

**EXTERNAL WORKING GROUP
MAJOR REVIEW OF THE REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
TUESDAY 10 FEBRUARY 2009**

Present:

Mike Thompspon	-	DRD
Seamus McAleavey	-	NICVA
Sue Christie	-	NI Environment Link
Diane Ruddock	-	National Trust
Tim Cunningham	-	CAJ
Caitriona Mullan	-	ICBAN
Stephen Huggett	-	Rural Community Network
Jake MacSiacais	-	Forbairt Feirste
Pamela Arthurs	-	East Border Region
Marie Therese McGivern	-	Representing BMA
Colm Bradley	-	Community Places
David Worthington	-	Royal Town Planning Institute
John Meehan	-	Derry City Council
Ken Sterritt	-	Queen's University
Ian Raphael	-	DRD
Alison McQueen	-	DRD
Pauline McParland	-	DRD

Apologies

John Dempsey	-	Representing North East Group of Councils
Patricia McKeown	-	UNISON
Jim Kitchen	-	Sustainable Development Commission
Danny McSorley	-	Representing Rural West Group of Councils
Teresa Canavan	-	RDC
Eamon Molloy	-	NWRCBG
Alastair Adair	-	University of Ulster
Nigel Smyth	-	CBI
Peter Bunting	-	ICTUNI
Mick McGuckin	-	Representing Mid Ulster Group of Councils
John McGrillen	-	Representing South East Group of Councils
John Armstrong	-	CEFNI
Michael McCullough	-	Ulster Scots
Reg McCabe	-	IBEC
Aidan Gough	-	Inter Trade Ireland
John Driscoll	-	ICLRD

1. INTRODUCTION AND APOLOGIES

Mike Thompson welcomed everyone to the meeting held in the North West. He highlighted that the RDS recognised the importance of the City as the Regional Capital for the North West. Since the RDS was formulated a Stakeholder Alliance group was established to oversee the outworking of the Strategy, ILEX had been established, and a strengthening of the cross border context by the 2 governments. A major conference had recently been held in Letterkenny and investment in roads and rail had been identified. The challenge now is to maximise its potential. It will be important that the review of the Strategy maintains the status of the North West.

John Meehan explained that a Futures Search Conference had been held recently with key agencies to reaffirm the Vision for the City of Derry. There is now one coherent statement. It is important to have a crystallised Vision which complements the RDS.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

3. PRESENTATION BY MIKE THOMPSON

Mike Thompson and Ian Raphael gave a presentation on the evidence the Department had gathered to date, the implication of this for the new RDS, and the next steps. They highlighted the objectives and the Department's proposals for Strategic Guidelines. They asked whether the headings were reasonable and if not what should be changed. They also asked for suggestions of key guidelines under each of the Headings.

4. WORKSHOPS TO CONSIDER STRATEGIC GUIDANELINES AND 5. DISCUSSION

The following is a summary of the discussion which took place.

- Thinking in Northern Ireland and Government Departments can be parochial and it will be difficult to break this down not only within towns but also government. One of the reasons the previous RDS had limited impact was that it did not become an underpinning Strategy. There is a danger that individual Departmental plans will drive the investment strategy rather than it being driven by an overarching plan.
- The equality agenda is important, particularly how it influences the policy agenda. An EQIA is being done in parallel with the review. It was suggested that equality should run through the guidance and this would underpin and assist in doing an EQIA. It will be important that the implementation of the RDS has equality at its core.

- It was anticipated there would be difficulties when rural proofing. There could be useful tension if it is done right. Complementarities are important for the border region and the rural area.
- There has to be integration of effort. The question to be asked is where does the RDS sit and does it set the template for others, particularly in terms of spend. In the South of Ireland the National Development Plan is the spend document and the National Spatial Strategy and the National Development Plan work off each other. The RDS is not where spending decisions will be taken but it will be a key influencer. The PfG is where priorities for spend are made.
- It is important that the relationship between the RDS, PPSs and Area Plans is in the right hierarchical order. Local government and central government need to work together. If everyone sees in it a space then people will have to buy-in. It will be important not to think of land use planning but rather spatial planning.
- It was suggested another objective could be included – “improve and strengthen integration with island wide planning and development”.

Suggestions for Strategic Guidance

- Sustainable Communities should also include equality.
- Poverty should be linked to connectivity, access etc.
- The issue of division within communities was raised and it was suggested it should be up front and a central message which addresses divisions - it could be a heading or a cross cutting theme.
- There should be linkages between each of the themes.
- Community Plans should be the implementation tool for the RDS – not Area Plans.
- Linkages and co-operation should be captured to demonstrate the benefits. Needs to be a reality check and this will be a challenge for elected representatives.
- Strategy has to be realistic in order for it to happen. It would be better not to have too many guidelines but rather a few which are clear and key. There was caution not to muddy the water too much.

6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business.

7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Mike Thompson thanked everyone for attending and the contribution made. He proposed the next meeting would be held in April and in Newry. Minister Connor Murphy would be invited to attend. A fuller discussion will be possible at that time.