



Local Just Transition Plan for West Kildare

2022

PREPARED FOR:

Kildare County Council



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Executive Summary

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This Just Transition Plan has been commissioned by Kildare County Council to identify projects to support and advance sustainable social, economic and environmental development in the transition to a low carbon future in the West Kildare region.

West Kildare – as defined by the three Municipal Districts of Athy, Kildare-Newbridge, and Clane-Maynooth – is an area in which the recent Irish government policy to cease industrial peat extraction will have a profound social, economic and environmental impact. It is an area where there are already pre-existing socio-economic challenges being faced by communities.

Addressing the County's turbary areas, this plan is thematic, and action-focused, with an emphasis on the effective and practical implementation of projects to stimulate and enable a range of actions that can be owned and driven by the many diverse communities of West Kildare. In so doing, it draws together opportunities associated with the Just Transition Framework for the wider Midlands Region, the National Territorial Just Transition Plan, and the impetus for the Transition to Low Carbon Economy.

Approach

The actions proposed have emerged from extensive stakeholder consultation with public, private, and third sector organisations. A range of organisations from small community groups through to Kildare County Council and Bord na Móna have been engaged, either in individual interviews or small groups via virtual round-tables. Participants were invited by the Public Participation Network, and then via referrals from organisations and individuals during the engagement process.

Key Highlights

The guiding priorities for this Plan have been to stimulate skills development and employment, to build community cohesion and to increase the resilience of the communities of West Kildare, across three key themes: Economy, Society, and Environment.

Actions have been co-created with stakeholders and focus on overcoming challenges and capturing opportunities. The themes of the Just Transition – economy, society, and environment – are at the heart of all 15 actions. Each action is designed to deliver against all three of these themes in some way. Therefore, rather than group actions by theme we have grouped actions into three areas of opportunity. These are Tourism, Business and skills, and Energy.

Some of the key actions identified in the Plan include:

- **Progress the opportunity for a new National Peatlands Park for Ireland**
- **Stimulus for community owned marinas and facilities as key blueway infrastructure to support the growing tourism sector**
- **Encourage new community development groups to emerge**
- **Grow the capacity for communities to help themselves through 'One-stop shops' at community hubs. These will enhance the ability of communities to access funding opportunities and skills training, as well as supporting remote working**
- **Community retrofit support**

There are also 3 priority enabling actions which have the capacity, if realised, to support all 15 proposed thematic actions:

- 1. A coordinated program of activity to bid in for Just Transition Fund monies**

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- 2. Critical partnership building**

- 3. Incorporate the JTP into the Local Economic Community Plan (LECP)**

Recommendations and Next Steps

The Just Transition Plan is driven by values of environmental stewardship, inclusive economic growth, community cohesion, and social resilience. What is clear from existing initiatives within West Kildare, across the wider turbary economy of Ireland, and from international examples is that none of these aims can be achieved without the creation of an environment for collaborative partnership working.

With the enabling leadership of Kildare County Council as a convenor of partnerships between state backed entities, semi-state commercial companies, and a wide array of community and environmental stakeholders, including LCDC, County Kildare LEADER Partnership, and LEO, and as an investor and as a catalyst to bring in investment funding to West Kildare, the Just Transition Plan will enable the region to meet the challenges and capitalise on the opportunities that the current and future changes to these unique peatlands represent.

In our view this key role for Kildare County Council will require the resource of a dedicated team to coordinate activities and partners. Such a team could also act a crucial resource in bidding in for Just Transition related funding opportunities over time; such work then catalysing further activity among partners and the communities of West Kildare.

Crucially, partners from the public, private, and third sectors will play an important role in delivering the Just Transition Plan, especially for actions which are outside the Council's responsibility and levers of control. Foremost among these are key stakeholders such as the Irish state, Bord na Móna, and the communities of West Kildare. By leading a Just Transition Plan Partnership approach to delivery, the Council can make sure that partners are enhancing and complementing one another in a way aligned to meet agreed district-wide long-term goals.

Following the adoption of the Just Transition Plan, the next

steps are to develop an implementation plan for the actions and a monitoring and evaluation plan for measuring these recommended actions against actual outcomes. Over the life of the Just Transition Plan Kildare County Council and partners need to ensure local intelligence systems are kept current and their relevance and application to decision-making and implementation is strengthened.

This Just Transition Plan and the establishment of the Just Transition Plan Partnership is an opportunity to reinvigorate and reimagine West Kildare's reputation as a dynamic, sustainable place with a compelling, distinctive blend of natural assets, community driven development opportunities, and shape a transition to a genuinely inclusive fresh and green approach to a new model of post-industrial turbary economic sustainability and prosperity.

Introduction

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Image by: Anand Vind / Unsplash

The Republic of Ireland is facing a climate crisis described by the Department of the Taoiseach as “the defining challenge of our time”.

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This Just Transition Plan has therefore been commissioned by Kildare County Council to identify projects to support and advance sustainable, social, economic, environmental development in the transition to a low carbon future in the West Kildare region.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has highlighted risks of food and water insecurity, extreme weather events, sea-level rise, biodiversity loss, increased occurrences of flooding and drought, disease, and the potential for mass migration associated with global heating exceeding 1.5 degrees.

The Government of Ireland’s 2019 Climate Action Plan acknowledges that, to date, Ireland has been a climate laggard, and repeatedly ranked as the worst performing EU member state in the annual Climate Change Performance Index. Despite evidence of the climate crisis resonating well with the public and demonstrating the pressing nature of the challenge, progress towards decarbonisation in the Republic of Ireland has been slow.

In response to this, the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 commits the Irish Government to reducing Ireland’s greenhouse gas emissions by 51% (from 2018 levels) by 2030 and to achieving climate neutrality by 2050. These targets were re-affirmed at COP26 and the Climate Action Plan. To achieve these ambitious targets the Republic of Ireland must take immediate steps to facilitate a Just Transition to a low carbon economy. This is particularly pressing for carbon-intensive areas of the country such as the wider Midlands region, of which West Kildare – along with Laois, Offaly, Westmeath, Longford, Roscommon, East Galway, North Tipperary – is an important member.

About this Just Transition Plan

The national context in the Republic of Ireland is therefore to make a Just Transition to a low carbon economy. What this means in practice is to ensure that no community, business or individual is left behind in this transition process. A key aspect of this policy is to ensure that communities, be they towns or villages, farming groups such as the Irish Farmers’ Association (IFA) or community groups, have some agency as to how their community’s future is being shaped. Meaningful consultation and community driven solutions are therefore an intrinsic part of any Just Transition.

West Kildare is an area where there are some pre-existing socio-economic challenges being faced by communities. Adding to these is the relatively recent Irish government policy to cease industrial peat extraction, a formerly culturally and economically significant practice in the area.

Bord na Móna – which is headquartered in Newbridge and is synonymous with County Kildare through a history of peat extraction and processing activities for heating fuels and composting for horticulture – announced its cessation of peat extraction in January 2021. This presents unique challenges relating to employment, skills, local authority services, and identity and cohesion for communities of West Kildare whose livelihoods will be lost because of an intentional shift away from fossil fuel-related activities

This Just Transition Plan has therefore been commissioned by Kildare County Council to identify projects to support and advance sustainable, social, economic, environmental development in the transition to a low carbon future in the West Kildare region.

Addressing the County’s turbary areas, the plan provides a concise, coherent, thematic, and action-focused plan with an emphasis on the effective and practical implementation of projects to stimulate and enable a range of actions that can be owned and driven by the many diverse communities of West Kildare. In doing so, it draws together opportunities associated with the Just Transition Framework for the wider Midlands Region, the National Territorial Just Transition Plan, and the impetus for the Transition to Low Carbon Economy.

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Defining West Kildare

This Kildare County Council initiative is a collaborative effort by the elected representatives of the three Municipal Districts of Athy, Kildare-Newbridge, and Clane-Maynooth (Figure 1). The vision is to build a strong consensus and strategically position communities in West Kildare to realise future opportunities, particularly those hardest impacted by the departure of Bord na Móna from peat harvesting activities. Areas include, but are unconfined to, Allenwood, Coill Dubh, Kilberry (Athy), Lullymore, Newbridge, Rathangan, Monasterevin and its hinterlands and Timahoe.

While the west of the county falls into three municipal districts, it is important to note that the west and east side of these MDs have very different socio-economic characteristics. A line could be drawn down the middle of the county from Enfield to Castledermot to separate west from east with Allenwood, Carbury, Robertstown, Rathangan, Monasterevin, and Athy having a completely different economic, social, and environmental context than the main urban areas of Maynooth, Celbridge/Leixlip, Naas, and Newbridge. This is highlighted in the **West Kildare Now Section** of this report (see **Figure 3**).

Creating the Just Transition Plan

The actions proposed have emerged from extensive stakeholder consultation with public, private, and third sector organisations. A range of organisations from small community groups through to Kildare County Council and Bord na Móna have been engaged, either in individual interviews or small groups via virtual round-tables, which subsequently evolved into a series of virtual ‘drop in’ sessions, with 1-3 people attending each. Participants were invited by the Public Participation Network, and then via referrals from organisations and individuals during the engagement process. The full list of organisations consulted for this Local Just Transition Plan for West Kildare is detailed in **Appendix I**.

The guiding priorities for this Plan have been to stimulate skills development and employment, to build community cohesion and to increase the resilience of the communities of West Kildare, both in economic, social, and environmental terms.

What is a Just Transition?

A Just Transition has been defined by the Republic of Ireland’s Just Transition Commissioner as:

“a vision which sets out a series of economic and social interventions needed to secure and shift economic and social activity in an area dependent on an extractive economy to jobs and activities relating to a regenerative economy”¹

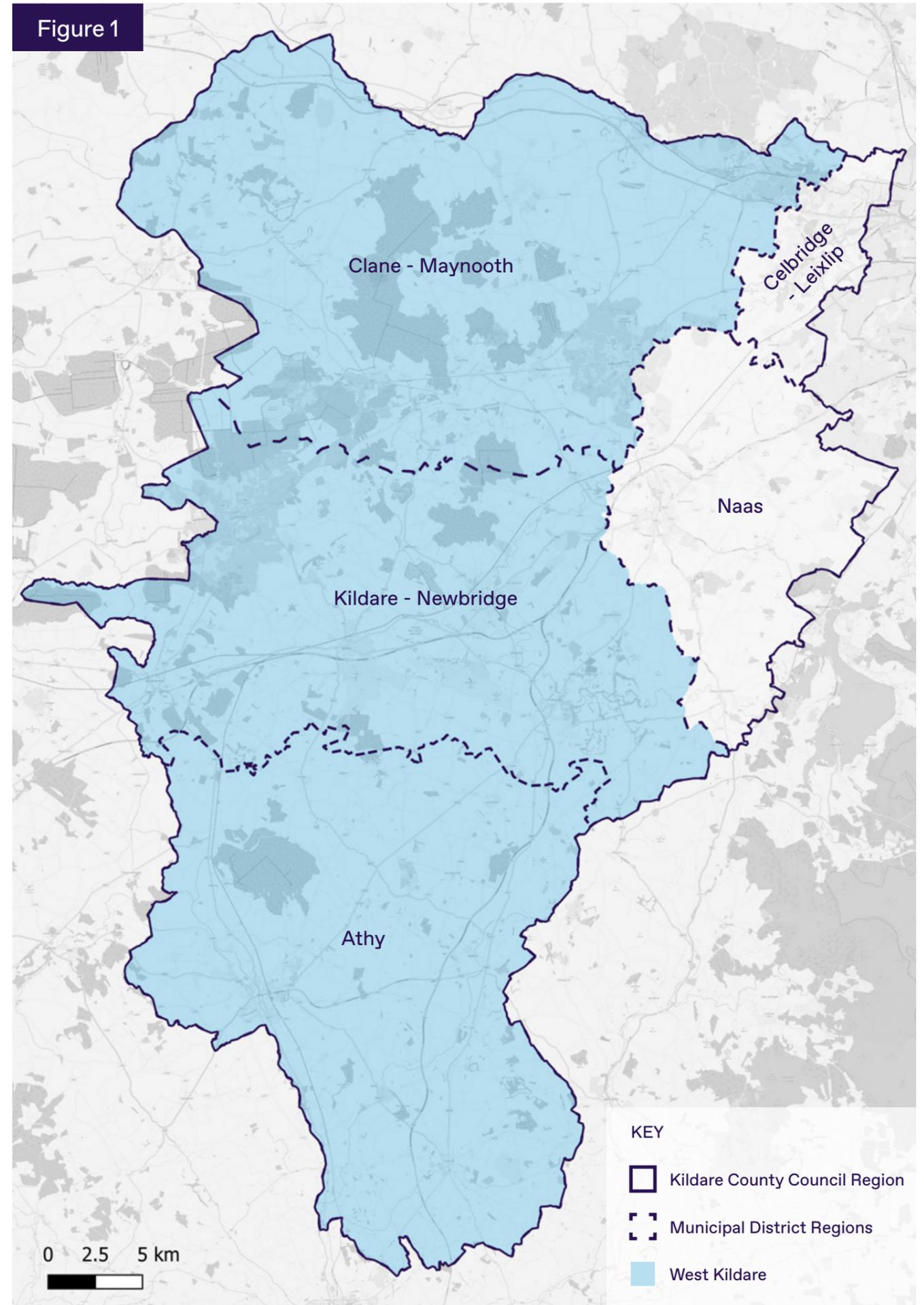
In the context of West Kildare, a Just Transition is therefore not solely about replacing the local jobs lost and put at risk by national decarbonisation plans and the associated cessation of industrial peat extraction and processing activities for electricity generation and home heating. To ensure sustainable socio-economic development and prosperity in West Kildare, a Just Transition to a low carbon economy must assume a broader focus than this, considering three key themes: Economy, Society, and Environment.

Economic outcomes

The economic profile for West Kildare tells a story of unequal prosperity. While West Kildare has a higher proportion of its residents at work than the national average, it also has a higher rate of unemployment. Moreover, while it has a higher proportion of skilled jobs than the national average, it also has a higher share of unskilled jobs. And while it has a higher share of residents educated to third (degree or higher) level, it also has a higher proportion with no formal education.

This somewhat contradictory picture at the aggregate level is, however, better understood when we look at the electoral division scale. Pockets of strong employment and high-skilled labour are found in the north and east of West Kildare while the south and west of the area – particularly rural areas – experience low employment and skills. It is in these more disadvantaged areas that efforts need to be concentrated to get more people into employment by creating more local and high-skilled jobs and upskilling the local population and workforce.

¹ Just Transition Progress Report (2020) Kieran Mulvey, Just Transition Commissioner



Bord na Móna’s investments in renewable energy generation are delivering new economic investment and new jobs. Additionally, it is the case that many people in West Kildare can and do commute to employment opportunities elsewhere.

It is important however for the social integrity of West Kildare’s communities that there are skills and work opportunities within a locally vibrant economy. To that end meaningful interventions to stimulate the growth of local businesses and locally generated community initiatives must be a key part of the Just Transition.

Social outcomes

While creating economic opportunities are a key part of any successful Just Transition, the broader impacts on society must also be an important consideration if such a transition is to be truly just.

As has been seen in other communities across Europe who have transitioned away from a previous dependence on an extractive economy, social cohesion can suffer as a result of this shift. This is equally true in West Kildare where there are significant pockets of the population who experience higher levels of crime, mental health issues, and substance abuse related to high levels of deprivation, yet at the same time lack access to key social services such as police, medical services, and quality schooling and housing.

This is due to a combination of more isolated, rural locations and an increasing strain on public service budgets. To adequately address these societal issues which threaten to undermine efforts to reinvigorate deprived communities, the Just Transition must seek to support better quality housing – including moving away from a reliance on turf heating – and higher levels of home ownership, improved health outcomes, and higher connectivity in terms of both transport and digital connectivity.

Additionally, there are areas of the economy that have deep roots in the social fabric of West Kildare; notably the farming sector. As an economic group this contains both large and smaller scale farmers, many of whom are keen to diversify their

income. As such they can be strong partners for community based business initiatives as well as playing a key role in the long term environmental custodianship of the re-wetted peatlands.

Environmental outcomes

The third element of a successful Just Transition is improved environmental outcomes.

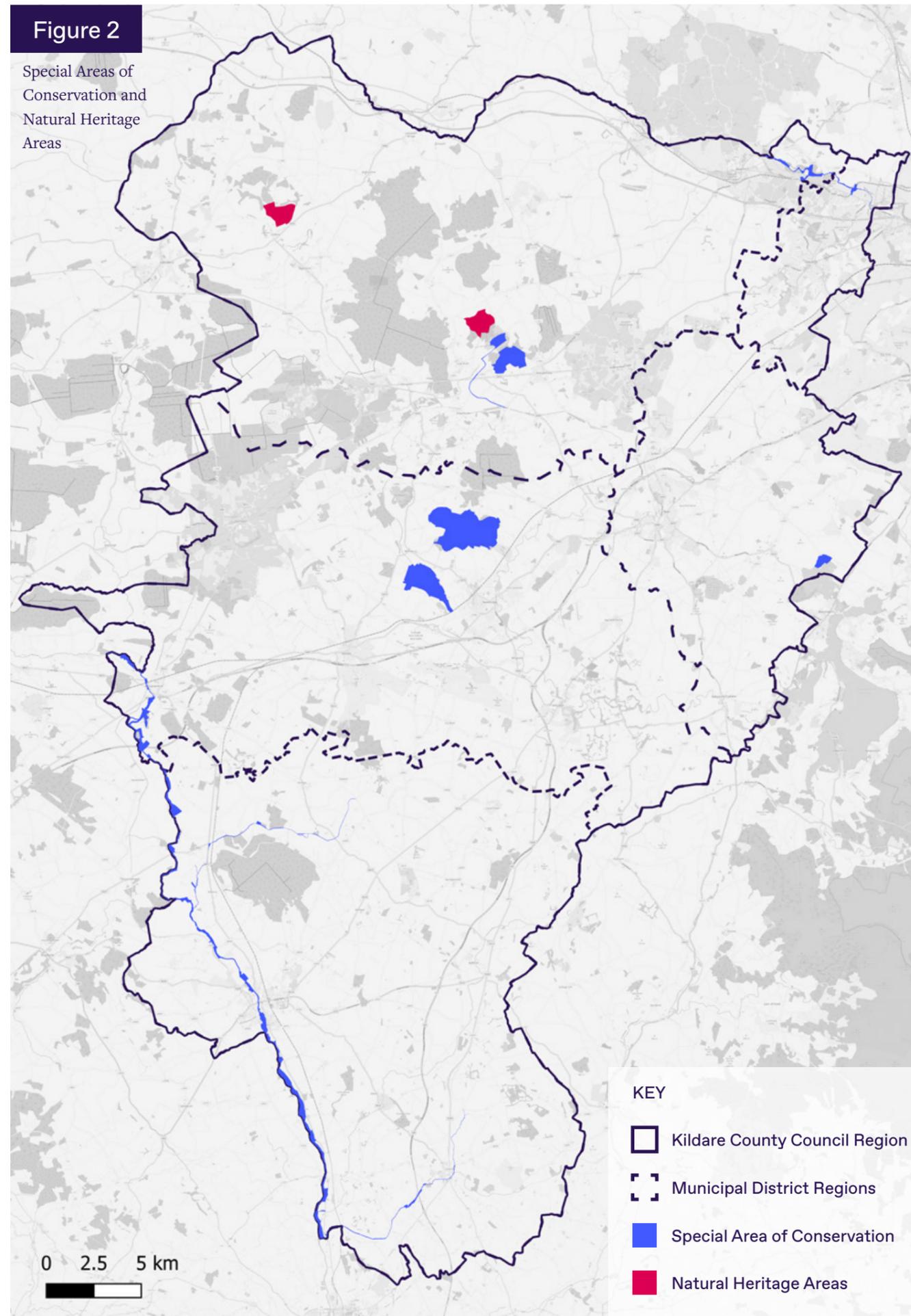
Rewilding, rehabilitating, and restoring the peat cutaways, will be central to achieving Ireland’s biodiversity and climate goals and reversing the biodiversity loss caused by the industrialisation of the peatlands in West Kildare over the past 90 years. Indeed, the Irish Government has recently declared a Biodiversity and Climate crisis and the Just Transition in West Kildare must seek to contribute to efforts to address this alongside plans to enhance the area’s economy and society.

There are significant opportunities to sequester carbon via the restoration of intact peatlands and rewetting of bogs, with one acre of rewetted bog capable of soaking up and storing twice the amount of Carbon as an acre of rainforest.

There also exists notable opportunities to enhance biodiversity, potentially through the creation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) in West Kildare. As **Figure 2** highlights, there are currently few SACs in West Kildare, despite there being a number of areas already home to a rich source of environmental biodiversity including one of Ireland’s three most important butterfly areas (IBAs).

The creation of more SACs would also align with the Irish Government’s commitment to increasing protected areas nationally from 13% to 30% - which is particularly important in Kildare where protected areas cover approximately 3% of the county. The transformation of former industrial bogs into nature reserves represents the primary mechanism where county Kildare and Ireland can develop new protected biodiversity areas.

Other key opportunities to enhance environmental outcomes as part of the Just Transition include increased



use of renewable energy, developing the circular economy by promoting waste prevention, reuse, maximising recycling, and using waste as a fuel instead of fossil fuels, building newer, more energy efficient housing and retrofitting existing housing stock, reducing reliance on fossil fuels for domestic heating, and lowering CO₂ emissions from transport.

Why is a Just Transition Plan needed?

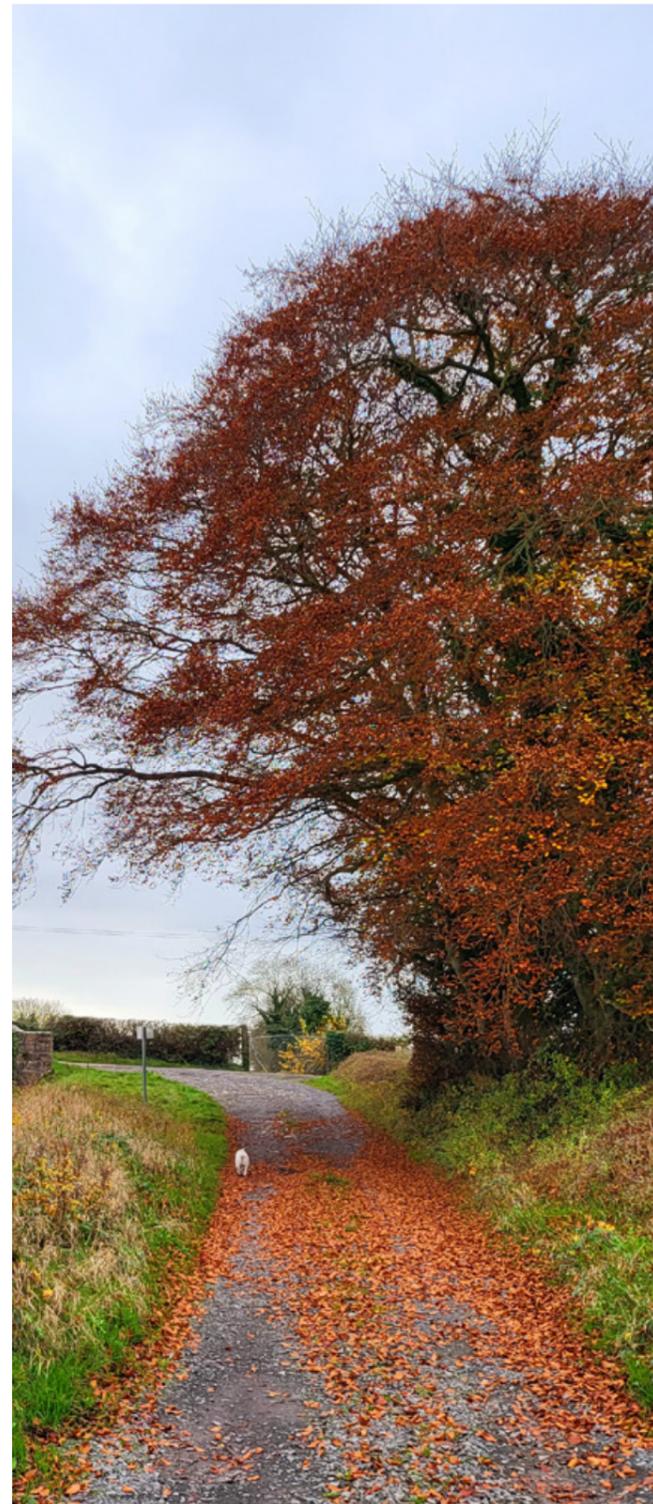
If West Kildare is to not only fully contribute to the region's Just Transition, but importantly, to secure its own Just Transition, there is a need for bottom-up, smaller scale, localised measures to complement larger regional and national development measures and investments.

Since the 1940s, the wider Midlands region has been reliant on carbon-intensive industry and developed an intrinsic connection and reliance on the major employers of Bord na Móna and the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) in terms of direct and indirect employment, income generation and associated supply chains, training and education, and physical, social, and community development. The acceleration of the Bord na Móna decarbonisation programme and the closure of two ESB-operated power plants in the region therefore pose a significant threat to West Kildare's and the wider Midland region's ongoing socio-economic prospects.

In response to these developments, the Midlands Regional Transition Team (MRTT) was established in 2018 with membership representing eight local authority areas, including Kildare County Council. The MRTT is mandated to develop a framework for the region to support impacted workers and their communities and leverage financial support for the economic diversification/development of the region.

Running in parallel to the workings of the MRTT is the preparatory work for the National Territorial Just Transition Plan. The plan is required to access the European Just Transition Fund, which will provide targeted support from 2021 to 2027 to the most affected regions to alleviate the

Image by: Eddie Smyth (Umerus Community Development/Umerus Peatland Park)



An economic, social, and environmental initiative such as the Just Transition Plan is often brought into being when a major dislocating event occurs.

impacts of the transition to low carbon.

This requires a concise, coherent, thematic, and action-focused plan emphasising the effective and practical implementation of projects to support and advance sustainable, social, economic, environmental development in the transition to a low carbon future in the hardest impacted West Kildare region.

Why now?

An economic, social, and environmental initiative such as the Just Transition Plan is often brought into being when a major dislocating event occurs that has the potential to bring not only economic hardship but also fundamentally impact the fabric of communities and social cohesion more widely.

In the case of the cessation of industrial peat cutting there is also the question of what to do with a denuded natural asset that has the potential to provide a source of environmental biodiversity, amenity well-being space, a real tourism driven economic asset, a landscape which can accommodate renewable energy, recycling, sustainable commercial enterprises, and a source of carbon sequestration that can materially help Ireland to meet its international carbon emissions obligations.

Such a Just Transition Plan is also, on this occasion, taking place against a backdrop of unprecedented economic uncertainty in the wake of one of the most profound challenges for the economy in recent decades; the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. While this inevitably raises additional challenges and threats, it also provides new opportunities to address underlying and persistent socio-economic issues in West Kildare. While County Kildare is home to a thriving and vibrant economy, inequality remains a key issue, with the highest pockets of unemployment and deprivation located in West Kildare.

Towns such as Monasterevin and Rathangan are already amongst the most deprived in Kildare and will be further left behind as the peat industry diminishes. This risks widening inequality as eastern parts of the county continue

to experience rapid economic growth. Action is needed now to avoid this and help Monasterevin, Rathangan and towns and villages up and down West Kildare benefit from emerging opportunities and planned investment set out in the Barrow Blueway Economic Plan².

It is therefore essential that proactive steps are taken now to ensure West Kildare's prosperity in the future. As the cost of doing nothing – or 'business as usual' – continues to rapidly rise, it is imperative that the mechanisms being established at EU, National, and Regional levels striving to frame, support, and propel the drive for the transition to low carbon economies must now be captured and translated into an effective and action oriented Just Transition Plan for West Kildare.

A note on partner engagement

Throughout the compilation of the evidence base for the JTP and the drafting of this document there has been extensive engagement with key partners and stakeholders who are an integral part of the social, economic and environmental fabric of West Kildare.

Our thanks go to all of those organisations (listed at Appendix 1) who have engaged so deeply with this process. Many of these entities have shared detailed plans, strategies and other documentation about the many and varied initiatives in which they are currently involved. This JTP is not the place to replicate that documentary evidence in full, but rather we have sought to highlight best practice and to cast a light on current and future areas of challenge and opportunity.

It is those challenges and opportunities that inform the rest of this plan and particularly are reflected in the Actions section of the document.

² Barrow Blueway Economic Plan (2021) County Kildare LEADER Partnership. Available at: <https://www.countykildarelp.ie/bbep/>

West Kildare Now 11

Image by: Michael Anderson (Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park)

Kildare overall is a well performing area across most traditional economic, social, and environmental performance metrics.

However, there are significant differences within West Kildare.

An Evidence Base sits alongside this action plan and presents selected baseline data in each of the three themes: economic, social, and environmental wellbeing. The Evidence Base has helped inform the focus of the actions presented later.

The rest of this section summarises key pieces of evidence which are most relevant to this report:

- relative deprivation of Electoral Divisions
- an overview assessment of West Kildare's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT)
- a bespoke Just Transition Index

Deprivation

The Pobal Deprivation Index shows the level of overall affluence and deprivation for electoral division areas³. Table 1 shows the 10 most deprived electoral divisions in West Kildare. The deprivation index clearly highlights the inequality between the western and eastern areas of the three MDs (**Figure 3**).

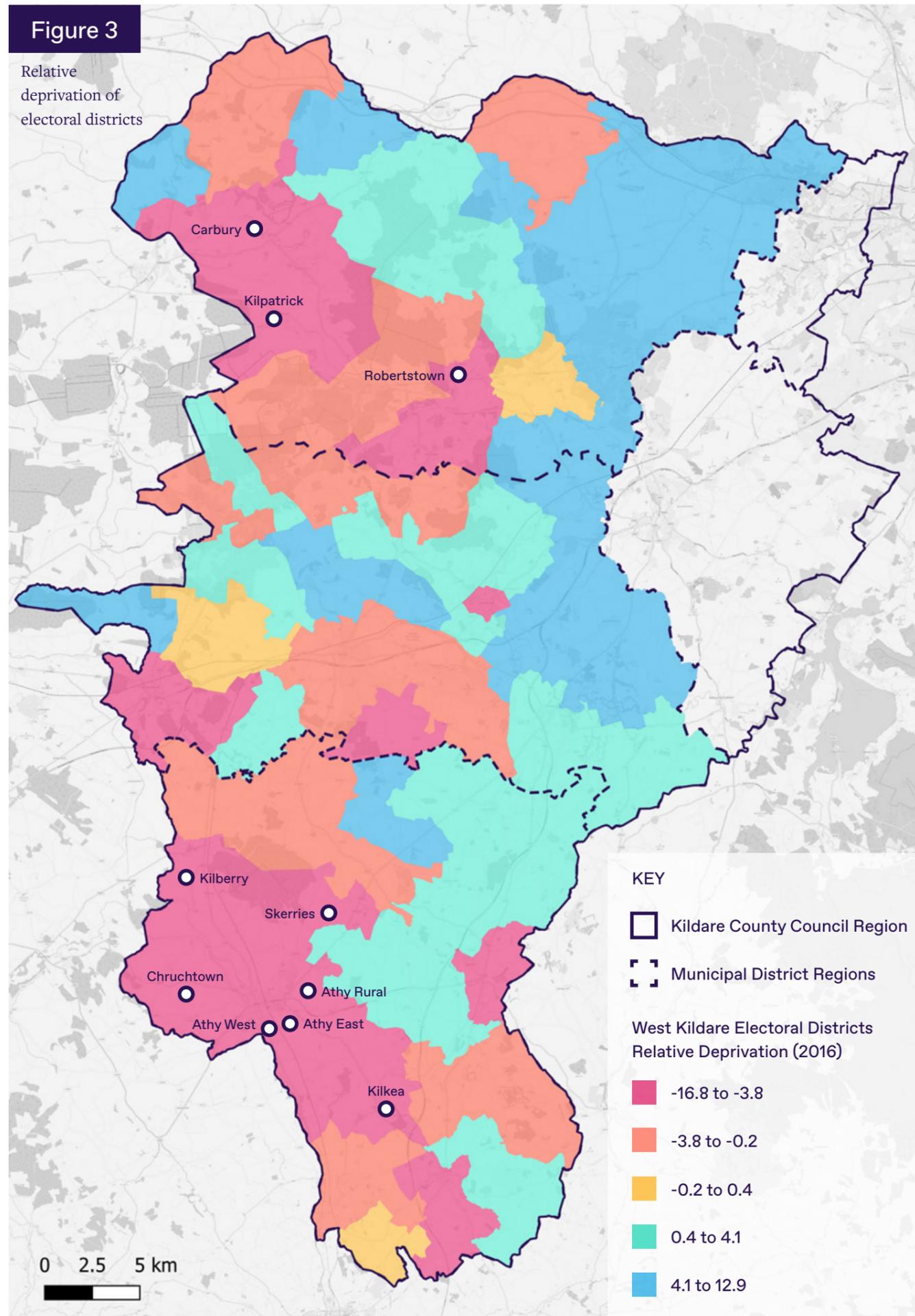
Table 1: Most deprived areas in West Kildare

1/ Athy West Urban
2/ Kilberry
3/ Kilpatrick
4/ Skerries
5/ Athy East Urban
6/ Kilkea
7/ Robertstown
8/ Carbury
9/ Churchtown
10/ Athy Rural

³ <https://data.gov.ie/dataset/hp-deprivation-index-scores-2016>

Figure 3

Relative deprivation of electoral districts



SWOT analysis

The Evidence Base, alongside insights from local stakeholders has been used to create an overview of West Kildare’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Table 2).

Table 2: SWOT overview for West Kildare

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>Natural environment and biodiversity close to communities and centres of population and accessible by land and water.</p> <p>Strong and proud industrial heritage, leading agricultural and rural industries, and quality food and drink production.</p> <p>A relatively young population makes West Kildare well placed to take advantage of economic growth opportunities.</p> <p>Proximity to Dublin creating economic growth and a high-skilled labour force in parts of the area, particularly Maynooth.</p>	<p>Inequality between different parts of West Kildare is growing. The western and southern areas are being left behind on most metrics (social and economic) compared to the east and north.</p> <p>There are ongoing skills, employment, and deprivation challenges in Athy and western parts of Kildare-Newbridge and Clane-Maynooth.</p> <p>Poor transport links from western and southern areas make outward commuting hard and inward investment and visitors harder to attract.</p> <p>Lack of broadband, digital connectivity, and energy grid connectivity in much of West Kildare especially rural areas in the west and south.</p>	<p>Professional services are large employment sectors in Maynooth and remote working can allow people to live in more rural communities.</p> <p>Strengths in professional services, transport and communications, building and construction and agriculture in different parts of West Kildare are a platform for innovation and economic growth.</p> <p>Underused buildings are an opportunity to develop community and visitor facilities based existing targeted at specific groups.</p> <p>Funding is available if communities can be supported to form private and social enterprises.</p> <p>Opportunities exist to match people leaving Bord na Móna and other industries to vacancies at large employers</p> <p>Access from Dublin via Blueways and Greenways provides a clear opportunity to promote and develop tourism across West Kildare, combining heritage, ecosystem restoration, and culture.</p>	<p>Reliance on fossil fuels including gas and peat, combined with poor energy efficiency will make it hard for households to reduce carbon emissions.</p> <p>Older and lower-skilled residents face limited job opportunities as the peat industry and associated sectors decline, especially in the west.</p> <p>Poverty and social exclusion in Kildare is of growing concern compounded by a lack of specific services and supports for vulnerable socio-economic groups</p> <p>Infrastructure deficits such as availability of appropriate housing, transport, and broadband could impact negatively on future prospects and investment</p> <p>Places risk being left behind if sufficient opportunities aren't available to encourage people to stay and positively contribute to the community.</p>

Just Transition Index

To help assess the starting point of a Just Transition and monitor change over time, we have created the Just Transition Index. The Just Transition Index provides a high-level profile of West Kildare and its Electoral Divisions across the three themes Economy, Society, and Environment.

The Just Transition Index responds to Action 12 of the Government of Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2021 which recommends development of “a suite of suitable indicators, for endorsement by Just Transition Commission and adoption by Government, to monitor progress in delivering a just climate transition.”

ACTION

Further develop the Just Transition Index with new data

The Just Transition Index in this Action Plan consists of core datasets which are available at electoral division level.

The data in the Index do not cover some key outcomes of a Just Transition, especially on themes such as mental health and wellbeing, community cohesion or isolation, precarious work, biodiversity, and carbon emissions. However, no suitable data which is consistently collected at electoral division level has been found to develop indicators for these key outcomes.

Therefore, there is a need to source data at a local level to ensure that the Just Transition Index fully represents the aims of a Just Transition for West Kildare and the Midlands region as a whole.

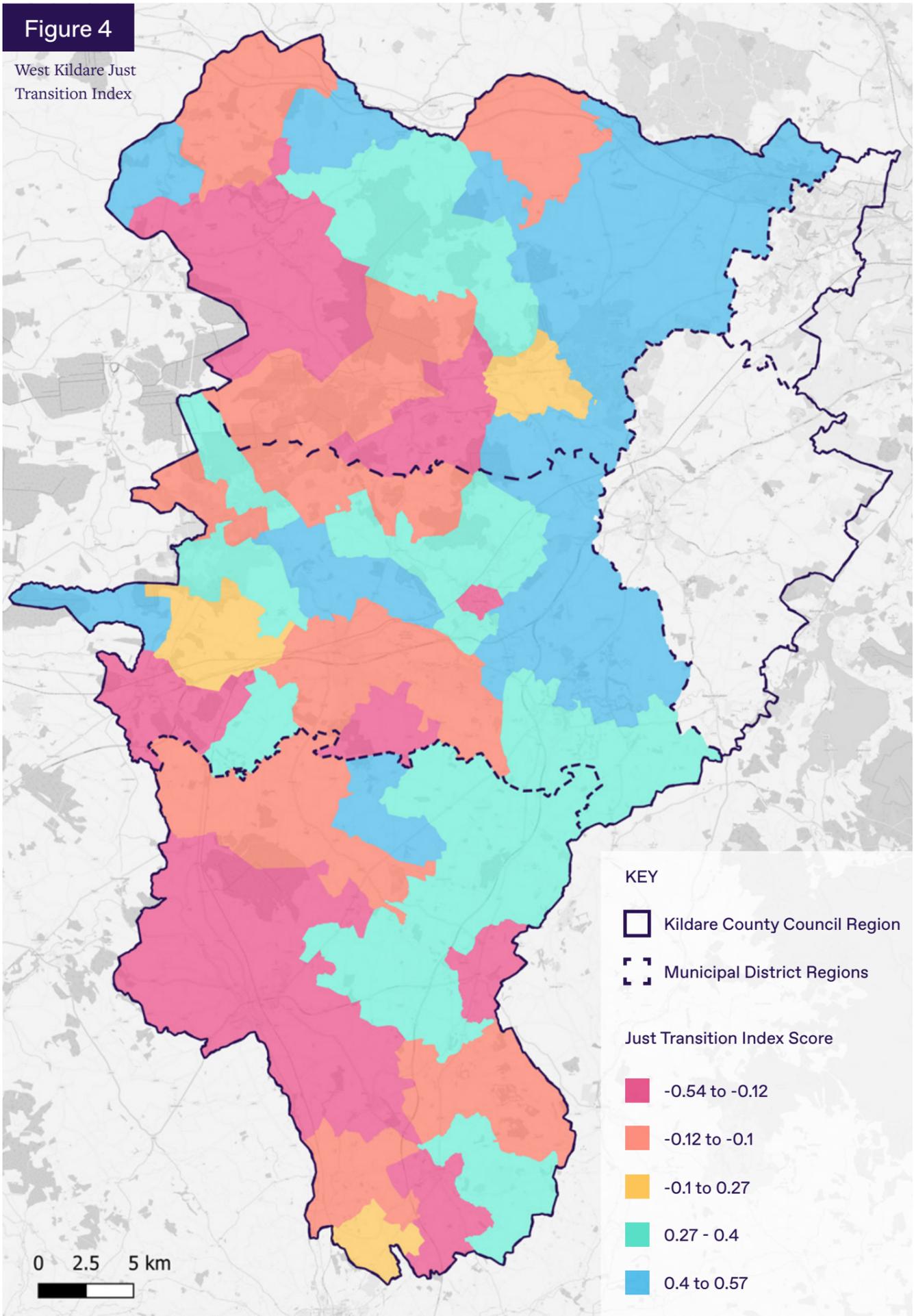
The Just Transition Index is composed from Census 2016 data across each of the three Just Transition themes (**Table 3**). Each constituent variable is assigned a score of +1 if it outperforms the national average and a score of -1 if it underperforms the national average. These are then aggregated and divided by the total number of indicators for each Just Transition dimension (9 indicators for Economy and Society and 7 indicators for Environment) to calculate an average Economy, Society, and Environment score (ranging from -1 to +1) for each area. An overall Just Transition Index score (ranging from -1 to +1) is then calculated by taking an average across each area's Economy, Society, and Environment scores. A breakdown of these scores is detailed in **Appendix II**.

Table 3: Just Transition Index Component Variables

JUST TRANSITION THEME	VARIABLE	CENSUS TABLE
Economy	At work	T8.1
	Unemployed	T8.1
	No formal education	T10.4
	Ordinary bachelor degree or national diploma	T10.4
	Commute under 15 mins	T11.3
	Commute over 1 hour	T11.3
	Skilled jobs	T13.1
Unskilled jobs	T13.1	
Society	Owner occupied accommodation	T6.3
	Private rented accommodation	T6.3
	Social rented accommodation	T6.3
	Good general health	T12.3
	Bad general health	T12.3
	Unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability	T8.1
	Broadband access	T15.3
Environmental	Houses built 2011 or later	T6.2
	Fossil fuel powered central heating	T6.5
	Active Travel to work or education	T11.1
	Public Transport to work or education	T11.1
	Private Vehicle to work or education	T11.1
	Car ownership (1 or more motor cars)	T15.1

Figure 4

West Kildare Just Transition Index



Creating and supporting economic opportunities should be considered a priority.

The Just Transition Index once again highlights the variation within West Kildare in terms of economic, social, and environmental characteristics. As **Figure 4** highlights, the electoral districts with the lowest scores are concentrated in the west of the region while the electoral districts with the highest scores are located in the east. There is a clear correlation between deprivation and Just Transition Index scores.

all five of the worst performing electoral districts scored -1 for economy – which means they underperform the national average on each of the Index’s nine economic metrics – they each scored above 1 for either society or environment.

This suggests that while there is certainly scope for targeted interventions across the three Just Transition themes in the weaker performing areas of West Kildare, **creating and supporting economic opportunities should be considered a priority.**

Significantly, the lowest scoring electoral districts (**Table 4**) are primarily weighed down by a low economy score. While

Table 4: Just Transition Index – Worst performers

	Economy Score	Society Score	Environment Score	Overall JTI Score
Monasterevin	-1.00	-0.78	0.14	-0.54
Athy East Urban	-1.00	-0.78	0.43	-0.45
Droichead Nua (Newbridge) Urban	-1.00	-0.78	0.43	-0.45
Kilberry	-1.00	0.11	-0.43	-0.44
Robertstown	-1.00	0.11	-0.43	-0.44

Table 5: Just Transition Index – Best performers

	Economy Score	Society Score	Environment Score	Overall JTI Score
Burtown	0.56	1.00	0.14	0.57
Carragh	0.56	0.56	0.43	0.51
Donore	0.56	0.78	0.14	0.49
Moone	0.56	0.78	0.14	0.49
Belan	0.56	0.78	0.14	0.49

Actions

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Actions have been co-created with stakeholders and focus on overcoming challenges and capturing opportunities.

There are three priority enabling actions in this section. Success in delivering against this action is a significant enabling factor for many of the other actions in this Just Transition Plan.

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The themes of the Just Transition – economy, society, and environment – are at the heart of all 15 actions.

Each action is designed to deliver against all three of these themes in some way. Therefore, rather than group actions by theme we have grouped actions into three areas of opportunity. These are tourism, business and skills, and energy.

A series of case studies accompany the proposed actions to provide context and insight for how similar ambitions have been realised elsewhere. These case studies include both Irish and UK examples with the intention of identifying best practice regardless of geography.

There are 3 priority enabling actions which have the capacity, if realised, to support all 15 proposed thematic actions.

PRIORITY ENABLING ACTION 1

A coordinated program of activity to bid in for Just Transition Fund monies

There is a reported €84.5m of EU money earmarked for Just Transition activity within the Republic of Ireland. This will potentially be supplemented by an equal sum of monies from within the Irish Exchequer's own resources. These monies, when taken together, represent a substantial challenge that counties and organisations across the country can bid in for.

Discussions with Kildare County Council, LCDC, LEO, and others suggest that an adequately resourced coordinated partnership approach is likely to yield best results. At present there are concerns re the resourcing for such a scenario.

If key community and grassroots local business actions are to be supported, and the voice of West Kildare heard, then it is key that such a representative partnership is formed quickly after the delivery of this Just Transition Plan and that coherent and well-evidenced plans are drawn up to present West Kildare's case for a fair allocation of centrally held Just Transition monies.

PRIORITY ENABLING ACTION 2

Critical partnership building

Kildare County Council need to engage with Bord na Móna, the Irish Farmers' Association and other economic, environmental and community stakeholders to create a formal working partnership to progress Just Transition issues and to credibly bid in for large scale central government monies.

Bord na Móna can be a critical partner in enabling many of proposed actions through providing access to land and infrastructure as well as knowledge sharing from other initiatives on Bord na Móna sites across the Midlands.

Community and other multi-stakeholder initiatives are likely to have to co-exist with the plans of other key landowners. These will include Bord na Móna's long term renewable energy generation and peatland reclamation imperatives, the ongoing plans of Forestry Ireland (Coillte) and the continuing productive use of the extensive small and large landholdings of West Kildare's farming community.

Bord na Móna are currently engaging at a senior level in Kildare Council to explore future land use opportunities across their landbank with the intention of developing and agreeing a Memorandum of Understanding to jointly explore and identify various workstreams.

The above high level engagement notwithstanding, it is also important that communities are equal partners in the proposed working partnership in order to facilitate real and meaningful change. As such, there is a need to establish a framework for non-institutional entities

Image: [Pollardstown Fen Boardwalk](#)



to lead and deliver on change so as to pre-empt any possible barriers that could arise preventing community led initiatives.

It is recommended that a formal tri-partite Just Transition Working Group is established consisting of government agencies (e.g. Kildare County Council, NPWS, LCDC, County Kildare LEADER Partnership, LEO), industry (e.g. Bord na Móna, the renewables sector, IFA, Coillte) and community (community groups and non-governmental organizations).

This Working Group will facilitate a tri-partite discussion on the future uses of the bogs so that a balance can be achieved between renewable energy/industrial uses and community and biodiversity imperatives.

PRIORITY ENABLING ACTION 3

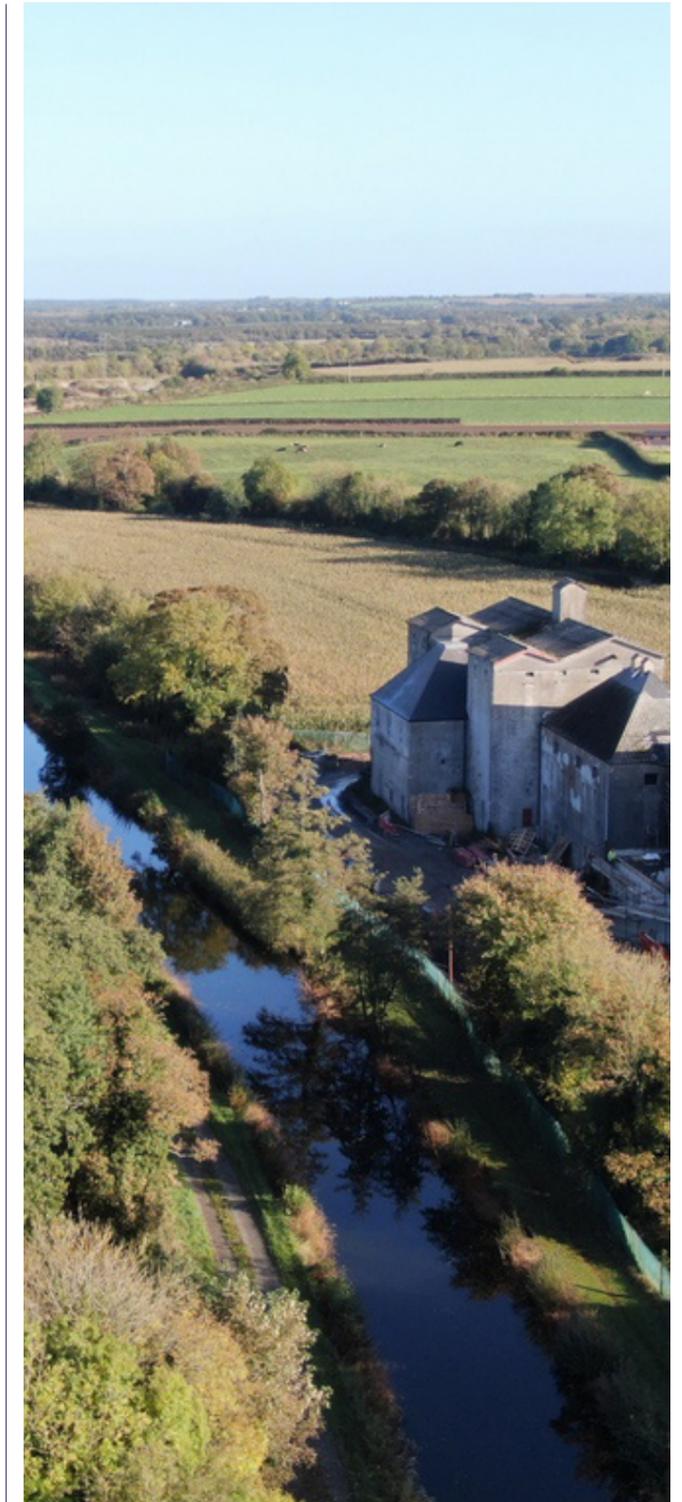
Incorporate the JTP into the Local Economic Community Plan (LECP)

The current Kildare Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP) sets out, over a five-year period from 2016-2021, the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic development and the local and community development of Kildare. The plan identifies twelve key social and economic goals with associated objectives and actions for Kildare, to be addressed over the lifetime of the plan:

- Population
- Urban/Rural County in the Greater Dublin Area
- Economic and Employment
- Housing
- Education
- A commuting county
- Health and Wellbeing
- Safe Communities
- Children and young people
- Community, Recreation, Arts & Culture
- Environmental Quality
- Economically Sustainable County

These priorities align closely to the outcomes identified within the JTP and as such the two should be aligned. By making the JTP a fundamental focus of the next iteration of the LECP, this would not only allow the JTP to become part of the statutory process but also better position the JTP to access a wider range of funding opportunities.

Image: Ballykelly Mill by Eddie Smyth (Umerus Community Development)



Nature and heritage-based tourism

The peatlands and bogs of West Kildare can provide a compelling tourist destination for the millions of visitors who come to the country through Dublin each year, as well as residents of the capital and towns and cities across the country.

There are significant new tourism opportunities arising from the cessation of peat extraction with Tourism Ireland strongly backing Green Tourism to grow in light of an increased appetite for sustainable tourism. This along with a general increase in the number of people who wish to go to outdoor venues and reconnect with nature gives West Kildare a unique chance to position itself as a leading region in Green/Sustainable tourism with the rewilding of the cutaways and the establishment of a National Peatlands Park.

Kildare County Council are already discussing with Into Kildare, County Kildare LEADER Partnership and others ways in which to bring agritourism into West Kildare. The IFA can also be an effective partner and co-creator of strategy in this and report that many smaller scale farmers are keen to diversify activities and income by offering farm stays, glamping, bike hire, canoeing and other activities to complement a county wide ecotourism offer.

The tripartite Just Transition Working Group needs to discuss which bogs should be used for renewable energy and which bogs should be used for national parks and nature tourism projects. Given the diversity of Bord na Móna's 80,000 hectare estate it would be desirable to reach consensus on how bogs can be designated for different land-uses including those community driven ecotourism initiatives so important to any Just Transition Process.

PRIORITY ACTION

Create a new National Park for Ireland

Kildare County Council, Bord na Móna, NGOs, community groups, and national Government, including the National Parks and Wildlife Service, will engage to create a new National Park for Ireland. This would be the only National Park in the midlands, and the only National Park for a raised bog landscape.

A farming, woodland and peatland tourism offer could have a National Peatlands Park (NPP) at its centre. Greenways, blueways and an enhanced rural public transport infrastructure (through cooperation with Irish Rural Link) can materially improve access to the rural communities of West Kildare, and areas across the whole county, Dublin, and neighbouring counties.

As the National Peatlands Park group (the community partners behind the NPP concept) look for means to engage more effectively with Bord na Móna, a model could be to look for common ground with initiatives such as LoughBoora Discovery Park. There is a need for a feasibility study to understand how a properly constituted and governed NPP consisting of a connected set of facilities such as LoughBoora create a more compelling tourist, visitor, employment, community and amenity offer.

The creation of a National Peatlands Park, pushed forward by local communities and environmental NGOs, deserves serious consideration and commands a degree of support from the Government with the proposal to create a new national park in the east midlands near the Greater Dublin Area aligning with the vision statement of The National Peatlands Strategy 2015-2025:

“to provide a long-term framework within which all of the peatlands within the State can be managed responsibly in order to optimise their social, environmental and economic contribution to the well-being of this and future generations”

Further to this, prioritised action S28 of the National Peatlands Strategy Mid-Term Review commits the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to conducting a feasibility study on the creation of a national peatlands/wetlands park to be published in 2021 (in the third quarter of 2021).

Umeras Community Development secured funding from the Just Transition Fund and County Kildare LEADER Partnership for design, biodiversity and strategic planning studies and an interim report has found that there is “Evidence, conditions and opportunity to create a successful and sustainable project at Umeras Peatlands Park”.

The current context, particularly the cessation of peat cutting by Bord na Móna, provides the opportunity to promote the new National Peatland Park. The need to rehabilitate peatlands, conserve remaining biodiversity at a landscape scale, to create a new relationship with our peatland heritage, meet Ireland's climate change commitments, and provide a just transition to Bord na Móna employees and local communities underline the suitability of the proposal at this juncture and for the future.

This proposed park could provide an opportunity to develop a centre of excellence for applied integrated peatland research and a national database for peatland related data and information as well as communicating information regarding peatlands.

New business and job creation will come from fusing nature and unique biodiversity assets, industrial heritage, arts and culture, and local food and drink production across a network of peat bogs and towns joined by canals, cycle routes and roads in a new leading turbary ecotourism destination. The peatlands park would create direct employment in building and managing the park, and also indirectly by creating demand for cafes/restaurants/pubs, shops, bike/kayak hire, horse-riding, accommodation, etc. in Monasterevin and Rathangan.

The peatlands park would therefore complement the current plans in place to grow the greenway and blueway network within West Kildare. Kildare County Council in conjunction with Laois County Council and Waterways Ireland have commenced works to the proposed Barrow Blueway which will provide a multi-use shared leisure route comprising 46km of off-road, flat, accessible, public space connecting Lowtown Kildare, through the towns of Rathangan, Monasterevin, and Vicarstown, to Athy.

Funded by the Government of Ireland under Project Ireland 2040 this new tourist attraction is due to be completed in late 2022 and is already well aligned to the Just Transition Plan outcomes for West Kildare. The Barrow Blueway will not only offer a huge economic boost, positively influencing economic growth opportunities, but will also contribute to an increased sense of community while creating exciting recreation opportunities for local residents and visitors alike.

Meanwhile, Kildare County Council have additionally proposed the construction of a shared walking and cycling greenway route along the Grand Canal Towpath. This proposed development will comprise the improvement and upgrading of the existing towpath along the Grand Canal and the provision of traffic control and safety measures and signage to facilitate safe pedestrian and cycling crossings and access to shared surfaces. These plans will expand on the existing Royal Canal Greenway which follows the 200 year-old canal running west from Maynooth through Kilcock onto County Meath and provides 130km of level towpath through rustic and industrial landscapes which encompass rolling fields, attractive waterside villages, working locks, historic landmarks, and cafés and picnic spots.

There is a strong economic case for increased funding in community-based infrastructure

There is a strong economic case for increased funding in community-based infrastructure to support access to and travel around the Peatlands. Where tourist infrastructure exists or is being developed, this needs to be given a profile within national Irish tourist literature given the proximity to Dublin which is the preferred gateway to the Republic for around 90% of the 11m annual visitors to Ireland nationally. For example, the Royal Canal and Grand Canal Greenways and the Barrow Blueway have significant visitor potential but currently there are no viable connections between them. Constructing, reinstating, mapping and publicising access routes can significantly stimulate and enable tourist and visitor interest even in natural areas considerably more remote than the turbary landscape of West Kildare.

Image: [Kildare Town](#)



Nature and heritage-based tourism actions

T1 /

Create a new National Park for Ireland

The National Peatlands Park group will establish a new National Peatlands Park on a landscape scale in the Bog of Allen in County Kildare with a view to rewild and restore the cutaway peatlands following the cessation of industrial scale peat extraction. The park will protect and greatly increase biodiversity, mitigate climate change, enhance the social and economic life of midland communities and act as a catalyst for a growing sustainable tourism industry.

Inspired by Boora, Corlea, Scohaboy, Abbeyleix, and other rehabilitated or restored peatlands, there is enormous potential to create new interconnected cultural, educational, scientific, archaeological and tourism experiences linking peatland habitats across the Midlands forming a network of National Parks.

Short-term priority: bid for Just Transition Fund (JTF) monies to deliver feasibility and design project in preparation for further funding bids.

T2 /

Community owned marinas and facilities

Community tourism, where businesses in a town work together to have a positive impact on the destination for visitors and locals, presents a significant opportunity for the nature and heritage-based tourism sector in West Kildare – particularly in conjunction with the development of the Barrow Blueway.

The Barrow Blueway runs through several towns from Robertstown to Athy, which can be home to new community marinas and facilities. The Canal Hotel in Robertstown East is a prime opportunity to develop a community owned facility. This can include canal moorings, café, shower facilities, and laundry facilities for boaters, as well as cyclists and hikers. These services can be introduced overtime, perhaps by different business owners.

To deliver this, one or more community development companies or social enterprises will need to be established who can bid for LEADER funding following the guidance in the Barrow Blueway Economic Plan. The proposed plans for the Levinstown Mill redevelopment provide one example model to follow in Robertstown. Other examples include the Into Kildare community tourism pilot group established in Newbridge – which is seeking to expand into Monastervin and Rathangan with the support of Fáilte Ireland, in line with the Barrow Blueway opening – and Into Kildare's Start Your Own Business programme which has encouraged new businesses to be set up to address identified market gaps.

Short-term priority: bid for JTF to deliver feasibility and design project in preparation for further funding bids.

T3 /

Nature & activity centres network

T3 / Nature & activity centres network

Restoration and rehabilitation of bogs and their biodiversity will create a unique environment for walkers, cyclists and horse riders as well as those keen to observe the different birds, plants and other wildlife. The important element of this project is that people who have had long-term or life-long jobs working on the bogs are provided paid and meaningful roles in management and maintenance of the land and paths.

Existing sites like the Bog of Allen Nature Centre are relatively isolated from one another. Connecting them with signed routes under one brand, with occasional public art reflecting the industrial heritage, would form the basis of a nature trail and activity trail which joins up with the Barrow Way, and other Blueways and Greenways and existing trails at Donadea Forest Park. Representatives from organisations like the Community Wetlands Forum and PPN, or staff at ‘one stop shops’ would need to support members of the community to form groups to bid for funding to set up visitor and nature centres. These centres could include cafes and accommodation, activity equipment hire and accessory shops, and wildlife information and tours.

Kildare County Council would need to liaise with Bord na Móna, Coillte and farmer landowners to agree designated routes on existing paths and tracks, installation of signage and any public art, and to identify further areas of Peatland to include. The Council would also need to work with project sponsors on legal, planning and insurance issues associated with using such land owned by 3rd parties. Butterfly Conservation Ireland works in partnership with Bord na Móna to manage the butterfly reserve at Lullybeg, demonstrating how such a partnership can work.

Interaction and involvement with local schools should be supported throughout the restoration and rehabilitation of West Kildare’s cutaways to inform, inspire, and connect the next generation to the peatlands.

Short-term priority: bid for JTF to establish a network organisation.

T4 / Oral & visual history project

Bord na Móna hold an extensive industrial and cultural archive. This provides an opportunity to create a legacy project involving the community. Creative Rathangan – Meitheal and Maynooth University have a shared ambition to turn the archives into historical exhibitions and involve community members to create oral history installations. This ensures that communities can include their history in Kildare’s future, with community pride and social cohesion being a key part of a Just Transition.

Consideration should be given to supporting the further growth of Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park as part of this project and then looking to replicate its approach in other areas. Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park currently works with Maynooth University’s Archaeology and Geography departments and is open to developing this further.

Short to medium-term priority: work with Maynooth University and community groups to bid for funding to further develop and access cultural content from West Kildare industrial heritage.

T5 / Ballydermot Camp experience

Also known as the Killinthomas turf camp, the derelict buildings at Ballydermot could provide a basis for experiential tourism, whether through a living museum or accommodation for visitors. Kildare County Council will need to take a lead in engaging with Bord na Móna regarding access and usage. Local organisations such as Allenwood Community Development Association will then play a crucial role in supporting local businesses to bid for LEADER funding for preliminary designs. Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park have been identified as potential managers of the site and would be open to working in partnership with others on its future development.

Medium-term priority: local enterprise office to bid for LEADER funding for feasibility and scoping.

T6 / A ‘Kildare 300’ km tourist route

County Kildare as a whole has an array of historic and sporting attractions. These include castles and monasteries around the county. Resort hotels are also present, providing a rural equivalent to clusters of hotels in Maynooth and Naas. Established museums include the Shackleton Museum in Athy, Newbridge Silverware Visitor Centre, Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park and the National Horse Racing Museum. Although some of these are not in West Kildare itself, they can be used to attract people to the area as part of a branded and promoted route.

Learning from Scotland’s North Coast 500 and the Northumberland 250 (see case studies), Into Kildare and Kildare County Council can establish a branded driving and cycling route. The Grand Canal Greenway which links with the Barrow Blueway and the Royal Canal Greenway presents a significant opportunity as this will provide hundreds of kilometres of accessible, sustainable, cycling routes. Key towns on the route can also be accessed by public transport.

Starting in more heavily visited towns like Maynooth or Naas, the route would visit existing and new attractions and accommodation in West Kildare’s peatlands. The publicised route would therefore link existing and more high-profile attractions with newer community tourist businesses in unexplored areas of West Kildare. Destinations such as the Church of Oak distillery could be key features of this route, as well as community-led and smaller-scale developments.

Medium-term priority: engage Into Kildare and co-ordinate hospitality and visitor attractions to scope proposed route.

T7 / Pop-up or touring exhibitions

Kildare County Council should engage with Bord na Móna to understand which built infrastructure sites are suitable for repurposing for temporary installations and exhibitions by local/regional artists, Maynooth University, or hosting tours from farther afield. To enable this, once sites are identified, creative industry groups and organisations will need support to approach organisations like Creative Ireland for funding.

Medium term priority: identify potential sites and form a community enterprise to explore options.

Case Studies

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The Levitstown Mill Tourism Activity Hub, Athy

Image: [Athy](#)

The unique heritage and strong eco-tourism credentials of Levitstown Mill provides an exciting opportunity to develop a cutting-edge tourism hub that could form the core of an enhanced tourism offer in Athy.

Nestled strategically between Athy and Carlow in a special area of conservation, the Levitstown Mill site includes a ruined Mill and ancillary buildings and a converted stable yard of four self-catering short term tourism accommodation units, with significant further development potential.

More importantly, however, is the site's potential for developing a unique sustainable eco-tourism offer - at the centre of which is the site's working hydro-electric turbine. Further, while the site already enjoys extensive River Barrow and Grand Canal frontage, proposed plans will see the Barrow Blueway run through the centre of the proposed seven-acre site, linking it to the wider eco-tourism activity in West Kildare.

Lough Boora Discovery Park

Image: [Lough Boora Discovery Park](#)

Lough Boora Discovery Park in Offaly is a prime example of a former Bord na Móna bog which has been transformed from a commercial bog to heat homes around the country to an important natural asset and amenity with high biodiversity value.

Home to countless species of birds and wildlife and fish-filled lakes, visitors can engage in walking, cycling, bird watching, and angling activities. Lough Boora Discovery Park also houses a permanent exhibition of outdoor sculptures which have been created using the old industrial materials of the bog such as locomotives, rail-line, and timber.

The Park is managed by Bord na Móna's Land and Property unit which oversees and promotes various beneficial uses of cutaway areas including renewable energy, biodiversity, amenity uses, water storage, and other infrastructure as part of the Group's corporate Biodiversity objective to:

- promote and enhance the conservation of biodiversity areas of local, national, and international importance within Bord na Móna lands;
- raise awareness of and encourage involvement in the conservation and management of biodiversity within Bord na Móna and the wider community; and
- facilitate the establishment of a framework for sustainable planning and development of the Bord na Móna cutaway bogs and associated lands for biodiversity and other appropriate potential after uses.

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Exploring less-visited areas along Scotland's North Coast 500 and the Northumberland 250

Image by: [Tim Wooliscroft / Unsplash](#)

The **North Coast 500** was established in 2015 by the Tourism Project Board of the North Highland Initiative (NHI). The North Coast 500 was designed to promote a less-visited area of Scotland as a tourist destination after a gap in the tourist market was identified in counties the route passes through. From the outset the route promoted local produce and specialities, created itineraries based around distilleries, breweries, heritage and history, and unique and important local nature. Itineraries are designed for cars, motorbikes and bicycles. Local accommodation providers from campsites to luxury hotels and visitor destinations ranging from activity centres to castles are listed on the site. The success and popularity of the route has grown to the extent that tourists can choose to pay a 15GBP membership fee for more exclusive offers and itineraries.

In 2021 the **Northumberland 250** was founded by a marketing entrepreneur to promote the county as a destination in a similar way to the North Coast 500 was used in Scotland. In its early stages, Northumberland 250 uses photography from local photographers and produces digital route maps and physical versions for sale on its own website, and is promoted as one of several tours by Visit Northumberland.

Combining nature and local beer into a tourist event

Image by: [Pearse O'Halloran / Unsplash](#)

Wild Intrigue is a small eco-tourism social enterprise based in Northumberland which creates "unique opportunities to inspire, educate, and rewild everyone through the discovery of British wildlife". Wild Intrigue has successfully collaborated with local businesses to offer unique tourism events which bring together local enterprises and the local natural environment.

Wild Intrigue was established by experienced ecologists and educators who recognised the value of combining nature-based experiences with local businesses to make a more compelling visitor offer which benefits local food and drink producers. For example, Bats & Beer offered visitors the opportunity to combine exploring the art of brewing with local bat conservation. Visitors were given the opportunity to learn about brewing with a local artisan brewery. This included a discussion of how ingredients were locally foraged and sourced and a sample tasting session. This was followed by a guided bat safari in the village of Elsdon which the bats share with the brewery. Such a model could be replicated in West Kildare, for example with Ballykelly Mill.

Case Studies

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Community owned marinas in Scotland



Image by: Fool on the Hill / Unsplash

Corpach Marina on Loch Linnhe, Fort William is a proposed community-owned marina which will add to the marine infrastructure of Lochaber. This will offer valuable new facilities for locals and visitors alike, complement existing businesses, and create much-needed local employment.

The Marina has been formed as a company limited by shares, although until ready to start trading, a small working group was formed to drive forward the project under the aegis of the Caol Regeneration Company (CRC) which was formed in 2005 as a charitable company limited by guarantee, with the object of contributing to the social and economic regeneration of Caol.

The success of this project is dependent on the support and cooperation of a wide range of key stakeholders – especially that of the local communities. Critical partners included Kilmallie and Caol Community Councils and the local members of the Highland Council, which represent the wider community, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Crown Estate Scotland, and Scottish Canals.

Funding for the project has been secured from the Scottish Government (RCGF £1.465m), EU LEADER (£171,000), SSE Sustainable Communities (£100,000) and several “aggregate/landfill” funds. Additionally, Highland Council has recently approved £77,000 from their Town Centre Fund.

Corpach is following a similar model to the community owned **Lochaline Harbour** established by the Morvern Community Trading Company (MCTC).

Green Offaly



Image by: Michael Anderton (Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park)

Devised as a solution to the Government’s Project 2040 seminar, ‘Empowering Communities in the Fight against Climate Change’, Green Offaly is a not-for-profit countywide green regeneration enterprise operating as a Development Trust. Green Offaly trades only for social purpose, where surpluses are reinvested into further enterprises for community benefit.

In its role as a Development Trust, **Green Offaly** will cultivate green community enterprises for the long term environmental, social, and economic sustainability of an area and facilitate the Green Regeneration of Offaly through the involvement of those with the greatest stake in the future of the County – the people who live and work there.

Building on Offaly’s significant assets including peatlands, waterways, agriculture, and communities ripe for regeneration, Green Offaly seeks to make Offaly the blueprint for the successful decarbonisation of the counties of Ireland.

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Business and skills

The focus of the Just Transition Plan is to help communities benefit from new business and income opportunities, whether in the tourist industry, existing industries like logistics and food and drink, or in emerging and growing industries such as green energy and digital. Achieving this has two parts.

First, there is a need to help communities and individuals turn ideas into planned and funded projects or businesses. Second, is a need for further support to help individuals access new jobs and benefit from economic change and the transition to net zero.

The Just Transition area in the Midlands is more than just Kildare. For instance, there are several communities along the border with Offaly where there are considerable cross-border links and similarities. There may be opportunities to be developed with Kildare and Offaly working together, and the actions below should bear this in mind.

PRIORITY ACTION

Encourage new community development groups to emerge

The Local Enterprise Office in Kildare works with businesses (both start up and pre-start up) to enable business growth, skills development and job creation in the area. LCDC and County Kildare LEADER Partnership work with and support community groups to form and be part of determining their own future.

Other organisations such as the Kildare Chamber, Network Kildare and Original Kildare are key parts of an extensive support network which can support those individuals, businesses and community enterprises looking to create economic opportunity and social benefit from the environmental remediation of the peatlands.

It is important that these bodies are represented at the table as part of the tri-partite partnership to Just Transition. For the larger entities present within West Kildare (such as Kildare County Council, Bord na Móna, ESB, Coillte and the IFA) the Just Transition process requires that smaller scale community led initiatives are given the space, resource and funding to shape the solutions that will then be delivered in their own communities.

Business and skills actions

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B1 / Encourage new community development groups to emerge

‘One-stop shops’ at community hubs can facilitate access between communities and funding opportunities by acting as a bridge between these communities and individuals and funding providers such as LEADER and the Just Transition Fund. One of the main barriers to more projects coming forward for funding is that ideas from individuals or groups can only be taken forward for funding application if a formal eligible organisation is established and ideas developed into more formal plans.

An initial action is required to hire paid advisers to support groups and individuals to come together and formalise ideas into community development companies, social enterprises or small businesses who can then engage with LEADER and other funding providers like Heritage Council, Creative Ireland and the Peatlands Community Engagement Scheme. Advice would include technical advice on establishing a company and consideration should be given to a specific, tailored business start-up program for the most disadvantaged areas. This could build on existing programmes such as LEO’s pre-start your own business programme.

One-stop shops should utilise existing facilities such as the Allenwood Community Development Association (ACDAL) or GAA clubs, where space is available. In communities with no venues like this, then options should explore whether Just Transition Funding can support repurposing of any vacant space or a ‘mobile hub’ which can travel between villages.

Short-term priority: identify sites for one-stop shops, potentially at GAA Clubs like Carbury and Robertstown or existing community organisation locations.

B2 / Community-skills

‘One-stop shops’ should also be a centre for skills matching, skills training, and remote working. Matching the skills of local people, including former Bord na Móna employees, to local opportunities can maintain employment in West Kildare. Matching should also work with individuals to find jobs slightly further afield in sectors with labour shortages (such as logistics) and which are accessible by affordable transport. There is scope to work with Irish Rural Link to explore the possibility of better linking former peat communities to more mainstream public transport to increase access to job markets.

Hubs can also provide the training people need to work in a range of sectors. Digital skills training is a priority, and already provided by organisations like ACDAL along with healthcare, horticulture, and Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (Skills Pass). Tourism and biodiversity related opportunities will need skills and accreditation in hospitality, business management, and land management and stewardship. Skills provision in these sectors could follow the model of the Athy Food, Drink & Skills Innovation Hub, which is included in the Kildare 2025 economic development strategy.

Remote working is opening up more opportunities for people with the right skills but who cannot afford to move to Dublin or Maynooth, but digital connectivity in rural areas remains a challenge. Community hubs can provide flexible, accessible and connected space for people to work remotely.

The Local Enterprise Office provided about 200 training programmes in 2021. These covered accessing grant aid, networking and a Green for Micro’ programme to make companies more lean, sustainable and efficient. A Blueway and Greenway start-up business program is also offered (3 have occurred in 2020-21).

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Another partner should be the Kildare and Wicklow Education and Training Board (KWETB) which supports and co-ordinates education, training, and youth services in Kildare and Wicklow and provides primary, post primary, post leaving certificate, apprenticeships, traineeships, youth services, music, community, outdoor, and adult further education and training. KWETB should be engaged in any potential education and training opportunities for West Kildare to ensure alignment and promote synergies with KWETB’s Statement of Strategy 2020-24. The potential role of the Department of Social Protection – the statutory agency with responsibility for supporting people who are unemployed – in delivering community skills should also be considered.

Short to medium-term priority: secure JTF funding for a diverse Just Transition skills programme for businesses and community not for profit organisations to be run from one-stop-shops.

B3 / Project sponsorship

Kildare County Council, potentially via the Kildare Local Community Development Committee (LCDC) could establish a coordinating office/ department to help community groups, stakeholders to develop ideas, craft bids and to advise on matters of governance, liability, legal and business plan development. Such an organisation can increase West Kildare’s share of Just Transition Fund and LEADER monies whilst also acting as a focal point for community led regeneration and enterprise. Other sources of funding include EU, UNESCO etc.

In turn, the Council should engage with Bord na Móna as a commercial semi-state company to create a new model where Bord na Móna proactively identify and support a number of community-led initiatives and provide some kind of ‘underwriting’ support. For example, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust in the UK plays a role facilitating the development of community capacity, by encouraging small voluntary, charitable and other organisations to expand their scope, build new partnerships, and tackle more ambitious projects within their communities by pairing development support with small investments.

Short to medium-term priority: establish a community enterprise support service run from one-stop-shops.

B4 / Community project co- ordinator

Kildare County Council has a key role to play to bridge between community organisations and social-enterprises and large landowners such as Bord na Móna. Maynooth University could also play a role, with the capacity and legal form to liaise with owners of land, buildings, or sites which could host research centres for nature recovery and restoration, field trips, or history exhibitions

A Kildare County Council-backed organisation like LEO, the LCDC, paid members of the PPN, or the Council itself could be an enabler for community driven schemes involving alternative uses of the boglands. This would also enable a more co-ordinated ask of National Government to designate the Peatlands as a National Park. Bord na Móna has expressed a willingness to engage with these bodies with respect to alternative uses of boglands.

Medium-term priority: a community project co-ordinator to represent projects in technical discussions and to help share information and resources between projects. To be based in a one-stop-shop close to the peat bogs.

B5 / Business incubation

Alongside community capacity and skills development, hubs will also need to provide space for business start-up, incubation and growth if remote working and tourism sees increases in inward investment and demand for space. The majority of enterprise hubs in the county are in Naas and Maynooth. ACDAL has proven to be a success in Allenwood, with similar hubs in Kildare and Athy.

Increased economic activity resulting from a connected network of Blueways and Greenways could mean that business space is needed in Robertstown, Rathangan and Monasterevin. This could be office space for companies in different sectors, including tourism, or workshop space for artisan food, drink and craft suppliers. Examples from the Just Transition Fund include Roscommon, Ballinasloe, Westmeath, Laois, and Athlone. Each typically receiving anywhere from €50-€500k for capital spend.

New enterprise hubs should be part of a County-wide network, tapping in to the same business support and training provision. The MERITS enterprise hub in Naas is working to build a network of hub managers, and new hubs should be integrated into this.

Medium term priority: secure funding for business space to accommodate new business growth.

Coalfields Regeneration Trust coalfields-regen.org.uk



Image by: Nick Nice / Unsplash

Following decades of industry contraction and accompanying pits closures, former coalfield areas by the late 1990s had a lack of employment opportunities, experienced high levels of poor health, and many people had no or few qualifications. In response to this the Coalfields Regeneration Trust was established an independent charity in 1999 to support former coal mining communities and create opportunities for their people.

The Coalfields Regeneration Trust delivers projects and programmes to support Health and Wellbeing, Employment, and skills to give people the support they need and help them lead a healthy lifestyle and get back into work. These include the Employment and Skills Service in Yorkshire, which has a team of experienced coaches providing 1-1 help to people who need bespoke support to build their CV's and find work.

While still receiving government funding in Scotland and Wales, alongside various grant funding from other sources, the Coalfields Regeneration Trust in England has been tasked with becoming financially independent. As a result, the Trust has created CRT Property Investments Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary that allows the Trust to generate funds from commercial and residential properties that can support the ongoing work that it does.

Investing in a portfolio of coalfield-based properties means that the Trust is able to use these assets to not only support its work, but also to create an infrastructure in some of the most deprived areas in the country and offer opportunities such as employment and apprenticeships.

Hospitality skills training and pathways to employment

Handcrafted is a charity which aims to empower those who have been disadvantaged or faced social exclusion due to crime, alcohol or substance abuse, poor mental or physical health, unemployment, or having experienced abuse or been in the care system.

With hubs in Chester-le-Street, Durham, and Gateshead, Handcrafted works with individuals to help them make positive steps to turn their lives around, be part of a community, and start to give back by:

- Offering tailored training opportunities and creative activities for individuals to build confidence, gain skills and work towards their goals.
- Providing holistic support that engages with individuals' whole lives, helping them to build healthy coping strategies.
- Providing supported housing across the region, renovating properties to make valuable homes that our residents can be proud to call their own.
- Welcoming everyone into our community, regardless of background, and helping them see the value they bring.

For example, Handcrafted is running a training kitchen at their Chester-Le-Street base supporting individuals to gain confidence and reimagine what they are able to achieve through offering courses that improve their cookery skills.

From these skills, trainees will be able to work towards Level 1 and 2 qualifications in Food Hygiene which will allow trainees to pursue passions in cooking, while looking towards employment particularly in the hospitality sector. Trainees will additionally be supported by the Handcrafted staff team with referrals to employment opportunities, along with advice and help with CVs and job applications.

Energy efficiency & generation

Switching Ireland's energy and supply to zero carbon sources and reducing energy demand from households are the two of the fundamental requirements of the country reaching net zero.

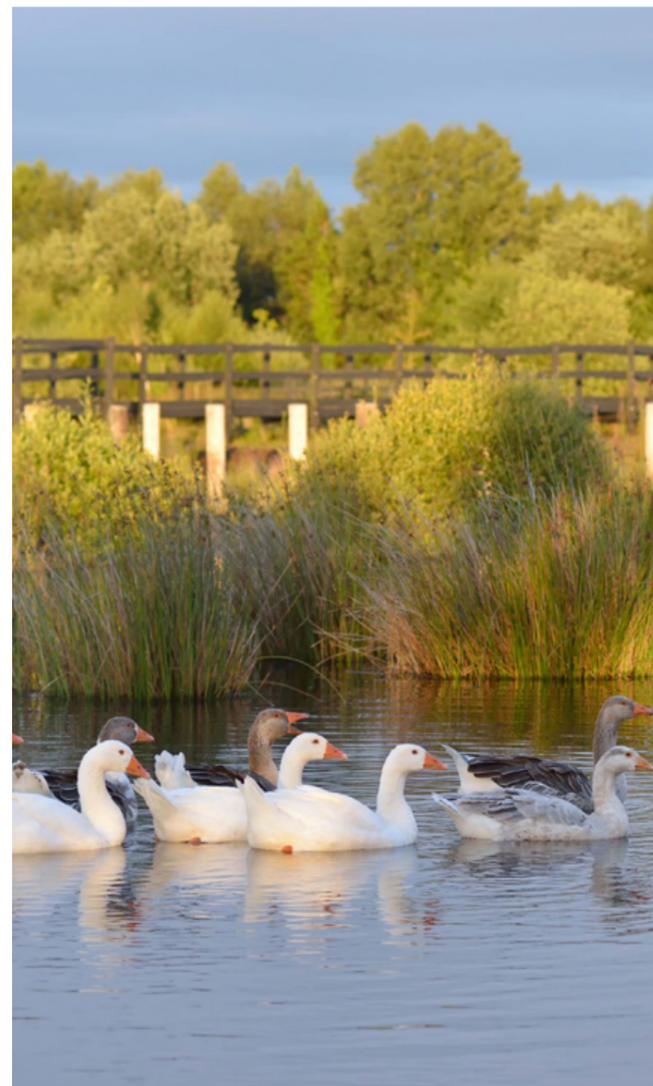
There are national initiatives supporting decarbonisation, as well as regional and local ones. Large scale developments and plans include:

- The Ballydermot Wind Farm in Kildare, following on from the Mount Lucas wind farm in Offaly.
- Bioenergy knowledge transfer – The Irish Bioenergy Association has received €255k to work across all 8 counties on a bioenergy knowledge transfer programme covering opportunities in biomass, biogas, wood fuel and energy crop processing and biochar production and usage. This includes a mentoring programme for up to 12 start-ups.
- The Electric Ireland Superhomes programme which aims to support Irish homeowners to transition to warmer, comfortable and more energy efficient homes and support the achievement of Ireland's climate action targets through a commitment to delivering 35,000 home retrofits by 2030. Support ranges from retrofit design through to project completion and payment of SEAI grant funding.
- Bord na Móna have already funded an Accelerate Green Programme at their existing office complex at Boora. Partnering with Resolve Partners and ERINN Innovation this is part of the LIFE IP Peatlands and People Programme. This has 12 SMEs engaged with it at present all with the capability to scale in the green sector.

Communities have an important role to play in meeting energy efficiency and generation targets, as highlighted by

the vital work being undertaken by the 25 Sustainable Energy Communities (SECs) across County Kildare. SECs are community groups whose goal is to work together to improve how energy is used for the benefit of their community. SECs look at how energy can be used in a sustainable, holistic way by seeking to use a combination of less energy, clean energy, and smart energy. This is often done through delivering projects in homes, transport, and local business as well as community buildings such as schools, community centres, and sports facilities.

Image by: Michael Anderton (Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park)



Nature and heritage-based tourism actions

E1 /

Community retrofit support

Many homes in West Kildare are not connected to gas or electricity networks for heating and will be difficult to make zero carbon. Similarly, the cost of new zero carbon sources of energy like heat pumps are expensive to install and expensive to run compared to the annual cost of fuels like peat. A Just Transition means households should be able to reduce their emissions without increasing bills and be supported to make capital investments.

The Electric Ireland Superhomes programme charges €475 for an energy report and between €950 and €2,300 for professional fees. This cost can be prohibitive to households in West Kildare. There is a need for households to proactively contact either the Superhomes programme or SEAI to enquire about grants, which is also off putting for some households.

This action recommends an on-the-ground house-to-house programme where paid advisors visit homes to provide a free energy report, advice on options for retrofit, and free support for accessing grants such as the 'better energy communities' and 'national retrofit' grants. A community company, closely linked to the sustainable energy community (SEC) programme, should be supported to bid for Just Transition Fund money to fund door-to-door advisors, either from Superhomes or local experts, in the communities with most need. The aim is to identify a small cluster of homes where owners are all willing to participate in a retrofit pilot programme. Addressing several neighbouring homes in one go can bring down the cost of energy efficiency measures like insulation, as well widening options for renewable or low carbon energy installations.

Short-term priority: bid for JTF to establish a funded retrofit initiative in communities most affected by industrial decline.

E2/

Joined up community benefit funding

Local communities should be equal partners in decision-making around the spending of any community gain funding.

Bord na Móna will be establishing a Community Gain Scheme for the Ballydermot wind farm development. At the Mountlucas wind farm, an annual fund of €1,000/MW per installed capacity per annum for the lifetime of the wind farm was established which provides an €84,000 annual fund. The Ballydermot development is set to be larger in scale and so may have a larger annual fund. To maximise the value of this fund for communities, it should be joined up with other funding sources referenced in this action plan such as LEADER and Just Transition Fund. Combining Bord na Móna funding with LEADER or Just Transition Funding means that community organisations and social enterprises will be able to invest more quickly and in more impactful projects.

This should be facilitated through the one-stop shop hubs (see action B1) where Bord na Móna can liaise directly with Kildare County Council, County Kildare LEADER Partnership, or the Kildare LDDC who are in turn working with communities and social enterprises at the hubs. This will ensure that Bord na Móna funding is targeted at projects where it will add most value. SECs should also be seen as key strategic partners.

Short-term priority: establish a Just Transition focussed Community Gain Scheme so that Bord na Móna's developments and nature and tourism projects are aligned and working together

E3 / Energy skills and innovation network

Bord na Móna and Resolve Partners have combined to deliver Accelerate Green in Offaly, an EU LIFE funded programme in partnership with ERINN Innovation. Accelerate Green offers participating companies the necessary tools, advice, mentoring, and a community of expertise that will enable them to understand the opportunities in transitioning to a green, and low carbon economy, and how to overcome the obstacles that prevent scale.

Whilst the programme will run for just 18 days of activity over four months, it uses a model which could be replicated at sites across West Kildare, at existing business centres and clusters like ACDAL. Learning from Accelerate Green, and combining with a dedicated retrofit and energy skills programme a network of activity should aim to:

- Provide new retrofit skills to people in West Kildare so they can benefit from housing retrofit job creation
- Provide new community energy generation maintenance skills, and electric vehicle and infrastructure maintenance skills
- Help existing businesses in West Kildare decarbonise their process or products
- Attract businesses from outside the area and encourage new start-ups from within the area

Linking activity in West Kildare with large initiatives like the proposed Rhode Green Energy Park in Offaly will be important, as will connecting with smaller scale projects via SECs.

Short to long-term priority: start a phased development with initial focus on retrofit skills and develop the hub over time

E4 / Community energy company

One-stop shops (see action B1) can also provide a home for a community energy company which would coordinate SECs under a single entity rather than multiple small ones. This can be a base for providing the expertise and support communities need for owning and scaling their own energy. This administrative mechanism for formalising a community energy company is noticeably lacking, with a reliance on volunteers and the sustainable energy community programme in Kildare who are under resourced.

Just Transition Fund funding can be used to fund SEC programme staff to work with communities at one-stop shops and help them establish a funded community energy company which is not reliant on volunteers. The funding would then be used to pay for technical, legal, and planning expertise to support the company to access funding from the national Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS). Locally generated electricity can provide an affordable source of power to electric vehicles, with community charging stations also being owned by the community energy company.

Alternatively, the community energy company can register with Community Power Group who will provide advice and guidance on legal structures for communities, land leases (including Lease Option), planning (including all studies & impact assessments), grid connections, RESS auctions, finance for project, construction and operation. Community Power is also a vehicle for all individual community groups to make representations and attempt to ensure commercial viability for Community Projects by supplying electricity locally through Community Power.

Medium term priority: support sustainable energy community programme staff to develop JTF bid for initial design phase of a community energy company.

Case Studies

Mountlucas Wind Farm



Image by: William Dehoogh / Unsplash

Mountlucas Wind Farm is co-located on 1,100 hectares of cutaway peatlands near Daingean, Co. Offaly. The site originally supplied peat for many years to Rhode Power Station and to Croghan Briquette Factory and supported much-needed employment to areas such as Mountlucas, Daingean, and Walsh Island. Today, the Mountlucas site is a good example of a multi-use land use that blends commercial, educational, community and biodiversity benefits.

The wind farm became fully operational in 2014 following a €115 million investment from Bord na Móna, and its 28 wind turbines now generate over 80MW of wind power, supplying enough electricity to the Irish grid to power over 50,000 homes per annum.

In addition to Bord na Móna's significant investment in renewable energy generation, the commercial semi-state company has also:

- committed to investing over €700,000 to almost 200 local, community-based projects through Community Gain Schemes and additional support for flagship projects including local schools, sports and athletics clubs, development associations, text alert schemes, first responder schemes, CCTV provision, and community facilities

- introduced a Near Neighbour Scheme which contributes towards electricity usage of households within a prescribed distance of a wind turbine and provides funding for individual residential properties to carry out energy efficiency measures on their property or use towards education support or the purchase of an EV vehicle
- completed the development of a 7km walkway-cycleway – which includes an Outdoor Physical Fitness Amenity Facility along the walkway as part of the 22km internal road network around the wind farm
- completed the design of its Learning Hub Facility at the Mountlucas Centre and developed a comprehensive tour programme to educate and inform students, teachers, and community and special interest groups about renewable energy, with a particular focus on wind energy
- actively promoted biodiversity and cultural heritage throughout the site by supporting the naturally developed suite of different habitats.

Case Studies

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Community Power



Image by: Bruno Viera / Unsplash

Community Power is Ireland's first community-owned electricity supplier. Beginning life as Templederry Wind Farm in Co Tipperary – Ireland's first community-owned wind farm – Community Power has since grown into a partnership of community energy groups with a mission to not only support Ireland to run on clean, renewable power, but to empower people to have a real stake in it and own it for themselves.

Community Power currently has two turbines generating about 15 GWh of electricity every year – about the amount of electricity used by the town of Nenagh – and is buying renewably-generated electricity from a handful of small and micro hydro and wind generators across Ireland and selling it to customers to use in their homes, businesses, farms, and community buildings.

Community Power works with the community energy organisations such as Energy Community Tipperary Co-operative, Aran Islands Energy Co-operative, Tait House Community Enterprise, Claremorris, and Western District Energy Co-operative, and is supported as part of the European Regional Development Fund through Interreg North-West Europe and by partners including Tipperary Energy Agency, Friends of the Earth, and Smart M Power.

Community Rapid & Renewable Energy Hub



Image by: Thibaut Marquis / Unsplash

Applecross is a grid-constrained, rural community in the Scottish Highlands with only single-phase power available. This energy barrier hinders business development, limits locally generated energy exports, and restricts electric vehicle (EV) charging capabilities. Upgrading the network to a three-phase supply could be used to support several new developments in the area and would allow the installation of a rapid EV charger, supporting residents in making the switch to EVs. However, this can be prohibitively expensive.

To address this barrier, innovation funding from the UK's Ofgem's Energy Industry Voluntary Redress Scheme to conduct a feasibility study for an innovative **Community Rapid and Renewable Energy Hub (CoRRe Hub)** in Applecross.

The project will investigate the ability to combine a limited grid connection, hydro energy, solar generation, and battery storage to provide the community with a practical, convenient, and affordable three-phase supply.

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Energy Communities Tipperary Cooperative CLG



Image by: American Public Power Association / Unsplash

Energy Communities Tipperary Cooperative CLG (ECTC) is a community-led, home insulation upgrade and retrofitting organisation. A designated Sustainable Energy Community (SEC), ECTC leverages funding from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) and provide a One Stop Shop service which facilitates getting grant aid, sourcing contractors, and overseeing projects for the homeowners.

ECTC has grown from a pilot scheme in the Drumbane/Upperchurch community in rural Tipperary to include 14 communities. The board of ECTC is made up of unpaid, volunteer directors from the participating communities as well as one each from North Tipperary LEADER Partnership (NTLP) and the Tipperary Energy Agency (TEA).

The 'Community Led Just Transition North Tipperary' Project is a collaboration between ECTC, Littleton Development Association CLG, and Ballingarry (Thurles) Community Development CLG, funded through the Just Transition Fund. The project aims to mobilise community-led energy efficiency in communities around Littleton, affected by Peat Plant Closures.

The project is being divided into two phases:

Phase 1 will involve informing the public and creating awareness around the project, carrying out technical assessments on houses in the area, and enlisting households wishing to partake in the home energy upgrade scheme. This will include a number of information events along with pop in clinics in Littleton and Ballingarry.

Phase 2 will involve the retrofitting of participating households following the successful completion of Phase 1.

Conclusions and Next Steps

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Image by: Andreas Kind / Unsplash

The Just Transition Plan is the start of a journey. This will see KCC acting as a key supporter, investor, convenor and catalyst to enable communities and a wide range of public, private and third sector stakeholders to work together to ensure a Just Transition for West Kildare.

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Funding the actions

EU: The Just Transition Fund (JTF)

There are a number of potential opportunities available for funding the Just Transition Plan actions identified in this report. €84.5m of EU money and will be matched central government Exchequer resources. This will enable delivery of Ireland's Climate Action Plan 2021 and will be available for Just Transition related work throughout the country.

If West Kildare is to benefit from this, then a plan for bidding into this challenge fund must be in place to ensure that Kildare County Council secures the necessary funding it requires.

This will require a dedicated resource for Just Transition funding bid in for the available EU and government money.

This new dedicated team would need to communicate well with LCDC, County Kildare LEADER Partnership, LEO, business, tourism, and environment teams etc. so that it could tap into or second that resource but ensure those organisations remain fully involved.

The Actions (specifically Priority Actions 1 and 2) address the need for such a team to convene a partnership to bring together resources, understand needs and build capacity for such an approach and to make the case to central government.

This may further require funding to staff this dedicated resource to put together meaningful coordinated bids. Such funding should be viewed as an investment rather than merely a cost.

The EU JTF has been created by the EU for the 2021-2027 programming period, aiming to support European regions facing the most serious socio-economic challenges deriving from the transition towards a climate-neutral economy.

The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications have launched a Public Consultation on the EU JTF, welcoming responses from representative bodies of the Midlands Region, including West Kildare. This consultation will inform the Territorial Just Transition Plan, which is being

developed by the Irish Government with the Eastern and Midland Regional Assembly.

The JTF presents a clear opportunity for KCC and wider stakeholders across West Kildare to inform this critical future funding route, which will play a key role in enabling the actions from the Just Transition Plan.

Irish Government: Just Transition Fund (JTF) 2020

In addition to the EU JTF, the Irish Government also established the JTF 2020 and the Office of a Just Transition Commissioner. This was an €11 million fund for retraining programmes of workers in legacy carbon intensive industries and for supporting employment opportunities in green enterprises in the Midlands region, including West Kildare.

As outlined by the Irish Government, the fund focused upon employment and enterprise, training and community transitioning. Although the fund closed in 2020, it highlights the type of national funding stream which may be replicated in the future to enable actions from the Just Transition Plan.

Irish Government: Climate Action Fund (CAF)

The €60m Climate Action Fund aims to provide support to local communities, enabling them to create and undertake new community-led low carbon projects, operating between 2022 – 2025 and through two phases of €30m. The CAF will be key for driving new community-led low carbon projects in West

Kildare and actioning the Just Transition Plan, which already has 25 Sustainable Energy Community groups.

To note, although Strand 2 closed on 27 January 2022, the CAF highlights the type of important funding stream for enabling low carbon community-led development in West Kildare. Details on Phase 1 are included below and information on Phase 2 are yet to be confirmed.

CAF PHASE 1 FUNDING STRANDS	WHO CAN APPLY?	WHEN?	AMOUNT	PROJECT TYPE
Strand 1: Building Low Carbon Communities	Local Authorities.	2022 – 2025	€24m in Total	Community and Local Authority Partnership projects. Examples include: Community EV Renewable Energy Energy Efficiency
	Local authorities will invite Expressions of Interest from Community Groups.	Expected Q1 2022	Further details on amounts are forthcoming	
Strand 2: Climate Education, Capacity Building and Learning by Doing	Not-for-profit organisations	2022 – 2025	€6m in Total	Build capacity of Communities. Examples include: Mentoring Tool Kits Guides Demonstrations Project Designs
	National or Regional Non-Government Organisations	Deadline: 27 January 2022	€5m available (€1m already allocated)	
	Community and Voluntary or Charitable organisations		Small Projects: €50k to 100K	
	Social Enterprises		Large Projects: €101k to €500K	
	Universities, Third Level Institutions or Education			
Libraries				

Irish Government: Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP)

SICAP has two clear objectives. Firstly, to support communities and target groups to engage with relevant stakeholders in addressing social exclusion and equality issues, developing the capacity of local community groups and creating sustainable communities. Secondly, to support disadvantaged individuals to improve quality of life through the provision of lifelong learning and labour market support.

Through the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme (SICAP), **County Kildare LEADER Partnership** provides access to training or education, business development and business start-up support to individuals and local community groups within County Kildare. More specifically:

- Community development support for projects and participation
- Educational support for children, families and young people
- Training and education
- Enterprise support
- Work placement programmes
- Youth employment support

The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) 2018-2022 is funded by the Irish Government through the Department of Rural and Community Development and co-funded by the European Social Fund. SICAP funding has been extended until December 2023 and more importantly, the Irish Government have stated that they envisage that a new programme will be implemented in January 2024. Therefore, SICAP can play an important part in supporting activity in the Just Transition Plan.

Image by: Eddie Smyth (Umerus Community Development)



Irish Government (EU): LEADER Transition Programme

The Irish Government have secured funding for a LEADER Transition Programme for community capacity building to enable strong rural development and a Just Transition for localities across Ireland. Furthermore, the long-standing LEADER Programme has been renewed and will operate between 2023-2027 with a indicative national allocation of €180m, reduced from €250m. However in the previous LEADER programme, Kildare was allocated the lowest allocation nationally and therefore there is a strong need to ensure that Kildare is allocated an increased amount in future LEADER funding rounds.

Kildare LCDC will continue to be a key local actor in delivering the LEADER Transition Programme and the LEADER Programme 2023 – 2027. Local Action Group (LAG) allocations for the LEADER Programme 2023 – 2027 are to be confirmed by the Irish Government.

FUNDING	WHO CAN APPLY?	WHEN?	AMOUNT	PROJECT TYPE
LEADER Transition Programme	Local Action Groups (LAGs): Kildare LCDC	2021 - 2022	€70m (National) Total	Community capacity building
			€65m allocated to 29 LAGs	Job Creation
	Communities which have not previously received LEADER funding and for COVID-19 response		€3m allocated to support the LEADER cooperation measure	Foster and encourage entrepreneurship
			€2m allocated to prepare for next LEADER Programme	Climate Agenda
			€1.5m (approx.) Kildare LCDC (LAG)	Digital Transformation

Delivering the plan

The Just Transition Plan is driven by values of environmental stewardship, inclusive economic growth, community cohesion, and social resilience. What is clear from existing initiatives within West Kildare, across the wider turbary economy of Ireland, and from international examples is that none of these aims can be achieved without the creation of an environment for collaborative partnership working.

West Kildare is a district of contrasts from the younger dynamic tech- and University-driven economy of the East and of Maynooth to the historic turbary economy and rural communities of the western areas of West Kildare. The Just Transition Plan comes at a time of dislocation as industrial peat cutting ceases and is replaced with a drive for a Just Transition to a future of renewable energy generation, environmental stewardship, investment in biodiversity, a renewed appreciation of the carbon sequestration of the

boglands and a pressing need to reinvent the economies of West Kildare, particularly in the far west.

With the enabling leadership of Kildare County Council as a convener of partnerships between state backed entities, semi-state commercial companies, and a wide array of community and environmental stakeholders, including LCDC, County Kildare LEADER Partnership, and LEO, and as an investor and as a catalyst to bring in investment funding to West Kildare, the Just Transition Plan will enable the region to meet the challenges and capitalise on the opportunities that the current and future changes to these unique peatlands represent.

In our view this key role for Kildare County Council will require the resource of a dedicated team to coordinate activities and partners. Such a team could also act a crucial resource in bidding in for Just Transition related funding opportunities over time; such work then catalysing further activity among partners and the communities of West Kildare.

The coming years will see national Government policy driving local authorities and local economies closer to net zero carbon emissions. This transition across the economy will be underpinned by public and private investment in new infrastructure, innovation, growth of new goods and services, and demand for new jobs and skills.

Kildare County Council and its partners and stakeholders can influence how much the district benefits from this green growth opportunity and from the increased amenity and tourism offer resultant from a reinstated natural peatland habitat.

Kildare County Council’s planning, procurement, and assurance processes will play an important role in bringing together public and private investment in infrastructure, innovation, business, skills, communities, and the natural environment. Making West Kildare a leader in the new post-industrial peatland economy requires cross-council working. This means using levers of planning, procurement, and the capital spending programme to stimulate, encourage, and support a wide array of green, heritage, tourism, amenity and skills based economic developments.



Image by: Eddie Smyth (Unerus Community Development)

This Just Transition Plan and the establishment of the Just Transition Plan Partnership is an opportunity to reinvigorate and reimagine West Kildare

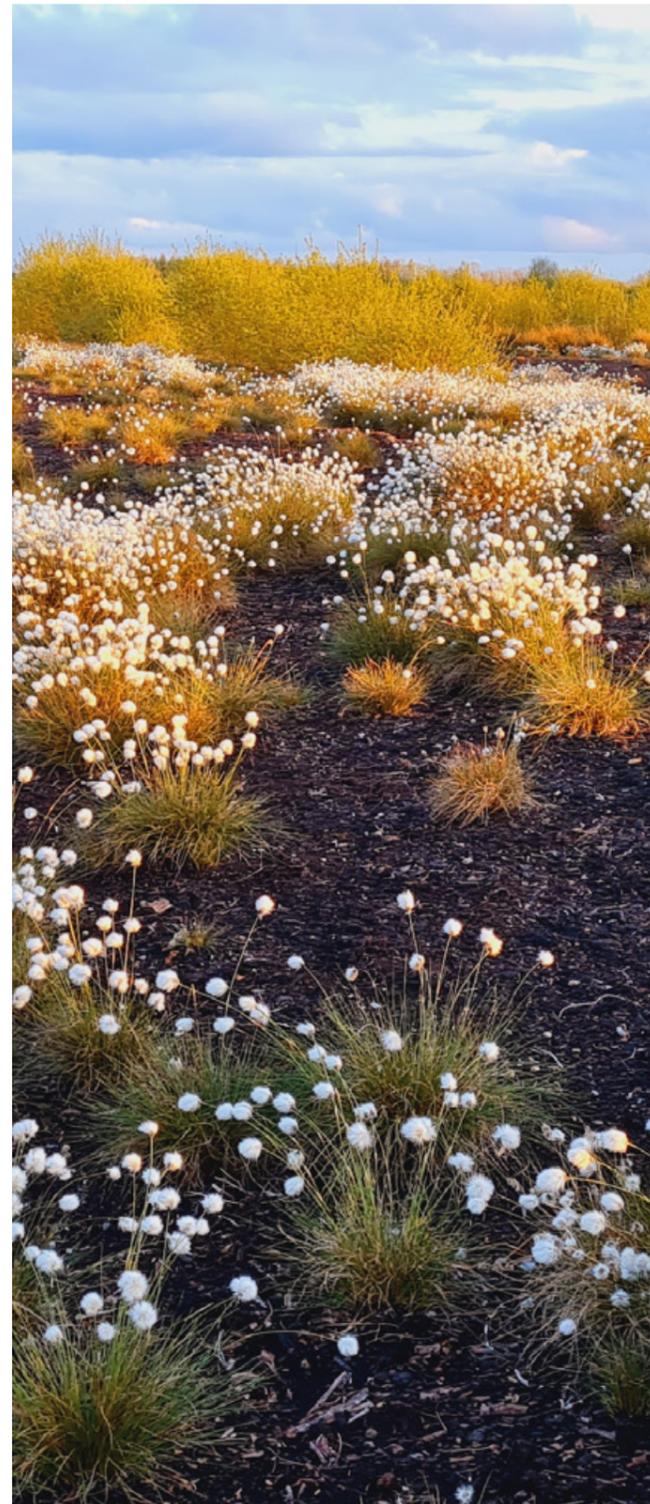
Crucially, partners from the public, private, and third sectors will play an important role in delivering the Just Transition Plan, especially for actions which are outside the Council's responsibility and levers of control. Foremost among these are key stakeholders such as the Irish state, Bord na Móna, and the communities of West Kildare. By leading a Just Transition Plan Partnership approach to delivery, the Council can make sure that partners are enhancing and complementing one another in a way aligned to meet agreed district-wide long-term goals.

Following the adoption of the Just Transition Plan, the next steps are to develop an implementation plan for the actions and a monitoring and evaluation plan for measuring these recommended actions against actual outcomes. Over the life of the Just Transition Plan Kildare County Council and partners need to ensure local intelligence systems are kept current and their relevance and application to decision-making and implementation is strengthened.

The extensive consultation and stakeholder engagement process to develop the Just Transition Plan has ensured that the competing needs and priorities of various stakeholders have been considered and inform the plan's conclusions and recommendations. However, these will need to be constantly assessed throughout the lifetime of the plan to ensure that any changes in priorities or needs are adequately reflected and any tensions arising are swiftly and constructively resolved. This will be particularly important when dealing with stakeholders external to Kildare County Council and underscores the need for partnership working and relationship building.

This Just Transition Plan and the establishment of the Just Transition Plan Partnership is an opportunity to reinvigorate and reimagine West Kildare's reputation as a dynamic, sustainable place with a compelling, distinctive blend of natural assets, community driven development opportunities, and shape a transition to a genuinely inclusive fresh and green approach to a new model of post-industrial turbary economic sustainability and prosperity.

Image by: Eddie Smyth (Umerus Community Development)



A range of organisations were engaged, either in individual interviews or small groups, and have contributed to identifying opportunities and creating the proposed actions. For some organisations multiple individuals were consulted.

Organisations consulted

ACDAL

Bord na Móna

Clane-Maynooth MD

Community Wetlands Forum

County Kildare Chamber of Commerce

County Kildare LEADER Partnership

Creative Rathangan Meitheal

Irish Farmers Association

Irish Peatland Conservation Council

Kildare County Council

Kildare Local Community Development Committee

Kildare Local Enterprise Office

Kildare Public Participation Network

Kildare-Newbridge MD

Lullymore Heritage & Discovery Park

Maynooth University

Merits

National Peatlands Park Group

Sustainable Energy Communities Program

Ummeras Peatlands Park

Other individual participants

Appendix II

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Just Transition Index - Scoring matrix

Outcome	Indicator	West Kildare	West Kildare MD			Other Kildare MD		Ireland
			Athy	Kildare - Newbridge	Maynooth	Celbridge - Leixlip	Naas	
EC1	At work	55%	50%	55%	57%	60%	60%	52%
	Unemployed	7%	10%	8%	5%	5%	5%	7%
EC2	No formal education	12%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%
	Technical/Apprentice/Certificate	21%	22%	21%	21%	21%	22%	21%
	Ordinary bachelor degree or national diploma	27%	20%	23%	37%	36%	36%	25%
EC3	Commute under 15 mins	30%	31%	31%	29%	25%	28%	37%
	Commute over 1 hour	14%	14%	14%	15%	14%	13%	8%
EC4	Skilled Jobs	36%	29%	33%	45%	45%	45%	33%
	Unskilled jobs	24%	25%	27%	19%	18%	21%	24%
Economy Score		-0.33	-0.78	-0.33	0.33	0.56	0.56	

SO1	Owner Occupied accomodation	71%	71%	70%	71%	76%	73%	72%
	Private rented accomodation	17%	14%	17%	20%	15%	19%	15%
	Social rented accomodation	8%	11%	9%	5%	6%	6%	9%
SO2	Good general health	89%	87%	88%	91%	90%	91%	88%
	Bad general health	1%	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%
	Unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability	4%	5%	5%	3%	3%	3%	4%
SO3	Broadband access	73%	64%	76%	78%	88%	82%	67%
SO4	10% most deprived (electoral districts)	5%	11%	4%	0%	17%	0%	10%
	10% least deprived (electoral district)	11%	7%	13%	13%	0%	40%	10%
Society Score		0.56	-0.78	-0.33	0.56	0.33	0.78	

EN1	Houses built 2011 or later	3%	2%	2%	4%	2%	2%	2%
EN2	Fossil fuel powered central heating (excluding peat)	79%	79%	77%	81%	90%	86%	80%
	Peat powered central heating	10%	10%	12%	9%	0%	2%	8%
EN3	Active travel to work or education	15%	11%	15%	18%	17%	14%	12%
	Public transport to work or education	12%	11%	12%	13%	18%	13%	10%
	Private vehicle to work or education	66%	70%	66%	63%	60%	68%	70%
	Car ownership (1 or more motor cars)	87%	85%	85%	90%	91%	92%	86%
Environment Score		0.43	0.14	0.43	0.14	0.14	0.43	

Overall JTI Score		0.22	-0.47	-0.08	0.34	0.34	0.59	
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