Rural Affairs Policy

September 2023

Contents

1 Summary and Key Points

Over the years, rural areas – which have always played a significant role in Ireland's history, culture, and economy – have faced many challenges, including depopulation, inadequate infrastructure, and declining levels of access to public services. We believe, however, that there is a wealth of opportunities that can – and must – be harnessed to not only address imbalance between rural and urban areas, but to drive sustainable growth across rural Ireland and to ensure residents of rural Ireland can avail of a high quality of life despite the threats posed by climate change and biodiversity loss. Examples of such opportunities include rural economic revivals driven by remote working, the development of coastal hubs for marine wind energy production, nurturing of world-leading sustainable food production, and rural tourism.

Our Rural Affairs policy is broken down into six sections, and key points from each are as follows:

- **Public and Social Services**
    - Improving access to rural healthcare, education, sustainable housing, and postal and banking services.
    - Enhancing rural safety, security, participation, and inclusion.
    - Maintaining and adding to the culture and heritage of communities, including those in Gaeltacht areas.

- **Housing Infrastructure & The Environment**
    - Creating affordable, well-serviced housing to cater for rural housing needs.
    - Prioritising nature-based solutions to flood management.
    - Mitigating rural climate change impacts such as farmland loss due to flooding, as well as coastal erosion.
    - Protecting and rehabilitating peatlands.

- **Transport**
    - Significantly enhancing rural public transport services and infrastructure, including late evening bus services to/from towns, better coordination of bus and train timetables, selling of leap cards in post offices, etc.
    - Reducing the cost of public transport as much as possible while still funding investment in enhancement of services and infrastructure.
    - Significantly enhancing rural active travel infrastructure such as safe school routes.

- Significantly increasing the number of electric-vehicle charging points in rural villages and towns.

- **Energy**

  - Growing the number of Sustainable Energy Community Initiatives[1] and expanding the number of these projects from 500 to 1,500 by 2030.

  - Supporting rural households, businesses and communities throughout the energy transition through enhanced funding of initiatives.

  - Supporting and growing the many opportunities for rural communities and landowners to generate new income streams from micro-generation in wind, solar, geothermal and hydro-electric generation.

- **Economy**

  - Rolling out broadband connectivity to all rural areas as soon as possible.

  - Significantly enhancing remote-working rights and rural remote-working infrastructure.

  - Supporting rural small-to-medium-sized enterprises, for example through enhanced financial access through creation of a public banking network (see the Green Party's Public Banking Policy[2] for additional detail).

  - Rather than focus exclusively on GDP, giving weight to a basket of other indicators, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Ireland's Wellbeing Framework 2023[3], to develop a well-rounded, holistic view of how our society is coping.

  - To ensure the long-term sustainability and prosperity of agriculture, incentivising farmers engaged in high-emissions farming practices to transition to more sustainable practices that lower greenhouse gas emissions.

  - Incentivising landowners to maintain the biodiversity of high-nature value lands, such as wetlands, native woodlands, and hedgerows.

  - Building on the success of the ACRES scheme[4] in opening up alternative income streams to farmers, such as by supporting the establishment of small-scale biodigesters on farms.

  - Future-proofing tourism-related service providers in the face of the growing demand from tourists for climate mitigation measures.

- **Administration and Funding**

  - Delegating additional functions of central government to regional and local authorities in line with international best practice in order to strengthen local democracy and increase rural communities' autonomy.

o Re-establishing town-councils as town and district councils with additional responsibilities and powers delegated to these councils to increase the effectiveness of second-tier local government.

o Pursuing increased EU LEADER funding[5] in future LEADER programmes to reverse cuts to LEADER funding following programmes I and II, and in parallel, while ensuring transparency, compliance, accountability, the LEADER simplifying the LEADER application process to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy which can serve as a barrier to community groups applying for LEADER funding.

o For cases where grants obtained through programmes such as LEADER do not fully meet funding requirements, making zero or low-percent interest bridging loans available to applicants.

o To address the decreasing competition in the Irish banking system and the difficulty experienced by micro-enterprises, many of which are rural, in obtaining financing, establishing a network of public banks to better serve the financial needs of rural communities, while in the meantime, expanding Credit Union and An Post banking services.

o Enhancing access to information and support pertaining to rural services and schemes, and making the systems for applying for funding for voluntary groups more accessible, with a database of funding opportunities available to community groups available accessible through Citizens Information bureaus and community development workers.

2   Introduction

Rural Ireland is famed for its beauty, peacefulness, access to nature, communities, natural and historical heritage, and more. For these reasons and more, people often desire to live in rural Ireland to enhance their quality of life, whether their roots are there or not. Life in rural Ireland presents opportunities not available elsewhere.

Despite such opportunities, however, rural Ireland faces numerous challenges. In small towns, villages and more remote areas or rural Ireland, people often do not have sufficient access to infrastructure and services that residents of urbans areas take for granted, such as transport infrastructure and services, broadband connectivity, Garda stations, post offices and banks. Additionally, cultural and entertainment facilities are often more limited in rural areas, the range of goods and services available is generally narrower, and job markets (and customer pools) are typically shallower.

Furthermore:

- People, especially younger members of the community, are sometimes forced to migrate for work or education to larger towns and cities, many not to return. Of those that do stay, commutes for work can be lengthy.
- Even though the population of rural areas is increasing, increases are seen mostly within existing centres of population.
- As the number of full-time farmers declines (despite increasing agricultural output), the need for their part-time alternative employment increases.
- The absence of nearby local services leads to increased travel distances (with consequent polluting emissions) for those owning or having access to transport or, for those who do not, inconvenience or doing without.

We need to ensure there are enough people happy to farm the land, work rural natural resources, service tourists and provide the infrastructure and environmental protection for all of this. While much has and is being done, more government support – financial and otherwise, is needed, which will be of benefit nationally as well as in rural areas.

Our vision is of rural Ireland is that of a network of thriving and sustainable communities that exist in harmony with local natural environments and that support the well-being and prosperity of their residents. Rural Ireland must remain a place where current and future generations can live, work, and thrive. We believe that this vision can be best achieved through a commitment to Green Party values, including:

1. **Environmental Responsibility**: We will prioritise the protection, regeneration and conservation of rural Ireland's natural resources, and we will empower rural Ireland to thrive in a way that is consistent with mitigating climate change and biodiversity loss. Rural Ireland must be a place where future generations can thrive.

2. **Economic Sustainability**: We will foster growth of local economies that is sustainable in the long term through the development of sustainable industries,

including agriculture, and by supporting small businesses, cooperatives and farmers markets.

3. **Just Transition**: We believe in supporting rural communities and residents in the transition to more sustainable practices in line with climate action. This includes supporting the development of alternative income streams and new economic opportunities for those most impacted. We recognise that the climate action transition must be just, and that it must take into account the needs and perspectives of those most affected by it.

4. **Social Justice**: We will work to reduce inequalities in rural communities by improving access to community healthcare, secular education, employment opportunities, and other key public services such as banking and public transport.

5. **Community Empowerment**: We will encourage the participation and involvement of local people in decision-making processes, as well as support the development of community-led initiatives that reflect the needs and values of rural Ireland, for example through existing Public Participation Networks.

3   Policy

3.1 Public and Social Services

The Green Party recognises the importance of providing a diverse and sustainable range of services for rural communities to improve access to healthcare, education, sustainable housing, and postal and banking services, to enhance safety, security, participation, and inclusion, and to maintain and add to the culture and heritage of communities, including those in Gaeltacht areas.

Health

Access to Healthcare

- Rural people should have reasonable access to healthcare; they should not have to travel unreasonable distances nor wait unreasonable lengths of time to access essential services.

- People must be facilitated by the state to stay in their homes rather than be institutionalised.

- The introduction of primary care services across rural locations should be expedited, to enhance access to primary care and reduce overcrowding in A&E.

- Holistic and community-based healthcare models such as Community Healthcare Networks[6] should be supported to better co-ordinate primary care services in rural locations and to support people to live and receive within their communities.

- The SH24[7] service, which provides a free self-administered testing service for sexually transmitted infections, should be rolled out to all counties, particularly all rural counties, and an awareness campaign should be conducted to advertise the service.

- The lack of access to abortion services in parts of rural Ireland[8] needs to be addressed. Women across Ireland should have equal access to abortion services regardless of location.

- There is currently a lack of support for rural dwellers with mental health issues, particularly young people, and as such, not only should funding for mental health services be increased, but mental healthcare accessibility should be enhanced in rural Ireland specifically, for example through additional primary care psychological services and additional talk therapy services.

- Targeted mental health outreach programmes should be undertaken for farmers to improve awareness around cardiovascular disease, cancers, and mental health, and to encourage early intervention.

Healthy Living Infrastructure

- The state should be obliged to provide independent living spaces in villages and towns for those with particular healthcare, accessibility, and inclusion needs at an affordable cost. Such spaces could be created through the refurbishment of older/vacant buildings. These spaces would espouse a person-centred care model, geared towards vulnerable persons that may prefer to live in a village setting. There should be a range of different types and sizes of living spaces to suit diverse needs.

- Rural, town, and village-planning and development should enhance permeability and facilitate and encourage active travel, which has known health benefits, and which would better connect people to villages, towns, neighbours and services.

Education

Primary and Secondary Level

- More should be done to prevent rural schools from closing. The Clusters 2-year pilot project[9] introduced by the government in mid-2021 aimed at optimising resources in rural schools is a step in the right direction.

- Schools are often key binders of rural communities. Where a school is under threat of closure or where the loss of a school puts a community at risk of disintegration, supports should be available to keep the school open.

- In addition to existing Green Schools[10] themes such as energy, water and litter and waste, a Green Schools theme should be established for food, to include for example horticulture.

- The Green Party believes rural residents should have a choice of schools to facilitate people who are both religious and non-religious. To achieve this, state-recognized patron bodies for schools must be established.

Further and Higher Education

- Remote and blended learning should be made available to rural students where feasible to allow them to continue living in their local communities while studying.

- The knowledge and skills base of the agriculture and forestry sectors should be developed, particularly in relation to the changing requirements for our agriculture and forestry sectors in respect of supporting biodiversity and reducing land-use greenhouse gas emissions.

- Upskilling and reskilling opportunities should be provided for workers to adapt and transition into sectors undergoing transformational technological change, particularly those sectors critical to the transition to a low carbon economy, e.g., renewable energy and other green technologies, the bioeconomy, ecotourism, marine-related employment etc. In addition to courses provided at existing retrofitting centres of

excellence, there should be training opportunities provided to other areas, including remote trainings where appropriate.

Apprenticeships and Trades

- To provide new career paths for people with different interests and abilities, the pathways between second-level education and apprenticeships should be improved by promoting and finding new ways of structuring and funding apprenticeships.

- Alongside the Action Plan for Apprenticeship, 2021 to 2025[11], capacity for green apprenticeships should continue to be enhanced in the construction, energy, and natural heritage sectors, to cater for future demand in the green economy.

- Traditional building skills should continue to be promoted and advanced, following on from the €9m in funding for Built Heritage Projects announced in late 2022 by the Minister of State for Heritage and Electoral Reform, Malcolm Noonan[12].

Safety and Security

- Garda stations should be retained and reopened where feasible to maintain a sufficient Garda presence in rural areas, or at least repurposed for housing or independent living spaces.

- A community-policing model should be pursued where appropriate to empower communities to actively participate in increasing the safety and security or their local areas. The Community Alert[13] and the Senior Alert Scheme[14] should continue to be supported.

Participation and Inclusion

Combating Isolation

- Initiatives aimed at improving neighbourly contact and combating isolation (e.g., meals on wheels) should be supported, particularly for elderly rural dwellers and those that live alone. Tried and tested models aimed at combatting exclusion, such as Obair[15] in Newmarket-on-Fergus, should be rolled out nationwide, with additional funding available for sustainable operating models using food cloud, sustainable forms of transport etc.

- Much community activity relies on voluntary organizations. While it is important that voluntary organisations in rural areas, particularly those that enhance participation and inclusivity, should be supported (e.g., through the Scheme to Support National Organisations (SSNO)[16], it is imperative that there is better access to information about funding of such schemes for voluntary organizations, including better guidance on how to complete forms etc. The systems for applying for such funding should be

more accessible, with a database of funding opportunities available to community groups available accessible through Citizens Information bureaus and community development workers.

- Men's and Women's Sheds should be properly resourced, and the 'shed' model should be extended to other societal groups where appropriate.

- The role of public houses in rural Ireland should be diversified, e.g., as WIFI hubs.

Increasing Participation and Inclusion

- Local media, such as radio and newspapers, should be financially supported so that they can continue to be platforms for discussing and addressing rural issues at a local level.

- Communities should be provided with opportunities to inform rural policy development, for example through the Rural Ideas Fora[17] and Irish Rural Link[18].

- Employment opportunities for people with disabilities living in rural areas should be improved, including through supports for remote working options.

- Additional EU LEADER funding[5] should be pursued, the LEADER application process should be simplified while ensuring compliance and accountability, and LEADER should be transitioned to a community-led rather than a local authority-led programme by supporting Local Development Companies to take up the role of Local Action Groups.

- Additional funding should be sought from the European Innovation Partnership Scheme[19], particularly for locally led environment, climate, and biodiversity projects in rural areas.

- Young people in rural Ireland should be empowered to identify and influence policy issues that impact on them and their future, for example through a Rural Youth Assembly.

- The Community Sponsorship Ireland[20] programme (resettling refugees into communities) should be expanded, to ensure best outcomes for refugees.

Post Offices, Banks, and Credit Unions

- Reasonable measures should be taken to facilitate the retention of post offices, banks, and credit unions, such as supporting them to offer additional services or commercial uses. They are vital community resources.

Culture and Heritage

- The rich culture and heritage of rural communities should be enhanced through the fosterage of community and local heritage groups.

- Gaeltacht communities should be preserved and enriched, for example through initiatives aimed at enticing Irish-speakers and those interested in learning Irish to relocate to Gaeltacht areas, including:

  - the development of a network of family resource centres in Gaeltacht areas to support families raising their children through Irish.
  - extending the remit of Údarás na Gaeltachta to encompass the provision of affordable and community-led housing for Gaeltacht communities.
  - the development of a Gaeltacht strategy to act as a national framework for the local language planning process taking place in each Gaeltacht area.
  - the provision of a recognition scheme, as a successor to Scéim Labhairt na Gaeilge, to recognize and support families raising their children through Irish in Gaeltacht areas.

- In line with such funding initiatives such as the €4m provided for build heritage projects in 2022 by Minister Malcolm Noonan[21], heritage sites, national monuments, and vernacular buildings should continue to be proactively protected from decay.

3.2 Housing Infrastructure and The Environment

Affordable, Well-serviced Housing at Scale

Local authorities should take an active role in the development of their towns and villages by purchasing sites adjacent to local population centres for development of housing, particularly of social and affordable housing. Such housing developments should be developed in line with permeability best practices and should be located within reasonable distances of local services to encourage active travel. While one-off rural housing should remain an option to residents in circumstances where a need for such housing is justified, such as where one is working in the immediate area, rural residents should be incentivised to avail of the benefits of clustered housing in closer proximity to services.

The vacant property tax should be increased to a level where there is sufficient incentive for vacant property owners to either sell their vacant properties to local authorities or to renovate them themselves. Such a property tax should also apply to holiday homes in rural areas. Conversely, grants for renovating vacant properties should also be increased to a level where there is sufficient incentive for existing and would-be owners to renovate them.

Given the large volume of properties in some parts of rural Ireland whose use has in recent years been restricted to short-term letting, thus effectively decreasing the long-term housing

stock, incentives should be provided for owners to make these houses again available for medium-to-long housing needs.

In general, there should be a focus on development of existing population centres in rural Ireland to take the pressure off the state to provide housing and associated services at punitive costs in the Dublin region.

Water and Sewerage Infrastructure

- A grant scheme should be available supporting infrastructure for the treatment and distribution of water under group water schemes and for sewerage disposal.

- Resource recovery of sewerage should be developed as an alternative to treatment and disposal. Resource recovery has the advantages of reduced pollution of ground water and recovery of water, phosphorous, nitrogen and compost for re-use. We are nearing peak phosphorous – a finite and relatively scarce resource.

- Interested rural residents should be incentivised to adopt resource-recovery dry toilets, for example through grants. Similarly, incentives should be created for grey-water recycling systems.

Flooding

There is no one solution to flood management and mitigation. It is critical that the outdated Arterial Drainage Act be abolished. As an alternative, we advocate for a combination of solutions, including:

- A return to nature-based solutions to mitigate existing flooding risks, for example, through restoration of flood plains, rewetting of peatlands, ending denudation of our uplands and planting of native trees and woodlands. Flooding mitigation should work with rather than against nature.

- Drainage of land and cleaning of water courses and rivers to be subject to a licensing system to be administered by the Parks and Wildlife section to prevent downstream flooding and biodiversity loss.

- Responsible land use planning to limit development in areas at high-risk of flooding, with any new developments required to incorporate measures to manage flood risk. Increased intensity of rainfall due to climate change should also be considered.

- A single body to oversee the Shannon Basin and to coordinate between stakeholder organisations, who must in turn retain responsibility for their respective roles. It is vital that local communities have places on this body as they know where lands have traditionally flooded as well as how and why they are flooding now.

- A relocation scheme for homes at high-risk of flooding.

Coastal Erosion

- Planning authorities should be obliged to take into account projected sea level rises when considering planning applications for coastal developments.

- A relocation scheme for homes no longer habitable due to coastal erosion should be made available.

Peatlands

Ireland's peatlands perform a key role in the control of floodwaters, are an important carbon sink and provide a unique habitat for rare wildlife and plants. The Green Party supports their restoration, which requires three phases of action:

- **Ending of Peat Extraction**: Strong monitoring and enforcement of the law is critical to ensure the end of illegal commercial extraction of peat. Additionally, non-commercial forms of peat extraction should be phased out once less polluting alternative energy sources are made broadly available and retrofitting progress has decreased the energy burden on households.
- **Restoration of Degraded Peatlands**: Appropriate measures should be taken to restore degraded peatlands, such as rewetting, rewilding and removal on non-native and inappropriate plantations.

- **Prevention of Future Planning Mistakes**: Planning authorities should ensure that unsuitable developments impacting peatlands are prevented.

3.3 Transport

The Green Party is concerned that Rural Transport and School Transport are not the remit of the Minister for Rural Affairs. We would support a close relationship between the Minister for Rural and Community Development and the Minister for Transport to ensure the best possible rural transport service.

We call for recognition that a significant proportion of the population are ineligible, unable or can't afford to drive cars and that this is especially disadvantageous in rural areas.

We estimate that fifteen counties are a source of commuters to Dublin. Clearly, provision of local employment is the answer where feasible but, where not, better public transport, also better childcare facilities, should be made available.

Implementing our transport policies will require increased state investment for transport infrastructure and services for the common good.

Public Transport

There is a clear need to urgently decrease the total number of kilometres travelled by car in Ireland (both urban and rural) to reduce the transport sector's greenhouse gas emissions. Given this, we advocate for significant enhancements in the provision of public transport services. While it is important that rural Ireland's roads are maintained to a high standard for safety purposes, it is critical that there is a shift towards greater investment in public transport.

As stated in the Green Party's Transport Policy[22], while there is a strong relationship between public transport usage and population density, transport in rural areas of Ireland needs to be viewed in a wider context as an essential way of connecting communities, contributing to mobility and ensuring balanced development across the Island.

On the issue of public transport fares, which are typically highest for those travelling long distances such as is often the case for residents of rural Ireland, we believe public transport should be made affordable, while acknowledging that a minimum fare level is typically necessary to ensure investment can be made to enhance existing services and create new services.

Leap cards should be available for purchase in post offices, to increase access to leap cards in rural Ireland.

Public transport (bus and train) ticketing and trip-planning technologies should be enhanced through the creation of digital tickets as well as an integrated mobile app to include real-time schedules and a journey planning tool.

The Green Party supports the provision of a guaranteed level of public transport services in all rural settlements based on the German/Swiss 'Every Village, Every Hour' model.

Bus

- The Rural Transport/TFI Local Link Programme[23] should be expanded and supplemented with more scheduled bus services. All communities should have, at a minimum, a daily service proportionate to their population, along with means of connecting to larger centres and where feasible with other transport modes. Bus Éireann services are currently focused too heavily on connecting a dozen bus stations across the country with each other and their peripheral towns, rather than connecting small and medium size towns in their own right.

- A demand responsive bus service should be developed that allows individuals to provide data to local bus services regarding their transport needs, allowing for a more tailored bus service which would also avoid empty buses driving around our villages.

- Generally, the numbers of public buses and school buses in rural Ireland be significantly increased, and all towns should have at least one late evening bus service.

- There should be an effort to ensure bus stations / stops are located within walking distances of train stations to make multi-modal journeys more practical, and there should be better co-ordination of times of arrival and departure of buses at railway stations with those of trains.

- Bus stops outside of centres of population should have lighting as well as shelter.

- Updated timetables should be published for local link and other bus routes.

- There should be a more supportive approach to licensing local bus services by the licensing authority, including tax incentives for those providing community bus services.

Rail

We advocate for:

- Full implementation of the All-Island Strategic Rail Review[24] findings.

- Retention of all railway lines and station stops and completion of the Western Rail Corridor.

- Increasing the number of stations on lines.

- Restoration of neglected station buildings - which have heritage value, provision of better station facilities for travellers and designation of principal stations as transport hubs linking with buses. Spin-offs would be their value to tourism and employment generation.

- Development of an all-Ireland heavy rail network that does not require trips through Dublin City and retention and further development of existing provincial railway lines.

Additionally:

- While acknowledging that greenways are excellent transport amenities, where there is a possibility that a decommissioned rail line could be re-established for rail travel, such rail lines should not be converted into greenways; priority should be given to rail travel.

- On all routes single lines should be replaced with double lines to the extent necessary to prevent trains having to wait for several minutes for a train travelling in the opposite direction to pass. There is a clear current need for double lines on routes such as Dublin to Galway and Sligo, as well as Mallow to Tralee. This would reduce journey time substantially, allow for an increased frequency of services across rural areas.

- Where travellers are required to transfer between trains on standard routes, such as is typically the case between Kerry and Cork city, they should not be expected to wait for more than 10 minutes to transfer between trains. Train times should be co-ordinated to avoid long transfer wait times.

- To encourage use of rail by rural residents, parking at rural train stations should be free for rail travellers.

Active Travel

The recommendations relating to Active Travel in the National Sustainable Mobility policy should be fully implemented[25]. We advocate for:

- Greenways to be an integral part of the rural transport network providing connections to towns and villages

- Inclusion of cycle and walking lanes in all road planning assessments particularly near schools and community sports facilities, in keeping with local concerns; segregated where possible.

- More public lighting (sensor based) on rural cycle paths/walkways to encourage/enable people to travel safely when dark.

Additionally:

- Bike sharing schemes should be provided in rural towns and villages, as well as at schools and train stations. Successful 'Bike Library' models[26] should be followed. There should be a particular focus on developing a Bike-to-School scheme either along the model of a Bike Library or the existing Bike-to-Work scheme.

- There should be additional and more accessible bike storage capacity on buses and trains to allow rural residents cycle to and from stations. Additionally, there should be cycle racks (Sheffield racks) at bus stops and railway stations. These racks should be secured and sheltered.

- Every rural school should be provided with sufficient active travel infrastructure, such as cycleways and sheltered bike racks, to encourage active travel to school. This would not only decrease the total kilometres driven by private car but would also go a long way to addressing the increasingly sedentary lifestyle imposed on our younger generations by our increasingly technologized society. MaREI centre research[27] has shown that companion/escort journeys (such as dropping off children to school) have the highest emissions intensity by journey purpose, and comprise over one tenth of all journeys in Ireland. Providing safe and accessible opportunities for children to cycling to school should decrease the volume of such journeys, increasing air quality, reducing congestion and dangerous driving at school locations, and encourage a healthier lifestyle for children.

Cars and Roads

We advocate for:

- Maintaining roads for road safety.

- A balance to be struck between avoiding the hazard of through traffic and supporting local businesses.

- Car-pooling should be encouraged and promoted more widely. Development of apps to facilitate car sharing should be encouraged by government, for example through a software development competition for schools/third level.

- There should be far more electric vehicle charging points in rural villages, towns, community centres etc., and electric vehicle charging points should be required as part of planning for any new rural housing.

- Park-and-ride facilities should be provided near bus services and train stations.

- Road quality should be maintained and enhanced where needed for safety purposes.

Aviation

- Aviation is an extremely carbon intensive form of travel and as such is a significant contributor to climate change. Where lower-emission alternatives to aviation exist, as is often the case with in-country journeys (such as for example between Kerry and Dublin, for which there exists train and bus services), it is the policy of the Green Party to support those alternatives ahead of aviation, by making them more accessible, more frequent, more comfortable, faster, and more affordable.

- Internal flights between destinations in the Republic of Ireland (with the exception of the islands) should not be permitted where there are suitable public transport alternatives.

- The Green party believes that the further development of regional airports is essential to counter act unsustainable congestion at Dublin airport. There should be quality surface transport links at regional airports, and the reopening of rail links to these airports should be a priority. Furthermore, the development of tax-free industrial zones should be extended to remaining regional airports.

3.4 Energy

In addressing the energy sector as it relates to rural Ireland, the Green Party is promoting smart data-driven policies, based on scientific, social and environmental factors. These

policies must align with national, regional and local plans, as well as EU and international best practice, in the grand plan for carbon reduction to net-zero, and the restoration and protection of our natural ecosystems. For details of our energy policies that are not specific to rural Ireland, please see the Green Party's Energy Policy[28].

Community Engagement and The Energy Transition

Most of the natural and physical resources which must be drawn on in the scale-up of renewable energies, are in areas beyond the urban centres. In the continuing transition to renewable energies, the Green Party recognises the critical role of all rural communities, including landowners, coastal communities, island dwellers, upland dwellers and people in the broader agri-food industry.

Respecting and understanding the concerns and needs of the communities in rural Ireland is of utmost concern to the Green Party. The changes that are planned to come in the transition to fossil-free energy in all sectors of the economy and society, will ask for wide-ranging and fundamental behavioural change in lifestyles and work environment.

Citizen engagement with open and transparent sharing of information will be essential for change within communities. People should not be apprehensive or fear the changes of energy policy and the new systems to bring about clean energy. People deserve a fair hearing on their concerns on renewable energy developments in their area and an opportunity to access information and reassurance that their quality of life will be protected. Renewable energy developments are a win-win for rural communities – they provide an improvement in the quality of living, access to locally produced and lower cost electricity and protection from increasing carbon taxes.

We aim to continue to grow Sustainable Energy Community Initiatives[2] and it is Green Party policy to expand the number of these projects from 500 to 1,500 by 2030. These projects have been a success story, with substantial savings being made by rural homes. The Sustainable Energy Community Initiative enables the rapid expansion of the National Retrofit Plan[29] which insulates homes, retrofits heating systems and installs smart metering for homes.

Significant Energy Infrastructure in Rural Areas

The demand for renewable energy to Irish homes and business is set to increase exponentially as the divestment from fossil fuels continues. This steep rise in demand is proposed to be met in part from offshore wind energy. The challenges and opportunities that these proposals present for coastal, rural and island communities are substantial and wide-ranging. Most of the national electricity grid and infrastructure will traverse the rural countryside and therefore impact many of these communities. We support strategic planning to address the engagement process, as well as a community-centric approach to

involvement and ownership of the process. We support open and transparent processes for dealing with such important infrastructure development and draws from learnings and experience from past engagements.

Our party also recognises that, to continue the growth of variable renewables in rural areas, it is crucial to support the growing importance of interconnection projects with other networks, such as North-South interconnection and the Celtic Interconnector to France. Given the rural implications of interconnections such as pylon construction, it is rural Green Party policy to support landowners and rural dwellers and strive for transparency throughout network construction.

Supporting Households, Businesses and Communities throughout The Energy Transition

It is Green Party policy to completely eliminate fossil-fuel energy and replace it with fully renewable energy. We support a combination of new energy sources such as solar, wind, hydro and bioenergy together with fundamental changes to energy-generation and transmission systems. The clean energy transition comes with significant investment costs. We aim to support people in rural communities, to ensure those communities are protected from fuel poverty and empowered throughout the clean energy transition.

It is rural Green Party policy to support and grow the many opportunities for rural communities and landowners to generate new income streams from the micro-generation in wind, solar, geothermal and hydro-electric generation. With adequate supports for grid management, smart metering and energy storage, excess renewable energy can be stored, sold or re-purposed on other energy demands. Our policy supports the financial incentivising of micro-generation via wind, roof-top solar, ground solar in conjunction with the widespread deployment of smart metering.

It is rural Green Party policy to support funding for smaller companies to invest in smart and clean energy efficiency and sourcing. Our policy aims to direct funding to renewable energy projects and support re-skilling of personnel for employment in the new energy sector.

We endorse sustainable bioenergy production in rural areas and the expansion of bioenergy production via local co-operatives and local enterprise. Keeping in line with the EU Sustainable Biofuel directives[30], we support the necessary regulation required to ensure new bioenergy initiatives do not displace agricultural land that would be otherwise protected or used for food production.

3.5 Economy

The Green Party is opposed to the current importance given to GDP in Ireland by government and policy makers, as outlined in our Alternatives to GDP policy[31]. We believe

the government should give weight to a basket of other indicators, such as the UN Sustainable Development Goals and Ireland's Wellbeing Framework 2023[3], to develop a well-rounded, holistic view of how our society is coping

Small and Medium Sized Enterprises

- Small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) are widely accepted as being the backbone of any economy, and this is the case in Ireland, with a majority of Irish businesses being SMEs, and a majority of Irish SMEs being micro business, employing fewer than 10 people, particularly relevant to rural areas.

- There should be enterprise supports in place for small, locally owned rural businesses, including niche shops and services, for small scale tele-working and back-office operations, for innovative companies, as well as for those involved in agriculture, horticulture, marine and forestry sectors. There should also be supports for employment opportunities within the community and voluntary sector. We would ultimately envisage that such supports would be available through a public banking network (see our Public Banking Policy[1]).

- The location of industry near to rural towns and villages, which should be incentivised, in liaison with the IDA where appropriate or opportune,

- The cooperative legislative framework should be updated to support standard incorporated businesses seeking to evolve into local smaller businesses and co-operatives, thereby keeping money circulating within local economies.

- Grant aid and expert advice support should be available to avail of traditional building skills – including thatching, use of hemp – to restore buildings with notable heritage value, including farm buildings, dry stone walls and farm gates. We would additionally seek to promote craft industries, such as woodcraft, pottery, jewellery, weaving, knitting, and hat-making, whether working from home or otherwise.

- Selling locally made/branded merchandise ("Pride of Place"), such as crafts, post-cards.

Agriculture

Agriculture & Food

- Agriculture plays a core part in Ireland's rural economy. It is crucial for rural Ireland that the agricultural sector is able to sustain itself in the coming decades of necessary climate action, which will require, innovation, diversification and enacting leadership to ensure that political decisions are made with a view to the long-term sustainability and prosperity of the sector, rather than repeating the mistakes of the recent past,

which all-too often have focused on short-term economic gains at the expense of the sector's sustainability.

- As was the case with both the Food Wise 2014-2020 and Food Wise 2015-2025[32] strategies, the current Food Vision 2021-2030[33] strategy prioritised economic expansion over the urgent need to significantly decrease the climate and biodiversity impacts of Irish agriculture. The green party is of the opinion that the Food Vision 2021-2030 needs to be re-examined as its objectives are not consistent with sustainable food production in the context of carbon reduction limits to be achieved by 2030. While stakeholders have committed to build on a climate smart, environmentally sustainable sector, with a goal of climate neutrality by 2050, and verifiable progress achieved by 2030. Ireland's future generations of farmers will likely have little choice but to undergo an even sharper transition to sustainable farming practices than would be required if more meaningful action was taken now.

- To ensure the long-term sustainability and prosperity of agriculture, it is critical that farmers are incentivised to transition to more sustainable practices that decrease greenhouse gas emissions and enhance biodiversity. In tandem, it is important that the CAP is reformed to ensure that the more sustainable forms of agriculture are made not only financially viable, but financially attractive.

- The impact of the beef and expanded dairy industries on carbon emissions is substantial and needs to be addressed. The importation of grain to increase both beef and dairy production will also need to be addressed. Farmers will need to be compensated for reductions in cow numbers. The multi-million-euro meat and dairy industries will need to be restructured to acknowledge these changes.

- The ACRES scheme[4] has been a major success and is oversubscribed at present. It is hoped that remaining intensive farmers who have not joined the scheme can be encouraged to do so by incentivising additional measures they can consider on their farms.

- The construction of suitably sized wind farms should be available as an alternative source of income for farmers to compensate for loss of income due to reduced beef and dairy production in the future as climate change carbon targets become mandatory.

- Farmers (and non-farmers) should be financially incentivised to maintain the biodiversity of high-nature value lands, such as wetlands, native woodlands, and hedgerows. These lands play key roles in biodiversity and carbon sequestration. Farmers should not be penalised but rather rewarded with an additional income stream for maintaining them in their natural state.

- Alternative income streams should be created to incentivise more sustainable forms of agriculture. For example, a market for organics should be developed. Separate to the need of additional income streams, however, sustainable organic vegetable production needs to be incentivised and support for the dwindling number of existing

vegetable producers needs to be addressed in the context of food security. The impact of the large chain stores selling vegetables below cost should be examined.

- Import substitution should be undertaken with respect to food products native to Ireland, such as apples, potatoes. In addition to increasing Ireland's food security, this would create additional rural jobs, and offer alternative agricultural income streams such as sales to cities and large towns and to tourists.

- Higher priority should be given to habitat creation and protection in farming policy, rural environment schemes and development planning.

- Meat producers should be supported in becoming more independent of the large processing companies, for example, by providing financial and other supports for adding value to meat production by establishment of local abattoirs and finishing at home, thereby also increasing employment and progressing phasing out of the export of live animals.

- Community involvement and training in food growing should be encouraged through community gardens, school gardens and allotments provided by local authorities at affordable rents. Additionally, community supported agricultural systems should be developed, along with co-ops; artisan food and farmers markets; farm-gate enterprises; and small-scale poultry.

- The Green Party continues to oppose the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in agricultural food production, as the consequences of these technologies are not fully understood.

Forestry & Woodlands

We advocate for:
- Significantly increased planting of trees to act as carbon sinks and mitigate flooding risks.

- Production of more timber to reduce imports and allow for substitution of high carbon materials.

- Multi-species (no monoculture) commercial forestry, with an increase in the proportion of broadleaf and native trees.

- Close-to-nature silviculture (continuous cover with no clear-felling).

- Agroforestry.

- Reserving areas for re-wilding to enhance biodiversity and reverse decline in certain animal and plant species.

- Preservation and creation of hedgerows.

- Preservation and creation trees for amenity and other benefits such as carbon and noise absorption in centres of population.

Aquaculture

Aquaculture may be defined as the cultivation of aquatic animals and plants, especially fish, shellfish and seaweed, in natural or controlled marine or freshwater environments or underwater agriculture.

Subject to the environmental criteria of the Party's Fisheries Policy[34], particularly the avoidance of over-fishing and over-exploitation of natural resources, we would promote, notably for its employment generation and the downstream business that it can generate, both coastal and inland:

- Regenerative ocean farming, such as the GreenWave[35] system. GreenWave's polyculture farming system grows a mix of seaweeds and shellfish that require zero inputs – which they claim makes it the most sustainable form of food production on the planet – while sequestering carbon and building reef ecosystems. Since their farms sit vertically below the surface, they produce high yields with a small footprint. They say that with a low-cost barrier to entry, anyone with 20 acres, a boat and $20-50K can start their own farm.

- Removal of obstacles to, and facilitating, the survival and recovery of salmon numbers in rivers.

- Prevention of practices that lead to fish kills in inland waters.

- Fair fish quota numbers and their allocation to fishers and localities.

- Sustainably farmed seaweed as a product in its own right, i.e., as food, fertiliser, cosmetics and nutraceuticals.

- Seaweed carbon capture farms whereby seaweed is suspended from sea level and anchored to the seabed to capture carbon. The reward to the farmer is in carbon credits.

Currently, aquaculture is worth about €200m to the economy, providing about 2,000 direct jobs and contributing to close to 9,000 indirect jobs. Insofar as this is from intensive fish-farming, we would discourage it in favour of more environmentally friendly practices.

Regeneration of Towns and Villages

Often when we think of rural living, our first thought is of living in the countryside; however, towns and villages play a large part in the lives of many rural residents. Over the years, it has typically been the more 'rural' towns and villages that have suffered most from a combination of economic migration to urban centres and ribbon development. Vibrant town

and villages centres are crucial sustainable anchors for rural hinterlands. It is a priority of the Green Party to revitalise such towns and villages, as outlined in our Town Centres First policy[36].

The government's Our Rural Future policy[37] itself even acknowledges that the implementation of a strategic approach to town centre regeneration through utilising existing buildings and unused lands for new development, addressing vibrancy and future function while promoting residential occupancy, are all central elements to securing a sustainable future for rural towns and villages.

It is critical that the revitalisation of our towns and villages is backed up with real public investment via such schemes and funds as the Town and Village Renewal Scheme[38] and the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund[39]. Additionally:

- Our rural towns and villages should be recognised as sustainable supports for rural hinterlands, offering decentralised access to goods and services for rural dwellers.

- Vacant and derelict buildings in town and village centres, including above shops, should be renovated for housing. This would increase footfall in the town/village centre and provide convenient accommodation within active distance of all town/village services.

- Local authorities, in liaison with local producer/farmer interests, should designate market areas of adequate size and with good pedestrian access to encourage more direct selling from producers to consumers and give vibrancy to the vicinity.

- There should be supports for local enterprise to retain and bring business to rural towns and villages, rather than passively allowing an exodus of business to larger urban centres.

- Public parks and playgrounds should be biodiverse and nature-based to promote interest in nature and sustainability. They should also be easily accessible, preferably via active travel.

- The application of the funding of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme[38] to the built fabric of our towns and villages should be led by the Heritage Council in collaboration with local authorities and local communities so that prioritised regeneration can take place. It should use locally sourced materials, local labour and traditional building skills.

- Measures such as grants, rates reductions and tax breaks should be explored to encourage the revitalization of rural towns and villages. Social goods such as housing can be supported or provided by the government for far less in rural Ireland compared to urban centres such as Dublin.

Remote Working

Remote working brings economic, social and economic benefits:

Environmental: It lessens emissions from transport and workplace heating saved versus home heating.

Social: It allows many rural residents to avoid long commutes, which frees up their time for other more meaningful activities, which for many people includes community engagement and social activities. In addition to this, working from a remote hub can offer an opportunity to engage with others in one's locality. Working from remote hubs also provides an antidote to the social isolation that some people experience when working from home.

Economic: The retention of workers in towns and villages during the working week boosts demand for local businesses, helping to maintain and create additional jobs, in addition to keeping money circulating within local economies. Avoidance of tiring commuting should benefit productivity in the long term.

The normalisation of the Covid-related remote working must be capitalised upon. For many workers, remote working provides an unprecedented opportunity to live in a rural area without compromising on their careers. This is turn provides an unprecedented opportunity to revitalise rural communities and economies through a 'Rural Return' of a part of the workforce that previously would have largely lived only in urban areas.

While not all jobs are suitable for remote working, it must be acknowledged that remote working brings several meaningful benefits to the lives of many, and thus employers should have to provide adequate evidence if they maintain that there is a need for in-office working, either full-time or in a hybrid manner, where an employee has a preference for remote work.

Remote working legislation should be significantly strengthened so that rural residents do not have to commute long distances without a reasonable justification from their employer.

In addition to supporting workers' rights to feasible remote working, there should be a focus on developing a network of remote working hubs in villages and towns.

Grant-aid and/or tax incentives should be designed to incentivise the development and use of remote working hubs in rural villages and towns. Tax incentives should also apply to employers to provide financial assistance for use of these hubs by employees.

Broadband

The roll out of high-speed broadband is essential to facilitate remote working, access to online information and services, and regenerate rural communities. Broadband connectivity should be rolled out to all rural communities.

Tourism

While tourism is a key component of many rural economies and communities across Ireland, there persists an imbalance in the spread of tourism, with the potential of many rural areas

remaining untapped. It will be important to fund rural Ireland as a sustainable, unique tourist destination, promoting the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, and Ireland's Ancient East, all the while supporting rural enterprises that are not in a position to capitalise on these brands. Building tourism workforce capacity, enhancing the attractiveness of jobs in the industry, and managing the impact of inflation on the sector will be vital to achieve these goals.

Future-proofing Tourism in The Face of The Climate Crisis

- To future-proof the tourism sector against increasing levels of eco-consciousness amongst tourists, it will be key to support the active transition of tourism service providers (e.g., accommodation providers) towards more sustainable operations.

- For rural Ireland to be credible as a leading nature tourism destination, steps need to be taken to enhance biodiversity, such as re-establishing native woodlands, removing harmful invasive species and rehabilitating peatlands, and steps need to be taken to provide sustainable transport and locally run accommodation options for eco-conscious tourists.

- Public transport in rural areas and integration between high-quality walking/cycling routes and public transport must be enhanced to allow eco-conscious tourists to travel conveniently through rural Ireland without renting a car.

- Additional car charging facilities should be provisioned at strategic locations to cater for tourists looking to travel rural Ireland in an electric car.

Activity and Nature-Based Tourism

- With its Atlantic coastline, geographic isolation from the European landmass, relatively sparse population, and world-famous green landscapes, there is a clear opportunity for rural Ireland to become a leader in activity and nature-based tourism. This type of tourism would particularly benefit rural economies as such tourists would not simply be passing through rural Ireland on day-visits from urban centres but immersing themselves there and supporting their local economies. However, this will require investment in active travel infrastructure as well as protection and enhancement of Ireland's natural environment.

- Regional and cross-regional walking, cycling and boating routes should be developed to provide active travel opportunities for tourists (and allowing them spend several days travelling sustainably through rural areas without needing recourse to urban connections).

- Small-scale camping infrastructure should be provisioned at strategic locations along active travel routes, to include composting toilets along with basic facilities

maintained to a high standard to cater for walkers/cyclists with tents and camper vans.

- Rural walks and access to rural walks should be enhanced in an unobtrusive manner, such as by including signage to trailheads, adding walking routes on local maps, and adding signage denoting the historical, ecological, cultural and/or biodiversity context of the area.

- The Green Party supports the strategies outlined in the National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027, Embracing Ireland's Outdoors[40].

- The Green Party believes that the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss[41] should be fully implemented, and Ireland should lead out on implementing the EU Nature Restoration Law[42].

- As stated in the Green Party's Access to the Countryside policy, access to nature in Ireland should follow the Scottish Model which encompasses 3 key principles.

    1. Respect the interests of other people.

    2. Care for the environment.

    3. Take responsibility for your own actions.

Linguistical, Cultural, Heritage, Arts and Sports Tourism

- Linguistical, Cultural, Heritage, Arts and Sports Tourism must be supported to ensure tourism across rural Ireland remains multi-dimensional and indigenous industries are able to thrive. In partnership with Údarás na Gaeltachta, Irish Language Tourism must be supported. Ireland's islands and coastal communities must be supported to reach their full tourism potential.

- Local food trails and festivals, cultural events and workshops, and wildlife and heritage walks should be supported to encourage tourists to spend more time outside of large urban centres.

- Rural Ireland's natural heritage must be protected both for its own cultural value but also as a key driver of active and nature tourism potential.

- Towns & villages with cultural/heritage/tourism links should have some form of a visitor information station, whether it be a heritage map, a touch-screen outdoor digital display, or a fully serviced information centre.

3.6 Governance and Funding

National Governance

- Rural and Community Development should remain a standalone government department, with a dedicated minister, to ensure Rural Affairs is given sufficient priority at government level.

Coordination of Rural Services/Schemes

Access to information and support pertaining to rural services and schemes should be enhanced, for example by establishing an appropriately funded Rural Supports Agency or by incorporating a rural services coordination body into existing providers of rural services/information. Such an agency or body must:

1. Be a truly one-stop shop for rural services and grant information.

2. Reduce rather than add to bureaucracy.

3. Reduce the likelihood of funding being not used by better advertising schemes and supporting individuals / groups in applications.

Grass Roots Approach

In line with the Green Party principle of encouraging decision-making at the lowest electoral level, we propose that:

- Additional functions of central government should be delegated to regional and local authorities in line with international best practice. This would strength local democracy and increase rural communities' autonomy.

- Town councils should be re-established as town and district councils with additional responsibilities and powers delegated to these councils to increase the effectiveness of second-tier local government.

- There should be enhanced collaboration between national bodies such as the NPWS and local voluntary groups to make the best use of national funding as well as local knowledge and volunteers.

- Local authorities and Local Development Companies should be supported to work together to administer the LEADER programme, which is a cornerstone of rural development. LEADER projects should be community-led as much as possible, and LEADER must not be simply a grant-giving exercise but should enhance public participation in the administration of European-funded projects as well as public

investment in community development. Transparency, compliance and accountability are also critical, however, and as such local government also has a role to play in administering LEADER.

It is important to emphases that the place of the voluntary sector is not to fill gaps in state services, but rather to work in partnership with the state, its agencies, and civil society towards building a fairer society. As such it is vital that the community and voluntary sector remains autonomous and independent of the state and that it is free to criticise government policies. The Green Party believes that a citizen-centred and participative approach, led by a vibrant community and voluntary sector, will lead to a fairer, more equitable and sustainable Ireland.

Funding for Rural Development

- **LEADER:** Increased EU LEADER funding[5] should be pursued in future LEADER programmes to reverse cuts to LEADER funding following programmes I and II. In parallel, while ensuring transparency, compliance, accountability, the LEADER application process should be simplified to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy which can serve as a barrier to community groups applying for LEADER funding.

- **EIP Schemes:** Additional funding should be sought from the European Innovation Partnership Scheme[19], particularly for locally led environment, climate, and biodiversity projects in rural areas.

- **Public Banking:** To address the decreasing competition in the Irish banking system and the difficulty experienced by micro-enterprises, many of which are rural, in obtaining financing, a network of public banks should be established to better serve the financial needs of rural communities, as described in depth in the Green Party's Public Banking Policy[1].

- **Public Service Viability and Funding:** Acknowledging that rural affairs often do not benefit from the economies of scale that can make offering of certain services profitable, there should be flexibility in exploring pathways, including funding options, to ensure vital services are available in rural areas.

- **Strategic Funding:** Local government and local enterprise office funding should be administered in a strategic fashion. There should be provisions to account for multi-annual programmes/schemes in annual budgets; funds should be spent throughout the year to avoid funds remaining unspent or spent due to time restraints at year-end; and funding should be earmarked for maintenance of executed projects rather than only their initial execution. Additionally, multi-annual funding arrangements should be available from Local Enterprise Offices to allow the community and voluntary sector to develop strategic plans.

References

1. Green Party Website - Public Banking Policy (2019) https://www.greenparty.ie/policies/public-banking (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

2. Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland Website - Sustainable Energy Communities Programme (undated) https://www.seai.ie/community-energy/sustainable-energy-communities/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

3. Irish Government Website - Understanding Life in Ireland: The Well-being Framework 2023 (2023) https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/1fb9b-a-well-being-framework-for-ireland-join-the-conversation/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

4. Irish Government Website - Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES) (2023) https://www.gov.ie/en/service/f5a48-agri-climate-rural-environment-scheme-acres/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

5. Irish Government Website - LEADER Rural Development (2021) https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/179274-leader-rural-development/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

6. Health Service Executive Website - Community Healthcare Networks (undated) https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/2/primarycare/community-healthcare-networks/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

7. SH:24 Website (undated) https://sh24.ie/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

8. National Women's Council Website – "Significant challenges remain in accessing abortion care in Ireland" (2022) https://www.nwci.ie/learn/article/significant_challenges_remain_in_accessing_abortion_care_in_ireland (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

9. Irish Government Website – "Minister Foley launches innovative research project to support small schools in rural Ireland" (2021) https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/d08e5-minister-foley-launches-innovative-research-project-to-support-small-schools-in-rural-ireland/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

10. Greens Schools Website – Themes (undated) https://greenschoolsireland.org/themes/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

11. Irish Government Website - Action Plan for Apprenticeship, 2021 to 2025 (2022) https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/0879f-action-plan-for-apprenticeship-2021-2025/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

12. Irish Government Website – "Minister Noonan Announces €9m in Funding for Built Heritage Projects" (2022) https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/493c5-minister-noonan-announces-9m-in-funding-for-built-heritage-projects/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

13. An Garda Síochána Website – Community Alert (undated) https://www.garda.ie/en/crime-prevention/community-engagement/community-alert.html (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

14. Irish Government Website - Emergency Personal Alarm for Older People (2018) https://www.gov.ie/en/service/8698a1-emergency-personal-alarm-for-older-people (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

15. Obair Website (undated) https://www.obair.org/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

16. Irish Government Website - Funding for voluntary organisations (2022) https://www.gov.ie/en/service/8966ac-funding-for-voluntary-organisations/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

17. Irish Government Website - Rural Ideas Fora (2023) https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/7afaa-rural-ideas-fora/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

18. Irish Rural Link Website (undated) https://irishrurallink.ie/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

19. Irish Government Website - European Innovation Partnership Scheme (2022) https://www.gov.ie/en/service/18a855-european-innovation-partnership-scheme/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

20. Irish Government Website - Irish Refugee Protection Programme (2023) https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ede36-irish-refugee-protection-programme/#community-sponsorship-ireland (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

21. Irish Government Website – "Minister Noonan Announces over €4m in funding for 512 Built Heritage projects across Ireland" (2022) https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/136b2-minister-noonan-announces-over-4m-in-funding-for-512-built-heritage-projects-across-ireland/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

22. Green Party Website – Transport Policy (2021) https://www.greenparty.ie/policies/transport (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

23. National Transport Authority Website - Rural Transport Programme/TFI Local Link (undated) https://www.nationaltransport.ie/public-transport-services/rural-transport-programme/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

24. Irish Government Website - All-Island Strategic Rail Review Public Consultation for Strategic Environmental Assessment (2023) https://www.gov.ie/en/consultation/4d4f2-all-island-strategic-rail-review-public-consultation-for-strategic-environment-assessment/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

25. Irish Government Website - National Sustainable Mobility Policy (2023) https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/848df-national-sustainable-mobility-policy/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

26. Irish Times Website – "Bike library scheme to be extended after 'phenomenal' success at Dublin school" (2023)

https://www.irishtimes.com/transport/2023/03/22/bike-library-scheme-to-be-extended-after-phenomenal-success-at-dublin-school/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

27. MaREI Website - How and Why We Travel – Mobility Demand and Emissions from Passenger Transport (undated) https://www.marei.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/How-and-Why-We-Travel-%E2%80%93-Mobility-Demand-and-Emissions-from-Passenger-Transport-MaREI-Template.pdf (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

28. Green Party Website – Energy Policy (2021) https://www.greenparty.ie/policies/energy (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

29. Irish Government Website - National Retrofit Plan (2021) https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/5052a-national-retrofit-plan/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

30. European Commission Website – Biofuels (undated) https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/renewable-energy/bioenergy/biofuels_en (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

31. Green Party Website - Alternatives to GDP Policy (2019) https://www.greenparty.ie/policies/alternatives-gdp (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

32. Irish Government Website - Food Wise 2025 (2021) https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a6b0d-food-wise-2025/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

33. Irish Government Website - Food Wise 2030 (2023) https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c73a3-food-vision-2030-a-world-leader-in-sustainable-food-systems/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

34. Green Party Website – Fisheries Policy (2021) https://www.greenparty.ie/policies/fisheries (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

35. GreenWave Website (undated) https://www.greenwave.org/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

36. Green Party Website - Town Centre First Policy (2021) https://www.greenparty.ie/policies/town-centre-first (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

37. Irish Government Website - Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 (2021) https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4c236-our-rural-future-vision-and-policy-context/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

38. Irish Government Website - Town and Village Renewal Scheme (2023) https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/01125e-town-and-village-renewal-scheme/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

39. Irish Government Website - Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (2023) https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/c77144-rural-regeneration-and-development-fund/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

40. Irish Government Website - Embracing Ireland's Outdoors - National Outdoor Recreation Strategy 2023-2027 (2023) https://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/43eee-embracing-irelands-outdoors-national-outdoor-recreation-strategy-2023-2027/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

41. The Citizen's Assembly Website – "Final Report of the Citizens' Assembly on Biodiversity Loss Launches" (2023) https://citizensassembly.ie/report-of-the-citizens-assembly-on-biodiversity-loss-report-launches/ (accessed 29 Aug 2023)

42. European Commission Website - Nature restoration law (2023) https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/nature-and-biodiversity/nature-restoration-law_en (accessed 29 Aug 2023)