

Committee for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs
c/o Stella McArdle, Clerk
Room 244, Parliament Buildings
Ballymiscaw
Stormont
BELFAST
BT4 3XX

13th January 2021

Dear Chair

Further to the letter dated 1st December 2020 requesting an input from Causeway Coast and Glens Local Action Group on the future Rural Affairs Policy and Framework Delivery, please see below comments from members of the LAG Board.

- Next programme needs to focus on investing in the rural community infrastructure, people and relationships and less on new capital builds. It's about growing and maintaining and bringing to life what we now have and allowing rural people to thrive. This is also in the context of post-covid where the importance of community relationships, volunteers and neighbours was noticed.
- Important that any future programme design, delivery and accountability is done on a truly equal partnership approach with communities and citizens. Statutory bodies inc. local councils cannot be driving it on their own.
- Important that climate change and environmental sustainability are actively mainstreamed throughout the programme and not just a limited add on. This goes the same for equality and good relations.
- In terms of the connectivity theme I think there is a very strong case to be made around transforming our social care system in rural areas - e.g. home help - where people are paid fair wages and providing the support and connectivity that allows older people to maintain their independence as long as possible.
- If the new Rural Programme won't be on the ground until 2022, then there needs to be investment over 2021 to bridge this transition and get folk ready for the new programme.
- The application process and the match funding requirements needs to be user friendly and not off putting to new applicants.
- Young people need to be at the heart of the new programme as this current generation heals from the impact of COVID on their employment, education and wellbeing.

The LAG Board would request that the consultation for the new Framework takes place as soon as possible as a matter of priority.

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I hope this input is of assistance and we look forward to having an input to the full consultation of the future Policy and Framework.

Yours faithfully

William King

William King
Chair
Causeway Coast and Glens Local Action Group