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Rural Development issues and challenges in Northern Ireland

This paper is not meant to be definitive but highlights and indicates a range of issues that may need to be addressed if the undoubted potential of rural communities and their citizens are to be fully utilised. In preparing this paper one of the major challenges has been around the fact that not all of the issues identified are backed up by verifiable, quantifiable and objective evidence. With this caveat in mind, the intention is for this paper to encourage conversation and reflection on the issues raised. This process may also lead to more work being commissioned to either further establish or dismiss the veracity of some or all the issues highlighted.

1. Background to rural Northern Ireland

The definition of 'rural' commonly employed within Northern Ireland is based upon the Interdepartmental Urban-Rural Definition Group's¹ statistical classification and delineation of settlements. Using this measure there is a recognition that **settlements of less than 4,500 people are recognised as rural.**

¹ [Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements, Report of the Inter Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group, NISRA, February 2005](#)

Accordingly **80% of Northern Ireland's landmass and 35% of the population are defined as being rural – equating to 1.12 million hectares of land and 589,843 people (based on 2001 census population).**

Northern Ireland's rural population is also growing. According to figures contained within NISRA's small area population statistics published in June 2010, **between 2001 and 2008 NI's rural population grew by 61,000 people compared to a growth of 25,000 for urban areas²**. NISRA are also projecting that this growth in the rural population will continue into the future.

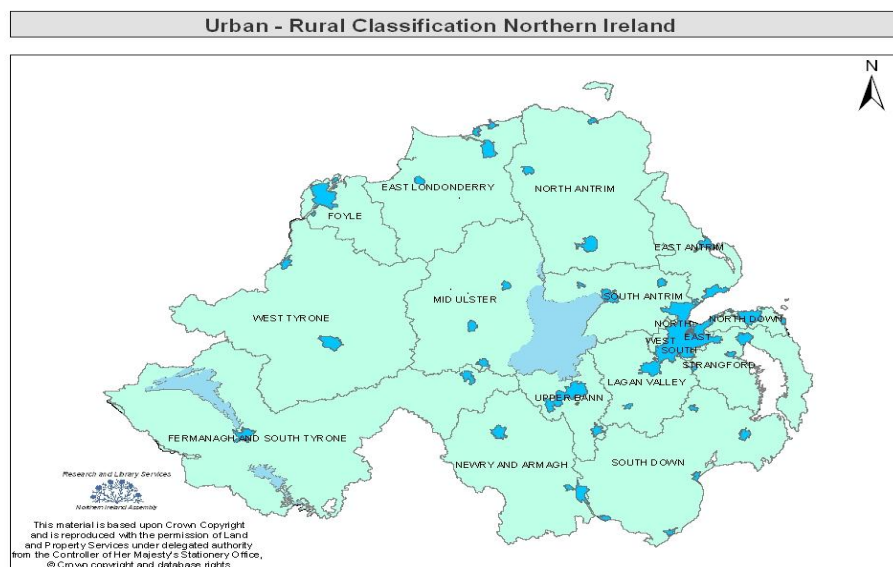


Figure 1: Rural and Urban land mass in Northern Ireland (rural in green)³

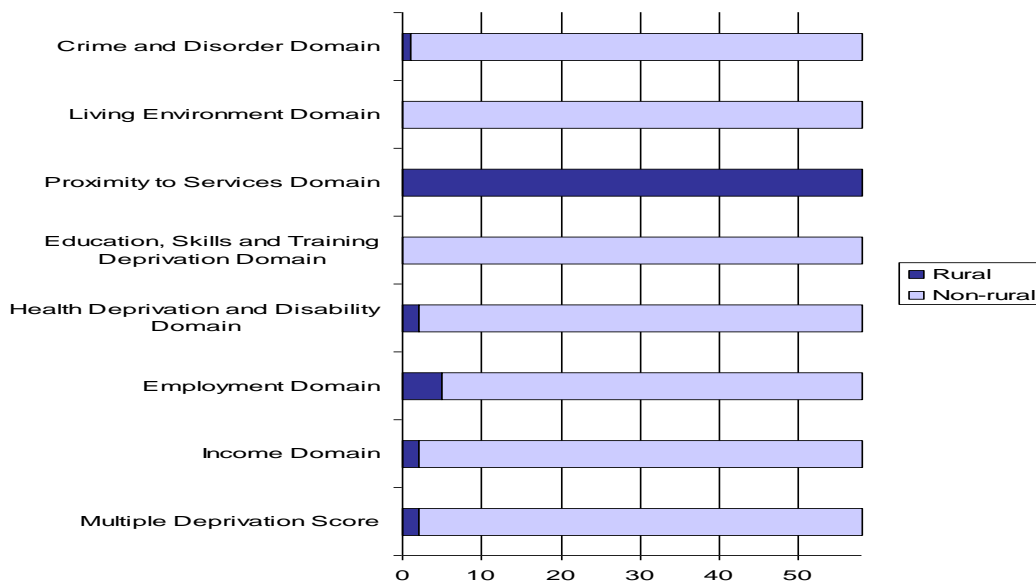
Some of the features of rural Northern Ireland are further revealed through the following key statistics drawn from a range of sources:

- In general, **deprivation levels are higher in non-rural wards than in rural wards**. With the **exception of Proximity to Services where all of the 10% most deprived wards were rural**, the majority of the 10% most deprived wards were non-rural⁴;

² [Ijpelaar J and Dignan T, New Small Area Population Estimates for Northern Ireland, 30th June 2010.](#)

³ [Statistical Classification and Delineation of Settlements, Report of the Inter Departmental Urban-Rural Definition Group, NISRA, February 2005](#)

⁴ *NISRA, NINIS (Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM), 2010*



- **Weekly household income figures** for 2002-2003 indicate that the **highest levels were found in accessible rural areas at £427 per week**, compared to £402 in Metropolitan Belfast Urban areas, £382 in less accessible rural areas, and £362 in other urban areas. **It should however be noted that rural households tend to be larger than those in urban areas;**
- In 2008/09 **school leavers from rural wards performed better than those from non rural wards with the 74.6% of rural school leavers achieving at least five GCSEs at grades A*-C compared to 68% of urban school leavers.** The figures for school leavers **achieving at least two A-levels were found to be 52.5% in rural areas and 48.9% in non rural areas;**
- The proportion of working age people claiming unemployment related benefits during the period Jan-Dec 2009 was lower in rural wards at 3.8% than it was in non rural wards (4.8%);
- In 2005 there were around **55,265 businesses in Northern Ireland registered for VAT. 30% of these businesses were located or had their head offices in accessible rural areas, with a further 47% being located in less accessible rural areas and 23% located in urban areas**⁵;
- In June 2009 there were a **total labour force of 48,000 people directly involved in agriculture.** Even taking into account the fact that this figure included spouses/partners and other workers it still makes agriculture one of Northern Ireland's biggest employers⁶;
- In terms of the actual economic contribution of agriculture to the wider economy **the gross value added at basic prices for agricultural products equated to £304 million in Northern Ireland in 2009. In percentage terms agriculture in**

⁵ Derived from UK Business: Activity, Size and Location, 2006 (National Statistics website:<http://www.statistics.gov.uk>)

⁶ [Agricultural Census 2009, DARD](#)

Northern Ireland contributed 1.2% of gross added value in 2008 and this figure was double the UK average;

- **70% of the agricultural land within Northern Ireland is also recognised as being Less Favoured⁷;**
- The overall trend in agriculture within Northern Ireland over the last 10 years has been a **reduction in the number of farms and full and part time farmers⁸;**
- Based upon 2008 figures **the sea fishing industry in Northern Ireland directly employed 625 people and the total value of fish landed at NI's 3 ports equated to £20.8 million⁹;**
- According to DRD's Sub Regional Transport Plan, 2015, **"a quarter of the rural population currently receives a minimal level of service from conventional bus services. However, no-one lives in a ward with no service whatsoever"¹⁰.**The report also states that with regard to public transport **"Bus service frequencies and coverage are generally poor in rural areas" with "users claiming that services don't go where you want to go"** or services don't run when you need them;
- Lack of access to bus services is more acute in rural areas than in urban areas, but it is a much more serious problem in Northern Ireland than in Great Britain; **42% of rural respondents in Northern Ireland said there were no bus services which could take them to local shops and services¹¹,** compared to just 16% of rural respondents in Great Britain;
- In 2006 the rate of housing unfitness in urban areas had been 2.5 per cent, but by 2009 this had reduced to 1.6 per cent. In rural areas the proportion of unfit dwellings in 2006 was 5.4 per cent; by 2009 the proportion had fallen to 4.1 per cent. **The highest rate of unfitness in 2009 continued to be in isolated rural areas where 6,000 (5.2%) of all dwellings were unfit,** indeed this accounts for a third (34%) of all unfit dwellings¹².

2. Context for this report

Rural areas have historically been identified with agriculture and food production, and whilst these industries continue to be highly significant for rural communities, this has often led many policy makers and departments to assume that rural issues are largely agricultural and as a result are the primary responsibility of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development. The danger of this rather simplistic approach is that it has the potential to both underplay the range of issues that affect rural people and communities, whilst also enabling other statutory bodies and government

⁷ [Review of Support Arrangements for Less favoured Areas in Northern Ireland, DARD Consultation Document, March 2009](#)

⁸ [Agricultural Census 2009, DARD](#)

⁹ [United Kingdom Sea Fisheries Statistics, 2008, Marine and Fisheries Agency, Defra](#)

¹⁰ [Sub Regional Transport Plan 2015, DRDNI, 2007, page 46](#)

¹¹ [Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey, Research Update, Number 11, May 2002 by Liz Fawcett](#)

¹² [2009 House Conditions Survey, NIHE](#)

departments to shirk their responsibility to meet the broad, and cross cutting needs of rural areas. In addition, this flawed approach fails to take account of the fact that rural and urban communities within Northern Ireland are not separate entities but are rather interdependent and as such are often affected by common issues which albeit impact or exhibit in different ways.

The limitations of a restricted and agri centric view of rural areas and the need for other government departments to play their part in making rural communities better and more sustainable places to live, work, learn and play have long been recognised by many rural stakeholders as key challenges. With these circumstances in mind and in an effort to highlight the challenges, issues, and opportunities for both rural communities and people, this paper provides an overview of the main rural development issues both present and future. The definition of rural development employed here is a necessarily broad one, probably best encapsulated by the view of the World Bank which sees rural development as ***“multi sectoral and focused on improving the well-being of rural people by building their productive, social, and environmental assets”***¹³.

3. Generic cross cutting themes impacting on rural development in Northern Ireland.

The following themes are not departmental specific but they constitute challenges that many rural stakeholders believe need to be addressed in a collaborative and proactive manner.

3.1 A growing and ageing population

As mentioned previously Northern Ireland has a growing rural population and this trend is projected to continue.

From 2001-2008, the net change in Northern Ireland's population was 86,000. Of that total, 61,000 (71 percent) occurred in rural areas with urban areas increasing by just 25,000¹⁴.

It also needs to be realised that Northern Ireland's overall population is also ageing. Research prepared by OFMDFM in 2008 entitled 'Older people in Northern Ireland' highlighted the fact that the actual number of people aged 65+ within Northern Ireland has grown by 104,000 between 1961 and 2008 (mid year estimate), a growth of 72%.

This trend of upward growth in the older population is even more marked when looking at the older age groups. The numbers of people aged 80-84 rose by 20,000 between 1961 and 2008, a growth of 122%.

¹³[World Bank website, referenced 23rd Nov 2010](#)

¹⁴[Dignan T., Ijpelaar J., Marshall D and Watson C, Small Area Population Estimates for Northern Ireland \(2008\), NISRA, June 2010.](#)

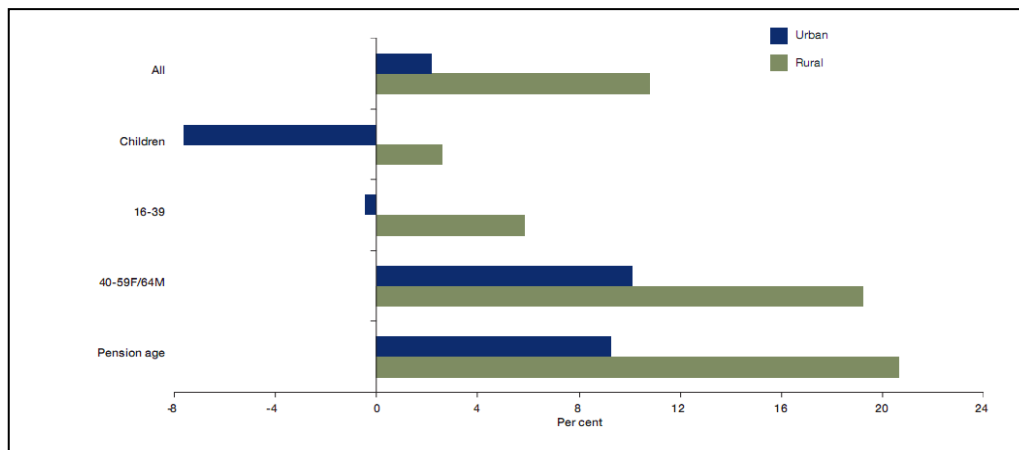


Figure 2: Population change 2001-2008, urban-rural by age group¹⁵

By the year 2041 the projections show that 29% of the population of Ireland, North and South will be aged over 60¹⁶.

The impacts of a growing and ageing population are likely to mean a growing need for particular services within rural communities. With regard to ageing, areas such as transport and health provision will undoubtedly need to consider how they respond to meeting the needs of an ageing and dispersed rural population whilst trying to ensure that people remain within their communities and living independently for as long as possible. Whilst the greatest growth has been, and will continue to be, in the ageing population figure 2 also highlights the fact that there has also been a growth in both the number of children and young adults in rural communities which will require other service providers including education and local government for example to look again at how they can best meet the needs of these growing rural populations.

3.2 Economic downturn and austerity measures – disproportionate rural impacts?

The downturn in the world economy and the massive national debts generated as a result of the efforts to address the crisis are still having an effect on Northern Ireland. Whilst economists and politicians continue to debate whether the UK economy is or isn't emerging from recession, the fact remains that Northern Ireland's over reliance on the public sector has so far largely insulated us from the downturn which has to date mainly affected the private sector across the UK. This is not to downplay the major downturn in the construction industry here which has had an undoubted and negative impact on many rural communities, where many small construction businesses and skilled tradesmen often tend to be based.

Bearing this caveat in mind however, it is the recent Comprehensive Spending Review at Westminster which is likely to have a far greater impact on Northern Ireland and it's

¹⁵ [Dignan T, Ijpelaar J, Marshall D and Watson C, Small Area Population Estimates for Northern Ireland \(2008\), NISRA, June 2010, page 29](#)

¹⁶ [Illustrating Ageing in Ireland North and South, Key Facts and Figures, Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland, 24th January 2010](#)

rural communities. The net effect of the recent CSR is that the Northern Ireland Executive is now facing a significant reduction in both its revenue and capital expenditure budgets. The full ramifications of this reduction are still being worked out by individual departments, but it is clear that there are going to be very real impacts on the quality and level of services delivered to the community across Northern Ireland.

It is within this context that concerns are growing around how departments prioritise the areas for cuts/efficiencies and how the impacts of these cuts/efficiencies will be assessed. Anecdotal evidence would suggest that in general terms, and on a per capita basis, services can often cost more to deliver to citizens living in dispersed rural communities. With this in mind and recognising that the policy environment is increasingly motivated by efficiency and value for money, it is not hard to envisage a situation where the delivery of services to rural communities comes under ever greater scrutiny and pressure. Rural communities already have direct experience of how the drive for efficiency can impact on services. Changes to hospital provision here for example have seen the closure or running down of rural hospitals including Omagh and Mid Ulster to be replaced by centralised and larger hospitals which also happen to be less accessible people living in more isolated rural communities.

The upshot of all of this is the need to ensure that budget setting and adjustment across all government departments takes account of the needs of rural communities and citizens and the potential impacts of any proposed cuts or efficiencies on the same. The development of effective rural proofing mechanisms with teeth to ensure compliance may well offer the best opportunity for achieving this aim.

3.3 The need for a legislative framework for rural issues – Rural White Paper?

As things currently stand there is no central co-ordinated and cross cutting strategy for the sustainable development of rural communities. The current Programme for Government contains a commitment to develop a Rural White Paper (PSA 17¹⁷) but with less than 6 months to go under this current mandate it is hard to assess whether this commitment can be met. DARD has consulted widely on both the concept and content of a Rural White Paper through the creation of a Rural White Paper Stakeholder Advisory Group which submitted its findings to the department earlier this year. It had been envisaged that DARD would use this document as a way of engaging with all government departments through the new mechanism of the Interdepartmental Committee on Rural Policy (IDCRP) in order to secure their agreement to both the concept of a Rural White Paper and the specific steps/measures that they would actually seek to undertake to address issues relating to rural communities that they had responsibility for.

It seems that DARD still envisage putting the work that emerges from this process out to public consultation in early 2011 but as yet there are no indications around what the

¹⁷ [Northern Ireland Executive, Programme for Government, 2008-2011](#)

consultation document will contain. What is clear is that DARD remains committed to delivering a Rural White Paper. What is not so clear at this stage is whether, or how, other government departments will react to the challenge posed by the need for the Rural White Paper to make practical improvements to the quality of life in rural communities.

In some ways one of the key challenges around this process is the need to build a cross departmental consensus with regard to the functions that rural communities currently perform, a vision for what rural communities can be like in the future, and who should be responsible, and in what practical ways, for making the vision a reality.

3.4 The legacy of the conflict for rural communities and the cost of division – creating a cohesive, shared and integrated society.

Northern Ireland is still very much a post conflict society and as such people and communities are still coming to terms with the impact of over 30 years of violence and disorder. In terms of numbers of people killed and injured over the course of the recent 'Troubles', the greatest number of incidents did occur within urban settings. Nonetheless rural communities also suffered, and in many ways whilst the overall numbers may not have been as great the effects on both individuals, and wider community relations are no different to those found within urban communities.

The segregated nature of many of our communities, both urban and rural has a direct impact on the public purse. A Deloitte report into the cost of division¹⁸ within Northern Ireland commissioned by OFMDFM in 2007 estimated the cost of our divided society as being somewhere between £1bn - £1.5bn annually, a considerable sum given that the Northern Ireland block grant equates to around £8bn annually. The current economic climate undoubtedly makes expenditure at this level increasingly difficult to justify given the high levels of duplication in public services such as education and health to name but two. The challenge posed here is around the need for rural (and urban) communities to both rekindle old relationships and build new ones which will enable communities to function effectively on a cross community basis.

The normalisation of relationships could potentially offer the opportunity for enhanced rural services given the likely reduction duplication and waste that the sharing of services would bring. In this regard the development and implementation by the Northern Ireland Executive of an effective Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI) Strategy/Policy would appear to offer a practical way of addressing some of these issues in a co-ordinated fashion across government.

The principles and practice enshrined within CSI also extend to meeting the needs of the migrant population which despite its relatively recent development has become an increasingly significant part of our society. In relation to this area, and contrary to common perception, the significant influx of migrants here in recent years has mainly

¹⁸ [Research into the cost of the Northern Ireland divide, Deloitte, 2007](#)

been concentrated within the largely rural communities around Dungannon, Cookstown, and Craigavon. According to organisations such as the South Tyrone Empowerment Programme, which provides support services for migrants, this influx has had a marked *'impact on the provision and delivery of local rural services in terms of integration and access'*¹⁹ Whilst the overall number of migrants coming to Northern Ireland has undoubtedly dropped off recently due to the economic downturn, a significant population still remains, and the 2011 census is expected to highlight this. In this regard the creation of cohesive, shared and integrated rural communities needs to do more than simply address the historic divisions here and look to develop a society responsive to the needs of all of our citizens.

4 Specific issues impacting of rural development in Northern Ireland.

In addition to the broad cross cutting issues impacting on rural development there are a number of specific rural development issues emerging under more specific themes which are the responsibility of individual government departments or agencies as follows:

- Housing;
- Agriculture and Sea Fishing;
- Health;
- Environment;
- Regional development;
- Education; and
- Wider Economy.

The detail around the challenges relating to these themes is outlined within the tables which form the appendices to this paper.

As before the themes and issues identified are not definitive, but do reveal the complexity of both the issues facing rural communities and the fact that the responsibility for addressing these issues extends well beyond the remit of DARD, past, present or future.

¹⁹ Research to identify additional difficulties experienced by minority ethnic groups and migrant workers because of the conflict in Northern Ireland, South Tyrone Empowerment Programme, 2010.

Appendix 1 - Specific housing issues impacting on rural development in Northern Ireland.

Area	Specific Issues	So what?	Responsible Departments
Housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Unfitness – remains highest in rural NI and particularly isolated rural areas. NIHE 2009 stock Conditions Survey found 4.1% of rural properties to be unfit compared to 1.4% in urban areas; • Replacement Grants Scheme on hold – can only be approved in exceptional circumstances; • Lack of Social Housing provision – end of March 2010 there were 5,311 households on the Housing Waiting List seeking homes in rural areas. Of these, 2,424 were in housing stress; • Housing Affordability – whilst the housing market has declined sharply from its high point a number of years ago the fact remains that the average house price still remains high and out of reach of many people on average wages here. This can be further compounded in rural areas attractive to tourists or commuters which leads to an inflation in house prices well above the reach of the indigenous local community and in extreme cases creates the winter ghost town or bed and breakfast community scenarios; • Empty Homes –NIHE’s Empty Homes Strategy for NI identified 16,300 empty properties that could potentially be brought back into use. 700 of these were unfit dwellings in isolated rural areas; • Planning – the implementation of PPS21 provides a framework for the sustainable development of the countryside but question marks remain over the consistent application/interpretation of the policy by planners. In addition there is a need for further work around the Dispersed Rural Community (DRC) classification and how it could be further utilised in more rural communities; • Fuel Poverty – Northern Ireland has the highest fuel poverty rate in the UK with 44% of total households in this position meaning that they are spending 10% of their household income on fuel. This problem is compounded in rural households which are mainly dependent upon oil to meet their fuel needs that is often more expensive than it would be in an urban community due to a lack of competition due to fewer local oil suppliers and a lack of direct competition in the form of mains gas. 	<p>The state and provision of housing in rural areas continue to be key issues. If rural communities are to be vibrant, welcoming, and sustainable there will need to be a critical mass of people able to live there to sustain both the community and the services it utilises. The provision of affordable, well heated, and high quality housing in adequate numbers will be critical to the long term success of rural communities.</p> <p>NIHE’s rural Action Plan raises and quantifies many of these and others issues but requires resourcing to address them.</p>	<p>Northern Ireland Housing Executive as part of DSD</p> <p>DOE in relation to PPS21</p> <p>DSD in relation to Fuel Poverty</p> <p>DARD in relation to specific rural Fuel Poverty contribution through the Rural Anti Poverty and Social Exclusion Framework</p>

Appendix 2- Specific agriculture and sea fishing issues impacting on rural development in Northern Ireland

Area	Specific Issues	So what?	Responsible Departments
<p>Agriculture and Sea Fishing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAP reform – how will CAP reform impact on local farming through possible changes to the single farm payment scheme (SFP). The possibility of a flat rate calculation for the SFP may affect the viability of many local farms due to their relatively small size and the marginal production capacity given that 70% of the land is acknowledged as being LFA (Less Favoured Area) ; • Abolition of milk quotas – the abolition of milk quotas in 2015 will see the market fully dictating both the price and demand for milk and milk derived products. To compete in this environment dairy farmers will have to be both highly efficient and operate at a large scale to maximise return – a problem given that many of our dairy farms are small and operate on land which is not suited to support large scale intensive farming in terms of stocking levels and the associated nitrates impact of the waste produced; • Diversification challenge – moves to encourage farm diversification here have been ongoing for many years and the process stacks up in both theory and practice and at both present and in the future. There are however challenges around the level and type of diversification that can be undertaken by many farmers. In effect there are only so many things to diversify to depending on farm size, location, farm family interests/skills and the proximity to other similar diversified businesses; • A fair price for farm produce – the difference between food prices at the farm gate and within supermarkets poses a real challenge for the sustainability of the industry. Cheap food, whilst appealing to consumers is potentially a short term gain, if the number of farms and farmers continues to fall due to farmers being unable to generate any worthwhile profit for the effort put in; • Nitrates Action Programme requirements – the costs for meeting the Nitrates Directive obligations to date within NI have been estimated at £240 million. The current regulations are enforced by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency and there are challenges around how this enforcement role is fulfilled with regard to unintentional breaches and their potential impact on single farm payments through cross compliance. In 	<p>Agriculture remains a critical industry and employer in Northern Ireland with a total labour force of 48,000 directly involved in agriculture in June 2009 and contributing £304 million gross value to the local economy. At a time when other business sectors are in decline the agri/food sector seems to be growing within Northern Ireland. Given the stated government objective of reducing public sector employment and growing the private sector the agri/food industry provides a real opportunity for further growth. For this growth to occur however there is a real need to ensure that agriculture here can be profitable and sustainable in the long term.</p> <p>Whilst the Sea Fishing industry here is not as significant to the local economy as agriculture, employing a total of 625 fishermen in 2008, the fact remains that many coastal communities along the east coast continue to rely heavily on the industry and the income it generates. Whilst the opportunities for growth compared to agriculture may be limited there is a real need to ensure that the industry that currently exists can continue to exist and be sustainable in the long term.</p> <p>With regard to both of these areas the role of the EU and policy that emerges from it is critical. With this in mind it is vital that Northern Ireland specific issues relating to agriculture and sea fishing are both taken account of and addressed in the EU legislation/regulations/programmes</p>	<p>DARD</p> <p>DETI in relation to farm diversification and wider agri/food job creation.</p> <p>DOE in relation to the Nitrates Action Programme. NIEA as part of DOE in relation to enforcement.</p>

	<p>addition the new Nitrates Action Programme will soon be put out for consultation and questions remain around both the level of derogation that will be outlined and any other new/amended proposals that will impact on the ability of farmers to best utilise fertilisers and deal with animal waste;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food and Energy Security – wide ranging global fluctuations in the price of fuel and food over recent years have seen policy makers at both and EU and National level focus on improving food and fuel security. Questions remain over the commitment to achieving better food and fuel security and whether such a commitment will extend to directly and practically supporting farmers who ultimately will often bear the challenge of growing the food and bio fuels. There is a real need to decide how best we can use our land and its productive capacity to meet our food and fuel needs; • Common Fisheries Policy reform – the CFP has brought mixed blessings to fishermen and fishing communities in Northern Ireland. Whilst the investment in the form of grant aid that has accompanied the CFP has undoubtedly improved many of the fishing villages and wider infrastructure the fact remains that the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) system and the Cod Recovery Plan have seen a contraction in both the size of the fishing fleet here and in terms of what it can catch. There is a real need to ensure that the voice of local fishermen has a real opportunity to influence both the development of the revised CFP and its implementation on an ongoing basis. 	<p>that emerge in relation to these policy areas.</p>	
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Appendix 3- Specific health issues impacting on rural development in Northern Ireland

Area	Specific Issues	So what?	Responsible Departments
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited service availability/access issues – the ongoing <i>centralisation of acute hospital provision</i> at the so called golden 6 hospitals has seen the associated <i>running down of services or ultimate closure of hospitals</i> such as the Mid Ulster and Omagh. Members of the public requiring A&E services as well as acute care on an ongoing or outpatient basis, not to mention their families, now face having to <i>travel significant distances</i> to access services or make visits. This issue is compounded by the fact that some evidence would suggest that <i>those living further away from the location where a healthcare service is provided will be less likely to use the service</i>; • Ambulance provision/response times – ambulance <i>response times in rural areas are almost double the regional average</i>. In addition the <i>number and covering hours of emergency ambulance provision have been cut</i> to be supplemented by the provision of Rapid Response Vehicles (RRVs) manned by individual paramedics. <i>Questions remain over the impact</i> of these changes on rural communities given the fact that <i>delays in travel time to hospital may be life critical</i> and the reality of the reduction in number and centralisation of remaining hospitals which has seen a significant increase in the journey time to hospital for many rural communities; • Mental Health issues and provision – the <i>culture of self sufficiency</i> is a fundamental feature of many rural communities that leads to a reluctance to seek outside help. This is a particular problem with regard to mental health issues. Recent years have also seen <i>a marked increase in the levels of stress, depression and suicide</i> across Northern Ireland. There is also <i>anecdotal evidence that stresses are magnified by isolation, single worker situations, a lack of knowledge about services and difficulties in accessing them</i> – all factors that come into play in rural communities; • Pressures on carers – the ageing population, the centralisation of services and the closure of residential care homes, day centres and other care facilities continue to place a <i>growing burden on carers within rural communities</i>. Figures contained within the National Survey for Carers found that <i>57% of carers in “remote rural areas” suffered some form of</i> 	<p>As people <i>live longer</i> the reality is that they are also likely to be <i>sicker</i> or require more care and support. This is a particular challenge within many rural communities given the fact that <i>people are often living a considerable distance from the static locations from which health services are provided</i>. If rural communities are to be viable places to live for all ages then there is a real need to ensure that people have <i>equitable access to high quality health and care services</i>. Whilst technological advances may address some of these issues there will continue to be <i>a need for real community based services that are tailored to the needs of rural people rather than simply expecting them to travel to often distant hospitals</i>.</p>	<p>DHSSPS</p> <p>NI Ambulance Service</p>

	<p>social exclusion. In addition they also experienced limited services and a lack of respite which placed a strain on both physical and mental health.</p>		
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Appendix 4- Specific environment issues impacting on rural development in Northern Ireland

Area	Specific Issues	So what?	Responsible Departments
Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Protection vs a living working countryside – there remains an ongoing battle in relation to how the countryside and the varied landscapes it contains are utilised. Rural areas undoubtedly make a major contribution to our bio diversity and as such these habitats need to be protected. However, the industry and business within rural communities including, but not exclusively, farming also need to be allowed to function if our rural areas are not to become sparsely populated picture box idylls. The challenge remains around striking a balance in future planning and environmental legislation which enables development whilst protecting the countryside. • Planning Reform – the overall reform of the planning system has the potential to greatly improve how the planning system relates and responds to the needs of rural communities. There are challenges around the proposed threshold minimums for major developments which could potentially see major developments in rural communities and villages without the need for a pre application consultation. In addition there are questions around how rural will be defined and what measures will be in place to ensure the consistent application of planning policy; • Review of Public Administration and Community Planning – the principle of devolved powers to reinvigorated local government and in conjunction with community planning processes appear to offer real opportunities for rural communities to have a say in the design and delivery of services. Concerns remain however around both rural representation and resource allocation given that the number of councillors per head of population will fall and the fear amongst rural dwellers that limited resources will be mainly focussed on meeting urban needs; • Road safety – 70-80% of all road deaths in Northern Ireland occur on rural roads. Pedestrians are also at risk on many of these rural roads given both the lack of footpaths and lighting. • Protection of built heritage (including archaeology) – concerns remain around how best to protect Northern Ireland’s undoubted built heritage. Particular questions remain around how best to protect historic buildings in 	<p>It could be argued that the physical environment is the greatest resource of our rural areas in both an historic, current, and future context. The other reality is that as is often said ‘land is one of the few things that they are not making more of’, so it is vital that we use what we have in the best way possible. It is vital that the rural landscape’s potential is fully utilised in a manner which doesn’t compromise its future sustainability and wider public value. In order for this to happen the competing developmental, recreational and environmental lobbies which are often at each others’ throats need to find a way to work together rather than trying to trump one another.</p> <p>The proposed changes to planning and local government offer the very real potential for rural residents to be more involved in shaping the nature and use of the landscape provided that the proposed mechanisms are workable.</p> <p>Whilst the factors undoubtedly need to be explored further, it is vital that the level of deaths on rural roads be addressed urgently as this situation should not be allowed to continue on roads with relatively low levels of traffic compared to their urban equivalents.</p>	<p>DOE</p> <p>Justice in relation to PSNI role in road safety and traffic law enforcement</p> <p>DOE has responsibility but DCAL has an active interest in the protection and promotion of built heritage</p>

	the light of provisions within PPS21 which would appear to implicitly encourage the destruction of listed buildings by fire for those intent on building new homes in the countryside.		
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Appendix 5- Specific regional development issues impacting on rural development in Northern Ireland

Area	Specific Issues	So what?	Responsible Departments
Regional Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to transport – the level of public transport provision within rural areas continues to be a real issue. Only 4.2% of Northern Ireland's rural population choose to, or are able to, use public transport to commute to work. The lack of a rural transport policy is also a cause for concern as the sub regional transport policy is a means of allocating funding as opposed to considering how to develop a rural transport system that will contribute to sustainable rural communities. There is a distinct impression that many public and community transport routes that currently exist currently fail to link many rural residents to the actual services that they use such as health facilities, libraries, shops and work to name but a few; • Rural Transport Fund/Community transport – the Rural Transport Fund provides financial support to Ulsterbus to provide 48 bus services that are uneconomical to run. Questions remain over whether this support and these routes will be maintained or can be maintained given the current economic climate. Similar questions arise around the viability and long term sustainability of the community transport providers operating in rural areas. The review of bus operator licence provisions also poses threats to the ongoing development of community transport; • Co-ordination of transport provision – the existing community and public transport services tend to operate in isolation from each other meaning that the opportunities for joint journeys utilising both systems are extremely limited in terms of timetabling or ticketing. Questions also remain around how transport provision by the health and education departments could be better co-ordinated and integrated in terms of provision/routes, timetabling and information; • Standards of roads/road building- improvements to roads infrastructure are critical to the effective development of many of our rural areas. Questions remain over the potential impact of cuts to the Executive Capital expenditure budget and the impact that this may have on rural road building/enhancement schemes; • Regional Development Strategy- the Regional Development Strategy is due to go out for public consultation soon and the final document that 	<p>Access to transport remains a critical issue if rural communities are to prosper. There is a real need to ensure that this issue is got right at both a planning and delivery level so that people of all ages and incomes are to be able to live, work and learn within rural communities. In terms of economic efficiencies it seems clear that a more co-ordinated and cross departmental/sectoral approach to the issue of public/community transport could deliver a more efficient, more effective and more appealing option for many rural dwellers.</p> <p>The infrastructural issues of better roads and water provision also need to be addressed in a fair and equitable manner to ensure that rural communities can be attractive areas for people to live or invest in. Failure to invest in these resources will only serve to limit the potential of the rural economy and contribute to greater regional disparity.</p> <p>The ongoing work on the Regional Development Strategy represents a golden opportunity for ensuring that the needs of rural communities are taken account and existing regional disparities between rural and urban development are addressed.</p>	<p>DRD,</p> <p>Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company and Translink as a GoCo of DRD</p> <p>16 Community Transport Providers funded by DRD to provide Community Transport</p> <p>DOE in relation to bus operator licensing</p> <p>DE and DHSSPS in relation to co-ordinated transport provision</p>

	<p>emerges needs to ensure that the provisions made for rural areas are both captured within the document and sit well with the Programme for Government and individual departmental responsibilities in rural communities;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water quality/Cost- the debate around water charging whilst relatively quiet of late has not been resolved. The current economic climate may well mean that water charges could be introduced within the next Assembly. In such circumstances questions remain over how water will be paid for and the type of service that rural dwellers, often used to lower water pressure and water quality can expect. From an equality standpoint the introduction of a flat regional water charge would mean that rural dwellers should have the same standard of water provision as their urban counterparts. There are also questions around the costs incurred by rural home owners to get access to mains water and sewage and whether these charges are fair or how they could be subsidised. 		
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Appendix 6- Specific education issues impacting on rural development in Northern Ireland

Area	Specific Issues	So what?	Responsible Departments
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small rural schools – falling pupil numbers are directly affecting the viability of many small rural schools and recent years have seen many unpopular decisions around proposed closures and mergers. In 2009/10 56.3% of rural primary schools had numbers of pupils which put them below the viability quota level of (105 or fewer) compared to 19.3% of urban primary schools (140 or fewer). In relation to post-primary schools the figures reveal that 63.8% of rural schools fall below the viability quota (500 or fewer pupils) compared to 25.6% of urban schools. Questions remain over whether schools falling below the viability quota should or can remain open given the current budgetary pressures. The Rural White Paper stakeholder working group paper included proposals for a presumption against the closure of rural primary schools as the starting point for any discussion on rural schools but the Department of Education’s thinking on this position remains unclear despite its popular appeal amongst rural citizens; • Attracting head teachers to rural schools – principal pay is linked to the size of a school so it is not hard to see that rural school principal positions will be harder to fill given the lower number of pupils and associated lower salary that could be attained in many rural schools. This situation may also make it more difficult for small rural schools to attract high calibre candidates to these jobs given the lower levels of remuneration when compared to larger schools; • Strategic approach to shared education- it is often argued that educational provision within Northern Ireland exceeds what is actually needed with many empty desks in our schools. The existence of the controlled, maintained, Irish medium and integrated sectors mean that we have many school buildings and curricular coverage at a time when pupil numbers seem to be falling. It is also argued by some that the quality of education provided here is somewhat diluted by the plethora of providers trying to deliver an often similar curriculum on a finite and increasingly under pressure budget. Questions remain over whether a more strategic and shared approach to education could make better and more efficient use of the existing facilities and curricular 	<p>Rural schools are still viewed by many rural citizens as an essential service critical to the long term viability and sustainability of their rural communities. There can be no doubt that rural areas need an educational system which offers the opportunity for people of all ages and abilities to gain skills, experience and knowledge which can then be used to the benefit of the rural economy and society in general.</p> <p>There is a real need for all education providers to realise the challenges and sensitivities of delivering their services within a rural community where economies of scale may not add up. As well as recognising this providers need to be prepared to adopt approaches, processes and supports that can effectively and practically address these issues.</p> <p>The current economic situation undoubtedly means that there will be ever growing pressures on the education and further education budgets, but there could be a real opportunity here to make the most of a potential crisis. The time is ripe for a resource sharing planning approach to education provision in rural areas that involves all stakeholders in developing a sustainable, innovative, high quality and more efficient system that can be accessed by all rural citizens. This approach should also extend to how educational facilities and resources could be better used in the delivery of other services by other departmental or community providers and</p>	<p>DE</p> <p>DEL in relation to FE provision</p>

	<p>coverage to improve educational standards whilst reducing costs to the taxpayer;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach Further Education provision/recreational courses- recent cuts to the FE budget have seen many of the regional colleges cutting back on both the number of recreational courses that they offer, as opposed to academic ones, and the number of overall courses which are delivered in community venues outside the colleges; • Extended school/community school models- As things currently stand most school buildings and facilities are only accessible by pupils within school hours during term time. This means that a valuable resource in terms of meeting space, classrooms, sports facilities and equipment that could be used for further education for example, is inaccessible to the wider community. Such a situation is undoubtedly wasteful as it means that additional, and it could be argued duplicate, facilities are required within these communities to service the needs of people not of school age. This situation could potentially be addressed through either the extended school or community school models which open up school premises and facilities to design and use by the entire community. 	<p>such an approach would bring undoubted efficiencies and potential enhancements to the services available to many rural communities.</p>	
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Appendix 7- Specific communications issues impacting on rural development in Northern Ireland

Area	Specific Issues	So what?	Responsible Departments
<p>Wider economy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broadband speed, provision and cost- all of Northern Ireland officially has access to broadband internet. This statement however fails to take account of the fact that there <i>continue to be wide variations in the speed and cost of accessing this service</i>. Rural areas are undoubtedly losing out on both these fronts as distances from exchanges and mobile phone mast led to the creation of so called ‘not spots’ for adequate broadband provision, whilst only being able to access broadband through satellite is prohibitively expensive for rural dwellers and businesses alike. • Green economy/renewable energy – the twin challenges of climate change and an over reliance upon finite fossil fuels such as oil to meet our energy needs mean that the <i>development of renewable energy sources is now a mainstream government objective within Northern Ireland</i>. There is a real need to fully <i>develop the estimated 1,133 MW of potential renewable energy</i> in Northern Ireland and in so doing contribute to NI’s efforts to reduce carbon by 20% by 2020. If this capacity was fully utilised it would be able to <i>provide the electricity for up to 339,000 homes here</i>. Challenges remain over how the <i>planning system deals with applications relating to renewable energy sources</i> such as wind turbines. There are also real <i>concerns in relation to both the levels of investment available for development of renewable sources</i>, whether the <i>market price for renewable production makes it a viable economic option</i> and of the real <i>need for investment in and enhancement of the rural electricity grid</i>. • Tourism – tourism is a major driver in our local economy both present and future. DETI’s draft Tourism strategy highlights the fact that tourism <i>supports over 40,000 jobs here and has the potential to generate 12,000 more which would provide further jobs and opportunities many of our rural areas</i>. There are however issues with regard to the <i>development of the tourism sector within rural areas due a perceived lack of co-ordination between key players including DARD, DETI and the Planning Service</i>. • Maximising the Arts and Culture potential to the local economy- in 	<p>The significance and <i>use of the internet</i> in relation to education, business and even service delivery <i>continues to grow at an exponential rate</i>. In this context having <i>access to high speed, reliable and affordable internet is now essential</i> if rural people, businesses and communities are going to be able to learn, trade and avail of services in the same way as their urban neighbours. A failure to enable this to happen could well <i>see rural areas becoming ‘online backwaters’</i>.</p> <p>The key point relating to <i>Northern Ireland’s renewable energy potential is that it is mainly located in rural areas</i>. As a result the successful generation of <i>energy from wind, wave and sources such as biomass here presents a real opportunity for rural communities and businesses</i>. The successful development of a green economy making extensive use of renewable energy sources could <i>see local high skilled jobs</i> being created whilst also <i>reducing energy costs</i> for all. If support in terms of <i>creating market conditions, stimulating capital investment, and developing and implementing planning policies that encourage the development of renewables</i> can be secured, rural areas stand to benefit greatly.</p> <p>The further development of our tourism industry offers <i>real potential for our rural communities in terms of jobs and investment</i>. The <i>assets of our rural landscape and people have been largely underutilised</i> for a plethora of reasons. It is however essential that <i>conditions are created to</i></p>	<p>DETI</p> <p>DARD</p> <p>DCAL</p>

	<p>2007 creative industries across the UK contributed £16.6bn to the economy which was equated to 4.5% of overall GDP compared to an EU average 2.6%. There are no figures broken down for Northern Ireland but it is clear that both direct governmental (through the Arts Council) and private/philanthropic contributions to the arts and culture sector are lower here than in the rest of the UK in recent years on a per capita basis.</p>	<p>enable the full and sustainable exploitation of these resources. For this to happen different departments and agencies need to work together in a more proactive, co-ordinated, and effective way.</p> <p>Similarly to tourism, investment in the creative industries here could make a valuable contribution to the local economy by for example attracting tourists or through developing skills and expertise which put Northern Ireland on the map and attract foreign investment. Rural communities and the traditions, artists and skills within them could play a valuable role here but for this to happen there needs to be greater private and governmental investment to encourage and sustain these industries on a sustainable basis.</p>	
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