



Offaly Local Development Company

Submission on Behalf of the Community Clustering Initiative - In Response to the Draft Territorial Just Transition Plan for Ireland

February 2021

The Community Clustering Initiative welcomes Irelands Draft Territorial Just Transition Plan for the Midlands and makes the following Submission.

Background:

The Community Clustering Initiative is currently supported under the current Just Transition Fund – **West Offaly Quality of Life, Place, Experience – Helping Communities to Launch themselves on new paths to Sustainable Development.**

The project is facilitated by Offaly Local Development Company. It is a bottom up intervention that extends the “place based model” for growth and sustainability to a level of implementation that engages directly with those communities directly affected by the transition to climate neutrality.

1. Territories Most Affected

Communities in Offaly have been disproportionately affected by the accelerated cessation of peat production and the resultant job losses. The impact of transition is not only experienced at an economic level, but extends to all elements of life in rural towns and villages across the County. Communities have had to face an immediate reimagining of who they are, what they do and what type of place they want to be now and in the future. These communities are very aware that the transition to climate neutrality has the potential to further amplify the socio economic challenges they face on an ongoing basis.

We contend that greater consideration needs to be given at a sub- regional level to the needs of those specific communities most affected by the accelerated transition to climate neutrality and a specific designation should be given within the Territorial Plan to take adequate account of this;

2. Development Needs & Actions

This clustering Initiative builds on the foundational asset based community planning work with individual communities across County Offaly, who have or are in the process of developing specific actions that look at how the strategic development of natural and cultural heritage assets, can be used to underpin the economic and social sustainability of their local areas. The initiative is currently working with the communities of Banagher, Shannonbridge, Ferbane, Kilcormac, Pullagh/ Leamonaghan, and Ballycumber in West Offaly and will extend its work to

other areas in County Offaly over time. At present its' work is focused on the development of a comprehensive audit/ profiling of community led innovation in the following area:

1. Community based proposals walking/ cycle routes and paths for the repurposing and reuse of the bog rail network;
2. Peatland rehabilitation – community based proposals – amenity, biodiversity, heritage directly related to the surrounding peatland;
3. Development of amenity and recreation that add value and connect with county/regional/national strategies e.g County Offaly Development Plan 2021 - 27, Midland Cycling Destination, Shannon Masterplan etc;
4. Identification of services/ facilities development with potential to create local employment and enterprise opportunities.

In this context it is clear that communities see their future economic and social viability closely aligned to the reuse and repurposing of the land that surrounds as tourism offerings that encourage people to visit and stay, as local amenities that enhance area as a place to live and stay, and the development of services and facilities that are needed to sustain a vibrant local and visitor economy.

We suggest that due consideration be given to the potential that local led community based innovation can play in terms of supporting employment, micro enterprise, tourism, creative industries.

3. Communities as Equitable Stakeholders in the Process of Transition

This geographic clustering is underpinned by a recognition that communities are equitable agents of change in the process of transition and like their sectoral counterparts should necessarily be supported to build their capacity, extend their knowledge and skill and be supported to develop evidence based/ solution focused projects of scale that respond to the immediate economic, social environmental challenges that directly affect them in a strategic, co-ordinated cross community initiative.

We suggest that the clustering model proposed for economic sectors should be applied to supporting the capacity of those communities most affected by transition to deliver bottom up innovation.

We express our thanks to the EU Commission, the Department of Environment, Climate Action and Communication and the Eastern & Midlands Regional Assembly for the opportunity to respond to this public consultation on the Draft Territorial Plan for Ireland.

On Behalf of the Offaly Community Clustering Initiative

Offaly Local Development Company

February 2022

