

Response to the DARD Draft Strategic Plan 2012 - 2020

NI Consultation

The Carnegie United Kingdom (UK) Trust welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) Strategic Plan 2012-20. The Trust has a long history of supporting rural community development. In our 100 year history, we have supported the early development of rural community councils, funded the building of village halls, and supported the rural voluntary arts network.

During 2004 -7 the Trust's inquiry into rural community development undertook one of the most comprehensive consultations on the challenges and opportunities facing local rural communities across the UK and Ireland in recent years, resulting in its 2007 publication, [A Charter for Rural Communities](#).

More recently in 2012 the Trust published a new report [Future Directions in Rural Development](#) by Professor Mark Shucksmith. In this report the Trust sets out the changed rural landscape five years on from A Charter for Rural Communities and reviews the varying success of different approaches to rural development.

We have chosen to only the answer the consultation questions relevant to our research and experience and have kept our answers brief. If you would like any further information about our research please follow the links in our responses, visit our website [here](#) or contact Jenny Brochie, Policy Officer at jenny@carnegieuk.org or on 01383 721 445.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

2.3 Should DARD actions include a specific focus on issues relevant to farm family units?

The Trust welcomes DARD's overarching Goal to 'improve the lives of rural dwellers' and supports the Department's ambition 'to be an

advocate within Government for the needs of the wider rural community.'

In our recent report [Future Directions in Rural Development](#) we evidenced how rural demographics in the UK and Ireland have changed over the last 5 years and highlighted the severe financial and environmental challenges now facing rural communities.

The report identifies that rural communities now rely less on agriculture and there has been a shift toward manufacturing and especially service employment in rural areas. This is sometimes referred to as the 'New Rural Economy'¹. An increasingly important element of economic development strategy for many rural communities now is making money from the appeal of landscapes, rural environments and local cultural heritage. Furthermore, many of the important issues now facing rural communities are very similar to those facing urban communities. These are issues to do with access to broadband, digital participation, local enterprise and community ownership.

Given this context, DARD should ensure that all sections of rural communities receive the support they need to contribute to a thriving and sustainable rural economy, community and environment. We therefore urge DARD to make sure that any specific focus on farm family household unit does not detract from the support given to other groups in rural communities.

2.4 Should DARD's rural policy be focused on advocating across government, rural proofing and the Rural White Paper Action Plan?

The Trust welcomes this approach. Our research and experience suggests that local action alone is not enough to deliver a thriving rural economy. National and regional level reviews and analysis, strategic planning and intervention are also required to address persistent patterns of structural differentiation.

Other jurisdictions within the UK are also considering how best to approach rural proofing and are taking a variety of approaches. For example, there are tentative plans for an English Rural Parliament and more concrete government

supported proposals in Scotland (which the Trust has been active in).

While we do not suggest that the rural parliament model is necessarily the right approach for Northern Ireland we do recommend that DARD keeps abreast of different approaches and their relative success in other jurisdictions.

2.6 Should the Department focus support to certain disadvantaged rural areas or identify specific rural issues and help address those where they arise?

The Trust would like to see the strategic plan recognise the diverse make up of rural communities in the 21st century and the inequalities between and within rural areas and contain relevant actions to address these unequal capacities.

Rural demographics are shifting. While some peripheral rural areas are still experiencing out migration many rural areas are experiencing counter urbanisation. The net result is that the rural population is growing and ageing² with all the pressures on services that accompany these trends.

We also see that rural communities are increasingly differentiated with unequal capacities for grassroots development. A supportive and responsive government is required to address regional level inequalities, build capacity in local communities, and mitigate against any unintended consequences of national and European level policies at a local level.

We believe that DARD should take a multi-level approach in its Strategic Plan to address the growing gaps between rural communities:

1 Taylor M, Living Working Countryside: The Taylor Review of Rural Economy and Affordable Housing, London: Department for Communities and Local Government 2008 <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/livingworkingcountryside.pdf>

2 Northern Ireland Assembly Research and Library Service Briefing Paper, Rural Development issues and challenges in Northern Ireland 2010 <http://archive.niassembly.gov.uk/researchandlibrary/2011/3011.pdf>

- at a **local** level DARD should look to support ‘networked development’, and;
- at a **national** level DARD should ensure that government policies are rural proofed (see our response to question 2.4) .

The ‘networked’ approach to rural development involves:

- the mobilisation of assets, both within and outwith the locality (see for example the Trust’s 2011 report [Appreciating Assets](#));
- the building of citizens’ capacity to act individually and collectively to work towards a shared vision for the future of their local area;
- support for networks which connect people within and beyond the locality.

A good example of the type of action that is required to support networked rural development is ensuring the long-term sustainability of rural development networks. Rural development networks play an important role in building community capacity, providing advice and support and facilitating the sharing of learning.

The Trust’s 2011 mapping research [Rural developments: A Mapping Exercise](#) identified a diverse landscape of rural development networks in Northern Ireland and other parts of the UK. However it also found considerable concern about the long-term sustainability of rural development networks in a crowded landscape with reduced funding.

There are a number of approaches that DARD might take to support the long-term sustainability of rural development networks. These include:

- hosting a summit of identified rural networks in Northern Ireland, to discuss the future of

rural development networks and opportunities for partnership working to enable the sector to improve its efficiency and effectiveness;

- carrying out a mapping exercise to identify potential local and national network partners and publishing the results to help facilitate joined up working and ready access to relevant sources of information and advice ;
- making links with civil servants from other jurisdictions within the UK in order to debate and discuss issues relating to the sector and share learning and experience.

We suggest that DARD consider the potential merits of each of these approaches within the Strategic Plan 2012-20.

The Carnegie UK Trust works to improve the lives of people throughout the UK and Ireland, by changing minds through influencing policy, and by changing lives through innovative practice and partnership work. The Carnegie UK Trust was established by Scots-American philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in 1913 and we are delighted to be celebrating our centenary in 2013. Please see our website for further information on our centenary plans.

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