



County Longford Public Participation Network

Putting Community at the Heart of Local Decision Making

Submission to the National Planning framework from County Longford Public Participation Network

County Longford PPN welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the National Planning Framework, “Ireland 2040 Our Plan: Issues and Choices”.

County Longford PPN is a network of approximately 200 groups in the county across the community, voluntary, social inclusion and environmental sectors. Set up in accordance with the government’s 2012 White Paper “Putting People First: Action Programme for Effective Local Government”. It is now the main structure in the county that enables the public to take an active formal role in the policy making and oversight activities of the Local Authority’s areas of responsibility.

Any long term planning initiative has to be cognisant of the importance of ensuring that no matter where people live in the state whether in a remote rural area or in the heart of the metropolis, it is incumbent on us all that we strive to build a just society where human rights are respected, human dignity is protected, human development is facilitated and the environment is respected and protected.

Against this background and coupled with the challenges faced by disadvantaged rural counties like County Longford. It is the considered view of County Longford Public Participation Network, that if these challenges are not addressed both in the immediate and long term, counties like Longford will slip into further decline

We now set out our key deliverables for Longford under (1) Community, (2) Environment & (3) Well Being Statement:

1. Community

- Support for the community and voluntary sector in the work they are carrying out in the area of childcare, special needs, disability, care of the elderly, the environment, sport etc
- Rural transport that addresses the needs of people who need it for employment, business and recreation.
- Quality broadband essential to attract business and reduce isolation.
- Ensuring that the PPN is included in all consultations in developing local, regional and spatial strategies

- Ensuring that counties like Longford where tourism is underdeveloped, that it is fully resourced to develop and implement an effective tourism plan while still protecting the natural environment
- All national plans and strategies to be rural proofed and their impact on rural areas carefully monitored

2. Environment.

- It appears the Irish government has currently abandoned its efforts to attempt to meet the 2020 GHG emissions targets. Ireland must immediately develop a comprehensive framework and start taking concrete measures to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions or face a run-away scenario.
- Energy Efficiency – progress on reducing our energy efficiency of our housing stock as slow and should be accelerated. This is now more relevant to this county as a Gas Pipeline has been proposed to Longford town in concert with the Centre parks development in Ballymahon and we should, therefore now be developing a programme of implementation for use in both industrial and domestic uses.
- Renewable Energy – Ireland should open opportunities for household-level and other renewable energy micro-generation systems such as small wind turbine, solar panel both water heating and PV application and also Anaerobic Digestion plants. All of these systems can contribute to secure long term investment, provide energy security and reduce air pollution.
- Transport – Ireland’s GHG for 2020 and beyond do not appear to be effectively integrated into our transport policies. The consequences will impact on public health, air pollution, transport poverty, social isolation, the vulnerable and people with disabilities.
- Agriculture, Forestry and other land use – Agriculture, forestry, peatlands and all land uses can have a significant impact on our GHG emissions, while on the other hand can contribute to enhancing greenhouse gas sinks and reservoirs. The impact of Harvest 2020 must be carefully considered.
- SPA’s & NHA designations – Longford has 3 designated SPA’s. These sites are also Natura 200 sites and are afforded protection in Irish law under the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, plus 6 designated NHA’s and a further 17 pNHA’s. These natural sites have to be allocated the highest order of natural protection and in particular those in the ownership of Longford County Council as lead examples.

3. Well Being Statement

Dictionary definitions such as “*The state of being comfortable, healthy, or happy*”. ‘*an improvement in the patient's well-being*’ goes some way to explain the meaning of Well Being, however in the context of a just society and in protection of our environment. Much further detail is required.

Everyone is entitled to well-being and everyone has a responsibility for their own well-being and that of others, but some people need extra help to achieve this. When a community comes together, everyone benefits:

- *Individuals benefit physically and mentally from being connected to the place and people around them*
- *Communities benefit through the increased support for local services and facilities which comes with an active population*
- *The more vulnerable members of a community benefit from the support and protection afforded them by being cared for within their community*

The glue which holds a community together is the connection between people, the environment and the many small ways in which neighbours interact and help each other. A strong community is one where people CARE – about their neighbours, about their environment, about the future of their area – and where they DO; in a strong community, people get involved. A strong community is one where people support each other to access the services and opportunities which each person needs in order to live a good standard of life.

Communities, who participate in the decisions which affect them, and seek to address the issues facing their community in an inclusive, sustainable way, must be considered to have a strong Well Being.