



***RDC Response to the Draft Programme for Government
2008-2011 Building a Better Future Public Consultation***

**Northern Ireland Rural Development Council (RDC)
17 Loy Street,
Cookstown,
Co. Tyrone
BT80 8PZ**

**Telephone: 028 8676 6980
Email: tcanavan@rdc.org.uk
Web: www.rdc.org.uk**



Melanie McGinnis
Economic Policy Unit
OFMDFM
Rm E5.22
Castle Buildings
Stormont
BELFAST
BT 4 3SR

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Dear Melanie,

Re: Building a Better Future – Draft Investment Strategy 2008-2018

Thank you for the opportunity to input to this important consultation, which takes place at a time of considerable challenge and change.

The role of the Northern Ireland Rural Development Council 

RDC was established in 1991 under the DARD Rural Development Programme. We summarise our role as being an independent rural organisation, which plays a vital role in influencing rural development policy, developing and delivering practical programmes, sharing information and building effective partnerships.

RDC believes that rural areas can play a significant role in **building a better future for Northern Ireland**. The rural nature of Northern Ireland represents one of its key characteristics and should therefore inform its strategic choices for an economic growth and quality of life unique to the region.

Whilst we agree with the need for and the broad thrust of the investment priorities around which the budget proposals are based and concur with the over-arching aim to build **a peaceful, fair and prosperous society in Northern Ireland, with respect for the rule of law**, we do feel there is an urgent need to take greater account of rural.

The physical infrastructure which underpins sustainable and vibrant rural communities is a key concern.

The Northern Ireland manufacturing sector has undergone substantial change over the last number of years. This has had a profound effect on rural areas especially in the West where textile manufacturing played a main part in employment.

The recent announcement of job losses in Limavady and Cloughmills are a further blow to the rural economy. The economic impact of job losses in rural areas has far reaching implications not only for the individual whose job is lost but on families and the entire community. We would call on the Government to consider a new job creation strategy for rural areas that focuses on growing a dynamic innovative rural economy.

Whilst we acknowledge an overall 2.6% increase in the DARD draft budget we are concerned about the lack of rural resource development initiatives contained within the other government department proposals. By way of example we comment: -

Investment Pillar	Pfg States	RDC Comment
Networks	NI was one of the first regions in Europe to offer 100% broadband availability. The challenge is now to increase uptake rates...outside Belfast.	<p>Despite a reported 100% coverage some rural areas still have difficulty in accessing broadband. Satellite options may exist but are more expensive and issues of quality in general often results in poor uptake.</p> <p>Investment to support the role of rural areas in the sustainable development of the region must reflect the increasing importance of the knowledge economy as a source of income and jobs. It is vital rural areas achieve the structural adjustments necessary to contribute effectively to the added value and flow of services which is a crucial characteristic of a knowledge economy.</p>
Skills	Some schools may be co-located with other services, for example libraries and health provision.	<p>The danger is that key services will amalgamate to district towns as part of a cost-driven logic reducing the basis for sustaining a more balanced pattern of settlement and community.</p> <p>RDC in its study of rural schools offer a number of suggestions about how to achieve the balance between economies of scale and sustaining the social fabric.</p> <p>RDC recommend access to services is given key consideration through enhancement of the resources for rural proofing.</p>
Health	Over the next 20 years the need and demand for our health and social services will increase and change. There are several reasons	<p>Using the NISRA definition of rural approximately 35% of the Northern Ireland population live in rural areas. This equates to just under 600,000 people.</p> <p>Pensioners now make up 16% of the Northern Ireland population and this figure will have risen to 24% by 2013¹.</p>

¹ Rural Network News (RCN) No.45 Autumn 2007

	<p>for this, a central factor will be our ageing population.....</p> <p>Investing in Primary and Community Care.. We will seek to ensure that where possible people will be supported to manage their treatment at home....</p>	<p>Over 80,000² older people in Northern Ireland live alone.</p> <p>Providing support and catering for older people in rural areas will require investment.</p> <p>Scattered populations, changing family structures (many people no longer live close to extended family), recognising and working with the social diversity of rural areas, all support the need for tailored rural solutions to the delivery of health services that meet real community need.</p> <p>Unlike those in urban areas, the more disadvantaged families in rural areas often live amongst those who are better off.</p> <p>The health and well being of rural people and the delivery of associated services should be a key goal within any agreed programme for government.</p>
Social	<p>We want to create economically competitive and socially cohesive cities and towns and thriving rural communities and environment.</p> <p>The investment in key regeneration projects in our cities will be complemented by investment in</p>	<p>The considerable number of dispersed small settlements and communities making up rural Northern Ireland are an important asset to the region.</p> <p>Government policy is needed to protect and build upon this community asset as a basis for social inclusion, local citizenship and positive lifestyle choices in wider society.</p> <p>Notwithstanding the increase in the DARD draft budget and the new rural development programme monies, we highlight a lack of an equivalent form of support for rural to the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy as a vehicle to tackle rural disadvantage and community development.</p>

² As above

	Heritage Trust) this might represent up to 7,500 jobs within 10 years and additional outputs and services worth 0.5 billion within 10 years
New opportunities presented by enhanced Information technologies for distance working, a greater freedom of choice for the location of new businesses, and greater potential for global marketing of niche products for smaller producers	DETI project a rise from 6 to 12% in the proportion of people teleworking over the next 4 to 5 years. A GMB Union survey suggests as much as 15% of people work from home in Moyle, and 13% or so in many other western and southern parts, prior to the arrival of broadband across rural Northern Ireland