



An Roinn Forbartha  
Tuaithe agus Pobail  
Department of Rural and  
Community Development

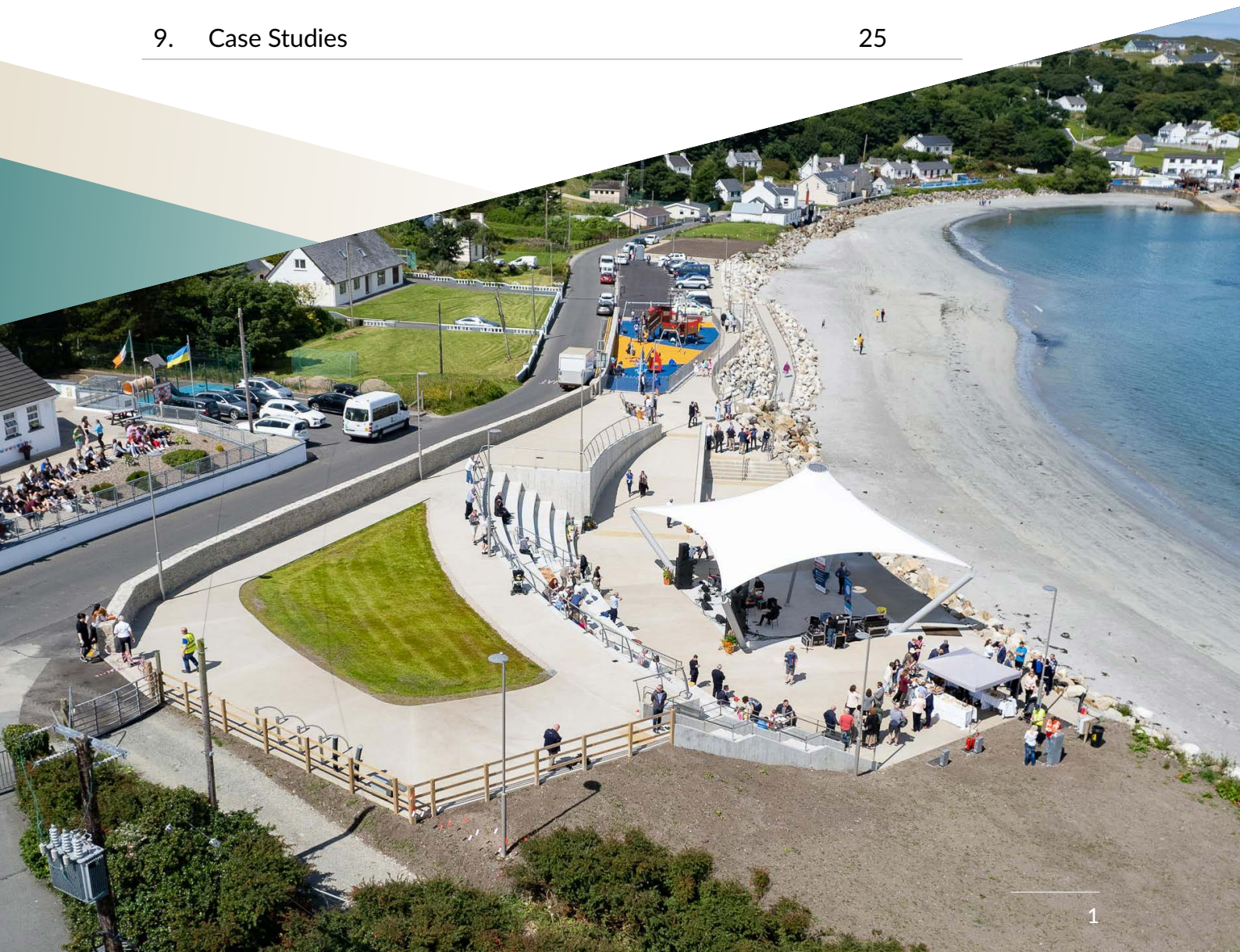
# Statement of Strategy 2023-2025





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## Our Vision

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A sustainable society with individual and community wellbeing at its heart, supporting thriving rural communities, and where all communities, urban and rural, have opportunities to grow and develop economically, socially and culturally



# Minister's Foreword



I welcome the publication of the Department's latest Statement of Strategy, covering the period 2023-2025. This Strategy is the result of extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. It will guide the delivery of

an ambitious programme of work over the coming years, with the aim of making a significant and lasting difference to rural Ireland and communities throughout the country.

I am proud of the positive contribution the work of my Department has made to date across our economy and society. Through leading delivery of Government policies impacting on rural Ireland and communities, and investing strategically, we are enabling our rural areas and communities to develop sustainably, emerge stronger from challenges, and to thrive. This Strategy will guide us as we build on the good progress already made.

Our Rural Future, the landmark national rural development policy, is already having a positive impact in communities, towns and villages across the country. Delivery of the policy, on a whole-of-Government basis, is revitalising our rural towns and villages and bringing about improved opportunities and a better quality of life for people who live and work in rural areas.

The Department's supports and policies for the Community and Voluntary Sector, and Social Enterprises are contributing to enhancing local community structures, strengthening the resilience that exists within our communities, and building social cohesion.

There has been unprecedented investment in our rural areas and our communities in recent years. Targeted investment is supporting rural regeneration, facilitating new working opportunities, fostering regional enterprise growth and enhancing community structures.

Ireland is in an era of unprecedented change as we recover from the impacts of COVID-19, as we adapt to new ways of working and as we transition to a climate-neutral society. We will continue to invest in and support communities across the country through our wide range of community supports and rural investment programme. We will build on the momentum already achieved in delivering our key policies and supports and adapt to address ongoing and emerging needs as they arise.

We will also focus on further strengthening and supporting our communities, which will be critically important as Ireland's population continues to become increasingly diverse. It is vital that we recognise that diversity and that we build a society which is inclusive, cohesive, and ensures no-one is left behind.

I'm passionate about driving delivery of the Department's vision, in collaboration with Minister of State Joe O'Brien, our Secretary General, the staff of the Department, our colleagues across Government and our international counterparts. And I look forward to working closely with our agencies, key stakeholders, and those in communities across Ireland to fully implement the ambition of this Strategy over its lifetime.

**Heather Humphreys T.D.**

Minister for Rural and Community Development

## Our Mission

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To promote rural and community development and to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland



# Secretary General Introduction



This Statement of Strategy sets out the vision, mission, and strategic goals that will guide the work of the Department of Rural and Community Development for the period 2023 to 2025. Going beyond that, it also outlines a set of key actions which we will

deliver over the lifetime of the strategy as we build on the significant progress made since the Department was established in 2017.

The Strategy has been developed in collaboration with staff, stakeholders and colleagues across Government, who have provided valuable insights. I would like to thank all those who contributed. That spirit of collaboration will continue as we work in partnership with those who share our mission to implement tangible measures and bring positive benefits to communities throughout the country.

Since its establishment, the Department has provided critical supports to enhance the lives of our people. From our rural communities and our islands to our disadvantaged urban areas, the work the Department undertakes is targeted at some of the most marginalised in our society.

Our mission is more relevant and important than ever, as our society continues to respond to the impacts of Brexit and COVID-19, and to overcome emerging challenges such as the impacts of the war in Ukraine and the rising costs of living.

Through delivery of a wide suite of strategic policy initiatives, actions, funding and supports over the lifetime of this Strategy, we will seek to unlock the vast potential for economic, social and cultural development that exists across rural Ireland, within our island communities and in our wider communities, both urban and rural.

We will continue our focus on strengthening community resilience, and supporting and equipping communities so they are empowered to overcome the undoubted challenges that exist while also embracing new opportunities. In doing this, we will seek to reduce social inequalities and contribute to building a fair society that leaves no-one behind.

The Department's work will be guided by the Programme for Government, existing and evolving cross-Government priorities such as Project Ireland 2040, the response to climate change, and emerging needs of communities.

As an organisation we continue to grow, develop, and innovate, with our approach being underpinned by a growing set of cross Government policies owned and delivered by this Department. We remain committed to organisational excellence. We will continue to innovate in the way we deliver for our stakeholders and focus on the outcome and impact of our interventions.

Together with colleagues, I look forward to working with Minister Heather Humphreys and Minister of State Joe O'Brien to further build on our achievements and to deliver on our ambitious agenda over the period of this Strategy.

**Mary Hurley**

Secretary General

# Context for our work

In developing our new Statement of Strategy for the coming three years we have reflected on our overall mission, our strategic goals and objectives, progress delivered to date, and consideration of emerging and potential needs of communities over the lifetime of the new Statement of Strategy. An extensive consultation process has reaffirmed much of our existing strategic mission and approach, and in many ways, this strategy is an extension of what has come before, building on the progress achieved in our last strategy.

## Introduction

The last number of years, and in particular the COVID-19 pandemic, has brought to the fore the importance of strong communities, working together to ensure no-one is left behind. Ireland's social and economic development depends on thriving rural areas and the input of community and voluntary groups and organisations in all parts of the country, who provide vital supports and play a key role in strengthening our communities.

In that context, the mission of our Department to support vibrant, inclusive and sustainable communities throughout Ireland is more important than ever.

We will continue our focus on strengthening community resilience and social cohesion, supporting communities so that they are empowered to face current and future challenges, and equipping their supporting structures to ensure meaningful participation in decision-making.

In doing this, we will seek to reduce social inequalities and exclusion, and facilitate a society that is just, fair and leaves nobody behind.

We will seek to improve the economic and social opportunities available in both rural and urban areas through delivery of a wide suite of strategic policy initiatives, funding and supports over the lifetime of this strategy.

The Department's work will be guided by the Programme for Government, existing and evolving cross-Government priorities such as Project Ireland 2040, the response to climate change, economic and social opportunities, and the emerging needs of communities.

### **Implementation of our key policy documents will underpin our work for the next three years, including:**

- Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025
- Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024
- The successor to the National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland 2019-2022
- National Volunteering Strategy 2020-2025
- Town Centre First Policy
- Embracing Ireland's Outdoors: National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027
- The forthcoming National Islands Policy
- The forthcoming National Philanthropy Policy
- The forthcoming National Hubs Strategy



## Responding to Emerging Needs

A key objective of all our programmes is that they are targeted at those sectors and areas most in need.

We will ensure our programmes and supports retain sufficient flexibility to react to emerging needs in our communities and will continue to work closely with our many partners and stakeholders with a view to maximising the impacts of our policies and programmes at local level.

We recognise that our collaborative relationships with local government, organisations in the community and voluntary sector and our other implementing partners are essential for programme delivery and to realise our vision to support sustainable development at a local level.

A key objective of all our programmes is that they are targeted at those sectors and areas most in need.



### Invasion of Ukraine

The humanitarian situation created by the war in Ukraine is affecting Ireland directly through the arrival of refugees, and indirectly in many other ways such as through increased energy and supply chain insecurity.

The Department is working across Government to assist with efforts to ensure that vital supports are put in place for refugees and their families and is providing added value to the supports structures. We provide a key conduit for dialogue at a national and local level between the community and voluntary sector and state, identifying and developing collective responses to emerging needs.

A Community Response Forum has been established in every local authority area to coordinate local responses to the Ukraine crisis. Building on structures and relationships which were highly effective during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Forum enable Local Development, Community Development and Voluntary groups to work together at local level under the stewardship of the local authority.

A number of the Department's programmes, some emergent, such as the Community Recognition Fund aim to support the national response to the arrival of refugees. The Community Recognition Fund supports the development of community infrastructure and facilities, in recognition of the contribution being made by communities across the country in welcoming and hosting significant numbers of arrivals from Ukraine and other countries. Flexibility in the design and delivery of the Department's programmes will continue to be an important contributor to the national response.

Enhanced support to our delivery partners, such as the Local Community Development Committees, the Local Development Companies (LDCs) and local Volunteer Centres will also be integral to the collaborative response to the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis. The delivery of the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) has an important role in supporting and integrating Ukrainians and other arrivals into their new communities.



## Rising Cost of Living

Since late 2021, added to the COVID-19 pandemic, the rising cost-of-living has impacted the lives of people throughout Ireland in both rural and urban communities. Fuel, food, heating, accommodation and other costs have all increased significantly. This has created an additional burden on already struggling communities and families, particularly in disadvantaged areas.

Key Department stakeholders, for example, the not-for-profit and voluntary organisations in the Community and Voluntary sector, are woven into the fabric of community life across Ireland and are vulnerable to the impact of rising costs. This has the potential to affect not only the operational functioning of those groups but crucially their ability to deliver at the front-line. Ongoing vigilance will be required to ensure that our stakeholders can continue to deliver in the face of these challenges and that assistance is provided by the Department where required, such as has been provided for energy costs through the Community and Voluntary Energy Support Scheme (CVESS) and for energy and other operational costs through the Community Support Fund.

## Post COVID-19 Recovery

Similar to other countries, Ireland's economy and its communities were significantly affected by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The community and voluntary sector played a key role in supporting vulnerable cohorts during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department recognises the unprecedented challenges that were faced by both rural and urban communities, and by the community and voluntary organisations that supported them.

While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been profound, it has demonstrated the importance of the community and voluntary sector and the value of having robust community structures in place. It has also left a legacy of strengthened community structures as we emerge from the crisis, with relationships between community and volunteering organisations and the local authority sector strengthened as a result of their working together to address the impacts of the pandemic. The learnings from COVID-19 provide an opportunity to build on and further enhance community supports for the future.

The response to the pandemic has also demonstrated how resilient our communities are and how they can adapt to deliver services in innovative ways, to meet arising needs. A range of initiatives were put in place to provide operating supports to the community sector, while also recognising that it required a whole of Government approach. We will continue working with the sector in responding to issues and developing tailored supports where required.

The experience of living through a global pandemic has also caused people to take stock and re-evaluate what is most important to them. It has brought about changes in people's views on how and where they wish to live and work, and with many returning to rural areas during COVID-19, the perception of rural living has changed. Accelerated access to remote working has resulted in new opportunities for town centre living and for more people to live and work in rural towns and villages, creating new economic potential and fuelling demand in the outdoor recreation sector. The Department is committed to responding to these opportunities.



# Leading and Influencing across Government

The development of rural Ireland and of sustainable, inclusive and resilient communities are Government priorities that involve collaboration and partnership with other Government Departments, public bodies and State agencies, as well as with sectoral representatives and local and community groups.

Our Department plays an important part in leading and guiding this collaborative work, through:

- Shaping and developing policy and implementation strategies for rural Ireland and for communities.
- Leading and overseeing whole-of-Government responses to the needs of these communities in a range of policy areas.
- Advocating for the consideration of rural Ireland, local communities and the offshore islands in the development of policies and programmes across Government.
- Influencing and supporting the important work of other Departments, through co-production of policies and strategies, contributing policy inputs, and the delivery of specific actions that help deliver economic recovery, growth and social advancement in rural Ireland and communities.
- Leading in ensuring the recognition and implementation of the values and principles for engagement with community and voluntary sector in a coherent and meaningful manner across central and local government.
- Engaging with other Departments and agencies to promote and facilitate meaningful community engagement, particularly in relation to initiatives which impact on disadvantaged and seldom-heard communities.



In delivering our mission, the Department takes a leadership role in the development of cross-Government policy and implementation plans in a range of areas which include:

- **Our Rural Future**, Rural Development Policy: *a whole-of-Government policy for the sustainable development of rural Ireland over the period 2021-2025.*
- **Rural Development Investment Programme:** *supporting the regional growth objectives of the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan.*
- **Town Centre First Policy** (in partnership with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage): *a whole-of-government policy framework to proactively address the decline in the health of towns across Ireland and support measures to regenerate and revitalise them.*
- **Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities**: *the five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland.*
- **Social Enterprise Policy**: *creating an enabling environment for social enterprise to grow and contribute to Ireland's social and economic progress.*
- **National Volunteering Strategy**: *recognising, supporting and promoting the unique value and contribution of volunteers to Irish Society.*
- **Philanthropy**: *the development of a National Philanthropy Policy to deepen understanding and knowledge, create an enabling environment and accelerate engagement with philanthropy in Ireland for social good.*
- **Development of An Polasaí Oileánda Náisiúnta/The National Islands Policy 2023-2033**: *a whole-of-Government policy and associated action plan is to ensure that sustainable, vibrant communities can continue to live - and thrive - on the offshore islands for many years to come.*
- **Embracing Ireland's Outdoors** - **National Outdoor Recreation Strategy**: *sets out a vision, mission and series of actions which will lead, guide and facilitate the sustainable development and management of the outdoor recreation sector for the next five years.*
- **Development of the National Hub Network and connectedhubs.ie**: *linking and supporting remote working hubs throughout the country.*
- **Public Libraries Strategy**: *to lead the development of the public library service over the next five years.*

Delivery in all of these areas is only possible in partnership with other Government Departments and wider stakeholders, and through an overall ethos of collaborative policy development and implementation.

Launch of Our Rural Future, March 2021



## Our Rural Future

Our Rural Future is a whole-of-Government policy for rural Ireland and its development over the period 2021-2025. It is an ambitious, transformational, policy framework containing over 150 commitments for delivery across Government.

The policy brings a renewed emphasis on sustainable and inclusive rural development by seeking to, for example, improve employment opportunities, enhance connectivity, and facilitate people and families to live and work in rural areas through remote working opportunities and improved public services.

Implementation of the measures contained in Our Rural Future will strongly underpin the work of the Department, working across Government, over the lifetime of the policy.

Our Rural Future aims to *inter alia*:

- Promote investment in remote working infrastructure to provide an opportunity for people to continue to live in rural communities while following their chosen career path.
- Invest in rural towns and villages as hubs of economic, cultural and social activity.
- Boost and diversify the rural economy and promote enterprise development, including through the delivery of high speed broadband to every part of the country.
- Adopt a place-based approach to rural development to meet the different and diverse in areas in a holistic manner and maximise the impact of investment in those areas.
- Invest in and empower rural communities to design and deliver responses that meet their own needs at local level.
- Actively promote young peoples' involvement in decision making in rural areas.

Our Rural Future is an ambitious, transformational, policy framework containing over 150 commitments for delivery across Government.

*Launch of Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership-Working with the Community and Voluntary Sector at a Local and National Level*



## **Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024**

*Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities:* A five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector in Ireland sets out Government's plan to support the sector over the next 5 years. Its aim is to support communities with both the means and opportunity to get involved in decisions that affect them and their future.

The high-level objectives and actions being implemented support consultation, inclusion and participation of communities, particularly disadvantaged communities, in public policy and decision-making at all levels.

The agreement and adoption by Government of a set of clearly defined, shared Values and Principles for Collaboration and Partnership-Working with the Community and Voluntary Sector at a Local and National Level, has been a key milestone in the strategy implementation and one which we will build on in the years to come.

Initiatives such as the National Civic Forum for formal dialogue between the sector and the state ensure greater opportunities for open, and engaging discussion on policy-making. The development of A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision-Making creates real opportunities to empower people to become involved in the decisions that impact their lives.

Over the lifetime of this Statement of Strategy, the Department will continue to deliver on these measures and to improve and strengthen community resilience through ongoing engagement and collaboration with the sector throughout the country.

Over the lifetime of this Statement of Strategy, the Department will continue to deliver on these measures and to improve and strengthen community resilience.

# Collaborating across Government

The Department will also continue to work with other Departments to progress our strategic objectives and to work to deliver other cross-cutting Government priorities for rural Ireland and communities, particularly in the areas highlighted below.

## Programme for Government

The Government's objective is to achieve the sustainable development of rural areas by encouraging local economic growth, arresting decline, and ensuring that rural Ireland continues to be a vibrant and lived-in place, meeting the needs of all communities.

Our Shared Future, the Programme for Government agreed in June 2020, recognises the significant and fundamental importance of rural towns, enterprises, and people to our national prosperity and wellbeing. It outlines a range of commitments for supporting balanced regional development and investment in rural areas and in communities, both urban and rural.

Much of our work over the lifetime of this Strategy Statement will prioritise the continued progression of these commitments.

## Project Ireland 2040

One of the ten Strategic Outcomes which Project Ireland 2040 aims to achieve is Strengthened Rural Economies and Communities.

Other Strategic Outcomes, such as Enhanced Regional Accessibility, A Strong Economy supported by Enterprise, Innovation and Skills, Transition to a Climate Resilient and Climate

Neutral Economy, and Enhanced Amenity and Heritage, will also support rural economies and communities.

Over the lifetime of this Statement of Strategy we will continue to invest in and support rural Ireland and communities across the country through delivery of our key policies and targeted rural and community investment programmes.

# Climate Action Plan

**Climate change and the actions required to mitigate against it continue to have a huge effect on all aspects of our lives. The Government has outlined an ambitious plan for a climate neutral future. This includes targets and measures to be undertaken to achieve the climate neutral objective. This will require significant changes in behaviours for communities, business, families and individuals everywhere.**

The Department has a key role in addressing the impacts these changes will bring by bringing stakeholders and communities together to promote, and to support, a just transition.

This involves building resilience in disadvantaged areas and vulnerable communities to overcome climate adaptation challenges, and to work to maximise climate mitigation and to promote adaptation opportunities for those communities.

We will do this through our policy development and through our funding programmes by:

- Supporting projects that bring about tangible climate benefits.
- Incentivising climate action through programmes under our remit.
- Putting the climate agenda at the centre of policy development and implementation.
- Building capacity in local development and community organisations in relation to climate change.
- Participating in the development and delivery of cross-Government Climate Action Plans.
- Contributing to the delivery of the commitments in the Public Sector Climate Action Mandate.



# Sustainable Development Goals

The UN Sustainable Development Goals recognise the need for strategies that lead to sustained, sustainable and inclusive economic growth and address a range of social needs, while tackling climate change and environmental protection.

The SDG National Implementation Plan commitment involves mainstreaming the 17 SDGs across national policies, and in that regard, our Department will continue to incorporate Ireland's commitments in our policy development and implementation.

We will:

- Place the SDGs at the heart of our policies.
- Work across Government to strengthen and build understanding and capacity in all key sectors to support the delivery of all SDG National Implementation Plans.



Source: United Nations

# North-South Cooperation

The Department contributes to North-South Cooperation through participation on the North South Ministerial Council Agriculture Plenary and the North South Ministerial Council Agriculture Sectoral Group.

The Department will continue to support the North-South Rural Policy Forum, a vehicle for the exchange of information and experience with counterparts in the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs on rural development matters.

The Department will also continue to be an Accountable Department for the completion of the PEACE IV Programme and for the forthcoming PEACEPlus Programme and will seek to ensure that border counties in particular will benefit from the opportunities presented in the new programme.



Derry-Londonderry Peace Bridge

# Innovation

**A thriving culture of innovation enables the Civil and Public Service to develop new policy responses and provide more efficient and improved services.**

Over the lifetime of this Statement of Strategy, we will seek to continuously innovate in line with the Public Service Strategy and the goals set out in our People Strategy.

We will encourage creative thinking and the creation of an environment where staff can contribute new ideas to make efficiencies in our work for continuous improvement.



*DRCD's Rural Strategy and Social Enterprise Unit, winners of Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Award in the Excellence through Collaboration category, for their work with Foróige on increasing social enterprise awareness amongst young people*

# Social Innovation

**Social innovation has significant potential to provide local communities with tools to address social, cultural and environmental challenges, deliver placed-based solutions, and build healthy and resilient communities.**

Social innovation measures can contribute to increasing access to employment for disadvantaged groups distant from the labour market, access to education for disadvantaged groups, and enhancing social inclusion of disadvantaged groups and those most at risk of poverty.

Our Department is actively and increasingly focussed on social innovation across social enterprise and local and community development, and considers there is a significant opportunity to scale-up innovation to address many pressing societal and environmental issues.

There is also a clear link with the social enterprise policy, with many social enterprises developing from social innovation ideas in a wide range of areas including environmental, health, integration, housing, childcare and training. The Department contributes to investment in social innovation initiatives through its ongoing supports provided to a wide range of social enterprises and through the implementation of measures contained in the National Social Enterprise Policy.

Through the delivery of the ESF+ Social innovation Programme from 2023-2027, the Department will support further capacity building of organisations involved in social innovation, raising awareness of social innovation, and contributing to the development and testing of new ideas, approaches and policies.

# Our Values

The Department of Rural and Community Development stands for Respect, Connectedness, Integrity and Innovation. These values are at the heart of everything we do, and define how we will work together with both internal and external stakeholders, to achieve our objectives and deliver on our strategic and business objectives.

## Respect

- Dedicated to fair and equal treatment of our stakeholders, promoting and advancing social justice and diversity.
- Promoting active participation in communities to identify their needs and achieve positive outcomes.
- Committed to human rights, equality and anti-discrimination in accordance with the Public Sector Duty obligation of the Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014.

## Connectedness

- Encouraging collaboration, communication and engagement.
- Influencing and implementing with colleagues across Government, to deliver policies and initiatives which support our mission and strategic objectives.
- Engaging with our stakeholders in order to identify and respond to emerging needs.

## Our Values



## Innovation

- Embracing innovation and fostering continuous improvements of our programmes, policies and procedures.
- Maximising emerging opportunities in the delivery of our mission.
- Being open to change, new ideas and new technology.

## Integrity

- Displaying professionalism, accountability, and transparency in delivering on our mission.
- Achieving efficiency in approaches and delivering value-for-money.
- Delivering a high quality customer service to our stakeholders.



## Our Strategic Goals

**1**

Advance the economic and social development of rural areas, including the offshore islands

**2**

Contribute to and support national regional development objectives

**3**

Support empowered, inclusive and resilient communities and a thriving volunteer culture

**4**

Enable the community, voluntary, charity, philanthropic and social economy sectors to contribute fully to civil society

**5**

Foster and maintain a high performance culture and organisation to achieve our mission in the interests of all communities

# Strategic Goal 1

## Advance the economic and social development of rural areas, including the offshore islands

### Strategic Objectives

- Lead a coordinated approach to rural development across Government to increase economic and social opportunities for rural areas.
- Make rural Ireland a viable and attractive place for people to live and raise families, including through the revitalisation of rural towns and villages, with access to good job opportunities and public services.
- Champion connected remote working which will enable people to live in rural areas and work locally.
- Reinforce the contribution of rural Ireland to our national wellbeing and development and emphasise the interdependence between rural and urban areas in supporting the objectives of Project Ireland 2040.
- Support the economic, social and cultural development of our island communities.
- Develop the Outdoor Recreation sector as a key contributor to job opportunities in rural areas.
- Maximise the benefits of high speed broadband and innovative technologies for rural communities and businesses, including through the development of Broadband Connection Points.

### Key Actions

- Coordinate both the delivery across government of Our Rural Future and the development of a successor national rural development policy to support the economic, social and cultural development of rural Ireland.
- Deliver a range of targeted schemes and initiatives under the Department's Rural Development Investment Programme to support the development of rural areas in line with the objectives of Project Ireland 2040, including the flagship Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.
- Roll out a new LEADER Programme for the period 2023-2027, in line with the next EU funding framework.
- Publish and implement a new Government policy and associated Action Plan for the development of our offshore islands.
- Deliver on the measures outlined in the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023 – 2027 as an overarching framework for the development of the outdoor recreation sector.
- Drive the implementation of the Town Centre First Policy and progress measures to encourage vibrancy in rural towns/villages, increased town centre living, and repurposing of vacant buildings in rural towns and villages.
- Work with Local Authorities through their Broadband Officers to maximise the benefits of high speed broadband for communities and local businesses, including through the Connected Communities Programme to ensure full use of Broadband Connection Points.
- Develop greater coherence and strategic alignment across the Department's funding schemes to enable delivery of a programme of interventions to achieve tangible and impactful regeneration of towns and villages.

# Strategic Goal 2

## Contribute to and support national regional development objectives

### Strategic Objectives

- Align our key policies and investments under the Department's Rural Development Investment Programme to support the regional growth objectives of the National Planning Framework and the National Development Plan.
- Support the Western Development Commission in deepening its impact in the Western region and in contributing to regional and national policy objectives.
- Promote the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) region, from Donegal to Kerry, as an attractive place in which to live, work and invest.
- Contribute to the delivery of the Government's Regional Enterprise Plans to support job creation and skills development throughout the regions.
- Facilitate the continuous improvement of mobile phone and broadband access throughout the country.
- Support peace and prosperity on the Island of Ireland through the delivery of the PEACE IV and PEACEPlus Programmes.

### Key Actions

- Review and monitor the suite of Rural Development Investment Programmes to ensure they continue to reflect the needs of rural areas.
- Work with the Western Development Commission to strengthen its role in promoting economic and social development in the Western region and to identify areas for further involvement in regional and national policy objectives.
- Develop our approach to rural proofing, to ensure that rural and regional development issues are embedded within key policy making processes.
- Work with the Western Development Commission to develop and deliver an Atlantic Economic Corridor Strategy which will further develop highlight the assets and opportunities along the Atlantic Economic Corridor area for employment, living and investment.
- Contribute to the development and delivery of the Government's Regional Enterprise Plans.
- Identify and address issues which will lead to better mobile phone and broadband access throughout the country.
- Drive the PEACE IV and PEACEPlus Programmes, and ensure that the opportunities for investment in the border region under these programmes is optimised.



# Strategic Goal 3

## Support empowered, inclusive and resilient communities and a thriving volunteer culture

### Strategic Objectives

- Support individuals and groups from disadvantaged, marginalised and socially excluded communities to reach their full potential economically, socially and culturally.
- Lead implementation across Government of the measures in Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities to support vibrant and inclusive communities, empowered to participate fully in society.
- Facilitate the growth of grassroots community-led development and greater participation and engagement by all communities in local decision-making processes which affect them.
- Support and promote the public library as a community hub and develop it as a focal point for community development.
- Recognise, support and promote the value of volunteering for individuals and for society as a whole.

### Key Actions

- Implement the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP).
- Support the emerging needs of communities through delivery of programmes such as Community Centres Investment Fund, the Community Enhancement Programme, Empowering Communities Programme, Community Recognition Fund, the Community Support Fund, the Community and Voluntary Energy Support Scheme and the Community Services Programme.
- Enhance the capacity of Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs) by implementing the recommendations of the LCDC review.
- Deliver the new Public Libraries Strategy to enhance the vital service public libraries provide and support library staff to engage with communities and develop a new Library Capital Programme 2023-2027.
- Implement the National Strategy on Volunteering and continue to strengthen volunteering infrastructure nationwide, supporting local Volunteer Centres in every county.
- Continue to ensure the Dormant Accounts Funding is utilised effectively to address disadvantage and to support people with disabilities.
- Work collaboratively with colleagues across Government and through the Community & Voluntary National Stakeholders Group to ensure that vital supports are put in place for refugees from Ukraine and their families arriving in Ireland.



Community Library in North Clondalkin, supported by the Department's Libraries Capital Programme

# Strategic Goal 4

Enable the community, voluntary, charity, philanthropic and social economy sectors to contribute fully to civil society

## Strategic Objectives

- Foster and strengthen the renewed collaborative relationships between Government and the Community Development, Local Development and Community and Voluntary sectors.
- Encourage open and inclusive policy-making by building community capacity to input into local decision making through our support of the Public Participation Networks
- Support the development of social enterprise and social innovation as key components of an inclusive and sustainable recovery.
- Support the growth and development of philanthropy in Ireland, learning from experiences in other countries.
- Ensure that the Charities Regulator has the necessary powers to increase public trust and confidence in the management, governance and administration of charities.
- Contribute to the development of the social innovation ecosystem in Ireland and explore new approaches to the challenges faced by disadvantaged groups.

## Key Actions

- Engage on an ongoing basis with the sectors to support the full implementation of the actions in *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024*.
- Review the implementation of *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024* and consider an appropriate process to develop a new strategy for the sectors.
- Develop an implementation roadmap to guide any necessary changes and support PPNs to further develop their capacity.
- Develop and deliver a new National Social Enterprise Policy building on the success of the first policy which covered the period 2019-2022.
- Develop a National Philanthropy Strategy in consultation with stakeholders, drawing on commissioned research and experience in other EU countries and similar philanthropic environments.
- Progress the Charities (Amendment) Bill, 2022 through the Oireachtas to enactment.
- Deliver the ESF+ Social innovation Programme to support social innovation measures including the development and testing of new ideas, approaches and policies.



Launch of A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making



# Strategic Goal 5

## Foster and maintain a high performance culture and organisation to achieve our mission in the interests of all communities

### Strategic Objectives

- Build strategic collaborative relationships with stakeholders which enable delivery of our mission.
- Foster a robust governance culture in our programmes and in the bodies under the Department's remit.
- Leverage strategic communications to support our mission.
- Be an employer of choice and support and enable staff to maximise their own potential and to deliver our objectives and goals.
- Build our capacity to evaluate the work we do and the impact it has to foster continuous improvement.
- Foster a culture of innovation and embrace technology within the organisation.

### Key Actions

- Implement our Organisational Capability Review Action Plan which encompasses the recommendations of an external review of the Department, and identify further actions as may be required
- Implement an ICT and Data Strategy for the Department and develop an online programme information management system for DRCD schemes and programmes.
- Continue operation of the blended working policy for the Department, with regular reviews to capture any emerging requirements and to foster innovation in how we work.
- Implement Our People Strategy 2022-2025 and embed our core values of respect, connectedness, integrity and innovation throughout the Department.
- Encourage and promote staff development and wellness through the provision of training and health and wellbeing initiatives.
- Develop new Communications Strategy for 2024-2027 and continue to increase awareness and understanding of our work.
- Strengthen structured engagement and collaboration with all our stakeholders including our counterpart Departments in Northern Ireland and with other international organisations.
- Deliver an inspection programme that informs scheme and policy development and supports enhanced programme efficiency, internal control and risk management.
- Support strong governance across the organisation and the state bodies under our aegis, supported by a strong internal audit function
- Support all recipients of Department funding through workshops and seminars, communicating compliance requirements and promoting and sharing good practice and feedback.
- Deliver annual programmes of evaluation to measure effectiveness of our work and collaborate with the ESRI and other research organisations to inform the ongoing development of our policies and programmes.
- Implement a new Resource Efficiency Action Plan 2023-2025 to build on progress already achieved and to include measures to reduce the Department's energy consumption profile and encourage recycling best practice.
- Meet our obligations under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 by performing our Public Sector Duty to assess relevant rights and issues arising.

## Bodies under our Aegis

The Department has four agencies under its remit – all are involved in working with, and on behalf of, the Department in the delivery of its objectives in relation to rural development, community development, regulation of the charities sector and, as an island nation, promoting water safety in our communities for coastal, as well as inland, waterways. The agencies work with us in promoting social inclusion, economic development, volunteering, rural and community development at a local and regional level, and ensuring compliance with the Charities Act.



The Western Development Commission (WDC) is a statutory body that was set up to promote both social and economic development in the Western Region (Donegal, Leitrim, Sligo, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare). It supports the delivery of Government policy towards balanced regional development, through projects and engagement across a wide variety of sectors.



Pobal works on behalf of Government, with communities and local agencies, to support social inclusion and local and community development. Pobal operates under the aegis of the Department which has a governance and oversight role in respect of the company.



Water Safety Ireland is the statutory body established to promote water safety in Ireland. It seeks to educate people in water safety best practices and develop public awareness campaigns to promote necessary attitudes, rescue skills and behaviour to prevent drownings and water related accidents.



The Charities Regulatory Authority (the 'Charities Regulator') is an independent statutory body established on 16th October 2014 pursuant to the Charities Act 2009. The key functions of the Regulator are to establish and maintain a public register of charitable organisations operating in Ireland, the first formal record of charities in the history of the State, and to ensure their compliance with the Charities Acts.



# Case Studies





## Case Study

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# University of Galway Connacht GAA Air Dome, Mayo

**In late 2018, Connacht GAA was among the first round of successful applicants for the Department of Rural and Community Development's Rural Regeneration and Development Fund with funding announced of €2.1 million towards the construction of an air dome.**

Construction of the air dome began in October 2019. Nine months later, despite the challenges of COVID-19, the largest sports air dome in the world was inflated.

The University of Galway Connacht GAA Air Dome contains a full-size indoor GAA field, a running track, fully equipped gym capable of accommodating 30 people at once, and a portable stand.

In addition, the completed Dome, within 72 hours, can be transformed into a fully functional, adaptable conference arena unique on the island of Ireland.



## Case Study

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# Ireland's Global Garden - Mount Congreve Estate, Waterford

**Funding of €3.7 million was approved from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund in 2019 to redevelop and restore the Mount Congreve Estate to create a world class visitor attraction. A further allocation of €1.2 million was approved from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund in 2022.**

Mount Congreve House and Gardens situated in Kilmeaden, Co. Waterford, in Ireland's Ancient East is home to one of "The Great Gardens of the World". Mount Congreve House, home to six generations of Congreves, was built in 1760 by the celebrated local architect John Roberts.

It now serves as a welcome and interpretive space for all garden visitors to complement the world-renowned gardens and best-in-class visitor centre that opened in October 2022.

The gardens comprise seventy acres of intensively planted woodland, a four acre walled garden and 16 kilometres of walkways.



## Case Study

# Fethard Town Park, Tipperary

**Minister Heather Humphreys officially opened the state of the art community sports and recreation campus at Fethard Town Park in County Tipperary in June 2023. The project is supported by investment of over €3 million from the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund.**

Fethard Town Park is an all-inclusive multipurpose facility in 26 acres in Fethard, Co. Tipperary.

The campus contains full size GAA/rugby floodlit 4G and grass pitches, community pavilion, dressing rooms, meeting room, gym, cafe, walkways, carpark and parkland.

Located directly adjacent to existing primary and secondary schools and residential areas, Fethard Town Park is accessible to all ages and abilities and is the Regional Centre of Excellence for Munster Rugby, Tipperary GAA Football and Tipperary Ladies Football.

Fethard Town Park is an example of how health and wellbeing can be promoted and developed when an engaged community is supported by local enterprise, local authority and funding bodies.



## Case Study

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# Limerick Greenway

**The Limerick Greenway is a 40km walking and cycling off-road route running along the old railway line connecting Rathkeale, Newcastle West, and Abbeyfeale. The project was approved for funding of €2.7 million under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund in 2018.**

Ireland's rolling green landscape, much of it untouched by development, makes it an ideal location for walking, cycling, or hiking for the enthusiast and casual walkers, cyclers, or hikers alike. Along the route, close to Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way, there are Norman castles, abbeys, medieval ruins, old railway stations, a viaduct, the Branagh Tunnel, and breath-taking scenery.

Limerick City and County Council's vision for the Limerick Greenway is to create a shared-use trail linking three historical urban centres in West Limerick to promote Limerick as a destination and place of opportunity, beauty, and healthy living.

The project was supported by funding under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme in 2021. In January 2022 Minister Heather Humphreys confirmed the allocation of an additional €600,000 as part of the Rural Regeneration Development Fund for the ongoing development of the Limerick Greenway. This latest round of funding will develop plans to renovate the Old Railway Station in Ardagh and the Abbeyfeale Hub to provide improved services for visitors to the Greenway.



## Case Study

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# New Cultural Centre, Trim, Meath

**Trim's new and long-awaited cultural centre and library was officially opened in May 2023.**

The €9 million project, supported by funding under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and Meath County Council, included the construction of a major new performance space at the site of the original library and old Methodist chapel in the centre of the town.

The theatre space includes a stage, retractable seating to cater for almost 250 people, a foyer and box-office, and new community meeting rooms. The meeting rooms and old church will double as backstage facilities for shows and performances.

Trim Library will be incorporated into new building and will include additional rooms for technology and study as well as a "maker room," an IT space where students can be "creative, collaborate, share and develop ideas as well as innovate."



