

Border Communities Against Brexit



Meeting of Oireachtas Joint Committee on Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs

Thank you Chair for your kind invitation and the opportunity to address this committee.

As many of you know, Border Communities Against Brexit, came about because of real concerns that the voices of those of us in the border region are not being listened to when it comes to the implications of Brexit.

We are a broad, cross community and non-political group. We invite anyone who shares our concerns to join with us in building an effective campaign.

We have come together to ensure that the North's democratically expressed wish by 56% of its people is to remain within the EU is respected.

Two Members will meet from Border Communities Against Brexit group.

John Sheridan

Runs a farm on the very south western corner of Fermanagh, most of the farm is located in the International Geo Park, Marble Arch which is jointly managed by Fermanagh/Omagh and Cavan District Councils and there is more as it runs up to the border between the north and south of Ireland. He feels that there is no such thing as a soft border; that any level of borderisation is a hard, border by stealth, there by putting our fragile Peace Process at risk. At risk also are the markets for beef and lamb. The land is all in a Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and is involved in the primary production of beef and lamb. Concern also for the loss of funding to our schools and colleges, our European health cards and Free Sky's Agreement and a creation of an us and them factor throughout Europe. All this will ruin rural communities, harm our heritage and through border communities against Brexit calls for the Good Friday Agreement to be properly addressed and implemented. He is convinced that we have right for special designated status for the economy of the island of Ireland.

JJ O'Hara, Leitrim Tourism Network

"Buyers are asking straight out if the Troubles are coming back"

JJ O'Hara is involved in tourism and technology businesses on several fronts. He operates a large, 12-bedroom B&B overlooking Lough Gill and Parkes Castle just outside Dromahair, Co. Leitrim. He also runs Irish Life Tours www.irishlifetours.com which takes groups large and small on trips around Ireland and Scotland. And he is a driving force behind the Leitrim Tourism Network. He specialises in the US and Italian markets and the intelligence he is picking up in both is not exactly reassuring.

"People are asking us about safety. Buyers are asking straight out if the Troubles are coming back. All they hear is that there is going to be a border again, and they remember what they heard about the same border 20 or 30 years ago."

This type of intelligence cannot be ignored, not even after our best ever year for tourism. In the North the sector was up 26% after three good years, and Leitrim saw a 14% increase.

"We are well above the national average and in the Network we are working on a 15-year plan to divert people off the Wild Atlantic Way and in towards Leitrim. In fact, there are absolutely crucial cross-border elements in the strategy because much of it is based on the Marble Arch Global Geopark which takes in a substantial part of Fermanagh and includes the Glencar Waterfall on this side. There's a butterfly-shaped tourist route around it and we have developed a Wild Atlantic butterfly marketing campaign. We are developing the Technology in Tourism concept at both ends of the Geopark."

Hard border outcomes could put all that at risk, but the implications go far wider. "At the local level we have a boardwalk over the Cuilcagh Mountains which runs right across the border – just imagine having to close it. But there is a much bigger picture and bigger things at stake.

We have record visitor numbers north and south delivered by global marketing by Tourism Ireland. It is a north-south cooperation body established under the Good Friday Agreement and nobody is telling us what is going to happen to it. It could be in the firing line in two years' time when the UK actually leaves the EU. There's a minimum two-year delivery timescale on almost anything in tourism product. So who will fund it? We need to know now, not in two years' time. We should have learned from the recession that continuity in marketing is absolutely vital."

We want to ensure that the views of local communities are heard when big decisions affecting our futures are taken in London, Dublin and Brussels.

The prospect of a new EU frontier, stretching from Dundalk to Derry some 300 miles, is not acceptable to those of us living and working in border areas, North or South.

Our DAY OF ACTION in October and again in February was a huge success, and today we are protesting at Stormont and Leinster House against article 50 being triggered without the British Prime Minister outlining a position for the North and Border Communities.

We are gathering a huge ground swell of public support with thousands attending our co-ordinated rallies.

It also demonstrates to everyone how unworkable a hard border would be.

We have met the Ministers at the North South Ministerial Council, attended the All Ireland Civil Dialogue in Kilmainham, we would like to take this opportunity to thank all political parties and the office of the Taoisigh, for their support.

If Brexit proceeds under the current constitutional arrangements, the border dividing Ireland will become an external border of the EU, possibly classified by the EU as a Third Country.

There is no reassurance for us in hearing both the British and Irish Governments state publicly that they do not wish to see the reintroduction of border control's and customs posts, and the closure of hundreds of Border roads.

This may not be up to them alone to determine.

Like me, you probably remember what it was like when there were customs post here in the past.

We remember the time of lengthy delays and traffic backlogs crossing the border. We were recently told that in excess of 2 million vehicles cross the border each month, with over 30,000 cross border workers each day.

Every other external border of the EU has physical and economic controls. Why should we believe that the border dividing Ireland would be any different?

The current arrangements for Europe managing its external border on the Eastern part of Europe is the responsibility of Frontex, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

Frontex supports co-ordinates and develops European border management in line with the Treaties including the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU as well as other international obligations.

Frontex seeks to ensure the coordination of the actions of the Member States in the implementation of measures, thereby contributing to an efficient, high and uniform level of control on persons and of surveillance of the external borders of the Member States.

All small roads are closed and people are forced through large designated checkpoints.

We have approximately 277 border roads, in the past there was approximately 17 official crossings.

Frontex state that the issue of migration is there largest issue, but also is the issue of smuggling of excise goods, stolen vehicles and human trafficking.

Unfortunately we know too well of the damaging effect of smuggling and the rise of criminality in the border area.

On our recent visit to Brussels it became very clear to us, that our border will throw up many problems, it is a very complex issue, which cannot be easily sorted out.

A frictionless border or a soft border is a nonsense, because all it takes is a series of serious infringements of that border for Europe to decide that a Hard Border must be put in place; such as the potential for GMO's or beef coming into the UK from countries who do not have the same welfare or steroid rules as the EU does.

Therefore a soft border is a Hard Border by stealth.

Added to that Britain with many different tariffs on excise goods, such as cigarettes and fuel and the forced closure of hundreds of border roads we can therefore see a huge rise in resentment that this new physical border would create.

From the very damaging economic effect on business, the 30,000 workers who cross the border daily, the tens of thousands who visit family and friends, and the tens of thousands who for work or sporting fixtures, or those who choose to holiday and travel North and South on a regular basis a Hard Border would be a disaster.

But on a broader political issue a Hard Border is much, much more potentially disastrous.

Northern Nationalism has embraced the Peace Process which has had massive European support.

The financial assistance to thousands of community groups in Peace building, the fantastic support in developing the Economy such as Motor Ways, Train links, and Telecommunications and supporting business to set up and create jobs, has utterly transformed the North of this Island in the past 25 years.

No one has been left out or excluded.

The total financial assistance from the EU Co Funded Programmes to the North from 2014 – 2020 is €3.5 billion, while the period from 2007 – 2013 was €3.4 billion.

£2.3 billion pounds of EU financial support to the rural community and farmers in the North of Ireland (from 2014 – 2020) is another example of how enormous the EU assistance to the North is.

Further detail on the various EU funded programmes can be found here <http://www.eurolink-eu.net/eu-funding-2/>.

The total funding for the North from 2014 / 2020 is close to €4 Billion.

The economic damage done by the loss of these funds will be huge, a British administration who has been against CAP for very many years will not assist farmers and rural communities in the North.

The EU imposes dozens of different duties on the import of beef; these are the percentage rates charged on selected cuts

For example, if after a Brexit on WTO terms a French restaurant sought to buy £100 worth of British rump steak, it would have to pay an additional £62.20 in customs duties

36.1% - Whole carcass

'Carcases or half-carcases of bovine animals, fresh or chilled'

47.2% - Forequarters

'Unseparated or separated forequarters of bovine animals, with bone in, fresh or chilled'

68.5% - Chuck and brisket

'Frozen bovine boneless crop, chuck and blade and brisket cuts'

0 Tongue

64.5% - Hindquarters

'Unseparated or separated hindquarters of bovine animals, with bone in, fresh or chilled'

62.2% - Rump

'Fresh or chilled bovine meat, boneless'

77.4% - T-bone

'Fresh or chilled bovine cuts, with bone in'

83.8% - Skirt

'Fresh or chilled edible bovine thick and thin skirt (excl. for manufacture of pharmaceutical products)'

Source <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/feb/20/no-deal-brexit-would-mean-6bn-in-extra-costs-for-uk-exporters>

30% of raw milk produced in the north is processed in the south every day; a big percentage of this milk is processed into Baby formula.

Firstly a big question mark hangs over whether any of this milk will be able to be processed in the south and the Chinese will not allow formula to contain milk from outside the EU. If this happens it will cause a major shock to the dairy industry in the North.

In 2014, over 45% of lambs from the north (370k) were sold to the south, which is over 7,000 a week, the most of these go on for sale in France, this market access is crucial for sheep farming in the North, it faces devastation.

The UK is Ireland's largest trading partner, with more than €1.2 billion of goods and services traded between us every week, directly supporting 400,000 jobs on both islands and even more among suppliers and surrounding communities.

Irish Nationalism has been very confident in its Irish-ness and has not felt excluded or undermined.

The Good Friday Agreement has given all an equal identity whether or not you wish to belong to the Unionist Tradition or the Irish one, and sets out very clearly the safe guards in the EU Charter of Human Rights which is enshrined in the GFA.

What concerns me greatly is the effect of a hard border on the impression of Irish identity in the North and particularly the Border areas.

Currently it is very difficult to find the actual border, with free travel, free movement of goods and services, and to just freely go where you want whenever you want, that could be taken away.

It is also very important that no border exists to those who see themselves living in Ireland.

Add to that the fact that 56% of the North voted to Remain in the EU, the North's population is being dragged out against our will.
441,000 voted to remain.

Their opinion is NOT being respected.

They are being totally disenfranchised.

It could be argued that many will see this as a Re - Partition of Ireland, with hard physical infrastructure.

There is at least a generation who do not remember the troubles, and at least two generations who do not remember any physical border.

Therefore the potential exists for creating a divided Ireland, giving way to alienation of border communities, the growth of resentment and frustration as they will perceive that their Irish-ness has been greatly diminished or taken away.

We need European Prime ministers, Governments and Commissioners to hear a very clear and strong message of the necessity for the North to stay within the European Union, does the committee know if the Irish Government has drawn up a framework so that can occur.

The Irish Government are pivotal in articulating the rights and the needs of Border Communities and the North's population? However possibly the biggest question for this committee is what effect does restricting people's movements, damaging an entire community economically, disenfranchising an entire community politically, cause people to feel resentment and alienation, to strip away people's hard won rights and safeguards, to put in place an incentive to smuggle and enter criminality?

While on the fringes we have groups who are ready and willing to use people's emotions and difficult economic conditions to create division seek a return to our past?

An extract from Irish Border Lands.com on Crossing the Border.

I have an – a memory, very distinct memory, of going to hire – in real hard times, trying to, to buy in a couple of trees from somebody that was felling them, and this was going to keep, eh, reduce the fuel bill and keep the family warmer for the winter, but having to hire em, a chainsaw, which I didn't have, from a fella named Maurice Allen at Kanturk, which is a post office, which basically if you look at it, about two miles from Clones on the Newtownbutler road. And I had to go through a Gard – a Garda checkpoint at the Creighton corner, which is on the, on the Newtownbutler road in Clones. I had to go through a customs post then, on the southern side. Then I had to go through a joint Garda and army checkpoint just before I crossed the border, to be met by a foot patrol of the British army, who were out on manoeuvres.

Then I had to go through an RUC checkpoint less than half a mile up the road, to go through the permanent army British checkpoint at Kanturk ... that was six stops to go to a fella to hire a chainsaw, and I had to go through the six of them on the way back in. and those were the kind of things that in the end of it all, scraped away at people's tolerance. Donald McDonald Omagh, Co. Tyrone.

As a group, Border Communities against Brexit, we believe Brexit will have a very negative impact for business and community development.

Here is a project, Irish.Network, that one of our members is developing on a national and international basis.

Irish.Network, which has the following vision:

1. Rural Regeneration
2. Business Communication
3. Community Development
4. Agricultural Support
5. Social Energising
6. International Outreach



Irish.Network

Business & Community Regeneration

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1. Executive Summary

Rural Ireland continues to have development issues. Like in most countries, cities are getting bigger while rural areas i.e. small towns and local villages face depopulation. These villages and small towns were once considered the backbone of rural Ireland. Unfortunately, too many now consist of empty houses and boarded-up shops.

Two of the key factors for rural renewal is employment and community development.

Developing a national network linked to an international platform will support the development of business and communities.

The 3 main areas of **Irish.Network** are as follows:

Business	Community	Communication
International Network	Country Portal Website	Networking Online/Offline
Business Directory	County Portal Website	Lobbying
Bulk Buying/Cost Saving	Event Platform	B2B Marketing



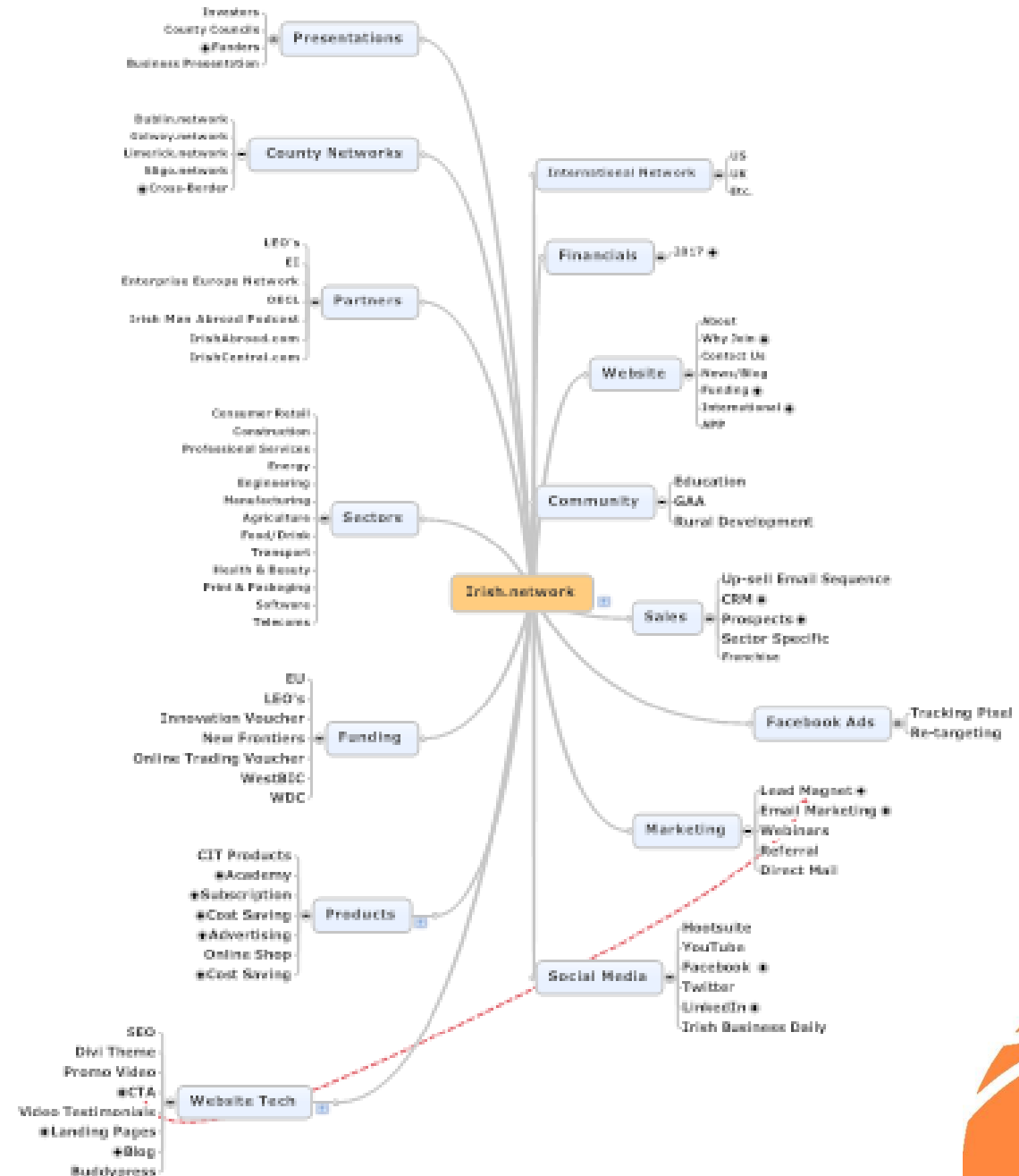
2. Irish Network Mind Map



3. Irish Network Vision

This is our vision for Irish Network

1. Rural Regeneration
2. Business Communication
3. Community Development
4. Agricultural Support
5. Social Energising
6. International Outreach



4. Why



Rural Ireland Regeneration

From people living in rural Ireland to the Government, there is complete agreement that regeneration is needed.

Irish.Network want to ensure that this regeneration takes place at grass roots level by providing:

- The development of a business and community communication platform
- Cost savings and bulk buying for businesses
- Group networking for sharing development ideas, contacts, leads and joint ventures.
- Local projects on a county by county basis
- Funding information, both public and private
- A business-to-business marketing channel
- Linking with an international Irish network

Irish.Network is fully inline with the Government Action Plan for Rural Development.

Improving the lives of those living and working in rural communities is a priority of the Government's Programme for a Partnership Government. Our objective is to ensure the success of vibrant, rural communities across Ireland. That means supporting the creation of 135,000 jobs in rural Ireland, bringing high-speed broadband to every home and business and revitalising towns and villages through 4,000 projects.

5. How

The following bullet points outline how our plan will be implemented:

- Development of the national network portal www.irish.network
- Development of each county network portal starting with:
 - www.Dublin.network
 - www.Galway.network
 - www.Sligo.networkwith all 32 counties set up in 2018
- Approach 10-15 major suppliers to businesses e.g. insurance, energy, I.T. etc. with a view to network member volume discount
- Promote community education and technology projects
- Monthly Network Meetings – Face-to-Face
- Monthly Network Meetings via Webinar



6. What

1. Networking

The website will provide the facility of all members to network with each other.

There will also be face-to-face monthly network meetings with

- Expert speakers in each county
- Members presentations
- Onsite business visits
- Business card exchange
- Lead referral
- Develop business-to-business packages
- Develop joint ventures
- Develop knowledge of international markets
- Attending national/international trade fairs
- Community Training



6. What – Training & Education

Training

In order for businesses to remain competitive, they must continually upskill. The challenge for rural businesses is access to these courses at a suitable time and place.

Our online courses will solve both these problems as they can be completed at a time that suits the participant with no travel necessary. Of course, adequate broadband is required and thankfully this is improving in rural areas.

Education

With our online discussion forum, we will also ensure business owners are kept up-to-date with other useful information including:

- Upcoming events
- Sources of funding, public and private
- Experience and advice from other members



6. What – Cost Savings

Cost Saving for Business

Employment is the lifeblood of any community. We want to ensure that every business is given an opportunity to remain open starting with reducing their ongoing costs.

- A. Volume Discount Buying e.g. Energy, Insurance, I.T. Print etc.
- B. Training & Education Discounts
- C. Member-to-Member Discounts
- D. Funding – Public, Private
- E. Trade Fair Attendance



7. Who

Who is Irish.Network?

Founder	Project Manager	Web Developer	Administration Manager	Daragh Stewart
JJ O'Hara	Johnny Beirne	Kate McCarty	Sheila McManus	Graphic Design

Who can join?

Irish.Network is for:

- companies
- business professionals
- community groups
- the public



8. Where and When

The following table outline the timeline and projected growth over the next 5 years.

	Phase 1 - 2018	Phase 2 - 2020	Phase 3 - 2022
Location	Ireland	UK & US	International
	1 National Portal + 1 Portal for each of the 32 Counties	Expand Phase 1 Portal by adding 5 major UK & 5 major US cities	International Portal made up of Phase 1 + Phase 2 + 1 portal per major international city. 25 cities
Membership	2,000	8,000	16,000



9. Marketing

Phase I

1. Set up Social Media Profiles and grow awareness and an audience
2. Engage with existing networks and organisations e.g. LEO's, Chambers, Local Networks
3. Distribute printed brochures
4. Run a tele-marketing survey campaign and monitor registration results
5. Run a direct marketing (postal) campaign and monitor registration results
6. Run a location specific Facebook Ad Campaign and monitor registration results
7. Build an email list
8. Conduct a survey gathering feedback from members for future improvements
9. Host a viral online giveaway to grow the email list
10. Develop an referral and affiliate program
11. Irish.network Podcast



10. Revenue Stream

Irish.Network will have the following revenue streams

1. Network Membership Subscription
2. International Membership Subscription
3. Online Advertising
4. Print Advertising
5. Group Training (Classroom)
6. Online Courses
7. Mentoring
8. Weekend Business Bootcamps & Retreats
9. Affiliate Products
10. Conferences & Seminars
11. Irish.Network Podcast Sponsorship



Domain Names Secured

Appendix I

.network	countynetwork.com	.network	countynetwork.com
www.antrim.network	www.antrimnetwork.com	www.limerick.network	www.limericknetwork.com
www.armagh.network	www.armaghnetwork.com	www.longford.network	www.longfordnetwork.com
www.carlow.network	www.carlownetwork.com	www.laois.network	www.laoisnetwork.com
www.cavan.network	www.cavannetwork.com	www.louth.network	www.louthnetwork.com
www.clare.network	www.clarenetwork.com	www.mayo.network	www.mayonetwork.com
www.cork.network		www.meath.network	www.meathnetwork.com
www.derry.network	www.derrynetwork.com	www.monaghan.network	www.monaghannetwork.com
www.donegal.network	www.donegalnetwork.com	www.offaly.network	
www.dublin.network		www.roscommon.network	www.roscommonnetwork.com
www.down.network		www.sligo.network	www.sligonetwork.com
www.fermanagh.network	www.fermanaghnetwork.com	www.tipperary.network	www.tipperarynetwork.com
www.galway.network	www.galwaynetwork.com	www.tyrone.network	www.tyronenetwork.com
www.kerry.network	www.kerrynetwork.com	www.waterford.network	www.waterfordnetwork.com
www.kildare.network	www.kildarenetwork.com	www.westmeath.network	www.westmeathnetwork.com
www.kilkenny.network		www.wexford.network	www.wexfordnetwork.com
www.leitrim.network	www.leitrimnetwork.com	www.wicklow.network	www.wicklownetwork.com

Irish.Network Landing Page

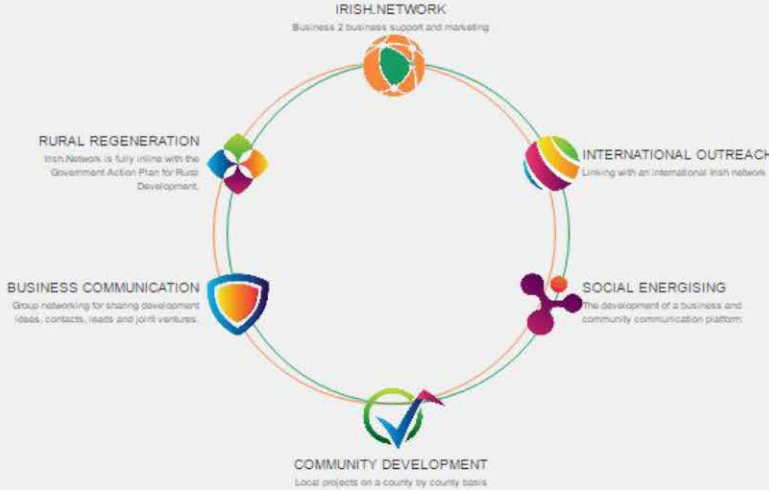
Appendix II



The landing page features a dark blue background with a map of Ireland. At the top center is the Irish.Network logo, which consists of a stylized orange and green globe. Below the logo, the text "Irish.Network" is displayed in large, bold, orange and green letters, followed by "Business and Community Regeneration" in smaller white text. A central white box contains the text "Find Out More" in bold, followed by a text input field labeled "Add email address" and a "Go" button.

**PARTICIPATE LOCALLY
WITH GLOBAL IMPACT**

Irish.Network want to ensure that this regeneration takes place at grass roots level.



A circular diagram with five nodes, each representing a different initiative. The nodes are connected by a circular line. The nodes are: 1. IRISH.NETWORK (top) with a globe icon and the text "Business 2 business support and marketing". 2. INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH (right) with a globe icon and the text "Linking with an international Irish network". 3. SOCIAL ENERGISING (bottom right) with a network icon and the text "The development of a business and community communication platform". 4. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (bottom) with a checkmark icon and the text "Local projects on a county by county basis". 5. BUSINESS COMMUNICATION (bottom left) with a shield icon and the text "Group networking for sharing development ideas, contacts, leads and joint ventures". 6. RURAL REGENERATION (left) with a flower icon and the text "Irish Network is fully inline with the Government Action Plan for Rural Development".

IRISH.NETWORK
Business 2 business support and marketing

RURAL REGENERATION
Irish Network is fully inline with the Government Action Plan for Rural Development.

BUSINESS COMMUNICATION
Group networking for sharing development ideas, contacts, leads and joint ventures.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
Local projects on a county by county basis

SOCIAL ENERGISING
The development of a business and community communication platform.

INTERNATIONAL OUTREACH
Linking with an international Irish network

Launching April 2017 - Join Now



Irish.Network

Business & Community Regeneration