



Tithe an
Oireachtais
Houses of the
Oireachtas

**An Comhchoiste um Ealaíona, Oidhreacht, Gnóthaí
Réigiúnacha, Tuaithe agus Gaeltachta**

**Joint Committee on Arts, Heritage,
Regional Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs**

32Ú DÁIL ÉIREANN / 25Ú SEANAD ÉIREANN

**TUARASCÁIL MAIDIR LEIS
AN TOSCAIREACT CHUIG CONTAE AN CHABHÁIN,
CONTAE NA HIARMHÍ, CONTAE NA MÍ AGUS CONTAE
MHUINEACHÁIN**

**REPORT ON THE DELEGATION TO COUNTY CAVAN,
COUNTY WESTMEATH, COUNTY MEATH AND COUNTY
MONAGHAN**

26 Bealtaine 2017

26 May 2017

INNÉACS / INDEX

INNÉACS	
INDEX	3
1. RÉAMHRÁ	
INTRODUCTION.....	4
2. CRUINIÚ I MBÉAL ÁTHA BUÍ, CONTAE NA MÍ	
MEETING IN ATHBOY, COUNTY MEATH	5
3. CRUINIÚ I GCOILL AN CHOLLAIGH, CONTAE AN CHABHÁIN	
MEETING IN BAILIEBOROUGH, COUNTY CAVAN.....	11
SEISIÚN 1: CÉARD A THEASTAÍONN A DHÉANAMH CHUN POBAL TUAITHE	
INMHARTHANA A CHAOMHNÚ	
SESSION 1: WHAT IT TAKES TO SUSTAIN A VIABLE RURAL	
COMMUNITY.....	11
SEISIÚN 2: FORBAIRT PHOBAIL, SHÓISIALTA AGUS	
EACHNAMAÍOCHTA AGUS COMHAR I GCONTAETHA NA	
TEORANN SA TODHCHAÍ	
SESSION 2: THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC	
DEVELOPMENT AND CO-OPERATION IN BORDER	
COUNTIES.....	16
4. CRÍOCH / CONCLUSION	19
AGUISÍN 1: COMHALTAÍ AN CHOMHCHOISTE	
APPENDIX 1: MEMBERS OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE	21

1. RÉAMHRA / INTRODUCTION

At its meeting on 10 May 2017 the Joint Committee on Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (the Joint Committee) agreed, that before completing and publishing its imminent reports on ‘What it takes to sustain a viable rural community’ and ‘The future of community, social and economic development and co-operation in border counties’, to send a delegation to engage with representative groups and individuals in four rural areas that would be representative of rural areas around the country.

The Joint Committee agreed to send a delegation to meet with representatives from the towns of Athboy, County Meath (Baile Átha Buí, Contae na Mí) and Castlepollard County Westmeath (Coinn Toirc, Contae na hIarmhí), at a meeting in Athboy and to meet with representatives from the towns of Bailieborough, County Cavan (Coill an Chollaigh, Contae an Chabháin) and Carricmacross, County Monaghan (Carraig Mhachaire Rois, Contae Mhuineacháin) at a meeting in Bailieborough.

The Joint Committee agreed the following Agenda for the delegation:-

1. Morning meeting in Athboy with representatives of the Chambers of Commerce, a local community development group, the local Job Club and the County Enterprise Office from each of the towns of Athboy, County Meath and Castlepollard, County Westmeath;
2. Afternoon meeting in Bailieborough with representatives of the Chambers of Commerce, a local community development group, the local Job Club and the County Enterprise Office from each of the towns of Bailieborough, County Cavan and Carrickmacross, County Monaghan.

The Joint Committee agreed to also invite elected representatives and local authority officials to the meetings.

The Joint Committee agreed that these meetings would provide a practical and hands-on aspect to its two projects and would facilitate it in including evidence gathered on the ground. It would allow the Joint Committee to review the situation in four small rural towns and their hinterlands as part of its two current projects.

2. CRUINNIÚ I MBÉAL ÁTHA BUÍ, CONTAE NA MÍ MEETING IN ATHBOY, COUNTY MEATH

The meeting in Athboy, County Meath took place in the Lawrence Hotel from 9.00 am to 12.00 pm on 26 May 2017.

The meeting discussed the topic 'What it takes to sustain a viable rural community'.

The meeting was attended by An Teachta Dála Shane Cassells; An Teachta Dála Michael Collins; Councillor Úna D'Arcy – Westmeath County Council; Mr Joe English – Meath Local Enterprise Board; Councillor David Gilroy – Meath County Council; Ms Bernie Ginnell – Westmeath Local Enterprise Office; Councillor Johnny Guirke – Meath County Council; Mr Keith Mulvey – Athboy Development Group; Councillor Frank Mc Dermot – Westmeath County Council; Councillor Sarah Reilly – Meath County Council; and An Teachta Dála Peadar Tóibín who chaired the meeting.



**Baile Átha Buí, Contae na Mí agus Coinn Toirc, Contae na hIarmhí
Athboy, County Meath and Castlepollard, County Westmeath**

Opening Address by An Teachta Dála Peadar Tóibín

An Teachta Dála Peadar Tóibín, in his opening address, set out the topic for discussion, describing how the distribution of Ireland's growing population had been characterised by spatially rudderless planning. He described how population growth has been concentrated on the main cities, leading to a strain on services and reduced access to housing.

In addition, the commuter belts for urban areas had extended out further from the urban centres, leading to unique challenges for these areas, while a third rural zone did not enjoy the benefits of access to the urban centres and suffered from ongoing depopulation, poverty and isolation.

He described how Athboy, Castlepollard and the surrounding areas faced the challenges of being located in the commuter belt zone and of being rural areas. In this they were representatives of towns and areas throughout the greater Leinster area and beyond.

He identified a big issue as the lack of transport infrastructure for commuters. He pointed out that more Meath residents left the county to work every day than worked in Meath itself. He called for the Government to invest in the transport and communications infrastructure of the different counties from which commuters travelled to Dublin (Baile Átha Cliath) every day.

Contributions by Participants

Each of the participants at the meeting outlined their views, insights and opinions based on their experiences operating in the various sectors.

For convenience, the contributions made are listed in alphabetical order and not in the order that they occurred at the meeting.

An Teachta Dála Cassells said that Athboy was a prime example of a thriving rural town. He attributed this success to regional planning strategies. He described how the East coast of Ireland was overheated in terms of development, but how, even within that area, growth was not spread evenly. In County Meath for example, the towns of Navan (An Uaimh) and Ashbourne (Cill Dhéagláin) were growing whereas the town of Oldcastle (An Seanchaisleán) was experiencing ongoing depopulation.

He said that the National Planning Framework needed to take responsibility for the situation. He warned that the Capital Development Plan needed to be ambitious and to invest in infrastructure in rural areas to avoid the same depopulation trends continuing into the future. This was the job of the Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas. He reiterated that Athboy was bucking the trend for rural Ireland and had shown what a strong community could achieve with some assistance from local and national Government.

An Teachta Dála Collins raised some of the issues affecting his constituency in West Cork and compared these with the situation in County Meath and County Westmeath. Lack of broadband connection and poor quality roads were the main barriers to employment. People were being blocked from either working remotely or from commuting to more urban areas.

He expressed concern that the €40 million available in 2017 for LEADER projects would not all be allocated by the end of the year.

Councillor D’Arcy raised several issues related to transport links in North County Westmeath. Children were only provided with transport to the nearest school and if parents wished to send children to school in another parish they were obliged to arrange their own transportation.

She said that there was a lack of transport links to bring people out of the urban centres and into the rural areas for tourism. She proposed that tax revenue from urban centres be allocated to develop tourism in rural areas. This would benefit both local people from the urban areas and tourists visiting the rural areas.

She expressed her concerns at the impact of industrial windfarms and peat companies on rural areas. She said that more funding was needed by Westmeath County Council to address these issues and to protect the local environment and heritage. The location of these industrial windfarms and companies was having a negative effect on the development of tourism in rural areas, which included ancient roadways that formed an integral part of the Ireland's Ancient East tourism strategy.

She raised the issue of the provision of services to children and adults with special needs. She said that work was urgently needed on Saint Mary's school in Delvin (Dealbhna Mhór), County Westmeath and questioned why the Health Service Executive was housing adults with disabilities in isolated rural houses where there was no suitable infrastructure and where the county council did not have the funding to build footpaths and other required infrastructure.

She discussed the negative impact of online retailing on employment in rural towns and called on local communities to support local businesses. She criticised onerous procurement and tender processes that put an undue burden on smaller businesses.

She called for:-

Government to incentivise farming to young people so that knowledge was passed down to younger generations;

Increased investment in the transition-year for secondary-level students, with a focus on sending students to study in other European Union countries;

An improved broadband and mobile telephone signal to be provided in rural areas;

A scheme to bring services out to rural areas one day a week;

Greater investment to improve the access and infrastructure available at Lough Lene (Loch Léinn) and Lough Derravaragh (Loch Dairbhreach) in County Westmeath.

She highlighted issues affecting the quality of life in rural areas, such as long commutes, lack of childcare and underemployment.

She said that the Data Commissioner had said that county councils could no longer name and shame those people who had been convicted of fly-tipping. She disagreed with this, as naming and shaming was one of the few methods by which county councils could effectively tackle the issue.

She called for grants to install independent living technology in homes so that elderly people could continue to live in rural Ireland instead of being obliged to move into nursing homes.

Mr English outlined how the Meath Local Enterprise Office (the Office) supported small businesses in rural areas. Thanks to a recent 20% increase in grant funding, the Office had been able to hire two new full-time staff to run information and training sessions throughout the county. The Office wanted to spread the message that innovation was important in establishing businesses and wanted to assist in establishing scalable businesses that could then be handed over to Enterprise Ireland.

He described how a service level agreement on co-operation had been established between LEADER and the Office in order to ensure that the focus was on the person who needed the support, and not on competition between the schemes. Since the food industry was so important in County Meath, the Office had a full-time Food Development Officer to work with food businesses. This was something that could be replicated around the country.

He cited poor broadband connectivity and a lack of third-level educational institutions in the region as difficulties. He proposed the development of outreach programmes to build links between rural areas and third level institutions. He said that what was also needed was a person to work full-time on developing human capital in the area.

He agreed with the An Teachta Dála Tóibín that there was a gap in support for companies that were too big to access support from a Local Enterprise Office and not big enough to access support from Enterprise Ireland.

He discussed the impact of online shopping and suggested that people purchasing online should make every effort to purchase from local retailers who provided an online facility to customers. He proposed the introduction of a trading online voucher scheme to encourage rural businesses to set up online shops.

Councillor Gilroy described how an approach based on partnership and co-operation had been adopted in the town of Athboy. He emphasised that rural communities were not looking for things to be done for them. What they needed was support.

Proper identification of the cultural and economic assets of the Athboy area and other rural areas in County Meath was needed in order to plan for rural sustainability. He also emphasised the importance of volunteer involvement and suggested that national models be based on what successful rural communities were doing.

He proposed that schemes should be put in place to support elderly people moving into towns and living in accommodation suitable for their stage of life.

Ms Ginnell highlighted the need for better broadband provision in rural areas. She described how the Westmeath Local Enterprise Office (the Office) had established a new e-working centre that catered for small businesses and individuals. However, outside of the towns, access to broadband was very poor in the area.

The Office provided training and mentoring for small businesses. Most of these businesses had fewer than ten employees and would benefit greatly from a better broadband connection. This applied both to people working from home and to individuals and businesses operating in rural areas. In addressing these problems, the Office had appointed a new full-time Broadband Officer to liaise with broadband providers and to develop a streamlined process for rolling out broadband services.

She raised the issue of childcare and its impact on availability for employment. Primary schools finished at 2.00 pm or 3.00 pm and there was a lack of services before and after school hours. She proposed a drop-off service in the mornings at rural schools.

Councillor Guirke raised the lack of funding faced by Meath County Council and called for better broadband, roads and transport infrastructure. As an example, he outlined how the absence of a direct public transport link from Oldcastle to Dublin was negatively affecting the quality of life of people living in the Oldcastle area, both in economic and social terms.

Councillor Mc Dermot said that there were 15 vacancies in two employment schemes in North County Westmeath. He proposed raising wages and investigating ways to encourage people to engage in employment schemes.

Tourism was growing in County Westmeath and organisations were working together on the Ireland's Ancient East Scheme.

He called for funding for a full-time researcher and procurer for each area to identify and manage grant schemes and to work with Local Enterprise Boards and Public Participation Networks.

Mr Mulvey outlined how the Athboy Development Group (the Group) was working to benefit the town of Athboy and its hinterland. Volunteers were at the heart of the community and between 30 and 40 people spent between 20 and 30 hours each week volunteering in the community. The Group had a multi-disciplinary approach and engaged with the local authority, local committees, Public Participation Networks, enterprise boards, linkage groups, etc. At that time, the Group was working on a Youth Strategy as it was very important to involve the younger generation in the work.

On a macro level, the main issue the Group faced was that of funding, as this impacted on what the Group could do. The cost of insurance was a big problem, as was the case for many other voluntary groups.

He raised the issues of crime and safety, and of the provision of youth services in rural areas.

He emphasised that a bottom-up approach was needed for planning strategies. Communities needed to be asked what they wanted, and plans needed to be based on current, not historical, data. Local communities needed to map their resources and to create an asset register to understand what tangible and intangible assets they had, and what tangible and intangible assets they needed. The town of Athboy could be used as blueprint for this process.

Councillor Reilly praised the work of community groups in the Athboy area. These included the Pride of Place Committee, the Irish Countrywomen's Association and the organisers of the Saint Patrick's Day parade in the town.

She called for the CLÁR Scheme, to which the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs had allocated €5 million, to be widened to include Athboy, Oldcastle and other towns.

She re-iterated that connectivity was a huge issue. The provision of adequate bus routes and roads, and access to broadband were needed for job creation and expansion. She called for the flexi-bus service to be maintained. The maintenance of the post offices was also vital.

She called for the re-introduction of Government-funded Community Involvement Schemes and Local Improvement Schemes in County Meath.

She highlighted the importance of the Irish language and the fact that there were two Gaeltacht areas in County Meath. She called for more investment to maintain and preserve this unique culture.

A general discussion followed these contributions.

An Teachta Dála Tóibín proposed that the Joint Committee examine the issue of State-owned buildings that were not in use and the possibility of such buildings being provided to community groups for use.

Several participants called for the Government to buy up derelict and vacant buildings and also make Government-owned property available to local authorities and community groups.

The participants discussed levels of intercounty communication and co-operation, and the difficulties caused by county boundaries. Some funding schemes were based on the midlands region and that created a boundary. Some bodies had been established to facilitate co-operation but this had only occurred on an ad hoc basis.

The impact of the Regional Assembly had not been limited.

There was agreement that the funnelling of people to urban population centres needed to be halted through well-thought out planning on a local level, investment in rural services and infrastructure, and by supporting entrepreneurship and small businesses in rural areas.

An Teachta Dála Tóibín thanked the participants for attending the meeting and for their insightful contributions and proposals. He said that the information gathered at this meeting would provide a valuable contribution to the final report of the Joint Committee on the topic 'What it takes to sustain a viable rural community'.

3. RUINNIÚ I GCOILL AN CHOLLAIGH, CONTAE AN CHABHÁIN MEETING IN BAILIEBOROUGH, COUNTY CAVAN

The meeting in Bailieborough, County Cavan took place in the Bailie Hotel from 3.00 pm to 5.30 pm on 26 May 2017.

The meeting discussed the topics 'What it takes to sustain a viable rural community' (Session 1) and 'The future of community, social and economic development and co-operation in border counties' (Session 2).

The meeting was attended by Councillor Colm Carthy – Monaghan County Council; Mr Breffni Clarke – Bailieborough Community Employment Scheme; Mr Paul Clifford – Director of Services for Economic and Community Development, Monaghan County Council; An Teachta Dála Michael Collins; Mr Robert Greer, Chairperson – Carrickmacross Local Development Group; Mr Jim Hand – Carrickmacross Chamber of Commerce; Councillor Paddy Mc Donald – Cavan County Council; Mr Gabriel O'Connell – Monaghan Integrated Development; Mr Brendan Reilly, Chief Executive Officer – Breffni Enterprises, An Teachta Dála Niamh Smyth and An Teachta Dála Peadar Tóibín who chaired the meeting.

SEISIÚN 1: CÉARD A THEASTAÍONN A DHÉANAMH CHUN POBAL TUAITHE INMHARTHANA A CHAOMHNÚ SESSION 1: WHAT IT TAKES TO SUSTAIN A VIABLE RURAL COMMUNITY

Opening Address by An Teachta Dála Peadar Tóibín

In his opening address, the An Teachta Dála Tóibín described the financial and social pressures caused by the overconcentration of population growth in the greater Dublin area.

He called for investment in transport, human capital and other infrastructure in rural areas, in order to attract business.

Contributions by Participants

Each of the participants at the meeting outlined their views, insights and opinions based on their experiences operating in the various sectors.

For convenience, the contributions made are listed in alphabetical order and not in the order that they occurred at the meeting.

Mr Breffni criticised the high turnover and privatised model of JobPath, which provided less support to participants than to the community-led approach of Tús and Community Employment schemes. He also criticised the increased paperwork involved in making applications under LEADER schemes.

Mr Clarke spoke about the impact that the Bailieborough Employment Scheme (the Scheme) had had on the town and its hinterland. At that time, 32 people were placed with 25 different sponsoring groups under the Scheme. Participants were provided with training and support. Most of the employment was in the construction and childcare sectors, and over 70% of participants went on to either full-time employment or full-time education.

He highlighted the importance of the social inclusion aspect of the Scheme, and how it provided participants with a routine and a support network, and had positive benefits for mental health of participants. However, he also described how it was becoming harder to find participants for the Scheme, as more people were finding employment in Dublin, mainly in construction, and because of competition from JobPath.

Councillor Carthy emphasised the importance of small and medium size enterprises in rural areas.

He called for more funding to be made available to local authorities to invest in roads and infrastructure.

He described how people of age twenty to thirty had no option but to emigrate, commute long distances or live away from home during the week, in order to find work.

Referring to the problem of empty retail units in rural towns he warned that a rates system based on profit rather than floor space could incentivise businesses to under-report profits.

In relation to educational opportunities in County Cavan and County Monaghan he described how Cavan Institute of Technology and Monaghan Institute of Technology were working with Solas and local businesses to create courses that matched the needs of local small and medium sized enterprises.

Mr Clifford described the strong small-and-medium-size enterprise culture in County Monaghan was mainly focused around the agri-food and engineering sectors. However, most employment was at the primary and secondary levels, and there were few employment opportunities for graduates. He criticised the focus on cities in planning strategies and highlighted how many towns were no longer eligible for funding under the European Regional Development Fund.

He called for investment in primary health care, roads, broadband, business and technology parks, mentoring, and training resources, and the tourism sector.

He highlighted the impact of administrative divisions in rural Ireland. In terms of primary care, County Cavan and County Monaghan were in the North-West region, and State bodies for the area were focused on the West or North-West of the State. However, County Cavan and County Monaghan had traditionally seen and continued to see Dublin and Dundalk (Dún Dealgan) as their main markets and urban hubs. He proposed that the region be developed as a distribution hub between the cities of Derry (Doire) and Dublin, capitalising on the N2 / A5 motorway.

He discussed ways to tackle dereliction and unused buildings in towns. He explained that the only tool available to local authorities was the Derelict Sites Acts, which allows local authorities to charge a derelict sites levy amounting to 3% of the market value of the land concerned.

An Teachta Dála Collins said that his community and constituency in West Cork faced many of the same issues faced by rural communities around the country and in County Cavan and County Monaghan.

One of the main issues faced by rural communities was the lack of adequate transport infrastructure. For example, there was no train line to West Cork as it had been removed many years previously, and this was a great loss to the local community there.

Lack of an adequate broadband provision was also a serious handicap to local business people in the small towns, but to an even greater degree in the rural areas outside the small towns. This was inhibiting people from investing, or establishing businesses, in these small towns and rural areas.

He expressed concern that the €40 million available in 2017 for LEADER projects would not all be allocated by the end of the year.

Mr Greer highlighted the importance of local community groups in sustaining a viable rural community.

Carrickmacross Lace, the Tidy Towns, local sports clubs and church groups all contributed to sustaining the local community.

Mr Hand described the town of Carrickmacross as an example of a success story in rural Ireland. Thanks to local authority funding, the Carrickmacross Chamber of Commerce had been able to promote and support businesses in the town during the recession.

The Local Enterprise Office had provided a subsidised course in social media and online marketing for business owners and staff.

A higher quality of broadband was essential for further development in the area.

The Chamber of Commerce had established a gift voucher scheme to support local businesses.

He proposed providing greater support for succession-planning for retailers and for small business owners. There were schemes in place to incentivise younger generations to take over family farms and these schemes should be replicated for businesses in the tertiary sector.

He called for Living-Over-The-Shop Schemes to be extended to rural towns to encourage people to move into these towns.

He suggested that the value-added food products sector provided opportunities for local businesses. Food producers should investigate the artisan food market, and local farmers markets could support this. The artisan food industry also presented opportunities for tourism.

He raised the issue of the problem of empty retail units in rural towns and the lack of funding available to open new retail businesses. He proposed that lower rates or a reduced rent scheme could encourage new businesses.

Councillor Mc Donald drew attention to the lack of a sufficient number of Garda Síochána stations in County Cavan and elsewhere in rural Ireland.

He said that the provision of broadband and mobile telephone coverage in rural Ireland was insufficient and rural Ireland was being forgotten about in this regard.

Referring to the problem of empty retail units in rural towns he proposed that the current system of deciding rates for retail businesses based on floor space should be amended.

Mr O'Connell described the work of the Monaghan Integrated Development Company. He called for the Back-to-Work Enterprise Allowance Scheme, which was under review, to be retained.

He criticised the new application process under the LEADER Programme. There were at that time 155 groups at the expression-of-interest stage in County Monaghan but only two applications had been approved so far. He pointed out the expression-of-interest stage had added more steps and time to the process, which as a result comprised 18 steps in total.

He raised the issue of the burden placed on local development companies by their having to tender for contracts and he called for better co-operation between the Government and local development companies.

Mr Reilly referred to the community work placement schemes in County Cavan such as Tús, LEADER and the Back-to-Work Enterprise Allowance. He said that there were between 800 and 900 participants on schemes in the County, approximately 60% of whom remained in employment after completing a scheme. However, much of this work was on a contract basis or involved having to commute to Dublin. He pointed out that self-employment was often a better option for people, due to the lack of jobs in the county and he praised the can-do attitude of local people.

He noted that more competitive process had made it more difficult to access LEADER funds. He criticised the amount of time and investment required upfront during the application process and he described how over 150 applications were, at that time, at the expression-of-interest stage. Over 60 application forms had been sent out to groups but only one application had been completed in County Cavan.

Referring to the problem of empty retail units in rural towns he suggested that new businesses could be encouraged to start off with pop-up shops and stalls at fairs.

An Teachta Dála Smyth said how both Bailieborough and Carrickmacross were two rural communities that had struggled to maintain their viability in the difficult recession years since 2008. Both towns had had many successes in this regard.

She said that like every other community in Ireland Bailieborough and Carrickmacross relied primarily on their own people and resources. But as part of Irish society and the Irish economy, they needed assistance in providing the major

infrastructure that was only available on a national level. This included the provision of broadband, roads and transport and the investment and expertise required to develop every community. While Bailieborough and Carrickmacross could not provide these national services on a local level or on their own initiative, the people of these towns paid their taxes and were entitled to a share of this money being fed back into their communities so that they could provide these services along with every other community in Ireland.

She said that communities like Carrickmacross and Bailieborough needed to be included and needed to be an integral part of the various Government initiatives; be it broadband, healthcare, education, etc. There was too often the tendency for the resources of the State to be put first and primarily into the large towns and cities, with the smaller towns and rural areas being left waiting, often years. And before these smaller towns and rural areas got their share, something else was required in the larger towns and cities and then the smaller towns and rural areas were left waiting a little while longer. The smaller towns and rural areas needed to catch up and needed to catch up immediately. They could not afford to be lagging behind the investment in the large towns and cities.

She said that Bailieborough, Carrickmacross and every other small town and rural area in Ireland needed to be given the same priority status as the large towns and cities. The urgency was just as great and sometimes even greater in these smaller towns and rural areas which faced ongoing depopulation, the removal of services and continuing isolation. Not everything, be it jobs or the provision of State services needed to be located in the large towns and cities. There were many things that could be based in small towns and rural areas and the Government should be identifying these and putting the case for locating them in small towns and rural areas.

A general discussion followed these contributions.

The Cathaoirleach thanked the participants for their insightful contributions and proposals. He said that the information gathered at this meeting would provide a valuable contribution to the final report of the Joint Committee on the topic 'What it takes to sustain a viable rural community'.

SEISIÚN 2: FORBAIRT PHOBAIL, SHÓISIALTA AGUS EACHNAMAÍOCHTA AGUS COMHAR I GCONTAETHA NA TEORANN SA TODHCHAÍ

SESSION 2: THE FUTURE OF COMMUNITY, SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND CO-OPERATION IN BORDER COUNTIES

Opening Address by An Teachta Dála Peadar Tóibín

In his opening address An Teachta Dála Tóibín said that it was crucial for border communities that Ireland secured certain protections against the imposition of a hard border through the middle of these communities.

He said that we needed to protect the local economies and communities on both sides of the border and that we needed to be coherent in our requirements in this regard when we put our case to the Government, to London and to Brussels.

He called for a special status for the North of Ireland to allow both jurisdictions in Ireland to operate under the same European Union rules.

Contributions by Participants

Each of the participants at the meeting outlined their views, insights and opinions based on their experiences operating in the various sectors.

For convenience, the contributions made are listed in alphabetical order and not in the order that they occurred at the meeting.

Mr Clifford described how Enterprise Ireland was helping businesses prepare for the British withdrawal from the European Union and was funding grants for Local Enterprise Offices to provide consultation programmes.

An Teachta Dála Collins said that although the British withdrawal from the European Union posed a particular challenge to the people in the border counties, it also posed an enormous challenge to people in every county in Ireland. Its impact would be felt across Ireland and across all sectors of the economy, including in the fishing industry which had made such an enormous contribution to the economy, both in his own area of West Cork and across Ireland.



**Coill an Chollaigh, Contae an Cabhán agus Carraig Mhachaire Rois, Contae Mhuineacháin
Bailieborough, County Cavan and Carrickmacross, County Monaghan**

Mr O'Connell described the British exit from the European Union as an enormous potential social and economic shock for the border region. However, it would also provide opportunities in the area.

He called for the promotion of innovation, and for the replication of idea-generation stimulus models that were operating elsewhere in the European Union, across the border region.

He suggested cross-county co-operation to pool resources and to promote specialisation on a regional level. For example, County Cavan, County Louth and County and Monaghan could work together on promoting tourism.

He called on the State to commit to funding Local Community Development Companies.

Mr Hand suggested that the development of a cross-border tourism product could mitigate some of the negative effects of the British exit from the European Union.

Mr Reilly raised the issue of cross-border workers and the effect of a hard border on towns in the region. He discussed the possible impact on employees living in the North of Ireland and accessing services in the Republic of Ireland, and vice versa.

An Teachta Dála Smyth said that the British withdrawal from the European Union posed an enormous challenge to the people of Bailieborough and Carrickmacross, and to every other community on both sides of the border. She expressed her concern that an arbitrary line would be drawn right through the heart of border communities and that officials in

Brussels and in London would dictate how border communities interacted with each other in terms of trade, travel and communication.

She said that the people of Counties Cavan, Fermanagh, Monaghan and Armagh were so intrinsically interlinked with each other in every possible way that it made absolutely no sense, especially after the coming together of the past 20 years, to once again divide these communities by a political border administered from outside the area.

She said that the last thing that anyone wanted to see was the erection of border posts on every road and the long queues that would accompany them. People in these counties did not want to be restricted from travelling freely; for example from Bailieborough to Newry. They wanted to be able to transport their local produce from one area to another. They did not want to have their daily journey to work or to school interrupted by border checks as they came and went, and they wanted to be able to socialise and communicate freely across the counties of Ulster.

She said that the current access to markets across Ireland should remain intact and perhaps some radical shift was required in the mind-sets of all our people to achieve this. Perhaps the answer lay in an even greater coming together of Irish people, North and South.

A general discussion followed these contributions.

The participants considered whether or not the imminent withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union had discouraged new business start-ups and investment by entrepreneurs. It was still too early to say if there had been any impact on business start-ups but the negative impact on the mushroom industry had demonstrated the risk posed by currency fluctuations. The participants acknowledged that, until it could be seen what trade deals were agreed between the United Kingdom and the European Union, there would continue to be a lot of unknowns.

An Teachta Dála Tóibín thanked the participants for attending the meeting and for their insightful contributions and proposals. He said that the information gathered at this meeting would provide a valuable contribution to the final report of the Joint Committee on the topic 'The future of community, social and economic development and co-operation in border counties'.

4. CRÍOCH / CONCLUSION

The Joint Committee was delighted to have this opportunity to engage with local and border communities in County Cavan, County Meath, County Monaghan and County Westmeath; both in terms of what is happening in these communities themselves and as communities that are representative of rural and border communities across Ireland.

The delegation found the open and frank discussion we engaged in most helpful in formulating our ideas and in bringing back the information gathered to the Joint Committee. The opinions and proposals put to us in Athboy and Bailieborough were well thought out and well presented and I wish to conclude this report by drawing particular attention to the following specific needs in small towns and rural and border areas which the meeting identified:-

What it takes to sustain a viable rural community –

- (1) To tackle ongoing depopulation trends;
- (2) To invest in transport infrastructure, to open up ease of ingress and egress to and from these communities and to provide greater mobility within these communities;
- (3) To improve the quality of broadband provided and the quality of the mobile telephone service available;
- (4) To protect the interests of local industries such as farming, food-processing and tourism and to ensure that they are not negatively impinged upon by other industries;
- (5) To incentivise young people's involvement in farming and other rural-based industries, including the provision of succession-planning strategies;
- (6) To encourage rural businesses to set up online shops and to encourage people who shopped online to support these local rural businesses;
- (7) To develop outreach programmes and build links between rural areas and third level institutions;
- (8) To tackle the excessive costs faced by local voluntary groups – for example, the cost of insurance;
- (9) To encourage greater consultation between Government Departments and agencies and rural communities;
- (10) To utilise all State-owned vacant and derelict buildings to the benefit of local communities;

- (11) To simplify administrative procedures and reduce red tape in the application processes for the various schemes;
- (12) To scrutinise and revise administrative boundaries that are obsolete and no longer relevant;
- (13) To provide adequate services to children and adults with special needs;
- (14) To ensure that access to services that are not provided directly in rural areas is facilitated for people living in rural areas;
- (15) To address the issue of fly-tipping and to reverse the prohibition on local authorities naming and shaming people who have been convicted of fly-tipping;

The future of community, social and economic development and co-operation in border counties –

- (1) To maintain intact the current access to markets across Ireland;
- (2) To secure certain protections for border communities on both sides of the border against the imposition of a hard border through the middle of these communities;
- (3) To obtain a special status for the North of Ireland to allow both jurisdictions in Ireland to operate under the same European Union rules;
- (4) To proactively take advantage of any potential opportunities that arise as a result of the British exit from the European Union;
- (5) To encourage cross-county co-operation, to pool resources and to promote specialisation on a regional level;
- (6) To develop a cross-border tourism product;



Peadar Tóibín TD,
Cathaoirleach
21 Meitheamh 2017

AGUISÍN 1: COMHALTAÍ AN CHOMHCHOISTE

APPENDIX 1: MEMBERS OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE

An Teachta Dála Ciarán Cannon (Fine Gael))

An Teachta Dála Michael Collins (Independent)

An Teachta Dála Danny Healy Rae (Independent)

An Teachta Dála Martin Heydon (Fine Gael))

An Teachta Dála Éamon Ó Cuív (Fianna Fáil)

An Teachta Dála Niamh Smyth (Fianna Fáil)

An Teachta Dála Peadar Tóibín (Sinn Féin) (Cathaoirleach)

An Seanadóir Maura Hopkins (Fine Gael)

An Seanadóir Marie Louise O'Donnell (Independent)

An Seanadóir Aodhán Ó Ríordáin (Páirtí an Lucht Oibre)

An Seanadóir Fintan Warfield (Sinn Féin)