

# **Balancing Regional Development**

## **Bunratty - October 22nd - 23rd 2007**

*County Clare, 4th October, 2007*

**The Clare Community Forum is leading a network of similar forums across the West of Ireland in seeking to redefine the term '*Balanced Regional Development*'.**

Announcing details of a major national Conference entitled 'Balancing Regional Development', the Forum described the National Development Plan as flawed because it had only been only partially realised due to the lack of a cohesive partnership approach to its implementation.

The Conference entitled 'Balancing Regional Development' will take place at the Bunratty Shannon Shamrock Hotel in County Clare on October 22nd and 23rd 2007.

The event will be attended by some of the leading academics, commentators and organisations in the field of Regional Development, including Mr. Eamon O'Cuiv, Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; John Brassil, Chair of Shannon Development; Dr. William Hynes, Director of Postgraduate Planning Degrees in University College Dublin (UCD); and Dr. Seamus Caulfield of the Western Development Commission.

*"The upcoming symposium will seek to redefine the term 'Balanced Regional Development' by pooling together the many and varied opinions currently being expressed by a plethora of organisations; business, development, tourism and by community and voluntary sector representatives throughout the country", explained Richard Cahill, Chairperson of the Clare Community Forum.*

*He continued, "The media is awash with reports of organisations, politicians and community groups stressing the need for balanced regional development with many highlighting the imbalance that exists, in terms of State investment in the Regions. This level of criticism, well intentioned as it may be, needs to become more focused on identifying ways to rectify the regional development imbalance that exists between Dublin and the Regions. The aim of the upcoming Conference will be to formulate such solutions, which will in turn be presented to the Government."*

Mr. Cahill added that the Government is failing to achieve the National Development Plan objective of balanced and sustainable regional development. He pointed to the Government's renegeing of commitments regarding the protection of Shannon Airport's slots at London Heathrow as an example of this failure.

*He stated, "The Government must now seriously look at its policies on regional development, not just for the Midwest Region but for all areas outside of the greater Dublin area."*

*"The situation that Shannon Airport finds itself in may be repeated elsewhere throughout the country if the Government fails to fulfil objectives under its own National Development Policy and National Spatial Strategy. Another example is the struggling decentralisation of government departments. The Clare Community Forum has organised the upcoming Conference in order to focus the Government's attention of its obligations and commitments given and to re-emphasise that infrastructure and access are critical to achieving balanced regional development in Ireland", said Mr. Cahill.*

*"Community and Voluntary groups and organisations throughout Ireland are of the opinion that a strong and consistent counter-balance to Dublin and the Eastern region will ensure that the economic development of the country is maximised, benefiting the entire population of Ireland, not just those in the regions", concluded Mr. Cahill.*

Among the speakers scheduled to address the upcoming symposium is the Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs. Event organisers have expressed optimism that Minister Eamon O'Cuiv, T.D., will deliver the Conference findings to the Government with a view to addressing inequities within Regional Development Policy.

Meanwhile, Dr. William Hynes, a U.C.D. Lecturer and Regional Development expert, will provide an overview of what regional infrastructure development means from a European perspective. He will be explaining how the European experience can be executed at local level in Ireland.

John Brassil, Chair of Shannon Development Co. will speak on the subject of Industry and Employment, in the context of regional development.

Dr. Seamus Caulfield from County Mayo is a retired professor of Archaeology at University College Dublin and an active member of the Council for the West. Dr. Caulfield will use his lifelong passion for Balanced Regional Development and excellent insight into the economics of same during his address to conference delegates.

Fr. Nicholas Flavin is Chairman of the Kilkenny Community and Voluntary Forum and a member of the Executive of the National Community and Voluntary Forum. Fr. Flavin will be discussing the effects of an imbalance in regional development on Community and Voluntary groups and, therefore, communities and volunteers.

Tina Lowe is a blind graduate working with the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability (AHEAD). Ms. Lowe will be speaking about her work with National Forum of Graduates with Disabilities, a project that is concerned with employment issues for students and graduates with disabilities.

Former President of the Irish Countrywoman's Association (ICA) Anne Murray, who is an avid campaigner and fundraiser for breast screening in the regions, will speak on how regional development has effected the health services and lives of women in the regions.

The Clare Community Forum is the recognised structure for the community and voluntary sector in County Clare whose twenty-five members of the Forum are drawn from Clare's five Electoral Areas. The countywide group consists of representatives from all interested community and voluntary groups in the county.

The Clare Community Forum aims to help identify and agree county-wide issues and proposals and develop integrated responses to the particular needs of the community and voluntary sector in the county; develop an effective network to enable the community and voluntary sector to meet and articulate common concerns; develop proposals for the enhanced participation of the community and voluntary sector in various development initiatives; and contribute to the policy development of the Clare County Development Board through its' various structures.

The '*Balancing Regional Development*' Conference will be held on October 22nd and 23rd at the Bunratty Shannon Shamrock Hotel. Disabled People of Clare (DPOC) will offer free transport to persons with disabilities from Limerick/Ennis Bus and Train Stations or Shannon Airport to the conference venue.

Further information on the Conference is available from **061-713605**  
or **086-38632634**  
or e-mail: **ccforum@eircom.net**

**Directions to Bunratty:** The Shannon Shamrock Hotel Clare is located 10 minutes from Shannon International Airport and 10 minutes from Limerick City. It is adjacent to Bunratty Castle and close to the main road networks.

Website: **www.bunrattyshannonshamrockhotel.com.**