

Rural Policy Framework for NI

Report on Public Consultation



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Ministerial Foreword



It gave me great pleasure to launch the consultation on the Rural Policy Framework on 9th July 2021 and I am greatly encouraged by the level of engagement and the quality of responses from stakeholders who took the time to respond to the consultation. The Framework seeks to support a fair and inclusive rural society where rural dwellers enjoy the same quality of life and opportunities as everyone else in Northern Ireland. The Rural Policy Framework demonstrates DAERA's ongoing commitment to ensuring that our rural communities continue to flourish and support the wider economic drivers to help Northern Ireland prosper.

Responses to the Rural Policy Consultation

Rural communities by their very nature are geographically remote from key economic drivers for Northern Ireland and the key findings from the consultation highlight poor transport, utilities and infrastructure as barriers to growth. My priority is to introduce policies and systems to address these issues, improve urban/rural linkages, provide greater accessibility to jobs, healthcare, broadband, education and training, social and other opportunities to help sustain and improve the economic outputs and sustainability of rural areas.

The consultation responses also highlight the changing nature of the challenges we face in rural communities presented by climate change and it is clear that stakeholders want environmental and sustainability considerations to play an important part in delivering future rural programmes. As we in Northern Ireland seek to address these challenges through our Green Growth Strategy, we must lay the foundations for a more sustainable society and our rural communities will play a significant role. If we get it right the benefits to our rural economy will be substantial.

Other key considerations from the consultation responses highlight the importance of social and affordable housing, partnership working and learning the lessons from LEADER and the need for longer term financial certainty.

LEADER and our involvement in the Rural Development Programme have clearly demonstrated the benefits of collaboration and a bottom up approach to tackling challenges faced in rural communities. During this time the contribution of Local Action Groups has been invaluable and I want to make sure that we learn from this approach to support the delivery of programmes and schemes going forward. To this end, my Department will establish a Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee (RSOC) to ensure the continued involvement of key stakeholders and

rural communities in helping to design programmes that meet these challenges head on. It is my intention that this Committee will be established in early 2022 and will be supported by a range of sub-committees covering equality, the environment and the thematic pillars of the Rural Policy Framework.

As Rural Champion, DAERA fully appreciates the importance of working in partnership with other public bodies, the private sector and rural stakeholders to ensure the best outcomes for our rural communities. We will therefore work closely with our partners in government to champion the needs of rural communities across a range of issues and this includes issues such as housing and other public services.

I also recognise the challenges that short-term budget settlements create and to that end I hope to secure a three year budget settlement that will underpin delivery of the Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. DAERA will also continue to deliver the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Programme and will seek to secure additional funding for rural communities through PEACE PLUS, Green Growth, Shared Prosperity and other funding opportunities that emerge in future.

The following report outlines the responses we have received to the consultation in detail and outlines the actions that the Department will now take to update the Rural Policy Framework. Once a revised version of the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland has been formally approved, development of the new Rural Business and Community Investment Programme will commence.

You will also see from this report that there are a range of pilot programmes which the Department has been taking forward to help test the assumptions in the Framework. These pilots will be subject to a full and detailed evaluation, helping to shape our response.

Rural communities in Northern Ireland are innovative and resilient and I have no doubt that with the right support and collaborating with other public authorities we will showcase the diverse and innovative way in which the needs of rural communities can be delivered. I am confident that the Rural Policy Framework will help to deliver the best possible outcomes for our rural communities and address many of the challenges that they face.



Edwin Poots MLA

Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Background

More than a third (36%) of Northern Ireland's population lives in a rural area and enjoy many of the benefits associated with living in the countryside. Despite similarities in many aspects of urban and rural life, there are also challenges which tend to be more pronounced in rural areas outside of Belfast. The nature of rural industry and employment differs from that of towns and cities. Difficulties with access to services, and issues with connectivity, social and digital, tend to have a disproportionate impact on rural dwellers. The cost of living also tends to be higher in rural areas, and rural households are more likely to experience fuel poverty. Despite the unique challenges presented by rural life, those living in rural areas on average enjoy a better self-reported quality of life than their urban counterparts, in terms of health, happiness and life satisfaction. The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 provides a statutory duty on public authorities to have due regard to rural needs which should deliver better outcomes for people in rural areas and help make rural communities more sustainable. The impact of a policy or the delivery of a public service can be different for people in rural areas to those in urban areas and a one size fits all approach is not always appropriate.

The Northern Ireland Rural Policy Framework has therefore been developed in recognition of the unique challenges faced by people living in rural areas. This framework also represents the Department's policy response to the cessation of the Rural Development Programme (RDP). Under the Priority 6 of the RDP LEADER and Rural Tourism provided investment of £80m to support non-agricultural activities supporting wider rural development.

In developing the Framework the Department recognises that new opportunities exist to allow a proactive response to the needs of Northern Ireland's rural communities and COVID has highlighted the need for our approach to be highly responsive and flexible.

The Rural Policy Framework has been developed following a process of extensive stakeholder engagement and builds on knowledge and experience of successive Rural Development Programmes. More recently the lessons learned and feedback received was taken into account as we worked in partnership with our rural stakeholders and our statutory partners to deliver for rural communities during the COVID Pandemic. This has been crucial in helping to shape the Framework and this level of engagement will be essential as we move forward to ensure that the priority areas for intervention identified under our 5 thematic pillars are delivered.

The Rural Policy Framework sets out an ambitious scope and remit recognising rural areas as places of opportunity. It is also designed to be challenging, to support innovation and ensure that rural communities are properly equipped to deal with the social, economic and environmental challenges our rural communities face.

This process has highlighted the importance and the benefits of working in partnership across central and local government, the private, community and voluntary sectors in order to achieve the best outcomes for people living in rural areas. We therefore recognise that delivering the programmes and schemes that will underpin delivery of this Framework, can only be achieved by the continuation and the strengthening of these relationships and the governance processes that underpin them.

The purpose of the consultation was to build on the extensive engagement processes that underpinned the development of the draft Rural Policy Framework and to hear the views of our stakeholders. This report provides an overview of the consultation process, an analysis of the responses and an outline of the steps the Department will now take to finalise the Rural Policy Framework. This will then provide the basis for developing the Rural Business and Community Investment Programme which will be designed, developed and delivered in partnership with our statutory partners and rural stakeholders.



Stakeholder Engagement (pre-consultation)

The Rural Policy Framework for NI has been underpinned by engagement, partnership and flexibility throughout its development with extensive engagement incorporating a wide range of rural stakeholders. Many of the issues identified throughout the stakeholder engagement process will require inter-departmental co-operation and joint working to ensure strategic delivery in addressing those issues. The Framework has also adhered to the cross-cutting horizontal principles of sustainability, equality and equal opportunities. Figure 1 below provides a brief summary of the stakeholder engagement on the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland at pre-public consultation stage.

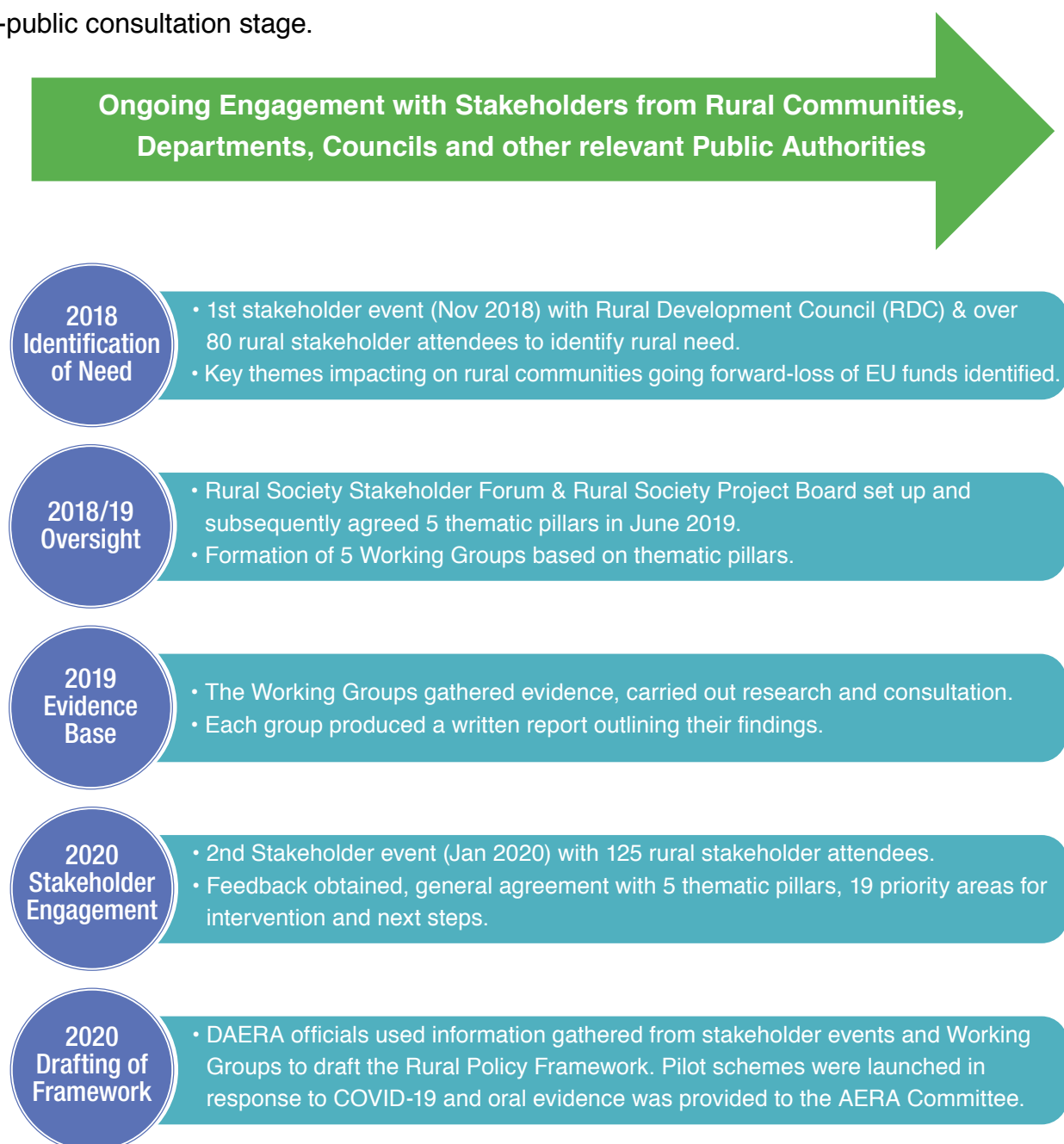


Figure 1: Summary of Stakeholder Engagement (pre-public consultation stage)

Consultation Process

The online public consultation exercise ran for a period of 8 weeks from 7 July 2021 until 6 September 2021. A range of other documents were published on the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs website, including the following:

- Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland Consultee Engagement Letter;
- Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland Consultation Document;
- Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland Consultation Document (Abridged Version);
- Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland Consultation Response Template;
- Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland Rural Needs Impact Assessment;
- Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland EQIA Screening Template; and
- Rural Policy Framework for NI FAQs.

The Department took the following actions to ensure as many stakeholders and members of the public as possible were able to participate in the consultation:

Initial Consultation Launch and Accessibility

At the initial launch on 7 July 2021, notification of the consultation launch and details for the 7 online webinars was issued to 215 organisations including the Assembly. All consultation documentation was issued via e-mail except for 2 hard copies to Section 75 groups and 1 large print copy which was requested.

Social Media and Publications

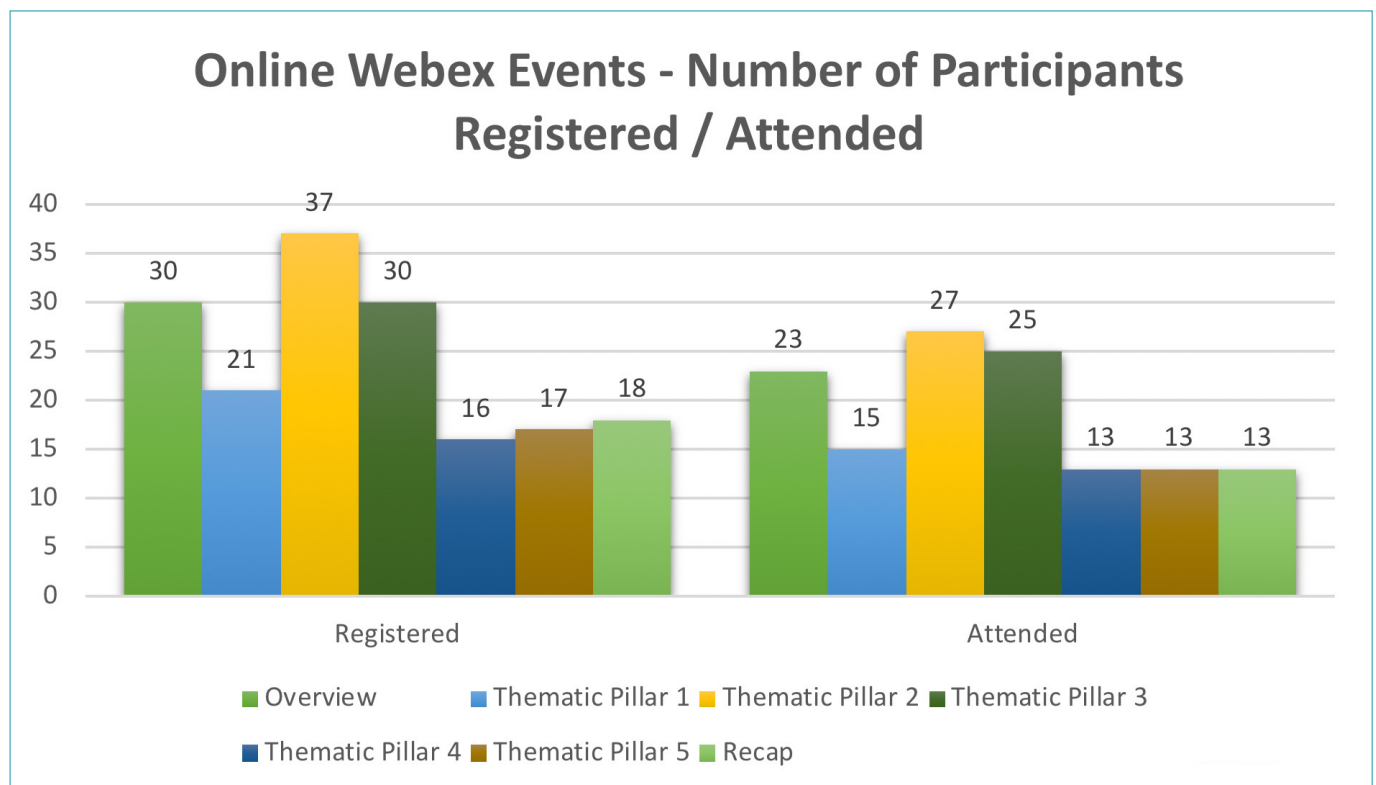
There was an extensive social media marketing campaign carried out over the 8 week period promoting each of the Thematic Pillar online webinars, with examples of projects funded by DAERA also highlighted. The social media marketing campaign included a range of infographics, pictures, videos and links to press releases. Across social media, there was a total of 62 posts (these included 32 twitter posts with a total impression number of 64,721 and an average engagement of 2.2%; and 30 Facebook posts with a total reach of 39,405)¹. Within the industry, 1.0% engagement is considered as good so the average engagement rate for the Rural Policy Framework posts was above average.

¹ Impressions/reach represents the number of times people viewed the post. On Twitter this is a total tally of the times the tweet has been viewed whereas on Facebook, it is the number of unique people who viewed the content. Engagement is the number of times people interacted with the post, i.e. liked, shared, or commented.

There were four press releases issued over the consultation period for launch; Thematic Pillars 1 and 4; and to encourage responses as the consultation drew to a close. Minister Poots also completed a radio interview with Farm Gate and the consultation was featured on the homepage of the Citizen Space website.

Stakeholder Engagement

DAERA held seven online WebEx events over the consultation period. There were 129 attendees with a wide range of rural stakeholders represented. A presentation was provided at each event² followed by a question and answer session. There were 77 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) also raised and published on the DAERA Website³. The chart below shows number of participants registered and those who attended each session. Full details of attendees are included in Annex A.



There were 105 consultation responses received (see Annex B for full list of consultees providing written responses to the consultation). Of these responses, 35 were received via Citizen Space and the remainder were via PDF response template or e-mail. There were 25 responses received from private individuals and the remainder were from the community and voluntary sector; the private sector and the public sector; and other sectors.

² Presentations available at: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/rural-policy-framework-northern-ireland-consultation>

³ FAQs available at: <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/daera/Rural%20Policy%20Framework%20for%20NI%20FAQs%20%2802.09.21%29.pdf>

Analysis and Collation of Respondent Views

A comprehensive and extensive exercise took place to review each response submission. Whilst there was overwhelming support for the proposals, many respondents also provided detailed commentary as part of their response. Various themes were identified and captured per proposal. Where the report refers to ‘a number of respondents’ or ‘some respondents’, it should be noted that this does not refer to all respondents. These have also been presented alongside levels of support for each proposal.

To assist with analysis, respondents were grouped into categories as follows:

Category	Description
Public Sector	Includes a range of organisations such as: Councils; Health and Social Care Trusts; Housing Executive; Libraries NI; North West Regional Development Group (NWRDG); The Consumer Council; and UNESCO Centre.
Private Sector	Includes The Nature Friendly Farming Network (NFFN); and a range of private accommodation providers.
Community/ voluntary ⁴	This includes a range of groups such as: Developing Health Communities; Disability Action; Easilink Community Transport; Early Years; Ecological Design Association NI; Here NI; Irish Moiled Cattle Society; Local Action Groups; NI Rural Women’s Network; RSPB NI; Rural Action; rural community groups and networks; Rural Support; a range of sports based community groups; The National Trust; Victim Support NI; Women’s Regional Consortium; and Woodland Trust NI.
Private Individual	This includes all responses from individuals across all formats.
Other	This includes a wide range of respondents such as: British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC); constituted groups and companies limited by guarantee; Housing Associations; Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN); Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association (NIAPA); Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA); Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform; political representatives; Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) NI; The Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC); Ulster Farmers’ Union (UFU); Ulster University; And Western Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnership (WDSVP).

⁴ It should be noted that seven rural support networks who responded to this consultation represented 915 community and voluntary groups verified as agreeing with overarching responses provided by particular groups. See Annex B for the full list of these.

Methodology

Response Rates and Preferences

Not all respondents provided a response to all 13 consultation questions. Each question has been presented within this document with a response rate, i.e. a percentage of those who responded to each proposal.

For example, out of a total of 105 responses, 96 responded to Question 1 (a response rate of 92%). These figures include all respondents who answered Yes or No to the question. Some respondents submitted responses in a written format not using the consultation response template. Where it was not clear if they were responding yes or no to the question, their commentary was taken into account for qualitative purposes but not for quantitative purposes.

Throughout the report, information is provided for each proposal in terms of the number of respondents who commented. The charts for each proposal indicating levels of agreement are based only on those respondents who clearly provided an indication of their support or otherwise for each consultation question.



Consultation Question Response Rate and Support for Proposals

Question Summary	Response Rate per Consultation Question (Number/Percentage)	Respondents who Answered Yes (Number/Percentage)	Respondents who Answered No (Number/Percentage)
Q1. Agree with Overarching Aim	96 (91%)	72 (75%)	24 (25%)
Q2. Agree that TRPSI approach should continue under Framework?	92 (88%)	90 (98%)	2 (2%)
Q3. Main challenges facing rural communities over next 5 years	93 (89%)	N/A	N/A
Q4. Main opportunities facing rural communities over next 5 years?	93 (89%)	N/A	N/A
Q5a. Agree with Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship	91 (87%)	89 (98%)	2 (2%)
Q5b. Agree with Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship Priority Areas for Intervention?	90 (86%)	88 (98%)	2 (2%)
Q6a. Agree with Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism	92 (88%)	77 (84%)	15 (16%)
Q6b. Agree with Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism Priority Areas for Intervention?	89 (85%)	70 (79%)	19 (21%)
Q7a. Agree with Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing	93 (89%)	92 (99%)	1 (1%)
Q7b. Agree with Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing Priority Areas for Intervention?	89 (85%)	84 (94%)	5 (6%)

Question Summary	Response Rate per Consultation Question (Number/ Percentage)	Respondents who Answered Yes (Number/ Percentage)	Respondents who Answered No (Number/ Percentage)
Q8a. Agree with Thematic Pillar 4: Employment	93 (89%)	90 (97%)	3 (3%)
Q8b. Agree with Thematic Pillar 4: Employment Priority Areas for Intervention?	75 (71%)	75 (100%)	0 (0%)
Q9a. Agree with Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity	91 (87%)	90 (99%)	1 (1%)
Q9b. Agree with Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity Priority Areas for Intervention?	87 (83%)	87 (100%)	0 (0%)
Q10. Ranking of Thematic Pillars	93 (89%)	N/A	N/A
Q11. Agree with 14 Key Principles	92 (88%)	76 (83%)	16 (17%)
Q12. Any other Comments	90 (86%)	61 (68%)	29 (32%)
Q13a. Views on Equality and Human Rights Screening Template	93 (89%)	42 (45%)	51 (55%)
Q13b. Views on Rural Needs Impact Assessment	91 (87%)	24 (26%)	67 (74%)

Good levels of response were seen across all consultation questions.

Next Steps

Given the volume of responses to this consultation, it is clear that the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland and the proposals are of high interest and importance to many in our society. The Department will now seek to make final amendments to the Framework to appropriately reflect the views and issues that have been highlighted as part of the consultation and then work will commence on drafting the new Rural Business and Community Investment Programme.

To inform the drafting of the new programme and to test a number of assumptions emanating from the needs identified in the Rural Policy Framework and in response to COVID-19, several pilot schemes have been taken forward by the Department. Pilots to date have included:

- Website Development Programme;
- Rural Tourism Collaborative Experiences;
- Rural Micro Business Growth Scheme;
- Rural Social Economy Investment Scheme;
- Micro Food Business Investment Scheme;
- Rural Halls Refurbishment Scheme; and
- Rural Community Pollinator Garden Scheme.

These pilots will be subject to evaluation and reported on in due course with lessons learned incorporated into the new Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. Evaluations will also be carried out in relation to the current LEADER, Rural Tourism and Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) programmes with any lessons learned from these also incorporated into the new programme.

Given the nature of the proposed priority areas for intervention, the importance of the involvement of rural stakeholders and considering the lessons learned from LEADER, it is clear that there is strong support for the bottom up approach to form part of the solution to implementing a new programme. To this end, the Department intends to establish a Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee (RSOC) to help ensure the best possible outcomes when designing the future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. It is anticipated that this Committee will be established in early 2022.

This Committee will act as an independent review body making recommendations to DAERA on implementation issues. The Committee will incorporate a range of rural stakeholders as

members and will be expected to meet at least twice per year. The Committee is intended to act as an independent review body and in doing so will:

- Oversee the implementation of the Rural Business and Community Investment Programme;
- Consider any suggestions for amendments to the Programme; and
- Provide feedback as to how the programme is benefitting rural businesses and community.

In addition to the central oversight committee, the Department intends to establish a number of sub-groups which will regularly feed views into the oversight committee. Given the key themes identified by respondents throughout this public consultation process, sub-groups will be established in relation to the cross-cutting horizontal principles of environment/sustainability; and also to promote Section 75/equality. Membership of these groups could include key stakeholders with specific Section 75 and environmental responsibilities. Other sub-groups will be established around the thematic pillars. All sub-groups will be expected to meet in advance of the main oversight committee meetings and will be tasked with reporting progress and issues to the oversight committee.



Proposals, Departmental Response and Next Steps

Question 1 Analysis



What we asked:

Do you agree that the proposed overarching aim 'To create a sustainable rural community where people want to live, work and be active' for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland is appropriate?

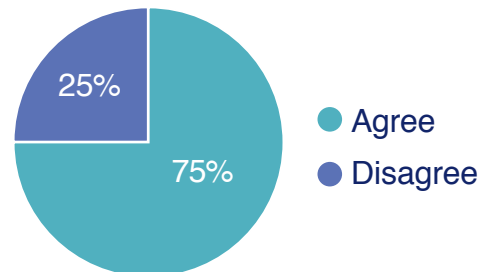
Out of a total of **105** responses,
96 (91%) responded to this consultation question.

Response
Rate

91%

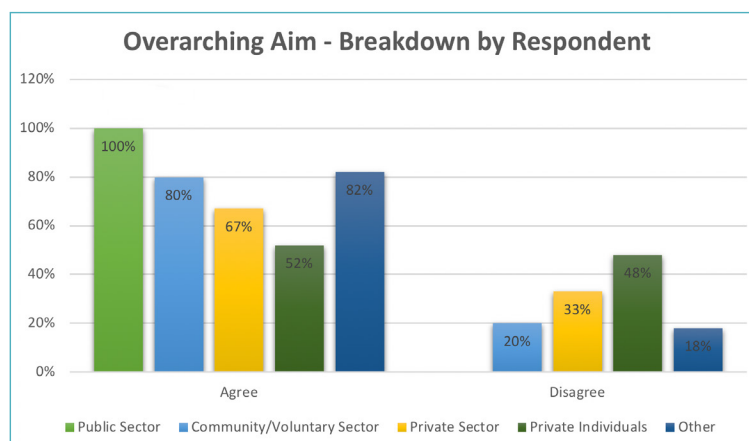
Overarching Aim

Of those who indicated a position on this consultation question, **75%** agreed with the proposed aim.



Breakdown of respondents who provided a position, by respondent type

Support for this proposal was greatest amongst the public sector with **100%** in agreement compared to **80%** of community/voluntary sector; **82%** of Other respondents; and **67%** of private sector respondents. Support was lowest amongst private individuals with **52%** agreeing with the proposed aim.



Summary of Respondents' Views

A number of respondents suggested various amendments to the wording of the proposed aim as follows:

DAERA will actively work to support people to live, work and be active in creating sustainable rural communities.

Protecting and sustaining our rural community for the future, where people want to continue to live, work and enjoy.

To create a rural community where people want to live, work and be active in a sustainable and environmentally responsible way.

To create a sustainable shared rural community where people want to live, learn, develop, work, and be active.

Other comments included the following:

Sustainability though needs to be pinned down and defined so as it can be all things to all people and can be used on both sides of competing arguments for, say, development vs conservation.

The aim is sufficiently broad to garner support from all those who have a stake in rural society. It will be important to keep the aim under review as other key strategies in development emerge...

This is a more active phrase and it could be argued that people currently want to live and work in rural communities, but the issue is the lack of opportunities and barriers preventing people from doing so.

Transport and Broadband connectivity will also be key to the success of this overall aim.

Themes Raised by Respondents

- A number of respondents suggested amendments to the overarching aim, that there was a need for a definition of sustainable rural community and that environmentalism should be included as a separate and distinct point.
- Need for rural communities that older, younger and disabled people will want to stay in.
- Need for affordable housing in rural areas.
- Rural inequalities - Section 75 duties need to be fully considered.
- Need for partnership working.



Departmental Response and Next Steps

It is recommended that the overarching aim is amended to: ***'To create a rural community where people want to live, work and be active in a sustainable and environmentally responsible way.'***

This helps to reflect the importance of environmental issues to rural society and that environmental sustainability plays an important part in the schemes that will be developed to support the implementation of the Rural Policy Framework.

The need for affordable and social housing in rural areas has been raised as an issue across many of the proposals and the Department will seek to incorporate this as a need within the Framework. Going forward, we recognise that housing is not a statutory obligation of the Department. However, we will seek to champion this need through working in partnership with other Departments and agencies.

The need for partnership working was reiterated as an issue across many of the proposals. The development of the Framework has been underpinned by engagement, partnership and flexibility throughout with extensive engagement incorporating a wide range of rural stakeholders on a wide range of issues. Many of the issues identified throughout the stakeholder engagement process will require inter-departmental co-operation and joint working to ensure strategic delivery in addressing those issues and the Department is committed to this approach.

The establishment of the Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee and its sub-committees will ensure that there is a formal mechanism in place to support this collaborative approach with key stakeholders and delivery partners in the design, development and delivery of future programmes.

To ensure full and robust consideration of Section 75 issues going forward, the Department intends to establish a Section 75/equality sub-group to regularly feed views into the Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee. This will ensure that views from members with specific Section 75 responsibilities are taken into account in relation to the new Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. All sub-groups will be expected to meet in advance of the main oversight committee meetings and will be tasked with reporting progress and issues to the oversight committee.



Question 2 Analysis



What we asked:

Do you agree that the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) approach should continue under the wider umbrella of the Rural Policy Framework?

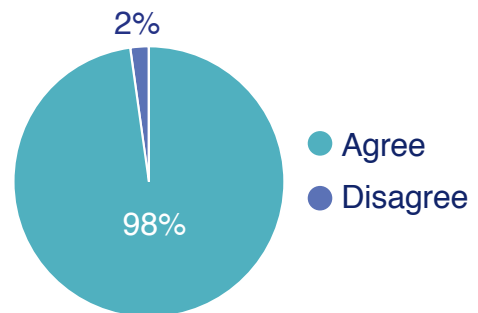
Out of a total of **105** responses, **92 (88%)** responded to this consultation question.

Response Rate

88%

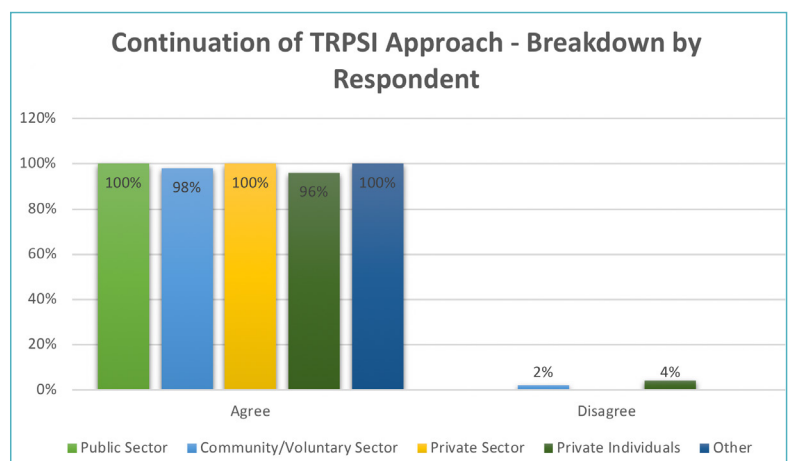
Continuation of TRPSI approach

Of those who indicated a position on this consultation question, **98%** agreed with the proposed continuation of the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation approach under the wider umbrella of the Rural Policy Framework.



Breakdown of respondents who provided a position, by respondent type

There was support for this proposal across the public; private and other sectors with **100%** agreeing with the proposal. A very small proportion of community/voluntary (**2%**) and private individuals (**4%**) disagreed with the continuation of the TRPSI approach.



Summary of Respondents' Views

TRPSI is an essential component of the Rural Policy Framework for NI. It has proven to be a responsive and agile investment process to emerging need in rural communities but none more so than during the pandemic.

TRPSI approach has allowed DAERA to effectively pilot and deliver to the heart of community under the policy framework. It has allowed for innovative and bespoke targeting of issues, areas and communities and to date has been the most incisive tool in reaching far into rural communities using the community development approach.

While Thematic Pillar 3 (Health and Wellbeing) will secure many of the desired outcomes, it is important to note that other Thematic Pillars (notably Pillar 1, Innovation and Entrepreneurship and Pillar 2, Sustainable Tourism) will also have an impact on tackling issues of poverty and isolation, and it is important that schemes are designed with the delivery of multiple benefits across pillars in mind.

The success of the TRPSI framework should be continued and expanded through Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing.

If TRPSI could be protected within the rural policy framework with a multi-annual budget this would be a very positive outcome for rural communities.

Themes Raised by Respondents

- Importance noted of local decision making and capacity building through grassroots structures such as Rural Support Networks. These interconnected structures were able to respond quickly to local needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Need to align to the NI Anti-poverty strategy and to explicitly identify rural poverty interventions within the Thematic Pillars. There were issues raised around poverty such as fuel and food poverty. It was noted that COVID has exacerbated poverty, social isolation and loneliness. The groups identified as being at particular risk of vulnerability and poverty are single parents the working poor; families with dependents with health disabilities and older people. Need noted for targeted interventions to also address pockets of severe deprivation.
- No equivalent of the Urban Neighbourhood Renewal Programme for the rural areas, which provides dedicated human resources to work in urban neighbourhoods.
- The benefits of the collaborative approach of TRPSI, particularly during COVID-19 were highlighted and a number of respondents noted that this approach should continue.
- Concerns raised about the level of bureaucracy in relation to relatively small levels of grant funding.



Departmental Response and Next Steps

This proposal will proceed as per the consultation. The Department is fully committed to continuing the TRPSI Programme and ensuring that it complements and supports delivery of Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing of the Rural Policy Framework.

The Department will ensure that the Rural Policy Framework and in particular, Thematic Pillar 3, is consistent with the Northern Ireland Anti-Poverty Strategy. This will include where appropriate, aligning the Framework with the aims of the Anti-Poverty Strategy to ensure a joined up approach.

The need for partnership working has been reiterated as an issue across many of the proposals. The development of the Framework has been underpinned by engagement, partnership and flexibility throughout with extensive engagement incorporating a wide range of rural stakeholders. Many of the issues identified throughout the stakeholder engagement process will require inter-departmental co-operation and joint working to ensure strategic delivery in addressing

those issues and the Department is committed to this approach. The establishment of the Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee and its sub-committees will ensure that there is a formal mechanism in place to support this collaborative approach with key stakeholders and delivery partners in the design, development and delivery of future programmes.

In relation to levels of bureaucracy, the Department will complete a full evaluation and review of existing programmes to ensure that lessons learned and best practice will be incorporated into the design, development and delivery of new schemes. As part of this process DAERA will ensure that any future Programme development will have streamlined controls and governance arrangements and these will be proportionate and appropriate.

To test a number of assumptions including the administrative burden on applicants, delivery agents and the Department, several pilot schemes have been implemented using revised procedures and processes. Pilots to date have included:

- Website Development Programme;
- Rural Tourism Collaborative Experiences;
- Rural Micro Business Growth Scheme;
- Rural Social Economy Investment Scheme;
- Micro Food Business Investment Scheme;
- Rural Halls Refurbishment Scheme; and
- Rural Community Pollinator Garden Scheme.

These pilots will be subject to evaluation and reported on in due course with lessons learned incorporated into the new Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. Evaluations will also be carried out in relation to the current LEADER, Rural Tourism and Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation (TRPSI) programmes with any lessons learned from these also incorporated into the new programme.

Question 3 Analysis



What we asked:

In your opinion, what are the main challenges facing rural communities in Northern Ireland over the next 5 years? Please select what you feel are the top five challenges from the options outlined below:

- Access to public services (e.g. health, education and social services).
- Availability of appropriate and adequate community facilities/ supports for different age groups.
- Broadband/mobile phone connectivity.
- Changing demographics (e.g. ageing population, new communities, and retention of young people in rural areas).
- Climate change and environmental sustainability.
- Future of farming/agri-food sector.
- Jobs and business.
- Managing tourism in a sustainable way.
- Transport and infrastructure.

Out of a total of **105** responses, **93 (89%)** responded to this consultation question. Where a respondent provided some ranking across the 5 options, they were included as a respondent for the choices which they had clearly selected. In some circumstances, respondents did not make for example, the first or fifth choice clear so this particular option was not counted.

Response
Rate

89%

Top Challenge Ranked as No.1 Facing Rural Communities (based on respondents who ranked a challenge as top priority)

Challenge	Respondents Ranking as Top Priority Challenge (Number/Percentage)
Availability of appropriate and adequate community facilities/supports for different age groups	22 (26%)
Access to public services (e.g. health, education and social services)	19 (22%)
Climate change and environmental sustainability	13 (15%)
Jobs and business	10 (12%)
Changing demographics (e.g. ageing population, new communities, and retention of young people in rural areas)	7 (8%)
Broadband/mobile phone connectivity	6 (7%)
Future of farming/agri-food sector	6 (7%)
Transport and infrastructure	2 (2%)
Managing tourism in a sustainable way	1 (1%)
Total No. of Respondents Ranking a 1st Priority Challenge	86 (100%)

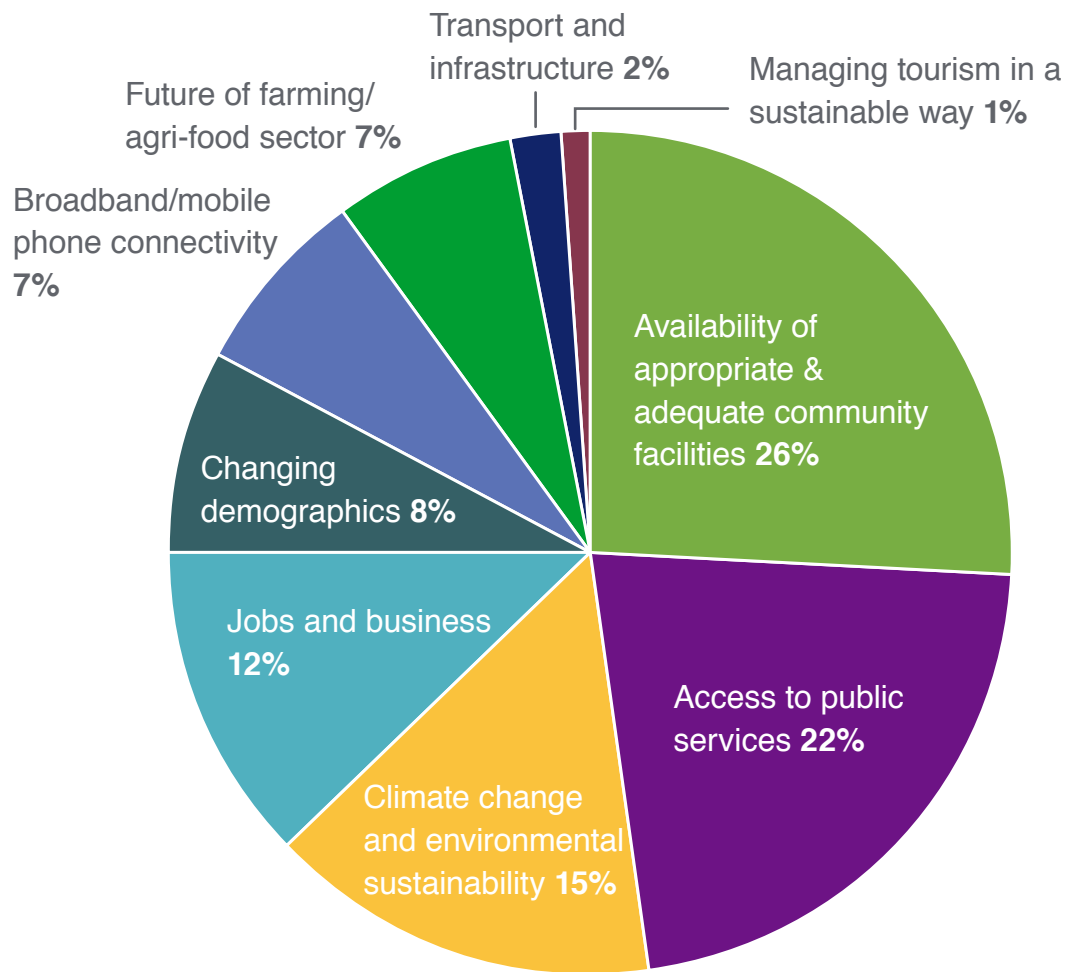
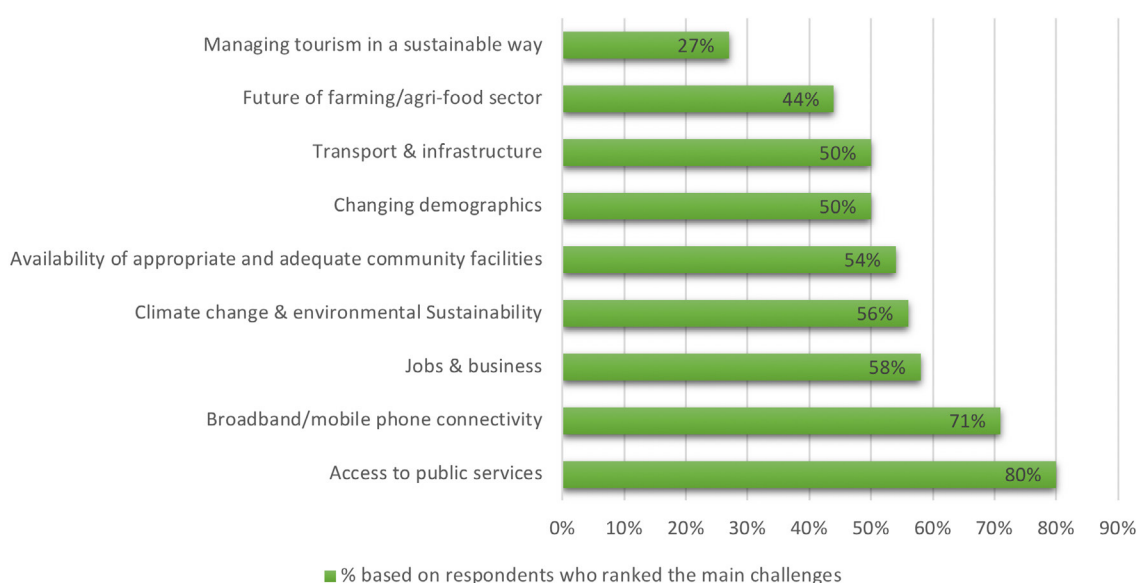


Figure 2: Top Challenge Ranked as No. 1 Facing Rural Communities

Top 5 Challenges Facing Rural Communities (based on respondents who ranked the main challenges)

Challenge	Respondents Ranking as Top 5 Challenge (Number/Percentage)
Access to public services (e.g. health, education and social services)	74 (80%)
Broadband/mobile phone connectivity	66 (71%)
Jobs and business	54 (58%)
Climate change and environmental sustainability	52 (56%)
Availability of appropriate and adequate community facilities/supports for different age groups	50 (54%)
Changing demographics (e.g. ageing population, new communities, and retention of young people in rural areas)	46 (50%)
Transport and infrastructure	46 (50%)
Future of farming/agri-food sector	41 (44%)
Managing tourism in a sustainable way	25 (27%)
Total No. of Respondents Ranking the Main Challenges	93 (100%)

Top 5 Challenges Facing Rural Communities



Summary of Respondents' Views

We support all these priorities and see them all as important to the success of any future Policy or Framework for rural areas, therefore although we have done as requested and only listed our top five, all are important as they are interconnected.

It is very difficult to rank these as they are all key challenges.

These challenges identified are also interlinked - better broadband provision may enable more remote working, reduce the need to commute and promote business development in rural NI all of which will contribute to reducing carbon. It will be important that govt. considers the broadband connectivity issue in rural communities from a digital inclusion perspective as well as a focus on building out the infrastructure.

Addressing the decline of services and dereliction in rural villages. Small towns and villages are by association rural and a more strategic approach to village regeneration/development is needed with a designated village champion within government.

Taking a place-based and holistic approach to the future sustainable and balanced development.

Availability of rural affordable housing - whilst we recognise this may not be a DAERA objective for the framework we would stress the importance of working in partnership with other government departments on rural need and challenges that are interdependent on meeting policy objectives.

Themes Raised by Respondents

- A number of respondents noted that it was difficult to rank challenges and that they were interconnected and all important. It was noted that rural economies are much more likely to thrive where there are strong communities and a high quality environment.
- The need for revitalisation of rural towns and villages was raised. Suggested a place-based and holistic approach is needed, particularly with changing settlement patterns and COVID-19.
- Key challenges identified for rural areas included: access to broadband (noted that this also needs addressed from a digital inclusion perspective); community development human resources; joint strategy for youth provision; need for affordable housing in rural areas; and rural planning issues.
- Planning issues raised as a blockage in progressing developments in rural areas.
- Climate change generally raised as a major challenge and linkages to for example, the need to retrofit properties to help make them more energy efficient.
- A number of respondents noted that two challenges going forward for rural NI are COVID-19 and Brexit.
- A number of respondents noted the need for outdoor recreation space.
- Need for access to health services and food poverty was raised as a challenge.
- A commitment to capacity building, a recognition that groups are cyclical in nature and investment in skills development in the sector are essential to underpin successful delivery.
- Recognition of the need for a joined-up approach by Government.



Departmental Response and Next Steps

The Department recognises that the challenges listed are interrelated and that it can be difficult to rank these as the evidence shows that these are issues which need to be addressed across rural communities in Northern Ireland. However, as previously noted the Department will focus on partnership working with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the most efficient and effective targeting of available resources to address challenges going forward. The Department needs to ensure that it maximises the outcomes delivered to rural areas through the new programme and as part of its role as rural champion.

There will be lessons to learn from the current LEADER, Rural Tourism and TRPSI programmes in addition to the pilot schemes and it is clear that there is strong support for the bottom up approach to form part of the solution to implementing a new programme. Although there are many challenges facing rural communities, it is clear that going forward, partnership working with a range of rural stakeholders is essential to ensure that any future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme targets funding to where it is needed most at the right time. To this end, the Department intends to establish a Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee (RSOC) to help ensure the best possible outcomes when designing the future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. It is anticipated that this Committee will be established in early 2022. In addition to the central oversight committee, the Department intends to establish a number of sub-groups (including environment/sustainability; Section 75/equality; and in relation to the thematic pillars) which will regularly report progress and issues to the oversight committee.

Many of the themes raised by respondents have already been identified within the Framework, however, the need for affordable and social housing in rural areas has been raised as an issue across many of the proposals and the Department will seek to incorporate this as a need within the Framework. Going forward, we recognise that housing is not a statutory obligation of the Department. However, we will seek to champion this need through working in partnership with other departments and agencies. Similarly, the overarching aim of the Framework will place greater emphasis on the environment thus bringing climate change to the fore.

The Department recognises the need for revitalisation of rural towns and villages which is identified as a priority area of intervention within Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing. We will seek to champion this need through working in partnership with other Departments, agencies and delivery partners.

Question 4 Analysis



What we asked:

In your opinion, what are the main opportunities facing rural communities in Northern Ireland over the next 5 years? Please select what you feel are the top five opportunities from the options outlined below.

- Diversification within farming/agri-food sector.
- Economic development of markets (local, national and international) and sectors (both non-traditional and emerging).
- Enabling communities (e.g. supporting local leadership, groups and volunteers, enhancing community amenities).
- Enterprise and employment: expanding opportunities (e.g. Social Enterprise, apprenticeships, supporting entrepreneurs).
- Joined-up approach from Government on delivering for rural communities in Northern Ireland.
- Optimisation of digital connectivity (e.g. Broadband and emerging technologies) (e.g. remote working, research, development and innovation, and future jobs).
- Revitalisation of towns and villages.
- Sustainable development and climate adaptation (e.g. renewable energy).
- Tourism: expansion of options including heritage, recreation and activity tourism.
- Transport infrastructure and services.

Out of a total of **105** responses, **93 (89%)** responded to this consultation question. Where a respondent provided some ranking across the 5 options, they were included as a respondent for the choices which they had clearly selected. In some circumstances, respondents did not make for example, the first or fifth choice clear so this particular option was not counted.

Response
Rate

89%

Top Opportunity Ranked as No.1 Facing Rural Communities (based on respondents who ranked an opportunity as top priority)

Opportunity	Respondents. Ranking as Top Priority Opportunity (Number/Percentage)
Enabling communities (e.g. supporting local leadership, groups and volunteers, enhancing community amenities)	23 (27%)
Joined-up approach from Government on delivering for rural communities in Northern Ireland	20 (24%)
Sustainable development and climate adaptation (e.g. renewable energy)	11 (13%)
Diversification within farming/agri-food sector	6 (7%)
Enterprise and employment: expanding opportunities (e.g. Social Enterprise, apprenticeships, supporting entrepreneurs)	6 (7%)
Tourism: expansion of options including heritage, recreation and activity tourism	5 (6%)
Economic development of markets (local, national and international) and sectors (both non-traditional and emerging)	4 (5%)
Optimisation of digital connectivity (e.g. Broadband and emerging technologies) (e.g. remote working, research, development and innovation, and future jobs)	4 (5%)
Revitalisation of towns and villages	4 (5%)
Transport infrastructure and services	3 (3%)
Total No. of Respondents Ranking a 1st Priority Opportunity	86 (100%)

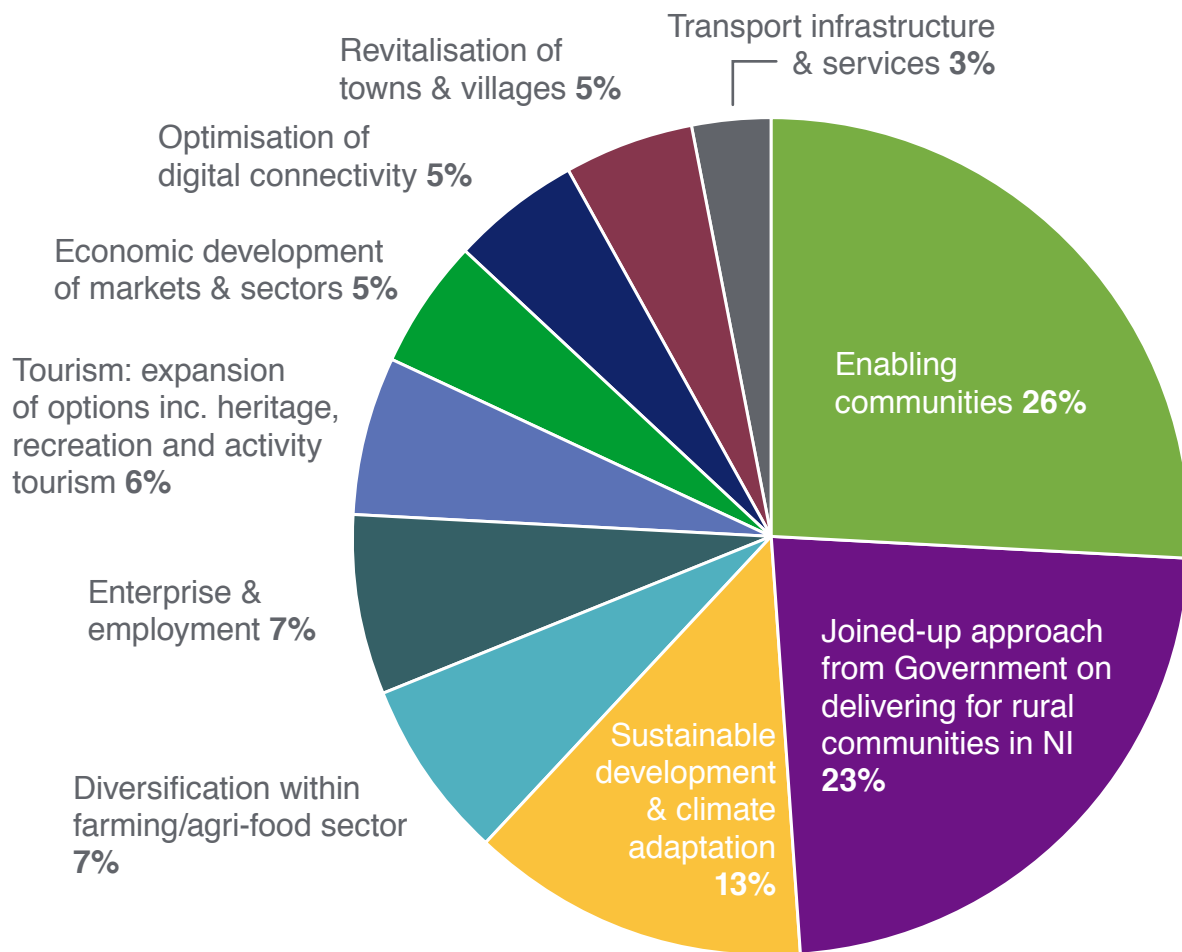
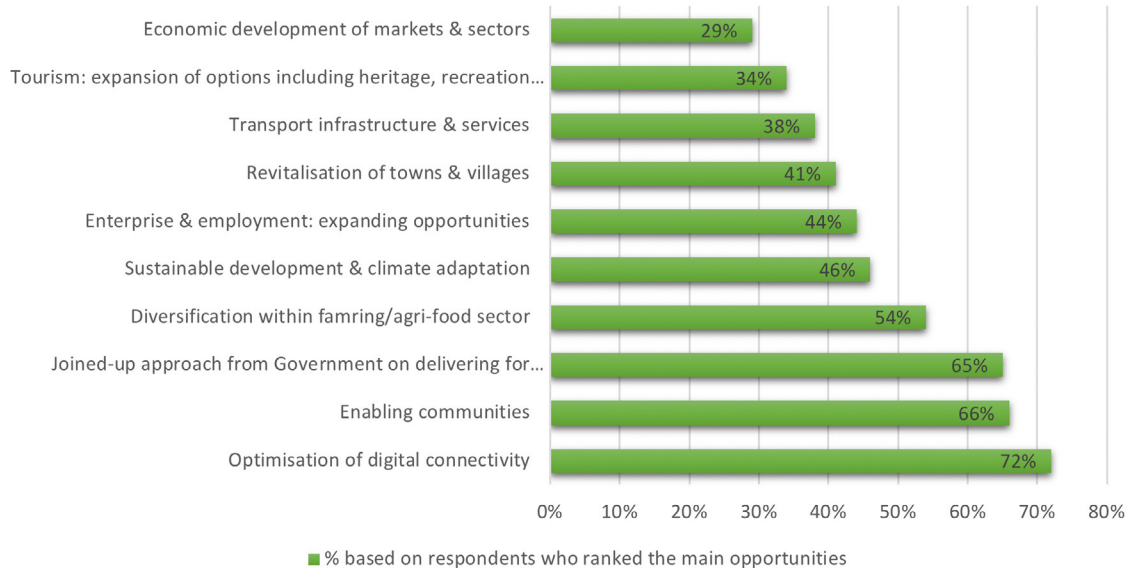


Figure 3: Top Opportunity Ranked as No. 1 Facing Rural Communities

Top 5 Opportunities Facing Rural Communities (based on respondents who ranked the main opportunities)

Opportunity	Respondents Ranking as Top 5 Opportunity (Number/Percentage)
Optimisation of digital connectivity (e.g. Broadband and emerging technologies) (e.g. remote working, research, development and innovation, and future jobs)	67 (72%)
Enabling communities (e.g. supporting local leadership, groups and volunteers, enhancing community amenities)	61 (66%)
Joined-up approach from Government on delivering for rural communities in Northern Ireland	60 (65%)
Diversification within farming/agri-food sector	50 (54%)
Sustainable development and climate adaptation (e.g. renewable energy)	43 (46%)
Enterprise and employment: expanding opportunities (e.g. Social Enterprise, apprenticeships, supporting entrepreneurs)	41 (44%)
Revitalisation of towns and villages	38 (41%)
Transport infrastructure and services	35 (38%)
Tourism: expansion of options including heritage, recreation and activity tourism	32 (34%)
Economic development of markets (local, national and international) and sectors (both non-traditional and emerging)	27 (29%)
Total No. of Respondents Ranking the Main Opportunities	93 (100%)

Top 5 Opportunities Facing Rural Communities



Summary of Respondents' Views

Many of the opportunities outlined above are interrelated and interdependent.

Our ranking of the opportunities is again in the context that all are important and mutually reinforcing and we would suggest balance in prioritising resources.

Sustainable development and climate adaptation needs to consider how housing stock in rural communities can be retrofitted to bring about lower energy costs and meet the ambition of zero carbon standards.

Again, these are interlinked with each other. Further, most are heavily dependent on public investment to strengthen infrastructure or local services.

The provision of housing (particularly social and affordable housing) in rural communities is a key issue and needs to be considered by the Rural Policy Framework.

We would also add opportunities for improved health & wellbeing associated with outdoor space (walkways, community gardening, allotments and forest developments) and the contribution these actions can have on physical and mental health.

A coherent joined up approach from central government on delivering for rural communities is of the utmost importance.

Themes Raised by Respondents

- A number of respondents noted that it was difficult to rank opportunities and that they were interconnected and all important.
- The need for revitalisation of rural towns and villages was raised.
- In relation to sustainable development and climate adaptation, a number of respondents noted there were opportunities going forward.
- An issue which is not listed is housing and having houses provided within rural communities is important in ensuring sustainability of rural communities
- Health and wellbeing through enhanced participation in physical activity in the outdoors is another key opportunity.
- Recognition of the need for a joined-up approach by Government.



Departmental Response and Next Steps

The Department recognises that the opportunities listed are interrelated and that it can be difficult to rank these. However, as previously noted the Department will focus on partnership working with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the most efficient and effective targeting of available resources to maximise opportunities going forward. The Department needs to ensure that it maximises the outcomes delivered to rural areas through the new programme and as part of its role as rural champion.

There will be lessons to learn from the current LEADER, Rural Tourism and TRPSI programmes in addition to the pilot schemes and it is clear that there is strong support for the bottom up approach to form part of the solution to implementing a new programme. Although there are many opportunities for rural communities, it is clear that going forward, partnership working

with a range of rural stakeholders is essential to ensure that any future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme targets funding to where it is needed most at the right time. To this end, the Department intends to establish a Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee (RSOC) to help ensure the best possible outcomes when designing the future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. It is anticipated that this Committee will be established in early 2022. In addition to the central oversight committee, the Department intends to establish a number of sub-groups (including environment/sustainability; Section 75/equality; and in relation to the thematic pillars) which will regularly report progress and issues to the oversight committee.

The Department recognises the need for revitalisation of rural towns and villages which is identified as a priority area of intervention within Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing. We will seek to champion this need through working in partnership with other Departments and agencies.

The Department also recognises the important role that climate change will play going forward. The overarching aim of the Framework will place greater emphasis on the environment thus bringing climate change to the fore.

The Department also recognises that in rural areas that a lot of the issues raised will be addressed through a joined-up government approach.

Question 5a Analysis



What we asked:

Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship:
To create a rural society where innovation and entrepreneurship flourish.

Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

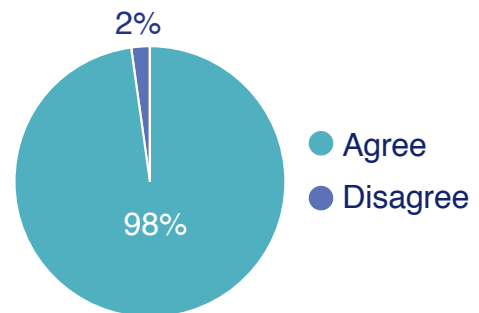
Out of a total of **105** responses, **91 (87%)** responded to this consultation question.

Response Rate

87%

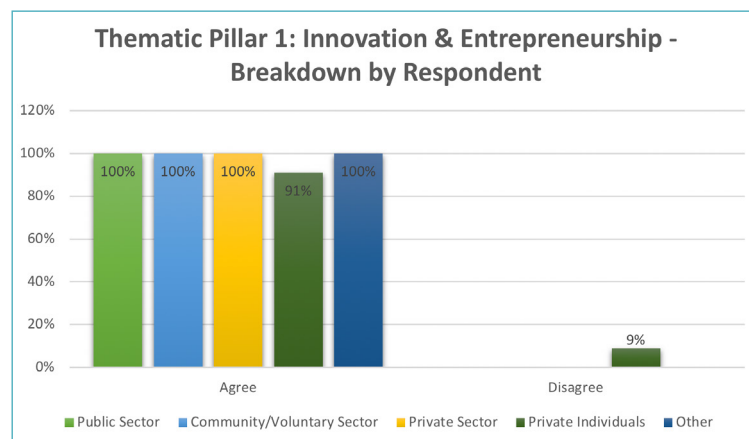
Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation & Entrepreneurship

Of those who indicated a position on this consultation question, **98%** agreed that the Thematic Pillar 1 was appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework. Only those respondents who answered yes or no to the question were counted as having responded. However, comments provided from other respondents have also been taken into account for the feedback section.



Breakdown of respondents who provided a position, by respondent type

There was overwhelming support for this proposal across the public; community/voluntary; private and other sectors with **100%** agreeing with the proposal. A small proportion of private individuals (**9%**) disagreed with the proposed Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship.



NB: the summary of respondent views; themes raised by respondents; and departmental response and next steps will be combined for questions 5a and 5b at the end of this Thematic Pillar section.

Question 5b Analysis



What we asked:

Do you agree that the three priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Develop a culture of rural innovation.
- Raise awareness, build capacity and capability to engage in rural entrepreneurship and innovation.
- Invest in and develop our rural economy.

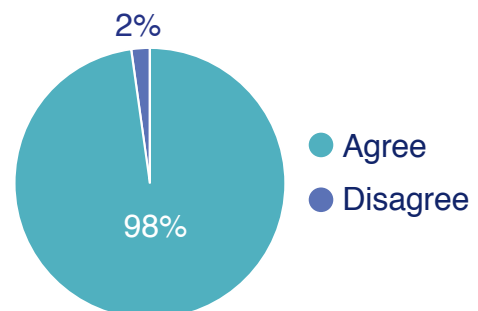
Out of a total of **105** responses, **90 (86%)** responded to this consultation question.

Response Rate

86%

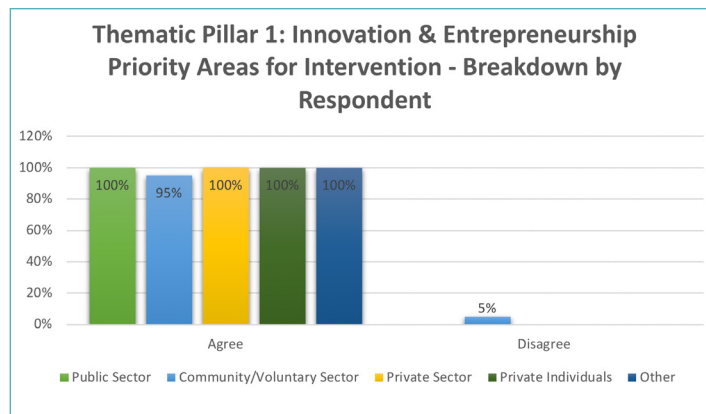
Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation & Entrepreneurship - Priority Areas for Intervention

Of those who indicated a position on this consultation question, **98%** agreed that the Thematic Pillar 1 priority areas for intervention were appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework. Only those respondents who answered yes or no to the question were counted as having responded. However, comments provided from other respondents have also been taken into account for the feedback section.



Breakdown of respondents who provided a position, by respondent type

There was overwhelming support for this proposal across the public; private; private individuals; and other sectors with **100%** agreeing with the proposal. A small proportion of community/voluntary sector (**5%**) disagreed with the proposed Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship priority areas for intervention.



Thematic Pillar 1: Summary of Respondents' Views

Agrees with the Thematic Pillar of Innovation and Entrepreneurship and the three supporting priority areas for intervention.

Yes this is key to a better future. But let the future be now.

All sections of the rural economy including the private sector, social economy and farm diversification would benefit from an enhanced support programme of Innovation and Entrepreneurship.

N. Ireland lags behind many regions of the UK in terms of innovation. The UK as a whole lags behind many areas of Europe in this regard.

Accessible Broadband, mobile infrastructure/digital inclusion must be available and affordable to all in rural communities and that people have the skills and confidence to make the most of the digital infrastructure that is being developed.

Culture of innovation already exists, just needs facilitation.

The framework needs to include more links between Further and Higher Education providers, entrepreneurs and social economy start up micro businesses and to tailor support programmes better to foster innovation.

Sustainable and Green solutions have greater potential if supported and the courage to change must be adopted if the younger generation are to have any future basically.

Consideration needs to be given to current planning regulations and the impact this has on businesses in rural areas.

Innovation and entrepreneurship are vital if we are to achieve the vision, strategic aim and objectives of the draft Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland.

The points that are stated above are all vital needs to boost the current situation of decline within the rural areas in Northern Ireland. It is important to give people options and possibilities.

More collaboration is required to support Agri and agri food at a national/local level with all businesses given opportunity to apply for support in growth and development.

A missing emphasis in Pillar 1 is the direct link between the economy and the natural environment.

It is important to encompass a wider definition of 'innovation'. It could relate to new ways of working, or expanding a business but using similar methods, as opposed to solely relating to something never done before.

Thematic Pillar 1 Themes Raised by Respondents

- A number of respondents noted that rural communities tend to be endemically innovative, therefore the support for innovation was crucial, rather than the need to foster innovation in the first place. It was suggested that the first priority intervention should be amended to 'support and foster the rural culture of innovation'.
- Lessons need to be learned from previous schemes. It was noted that there is too much bureaucracy and the government needs to be less risk adverse. Local authorities also wanted further engagement with DAERA during the programming phase with any support programme offering both grants and capacity building.
- A number of respondents noted a need to invest in green infrastructure with direct linkages between the economy and the natural environment. Also suggested that more action should be taken to promote the business benefits of environment management.
- Again, a need for affordable and social housing in rural areas was cited. A number of respondents suggested support for owners of derelict buildings in villages and towns.
- A number of respondents noted that rural businesses need sustained and developed, not just start-up businesses.
- A need to support female entrepreneurship was identified by a number of respondents.
- Access to decent broadband and mobile infrastructure is one of the key foundations, particularly with a culture now of working from home and digital hubs. There is an opportunity for rural communities to benefit economically from remote working environments.
- Thematic Pillar 1 should not be considered in isolation from the other pillars and interventions and needs to be flexible in order to be successful. Also consideration to adding Programme for Government outcomes 2 and 6 to this Thematic Pillar.
- A number of respondents noted a need for upskilling rural communities, whether that be through linkages with education providers; encouraging trade skills etc.
- Planning policies and their impact on businesses in rural areas should be addressed.



Departmental Response and Next Steps

This proposal will proceed as per the consultation. However, given that some respondents suggested that rural businesses are already innovative and need to be sustained and developed going forward, consideration will be given to enhancing the first priority intervention to: 'To support and foster the rural culture of innovation'. Consideration will also be given to whether or not it is appropriate to add Programme for Government outcomes 2 (We live and work sustainably - protecting the environment) and 6 (We have more people working in better jobs) to this Thematic Pillar.

Many of the themes raised by respondents have already been identified within the Framework, however, the need for affordable and social housing in rural areas has been raised as an issue across many of the proposals and the Department will seek to incorporate this as a need within the Framework. Going forward, we recognise that housing is not a statutory obligation of the Department. However, we will seek to champion this need through working in partnership with other Departments and agencies. Similarly, the overarching aim of the Framework will place greater emphasis on the environment thus bringing climate change to the fore.

As previously noted the Department will continue to focus on partnership working with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the most efficient and effective targeting of any resources to address challenges and maximise opportunities going forward.

The Department recognises the impact of planning policies on businesses in rural areas and will seek to champion rural in this regard by ensuring partnership working with the relevant Departments and agencies. It should be noted that DAERA is not solely responsible for rural issues. The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 provides a statutory duty on the public authorities listed in the Schedule to the Act to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and when designing and delivering public services. This could involve: acting as Rural Champion; working with other Departments and public agencies on an integrated approach; and supporting rural groups and networks to articulate rural needs to policy makers and influencers.

There will be lessons to learn from the current LEADER, Rural Tourism and TRPSI programmes in addition to the pilot schemes and it is clear that there is strong support for the bottom up approach to form part of the solution to implementing a new programme. Although there are many opportunities for rural communities, it is clear that going forward, partnership working with a range of rural stakeholders is essential to ensure that any future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme targets funding to where it is needed most at the right time. To this end, the Department intends to establish a Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee (RSOC) to help ensure the best possible outcomes when designing the future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. It is anticipated that this Committee will be established in early 2022. In addition to the central oversight committee, the Department intends to establish a number of sub-groups (including environment/sustainability; Section 75/equality; and in relation to the thematic pillars) which will regularly report progress and issues to the oversight committee.

Question 6a Analysis



What we asked:

Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism: To maximise the contribution that sustainable rural tourism makes to rural society and to the wider economy and environment.

Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

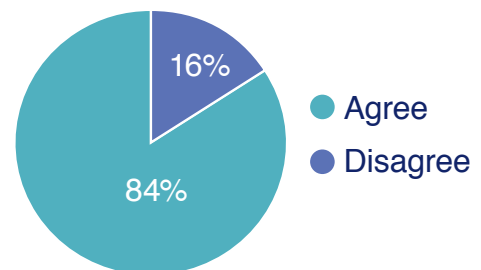
Out of a total of **105** responses, **92 (88%)** responded to this consultation question.

Response Rate

88%

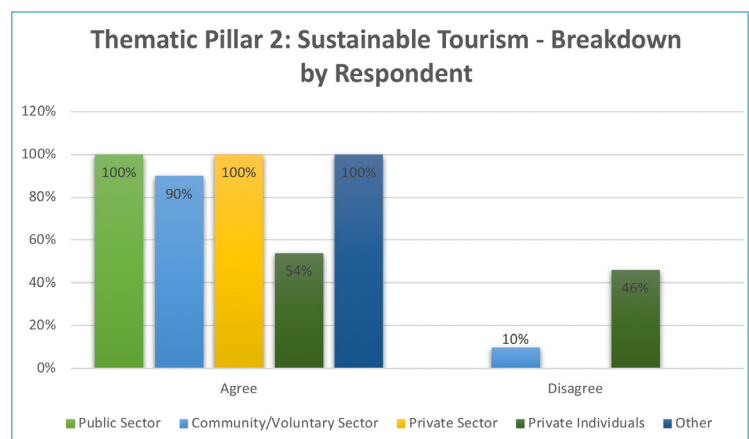
Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism

Of those who indicated a position on this consultation question, **84%** agreed that the Thematic Pillar 2 was appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework. Only those respondents who answered yes or no to the question were counted as having responded. However, comments provided from other respondents have also been taken into account for the feedback section.



Breakdown of respondents who provided a position, by respondent type

There was strong support for this proposal across the public; private and other sectors with **100%** agreeing with the proposal. A small proportion community and voluntary sector respondents (**10%**) disagreed and a significant proportion of Private Individuals (**46%**) with the proposed Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism.



NB: the summary of respondent views; themes raised by respondents; and departmental response and next steps will be combined for questions 6a and 6b at the end of this Thematic Pillar section.

Question 6b Analysis



What we asked:

Do you agree that the four priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Encourage and support the delivery of compelling year-round, authentic visitor products and experiences of a quality that will provide international stand out for Northern Ireland.
- Support a rural tourism sector that is commercially focused and achieves sustainable levels of growth and prosperity.
- Facilitate welcoming and supportive rural communities to play an enhanced role in developing and managing tourism in their locality, thereby strengthening, benefitting and enriching local areas.
- Recognise, value, protect and enhance Northern Ireland's natural, cultural and historic built environment as the cornerstone of its rural tourism.

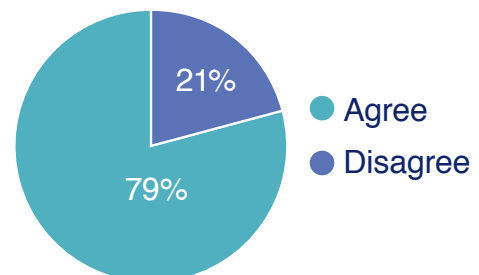
Out of a total of **105** responses, **89 (85%)** responded to this consultation question.

Response
Rate

85%

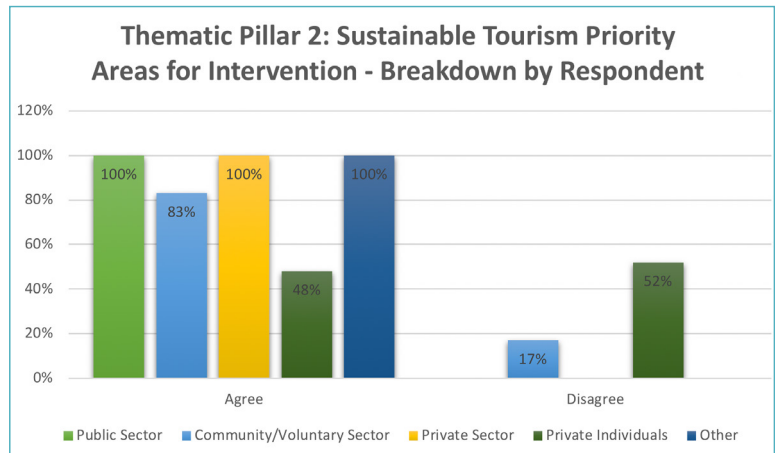
Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism - Priority Areas for Intervention

Of those who indicated a position on this consultation question, **79%** agreed that the Thematic Pillar 2 priority areas for intervention were appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework. Only those respondents who answered yes or no to the question were counted as having responded. However, comments provided from other respondents have also been taken into account for the feedback section.



Breakdown of respondents who provided a position, by respondent type

There was overwhelming support for this proposal across the public; private; and other sectors with **100%** agreeing with the proposal. A proportion of community/voluntary sector (**17%**) and a slight majority of private individuals (**52%**) disagreed with the proposed Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism priority areas for intervention.



Thematic Pillar 2: Summary of Respondents' Views

Yes, agree that Sustainable Tourism is an appropriate thematic pillar for the Rural Policy Framework for NI.

Tourism however is more of an opportunity for rural NI.

We agree with the UN World Tourism Organisation definition of sustainable tourism, which 'takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities'.

A Green Recovery Fund could see benefits in tourism as investment in natural environment attracts more people to nature sites and surrounding areas as well as creating jobs in the tourism sector as it works closely with nature restoration of land.

Derelict buildings should be brought back into suitable use. We have visitors coming to the area for the likes of Game of Thrones attraction, these tourists need places to stay. Old buildings like these should be converted for accommodation.

Make planning easier and far more sympathetic to retaining heritage and enhancing the environment and ecology in rural areas is needed.

The Tidy Towns initiative which is very successful in the Republic utilising volunteers could be of great benefit to local towns and villages to enhance their appeal for staycations.

Fishing is a popular sport on the island and should be looked at as a tourist attraction.

All those involved in tourism need to work together to understand how we can achieve a successful, sustainable tourism offer in NI while also playing our part in moving towards a net zero carbon future for Northern Ireland.

Consideration should be given to empowering local communities with initiatives such as the Tidy Towns initiative in Gwynedd Wales.

The priority to support a rural tourism sector that is commercially focused and achieves sustainable levels of growth and prosperity and the priority to recognise, value, protect and enhance Northern Ireland's natural, cultural and historic built environment as the cornerstone of its rural tourism are two competing priorities and the Framework needs to state up front that it recognises the difficult challenge of balancing these two priorities.

Thematic Pillar 2: Themes Raised by Respondents

- A number of respondents noted that to be sustainable, there is a need to disperse visitors to rural locations from the main destinations of North Coast and Belfast. Also there needs to be a focus on rural employment.
- A number of respondents noted responding to climate change must be at the heart of any sustainable tourism proposals and that there was not enough reference to this. Concerns were raised about climate change and the consequences of international long haul flights. Suggestion was also made for the need for a green recovery fund.
- Sustainable tourism can be achieved through clear set of boundaries to prevent extractive tourism and attractions should be dispersed with a focus on green outcomes. A need was identified for enhanced visitor management services and initiatives such as Tidy Towns to deal with issues such as litter, fires, dog attacks on stock etc.
- Sustainable tourism needs adequate infrastructure. There is a need to invest in physical infrastructure such as roads, carparks, public transport etc. as tourists have difficulty getting to rural areas. There is also a need for effective broadband/mobile phone connectivity to enable the promotion/marketing and booking of tourism services.
- A number of respondents noted that derelict buildings should be brought back into use and that the current planning regulations made it difficult and many were buying second homes in tourist areas and so outpricing locals.
- Domestic tourism is more likely post COVID-19 for a period of time with increased staycations and it is the overnight stays that benefits rural areas the most. There is a need for authentic, year round products/experiences given the seasonal nature of tourism.
- Issues were raised in relation to public rights of way, particularly for landowners with trespassing on private land.
- A number of respondents noted a need to avoid duplication at a programming stage.
- In order to support rural tourism, there needs to be a greater emphasis on the physical regeneration of towns and villages as these can be unattractive and subject to anti-social behaviour.
- Collaborative and partnership working is very much needed.
- In relation to branding/marketing, a number of respondents noted that 'Embrace a Giant Spirit' should be used; there was a need for authentic tourism, local branding; clustering of tourism attractions; and involvement of locals in the promotion of their area/culture.
- There is a need to build capacity of rural communities to establish, sustain and grow rural businesses.



Departmental Response and Next Steps

This proposal will proceed as per the consultation.

The overarching aim of the Framework will place greater emphasis on the environment thus bringing climate change to the fore.

As previously noted the Department will continue to focus on partnership working with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the most efficient and effective targeting of any resources to address challenges and maximise opportunities going forward. There will be lessons to learn from the current LEADER, Rural Tourism and TRPSI programmes in addition to the pilot schemes and it is clear that there is strong support for the bottom up approach to form part of the solution to implementing a new programme. Going forward, partnership working with a range of rural stakeholders is essential to ensure that any future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme targets funding to where it is needed most at the right time. To this end, the Department intends to establish a Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee (RSOC) to help ensure the best possible outcomes when designing the future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. It is anticipated that this Committee will be established in early 2022. In addition to the central oversight committee, the Department intends to establish a number of sub-groups (including environment/sustainability; Section 75/equality; and in relation to the thematic pillars) which will regularly report progress and issues to the oversight committee.

The Department recognises the need for physical regeneration of towns and villages and is engaging fully with the High Street Task Force to ensure that there is a rural dimension to the recovery of Northern Ireland's high streets. In addition this is identified in Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing.

The Department also recognises the issues around extractive tourism and the dispersion of attractions and will seek to take forward work on this.

Question 7a Analysis



What we asked:

Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing: To reduce loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of rural isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers.

Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

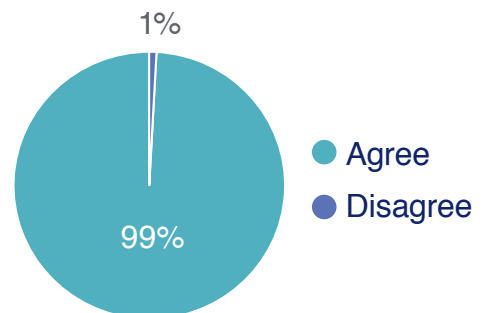
Out of a total of **105** responses, **93 (89%)** responded to this consultation question.

Response Rate

89%

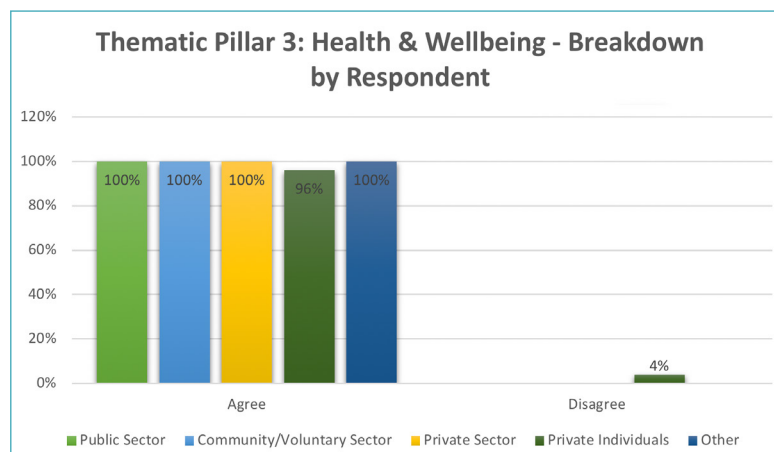
Thematic Pillar 3: Health & Wellbeing

Of those who indicated a position on this consultation question, **99%** agreed that the Thematic Pillar 3 was appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework. Only those respondents who answered yes or no to the question were counted as having responded. However, comments provided from other respondents have also been taken into account for the feedback section.



Breakdown of respondents who provided a position, by respondent type

There was overwhelming support for this proposal across the public; private; community and voluntary and other sectors with **100%** agreeing with the proposal. A very small proportion of Private Individuals (**4%**) disagreed with the proposed Thematic Pillar 3: Health & Wellbeing.



NB: the summary of respondent views; themes raised by respondents; and departmental response and next steps will be combined for questions 7a and 7b at the end of this Thematic Pillar section.

Question 7b Analysis



What we asked:

Do you agree that the five priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Champion awareness and understanding of rural social exclusion, isolation and loneliness.
- Support a rural dimension within the work of other organisations which are promoting positive health and wellbeing, addressing social exclusion, isolation and loneliness and build the capacity of rural organisations and people to develop their activities in this area.
- Establish effective approaches to reducing loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas, to minimise the impacts of social isolation and to promote the health and wellbeing of rural dwellers.
- Sustain the future viability of villages as social and economic centres.
- Support the strategic development of existing rural community assets as places where people can meet, interact, access services and enhance their health and wellbeing.

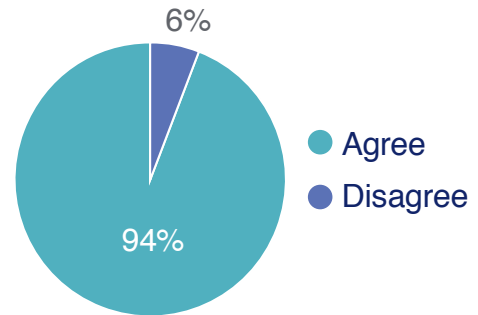
Out of a total of **105** responses, **89 (85%)** responded to this consultation question.

Response
Rate

85%

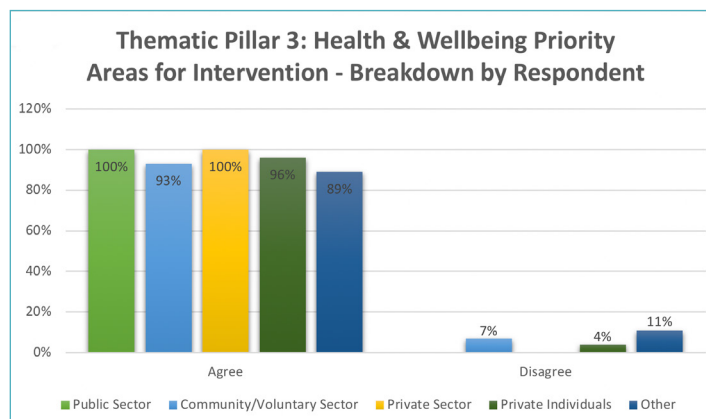
Thematic Pillar 3: Health & Wellbeing - Priority Areas for Intervention

Of those who indicated a position on this consultation question, **94%** agreed that the Thematic Pillar 3 priority areas for intervention were appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework. Only those respondents who answered yes or no to the question were counted as having responded. However, comments provided from other respondents have also been taken into account for the feedback section.



Breakdown of respondents who provided a position, by respondent type

There was overwhelming support for this proposal across the public and private sectors with **100%** agreeing with the proposal. A small proportion of community/voluntary sector (**7%**); private individuals (**4%**) and other sectors (**11%**) disagreed with the proposed Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing priority areas for intervention.



Thematic Pillar 3: Summary of Respondents' Views

Yes, agree that Health and Wellbeing is an appropriate thematic pillar for the Rural Policy Framework for NI.

This pillar is vital to the foundation of any community and should be promoted robustly.

Exiting abuse is harder, takes longer and is more complex for rural victims as there are significant additional barriers in rural communities compared to urban areas.

Agree. We had the opportunity to sit on this working group and believe that the framework is reflective of the needs identified.

There is however a glaring omission and that is the need to champion awareness, response and strategic development activities to address domestic and sexual violence as a priority area for intervention.

Those in need of mental health support should have quick and easy access to counselling and it should not be determined by your post code or your socioeconomic status.

There are numerous examples of cases where pandemic restrictions have made existing mental health issues even tougher e.g. rural isolation, lack of contact between people, fear and anxiety of breaking rules/ guidelines.

We would also add that the increased supply of rural housing is an important factor in tackling loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas. A lack of affordable housing opportunities is a significant factor which will lead to younger households moving away from rural areas and relocating to urban centres where there is a greater choice of affordable housing options.

DAERA also needs to explore measures to address dereliction in villages and towns where a small number of unoccupied and unmaintained properties can have a disproportionately harmful impact on the economic and social life of these communities. It may be worth exploring measures to incentivise building owners to re-purpose derelict or unmaintained buildings in villages and towns to address this issue.

Investment in support of Domiciliary Care in the most isolated rural areas.

In the contexts of digital economies and a post-COVID re-shaping, “the future viability of villages as social and economic centres” has to be looked at in totally new ways. The traditional ‘rural service centre’ has been consigned to history and isn’t coming back.

I welcome the specific and explicit mention of rural health and social wellbeing, including discrete mention of food poverty in this context. The links between diet and health are well established.

There needs to be: recognition and support of the role of community spaces; women only spaces; support for safe LGBTQ+ spaces in rural areas in addressing social isolation. These spaces require human as well as capital resourcing.

We believe this policy should support the production of local, affordable, sustainable and healthy foods such as plant-based protein alternatives and nature-friendly meat products for the benefit of nature, public health and climate change mitigation.

There is a huge appetite in the rural community for more social engagement, if events are put on people will attend. Rural communities traditionally support local events better than those that live in urban centres.

Loneliness and Rural Isolation is a major health challenge in rural areas and not specific to a particular age group.

Living through the Covid pandemic of the past 18 months has led to an increased awareness of how important easy access to green space is for people’s health and wellbeing.

Taking this a step further, social farming or other similar growing schemes have the potential to bring whole communities together. Working collectively in the fresh air and getting back in touch with nature has been shown to have a really positive impact on people's health and wellbeing, particularly for individuals who are recovering from issues such as family bereavement, addiction or long-term unemployment.

It is clear that while DAERA has a critical role as champion, all government departments have a role to play, and harnessing the skills and expertise of stakeholders in the community and voluntary sector will also be essential to ensure the most efficient and cost-effective delivery of programmes.

The current pandemic has highlighted need for flexibility and also the value and safety of services for smaller groups or individuals.

There is a need for outreach engagement and activity programmes as many rural areas often miss out as they are not normally amongst the top most deprived areas and therefore find it more difficult to access some funding streams.

We would also highlight from our own experience that alongside pockets of isolation, rural communities are some of the most engaged, animated and enthusiastic communities that we work with.

Absolute poverty amongst pensioners is particularly acute in rural areas and needs to be addressed.

There is a clear increased cost to rural living e.g. fuel costs. We know that poverty impacts on our health and wellbeing yet the word 'poverty' is not referenced in the Framework. Poverty has a disproportionate impact on women.

Rural communities are concerned that health services will become more centralised and chronic waiting lists become harder to access for vulnerable rural dwellers.

We also think that the specific needs of children and young people could be acknowledged within these priorities. Lifetime health outcomes are to a large extent shaped in childhood and access to youth services is spotty at best in many rural areas.

The use of telemedicine and digital clinics has potential to improve access for some rural dwellers to specialised health services.

The need for Community Buildings/Hubs - suggest having an integrated coffee shop or social supermarket within the hubs to remove potential stigma associated with other activities on offer.

Coming from a Rural Community Transport perspective, we are increasingly being asked to facilitate the access needs to health and well-being services and activities within our rural communities for the most excluded and marginalised and often with the most complex health and mobility-related needs, as Translink services and Northern Ireland Ambulance Service Non-Emergency Patient Transport Services continue to recede.

With the aging of the population, there is a direct and growing correlation with the prevalence of multiple disease/multi-morbidity and poorer personal mobility.

Further develop community led responses to social exclusion and isolation making use of the considerable rural asset we have in community groups, volunteers institutions and halls/venues.

The Consultation document mentions that the Framework will seek to complement the Community Planning Process. This is an excellent idea as the networks have been updating groups on this process

Places of worship should be encouraged to get out into the community and help as much as possible - particularly at times of most need.

Local Government knows better than DAERA what is going on at community level. It is essential DAERA works closely with Council and Community Planning to ensure these priority areas are addressed in a coordinated way.

Local shops/services in rural areas have a unique reach into their local communities and play a key role in the lives of their customers. Not only do they provide essential products and services to the communities that they serve, they also provide a valuable source of social interaction for people, especially those who may be more vulnerable or isolated.

Championing and promoting an understanding of rural issues, poverty, isolation, Health & Wellbeing issues and reduced access to services.

EQIA required

Thematic Pillar 3: Themes Raised by Respondents

- A number of respondents suggested the need to include recognition of specific impacts crime has on people in rural areas including domestic and sexual violence and suggested a priority area for intervention relating to this could be added.
- A number of respondents noted that the mental health crisis has worsened through COVID-19, particularly with a strain on counselling services with lengthy waiting lists.
- A number of respondents noted that the future viability of villages as social and economic centres should be sustained. It was noted that DAERA should explore how the need for additional social housing in rural settlements can be met in partnership with DfC, the Housing Executive and Housing Associations.
- The impact of COVID-19 and EU Exit has created pressures which have increased food costs and reduced food availability, compounding food poverty. It was noted that there is a need for safe and affordable food and that agriculture; food production; and health policies should complement each other more closely. Also a reference to food innovation whilst ensuring ongoing environmental sustainability was also made. Reference was also made to plant based alternatives and nature friendly meat products.
- A number of respondents noted that LGBT+ support organisations were mainly based in urban areas and that there was a need for adequate resourcing in rural areas with those in the LGBT+ community more likely to experience social isolation than the population as a whole, particularly since the pandemic.
- Isolation and loneliness is a major health challenge in rural areas affecting all age groups, although particularly prevalent in ageing populations. There is a need to rebuild social engagement in rural communities, particularly since COVID-19. A targeted programme of support could make full use of physical assets such as rural halls. Libraries also provide social spaces for people from all demographic groups to engage with each other.
- Particularly since COVID-19, the need and demand for outdoor recreational space has increased. Associated infrastructure needs to be accommodated in a sustainable way. There is a need for walking trails and footpaths and that outdoor space which increase physical health, support mental wellbeing and improve quality of life. Reference was also made to initiatives such as farmer to farmer networks and group tidy ups such as Tidy Towns which would encourage the local community to take an interest in their local environment and build capacity to provide benefits for climate, nature and people whilst improving health and wellbeing.



- There is a need for collaborative and joined up working between statutory, community and voluntary sectors including on a cross-border basis with DAERA having a critical rural champion role to play. A number of respondents noted that COVID-19 highlighted how poor and limited many statutory sector rural supports, services and networks are and that many people's health and wellbeing was only sustained on the back of huge voluntary community efforts.
- A number of respondents noted a need for capital funding for health and wellbeing projects being taken forward by community planning statutory partners. It was noted that community groups and rural networks need more support and long-term funding. A number of respondents commended the recent rural halls refurbishment pilot scheme and would like to see this rolled out. It was noted that DAERA needs to link into other funding opportunities such as PEACE+ to address the priority areas of intervention.
- A number of respondents noted that they had expected to see some reference to poverty as the key determinant of ill health and to ensure that programmes of support will address rural poverty. Interventions should also have synergy with strategies under development by DfC. When targeting interventions, it was noted that consideration should be given to poverty, disability and service coverage.
- A number of respondents noted a concern that health services were becoming more centralised and chronic waiting lists were making it harder to access for vulnerable rural dwellers. Whilst the use of telemedicine has a place to improve access for some, it was noted that it is not a 'one size fits all' approach and that physically accessible GP services were still required in rural areas. It was noted that some services might need decentralised. The benefits of social prescribing were also noted.
- A number of respondents noted a need for community buildings and hubs with integrated coffee shops or social supermarkets to remove the stigma of other activities on offer. There is also an increasing need for rural community transport provision, however funding has decreased so the role of DAERA to champion rural in this regard was highlighted.
- A number of respondents noted a need for community development led interventions and the need to complement the community planning process. It was noted that capacity and skills development were as important as capital grants and Area-based strategy managers would be welcomed as they would be best placed to champion awareness and understanding of rural social exclusion, isolation and loneliness.



- Difficulties with work/life balance for farmers were noted and the uncertainty in relation to the future. It was noted that increased levels of mental health interventions may be needed for farm families.
- A number of respondents noted that this should be a central hub for other themes and not standalone. Rural wellbeing should be the overarching goal that the Framework delivers on.
- A number of respondents suggested amending the 4th priority area for intervention to 'sustain the future viability of villages as residential, social and economic centres'.



Departmental Response and Next Steps

This proposal will proceed as per the consultation. Respondents ranked this pillar most highly and highlighted its importance. The Department accepts that the importance of health and wellbeing has become even more acute since the pandemic, particularly in relation to mental health and wellbeing. Some respondents also suggested the need for priority areas of intervention recognising rural crime and poverty. The Department will take this feedback into account where appropriate when finalising the Framework.

A number of respondents have mentioned various groups within Section 75 equality legislation and their needs, the Department would reiterate that equality was a horizontal principle carried across all the Thematic Pillars of the Framework. Going forward, all schemes being developed will be subject to equality screening. The Department intends to establish a Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee (RSOC) to help ensure the best possible outcomes when designing the future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. It is anticipated that this Committee will be established in early 2022. In addition to the central oversight committee, the Department intends to establish a number of sub-groups (including environment/sustainability; Section 75/equality; and in relation to the thematic pillars) which will regularly report progress and issues to the oversight committee.

Many of the themes raised by respondents have already been identified within the Framework, however, the need for affordable and social housing in rural areas has been raised as an issue across many of the proposals and the Department will seek to incorporate this as a need within the Framework. Going forward, we recognise that housing is not a statutory obligation of the Department. However, we will seek to champion this need through working in partnership with other Departments and agencies.

The TRPSI approach has been highly effective over the years in responding quickly to emerging needs and facilitating the targeting of funding where it is needed the most. This was particularly

so throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. There will be lessons to learn from the current LEADER, Rural Tourism and TRPSI programmes in addition to the pilot schemes and it is clear that there is strong support for the bottom up approach to form part of the solution to implementing a new programme. As previously noted the Department will continue to focus on partnership working with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the most efficient and effective targeting of any resources to address challenges and maximise opportunities going forward in the development of the Rural Business Community Investment Programme. The Department also recognises the massive contribution of voluntary and community efforts in maintaining people's health and wellbeing, especially throughout COVID-19. In the development of any new programme, the Department will consider if there is merit in developing cross-border solutions on the basis of evidence.

Many of the priorities will be funded and taken forward through a range of different mechanisms. The Department continues to link into all potential funding streams including PEACE+/Shared Prosperity Funding/TRPSI funding etc.

The Department has noted feedback that area-based strategy managers would be welcomed and that the rural halls refurbishment pilot scheme should be rolled out and that there is a need for walking trails, footpaths and outdoor space.

Question 8a Analysis



What we asked:

Thematic Pillar 4: Employment: To increase employment opportunities available to people living in rural areas.

Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 4: Employment is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

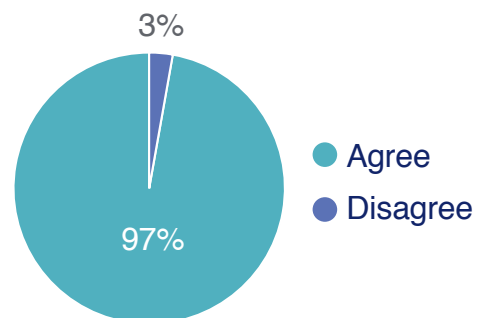
Out of a total of **105** responses, **93 (89%)** responded to this consultation question.

Response Rate

89%

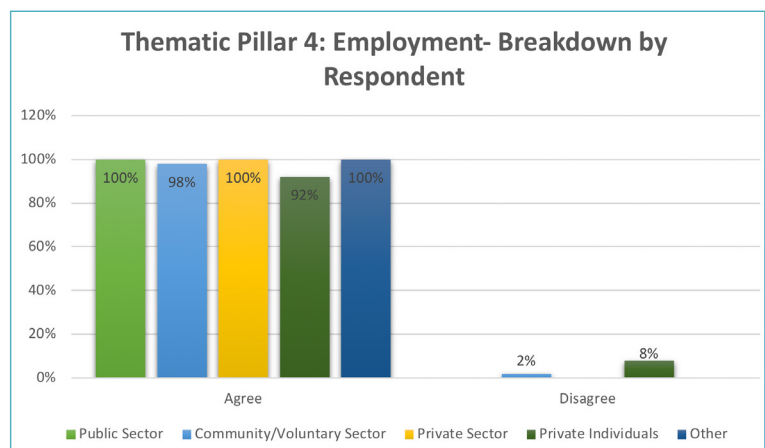
Thematic Pillar 3: Health & Wellbeing

Of those who indicated a position on this consultation question, **97%** agreed that the Thematic Pillar 4 was appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework. Only those respondents who answered yes or no to the question were counted as having responded. However, comments provided from other respondents have also been taken into account for the feedback section.



Breakdown of respondents who provided a position, by respondent type

There was overwhelming support for this proposal across the public; private; and other sectors with **100%** agreeing with the proposal. A very small proportion of Private Individuals (**8%**) and community/voluntary sector (**2%**) disagreed with the proposed Thematic Pillar 4: Employment.



NB: the summary of respondent views; themes raised by respondents; and departmental response and next steps will be combined for questions 8a and 8b at the end of this Thematic Pillar section.

Question 8b Analysis



What we asked:

Do you agree that the three priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 4: Employment are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- To promote rural prosperity by providing support to non-farming rural enterprises to help increase rural business start-ups, sustainability and growth.
- To champion the need to address the personal and practical issues which create barriers to employability for our rural dwellers.
- To invest in and develop our rural society.

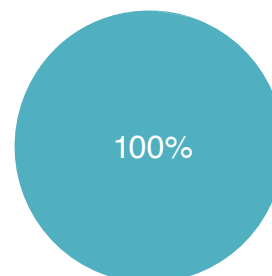
Out of a total of **105** responses, **75 (71%)** responded to this consultation question.

Response
Rate

71%

Thematic Pillar 4: Employment - Priority Areas for Intervention

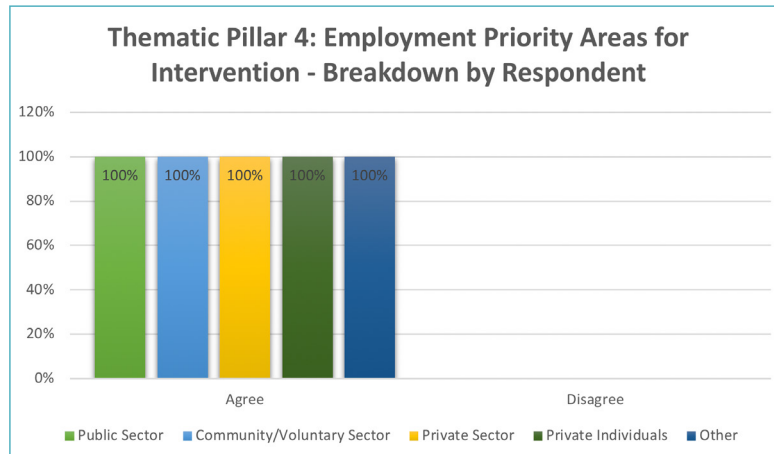
Of those who indicated a position on this consultation question, **100%** agreed that the Thematic Pillar 4 priority areas for intervention were appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework. Only those respondents who answered yes or no to the question were counted as having responded. However, comments provided from other respondents have also been taken into account for the feedback section.



- Agree
- Disagree

Breakdown of respondents who provided a position, by respondent type

There was complete support for this proposal across all respondents with **100%** agreeing with the proposed Thematic Pillar 4: Employment priority areas for intervention.



Thematic Pillar 4: Summary of Respondents' Views

Employment should definitely be a thematic pillar for the Rural Policy Framework as it is a key foundation to enable people to remain in rural communities.

This area is vital to sustain the rural economy and provide opportunities for rural dwellers.

This is an appropriate theme and the wide-ranging challenges and barriers to progress in this area have been identified by the working group.

Through provision of good social housing that accommodates added home working space current employment can be sustained and wider employment opportunities accessed that may not have been possible in the past due to prohibitive commuting.

There should be incentives for the set-up, development and maintenance of community hubs where rural people can hotdesk locally, share ideas, work remotely, and socially interact.

We need quality not quantity of opportunities in our rural areas.

DAERA has a significant role to play in championing the needs of rural dwellers who are disadvantaged compared to urban dwellers in terms of access to Wi-Fi, broadband and public transport. Better connectivity through comprehensive broadband coverage will enable people to work from rural hubs or from the home place.

The creation of a Green Jobs Scheme would be a welcome move, particularly in light of the impact that COVID-19 has had on employment opportunities in rural areas.

Opportunities in the green and blue economies, creative industries (film, gaming) and food and energy security are mainly associated with rural areas; and offer opportunities for rural business start-ups that in turn promote rural sustainability.

Thematic Pillar 4: Themes Raised by Respondents

- A number of respondents noted a need for better, wider range of housing products. Household needs change over time and working from home can only be facilitated if there is affordable housing available. Planning permission remains a challenge but do planners understand the nature of the projects in front of them?
- A number of respondents noted a need for measures to be in place to address personal and practical issues that create barriers to employment such as affordable childcare; transport and broadband issues.
- Many young people are emigrating from rural areas to access training or work - there is a need to keep them in the rural areas, particularly with an ageing population. Furthermore, some areas were heavily reliant on migrant workers and now have a declining population - importance of a differentiated and more flexible migration policy.



- Local employment is critical to rural communities, not just new employment opportunities but sustaining existing employment in these areas.
- A number of respondents noted that skills deficits can be a consequence of poor terms and conditions synonymous with particular industries such as caring professions and hospitality with long working hours and low pay. There is a need to work with colleges and provide linkages to employers with skills shortages. It was also noted that the costs to train employees in a conventional way are very high - suggestion to look at virtual or simulation training for trades.
- Libraries can provide access to information and enhance people's quality of life e.g. job seeking information.
- A number of respondents noted that there should be linkages to DfE 'A Skills Strategy for NI - Skills for a 10x Economy'.
- A number of respondents noted that councils were best placed to lead on these priority areas for intervention given that they have statutory responsibility for enterprise, community planning function and are establishing labour market partnerships for their areas. Programmes need to be developed in ways that complement and support the Green Growth Strategy as it emerges and for future grant schemes, it was noted that sustaining jobs was as important as job creation.
- A number of respondents noted that Pillars 1 and 4 were very similar and consideration could be given to merging the two.
- A number of respondents noted the need for green jobs, possibly via a green jobs scheme, however, others had concerns that this would result in machinery replacing jobs.
- A number of respondents noted that interventions 1 and 2 were too broad and asked how they could be measured.
- The need for collaborative working was highlighted, particularly between Councils, education providers and employers.
- A number of respondents noted that there was a need for support to non-farming enterprises and allowing farm diversification.
- Given that women are more likely to have caring responsibilities and experience a lower employment rate due to these responsibilities, it was noted that there is a need for affordable and accessible childcare in rural areas.
- A number of respondents also noted the need for rural hubs which provide remote working facilities and shared creativity options.



Departmental Response and Next Steps

This proposal will proceed as per the consultation.

Some respondents indicated that the priority areas for intervention were too broad and that consideration could also be given to merging Thematic Pillars 1 and 4. However, the Department is of the view that whilst there are similarities across these pillars, there is merit in keeping them separate and that the broader nature of the interventions facilitate a greater scope for interventions on the ground. The Department will also review the DfE 'A Skills Strategy for NI - Skills for a 10x Economy' and include references to this in the revised Framework if appropriate.

Many of the themes raised by respondents have already been identified within the Framework, however, the need for affordable and social housing in rural areas has been raised as an issue across many of the proposals and the Department will seek to incorporate this as a need within the Framework. Going forward, we recognise that housing is not a statutory obligation of the Department. However, we will seek to champion this need through working in partnership with other Departments and agencies. It is hoped that such work will help address the emigration of young people from rural areas.

The Department also notes that respondents have indicated a need for affordable and accessible childcare in rural areas and the need for any future schemes to also complement the Green Growth Strategy as it emerges.

As previously noted the Department will continue to focus on partnership working with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the most efficient and effective targeting of any resources to address challenges and maximise opportunities going forward. There will be lessons to learn from the current LEADER, Rural Tourism and TRPSI programmes in addition to the pilot schemes and it is clear that there is strong support for the bottom up approach to form part of the solution to implementing a new programme. Although there are many opportunities for rural communities, it is clear that going forward, partnership working with a range of rural stakeholders is essential to ensure that any future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme targets funding to where it is needed most at the right time. To this end, the Department intends to establish a Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee (RSOC) to help ensure the best possible outcomes when designing the future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. It is anticipated that this Committee will be established in early 2022. In addition to the central oversight committee, the Department intends to establish a number of sub-groups (including environment/sustainability; Section 75/equality; and in relation to the thematic pillars) which will regularly report progress and issues to the oversight committee.

Question 9a Analysis



What we asked:

Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity: To improve connectivity between rural and urban areas.

Do you agree that Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity is appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

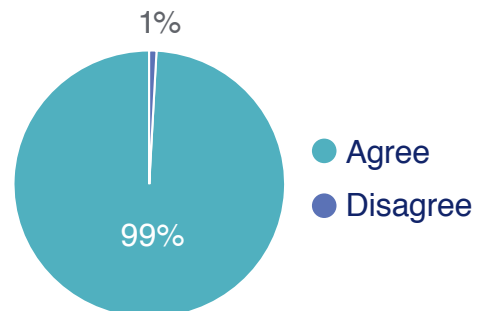
Out of a total of **105** responses, **91 (87%)** responded to this consultation question.

Response Rate

87%

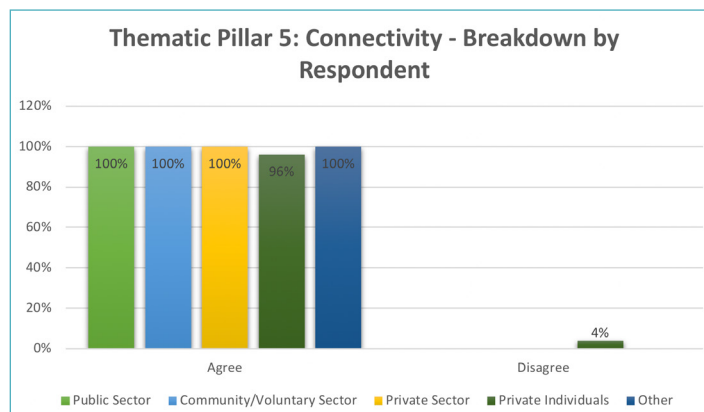
Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity

Of those who indicated a position on this consultation question, **99%** agreed that the Thematic Pillar 5 was appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework. Only those respondents who answered yes or no to the question were counted as having responded. However, comments provided from other respondents have also been taken into account for the feedback section.



Breakdown of respondents who provided a position, by respondent type

There was overwhelming support for this proposal across the public; community and voluntary; private and other sectors with **100%** agreeing with the proposal. A small proportion of private individuals (**4%**) disagreed with the proposed Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity.



NB: the summary of respondent views; themes raised by respondents; and departmental response and next steps will be combined for questions 9a and 9b at the end of this Thematic Pillar section.

Question 9b Analysis



What we asked:

Do you agree that the four priority areas for intervention outlined below supporting Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- To support sustainable public transport services between rural areas and urban centres and encourage active and public transport usage that better meets the needs of rural dwellers
- To support balanced regional development by promoting better connectivity between urban and rural centres
- To support improved telecommunications infrastructure including high speed broadband making it available to as many people as possible regardless of where they live
- To reduce barriers to accessing services in rural areas

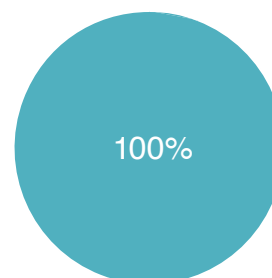
Out of a total of **105** responses, **87 (83%)** responded to this consultation question.

Response
Rate

83%

Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity - Priority Areas for Intervention

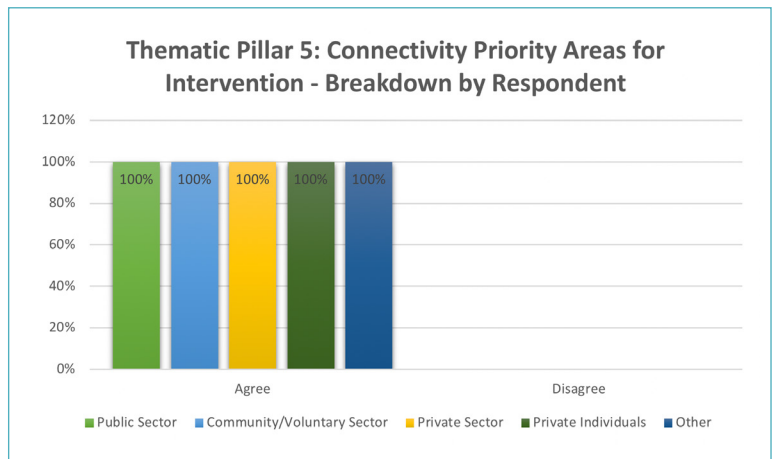
Of those who indicated a position on this consultation question, **100%** agreed that the Thematic Pillar 5 priority areas for intervention were appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework. Only those respondents who answered yes or no to the question were counted as having responded. However, comments provided from other respondents have also been taken into account for the feedback section.



- Agree
- Disagree

Breakdown of respondents who provided a position, by respondent type

There was complete support for this proposal across all respondents with **100%** agreeing with the proposed Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity priority areas for intervention.



Thematic Pillar 5: Summary of Respondents' Views

Connectivity is a key consideration, particularly to many rural communities.

Yes, agreed that the four priority areas for intervention noted above are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for NI.

It highlights the importance of physical, social and digital connectivity, issues which have also been highlighted as fundamental to local people and places during the recent pandemic.

We acknowledge that poor connectivity is only one major barrier to accessing services in rural areas, the financial climate we are experiencing in terms of local, regional and central government finances necessitates collaboration across the public, private and third sectors to maximise use of investment and find place-based innovative solutions.

Service provision, infrastructure, and connections must be improved for rural communities. These priority areas recognise that need.

We recommend that this Policy Framework takes cognisance of the issues outlined above, and includes within the draft a commitment to greater connectivity and local resources in rural community to help with both the prevention as well as support available after crime.

Raises issue of active travel within rural communities and also decline in rural services. How do residents access banking, libraries etc?

Covid has highlighted the importance of rural transport links even more and also the importance of green energy e.g. hydrogen.

Cost of running a car is increasing with no alternatives for rural dwellers. Sustainable and affordable public transport between rural and urban is needed to encourage the better usage of active and public transport that meets the needs of rural dwellers.

Greenways were mentioned in the document and would be very positive to see.

The infrastructure must be improved for all, therefore significant investment is needed from the NI Government not just the DAERA.

Major issue of factory's electricity capacity at peak times and battery storage. Looking at a big increase in demand for electricity in the future i.e. demand for electric cars. Lack of electric recharge points for cars in rural areas. If more were installed it would bring people into the rural areas. We must avoid situation where travel is moved to electric cars but we do not have enough charging points.

The Department for the Economy is soon to publish its Energy Strategy which will provide the first roadmap for the journey to net zero in Northern Ireland. This encompasses decarbonising heat, transport and power and eliminating GHG emissions from the agriculture sector.

The removal of bank buildings in rural towns has negatively affected those who are unable to switch to online banking.

To support balanced regional development by promoting better connectivity between urban and rural centres.

We welcome the intention to support balanced regional development and encourage the Department to work with the 11 councils and the City & Growth Deal areas to maximise investment from regional and national funding as well as to seize opportunities arising from the Peace Plus programme and Shared Island Unit Fund.

Thematic Pillar 5: Themes Raised by Respondents

- A number of respondents noted that good internet access is essential for rural households and businesses alike and that the pandemic has amplified the digital divide between urban and rural (particularly notable during home schooling and also for victims of crime who had to access online support services). It was noted that some rural areas are not covered by project stratum and do not have broadband access with a need for DAERA to work with other Departments to resolve this. The working from home culture provides an opportunity for rural areas to catch up with urban and there is an opportunity to capitalise on digital technologies. It was suggested that digital innovation hubs could facilitate the provision of these services and that there was a need to develop programmes such as the 'Go ON NI' scheme to improve the IT maturity of users. Further action is also needed on mobile phone coverage.
- A number of respondents noted that affordable and fit for purpose access to public transport in rural areas is important (e.g. many people go to urban areas from rural areas to access services such as doctors; childcare; work; main shop for the week etc. and women are more likely than men to rely on public transport). A number of respondents also noted the need for more greenways, cycle lanes and rural trails and that public transport in rural areas was limited and not fit for purpose with many rural routes having been cut back and economically unviable.
- Need for DAERA to collaborate with DfE, DfI and NI Water and other large energy users to reduce energy demand and use land for renewable energy generation. It was noted that there were also better opportunities for geographically targeted connectivity with the water and hills, particularly in coastal areas and that greater disabled access was needed for harbours and coastal walkways etc. The development of rural infrastructure is required but must be done in a way that protects and conserves natural environment and rural communities.
- With increased demand for working from home, it was noted that remote rural areas could ease housing pressures in traditional commuter zones and that as rural communities continue to grow, there is a need for more services to meet that demand.
- Need for more electric recharge points for cars in rural areas. Also a number of respondents noted that clean technology should be a key focus. Rural consumers should be provided with correct information, advice and support to enable them to make the transition to net zero.



- It was noted that services have reduced in rural areas over the years such as access to bank buildings; GPs; post offices; libraries etc. and that this has resulted in increased social isolation.
- A number of respondents noted that connectivity was required for on farm data collection (i.e. technology to monitor livestock and crops). The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that some jobs can be carried out remotely and a number of respondents noted that employers should be encouraged to keep these options available.
- A number of respondents noted that there was a need to define 'sustainable' and that the priorities should be more specific as 'to support' was a very general term. Balanced regional development needs to be targeted, planned and delivered. Also, a number of respondents suggested localised needs could be included in the first intervention.
- The need for collaborative working was noted.
- There is a concern that if emergency services are needed, it takes much longer to reach rural areas.



Departmental Response and Next Steps

This proposal will proceed as per the consultation.

Some respondents suggested that reference also needs included to localised needs within rural areas for the first priority area for intervention, however, the Department considers that this has already been covered within the priority areas for interventions. It was also noted that the priority areas for intervention were very general with the term 'to support'. The Department considers that the phrase 'to support' covers a wide variety of mechanisms to address need.

There will be lessons to learn from the current LEADER, Rural Tourism and TRPSI programmes in addition to the pilot schemes and it is clear that there is strong support for the bottom up approach to form part of the solution to implementing a new programme. Although there are many opportunities for rural communities, it is clear that going forward, partnership working with a range of rural stakeholders is essential to ensure that any future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme targets funding to where it is needed most at the right time. To this end, the Department intends to establish a Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee (RSOC) to help ensure the best possible outcomes when designing the future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. It is anticipated that this Committee will be established

in early 2022. In addition to the central oversight committee, the Department intends to establish a number of sub-groups (including environment/sustainability; Section 75/equality; and in relation to the thematic pillars) which will regularly report progress and issues to the oversight committee.

Many of the themes raised by respondents have already been identified within the Framework. As previously noted the Department will continue to focus on partnership working with a wide range of stakeholders to ensure the most efficient and effective targeting of any resources to address challenges and maximise opportunities going forward. In particular, the Department will continue to work with key stakeholders to maximise broadband coverage through Project Stratum in rural areas and recognises the importance of this to facilitating access to digital technologies. The Department will also continue to work with other stakeholders to develop digital inclusion and transformation programmes.



Question 10 Analysis



What we asked:

What are your views on how the five thematic pillars should be prioritised, ranked by priority from 1-5 (with 1 being the highest priority and 5 being the lowest priority)?

Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism

Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing

Thematic Pillar 4: Employment

Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity

Out of a total of **105** responses, **93 (89%)** responded to this consultation question. Where a respondent provided some ranking across the 5 options, they were included as a respondent for the choices which they had clearly selected. In some circumstances, respondents did not make for example, the first or fifth choice clear so this particular option was not counted.

Response Rate

89%

Top Thematic Pillar as No.1

(based on respondents who ranked a pillar as top priority)

Thematic Pillar	Respondents Ranking as Top Thematic Pillar
Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing	52 (56%)
Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship	15 (16%)
Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity	14 (15%)
Thematic Pillar 4: Employment	10 (11%)
Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism	2 (2%)
Total No. of Respondents Ranking a 1st Thematic Pillar	93 (100%)

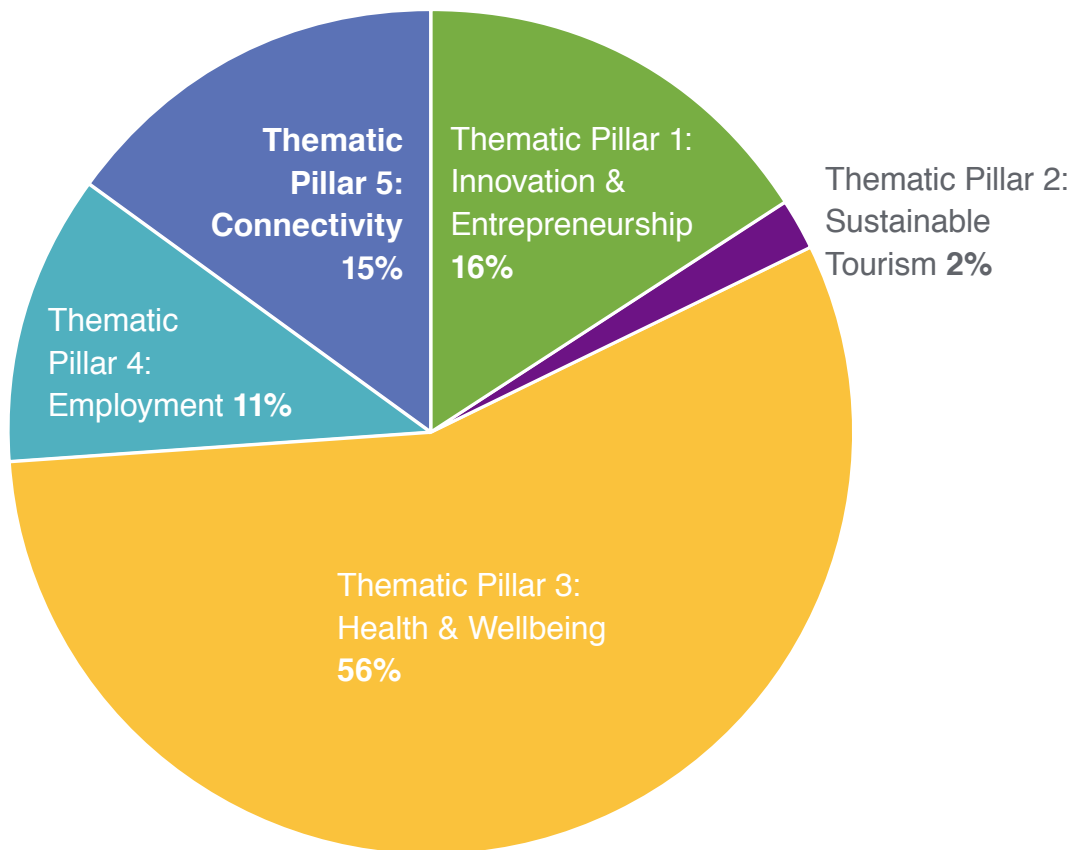
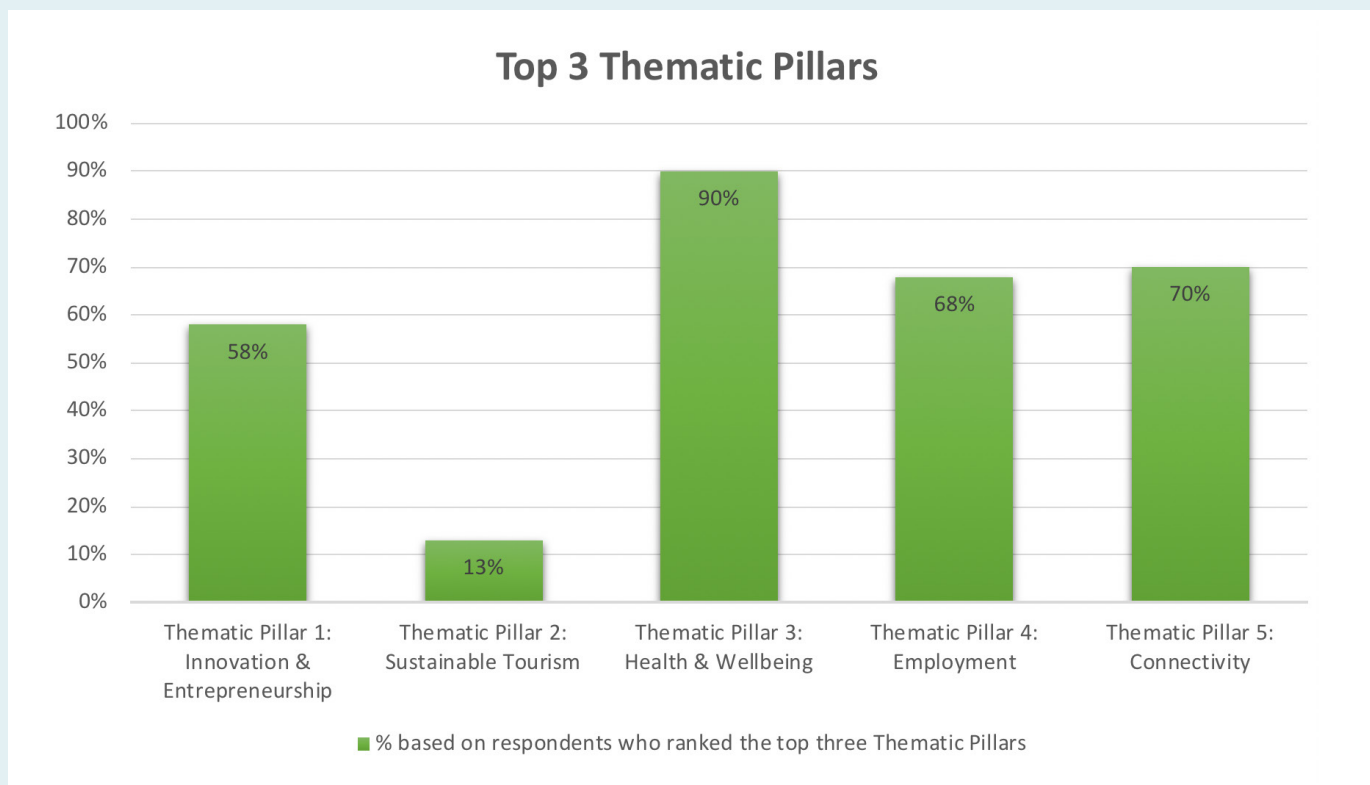


Figure 4: Top Thematic Pillar Ranked as No. 1

Top 3 Thematic Pillars

(based on respondents who ranked the Thematic Pillars)

Thematic Pillar	Respondents. Ranking as Top 3 Thematic Pillar
Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing	84 (90%)
Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity	65 (70%)
Thematic Pillar 4: Employment	63 (68%)
Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation and Entrepreneurship	54 (58%)
Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism	12 (13%)
Total No. of Respondents Ranking top 3 Thematic Pillars	93 (100%)



Departmental Response and Next Steps

It is clear from respondents ranking the Thematic Pillars that Thematic Pillar 3: Health and Wellbeing was prioritised. This is not surprising given that we are still in the midst of a global pandemic and the outworkings of that. The Department recognises the integrated nature across all pillars.

There will be lessons to learn from the current LEADER, Rural Tourism and TRPSI programmes in addition to the pilot schemes and it is clear that there is strong support for the bottom up approach to form part of the solution to implementing a new programme. Although there are many opportunities for rural communities, it is clear that going forward, partnership working with a range of rural stakeholders is essential to ensure that any future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme targets funding to where it is needed most at the right time. To this end, the Department intends to establish a Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee (RSOC) to help ensure the best possible outcomes when designing the future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. It is anticipated that this Committee will be established in early 2022. In addition to the central oversight committee, the Department intends to establish a number of sub-groups (including environment/sustainability; Section 75/equality; and in relation to the thematic pillars) which will regularly report progress and issues to the oversight committee.

Question 11 Analysis



What we asked:

Do you agree that the 14 Key Principles outlined below are appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland?

- Address the needs of rural communities through the delivery of outcomes based initiatives which provide value for money and also contribute to the outcomes set out in the draft Programme for Government 2016-21 (PfG);
- Promote the piloting of new and innovative approaches to the challenges facing rural communities;
- Encourage partnership working between Departments, other public sector organisations and the rural community sector;
- Recognise the important role played by the rural community sector and the need to encourage rural community empowerment;
- Encourage the mainstreaming of successful projects and the development of suitable exit strategies;
- Complement other rural initiatives including the Rural Needs Act 2016;
- Be cognisant of the fact that all Departments have responsibilities for rural areas;
- Promote sustainability through support for projects which deliver long term benefits for rural communities;
- Seek to promote equality and good relations in line with the Department's duties under Section 75;
- Seek to complement the aims and objectives of other key Executive policies and strategies including the Draft PfG and the New Decade, New Approach Deal;
- Promote the sharing of information (in line with UK data protection legislation), learning and best practice between organisations;
- Seek to complement the community planning process;
- Recognise opportunities for partnership working on a North/South, East/West or transnational basis; and
- The Framework will seek to use the Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework (TRPSI) delivery approach under the wider umbrella of Thematic Pillar 3.

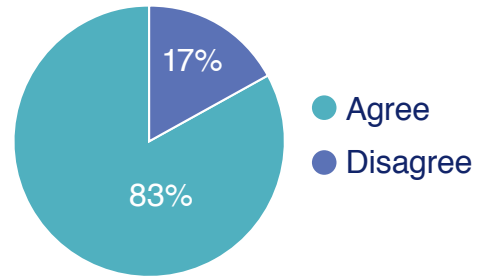
Out of a total of **105** responses, **92 (88%)** responded to this consultation question.

Response Rate

88%

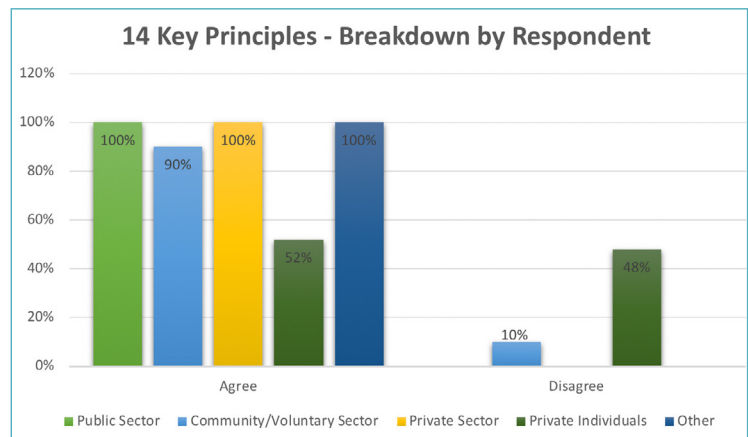
14 Key Principles

Of those who indicated a position on this consultation question, **83%** agreed that the 14 Key Principles were appropriate for the Rural Policy Framework. Only those respondents who answered yes or no to the question were counted as having responded. However, comments provided from other respondents have also been taken into account for the feedback section.



Breakdown of respondents who provided a position, by respondent type

There was overwhelming support for this proposal across the public; private and other sectors with **100%** agreeing with the proposal. A small proportion of community and voluntary sector (**10%**); and a larger proportion of private individuals (**48%**) disagreed with the proposed 14 Key Principles for the Rural Policy Framework.



Summary of Respondents' Views

The first principle will need to be updated to align with the outcomes in the more recent draft iteration of the Programme for Government.

Main thing is to employ a simple, common sense and deliverable approach. We need to step away from the same old mistakes mindset and embrace new technology and new concepts to deliver a sustainable and environmentally sound future.

Principle 9 which refers to 'other key Executive policies and strategies' should make specific reference to the forthcoming Green Growth Strategy and the Environment Strategy as both these have the potential to present particular opportunities for rural areas.

We welcome the inclusion of working in partnership with other regions North/South, East/West or transnational basis and would seek further clarity on how such cooperation may be developed within the various pillars.

We would like to see an environmental principle that ensures impacts on the rural landscape and habitats are a central consideration in developing and implementing proposals.

We welcome the recognition that government departments share responsibility for rural areas and that partnership working should be encouraged.

We would stress that the principle to 'seek to complement the community planning process' must be emboldened - the community planning process must be embedded within the Framework and be the key driver of programmes within it.

It is vital that an appropriate budget is allocated to a future rural policy and that there is a clear mechanism to deliver that funding.

There is also the impression that with more people working from home they may relocate to rural areas which will have a future effect on the rural housing market which will need careful management.

Themes Raised by Respondents

- The need for a key principle or possibly a thematic pillar relating to environmental sustainability, protecting biodiversity and addressing climate change;
- Partnership working with other regions - how will such cooperation be developed?
- A number of respondents suggested a need for stronger reference to community planning and were concerned at removal of LAG approach.
- Queries raised as to how a new programme will be resourced and monitored.



Departmental Response and Next Steps

This proposal will proceed as per the consultation.

The Department is of the view that by expanding the overarching aim (see Question 1) within the Framework to include a reference to the Environment that this will address any concerns in relation to environment and sustainability.

There will be lessons to learn from the current LEADER, Rural Tourism and TRPSI programmes in addition to the pilot schemes and it is clear that there is strong support for the bottom up approach to form part of the solution to implementing a new programme. Although there are many opportunities for rural communities, it is clear that going forward, partnership working with a range of rural stakeholders is essential to ensure that any future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme targets funding to where it is needed most at the right time. To this end, the Department intends to establish a Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee (RSOC) to help ensure the best possible outcomes when designing the future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. Part of the role of the Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee will be to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the programme; making recommendations for changes as necessary; and manage expectations for rural stakeholders around funding and what we can deliver. It is anticipated that this Committee will be established in early 2022. In addition to the central oversight committee, the Department intends to establish a number of sub-groups (including environment/sustainability; Section 75/equality; and in relation to the thematic pillars) which will regularly report progress and issues to the oversight committee.

Question 12 Analysis



What we asked:

Are there any other aspects of the proposals that you wish to comment on?

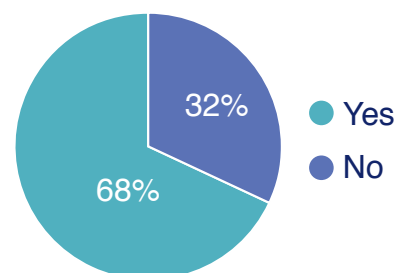
Out of a total of **105** responses, **90 (86%)** responded to this consultation question.

Response Rate

86%

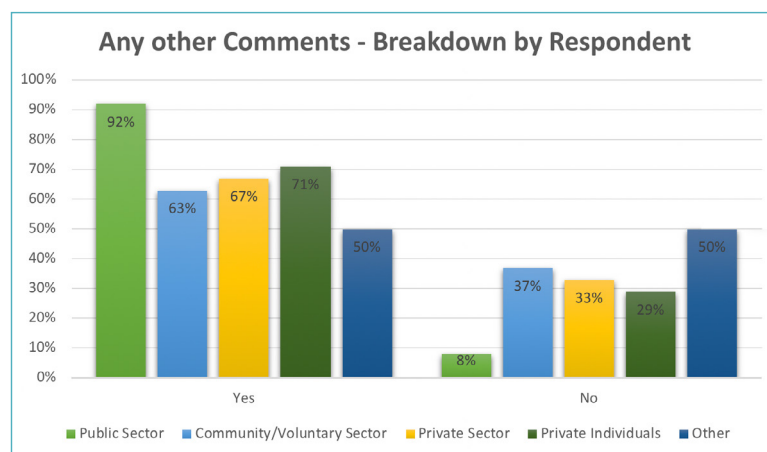
Other Aspects

Of those who indicated a position on this consultation question, **68%** indicated that there were other aspects of the proposals they wished to comment on. Only those respondents who answered yes or no to the question were counted as having responded. However, comments provided from other respondents have also been taken into account for the feedback section..



Breakdown of respondents who provided a position, by respondent type

The most additional comments were raised by the public sector with **92%**. A fair number of additional comments were raised across the other sectors as follows: community and voluntary (**63%**); Private sector (**67%**); Private individuals (**71%**); and Other (**50%**).



Summary of Respondents' Views

We look forward to participating in the Framework's outworkings over the next few years and thank you again for this opportunity to feed into these deliberations through both the workshops and stakeholder events.

We hope that DAERA will also consider any lessons learned from LEADER and we look forward to sharing our evaluation findings on completion of the current programme.

The Framework is comprehensive and acknowledges the unique challenges facing our rural communities. There is a recognition that targeted investment is required to sustain and grow the rural economy.

There are many positive aspects to the Rural Policy Framework. However, this does not go far enough and is unambitious.

The stated ambition also to seek opportunities in green growth, globalisation and technological innovation rightly has been, and deserves to be highlighted.

Housing accounts for 13% of greenhouse gas emissions in Northern Ireland, which is above the UK average, and we would like to maximise all opportunities to improve the energy efficiency and sustainability of new and existing homes. The Housing Executive has taken the lead on two pilot projects which aim to test technologies which could improve the energy efficiency and thermal comfort of our stock and reduce energy costs for tenants. Both of these pilot initiatives will be located in rural areas in the west where there is currently a reliance on oil heating.

The potential to develop employment opportunities related to retro fitting of insulation, air tightness of buildings and carbon neutral heating systems are significant but will need considerable support from government as well as the correct policy signals to ensure private sector businesses are prepared to take advantage of these opportunities.

Much greater consideration of the environment is needed.

The provision of housing and social/affordable housing in rural communities. This was a big issue before the pandemic and has become even more of an issue now house prices are rising and more people are seeking to return to rural communities (taking advantage of greater opportunity for home working).

A joined up approach between central and local government in the delivery of a range of interventions has proved particularly successful in the past and this should be developed further keeping in mind the knowledge at the ground level by local authorities.

Continuing to foster and develop cross border relationships is also vital in the development of a range of projects. This has proved successful in the past and leads to continued investment specifically from a tourism perspective between the partner organisations. The learning experiences that are shared between the actors continue to bear fruit.

A key message from the Stakeholder Engagement Event in January 2019 was that real meaningful engagement with the rural community was required to identify need/concerns and co-produce solutions.

Additionally, Covid-19 has had a negative adverse impact on incomes in rural communities.

The Framework is comprehensive and acknowledges the unique challenges facing our rural communities. It is noted this was developed pre-covid and it would be a good opportunity to ensure that any solutions match with the current needs post covid.

Would also like innovative approaches to wealth generation and expenditure highlighted. Such as progressive procurement (e.g. Preston model) and participatory budgeting.

There was a previous EU requirement that there would be a robust citizens group to monitor how progress is delivered. How will this be embedded in equality? How will it be delivered against Section 75? How robust is it going to be?

Rural dwellers should have equality of opportunity.

Rural schools form a key part of rural communities. Over half (55%) of NI's primary schools are situated in rural areas, along with 20% of post-primary schools. Not only do they provide a safe learning space for young people, but employment and a social venue for other clubs such as community classes, youth clubs etc.

It is important that DAERA work with a wide range of stakeholders to co-produce solutions required to support rural communities and businesses develop in a sustainable way to meet the challenges of the 21st century.

The focus is very much on entrepreneurship, the economy and sustainable tourism, rather than the provision of services that will enable a rural population to stay (and thrive) within the area.

A setting will only receive additional places if all funded places in the surrounding area, usually a nursery in a town, have been filled. It is not fair for a nursery to be oversubscribed and lose potential children to a larger nursery just because they have not filled their spaces.

Keen to ensure that the goal of 'connectivity' is expanded to include cooperation measures to help local communities forge links with other communities across Ireland, the EU and Britain.

The lack of access to fast reliable broadband has hampered rural dweller's ability to work more efficiently from home, in line with guidance, putting many at a disadvantage. Covid-19's impact on the mental health of the public has also compounded existing problems of social isolation affecting many in rural areas.

Future agile working or hot desks and office hubs would help reduce excessive commuting.

Improved broadband reliability in rural areas, could lead to productivity gains, and will enable future technologies including the roll out of smart meters and modern heating controls.

Indeed generally, in taking forward the policy framework we would urge a balanced approach to the mutually re-enforcing and complementary objectives and principles.

Elements such as greenways could be further emphasised as helping promote several of the themes.

The DfI Rural Transport Fund in collaboration with DAERA and its complementary assistance through the Assisted Rural Transport Scheme under its 'Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation Framework' supports the delivery of an essential public service for those persons most removed from accessing basic and essential services from right across our rural communities in Northern Ireland due to their lack of access to traditional public transport and or a private car etc.

We found the ranking process of thematic pillars, opportunities, and challenges difficult as the issues discussed were not easy to isolate or prioritise.

The policy framework is described as a 'living document', meaning it will be flexible enough to respond to emerging rural issues as they happen. Flexibility to respond is important but interventions must always be based on understanding the challenges rural communities face and their needs in addressing them.

Themes Raised by Respondents

- A number of respondents noted that any future programme must take into account lessons learned from the current Rural Development Programme through local LAGs.
- A number of respondents noted that there was no section on the importance of the natural environment as a theme and that there was a need for more focus on sustainability and green economy, ultimately aiming towards net zero.
- A number of respondents noted that the provision of social and affordable housing in rural communities was a big issue pre-pandemic and has become even more of an issue now that house prices are rising and more people seeking to return to rural communities, particularly with working from home. A number of respondents noted that the issue should be added as a separate pillar as housing is the cornerstone of building strong communities.
- A number of respondents welcomed how the Framework had been developed through engagement and an element of co-design.



- A number of respondents were concerned about the loss of EU funding and where funding for a replacement programme would come from. It was noted some funding would be available from the Community Renewal Fund but the status of Shared Prosperity Funding is unclear. Concerns were also raised that the COVID-19 has had an adverse impact on incomes in rural communities. It was also noted that the Framework was developed pre-COVID so there is a good opportunity to ensure any solutions match current needs.
- It was noted that DAERA should take into account inequalities in updating the Audit of Inequalities report and associated action plan. A number of respondents also suggested there was a need for an EQIA and noted that MDM indices favour urban and semi-urban areas.
- There was support for the area based strategy manager approach, however, a number of respondents noted a need for long-term funding, appropriate staffing, administrative budget and resources to support the initiative. It was also noted that a commitment to capacity building would require a recognition that groups are cyclical in nature and investment in skills development in the sector are essential to underpin successful delivery.
- A number of respondents noted that rural schools form a key part of rural communities. It was noted that there are some issues with the availability of EA funded nursery places (i.e. funding same number of places in a year which does not allow flexibility from one year to the next). Working from home could also result in an increased demand for nursery places in rural areas. It was noted that the focus of the Framework was very much on entrepreneurship, the economy and sustainable tourism, rather than the provision of services that will enable a rural population to stay and thrive within the area. Framework should demonstrate greater focus and attention on the provision of services (health, education, social services).
- A number of respondents noted a need for reliable broadband to help rural dwellers working from home. Future agile working and office hubs would help reduce excessive commuting. It was noted that 15 minute neighbourhoods where residents have access to most, if not all of their needs within a short journey from their home could be developed. Concerns were raised about the new proposed DfI funding methodology for distributing Rural Transport Fund monies to the respective Rural Community Transport Partnerships and that this would have a disproportionate population bias in favour of more densely populated and larger rural areas. The championing role of DAERA was welcomed.



- Concerns were raised that the Department would focus only on pillars with the most ‘ranking points’. The links between the pillars highlight the need to take a holistic approach in developing and implementing the Framework would be useful to identify options that could efficiently address more than one pillar.
- It was noted that there needed to be a greater focus on older people in the Framework.
- It was noted that links with the farming sector need to be clearer.



Departmental Response and Next Steps

The Department appreciates the time taken by respondents and is content to reinforce the importance of the environment and sustainability.

In addition, the Department accepts the vital role that affordable and social housing plays within our rural communities. Going forward, we recognise that housing is not a statutory obligation of the Department. However, we will seek to champion this need through working in partnership with other Departments and agencies.

There will be lessons to learn from the current LEADER, Rural Tourism and TRPSI programmes in addition to the pilot schemes and it is clear that there is strong support for the bottom up approach to form part of the solution to implementing a new programme. Although there are many opportunities for rural communities, it is clear that going forward, partnership working with a range of rural stakeholders is essential to ensure that any future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme targets funding to where it is needed most at the right time. To this end, the Department intends to establish a Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee (RSOC) to help ensure the best possible outcomes when designing the future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. It is anticipated that this Committee will be established in early 2022. In addition to the central oversight committee, the Department intends to establish a number of sub-groups (including environment/sustainability; Section 75/equality; and in relation to the thematic pillars) which will regularly report progress and issues to the oversight committee.

The Department is also aware of the importance of funding and the need to programme multi-year funding going forward.

In relation to concerns about a focus on the most prioritised pillars, the Department will take a holistic approach in developing and implementing interventions under the five pillars and will take into account views raised by the Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee.

Question 13a Analysis



What we asked:

Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DAERA in relation to Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland in respect of:
The Equality and Human Rights Screening Template.

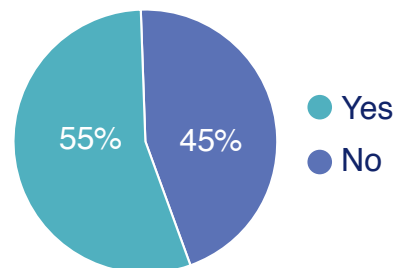
Out of a total of **105** responses, **93 (89%)** responded to this consultation question.

Response Rate

89%

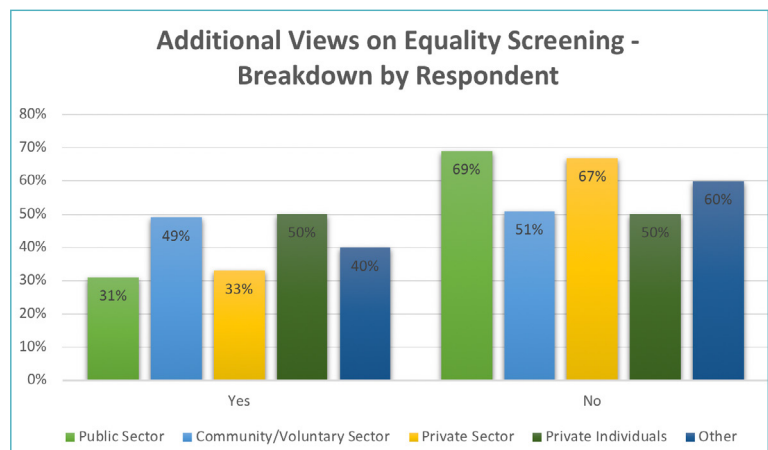
Additional Views on Equality Screening

Of those who indicated a position on this consultation question, **45%** indicated that they had additional views to provide in relation to the Equality and Human Rights Screening Template. Only those respondents who answered yes or no to the question were counted as having responded. However, comments provided from other respondents have also been taken into account for the feedback section.



Breakdown of respondents who provided a position, by respondent type

The most additional comments relating to the equality screening template were raised by the private individuals with **50%**. A fair number of additional comments were raised across the other sectors as follows: public sector (**31%**) community and voluntary sector (**49%**); Private sector (**33%**); and Other (**40%**).



Summary of Respondents' Views

Housing is a basic human right and the equality needs for older and disabled persons must be considered.

The 2012 Audit of inequalities & associated action plan is an important document to addressing inequality through the lens of section 75. The consultation document makes reference to Equality & equality of opportunity as key principles, I think it's important that the consultation document is updated to reflect the updated version of the Audit report to reflect Rural inequalities.

...welcomes the commitment (subject to approval of the Framework) that individual schemes will then be developed into a new Programme entitled 'Rural Business and Community Investment Programme' and an Equality Screening exercise will be carried out at that stage. It is crucial that EQIA is undertaken at that stage to assess any equality impacts on proposed schemes that are being developed ... strongly urges DAERA to undertake robust monitoring of any such programme, both applications made to it and delivery to continue to help identify any possible problems that are specific to groups, individuals or organisations within the rural community. The EU funded Rural Development Programme had previously had issues with non collection of equality monitoring data for some schemes.

Themes Raised by Respondents

- Need to reflect a range of rural inequalities such as: populations experiencing deprivation; violence against women; housing; equality needs of older and disabled persons;
- Consideration of positive impacts on good relations;
- Need for a full EQIA to be carried out for the Rural Business and Community Investment Programme and also ongoing equality monitoring required.



Departmental Response and Next Steps

The Department has noted the comments raised and will carry out equality screening exercises in relation to each of the schemes developed under a future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme and these screening exercises will determine whether or not a full EQIA is required.

There will be lessons to learn from the current LEADER, Rural Tourism and TRPSI programmes in addition to the pilot schemes and it is clear that there is strong support for the bottom up approach to form part of the solution to implementing a new programme. Although there are many opportunities for rural communities, it is clear that going forward, partnership working with a range of rural stakeholders is essential to ensure that any future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme targets funding to where it is needed most at the right time. To this end, the Department intends to establish a Rural Stakeholder Oversight Committee (RSOC) to help ensure the best possible outcomes when designing the future Rural Business and Community Investment Programme. It is anticipated that this Committee will be established in early 2022. In addition to the central oversight committee, the Department intends to establish a number of sub-groups (including environment/sustainability; Section 75/equality; and in relation to the thematic pillars) which will regularly report progress and issues to the oversight committee.

The need for affordable and social housing in rural areas has been raised as an issue across many of the proposals and the Department will seek to incorporate this as a need within the Framework. Going forward, we recognise that housing is not a statutory obligation of the Department. However, we will seek to champion this need through working in partnership with other Departments and agencies.

Question 13b Analysis



What we asked:

Do you have any views on the conclusions reached by DAERA in relation to Rural Policy Framework for Northern Ireland in respect of:
The Rural Needs Impact Assessment.

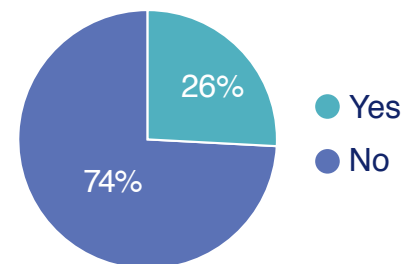
Out of a total of **105** responses, **91 (87%)** responded to this consultation question.

Response Rate

87%

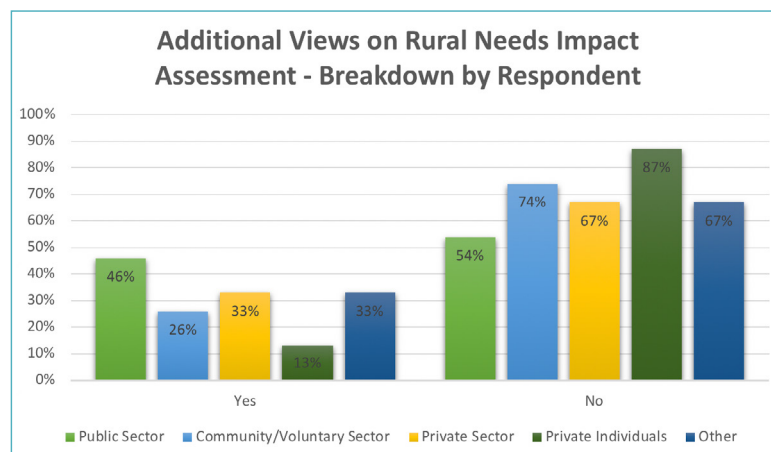
Additional Views on Rural Needs Impact Assessment

Of those who indicated a position on this consultation question, **26%** indicated that they had additional views to provide in relation to the Rural Needs Impact Assessment. Only those respondents who answered yes or no to the question were counted as having responded. However, comments provided from other respondents have also been taken into account for the feedback section.



Breakdown of respondents who provided a position, by respondent type

The most additional comments relating to the rural needs impact assessment were raised by the public sector with **46%**. A number of additional comments were raised across the other sectors as follows: community and voluntary sector (**26%**); Private sector (**33%**); Private Individuals (**13%**); and Other (**33%**).



Summary of Respondents' Views

We welcome access to services whether in a rural or urban setting that is adequately funded and resourced, available to the right people at the right time.

Agrees that the framework has the potential to impact on people who live in rural areas, people who work in rural areas, people who operate businesses in rural areas and people who travel to rural areas for the purposes of tourism or leisure through the implementation of policies and programmes implemented under the framework - and that this impact will be largely positive.

Question 2C ... The Council believes that a good Rural Policy Framework will benefit all of Northern Ireland - for example by improving transport links between rural and more urban areas. A strong rural community helps create a strong Northern Ireland economy as a whole.

Question 2D ... a well-implemented Rural Policy Framework should impact on the majority of the areas outlined within 2D and not just Rural Development.

Themes Raised by Respondents

- The Framework should be prioritised across every relevant government department.



Departmental Response and Next Steps

The Department has noted the comments raised. It should be noted that DAERA is not solely responsible for rural issues. The Rural Needs Act (NI) 2016 (The Act) provides a statutory duty on the public authorities listed in the Schedule to the Act to have due regard to rural needs when developing, adopting, implementing or revising policies, strategies and plans, and when designing and delivering public services. Due regard could include: acting as a rural champion; working with other Departments and other public agencies on an integrated approach; and supporting rural groups and networks to articulate rural needs to policy makers and influencers.

The Act was introduced to ensure that consideration of the needs of people in rural areas becomes more firmly embedded within public authorities and provides a key policy tool for DAERA in seeking to ensure that the needs of people in rural areas are fully considered by government in policy making and in the delivery of public services. It is imperative that Departments, councils and other public authorities listed in the Schedule to the Act work more closely with rural stakeholders in seeking to identify the particular needs of people in rural areas and to be open to adopting new approaches and to developing more innovative solutions to help address rural needs and deliver more equitable outcomes for rural dwellers.

Annex A: Online WebEx Event Attendance and links to presentations/FAQs raised at events

Event Details	No. Registered/ Attended	Attendees Represented
Rural Policy Framework for NI Overview 19/07/2021 (7-8pm)	30 registered 23 attended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council - Ards & North Down Borough Council - Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council - Causeway Coastal Route Cluster - Carrickfergus Enterprise - County Down Rural Community Network - Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs - Fermanagh and Omagh District Council - Health and Social Care Trust - Learmount Community Development Group - Lisburn and Castlereagh Council - Mid and East Antrim Borough Council - Mid & East Antrim Local Action Group - Northern Area Community Network - Omagh Forum for Rural Associations - Private Individuals - Sinn Féin - Ulster Farmers' Union
Thematic Pillar 1: Innovation & Entrepreneurship 27/07/2021 (7-8pm)	21 registered 15 attended	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Causeway Coastal Route Cluster - Carrickfergus Enterprise - Community Organisations of South Tyrone & Areas Ltd - County Down Rural Community Network - Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs - Easlink Community Transport

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fermanagh and Omagh District Council - Mid and East Antrim Borough Council - Mid & East Antrim Local Action Group - Mid Ulster District Council - Omagh Forum for Rural Associations - Private Individuals - Rural Community Network - Sinn Féin
<p>Thematic Pillar 2: Sustainable Tourism</p> <p>04/08/2021 (7-8pm)</p>	<p>37 registered 27 attended</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ards & North Down Borough Council - County Down Rural Community Network - Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs - Fermanagh and Omagh District Council - Lisburn and Castlereagh Council - Mid and East Antrim Borough Council - Mid Ulster District Council - Mourne Heritage Trust - National Trust - Omagh Forum for Rural Associations - Private Individuals - Rural Area Partnership in Derry - Rural Community Network - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds - Sinn Féin - think6 Marketing Solutions
<p>Thematic Pillar 3: Health & Wellbeing</p> <p>12/04/2021 (7-8pm)</p>	<p>30 registered 25 attended</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community Organisations of South Tyrone & Areas Ltd - County Down Rural Community Network - Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs - Department of Health - Developing Healthy Communities Northern Ireland

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fermanagh and Omagh District Council - Fermanagh Rural Community Network - Mid Ulster District Council - Network Personnel - Northern Area Community Network - Omagh Forum for Rural Associations - Private Individuals - Rural Community Network - Rural Support - Sinn Féin - TADA Rural Support Network
<p>Thematic Pillar 4: Employment</p> <p>17/08/2021 (7-8pm)</p>	<p>16 registered 13 attended</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community Organisations of South Tyrone & Areas Ltd - Employers for Childcare - Fermanagh and Omagh District Council - Fermanagh Rural Community Network - Irish Central Border Area Network Ireland - Mid and East Antrim Borough Council - Mid Ulster District Council - Omagh Forum for Rural Associations - Private Individuals - Rural Community Network - Sinn Féin - The Federation of Small Businesses
<p>Thematic Pillar 5: Connectivity</p> <p>25/08/2021 (7-8pm)</p>	<p>17 registered 13 attended</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - County Down Rural Community Network - Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs - Disability Action - Easlink - Fermanagh Community Transport - Fermanagh Rural Community Network - Glenann Consulting - Omagh Forum for Rural Associations

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Private Individuals - Sinn Féin - The Bytes Project
<p>Recap of Rural Policy Framework for NI</p> <p>31/08/2021 (7-8 pm)</p>	<p>18 registered</p> <p>13 attended</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community Organisations of South Tyrone & Areas Ltd - Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs - Disability Action - Fermanagh Rural Community Network - Irish Central Border Area Network Ireland - Lough Neagh Partnership - Mid Ulster District Council - Omagh Forum for Rural Associations - Private Individuals - Rural Area Partnership in Derry - Rural Community Network
<p>Presentations and FAQs are available at:</p> <p>https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/consultations/rural-policy-framework-northern-ireland-consultation</p>		

Annex B: List of consultees providing written responses to consultation

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annalong FC Youth • Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council • Ards and North Down Borough Council • Ards Peninsula Villages Partnership • Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council • Arroy Community Association • Badoney Development Partnership • British Association for Shooting and Conservation (BASC) • Carrickfergus Enterprise • Causeway Coastal Route Cluster • Clanmil Housing Association • Community Organisations of South Tyrone & Areas (COSTA) • Cookstown And Western Shores Area Network (CWSAN) • County Armagh Community Development • County Down Rural Community Network (CDRCN) • Derry City and Strabane District Council • Developing Healthy Communities • Disability Action • Early Years • Easilink Community Transport • Ecological Design Association Northern Ireland • Fermanagh and Omagh District Council • Fermanagh and Omagh Local Action Group (FOLAG) • Fermanagh Community Transport | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fermanagh Rural Community Network • Gortin St Patricks GAA • GROW South Antrim Limited • Grow the Glens CIC • Here NI • Irish Central Border Area Network (ICBAN) • Irish Moiled Cattle Society • Lagan Rural Partnership Ltd • Libraries NI • Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council • Local Action Group • Mid and East Antrim Borough Council • Mid and East Antrim Local Action Group • Mid Ulster District Council • Mid Ulster Rural Development Partnership • Mourne, Gullion and Lecale Rural Development Partnership • Mourne Heritage Trust • Muintir Luinigh Initiative • Naomh Pdraig agus Mna Both Domhnaigh An Goirtin (St Patrick's and Badoney Ladies Gortin) • Nexus • NI Rural Women's Network (NIRWN) • Northern Area Community Network (NACN) • Northern Ireland Agricultural Producers Association (NIAPA) • Northern Ireland Co-Ownership Housing Association Limited • Northern Ireland Federation of Housing Associations (NIFHA) |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Northern Ireland Local Government Association (NILGA)• Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform• Northern Trust• North West Regional Development Group (NWRDG)• Omagh Forum for Rural Associations• Portaferry Community Collective• Private Individuals - 25• RH /AS Properties• Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) NI• RSPB Northern Ireland• Rural Action• Rural Area Partnership in Derry (RAPID)• Rural Community Network• Rural Support• Sinn Féin• Slemish Barn Ltd.• Southern Organisation for Action in Rural Areas (SOAR) (ABC) Ltd | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Antrim, Down, and Armagh (TADA) Rural Support Network• The Consumer Council• The Council for Nature Conservation and the Countryside (CNCC)• The Housing Executive• The National Trust• The Nature Friendly Farming Network (NFFN)• The Strangford Residents’ Association• Ulster Farmers’ Union (UFU)• Ulster University• UNESCO Centre, School of Education, Ulster University• Victim Support NI• Western Domestic and Sexual Violence Partnership [WDSVP]• Women’s Regional Consortium• Woodland Trust Northern Ireland |
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Additional Community and Voluntary Groups signed up to the written responses from the Rural Support Networks listed below

Community Organisations of South Tyrone & Areas (COSTA)	Cookstown And Western Shores Area Network (CWSAN)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age NI • Ballygawley Area Development Association • Bawn Development Association • Bush Community Cultural Group • Carricklongfield Cultural Group • Castlecaulfield Horticultural Society • Clogher Rural Centre • Coalisland Training Services • Desertcreatives • Dungannon Area All Stars • Dungannon Multiple Sclerosis Support Group • Dungannon West Recycled Teenagers • First Steps Women’s Centre • Fivemiletown Community Development Association • Granaghan & District Women’s Group • Killeeshill & Clonaneese Historical Society • Killeeshill Community Centre • Killeeshill Community Group • Mid Ulster Seniors Network • Naomh Colum Cille Tyrone • Parkanaur Manor House • Pheonix Masonic Lodge Caledon 210 • St Malachy’s GAC Castledawson • Tamnamore Community Development Association 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 040 Cookstown • 10 Tyrone Killeeshil Scouts. • 1st Castlecaulfield Boys Brigade • 1st Culnady Boys Brigade • 1st Moneymore guides • 33rd Derry Ballinascreen Scouts Acorn Womens Group • ACRES • Annaghmore LOL 2033 • Aughadarragh Parent support Association • Aughnacloy Presbyterian Church Comm gp • Aughtan Pipe Band • BADGER • Ballybriest LOL 277 • Ballymaguigan LOL 292 • Ballyronan Community Group • Ballyscullion Community Group • Bellaghy Masonic Temperance Lodge • Bellaghy Mens Shed • Bellaghy Village Regeneration • Bellaghy Women’s Group • Blackhill LOL 681 • Bonn Cultural Group Pomeroy • Brocagh Afterschool • Brocagh Emmets • Broughderg Area Development Association Ltd • Busy Bee Cross Community Playgroup • Cairde Ui Neill Afterschool Club • Castledawson Part Music Flute Band

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Causeway & Mid Ulster Womens Aid • Clonoe Camera Club • Clonoe Rural Development • Coagh & Drummullan Network Group • Coagh Community Crossroads • Coalisland & District Community Food Bank • Coalisland canal inlands waterways gorup • Cookstown and Western Shores Area Network • Cookstown Active Retirement • Cookstown History Group • Cookstown Lambeg Drumming School • Cornstore Youth Club • Cranny Pipe Band • Cumann Fionnbarra Naofa (St Finbarrs GAA) • Curran Heritage Culture & Community Ass. • Curran LOL 121 • DADS • Derganagh Training and Development Association • Derrylaughan GFC • Derryloughan Camogie Club • Desertcreatives • Desertmartin Accordion Band • Desertmartin Active Retirement • Desertmartin LOL 376 • Drumullan Community Group • Friends of Stewartstown Primary School • Galbally Pearses GFC • Glor na Speirini • Granaghan Womens group • Hilltop Highland Dancers • Hope Magherafelt • Hope Magherafelt Foodbank • Jack & Jill Pre-School • Kiddies Castle Early Years | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kilcronaghan Community Association • Kilcronaghan Youth Hostel Ltd • Kildress Area Youth • Kildress Kare • Killyman & District Cultural Group • Killyman Community playgroup • Knockinroe Flute Band • Knockloughrim Accordion Band • Knockloughrim Community Development Association • Knockloughrim Community Development Association • Ladies Over 50 Fitness Group, Gulladuff • Learning to grow with Mary, Ardboe • Lissan Hall Committee • Lissan Leisure Club • Little Amps Early Years • Little Rainbows Playgroup • Lough Neagh Rescue • Loughfea Ladies Group • Loughshore Community Services • Loughshore Open Door Club • Loup & District Historical Association • Loup Women's Group • Maghera Cross Community Link • Maghera Foodbank • Maghera LOL 209 • Maghera Strollers • Matt Boyd Memorial • Mid Ulster Agewell • Mid Ulster Disability Forum • Mid Ulster Senior Network • Mid Ulster Stroke Survivors Group • Mid Ulster Volunteer Centre • Moneymore Presbyterian Church Bowling Club |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moneyneena & District Development Initiative • Montuber Oranage Hall • Moree Community Association • Muintir Na Monteach Ltd • MUVC • Old Heritage Group • Open Doors Club, Swatragh • Phoenix Masonic Lodge Caledon 210. • Pomeroy Community Projects • Pomeroy District Sports & Cultural Association • Pomeroy Men's Shed • Pomeroy Over 55's Club • Recycle for Kicks Count, Tamlaght O Crilly • Reahaghy LOL 857 • Reahaghy Rural Community • Ringsend Community Group • Rock Community Hub • Rock community/historical group • Rowan Tree Centre Pomeroy • Royal British Legion • S.T.E.P.S. • Saltersland Bowling Club • Sandholes Community Group • Shamrocks Running Club • Shopmobility Mid Ulster • Sixtowns Heritage • Slatequarry Community Centre • Slieve Gallion Community Pre-school Ltd • Sperrin Cultural Awareness Association • St Martin's GAC Desertmartin • Stewartstown Community Group • Stewartstown Development Association • Sunflower Support • TABBDA • Tamlaght O'Crilly Community Group • Termoneeny Young at Heart | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Termononeey Young At Heart • The Hub BT80 • The Link, Maghera • The Low country native Irish Honeybee Association • The Mosses group • Tirgan Community Association • Tobermore Community Projects • Tobermore Community Projects • Tobertinys Community Playgroup • Tobin Centre Moortown LTD • Tullylagan Pipe Band • Upperlands Men Shed • Upperlands Royal British Legion • WAG Art group • Washingbay Bowling club • Washingbay Jujitsu Club • Washingbay Walking Club • Ballymoughan Flute Band • Draperstown Afterschool Club • Dumamoney LOL 678 • Dunamoney Flute Band • Fairhill Youth Centre • Halo Helping Hands • Institute of Irish Leadership • Kildress Wolfe Tones Gaa • Knocknagin Hall Committee • Maghera Cross Community • Meghargy Pride of Ulster LOL 268 • Mulnahorn Pipe Band • Niamh Louise Foundation • Pomeroy After Schools • RDA Fort Centre • Rhone Valley • St Malachy's GAC • St Swithin's evergreen • Three Spires Craft Club • Upperlands Community Development |
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County Down Rural Community Network (CDRCN)

- 6th Ards Sea Scouts
- Abbey Villa Youth FC
- Annsborough Community Forum
- Ardglass Development Association
- Ardglass Football Club
- Ardglass GAA
- Ardglass Harbour Developments Ltd
- Ardglass Marina t/a Phennick Cove Developments
- Ards Peninsula Coastal Erosion Group
- Ards Peninsula First Responders
- Ards Peninsula Villages Partnership
- Ark Community Garden
- Attical Community Association
- Ballygowan & District Community Association
- Ballygowan Seniors Club
- Ballyhalbert Community Association
- Ballyhornan Development Association
- Ballykinler Forever Young Pensioners
- Ballykinler GAC
- Ballynagross FC
- Ballynahinch Community Collective
- Ballynahinch Counselling Service
- Ballynahinch Men's Shed
- Ballyninler and Tyrella Community Association
- Ballyphilip Youth Club
- Ballywalter & District Historical Society
- Ballywalter Community Action Group
- Ballywalter Lightship Masonic
- Ballywalter Seniors Group
- Ballywalter Youth & Community Cooperative
- Barnamaghery Rural Society
- Bright Community Association
- Bright GAC
- Castlewellan Traders Group
- Clough Social Therapy Group
- Cloughey & District Community Association
- Creative Village Dundrum
- Crossgar Community Association
- Crossgar Ladies Walking group
- Crossgar War Memorial Hall
- Cumann Ghaelach Crois Dharach agus Tonaghneave language and Cultural Group
- Dechomet Community Group
- Downpatrick Autism Family Support Group
- Dromara GAC
- Drumaroad Community Group
- Dunsford Arts & Crafts
- East Down Men's Shed
- Glasdrumman Hibernian Social Club
- Glór Uachtar Tíre
- Greyabbey & District Community Association
- Harry's Place CIC
- Heart of Down Red Squirrel Group
- Heart of Down Rural Society
- Hilltown Community Association
- Inverbrena Over 50s Strangford
- Kilclief Residents Association
- Kilcoo GAC
- Killinchy & District Community Association
- Killinchy Tuesday Club
- Killough Youth and Community Hall
- Killyleagh & Shirigley Friendship Group
- Killyleagh Youth FC
- Kingdom Men's Shed
- Kingdom Youth Club
- Kircubbin & District Community Association

- Kircubbin Regeneration Programme
- Kirkistown LOL 1412
- Loughinisland GAC
- Magheradroll Bowling Club Ballynahinch
- Mike Bean Tai Chi
- Millisle & District Community Association
- Millisle Health & Wellbeing Group
- Millisle Regeneration
- Millisle Youth Forum
- Mourne Heritage Trust
- Naomh Mochai Cumann Lúthchleas Gael Crois Dharach
- Newcastle CCE
- Newcastle Chit Chat Group
- Newcastle Lions Club
- Pantry Foodbank
- Pepper Johns Community Centre
- Portaferry Community Collective Ltd
- Portaferry In Bloom
- Portaferry Men's Shed
- Portaferry WI
- Portavogie Culture & Heritage Society
- Portavogie PS PTA
- Portavogie Rangers FC
- Portavogie Rangers Youth FC
- Portavogie Seniors Group
- Portavogie True Blues LOL 552
- River Valley Development Association
- Rowallane Hub
- Saintfield Development Association
- Saintfield Men's Shed
- Saul Community Pre-school
- Saul GAC
- Saval GAC
- Sir Hans Sloane Centre
- Slievenamann WI

- St. Columba's PTFA
- St. Johns GAC, Drumnaquoile
- Strangford Residents Association
- Teconnaught GAC
- Teconnaught Tuesday Club
- United Ulster History Forum
- Women of Clonduff

Northern Area Community Network (NACN)

- 5th Larne Guide Unit
- 6th Larne Brownies
- 6th Larne Rainbows
- A Safe Space to be Me
- Age Concern Causeway
- Aghanloo and Killybready Cultural & Historical Group
- Agivey Angler's Association
- Agivey LOL 361
- Ahoghill District No 12
- Ahoghill Traders' Association
- Ahoghill WLOL No5
- Al Salam Women's Group
- All About Us - Asd Teens
- All Saints GAC
- Antrim Glens Tourism
- Ardinariff Historical & Cultural Society
- Armoy Auld Boys Musical Association
- Armoy Community Association
- Armoy Cross Community Playgroup
- Armoy Girls' Brigade
- Armoy LOL 1065
- Articlave District Community Association
- Articlave LOL
- Assistance Dogs Northern Ireland
- Ballerin GAA

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ballinagarvey Senior Citizens Group • Ballinrees Bowling Club • Ballinrees LOL 1032 • Ballinteer Bowling Club • Ballinteer Flute Band • Ballinteer Orange Lodge • Ballintoy Accordion Band • Ballintoy Old School Restoration Committee • Ballintoy Orange Lodge • Ballintoy Young @ Heart Club • Ballybogey Community Association Limited • Ballybogey Over 50s Club • Ballyboley Pipe Band • Ballycastle & District Over 55 Club • Ballycastle Fitness & Wellbeing • Ballyduff Community Redevelopment Group • Ballydunmaul LOL 306 • Ballykelly Boxers A.B.C. • Ballykelly Men's Shed and Community Association • Ballymaconnelly Renewal Group • Ballymena and District Branch Parkinson's UK • Ballymena Church Members Forum • Ballymena Fibromyalgia Support Group • Ballymoney Hockey Club • Ballymoney Mini & Maxi Rugby Club • Ballynarrig Cultural Group • Ballyrashane L.O.L. 431 • Ballyspallen Cricket Club • Ballyvoy and Carey Community Development Group • Ballywatt Bowling Club • Bann Maine West • Bannvalley Community Association • BCDA Ltd | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believe In you for you • Benbradagh Community Support • Bendooragh & District Community Association • Bendooragh ABOD Cultural Society • Bendooragh Orange Lodge LOL 804 (O'Hara's True Blues) • Benedy Comm Assoc • Benvarden Community Association • Benvarden Friendship and Craft Group • Binevenagh and Coastal Lowlands Landscape Partnership • Blackhill Accordion Band • Boveva Loyal Orange Lodge 260 • Bovevagh Scouts • BraveheartsNI • Brookeville Enterprises • Broughshane & District Community Association Limited • Broughshane & District Pipe Band • Broughshane Improvement Committee • Broughshane Primary School Parent Teacher Association • Broughshane Women's Institute • Building Bridges • Burnfoot Comm. Dev. Assoc. • Burnside & District Community Group • Burnside Village Committee • Bushmills and District Motorcycle Club • Bushmills Orange Hall Committee • Bushside Independent Flute Band • Bushside LOL 923 • Cairncastle L.O.L. 692 |
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- Cairns Residents Group
- Carey Faughs GAC
- Carnlough Community Association
- Carnlough Vintage Society
- Carnmoney Parish Church
- Castle Rowing Club
- Castlecatt LOL 877
- Castlerock Scout Group
- Castleroe PS PTA
- CCDS (Contact Combative Defence Systems)
- Cloney Rural Development Association
- Clough Masonic Lodge
- Cloughmills Community Action Team
- Cloughmills Community Centre
- Cloughmills Cultural & Historical Society
- Coiste Ghaeloideachais Chromghlinne
- Coleraine Borough 50+ Forum
- Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann, Dún Lathaí/ Dunloy Comhaltas
- Community Relations Forum
- Coronation Sports & Social Club
- Counties Antrim & Derry Country Fiddlers Association
- County Antrim Independent Grand Orange Lodge Cultural Committee
- County Londonderry Scout Council
- Craft Collective
- Crafty Wellness
- Creative Crafters Group
- Crow's Nest Community Playgroup
- Cullybackey Apprentice Boys of Derry
- Cullybackey Community Partnership
- Cullybackey LOL 696 & Flute Band
- Cullybackey Pipe Band
- Cullybackey Senior Section

- Cushendall Development Group
- Cushendall Men's Shed
- Cushendun & District Development Association
- Cushendun Building Preservation Trust
- Cushendun Walking Group
- Derramore Presbyterian Woman
- Dervock & District Community Association
- Dervock Community Playgroup
- Dervock LOL 534
- Doury Road Development Group
- Dunaghy Accordion Band
- Dunaghy Auld Boys Flute Band
- Dunaghy Community Partnership
- Dunaghy Flute Band
- Dunaghy ILOL 16
- Dunaghy LOL 791
- Dunaghy RBP 340
- Duneane Primary School Parent Teacher Association
- Dungiven Boys Brigade
- Dungiven Celtic Youth FC
- Dungiven Regeneration Club
- Dunglebe Sporting & Cultural Society
- Dungonnell Ulster Scots Society
- Dunloy Accordion Band
- Dunloy Cycling Club
- Dunloy Football Club
- Dunloy Stronger Together
- Dunluce Guide House
- Dunseverick Accordion Band
- Dunseverick LOL 528
- Edenmore Flute Band

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edenmore Flute Band • Educational and Cultural Group • ELM NI Suicide Prevention, (Every Life Matters) • Equality Period • Feeny Community Association • Feis na nGleann • Foreglen Community Association • Friends of Castlecat War Memorial Hall Association • Friends of Glenann • Friends of Glenariffe • Friends of Maine • Friends of Partytime Garden • Gaeil Ruairi Og agus Gaeil na nGlinnti • Galgorm LOL 239 • Garryduff Crimson Banner LOL536 • Garryduff Crimson Flute Band • Garryduff Flute Band • Garryduff Primary School PTA • Garvagh Boys Brigade Company • Garvagh Development Trust • Garvagh Museum Ltd • Garvagh Phoenix Volleyball Club • Geraldines Camogie Club • Glarryford Farmers' Hall Limited • Glarryford Young Farmers' Club • Glen Rovers GAC Armoy • Glen Rural Community Group (Armoy) • Glenariffe Improvement Group • Glenariffe Oisin CLG • Glenarm Buildings Preservation Trust • Glenarm Community Focus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Glenarm Community Pre-School • Glenarm Village Committee • Glenkeen Fife & Drum Club • Glenlough Running Club • Glenravel & District Community & Residents Association • Glenravel Community Development Association (GCDA) • Glenravel Community Playgroup • Glenravel Historical Society (Ballymena) • Glens and Dalriada U3A • Glen's Community First Responders • Glens Cycling and Triathlon Club • Glens of Antrim Comhaltas • Glens Red Squirrel Group • Glens Runners • Glens Storytelling and Cultural Heritage Group • Gloonan Cultural Society • Gloonan LOL 504 • Glynn Community Group • Good Morning Ballymena • Gortnaghey Community Association • Gracehill LOL 772 • Granagh Independent L.O.L. No 30 • Grange Fife and Drum Club • Harbour Bears Pre-School • Harry Gregg Foundation • Harryville Men's Shed • Health Connecting LTD • Heart of the Glens Festival • Hillstown Rural Community Group • Home-Start Causeway |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspire Wellbeing - The Glens Floating Support • Islandmagee Community Development Association • Kells & Connor Community Improvement Association • Kellswater Orange Lodge • Kids Inn After School Club • Kilrea & District Ulster Scots Society • Kilrea Rainbows • Kirkinriola Early Years • Landhead Drumming Club • Landhead Youth Club • Largy Community Association • Larne & District Girl Guides • Larne Community Care Centre • Larne Lighthouse • Larne Well-Being Hub • Latharna Rang Gaeilge • Lily of the North LOL 249 • Limavady Advice Centre • Limavady Orange Youth Forum • Lisnagrot Accordion Band • Local Economic Development Company (LEDCOM) Limited • Loch Mor Dal gCais • Longstone Primary School • Loughan LOL 1020 • Loughan Ulster Scots • Loughanreagh LOL 909 • Loughgiel Community Association Ltd • Loughgiel Mums and Tots • Lylehill Young Farmers Club | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mae Murray Foundation • Magilligan Congregation of the Presbyterian Church of Ireland • Marconi Radio Group • Marlagh Educational & Cultural Group • Mary Queen of Peace PTA • Mens Shed @Foreglen • Millbrook Community Development Association • Milltown Accordion Band • Monday Club Portglenone • Moneydig LOL 273 • Moneydig Rural Network • Moneydig Young Conquerors Flute Band • Monkstown Boxing Club • Mosside Community Association • Mosside Independent Lodge & Band Club • Mount Druid Purple Star Craigalappin LOL 881 • Movenis Rising Sons of William Flute Band • Moyarget Chosen Few LOL • Moyasset Heritage and Cultural Society • Moyasset True Blues LOL 531 • NAS Larne and Carrickfergus • Naturally North Coast and Glens CIC • NHSCT Befriends Cafe • North Antrim Agricultural Association Ltd • North Antrim Cultural & Musical Society • Oasis Caring in Action Antrim • O'Briens Foreglen GAC • O'Connors Glack GAC • Portglenone Community Workshop & Men's Shed |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portglenone Enterprise Group • Portglenone Paddlers • Portglenone Thursday Senior Citizens Bowling Club • Portrush Hockey Club • Pride of the Park Flute Band • Ramoan Friendship Group • Randal Community Network • Rasharkin and District Rural Cultural and Educational Society • Rasharkin Community Playgroup • Rathlin Development & Community Association • Ravel Rascals Parent Toddler Group • Rice Kitchen Ministries • Riding for the Disabled Association Coleraine • Riverside Community Enterprises (RCE) • Roseyards Girls' Brigade • Ruairi Og Hurling and Camogie Club • Saint Anne's PTA, Corkey • Scoil Rince na Speirini • Seaivew Integrated Primary School • See-Saw Playgroup • Sensory Kids • St. Brigid's Cloughmills GAC • St. Canice's GAC • St. Ciaran's Parent Support Group • St. Colm's Drum GAC • St. Ergnats GAC, Moneyglass • St. Johns Primary School PTA • St. Josephs Parish Centre • St. Jude's Parish Church • St. Mary's GAC Banagher | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • St. Mary's GAC Rasharkin • St. Mary's Gaelic Athletic Club Faughanvale • St. Mary's Primary School and Nursery Unit • St. Patrick's Primary School & Nursery Unit Rasharkin PTA • St. Patrick's Primary School PTFA • St. Patrick's, Dungiven Camogie Club • Staffordstown Accordion Band • Staffordstown Rural Community Group • Star of Knockagh Accordion Band • Stitching Time • Straidarran Community Playgroup • Stranocum & District Development Group • Stranocum Youths Football Club • SUNSHINE KIDS (3rd Presbyterian Parent & Toddler Group) • Tapp Friens Community Group • Taylorstown Ulster Scots Association • Templepatrick Action Community Association • The Ballymena Club for the Hard of Hearing • The Bushmills Trust • The Country Preschool • The Glens of Antrim Historical Society • The Glens Social Club • The Glens Youth Club • The Living Rooms Project and Community Hub • The Village Garden (Broughshane) Limited • Third Portglenone Presbyterian Church • Tildarg True Blues • Toome Men's Shed • Torrens Memorial Hall • Tullagh Fife and Drum Club |
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- Tullagh Fife and Drum Club
- Tullaghans Sons of Liberty Flute Band
- Tullygarley Community Association
- Ulster Memorial Drumming Club
- Vineyard Compassion
- Vow Accordion Band
- Vow Cultural Committee
- Wellington Rec Football Club
- Whitehead Storehouse
- Willowbreeze Community Anglers
- Women on Wednesday

Omagh Forum for Rural Associations

- 1st Ballinamallard Scouts
- 1st Magheraculmoney Scouts, Kesh
- 338th Mountjoy Girls Brigade
- 6th Fermanagh Scouts
- Action for Children
- Altamuskin Community Association
- Aughakillymaude Community Association
- Ballinamallard United
- Belcoo GFC
- Belleek Mens Shed
- Beragh Swifts
- Beragh Swifts Community Group
- Blacksessiagh Farmers
- Boho Youth Club
- Brackey Flute Band
- British Red Cross Omagh
- Cappagh YFCU
- Carrowshee park/Sylvan Hill Comm. Assoc.
- Cashel Community Association
- Cavan Development Association
- Clanabogan Community Association
- Clanabogan Development Initiative
- Cleenish Millenium Hall, Arney

- Cooley Connect
- Cooley PS PTA
- Derrygannon Art Group
- Derrygannon Community Association
- Derrygonnelly PTA
- Devenish GFC, Garrison
- Dromore Education & Community Partnership
- Drumduff & Drumnakilly Community Association
- Drumquin Development Association
- Drumquin Womens Group
- Drumquin Young at Heart
- DSG2010
- Easilink Community Transport
- Edenderry LOL
- Ederney Community Development Trust
- Ederney Trust
- Eire Og HC, Carrickmore
- Erne Gaels
- Eskra Childcare
- Eskra Community Association
- Farm Families
- Fermanagh & Western FA
- Fermanagh Community Transport
- Fermanagh GAA
- Fermanagh Sports & Cultural Awareness Association
- Fintona Pearses Bowling Club
- Flaxmill Centre
- FOCUS
- Fr. Shields Camogie Club
- Friends of Clachan Court

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Garrison Community Hub • Gortaclare Pipe Band • Greencastle Retirement Club • Homestart, Omagh • Irvinestown Scouts • Kesh Development Association • Killadeas LOL • Killesher Development Association • Kinawley Brian Boru's • Kinawley Community • Kirlish Rifle and Pistol Club • Knocks Community Association • Lakeland Special Olympics Club • LAST Surestart • Lisbellaw & South Fermanagh War Society • Lisbellaw Flute Band • Lisbellaw LOL • Lisnaskea Emmetts • Little Smarties Pre-School • Little Treasures Playgroup • Loughmacrory 50+ Club • Loughmacrory and Murrins District Aglers Association • Loughmacrory Community Development Association • Loughmacrory GFC • Loughmacrory Handball Club • Loughmacrory Over 50's Club • Lower Lough Erne Sporting Club • Maguiresbridge District L.O.L. No. 14 • McClintock PS PTFA, Seskinore • Melvin Enterprises Ltd • Milestone Centre, Carrickmore | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mountfield FC • Mullinagroagh Regeneration Society • Mullymesker PFTA • Omagh CCE • Omagh Protestant Boys Flute Band • Roscavey Bygone Days • Roslea Shamrocks GFC • Rouskey Com & Dev Association • Seskinore & Clogherney Church • Sixmilecross Community 1st Responders • Sixmilecross Pipe Band • St. Dympna's GFC, Fromore • St. Dympna's Ladies GFC, Dromore • St. Molaise Community Hall, Irvinestown • St. Patricks GFC. Donagh • Tattyreagh Community Group • Tattyreagh Youth & Community Group • Teemore Shamrocks • Tempo Development Association • Tempo Parish Church • Termonmagurk Community Responders • The Erne District Chinese Families' and Friends' Association • Trillick Arts & Culture • Trillick Community Group • Trillick St. Macartans GAC • Tubrid Vaughan Bowling Club • Tyrone GAA Health & Wellbeing Co. • W.F. Marshall Centre • White Hare Daycare, Creggan Community Association |
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Rural Area Partnership in Derry (RAPID)

- A Little Pick Me Up
- Aghyaran Accordion Band
- Aghyaran LOL 1641
- Ardbarron Cultural Association
- Ardbarron Pipe Band
- Ardstraw Area Women's Group
- Ardstraw Presbyterian Bowling Club
- Aughabrack & District Community Association
- Banagher Community Playgroup Ltd
- Bonds Glen Community Association
- Bonds Glen Cricket Club
- Campsie Masonic Community Hall
- Castle K1 Martial Arts Academy
- Claudy Rural Development Ltd
- Craigbane Hall Committee
- Creative Arts Social Team CIC
- Cumber Claudy Community Association
- Dennett Interchange
- Derg Valley Hockey Club
- Derg Valley Hospitality Association
- Derg Valley Vintage Club
- Eglinton Building Bridges
- Essan Cottage CIC
- Faughan Rural Community Hub Ltd
- First Steps Daycare
- Glenelly Development Trust
- Glenmornan Community Association
- Gortilea Social Farm CIC
- Kildoag & Bonds Glen Historical Association
- Kildoag Area Women's Group
- Kildoag Cultural Society
- Kildoag Pipe Band
- Killen Pipe Band
- Killen Pride of the Village LOL 1272

- Killen Women's Group
- Killeter & District Development Trust
- Killeter Historical Society
- KVC Creativity CIC
- Learmount Community Development Group
- Lislaird Pipe Band
- Newbuildings Community & Environmental Association
- Sion Mills Community Forum
- St. Eugenes GAC Castleberg
- St. Josephs GAC Craigbane
- Strathfoyle Community Association
- Strathfoyle Womens Group
- The Drummond Centre Youth Project
- The Oaks Rural Community Hub
- Two Castles Amateur Boxing Club
- Two Castles Community Development Association

The Antrim, Down, and Armagh (TADA) Rural Support Network

- 1st Drumgooland and Kilkinamurry Boys Brigade
- 1st Waringstown Boys Brigade
- 2nd Waringstown Girl Guides
- Aghalee Village Hall
- Amahinchago Rural Development Association
- Annaclone summer scheme
- Annaghmore/Eglisish Regeneration & Development Association
- Aughnaskeagh & Moybrick Community Development Association
- Autumn Leaves
- Ballela Community Association

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ballydougan Bowling Club • Ballydougan Patchwork and Craft Group • Ballygorman School House • Ballyhegan Davitts GFC • Ballymacanallen Community Association • Ballymacnab CDA • Ballymacormick Rural Community Association • Ballyvichnahelly Rural Development Group • Banbridge VIP Club • Birches Action Rural Network (BARN) • Blackskull Methodist Church • Bleary Farmers Hall Management Committee • Bleary Young farmers • Brackagh Golden Springs LOL 18 • Carnew Rural Society • Carsons Memorial Pipe Band • Chrysalis Woman's centre • Church of Ireland, Select Vestry for Parish of Clogher & District Cultural Development Group • Clogher Protestant Boys Flute Band • Clonmore Regeneration Group • Closkelt Highland Dancers • Cloughskelt Rural and Cultural Society • Club Elegance • Coach House Regeneration LTD • Collone Young Famers • Corbet Accordion Band • Corcreeney Rural Development Association • Corkley Orange Hall • Country Comes to Town • Derrycarne Rural Community Association | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Derryhirk Rural Development Association • Derrymacash Playgroup and Afterschools • Derrynoose Community Centre & Derrynoose GAC • Derrynoose Great Oaks • Derrynoose Walking Club • Diamond Rural Development Group • Dollingstown Ulster Scots • Donaghcloney British Legion • Donaghcloney Community Garden • Donaghcloney Football Club • Donaghcloney linen green association • Donaghcloney Mill Cricket and Recreation Club • Dromara Community group • Dromara Connect • Drumgath Ladies Group • Drumlough Community Association • Finnis Rural Development • Glascar Presbyterian Church • Glenanne Community Development Association • Glenavy Development Partnership • Glenavy Youth Group • Grange True Blues LOL 36 • Halftown Community Association • Healthy Kidz • Holy Trinity Church Waringstown • Jerrettspass Community Association LTD • John Hunter Accordion Band • Kilcluney Community Hub • Kinallen Rural Development Society • Lagan Valley Rural Transport |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Life 4 Veterans• Lislea Community Association• Lislea Mens Shed• Little Villagers Playgroup• Logic Café• Logic Youth Group Moira• Loughgall & District Improvement Association• Loughgall Football Club• Lurgan and District Horse and Cattle Show Society• Lurganville and District Community Association• Madden Raparees GAA• Magheralin Hall Co Ltd• Markethill Festival Committee• Middletown Friendly Club• Milford Community Development Association• Moirafriendship Group | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Moonbeam Crafts• Mullabrack Rural Community Group• Poyntzpass Silver Band• Rathfriland Football Club• Rathfriland Pre-School Playgroup• Red Star of Drumcree RBP 30 Resurgam Trust• Shaws Fisheries Limited• Stoneyford Community & Youth Association• The Coach House Regeneration• The Singing Kettle• TWG Plus Tandrem Walking• Tyrone Ditches Pipe Band• Waringstown Development Association• Waringstown Together• Waringstown vintage cable cage committee• Weavers Cancer Support Group• Whitemountain & District Community Association |
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For further information:

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