

Towards a Green and Just Transition in Ballyhoura



BALLYHOURA
DEVELOPMENT CLG

tasc
Think-tank for action on social change

A poem for Ballyhoura

By Miriam Lenihan, Anglesboro, Age 11

*As I gaze along the Boro Road
Neath the Galtees standing tall
I dream of what the future holds
To benefit us all.*

*Temple Hill and Paradise
Home to birds, wee beasts and bees
We must try hard to care and mind
These friends among the trees.*

*We hear so much of climate change
Less wildlife and pollution,
We need to love our Galtee range
And look for a solution.*

*We welcome all to visit us or make themselves a space
We do not mind from where you come, religion or your race.*

*So come and see the lovely trails,
Bug hotels and bird hides
Fresh air and views to win your hearts
It's free on foot or bike.*

*There's room for all to work and learn
And look out for each other
Electric cars and solar power
Can help to save our future.*

*Our community is strong and kind
With care for every person,
Our future days will be our best-
Of that I can be certain.*

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Chairperson's Address

On behalf of the Board of Ballyhoura Development CLG, we warmly welcome the Ballyhoura Just and Green Transition Strategy. We are aware of the challenges faced by community groups, families and businesses across the area in creating inclusive communities and preparing for a just and green transition, and we hope that the inclusive process of developing this strategy can help underpin sustainable change moving forward.

The highlight of the strategy development process has been the level and quality of community engagement and conversations. We wish to acknowledge the commitment of the 603 people who shared their thoughts, local insights, and expertise and supported the development of this strategy.



The Board express their gratitude to TASC and to the staff of Ballyhoura Development, who have co-facilitated the consultation sessions and who will continue to support the implementation of sustainable and inclusive community-led climate and social initiatives. We hope that every community will find the information in this strategy useful and a guide to future development opportunities.

Mary Laffan, Chairperson, Ballyhoura Development CLG

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Towards a Green and Just Transition in Ballyhoura aims to set out a roadmap for community-led climate action across the Ballyhoura area. Taking on board community knowledge, capacity, assets and priorities, this strategy views climate action as an enabler of local development. Underpinned by TASC's People's Transition model, this 'whole of Ballyhoura' plan is intended to support communities throughout the region to plan for and benefit from the transition to zero emissions.

In 2022, Ballyhoura Development, who have been supporting community-led local development for 34 years, partnered with TASC, the Think-tank for Action on Social Change, to define an approach that would complement Ballyhoura's existing portfolio of work and place communities at the heart of the activities, projects, and solutions required to achieve an equitable and sustainable future for present and future generations. The research for this project was completed by TASC researchers Róisín Greaney, Deirdre Carolan, Rob Keogh, and Kieran Harrahill, with valuable support from Emmie Voet, Manuela Rosso-Brugnach, Seán Pender, and Julia Danilowa.

The development of this strategy took place over 12 months, from 2022 to 2023 and is structured thematically around six key areas where it was felt that a community-led development approach could support climate action that is fast, fair, and inclusive. The six key areas identified are 1) thriving inclusive communities; 2) energy generation; 3) the built environment; 4) transport and mobility; 5) agriculture, food, forestry, and the natural environment; and 6) regenerative tourism. Informed by extensive desk-based research and deep community consultation, it was made possible by the participation of 603 local people who lent their voices and time to this endeavour.

Analysis of the region revealed that Ballyhoura is a growing, ageing, and diverse place with a complex socio-economic landscape, encompassing rural hinterlands and villages, market towns, and peri-urban areas, underscoring the need for a place-based approach. Further analysis of each key theme revealed challenges such as reliance on fossil fuels for home heating, widespread car dependency, and the need to support low-income farm families during the transition. Opportunities for community-led climate action also emerged, including enhanced localisation of services, community ownership of renewable energy, community-led retrofitting, and regenerative tourism.

In the spring of 2023, Ballyhoura Development staff engaged with community members throughout the region, gathering insights into the unique capabilities, hopes, aspirations, challenges, and priorities of those who live here. The consensus was that Ballyhoura is a vibrant place with great heart, unrealised potential, and a rich history of active citizenship and volunteerism. People spoke about the region's natural beauty and expressed an appetite to be involved in community-led approaches to climate action. Community members described a desire for increased access to decision-making and greater inclusion of marginalised groups, older community members, and those living in remote areas. People also expressed challenges in transitioning away from fossil fuels at home, adopting sustainable transportation modes, and dealing with the increasing cost of living. Farmers identified issues such as farm consolidation, profitability, and their wish to be listened to and supported through the changes the climate transition will bring.

The vision for a Green and Just Transition in Ballyhoura by 2035, as imagined by attendees of the Ballyhoura Summer Networking Forum in June 2023, includes universally accessible rural bus services, locally accessible rail services, energy-efficient homes, inclusive and cohesive communities with improved access to local services, livelihood opportunities in farming, energy and retrofitting, remote and digital work, and a growing bio and circular economy.

The final phase of this project integrated findings from desk-based research and community consultations to set out a roadmap of potential projects and actions. Chapter 5 of this report outlines 18 community-led actions that combine climate action with local development and social inclusion. The actions include:

- Establishing repair cafés to promote a circular economy, local skills development, local intergenerational activities and community cohesion.
- Implementing community-owned energy initiatives to reduce local fossil fuel dependency and build community wealth in the long-term.
- Creating a community-led housing retrofit support service to provide tailored assistance to people across the region to upgrade their homes.
- Converting vacant buildings into community facilities and housing to address vacancy issues, create new local services and respond to housing shortages.
- Developing community-owned Electric Vehicle charging facilities powered by solar energy that would see surpluses reinvested into community social and climate action projects.
- Launching a community car service to link with public transport to reduce car dependency, transport deprivation, and social exclusion.
- Establishing a local food growing collective to enhance food security, promote biodiversity and support local farmers and growers.
- Creating community-managed native woodlands to provide a sustainable model of woodland management and accessible green space for community wellbeing.
- Developing community-owned visitor facilities and services to support regenerative tourism, local employment, as well as the provision of facilities for community members.

In addition to these actions, the plan outlines how Ballyhoura Development could integrate social considerations into its environmental and local economic development programmes, and environmental considerations into its social and local economic development programmes, emphasising that all climate actions should prioritise the well-being and dignity of all people, particularly those most marginalised. This Green and Just Transition Strategy offers an opportunity to embed a people-centred approach into climate action in Ballyhoura.

By viewing the transition as a long-term, place-based process, community-led local development has the potential to build a foundation of equity, address the needs and priorities of those experiencing socio-economic exclusion, and build support for transformative climate action. Moreover, as public spending on climate action is channelled into communities through programmes such as LEADER, SICAP, the Climate Action Fund, and the EU Just Transition Mechanism, it is hoped that this strategy can be brought to life through community-led initiatives across the Ballyhoura area. Finally, in addition to the plan laid out in the following chapters, it is our hope that the process of participating in and engaging with this project has been valuable to all who generously took part.

Young Voices art competition entries: How can Ballyhoura be more welcoming to people and nature?



Key Terms

Key Terms

Climate Action

Political, collective and individual action on climate change can take many forms. Climate action means stepped-up efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-induced impacts, including climate-related hazards in all countries; integrating climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning; and improving education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity with respect to climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning.

Just Transition

The concept of a Just Transition has its origins in the international labour movement. Just Transition is rooted in social dialogue and the participation of those affected at every stage of the process. While there is no one universally adopted definition of a Just Transition, the term has evolved from a specific focus on labour and support for affected workers in polluting industries, to a call for the transformation of society and the economy as a whole to address inequality.

Community-led Local Development

Community-led local development (CLLD) is a bottom-up approach to policy development that involves citizens at a local level in developing responses to the social, environmental and economic challenges we face today. The local development approach considers the potentialities of a place. Economic and non-economic factors influence local development processes. Among the non-economic factors, social, cultural, historical, institutional, and geographical aspects can be decisive in the process of local economic development. It offers a starting point for the creation of an enabling environment for a Green and Just Transition and expanding the capabilities of local communities. Communities across the Ballyhoura area have demonstrated an ambition to lead the way in community-led development over the past 30 years.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development has been defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development calls for concerted efforts towards building an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient future for people and the planet. For sustainable development to be achieved, it is crucial to harmonise three core elements: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. These elements are interconnected, and all are crucial for the well-being of individuals and societies.

The People's Transition

The People's Transition is a participative decision-making place-based model developed by TASC that views climate action as an enabler of local development (McCabe, 2020). The People's Transition model argues that including people and communities in the design, planning, and implementation of the transition to zero-carbon societies is not simply the fairest approach but also the fastest. Furthermore, it asserts that fast and effective climate action will be delivered when people see tangible improvements in their living standards and, as a result, demand rather than resist the radical transformation required to avoid catastrophic climate change.

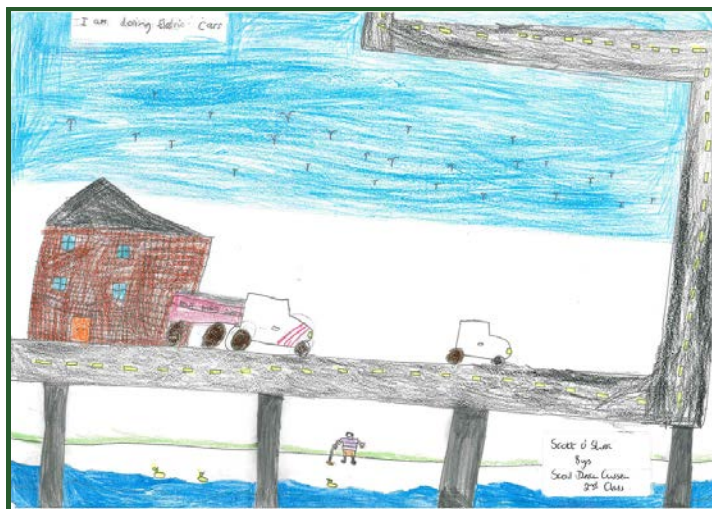
Community Wealth Building

Community wealth building (CWB) is 'a people-centred approach to local economic development, which redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people' (The Centre for Local Economic Strategies, n.d.). Community Wealth Building has five fundamental principles: 1) Plural ownership of the economy; 2) Making financial power work for local places; 3) Fair employment and just labour markets; 4) Progressive procurement of goods and services; and 5) Socially productive use of land and property (The Centre for Local Economic Strategies, n.d.). CWB is well placed to support a Green and Just Transition. Plurality and more democratic forms of ownership, in addition to fair work and greater autonomy along with the use of land and property in a way that benefits both people and the planet, contribute to the extent to which a transition is 'just' (Lacey-Barnacle, Smith and Foxon, 2023).

Capabilities Approach

Encompassing a capabilities approach to Green and Just Transition planning aims to ensure that actions taken to tackle climate change are developed on a foundation of equity. This approach recognises that people have different capabilities due to factors such as their gender, socio-economic background, or disability. It aims to promote equality by focusing on expanding people's capabilities and providing them with the resources and opportunities necessary to lead meaningful lives (Robeyns and Byskov, 2011).

Young Voices art competition entries: How can Ballyhoura be more welcoming to people and nature?



1. Introduction

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1.1. Ballyhoura Development

Ballyhoura Development is a partnership-based, community-led, local development company established by local communities in 1989 to facilitate sustainable place-making. The organisation supports 54 communities surrounding the Ballyhoura, Galtee and Slieve Felim mountains across north Cork and east Limerick by raising awareness, improving knowledge, and increasing capacity and participation in locally-led social, environmental, and economic development. The inclusive and professional bottom-up community-led governance structures, processes, and procedures give the organisation a deep reach into every local community. Furthermore, Ballyhoura Development facilitates the participation of marginalised voices and different lived experiences to progress the organisational mission of working in partnership to develop ‘empowered and inclusive communities’. Ballyhoura Development delivers more than 30 programmes across three core themes: 1) Community Development, 2) Economic Development, and 3) Environmental Development. Many of these programmes actively contribute to advancing a Green and Just Transition throughout the Ballyhoura region. Some of the more extensive programmes administered include:

- The LEADER Programme: Ballyhoura Development serves as the local implementing partner for the LEADER programme, which aims to foster sustainable development of Ireland’s rural areas.
- The Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP): Ballyhoura Development is contracted to deliver the SICAP programme throughout the Ballyhoura area. Established to tackle poverty and improve social inclusion through local engagement and collaboration, Ballyhoura Development employs a community development approach to provide supports and services to people across the region experiencing marginalisation and deprivation.
- The Rural Social Scheme: Ballyhoura Development is contracted to manage the Rural Social Scheme, an income support scheme for low-income farm families that provides services that benefit rural communities, such as social care, local environmental maintenance, village and countryside enhancement, as well as assistance with household energy conservation.
- Sustainable Energy Communities (SEC): Ballyhoura Development is contracted to coordinate the regional SEC and supports and empowers communities across the Ballyhoura area to engage with the SEC network and take local action to transition to a more energy efficient and sustainable future.

1.2. About this strategy

The work of Ballyhoura Development is dedicated to supporting communities to take action locally, as well as setting out region-wide strategies and projects to achieve its vision of an area with empowered, inclusive communities and a diversified economy. For over three decades, communities throughout the Ballyhoura region have demonstrated an ambition to lead the way in community-led local development and respond to the challenges of the day.

Climate change represents one of the greatest threats that humanity has ever faced, and its effects are already being felt across the globe—disproportionately impacting those who have contributed the least to the problem. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the best chance society has to guarantee a safe future will be through ‘deep, rapid and sustained reductions in greenhouse gas emissions’ (Lee et al., 2023, p. 57). However, simply shifting to a zero emissions economy without embedding equity and justice at the core risks maintaining and deepening existing inequalities and thus reducing public support for climate action. On the other hand, a bottom-up, place-based approach to climate action, informed by social justice and equity that proactively addresses inequality and drives local development, offers the potential to create an enabling environment for a Green and Just Transition. Over the coming years, this will be the next big challenge for both Ballyhoura Development itself and the 54 communities that comprise the Ballyhoura area.

Many ongoing initiatives undertaken throughout the area actively contribute to achieving a greener and fairer future locally. However, it became evident that a comprehensive region-wide strategy for Ballyhoura was essential to weave together this work and develop and support new opportunities for community-led climate action to harness the local economic, social and environmental opportunities of a genuinely Just Transition for Ballyhoura.

To facilitate the creation of this Green and Just Transition Strategy, Ballyhoura Development initiated a procurement process in May 2022. Subsequently, in June 2022, Ballyhoura Development partnered with TASC, the Think-tank for Action on Social Change, to undertake this work. TASC is a charitable public research and education organisation that has been a dedicated and established resource for more than two decades in addressing equality, democracy, and social inclusion. Since 2019, TASC has applied its expertise in inequality and democratic sustainability to the issue of advancing climate justice and realising a Just Transition. At the forefront of TASC’s work on climate justice is the People’s Transition model, which is closely aligned with the mission and vision of Ballyhoura Development. The model ‘views climate action as an enabler of local development, gives people and communities ownership of the transition to zero-carbon societies and enhances public support for climate action’ (McCabe, 2020, p.4).

This strategy identifies six key areas where Ballyhoura Development can support a community-led approach to climate action across the region over the coming years. They are:

1. Thriving inclusive communities
2. Energy generation
3. Energy poverty and the built environment
4. Transport and mobility
5. Agriculture, food, forestry, and the natural environment
6. Regenerative tourism

Set out across five chapters, this strategy presents data and findings from desk-based research on the Just Transition context and the Ballyhoura area profile. This desk-based research was then coupled with the valuable input received through deep community consultation. The strategy concludes by integrating the findings to present a roadmap of potential development actions, recommendations, and enabling activities for the benefit of communities in the Ballyhoura area.

1.3. Methodology

Snapshot in numbers:

- 12 months
- 3 phases
- 603 community members who generously shared their local knowledge, aspirations, needs, and development priorities
- 1 staff capacity-building session facilitated by TASC
- 2 Community Networking Forum workshops facilitated by TASC
- 36 focus groups across the breadth of the region involving 309 community members led by Ballyhoura Development's Programme Staff
- 16 one-to-one interviews
- 1 region-wide art competition involving 84 young people
- 1 LEADER consultation survey

Phase 1: Desk-based research

September - December 2022

The first phase of the strategy development process involved conducting a comprehensive desk-top study to map and analyse Green and Just Transition policies as they relate to Ireland and Ballyhoura as well as examining the six key thematic areas: 1) Thriving inclusive communities; 2) Energy generation; 3) Energy poverty and the built environment; 4) Transport and mobility; 5) Agriculture, food, forestry and the natural environment; and 6) Regenerative tourism.

Phase II: Primary research and community consultation

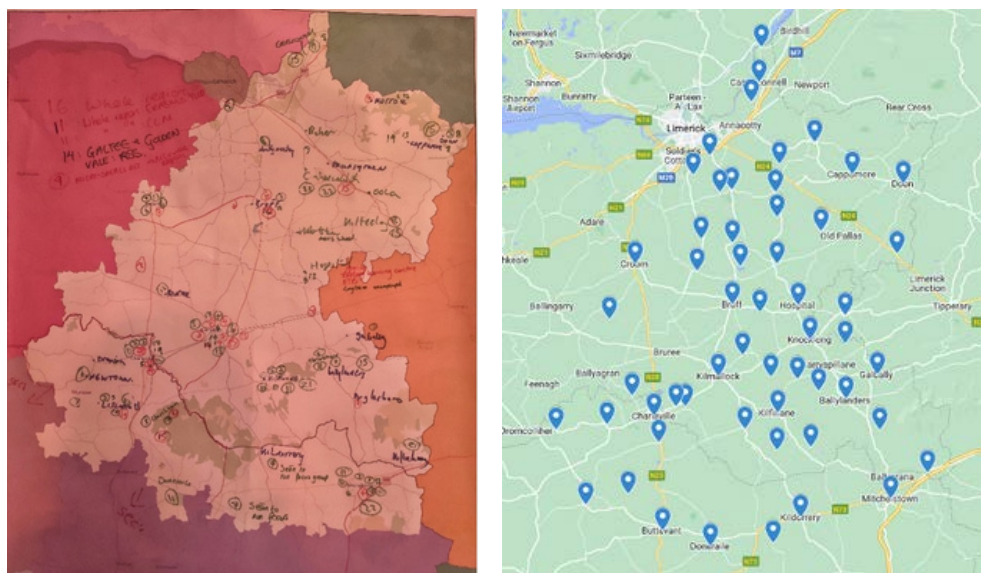
January - May 2023

Primary research and community consultation began in January 2023. The core aim of this phase of the strategy development process was to build capacity among Ballyhoura Development Programme Staff and local communities and to distil out the needs, challenges, and local development priorities of those living in the region.

In January 2023, TASC facilitated a one-day workshop and staff training session in Kilfinane with Ballyhoura Development to ideate, develop, and co-create the community engagement plan that would be delivered by Ballyhoura Development programme staff in the spring.

At the workshop, TASC began to support capacity-building among Ballyhoura Development programme staff for community engagement on a Green and Just Transition. The group then mapped out a plan for incorporating community consultations into forthcoming sessions, events and community visits. The output from this session was an engagement plan designed to be both geographically and socioeconomically inclusive.

Image 1: Maps indicating the location of community consultations



The community engagement phase began officially with a World Café session hosted by TASC during the Ballyhoura Winter Networking Forum in January 2023 (Image 1). More than 90 community members participated in the World Café style workshop and, over a cup of tea, worked together to discuss and identify Ballyhoura's strengths, capacities and challenges.

Image 2: Visual illustration of the outputs from the Ballyhoura Winter Community Networking Forum



Throughout February, March, April and May 2023, Ballyhoura Development programme staff led 36 focus groups, 16 one-to-one interviews, a region-wide art competition with young community members (see image 3) and conducted a survey as part of the Leader 2023 - 2027 Ballyhoura Development Local Development Strategy (LDS) consultation covering the breadth of the Ballyhoura region. People from the following groups across the region took part in the engagement process:

- Community group representatives
- Isolated rural dwellers
- People not in employment
- Young people
- People with disabilities
- Farm families
- Older people
- Young people not in education or employment
- Travellers
- Low income households
- And migrant groups

Image 3: Young Voices art competition: How can Ballyhoura be more welcoming to people and nature?



A total of 603 people across the region generously shared their local knowledge, priorities, and aspirations for the future. For many participants, this marked the first collective gathering since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

To conclude the primary research phase of the strategy development, at the Ballyhoura Development Summer Networking Forum on the 30th of May 2023, the project team presented the initial findings from the community consultations to build consensus around the needs, challenges and priorities that arose throughout the region and to present an award to the winner of the Young Voices art competition. Moving from the present to the future, TASC facilitated a visioning workshop with participants to develop a shared vision of what a Green and Just Transition in Ballyhoura could look like by 2035.

Image 4: Photos from the Ballyhoura Development Summer Networking Forum, 2023



Phase III: Development of the Strategy, recommendations and action plan

June – September 2023

Throughout the summer of 2023, the findings from phase I of the project were combined with the input from each person who participated in the community consultations. With this information, the project team researched and compiled a roadmap of potential development actions across the six key themes. It is intended that this roadmap will support Ballyhoura Development and the 54 local communities that comprise the region to drive forward people-centered climate action and community-led development for a Green and Just Transition in Ballyhoura's rural villages and hinterlands, towns, and peri-urban areas.

1.4. Climate action and a Just Transition: policy and context

1.4.1. EU policy development

National and international policy development informs this strategy. The need to embed equity and justice into climate action has its origins in the global labour movement as key actors and trade unions sought to harmonise environmental and social considerations in the 1970s. Over time, the term Just Transition evolved to encompass a variety of approaches that aimed to embed fairness into the decarbonisation of polluting industries. In 2015, the **International Labour Organisation**, a United Nations agency whose aim is to progress social and economic justice, adopted a comprehensive set of Just Transition Guidelines which emphasised the role of social dialogue in Just Transition policy development and the necessity for decent and quality employment for workers in affected industries (International Labour Organisation, 2015). That same year, the landmark **Paris Agreement**, the first ever legally binding international treaty on climate change, signed by 195 countries, including Ireland, set its goal to limit global warming to well below 2°C, preferably to 1.5°C, compared to pre-industrial levels. 1.5°C is deemed by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change to be a critical threshold beyond which society risks triggering far more severe climate impacts with disastrous consequences (United Nations, n.d.). Crucially, the Paris Agreement stresses the importance of a Just Transition, calling on all signatories to consider ‘the imperatives of a Just Transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities’ (United Nations, 2015). As the Irish Congress for Trade Unions points out, under the Paris Agreement, Just Transition should not be seen as an optional policy by the Irish government but as a binding legal responsibility as a signatory to the Paris Agreement (Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 2019).

That same year, countries worldwide adopted the **2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, containing the **17 Sustainable Development Goals**. This Agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that aim to address poverty, ensure environmental protection, and build prosperity. A just, equitable and inclusive transition is seen as a critical enabler for Agenda 2030 (United Nations, 2021). Ballyhoura Development has been selected as a Sustainable Development Goal Champion for 2023-2024, one of 26 organisations across Ireland recognised as taking a leadership role in supporting Ireland’s progress towards the SDGs.

In line with commitments under the Paris Agreement, **the European Green Deal**, launched in 2019, shapes Europe’s approach to tackling climate change and sets out a target for the EU to be the first climate-neutral continent by 2050 in addition to strengthening the EU’s 2030 emissions reductions target, in line with limiting warming to 1.5°C (European Commission, 2021a). The European Green Deal highlights the importance of a Just Transition. Going further, recent work by the European Commission on the European Green Deal underscores the need for a fair and equitable transition that addresses societal inequalities (European Commission, 2021b).

Ballyhoura Development is one of 24 partners that have been selected to work at a local level on the Shared Green Deal programme, which aims to stimulate shared European Green Deal actions. Alongside local organisations and governments across Europe, Ballyhoura Development will contribute to European efforts by implementing the *Stop, Look and Listen: Preserving the Biodiversity of Ballyhoura* project during 2023 and 2024.

As part of the financial pillar of the European Green Deal, the **Just Transition Mechanism** commits to mobilising a fund to the tune of €55 billion to address the transition's socio-economic impacts (European Commission, n.d.). Under the Just Transition Mechanism, €84.5 million has been allocated to the Midlands region of Ireland by the European Union in addition to a co-financing commitment of €84.5 million by the Irish state, representing a total investment of €169 million (Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, 2023a).

1.4.2. Irish policy development

In line with international and European climate goals, The **Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act (2021)** put Ireland's climate policy on a statutory footing for the first time in 2021 (Government of Ireland, 2021a). It establishes a legal obligation for Ireland to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 51% relative to 2018 levels by 2030 and reach net zero emissions by 2050. Emissions projections research conducted by the Environmental Protection Agency, published in 2023, found that Ireland is set to miss the 51% emissions reduction target by 2030 by a wide margin. Ireland is predicted to achieve a much lower reduction of 29% (Environmental Protection Agency, 2023a).

Each year, Ireland publishes a national **Climate Action Plan**. The Climate Action Plan sets out a roadmap of climate mitigation and adaptation measures as well as a Just Transition policy framework. Ireland's 2023 and 2021 Climate Action Plans commit to establishing a Just Transition Commission, which would provide advice to the government in support of Just Transition planning and implementation (Government of Ireland, 2021b; 2022); however, its implementation has been delayed (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2023).

Regarding the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Ireland's 2023 Voluntary National Review—the process through which states evaluate and report on their progress in implementing the 2030 Agenda—recognises the SDGs as providing a pathway to a Just Transition that transforms every sector of society, while leaving no one behind (Government of Ireland, 2023).

As evidenced by the Just Transition Mechanism, efforts in Ireland have focused predominantly on the Midlands region. A broader focus is recognised among civil society, workers' unions and parliamentarians as needed for a Just Transition (Dekker, 2020). Key Irish Just Transition publications call for a genuinely fair and equitable transition that can be understood broadly as follows (Moore-Cherry et al., 2022; McCabe, 2020; Mercier, 2020; Mercier et al., 2020):

- A Just Transition should be understood as a longer-term process
- A place-based approach is critical to the success of a transition
- Groups that are likely to experience disadvantage or poverty-exacerbating effects of the transition must be supported to shape both the processes and the outcomes of the transition
- Just Transition plans should focus on local and regional development rather than a sole focus on impacted workers
- Public investment will play a key role in achieving a Just Transition
- Decent work and quality jobs remain a crucial outcome of a Just Transition

TASC's People's Transition model, published in 2020, connecting local development to the urgency of climate action, puts forward a model for a community-led Just Transition that aims to listen to the hopes and aspirations of people, respond to the cultural fabric of society, and develop climate action rooted in local development that simultaneously tackles inequality and expands the capabilities of all people.

1.4.3. Limerick and Cork County policymaking

Under the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2021, each local authority must put in place a 5-year Climate Action Plan. It is expected that all local councils will have Climate Action Plans in place during 2024 (Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, 2023b). Preparation for Cork and Limerick Climate Action Plans is underway, with decarbonisation zones pinpointed for Newtown Perry in Limerick City and the market town of Macroom in Cork (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2022). To begin the Limerick Climate Action Plan consultation process, Limerick City and County Council have published a Climate Action Summary Report which, at the time of writing, highlights the importance of a Just Transition and notes that the decarbonisation zone of Newtown Perry 'will be a demonstrator for the Just Transition', but the document does not refer to what the process of a Just Transition will look like (Limerick City and County Council, 2023, p.10). The draft Cork Climate Action Plan includes in its principles a commitment to a Just Transition approach that is inclusive of all and sets out an action to collaborate with stakeholders to understand how climate action can be undertaken equitably in the county (Cork County Council, 2023).

Examining adopted policies, within the Limerick and Cork County Development Plans, which establish the development objectives of each county, a strong emphasis is placed on achieving a 'climate neutral economy' or 'a low carbon economy' (Cork County Council, 2022; Limerick City and County Council, 2022). In addition to climate change mitigation, both Limerick and Cork have climate adaptation strategies in place (Cork County Council, 2019; Limerick City and County Council, 2019). A requirement under the National Adaptation Framework, climate adaptation strategies set a baseline for extreme weather events in each county, forecast future weather risks, and outline actions for adaptation. Neither the Limerick nor the Cork adaptation strategy references a Just Transition.

1.4.4. Key takeaways

- Against the backdrop of intensifying climate impacts and an urgent need for deep, rapid and sustained greenhouse gas emissions reductions, Ireland is projected to miss its legally binding 2030 targets.
- While a Just Transition is recognised as imperative, commitment to embedding fairness and equity within the transition is uneven at a national and local level. To date, national efforts have predominantly focused on the Midlands region. At the same time, the extent to which Just Transition principles and processes are incorporated into local plans and strategies varies by policy.
- A community-led local development approach to climate action has the potential to support a place-based approach to climate action that is fast, fair, and inclusive, as outlined in the People's Transition model. As evidenced by the EPA, at the state level, current policies and implemented measures are not on track to deliver the scale of change needed this decade to achieve Ireland's legally binding targets and safeguard a green and fair future for all. In the Limerick and Cork region, Ballyhoura Development is well placed—as a locally embedded organisation dedicated to community, economic and environmental development—to show leadership in pursuing a Green and Just Transition.

2. Socioeconomic and demographic analysis of the Ballyhoura area

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2.1. Defining Ballyhoura

The Ballyhoura region spans two administrative areas: East Limerick and Northeast Cork. Named after the Ballyhoura mountain range, the region is home to more than 95,000 people living across 88 Electoral Divisions (EDs) and 54 local communities.

To facilitate a comprehensive comparison of trends and disparities in Ballyhoura's rural and urban areas and build upon previous socioeconomic analyses conducted on behalf of Ballyhoura Development, the 88 Electoral Divisions (ED) within the region have been categorised into three different typologies: 1) Rural villages and hinterlands; 2) Towns; and 3) Peri-urban areas. They are understood as follows:

- **Rural villages and hinterlands:** These areas primarily comprise the dispersed rural smaller towns, villages, and upland areas that have a high dependence on agriculture for employment and relatively low levels of accessibility. In these areas, Ballyhoura Development works to support local services, safeguard the natural environment, and promote and support economic opportunities, such as tourism, where appropriate.
- **Towns**, also known as market towns, comprise Ballyhoura's larger towns, including Charleville, Kilmallock, and Castleconnell, as well as the adjacent rural hinterland. Ballyhoura's towns can act as a counterbalance to the cities of Limerick and Cork. The development and protection of quality local and sustainable livelihoods is a key focus of Ballyhoura Development in these areas.
- **Peri-urban** areas are areas close to and under the influence of main urban centres that have undergone significant urbanisation. Features include high population densities and high levels of commuting to work with relatively low reliance on farming. Ballyhoura Development's work in these areas aims to ensure that these communities develop strong individual identities with ample access to community facilities and services to reduce the likelihood of these places becoming dormitory or commuter communities.

The majority of the Ballyhoura population lives in rural villages and hinterlands (63%), followed by the peri-urban areas (26%). 11% of the population lives in Ballyhoura's larger towns (Table 1).

Table 1: Population of the Ballyhoura region, 2022

Population 2022	(n)	(%)
Peri-urban population	24,848	26%
Town population	10,442	11%
Rural population	60,129	63%
Total	95,419	100%

(Source: Central Statistics Office, 2023a)

When this strategy was compiled, limited Census 2022 data was available at the electoral division level. 2022 Census data was used to examine population, age, gender and birthplace, while 2016 Census data was used to investigate education and employment.

2.2. Ballyhoura demographic profile and socio-economic analysis

2.2.1. Summary

Ballyhoura is a growing, ageing, and increasingly diverse place

2022 Census data

- **Population growth:** An additional 7,512 people are living in Ballyhoura since 2016. Rural and peri-urban areas account for most of the region's population growth.
- **Population growth:** Ballyhoura's towns have grown at a slower rate of 4.6%.
- **Age:** Across Ballyhoura's towns and rural areas, one in four people are under 17.
- **Age:** The population over 65 has been growing since 2006. In rural areas, there has been an increase of 2,713 people aged 65+ since the 2016 Census.
- **Gender:** 49.6% of the population are female. 50.4% are male.
- **Diversity:** 14%, or 13,472 people living in Ballyhoura were born outside of Ireland. In Ballyhoura's towns, 21% of people were born outside of Ireland.
- **Vacant domestic buildings:** Vacancy is higher in Ballyhoura's rural villages and hinterlands (8.9%) and towns (8.7%) in comparison to peri-urban areas (4.7%) against a national average of 8%.

2016 Census data

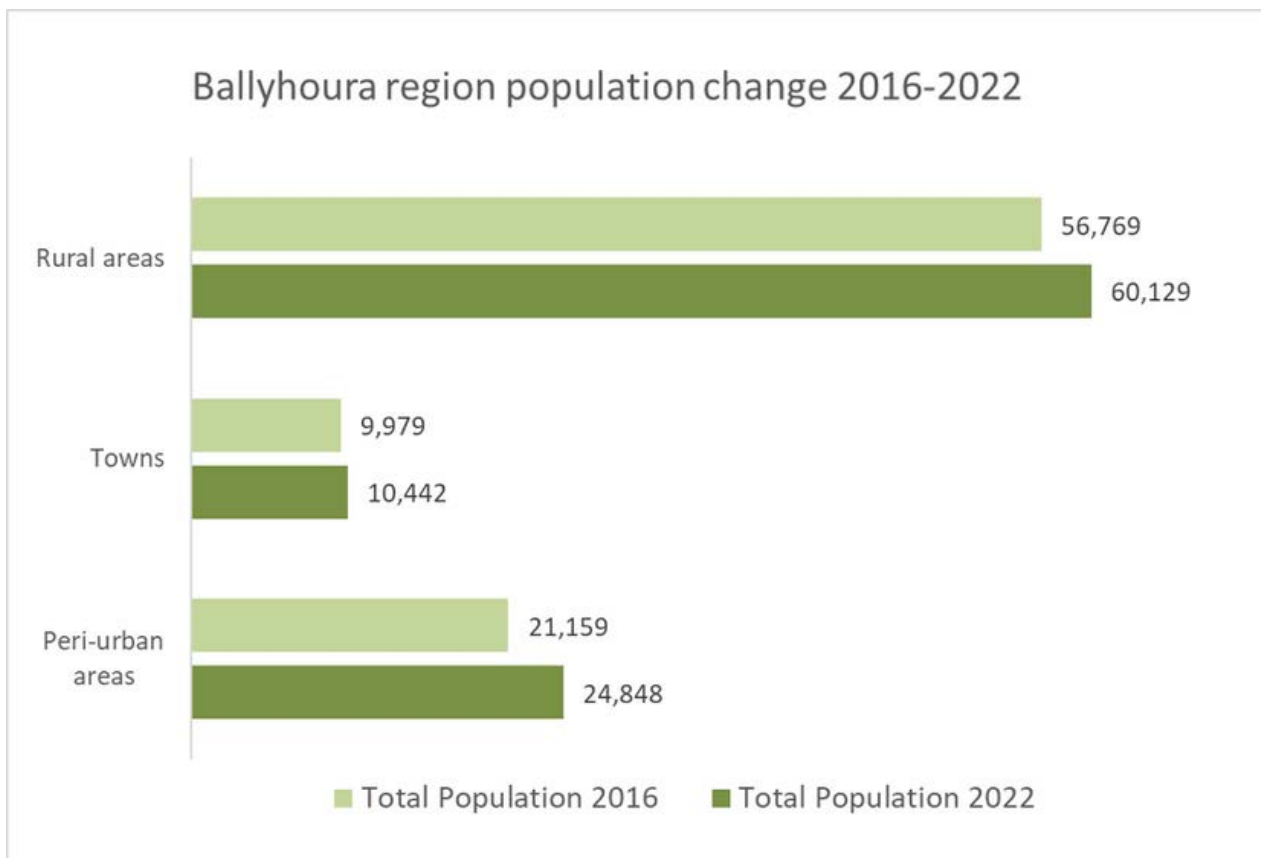
- **Economic status:** In 2016, 51% of the Ballyhoura population over 15 were working. 5.9% were unemployed.
- **Economic status:** Of the 8.2% who reported themselves as looking after the home/family, 94% were female.
- **Economic status:** In Ballyhoura's towns and rural areas, approximately 10% were students, 9% were looking after the home or family, and 5% were unable to work due to permanent illness or disability.
- **Economic status:** 16% of people in rural areas and 18% in towns were retired.
- **Industry:** 12% of the working population in rural areas worked in agriculture, forestry and fishing, while 6% worked in building and construction.
- **Education:** Across Ballyhoura's towns and rural areas, people are staying in education longer, and the gap in education attainment between men and women is narrowing.

2.2.2. Population

As of 2022, the population of the Ballyhoura region stood at 95,419, reflecting an increase of 8.5% or 7,512 people since the last Census was conducted in 2016. This compares to a 7.5% and 7.6% increase in the population of Limerick and Cork Counties, respectively, and an increase of 8.1% nationally.

Within the Ballyhoura region, rural areas of Ballyhoura grew by 5.9%, or 3,360 people, to a population of 60,129, accounting for almost 45% of population growth in the region. Ballyhoura's towns have shown a relatively slower growth rate of 4.6% (or 463 people) since 2016, rising to a population of 10,442, contributing to just 6% of the population increase. Peri-urban areas, on the other hand, have grown by 17.4% since 2016, accounting for almost half (49%) of the overall population growth. The absolute population in 2022 and 2016 can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Ballyhoura region population change, 2016-2022

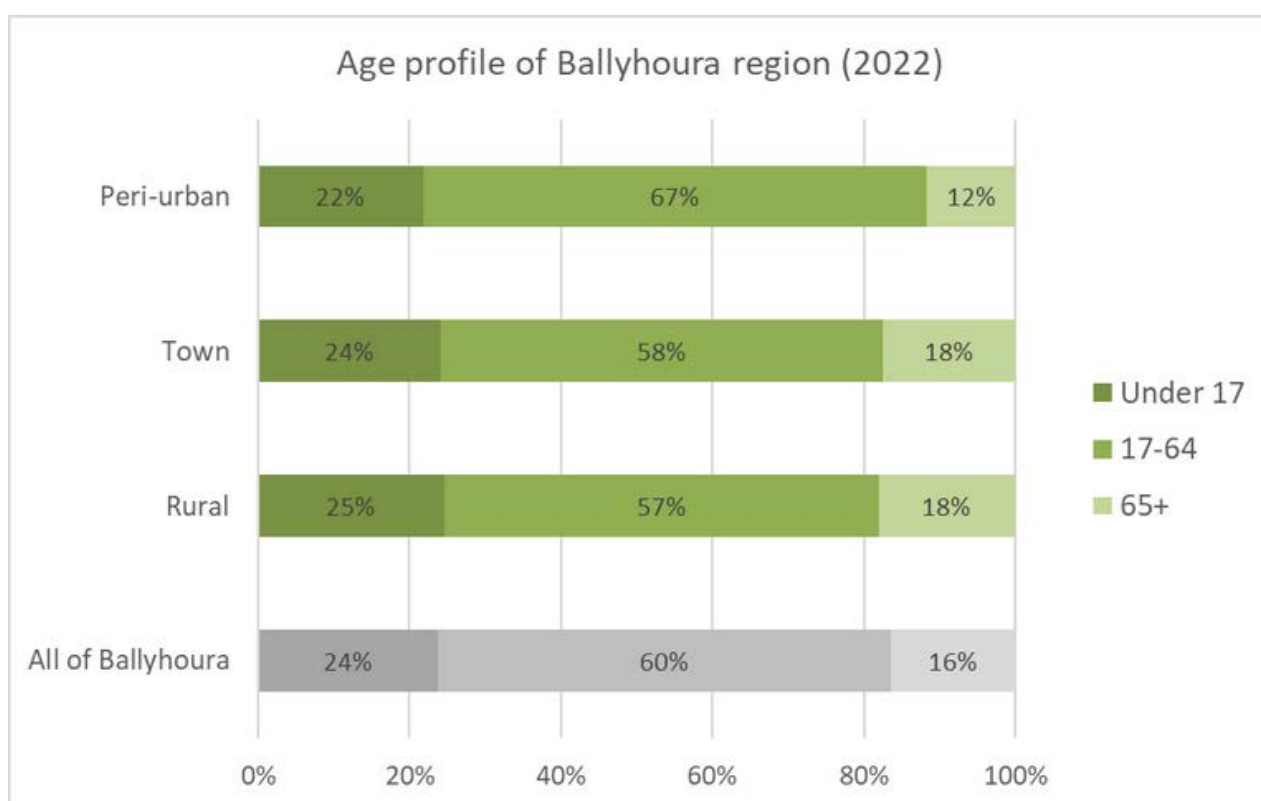


(Source: Central Statistics Office, 2023a)

2.2.3. Age

Almost one quarter (24%) of the population of the Ballyhoura region is under 17, while 60% of people are between 17 and 64, and 16% are aged 65 years or older. Notably, in peri-urban areas, the working-age adult population, those aged between 17-64, constitutes a more significant proportion, accounting for 67%, against the region average of 60%. This is lower in Ballyhoura's towns and rural areas, where the working-age population accounts for 58% and 57% of the population, respectively. Conversely, the percentage of the population over 65 is higher in Ballyhoura's towns and rural areas (18%) than in peri-urban areas (12%).

Figure 2: Ballyhoura age profile, 2022



(Source: Central Statistics Office, 2023a)

Comparing this data with the 2016 Census, it is noteworthy that the proportion of individuals under 17 has remained relatively stable at 24% of the Ballyhoura population. However, the share of working-age adults has declined from 62% in 2016 to 60% in 2022. Concurrently, the percentage of the population aged 65 and above has increased from 14% in 2016 to 16% in 2022, an increase of 3,186 people. A substantial portion of this increase in the population aged 65 and above has occurred in Ballyhoura's rural areas, where there has been an increase of 2,713 people over 65. Earlier socioeconomic analysis conducted on behalf of Ballyhoura Development that examined the towns and rural areas specifically indicated a consistent increase in the number of individuals aged 65 and above since 2006, signifying a likely surge in the demand for services catering to the elderly population. Moreover, the proportion of people aged 17-64 continues to gradually decline, from 66% of the population in 2006 to 57.5% in 2022 in Ballyhoura's towns and rural areas.

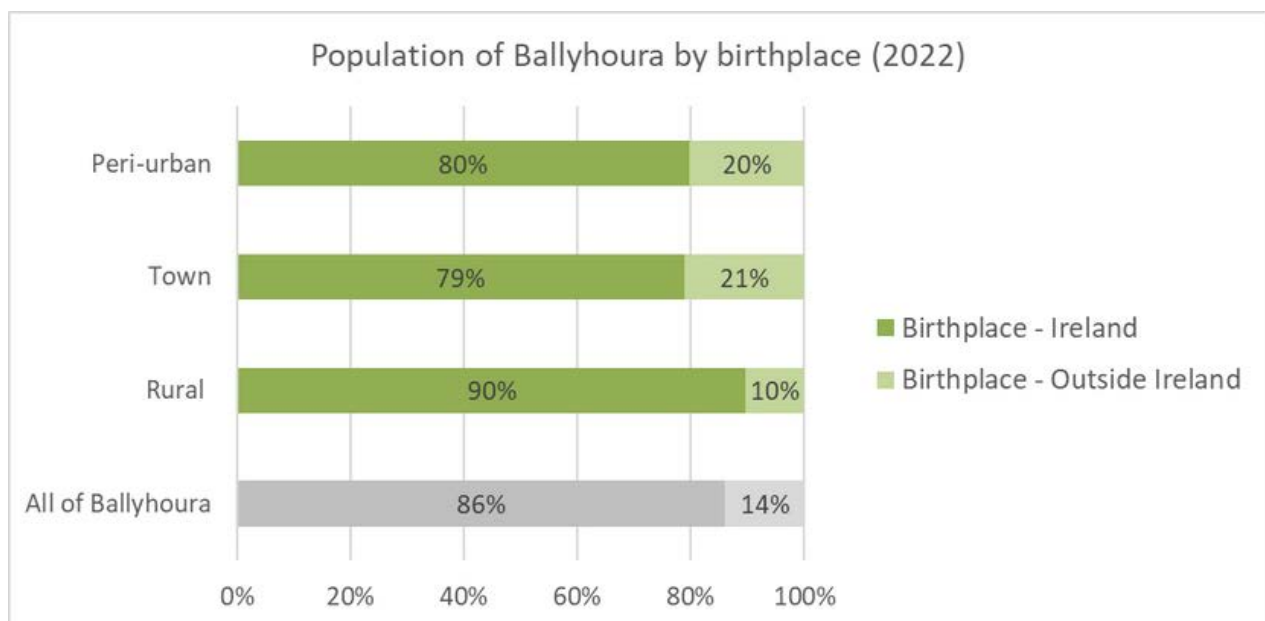
2.2.4. Gender

The population of the Ballyhoura region in 2022 was 49.7% female and 50.4% male. It is important to highlight that the 2022 Census offered only two possible responses to the question 'What is your sex?': Male and Female.

2.2.5. Birthplace

Regarding birthplace, as of 2022, 86% of the Ballyhoura population were born in Ireland, while 14% were born outside of Ireland (n=13,472). The percentage of individuals born outside of Ireland is highest in Ballyhoura's towns, where 21% were born in a different country and lowest in the rural areas of Ballyhoura (10%). It should be noted that Census data might not fully account for the total number of Ukrainian refugees who have settled in the Ballyhoura region, as the Census took place on April 3rd, 2022 before the full impact of the war was reflected.

Figure 3: Population of Ballyhoura by birthplace, 2022



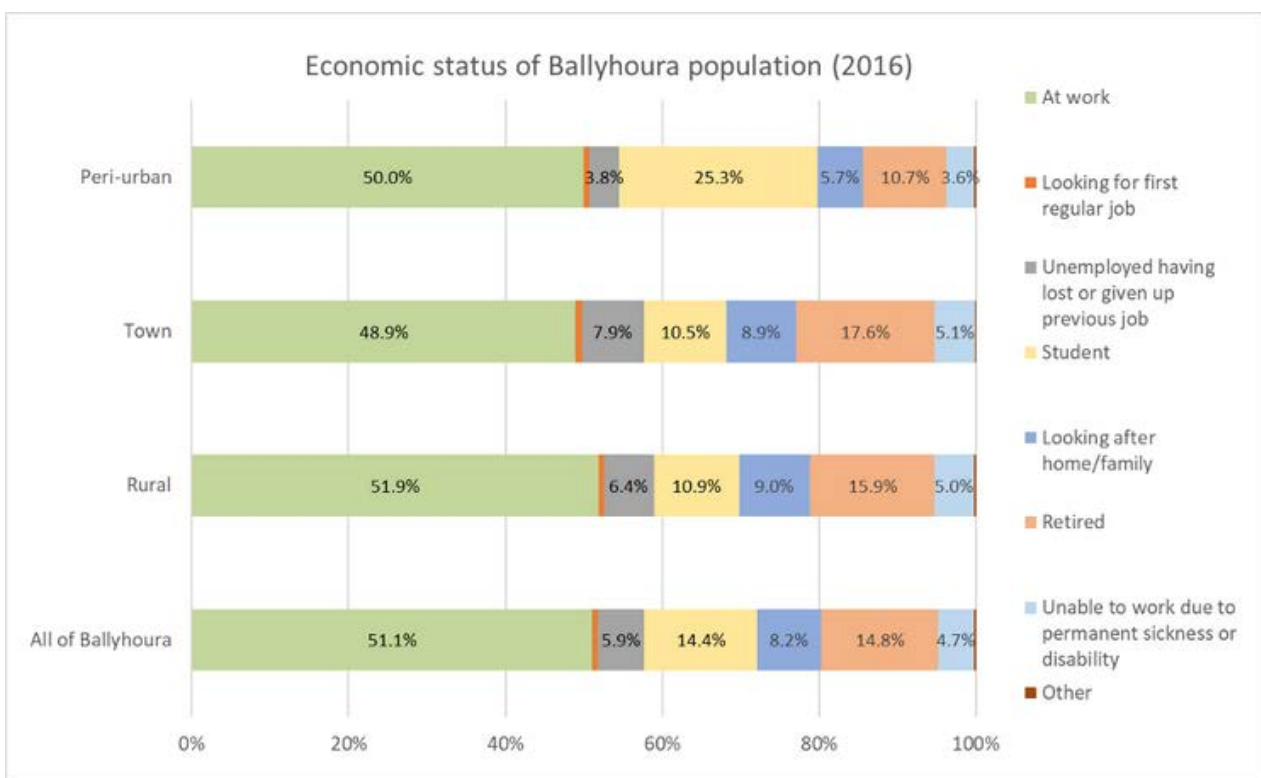
(Source: Central Statistics Office, 2023a)

2.2.6. Economic status

In 2016, 51% of the Ballyhoura population was at work. Unemployment was highest in Ballyhoura's towns at 8% and lowest in peri-urban areas (3.8%). Students accounted for one in four people in peri-urban areas against approximately one in ten in Ballyhoura's towns and rural areas. 15% of the population was retired, 8% looked after their home or family, and 5% could not work due to illness or a disability.

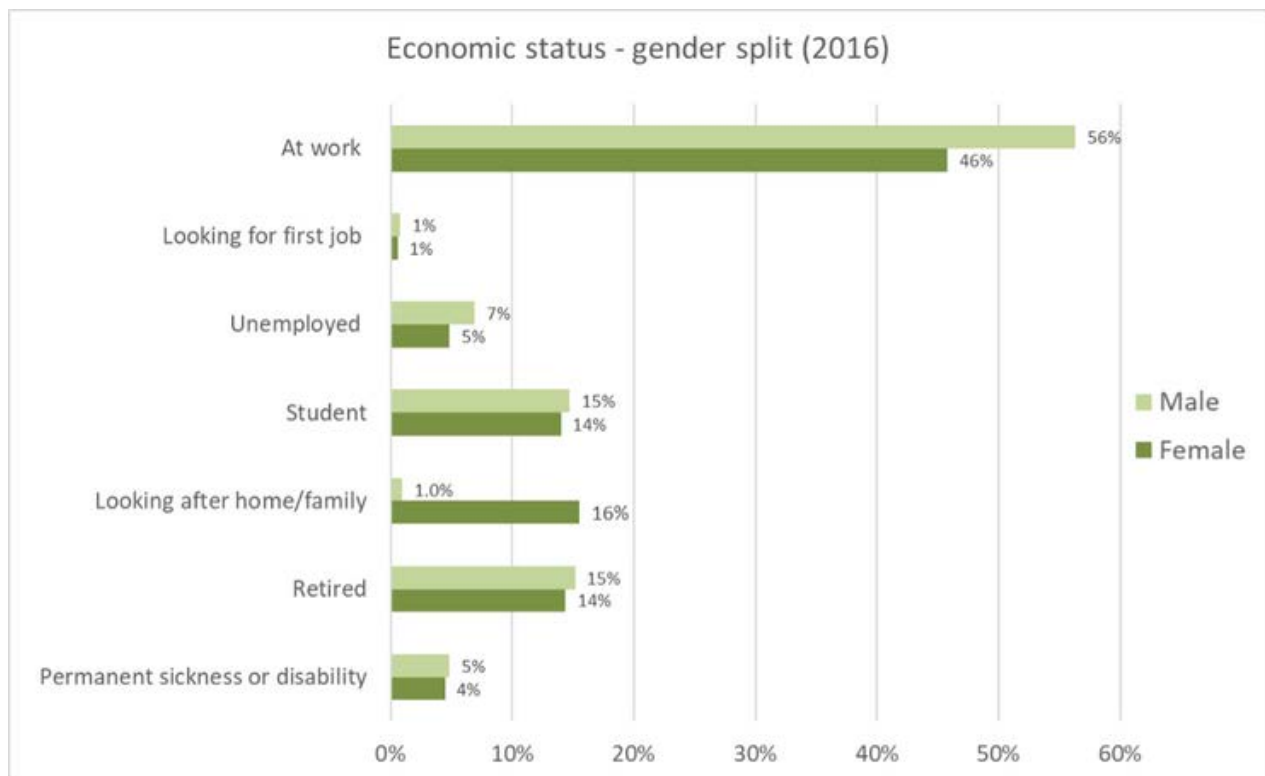
The number of retired people living in Ballyhoura had increased substantially in the two decades before 2016, reflecting the ageing of the overall population. In addition, the number of people unable to work due to illness or a disability also increased during this period. As can be seen in Figure 4, the number of people not working due to illness or a disability is lower in peri-urban areas than in Ballyhoura's towns and rural villages and hinterlands.

Figure 4: Economic status of the Ballyhoura population, 2016



(Source: Central Statistics Office, 2023b)

Examining the difference in labour force participation between men and women in the Ballyhoura region, the most significant disparity relates to those looking after the home/family. In 2016, of the 8.2% of the population over 15 and looking after the home/family, 94% were women. 15.5% of women (n=5,354) were looking after the home/family compared to 1% of men (n=332), largely accounting for the gap between the percentage of women (46%) and men (56%) who were reported as 'at work'. This divergence was higher in Ballyhoura's towns (16%) and rural areas (17%) than in peri-urban areas (11%). While it is likely that the disparity still exists, 2022 Census data suggests that, at a national level, the number of women looking after the home/family decreased while the number of men looking after the home/family increased (Central Statistics Office, 2023a).

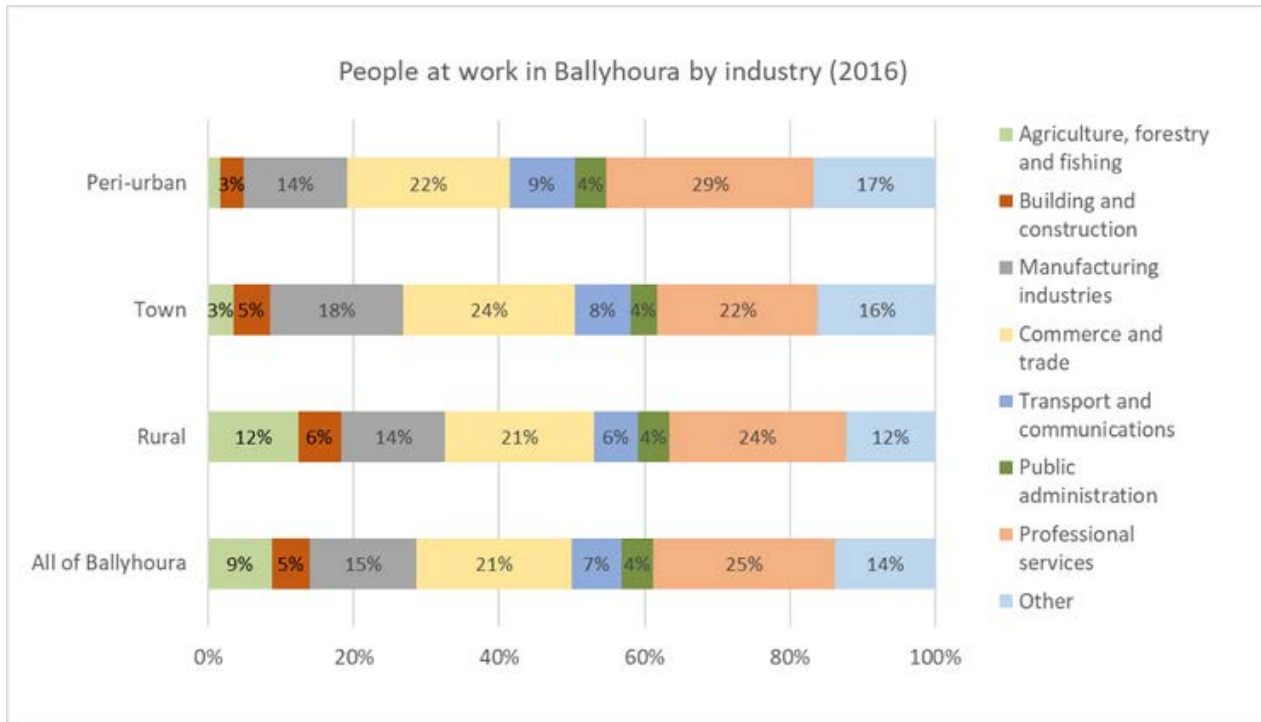
Figure 5: Economic status split by gender, 2016

(Source: Central Statistics Office, 2023b)

2.2.7. Employment industries

As of 2016, one-quarter of the Ballyhoura population at work was working in professional services, 21% worked in commerce and trading, 15% worked in manufacturing industries, 9% worked in agriculture, forestry and fishing, 7% worked in transport and communications, 5% worked in building and construction, and 4% worked in public administration. 14% of the working population were categorised as 'other'.

Comparing this data by typology, it is evident that the percentage of people working in agriculture, forestry and fishing is higher in rural Ballyhoura than in its towns and peri-urban areas, at 12% of the working population. Across other sectors, the differences between the three typologies are less pronounced. In peri-urban areas, the percentage of people working in professional services (29%) is higher than in Ballyhoura's towns and rural areas.

Figure 6: People at work in Ballyhoura by industry, 2016

(Source: Central Statistics Office, 2023b)

2.2.8. Education

While 2022 Census data relating to education in Ballyhoura was not available at the time of writing, an analysis of the region's towns and rural areas conducted on behalf of Ballyhoura Development following the publication of the 2016 Census highlighted several key trends related to education (Meridith, 2019). Firstly, the number of people across the region remaining in education after age 15 increased by 13.6% from 1996 to 2016. Additionally, the student population of Ballyhoura, expressed as a percentage of the population aged 15 to 24, increased from 54% to 75% from 2006 to 2016. This represented a significant step change compared to the decade prior. From 2006-2016, the gap between education attainment in rural and urban areas and between males and females narrowed substantially. The analysis also discussed how, in response to the economic crisis that began in 2008, young people who might have ordinarily left education to pursue work likely decided to remain in education due to the lack of economic opportunities in the country at the time. Looking forward, as more of the young population continues to secure higher levels of education and become more mobile, the challenge will be to provide decent work and education opportunities for young people in or within commuting distance of the region. Access to transport, namely public transport, will likely play an essential role in this.

2.2.9. Vacancy

Census 2022 provides information on the extent of vacancy in the housing stock of Ballyhoura at an ED level. The highest vacancy rates were in rural Ballyhoura, where 8.9% of the housing stock was vacant. In Ballyhoura's towns, the vacancy rate was 8.7%, while in peri-urban areas it was 4.7%. The vacancy rate for Ireland was 8%, so the rural and town EDs in Ballyhoura have a vacancy rate above the national average. There was a difference between the vacancy rate in Limerick and Cork EDs, with the latter having a vacancy rate of 9.6% and the former a vacancy rate of 7.3%.

2.2.10. Peri-urban, town, and rural trends

Previous analysis conducted on behalf of Ballyhoura Development has highlighted that the socio-economic profile of the area is complex and that there are variances with regard to past, present and future development across the three typologies (Meridith, 2019). Furthermore, differences in deprivation, employment, social, and education levels indicate varying needs. While the typologies of peri-urban, towns and rural areas are a helpful starting point to build an evidence base for this strategy, implementing fast and fair climate action on the ground will require tailoring at a very local level. As Ballyhoura Development supports and drives forward community-led local development for a Green and Just Transition, each of the interventions and actions outlined in Chapter 5 of this strategy will require a certain level of customisation to incorporate local knowledge and respond to the context, needs and local development priorities of each of the 54 unique communities that comprise this region. This aligns with research demonstrating that a place-based approach to climate action is essential for a Just Transition. One-size-fits-all approaches, on the other hand, can obscure how social, economic, cultural, and ecological characteristics differ across place, which risks producing unjust and potentially ineffective outcomes (Moore-Cherry et al., 2022).

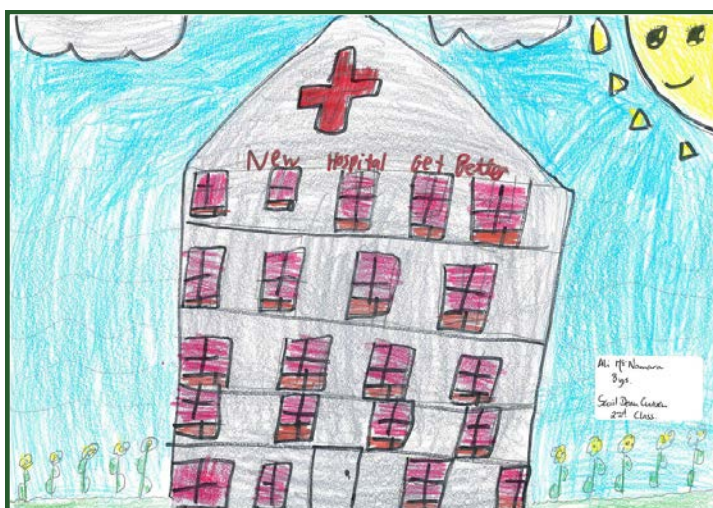
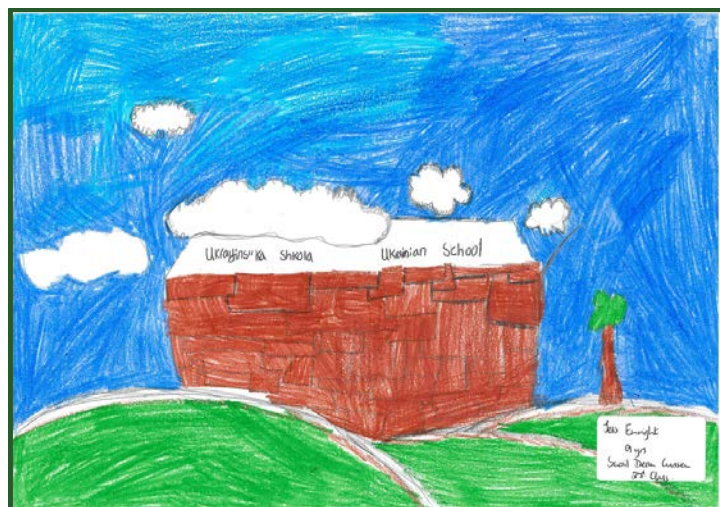
The need for a place-based approach to transition is especially relevant to Ireland's small towns and rural areas, where transitions are likely to be more difficult due to constraints in several areas, such as lesser access to services, employment opportunities, and amenities, in addition to significant car dependency (Moore-Cherry et al., 2022).

2.2.11. Key takeaways

- Ballyhoura is a growing, ageing and diverse region. Ballyhoura's rural and peri-urban areas account for most of the region's population growth. In 2016, 5,534 women registered their principal economic status as looking after the home/family compared to 332 men.
- The socio-economic landscape of the Ballyhoura region is complex, and a place-based approach to transition is needed. Furthermore, transitions will likely be more difficult in towns and rural areas. A uniform approach to transition across the region risks obscuring the unique characteristics and needs of each distinct Ballyhoura community. This strategy offers a starting point by classifying the region into three typologies. However, over the coming years, practical implementation of the roadmap of actions, projects and recommendations outlined in Chapter 5 will need to be tailored to account for the unique context of each 'place' that makes up the Ballyhoura region.

- The growing, ageing, and diverse population of the Ballyhoura region will require increased service provision for all age groups to meet the needs of the people living there. Localised or re-localised service provision can lay the groundwork for a fast and fair transition and create a foundation of equity by enhancing access to essential services, amenities, facilities, and employment opportunities. Under a Just Transition, enabling conditions that promote community development and equitable access to facilities and services should be pursued alongside more traditional climate actions outlined in Chapter 5. These could include existing programmes such as Community Childcare and After School Services, which support equitable access to childcare services essential for the well-being of both young people and their primary caregiver(s), as well as supporting primary caregiver(s) to be able to participate more fully in social, economic and cultural life in Ballyhoura.
- Ballyhoura is an increasingly diverse place. Community-led local development for climate action could serve as an avenue through which newcomers and traditionally marginalised groups are welcomed, included, and integrated into each community, thereby enhancing social inclusion, representation and access to decision-making in line with the principles of climate justice and a capabilities approach.
- Tackling the plight of vacant buildings across the region could provide the physical space needed to support access to services, housing, facilities and amenities as part of a Green and Just Transition.

Young Voices art competition entries: How can Ballyhoura be more welcoming to people and nature?



3. Six key areas for community-led action

3. Six key areas for community-led action

3.1. Thriving inclusive communities

Thriving inclusive communities as an enabling condition for a Green and Just Transition in Ballyhoura.

The process and the outcomes of the transition to zero emissions should aim to be equitable, fair, and inclusive, leaving no one behind. Structurally vulnerable groups in Ireland are more likely to be disadvantaged by a transition that is not just and does not seek to address inequity (O'Neill et al., 2022; Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 2023). They can include:

- People living in poverty
- Person(s) with disabilities
- Elderly people
- Migrants
- Minority ethnic groups
- Rural isolated dwellers
- Farmers
- Women
- Young people

As such, and aligned with the commitment under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to 'reach those furthest behind first', it is crucial that underrepresented, harder-to-reach and structurally vulnerable groups are involved in both the process and the outcomes of a Green and Just Transition for Ballyhoura.

As discussed in Chapter 2, catering to a growing and increasingly diverse population provides an opportunity to support the development of thriving communities in line with a Green and Just Transition across the Ballyhoura region by enhancing localisation of services, amenities, facilities and decent employment opportunities. Ballyhoura Development already conducts several programmes across the area that work towards this aim, such as the Social Inclusion Community Activation Programme, the aforementioned Community Childcare Service programme, the Healthcare Opportunities for Women programme, which supports women at a distance from the labour market to participate in socio-economic life, and Strive, which aims to help people with a disability to participate in local community and economic activities. Expanding on this work, as well as integrating these programmes into existing and upcoming Green and Just Transition projects and actions, could pave the way for an equitable transition.

3.2. Energy generation

Scaling up renewable energy generation across every county of Ireland is crucial to reducing fossil fuel dependency, achieving the country's climate commitments, and securing a safe future for generations to come. The energy sector accounts for 16.6% of Ireland's emissions. It has been tasked with the ambitious goal of reducing emissions by 75% by 2030, making it the sector with the most substantial emission reduction target (Environmental Protection Agency, n.d. a; Department of the Taoiseach, 2022).

The 2021 Climate Action Plan emphasises that community participation in the growing renewable energy sector will support achieving a fair and Just Transition of Ireland's power system (Government of Ireland, 2021b). At a national level, community involvement in renewable energy generation has primarily been facilitated through the Renewable Energy Support Scheme (RESS), which supports community energy installations from 0.5 to 5 megawatts. The Small-Scale Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (SRESS) is set to be launched in late 2023. This scheme aims to support communities and farmers to participate in renewable electricity generation and the energy transition and provide more accessible routes to implementation for community-led projects than the RESS. Unlike the RESS, the SRESS will not take the form of a competitive auction and will be continuously open for applications (Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, 2023c).

While energy generation data is not available for the Ballyhoura region, it is notable that both Limerick and Cork Councils signal support for the involvement of communities in renewable energy development. For example, Chapter 9 of Volume 1 of the Limerick City and County Development Plan on climate action affirms that 'it is a policy of the Council to support the development of community based renewable energy projects, subject to appropriate levels of environmental and planning considerations' (Limerick City and County Council, 2022, p.280). In the Cork County Development Plan, 'the Council recognises the importance of community ownership of wind energy projects and how they enable local communities to directly benefit from local wind energy resources and ensuring long term income for rural communities' (Cork County Council, 2022, p.300).

Despite the potential for community participation in renewable energy generation, research examining community energy in Ireland (Watson, 2020) has identified several challenges, including obtaining planning permission, securing the necessary finance, and gaining access to the national grid. Watson (2020) recommends that for community energy to thrive in Ireland, additional resources, policy support, and a flexible governance approach that would allow communities to explore options and experiment is necessary.

Furthermore, the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland recommends conducting a grid feasibility study before investing significant time and resources into a community energy project. This would include determining if there is capacity on the grid to host the energy project. If there isn't the required capacity, the project would have to incur the costs of upgrading the grid, which could potentially reduce the financial feasibility of the project (Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, 2021). To support those seeking to assess grid capacity, the Electricity Supply Board (ESB) publish a network capacity heat map on their website at www.esbnetworks.ie/new-connections/generator-connections-group/availability-capacity-map. The interactive map gives an indication of the capacity of each substation in Ireland to accommodate new developments.

Ballyhoura Development, through its programme of work, supports community involvement in renewable energy projects through the following activities and programmes:

1. Community Socioeconomic and Environmental Planning. Ballyhoura Development facilitates participative community-led socioeconomic and environmental planning with local communities across the region. This process helps identify opportunities with increasing numbers of communities seeking to understand the potential for energy generation at a community level.

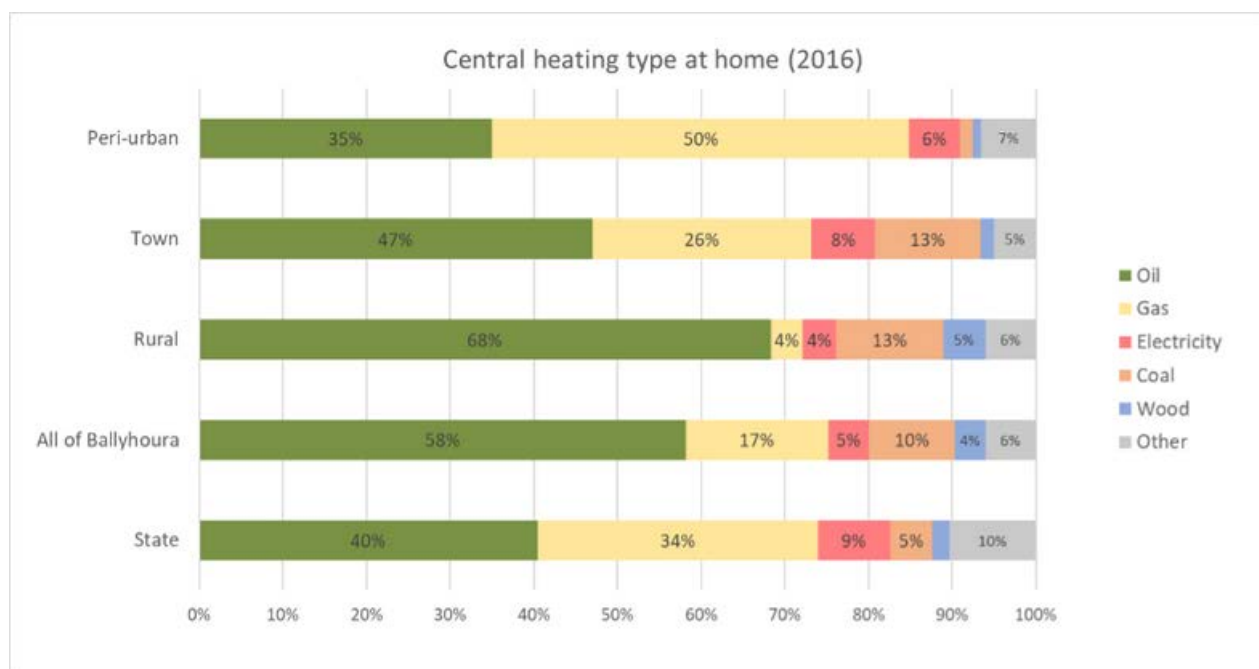
2. The Sustainable Energy Communities Network (SEC). Through the Sustainable Energy Communities programme, Ballyhoura Development facilitates local community involvement in the energy transition. Local communities across Ballyhoura are involved in the programme at various stages as they progress through the programme stages of Learn, Plan, Do. Several local communities have developed Energy Master Plans and are seeking to implement them over the coming years, while some wish to establish community-led energy generation projects.

3. Ballyhoura Development has supported various **community-led energy initiatives** since 2010, including exploring the potential for agriculture-based renewable gas and community and farmer-led collaborations in optimising new developments for the wider Ballyhoura area. Mitchelstown, in Ballyhoura, is set to be the location for Ireland's first grid injection facility for upgraded biofuel. This project, led by Gas Networks Ireland with funding from the National Climate Action Fund, is scheduled to commence construction in 2023 (Gas Networks Ireland, 2022).

3.3. Energy poverty and the built environment

Residential buildings account for 13.6% of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions due to their heavy reliance on fossil fuels for heating. An analysis of 2016 Census data revealed that 64% of homes in Ballyhoura were constructed before 2001, indicating an ageing housing stock. Moreover, an examination of primary home heating methods showed that Ballyhoura's towns and rural areas relied more on oil and coal for central heating than the national average (Figure 7). 58% of households in the Ballyhoura region relied on oil as their primary heating source, surpassing the national average of 40%. In rural areas of Ballyhoura, this rose to 68%. The region's dependence on coal for central heating was twice the national average at 10.2%. In rural areas and towns, 13% of homes used coal as their primary heat source.

Figure 7: Central heating type at home, 2016



(Source: Central Statistics Office, 2023b)

Community buildings also play a role in contributing to the emissions of Ballyhoura's built environment. Findings from a local community, cultural and arts facilities audit undertaken during 2019 and 2020 by Ballyhoura Development in partnership with Limerick City and County Council show that just 16% of community buildings were built after the millennium (Limerick City and County Council, 2021). In comparison, of the 84 community spaces audited in East Limerick, a large majority (84%) were constructed before that, and one-quarter were constructed pre-1900s, indicating an ageing stock of community spaces. Further, the audit found that in terms of energy efficiency, a majority of community buildings (64%) were rated by respondents as 'fair', 'poor' or 'very poor'. Across Limerick, the audit report describes how most community buildings depend on fossil fuels for heating and predicts that upcoming climate action grant programmes will focus on this area. Ballyhoura Development also undertook the audit of facilities across its Cork area and described the findings from the Cork audit as consistent with those emerging from Limerick.

Against the backdrop of the war in Ukraine, in 2022, energy poverty in Ireland rose to 29% of the population, the highest recorded rate since 1994/95 (Barrett et al., 2022). Increasing energy prices have disproportionately affected lower-income households, who spend a larger share of their income on energy expenses than middle- and higher-income families (Sweeney and Storrie, 2022).

Retrofitting and home energy upgrades present an opportunity to simultaneously reduce emissions and energy poverty, supporting a Green and Just Transition. Ireland's National Retrofit Plan sets out a target to retrofit 500,000 homes to a B2 rating standard by 2030. To date, retrofitting progress in Ireland has been slow. However, quarterly figures published by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland show it is starting to increase. In Limerick, 906 properties were upgraded during the first six months of 2023 compared to 283 in 2022, an increase of 623 properties (Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, 2023). For low-income households, high upfront investment costs, limited awareness of available grants, and the complexity of the application process characterise several of the barriers that impede progress (O'Connor, 2022).

Considering the unique economic, cultural and social values and norms that could be impacted by decarbonisation is regarded as an important aspect of embedding fairness into the transition. Recent research by the Environmental Protection Agency investigating residential solid fuel use in Ireland found that for some people, specifically in rural areas, removing access to non-traded solid fuels could increase the risk of energy poverty and deprivation (Eakins et al., 2022). Furthermore, it is also important to stress the importance of recognising and responding to the loss of cultural heritage that may be felt during the transition (Murphy et al., 2022). Not doing so risks leaving people behind and eroding trust in the transition process.

Research examining the impact of community-led retrofit has found that such programmes are particularly beneficial in overcoming barriers and can function as a catalyst for change within the broader community (Putnam and Brown, 2021; Haggett and Aitken, 2015). The potential for community-led retrofit to act as a delivery partner for local government in reducing energy poverty is also highlighted.

Many examples of community-led retrofit exist in Ireland, the UK, and elsewhere. In Ireland, out of the 17 projects awarded funding under the Community Climate Action Programme (Strand 2), four have a strong emphasis on community-led retrofit.

Ballyhoura Development, through their programme of work, supports community involvement in retrofitting projects through the following programmes and events:

- The Sustainable Energy Communities (SEC) Programme. Supported by the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, Ballyhoura Development coordinates the programme in the Ballyhoura area as well as for counties Clare, Tipperary, Limerick, Kerry and Cork. Through this programme, Community Energy Mentors are deployed to support, empower, guide, and mentor communities across the region to participate in the SEC network and to avail of programme funding to develop Community Energy Master Plans. The outcome of the process is an action-based plan for community-led energy initiatives.
- Community Energy Information Events. These events aim to provide community members with information and guidance on retrofitting and energy efficiencies applicable to homes and community facilities.
- Initiatives such as the Ballyhoura Be Winter Ready campaign which seeks to raise awareness and knowledge amongst community groups and individuals around energy use and efficiency through a complementary set of actions. The Ballyhoura Be Winter Ready campaign 2023/24 provides Home Energy Savings Kits (HESKs) on loan to communities and is complemented by a planned series of webinars on energy themes and a participative training programme due to launch in the spring of 2024.
- Working with partners to leverage expert resources to benefit community-led energy projects in the Ballyhoura region, both nationally and internationally. *Síolta Glasa*, for example, is one of 19 large-scale interdisciplinary projects recently approved for funding through the Creative Climate Action Fund II and will support community-creative partnerships to build capacity around decarbonisation in Limerick city and county over the coming years. *Síolta Glasa* is a collaboration between Limerick City and County Council, the University of Limerick, Mary Immaculate College, Ballyhoura Development, and expert mentors.
- Learning from best practices internationally, with the objective of facilitating communities to innovate and deploy techniques and technologies that have been proven elsewhere, within their local areas, e.g., Anaerobic Digestion (AD) and Aqua Thermal Energy (AQE). Ballyhoura Development is one of nine partners taking part in AquaCOM. This Ballyhoura Development led, European Union funded Interreg project will develop a replicable, scalable model for small-scale local or district heating networks using aqua thermal energy derived from rivers, canals and lakes over the period to 2027. Ballyhoura Development anticipates that participation in and learning from this project will enable communities across the region to replicate and take advantage of the potential for community-led aqua thermal energy projects within and for the benefit of their local communities. In the case of anaerobic digestion, Ballyhoura Development is active on several fronts: a) BD continues to work with farmers, farming stakeholders and companies active in this field to facilitate and develop a suitable model of harnessing the potential of AD for the benefit of local farming communities; and b) BD is engaged in advocating for enabling AD supports at a policy level.

3.4. Transport and mobility

Ireland has emerged as the second most car-dependent state in the European Union after Cyprus (European Commission, 2022), with the transport sector accounting for 19% of greenhouse gas emissions (Environmental Protection Agency, n.d. a). Under the national sectoral emissions ceilings, transport was allocated an emissions reduction target of 50% by 2030 (Department of the Taoiseach, 2022). To meet this target, Ireland's car-dependent transport system will require a significant redesign, but doing so will provide additional co-benefits such as improved quality of life and better health outcomes (OECD, 2022).

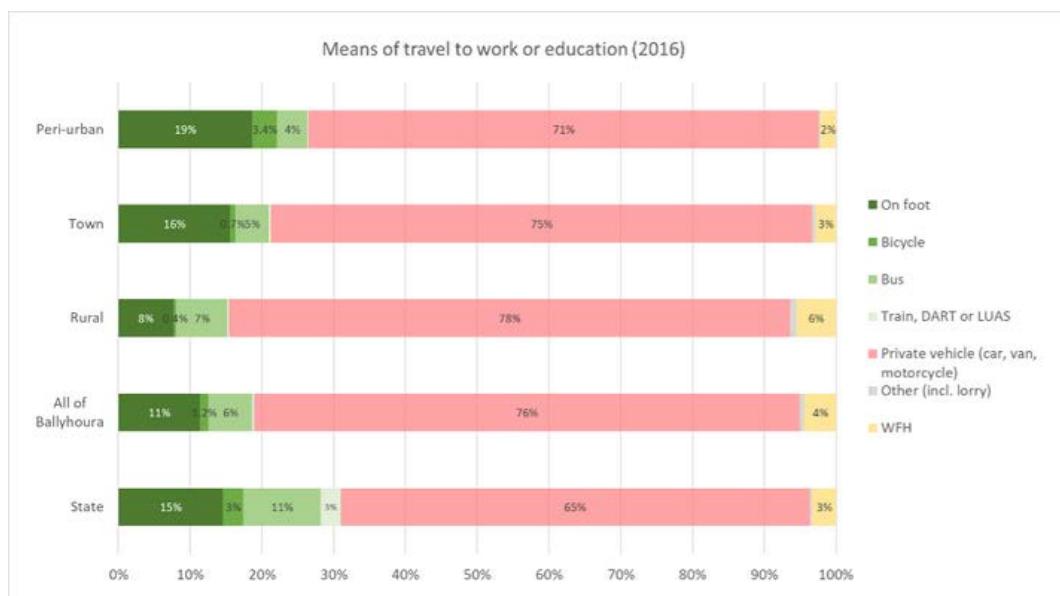
A high level of car dependency in the Ballyhoura area is evident in the 2016 Census data. When writing this strategy, commuting data from the 2022 Census had not been released at the ED level. Still, figures available for the state revealed that the number of people driving to work by car in Ireland increased by 4% between 2016 and 2022.

In 2016, across the Ballyhoura region, 76% of commuters travelled by private vehicle. This figure surpassed the state average of 65% in all three Ballyhoura typologies (Figure 8). Commuter journeys include journeys to work and to school or college for the population over the age of 5. The commuter population living in rural areas were more likely to use a car, van or motorcycle (78%) than those living in Ballyhoura's towns (75%) and in peri-urban areas (71%).

6% of commuters in the Ballyhoura region travelled by public transport in 2016, against a state average of 14% (Figure 8). Just 0.2% cited train travel as their mode of commuting to work or education. The use of buses for commuting was highest in rural Ballyhoura at 7% and lowest in the peri-urban areas at 4% in 2016. However, journeys on foot featured more prominently in Ballyhoura's peri-urban areas and towns, where 19% and 16% of people cited walking as their primary way of commuting to work or education. This ranked higher than the average for the state at the time (15%).

Commuting by bicycle in Ballyhoura is not widespread. Just 1.2% of commuters over the age of 5 cited cycling as their primary mode of transport, a majority of whom (72%) live in peri-urban areas.

Figure 8: Means of travel to work or education, 2016



(Source: Central Statistics Office, 2023b)

3.5. Agriculture, food, forestry and the natural environment

3.5.1. Agriculture

Over recent years, the impact of agriculture on the environment has become a significant factor in discussions on climate action in Ireland. The sector is responsible for the largest share of greenhouse gas emissions at 38% (Environmental Protection Agency, n.d. a). This is caused by the level of methane and nitrous oxide emissions from the sector.

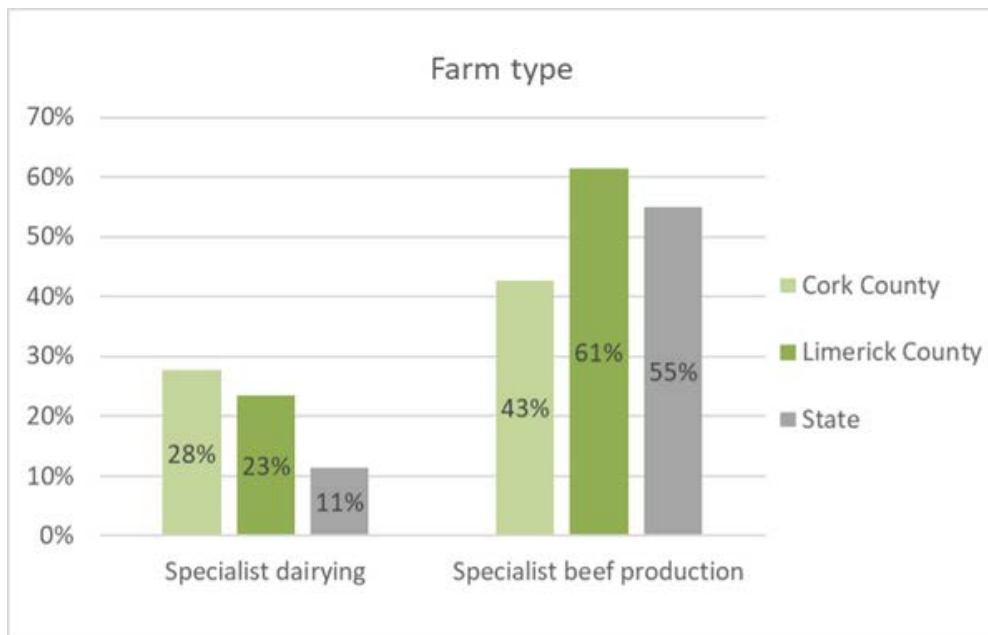
Agriculture is a sector that experiences significant inequality. As outlined in McCabe (2020), pervasive income inequality combined with vulnerability to extreme weather and emissions reduction measures underscore the need for a Just Transition for agriculture in Ireland.

While all farmers in Ireland risk being impacted by an unjust transition, dairy farms are typically larger and more profitable than beef farms. Income per hectare is lowest for cattle-rearing farms at €334, with 59% in Ireland earning €10,000 or less in 2021. On the other hand, 72% of dairy farms recorded an average family farm income of more than €50,000 in 2021 (Dillon et al., 2022).

To compare the 2020 Census of Agriculture to a previous analysis conducted on behalf of Ballyhoura using the 2010 Census of Agriculture, Ballyhoura is split into two typologies for this section: Ballyhoura-Cork and Ballyhoura-Limerick, which excludes peri-urban areas.

In 2010, a trend of farm consolidation in the Ballyhoura-Cork region was identified. The average farm size in Ballyhoura-Cork at the time was 38 hectares (Meridith, 2010). In 2020, the average farm size in Ballyhoura-Cork rose to 39.6 hectares, indicating that the trend of farm consolidation in the region continued throughout the last decade. In 2020, the average size of a farm in the Ballyhoura-Limerick region was 38 hectares. This compares to the national average of 33.4 hectares.

Examining farm type, specialist beef production is the most common farm type in Cork, Limerick, and the state, with 61% of farms in Limerick and 43% of farms in Cork engaged in specialist beef production. However, it is noteworthy that the percentage of farms involved in specialist dairying in Cork and Limerick is higher than the national average.

Figure 9: Percentage of farms dedicated to specialist dairying and specialist beef production, 2020

(Source: Central Statistics Office, 2022)

Ballyhoura Development, through its programme of work, supports the farming community and foregrounds the central role that farmers can play in protecting the environment. As well as that, Ballyhoura Development facilitates and supports access to funding for community and farmer-led projects. This is achieved through programmes such as LEADER and the European Innovation Partnership (EIP) scheme. Additionally, the organisation assists farmers in supplementing their income through the Rural Social Scheme and supporting farmers and farm families to take an active role in nature restoration. Examples include Ballyhoura Development's involvement in EIP projects focused on biodiversity regeneration in a dairying environment, as well as regularly running soil health workshops, talks on the importance of biodiversity in farming, and workshops on hedgerows and linear biodiversity habitats on farms.

3.5.2. Food

Ballyhoura Development takes an active role in leading and implementing several community food programmes, such as:

- **Ballyhoura Food Hubs.** Ballyhoura Development coordinates an online portal that showcases the food production spaces available across the region, including community food kitchens, demonstration kitchens, and food innovation centres with the aim of supporting small and micro food businesses.
- **Community Food Initiatives.** Ballyhoura Development supports communities to access safe and healthy food, learn about nutrition, develop cooking skills and prevent food waste.
- **Savour Food – Waste Reduction.** An initiative set up to support Ballyhoura businesses to reduce their food waste.
- **Social Farms, Community Allotments and Gardens.** Ballyhoura Development supports organisations that run social farms, community allotments and garden initiatives across the region.

The transition to a resilient, sustainable and equitable food system can be supported by urban and rural communities as well as by Ballyhoura's farmers. For example, community gardens could promote food security and access to locally produced food and reduce food poverty, while efforts to reduce food waste encourage the development of a more circular economy.

3.5.3. Forestry

Alongside agriculture, land management will play an essential role in responding to the climate crisis. While agriculture is Ireland's predominant land-use category, forested land is a crucial carbon sink (O'Rourke, Byrne and Smith, 2023; Environmental Protection Agency, n.d. b).

Forestry policy in Ireland has been a contested space in recent times. While it is positive that the Irish Government aims to increase forest cover, communities have reported negative socioeconomic impacts from increasingly large-scale and privately owned forests (Fitzgerald, n.d.). Furthermore, there are concerns about the type of forestry being pursued, namely the planting of monocultures such as the Sitka spruce. In January 2023, the European Commission director for biodiversity expressed concerns about Ireland's strategy of planting Sitka spruce on important land for biodiversity (Houses of the Oireachtas, 2023).

Findings from Ireland's National Forest Inventory in 2022 show that forest covers 12.4% of Cork's total county land area and 10.5% in Limerick. Of all counties, Cork has the largest share of forested land at 92,471 hectares. At the same time, Limerick recorded the most significant annual increase in volume (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine of Ireland, 2022).

In a survey on public attitudes to forestry conducted in 2021 by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, the most important reasons for planting new forestry, according to participants, were to support wildlife (38%), to provide space for relaxation and support mental health (21%), to support tourism and recreation (17%) and to tackle climate change (15%). Only 1% thought timber production was the most important reason for planting new forestry (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, 2021b).

3.6. Regenerative tourism

Up-to-date data on the tourism sector in the Ballyhoura region is limited, although the report titled *Ballyhoura Country 2020 – The Way Forward* provides some insights. The information presented in that report, however, is now dated. The report cites estimates that in 2012, the Ballyhoura region attracted over 0.5 million visitors, representing a total spend in the local economy of €42 million (Tourism Development International, 2014). Day trips were estimated to account for over half of these visits, while 262,000 visitors stayed more than a day. Of the latter group, 182,000 were estimated to have stayed in paid accommodation, while the remainder stayed with friends or relatives. These figures should be treated as indicative as they are estimates and are not recent. Indeed, the report suggests that these estimates are likely to be relatively high. However, until more up-to-date information is available, they provide some insight into the size of the tourism sector in Ballyhoura. The report also contains information on the number of accommodation providers in the area. The report estimates that there were 94 accommodation providers in the area, including hotels, guesthouses and B&Bs, farmhouses, self-catering, holiday cottages, youth hostels, and caravan/camping parks. As a decade has lapsed since this data was collected, the local visitor accommodation landscape may have changed since. From an employment perspective, the report estimates an employment base in tourism locally of more than 1,500 jobs.

Ballyhoura is one of the select destinations in *Ireland's Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy 2023 – 2027*, where it features as an outdoor recreation destination. The Hidden Heartlands strategy aims to develop a tourism sector that is sustainable and regenerative, which benefits both local communities and nature. Fáilte Ireland estimates that in 2019, the Hidden Heartlands attracted 4.1% of overseas visitors and 6.7% of domestic visitors (Fáilte Ireland, 2023b). Therefore, from a tourism perspective, Ballyhoura is part of a broader region that is relatively under-visited by domestic and overseas visitors, representing a significant opportunity for local development if the cultural and natural assets of the area can be leveraged, promoted, and enhanced. The strategy's vision is that by 2032, the Hidden Heartlands will be a leading destination in Europe for regenerative tourism, bringing an opportunity for Ballyhoura as one of its featured destinations.

The concept of regenerative tourism is at the core of the Hidden Heartlands strategy. It refers to a model of tourism that 'gives back more than it takes, that not only protects and limits environmental damage, but actively and intentionally delivers positive benefits to nature, habitats, community and places' (Fáilte Ireland, 2023a, p. 6). The aims of regenerative tourism include diversifying local economies, creating jobs, restoring and protecting biodiversity, creating transformative experiences for visitors, and improving facilities for local communities. Regenerative tourism has become a development priority for Ballyhoura Development, in line with the priorities of the local tourism sector, community organisations and Fáilte Ireland.

3.7. Key takeaways

- 1) **Thriving inclusive communities:** Expanding existing community development programmes that promote social inclusion and reduce inequity should be considered integral to achieving a Green and Just Transition across the Ballyhoura area. In addition, new actions and programmes should be equality-proofed to ensure that structurally vulnerable groups are included and benefit from the changes coming down the line.
- 2) **Energy generation:** Ballyhoura Development has been supporting community involvement in the energy transition long before the development of this Green and Just Transition strategy and thus is well placed to take the lead on supporting communities to pilot ambitious renewable energy generation projects. Furthermore, the organisation could apply an area-wide approach to pilot projects whereby communities across the area can learn from and be inspired by one another. The upcoming Small-Scale Renewable Electricity Generation Scheme is hoped to provide the necessary framework for supporting community groups to embark on energy generation projects and implement their SEC Energy Master Plans.
- 3) **Energy poverty and the built environment:** In 2022, energy poverty rose to 29% in Ireland. Census data highlighted that 64% of homes in Ballyhoura were built before 2001, and homes in rural areas and towns were more reliant on oil and coal for central heating than the national average. An audit of community buildings in Ballyhoura-Limerick in 2019/2020 produced similar findings of an ageing stock of community spaces and widespread fossil fuel dependency. Retrofitting offers a triple-benefit solution in line with a Just Transition by reducing energy poverty and residential emissions while creating local employment opportunities. However, economic, social and cultural barriers can impede uptake for low-income families and communities. Community-led retrofit has the potential to overcome the obstacles to retrofitting and several related projects underway across Ireland, such as Retrofit Ready—an Irish Local Development Network led project in collaboration with Local Development Companies in Sligo, Leitrim, Cavan and Monaghan, PlanEnergy and the Atlantic Technological University—could serve as a blueprint for action or a potential avenue for inter-region collaboration.
- 4) **Transport and mobility:** 2016 Census data shows that car dependency is widespread across the three Ballyhoura typologies. The differences in mobility patterns by typology suggests the need for a tailored approach to action development in the area of community-led transport. While measures such as reallocating road space and expanding public transport services are the responsibility of the State, there are areas such as shared mobility services for last-mile transport, community transport, car-sharing, peer-to-peer sharing, and shared use of charging infrastructure, where solutions could be developed and implemented by community groups (OECD, 2022).
- 5) **Agriculture, food, forestry and the natural environment**
 - a) **Agriculture:** Ongoing farm consolidation in the Ballyhoura region, income inequality across farm types, and a history of agricultural intensification represent challenges both in terms of emissions reductions within the sector and in relation to the impact on those who are farming smaller holdings in the Ballyhoura-Cork and Ballyhoura-Limerick regions, particularly beef farmers. Without national or regional Just Transition plans in place, a community-led approach could begin to take innovative measures locally to support Ballyhoura farmers to diversify their practices and encourage farmers and community members to participate in more sustainable food systems.

b) **Food:** There is potential for community groups, both urban and rural, alongside farmers, to play an important role in supporting access to locally grown food and promoting a circular economy by reducing food waste.

c) **Forestry:** Policies promoting increased forest cover are becoming contested. Forest planting that does not benefit communities and focuses solely on economic return risks eroding trust in climate policy. Community-led approaches such as community-managed woodlands could offer a nuanced approach to carbon sequestration in the Ballyhoura region and provide co-benefits such as increased access to green space and recreational activities, as well as supporting wellbeing and community cohesion.

6) **Regenerative tourism:** There is significant potential for regenerative tourism to be promoted as a means of community-led local development and community wealth building in Ballyhoura through projects such as community-owned visitor services and facilities, tourism enterprises, etc. With tourism assets like the Ballyhoura Mountain Bike Trails, the Ballyhoura Way, and the Slieve Felim Way, regenerative tourism in the area could be enhanced by opening additional accommodation and experiences locally.

Young Voices art competition entries: How can Ballyhoura be more welcoming to people and nature?



4. Community consultations

4. Community consultations

4.1. Thriving inclusive communities

Community-led local development approaches aim to build on an area's social, environmental, and economic strengths. The consultations revealed recurring themes surrounding the notion of 'community', including community spirit, the region's potential, opportunities for cross-community networking, and a history of volunteerism and collective action. These elements serve as fertile ground on which to build the foundations for transformative change. However, identified areas for improvement, such as enhancing social inclusion, ensuring equitable access to social infrastructure, and a need to bring decision-making closer to people, particularly those on the margins, highlight the places where more can be done to build capacity at a local level and to ensure a fair, just, and inclusive transition that leaves no one behind.

4.1.1. Community spirit

Community vibrancy and spirit were consistently praised as a primary strength during almost every consultation. Participants described the region as welcoming with 'great heart, spirit and [where people] pull together when there is need'.

Community care and support were highlighted, with participants noting that people look out for one another, extending their hospitality to newcomers and offering support to those they may not know well. The significance of community was regarded as fundamental to the essence of the Ballyhoura area, as one group emphasised: 'It's the people that make the place.'

Throughout these discussions, numerous community-led groups and clubs were consistently named as contributors to community spirit and vibrancy across the region. These included Ballyhoura Development, the GAA, soccer clubs, men's sheds, women's sheds, Tidy Towns, heritage groups, book clubs, youth groups, drama clubs, and local markets.

4.1.2. Social inclusion

Social inclusion was a widely discussed topic during consultations. Community members had a predominantly positive outlook, particularly regarding the experiences of older people, people with disabilities and newcomers. However, some community members expressed feelings of exclusion due to discrimination, rural isolation, and the effects of the digital divide.

During consultations in Ballyhoura's towns, members of the Traveller community highlighted that the strong support network within their community is not extended beyond it. Discrimination was raised as a challenge faced by the Traveller community 'every day'. As one participant remarked to the session facilitator: 'It's fine for you to be here, and you get on great with us, but at the end of the day, you are being paid. If you found out that my family was moving in beside you, I bet it would be different.'

Travellers also reported discrimination in education, employment and social settings.

Other issues related to social inclusion voiced by participants encompassed the challenge of rural isolation and the digital divide. Community members, particularly those living in isolated rural areas, spoke about the 'post-Covid disconnect'. They described a sense of diminished activity and less vibrant community life, particularly emphasising the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Regarding the digital divide, older people in rural Ballyhoura shared the difficulties they face accessing information and resources. During the 2022 Winter Community Networking Forum, one participant poignantly remarked that 'the digital divide is becoming more of an abyss than a divide'.

4.1.3. The potential of the Ballyhoura region

Consultations frequently highlighted the region's immense potential. During the Community Networking Forum, there was agreement that fresh energy, due to an increasing population, could invigorate towns and villages and set a positive feedback loop of progress in motion. There was a shared perception that the return of young people to the area could be a valuable social asset in supporting the region to realise its potential. The consultations revealed an openness to innovative ideas and a strong willingness to collaborate with other groups throughout the area, reflecting a region-wide attitude. The potential for enhanced cross-community networking emerged as a recurring theme during several consultations and the idea of having somewhere in Ballyhoura to look to as a case study was important.

'There's a lot to be said for just visiting other communities...You don't have to reinvent the wheel all the time'.

4.1.4. Volunteerism and collective action

Across consultations, describing their strengths as a community, participants spoke about being good at working together and achieving things collectively, with community members willing to help out. This was linked to the importance of volunteerism throughout the region and the sense that things would be a lot worse without volunteers: 'People are volunteering to keep the community alive'.

People also reported an eagerness to be involved in community activities and felt there were a lot of opportunities to come together for events and activities and that their involvement was valued.

While the sentiment around community engagement and collective action was predominantly positive, concerns arose regarding the succession of ageing volunteers and the need to increase volunteer numbers. These concerns were echoed across various rural locations, at the Winter Community Networking Forum, and at region-wide consultations, where community members expressed hopes that more young people would get involved in community-led development. Increasingly busy lives and the need to leave Ballyhoura for work were listed as barriers to volunteerism across the region.

Concerns about volunteer succession arose predominantly in rural areas of Ballyhoura, but not always. Participants at a rural focus group spoke about how 'there is a good core [of young people] who are willing to get involved, and they are getting their peers involved as they go along.'

In addition, participants at a focus group in a Ballyhoura town highlighted the emergence of a younger cohort stepping into community organisations and a ‘changing of the old guard’ bringing with it an infusion of fresh ideas.

4.1.5. Social infrastructure

Social infrastructure refers to the interconnected systems of spaces, services, amenities, institutions, and communities that provide opportunities for social connections to thrive (Latham and Layton, 2019). Social infrastructure is fundamental to well-being and local identity and contributes to a sense of place. It can refer to health, care, education, community and sports organisations, and other services.

Consultations highlighted a perception of an uneven provision of social infrastructure across the region, discussing how there have been losses in some places and gains in others. There was cohesion across consultations that expanding social infrastructure and providing additional community spaces would bring new opportunities.

While insights related to social infrastructure do not neatly differ across the three Ballyhoura typologies, several participants from northeastern areas of the Ballyhoura region, relatively close to Limerick City, described how they appreciated and valued their local community facilities and services. A participant in rural Ballyhoura noted how ‘the local community hall is really busy; it’s open every night and is one of the biggest facilities in the area.’ Community members in a Ballyhoura town spoke about the diversity of cultural and sports activities in the area and described the University of Limerick as ‘on the doorstep’. Participants in other Ballyhoura towns expressed a wish for their town centres to become hubs of activity, with vibrant main streets as opposed to being a ‘drive-thru with traffic’.

In several remote areas and villages, residents expressed a desire to expand social infrastructure locally. Consistently, consultations underscored the lack of activities for teenagers and older children across the region. Participants highlighted the need for spaces like skateparks that cater to this age group, filling the gap between ‘the playground and the pub’. They emphasised the importance of providing options for teenagers who may not be inclined toward sports, as the existing offerings were deemed insufficient within their communities.

4.1.6. Decision-making

A prevailing sentiment emerged regarding the lack of community involvement in local government decision-making during consultations. Participants expressed feelings of having little say in matters concerning their area and the perception that some decisions were made without their knowledge or input. There was a feeling that people’s input wasn’t taken on board following local government consultations with communities.

Furthermore, participants attributed this lack of access to decision-making to factors such as geographical location.

For instance, some felt that being located far from major urban areas like Cork or Limerick City resulted in being overlooked in decision-making processes, which were perceived to prioritise the needs of urban areas over rural ones. Participants also stressed that decision-making processes should recognise and incorporate local knowledge, particularly in rural areas.

Young participants voiced their sense of exclusion from government decision-making processes and expressed uncertainty about how to make their voices heard. In a rural area, a group of young people shared that they felt they had limited opportunities to contribute due to their age and lacked guidance on where to go or whom to approach.

Members of the Traveller community in a Ballyhoura town also expressed a sense of voicelessness, noting that politicians often neglected to engage with their community during local elections.

4.2. Energy generation

Possibly influenced by Ballyhoura Development's extensive work leading the region-wide Sustainable Energy Community network, participants expressed a strong interest in the transition to renewable energy sources and identified solar energy as a significant opportunity for individuals and community groups. In a focus group discussion involving a range of representatives from various community groups and social enterprises, the potential for selling solar-generated electricity back to the grid was highlighted as a potential source of income for Ballyhoura communities. At the 2022 Winter Community Networking Forum, participants showed optimism about the potential for community-owned energy projects as long as they were executed correctly. Participants also expressed a desire to install solar panels in their homes. However, they frequently cited the significant upfront investment required as a barrier. Further discussion about retrofitting is included in the next section of this chapter.

While there was a strong interest in renewable energy, discussions also revealed the obstacles hindering progress in this area. The primary barriers identified included the significant upfront costs and the need for support for communities embarking on community-owned energy projects.

Concerns regarding the energy transition were evident across multiple consultations. In a focus group involving low-income families and farm families, one participant remarked that 'It will impact financially on our community, the move away from fossil fuels. How will we pay for the change? Where will the money come from?'

Participants also emphasised the necessity for enhanced assistance and funding at the local, regional, and national levels to support transformative change. Several farmers discussed their challenges in embracing rooftop solar on farm buildings as an alternative revenue stream.

Conversations about wind energy revealed a more diverse range of opinions than solar energy. Some participants expressed opposition to local wind farms, while others suggested that offshore wind could be a more viable option with greater community acceptance. It is worth noting that there are currently no community-owned wind farms in the Ballyhoura region, and further investigation would be necessary to determine if implementing a community-ownership model could generate greater interest in local wind energy. Additionally, no clear geographic pattern emerged regarding the enthusiasm for wind energy.

4.3. Energy poverty and the built environment

4.3.1. Energy poverty

While it was not possible during community consultations to determine whether participants were living in energy poverty, though national statistics would suggest that many in Ireland are, it was evident that people across the region faced challenges due to rising inflation and increasing energy prices. There was, however, no perceptible difference between Ballyhoura's towns and rural areas. Participants spoke about reducing energy consumption to cope with the financial strain, discussed feeling stressed or worried about energy bills, and shared concerns about the costs associated with home energy improvements.

Across almost every consultation, participants were concerned about rising energy bills, describing them as 'doubling', 'sky high', 'affecting everyone', and 'the biggest challenge'. During several conversations, people discussed how inflation and the cost-of-living crisis affected many people across the region. There was a particular concern regarding the impact of energy poverty on older people, those on lower incomes, and people living in old and/or cold housing. Illustrating the change in energy costs and the impact that was having, a community member living in rural Ballyhoura described how:

'Living alone, you are using the same amount of fuel and energy as two people. A year ago, I could get two bags of coal a week for €40, now it's €70. They are hard decisions, and everyone wants to transition, but the cost deterrent is not manageable. You have to stay warm.'

A participant shared their lived experience, conveying the connection between energy poverty, vulnerable groups, and the sense of worry that arose across consultations:

'Our community and families will struggle, especially the older generations who are going to suffer due to the cost of heating. My Mam and Dad had stopped using the heating. The place at home was freezing...'

Dependency on solid fuels, such as coal, turf, and wood, was a recurring theme across focus groups and interviews. At a session in rural Ballyhoura, all 14 participants indicated that they use a stove for burning solid fuels at home. During at least three consultations, two in rural areas and one in a town, participants spoke about how they felt that solid fuels provide a sense of personal energy security. One participant spoke about how they reduced their oil use over the winter months and began to use their stove more often because they had access to timber. Others described how using solid fuels allows people to pay for their energy upfront. Illustrating this, another participant lamented that 'control has been taken by electricity companies'. Capturing the same sentiment, a participant in a Ballyhoura town remarked: 'They can take the oil; I am keeping my turf and blocks.'

4.3.2. Retrofitting

While retrofitting and home energy upgrades were discussed as a solution to energy poverty for the Ballyhoura region, conversations primarily revolved around the barriers that hinder people from reducing their reliance on fossil fuels. The upfront investment cost of retrofitting was a recurring concern. A representative from a community group in rural Ballyhoura captured this sentiment, stating, 'I think that it is very difficult for people to get grants as they have to spend the money before they can claim it back.' The challenges posed by retrofitting older housing stock and historic buildings were also raised as a significant issue. Access to information about renewable energy and retrofitting grants was described as problematic, particularly for older individuals, contributing to the digital divide.

Participants expressed significant concerns about the future of home heating and the level of support available during the transition. They also raised questions about alternatives once fossil fuels are no longer viable, reflecting uncertainty and a perceived lack of practical assistance for households. A participant from a low-income background encapsulated these concerns, stating:

'The move away from fossil fuels will impact the pensioners with the rising cost of fuel. If they change from solid fuel or other fossil fuels, they will need to change the whole heating system. It's not as simple as saying, we need to change this, and the government is telling us this. It is great in theory but not in practice.'

4.3.3. Housing

Dereliction was the main housing-related issue noted by people across rural areas of Ballyhoura and participants reported how vacant buildings could be put to much better use. In alignment with a green and just transition, participants described that instead of building new, existing buildings should be brought back into community use, benefit the people living there, and alleviate Ireland's housing crisis. In a rural area of Ballyhoura, an interview with a farm family living in a place where vacant buildings had been done up highlighted:

'The recent upgrading and renewing of vacant properties in the village is very welcome. This will bring new families/new life into the village and add to the vibrancy of the whole parish. I hope this continues.'

There was a perception that buildings that have been vacant, particularly those that have remained unused since the 2008/2009 economic recession, indicate rural depopulation. As all three Ballyhoura typologies experience population growth, it will be necessary for local development and service provision to support the growing population.

In several consultations, participants expressed concerns about wastewater treatment and their local sewage systems, describing the issue as a barrier to building and development in local towns and villages. In addition, obtaining planning permission in rural areas was also discussed as a challenge. So, too, was the availability of housing, where participants felt there was a scarcity of affordable houses across the region and a lack of social housing being built by the council. Participants were apprehensive about young people, expressing concern over the number of young people still living at home. Additionally, appropriate housing was raised as an issue for structurally vulnerable groups, particularly for persons (s) with disabilities and members of the Traveller community.

4.4. Transport and mobility

Transport was discussed during at least 40 community consultations and at the 2022 Winter Community Networking Forum. Cars were described as essential to get around the Ballyhoura region, and across several discussions, participants remarked that being without a car would result in isolation and make life difficult. Illustrating this sense of dependency, one participant noted how they would ‘crack up without a car’. Across multiple consultations, participants also underscored their reliance on cars for fulfilling caregiving responsibilities, commuting to work and grocery shopping. Furthermore, the financial burdens associated with car ownership, including maintenance and operational costs, were recognised as significant challenges.

Demonstrating this sense of car dependency, an interviewee in rural Ballyhoura noted how:

‘You need to keep driving your own car until public transport has improved [in rural areas].’

4.4.1. Public transport

Car dependency was mainly discussed as an effect of poor public transport provision across the region. The scarcity of public transport options became evident during community consultations, prompting discussions on the need for improvements. While public transport arose as a significant issue across all three Ballyhoura typologies, it was more pronounced in rural areas. Consultations across the region underlined the need for transport services that would allow people to rely on using public transport to get to work on time, undertake caregiving duties, access employment and education opportunities, and attend social events.

Illustrating the sentiment that arose during several consultations and addressing the importance of well-coordinated timetables that align with work and education schedules, participants remarked:

‘The idea that everyone will buy an electric vehicle is fanciful. Public transport has to be improved. A reliable and frequent public transport system would be used in the area. However, if it cannot be relied upon, then it will not be used.’

‘Accessing public transport, that would be the biggest thing. There should be a massive push to provide more public transport that is used by everyone.’

Community members also raised the link between transport and fairness. Discussing the uneven provision of public transport between rural and urban areas of Ireland and referring to recent calls for free public transport (O’Sullivan, 2023), a participant in rural Ballyhoura stated that:

‘The idea of the government giving free transport [does not make sense] without supplying more transport. I would rather have more transport and not free transport.’

Another noted: ‘Public transport is the number one element for me that I feel needs to be improved in order to transition in a fair and accessible way’.

Several participants also expressed a need for bus shelters.

One exception to the prevailing frustration towards public transport in the Ballyhoura region was the Local Link service. However, this was primarily related to people living in Ballyhoura's towns. Reflecting the previously discussed sentiment that scheduling and reliability are issues, one participant noted: 'We use the Local Link, but they wouldn't be efficient enough for going to your job and back'. Where a Local Link service was in place, several participants spoke about challenges relating to the last mile.

In addition, participants noted that increasing train services and reopening old stops on existing lines would be an opportunity for the region and make life easier for the people living there.

Despite the frustration expressed by many, enhancing the public and shared transport system was repeatedly emphasised as a critical priority in achieving a Just Transition for the region. Participants also spoke about possibilities for Ballyhoura, such as at the Winter Community Networking Forum, where the group suggested that models of transport that work in other countries should be drawn on. The example of Denmark was offered, where buses operate a shared service, transporting older and young people in the morning.

4.4.2. Active travel

Discussions surrounding active travel shed light on the significant barrier to safety, which was discussed as discouraging people across the region from cycling or walking more frequently. For example, a young participant in Croom remarked, 'We would like to walk to school, but [it is] not possible due to safety concerns'. In addition, the issue of 'linkability' was raised in several conversations. Community members described the need for bicycle lanes and paths to link up and that currently, 'you have to get in the car to get to the cycling path; it's not connected'.

4.4.3. Electric vehicles

According to participants, the main barriers to electric vehicle uptake are the upfront investment cost and a perceived lack of adequate charging infrastructure throughout the region. Participants emphasised that making the switch to an electric vehicle would be financially burdensome. Illustrating this sentiment, a participant in Ballyhoura town noted how:

'The move to electric cars is seen as a positive. However, there is only a certain demographic that can afford such a purchase.'

Besides the initial investment cost, people also shared concerns about the ongoing expense of charging an electric vehicle, especially amid the current cost of living crisis. A lack of community charging infrastructure was a recurring issue raised by community members in Ballyhoura's towns and rural areas.

4.5. Agriculture, food and forestry

At least 13 different Ballyhoura Green and Just Transition consultation sessions included farmers and members of farm families across the region; however, in reality, this figure is likely higher. This is because some participants that farm may have identified themselves as a community group representative, an isolated rural dweller, or an older person, obscuring the total number of farmers engaged in consultations.

4.5.1. Farm consolidation

In agreement with Farm Census trends across the Ballyhoura region, farm consolidation and the increasing intensity of production were raised as significant challenges facing small farmers in rural areas of Ballyhoura. There was a perception that the consolidation of farms negatively impacted the livelihoods of smaller farmers, who are struggling to remain viable and get a decent price for their produce. Illustrating this phenomenon, across consultations, farmers noted how:

‘The big farms are just getting bigger and bigger; all the small fellas are gone.’

‘Small beef farmers have been forgotten about; they won’t get a loan from the bank.’

‘In the 80s, there were about 45 dairy farmers, now there’s about 25 in the area.’

Indicating the shift to intensification within the agricultural sector in recent years, participants remarked:

‘We had 100 cattle at one time, and we thought we were big farmers, now that’s only a small farm.’

‘The dairy farms are getting bigger and are polluting.... beef farms are getting smaller and are getting most of the blame.’

4.5.2. Price for produce

Larger farmers were reported to get better prices and, therefore, have better access to credit, while it was felt that smaller farmers find it hard to get loans and struggle to make a profit. During several consultations, participants spoke about the pressure that farmers face due to the need to produce food cheaply. People stated that because supermarkets control the price of food, the farmer has less control, while the consumer is somewhat sheltered.

‘The supermarkets drive the price, and the farmer must produce food faster and cheaper, so there needs to be a compromise.’

4.5.3. A Just Transition for farmers

There was a sense that the need to reduce agricultural emissions poses a significant challenge to farmers across the region, particularly those more vulnerable to changing practices, such as older farmers who may need additional support. Consultations spoke about the need to recognise the farmers already making changes and, crucially, the significant level of support that farmers need during the transition. Financial support for the protection of nature and biodiversity was described as a necessity. Participants also spoke about how farmers across Ballyhoura are ageing and that while younger people ‘can see the bigger picture’ concerning climate action, there are not enough young people getting into farming to realise these opportunities.

Describing the need for a Just Transition for agriculture, a participant expressed how:

‘We need to bring agriculture along on the ride, on the journey. We need to share the knowledge.’

4.5.4. Food

During consultations, which were conducted during the 2022/2023 cost-of-living crisis, food poverty was raised as an issue. Alongside energy, food was often described as a regular cost that people were struggling with, and participants noted a reliance on using food banks. Across consultations, people spoke about Ireland’s dependence on imported food and highlighted how community gardens and growing schemes could improve food security locally.

4.5.5. Forestry

Forestry was perceived negatively by participants, specifically in the area near Cappamore and Doon, where there is a lot of forestry at present. Participants described forestry as leading to competition for farmland and exacerbating farm consolidation in the area, negatively impacting small farmers. In line with some of the issues related to afforestation outlined in Chapter 3, participants remarked:

‘Competition for land is an issue due to forestry; there will be no small farms, bigger farms [and other actors] will acquire small farms [to plant forestry].’

‘There is too much forestry coming into the area. We are losing communities as a result of it.’

4.6. Tourism

During the community consultations, no direct questions were asked about tourism. Nevertheless, many community members spoke about the area's natural beauty, and some mentioned the potential to further develop tourism in Ballyhoura. In a rural area of Ballyhoura, a participant stated that the Galtees and Ballyhoura 'offer great amenity value' and are a 'great attraction to visitors.' Another participant emphasised the 'beautiful rural area surrounded by the mountains and valleys of Limerick and Tipperary' in which they live. Where tourism was mentioned, it was sometimes in the context of there being a perceived need for greater investment in the sector. In a rural area, one participant felt there was a need for more tourism facilities given its location in the Slieve Felim Mountains and the local history there. Furthermore, another participant believed that the tourism sector in the Ballyhoura area has not been developed to its full potential.

4.7. Summary of consultation outputs and emerging priorities

4.7.1. Key findings

- 1) **Thriving inclusive communities:** Participants felt that Ballyhoura is a vibrant place with a strong community spirit supported by dedicated volunteers and numerous community-led groups and organisations. There was agreement that the region has great potential to develop sustainably due to an increasing population and the in-migration of young people. There is an opportunity through a Green and Just Transition to support improved access to local decision-making by developing community-led projects as well as better ensuring that all groups including Travellers, older people, and rural isolated dwellers are fully included in the design, implementation and outcomes of the transition as well as enhancing and expanding social infrastructure.
- 2) **Energy generation:** Participants expressed an appetite for community involvement in and ownership over renewable energy resources within the Ballyhoura area, particularly concerning solar energy; however, upfront investment costs are perceived as a significant barrier to implementation. Furthermore, there was concern that the energy transition would disproportionately impact low-income households, and thus they should be supported. It was felt that looking to other communities, instead of reinventing the wheel, offers a way to ensure community energy projects have the best chance of success.
- 3) **Energy poverty and the built environment:** Energy bills and the cost of solid fuels were raised as an issue across the region. The use of solid fuels was widespread, and for some, they were perceived as providing personal energy security. As pressure mounts to achieve retrofitting targets, these nuances should be considered to ensure that alternatives are made available before supports are removed to restore and ensure trust in the transition process. A community-led approach to retrofitting could support vulnerable community members to transition away from fossil fuels, reduce energy poverty, access the appropriate supports, and ensure that the experience is positive and improves, rather than erodes, one's standard of living. Related to housing more generally, refurbishing vacant buildings for housing or community use was perceived as an area of significant opportunity.

4) **Transport and mobility:** Car dependency was evident across consultations, but improving public transport was seen as a significant opportunity for the region, particularly improvements that enhance the reliability of services. Where there is evidence of the development of more transformative transport services, mainly in Ballyhoura's towns to date, the last mile is a significant hurdle to be overcome to ensure that new services are accessible to everyone. This divergence between Ballyhoura's towns and rural areas underscores the need for a tailored approach to public and shared transport improvements across the region. Lastly, prohibitive aspects of increased electric vehicle use, primarily the cost and provision of charging points, speak to an opportunity to explore the potential of communal charging infrastructure and shared mobility options across the region.

5) **Agriculture and Forestry:**

a) **Agriculture:** Farm consolidation was repeatedly expressed as a significant issue facing smaller farmers across rural areas of Ballyhoura, particularly beef farmers. With specialist beef production representing Limerick and Cork's most common farm type, Ballyhoura's beef farmers will need significant support. Non-farming community members expressed their wish to support a Just Transition for farmers across the region. In light of the need to shift to sustainable food systems, community-supported diversification opportunities for farmers could build on community goodwill and provide decent price for produce for Ballyhoura's farmers.

b) **Food:** Participants felt that community allotments and growing schemes could support people experiencing food poverty and enhance local food security.

c) **Forestry:** The current forestry model was perceived to impact several communities negatively.

6) **Tourism:** While tourism was not a common theme of discussion, possibly because it wasn't included as a standalone question during consultations, when it was discussed, one of the perceptions was that tourism-related facilities should be expanded and invested in. In addition, participants spoke fondly about the natural beauty of the Ballyhoura region, particularly the local mountains.

TASC and Ballyhoura Development presented these consultation findings to community members at the 2023 Summer Community Networking Forum. The findings informed a visioning workshop whereby community members were invited to put forward their vision for the Ballyhoura region in 2035.

4.7.2. A vision for the Ballyhoura region in 2035

Energy	Built environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community-owned energy schemes are in place across the Ballyhoura region • Community buildings are generating their own energy, e.g., rooftop solar • Ballyhoura Development is supporting resourced and funded community groups to choose the best projects that suit their needs • There is simple grant information for communities, and the systems and supports are in place to bring community energy projects to life • Specific policies and supports are in place to support people living in rural areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homes are warm and insulated. Energy poverty is a thing of the past • Access to retrofitting, as well as information about retrofitting is available to everyone • People across the region have access to retrofitting-related trade and job opportunities • Homes are close to services and transport options • There is high-speed internet that allows people to work from home • Everyone who wants a home can buy one, and there are step-down options for people who want to downsize • Derelict and vacant buildings have been done up and are in use, benefitting the community
Transport	Agriculture, Forestry and Food
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All rural areas have a bus service • The bus service is accessible and gets people to work on time • Timetables are practical and are organised in such a way that people can get to where they need to go • Bus shelters are widespread across the region • Old train stations have been reopened, and more are reopening • Train stations are linked up to the towns and villages that surround them • Fares are competitive • Electric vehicle charging points are widespread across the region • Country roads have improved • Park-and-ride facilities are in place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is food security across the Ballyhoura region • There is pride in growing local food • Farmers' markets, marts, farm shops, box schemes, and farmers having more control over prices and produce is mainstream • Farmers are recognised for the work that they do for trees, rivers and biodiversity • Farmers are supported to diversify • Farmers are supported to enhance biodiversity • Young people are taking up farming • Water quality has improved • A sustainable model of forestry is in place
Inclusive communities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everyone is included in the changes that are happening • Young people and older people are coming together to learn about and be involved in climate action • Small communities know what's coming down the line in terms of climate action • There are services such as playgrounds and spaces where those doing care work have a space to come together • There are spaces for young people to come together outside of sport • Community groups are meeting in person and online 	

5. From community needs to community-led climate actions

5. From community needs to community-led climate actions

This chapter builds on the findings of the desk-based analysis and community consultations to move from understanding community needs to proposing a variety of actions that Ballyhoura Development and local communities could advance in pursuit of a Just Transition in the region. First, a SWOT analysis is presented based on the findings of the desk-based research and community engagement that were presented in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. The SWOT analysis outlines the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in Ballyhoura from a climate action and just transition perspective. Beginning from this understanding of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, the chapter then proposes a menu of actions that could be taken forward by Ballyhoura Development and local communities.

5.1. SWOT analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growing population in the area has the potential to bring new ideas and support economic development. • Social capital, community spirit, and willingness to volunteer. • Sense of social inclusion amongst older members of the community, people with disabilities, and newcomers. • Natural beauty of area and local environment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of democratic deficit in local government consultation and decision-making and that local knowledge is not taken into account. • Ageing housing stock, with relatively high reliance on oil and coal as residential heat source. • Relatively high level of car dependency, and relatively low public transport availability and use. • Lack of EV charging infrastructure.
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of community-owned energy generation, and support for local residents to upgrade the energy efficiency of their homes. • Redeveloping vacant / derelict buildings for use as community or social housing. • Improved transport network through community-owned EV charging points, ridesharing, community car / bus service, and active travel. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unjust transition and entrenched marginalisation of certain cohorts of community, such as Travellers and individuals living in isolated areas. • Low levels of home energy upgrades due to lack of information and support, resulting in sustained states of energy poverty. • Continued high levels of car dependency and fossil-fuel based transport in the absence of a better transport network.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater access to locally sourced food, more sustainable livelihoods and more autonomy for food producers. • Development of regenerative tourism in the Ballyhoura area, leveraging existing assets such as walking and biking trails. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of livelihoods in parts of the agriculture sector (e.g., smaller specialist beef farming) without opportunities for transitioning into alternative employment or compensation. • Lack of support for climate action if it is perceived as unfair or insensitive to rural concerns.
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5.2. Development actions

This section outlines a variety of development actions for the Ballyhoura region that Ballyhoura Development and local communities could pursue, informed by desk-based research and widespread community consultations. The first section examines Ballyhoura Development's existing work programmes and internal processes and identifies how they can be enhanced to support a Just and Green Transition. The second section identifies a range of community-led development actions that vary in size and by policy area. While the first set of actions refers to internal actions that Ballyhoura Development would be directly responsible for implementing, the second set of actions would be led by communities but with the support of Ballyhoura Development. The planning and implementation of the community-led development actions would be enabled by a diversity of factors, but especially by the strength of local civil society that was made evident in the community consultations.

5.2.1. Internal Ballyhoura Development actions

As outlined in Chapter 1, Ballyhoura Development's work programmes are organised under three themes: Community Development; Economic Development; and Environmental Development. The work programmes under the theme of Community Development include tailored supports to disadvantaged communities and groups, digital inclusion and skills, youth-led local development, and the provision of inclusive community services (e.g., childcare, family services, legal advice, and employment supports). Under the theme of Economic Development, the work programmes focus on food systems, the bioeconomy, and circular economy; sustainable rural enterprise and social enterprise; farm diversification; regenerative tourism; and outdoor recreation. Finally, the work programmes under the theme of Environmental Development include biodiversity and water quality; sustainable energy communities; community climate action capacity building; and mitigation and adaptation. This wide range of integrated programme delivery is the foundation on which Ballyhoura Development will continue to develop the conditions for a more localised, inclusive, and sustainable economy with stronger community resources into the future.

Community development and social service provision are significant components of Ballyhoura Development's work. From a Just Transition perspective, the latter can be seen as part of an essential infrastructure of care for people in need of support in society, and the former as an enabler of local capacity building. In the transition towards a societal model based on the principles of care and well-being, support must be available for citizens to allow them to develop their capabilities and live fulfilling lives.

In the context of a Just Transition and the challenges facing communities (now and in the future) due to the ecological crisis, the services offered by Ballyhoura Development could be expanded or redesigned. For example, employment supports for local people working in sectors or occupations that will be at risk due to climate change or climate policy will be required to retrain or compensate them for losses to their livelihood. Similarly, education and training opportunities could be provided for local people in green skills that will be increasingly important in a green economy. As suggested in the next section on community-led development actions, Ballyhoura Development could support communities in expanding access to sustainable transport services through schemes like a community car service, an organised hitchhiking service, or an e-bike library. In addition, Ballyhoura Development's existing work in the area of promoting social inclusion should continue. Previous work in this area includes The Ballyhoura Community Inclusion Toolkit (Ballyhoura Development CLG, 2019), which aims to provide support to community groups to ensure that they can include as many people as possible from a wide range of backgrounds and circumstances. Furthermore, integration and social inclusion could be promoted through food events and festivals promoting intercultural understanding, given Ballyhoura Development's work with community kitchens and local food enterprises.

Secondly, in the area of Economic Development, Ballyhoura Development seeks resources to encourage alternative, sustainable forms of locally-led economic activity in the area. At present, Ballyhoura Development supports the development of local enterprises through mentoring and training supports for unemployed or under-employed people who may like to become self-employed, supports for start-ups, and supports for new and existing social enterprises (Ballyhoura Development, n.d.). They also support women's entrepreneurship through the Women's Rural Entrepreneurship Network (WREN). These current programmes do not explicitly focus on environmental sustainability, so there is an opportunity for Ballyhoura Development to ensure that their enterprise supports provide local enterprises with the knowledge and supports they need to develop sustainable businesses. For example, this could include methods for understanding the environmental impacts of an enterprise's activity. To date, Ballyhoura Development has supported enterprises in sectors including food; retail; tourism; accommodation; activities; creative experiences (potters, visual artists); manufacturing; childcare; trades; fitness; and creative arts. In making decisions about enterprise supports, Ballyhoura Development has used economic criteria such as deadweight, displacement, contribution to employment, innovation, etc. In the future, Ballyhoura Development could incorporate environmental and social criteria into their decision-making processes, such as contributing to reducing the local ecological footprint or providing fair employment.

Ballyhoura Development's engagement with Environmental Development includes work programmes on biodiversity, food waste initiatives, support for sustainable energy communities, and responsibilities for recreation trails in the area. Given the scale of transformation that will be required in the coming decades in order to reduce the country's ecological footprint, there is considerable scope to deepen and expand the range of environmental initiatives Ballyhoura Development leads. A full consideration of these initiatives is beyond the scope of this exercise, but some possibilities are support and capacity building for community-owned forestry and greater localisation of food systems, training for communities in community-scale energy generation, and greater investment in nature-based infrastructure like recreation trails and outdoor classrooms as an opportunity to connect more people with the local environment. The next section outlines a range of actions that would be community-led, and Ballyhoura Development would play an important role in providing support for these projects. . The environmental initiatives delivered by Ballyhoura Development should aim to integrate social considerations in their design and delivery to ensure that they do not undermine the goals of the Just Transition.

An example of this would be to ensure that programmes that aim to improve biodiversity in the region also attempt to improve the lives and livelihoods of local people who are marginalised in society or are put at risk by climate action (e.g., non-intensive beef farmers). Further work would be needed to fully consider the range of options for integrating environmental and social action in Ballyhoura, but the central principle is to not think of the environment - and environmental initiatives - as separate from social considerations.

Ballyhoura Development has initiated changes to its procurement practices to support a Just Transition and to provide further support to local enterprises. Green public procurement is a process where ‘public authorities seek to source goods, services, or work with a reduced environmental impact throughout their life-cycle’ (Office of Government Procurement, 2023). Ballyhoura Development currently procures office supplies, trainers, and consultants, and the principles of green public procurement criteria can be further applied to these activities. In addition, Ballyhoura Development could extend its procurement policies to not only reflect the need to procure sustainable products and services but also to procure from local companies that provide decent work and other social benefits to local communities.

Finally, Ballyhoura Development plays an important role in the local community in providing training, mentorship and upskilling opportunities, and greater focus could be placed upon the areas of climate action, sustainable economic activities, and climate justice in this work. There are already organisations, tools, and resources that can help to inspire the development of training programmes for local community capacity building in climate action and sustainable development. For example, the Doughnut Economics Action Lab provides a wealth of resources on the concept of doughnut economics and how it can be applied in communities to develop a fair, sustainable economic model (Doughnut Economics Action Lab, n.d.). Ballyhoura Development need not reinvent the wheel but could consider how existing training toolkits could be used to support the development of local knowledge and capacity in just and sustainable forms of local development.

5.2.2. Community-led development actions

This section provides a summary of a variety of community-led development actions that aim to deliver on at least two of the following goals from the model of the People’s Transition: advancing climate action by mitigating emissions or building adaptive capacity; addressing an immediate development priority or need; and delivering opportunities for community wealth building (McCabe, 2020). The proposed actions are grouped into six areas: thriving inclusive communities; energy generation; energy poverty and the built environment; transport and mobility; agriculture, food, forestry and the natural environment; and regenerative tourism. The actions are summarised with a brief description, a summary of the need which the action is addressing, and expected outcomes. It is important to emphasise that the actions highlighted are actions that can be developed and implemented at the community scale. There are complementary and alternative policies that could be pursued at the state level, but it is beyond the scope of this exercise to assess these policy options. Furthermore, these actions should not be viewed as off-the-shelf solutions that can be applied in any community in Ballyhoura. Their implementation would have to be conditional on and tailored to specific place-based contexts. Finally, these actions are not the only possible community-led development actions that would be beneficial in Ballyhoura. Considering the same set of needs and priorities, others may identify additional actions.

Thriving inclusive communities

The community-led development actions that are presented in this section are aimed at the cultivation of thriving, inclusive communities. The local community, its capacities, and the strength of its social relations ought to be placed at the heart of any place-based Just Transition. The actions outlined in this section aim to strengthen those social relations and capacities through continued implementation of the Ballyhoura Inclusive Communities Toolkit and the provision of community-managed facilities such as repair cafés and community cafés.

- **Continued Implementation of the Ballyhoura Inclusive Communities Toolkit.** This toolkit, developed by communities in the Ballyhoura area, has been identified by the Department of Rural and Community Development as a best practice initiative that communities can follow in building diverse and inclusive community groups. Continued local community group uptake of the toolkit will further strengthen group succession planning and local community representation and cohesion.
- **Repair Cafés.** These would be circular economy initiatives for local people to repair items that they own, with local volunteers giving their time and skills. It is imperative that communities and regions begin to establish the infrastructure for a local circular economy and build capacity in mending and repairs. The key outcomes would be the cultivation of a culture of repair locally, a reduction in waste and e-waste, and strengthened social connections.
- **Community Cafés.** These are community-managed spaces where affordable and healthy food is available and where facilities can be provided for socialising and local events. There are places in Ballyhoura where affordable, local produce is not easily accessible, and there are also places where there is insufficient access to community spaces. The key outcomes of this action would be strengthened social relations between local people and greater access to healthy food. In addition, these could be spaces that facilitate the distribution of food to local people suffering from food poverty.

Energy generation

The next set of community-led development actions is focused on energy generation. Given the imperative of transitioning towards a more sustainable energy system and recent increases in the cost of fossil fuels, the listening phase of this research revealed a significant level of interest in the local area in renewable energy. This section focuses on community-owned renewable energy facilities, which would build community wealth and drive local development in the long term. Community-owned energy can be seen as a way to raise finance to support a wider energy transition in the area by providing a long-term source of income that could be used to invest in a variety of much-needed measures, including housing retrofits for those most in need, while also potentially contributing to making the local community more energy independent. The proposed actions include community-owned hydroelectric energy, anaerobic digestion, aqua thermal facilities, and solar energy.

- **Community-Owned Hydroelectric Energy.** Old river mills lie idle and derelict across the area and present opportunities for small-scale, community-owned hydroelectric energy. Such developments would respond to the need for more renewable energy generation locally, as well as for capturing the economic benefits for the community. The key outcomes would be an alternative source of electricity to fossil fuels, a source of income for the local community from electricity sales, and greater awareness of how energy is produced.

- **Community-Owned Anaerobic Digestion**, which would create energy from agricultural residues. Such actions would respond to the need for farmers to diversify their income streams, reduce water pollution and methane emissions from agriculture, and generate additional employment in the area. These would be the key outcomes of the project, especially the diversification of income for less commercially viable farmers in the Ballyhoura area.
- **Aqua Thermal Facility**, which would involve a small-scale local or district heating network using aqua thermal energy derived from rivers, canals, and lakes, providing green energy for the local community. Ballyhoura Development is currently the lead partner in an Interreg Northwest Europe project examining the feasibility of sustainable energy communities incorporating aqua thermal projects into the renewables mix.
- **Community-Owned Solar Energy** initiatives. These would entail the development of community-owned solar energy facilities that would sell electricity to the national grid. The key outcomes would be to reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with electricity generation and to generate an income stream for the community that could be invested in a range of energy transition projects.

Energy poverty and the built environment

The next set of community-led development actions is focused on energy poverty and the built environment. The desk-based research and deep community consultation undertaken during this research project made clear that the Ballyhoura area faces significant challenges in housing provision and energy costs. There are differential capacities to navigate these challenges and differential impacts across the community. In rural areas and towns, dependence on fossil fuels for home heating is higher than in peri-urban areas. In response to these challenges, this section proposes three development actions: a community housing retrofit support service; targeted renewable energy initiatives for self-consumers such as community housing or Travellers living in mobile homes or trailers; and the increased upgrading of vacant residential buildings into social or community housing.

- **Housing Retrofit Support Service.** This would entail establishing a local support service to provide information and support to local people for retrofitting and insulating their homes and buildings. This action responds to the need for greater levels of housing retrofits in the Ballyhoura area in order to improve the comfort of people's homes, reduce energy poverty, and reduce carbon emissions associated with residential energy use.
- **Renewable Energy for Self-Consumers Including Community-Led Voluntary Housing and Travellers Living in Mobile Homes or Trailers.** This would entail developing renewable energy facilities for self-consumption in clusters of housing, for example in community-led voluntary housing schemes or for Travellers living on a particular halting site. This would reduce energy bills, provide green energy, and if targeted correctly could reduce energy poverty for specific groups of local people most in need of more energy.
- **Increased Conversion of Vacant Buildings into Community Housing.** This action would identify vacant or derelict buildings that would be suitable for housing and redevelop them to a sufficient standard. This development action responds to the presence of significant amounts of vacancy and dereliction in particular areas of Ballyhoura, as well as shortages of housing stock in the area. The key outcomes of the action would be a reduction in vacancy and dereliction, an increase in the social / community housing stock, and a more sustainable use of local resources.

Transport and mobility

The proposed community-led development actions under the theme of transport and mobility include a community-owned electric vehicle (EV) charging point; a bike library; a community car service; and an organised hitchhiking service. The need for better public transport was one of the strongest themes that came out of the listening phase of this research. Given the limitations of public transport in rural areas and the lack of – or slow pace of - action at a national scale in terms of expanding access to public transport, we have identified potential actions that could be taken at a local scale that focus on sustainable and shared mobility.

- **Community-Owned EV Charging Facilities.** Powered by a solar array, any income generated from electricity sales at charging points would flow back to the community cooperative. This action responds to the need in Ballyhoura for greater access to EV charging points. The key outcomes of the project would be increased use of EVs in the area, and an associated decrease in carbon emissions. Furthermore, there would be potential that any surplus income could be ringfenced for community energy and social projects, such as a community car service.
- **Local Bike Library.** In a pilot school in the area, several bikes could be made available free of charge for families to loan for a school term or school year. The pilot school would be in an area where there is adequate cycling infrastructure. This project is aimed at increasing levels of active travel in peri-urban areas to reduce carbon emissions and air pollution associated with car travel and improve health and wellbeing. For low-income families in particular, the option to lease an e-bike/cargo bike free of charge would help reduce their transport costs and reduce levels of forced car ownership.
- **Community Car Service.** This service would rely on volunteer drivers to provide transport for members of the community who would otherwise find it difficult to access either public or private transport due to their geographical location or their ability to drive. This development action responds to the need for better public transport options in Ballyhoura, including last-mile transport that links up households with the closest bus or train route. The key outcomes of this action would be increased access to public transport for individuals with inadequate access, better community cohesion, and reduced carbon emissions associated with private vehicle use.
- **Organised Hitchhiking Service.** This would entail the development of a hitchhiking service that would operate through an app and designated hitchhiking stops. This development action also responds to the need for better public transport options in Ballyhoura. This service would be the first of its kind in Ireland, and it could serve as a pilot for expanding the service across the country. The action would increase mobility in rural areas of Ballyhoura and minimise carbon emissions on a per-journey basis through ridesharing.

Agriculture, forestry, food and the natural environment

This section outlines several community-led development actions that focus on agriculture, forestry, food, and the natural environment: a local food growing collective; a community-managed composting facility; and a community-managed woodland. These three projects respond to the need to create a more equitable and sustainable local food system, to empower communities to take more responsibility for the food waste they create, and to transition towards a more inclusive and sustainable model of woodland or forest management.

- **Local Food Growing / Distribution Collective.** This action would involve a collective of farmers, social farmers and community growers that supply local shops, restaurants, and households with local produce. This would create a sustainable income stream and diversification opportunities for food growers and provide access to nutritious, locally grown food in the area. This action responds to the need for access to affordable, locally grown, and sustainable food, as well as the need for farmers and growers for access to markets and a fair price. This scheme could also benefit local people experiencing food poverty by providing produce to food banks.
- **Community Composting.** This space would serve as an educational space for building a culture of sustainable living through the lens of food waste. The project responds to the imperative of transitioning away from a linear food system towards a circular food system at national and local levels. The key outcomes would include reduced levels of food waste, better social relations between community members, and compost products for community gardening and horticulture.
- **Community Woodland.** This refers to the development of a community-managed native woodland with accessible paths, nature education, well-being activities, and sustainable management. This development action responds to the need for more outdoor spaces that are accessible in particular areas of Ballyhoura. The key outcomes would be to provide greater accessibility to nature for local people, to improve wellbeing, to cultivate a better understanding of the local environment through nature education activities, and to provide a more sustainable model of native woodland management for carbon sequestration and biodiversity.

Regenerative tourism

Finally, there is potential to further promote the development of a sustainable, regenerative tourism offering in Ballyhoura in order to spur local development and community wealth building. The area is home to significant tourism assets such as national waymarked trails - the Slieve Felim Way and the Ballyhoura Way – and the Ballyhoura Mountain Bike Trails, and a range of authentic community-led arts, heritage and cultural activities and facilities. These local assets could be further supported as the basis for regenerative tourism to provide more economic, environmental and social benefits for the area. One part of this would be to harness the creativity and expertise of local artists to develop creative and cultural experiences for locals and visitors, including events and events series. The primary action proposed, however, which would underpin a regenerative tourism strategy, is to develop locally and community owned visitor accommodation in the Ballyhoura area.

- **Locally and Community Owned Visitor Accommodation.** According to Sport Ireland (n.d.), there is a scarcity of accommodation along the Ballyhoura Way. There are opportunities to increase, strengthen and promote a variety of locally and community owned visitor accommodation, across Ballyhoura, to help increase and retain the economic value and social benefits of tourism to the local area.

5.3. A set of principles for communities in delivering a sustainable and just transition

This section offers guidance for local community groups and enterprises to think about how they can support the creation of a more sustainable and just community and region. In the People's Transition model, the design of local development actions aims to deliver at least two of the following goals:

- 1) Advancing climate action by either mitigating emissions or building adaptive capacity;
- 2) Addressing an immediate development priority or need; and
- 3) Delivering opportunities for community wealth building (McCabe, 2020).

These principles apply to local community groups and businesses that want to contribute to social and environmental well-being in Ballyhoura. These 'triple wins' should be focused on including the most marginalised members of the community and promoting social inclusion locally. The first principle can be extended to include broader environmental concerns such as biodiversity and water quality.

Community groups and local businesses can ask themselves four questions with respect to these principles:

1. How does our work advance environmental action by mitigating emissions, building adaptive capacity, or protecting the environment?
2. How does our work address an immediate development priority or need in the area?
3. How does our work improve social inclusion and include the most marginalised members of the community?
4. How does our work provide an opportunity for advancing community wealth building locally?

There are resources available for communities to help them think about how they can work towards a more sustainable and just path of local development. One of the most prominent concepts and set of resources is that of the doughnut economy. The doughnut has been described as 'a compass for human prosperity in the 21st century, whose goal is to meet the needs of all people within the means of the planet' (Doughnut Economics Action Lab, 2020).

The doughnut is based upon the UN sustainable development goals, as well as planetary boundaries that have been identified by earth system scientists (Richardson et al., 2022). The doughnut model envisions an economy that respects planetary boundaries – e.g., climate and biodiversity - while also meeting the needs of all people, e.g., the provision of adequate housing and decent work. In relation to the doughnut economic model, the first question outlined above could be understood as connected to the planetary boundaries (ecology), while the second and third questions are related to the social foundations (human need). The fourth question goes further than the doughnut economic model by considering questions of power and ownership in the economy. There is a wealth of resources available on doughnut economics (Doughnut Economics Action Lab, n.d.), as well as established networks of researchers, government bodies, businesses, and communities that engage with the concept, which communities could leverage in their plans for creating a more sustainable and just local economy in the coming years and decades.

6. Conclusion

6. Conclusion

This report outlines a Just Transition strategy for the Ballyhoura region in order to guide Ballyhoura Development and local communities over the coming years to further develop and strengthen community-led climate action that stimulates local development, builds social inclusion, and protects the environment. As policies at national and local levels to date have been insufficient to reduce Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions in line with 2030 targets, and to ensure a truly just transition across society, organisations like Ballyhoura Development have an important role to play as leaders of a Green and Just Transition. The strategy was informed by desk-based research as well as deep community consultations in which 603 community members from across the region were engaged through focus groups, interviews, community forums, an art competition, and a survey. This strategy would not have been possible without their participation. Ballyhoura Development and TASC are grateful to all of the local people who contributed to this research.

The strategy focuses on six key thematic areas: 1) Thriving inclusive communities; 2) Energy generation; 3) Energy Poverty and the built environment; 4) Transport and mobility; 5) Agriculture, food, forestry and the natural environment; and 6) Regenerative tourism. These thematic areas were chosen as they align with Ballyhoura Development's priority areas, were significant themes of discussion in the community consultations, and as they are all of high relevance from a Just Transition perspective. Desk-based research (Chapter 2 and 3) and community consultations (Chapter 4) were combined to examine the needs and challenges of local people within each of these thematic areas, which ultimately informed the development of community-led development actions (Chapter 5) that would advance climate action by reducing greenhouse gas emissions or build adaptive capacity, address an immediate development need, or create opportunities for community wealth building.

Understanding Just Transition as a longer-term process, this report sets out a place-based approach that aims to build local capacity over time and is grounded in an understanding of the diverse needs and challenges that local people experience on a day-to-day basis. Top-down climate action that is insensitive to local needs and priorities is likely to result in unjust public policy that undermines support for climate action. Importantly, the strategy foregrounds the needs of marginalised community members to ensure that local development actions can enhance – rather than constrain - their capabilities. As the Ballyhoura region continues to develop over the coming years and decades, this strategy should serve as a guide for community-led climate action in the area that reduces inequality and builds social support for transformative climate action.

7. References

7. References

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Toward a Green and Just Transition in Ballyhoura aims to set out a roadmap for community-led climate action across the Ballyhoura area. Taking on board community knowledge, capacity, assets and priorities, this strategy views climate action as an enabler of local development. This ‘whole of Ballyhoura’ plan is intended to support communities throughout the region to plan for and benefit from the transition to zero emissions and was made possible by the participation of 603 local people who lent their voices and time to this endeavour.



BALLYHOURA
DEVELOPMENT CLG



Rialtas na hÉireann
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