

# **Innovative approaches to participative community based socio-economic planning: Developing a model to underpin the sustainability of Ireland's local communities**

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## Executive Summary

This report has been commissioned by Ballyhoura Development Ltd. to provide an overview of community/area based initiatives across Ireland. The report examines such initiatives in Counties Cork, Limerick, Mayo and Offaly. The research for the report is based on a desk top review of material made available for the research. A series of one to one interviews by telephone and a workshop of those interviewed were also conducted.

The Report highlights a range of approaches to undertaking participative community based planning. It acknowledges that the application of integrated socio-economic planning at community level is relevant to the principles set out by the Task Force for the Integration of Local Government and Local Development.

The Report notes the current objectives in regard to the reform of local government and the alignment of the local development sector to the renewed local government framework. It highlights the importance of implementation of the *Programme for Government* in regard to the preparation of strategic plans in each City and County. It also highlights the need for a renewed town/sub county public service. It identifies opportunities through which community based area focused initiatives can underpin such reforms in a manner which is complementary to the objectives of the *Programme for Government*.

The Report sets out in broad terms, the approaches taken to community/area based initiatives in Mallow, Dunmanway, Croom, Kilmallock, Mulranney, Islandeady, Banagher and Ferbane. The report draws upon the processes applied to develop a possible model which could be applied in the context of the renewal of local government and the alignment of local government and local development.

### Key Findings in the Report

**Key Message: Structured processes are central to participative community-based planning which are, in turn, central to the statutory planning of local authorities and the business planning of other agencies operating at local level. The best practice identified in this report suggests that local communities engage in socio-economic planning from one to two years prior to the commencement of the statutory planning**

**process and the county strategy with appropriate involvement of the relevant public sector officials.**

The Report identifies five factors which impact on the achievement of best results:

- *Local community capacity (knowledge, understanding and skills to engage in socio-economic planning and deliver agreed projects)*
- *Legal umbrella structure within the local community and network of their representatives at county/sub-county (district) level.*
- *Local authority willingness to engage appropriately with the socio-economic planning*
- *The level of trust among community leaders for engaging with the public sector.*
- *External facilitation is needed to support the socio-economic planning process at community level (most of which may be delivered by existing staff in local authorities and local development companies).*

The capacity of local communities to engage has improved in the last two decades as a result of resources applied by the local development sector. The capacity remains unequal. There are two distinct levels; The most advanced community umbrella groups who also need to ensure a social inclusion focus in their work. The less advanced communities require support in developing structures and developing the capacity of the disadvantaged and broad-based interest groups in their community.

The case studies in this report highlight a range of empowering training initiatives to improve participation and structures. The required resources are available through the local development sector.

The legal umbrella structure needs to be representative of all the interest groups and sectors in the community. It has a number of functions. It is the local formal link for the public sector. It leads the local socio-economic action planning. It monitors the implementation of the actions in the socio-economic plan. Public money should only be given to community projects where there is a community umbrella group and a local socio-economic plan, both of which create

significant cohesion and voluntary/public resource efficiencies (much less waste and duplication of facilities).

The case studies demonstrate best practice of local development and local authority engagement with local socio-economic planning in speeding up the pace, scale and quality of development, much of which is led by the local community where the Forward Planning Unit of a Local Authority participated actively in the facilitated socio-economic Planning, the plans were linked into the Local Area/County Development process. A number of local authorities have recommended an amendment of the planning and development legislation to include social and economic as well as land use and environmental issues.

The level trust between the voluntary and public sector arises from previous experiences and the understanding of each other's sectors role/functions. Where there is an existing poor level of trust, there are processes that have worked to redress the situation. For example in a local authority estate with poor perception of the local authority, a soft initial (recreational/cultural/environmental) engagement aims to build a relationship. This allows deeper engagement such as surveying/consultation to determine residents needs and the development of a plan for their small area. The delivery of small actions help build confidence that residents can achieve by working together.

External facilitation is needed to support the socio-economic process at community level. There is a need for community buy in to the process. The community needs to be motivated, to see the merit and want to participate in the plan. All of the groups and the sectors that do not have a representative group need to be involved from an early stage. Most of the facilitation can be delivered by existing staff in local authorities and local development companies and trained volunteers. A key action within the facilitated process is engagement with relevant public and voluntary service providers. Two outcomes arise: appropriate actions to be delivered at local level; and learning from the engagement which informs the county strategy and in turn the future plans of the service providers.

## **Proposed Model which integrates community planning into public planning processes**

In the context of local government reform and alignment of local government/local development, there is an opportunity to value a process that delivers good results and get it universally delivered in the Republic of Ireland. A model which integrates the community socio-economic planning processes into the Local Authority and other public planning processes is proposed (appendix 1) in the context of a move towards a sub-county/municipal structure. The principal elements to the process include:

- The completion of intensive training to underpin community capacity is central to a community based participative planning process.
- Agreement of the local authority, the local development sector and the relevant state agencies, at the commencement of the process regarding the need to move towards committed forms of engagement is a necessary feature of successful community/area based initiatives.
- Opportunities for engagement with disadvantaged communities within the areas concerned, thereby underpinning social inclusion policies must be a central feature of all community/area based initiatives.
- Each identified community has to have a cadre of volunteer leaders operating with the support of, at least, an officer with the necessary developmental skills to facilitate a continuous focus on the delivery of actions.
- The recruitment of **C**ommunity Support Volunteers, appropriately trained to lead community engagement from plan preparation to plan implementation and review is best practice and should be a feature of all area based planning processes.
- The engagement of **an** external facilitator to work with the communities to develop their plans is a necessary feature of community/area based planning.
- In the absence of a statutory basis, integration between community or area based planning initiatives and the local area planning of each planning authority is currently dependent on a willingness of the local planning authority to engage.

## Introduction

Successive reports on the reform of local government have highlighted the need to re-focus the structures of local authorities to meet the needs of their communities through area-based organisation. As far back as 1991 the *Barrington Report*<sup>1</sup> identified, among other concerns with the then system: a poor level of integration of public services at local / regional level; a narrow range of functions being delivered by local government; the lack of a structured regional level and a poorly developed municipal level; poor linkage between the local authorities and non-government organizations and a central government policy role which was poorly linked with meeting local expectations.

The *Devolution Commission*<sup>2</sup> in 1995 identified the need to develop a four level policy system based on national, regional, county and, critically, sub-county arrangements, through which public service delivery could be enhanced and citizen-centred. *Better Local Government*<sup>3</sup> also sought to enhance the processes of local development and local democracy through establishment of area committees to oversee service delivery. The reforms also allowed for the co-ordination of local development and its agencies with the creation of community and enterprise groups to facilitate the co-ordination process. The *Task Force for the Integration of local government and local development*<sup>4</sup> similarly called for an area-based focus to underpin the re-organisation of local development and the renewal of local democracy.

More recently, the *Programme for Government*<sup>5</sup> has highlighted the need for a fundamental re-structuring of local development and local government. It envisages a programme to align community and local development processes alongside a reformed local authority system. This, it is suggested, will ensure the sustainability of local initiative within an overall cost effective framework. In doing so the re-configuration process is seeking to meet the broad objectives of the IMF/ECB/EC Memorandum of Agreement which has been agreed

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<sup>1</sup> Local Government Reform-Report of the Expert Advisory Committee, Department of the Environment, Dublin, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Government of Ireland, First and Second Reports of the Devolution Commission, Department of the Environment, Dublin, 1996/7.

<sup>3</sup> Government of Ireland, Better Local Government: A Programme for Change, Department of the Environment, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Government of Ireland. A Shared Vision for County/City Development Boards: Guidelines on the CDB Strategies for Economic, Social and Cultural Development. Department of Environment and Local Government. April 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Programme for Government, Government of Ireland, 2011.

with the Government. The *Programme for Government* also acknowledges that the local democratic process must be a central aspect of the re-configuration process. In light of the Programme, the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (the Minister) has committed to a renewed focus on the role of towns and other sub-county structures in the local government system. The challenge, as highlighted by the Minister in a recent statement on the reform process<sup>6</sup>, is to ensure that the vitality of local democracy and local development are sustained in the overall reform process and that the necessary efficiencies identified in the Efficiency Review of the local government system<sup>7</sup> provide a long-term resolution to the need to have a self-reliant system of local democracy.

This thinking marks a shift away from the limited perspective on local development set out in the McCarthy Report<sup>8</sup> on public expenditure. The McCarthy Report took the view that the burden of future financing of local development should fall on local government. This view failed to acknowledge the existing EU rural development policy framework and the obligations on the Irish government as a consequence. The Minister is clearly conscious of the current obligations on Ireland and on possible likely obligations arising in a post 2014 EU rural policy environment. The decision to move towards an alignment of both local government and local development therefore must be placed within the Minister's perspective rather than that of either the Local Government Efficiency Review or the earlier McCarthy Report.

## **The Report**

There is therefore long-standing recognition that a community/ area-based approach to local service planning and delivery is a valid framework within which local democratic and community development processes can be sustained. This thinking, and the processes underpinning experience to date in applying area-based approaches, will be examined in the following report. It has been commissioned by *Ballyhoura Development Ltd.* to identify examples of best practice and possible options which could be applied within the overall framework of the *Programme for Government*. The report will examine efforts at applying

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<sup>6</sup>Good Government Founded on Local Government, Keynote address by Mr Phil Hogan, T.D., Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, University of Limerick Summer School – *Renewing Local Democracy through Civic Engagement* – 13 June 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Government of Ireland, Report of the Local Government Efficiency Review Group, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Dublin July 2010.

<sup>8</sup> Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes, Dublin 2009.

community planning processes in a number of counties, Cork, Limerick, Mayo and Offaly. It will also examine the evaluations, which have been undertaken, of such processes with the objective of identifying lessons arising from putting in place community-based planning in these areas. It will consider possible best practice arising from the various processes.

The Report is based upon a desk top review of materials made available to the consultant along with a series of telephone interviews with key participants in each of the study areas. Details of those interviewed are included in Appendix 3.

A key overall objective is to report on the usefulness of the community planning models being reviewed in informing the alignment process at the national policy level. A feature of this examination is therefore to consider whether these examples could deliver a possible option, based upon a town and hinterland model, for the renewal of local government and the sustaining of local communities development. This model, which would be expected to rest within an overall re-structured and re-configured service model within the renewal of the county government regime, might then satisfy the Minister's expectations in regard to meeting the objectives of the *Programme for Government*.

In any re-structuring of the local government system and in the alignment of the local development sector with local government, it will be necessary to consider the best practice in regard to addressing the future development needs of communities across the State. Such policy development cannot be limited to spatial development alone but must, as the Minister and the Programme for Government seem to recognise, be placed within a socio-economic context to ensure that a sustainable perspective is applied to the future of both urban and rural communities. Given this background, consideration of community based socio-economic planning initiatives is now appropriate with a view to identifying possible options for delivering a credible community based planning environment in which the long-term future of communities can be addressed.

## **The Case Studies on Community/Area-based Processes**

### **Mayo Community Futures**

Mayo Community Futures (MCF) is a partnership of community and agencies and was established as a sub-committee by the County Community Forum in 2005 to:

- Assist communities prepare Community Action Plans
- Encourage more people to become active in their communities
- Strengthen and develop local community organisations
- Enable communities to identify and progress priority projects and actions
- Enable communities to effectively represent their interests at local, county, and national levels.

The processes undertaken by MCF were supported by the Mayo County Development Board and the local development companies. Since 2007 a range of communities (16 to date with a further 4 to be undertaken in 2012) have been supported to undertake community action plans. These include the communities of Mulranney and Islandeady which were examined for this report as both provide an example of the various dynamics which underpin the community planning processes as well as providing for inputs into the statutory planning processes of Mayo County Council.

An overriding concern for the County Development Board in Mayo was that processes to ensure real participation in the forward planning of communities across the county were put in place. For this reason, the community and enterprise team in the Council examined engagement processes in other rural communities in Ireland and the United Kingdom. The experiences of communities undertaking a community's future process in Scotland suggested itself as an appropriate model for Mayo. On this basis the Board, with the agreement of the local development sector and the relevant state agencies, commenced the process with resource supports drawn from the local authority and the other bodies, most notably the local development companies.

Key features of the process included the completion of intensive training on the process by staff drawn from the various bodies, most notably the Community Forum coordinator and representatives of the communities initially undertaking the process. In addition, the intensive nature of the participation of all in the communities concerned, a continuing

feature of the process since inception, has provided a valuable platform on which community capacity has been developed. Furthermore, the methodologies applied in the processes has allowed for the identification of a considerable level of community effort and resources to underpin the delivery of the action plans within the time frames set out in those plans. The ready acknowledgement of the community futures process within the communities examined suggests a high level of participation among the people of the communities concerned as well as the voluntary organisations in these communities.

In both Mulranney and Islandeady there is a clear demonstration of engagement by the two communities across every known organisation in the parishes concerned. In addition, the processes have resulted in the collection of data otherwise unavailable to the local development sector and the local authority particularly in regard to social disadvantage a key priority for the development board.

A further point of note, one which is also a feature in the other case studies examined, is that each provided new opportunities for engagement with disadvantaged communities within the areas concerned, underpinning social inclusion policies in both the supporting local authorities and the local development companies. In the community planning processes applied, a very real effort was made to engage in a practical manner with a clear focus on inclusion.

Noteworthy lessons from the process include the recruitment of Community Support Volunteers. These were people from within the community who were recruited on a voluntary basis to provide a local network to support the Forum Coordinator at County level. Only expenses were covered by the process. These volunteers also received the community futures training referred to above.

The futures process itself did include the need initially for external engagement of a consultant to work with the communities to develop their plans. As capacity in the Forum, the Council and the members of the Communities Futures steering group developed the need for such external engagement became unnecessary and the process is now largely driven by the Forum Coordinator.

A further key aspect of the process was its integration with the local area planning of Mayo County Council. This has ensured that the policy expectations arising from the futures process are being embedded into the local and county based spatial policy process. The elected members of the County and Town Councils are also fully engaged and supportive.

The implementation process is the responsibility of the communities themselves. In each various delivery models have been put in place including specifically established companies, existing community councils, action groups or development associations. No evaluation of an appropriate model or models has being undertaken but individual plan evaluation is a feature in each.

It is evident from the process that the capacity now available to the communities concerned is central to meeting specific long term projects of both the communities and the local authority and local development company. The development of the County as a major centre for walking and cycling could not have occurred without the processes, while other initiatives in community and social development have also featured in the process. These initiatives have not required significant state resourcing, releasing as they do existing resources or allowing for greater inter-agency support for local enterprise/tourism/social development actions.

An overall critical message is the fact that the futures process was largely undertaken in advance of the policy development of most of the agencies represented on the Community Futures Steering Group. This allowed for a re-prioritisation of some of the spending of the bodies concerned to allow for greater inter-agency activity as well as providing the opportunity for cross resourcing with the communities concerned. It was for this reason that, notwithstanding considerable financial pressure, the agencies concerned agreed to continue the process in 2012. A bid process is now underway to roll out the process in a further four communities in 2012. Funding has also being agreed through the EU Interreg Programme to focus on enterprise activities in the existing communities. This funding will support micro employment opportunities.

## The Integrated Area Planning Process in Offaly

The Tipperary Institute<sup>9</sup> with the support of the local development companies, Offaly County Council and other statutory bodies undertook the preparation of Integrated Area Plans (IAPs) in Banagher, Clara, Ferbane and Cloghan. The processes were subject to external review undertaken by Fox, Timmons and Associates. These IAPs are noteworthy in that they were clearly based upon the processes envisaged within *Local Agenda 21* as well as reflecting the thinking on area based service delivery which Offaly County Council was moving towards in 2008-09. A notable aspect of the IAPs is that they provide a fully appraised application of the ADOPT<sup>10</sup> process which was developed by UCD, in association with Ballyhoura Development Ltd. (see appendix 5 for further details on ADOPT).

This process itself provides an internationally accepted model to underpin area based programmes for planning local economic development<sup>11</sup>. The processes in Banagher and Cloghan were examined in detail. Offaly Integrated Local Development Company Ltd. provided the development resourcing for the processes. Implementation Groups are currently overseeing the delivery of the actions set out in each plan.

A key lesson from the processes suggests that, while there had been earlier efforts to develop community plans, they did not impact upon the spatial planning being undertaken by Offaly County Council. In the processes undertaken as a part of the IAP initiative and facilitated by Tipperary Institute, a key objective was to influence the policy process of the local authority. There was a commitment from the Council to engage with the communities but this proved challenging. The long term nature of the local area planning process which the Council is responsible for does not have a focus on immediate project delivery. The communities themselves did have a focus on short-term projects. As a result it was difficult to create the conditions where those local people in the process could see the benefit of engaging in the Council policy process which was focused on long-term spatial planning. As a result, there has been limited policy impact at County Council level.

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<sup>9</sup> Integrated Area Planning: A collaborative approach to decision-making, Tipperary Institute, 2008.

<sup>10</sup> ADOPT: Should the ADOPT Model be adopted? Department of Agribusiness, Extension and Rural Development, University College Dublin, in association with Ballyhoura Development. 2004.

<sup>11</sup> Among others, Blakely and Leigh, Planning Local Economic Development, Theory and Practice, Sage, Los Angeles, 2010.

Nonetheless, real practical actions have come through on an inter-agency basis from both processes reviewed. This has included addressing substantive community concerns arising from traffic and access. While the communities did not see any transparent translation of their inputs to the County spatial planning process, there was and is sufficient impact on practical matters to ensure continued active participation. The challenge that now arises is to address this apparent inability to connect the local process with the local area planning of the Council. This issue has been highlighted in a review by the Tipperary Institute. There is broad agreement across the steering groups, the Institute and the Council that this issue needs to be more fully addressed to maximise the benefit from the IAP process.

The limited response by the planning authority at the policy-making level, may reflect a more endemic issue with regard to the ways in which draft development plans are viewed by planning authorities and the consequent attitude towards, and responses made, to submissions on such draft plans. It is a natural response of those proposing policies in regard to a draft to defend the draft rather than view it as an open document that may be changed. This makes it more difficult when submissions might have a significant impact if accepted in a drafting process. Any model that is developed in this regard must recognise the need to have the necessary arrangements in place through which submissions made can receive serious consideration and through which policy proposals can be genuinely open to change on foot of submissions received.

More generally, the views expressed were positive. While further capacity development will be necessary if the communities concerned are to fully engage with the Council, the IAP process did create a momentum within the communities concerned to take responsibility for local actions which are underpinning improved quality of life. In addition, and significantly, given current economic conditions, the process has allowed for a more realistic understanding on the part of the communities and the Council on how to address local needs and expectations. As a result there is more realism and better relations between the communities and the Council and other agencies.

Building up community capacity has been a major advantage in getting to this current realism and there are now community leaders in both who have the skills to interface between the community and the Council.

Local elected members have reacted differently to the IAP processes. A number see its value in providing them with a comprehensive understanding of community priority, need and expectation. Others however remain wary of the process as they see it as interfering with the councillor-constituent relationship. This was it was acknowledged a partial explanation for the limited impact the IAPs had on the local area planning of the Council.

In regard to the general impact of the processes on the business planning of the state agencies, it was acknowledged that aside from the local authority and the local development company, it has been difficult to see any substantive delivery of projects as a result of the IAP process. It was noted that many agencies did involve themselves in the consultation and plan-making elements of the IAP. However, and notwithstanding the fact that some agreed to commitments to actions in the IAPs, little to no delivery has occurred.

This suggests that those engaged, from the wider state sector, in such processes need to move beyond non committed forms of engagement. If the process is to deliver added value to communities, the local authority and the local development company, it will be necessary for other agencies to deliver on their stated commitments. If such commitments are not delivered, or are non-deliverable, the community must have the means of understanding the reasons for this being the case.

A final and substantive point raised by those interviewed for the project is the need to underpin community capacity. The availability of a supporting resource to facilitate the internal engagement within the community as well as engagement with the local authority and the other state agencies is seen as a fundamental necessity to underpin the community planning process. While a community of volunteers with appropriate training and capacity building can oversee the delivery of many local actions, there is still a need, even in the most skilled of communities, to have a person who can focus on day to day delivery and engagement with the agencies.

### **Socio-economic action planning by communities in County Limerick**

The statutory authorities in Limerick have a long history of co-operation within a regional development model which is unique in Ireland. Such co-operation has also been a hallmark

of community and rural development in the County, pre-dating, to some considerable extent, the county development board and the national resourcing of local development bodies. Such historic initiative did benefit considerably from the move to resource community based initiatives via the LEADER Programme and the piloting of Irish resourced actions for social inclusion by communities across Ireland.

It is important to acknowledge however, that experience in Limerick was in the first instance driven by a need to support community development within a resource constrained environment. Nonetheless, there are thirty-four communities spread across East Limerick and also in North Cork which have benefited from the experience of community/area based initiatives developed with the support of Ballyhoura Development Ltd. and the relevant local authorities, Limerick County Council and Cork County Council and other agencies.

The greater focus given to area-based initiatives with the establishment of Ballyhoura Development Ltd. was therefore a central pillar in the successful roll out of community planning in these communities. As such Ballyhoura Development Ltd. have provided a valuable resource through which an understanding of the dynamics of local socio-economic development can be nurtured.

The planning underpinning the funding applications overseen by Ballyhoura Development Ltd., has created an impetus which has successively been highlighted as best practice in sustaining development in rural communities<sup>12</sup>. The key has been the focus on such communities by engagement directly with the people living and working within them. The processes undertaken are acknowledged, in the consultation undertaken for this report, as having opened the latent resources which exist in rural communities to take charge of their own development, economic and social. The consultation highlighted the example of an area based process in Kilmallock. This particular example is worth consideration in light of the impact which a major industrial closure had on the town and the surrounding environs. A second area, centred on Croom, is also of interest given the lack of previous active community engagement in local economic and social development in and around the town. The implementation of an area based process in Croom was and remains supported by

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<sup>12</sup> ADOPT: Should the ADOPT Model be adopted? University College Dublin, 2004.

Ballyhoura Development Ltd., Limerick County Council and the other statutory agencies operating at county and regional level.

In both instances, the ADOPT process or a variation of the process was put in place with the support of the local development and local authority bodies. The initiative to commence both derived from both communities rather than through application of a pro-active engagement by the local authority. This followed the delivery of capacity building support through Ballyhoura Development Ltd. The creation of local structures, and more significantly, the animation of local leaders with whom the development company could work alongside became a central feature to building confidence between the communities and the agencies. This animation process, underpinned by capacity development and training is a critical feature of the area based process undertaken in both Kilmallock and Croom.

Equally, the fact that both communities would have had recognised leaders from within the community meant that the development company was positioned to advance innovation and confidence-building in co-operation with the communities and the other agencies. The process itself is more fully set out in Appendix 1. It is worth noting however that, while the process was based upon a robust development model underpinned by the research capability of University College Dublin and the extra-mural outreach training capacity of University College Cork, a central aspect was the capacity of the local development company to apply practical training techniques and personnel development through the development officers employed by Ballyhoura Development Ltd.

Subsequently, in the case of Kilmallock, an external consultant was engaged to bring together aspects of the implementation plan for Kilmallock, albeit that this was a once-off engagement as, due to the capacity development in the community, the steering group implementing the action programme was sufficiently developed and had the capacity to oversee substantial delivery of the actions set out in the external consultants action plan.

A key outcome in Kilmallock, and one subsequently identified in Croom, was the self-confidence and self-reliance generated within the community leaders along with the establishment of a good level of trust between those leaders and the agencies that had a direct role in the delivery of the actions agreed with the community in both instances.

Several key lessons are acknowledged across those that were central to the area processes in Limerick. A critical message is that the completion of an integrated socio-economic or futures based community plan should ideally take place prior to the preparation of a local spatial plan such as a Local Area Plan covered by the Planning and Development Act, 2000. However, this could have the effect of creating engagement fatigue if it is evident that the socio-economic process has not been seen to deliver an adequate response from the statutory bodies or to have been fully considered in any subsequent planning process by the State, local or national.

A second key message is that there is a fundamental obligation on those seeking to engage with communities in any policy process to ensure that such communities have the capacity to contribute in a transparent and valued manner. In instances where communities may be lacking such capacity it is critical, from the experience in Limerick, that arrangements are put in place to develop this capacity. Efforts to apply community planning without this capacity will limit the prospects for any genuine buy-in from the community concerned. It might also begin to raise unrealisable expectations of agencies delivering services beyond what may be realistic given resource constraints. The capacity building of communities in any planning process is therefore a critical first, preliminary, step.

In Limerick such capacity was and is delivered through the local development sector in cooperation with, among others, the local authority, the enterprise board. It draws upon both practical development experiences from within these bodies as well as academic resources which have been made available through the adult/continuing education and third level sector. A key objective from such development is that there will be sufficient community capacity embedded within the target community following completion of such planning processes. This allows the agencies withdraw from any potential long-term resource demands so that they can move to focus on other communities which also will have development needs. The retention of capacity within the local community is therefore critical in ensuring that the communities concerned retain the wherewithal to deliver on self generated activities with the support of relevant agencies, and which will be central to their own long-term socio-economic development.

In broad terms the processes undertaken in Limerick suggest that each identified community should have a cadre of volunteer leaders operating with the support of an officer with a continuous focus on the delivery of actions which have been agreed within a future focused socio-economic plan. The plan itself should address delivery of actions which are practical and deliverable. This means that the plan must avoid over ambition and retain a focus on what can be delivered within a time frame which allows for sufficient resourcing by both community action and the action of supporting agencies such as the local authority or local development body. This thinking is underpinned in a separate evaluation of the ADOPT Process undertaken by the Tipperary Institute.<sup>13</sup>

### **Community based processes in County Cork**

Cork County Council is the largest such council in Ireland. Within its functional area it has 12 town councils. The County Council has long had an area-based divisional structure including West Cork, East Cork and North Cork. The area structures are based around the urban centres of Mallow in the North, Midleton in the East and Clonakilty in the West. As a feature of the Development Board's work programme between 2006 and 2009, area based initiatives were also undertaken which were based on urban settings which did not have formal urban council designation, i.e. Dunmanway, Mitchelstown and Carrigaline. In the case of Dunmanway the lack of a town council was recognised as having undermined integrated responses to problems affecting the town and its hinterland. The Dunmanway project was developed as a three year (2006-2008) programme, with the principal aim of the creation of a sustainable partnership approach to the continued development of the town and hinterland beyond the life of the project.

Working groups were established and an agreed implementation template developed to ensure that progress could be easily measured and monitored. In the main this included the tasks; the performance indicators; the targets; the responsible agencies/persons; the required resources; and, the provider of these resources. Each template was agreed by all agencies and all tasks were and continue to be multi-agency in their approach and output. The principle of co-funding and co-operation for all projects undertaken is part of the outcomes for the project. For example, the production of the integrated Development

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<sup>13</sup> Evaluation of the ADOPT Model of Community Planning, Tipperary Institute, November 2007.

Strategy was commissioned and financed by the group members. The model developed in Dunmanway offers the potential to develop a new model of local governance, which responds to the geographical realities of service provision to react positively to specific local problems and issues at a local scale in towns whose population is such that it does not qualify for a town council or other local government structure.

Key Features from Dunmanway to Note:

- Local animation/capacity building was provided by the Community and Enterprise Development Officer
- The Local Community Plan developed inputted into the statutory planning process of Cork County Council
- The Implementation Process became the responsibility of all the agencies involved in the process and new community based networks were developed i.e. Community Council and Business Network

The Mallow project presents a unique model in Irish local Government of a successful partnership structure to drive Hub growth at a local level. Cork County Council and the County Development Board led a process of planning and negotiation with local stakeholders to strengthen and enlarge the Mallow Development Partnership from a single committee to a Forum to include the full range of stakeholders from local government, local business and the community who impact on the socio economic development of Mallow.

Mallow Development Partnership (MDP) comprises a broad spectrum of local business, statutory and community interests including Cork County Council, Mallow Town Council, Mallow Chamber of Commerce, North Cork Enterprise Board, Avondhu Blackwater Partnership and RAPID. Using the MDP structure as the implementation vehicle, enhanced service delivery has been achieved through an agreed action plan, shared resources, networking and information. Actions are carried out through the five working groups that mirror activities and targets outlined in the most recent Local Area Plan for Mallow.

1. Infrastructure
2. Heritage & Recreation
3. Education
4. Health

## 5. Economic Development

This model is an exemplary benchmark for effective and successful partnership structures at a local level. It has been welcomed as a new way to engage with all those with an interest in and responsibility for the development of the Hub town and its services. It will achieve better service delivery, secure extra resources and achieve value for money by involving all stakeholders. The project won an “Excellence in Local Government Award 2007”, sponsored by Chambers Ireland and was commended for encouraging balanced and sustainable development in the Mallow area.

Actions undertaken and those progressing are set out in Appendix 4.

More recently, among other new priorities, the County Development Board has focused on the islands off Cork as an integrated area-based planning model.

The consultation process undertaken for this report suggests that the Council has, like all local authorities and public bodies, on-going budgetary concerns and therefore needs to be alert to the many commitments coming before it. Nonetheless and notwithstanding the prevailing economic conditions, one of the benefits, identified in the Cork case studies, of undertaking the community/area based approach is that the local priorities of the communities addressed in the area approach, including those on the islands, had an arena in which realism could be applied to determining the capacity of the Council and other agencies to meet local expectations. In addition, and more a recent feature of the processes applied in the County, the community/area approach has had to take a more overt approach to local economic development. The implementation, therefore, of the actions arising from the Mallow Area Initiative is seen as a success in this regard. The process is well embedded into the Council’s own business planning and therefore has become self-sustaining. Concern had been expressed about maintaining the momentum built up in the initial phase of the plan in Mallow but this had continued even though the Development Board had not maintained the process as a new priority under its revised action plans to 2011.

In the case of Dunmanway, the community/area process is also seen as a success. The establishment of local delivery networks i.e. the Community

Council and the Business Network are an important feature of sustaining the progress made in Dunmanway. This provides a demonstration action of national significance in that there was a virtual absence of any such structures prior to the implementation of the area process. Their establishment was a key aspect of the Priority when adopted originally by the Board. Both now play a key role in sustaining local economic activities and provide a means through which the Council can engage with the local community.

An overall perspective coming from both experiences indicates that there is a need for senior council management participation in area processes such as those in Mallow and Dunmanway. The personal commitment of senior council staff was and remains a key strength in both instances. Of note is that in the Mallow case, the management has changed but such is the value of the process that the incoming senior personnel have sustained a similar level of commitment to the Mallow Area process, a factor which is acknowledged by those consulted for this report. This was and is seen as central to having the other agencies actively participate and resource the implementation of actions in both instances.

## Understanding Community Planning and its role in local economic development

As is evident from the above examples, community based planning as a central feature of renewed economic development at local level has long been recognised in many initiatives throughout the country. In this context the Task Force for the integration of local government and local development set out useful underlying principles for integrated local policy development which include:

- Community development should be based upon a process of collaborative planning underpinned by the local government system;
- Social inclusion based on targeted local development needed to be embedded into the local government system;
- Partnership / participation based on the development of governance having real inclusion in decision making capability within the local policy process which would parallel similar arrangements then applying at the national level;
- Democratic legitimacy based upon an integrated framework of elective and participative forms of governance.

The strategic thinking set out in the *Programme for Government* clearly acknowledges the above principles. The Minister has further developed the above perspective in his Limerick (and subsequent) speech. The impact of such thinking did result in the adoption of integrated socio-economic strategies at county/city level. These however did not, as had at the time been expected, feed into the national policy process. The effect was that national and regional agencies operating to a national mandate which largely ignored the strategies, did not actively engage, with a limited number of exceptions, with the county/city process<sup>14</sup>. The result was that there was limited impact, notwithstanding the potential of the strategies, for a process in which all the local actors in socio-economic development were involved. This non-engagement contrasts with the very real efforts by both local authorities and the local development bodies to work together in each of the above case studies. The case studies therefore provide a useful series of practical models which should be of relevance to the reform of sub-county structures. Equally, the willingness of agencies to work within a

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<sup>14</sup> Indecon Review of County/City Development Board Strategic Reviews and Proposals for Strengthening and Developing the Boards, January 2008.

multi-agency framework, based upon a local area context, points to a possible way forward in aligning the operational planning of such bodies, having regard for the broad objectives of the *Programme for Government*.

Current international thinking by among others the OECD, continues to argue the case for the adoption of community based approaches to service planning and delivery<sup>15</sup>. The development of community based initiatives allows for greater innovation and flexibility in local economic renewal. It enables communities to plan on the basis of comparative advantage, a central feature of current approaches to spatial economics.<sup>16</sup> The thinking now prevalent within spatial based policy development and economic theory suggests that policy-making is informed by locational characteristics.

Policy-making however, is often shaped through organisational cultures and perceptions which are driven by sectional expectations beyond the location in need of regeneration. While such thinking remains prevalent the opportunity for economic renewal is reduced and the ability of a community to take advantage of any comparative advantage, no matter how limited, is lost. This places further pressure on external bodies and national agencies to intervene in an effort to mitigate the loss of opportunity and the reduction in local capacity.

As a result a further demand for national resources becomes a critical issue, placing the national exchequer under additional pressure to release resources to underpin development which might originally have been available at local level. A vicious circle is created ultimately resulting in a complete collapse of local capability to address its own economic development. This leaves a long-term need on the part of the, in this particular instance, national development bodies, to resource what should more correctly be local driven economic development which is resourced within a local context.

Community based development must therefore draw upon a locational perspective which allows sufficient scope for local innovation. This scope must be set within a geographic context where identity and the geo-physical dimensions of the area can become a central

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.regionalstudies.org/international-networks/2011/sept-ire/presentations/Garcilazo.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Luger I., *The role of local government in contemporary economic development*, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, 2007.

aspect to economic development, a key argument made by leading economic writers such as Krugmann, Porter and Lejano<sup>17</sup>.

Furthermore, given locational characteristics, there is also a need to reflect on the long-term impacts of economic policy. Such effects can include the depletion of the natural resource stock of an area, a shift in cultural perspective of an affected population or the enhancement of financial reserves. This long-term influence is increasingly being factored into the economic policy process internationally, given the effect of cumulative legacy and the need to manage it. Such "market failures" inevitably result in environmental liabilities falling on the communities most directly affected by market failure developments.

Good governance, based upon community models, is therefore seen as essential for proper planning and sustainable development. Any real effort to reform local government, as highlighted in the *Programme for Government*, must thus place community based planning and spatial economics at the heart of the renewal process. Such thinking was underpinned by Sir Michael Lyons<sup>18</sup> in his review of local structures in England. He identifies a future for local communities based upon processes which develop place-shaping and identity where public and local development bodies are focused on a shared programme based on well-being. Such communities would have strategic processes based on the capacity to understand and respond to the needs of such communities within a framework established by the communities themselves. This perspective reverses the traditional top-down perspective of institutional reform in England and is a central pillar in the move towards localism which is a key public service reform under the current UK Government<sup>19</sup>.

## **Existing Arrangements in Ireland**

The implementation of area based structures across the country, based on the recommendations of the Task Force and following the customer focus of *Better Local Government* has been a consistent feature of the local government reform process over the past decade. In addition, local authorities generally have sought to implement local area planning on the basis of the provisions of the Planning and Development Act, 2000.

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<sup>17</sup> For example Lejano, R., P., *Frameworks for Policy Analysis: Merging Text and Context*, Routledge New York, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> Lyons, Sir Michael, *Place-Shaping: A shared ambition for the future of local government*. UK Stationary Office, London. 2007.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/localgovernment/localismplainenglishguide>

However, as the Indecon Report acknowledged, there is limited connectivity between these processes and the more strategic framework for which the development boards were responsible.

In addition, the institutional environment has been complicated by a relatively ad hoc approach to managing the reform of town government. The Minister has clearly recognised that existing arrangements cannot be allowed to remain. Significant re-configuration of the local government system, the planning system and the strategic planning carried out through the county/city development boards is now a political priority. Maintaining the status quo is no longer an option.

The Minister is clearly aware of the various efforts to use local initiative in planning the long-term for our communities. This is plainly acknowledged in his Limerick speech and in more recent pronouncements on the implementation of the Efficiency Review and the merger of Limerick City and County Councils, the two Tipperary Councils and the possible merger of Waterford City and County. The Minister wishes to:

*"Improve links between national, regional and local planning to achieve better and more co-ordinated development that supports local communities ensuring a proper plan-led system. From the top down, we have a robust planning framework in place from the National Spatial Strategy, through the regional planning guidelines to development plans and local area plans at the local level. But there is equally a **bottom-up approach from a community perspective with an understandable focus on how their own local area**<sup>20</sup> will be developed and enhanced. The consultation processes built into the planning system are crucial to integrate these views into plans and the assessment of development applications."*

In the above context it is now relevant to examine the approach to the participative community based planning undertaken in the communities outlined earlier. In addition, it will be appropriate to begin to identify possible lessons from these exercises and ultimately to begin to set out a possible way forward for area based planning which will facilitate the achievement of the Minister's clearly stated objectives.

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<sup>20</sup> Bold- Report emphasis

## Lessons from the Case Studies

**Key Message: Structured processes are central to participative community-based planning which is itself central to developing sustainable communities**

In broad terms each of the processes undertaken in the case studies involved a multi-phase approach which included:

- 1) Setting the geographical scope for the community planning
- 2) Identification of key stakeholders
- 3) Engagement in preliminary consultation with such stakeholders
- 4) Completion of a demographic profile
- 5) Identification of key issues and concerns/SWOT Analysis
- 6) Identification of practical actions and delivery programme with agreement of relevant statutory and local development bodies
- 7) Establishment of local monitoring arrangements
- 8) Identification of resources
- 9) Implementation

The process itself is presented more comprehensively in the following *Figure1*<sup>21</sup>. It is important to note however that this is simply a figure to demonstrate a process of engagement which places a community at the heart of a strategic planning framework and should be interpreted in that context. It does not seek to fully demonstrate the dynamic nature of the engagement required nor can it capture an essential feature found in each of the above case studies, i.e. the very real personal commitment to the processes on the part of both the local communities themselves and the individuals from the various agencies.

A central issue in each case was the need to involve the community and local elected members along with an essential level of support from the local development sector and senior council officials. This required a preliminary developmental phase with the relevant communities in all cases to create the confidence necessary to underpin structured interaction between the local community, its leaders, including local political

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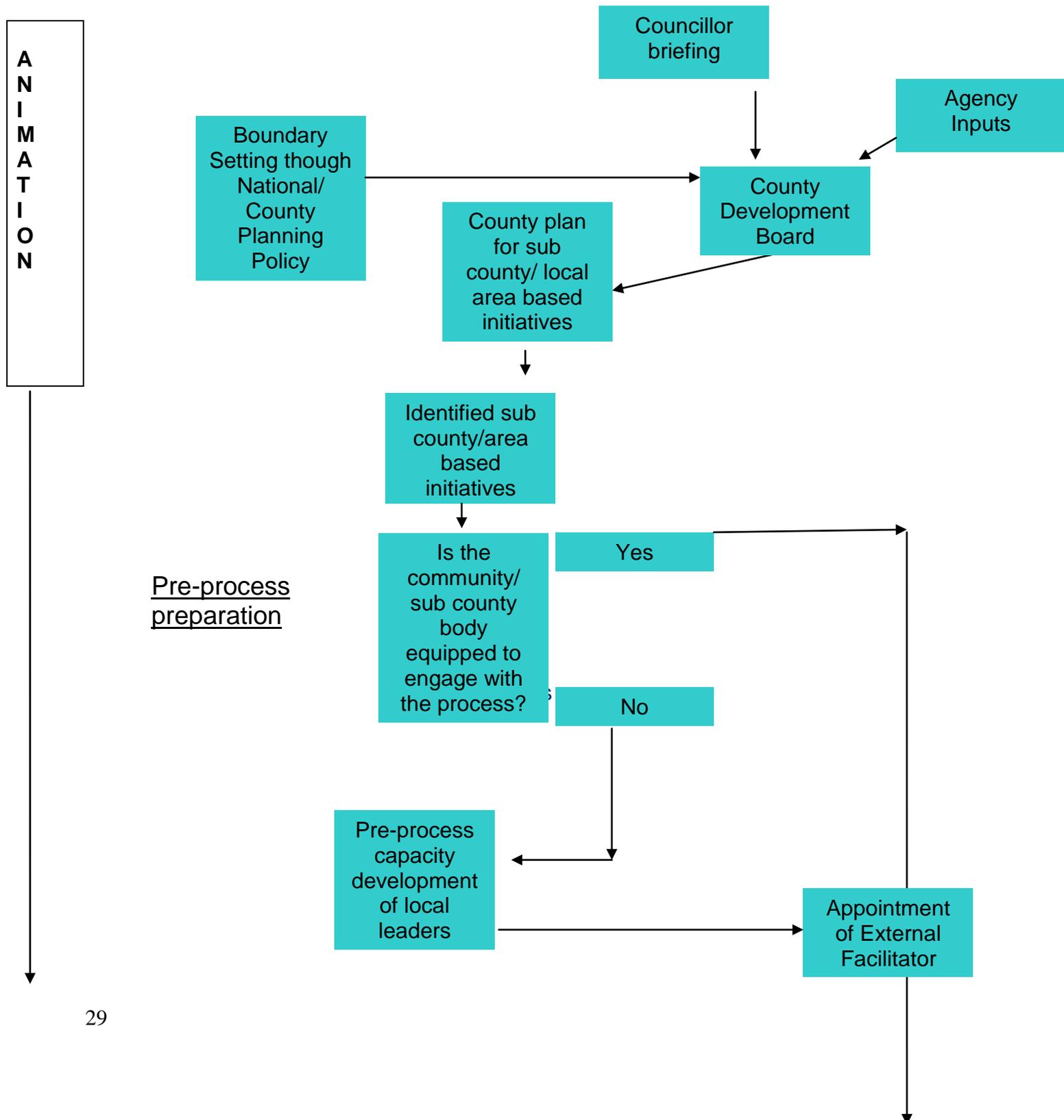
<sup>21</sup> Further details see Appendix 1

representatives, and the statutory bodies and voluntary service providers. The relationship between the relevant local development company and those on the County Development Boards is seen in a number of the case studies to have played a central part in creating a suitable environment in which such engagement could take place. The confidence-building within the Board structures, through the on-going engagement across the agencies represented on the Boards concerned, was a critical cornerstone to this process. It facilitated the local development companies and ultimately the local communities to engage with the statutory sector as an equal partner.

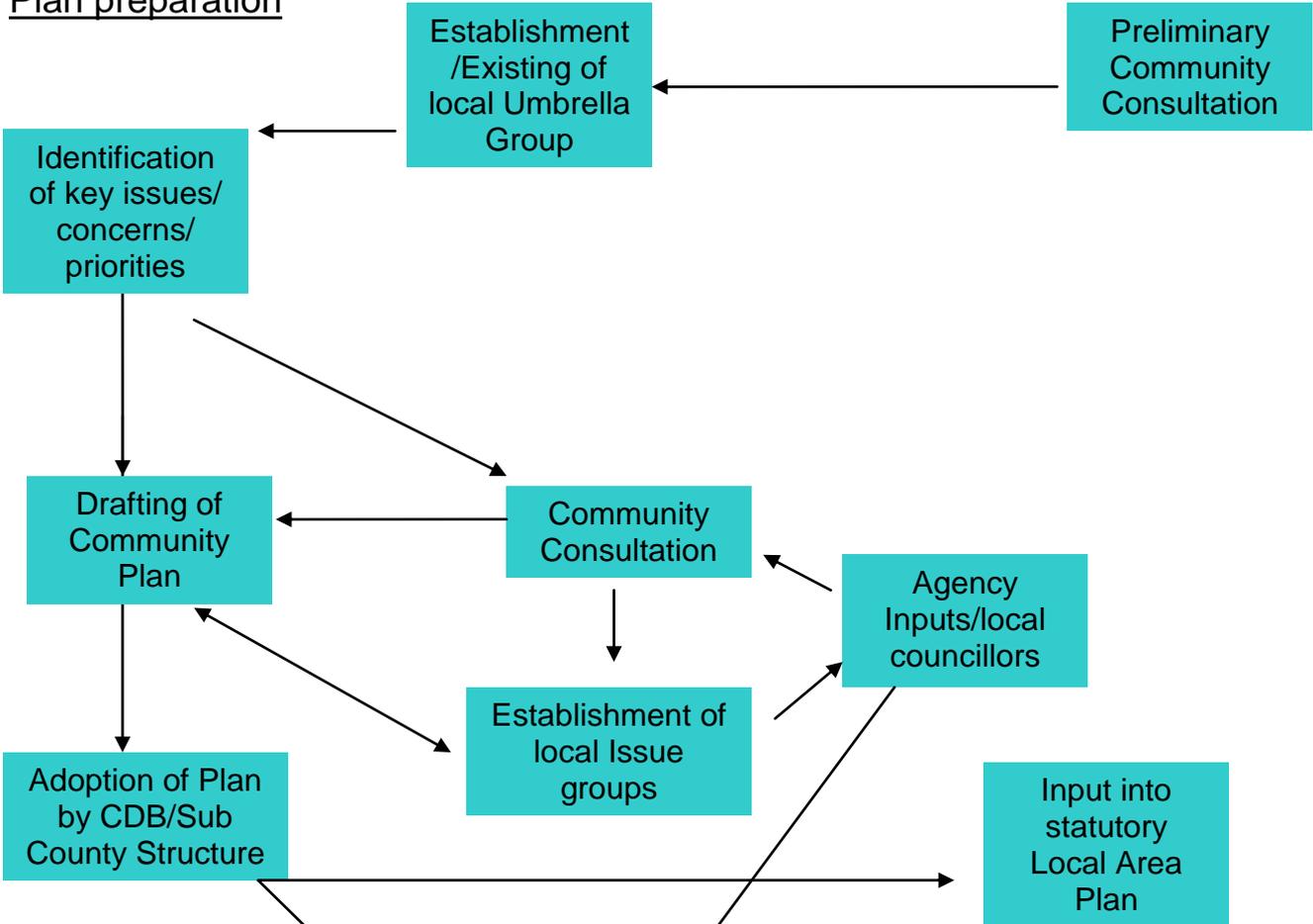
Of further relevance were the inputs from both the Tipperary Institute and UCD in applying integrated socio-economic processes and providing the capacity training underpinning such processes in Offaly, Limerick and Cork. This has ensured an appropriate independent setting for the evaluation which was carried out on each of the case studies examined for this Report.

**Figure1: Community Planning Process**

Geographic Scoping-strategy setting

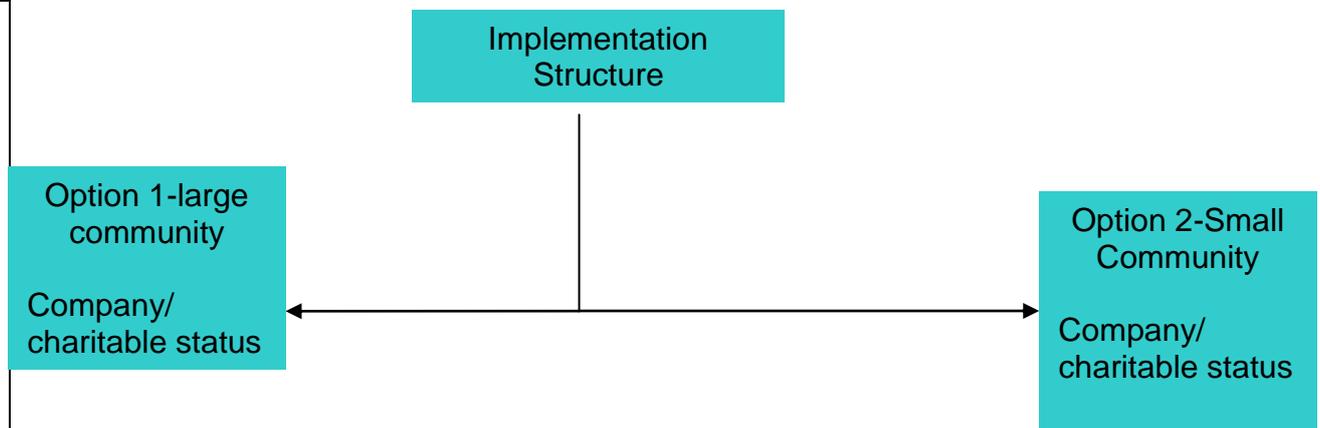


Plan preparation



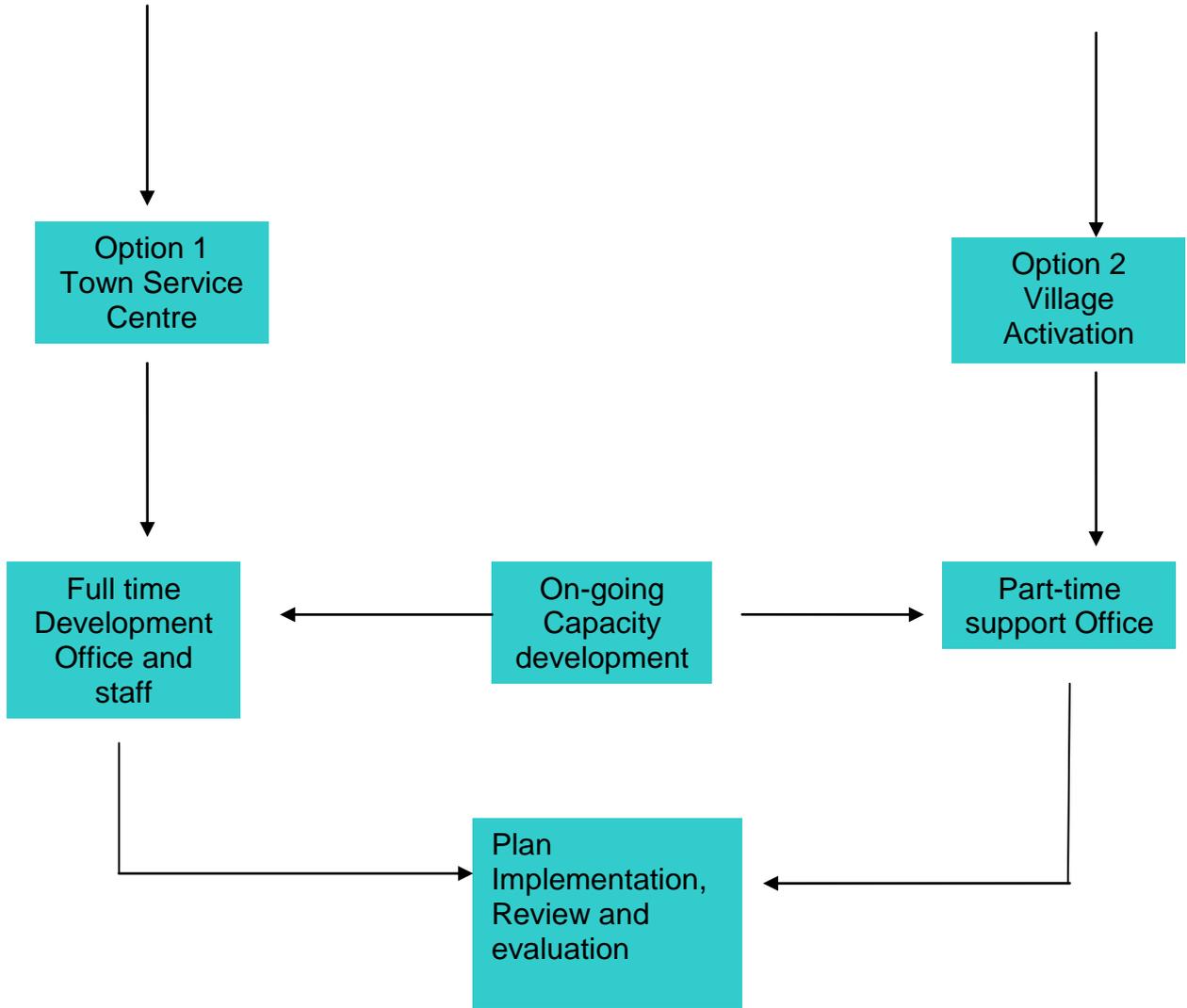
EXTERNAL FACILITATION

Plan Implementation



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## **Application of the IAP/ADOPT/Communities Futures Planning Processes**

Each of the above processes essentially applied the best practice recognised in international research. The processes acknowledge that area planning requires a preliminary stage which sets out to identify the key stakeholders in each of the areas concerned. This included the statutory and local development bodies. Of equal significance to sustaining the planning process in each case study ( and the need to ensure buy-in from the local community) is the involvement of all of the groups and organisations in the community including those sectors not represented by groups, those leaders within the communities concerned that could demonstrate the track record in managing local voluntary organisations, and those not normally involved but having a capacity to actively contribute. This included both local elected representatives as well as key individuals who were held in high regard due to specific interests and experiences in, for example, local business.

This approach brought a high level of legitimacy to the overall approach as well as providing a voice through which community engagement could be established between the statutory bodies and the wider community. In addition, there were times in each case where local leadership had to be provided to move on specific challenges as they arose. The use of the processes where local leaders could engage with their community was essential in each case.

Notwithstanding the above, a further and critical aspect of each case study was that a full-time resource was available to each of the planning processes. This was highlighted in the Review of County Development Board Priorities undertaken by the Cork County Development Board<sup>22</sup>. In the case of the Cork case studies such resources were, and continue to be, provided by a combination of direct allocation of staff resources from within

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<sup>22</sup> Review of Cork County Development Board key Priorities 2005-2007

the community and enterprise section of the Council or by the local development companies. In Limerick, the supports have been supplied by the local development companies and relevant agencies, while in Mayo and Offaly resources were provided on a shared basis between the relevant local authority and the local development sector.

*A key recommendation* therefore, will be to ensure that there is a consistent and recognised support, facilitation and secretarial system provided to all local area based processes undertaken to support local economic and social renewal. This resource must necessarily supply capability support and related developmental work which will be central to creating the necessary confidence in all communities to move forward within their own socio-economic development contexts. This approach may require a two level approach to capacity building with necessary external facilitation.

In the first instance, communities may well benefit from an initial capacity building process among potential or existing community leaders. A second capacity building process, one to underpin implementation of any actions arising from the planning process, should be considered as implementation becomes the focus for the concerned community.

## **Defining the geographic scope for community plans**

A useful aspect of the case studies is that they address very different geographic contexts ranging from specific urban settings along with a rural hinterland e.g. Limerick and Cork, (and thus it would seem of interest from the perspective of the Minister's ideas) to quite wide definitions which reflect the fact that the initiatives found their origins in existing community/area based work of local development companies and the area structures of the relevant local authorities e.g. Offaly. The case studies in Mayo and Limerick provide a micro or sub sub-county perspective which suggests the validity in seeking to underpin the development of smaller urban centres with rural environs, albeit without the necessity for the on-going resourcing that is evidently required in the larger examples e.g. CE supervisor and team members may provide the on-going human resourcing for a small community, or a full-time official may be required to support voluntary activists in a larger community, while both may benefit from intermittent mentoring/advocating by local development company staff.

International practice in regard to the definition of geographic scope for forward planning is imprecise. Locational influences such as physical aspects i.e. mountains, catchment areas, may not necessarily fit with the functionality of day to day living or cultural identity. The evidence suggests that the preparation of strategic, community based, plans is best determined where the scoping of geographic coverage is a central initial part of the process. This experience would seem to be borne out by the case studies where using broadly similar approaches to differing areas of scale has resulted in a relatively dynamic process in each instance. The extent of the communities covered was however influenced by recognition of both function and identity. The key, it seems is in regard to the availability of resources, staffing and financial, to underpin the strategic process in the first instance. This includes the capability development which is central as outlined above. It also includes the capacity of the relevant statutory agencies to focus on communities below their normal organisational arrangements. The degree to which the expectations of local communities of whatever scale can be complemented by county and/or national policy will also be an influence.

In this context there is some relevance in referring to the Minister's Limerick speech in regard to the role of town government and in seeking to build up a stronger municipal framework in Ireland. The existing town council structures do not reflect any degree of consistency, reflecting as they do a largely 19th century construction which is well past its sell by date. Some towns are largely limited, notwithstanding their population, to a representational role for local electoral purposes, some have absolutely no role in their own right while a few do have a relatively significant role in the planning and provision of services. This is evident from the case studies in Mallow and Dunmanway in Cork and Kilmallock and Croom in Limerick<sup>23</sup>. It is also of relevance to the other case studies in Mayo and Offaly.

It is clear from all the case studies that there is both a need, and a commensurate demand, for local initiative in planning communities, which moves well beyond the local area planning which is provided under the Planning and Development Acts. Such planning is a necessary feature of managing the natural resources of the state though setting direction for physical development. It is not, however, sufficient to restrict forward planning efforts to a simple focused effort addressing spatial development. A more critical necessity is to provide an integrated socio-economic perspective within which spatial planning, as undertaken within the planning and development regulatory framework can be placed. This means that ideally there should be a preliminary planning process addressing the socio-economic conditions, current and future, confronting a community before spatial policy can be addressed. Equally, there is a need to bring some consistency to the organisation of sub-county structures across the State and to resolve the current position regarding the role of town government operating within boundaries which are largely based on 19th century conditions.

There is therefore a need to bring some rationality to the proper planning of the country on a sub-county basis. This could, in the first instance, be addressed, as originally envisaged by the *Task Force for the Integration of Local Government and Local Development*, within the framework of a strategic plan for each county. However, such planning at county level is not a necessary condition as there should be sufficient scope, given the experience in the

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<sup>23</sup> Mallow has a Town Council, the area process however is focused on the functional role of the town and includes an extensive rural hinterland. The other examples have no town government.

processes reviewed in this report, for such planning to be undertaken at a more local area-based level than the county, even if there is no national move to apply county-based strategic planning as envisaged in the *Programme for Government*.

It is nonetheless noted that county/city strategic planning remains a key objective of the *Programme for Government*. Given this particular policy commitment, and as the existing strategies of the boards are no longer relevant in the current social and economic environment, a wholesale re-examination of strategic plans in each is now required. A central feature of this review should be to determine the appropriate area scope as demonstrated by both Cork and Limerick Development Boards following their most recent Strategic Reviews. Such scoping would then allow for the completion of area based community orientated plans which in turn would facilitate delivery of statutory local area plans and other relevant operational planning of all agencies delivering services at a sub-county level.

## **Stimulation of the community and local elected representatives**

As acknowledged earlier, the case studies demonstrate that early stimulation of community concerns are a central feature of an area based planning process. This is applicable regardless of geographic scope or demographic scale. In each of the case studies at least one community development expert was retained to deliver the initial capability and local capacity to drive the process forward. This, in turn, brought added benefit in that those from the community working alongside the community development worker were enabled to interact with their communities on a targeted basis. They did so in the knowledge that others around them would also be working in parallel thus enhancing the extent to which stakeholder participation from all sections of the relevant communities were involved.

A key aspect, it would appear, of the development workers concerned was to move towards becoming an advocate (for the relevant communities) within their own professional or organisational setting. In doing so levels of trust were built which eased the preparation of the area plans. It also underpinned decisions from both public and private bodies in making resources available to deliver on the actions identified in the implementation plans. This is notably the case in both Cork case studies, the Mayo community futures initiatives, Kilmallock and to a more limited extent in the remaining examples. In the Cork cases, the success of both, and related examples in Carrigaline and, albeit under differing circumstances, Mitchelstown, has created the impetus behind the County Development Board instigating new priority actions to support area-based initiatives in Monard and the Islands.

A key challenge did highlight itself in regard to the role of the locally elected representatives in Cork. Their involvement in each instance was initially restricted causing a degree of suspicion among the councillors. Nonetheless, over a relatively short period and due to direct intervention on the part of senior officials in Cork County Council, the local representatives in each area did go on to play an increasing role in the area-based initiatives. This lesson has applied subsequently in the Islands Initiative, recently undertaken by the Development Board. Similar experiences are noted from the Offaly case studies and to a more limited, if important, extent in Limerick, all of which suggests that:

1) There is a key role from the start of local community based processes for the local elected representatives. This may involve active engagement or the provision of information on the process. In the latter case an assurance that the elected members will be brought into the process at an appropriate juncture may be sufficient. This should be a matter for agreement with the elected members as, depending on matters of scale, geographic coverage and other influences, early engagement may or may not be a necessary condition for a successful process: and:

2) It is as essential that local elected members are provided with the same opportunity for skills and capability training as other actors in the process to ensure that their role as the representative voice of each community is both respected and underpinned.

Based upon this approach the following characteristics might be expected to be central to a renewed local government system centred on the strategic planning processes envisaged in the ADOPT/IAP/Community Futures model.

- **A long term strategic partnership:** A variety of stakeholders, some formal, others informal, would be expected to operate within a strategic partnership framework provided through the area level but subject to the overall democratic process.
- **Collaborative planning:** Even those that are a part of a strategic partnership cannot see themselves as being positioned to address all issues and therefore they will need to work collaboratively with other similar partnerships at other levels of governance, a process of collaboration that is both horizontal and vertical in terms of public management.
- **Process of socio-economic development will be the focus for the development board:** Local government, in its spatial planning role, can no longer be the sole determinant of the local spatial planning policy framework. Equally spatial policy cannot be restricted to solely national objectives. A key aspect of the models for example, is that they are set within an agreed socio-economic context which could be determined by a re-configured development board.
- **Cultural Perspective:** Integrated policy planning at development board and higher levels must recognise the differing cultural perspectives that apply in a particular area and across institutional settings. Therefore what may be an appropriate institutional

setting for one area may be completely inappropriate for another. Thus the national/county planning framework must seek to provide the necessary flexibility to enable the application of differing institutional settings, including those relating to organisational boundaries.

- **Sustainable development:** Such integrated and culturally derived frameworks must be based upon a real understanding of the socio-ecological footprint of the community and an iterative process needs to be in place to ensure that where conflict arises between local and international and national demands that the planning process can realistically operate within the boundaries set by national and international sustainability requirements.
- **Critical monitoring and evaluation:** A critical feature is to have a real understanding of the capacity to deliver practical actions through the ADOPT/IAP/Community Futures process. This would entail having an agreed level of minimum standards in public service delivery, and acceptance that a balance needs to be determined in terms of geographic trade-offs. The re-configured councils and area structures would have to have the capacity to measure and evaluate levels of actual implementation associated with the process.

## Application to meet Minister's Objectives

As outlined earlier the Minister is seeking to implement a re-configured local government system based upon a renewed focus on municipalities rather than retaining the existing town councils and area committees of county councils. He is also responsible for the alignment of the local government and local development sectors. In that context there is an opportunity to consider the applicability of a re-structured local municipality within the characteristics set out above. Thus the reform process envisaged by the Minister could be based upon the community planning model developed above.

In taking such an approach the on-going need to address area planning and the delivery of public services would be, once and for all, comprehensively addressed, along with the resolution of the need for reform of town government, a long-standing block to general reform of public management in Ireland.

Therefore it is *recommended* that a general application of the community planning processes such as Adopt/IAP/Community Futures be applied through a re-configured development board structure and the aligned local government and local development sectors envisaged in the *Programme for Government*. This should apply on the basis that the full extent of non-City Council areas are covered by area based municipalities which are centred on relevant urban centres and surrounding rural hinterland in line with the ADOPT /IAP/Community Futures models

Options for membership of such municipalities should be based upon democratic election with appropriate participation arrangements for the wider community in line with the participation models developed under ADOPT /IAP/Community Futures.

The approach to applying a participative community planning process within the local government reform framework is set out in more detail in the following Appendix 1 and 2. In summary, however, the following features must apply to the undertaking of a community based participative planning process which will underpin overall local government reform:

- 1) The completion of intensive training to underpin community capacity is central to a community based planning process. There is a fundamental obligation on those seeking to

engage with communities in any policy process to ensure that such communities have the capacity to contribute in a transparent and valued manner. The creation of local structures, and more significantly, the animation of local leaders with whom the development company could work should become a central feature to building confidence between the communities and the agencies.

2) Agreement of the local authority, the local development sector and the relevant state agencies, at the commencement of the process regarding the need to move beyond non-committed forms of engagement is a necessary feature of successful area based initiatives. If the process is to deliver added value to communities there is a need for senior council management participation in area processes. The personal commitment of senior council staff was and remains a key strength in the case studies addressed in this report.

3) Opportunities for engagement with disadvantaged communities within the areas concerned, thereby underpinning social inclusion policies must be a central feature of all area based initiatives.

4) Each identified community has to have a cadre of volunteer leaders operating with the support of, at least, a person with the necessary developmental skills to facilitate a continuous focus on the delivery of actions. A high level of participation among the people of the communities concerned as well as the voluntary organisations in these communities was also a feature of the success of the processes examined. A further aspect worth highlighting in this regard was the importance of a continuing level of advocacy from those that helped to facilitate each of the processes reviewed.

5) The engagement of an external facilitator to work with the communities to develop their plans is a necessary feature of area based planning, It is noted from the case studies that such facilitation was provided by a variety of resources, in some the local development company provided staff, in others the local authority provided a community and enterprise staff member or an area based official. In a limited number of instances, where an external consultant was used, it was clearly intended that the consultant was to play a facilitative role and would not be available to oversee implementation. It is, however, also important to note that an external consultant may be required in circumstances in which levels of trust between communities and the public agencies is poor. The creation of an adequately

trained steering group including members from the relevant agencies and the community was a central pillar resulting in successful implementation of the area based plans.

6) The recruitment of Community Support Volunteers, appropriately trained to lead community engagement from plan preparation to plan implementation and review is best practice and should be a feature of all area based planning processes .

7) In the absence of a statutory basis, integration between community or area based planning initiatives and the local area planning of each planning authority is currently dependent on a willingness of the local planning authority to engage. In the case studies examined this resulted in a broad range of co-ordination being put in place. The long term nature of the local area planning process which county councils as planning authorities are responsible for do not have a focus on immediate project delivery. The communities in all cases did have a focus on short-term projects. The area based plan itself should address delivery of actions which are practical and deliverable as well as having strategic longer-term objectives. Communities however should be facilitated to contribute more input through their community planning processes into the longer term planning of the planning authorities. In the instances where this was the case there is an acknowledgement of the significance of the area based process in underpinning the local planning authority policy process. The community-based plan can, with regard to land-use planning, be seen as providing the context and the socio-economic objectives which the land-use plan would seek to facilitate in the most environmentally sustainable manner.

8) An overall critical message is the fact that the community planning process in a number of the case studies was largely undertaken in advance of the policy development of most of the agencies represented, including the planning authority. This has allowed the agencies to align their operational/strategic plans for the areas concerned with the community planning process and to provide for a more structured input to the spatial planning process within the local planning authorities.

## **Appendix 1**

**Community planning in the context of a move towards a municipal structure at sub-county level.**

1). In the event of a move towards a sub-county municipal structure based on municipalities<sup>24</sup> with directly elected members who would also sit at County Council level the community participative planning process would:

- Facilitate the preparation of community led socio-economic plans<sup>25</sup> at a level below that of the municipality in line with the provisions of the rural development proposals of the European Commission and the emerging ideas regarding a possible bottom-up element of programmes within the context of the CSF.
- Integrate the community socio-economic plans with the likely need to prepare/amend local area plans required under the existing Planning and Development/local government code in Ireland without the need for a separate statutory provision. However, in the planned amendment of the Planning and Development legislation, consideration of the inclusion of social and economic as well as land-use and environmental issues should apply. How this might be given effect is set out in appendix 2.
- Introduce an enhanced participation process to address the significant gap which will arise between the local elected representatives and the communities they represent due to the reform of the town councils and the reduction in elected members. The introduction of an enhanced participation process based on the socio-economic characteristics of local communities will go some way to bridging this gap as it will provide a platform for both councillors and citizens to engage with each other. Such processes must however, include mandatory elements regarding how community inputs are used and responded to, particularly in regard to underpinning the statutory policy role of the elected members. How this would be given effect is set out in appendix 2.
- Develop, through the Development Board, a renewed local electoral area framework based on the municipal structures. The putting in place of local electoral areas which complement the socio-economic planning of the constituent communities at sub-county level would, in turn, underpin local democracy and the business planning of the Local Development Companies and public authorities- see appendix 2.

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<sup>24</sup> Possible options here include: a) town/hinterland, b) area defined by natural environment/local identity and c) defined area within a county. Ideally these should be identified through the relevant Development Board following a consultation process

<sup>25</sup> Recognising the need for a) pre-engagement with all sections of the relevant community b) pre-development of capacity and structures and c) a call system for communities to participate in developing a community socio-economic plan

- Enhance the business and operational planning of the various agencies sitting on the development boards which will also require some changes in the level of obligation of such agencies to respond to bottom-up approaches; this must happen either through some greater flexibility to respond to local needs being provided to centralised agencies or through the setting aside of an element of budgets to facilitate such a response
- Provide a community led policy process which has to complement existing national policy on sustainability. A key aspect would be to ensure that the community led process is seen to actively contribute to national policy development so that national policy outcomes are clearly embedded within the local community planning process and vice versa. This means that for the first time there would be an organised process of moving issues from local to county to national level and back down.

2). The creation of a "patchwork quilt" of sub county voluntary based districts and communities underneath the municipal area structure will facilitate better the planning of focused services and facilities to meet the needs of specific communities. (See appendix 2)

- More effective drawing up of local electoral areas and districts, based on an established evidence-based platform through the Development Board
- Greater co-ordination of local voluntary effort in line with the concept of "localism" where communities would take responsibility for the delivery of local initiatives within the strategic framework of the County Socio-Economic Strategy. This could ensure that the local community owns the community socio-economic plan and the implementation of actions therein; such an approach will reduce the costs<sup>26</sup> and administrative pressures required with the drafting of local area plans by the planning authorities. The community inputs into other local public authority and local development company plans will also be enhanced. This will enable the alignment of the local development companies business planning with the local area planning of the new municipal structures and the strategy planning of the development board bringing greater synergy and lower costs to the local development process.

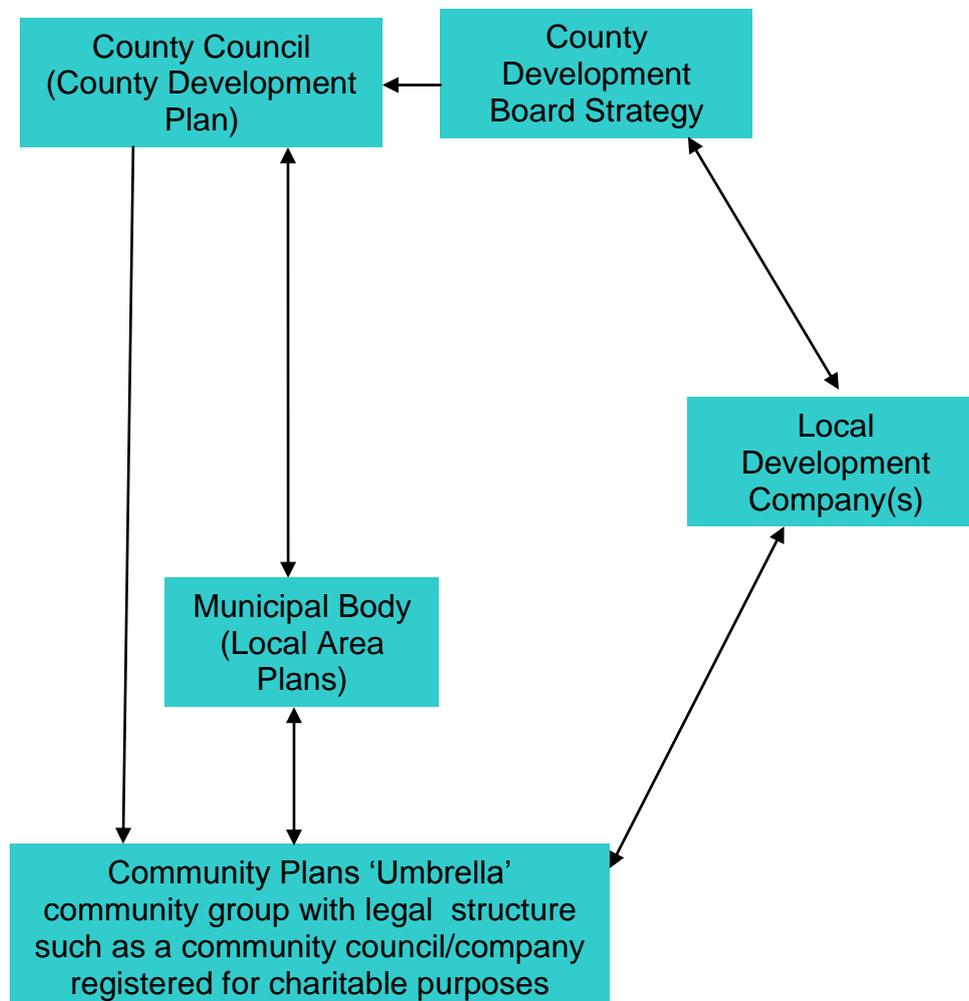
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<sup>26</sup> Preparation of local area plans is currently a heavy resource demand on local authorities. Replacing these with a single LAP per municipality would free up resources and produce savings for the local authority. The preparation of socio-economic plans will require external facilitation (ideally by staff of the Forward Planning Unit of the Local Authority and staff of the LDC) but is relatively cost free given that they are largely driven by voluntary action and support from the local development companies. Some support is available from the statutory agencies but this is considerably less than the costs associated with local area planning.

- Facilitate the development of appropriate inclusive ‘umbrella’ community structures and capacity, thereby optimising the resource that is social capital.

3).The alignment of the local development company with local government should take place alongside the creation of the municipal structure. The local development company should either operate as a single county based entity or, depending on the scale of the municipality, the municipal area itself. This would be determined through the development board based on both EU and national criteria. This would allow a maximum flexibility in creating the most appropriate structures to fit with local and county identity, spatial functionality and the need for overall strategic direction at county level.

The overall alignment would look like:



In terms of the final community socio-economic plans it will be important that there are resources put in place to support this structuring such as mentoring, training and capital. This should be a feature of engagement agreed between the development board and the local development companies and local authority.

4).The tasks which should be undertaken within the above alignment include:

*At County Development Board level:*

- Agree with agencies the overall district electoral area framework for adoption by the local authority
- Prepare a county based socio-economic strategy
- Agree overall process and timescale for rolling out community socio-economic plans to complement business planning of the rural development initiatives and the local area planning of the local authority as well as business planning within public bodies and local development companies represented on development board<sup>27</sup>
- Promote the process to allow for overall county coverage within a seven year time frame to allow for both local animation/capacity building and ultimate alignment to both the County Socio-Economic Strategy and the County Development Plan.
- Facilitate the policy setting for socio-economic plans through the County Strategy
- Provide the platform through which inter-agency business planning and socio-economic plans can be aligned
- Roll out such initiatives throughout the county
- Facilitate the establishment of the municipal structures and their alignment over the seven years with both the community socio-economic plans and the local area plans.
- Provide the platform for the sharing of experience and best practice.

*At County Council level:*

- Facilitate through a renewed economic development unit, support for specific actions in the socio-economic plans and ensure complementarity between the CDB Socio-Economic Strategy and the County Development Plan
- Develop and adopt the County Development Plan
- Adoption of County corporate plan

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<sup>27</sup> Develop funding criteria which require communities over time (as socio-economic plans are prepared) to only be eligible for public funding if a) they have a community plan and b) they have the requisite legal “umbrella” structure.

- Delegate, as appropriate, service delivery to the municipal structures in line with national policy recommendations
- Ensure alignment of county based policy with both national and municipal policy environment
- Support municipal and, as appropriate, initiatives for implementation of inter-agency actions within community plans.

*At municipal level:*

Preparation of a local area plan to replace existing local area plans. One plan-one municipal area in collaboration with the Community Councils (as assisted by the Local Development Company)

- Adoption of service level agreements and shared service agreements with local development company and with other public authorities as appropriate along with the need for other public authorities to buy into this process.

*At local development company level:*

- Community empowerment, both focused on the marginalised and the broad based community, as a preparation for inclusive engagement and to ensure capacity of all communities to participate
- Alignment of local development business planning<sup>28</sup> with community socio-economic plans- and municipal organisation
- Pre-development support for communities identified through the joint CDB/LDC call for community socio-economic plans
- Facilitating the socio-economic planning process
- Capacity building and development of community structures with legal and charitable status
- Supporting/mentoring of specific actions in line with EU rural development policy requirements
- Obligation over time to fund only those actions identified within the community socio-economic plans
- Overseeing integration of community socio-economic plans into re-configured local development framework.

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<sup>28</sup> In line with the seven year timeline to ensure complementarity with both local area plans and reforms to policies of the European Union

- Funding specific actions in line with the community socio-economic plans and local authority mandated functions in line with proposals of the European Commission

Jointly between the local authority and the local development company

- Agree processes and timescale for local community planning
- Promotion of calls for communities to participate
- Facilitate the socio-economic planning process
- Support implementation of actions
- Roll out inter-agency actions
- Participate on the various structures
- Feed recommendations arising from the process into the CDB socio-economic strategy

## **Appendix 2: From community socio-economic plans to municipal organisation**

## ***How it might look***

### Example 1

Currently a County with a city council /large county town, say population of 190,000 with 95,000 in an urban setting:

To become

One Unitary\_Council (UC) (1 Corporate Strategy, 1 Development Plan) and one Development Board (1 Socio-Economic Strategy)

- Three "municipalities, one urban and two rural
- Twenty six elected members on the Unitary Authority
- 10 UC members in the "urban municipality", 8 UC members each in the two rural municipalities. (multiples of 2 for the Districts)
- Three local area plans-the urban and the two rural per the provisions of the Planning and Development Code
- Districts\_within each municipality(4 Districts in each rural municipality and 5 districts in the urban municipality in the example) each organised on the basis of:
  - a) Town and hinterland/ natural service area; and includes
  - b) Parishes with villages ; and
  - c) Communities with recognised identity
- Each district to elect 2 Councillors, who sit on the Municipality Fora and on the Unitary Authority
- Each district to have a voluntary committee of members elected by local population (2 per community) through universal suffrage. Each district to nominate two members to sit on municipal aligned community and voluntary forum which in turn nominates members to sit on Local Development Company Board, County Development Board, Strategic Policy Committees and other relevant local consultation arena.

- Each district to have a district co-ordination network of front line staff of state and voluntary service providers to support the socio-economic plan for each district
- Communities to create a "patchwork quilt" across each district and municipality and organised with :
  - a) "Umbrella" Legal structure registered for charitable purposes.

## Example 2

Currently a county council, no town councils, say population of 30,000

To become: One council(1 Corporate Strategy, 1 Development Plan) and One Development Board (1 Socio-Economic Strategy)

### 12 members

- Districts\_within the council (4 districts) each organised on the basis of:
  - a) Town and hinterland/ natural service area; and includes
  - b) Parishes with villages ; and
  - c) Communities with recognised identity
- Each district to elect 3 councillors, who sit on the authority
- Each district to have a voluntary committee of members elected by local population (2/community) through universal suffrage. Each district to nominate two members to sit on county aligned community and voluntary forum which in turn nominates members to sit on Local Development Company Board, County Development Board, Strategic Policy Committees and other relevant local consultation arena.
- Each district to have a district co-ordination network of front line staff of state and voluntary service providers to support the socio-economic plan for each district
- Communities to create a "patchwork quilt" across each district and organised with :
  - a) "Umbrella" Legal structure registered for charitable purposes.

### Example 3

Currently a County Council, population of 70,000 people with two town councils (1 rating, 1 non-rating) of 15,000-18,000 people.

To become: One County Council (1 Corporate Strategy, 1 Development Plan) and One Development Board (1 Socio-Economic Strategy)

### 18 Members

- Two "municipalities based on town and hinterland e.g. East County/West County
- Eighteen elected members on the Unitary Authority
- 9 UA members in the two " municipalities"
- Two local area plans- per the provisions of the Planning and Development Code
- Socio-economic districts within each municipality organised as:
  - a) Town and hinterland/ natural service area; and includes
  - b) Parishes with villages ; and
  - c) Communities with recognised identity
- Each district to elect 2-3 Councillors, who sit on the municipality and on the Unitary Authority
- Each district to have a voluntary committee of members elected by local population (2 per community) through universal suffrage. Each district to nominate two members to sit on Municipal aligned community and voluntary forum which in turn nominates members to sit on Local Development Company Board, County Development Board, Strategic Policy Committees and other relevant local consultation arena.
- Each district to have a district co-ordination Network of front line staff of state and voluntary service providers to support the socio-economic plan for each District
- Communities to create a "patchwork quilt" across each district and municipality and organised with :
  - a) "Umbrella" Legal structure registered for charitable purposes.

## **Appendix 3: ADOPT**

## Overview of ADOPT Model

The ADOPT model was developed by UCD in association with Ballyhoura Development Ltd. to facilitate strategic planning of communities within the business planning framework of Ballyhoura whilst having regard for the overall strategic planning of both development boards in Cork and Limerick. The approach provides for a clearly delineated process which will take a community from being disorganized with limited community perspective on its future development to one where a shared vision and underpinning action plan can drive the actions of both public and private sectors in the same community. The model allows for an auditing (A) of the area in terms of its socio-economic profile followed by the identification of districts (D) which will become the focus for service planning and delivery. Organisations (O) can then be established or re-orientated to deliver on the necessary implementation while more extensive planning (P) and training (T) can then be put in place on either a district wide basis or alternatively within specific communities such as a parish or even housing areas which might be suffering from social disadvantage.

The model complements best practice in strategic planning allowing as it does for the necessary flexibility to address local circumstances, political concerns and shifts in the economic environment.

In a review of the model the Tipperary Institute acknowledged its process driven approach which is based on active participation by the key stakeholders in the relevant communities and an active collaboration between both statutory and non-statutory agencies and private sector partners. The Review<sup>29</sup> noted that the model has a range of uses but that in broad terms it provides communities of differing backgrounds, scale and cultural perspective with the means to engage in a planning process which would contribute to greater community cohesion. The model, it found would allow communities to apply greater energy to the planning of their area and allow for the marrying of resources across both public and private bodies and from the wider community providing greater scope for integrating local spending and enhancing the impact of such spending to give added value in meeting the objective needs of the relevant communities.

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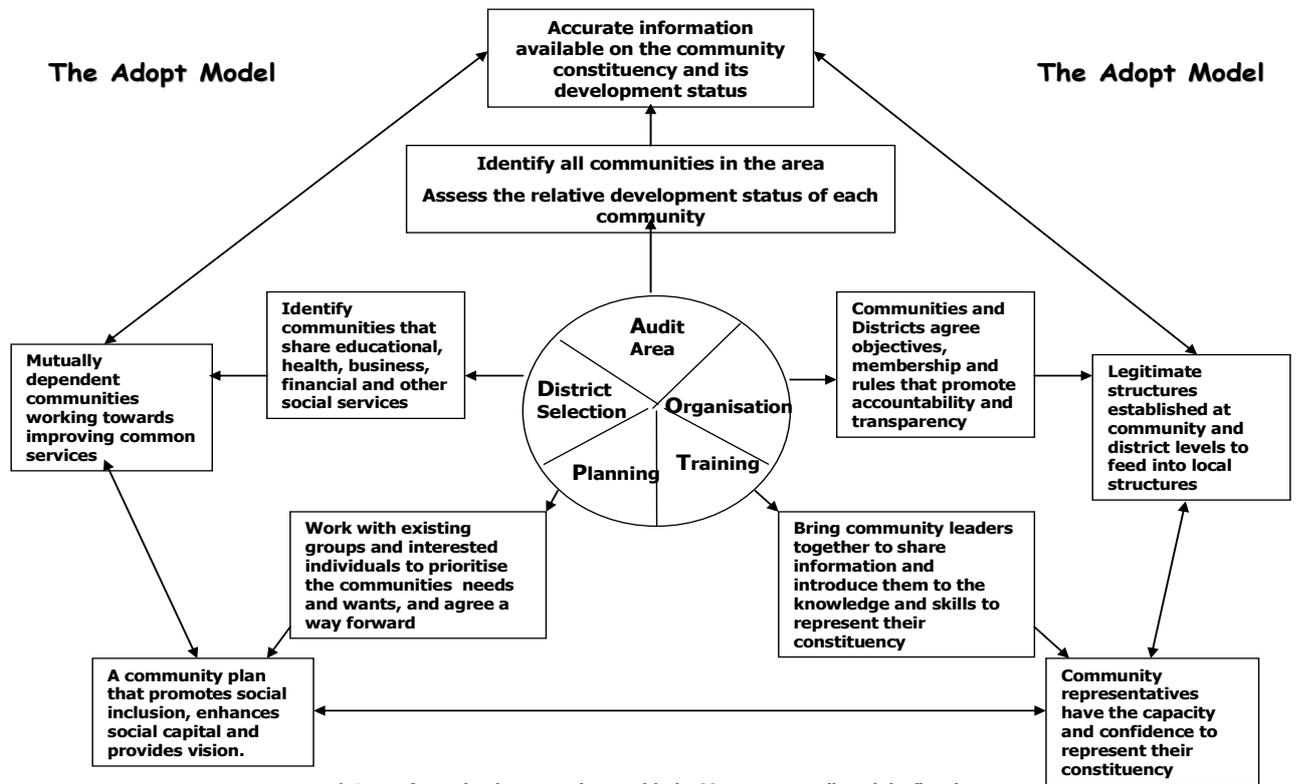
<sup>29</sup> Evaluation of the ADOPT Model of Community Planning, Tipperary Institute, November 2007.

The Report noted that application of the model when based upon concrete actions would provide the communities concerned, along with the participating agencies, with a clear demonstration of improved local service delivery and thus value for money. This in turn would underpin an impetus to further develop actions across the public-private arena.

A further aspect of the model highlighted in the review relates to the extent to which *"lethargic communities were energised"*. This is clearly evident from a number of the case studies examined in this Report, most notably in both Limerick and Cork.

In broad terms the review identifies the model as one which is of continuing relevance to the planning of areas in an Irish context. This is also underpinned by the experiences demonstrated in this Report.

An overview of the model is set out overleaf.



<sup>1</sup> Area refers to local area consistent with the 29 county councils and the five city boroughs  
<sup>2</sup> Communities: as defined in geographic terms  
<sup>3</sup> District: Refers to service centres and the communities they serve

## **Appendix 4: Actions undertaken in Mallow**

- Mallow Website [www.mallow.ie](http://www.mallow.ie): developed to provide businesses and individuals with key information and key contacts on investment, living, visiting and town governance.
- Development of an integrated Heritage Plan and Heritage Trail.
- Recreation and Amenity Strategy.
- Parking Strategy.
- Review of Educational facilities usage.
- Health Strategy & Health Festival.
- HUB Marketing Strategy.
- Town Enhancement Plan.
- Town Loop Walk.
- Maths and Science Fair: An estimated 2,500 adults and children visited the Science and Maths held October 2011, making the event a huge success. Some of the country's top educational and commercial institutions worked with the Mallow Development Partnership and the National Centre for Excellence in Mathematics Teaching and Learning (NCE-MSTL) to hold what was Ireland's first community-based Science and Maths Fair.

## Appendix 5: Interviewees

Ms. Carmel Fox, Chief Executive, Ballyhoura Development Ltd.  
Mr. Ciaran Lynch, Development Manager, Limerick Institute of Technology  
Ms. Elaine Butler, Chief Executive Officer, Croom Development Association  
Ms. Breeda Murphy, Community & Enterprise Development Officer, Cork County Council  
Mr. Anthony Coleman, Administrative Officer, Limerick County Council  
Mr. John Coll, Director of Community and Enterprise, Mayo County Council  
Mr. John McGee, Administrative Officer, Mayo County Council  
Mr. John Webb-O'Rourke, Chairman, Kilmallock Partnership  
Ms. Norita Clesham, Development Officer, South West Mayo Development Company  
Mr. Stephen O'Donoghue, Development Officer, Offaly Integrated Development Company Ltd.  
Mr. Gordon Daly, Senior Planner, Clare County Council previously Offaly County Council  
Mr. Denis Brosnan, Chairman, Croom Development Association  
Ms. Mary Rafter, Co-ordinator, Mayo Community Forum  
Mr. Ian Dempsey, Chief Executive Officer, West Cork Development Partnership Ltd.  
Ms. Sineád Carr, Director of Community and Enterprise, South Tipperary County Council  
Dr. Pat Gibbons, College Lecturer, Agriculture and Science, University College Dublin

#### Previously Interviewed

Ms. Teresa White, Assistant County Manager, Cork County Council  
Mr. Tim Lucy, Cork City Manager, previously Assistant Manager, Cork County Council