

Ederney Community Development Trust

Bill of Rights Submission

December 2007

Introduction

Ederney is situated mid way between Enniskillen and Castlederg in an isolated rural community. The village itself has a population of 554 people.

The demographic characteristics of the people living in Ederney on Census day 2001 was as follows:

- 25.3% were aged under 16 years;
- 16.8% were aged 60 and over;
- the average age was 35.5 years (NI average age 35.8 years);
- 51.8% of the population were male and 48.2% were female;
- 84.8% were from a Catholic Community Background;
- 14.4% were from a 'Protestant and Other Christian (including Christian related)' Community Background;
- 11.2% were born outside Northern Ireland; and
- 2.2% were from an ethnic group other than white

The statistics show a community, which has a much lower level of degree-educated population than the rest of Northern Ireland.

Additionally there is a significant lower level of females in employment than the rest of NI, whilst the level of unemployment in Ederney is twice that of the rest of Northern Ireland.

(Information taken from NINIS – Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.)

Ederney Community Development Trust works with almost twenty other groups in the village and beyond. The group was set up to assist with the socio-economic development of Ederney and the surrounding area. Since its inception the group has re-established the Town Hall as a hub of activity providing training, development and support to the local community and groups.

In the past few years the group focused on the development of a socio-economic project for the area, last year the group completed work on Glendarragh Valley Hostel. The hostel provides accommodation as well as a restaurant facility, which is open for a variety of functions, including conferences and seminars. Prior to this the group worked hard to bring sheltered accommodation to the area and a popular, modern facility is now

in the village for the use of older people who require some degree of assisted living.

Ederney Community Development Trust has been working on the Bill of Rights since October 2007; the group has been keen to develop its own submission for inclusion in the Bill of Rights. Work with the group highlighted a variety of issues, which are included in the following document.

Bearing in mind the needs of the rural area served by Ederney Community Development Trust the group feels that it can best put forward any concerns by focusing on one particular aspect of the Bill of Rights - Economic and Social Rights, including relevant equality issues.

The group were keen to ensure that rural issues were emphasised and built into any new process for Northern Ireland.

Economic and Social Rights, including relevant equality issues.

Housing

Ederney Community Development Trust recognises that in this rural community there is a great need for social housing, particularly for the older members of the community. This community will in the future have an increased requirement for supported housing, this rural community considers it a basic right for older people to be able to stay in their local communities. Demand at present means that there is not enough local sheltered accommodation and this demand is likely to rise.

Although the sale of social housing has benefited many in the past the availability of social housing in this area needs to be addressed for future generations. Ederney, like many other small villages, is changing, it acts as a satellite for the larger towns of Omagh and Enniskillen and as a growing village is developing more diverse and complex needs. This myriad of issues and needs must be addressed as physical development threatens to take over the other social needs of the area.

Health

Although the village of Ederney still has access to a surgery within the village and acute services are still available fairly closely, there are other issues that need to be addressed. Access to preventative health care and

healthy living programmes is still limited. It is important that this community is able to access improved health services. More outreach work is required and greater health education for young people. In general this rural community requires greater commitment from health service providers with a greater joined up approach. This approach should be designed to ensure improved access to the wider range of health services that should be made available to any rural community.

Education

Although the area is served by primary and nursery education, the local area has lost its provision of secondary level education in recent years, additionally, the area suffers from a lack of education provision for adults, this includes lack of suitable venue and transport. Working with statutory services regarding education provision is fraught with difficulty and means that provision in this rural area is non-existent. If rural communities are to access and provide greater education opportunities for adults then some policy decisions need to be made first: it is more difficult for rural communities to attract large numbers which means that education providers like FE Colleges are not interested. A greater commitment to rural communities is required and increased government support must be given to local community action, such as Fermanagh Education Forum if this community is to improve access to education services locally.

Employment

Access to decent employment opportunities in this area is impeded by lack of appropriate training and development opportunities. Unemployment in the Ederney area is twice the Northern Ireland average and the problems associated with this have a negative impact upon the quality of life locally. The area has no large employers or big businesses while there are also a large number of small businesses, particularly in the service sector; this is a very typical rural community from an economic perspective.

Improving access to employment or stimulating entrepreneurship locally is restricted by lack of transport or finances to pay for new training and employment opportunity. Access to employment opportunities locally is inhibited by poor transport infrastructure, most people in work travel to Omagh or Enniskillen, while public transport provision to both these towns is poor. To enable people in rural communities like Ederney to have equality of employment then a policy change is needed which sees greater and improved availability of public transport.

Aside from this, more work is required to enable people to take advantage of opportunities. This includes encouraging people into work and assisting people to start businesses that may be able to sustain this rural community in the longer term. At policy level there is too much emphasis on big business and this excludes this rural community from increasing economic activity.

Social Security

The higher levels of benefit dependency has a negative impact upon the local area, there is a growing number of pensioners and demographically the area is also changing with the development of new housing areas. Accessibility of social security benefits needs to be looked at as rural post offices face closure. There is a risk of increasing the numbers of those facing exclusion and marginalisation as those with low incomes are forced to spend more of their benefits on transport to larger settlements where they can access benefits and pay their bills. The issue of transport and accessibility impacts upon those most at risk in the community, including older people and those with different abilities.

This community is mindful that greater attention must be paid to the needs of the whole rural community with equality of access an important thread which is found in all aspects of the Bill of Rights.

Environment

The community in and around Ederney is facing changes in that the built environment and infrastructural issues of roads, pavements and associated problems of litter and fly tipping rising up the local agenda. The closure of the local skip site has impacted upon the environment with people now having to travel further to dispose of waste safely and within the law. By the same token, there is a recognition that local council commitment to waste management and preservation of the local environment are seen as better than in some areas. Nevertheless the local community in Ederney sees that there is a need for a more integrated approach by the relevant agencies to ensure that a more holistic approach is adopted to the protection of the environment. This community sees that it is its right to enjoy and protect the local environment in partnership with the other agencies that have specific responsibility.

Social Rights

Bearing in mind the changing shape and demographic of the Ederney community the group felt that greater cognisance should also be paid to

the various social needs of the local community. The increasing population brings with it an increase in anti social behaviour, which has also highlighted gaps in policing provision in this rural community. This community sees that greater local policing is required with a change in approach required which sees ASB as a wider societal problem with greater local involvement required in solving local problems.

Conclusion

In all aspects of this theme – Economic and social rights, including relevant equality issues, two main themes have recurred:

- Equality of opportunity and
- Accessibility.

In developing this submission, Ederney Community Development Trust asks that the Bill of Rights Forum recognises the diverse needs of rural communities. Sustainability of rural communities is central to the development of Northern Ireland. To sustain this rural community a greater commitment from statutory and government bodies is required. This will lead to the partnership approach that is required to ensure this rural community is sustained into the future, with a focus on accessibility and equality.