

## **Offaly Local Development Company**

### **Draft submission to the territorial just transition plan**

**14<sup>th</sup> February 2022**

Offaly Local Development Company is a local partnership company providing a mix of multidisciplinary supports to individuals, communities and business start up's across the county. The company has a 30 year relationship with communities in Offaly working hand in hand with them to develop a range of innovative local solutions, addressing needs in employment, availability of community & social infrastructure, supports to foster enterprise (private and community) and access to training and tailored supports to individual, group and families.

This relationship is founded on building the capacity of communities, people and businesses that are at consistent risk of socio economic disadvantage, rural decline and will potentially be more at risk of further economic and social exclusion as a result of the process of transition.

In 2019 Offaly Local Development Company initiated an asset based community planning programme. To date 23 separate communities have been engaged in this work; developing strategic plans for re-imagining the future of their communities.

In tandem with this, is the development of the Peatlands Communities Clustering Initiative; initiated to provide a co-ordinated sub territorial response to the challenge and opportunities presented by Just Transition. This will be done through the development of community led projects of scale focusing on recreation and economic development of those communities most impacted by the transition.

#### **Ensuring the JUST in Just Transition:**

***“This is not just about the environment, it's about the community, it's about jobs; it's about justice.” - Eddie Bautista.***

With 42,000 ha of Peatland in the County, our citizens are profoundly affected by the transitioning to a low carbon society; it is incumbent upon us to do this in a way that provides diversification of income for our citizens and our communities. Supporting citizens to be the drivers of their own futures and their own communities is social inclusion. The transition to a green future is no different. Sustainability comes from collective action - that is designed and delivered in a way that includes everyone.

The history of both Bord na Mona and ESB's operations within the County goes beyond their landmass and energy production however – it is also about generational employment; the direct establishment of communities by these bodies in the 1950s when they commenced operations in the County; and it is about a cultural consciousness that has moulded these communities to what they are today.

The cessation in peat production has resulted in an immediate impact on the direct and indirect employment rates in Offaly. Employment figures from BnM in 2018 indicate that 858

people were directly employed in Offaly, this figures align with CSO stats from 2016 showing employment in Bord na Mona was higher in Offaly as a % of the at work population than any of the other counties within the region.

The Territorial Just Transition Plan must demonstrate a genuine approach to change through partnership and collaboration based on:

- mutual respect,
- aligned values in terms of social inclusion and support for those most communities and individuals within these communities who are most directly affected
- recognition and belief that our climate belongs to all - it is not exclusivity of academia, statutory bodies, departments or any one particular sector of our society
- a commitment of making our society a better place to live, work and enjoy through combined climate action

**The allocation of funding under the EUJTF should not just be based on a thematic intervention logic but also intersect with an apportionment of financial support to those geographic areas most affected by the transition.**

### **Development Need 1: Modernise the Business Environment and Create Employment Opportunities**

Action 1: Midlands Green Energy Cluster: Dedicated Staff and Development Plan

A green energy cluster located in the Midlands, supporting the development of renewable and sustainable energy technologies. Would entail creating a development plan which would include dedicated staffing to develop the proposal, carry out a cluster mapping exercise and co-ordinate a vision to carry forward into implementation stage.

OLDC welcomes the development of a Midlands Green Energy Cluster. In relation to the development plan for this action this needs to ensure that it includes community based energy proposals – particularly in those communities most affect by the transition – in tandem with private sector.

Action 2: Midlands Green Energy Cluster: Business Supports and Advice

Support the skills capacity for the development of the green energy cluster and the Midlands Retrofit Programme through providing business supports and advice for construction workers and businesses on how to establish and grow one-stop-shops for retrofit projects.

The development of skills in the green energy cluster needs to go beyond construction workers and retrofitting projects to include upskill in areas of other potential green energy projects such as biomass, solar - the technical skills these require and the business support they would need to be successful.

Crucially important is that the available skills within communities meet the demand of emergent growth sectors

Action 4: Entrepreneurship and Social Enterprise Training & Support for Low Carbon Services Fund staff and training to create business incubators focusing on supporting enterprises to set up in the green economy. Could include technical advisors to evaluate and mentor emerging low carbon projects and advise businesses on how to transition to more sustainable practices and engage with the green energy cluster. Provide mentorship within communities.

Support for capital development of appropriate incubation space should be considered to facilitate successful collaboration and transfer of knowledge in this area. Support for sub regional social enterprise innovation should also be included.

Action 12: Expand Midlands Retrofit Programme to Private Housing and Retrofitting Public Buildings

In line with energy efficiency priorities, retrofit private housing to be part of an expanded Midlands Retrofit scheme which is focussed on social housing. Also to consider improving the energy efficiency of all public buildings in the region to a level that is commercially viable.

Consideration should be given to community housing schemes and community facilities (in addition to public buildings) for inclusion in this programme.

Action 13: Supporting Smart Specialisation Strategies

A number of smart specialisation strategies have been identified as areas which could be further supported to enhance the productivity of the region, for example: a Food and Drink cluster, Robotics, Telecommunications and Sustainable Advanced Manufacturing.

This should be expanded to include sectors such as creative industries, design industry; traditional skills development; slow tourism & the tourism recreation sector and the circular economy potential.

Resourcing of such clustering initiatives should also be considered to ensure sustainability beyond networking.

## **Development Need 2: Enhance the Skills Profile**

Action 3: Midlands Green Energy Cluster: Training Centres of Excellence

This action would develop and enhance training facilities to enable the region to operate as a retrofit training centre of excellence, also supporting the development of the Midlands Green Energy Cluster, the Midlands Retrofit Programme and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan's Green Skills Action Programme.

This should be expanded beyond the retrofitting training to include other areas of specialism such as environmental management, climate change, energy management, alternative energy sources.

Action 5: Green Ambassador Enhanced Employment Scheme

Develop an enhanced (supported) employment scheme for impacted employees in "Green Ambassador" roles.

This would be a welcome addition and consideration should be given to prioritising the most disadvantaged areas and those individuals who are most distant from employment



and or training opportunities. In addition this could be linked to other schemes such TÚS, Rural Social Scheme; Local Training Initiatives and Community Employment Schemes and community groups such as Tidy Towns and Development Organisations.

#### Action 6: Career Guidance Personnel for Secondary Level Students Fund

Regional career guidance personnel to co-ordinate and provide information to existing career guidance services so that secondary level students are more efficiently matched to further and higher education and job opportunities in the region.

Provision of additional career guidance support in secondary schools which address the systemic social exclusion and underlying issues of educational disadvantage in some communities in Offaly

A range of pathways should be developed to support this, apprenticeships, PLC, Community education, proactive engagement with primary and secondary education, youth programmes and projects

### **Development Need 3: Promoting Environmental Sustainability and Industrial Heritage**

#### Action 11: Developing the Midland's Tourism Potential Support

Tourism initiatives in the Midlands links to build on the national JTF tourism projects and Fáilte Ireland's Hidden Heartlands. Tourism is growing in the Midlands on the back of both the new Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brand and on the renewed interested in the region from the domestic market during 2020 and 2021.

This development need should also support actions related to the Shannon Masterplan and Irelands Ancient East; investment in Smart Travel projects as well as looking supporting community based tourism based projects of scale as envisaged in Peatlands Clustering Initiatives. This community clustering initiative envisages the re-use of the bog rail network across a number of communities and its relationship to other activities proposed by communities in terms of peatland rehabilitation, its links to the greenway, blueway, historic/ cultural assets and the development services that generate local employment opportunities

The area of recreational tourism should be represented in this action as well.

#### Action 10: Extension of Peatlands Restoration

Expand the current peatlands rehabilitation scheme - the current Enhanced Decommissioning, Rehabilitation and Restoration Scheme (EDRRS) - from 33,000 hectares to cover additional hectares designated for rehabilitation or develop an additional/ distinct programme for National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) sites.

This needs to be considered in the context of providing additional economic opportunities for people living these communities and how they may avail of these opportunities.



Action 15: Support for the EU LIFE Project/Agricultural Training Peatlands and People Project includes Just Transition Accelerator, Peatlands Knowledge Centre of Excellence and People's Discovery Attraction. Skills development in agricultural practices through upskilling former peat workers to assist in creating local job opportunities. Support, animation and training services to upskill farmers for opportunities in sustainable agricultural activities.

This action should prioritise those with farming incomes that are below the national average; smallholders (of which there are many in Co. Offaly) and those for whom farming was a part-time profession and whose income was significantly support by their work in either Bord na Mona and ESB.

Support for establishment of services to support this category of farm should be re-developed and resourced.

#### **Development Need 4: Enhancing potential of region as a place to live and work**

There are many factors which support communities has places to live and work including access to recreational facilities – outdoors and indoors; access to high quality broadband; access to services and access to support systems. These needs to be reflected in within this development need. Title should include “Region as a place to live, work and be part off”.

Action 7: Scoping for Development Sites - FDI, Business and Community Facilities Carry out a scoping exercise to identify suitable sites for workspace investment including workplaces suitable for IDA and LEO businesses, remote working hubs and community facilities. This could include unused buildings which could be repurposed for regeneration of towns.

In addition to capital investment for repurposing and fit out of community facilities, developmental initiatives are also required to support the capacity of the community to operate these facilities and to ensure that the facilities are meeting the needs of people living in the community.

In the context of unused building for the regeneration of towns – the build environment is only one aspect to regenerating communities. Regeneration is a process which requires focussed social inclusion and rural development support.

Action 8: Repurposing of Existing Sites - FDI, Business and Community Facilities Further to Action 7 above, a dedicated fund would be made available to repurpose the existing sites including refitting technology and facilities. This may include unoccupied office space, factories, manufacturing centres, or other spaces.

This is welcome however needs to include a developmental fund – i.e. capacity building, working with local communities as well as potential external stakeholders.

Action 9: Community Support Fund for Microenterprise, Active Mobility & Circular Economy A community support fund to enable Local Action Groups to support employment and economic development through micro-enterprises, active mobility and the circular economy. Targeted at supporting small enterprises. Could play a beneficial role in terms of creating direct employment opportunities for displaced workers.



Core to this community support fund should be social inclusion and participation of community owned businesses as key collaborator; in tandem with the local development companies.

Community leadership programme targeted at change management, project managements skills, leadership & people, green enterprise, digital resourcing, farm based innovation in practice and biodiversity, community employment projects, space for social innovation projects that focuses on behavioural change.

Building capacity to projects of scale that have the potential to add value from the bottom up in terms of employment creation, enterprise development, social enterprise, community energy schemes, addressing the behavioural and cultural shift needed in communities around climate change

#### Action 14: Improved Local Mobility

Put in place improved regional transport links and improve bus links between towns, remote working hubs/offices and educational institutions to ensure better public transport infrastructure for potential employees and address rural isolation. May include electric vehicle charging points.

This action is welcomed and as well as improved regional transport; the rural transport project should also be included.

#### Contact Details:

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