel poverty. Nevertheless, the rural population on average enjoy a better quality of life than their urban counterparts, in terms of health, happiness and life satisfaction. Figure 1 provides a brief overview of the key issues affecting both urban and rural areas and the differences between the two.



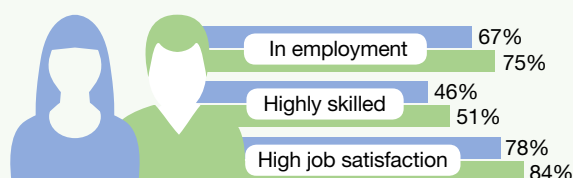
Northern Ireland Urban-Rural Statistics

● = Urban ● = Mixed ● = Rural

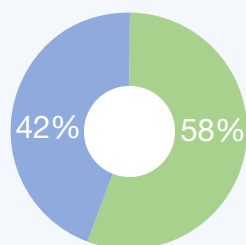
Population Growth, 2001-2018



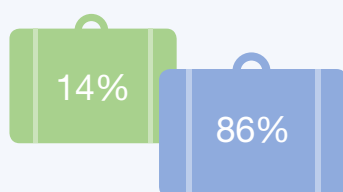
Job Quality 2018



Businesses 2019



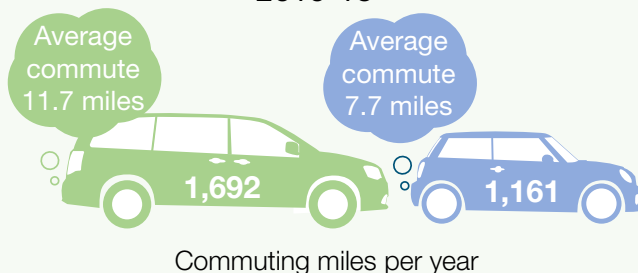
Tourism Expenditure 2018



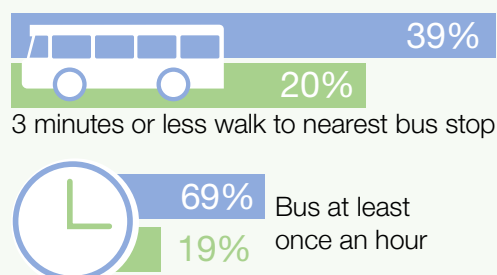
Median Annual Salary 2019



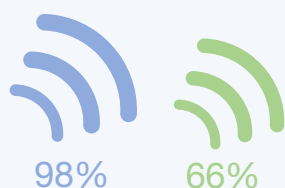
2016-18



Public Transport 2016-18



Coverage of Superfast Broadband 2019



People in Absolute Poverty 2018/19

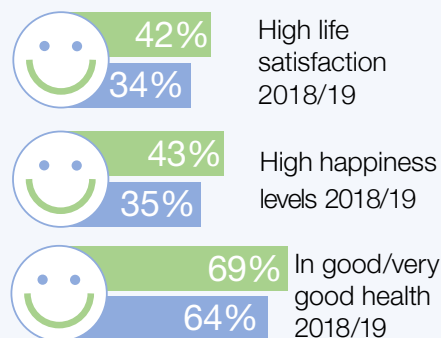
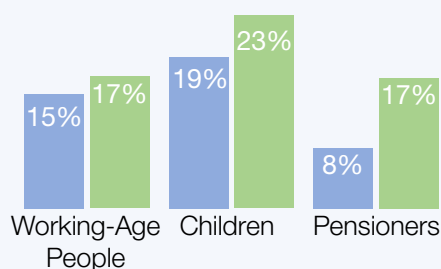


Figure 1: Taken from Key Rural Issues, Northern Ireland 2020 report available at:

https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Key%20Rural%20Issues%202020%20Infographic_0.pdf

Stakeholder Engagement (pre-consultation)

The Rural Policy Framework for NI has been underpinned by engagement, partnership and flexibility throughout its development with extensive engagement incorporating a wide range of rural stakeholders. Many of the issues identified throughout the stakeholder engagement process will require inter-departmental co-operation and joint working to ensure strategic delivery in addressing those issues. The Framework has also adhered to the cross-cutting horizontal principles of sustainability, equality and equal opportunities.

Figure 2 below provides a brief summary of the stakeholder engagement on the Draft Rural Policy Framework for NI up until now.

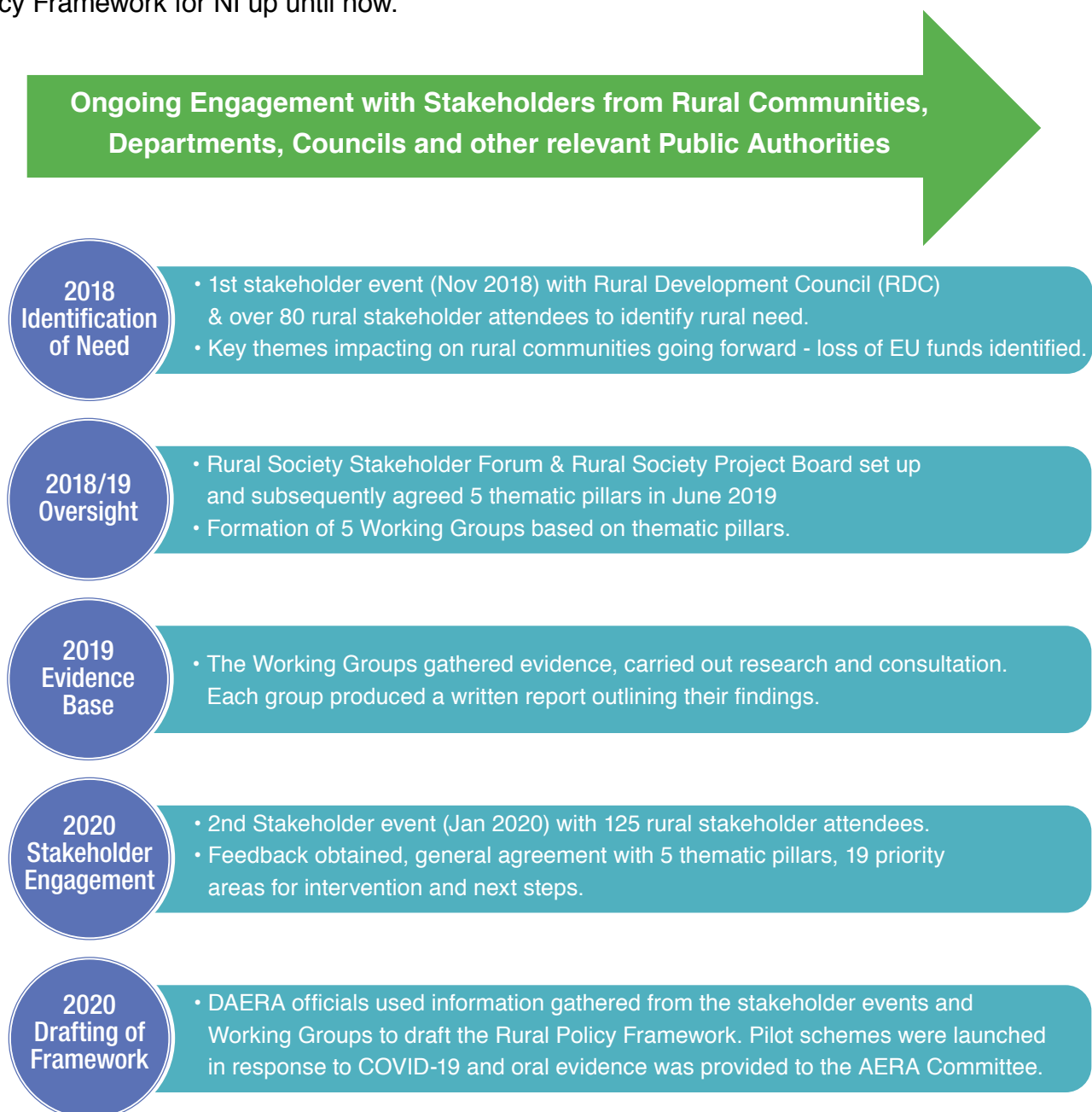


Figure 2: Summary of Stakeholder Engagement.

The Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland

Framework Overview

Figure 3 below demonstrates how each of the thematic pillars and priority areas for intervention feed into the overarching Rural Policy Framework for NI. Subject to approval of the proposed Rural Policy Framework for NI, individual schemes will then be developed into a new Programme entitled the ‘Rural Business and Community Investment Programme’.

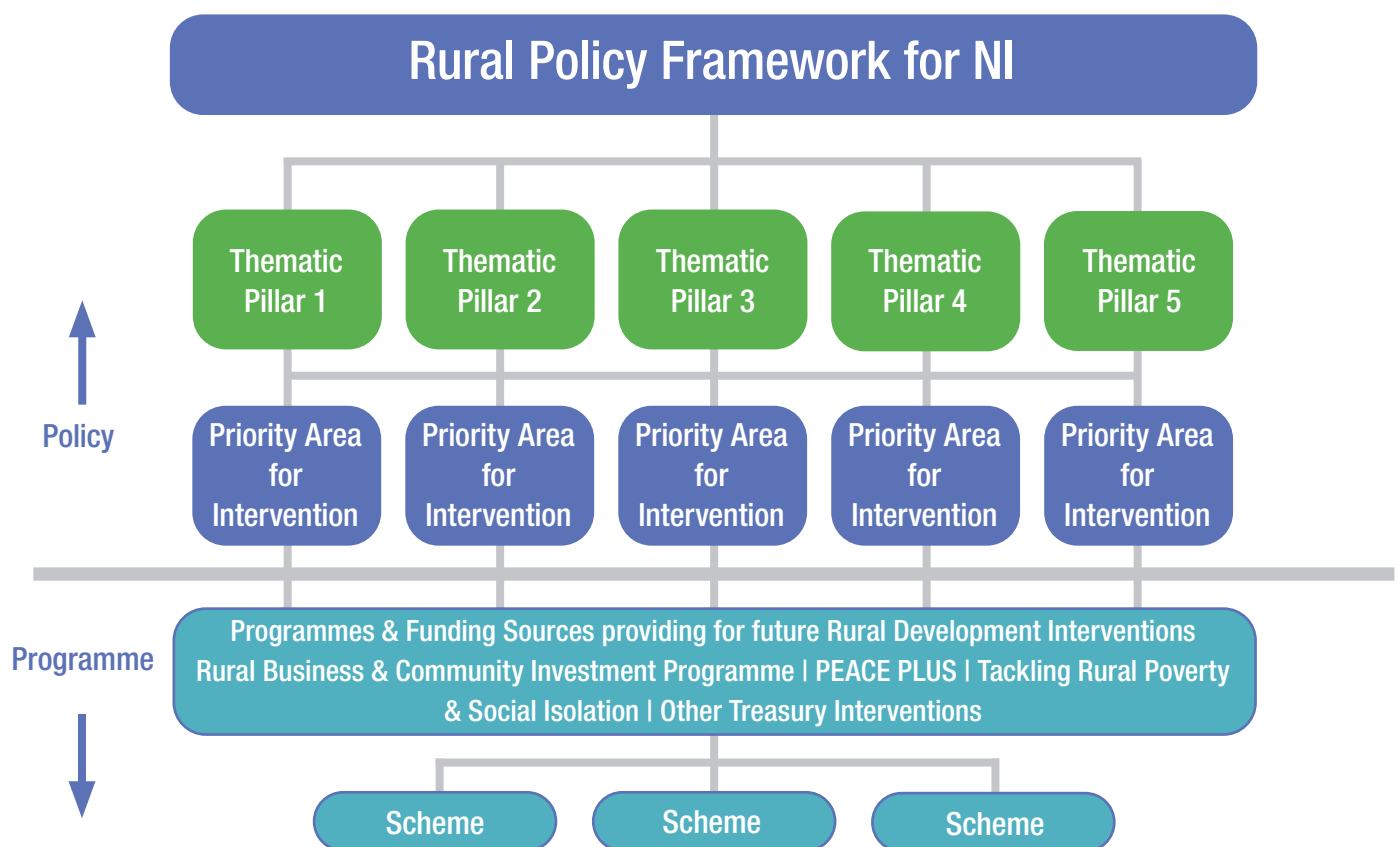


Figure 3: Overview of Rural Policy Framework for NI.

A Vision for Rural

DAERA's vision is:

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape, valued by everyone.

Overarching Aim

The aim for the Draft Rural Policy Framework for NI is:

To create a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active.

Thematic Pillars and Priority Interventions

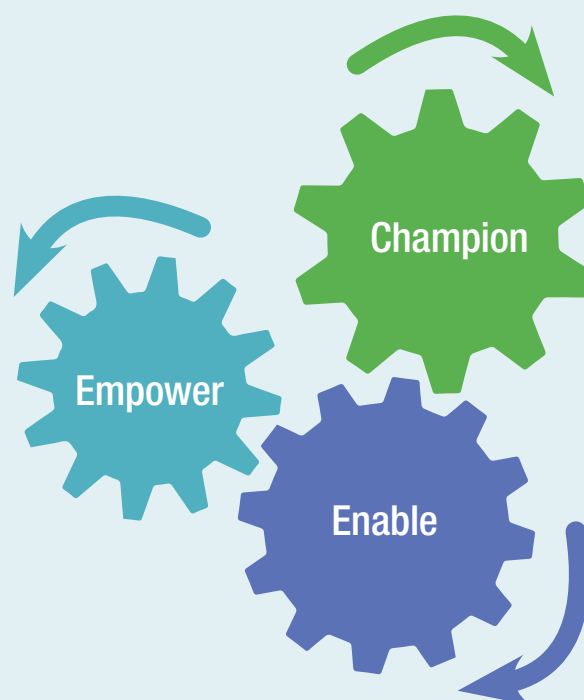
The table below provides a summary of the five key thematic pillars and the nineteen associated priority interventions that make up the Rural Policy Framework for NI. Whilst each of the five thematic pillars will incorporate a number of priority areas for intervention, it is recognised that there is potential for significant overlap between the five thematic pillars and that individual priority areas may address more than one thematic pillar.

Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship
To create a rural society where innovation and entrepreneurship flourish.



Programme for Government Outcomes

- **Outcome 1:** We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy.
- **Outcome 5:** We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential.



The following priority interventions have been developed for rural innovation and entrepreneurship in NI:

- Intervention 1 - **Champion:** Develop a culture of rural innovation.
- Intervention 2 - **Empower:** Raise awareness, build capacity and capability to engage in rural entrepreneurship and innovation.
- Intervention 3 - **Enable:** Invest in and develop our rural economy.

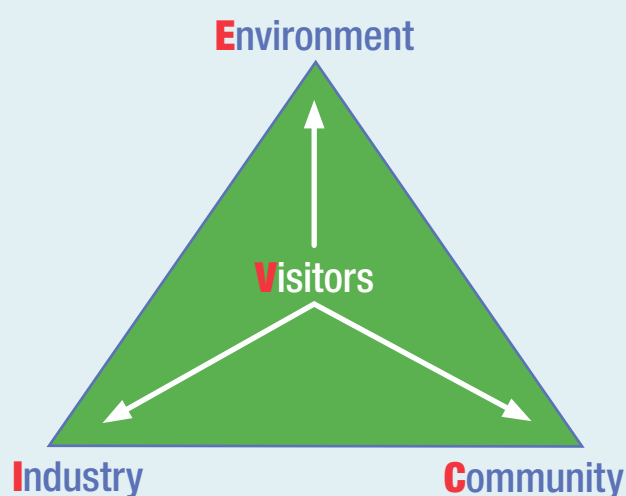
Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism

To maximise the contribution that sustainable rural tourism makes to rural society and to the wider economy and environment.



Programme for Government Outcomes

- **Outcome 1:** We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy.
- **Outcome 2:** We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment.
- **Outcome 10:** We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest.



Adapted from New Zealand Ministry of Tourism *et al.* (2006).

The following priority interventions have been developed for sustainable rural tourism in NI:

- **Intervention 1 - Visitor:** Encourage and support the delivery of compelling year-round, authentic visitor products and experiences of a quality that will provide international stand out for NI.
- **Intervention 2 - Industry:** Support a rural tourism sector that is commercially focused and achieves sustainable levels of growth and prosperity.
- **Intervention 3 - Community:** Facilitate welcoming and supportive rural communities to play an enhanced role in developing and managing tourism in their locality, thereby strengthening, benefitting and enriching local areas.
- **Intervention 4 - Environment:** Recognise, value, protect and enhance Northern Ireland's natural, cultural and historic built environment as the cornerstone of its rural tourism.

Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing

To reduce loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of rural isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers.



Programme for Government Outcomes

- **Outcome 3:** We have a more equal society.
- **Outcome 4:** We enjoy long, healthy, active lives.
- **Outcome 5:** We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential.
- **Outcome 8:** We care for others and we help those in need.
- **Outcome 9:** We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity.
- **Outcome 11:** We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure.
- **Outcome 12:** We give our children and young people the best start in life.



The following priority interventions have been developed for rural health and social wellbeing in NI:

- Intervention 1 - **Champion:** Champion awareness and understanding of rural social exclusion, isolation and loneliness.
- Intervention 2 - **Build Capacity:** Support a rural dimension within the work of other organisations which are promoting positive health and wellbeing, addressing social exclusion, isolation and loneliness and build the capacity of rural organisations and people to develop their activities in this area.
- Intervention 3 - **Reduce:** Establish effective approaches to reducing loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of social isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers.
- Intervention 4 - **Sustain:** Sustain the future viability of villages as social and economic centres.
- Intervention 5 - **Community Assets:** Support the strategic development of existing rural community assets as places where people can meet, interact, access services and enhance their health and wellbeing.

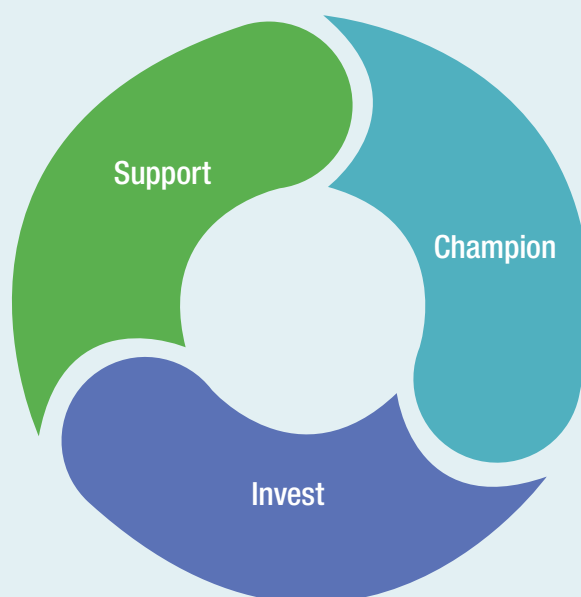
Thematic Pillar 4: Employment

To increase employment opportunities available to people living in rural areas.



Programme for Government Outcomes

- **Outcome 1:** We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy.
- **Outcome 2:** We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment.
- **Outcome 3:** We have a more equal society.
- **Outcome 6:** We have more people working in better jobs.
- **Outcome 12:** We give our children and young people the best start in life.



The following priority interventions have been developed for rural employment in NI:

- Intervention 1 - **Support:** To promote rural prosperity by providing support to non-farming rural enterprises to help increase rural business start-ups, sustainability and growth.
- Intervention 2 - **Champion:** To champion the need to address the personal and practical issues which create barriers to employability for our rural dwellers.
- Intervention 3 - **Invest:** To invest in and develop our rural society.

Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity

To improve connectivity between rural and urban areas.



Programme for Government Outcomes

- **Outcome 1:** We prosper through a strong, competitive, regionally balanced economy.
- **Outcome 2:** We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment.
- **Outcome 3:** We have a more equal society.
- **Outcome 11:** We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure.



Transport



Connectivity



Broadband



Access

The following priority interventions have been developed for connectivity between urban and rural areas in NI:

- Intervention 1 - **Transport:** To support sustainable public transport services between rural areas and urban centres and encourage active and public transport usage that better meets the needs of rural dwellers.
- Intervention 2 - **Connectivity:** To support balanced regional development by promoting better connectivity between urban and rural centres.
- Intervention 3 - **Broadband:** To support improved telecommunications infrastructure including high speed broadband making it available to as many people as possible regardless of where they live.
- Intervention 4 - **Access:** To reduce barriers to accessing services in rural areas.

Links to Draft Programme for Government Outcomes

We note that the Executive has recently launched a public consultation on its Programme for Government (PfG) Outcomes Framework 2021. The development work for the Rural Policy Framework was based on the existing draft PfG 2016-2021 outcomes. The outcomes listed below are from the existing draft PfG, however, should the proposed outcomes be accepted, they will be incorporated at the first opportunity (for ease of reference we have also listed the new corresponding proposed outcomes alongside the existing ones). The Rural Policy Framework for NI is intended to feed into the following eleven (or eight under the proposed outcomes) draft Programme for Government (PfG) 2016-2021 outcomes:

| Current PfG Outcome | Corresponding Proposed PfG Outcomes |
|---|---|
| Outcome 1: We prosper through a strong competitive regionally balanced economy. | Proposed Outcome: Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral. |
| Outcome 2: We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment. | Proposed Outcome: We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment. |
| Outcome 3: We have a more equal society. | Proposed Outcome: We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect. |
| Outcome 4: We enjoy long, healthy, active lifestyles. | Proposed Outcome: We all enjoy long, healthy, active lives. |
| Outcome 5: We are an innovative, creative society, where people can fulfil their potential. | Proposed Outcome: Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral. |
| Outcome 6: We have more people working in better jobs. | Proposed Outcome: Everyone can reach their potential. |
| Outcome 8: We care for others and we help those in need. | Proposed Outcome: We have a caring society that supports people throughout their lives. |
| Outcome 9: We are a shared, welcoming and confident society that respects diversity. | Proposed Outcome: We have an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect. |
| Outcome 10: We have created a place where people want to live and work, to visit and invest. | Proposed Outcome: People want to live, work and visit here. |
| Outcome 11: We connect people and opportunities through our infrastructure. | Proposed Outcomes: Our economy is globally competitive, regionally balanced and carbon-neutral; Our children and young people have the best start in life. |
| Outcome 12: We give our children and young people the best start in life. | Proposed Outcome: Our children and young people have the best start in life. |

Key Principles

The following 14 key principles apply to the Rural Policy Framework for NI:

- The Framework will focus on addressing the needs of rural communities through the delivery of outcomes based initiatives which provide value for money and also contribute to the outcomes set out in the draft PfG;
- The Framework will promote the piloting of new and innovative approaches to the challenges facing rural communities;
- The Framework will encourage partnership working between Departments, other public sector organisations and the rural community sector;
- The Framework will recognise the important role played by the rural community sector and the need to encourage rural community empowerment;
- The Framework will encourage the mainstreaming of successful projects and the development of suitable exit strategies;
- The Framework will complement other rural initiatives including the Rural Needs Act 2016;
- The Framework will be cognisant of the fact that all Departments have responsibilities for rural areas;
- The Framework will promote sustainability through support for projects which deliver long term benefits for rural communities;
- The Framework will seek to promote equality and good relations in line with the Department's duties under Section 75;
- The Framework will seek to complement the aims and objectives of other key Executive policies and strategies including the Draft PfG and the New Decade, New Approach Deal;
- The Framework will promote the sharing of information (in line with UK data protection legislation), learning and best practice between organisations;
- The Framework will seek to complement the community planning process;
- The Framework will recognise opportunities for partnership working on a North/South, East/West or transnational basis; and
- The Framework will seek to use the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework (TRPSI) delivery approach under the wider umbrella of Thematic Pillar 3.

Implementation

The Rural Policy Framework for NI sets out five thematic pillars incorporating nineteen priority areas for intervention that we want to achieve to help create a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active. We will work towards achieving these interventions in relation to the policies, programmes and services we provide.

Publication of this draft Framework is only the beginning of the process. Subject to consultation feedback and approval of the proposed Rural Policy Framework for NI, there are a number of steps to take forward as we begin to put it into operation. A key task will involve developing individual schemes into a new Programme entitled 'Rural Business and Community Investment Programme'. This new Programme will take into account any lessons learned from the Priority 6 element of the EU RDP and it is anticipated to last for a minimum of 7 years to facilitate meaningful outcomes and to tie into the multi-year budget approach outlined in the New Decade, New Approach Deal. Any Programme and associated interventions require sufficient budgets and delivery mechanisms to realise the Framework's overarching vision and aim. The interventions should also complement each other and be strategic in both development and delivery.

We will work with other organisations in designing and implementing a programme of priority areas for intervention to be delivered under the Framework. These organisations will include other Departments, local councils, other public and/or private bodies and the rural community sector.

The Rural Policy Framework for NI will operate from 2021 onwards and the initial programme will be implemented over a period of 7 years. The programme will be published setting out details of any schemes to be funded. We expect that an interim evaluation of the programme will be completed in year four and recommendations implemented. The programme will be a living document that will be updated regularly during the lifetime of the Framework. This enables opportunities to make amendments to the schemes to be funded under the programme, according to the need at the time. The need for such flexibility and adaptability was highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

An Equality Screening and Human Rights screening exercise has been carried out in relation to the draft Rural Policy Framework. A screening exercise will also be carried out in respect of the Rural Business and Community Investment Programme to be delivered under the Rural Policy Framework for NI.

Monitoring

DAERA is responsible for the Rural Policy Framework for NI and will have a co-ordinating role but each Department has responsibility for their respective departmental and policy areas.

To ensure that any future Programme can proactively respond to rural needs in a flexible way going forward we will establish a new cross-cutting Rural Society Oversight Committee comprising senior managers from Departments and a range of stakeholders representing organisations with an interest in issues affecting rural communities. This Committee will be responsible for monitoring any future Programme, with regular updates provided on progress and expenditure. Whilst this committee will not have approval powers it will be able to highlight new need or reconfiguration of existing scheme(s) ensuring robust scrutiny of the Programme. Such an approach will provide opportunities to proactively respond to rural needs in a flexible way going forward. We expect that an update will be provided to the oversight committee twice per year or ad hoc as required.

Monitoring and Reporting

Indicators emanating from the nineteen priority intervention will be developed to assist with the monitoring of the effectiveness of the Framework. These indicators will be developed during Year One of the Framework. Whilst some indicators will be clearly associated with one particular priority intervention, other indicators will be cross-cutting and relevant across a number of priority areas for intervention.

There will be ongoing monitoring of the indicators to determine whether the actions we are taking are having an impact, how the indicators are being achieved and whether or not we are creating a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active.

Reporting and any updates to the Rural Society Oversight Committee will be proportionate and meaningful, so it can clearly be seen whether or not the Framework is making an impact. It is our intention that, as far as possible, reporting arrangements will be aligned with the reporting arrangements for the PfG. Data will be made available to our stakeholders and the public so they can see what progress is being made.

Equality Monitoring will be undertaken at a programme level regarding funding.

Regular Review

Regular reviews of the Rural Policy Framework will be considered to ensure that the Framework takes account of new issues affecting rural communities that might emerge over its lifetime.

Evaluation

Each intervention funded under the Rural Policy Framework for NI will be subject to an evaluation following its completion. An evaluation of the Framework will be undertaken prior to the development of any future Framework.

Next Steps

The Department welcomes feedback in relation to these consultation proposals (see how to respond section for more details) and the draft Equality and Human Rights Screening Template. All consultation responses will be analysed and used, as appropriate, to shape the final recommendations. Following the end of the consultation period the Department will:

- Collate and analyse consultation responses;
- Publish a response report (all responses may be published in full or in summary form);
- Finalise proposals and the Equality and Human Rights Screening Template; and
- Publish a future programme.

Rural Needs Considerations

DAERA has a statutory duty to implement the requirements of the Rural Needs Act.

A Rural Needs Impact Assessment has been completed and is available at:

<https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/daera/Rural%20Policy%20Framework%20for%20Northern%20Ireland%20Rural%20Needs%20Impact%20Assessment.pdf>

Equality Considerations

Section 75 of the NI Act 1998 (the Act) requires public authorities, in carrying out their functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity and regard to the desirability of promoting good relations across a range of categories outlined in the Act. We commit to having effective internal arrangements in place for ensuring our effective compliance with the Section 75 statutory duties and for monitoring and reviewing our progress.

In the context of Section 75, 'policy' is very broadly defined and it covers all the ways in which we carry out or propose to carry out our functions. In making any decision with respect to a policy adopted or proposed to be adopted, we take into account any assessment and consultation carried out in relation to the policy.

We use the tools of screening and Equality Impact Assessment to assess the likely impact of a policy on the promotion of equality of opportunity and good relations. Screening is completed at the earliest opportunity in the policy development/review process. Policies that we propose to adopt will be subject to screening prior to implementation. For more detailed strategies or policies that are to be put in place through a series of stages, we will screen at various stages during implementation.

An Equality and Human Rights Screening Template has been completed for this Framework and is available at: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/daera/Rural%20Framework%20for%20NI%20EQIA%20Screening%20Template.docx.DOCX>

How to Respond

DAERA welcomes responses and comments from stakeholders on the questions outlined in this document to help develop the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland for publishing.

A full list of questions in this document can be found at Annex A.

When responding please provide the following information:

- Your name;
- Contact details (preferably e-mail); and
- Organisation you represent (if applicable).

This consultation exercise uses the Citizen Space Hub, accessible via: <https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/daera-central-services-and-rural-affairs/rural-policy-framework> as the primary means of response, in order to make it as accessible as possible.

However, you may download a response template at: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/daera/20.21.042%20Rural%20Policy%20Framework%20NI%20-%20Response%20Template%20final.PDF> and reply:

By e-mail to: ruralpolicydelivery@daera-ni.gov.uk

By post to: Rural Policy and Delivery Branch

Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Rural Affairs Division,
2nd Floor, Ballykelly House
111 Ballykelly Road
Ballykelly
Limavady
BT49 9HP

Early responses are encouraged but the closing date for responses is **Monday 6 September 2021**. Before you submit your responses please read the “Publication of Responses” section below, which gives guidance on the legal position. If you require any further information, on this consultation exercise, we would encourage you to contact us via e-mail. If you are unable to access e-mail, you can telephone us on 028 7744 5113. Please note this is a voicemail service and a member of the team will call you back.

Publication of Responses

At the end of the engagement, the Department intends to publish a summary of responses following the closing date for receipt of views. Your response, and all other responses to this publication, may be disclosed on request. The Department can only refuse to disclose information in exceptional circumstances. Any confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system in e-mail responses will not be treated as such a request.

Section 8(e) of the Data Protection Act 2018 permits processing of personal data when necessary for an activity that supports or promotes democratic engagement. Information provided by respondents to this stakeholder engagement exercise will be held and used for the purposes of the administration of this current exercise and subsequently disposed of in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 and UK General Data Protection Regulation.

The Freedom of Information Act gives the public a right of access to any information held by a public authority, namely, the Department in this case. This right of access to information includes information provided in response to a stakeholder engagement exercise. The Department cannot automatically consider as confidential information supplied to it in response to a stakeholder engagement exercise. However, it does have the responsibility to decide whether any information provided by you in response to this stakeholder engagement exercise, including information about your identity, should be made public or be treated as confidential. If you do not wish information about your identity to be made public, please include an explanation in your response.

This means that information provided by you in response to the stakeholder engagement is unlikely to be treated as confidential, except in very particular circumstances. The Lord Chancellor's Code of Practice on the Freedom of Information Act provides that:

- The Department should only accept information from third parties in confidence if it is necessary to obtain that information in connection with the exercise of any of the Department's functions and it would not otherwise be provided;
- The Department should not agree to hold information received from third parties "in confidence" which is not confidential in nature; and
- Acceptance by the Department of confidentiality provisions must be for good reasons, capable of being justified to the Information Commissioner.

For further information about confidentiality of responses please contact the Information Commissioner's Office (<https://ico.org.uk/>).

Annex 1 - Summary of Consultation Questions

Consultation Questions

Q1) Do you agree that the proposed overarching aim ‘To create a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active’ for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland is appropriate?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Q2) Do you agree that the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) approach should continue under the wider umbrella of the Rural Policy Framework?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Q3) In your opinion, what are the main challenges facing rural communities in Northern Ireland over the next 5 years? Please select what you feel are the top five challenges from the options outlined below.

Rank these five challenges by priority from 1 to 5 (with 1 being the most significant challenge, 2 being less significant etc.)

- Access to public services (e.g. health, education and social services)
- Availability of appropriate and adequate community facilities/supports for different age groups
- Broadband/mobile phone connectivity
- Changing demographics (e.g. ageing population, new communities, and retention of young people in rural areas)
- Climate change and environmental sustainability
- Future of farming/agri-food sector
- Jobs and business
- Managing tourism in a sustainable way
- Transport and infrastructure

If there are any other challenges you feel have not been included in the list, please indicate these in the comment box below.

Q4) In your opinion, what are the main opportunities facing rural communities in Northern Ireland over the next 5 years? Please select what you feel are the top five opportunities from the options outlined below.

Rank these five opportunities by priority from 1 to 5 (with 1 being the most significant opportunity, 2 being less significant etc.)

- Diversification within farming/agri-food sector
- Economic development of markets (local, national and international) and sectors (both non-traditional and emerging)
- Enabling communities (e.g. supporting local leadership, groups and volunteers, enhancing community amenities)
- Enterprise and employment: expanding opportunities (e.g. Social Enterprise, apprenticeships, supporting entrepreneurs)
- Joined-up approach from Government on delivering for rural communities in Northern Ireland
- Optimisation of digital connectivity (e.g. Broadband and emerging technologies) (e.g. remote working, research, development and innovation, and future jobs)
- Revitalisation of towns and villages
- Sustainable development and climate adaptation (e.g. renewable energy)
- Tourism: expansion of options including heritage, recreation and activity tourism
- Transport infrastructure and services

If there are any other opportunities you feel have not been included in the list, please indicate these in the comment box below.

Q5) Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship: To create a rural society where innovation and entrepreneurship flourish.

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. Do you agree that the three priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Develop a culture of rural innovation.
- Raise awareness, build capacity and capability to engage in rural entrepreneurship and innovation.
- Invest in and develop our rural economy.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Q6) Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism: To maximise the contribution that sustainable rural tourism makes to rural society and to the wider economy and environment.

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. Do you agree that the four priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Encourage and support the delivery of compelling year-round, authentic visitor products and experiences of a quality that will provide international stand out for Northern Ireland.
- Support a rural tourism sector that is commercially focused and achieves sustainable levels of growth and prosperity.
- Facilitate welcoming and supportive rural communities to play an enhanced role in developing and managing tourism in their locality, thereby strengthening, benefitting and enriching local areas.
- Recognise, value, protect and enhance Northern Ireland's natural, cultural and historic built environment as the cornerstone of its rural tourism.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Q7) Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing: To reduce loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of rural isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. Do you agree that the five priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Champion awareness and understanding of rural social exclusion, isolation and loneliness.
- Support a rural dimension within the work of other organisations which are promoting positive health and wellbeing, addressing social exclusion, isolation and loneliness and build the capacity of rural organisations and people to develop their activities in this area.
- Establish effective approaches to reducing loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of social isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers.
- Sustain the future viability of villages as social and economic centres.
- Support the strategic development of existing rural community assets as places where people can meet, interact, access services and enhance their health and wellbeing.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Q8) Thematic Pillar 4: Employment: To increase employment opportunities available to people living in rural areas

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 4: Employment is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. Do you agree that the three priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 4: Employment are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- To promote rural prosperity by providing support to non-farming rural enterprises to help increase rural business start-ups, sustainability and growth.
- To champion the need to address the personal and practical issues which create barriers to employability for our rural dwellers.
- To invest in and develop our rural society.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Q9) Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity: To improve connectivity between rural and urban areas

a. Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. Do you agree that the four priority areas for intervention outline below supporting Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- To support sustainable public transport services between rural areas and urban centres and encourage active and public transport usage that better meets the needs of rural dwellers.
- To support balanced regional development by promoting better connectivity between urban and rural centres.
- To support improved telecommunications infrastructure including high speed broadband making it available to as many people as possible regardless of where they live.
- To reduce barriers to accessing services in rural areas.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Q10) What are your views on how the five thematic pillars should be prioritised, ranked by priority from 1-5 (with 1 being the highest priority and 5 being the lowest priority)?

- Thematic pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship
- Thematic pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism
- Thematic pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing
- Thematic pillar 4: Employment
- Thematic pillar 5: Connectivity

Q11) Do you agree that the 14 Key Principles outlined below are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Address the needs of rural communities through the delivery of outcomes based initiatives which provide value for money and also contribute to the outcomes set out in the draft Programme for Government 2016-21 (PfG);
- Promote the piloting of new and innovative approaches to the challenges facing rural communities;
- Encourage partnership working between Departments, other public sector organisations and the rural community sector;
- Recognise the important role played by the rural community sector and the need to encourage rural community empowerment;
- Encourage the mainstreaming of successful projects and the development of suitable exit strategies;
- Complement other rural initiatives including the Rural Needs Act 2016;
- Be cognisant of the fact that all Departments have responsibilities for rural areas;
- Promote sustainability through support for projects which deliver long term benefits for rural communities;
- Seek to promote equality and good relations in line with the Department's duties under Section 75;

- Seek to complement the aims and objectives of other key Executive policies and strategies including the Draft PfG and the New Decade, New Approach Deal;
- Promote the sharing of information (in line with UK data protection legislation), learning and best practice between organisations;
- Seek to complement the community planning process;
- Recognise opportunities for partnership working on a North/South, East/West or transnational basis; and
- The Framework will seek to use the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) delivery approach under the wider umbrella of Thematic Pillar 3.

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

Q12) Are there any other aspects of the proposals that you wish to comment on?

If you have any additional comments, please outline below.

Q13) Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DAERA in relation to Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland in respect of:

a. The Equality and Human Rights Screening Template

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

b. The Rural Needs Impact Assessment

If you have any additional comments to accompany your answer, please outline below.

For further information:

Rural Policy and Delivery Branch
Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
Rural Affairs Division
2nd Floor, Ballykelly House
111 Ballykelly Road
Ballykelly
Limavady
BT49 9HP

Tel: 028 7744 5113 - (This is a voicemail service and a member of the team will call you back)

Email: ruralpolicydelivery@daera-ni.gov.uk

www.daera-ni.gov.uk