

## **Macra na Feirme submission to the National Planning Framework's Ireland 2040 Our Plan**

Macra na Feirme welcomes the National Planning Framework initiative to develop Ireland 2040 Our Plan and for the opportunity to feed into the consultative process.

To ensure Ireland in 2040 has a vibrant, progressive, sustainable rural economy, Macra na Feirme's identifies the need for a substantive development strategy to meet the needs of our small towns, rural areas and local communities. Currently some of Ireland's large urban centres continue to expand and reap the benefits of economic recovery, primarily areas of Dublin. The projected increase in Ireland's population growth and spatial concentration around large urban areas will create infrastructural, economic and social stresses. As a counter balance Ireland needs to ensure the rest of the country is seen as an attractive place for people to live and work. Many rural communities continue to suffer from underdevelopment characterised by unemployment, underemployment, lack of diverse job opportunities, infrastructure and services. Despite the above reality rural Ireland is very much alive with agricultural activity at its core, however rural Ireland needs a diverse economy with opportunities for young people to remain and prosper. As the farming organisation representing rural young people, Macra na Feirme firmly commits itself to ensuring that the needs of our local areas are met by calling for meaningful policies to improve opportunities for young people to ensure our rural areas are alive, vibrant and prosperous in 2040.

Macra na Feirme in the coming months will undertake to complete a consultative process to engage with rural youth from across the country to determine their vision for Ireland in 2040 and identify the key opportunities and challenges that need to be addressed. We will feed the outcome of this process into the next phase in the consultation process for the vision of Ireland in 2040. The organization proposes to model the consultation on a similar format to the recent CAP 2020 consultation. This involved hosting consultative events with young farmers across the country and empowering Macra na Feirme members to act as facilitators. Members documented the findings on worksheets and feed into the discussion at the events. This was then compiled into a policy document for further discussion within the organisation's Agricultural Affairs committee. A survey was also circulated to members to get further feedback. A comprehensive policy document was completed and presented

at national and European level. This consultative process would be delivered through Macra's Rural Youth committee.

Initial observations from Macra na Feirme on achieving balanced regional development is the need for the Government to put in place and implement a number of vital policies in our communities. It is essential that the Government substantively **'rural proof'** all development policies. Policy makers must examine ways in which policy impacts on rural populations, taking into consideration the range of economic, social and cultural factors that affect local communities.

Also the vision for Rural Ireland 2040 must take account of Ireland's social geography by strategically identifying the fluid linkages between our urban centres, regional gateways and local communities. This is not a process that can be completed in an ad-hoc approach to investment. For instance Dublin suffers severe over-congestion, thus the question must be asked, how can we enable employers of the future to gain access to the infrastructure necessary to conduct business in our advanced economy and simultaneously invest in rural areas that provide an attractive place in which to live? How can young people in smaller towns gain access to high quality jobs, necessary childcare services, educational facilities for themselves and their children, health care facilities and all the necessary ingredients necessary to be included in Irish social and economic life?

### **Young people at work in their Rural Communities**

Young people in Macra na Feirme are consistently noted for their activism and high quality contributions to the regeneration and development of their local communities. The nurturing and development of this important service to rural areas is achieved through organisations like Macra na Feirme. An example of this is where Macra na Feirme members contribute significantly towards the betterment of rural areas throughout the country with nationwide events such as our 'Know Your Neighbour' campaign bringing communities closer together. However the major limiting factor for the further development of rural youth is funding shortages. The vision for youth development should be well funded rural youth organisations to deliver on youth potential.

### **Development of Human Capital in rural young people**

The greatest asset young people have in abundance is their human capital. This human capital needs to be stimulated and developed to allow our young people to champion an entrepreneurial spirit to help the development of rural areas. To foster this spirit of entrepreneurship innovation, entrepreneurial funds and initiatives targeted at young people are essential. A vision of rural areas as hubs of economic activity driven by young entrepreneurs can be a reality if the necessary incentives are put in place.

### **Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Ireland**

The primary task given to the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Ireland (CEDRA) was to identify strategic initiatives that will ensure rural areas contribute to sustained and sustainable national economic growth and development in the future. Government should drive and make available the necessary resources for the full implementation of the recommendations in the CEDRA report as to date little has been achieved.

### **Action Plan for Rural Ireland**

Macra na Feirme welcomed the launch of the new Government initiative - Action Plan for Rural Ireland. This initiative which aids the development of rural Ireland, puts clear timelines on specific actions and sets out how the development and huge potential, which exists in rural communities, can be harnessed. The plan includes supporting sustainable communities, enterprise and employment, maximising rural tourism, fostering creativity in rural communities and improving infrastructure and creativity. To avoid history repeating itself when it comes to plans of rural Ireland, this action plan needs to be fully resourced with a dedicated budget to ensure that the full potential of rural Ireland can be realised. Often as part of the Rural Development Programme, sustainability refers to the economic, social and ecology of rural areas. It is essential similar appreciations of sustainable practices are applied to the development of rural Ireland. The importance of the social and ecological aspects of sustainability are on par with the importance of economics in maintaining rural Ireland as an attractive destination to live. Sustainable rural development is necessary to

ensure young people who want to live and work in rural areas can do so. This plan needs to deliver for our young people so they can live, work and contribute to rural Ireland.

### **Housing in the future; where and what**

It is important that people who have roots in a rural community are allowed to build a home in that area. Any measures that result in young people returning to live and contribute to rural communities are to be welcomed.

### **Key infrastructure such as broadband**

Broadband is a significant catalyst in the increased usage of newer information and communications technologies. Rural populations in general will suffer from the digital divide in Ireland, given the quality of broadband access in rural areas. Quality broadband in rural Ireland is not only to be considered on its social contribution but consideration given to the role it has in aiding the successful running of already established enterprises and attracting new businesses to the countryside. The broadband strategy needs to be rolled out without delay.

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