Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Ár dTodhchaí Tuaithe
Our Rural Future

Our Rural Future 2026-2031

Public Consultation Document
Final Written Consultation

Prepared by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht

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A Message from the Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht, Dara Calleary, T.D.

Ón tráth a seoladh Todhchaí Cheantair Thuaithe na hÉireann sa bhliain 2021, leagadh amach uaillmhianta an Rialtais i leith cheantair thuaithe na hÉireann agus cuireadh creat ar fáil ar mhaithe le gníomhaíocht forbartha tuaithe ar fud ranna Rialtais. Tríd an gcur chuige uile-Rialtais seo, chuir Todhchaí Cheantair Thuaithe na hÉireann infheistíocht agus tacaíochtaí ríthábhachtacha ar fáil, neartaíodh geilleagair áitiúla, feabhsaíodh caighdeán na beatha in go leor pobail thuaithe, agus leagadh síos dúshraith láidir i ndáil le fás agus acmhainneacht fhadtéarmach.

Since its launch in 2021, *Our Rural Future* has set out the Government's ambitions for rural Ireland and provided the framework for rural development activity across Government departments. Through this whole-of-Government approach, *Our Rural Future* has delivered vital investment and supports, strengthened local economies, improved quality of life in many rural communities, and laid strong foundations for long-term growth and resilience.

All the while, Ireland continues to change and our rural policy must evolve with it. The next iteration of *Our Rural Future* is being developed to respond to emerging opportunities and challenges – whether in relation to demographic change, an aging population, digital transformation, climate action, and the evolving needs of rural economies and communities.

This new policy will build on the progress already made and will set out a renewed vision for the years ahead. It will be supported by clear and practical actions, developed across Government, and backed by substantial investment in rural Ireland. Together, these measures will ensure that rural Ireland continues to support vibrant and connected communities, strong and sustainable local economies and the wellbeing of all who live, learn and work there.

I ndiaidh an aistrithe feidhmeanna i Meitheamh 2025, tá rannán na Gaeltachta anois faoi choimirce na Roinne seo ina iomlán. Ba mhaith liom cinnte a dhéanamh, tríd an mbeartas nua, go dtacófar go hiomlán le riachtanais phobail na Gaeltachta ar fud na hÉireann agus ar ár n-oileáin ar a labhraítear Gaeilge. Ba mhaith liom beartas a fheiceáil lena dtugtar aghaidh ar na dúshláin atá roimh ár n-oileáin amach ón chósta, ar bheartas é atá ag teacht go hiomlán le Ár nOileáin Bheo, straitéis oileán an Rialtais.

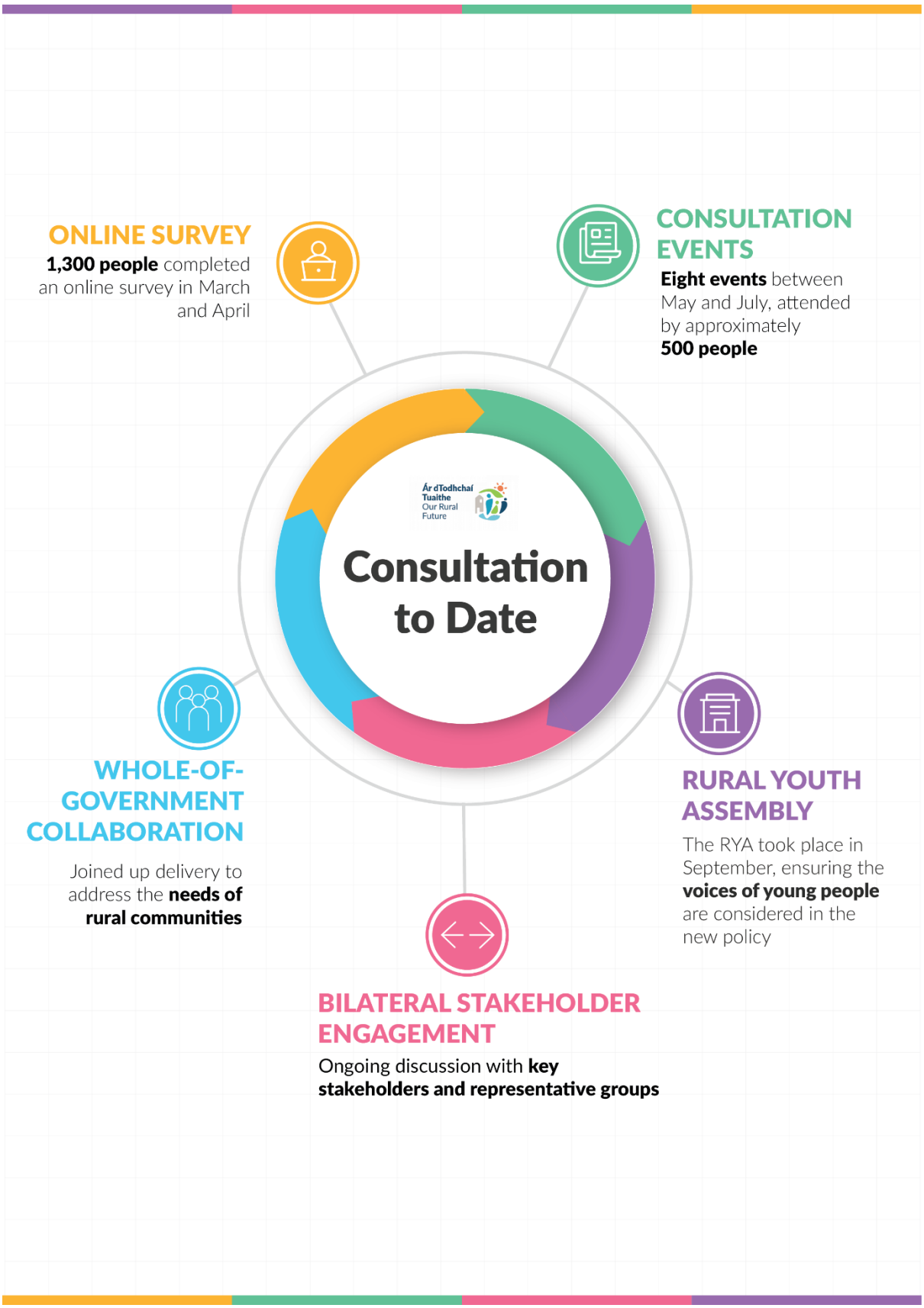
I am publishing this consultation document to help shape the next iteration of Ireland's rural development policy. The document has been informed by the extensive engagement already undertaken and is the final phase of the consultation process on the new policy. Over recent months, my department has engaged with stakeholders, communities, and organisations across the country to gather perspectives on what matters most for rural Ireland and its people.

Consultation commenced in March with an online survey, followed by a series of eight stakeholder and public events across the country and online. So far, there has been strong participation and well-informed discussion on the opportunities and challenges ahead, with close to 2,000 people contributing during the consultation process to date. Bilateral meetings with key stakeholders, representative groups, Government Departments and public bodies have also shaped this consultation document.

I now invite you to have your say on the emerging shape of the next iteration of the Our Rural Future policy. It is your opportunity to help ensure that Ireland's rural development policy continues to be clearly linked to the changing needs, opportunities and challenges that are present in our rural communities.

Dara Calleary

Dara Calleary, T.D.
Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht


ONLINE SURVEY
1,300 people completed an online survey in March and April
CONSULTATION EVENTS
Eight events between May and July, attended by approximately 500 people
Ár dTodhchaí Tuaithe
Our Rural Future
Consultation to Date
WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT COLLABORATION
Joined up delivery to address the needs of rural communities
RURAL YOUTH ASSEMBLY
The RYA took place in September, ensuring the voices of young people are considered in the new policy
BILATERAL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT
Ongoing discussion with key stakeholders and representative groups

Structure of the Consultation Document

Building on the extensive consultation undertaken to date, this document represents your final opportunity to help shape the next iteration of *Our Rural Future*. It is set out in a series of sections, and in each section some suggested consultation questions are posed. These questions are designed to assist interested parties in making their submissions.

The document is set out in the following sections:

- **Section 1: Progress So Far – Foundations for the Future**
  This section briefly sets out some of the main areas of progress that have been delivered through a coherent whole-of-Government approach to the delivery of *Our Rural Future*. While much progress has been made, it is recognised that there remain existing and emerging challenges for rural areas which will be addressed in the new policy. The next phase of the policy will further enhance cross-Government collaboration – deepening coordination, aligning objectives, and strengthening joined up delivery to better address the evolving needs of rural communities. This section sets out a specific consultation question on the challenges which the new policy should address.

- **Section 2: Our Rural Future – A New Phase**
  This section sets out the aim to ensure continuity of policy development as the new *Our Rural Future* is drafted, gives some guidance as to what we mean by the term rural, and sets out a proposed statement for the new policy. A specific consultation question is set out seeking views on the wording of this statement.

- **Section 3 – The Core Pillars**
  The consultation to date has informed the identification of the core pillars that are proposed to underpin the new policy. This section gives an overview of the policy framework and sets out a specific consultation question in relation to these pillars.

  Each pillar is then addressed in more detail. For each pillar, the document sets out some contextual information, gives a brief overview of what we have heard from the consultation process to date, and sets out our proposed approach. Included in each pillar is a set of proposed priority areas for delivery over the lifetime of the new policy. These proposed priority areas have been directly informed by the consultation process and collaboration across Government to date and will serve to provide the framework for the series of clear, ambitious and practical actions that will be included in the new policy. For each pillar, a consultation question is set out seeking views on what specific actions should now be considered for inclusion in the new policy.

- **Section 4 - Making your submission**
  This section sets out some useful information in relation to how and when you can make your submission.

Section 1

Progress So Far – Foundations for the Future

Since its launch in 2021, *Our Rural Future* has delivered real and measurable progress across its core ambitions to further the economic, social, cultural and environmental development of rural areas, laying the foundation for the next phase of rural policy.

Across Government, policies and programmes have been delivered which have enhanced the wellbeing and quality of life of people living, working and learning in rural areas. Some of the main areas of progress to date are set out below.

The **National Broadband Plan** has transformed digital connectivity, making it possible for over 440,000 rural premises – including offshore islands – to access gigabit broadband services. This has enabled remote and hybrid working while driving diversification of rural economies though digital jobs and enterprises and reducing isolation for those in remote locations.

The target of establishing a network of **400 Connected Hubs** has been met, giving people access to flexible, digitally enabled workspaces across the country. These hubs are anchoring jobs and innovation locally, ensuring rural Ireland can compete in an increasingly digital economy and enabling people to pursue quality careers while living in rural communities.

Building on this, *Our Rural Future* has prioritised **regional employment and enterprise growth** by fostering an environment that supports entrepreneurship and business development.

Through the nine **Regional Enterprise Plans**, targeted supports for small businesses, entrepreneurs and social enterprises, and new investment from both indigenous firms and foreign direct investment (FDI), rural enterprises have been supported to diversify, scale and innovate. These measures are helping to create jobs, attract and retain talent, and strengthen the resilience of rural economies. 64% of the new jobs created in Enterprise Ireland client companies last year were located outside the Dublin region with all nine enterprise regions recording jobs growth, while 59% of IDA client investments last year were also in regional locations outside Dublin.

The establishment of **Technological Universities** (TUs) across the regions complements this by creating new opportunities for education, research, enterprise and skills development in rural areas. Two new TUs – South East TU and Atlantic TU – have been established since 2021, bringing the total number to five across the country.

Together, these advances in connectivity, innovation infrastructure, enterprise supports, and higher education are laying the foundations for sustained economic development in rural Ireland.

Targeted investment has revitalised towns and villages, guided by the 2022 launch of the **Town Centre First** Policy, with the **Town and Village Renewal Scheme** and the **Rural Regeneration and Development Fund** allocating some €500 million over the last 5 years to fund hundreds of projects to repurpose vacant buildings, enhance public spaces, and support population growth.

Over €110m has been invested through the **Community Centre Investment Fund** in upgrading 1,650 community facilities across the country, while the **Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme** has delivered over 1,200 recreation projects such as new trails and cycleways which have boosted tourism, wellbeing and community pride.

Programmes such as the €100m **Community Recognition Fund** which funded small infrastructural projects and facilities are making a real difference and building resilience in rural communities. Similarly, the **CLÁR programme** has seen year on year growth in targeted investment levels over the lifetime of the policy with over €13.5m allocated to projects across the country in 2024 alone.

Training and leadership initiatives have built capacity and empowered local community leaders, strengthened resilience and equipped rural communities with the supports they need to thrive. The publication of the first national islands policy in 27 years, ***Our Living Islands***, has set a framework to support vibrant and sustainable island communities, and our Gaeltacht regions continue to be well supported.

Access to **high-quality public services** in rural areas has improved. Digital connectivity has enabled greater delivery of online public services, while initiatives such as the **Connecting Ireland Rural Mobility Plan** have expanded rural transport links with over 150 new and enhanced bus routes introduced since 2021, enabling better connections between towns and villages and ensuring services are inclusive and accessible to all. These improvements are reducing isolation, improving access to jobs, education and healthcare, and supporting more sustainable travel choices.

Rural Ireland is making real **progress on climate and sustainability**. Renewable energy and retrofitting projects are creating local opportunities, while restored peatlands are supporting biodiversity, clean energy and tourism. Alongside this, investment in sustainable agriculture, marine and forestry is safeguarding natural resources, strengthening rural livelihoods, and supporting a just transition to a climate-neutral future.

Together, these achievements highlight the impact of a coordinated **whole-of-Government approach** and provide a strong platform for the next phase of rural policy – one focused on deepening sustainability, growing opportunity, and ensuring that rural Ireland continues to thrive as a place to live, work, invest and visit.

While much progress has been made, it is important to also recognise that challenges remain for rural communities and that new challenges will emerge over time. The development of the new policy will reflect this, and the commentary in the forthcoming sections reflects the balance between what has been achieved to date and what challenges still remain.

Suggested Consultation Question

1. **What are the emerging opportunities and challenges for rural Ireland that the new policy should address?**

Section 2

Our Rural Future – A New Phase

Our Rural Future has become a well-recognised name for rural development in Ireland. Communities, stakeholders and Government now associate it with investment, partnership and progress. Retaining this title for the successor policy ensures continuity and builds on this strong recognition.

At the same time, *Our Rural Future* still reflects the spirit of what we want to achieve and signals that the next phase of the policy will continue to support vibrant communities, strong local economies and a sustainable future – while setting out a renewed vision and new actions to respond to the opportunities and challenges ahead.

Defining 'Rural'

During consultations to date, many stakeholders raised the question of what 'rural' means in the context of national policy. For some, rural is best understood geographically – areas outside the main cities and larger towns. For others, it is about daily life, shaped by settlement patterns, access to services and the realities of community life. Most rural areas share certain characteristics, such as more dispersed populations, differing employment opportunities and greater distances from services, which distinguish them from larger urban centres – but no two rural areas or communities are the same.

As with the current policy, the next iteration of *Our Rural Future* will not rely on a single definition. Instead, it will continue to recognise the different ways rural life is experienced across the country, and the close interdependencies between rural and urban areas. This will help ensure that the opportunities and challenges faced by rural communities are better understood and can help guide future actions, while making sure that no part of rural Ireland is overlooked.

Statement

The new policy will include a clear statement which will seek to provide direction and ambition for the future of rural Ireland. It will set out what we want rural communities, economies, and places to become over the lifetime of the new policy.

This draft statement set out below builds on the progress already made under Our Rural Future and reflects the priorities highlighted through consultation to date. It is intended to capture the aspirations of rural Ireland and provide the right foundation for the next phase of Our Rural Future. We are now inviting views on whether it expresses the future you want to see for rural communities.

"Our vision is for a thriving and inclusive rural Ireland. This is a place where people can live, learn and work in connected, sustainable and vibrant places, supported by strong local economies and resilient communities. It's a vision rooted in a deep respect for, and engagement with, our language, culture, and heritage, and where wellbeing is at the heart of rural life."

Suggested Consultation Question

2. **Does the draft statement reflect your aspirations for the future of rural Ireland? Is there anything you would add or change?**

Section 3

The Core Pillars

We are proposing that the next phase of Our Rural Future will be built around four core pillars. These pillars reflect the key themes that emerged through consultation to date and provide a clear structure for shaping the new policy.

Together, they capture the key aspects of rural life and translate the vision into reality. They provide for a renewed framework to ensure rural communities can thrive socially, economically, and environmentally while building a sustainable and resilient future. The new policy will also set out an approach to supporting and driving delivery, including a clear action plan and targeted investment, so that commitments translate into real outcomes for rural communities.

The core proposed pillars for the new policy are:

Pillar One: *Thriving Rural Places*

Support rural towns, villages and communities to become more vibrant, well connected, and inclusive places, with quality infrastructure, housing and services that support economic and social development and a high quality of life.

Pillar Two: *A Strong and Diverse Rural Economy*

Foster a strong and diverse rural economy that provides employment, supports enterprise and innovation, and harnesses the unique strengths of rural Ireland across traditional and emerging sectors.

Pillar Three: *Resilient Rural Communities*

Build resilient rural communities that are inclusive, connected and empowered – with strong local organisations, safe and welcoming places, and opportunities for all to participate in community life, nurture traditions, and celebrate language, culture and heritage.

Pillar Four: *A Greener Rural Future*

Support rural communities to lead in climate adaptation and sustainability, ensuring a fair transition to a climate-neutral future while building resilience to climate impacts, protecting livelihoods, enhancing biodiversity and creating new opportunities for growth.

Suggested Consultation Question

3. **Do you think anything should be added to the four core pillars proposed?**

Pillar One: *Thriving Rural Places*

Thriving rural places are at the heart of our national identity, and our ambition is to ensure that rural towns, villages and communities are vibrant, well connected, and inclusive, and that they support people as they live, learn, work and raise their families.

Everyday wellbeing in rural communities depends on reliable services and resilient infrastructure, enabling people to access social, economic and cultural opportunities, connect with others and feel confident about the future.

With Ireland's population projected to grow by around one million people by 2040, ensuring rural towns and villages have the connectivity and services they need will be essential to sustaining vibrant communities and balanced regional growth.

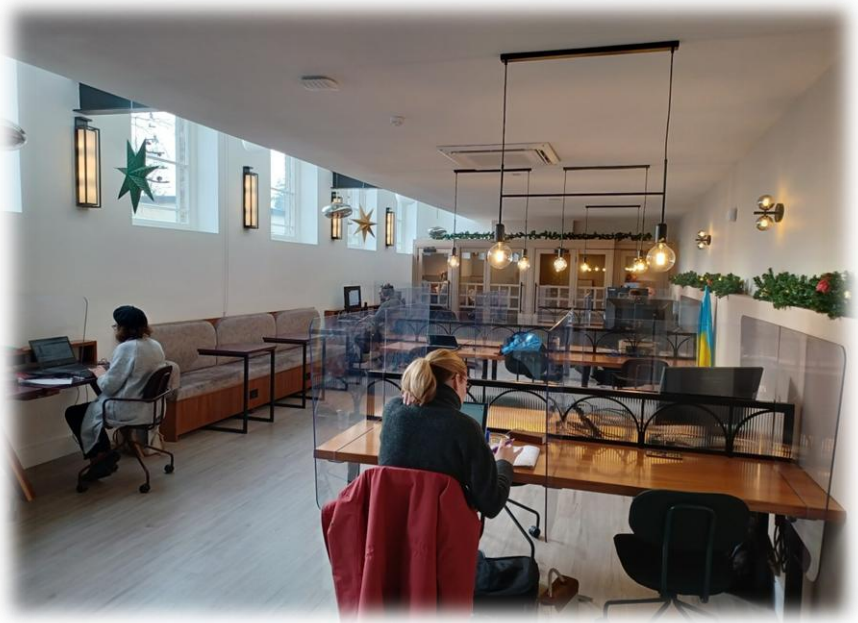
Investing in rural places means providing the foundations for job creation, climate action, community strength and cultural life. By investing in housing, transport, digital connectivity, utilities and services, we enable rural Ireland to grow, diversify and thrive into the future.

What have we heard to date?

Consultation to date has shown strong appreciation for the progress made under Our Rural Future in laying the foundations for thriving rural places.

People highlighted positive impacts from improved broadband access, expanded rural transport options, and upgraded community facilities. Many reported an improved quality of life, including reduced commuting thanks to remote and hybrid working, alongside new economic and educational opportunities enabled by digital connectivity.

At the same time, challenges remain. Housing was consistently raised as a pressing nationwide issue, while the need to strengthen supporting infrastructure – particularly roads, water, and energy – was frequently noted. Improving access to essential services such as childcare, healthcare, disability services, and social care locally was also noted, along with the need to make public transport more available and accessible. The importance of ensuring that services and places are inclusive and accessible to all was also emphasised.



These insights underline both the progress achieved and the areas requiring further progress. They provide clear direction for the next phase of rural policy to deliver on the ambition of thriving, well-connected and inclusive rural places.

Our Proposed Approach

It is proposed that the next phase of Our Rural Future will prioritise investment in infrastructure and services that deliver tangible benefits for rural communities. Aligned with the National Development Plan (NDP), the National Planning Framework (NPF), and the Government's new Housing Plan, this approach will promote balanced regional development by supporting the delivery of sustainable housing options, enhanced connectivity, and vibrant local economies.

We will focus on strengthening the core foundations of rural life – ensuring a clear and consistent approach to housing in rural areas, modern transport links, reliable digital connectivity, sustainable utilities and improved access to essential services such as healthcare, childcare, disability services, and education. We will continue to ensure an integrated approach to tackling vacancy and dereliction in rural Ireland. Investment in these areas will make rural towns and villages more attractive and resilient, while supporting opportunities for people to live, work and thrive in their local communities.

Ensuring that this investment supports balanced regional development will be central to our approach. Growth and opportunity must be shared fairly across the country, with rural towns and villages acting as hubs for their wider regions and communities. Embedding sustainability and resilience in all new infrastructure will also prepare rural communities to meet future challenges, including those posed by climate change.

Informed by the consultation process to date, a number of priority areas for delivery under the new policy have been identified under this pillar. **These priority areas will serve to form the basis for the development of clear, ambitious and practical actions for inclusion in the new policy**.

The priority areas identified to date include:

- The promotion and delivery of balanced regional development.
- Supporting the delivery of reliable, gigabit capable broadband to all premises and businesses in Ireland to enable rural communities to benefit from digital transformation.
- Investment in modern, resilient and smart energy and water infrastructure.
- Supporting the role of, and access to, high-quality education at all levels.
- Supporting the provision of sustainable rural housing as a key building block to ensuring viable rural communities.
- Continuing to invest in the revitalisation and regeneration of our rural towns and villages, including through the delivery of the Town Centre First approach.
- Enhancing the provision of modern, safe and accessible public transport in rural areas.
- Ensuring equitable and timely access to high-quality healthcare services, including disability services, for rural communities.
- Supporting families in rural communities by improving access to affordable childcare services.

Suggested Consultation Question – Pillar 1

4. **What specific actions should be considered for inclusion in the new policy to deliver on our ambition under Pillar 1?**

Pillar Two: *A Strong and Diverse Rural Economy*

A strong and diverse rural economy that drives enterprise, innovation and productivity is vital to Ireland's national competitiveness. It underpins vibrant communities, creates quality jobs, and secures opportunities for future generations.

Rural-based businesses – from sole traders and SMEs to larger enterprises and multinationals with a rural footprint – are central to Ireland's economic success. They provide employment, stimulate local growth, and make wider contributions within their communities, helping people to build successful and fulfilling lives in rural Ireland.

With access to skills, training, digital connectivity and flexible work, rural areas can harness their distinctive strengths across both traditional and emerging sectors, attracting and retaining younger people and new or returning residents.

The rural economy remains a cornerstone of Ireland's economic performance, with agriculture, forestry, fishing and tourism continuing to sustain local livelihoods. At the same time, diversification into renewable energy, emerging technologies, the bioeconomy, creative industries, and social enterprise will keep rural Ireland resilient, innovative and sustainable into the future.

What have we heard to date?

Consultation to date has highlighted strong appreciation for improved access to remote and hybrid working, supported by initiatives such as Connected Hubs. Local Enterprise Offices and the supports they provide were also well recognised. Many recognised scope for further developing rural tourism, building on strengths such as festivals, cultural events, the Arts, our natural heritage, and the untapped potential of agri-tourism, as well as the growing opportunities in renewable and green energy. Social enterprises were valued for their role in creating local jobs while delivering wider social and environmental benefits.

At the same time, concerns were raised about the quality and variety of available jobs, and the challenges of starting and growing local businesses, including the rising cost of doing business which was consistently noted as a barrier to enterprise growth. Stakeholders also emphasised challenges in accessing business supports, particularly for early-stage enterprises and those in emerging sectors, as well as challenges in developing and retaining skills locally.

Consultation feedback highlighted the central role of the agriculture, food, marine and forestry sectors in sustaining rural economies. Key challenges identified include farm viability and generational renewal, the need to adapt to evolving environmental and climate requirements, and pressures on land use, water quality and biodiversity. Opportunities were also strongly emphasised – particularly the potential for diversification and the development of low-carbon and circular bio-economy initiatives.

Our Proposed Approach

It is proposed that the next phase of *Our Rural Future* will seek to strengthen and diversify the rural economy by supporting enterprise, creating diverse employment opportunities and building resilience across all sectors. It will build on the policies and supports delivered by Government and its agencies to back rural businesses and foster entrepreneurship.

Delivery will be aligned with the Action Plan on Competitiveness, Regional Enterprise Plans and regional skills policies, ensuring a joined-up approach that builds on local strengths and opportunities while contributing to balanced regional growth.

A strong focus will be placed on innovation and entrepreneurship, including the adoption of new technologies and AI, to create new opportunities for rural enterprises.

Government is committed to facilitating remote and flexible working, and to investing in the infrastructure, skills and business supports that enable rural economies to adapt and grow. This includes maximising digital opportunities, supporting tourism, farming, fishing and forestry, and expanding training and upskilling so people can succeed in a changing economy.

Informed by the consultation process to date, a number of priority areas for delivery under the new policy have been identified under this pillar. **These priority areas will serve to form the basis for the development of clear, ambitious and practical actions for inclusion in the new policy**.

The priority areas identified to date include:

- Strengthening and diversifying rural Ireland's enterprise base and supporting high quality and sustainable employment.
- Enhancing the sustainability and competitiveness of rural enterprises, including social enterprises, and enabling businesses to adapt, grow and thrive in evolving economic conditions.
- Continued support to underpin the vital role of the agriculture, food, marine and forestry sectors in rural areas and the rural economy.
- Promoting growth in sustainable, year-round regionally dispersed tourism across the country.
- Building on the opportunities presented by remote working for the rural economy and rural communities.
- Harnessing the opportunities provided by digital development and emerging technologies such as AI to enhance rural connectivity, support digital skills, and enable innovation-driven enterprise and public services in rural communities.
- Unlocking the full economic and social potential of Gaeltacht areas by supporting enterprise and innovation, tourism, and community initiatives, and exploring opportunities for targeted investment.

Suggested Consultation Question – Pillar 2

5. **What specific actions should be considered for inclusion in the new policy to deliver on our ambition under Pillar 2?**

Pillar Three: *Resilient Rural Communities*

The strength of rural Ireland lies in its people and their deep ties to place, culture, and community. Resilient communities that are inclusive, connected and empowered enable people to live rewarding lives locally, adapt to change, and create opportunities for future generations. They provide the networks of care and belonging that sustain wellbeing and keep community spirit alive.

They also reflect the diversity of modern Ireland. Inclusive communities ensure that people with disabilities, new arrivals, minority or marginalised groups, the LGBTIQ+ community, and people across all generations are welcomed and supported to participate fully in local life.

Strong community groups are central to this. By building capacity, driving local initiatives and supporting those around them, they become empowered to give rural Ireland the tools to respond to challenges and embrace new possibilities.

It is also crucial that we sustain and grow our Gaeltacht regions and our island communities, and nurture our language, culture, heritage and sporting traditions. This is vital not only for identity and pride but also for wellbeing, tourism and local enterprise. These connections enrich lives, create economic opportunity, and strengthen national resilience.

What have we heard to date?

Consultation highlighted the strong pride people take in community life and the essential role of local groups, clubs and sporting organisations in sustaining rural Ireland and providing spaces for social connection, youth engagement and physical activity. They were seen as vital for local identity, participation and resilience.

At the same time, stakeholders raised concerns about the pressures facing these organisations and the wider community sector, including volunteer fatigue, an over-reliance on a small number of committed volunteers, and challenges in attracting and retaining new members. Issues such as the funding required to operate and maintain local facilities, and the administrative burden on small organisations were also highlighted.

Supporting the specific needs of Gaeltacht and island communities and building on the progress made under *Our Living Islands* was identified as a key priority during consultation. Stakeholders highlighted the unique challenges relating to geography, connectivity, service delivery, and demographic change, which require sustained and place-based policy responses whilst also identifying the strategic opportunity for these communities to contribute to long-term resilience and balanced regional growth.

Consultation feedback also reaffirmed the role of the Irish language as a cornerstone of Ireland's cultural identity and as a living community asset, particularly within the Gaeltacht and in Irish speaking networks across the country.

Stakeholders highlighted ongoing challenges relating to sustaining daily language and ensuring that the provision of public services through Irish keeps pace with community needs. The statutory National Plan for the Provision of Irish-Medium Public Services, the implementation of which is committed to in Civil Service Renewal 2030, was viewed as providing new employment and economic opportunities for Gaeltacht communities, while also delivering quality public services through Irish to them. At the same time, significant opportunities were identified – including the economic potential of the Irish language in areas such as tourism, cultural enterprise, and attracting investment linked to Ireland's linguistic heritage – with the work of Údarás na Gaeltachta seen as being central to the realisation of these opportunities in Gaeltacht regions.

Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of promoting inclusion, equality, and integration, and ensuring that services and activities reflect the diversity of today's rural population. Access to appropriate creative spaces and supports was also identified as a challenge, particularly for young people.

Community safety was raised as an ongoing priority, with calls for continued investment to ensure that rural areas remain safe and welcoming places to live.

Our Proposed Approach

It is proposed that the next phase of Our Rural Future will seek to strengthen the resilience, inclusivity and sustainability of rural communities. The focus will be on ensuring that communities have the supports and frameworks needed to thrive, adapt to change, and create opportunities for future generations, as well as maximising the impact of our investment under the current policy.

We will place a strong emphasis on developing skills, volunteering and leadership so that local organisations can lead development with confidence. This will be underpinned by forthcoming strategies for the community and voluntary sector and for volunteering, which will provide the framework to strengthen participation, reduce barriers, and encourage a new generation of volunteers.

Our approach will also build on and complement wider national strategies for housing, language, culture, heritage, and sport. Sustaining our Gaeltacht and island communities will remain a priority, with actions aligned to the 20-Year Strategy for the Irish Language and the *Our Living Islands* policy, ensuring that linguistic, cultural and economic sustainability are secured. We recognise that the availability of housing is key to this sustainability. We are committed to providing clarity and consistency within the planning system in relation to housing in Gaeltacht areas and will examine the feasibility of Údarás na Gaeltachta, working with Uisce Éireann and local authorities, to support building housing for Irish speaking communities.

By ensuring alignment across policy areas, rural development will be embedded as a shared national priority and delivered in a way that reflects the diversity and needs of communities.

A strong commitment to inclusion and equality will guide all actions, ensuring that people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities feel connected, valued, and supported in their communities.

Informed by the consultation process to date, a number of priority areas for delivery under the new policy have been identified under this pillar. **These priority areas will serve to form the basis for the development of clear, ambitious and practical actions for inclusion in the new policy**.

The priority areas identified to date include:

- Continuing to support sustainable, inclusive and cohesive rural communities, with particular attention to the distinct needs of Gaeltacht and island communities.
- Ensuring that social inclusion remains at the core of rural development.
- Promoting safer, more resilient rural communities.
- Promoting meaningful youth engagement in rural communities.
- Supporting initiatives that promote improved health and quality of life outcomes for people of all ages in rural communities.
- Fostering a thriving volunteer culture in rural communities by recognising, supporting and empowering volunteers to contribute meaningfully to social, cultural, and economic life.
- Promoting and sustaining the Irish language in line with the objectives of the 20-year Strategy for the Irish Language.

Suggested Consultation Question – Pillar 3

6. **What specific actions should be considered for inclusion in the new policy to deliver on our ambition under Pillar 3?**

Pillar Four: *A Greener Rural Future*

Rural Ireland's natural heritage is one of its greatest strengths. Its landscapes, biodiversity, and natural resources sustain farming, forestry, fishing and tourism, while also supporting wellbeing and quality of life. Protecting these assets is vital to the identity and prosperity of rural areas.

Climate change is already placing these resources under pressure, with rural communities experiencing more frequent extreme weather, flooding and coastal erosion. At the same time, rural areas are central to the solutions. By advancing renewable energy, strengthening energy security, and promoting sustainable agriculture, waste management, and the circular economy, rural Ireland can lead in meeting national climate targets and building resilience.

A greener rural future is therefore essential – not only to protect the environment and safeguard livelihoods, and strengthen food security, but also to create new opportunities for jobs, innovation and investment. Rural communities have a vital role in ensuring Ireland's natural heritage is protected and enhanced, so that it can continue to support future generations.

What have we heard to date?

Consultations highlighted that people in rural areas are conscious of climate change and willing to play their part in addressing it. Many saw opportunities for rural Ireland in renewable energy and the green economy, whilst also expressing a clear desire to be engaged in decisions about green energy infrastructure and local development.

Communities noted the importance of moving beyond short-term emergency responses to extreme weather events, towards more strategic and long-term planning. This includes investing in resilience measures that help rural areas prepare for and adapt to the increasing impacts of climate change.

Participants also emphasised the importance of conserving biodiversity and managing land sustainably, with strong support for measures that protect natural resources. Farmers in particular expressed interest in more support for sustainable practices, while noting the pressures and challenges of adapting.

Feedback also highlighted the need for more sustainable transport options, including safe walking and cycling routes, and greater provision of electric vehicle infrastructure to support transition.

Our Proposed Approach

It is proposed that the next phase of Our Rural Future will prioritise the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient rural Ireland, supporting communities to benefit from emerging economic and social opportunities in the green economy. Guided by national climate and adaptation policies, this approach will make the transition fair, inclusive and sustainable, while protecting the natural environment.

We will focus on protecting landscapes, biodiversity, and natural resources, while enabling rural communities to adapt to climate change and ensuring that those most at risk to changing practices and climate-related impacts are supported by Government to make the transition towards a sustainable future. We will also strengthen the role of the bioeconomy and circular economy, particularly through supporting businesses and commercial activity that can scale or act as exemplars in tackling the effects of climate change in Ireland.

The Government's approach will embed sustainability in rural communities by investing in renewable energy and sustainable transport, supporting land and resource management practices that protect biodiversity, and enabling communities to plan strategically for climate impacts.

Informed by the consultation process to date, a number of priority areas for delivery under the new policy have been identified under this pillar. **These priority areas will serve to form the basis for the development of clear, ambitious and practical actions for inclusion in the new policy**.

The priority areas identified to date include:

- Enhancing the climate resilience of rural Ireland by supporting communities, economies, and infrastructure to adapt to the impacts of climate change.
- Protecting and enhancing biodiversity in rural Ireland and promoting the conservation and sustainable use of Ireland's natural heritage.
- Supporting the development of clean, reliable, and affordable energy for rural Ireland
- Strengthening the role of the bioeconomy and circular economy in rural economies and communities.

Suggested Consultation Question – Pillar 4

7. **What specific actions should be considered for inclusion in the new policy to deliver on our ambition under Pillar 4?**

Section 4

Making your Submission

We are now seeking written submissions from all interested parties. It is open to people to make a submission as an individual or as a member of a particular group.

The suggested consultation questions which are set out in this document are designed to assist interested parties in making their submissions. The full list of questions is available at Appendix 1. You are not required to address all or indeed any of these consultation questions in making your submission. Comments outside the questions posed are also welcome.

Please email your submission to rural.consultation@drcdg.gov.ie with "Our Rural Future Consultation" in the title.

You may also send your submission by post to:

Our Rural Future Consultation
Rural Strategy Unit
Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht
Government Offices
Ballina
Co Mayo
F26 E8N6

This consultation will **be open until 12 December** 2025.

Respondents are advised that it is intended to publish all submissions online after the consultation.

The Department is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2014 and Data Protection legislation. Personal, confidential or commercially sensitive information should not be included in your submission, and it will be presumed that all information contained in your submission is releasable under the Freedom of Information Act 2014.

Appendix 1: Suggested Consultation Questions

1. **What are the emerging opportunities and challenges for rural Ireland that the new policy should address?**

2. **Does the draft statement reflect your aspirations for the future of rural Ireland? Is there anything you would add or change?**

3. **Do you think anything should be added to the four core pillars proposed?**

4. **What specific actions should be considered for inclusion in the new policy to deliver on our ambition under Pillar 1?**

5. **What specific actions should be considered for inclusion in the new policy to deliver on our ambition under Pillar 2?**

6. **What specific actions should be considered for inclusion in the new policy to deliver on our ambition under Pillar 3?**

7. **What specific actions should be considered for inclusion in the new policy to deliver on our ambition under Pillar 4?**