

Cllr. John Clendennen

Dear Sir,

The EU Just Transition Fund will play an important role for Offaly and the Midlands, securing the long term economic development and diversification of the region. It is of critical importance that funding is invested prudently, ensuring long term sustainable benefit whilst also achieving material change in the short to medium term.

As a Public Representative in Offaly, significant progress has been made in developing the basis of a comprehensive tourism infrastructure network for the county. The development of greenways and trails has already resulted in tangible benefit, but we must now see investment in facilities that will enhance the visitor experience and ensure the tourism product remains appealing for the longer term.

There are several new and exciting business opportunities seizing the opportunity presented by renewable energy, and we must be in a position to assist such businesses and ensure they develop and root their business in the region, creating local employment and local economic development.

There is an urgent need for a Land Management Plan, particularly in a county like Offaly where over 20% of the land is in state ownership. Bord Na Mona outlined their latest agenda to be 'Naturally Driven' as a Irish, semi-state climate solutions company. One would really have to question if tourism facilities such as Lough Boora Discovery Park should remain under their remit. Additionally, with vast sections of land lacking a purpose, there should be consideration given to repurposing such buildings and land by a respective independent third party agent.

The intention of the Deep Retrofit Scheme is excellent, but to achieve tangible results can be disruptive and slow. Deep Retrofit should be completed at a point of generational change in residential dwellings, but in the interim period, a more comprehensive range of grants should be made available for less disruptive energy efficient measures such as replacement of windows and the introduction of pellet stoves.

Finally, the levels of match funding demanded of community and volunteer groups for capital projects must be revised. There are some brilliant ideas and concepts to transform the midlands that will require dedication, commitment and sacrifice, we need to ensure that focus and ambition is not lost to burdensome obstacles.

If you have any questions please let me know.

Thanks,

John