

Green Party Policy Document Rural Affairs



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1. Vision Statement

The Green Party believes in and will work towards ensuring that Ireland has a network of vibrant rural communities, towns and villages that are economically independent and interdependent, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable and where people of all ages can contribute positively towards a living countryside .

We will achieve this by collaboration with all relevant agencies and communities. We seek to work with those who care for rural Ireland to implement policies at local, regional and National level that are consistent with EU policies and protection of the environment and the rural way of life.

2. Summary and Key Points

Background

Rural Ireland is a place of strong community links and economic potential.

However, in small towns, villages and more remote areas, inhabitants often do not enjoy the amenities that dwellers of cities and large towns take for granted. Some of these resources and support systems include day-to-day necessities, such as public transport, close neighbours, jobs (for employees), customers (for businesses), and a comprehensive range of goods and services. What they do have they may pay more for or what they find difficult to access.

As the first steps to improvement, there must be recognition of the need or shortfall, the will to ameliorate and recognition that this may require subsidy. While much has and is being done, it is not enough, lacks urgency and needs some re-direction.

What is being Done

Over the years, successive Governments have overseen development of rural supports through structures and funding, even though they are currently less than at their peak. The EU and Voluntary Sector contribute. This much is acknowledged and what we must build on.

Our Policy - What Still Needs to be Done

Our Priorities

Our priorities are:

1. Creation of a Rural Supports Agency
2. Increase in the availability of public transport
3. Acceleration of the Broadband programme.
4. More local jobs.
5. Localising energy production
6. Holistic community care.
7. Increased and targeted State funding to rural areas

Administrative and General

The Green Party proposes that the responsibility for rural affairs should be transferred to the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government. We also propose that there should be an appropriately funded Rural Supports Agency as a 'One Stop Shop' for services required and to identify areas where the actions of the many State-sponsored support organisations and schemes could be simplified, better co-ordinated, better advertised and overlap eliminated or reduced.

The Green Party is largely supportive of The Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA)'s recommendations www.agresearch.teagasc.ie/merc/CEDRA/CEDRA_Report.pdf.

This represents a core Green Party belief in a grass roots approach by community groups to the development of local enterprises that will ensure better participation by communities in rural economic spatial planning and implementation.

Funding

The Green Party advocates the restoration of funding to the community and voluntary sector to a level that allows effective projects particularly in rural areas to be viable and to serve the needs of their local communities. In tandem, The Green Party advocate a move towards Public Banking (banking owned and controlled by the community of the region at a level above credit unions and primarily for lending to local businesses).

Once a project is approved under any scheme, it is important that sufficient funding is earmarked for not just execution of the project, but also for its maintenance.

Infrastructure & Environment

As an alternative to one-off housing, which places a strain on the infrastructure and sustainability of rural Ireland, the Green Party proposes local authorities taking an active role in the development of their towns and villages by identifying sites adjacent to local population centres, with a proportion of these made available for social and affordable housing.

The Green Party proposes to implement a grants scheme supporting infrastructure for the treatment and distribution of water servicing group water schemes and sewerage disposal. We also promote the resource recovery of sewerage as an alternative to treatment and disposal.

The Green Party sees the rollout of high speed broadband across Ireland as a Public Service Obligation and a key priority in the support of rural communities and the viability of technology-related rural jobs.

There is no one single answer to preventing flooding, rather we advocate a combination of solutions: using local knowledge of past flooding and water movements, restoring flood plains, using existing bogs as soakage areas as well as replanting some of them, planting native woodland, water management.

The Green Party supports the retention of Ireland's remaining bogland and the immediate cessation of their exploitation.

Energy

The Green Party believes the development of the renewable energy infrastructure across the country is essential to meet our responsibilities on climate change and would allow rural communities to benefit from their natural resources.

The Green Party will reintroduce support mechanisms to allow householders and businesses to sell their surplus electricity (where generated from renewable resources) back into the national grid.

The Green party calls for a total ban on hydraulic fracking on and offshore; as well as the below ground risks, it is also concerned about, inter alia, its environmental damage at ground level and its affect on the economy, especially tourism.

Public Transport

The Green Party recognises 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 propose the expansion of the Rural Transport Programme <https://www.nationaltransport.ie/.../rural-transport-programme> and that it be supplemented with more scheduled bus services.

Towards A Stable Rural Economy and Jobs

The Green Party measures growth not just in economic terms but in terms of quality of life.

We are working towards:

1. Sustainable Jobs, especially for youth; indigenous enterprise.
2. The evolution of standard incorporated business practice to co-operatives so that money is kept in the local economy.
3. A community led approach to rural development.
4. The support and growth of fisheries and downstream business as a viable economic opportunity and an properly managed, sustainable enterprise

Agriculture, Food and Craftmanship

The Green Party believes that local food production has the potential to address a number of rural development issues. We believe that rural communities must be supported to:

- Promote and increase the production of organic food production.
- Give higher priority to habitat creation and protection in farming policy.
- Increase the market share of agrifood and craft industries.
- Continue to oppose the use of GMOs in agricultural production as the consequences of these technologies are not fully understood.

Tourism

The Green Party proposes promoting tourism and the employment it generates by:

- Developing a network of All-Ireland off-road walkways and cycleways.
- Developing marine and inland waterway tourism and leisure business.
- Increasing opportunities for Eco-tourism.
- Branding rural towns and tourism areas including wider tourism districts.

Regeneration of Towns and Villages

We would promote, including providing where appropriate incentives and supports:

- Regeneration of town centres. The Green Party believes that more attractive living options in town centres, including above shops, would greatly enhance rural life. This would also increase footfall in the town rather than promoting travel to shopping centres in the outskirts.
- Local enterprise to bring business to villages rather than take from them.
- The application of the funding of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme www.ahrrga.gov.ie/rural/rural-development/town-village-renewal-scheme should be led by the Heritage Council in collaboration with local authorities and local communities.

Social Services

In the rural environment there are particular social needs, for which the Green Party would ensure the appropriate services are provided, for example:

- Measures to facilitate retention, or slowing the rate of closure, of post offices, Garda stations and banks, such as alternative services or commercial uses. They are a vital social resource.
- Better access to health services as geographic locations and isolated living can render this more challenging
- Holistic and community focused health care, with access to community care teams.
- Attention to mental health/rural isolation issues, which become more significant as our population ages.
- Skills development in trades and crafts, especially traditional ones.
- Promotion of partnership of local colleges with Third Level Institutes in provincial areas, including exploring shared status where feasible.
- We advocate rural groups and individuals in disadvantaged rural communities availing of the platform provided by Irish Rural Link www.irishrurallink.ie , for articulating their common needs, sharing their experiences and presenting their case to policy-makers.

Changes in the Law

To implement our Policy, some changes in the law will be necessary or desirable, for example:

1. In respect of one-off housing, (including for holidaying), tighten the planning law, and improve application of the law and enforcement of building standards.
2. Declare areas susceptible to flooding to be permanent exclusion zones for development.
3. Reduce commercial rates in villages and small towns as an incentive to local enterprise and local shopping opportunity.
4. Alter the building regulations to permit the building of dry toilets in conjunction with resource recovery systems.

3. Background

Rural Ireland is famed all over the world for its beauty, people and their communities, natural and historical heritage, quality food, sport and much more. Some people desire the choice to return to rural Ireland to enhance their quality of life. They long for a strong sense of community as well as the peace and beauty of the rural landscape. Rural Ireland is a place of great opportunity and potential.

Rural dwellers also face challenges that more urban inhabitants do not including:

- Difficulty in accessing services and ensuring an equitable distribution of those services where they exist and are sufficient.
- People, especially our younger members of the community, are forced to migrate for work or education to larger towns and cities, many not to return, resulting in a brain drain and leaving behind age and sometimes gender imbalances. When inhabitants do stay it is often with a reliance on employment that includes a considerable commute, largely divorcing themselves from local community life.
- Even though the population of rural areas is fairly static rather than declining (it is increasing in urban areas) the trend within rural areas is towards centres of population
- As the number of full-time farmers declines despite increasing agricultural output, the need for their part-time alternative employment increases. Apart from niche localities, there is economic and social decline.
- The absence of nearby local services leads to the time and cost of travelling greater distances (with consequent polluting emissions) for those owning or having access to transport or, for those who do not, inconvenience or doing without.
- While housing is cheaper, the scope for appreciation in its value is less than in urban areas and this imbalance can lead to inequality of opportunity for those wishing to move
- Government inertia is allowing rural Ireland drift to towns and cities. 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.

Enhancing economic and social well-being while protecting our natural resources and environment are key priorities in building balanced regional development and a more inclusive and fairer society. Rural Ireland cannot look after itself entirely by itself. It has the will, but not the human or financial resources to reverse a decline. All it needs is to be given a good start and continuing modest support. In turn, this will be of benefit nationally as well as in rural areas.

4. Current Action on Rural Affairs

Over the years, successive Governments have overseen development of rural supports through structures and funding, even though they are currently less than at their peak. The EU and Voluntary Sector contribute. This much is acknowledged and what we must build on which includes simplifying the availability and relationship of support organisations and schemes for rural Ireland, which are currently complex.

5. Our Policy

5.1 Administrative and General

5.1.1 Rural Supports Agency

The Green Party advocates setting up a Rural Supports Agency with the purpose of being a truly one stop shop for services required, under the Minister for Rural and Community Development. The RSA would have responsibility for identifying areas where the actions of the many State-sponsored support organisations and schemes could be simplified, better co-ordinated, better advertised and overlap eliminated or reduced. It would need to know what other bodies do and could have a coordinating role, especially where there is overlap between the other organisations. Its existence will reduce the possibility of available funds not being used.

It must not add to bureaucracy, rather reduce it. It would be easily accessible and do more than just Citizen Information Centres www.citizensinformation.ie or Local Enterprise Offices <https://www.localenterprise.ie>.

5.1.2 The Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas (CEDRA) www.agresearch.teagasc.ie/lerc/CEDRA/CEDRA_Report.pdf

The Commission was a recommending, aspirational body rather than an implementing one. Some of its recommendations have been or are being implemented, but much remains to be carried out. The Action Plan illustrates the complexity of the organisation, and seemingly endless re-organisation of rural services or plans for them. The Green Party is largely supportive of CEDRA's recommendations, notably the following:

1. The requirement to coordinate across departments and agencies and that this responsibility is given a statutory footing.
2. Local government reform currently underway offers a unique opportunity to ensure that rural Ireland has a distinct voice at regional, local and community level; the CEDRA recommendations are in line with the aims and objectives of the reform process.

The Green Party advocates a sense of urgency in their implementation and it calls for a simplification of the current complex arrangement whereby LEADER <https://www.pobal.ie/FundingProgrammes/LEADER/Pages/LEADER.aspx>, Rural Economic Development Zones www.ahrrga.gov.ie/.../rural-economic-development-zone-redz, Local Authority and Department are all involved in rural economic development and social services.

5.1.3 Grass Roots Approach

The Green Party advocates a grass roots approach by community groups in the development of local enterprises giving better participation by communities in rural economic spatial planning and implementation.

The Green Party recognises that Ireland has led a grass roots approach to rural development under LEADER I and II Programmes through local development partnerships, free from political interference and with full community participation. We support a return to this approach once the current LEADER III programme concludes, as local authorities/Local Community Development Committees www.housing.gov.ie/community/...local-government-local-development are not equipped to sufficiently deliver the programme on the ground. Local government still have a strong role to play through the delivery of Local Economic and Community Plans (e.g. County Meath) www.meath.ie/.../CommunityDevelopment/LocalEconomicandCommunityPlan that are an integral part of the LEADER programme. We support autonomous local development partnerships as models of best practice recognised as such across the EU.

5.1.4 Regional and Local Governance and Community and Voluntary Sector

Summary of Green Party Policy:

- To implement the recommendations of the Mahon Tribunal <https://planningtribunal.ie>
- To introduce directly elected regional authorities, with the country divided into regions, with significant powers to coordinate, transport, planning and other services between counties.
- To restore Town councils as new district councils that encompass the rural hinterland of each town in such a way that every rural area is under a district council.
- To delegate many of the functions of central government to regional and local authorities including aspects of the administration of health, education and social welfare based on international best practice.
- To introduce the facility to call a regional or local referendum through the collection of a certain percentage of voters' signatures.
- To have local authority planning procedures that allow for participatory budgeting.
- To have a strong and vibrant community, voluntary and charitable sector supporting and enhancing the broad social, economic and environmental objectives of the State.

This is not to say that the community and voluntary sector should fill the gaps that the State fails to provide, but rather that it works in partnership with the State, its agencies, and civil society towards building a fairer society. 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.

5.2 Funding

The Green Party advocates the restoration of funding to the community and voluntary sector to a level that allows effective projects particularly in rural areas to be viable and to serve the needs of their local communities. In tandem, The Green Party advocate a move towards Public Banking (banking owned and controlled by the community of the region at a level above credit unions and primarily for lending to local businesses).

The Government should recognise that much greater financial subsidy is needed in rural areas and justified from both the national and value-for-money perspectives, especially where the economy of scale is inferior to urban areas.

The Green Party notes that the €250m allocation to the LEADER Programme for the period 2014-2020 is substantially less than the 2007-2013 allocation and that applications by local groups for funding comfortably exceed the money available. We believe this sum of €250m, spread over 7 years, is grossly inadequate for its purpose. Given this significant reduction in funding for the LEADER III programme, we advocate the establishment of a fully resourced “EU Unit” in every local authority. The EU Unit would work with Local Development Companies, the Regional Authority and relevant State agencies to maximise the potential for accessing complementary sources of EU funding to enhance LEADER and thereby give greater capacity for rural development projects, employment opportunities and developing a low carbon economy.

Funding to Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) <https://www.localenterprise.ie> should be ring fenced for a period of five years to allow the community and voluntary sector to develop strategic plans, based on sustainable guaranteed funding of LEOs. An advantage would be more autonomy of local authorities *vis-a-vis* central government in the control of financial support.

As the Town and Village Renewal Scheme www.ahrrga.gov.ie/rural/rural-development/town-village-renewal-scheme was initially to benefit only “up to 200” towns and villages (in the event, close to the 200 was achieved), it is important that grants continue in 2017 and beyond so that ultimately all towns and villages under 10,000 population have the opportunity to benefit. Also, sufficient time should be allowed to plan for and spend the funding available without loss of entitlement.

Once a project is approved under any scheme, it is important that sufficient funding is earmarked for both the execution of the project and its maintenance. So often in the past, works from State-funded schemes have been allowed to deteriorate, rendering them poor value for money or ultimately worthless.

5.3 Infrastructure & Environment

5.3.1 Generally

The Green Party believes in a strong and properly enforced heritage policy for the rural landscape, built environment and biodiversity.

Rural Ireland has many natural resources, which (i) must be protected and (ii) should be exploited sustainably.

As an alternative to one-off housing, which places a strain on the infrastructure and sustainability of rural Ireland, the Green Party proposes local authorities taking an active role in the

development of their towns and villages by identifying sites adjacent to local population centres, with a proportion of these made available for social and affordable housing. These sites would be sold with planning permission and all service connections provided. Such an arrangement would ensure that sustainable communities can flourish and grow and local amenities and businesses can thrive, while meeting the needs of people who wish to live in their own localities.

5.3.2 Water and Sewerage

The Green Party proposes to implement a grants scheme supporting infrastructure for the treatment and distribution of water servicing group water schemes and sewerage disposal. We also promote the resource recovery of sewerage 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. Simultaneously, residents should be encouraged to turn to resource recovery dry toilets. We also propose to support the implementation of grey-water recycling.

5.3.3 Broadband

The Green Party sees broadband as a Public Service Obligation. Thus the rollout of high speed broadband across Ireland must be a key priority in the support of rural communities and the viability of technology-related rural jobs. As such, we see broadband availability nationwide as of utmost importance to future rural sustainable life and, to this end, wish to see acceleration of the programme.

5.3.4 Climate Change and Flooding

Climate Change

For rural communities, the impacts of climate change - such as more volatile weather - have potentially disastrous effects. Solutions (including prevention) will require both vision and commitment from the various stakeholders.

The environmental impact of conventional agriculture is such that short term economic benefits of expansion will be dwarfed by the economic costs of climate change.

Schemes which encourage environmentally responsible farming such as GLAS and the organic farming scheme show that farming which is considerate of biodiversity and pollution can be as profitable as conventional agriculture. However, there are limitations to these schemes. In Government, we will enhance the GLAS Agri- Environment Scheme <https://www.agriculturalconsultant.net/schemes/glas> to fund local projects to future proof farmers' their lands from degradation.

Flooding

There is no one single answer to preventing flooding, rather we propose a combination of solutions: using local knowledge of past flooding and water movements, restoring flood plains, using existing bogs as soakage areas as well as replanting some of them, planting native woodland, water management.

We advocate:

1. A single body (Board) to oversee the Shannon Basin, with the other organisations retaining responsibility for their respective roles. It is vital that local communities have places on this Board as they have the knowledge where lands have traditionally flooded and how and why they are flooding now.
2. A regional approach to flood prevention. Draining land and removing blockages is allowed under the EU Habitats Directive [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/...](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/legislation/habitatsdirective/), but simply removing large amounts of water from one area can lead to more intensive flooding further downriver.
3. Better water management by a responsible approach by Bord Na Mona and the ESB in controlling river and lake levels.
4. A single emergency response agency involving local authorities, Government departments, Gardai, Defence Forces, Civil Defence and emergency services.
5. Land use management of each river catchment area for the benefit of communities who live and work near vulnerable areas by attenuating flood waters, building natural revetment barriers and planting broadleaf forestry.
6. Alternative uses for peatlands such as short rotation coppicing of willow, which will continue to provide employment as well as keeping the power stations supplied with fuel. (See also “Peatlands” below).
7. Upgrading infrastructure to enable it to take on higher levels of rainfall, be it roads, bridges, culverts, and better equipping the Civil Defence, Fire Brigade and other rescue services.
8. Ending denudation of our upland and blanket bogs. Draining and farming practices must be better managed with flooding in mind.
9. Alter the GLAS Agri-Environment Scheme to fund local projects to give revenue to farmers to future proof their lands from degradation.
10. A flood relocation of homes scheme, instigated with the cooperation of local communities
11. Areas susceptible to flooding being declared permanent exclusion zones for development.

5.3.5 Peatland

The Green Party supports the retention of Ireland’s remaining bogland and the immediate cessation of their exploitation. These 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 retention of boglands will provide a real educational resource for future generations, while also being of long term economic value in reducing our environmental impact.

5.4 Energy

5.4.1 Various

The development of community owned wind farms alongside other renewable energy sources, such as solar, wood/biomass, hydro and anaerobic digestion, would allow rural communities to benefit from their natural resources rather than subjecting them to the development plans of large companies with little benefit to rural communities.

We favour micro-grids, where energy can be produced and consumed locally through combined-heat-and-power.

The Green Party will reintroduce support mechanisms to allow householders and businesses to sell their surplus electricity (where generated from renewable resources) back into the national grid.

The Green Party would like to see proposers of all energy projects engaging meaningfully with local communities throughout the planning process.

5.4.2 Fracking

The Green Party does not support the implementation of fracking or any fuel harvesting technology similar to fracking on the island of Ireland. We propose a permanent ban on all such activity both on and offshore. In the press release by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment on 30th November, 2016 with reference to the publication of the EEPA led Joint Research programme (part-funded by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency), the Minister says, *inter alia*, “I believe the Report’s findings justify the continuing prohibition on the licensing of hydraulic fracturing” and “I have decided to refer the report to the Joint Oireachtas Committee for its consideration”. The Green Party notes that no mention is made of environmental damage at ground level and its affect on the economy, especially tourism.

5.5 Public Transport

The Green Party is concerned that Rural Transport and School Transport are not the remit of the Minister for Rural Affairs (see also 5.1.1). We would support a close relationship between the Minister with responsibility for rural affairs and the Minister for Transport to ensure the best possible rural transport service.

The Green Party proposes linking rural communities with an integrated rural transport network in a manner that is comprehensive and user friendly. All communities should have, as a minimum, a daily service proportionate to their population and means of connecting to larger centres and where feasible with other transport modes. Bus Éireann services are 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. We advocate

1. A more supportive approach to licensing local bus services by the licensing authority.

2. Expansion of the Rural Transport Programme <https://www.nationaltransport.ie/.../rural-transport-programme> and supplement it with more scheduled bus services.
3. Nominally, 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, and also better child care facilities, should be made available.
4. Retention of all rail lines and station stops.
5. The inclusion of cycle and walking lanes in all road planning assessments across Ireland, where appropriate, and in keeping with local concerns.
6. We advocate 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 its value to tourism and employment generation.

5.6 Towards A Stable Rural Economy and Jobs

5.6.1 Generally

The Green Party supports international trade and sustainable and fair business practice between our partners in the EU and around the world. Trade deals should not disenfranchise rural dwellers, the unemployed, young people or consumers just as they must not threaten our biodiversity and long term sustainability

Trade deals, including the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/ceta> must not undermine the viability of the local economy, and the environment; also a concern of developing countries.

5.6.2 Small and Medium Sized Enterprises

The Green Party advocates and would support:

1. Small local/indigenous enterprises, including niche shops and services, innovative companies, agricultural, horticultural, marine and forestry and community/voluntary sector employment such as LEADER.
2. The evolution of standard incorporated business practice to local smaller businesses and co-operatives so that money is kept in the local economy. We propose to update the cooperative legislative framework.
3. The location of industry close to rural towns and villages and away from cities, which could support rural communities. It should be incentivised, in liaison with the IDA where appropriate or opportune.
4. Rolling out the Rural Economic Development Zones (REDZ) countrywide under the LEADER elements of the RDP 2014-2020

www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/press/pressreleases/2014... and the funding needs to be significantly increased in order to have a real impact on rural towns and surrounding areas. The concept of a REDZ involves supporting communities to avail of opportunities to help themselves and their local areas and is the essence of a community led approach to rural development.

5. Small scale teleworking and back-office operations, with grant-aid/tax incentive for operating from (already populated) remote locations and technology enterprises, when broadband is available..
6. Substitution of hemp for oil-based materials where opportune by promoting its use, growing and manufacturing.
7. The support and growth of fisheries industries and downstream business, with the caution that inshore fisheries must be environmentally acceptable.
8. Forestry and downstream business, including biomass.

5.6.3 Agriculture, Food and Crafts

The Green Party believes that local food production and supply chains have the potential to address a number of rural development issues. It can be seen to have not only environmental but also social and economic benefits, helping to create resilience within communities, make farming on the small scale more viable and support local business and employment creation. Local food can be a source for export to cities and abroad, for sale to tourists and for food security.

Harvest 2020 and Food Wise 2025 will increase the environmental impact of agriculture while providing no benefit to Ireland's food security, all the while more and more people are forced to move out of rural areas due to the lack of jobs and services. A greatly scaled up model of high quality agricultural output based on food targeted at domestic and European markets should be promoted.

In Government the Green Party would:

- Promote and support organic food production, especially focusing on import substitution, to achieve a target of 20% (currently 3% in Ireland and 6% EU average) of arable land in organic agriculture.
- Continue to oppose the use of GMOs in agricultural production as the consequences of these technologies are not fully understood.
- Give financial and other support for adding value to meat production by establishment of local abattoirs and finishing at home
- Give higher priority to habitat creation and protection in farming policy, rural environment schemes and development planning.

- Encourage community involvement and training in food growing through community gardens, school gardens and allotments provided by local authorities at affordable rents.
- Promote the development of community supported agricultural systems and encourage access schemes for young farmers who do not have title to their own land.
- Press for local food procurement policies to be allowable under EU and World Trade Organisation rules.
- Promote greater integration of small scale forestry into farming systems.
- Promote co-ops.
- Promote market gardening; artisan food, including cheese; small-scale poultry
- Promote farm-gate enterprises and farmer markets
- Promote craft industries, such as woodcraft, pottery, jewellery, weaving, knitting, hat-making exist and there is scope for more, whether from the home or otherwise. Applying traditional building skills – including thatching - to the restoration of farm buildings, dry stone walls and farm gates. Support should be available through advice, including on starting up, premises and marketing, and through grant aid.

5.6.4 Tourism

The Green Party proposes promoting tourism and the employment it generates through increased funding and non financial supports to the industry. We advocate:

- “Food Tourism”, starting with “food trails” and the provision of food in public houses, particularly in rural areas.
- Developing a network of All-Ireland off-road walkways and cycleways, including utilising former railway infrastructure ecotourism development ; in liaison with farmers.
- Marine and inland waterway tourism and leisure business.
- Activity-based/outdoor adventure tourism; educational tourism; heritage tourism.
- Eco-tourism. See Fáilte Ireland’s *Ecotourism Handbook for Ireland*. www.failteireland.ie/.../Ecotourism_Handbook-2.pdf
- Implementing the National Landscape Strategy (see [buildingsofireland.com/media/National Landscape Strategy for...](http://buildingsofireland.com/media/National_Landscape_Strategy_for...)) to protect our cultural landscapes as a major tourist resource.
- Designating new, suitable, area(s) as national park(s) to attract tourism.
- Marketing Ireland as a clean green holiday destination and a place for year-round tourism.
- A nationwide network of high quality Bed and Breakfasts.
- Branding of rural towns and tourism areas including wider tourism districts.

5.6.5 Regeneration of Towns and Villages

We would promote, including providing where appropriate incentives and supports:

 Regeneration of town centres. The Green Party believes that more attractive living options in town centres, including above shops, would greatly enhance rural life. This would also increase footfall in the town rather than promoting travel to shopping centres in the outskirts.

 Treatment of our towns and villages as sustainable rural settlements and places of trade.

 Promotion of shopping locally, especially to farmers and residents of isolated homes who tend to by-pass villages for towns. Better access to goods and services locally.

 Local authorities designating market areas with good pedestrian access to encourage more direct selling from producers to consumers and give vibrancy to the vicinity.

 Local enterprise to bring business to villages rather than take from them.

The application of the funding of the Town and Village Renewal Scheme www.ahrrga.gov.ie/rural/rural-development/town-village-renewal-scheme should be led by the Heritage Council in collaboration with local authorities and local communities so that the regeneration of the built fabric of our towns and villages can take place and should use locally sourced materials, local labour and traditional building skills. See also under “Funding” above. The Scheme addresses one of the recommendations in the CEDRA report.

Section 5.6.:

The Welsh Assembly have spearheaded sustainable rural development through an alternative planning stream, named "One Planet Development (1)." This careful planning review process allows an entirely separate strand of planning approval based on a rigorous but distinct set of criteria focussed on very low environmental impact and clear sustainability. This will allow people committed to living a sustainable existence on the land to seek approval for low impact rural housing allied with land-based working practises which generate a sustainable income. We propose to implement similar planning regulations in Ireland. While the total numbers of individuals taking up such opportunities may be relatively small, they provide an important blueprint for the practicalities of how we can better transition to low impact low carbon sustainable living, and at the same time enrich and repopulate rural communities.¹

5.7 Social Services

5.7.1 Generally and Various

1 <https://gov.wales/docs/desh/publications/121114oneplanetguideen.pdf>

The Green Party recognises the value of providing a diverse and sustainable range of services for rural communities that will combat poverty, reduce isolation, ensure employment and add to the culture and heritage of communities, including those in Gaeltacht areas.

In the rural environment there are particular social needs, for which the Green Party would ensure the appropriate services are provided, thus:

- Supporting community organisations through engagement at the local authority level.
- Measures to facilitate retention of post offices, Garda stations and banks, such as alternative services or commercial uses. They are a vital social and infrastructural resource.
- Gardai presence sufficient to counter rural crime and carry out their normal duties.
- Promotion of better neighbour contact and combating isolation, including meals on wheels, enhancement of clubs
- Recognition that the hub of much community activity relies on the voluntary sector (e.g. Irish Countrywomen's Association, sporting bodies particularly the GAA) and, whether by choice or otherwise, the pub and, in a pastoral sense, the church. GAA halls and schools outside school hours are untapped resources as centres for the community to meet and have activity.
- Improved public transport (5.5 above).
- Maintenance of a rural society rich in culture and heritage, including fostering community and local heritage groups.
- The preservation and enrichment of Gaeltacht communities.
- Tackling fuel poverty- significant as our population ages.

5.7.2 Health

In some cases access to health services is more challenging for rural dwellers because of geographic locations and isolated living. People should be facilitated by the state to stay in their homes rather than be institutionalised.

While we do think it is important to have centres of excellence, we believe it should not be at the expense of neglecting local communities through Primary Healthcare. Characteristics of the maintenance and treatment of health locally should be:

- 1 Holistic and community focused, with access to community care teams.
- 2 Fostering the role of nurse practitioners.
- 3 Swift access to acute hospitals; on-campus lodges for patients and family members.
- 4 Attention to mental health/rural isolation issues, which become more significant as our population ages. Suicide is a special concern and we advocate enhancement of support organisations such as Jigsaw and Family Resource Centres.
- 5 Co-operative projects such as the Plunkett Foundation in the UK and its fledgling Irish equivalent in Loughmore, Co. Tipperary
- 6 Access to medical care without having to travel unreasonable distances, or wait for very long to get it.

5.7.3 Education

The Green Party proposes:

1. Skills development in trades and crafts, especially traditional ones.
2. Promotion of partnership of local colleges with Third Level Institutes in provincial areas, including facilitating upgrading of status to university level where feasible.
3. Online facilities for provincial students through their local colleges.
4. Teagasc courses and colleges.
5. Primary and secondary schools' curriculums to include rural studies and plots to be provided to facilitate learning agriculture and horticulture.
6. Introduction of schemes across primary and secondary schools aimed at educating children about all aspects of food (including selecting, meal planning, preparing and growing your own) .

While there are Degree and Certificate courses available in Rural Enterprise/Community Development, at least in Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology and Limerick Institute of Technology Thurles/Limerick/Tipperary, employment opportunities have been affected by a significant reduction in funding. Funding should be restored both for the service graduates can provide to communities and for the employment it would enable.

5.8 Changes in the Law

To implement our Policy, some changes in the law will be necessary or desirable, as follows.

Zoning/Land Use:

- In respect of one-off housing, (including for holidaying), tighten the planning law, and improve application of the law, limiting one-off housing (who may build and where and how long it must be occupied by locals); consider levies towards the cost of related public services.
- Areas susceptible to flooding being declared permanent exclusion zones for development.
- Reduction in commercial rates in villages and small towns as an incentive to local enterprise and local shopping opportunity.
- Alter the building regulations to permit the building of dry toilets in conjunction with resource recovery systems.
- Legislate to facilitate establishment of farm-gate shops.
- Update the co-operative legislative framework.
- Introduce legislation to ensure that all misshapen and still edible foodstuffs are saleable.
- **Implement planning legislation and regulation changes that permit "One Planet Development" opportunities for low environmental impact homesteads generating viable self-sustaining land based income**

Appendices

Appendix I - References to Other Policy Areas of The Green Party

Although the following policy areas are touched on in this document, for full policies see the relevant policy documents at <https://greenparty.ie> :

Agriculture & Food

Animal Welfare

Education

Energy

Forestry

Health

Mental Health

Justice (notably crime)

Transport