

Economic and Enterprise Development Strategy for Lanesborough - Ballyleague

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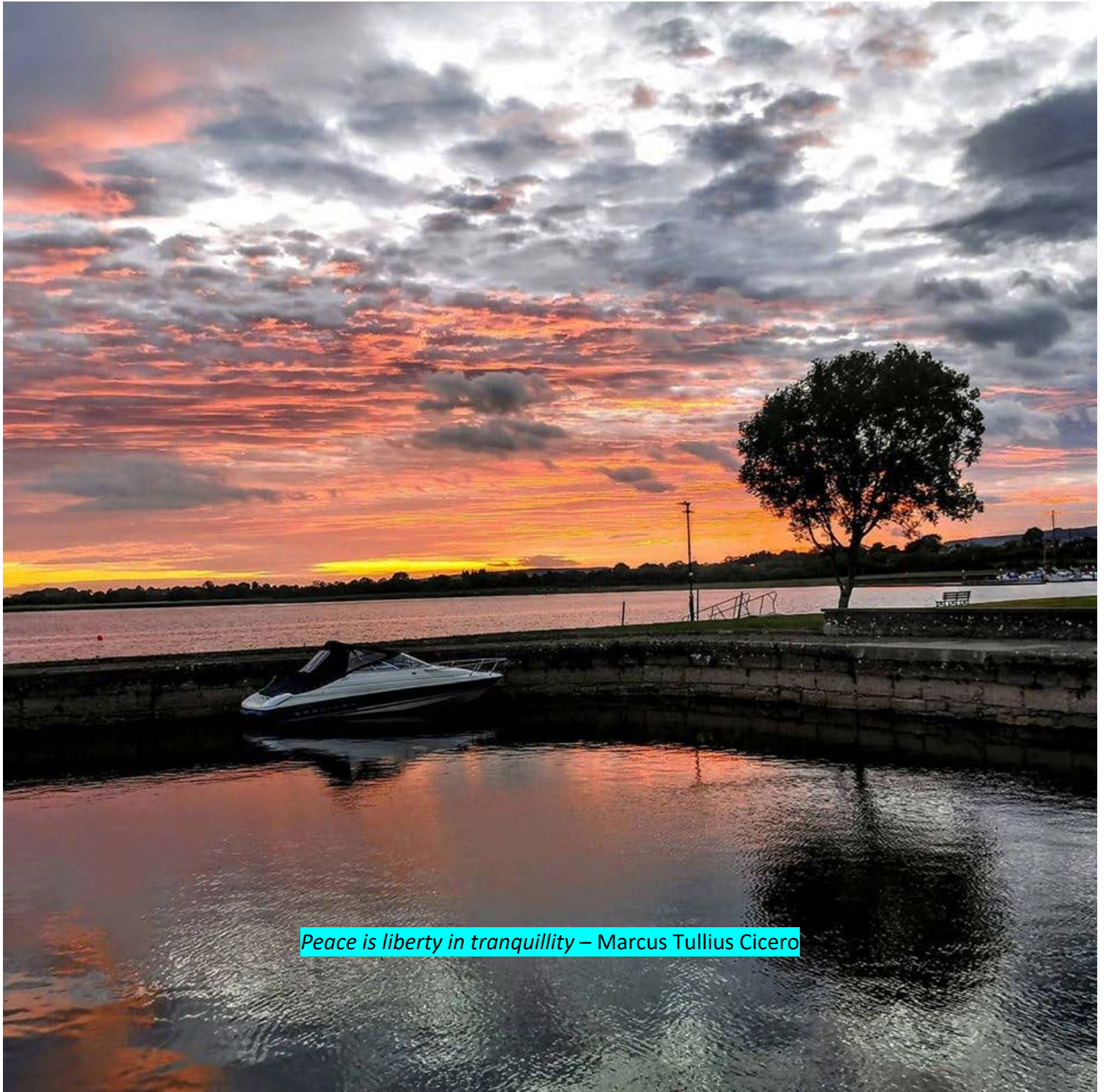
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Peace is liberty in tranquillity – Marcus Tullius Cicero

Executive Summary

1.1 Purpose of this report

KPMG Future Analytics has been appointed by Longford and Roscommon County Councils to prepare an Economic and Enterprise Development Strategy (EEDS) for Lanesborough - Ballyleague. **The objective of this strategy is to develop and deliver an effective short, medium, and long-term path to enterprise and job creation in the area, building on existing and planned investment and innovation initiatives.**

1.2 Structure of this Report

This report comprises:

- **An overview of relevant policy landscape and research findings in section 2.0 (with further detail provided in Appendix 2)** to inform our understanding of the context for development of the local economy. This includes:
 - **Socio-economic profile analysis and population projection analysis**, to inform our understanding of the town;
 - **PESTEL (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal) analysis**, which identifies macro (external) forces facing Lanesborough/ Ballyleague and Longford and Roscommon more generally and provides an understanding of the factors influencing and impacting Lanesborough/ Ballyleague's 's current economic context;
 - **Spatial Analysis**, including a comprehensive survey of land uses, vacancy and dereliction within Lanesborough-Ballyleague and the identification and prioritisation of potential development sites.
- **Summary of consultation and engagement undertaken as part of this project in section 3.0**, this includes an online survey as well as a summary of strategic conversations held with key stakeholders to elicit their views on ways in which the economy of Lanesborough-Ballyleague could be revitalised.
- **SWOT analysis** to identify key issues and opportunities to revitalise the economy of Lanesborough-Ballyleague, and **summary of emerging projects in section 4.0**;
- **Vision and project proposals in section 5.0**;
- **Implementation framework and action plan in section 6.0.**

1.3 Report Overview

A wide range of projects are being considered, planned or are actively in development for Lanesborough-Ballyleague. These include projects related to tourism and recreation, food and drink, and alternative energy. Together these proposals, if implemented, would transform the economic landscape of Lanesborough-Ballyleague, not only providing employment during construction phase but also ongoing jobs in operational phase and associated entrepreneurial opportunities. However, to a certain extent many of these proposals, particularly around tourism and recreation, are being advanced independently without an over-arching plan.

A significant opportunity is presented by the availability of funding under Just Transition, and by support from several key agencies for significant projects in Lanesborough-Ballyleague.

The proposed over-arching vision for Lanesborough Ballyleague is:

By 2040 Lanesborough-Ballyleague will be a better place to live, visit, work and study; a place with a high quality of life and a range of employment opportunities where people choose to locate and visit. A thriving integrated and attractive town with sustainability at the heart of the economy; a hub for the Mid-Shannon area.

Two **Regional Catalytic Projects** are recommended:

- A: Collaborating to Establish the Lough Ree Biosphere Nature Reserve
- B: Collaborating to Encourage Sustainable Villages Cluster

The goal is to build on the town and the areas strengths, and to increase footfall in the town, thus making businesses more viable and revitalising the town centre; providing a range of employment opportunities which in combination will lead to sustainable economic development and revitalisation of the towns.

Four key enabling pillars are identified for capital projects, focussing on making the town a more desirable place to choose to live, visit, work and study, and to raise awareness of the town’s offering targeting investors, those seeking to re-locate, and visitors. **Ten themes and fifteen transformational projects** are underdefined under the four pillars, as illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 1. Together these projects have the potential to transform not only Lanesborough-Ballyleague, but to create a regionally significant employment and visitor hub.

While this is a long-term strategy focussed on more sustainable development, there is an urgent **need to deliver employment opportunities in the short term**, to support those workers that are being made redundant and to ensure that the town doesn’t fall into irreversible decline. The projects outlined below have been identified for their ability to deliver on this objective and prioritised according to their **capacity to deliver employment**, as well as their **deliverability** and **potential medium-long term impact**.

Table 1 Strategic Approach - Proposed Pillars, Themes and Projects

Pillar 1: A Better Place to Visit - Maximise Tourism Opportunity		
Theme	Project	Project Summary
1 Develop Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre - Tri-located	1 Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre 1 – Lanesborough – visitor hub	Principal Visitor Hub for the 20,000 ha Lough Ree Biosphere located next to the Lough Ree Distillery near the North Commons. Including world class interpretation of biodiversity and cultural history, visitor services, retail, restaurant and visitor information. Linked by electric bus to #2 and #3. New build architecturally distinctive high-quality lake side building. This project includes an associated link road and potential for a venue based in the former quarry site, which was included within the application for design stage funding to ERDF.
	2 Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre 2-Ballyleague – water/land activity	Water and land sports activity centre to include boat trips to Inchcleraun and along the Shannon, kayak and bike hire, kayak tuition, angling tackle shop and guide services. Community run and branded as part of the Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre. Opportunity for boat building. Physically linked to greenways, walking trails and Blueways.
	3 Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre 3 – Cloontuskert - story of re-wilding, people and organic farming	Conversion of the Clontuskert Bord na Móna Machinery works, located just north of Ballyleague to a visitor experience based around the story of the people who worked on the bogs, the programme to re-wild the bogs, and an organic farm. Linked to Lanesborough via Kilnacarrow Bridge via a restored bog train.
2 Increase availability of visitor accommodation	4 Seek to develop Ballyleague campervan site	Development of landscaped campervan site with associated site services – potential sites include ones adjacent to Hanley’s Marina and the Waterways Ireland Marina subject to landowner agreement. Two stage project, feasibility study and design/build.
	5 Encourage and facilitate adaptive re-use to provide alternative/experiential visitor accommodation	Identification of effective and incentivised adaptive re-use model to encourage owners of empty properties on the Main Street of Lanesborough-Ballyleague to bring buildings back into use as short-let rentals.
3 Enhance and link recreation infrastructure	6 Continue to develop Green and Blue Infrastructure Network	Further investment in walking/cycling trails network development, Inner lake boardwalk, Blueway infrastructure and angling infrastructure in partnership with key agencies.
4 Increase destination legibility	7 Seek funding for Wayfinding and interpretation Initiative	Design and implementation of an orientation and wayfinding scheme for Lanesborough-Ballyleague.
Pillar 2: A Better Place to Work & Learn - Creating New Opportunities		
Theme	Project	Project Summary

5 Build on history with a new alternative energy R&D hub	8 Support development of Lough Ree Technology Cluster	Completion of a research study and site identification for the development of an Alternative Energy Hub / Research and Development Centre
	9 Support development of an anaerobic digester at Mount Dillon	Feasibility study to determine optimum site for development of an anaerobic digester, with the optimum site envisaged to be the Bord na Mona Mount Dillon site. Development of the AD.
6 Develop new co-working centre/training hub and 2nd landing site	10 Support Lanesborough-Ballyleague Co-working Centre to include training and R&D hub	Feasibility study to be commissioned to support the development of a co-working centre in Lanesborough development in partnership between Longford County Council, Roscommon County Council and the local community.
	11 Seek funding for feasibility/site assessment for second landing site for new businesses	Development of a second landing/incubation hub for SME (1-50 employees) in technology, R&D, light industry in either Lanesborough or Ballyleague.
7 Capitalise on Lanesborough-Ballyleague's food and drink reputation	12 Continue to support Premier Lakelands Food Hub	Development of a high-quality food grade incubation space in Lanesborough. The facility will also provide food standard facilities for new incubation units and businesses leveraging off the BnM products and other food processing initiatives to facilitate existing and new food-based start-ups in the micro-food sector.
Pillar 3: A Better Place to Live – enhancing sense of place and vitality		
Theme	Project	Project Summary
8 Enhance appearance of town centres environment	13 Commission and implement joint Public Realm project for Lanesborough-Ballyleague	Joint public realm project commissioned and implemented for Lanesborough-Ballyleague to enhance the town centre.
9 Facilitate increased residential density in town core	14 Provide serviced sites for residential development in core areas of Ballyleague and Lanesborough	Sites in the ownership of each local authority to be identified and prioritised for provision of site services on a phased basis to encourage increased residential density in the town centre. Sites to be then sold to private individuals for construction of one-of housing in the town centre.
Pillar 4: Increase the Visibility of Lanesborough-Ballyleague		
Theme	Project	Project Summary

<p>10 Marketing and Promotion of Lanesborough-Ballyleague to Maximise Opportunities</p>	<p>15 Seek funding for a Digital Marketing Strategy for Lanesborough-Ballyleague</p>	<p>The commissioning of a comprehensive digital marketing strategy for Lanesborough-Ballyleague would focus on promoting the town as a sustainable community that is a desirable place to live, work, visit and invest.</p>
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Figure 1 Indicative Location of Proposed Projects

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Study Context

KPMG Future Analytics has been appointed by Longford and Roscommon County Councils to prepare an Economic and Enterprise Development Strategy (EEDS) for Lanesborough-Ballyleague. **The objective of this strategy is to develop and deliver an effective short, medium, and long-term path to enterprise and job creation in the area, building on existing and planned investment and innovation initiatives.**

Lough Ree Power Station – Impact of Closure

Lanesborough-Ballyleague has strong associations with its surrounding peatlands. During the 1950s and 1960s, the area experienced considerable economic and population growth with the development of the peat fired ESB Lough Ree Generating Station and the development of Bord na Móna’s peat production facilities. Bord na Móna and the ESB have provided significant levels of employment in the Midlands region for over 70 years, and indeed many rural communities and villages emerged near their sites. **This has also led to an economic reliance on employment with Bord na Móna and the ESB.** However, the ESB confirmed in 2019 that the two peat-fired power stations namely, West Offaly Power Station (Shannonbridge, County Offaly), and Lough Ree Power Station (County Longford) would close the end of 2020.

The closure of the Lough Ree Power Station will mean, in addition to those lost in 2019, the loss of 20-25 permanent jobs and 15-20 casual jobs in Lanesborough-Ballyleague, resulting in a significant loss of economic revenue for Lanesborough-Ballyleague. **The negative impact on those losing their employment, and indirect impacts on the wider community will be huge both financially and psychologically.** Indeed, the impact of the closure of the power stations will be felt across many communities in many rural villages and towns in the Midlands, with peat extraction to supply the power stations taking place across 130 individual bogs covering 80,000 hectares in eight counties¹.

While closure of the power stations and the cessation of peat burning will play a necessary role in mitigating the threat of climate change, and Ireland’s efforts to create a more sustainable, low-carbon, resource efficient economy, **the negative associated socio-economic impacts of the loss of employment must also be addressed.** Lanesborough-Ballyleague, and the wider regions², are currently undergoing a ‘Just Transition’ process.

Just Transition Process

To reach the goal of the EU achieving climate neutrality by 2050 in a way that is fair, the European Green Deal proposed a €150bn Just Transition Mechanism over the period 2021-2027, which includes a Just Transition Fund, to bring people and places along on a journey towards more sustainable development and not leaving them behind³. The European Commission confirmed its agreement, in July 2019, to the inclusion of the Midlands region in the Platform for Coal and Other Carbon Intensive Regions in Transition.

In November 2019, the Government appointed Mr. Kieran Mulvey as the first Just Transition Commissioner to co-ordinate the government's response to an accelerated exit from peat for electricity generation in the region. The process is supported by an €11 million Just Transition Fund,

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/midlands_regional_profile_-_start.pdf

² Lanesborough, County Longford is part of the Eastern and Midlands Regional Authority (EMRA), while Ballyleague, Co. Roscommon is part of the North and Western Regional Authority (NWRA).

³ https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

to which the ESB has contributed €5 million in recognition of their long-standing relationship with communities in the Midlands. This funding aims to support the retraining and reskilling of workers and to assist local communities and businesses in the midlands to adjust to the low carbon transition.

The 2020 call for applications the Just Transition Fund closed on 17 July 2020. Provisional offers totalling €1.2 million were made to sixteen successful applicants under the 2020 Fund, with these listed in Appendix 1. The offers relate to Strand 1 applications for less than €100,000 in funding. Applications seeking more than €100,000 from the Fund will receive provisional offers in late November.

Irish Carbon Tax revenues are ring fenced for climate action measures and includes funding for just transition, retrofitting and protecting the vulnerable from rising energy cost. In the 2020 Just Transition Progress Report Mr Kieran Mulvey recommended that, as part of the Carbon Tax Allocation in 2021:

- **The Just Transition Fund be increased from €6m to €25m** to achieve recommendation in the report, to facilitate projects that require completion, and to support new priorities for 2021-2023;
- **The Peatlands Rehabilitation fund (€5m in 2020) be continued**, given its contribution to employment generating opportunities, and for environmental benefits⁴.

Funding of 108m was announced on 25th November 2020 for Bord na Móna’s large-scale peatlands restoration project. The plan will protect the storage of 100 million tonnes of carbon, sequester 3.2 million tonnes of carbon out to 2050, enhance biodiversity, create 350 jobs and contribute to Ireland’s target of being carbon-neutral by 2050. The Government funding, which will come from the Climate Action Fund, will be bolstered by an €18 million investment from Bord na Móna, who are committed to a “brown to green” transition.⁵

Focus of this Strategy

It is within this overarching context that Longford and Roscommon County Councils commissioned an Economic and Enterprise Development Strategy (EEDS) for Lanesborough-Ballyleague. This strategy includes the development of an **ambitious, distinct and wholly achievable vision for the economic development of the settlement to 2040**. It aims to **promote sustainable economic growth and job creation**, in the short, medium and long term while also providing an **economic framework to build upon the current offerings in Lanesborough-Ballyleague and to drive prosperity in line with the defined vision**. This strategy will inform future developments to be supported under the Just Transition Fund and other relevant funding programmes.

The difficulties faced by communities like that of Lanesborough-Ballyleague have been more recently compounded by the **Covid-19 pandemic**. Following a period of relative national economic growth in the aftermath of 2007/8 global crisis, the country is once again grappling with the impacts of a sudden shift in economic circumstances. **This complex set of challenges necessitates a reimagining of the growth potential of Lanesborough-Ballyleague and the further sustainable and resilient development of enterprise and employment opportunities.**

⁴ Just Transition Progress Report, Kieran Mulvey, April 2020, page 62

⁵ <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/2aae1-cabinet-approves-108m-funding-for-groundbreaking-bord-na-mona-bog-rehabilitation-plan-minister-ryan-also-announces-that-47-more-projects-in-the-midlands-totalling-278m-are-approved-under-the-just-transition-fund/>

A range of funding applications have been made for infrastructure enhancements, recreation schemes, public realm enhancement, enterprise and energy initiatives and tourism projects in recent years, with detail provided in Appendix 1. These have been made under several different funding initiatives including:

- Just Transition
- Rural Redevelopment Development Fund (RRDF)
- Town and Village renewal Scheme
- Leader

This report aims to build on these initiatives by identifying those projects or groups of projects that have the greatest potential to generate alternative and sustainable employment opportunities; both to replace those jobs lost as a result of the closure of the Lough Ree Power Station, and to ensure that Lanesborough-Ballyleague, as well as nearby settlements such as Cloontuskert, can be a thriving and sustainable community for current and future generations. Underpinning the work of KPMG Future Analytics on this project is the need to identify realistic and evidence-based projects that can provide tangible socio-economic benefit.



2.0 Lanesborough-Ballyleague

2.1 Overview of Lanesborough-Ballyleague

Lanesborough-Ballyleague is one settlement, comprising of two attractive villages separated by the majestic River Shannon, on the northern shores of Lough Ree. Ballyleague is situated to the west of the Shannon in County Roscommon, with Lanesborough on the eastern side of the river in County Longford.



Figure 2 Lanesborough-Ballyleague Regional Context

The town was originally known by its Irish name of *Beal Atha Liag* or ‘the mouth of the ford of the flagstones’ with this name referring to the settlement on both sides of the Shannon and relating to flagstones placed to aid crossing the river. In the late 17th Century George Lane was granted land on

the Longford side for services rendered to King Charles, after which the settlement on this side of the river became known as Lanesborough. The population of Lanesborough-Ballyleague at the time of the 2016 Census was 1,454.

One of the earliest references to the settlements is from 520AD when St. Brendan the Navigator and his brother St. Faithleach land travelled north on the Shannon, landing around one kilometre to the east of Ballyleague and subsequently founded **St. Mary's Abbey at Cloontuskert** 3km to the north of Ballyleague. The **first bridge across the Shannon at this point** was built by Malachy, High King of Meath, and the King of Connacht around 1000 AD in a joint effort to defend against the Vikings, with a more permanent bridge built by Turlough O'Connor, High King of Ireland around 1140. A nine-arch bridge was built in 1706, using stone from a Norman castle from the car park, and replaced in 1847 by the current seven arch bridge. Quays, a boat slip and a cut-stone harbour were constructed in the 1820s to cater for increased river traffic.

Visually the town is dominated by the Lough Ree Power station to the north of Lanesborough which has historically been the predominant employer for the town and wider region, with importance reducing in recent decades. Both Ballyleague and Lanesborough have evolved as linear settlements along principal roads, with several more recent clusters of residential development. Other significant buildings include Ballyleague Towerhouse which is visible from the main road, and the Kiln House in Ballyleague on the banks of the Shannon to the north of the bridge, which was more likely associated with malting and the production of whiskey than as a lime kiln.

Lough Ree is the second largest lake on the Shannon after Lough Derg to the south. Athlone is located at the southern end of the lake, which is popular for fishing and boating. Lough Ree has been designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and a Special Protection Area (SPA) due to the importance of habitats and migratory wildfowl. The **island of Inchcleraun** lies in the northern part of the lake and is home to the ruins of St. Diarmaid's Monastery founded by St. Diarmuid in AD 560 and has the remains of seven churches. The island is owned by the Irish state. In Irish legends, it was on this island that Queen Maeve was killed.

Lough Ree and the Shannon are renowned for angling and Lanesborough-Ballyleague has hosted many major angling competitions, including the World Predator Boat Fishing championships and several other international angling events, with anglers particularly attracted by the 'hot water stretch' from the outlet from the power station which made this one of the most popular locations on the Shannon. The closure of the Lough Ree Power Station will result in the loss of this feature with a knock-on impact on the quality of the angling. Nearby Kilnacarrow is a short stretch of the Shannon that fishes well for roach, hybrids and bream in warm weather.

Lanesborough-Ballyleague is **ideally located to enable access to both Lough Ree and the River Shannon**, as well as nearby attractions such as Strokestown House. The town is approximately equidistant from Roscommon Town (14km to the south-west on the N63), Strokestown (16km to the north-west via the N371/N5), and Longford Town (16km to the north-east via the N63). Further afield Athlone is 40km to the south, while Mullingar lies 52km to the east, and Dublin 134km to the south-east. Center Parcs lies 26km to the south-west near Ballymahon, Co. Longford. **Slieve Bawn** is a mountain located mid-way between Strokestown and Ballyleague. Throughout the forest are looped walks, a trim trail for fitness, an equestrian trail, a raised viewing platform and a new picnic area. These amenities were developed as part of the Sliabh Bawn wind farm and represent a €500,000 investment by Sliabh Bawn Power a joint venture between Coillte and Bord na Móna.

In terms of **public transport** Lanesborough-Ballyleague is served by Bus Éireann service 425 (Galway-Roscommon-Longford) and, the 467 (Wednesday's only) service Longford-Lanesborough. Longford-Westmeath Community Transport co-ordinate the Local Link services R13 from Newtowncashel/Lanesborough to Longford (Tuesdays and Saturdays), and the R19 Newtowncashel Upper to Lanesborough (Friday). The nearest railway stations are Longford town (17km), on the Iarnród Éireann Sligo-Connolly line, and Roscommon town (16km), on the Ballina/Westport-Heuston line. The former provides a two-hour weekday service to Dublin, and the latter a three-hour weekday service to Dublin.



Figure 3 Lanesborough-Ballyleague and Lough Ree Context

Cruising times from Lanesborough north on the Shannon are one hour to Termonbarry, 3 hrs to Roosky, 4 hours to Dromod, and six hours to Carrick -on-Shannon. To the south cruising time to Athlone is approximately 2 hours. On the Ballyleague side of the Shannon are the Ballyleague Marina and Hanleys Marina, both of which offer a range of facilities including toilets, showers and pump out option. Ballyleague Marina has 32-berths and has recently installed new moorings with electric points,

making it only the third location on the Shannon with this facility along with Carrick-on-Shannon and Athlone. The initiative is part of the Ballyleague Town & Village Renewal project and funding was secured from the Department of the Environment. **While the infrastructure for cruising is excellent people hiring cruisers are not encouraged to stay overnight here due to the lack of restaurants and lack of things to see and do, in comparison to other locations**⁶.

In 2016, the "Taste of the Lakelands Food Festival" brought a crowd of 6000 visitors to the town with the aim to bring a new focus on food tourism and food production in the area.

There are a wide range of community groups in Lanesborough-Ballyleague, these include:

- Ballyleague Village Renewal & Tidy Towns
- Lanesborough Tidy Towns Committee
- Lanesborough Tourism Co-op Society
- Lanesboro Triathlon Club
- Lough Ree Sub-Aqua club

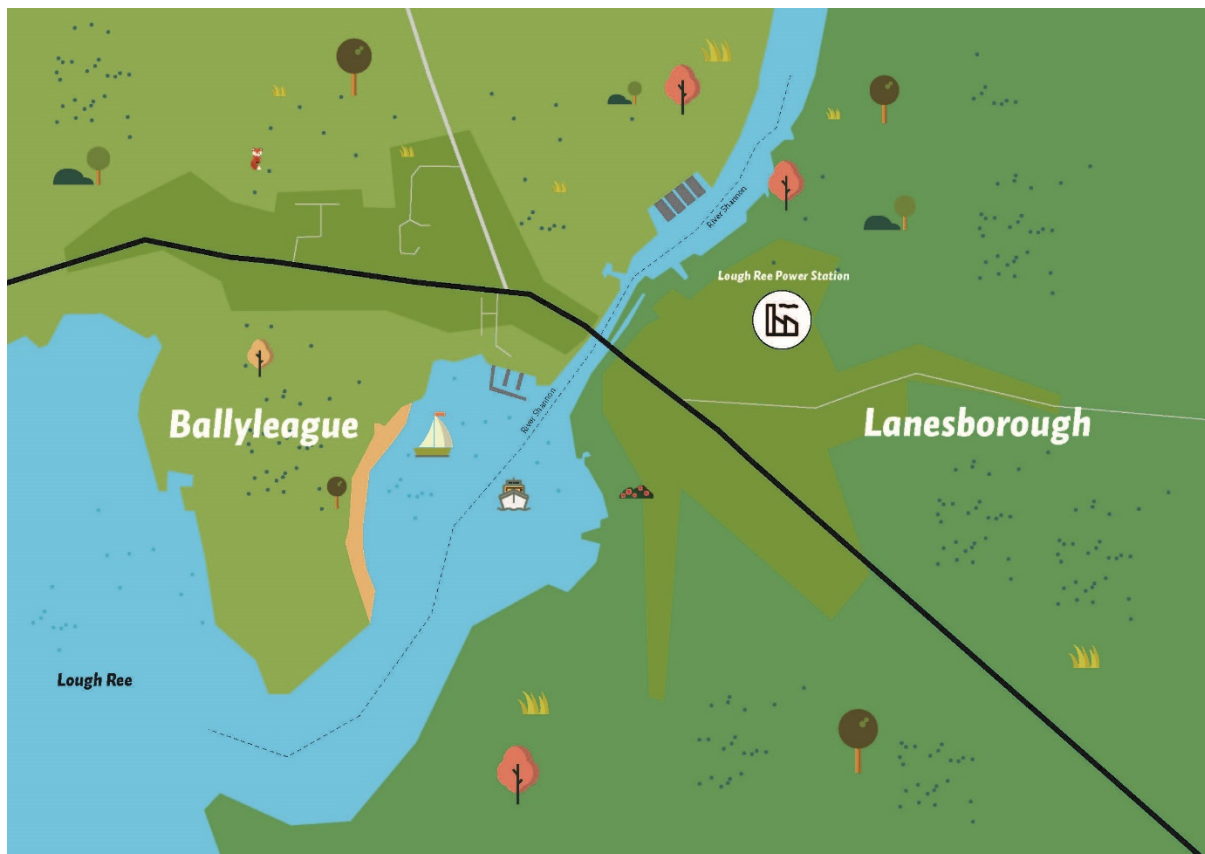


Figure 4 Lanesborough-Ballyleague Local Context

2.2 Socio-economic Profile of Lanesborough-Ballyleague

A socio-economic assessment of Lanesborough-Ballyleague and wider county, as well as population projection analysis to 2040 is set out in Appendix 3. Possessing an understanding of the socioeconomic attributes of a study area offers insights into the area's requirements. Similarly, the population

⁶ Conversation with Carrickcraft November 2020

composition, in terms of attributes such as age and categories of employment, will impact on the type of accommodation and services required.

The population of Ballyleague and Lanesborough increased by 6% between 2011 and 2016. In common with much of rural Ireland, there is a relatively high dependency rate, and over 20% of the population is retired. There is also a relative high proportion of the population that is disabled. The economically active younger age group are less well represented in the population profile.

The socio-economic profile for Lanesborough-Ballyleague has indicated that **the town will continue to experience growth up until 2040. By 2040, the projected population for Lanesborough-Ballyleague is 1,840**, which is a 26.5% increase on the numbers recorded in 2016 (1,454). The town has an average age and age dependency well above the state average and since 2011 the student population has declined by almost 10%, which **highlights the towns ageing population**. Lanesborough-Ballyleague possesses a **highly educated population** who are **predominantly employed in professional services and commerce & trade**.

While Bord na Móna and ESB were major employers historically this has substantially declined in recent decades. Both Roscommon and Longford County Councils have sought to attract employment to established centres. This has consequently resulted in Lanesborough-Ballyleague increasingly having a commuter economy. A focus for this strategy is to reverse this trend and to aim for more locally based employment over the coming years.

The population of Lanesborough-Ballyleague has a **good level of education attainment** but falls below state averages when it comes to NFQ7 and above. Employment in the area increased by 8.3% in the 5-year period between 2011 and 2016 with the numbers looking for a first-time job rising significantly. During this period, the unemployment rate also increased by 1.5%. Of the people at work the analysis highlights that ‘non manual’, ‘manual skilled’ and ‘semi-skilled’ are the most predominant socioeconomic groups. Almost 10% of the population were classed as ‘employers and managers’.

Matching skills with employment

The objective of this strategy is to address the deficit in employment as a result of the closure of the Lough Ree Power Station at the end of 2020, as well as providing medium-long term employment opportunities. A key consideration must be what skills are available amongst those currently and formerly employed by Bord na Móna. Any proposals for short term employment generation must match available skills to ensure compatibility.

The Lough Ree Access for All project team undertook a skills audit of Bord na Móna workers in July 2020. The results of this audit can be seen in Table 2. While commissioned to inform the Just Transition application by the Access for All project team for a recreation hub, and therefore tailored towards the requirements of that project, this clearly illustrates a wide range of skills sets that are available.

Table 2 Bord na Móna Workers Skills Audit July 2020 (carried out by Lough Ree Access for All project team)

Skill Set	Number of former employees
Engine/Bicycle/Maintenance	32
Reception centre Staff	21
Office/Book-keeping/IT	22
Caretaking/Cleaning/Security	30
Passenger Boat skipper	9
SNA's/Carers on board	14

Angling Guides	20
Historical Sites Guides	8
Kayak/Boat Training/Lessons	9
Other	2

2.3 Spatial Analysis of Lanesborough-Ballyleague

KPMG Future Analytics have undertaken an overview of trends in terms of national and local level vacancy and dereliction across both residential and commercial properties in Ireland, as informed by Geodirectory data. Key trends in commercial property across Ireland are outlined below, along with an overview of the provision of commercial properties in Lanesborough/ Ballyleague. Building upon the latest Geodirectory land use and vacancy data, KPMG Future Analytics have then undertaken a comprehensive survey of land uses, vacancy and dereliction within Lanesborough/ Ballyleague.

2.3.1 Comparative Vacancy and Dereliction Analysis

In January 2020, the GeoDirectory published the 2019 Quarter 4 (Q4) ‘GeoView Residential Buildings Report’ which details the stock of residential properties in Ireland on a quarterly basis. As of December 2019, the GeoDirectory reports that there were over 2,014,357 residential dwellings in Ireland. The average vacancy rate across the State was 4.7%. Leitrim had the highest percentage of vacant units in the State at 15.3% while Dublin had the lowest vacancy rate at 1.3%. Indeed, the three counties with the lowest vacancies in the country were all based in the Greater Dublin Area, namely, Dublin (1.3%), Kildare (2.2%) and Wicklow (3.2%). **However, 18 out of 26 (or 69%) counties in Ireland experienced a decline in their residential vacancy rates in the past year. This may indicate that as the housing crisis intensifies, more vacant homes are coming back into use.**

Census 2016 figures show the total housing stock in Co. Roscommon as 31,285. Of these houses, 5,323 or **17% were identified as being vacant**. This is a reduction from the 7,332 houses that were identified as being vacant in the 2011 Census. The figures from Geodirectory in December 2019 indicate that 13.3% of housing stock is vacant (excluding holiday homes), signalling a **decrease in overall vacancy**. However, **this rate of 13.3% represented the second highest rate in the country** in December 2019.

Census 2016 results record a total housing stock of 18,591 units in Co. Longford. The number of vacant units in 2016 stood at 2,824 (or 15%). There was an overall decline of 918 units in the number of vacant dwellings between 2011-2016. The figures from Geodirectory in December 2019 indicate that the vacancy rate was **10.1%, again signalling an overall decrease in the county vacancy rate**.

The GeoDirectory has also assembled the first data on derelict buildings across the state, noting that derelict buildings have to date been excluded from housing stock figures. The definition utilised by the GeoDirectory for derelict buildings are buildings that are *‘boarded up, not in use and in need of substantial repair to be made into a habitable dwelling’*. This shows that there were 28,359 derelict address points in the State in June 2019. This is a reduction of 604 in the four years since June 2015. The vast majority (92.6%) are in rural locations. However, in analysing the largest 1,300 towns in Ireland, the GeoDirectory notes that the total number of derelict address points was 1,860 in June 2019. This figure is 501 less than the corresponding total in June 2015. At 249, Dublin has the highest proportion of derelict address points in the State, down from 329 in 2015. **In June 2019 Longford recorded 133 derelict address points while Roscommon recorded 96.**

Commercial Property – Key National Trends

As 2020 marks the beginning of a new decade, GeoDirectory have taken the opportunity to examine several interesting trends using GeoDirectory data to tell the story of how Ireland has changed over the past ten years. This analysis points to changes in several specific establishments in the main urban areas which have led to 1) an increasing café and bar culture; 2) a greater number of beauty salons and personal grooming establishments; and 3) a growing preoccupation with health, fitness and well-being.

Much of these changes reflect the recovery in the economy over the period, including the exceptional performance of the labour market and the increase in total income earned. Annual average earnings in the State rose from €36,277 to almost €40,000 over the ten years, an increase of over 10%. This growth in jobs and incomes has been associated with a rise in discretionary spending.

While the economic context has rapidly changed in the past 6 months, it is anticipated these trends will resume in the longer term once the threat of the virus dissipates. In the current context, however, these sectors have taken a substantial hit. Analysis of debit card transactions by Bank of Ireland has revealed that restaurant spend between March and April was down 69% as the recent trend towards a food delivery model continues.

Gaps in Provision of Commercial Properties in Lanesborough-Ballyleague

GeoDirectory published the 2019 Quarter 4 ‘Commercial Vacancy Report’ which provides an analysis of the commercial building stock across Ireland. As of December 2019, there were 211, 529 commercial properties in the state, with 13.3% (or 28,156 properties) reported as vacant. **16 counties reported increases in commercial vacancy since 2018, with only 6 reporting decreases.**

Regionally, vacancy rates were lowest in Leinster where a rate of 12.4% was recorded in Q4 2019. Even with the exclusion of Dublin the vacancy rate for Leinster is still reported to be lower than the national average at 12.6%. With 18.9% of properties vacant, Sligo recorded the highest overall vacancy rate in Ireland. In contrast, Meath recorded the lowest vacancy rate of 10.1%.

Overall, **County Roscommon recorded fifth highest commercial vacancy rate in the country, at 16.3%.** The county also experienced the third highest increase in commercial vacancy levels between Q4 2018 and Q4 2019 (+ 0.6%). **The comparable vacancy figure for County Longford was 14.9% (with a +0.1% change between Q4 2018 and Q4 2019.** It is notable that this analysis took place prior to the COVID 19 crisis, which has had a significant impact on many businesses throughout the country.

The existing commercial activity within Lanesborough-Ballyleague has been analysed by KPMG Future Analytics with detail provided in Appendix 3. This provides a detailed breakdown of commercial uses across the two villages. These uses are structured by the NACE codes allocated to them. **Overall, 88 such commercial properties were recorded across the settlement.**

It is first necessary to understand national and county level trends around the primary occupiers of commercial units. This data has been compiled by GeoDirectory within the ‘GeoView Commercial Vacancy Rates Report – Q2 2019’. This report confirms that there are 211,485 commercial address points in Ireland. If vacant units are excluded, this figure stands at 183,422 occupied address points. 166,939 of this total or 91.0% were allocated a NACE code as of the 12th of July 2019.

Businesses in the services sector continue to be the primary occupier of commercial units allocated a NACE code in Ireland, accounting for 48.3% or 80,639 of total units. Activities that are prominent in this sector include Accommodation and Food services (22,774 units), Professional Scientific and

Technical services (13,188 units) and Arts, Entertainment and Recreation activities (8,638 units). The Retail and Wholesale sector accounted for the second largest proportion of commercial units, representing 23.4% or 39,124 of occupied commercial address points with a NACE code. Just under three quarters of this category were specifically involved in the Retail trade sector (27,532 commercial units). Health was the third largest business activity, representing 9.1% or 15,186 of the total units allocated a NACE classification. Activities in this category range from healthcare provided by trained medical and dental practitioners, health clinics, residential care and nursing home activities to social work activities.

The proportion of commercial sectors in Lanesborough-Ballyleague aligns broadly with national trends. The trend towards greater “experiential” shopping is evident, with consumers now seemingly spending less on comparison goods and instead spending more on experiences, such as food, beverages and services such as beauticians and barbers. Indeed, these activities (restaurants and mobile food service activities; beverage serving activities; and hairdressing and other beauty treatment) form some of the most dominant uses.

Lanesborough-Ballyleague Vacancy and Dereliction Analysis

The Lanesborough-Ballyleague Local Action Plan 2018 noted that the villages have several key vacant properties in the core area. The Plan acknowledges that these properties detract from the sense of commercial vibrancy and recommends that a strategy should be adopted to find pop-up or short-term uses that are consistent with an ultimate long-term sustainable use. **In 2016, the Census results showed that the residential vacancy rate across the settlement was 21.6% (excluding holiday homes and temporarily vacant dwellings). This is higher than both the 2016 Roscommon and Longford county vacancy rates (which were 17% and 15% respectively, as above).**

The core area of the villages was defined as the case study area, as depicted in Figure 5 below. This survey has also enabled the development of a fully electronic ARC GIS database with each property geo located and recording its vacancy/ dereliction status along with survey photographs and comments attached. This can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/lanesboroughsurvey>.

The results of the survey show:

- A small concentration of vacant properties along Main Street near the River and the Lanesborough Bridge. While some of these are in the process of undergoing refurbishment (or have been recently sold), others remain in a stagnant vacant state.
- Two derelict structures overlooking the River Shannon on the Ballyleague side one of which is the old Malt/Kiln House building on the northern side, in private ownership, which was partly the subject of the Ballyleague North and Harbour Conservation Plan in 2014.
- A derelict structure near the bridge on the Lanesborough side.
- One building of note is the vacant and substantial former Convent Building on Main Street. This has been highlighted throughout the consultation period as a potential opportunity site for re-use.
- There are several sites on both sides of the river that require infill to provide a continuous frontage, enhancing the appearance of the main street.

Key findings include:

- Buildings that provide **potential for alternative use** include
 - the former convent building in Lanesborough;
 - the disused Waterways Ireland building near the old harbour in Ballyleague, for which planning permission has been granted for a recreation centre, and for which a

successful application has been made to the 2020 Just Transition Fund (see Appendix 1).

- The site occupied by St Mary’s community hall, the car park to the rear and associated buildings;
- The former Sliabh Bán hotel in Ballyleague.
- The Ballyglass Bord na Móna site near Clontuskert;
- The Bord na Móna site at Mount Dillon.
- **Key opportunity sites** include:
 - the Lough Ree Power Station site, subject to outcome of ESB assessment;
 - lands on the Commons adjacent to the inner lake of Lough Ree;
 - lands adjacent to the Waterways Ireland marina to the south of Ballyleague, subject to landowner agreement;
 - lands to the west of the Waterways Ireland building in Ballyleague, subject to landowner agreement
 - Lanes to the south of Hanley’s Marina, subject to landowner agreement;
- There is **potential to use vacant upper floors and empty buildings for community and visitor accommodation use**, subject to owner engagement.

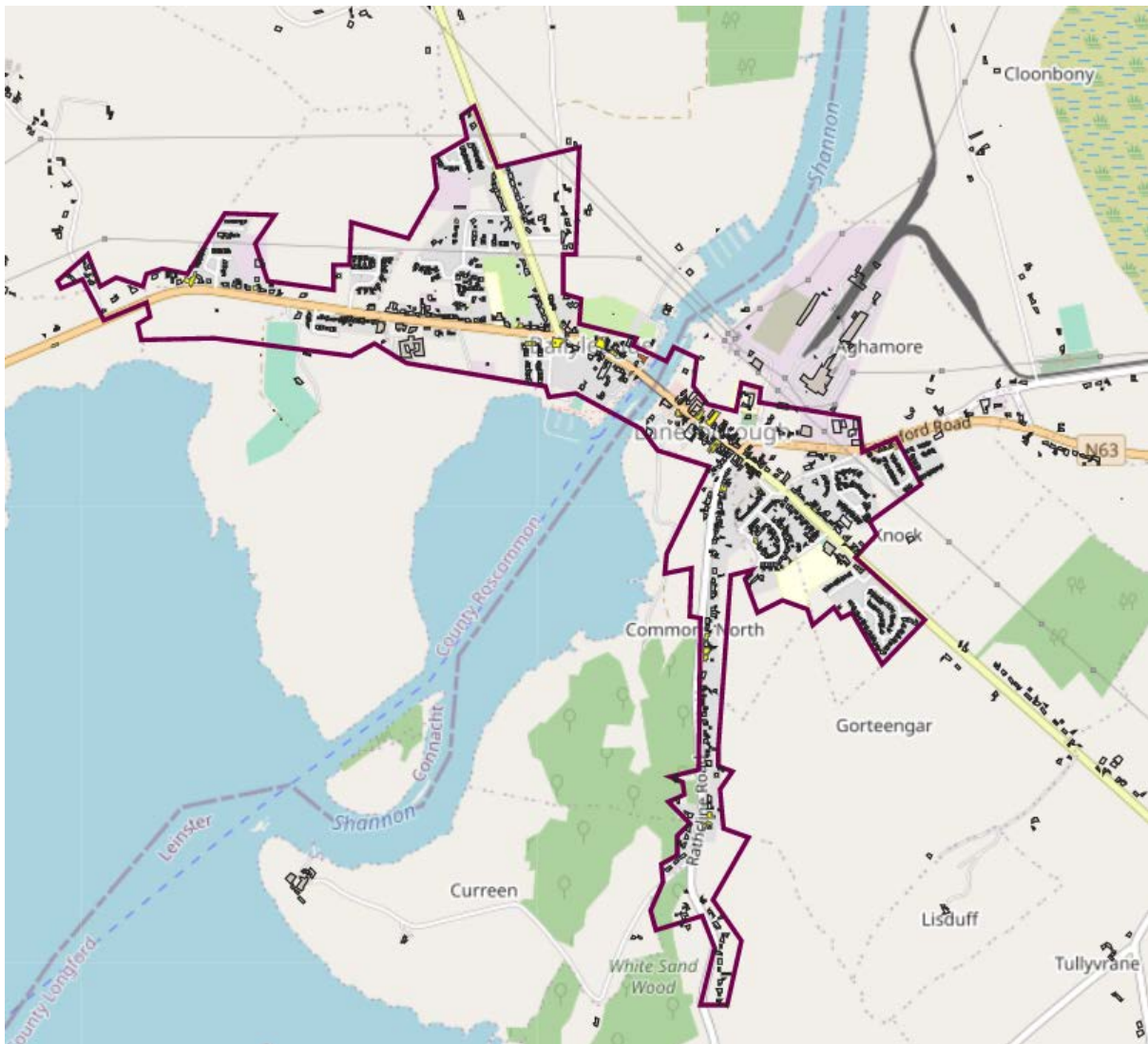


Figure 5 Land Use, Vacancy and Dereliction Analysis

3.0 Policy Landscape and Research Findings

This review establishes the spatial and sectoral policies that have shaped Lanesborough-Ballyleague's socio-economic development to date and will shape its future growth. As part of this project a detailed review of the national, regional and local policy context was conducted. The following comprises a summary of this review, the detail of which was provided as a part of an Interim Report. Consideration is given as to how existing policies and initiatives can be used to capitalise on enterprise opportunities and provide for sustainable and resilient economic growth for Lanesborough-Ballyleague.

Further research findings are summarised in section 3.2 PESTEL analysis, with further detail provided in Appendix 3.

3.1 Policy Landscape

3.1.1 National Policy

Relevant National Strategic Outcomes under the **National Planning Framework (NPF) 2040** include a 'Strengthened Rural Economic and Communities' and a 'Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society'. The **National Development Plan** sets out investment priorities that will underpin the implementation of the NPF up to 2027 and beyond. Significant funding is to be delivered under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (€1 billion) and Climate Action Fund (€500 million) to support both job creation, entrepreneurship and innovation in rural areas and the decarbonisation of Ireland's energy systems.

The **National Mitigation Plan** introduces the concept of a **Just Transition**, where supports for enterprise and employment are made available to offset the burden on those groups who will bear the greatest impact of such a transition. The **National Energy and Climate Plan** expands on the social and economic implications of this transition and makes specific reference to measures announced in Budget 2020 to support workers effected by the cessation of Bord na Móna's activities around peat harvesting in the Midlands region. These include:

- *the appointment of a Just Transition Commissioner*
- *the establishment of a €6m Just Transition Fund to support the retraining and reskilling workers and assist local communities and businesses in the Midlands to adjust to the low carbon transition*
- *the allocation of €5m for bog restoration and rehabilitation which will restore bogs to their natural habitat and become sinks that absorb carbon*
- *providing €20m to deliver a new model to group housing retrofitting upgrades together and targeted at the Midlands.*

The Minister for Finance announced in Budget 2021 that the carbon tax will be increased by €7.50 a tonne in 2021. All the resulting revenues raised will be allocated in line with the Programme for Government commitment to use increases in the carbon tax to:

- Ensure that the increases in the carbon tax are progressive through targeted social welfare and other initiatives to prevent fuel poverty and ensure a just transition;
- Fund a socially progressive national retrofitting programme targeting all homes but with an emphasis on the Midlands region and on social and low-income tenancies;
- Allocate funding to a REPS-2 programme to encourage and incentivise farmers to farm in a greener and more sustainable way.

The Finance Act 2020 will also provide a legislative basis to increase the tax each year by €7.50 up to 2029 and by €6.50 in 2030 to achieve a rate of €100. This will raise an estimated additional revenue

of some €90 million in 2020 and €130 million in a full year. This means that the combined proceeds of the 2020 and 2021 increases in the carbon tax are estimated at €238m in 2021. The combined proceeds of the increase in carbon tax introduced in Budget 2020 and the further increase being introduced in Budget 2021 will amount to approximately €238 million in additional revenues.

Of the €238m, a total of €70 million is to be allocated to the continuation of the 2020 carbon tax investment programme, which includes energy poverty schemes, creation of a Just Transition Fund and increases in allocations to greenways and urban cycling programmes. According to **Budget 2021: The Use of Carbon Tax Funds 2021, €6 million will go to Just Transition fund, the same amount 2020⁷, but below the figure €25m recommended by Mr Kieran Mulvey in his Just Transition Progress Report published in April 2020.**

The **Just Transition Progress Report** published by the Just Transition Commissioner in 2020 provides an overview of the current state of affairs for the Midlands Region and makes a number of recommendations for policy measures and actions needed to achieve a Just Transition for the Region.

Provisional offers totalling €1.2 million were made to 16 successful applicants under Strand 1 of the 2020 Fund. Under Strand One provisional offers of funding, totalling €27.8 million, have been made to 47 projects in the Midlands under the Just Transition Fund for applications for €100,000 and above⁸. All successful projects are listed in Appendix 1.

Relevant successful projects for Lanesborough-Ballyleague in Stage 1 (under €100,000) included:

- Lough Ree Bay Boardwalk Feasibility Study (Roscommon County Council)
- Lanesboro Anaerobic Digestion Facility: Feasibility Study (Longford and Roscommon County Councils)
- Lough Ree Technology Cluster Study (FDT Consulting Engineers and PM Limited)

Relevant successful projects for Lanesborough-Ballyleague in Stage 2 (over €100,000 included those shaded in blue in Table 3. Other stage 2 funded projects will an all-county focus that are also of relevance to Lanesborough Ballyleague include those shaded in green in Table 3.

Table 3 Just Transition Fund 2020 Stage 1 Successful Applications of Relevance to Lanesborough-Ballyleague

	Project Name	Lead Applicant	JFT Funding Amount Sought (€)	Counties impacted
1	A Brown to Green Jobs Transition to Eliminate Energy Waste in Midlands Homes	Hub Controls Ltd	1,000,000	All counties
3	Bord na Móna Employee Supports - Training and Upskilling Project	Bord na Móna	1,000,000	All counties
4	Bord na Móna Medicinal Herbs Project	Bord na Móna	1,000,000	All counties
6	Climate Action Training and Mentoring Programme	Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office	255,000	All counties
7	Clontuskert Ballyleague Bog Heritage Train	Roscommon County Council	212,000	Roscommon

⁷ <http://budget.gov.ie/Budgets/2021/Documents/Budget/Carbon%20tax%20document.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ed10d-just-transition-fund/>

8	Clontuskert Ballyleague Visitor Centre and Organic Farm	Roscommon County Council	212,000	Roscommon
10	Connecting Communities with Peatlands	Irish Rural Link	277,079	All counties
15	Empower Eco	Athlone Institute of Technology	907,765	All counties
16	Enablers of a Just Transition for Communities in the Midlands Region	University of Limerick - Centre for Environmental Research	217,600	All counties
21	Lanesboro Food Hub	Premier Lakelands Hub	1,000,000	Longford, Roscommon
22	Lanesborough Tourism Hub	Longford County Council	212,500	Longford, Roscommon
26	Lough Ree Access for All	Lough Ree Access for All CLG	471,693	Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath
27	Lough Ree Distillery - Phase 2	Blacksmith Ventures Limited	1,000,000	Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath
28	Midland Bioenergy Development Project	Irish BioEnergy Association	255,000	All counties
30	Midlands Network of Co-working Facilities - Business Development	Laois County Council	255,000	Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath
31	Midlands Retrofit Growth	KORE Retrofit Ltd	948,600	All counties
32	Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park Greenway	Longford County Council	102,000	Longford, Roscommon

The **Climate Action Plan** makes a commitment to maximise new enterprise opportunities arising in relation to Bord na Móna’s activities in the Midlands.

The **Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways** recognises the high potential of Greenways as economic contributors to rural communities through increased tourism. In order to ensure the economic maximum benefit, future greenways funded under this strategy will be required to be *‘strategic, scenic, sustainable, offer lots to see and do and substantially segregated from vehicular traffic and offering shared use between pedestrians and cyclists’*.

The **Action Plan for Rural Development** includes a commitment to publish action plans for job creation for Ireland’s regions, and committed to funding to boost economic activity and job creation in Ireland’s rural towns and villages.

Innovations in enterprise and job creation are supported under **Future Jobs Ireland and Enterprise 2025 Renewed**, which together comprise framework to capitalise on opportunities arising from technological advances and the transition to a low-carbon economy, and increase job resilience in the face of Brexit, global trade policies and other disruptions.

3.1.2 Regional Policy

The **Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Eastern and Midland Region** will support the implementation of the NPF by providing a strategic planning and economic framework for the region’s sustainable growth and development. The RSES reflects the core objectives of the NPF and

includes a number of regional policy objectives aimed at strengthening the fabric of rural Ireland through the sustainable development of rural towns and communities, improving connectivity, and supporting job creation and diversification.

Similarly, the ***RSES for the Northern and Western Region*** presents an integrated Growth Framework for the region’s development. Strengthening the region’s economy and employment is recognised as key to ensuring a vibrant region. The RSES highlights the shift to renewable energy and low carbon technologies as a key sector in the region’s economic growth, as well as opportunities to boost rural employment arising from technological developments around automations, digitisation and AI.

Powering the Regions is published by Enterprise Ireland in response to recent Government regional initiatives and identifies national initiatives to drive innovation and diversification and support 10,000 co-working and incubation spaces to support new start-ups. These initiatives are underpinned by specific plans for each region.

The ***Midlands Regional Enterprise Plan*** includes Key Actions to support the redeployment and retraining of staff impacted by Bord na Móna’s decarbonisation efforts including submission of funding applications to Project Ireland 2040 funding schemes, and identification of regional Climate Change Adaptation actions and economic opportunities.

The ***West Regional Enterprise Plan*** focuses on maximising opportunities to grow the regions tourism sector including new and improved experience for Mayo and Roscommon, development and implementation of saleable visitor experiences with the private sector aligned with regional brand objectives, with a focus on private sector delivery.

Lough Ree and Mid-Shannon: A Shared Vision – Spirit Level aims to activate the potential of Lough Ree and the Mid-Shannon for local people, their livelihoods, for visitors and for ecosystem services. This plan identifies a number of strands of opportunity, including a focus on blue/green infrastructure, a focus on places along the waterways which have a key role to play in the off-road blue and green network, active travel and joined up visitor experience.

The Shannon Mighty River of Ireland - A Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020-2030 considers the tourism and visitor development opportunities for the entire length of the Shannon Navigation and the Shannon Erne Waterway. The masterplan was prepared by Fáilte Ireland in association with Waterways Ireland and the relevant Local Authorities. The overall aim of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan, to grow tourism in Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands, strongly with national rural development policy to drive rural development through tourism. The objective of this plan is to reposition the River Shannon as a key destination in Ireland identifying visitor experiences based on the region’s natural and cultural assets. **Longford and Roscommon are identified as part of ‘Discovery Zone 2; Mid Shannon’ in the Shannon Tourism Masterplan.** This area stretches from Clondra in the north to Portumna in the south of the region and is described as: *“an elemental zone where Lough Ree and the Shannon Callows meet; where land melts to a mosaic of lakes, wetlands and peatlands; a place of open skies and expansive bogs merging on the horizon; where the visitor will experience a sense of timelessness and of total immersion in nature.”*⁹

Identified as a management issue for this area of the Shannon is consultation with island landowners to explore opportunities for visitor access to the islands of Lough Ree. The two relevant harbours are identified as Lanesborough-Ballyleague and Portun-Lecarrow. **This represents a significant opportunity for Lanesborough-Ballyleague.**

⁹ Volume 2 Draft Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon, page 51

Under ‘*Strategic Initiative 5: Protecting & Enhancing the Shannon Environment*’ the Masterplan refers a variety of measures. Key amongst these are reference to the Spirit Level report which calls for a Destination Development and Rewilding Plan to develop access to the Shannon Peatlands. The Masterplan states: **“A Destination Development and Rewilding Plan’ encompassing habitat regeneration, rewilding and future habitat management together with the identification of a range of visitor and educational experiences should be prepared to further the regeneration of the Shannon’s Peatlands, contributing to national climate mitigation research and actions.”**¹⁰

The Masterplan also refers to the UNESCO Biosphere for Lough Ree and Environs, stating: *“The Department of Culture, Heritage & the Gaeltacht (Heritage Division), in liaison with the relevant Local Authorities, is considering the concept of a UNESCO Biosphere for Lough Ree and its environs, to reflect the importance of its ecosystems. The focus of a UNESCO Biosphere is primarily on conservation of biodiversity and cultural diversity; while **fostering sustainable communities and enterprises**, as well as education, training and research to support conservation and sustainable development. The ambition of the masterplan is to integrate the efforts of key stakeholders, including landowners, in sustainable development, **socio-economic enhancement** and tourism related amenities. **Ultimately, the biosphere will create opportunities for local guides and enterprises to deliver active nature experiences for visitors to the Shannon.**”*¹¹

The masterplan refers to Lanesborough-Ballyleague as a village which has developed as a crossing point of the River Shannon at the north end of Lough Ree. **Longford County Council is highlighted as supporting the maintenance and growth of water tourism by sustainably developing the infrastructure on watercourses and the development of Lanesborough as a premier water recreation and angling destination.** The plan states that the council has several development objectives in relation to waterway development including facilitating the development of Blueways (Shannon-Lough Ree Canoe Blueway from River Inny to Lanesborough). The **annual Lough Ree Environmental Summer School** at Lanesborough also engages visitors in active exploration of the Shannon’s natural environments.

3.1.3 Local Policy

The **Longford County Development Plan 2015-2021** contains several policy objectives that provide a proactive approach to support enterprise and employment opportunities. The Plan also **recognises the potential of Lough Ree and the county’s peat bog as resources to grow the county’s tourism sector** and includes the **development of a visitor centre at Lanesborough** as a policy objective.

The **Roscommon County Development Plan 2014-2020** contains an Economic Strategy for the county that seeks to **facilitate indigenous industries and new start-up enterprises**, as well as provide for an **alternative land use for peatlands** the county shares with the midlands region.

Enterprise development for Lanesborough-Ballyleague is further supported by the **Local Economic and Community Plans** for County Longford and County Roscommon, which include actions for the **development of enterprise incubation spaces**, and the **reuse of worked-out boglands for tourism and renewable energy opportunities**. The development of the town’s tourism offering is supported by the *County Longford Tourism Strategy 2017-2022* and the *County Roscommon Tourism Strategy 2017-2022*. These contain overlapping objectives for the development of Lough Ree, the River Shannon and the peatlands to **create a tourism offering highlighting the areas natural history and**

¹⁰ Volume 2 Draft Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon, page 97, our emphasis

¹¹ Volume 2 Draft Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon, page 98, our emphasis

biodiversity as part of the Mid-Shannon region, and development of new trails linking the town to a proposed ‘Pilgrim Path’ between County Dublin and County Mayo.

The *Ballyleague and Lanesborough Local Action Plan 2018* presents six key themes to improve the settlements economic and social resilience, each with associated outcomes and objectives. These include the **improving broadband connectivity** and **providing a new pop-up enterprise centre** to support enterprise development and **developing the settlements eco-tourism and outdoor recreation offer** to attract visitors and support new businesses.



3.2 PESTEL Analysis

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the wider context and influencing forces shaping the growth and future development of small-town economies in Ireland (including Lanesborough/Ballyleague), a PESTEL analysis has been undertaken, and discussed in detail in Appendix 3. This PESTEL framework highlights key external and internal influencing factors under six thematic areas – Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Ecological and Legal. In turn, this analysis highlights key challenges and opportunity areas which may shape the future trajectory of the area’s economic development.

The SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis, provided in section 4.0, further analyses these factors and seeks to classify them according to whether they pose constraints, opportunities etc for Lanesborough/ Ballyleague specifically. PESTEL complements SWOT analysis by providing a wider ‘broad-brush’ view of influencing factors which may be missed by more localised SWOT analysis alone.

- **Political** – outlines the Just Transition Framework and summarises successful applications for funding relevant for the towns to date, discusses flexible working solutions including relevant government policies and funding,
- **Economic** - discusses economic growth and employment including the impact of Covid-19, considers economic trends particularly the shift towards remote working which presents significant opportunities for regional towns such as Lanesborough-Ballyleague, provides a summary of Commercial Activity and Vacancy Rates at national and county Level. This section also discusses key economic threats and risks recognising those presented by Covid-19 and Brexit and considers the impact of changing consumer behaviour on high streets.
- **Social** – provides summary discussion of demographic trends such as ageing populations and commuting and local jobs recognising that outward commuting is a factor for many Midlands towns.
- **Technological** – focusses on the Increasing digitalisation of economic activity with the rise of more flexible working solutions having repercussions for the composition of the traditional town centre main street, with the COVID-19 pandemic rapidly accelerating these trends. Increasing Broadband Availability and Portable computers / remote work tooling are also discussed with rapid adaption of remote working in 2020 proving that these shifts are workable and offering a potentially longer-term alternative to ‘normal’ working practices.
- **Environmental** - a transformational shift of our economies and societies towards climate resilient and sustainable development is essential, with remote working solutions (working from home or hub working, for example) reducing emissions and energy use and contributing towards the achievement this important goal.
- **Legal** – there may be legal issues arising from home working, however the current crisis and unprecedented shift towards remote working enables key lessons to be learned in a very short space of time.



4.0 Consultation and Engagement Summary

This section summarises consultation undertaken to inform this study. This includes the outcome of an **online survey** that was prepared to capture information on employment and commuting patterns in Lanesborough/Ballyleague, as well as perceptions around the viability of an enterprise hub for the town and other priority areas for the town’s development. **Targeted strategic conversations** were held with a range of key stakeholders to elicit their views on ways in which the economy of Lanesborough-Ballyleague could be revitalised.

4.1 Online Community Survey

This survey also attempted to capture how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted work and commuting patterns and whether it has changed people’s perceptions around the value of working from home as opposed to in an office. This survey was publicised online and made available to answer between the 8th July and 9th of September 2020. **A total of 74 respondents took the survey.** Due to the format of the online survey respondents were able skip certain questions. In the following sections it is noted how many respondents opted to answer a certain question, and the percentages referred to therewith refer to the total number of respondents who opted to answer that question.

Section 1: Context

Section 1 gathered data around the working and commuting patterns of respondents, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on these patterns.

Employment

- **62% of respondents indicated that they were employed full time, while 7% indicated they were employed part-time.** 11% of respondents were self-employed full time, while 4% were self-employed on a part-time basis. The remaining respondents were unemployed, retired, students, engaged in home duties or unable to work due to sickness or disability. (71/74).

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Employed (Full Time)	61.97%	44
Employed (Part Time)	7.04%	5
Unemployed	4.23%	3
Self Employed (Full Time)	11.27%	8
Self Employed (Part Time)	4.23%	3
Student	2.82%	2
Retired	4.23%	3
Engaged in home duties	2.82%	2
Unable to work due to permanent sickness/ disability	1.41%	1
TOTAL		71

- Regarding their typical place of work (pre-Covid-19), **23% of respondents indicated that they worked in Lanesborough/Ballyleague, while the majority (25%) worked elsewhere in County Longford.** 13% of respondents typically worked elsewhere in County Roscommon, and a similar number worked in County Dublin. Some respondents worked in County Westmeath (9%) while a minority worked in County Galway and Galway City (2%). **A notable segment of respondents indicated that they typically worked from home (6%) or had no fixed location for work (9%).** (64/74 respondents).

- The sectors in which respondents worked were varied. **The largest proportion of respondents worked in retail (14%), while 12% worked in Public administration and defence.** Other notable sectors included. Other notable sectors included Financial, insurance and real estate activities (10%), Education (10%), Professional, scientific and technical activities (8%) and Administrative and support service activities (8%). (59/74 respondents).

Commuting

- When asked how they typically travel to work, **most respondents used a car to commute to work, either as a driver or passenger (85%).** The next highest proportion of respondents indicated that they mainly worked from home and so did not have to travel (9%). The remaining respondents travelled to work on foot (3%) or used a bus or train (1% each). Noticeably no respondents used a bicycle to travel to work. (68/74 respondents).
- **Most respondents indicated that their commute took under 15 minutes (41%), with 27% indicating their commute took between 15-30 minutes.** 12% had a commute of between 30-45 minutes, and 8% took between 45 minutes to an hour. Only 2% indicated their commute took between an hour and an hour and a half, while 11% indicated their commute last over an hour and a half. (66/74 respondents).

Alternative Working Arrangements

- Respondents were asked whether they typically participated in flexible working arrangements, such as working from home or utilising a co-working space. While most respondents answered in the negative (71%), **21% indicated that they typically work from home at least one day a week.** 6% indicated they occasionally work from home on an ad-hoc basis. Though no respondents work in a co-working hub or space one or more days a week, 2% do utilise such spaces on an ad-hoc basis. (66/74 respondents).
- Respondents were also questioned regarding the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on their place of working. **45% indicated that their work does not allow them work from home and that they were still active in their normal place of work, while 25% indicated that they were now working from home on a full-time basis.** 18% said that they were now working from home on a part-time basis, and 11% were already working from home prior to the crisis. (65/74 respondents).
- To provide further context respondents were also asked how long they had lived in Lanesborough/Ballyleague. **The majority indicated that they lived in Lanesborough-Ballyleague for more than 20 years (57%).** 17% had lived in Lanesborough-Ballyleague for 11-20 years, and a similar number for 1-5 years, while the remaining 9% had lived there for 6-10 years. (65/74 respondents).

Section 2: The Local Economy

Next respondents were asked to provide information on their **vision of an improved economy for Lanesborough-Ballyleague** and **identify relevant opportunities and barriers to achieving this vision.**

- Respondents were asked to **rank and prioritise five objectives for the local economy.** It is noted that 44 respondents answered this question, while 30 opted to skip. These objectives and the % of respondents that ranked them as the primary priority for the economy are listed below:
 1. Attracting more business to the area (44%)
 2. To retain and expand locally owned businesses / industries (29%)
 3. Attracting more visitor / tourists to the area (13%)
 4. Growing a specific sector and attracting jobs in that field (13%).

5. Attracting more people to live in the area (8%).

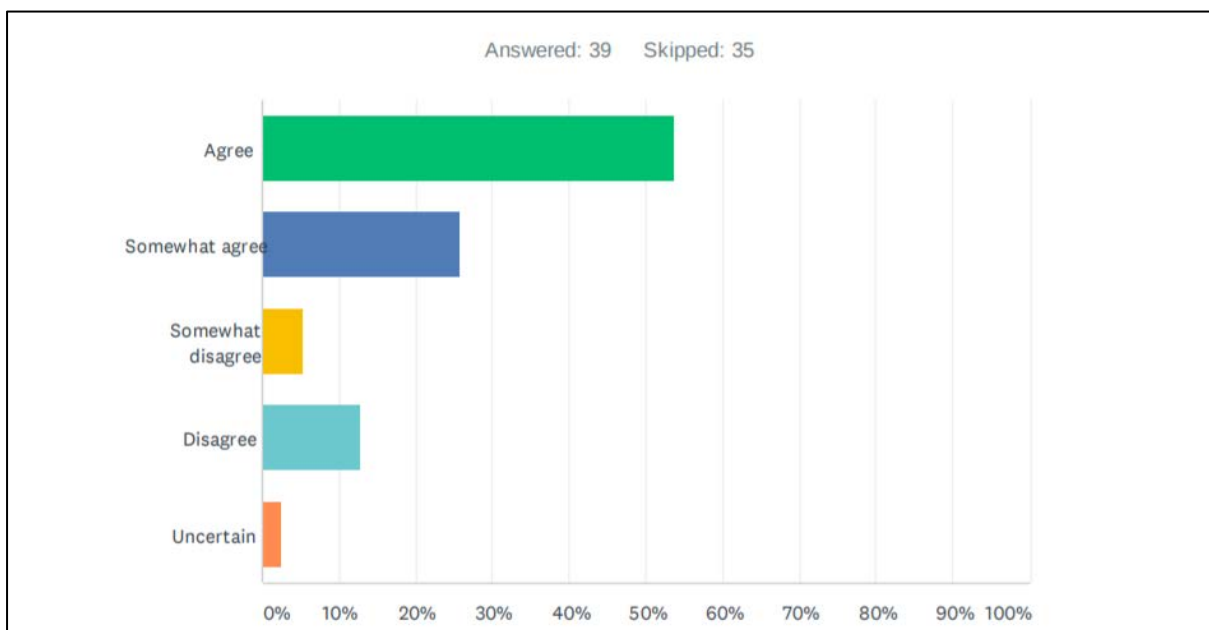
	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	SCORE
Attracting more businesses to the area	44.19% 19	20.93% 9	20.93% 9	11.63% 5	2.33% 1	43	3.93
Attracting more people to live in the area	8.33% 3	22.22% 8	11.11% 4	19.44% 7	38.89% 14	36	2.42
Attracting more visitors / tourists to the area	13.16% 5	18.42% 7	36.84% 14	10.53% 4	21.05% 8	38	2.92
To retain and expand locally owned businesses / industries	28.57% 12	23.81% 10	19.05% 8	26.19% 11	2.38% 1	42	3.50
Growing a specific sector and attracting jobs in that field	12.50% 5	22.50% 9	20.00% 8	17.50% 7	27.50% 11	40	2.75

- Respondents who answered this question were then invited to explain their choice or comment further on their vision for Lanesborough/Ballyleague’s economic future. **The need to attract new enterprises, both large and small, to sustain the local economy and attract new people to the area emerged as a key theme.** Some sought a **new employer on the scale of Bord na Móna and the Lough Ree Power Station** to ensure sustainable employment, while other decried perceived commercial rate hikes and suggested **greater support for small businesses.** Some respondents suggested that **visitor accommodation and other related facilities such as bars and restaurants were necessary** to attract new visitors, as well as the **need to capitalise on and develop opportunities for eco and water-based tourism,** including Lough Ree and the River Shannon and local boglands. In contrast, another respondent claimed that **tourism is seasonal** and that **new-year long enterprises were necessary** to achieve prosperity. (30/74)
- The same respondents were then asked to identify the **key barriers to achieving economic development.** 28 respondents answered this question, and some common themes that emerged are included below:
 - Poor infrastructure, including roads, public transport and broadband connectivity.
 - The lack of businesses necessary to attract and cater for tourists, such as a quality hotel and restaurants.
 - A lack of leadership at the local and national level, and an unwillingness to commit funding to new projects.
 - The failure to consult with the local community.
- 29 respondents then identified **opportunities, resources and assets that could help provide for Lanesborough/Ballyleague’s economic development.** These included:
 - The River Shannon, which should be used for water sports, camping and other recreational and tourism activities.
 - The ESB power station building, which is currently in good condition.
 - The Bord na Móna land back, which could be developed into a natural park or wilderness area.
 - The Lough Ree Distillery.
 - The areas boglands, which could be used for camping and tourism activities.
 - A new greenway route to Castlecoote that would link existing greenways to make the town a stopover location for cyclists.
- Respondents were then asked **how they themselves or other members of the community and local businesses help achieve their vision.** This was answered by 25 respondents, with some answers included below:

- Create a single body to unit and represent the needs of both Ballyleague and Lanesborough to state agencies.
- Focus on re-training and capitalising on new investment opportunities in the town.
- The Cloontuskert Development and Tidy Towns Association CLG.
- Public meetings to raise and discuss new ideas.
- Help create a positive marketing campaign for the town.
- To capture the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the local economy respondents were asked to **indicate the degree to which they agree or disagree with the following statements:**

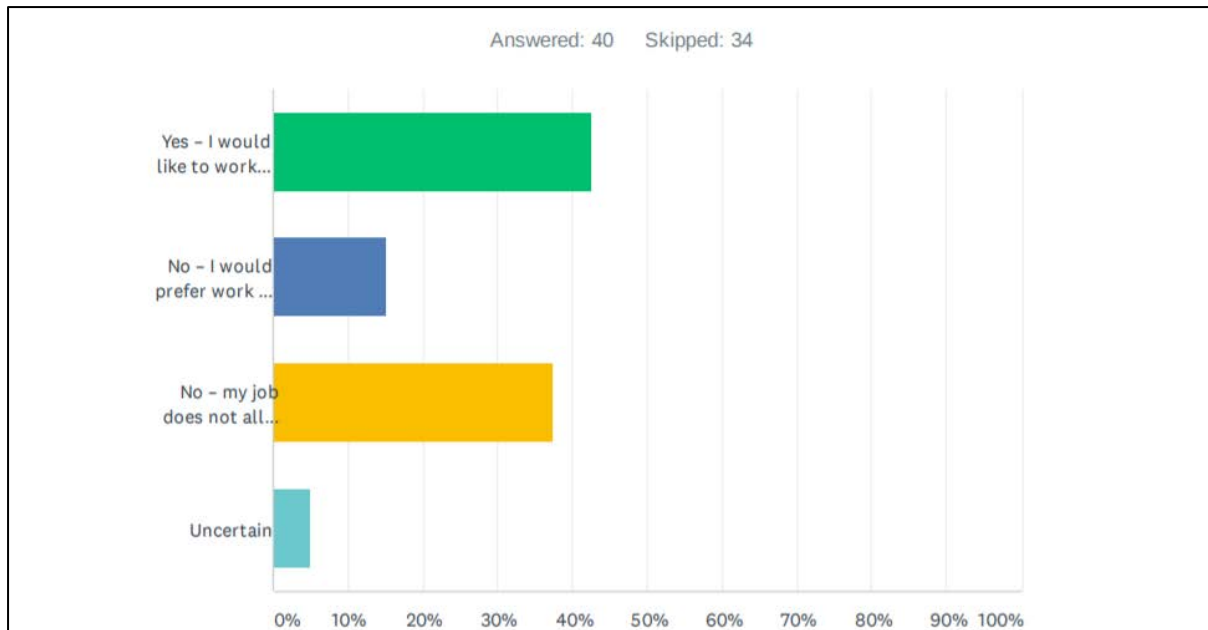
Between March and July 2020, I have spent more money locally on goods and services provided within Lanesborough-Ballyleague than I typically would.

- 54% of respondents agreed with this statement, while 13% disagreed. The remainder somewhat agreed, somewhat disagreed, or were uncertain. (39/74 respondents)

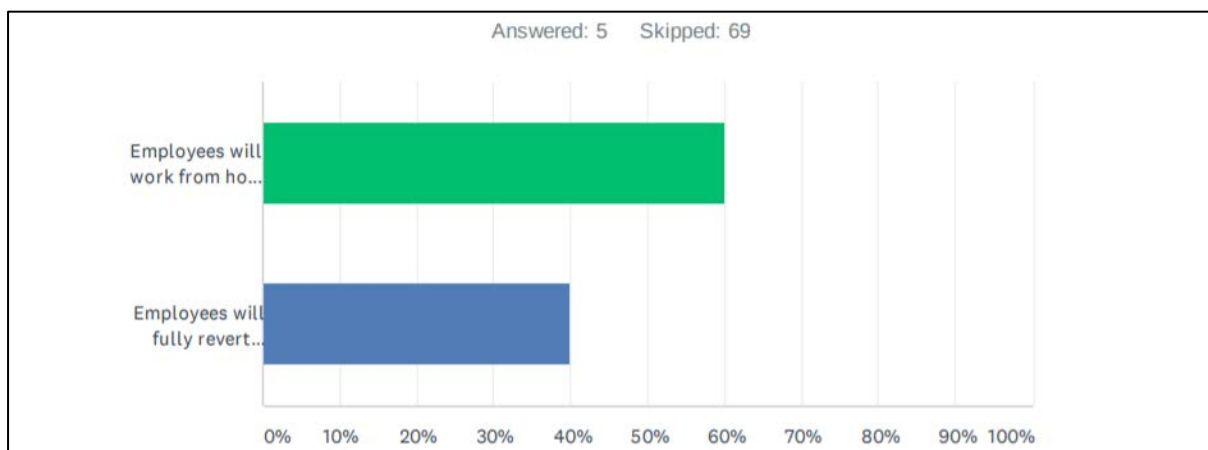


When society and businesses begin to open up once again, I would be interested in working from home on a more regular basis (with the agreement of my employer).

- **43% of respondents chose 'Yes'**, and cumulatively 53% chose 'No'. The majority of those that chose No did so on the grounds that their job does not allow remote working (38%), while 15% would prefer to work as per their previous arrangement. 5% were uncertain. When invited to comment on their choice, some several respondents indicated that better more reliable broadband would be a prerequisite for working from home, while others enjoyed the social and create elements of the workplace. **Many indicated that a balance of working from home and in an office would be ideal.** (40/74 respondents)



- Next employers and business owners were asked to indicate how they thought the Covid-19 pandemic would impact the operation of their business in the long term. 5 respondents opted to answer this question. **60% believe that employees will work from home on a more regular basis, and 40% believe that employees will fully revert to previous working arrangements when it is safe to do so.** When asked to explain their answer, one respondent indicated that working from home in the future may suit some industries and not others. Another respondent indicated that, as owner of a small manufacturing business, they have been able to operate as normal throughout the pandemic.

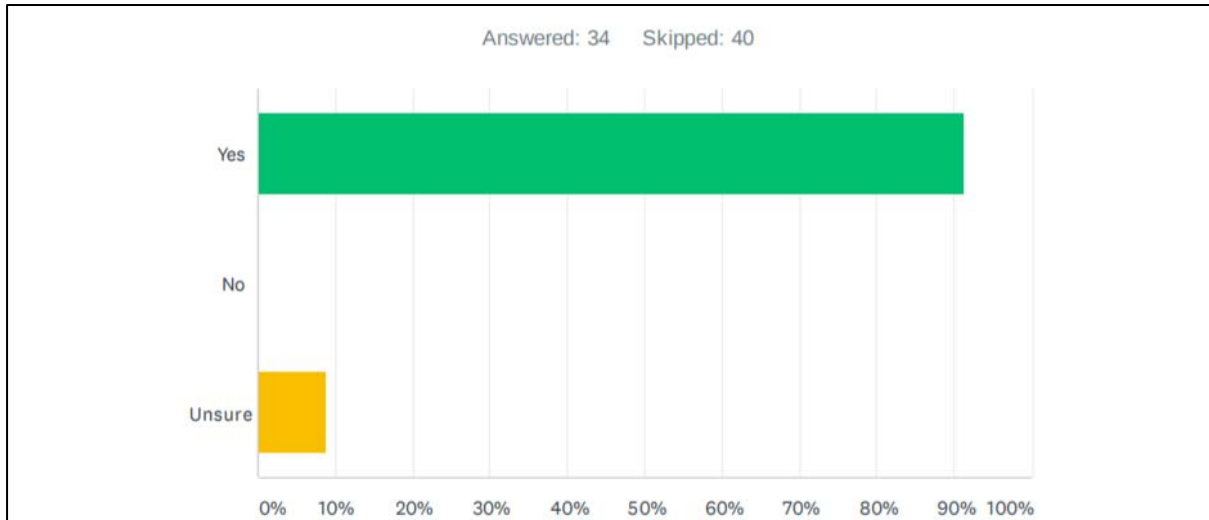


Section 3: Development Opportunities

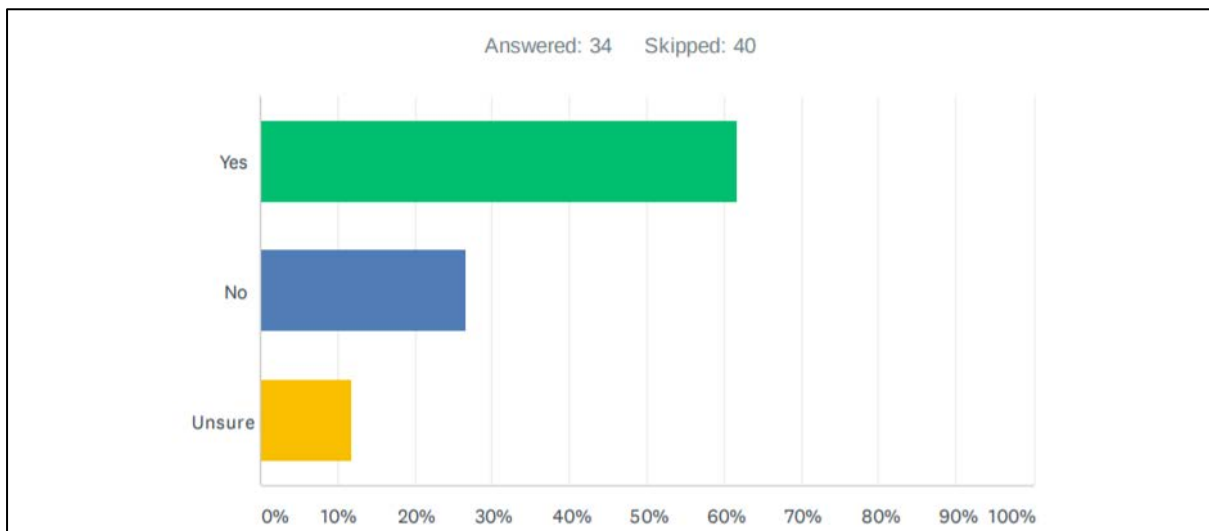
Finally, respondents were asked to **provide their opinion on the viability of an Enterprise Hub for Ballyleague/Lanesborough**, and to **identify other development proposals** that should be prioritised in the EED.

- Most respondents answered ‘Yes’ (91%) when asked whether they thought there was a need for an Enterprise Hub for Lanesborough/Ballyleague**, with the remaining respondents answering that they were ‘Unsure’ (9%). It is noted that 34 respondents answered this question, while the remainder opted to skip. When asked to explain their answer, reasons cited for the need for an Enterprise Hub included the following:

- It would attract more businesses and employment.
- It would meet a demand for office space for people who used to commute but have been forced to work at home due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- It would allow for flexibility in pursuing seasonal trades.
- Bringing people together to work can help generate new ideas.
- It would help overcome the challenge of establishing broadband connections in people’s homes.



- **62% of respondents that answered the above question said they would be interested in working from such a hub in the future, while 26% were not interested. 12% were unsure. (34/40 respondents)**



- Respondents were then asked to **rank those facilities or services that would influence their decision to utilise such a hub**, based on a list of 13 amenities. 32 respondents participated in this exercise. These amenities and the % of respondents that ranked them as the primary factor for influencing their decision are listed below:
 - High Speed Broadband – 47%
 - Private office space – 33%
 - Training and Upskilling Events – 7%
 - Open Plan Office Space – 3%

- Networking Opportunities – 3%
- Meeting Rooms – 3%
- Cafeteria – 3%
- Cost – 3%
- All Inclusive Fees – 0%
- 24 Hour Access – 0%
- Car Parking – 0%
- Laboratory Spaces – 0%
- Secretarial Services – 0%
- It was stated that the project team for the EED are aware of a range of ongoing activities related to the Just Transition development proposals for the area, including a food hub, an anaerobic digester and new greenway trails. Respondents were asked to **indicate any other development proposals or action areas they felt should be explored or prioritised in the EED.** 18 respondents answered this question. **New development proposals included:**
 - Watersports and water-based tourism.
 - Glamping in the former quarry area of the forest.
 - The completion of the Lough Ree Distillery.
 - A heritage site at the Cloontuskert Abbey and heritage trails through the associated forest area.
 - A green recycling centre at the ESB site.
 - New quality accommodation facilities.
 - A ferry service between Lanesborough and Athlone
 - A new park with facilities to cater for different activities, such as AstroTurf pitches, a skate park and a golf putt course.
 - The Midshannon Wilderness Park,
- Finally, respondents were invited to **provide any further comments they may have had on the development of the Lanesborough-Ballyleague EED.** Some of these comments are summarised below:
 - High speed broadband must be the number one priority for the town.
 - Longford and Roscommon County Councils need to provide a permanent presence in the town so that local business can better avail of funding and supports.
 - Cloontuskert should be included within the EED.
 - There is a general need for more collective thinking and action.
 - Developing linkages with a third level institution and providing a new educational facility with quality amenities can help provide long term training for the town.
 - Development must work in a positive way to attract tourism and people to the area.

4.3 Semi Structured Interviews

Interviews were held with a wide range of community groups, local businesses, elected representatives, educational establishments, key agencies, and organisations. Those contacted are listed in Appendix 2. Key points from these conversations are provided below, with points raised also incorporated into the SWOT in Section 5.

- Participants predominantly highlighted three priority areas – **creating alternative and sustainable employment, enhancing collaboration between the towns/local authorities, enhancing the tourism offer of the area;**

- **Creating a range of employment is essential**, not just for those who have lost or will be losing jobs with Bord na Móna, but also to provide employment opportunities for future generations to **reverse the trend towards an ageing demographic**.
- There has been a **lack of strategic focus** to the formulation and submittal of capital funding applications which could be improved and better coordinated.
- The **River Shannon and Lough Ree** are a key asset and opportunity.
- There is a general feeling that **tourism has been largely forgotten until now** (as the area was so reliant on the ESB and Bord na Móna for its growth) and is largely seasonal in nature. There is much interest in developing **year-long tourism offerings**, connected to an overarching sustainable and environment-based tourism theme. This should seek to exploit the current demand for ‘staycations’ and provide outdoor recreational amenities. Cycling and kayak hire were highlighted as an opportunity area. The **lack of accommodation in the area was highlighted as a key barrier to advancing the tourism offering**. To address this, and to test the business case for hotel or other permanent accommodation options, the possibility of a **‘glamping’ type development was supported**.
- The Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park (now **Lough Ree UNESCO Biosphere Reserve**) was mentioned by many participants as a means of further developing the area’s ‘brand’ as a sustainable community – fitting with the overarching Just Transition theme.
- **Activity-based tourism and tours based on the natural environment** were mentioned by several as a key opportunity with the proposal for the former Waterways Ireland building considered an opportunity to provide a cluster of water-based activities, and employment for former Bord na Móna employees.
- The need for an **enterprise hub** was acknowledged by many participants, with all supportive of the idea in practice. It is suggested that this could comprise of both **incubation space for new and emerging businesses and co-working spaces**. The availability of high-quality broadband will be a critical issue in advancing this. **The Convent building was suggested as an ideal location for this**. An enterprise hub would offer a mechanism to reduce commuting times and promote more sustainable travel to work patterns.
- The tourism ‘brand’ of Lanesborough-Ballyleague could also be advanced through the **Lough Ree Distillery**, which is very much tied to the history of the area (e.g. **peat distilled as a botanical in the gin**). For example, the Shed Distillery at Drumshambo, County Leitrim is set to become a key tourist attraction for the town.
- **Opinions were mixed regarding the former power station building** with some convinced it should be retained as a commercial asset and highlighting that demolition would have a negative carbon impact. Others said it was a visual eyesore and should be demolished and the land used for more practical employment generating opportunities such as an alternative energy hub.
- **Alternative energy presents a strong opportunity**. As part of this retrofitting would provide employment but under the current process work would need to be tendered by local authorities and this doesn’t leave room for training programmes/up-skilling as part of the tender process. This needs to be reviewed if it is to have a positive impact e.g. tenders should allow for training and implementation.
- **Linkages are important** e.g. between Lanesborough-Ballyleague and other villages as a network of sustainable communities; and with other settlement via walking trails, greenways and by water.
- The Lanesborough Ballyleague has a **strong food offering** evidenced by the successful Taste of the Lakelands Festival. This should be developed further, and the Premier Lakelands Food

Hub is seen as having a key role in this. There are opportunities to develop this as part of a sustainable community approach.

- **Implementation of the Enterprise and Economic Development Strategy was raised as a concern.** The collaborative group is made up of volunteers. **It is suggested that a dedicated post be created (perhaps linked with the Enterprise Hub) tasked with advancing the recommendations of the Strategy. It is queried whether this could be funded through Just Transition.**

5.0 SWOT and Emerging Projects

5.1 SWOT Analysis

Strengths

Location and Access

- Location on the River Shannon, at the north of Lough Ree, with accessibility from N4 and proximity to M6 providing strategic advantage;
- Proximity to towns of Roscommon, Longford and Athlone providing population mass and visitor hubs;

Natural and Cultural Heritage

- Natural beauty of Lough Ree, Shannon River and the Mount Dillon Bog complex;
- Cultural heritage of Lough Ree and the lake islands, particularly Inchcleraun of interest to visitors;
- Proposed programme of re-wetting/wilding of bog network providing opportunities for recreational development;
- Attractive streetscape of the towns with historic shopfronts providing foundation for town enhancement;
- Existing industrial heritage of Bord na Móna e.g. machines, locomotives, equipment and tools and story of people who worked there providing basis for story development;
- Kilnacarrow Bord na Móna bridge providing potential for linkage over the Shannon linking Leinster/Connaught, NWRA/EMRA, Roscommon/Longford;

Business Environment

- Several investment initiatives underway including Lough Ree Distillery and the Premier Food Hub that can act as catalytic employment opportunities;
- Third level institutions in support of innovative activity, including AIT;
- High quality National Grid electricity connection;

Tourism and Recreation

- Proximity of Center Parcs with potential external linkages;
- Strong reputation for recreational and sport angling on river and lake;
- Growing reputation for food, with successful Taste of the Lakelands Festival event in 2019;
- Established water sports centre with opportunities for kayaking;
- Lough Ree Distillery opening in 2021/2022 with peat as a gin botanical, strong USP;
- Living Bog Initiative (an EU LIFE-funded project supported by the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht) located in Ardagullion Bog, near Edgeworthstown with potential for extension to the Mount Dillon Works;

Community and Governance

- Collaboration Group in place providing community-local authority oversight and input to proposals;¹²

¹² A Collaboration Group was established in 2017, comprising 3 elected members from each municipal area and members of the executive of Longford and Roscommon County Councils, including Directors of Services. Furthermore, an operational group was put in place, comprising elected members and members of the voluntary and community organisations. A consultant was appointed by the Local Authorities to carry out consultation and prepare a Local Action Plan. This plan represents the priorities of the local community and is fully endorsed by both Local Authorities.

- Strong local community/sense of community;

Marketing and Awareness

- Fáilte Ireland investment in the Irelands Hidden Heartlands brand and associated support/marketing;

Weaknesses

Location and Access

- Poor public transport linkages;

Natural and Cultural Heritage

- Currently lack of easily accessible recreational networks associated with bog complexes, or high-quality boat trips on the lake and river;

Business Environment

- Lanesborough-Ballyleague and indeed Counties Longford and Roscommon have limited scope to promote itself to foreign firms as an independent economic entity;
- Reliance on single employer for many years has perhaps resulted in reduced entrepreneurial focus;
- Lack of economic opportunities for younger people leading to depopulation and ageing demographic;
- Lanesborough-Ballyleague has a relatively small business community;
- Longford and Roscommon struggles to provide enough employment opportunities comparable with levels of educational attainment;
- High vacancy rate amongst commercial properties leading to lost opportunity;

Tourism and Recreation

- There is a lack of overnight accommodation meaning overnight revenue spend is not being captured;
- There are not enough reasons for people to decide to stay overnight in the towns – there is a lack of attractions and activities;
- There is currently a lack of good quality cafes and restaurants, particularly ones with a visual connection to the river or lake;
- There has been a lack of exploitation of tourism opportunities in the past;
- Impact of loss of ‘hot water stretch’ on angling based tourism;
- Lanesborough-Ballyleague is not an established visitor destination;

Community and Governance

- Lack of implementation of actions proposed in past and current plans;
- Funding applications can be complex, and communities need help with application development;
- Competition between villages e.g. Ballyleague, Lanesborough and Clontuskert for funding.
- Community infrastructure becoming dated and in need of upgrading, including accessibility and energy efficiency issues;

Marketing and Awareness

- The town lack visibility; there is no brand for the towns;

Opportunities

Location and Access

- Provision of strategic tourism links between existing and developing tourism destinations in the Midlands;
- Development of synergies and linkages between villages and towns in the Midlands to create coordinated approach to economic opportunities;

Natural and Cultural Heritage

- Achievement of UNESCO Biosphere designation for Lough Ree and environs which would raise the profile of the area as a visitor destination;
- State funding of €108 million for Bord na Móna's large-scale peatlands restoration project. A further €18 million will be committed to the project by Bord na Móna;

Business Environment

- Significant funding available under State funded Just Transition funding for several projects located in and around Lanesborough-Ballyleague from 2020-2023 including those related to tourism, recreation, food, and energy, enabling investment in catalytic infrastructure;
- Significant funding likely to be available under EU funded Just Transition programme from 2021-2027;
- Bord na Móna Naturally Driven programme focus on alternative revenue such as Birchwater and herbs which could provide opportunities for co-location with food hub and economic opportunities for materials growth;
- Rise in demand for remote working/co-working due to Covid and wider trend to home-working;
- Some existing vacant commercial buildings may have potential to convert to enterprise/incubation hubs and support centres such as the former convent building;
- Opportunity for creative financial incentives to encourage business development such as rates holidays, Development Contribution Waiver scheme etc.;
- Development of economic potential in green/alternative energy sector, including biomass, hydrogen, and energy storage;

Tourism and Recreation

- Development of a Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre in Lanesborough-Ballyleague which would encourage visitors to come to the towns and to stay for longer;
- Objectives to capitalise on recommendations of the Shannon Masterplan and the Spirit Level strategy for Lough Ree, particularly around recreational infrastructure on water and on land e.g. boat trips to Inchcleraun and greenways across the re-wetted bogs;
- Availability of funding from range of national programmes including RRDF, ERDF, ORIS, Platforms for Growth;
- Increase of domestic tourism due to Covid-19 and visitors seeking open spaces which is suited to the local offer;
- Development of long-distance walking and cycling routes running close to or through Lanesborough-Ballyleague, utilising the existing rail network on the bogs and the BnM bridge

over the Shannon, and linking to the Royal Canal, with potential for linkage to Dublin-Galway Greenway;

- Development of Inner Lake Boardwalk with potential for bird-watching;
- Potential for use of BnM employees for construction and maintenance of greenways, utilising existing skills.

Community and Governance

- Strong partnership approaches to development between communities, agencies and statutory bodies;
- Utilise targeted measures in SICAP Programme to increase capacity, upskill and combat social exclusion amongst target group leading to increased engagement with employment opportunities.

Marketing and Awareness

- Active promotion of Lanesborough-Ballyleague as an attractive place to live, work and locate business.

Threats

Location and Access

- Proximity of population centres such as Roscommon, Longford, Athlone, means that smaller towns may have to form networks to compete;

Natural and Cultural Heritage

- Potential negative impact on natural environment of excessive windfarm development;
- Negative impact of a do-nothing approach to the former power station site in terms of re-use and visual impact.

Business Environment

- Proximity of Roscommon and Longford towns mean threat to establishment of local business due to competition;
- Impact of Brexit on tourism revenue in medium-term.

Tourism and Recreation

- Competition from other nearby destinations which are further advanced in terms of tourism amenities, branding and accommodation;
- Lack of a hero attraction providing a compelling reason to visit the area;
- Lack of saleable experiences providing an opportunity for visitor revenue spend;
- Further Covid-19 outbreaks impacting on domestic and overseas tourism.

Community and Governance

- Lack of alternative employment opportunities leading to high unemployment and population decline, dependence on welfare and require people to travel further for new opportunities, negatively impacting on climate action. Negative associated impacts on the quality of life of those residents, in terms of their mental health and wellbeing.

Marketing and Awareness

- Lack of awareness of the quality of the natural environment amongst visitors to Ireland.

5.2 Emerging Projects

A wide range of projects are being considered, planned or are actively in development for Lanesborough-Ballyleague. These include projects related to tourism and recreation, food and drink, and alternative energy.

Together these proposals, if implemented, would transform the economic landscape of Lanesborough-Ballyleague, not only providing employment during construction phase but also ongoing jobs in operational phase and associated entrepreneurial opportunities. However, to a certain extent many of these proposals, particularly around tourism and recreation, are being advanced independently without an over-arching plan.

A significant opportunity is presented by the availability of funding under Just Transition, and by support from several key agencies for significant projects in Lanesborough-Ballyleague.

A key issue that arose during consultation is the need for coordination of development, phasing and implementation, with a multi-faceted multiagency approach considered to be essential.

6.0 Vision and Project Proposals

6.1 Vision

The proposed over-arching vision for Lanesborough Ballyleague is:

By 2040 Lanesborough-Ballyleague will be a better place to live, visit, work and study; a place with a high quality of life and a range of employment opportunities where people choose to locate and visit. A thriving integrated and attractive town with sustainability at the heart of the economy; a hub for the Mid-Shannon area.

The goal is to build on the town and the areas strengths, and to increase footfall in the town, thus making businesses more viable and revitalising the town centre; providing a range of employment opportunities which in combination will lead to sustainable economic development and revitalisation of the towns.

Four key enabling pillars are identified for capital projects, focussing on making the town a more desirable place to choose to live, visit, work and study, and to raise awareness of the town’s offering targeting investors, those seeking to re-locate, and visitors.

Together these projects have the potential to transform not only Lanesborough-Ballyleague, but to create a regionally significant employment and visitor hub.

6.2 Regional Catalytic projects

A: Collaborating to Establish the Lough Ree Biosphere Nature Reserve

Key points regarding the concept of a Lough Ree UNESCO Biosphere Reserve:

1. For several years Longford County Council have been promoting the concept of a Shannon Wilderness Park focussed on the Mount Dillon Bog complex, as indicated in Figure 6. This concept has in recent years evolved into a broader concept of a Lough Ree UNESCO Biosphere, potentially as a precursor to a future application for national park status.
2. The Biosphere would include a core area of designated areas (e.g. SPA/NHA), a transition zone of non-designated areas (e.g. areas that are hydrologically linked) and a buffer zone of towns and villages.¹³
3. The concept is grounded in the **current Programme for Government** which states *“Building on the success of the UNESCO Dublin Bay Biosphere, achieve further UNESCO designations for Irish sites”*.¹⁴
4. The concept of a designation incorporating Lough Ree is been **supported at Regional level** in the Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly’s (EMRA) Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) which indicates *“There is also an opportunity to develop a National Park based on the raised bog peatlands of the Midlands in the emerging Lough Ree and Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park that could act as an economic driver in the area focussing on eco-tourism and addressing climate change adaptation and mitigation whilst also acting as an important nature reserve addressing conservation and biodiversity”*.¹⁵ The same document further supports *“the development of a cross sectoral approach to maximise the tourism potential*

¹³ Conversation with NPWS November 2020

¹⁴ Programme for Government – Our Shared Future, 2020, Page 40, our emphasis

¹⁵ EMRA RSES 2019-2031, Eastern and Midlands Regional Assembly, 2019, page 163

of the River Shannon and Lough Ree, involving Westmeath, Roscommon and Longford County Council and relevant stakeholders”.¹⁶

5. The Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) RSES offers support, although it could be interpreted as identifying Athlone as a hub for the concept stating: *“Support the promotion of Athlone as a destination centre for the development of Hidden Heartlands including the development of a Wilderness Park Project based around Lough Ree”*¹⁷.
6. The Draft Longford County Development Plan includes relevant policy stating: *“Continue to work closely with Bord na Móna, Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, NPWS, Coillte, Just Transition related groups and neighbouring counties to realise and develop the potential of the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park and Lough Ree Biosphere Nature Reserve”*.¹⁸ It is understood that the forthcoming Draft Roscommon County Development Plan will include similar supporting policy¹⁹.
7. Next steps will include public engagement on the concept, and an **application to UNESCO in September 2021**.
8. Discussions held as part of this project with Fáilte Ireland and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage **indicate support for Lanesborough-Ballyleague as a hub for the Lough Ree Biosphere**.
9. A Lough Ree Biosphere would be in keeping with the character of the area and would be a **year-round offer focussed on low impact tourism** associated with Lough Ree, the Shannon, the bogs. It would **align well with the Ireland Hidden Heartlands brand**, which encourages visitors to be ‘active in nature’ and to explore the region off the beaten tracks, **and with consumer aspirations for post Covid tourism activities**.
10. The support of key agencies for Lanesborough-Ballyleague as a hub for the Lough Ree Biosphere is a significant opportunity.

KPMG Future Analytics recommend that it is essential that momentum is maintained, and that high-level support is given to this initiative. This must include Longford, Roscommon and Westmeath County Councils, Fáilte Ireland, NPWS, NWRA, EMRA, Born na Mona, Waterways Ireland, Coillte, the local community. This is considered the most significant catalytic action that can be undertaken to support the economic regeneration of Lanesborough-Ballyleague.

¹⁶ Ibid, page 58, our emphasis

¹⁷ NWRA RSES 2020-2032, 2019, page 82, our emphasis

¹⁸ Draft Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027, Chapter 10, Policy CPO10.51, our emphasis

¹⁹ Conversation with Martin Lydon, Roscommon County Council, November 2020

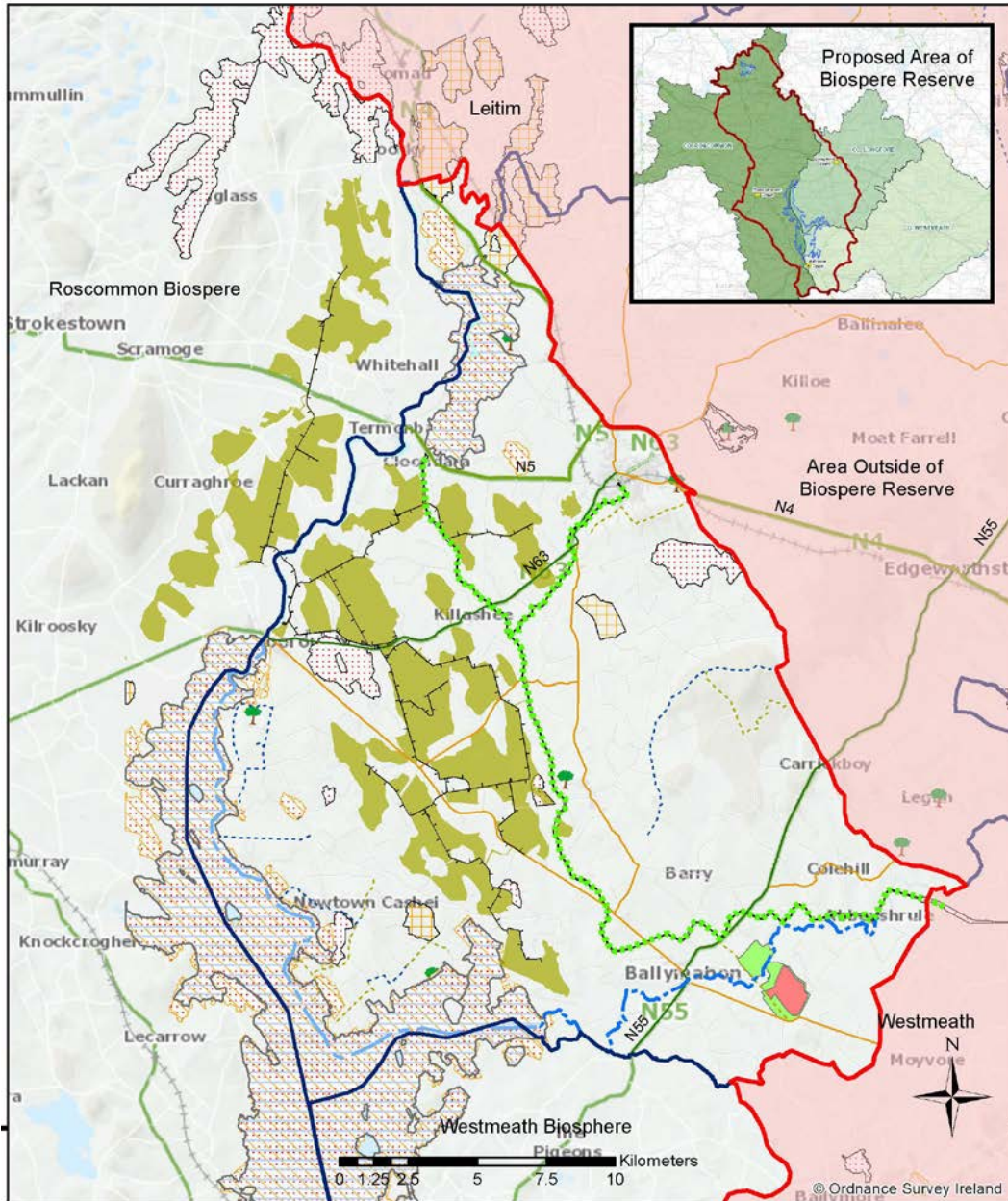


Figure 6 Proposed Location of the Lough Ree Biosphere Reserve (Source: Draft Longford County Development Plan)

B: Collaborating to Encourage Sustainable Villages Cluster

In September 2016, more than 340 rural stakeholders gathered in Cork, Ireland and developed a vision for the future of EU rural areas. Under the heading "A Better Life in Rural Areas", the Cork Declaration 2.0 sets out the expectations and aspirations of rural areas. Among the priorities to be addressed, it calls for policies to pay attention to overcoming the digital divide between rural and urban areas and to develop the potential offered by connectivity and digitisation of rural areas. Emphasis was given to the need for integrated approaches and the interaction between different policy fields in view of increasing complementarity and coherence.

Following on from this event and the Cork Declaration 2.0, the European Commission launched its 'EU Action for Smart Villages'²⁰ in April 2017. The document outlines a process of reflection on 'villages of the future' and the need to bring different programmes together in order to build strategic approaches to promoting 'smart villages', including support for knowledge, investments and connectivity. In launching the document, the Commission stated that

"EU rural areas are places of great assets and they can become even more attractive if we enable local actors to unlock their potential. They provide indispensable contributions to solve many of the big societal challenges such as climate change or the sustainable provision of food, biomass and energy. Tourism and culture can stimulate employment and investment in rural areas"

Smart Villages is a relatively new concept within the realm of EU policy making. The emerging concept refers to rural areas and communities which build on their existing strengths and assets as well as on developing new opportunities. The concept purports that traditional and new rural networks and services are enhanced by means of digital, telecommunication technologies, innovations and the better use of knowledge, for the benefit of inhabitants and businesses. As such, while digitisation is key to the creation of a Smart Village; **social innovation is also paramount**. Indeed, the Pilot Project on 'Smart Eco-Social Villages'²¹ promoted by the European Parliament and managed by the European Commission has concluded that any definition for the 'Smart Villages' concept should be inclusive and broad due to the diverse challenges and needs of rural areas. Their working definition is as follows:



*"Smart Villages are communities in rural areas that use innovative solutions to improve their resilience building on local strengths and opportunities They **rely on a participatory approach** to develop and implement their strategy to improve their economic, social and/or environmental conditions, in particular by mobilising solutions offered by digital technologies. Smart Villages **benefit from cooperation and alliances with other communities and actors** in rural and urban areas. The initiation and the implementation of Smart Village strategies may build on existing initiatives and can be funded by a variety of public and private sources"*

The concept of Smart Villages therefore is not prescriptive and there is an acknowledgment that there is 'no one size fits all' model that can be applied universally. Its operationalisation must be territorially sensitive, based on the specific and varying needs of communities. This in turn allows EU Member States broad discretion on how to plan for and implement this innovative initiative in their respective countries.

'Smart Villages' is the current sub-theme of the broader European Network for Rural Development (ENRD) thematic work on 'Smart and Competitive Rural Areas. A Thematic Group (TG) is working on this topic between September 2017 and July 2020. The TG contributes to the EU Action for Smart Villages by enabling exchange on innovative ways of creating more vibrant, sustainable and attractive

²⁰ https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/eu-action-smart-villages_en

²¹ <http://pilotproject-smartvillages.eu/>

rural areas and by exploring how the Rural Development Programmes (RDPs), the EU's Cohesion policy and other financing instruments can be best used to support this. The ERND affirm that ‘smart’ means **thinking beyond the village itself**²². Some initiatives are taking place at village level, but many involve the surrounding countryside, groups of villages, small towns and links to cities. Smart means building **new forms of cooperation and alliances**: between farmers and other rural actors; between municipalities; the private sector and civil society; from the bottom-up and the top-down.

The ‘Smart Villages’ concept is closely alignment to **Ireland’s new ‘Smart Community’ initiative**, launched by the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and the Environment in January 2019. The stated objective of the Initiative is to *“bring exposure to digital content and technology into the community and support the discovery of the value of digital technologies in the daily lives of people”* (Department of Rural and Community Development, 2019). It aims to minimise the ‘digital divide’ in Ireland, ensuring both broadband connectivity and the provision of skills training to promote digital literacy; an objective with even greater urgency in 2020. It also intends to highlight the supports available locally and the opportunities provided by embracing technology. The pilot location for the Initiative was Tubbercurry, County Sligo, a town of almost 2,000 people.

In launching the Initiative, a Tubbercurry Smart Community committee was established to develop several local activities and projects. One strand of the initial work was working with a volunteer movement in Ireland called **‘Grow Remote’** which is championing the spread of remote working across the regions of Ireland. The stated aim of Grow Remote is to build a community and ecosystem around remote workers and then to grow it so that the organisation can increase the number of employment opportunities available in local communities, particularly more rural ones. In doing so, it also aims to **capitalise on the emergence of community workspaces or ‘hubs’** across Ireland. Grow Remote held their annual conference in Tubbercurry in April 2019 and featured speakers from across Europe and the US. Central to the discussion was the opportunities that exist for remote working in Ireland and the benefits it can bring to employees, employers and local communities like Tubbercurry.

Crucially, the EU Smart Villages concept also emphasises a strategic approach to its implementation – including **building new forms of cooperation and alliances** (aided by programmes such as LEADER). This must also be a key focus of the Irish Smart Communities Initiative if rolled-out further and will require the closing of key data gaps (around hub developments, for example), enabling a more integrated and holistic package of future orientated actions. It is proposed that that the Lanesborough Ballyleague region is an ideal setting to further explore the concept within the Irish context and to serve as a model for sustainable town/village clustering.

Indeed, developing regional, networked approaches to community resilience is increasingly being explored across Europe. For example, one such project in Ireland is led by NGO Cultivate (based in Cloughjordan) and aims to create resilient regional food systems. This is an example of sectoral collaboration and one which could be investigated within the Lanesborough/Ballyleague context (given the development of the food hub).



KPMG-Future Analytics recommend that consideration be given to the establishment of a demonstration clustered SMART Villages concept in east Roscommon and west Longford. This could link to the EU SMART Programme²³ and to Regional Assembly projects regarding slow tourism, gastronomy and greenways.

²² https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/enrd_publications/publi-enrd-rr-26-2018-en.pdf

²³ <https://smart-europe.eu/project>

6.3 Policy related recommendations to foster economic growth

KPMG Future Analytics recommend the following policy interventions in relation to:

- Tourism Chapter of the Draft Longford County Development Plan
- Lough Ree Distillery
- A Future Local Area Plan for Lanesborough-Ballyleague

6.3.1 Tourism Chapter of the Draft Longford County Development Plan

10.6 Destination Towns

Edit section on Lanesborough to emphasise potential of Lanesborough to act as the hub for the Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre and for Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands.

KPMG Future Analytics recommend the following sentence be deleted: *“The power station has the potential for utilising the existing station for various activities including a museum, zip wire and a viewing tower across the Shannon.”* The rationale being that the power station site would be better repurposed for an alternative energy centre.

We recommend that policy CPO.23 which states:

“Support the repurposing of the Lough Ree Power Station and Bord na Móna Mount Dillon infrastructure and associated work depots for alternative uses in association with the Just Transition process. A Lough Ree Visitor Centre shall be developed in Lanesboro to tell the storey of Lough Ree and its unique position not only in human life but also its importance for natural heritage”

Be changed to:

“Support the development of a Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre located at Lanesborough, Ballyleague and Clontuskert in partnership with Roscommon County Council to act as a visitor hub and interpretative centre (Lanesborough), water and land adventure activity centre (Ballyleague) and story of those formerly working on the bogs (Clontuskert) linked by a bog train. “

We recommend that policy CPO10.32 which states:

“Continue to promote and develop the Corlea Trackway Centre as a sustainable visitor offering and enhanced access to the site, including an extension to the premises and the creation of walking and cycling connections with Ballymahon and Lanesborough across the proposed Bog Greenway.”

Be changed to:

*“Continue to promote and develop the Corlea Trackway Centre as a sustainable visitor offering and enhanced access to the site, including ~~an extension to the premises and~~ the creation of walking and cycling connections **across the proposed Bog Greenway** with Ballymahon and **with Lanesborough as part of a Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre cluster.**” ~~across the proposed Bog Greenway~~*

We recommend retention of policy CPO10.51:

“Continue to work closely with Bord na Móna, Fáilte Ireland, Waterways Ireland, NPWS, Coillte, Just Transition related groups and neighbouring counties to realise and develop the potential of the Mid Shannon Wilderness Park and Lough Ree Biosphere Nature Reserve”.

We recommend retention of policy A10.1:

“Collaborate with relevant state bodies, neighbouring Local Authorities and local communities in delivering a UNESCO accredited, Biosphere for Lough Ree and the Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park.”

However, we recommend consideration as to whether “Lough Ree and the Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park” should be changed to “Lough Ree” for clarity.

We recommend that policy A10.3 which states:

“Seek funding for the responsible development of Biodiversity Interpretative Centre within The Commons area of Lanesborough Town.” Be changed to:

“Seek funding for the responsible development of a Lough Ree Biosphere Interpretative Centre within The Commons area of Lanesborough Town.”

6.3.2 Policy Recommendations for Draft Roscommon County Development Plan 2021-2027

It is understood that submissions are closed on Issues Papers and the draft County Development Plan for County Roscommon is currently being prepared. It is noted that the Chief Executive’s Report on Pre-Draft Consultation indicates:

- *Support for public realm enhancement;*
- *Strong focus on regeneration, revitalisation and sustainable growth;*
- *Support for sustainable rural development sectors, including agriculture and agri-food, forestry, renewable energy production and carbon reduction rural tourism and recreation;*
- *The building of a resilient locally driven economy,*
- *Support for remote working opportunities, including designated hubs/co-working spaces;*
- *Increased emphasis on walking and cycling infrastructure;*
- *General support for renewable energy;*
- *Support for the sensitive development of greenways, blueways, peatways etc.;*

It is further noted that submissions made regarding Economic Development include a request from Fáilte Ireland that tourism identified as a one the key aims of the Core Strategy, and that the brand initiative Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands be fully integrated into the Development Plan. It is further noted that “a number of submissions have promoted the idea of a National park based on the Lough Ree and Mid Shannon Wilderness Park which could act as an economic driver to this part of the county”.

We recommend that a specific policy be included within the Development Plan which states:

“Collaborate with relevant state bodies, neighbouring Local Authorities and local communities in delivering a UNESCO accredited, Biosphere for Lough Ree and the Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park.”

6.3.3 Lough Ree Distillery

We recommend inclusion of a policy under Destination Towns (policies CPO10.16-CPO10.21) stating:

“Support the development and promotion of Lough Ree Distillery in Lanesborough as a key visitor attraction for the county”.



6.3.4 A Future Local Area Plan for Lanesborough-Ballyleague

We recommend that a joint Local Area Plan be considered for Ballyleague Lanesborough by Longford County Council and Roscommon County Council.

6.4 Opportunities and hindrances for investment and required mitigation measures

There are several **significant positives opportunities** in the context of this project. These include:

- Collaboration between Longford and Roscommon County Councils in commissioning this strategy;
- The availability of significant capital funding for project design and implementation from Just Transition, RRDF, REDF, Leader, and Fáilte Ireland;
- Leader’s new programme will focus on the environment and can provide funding for feasibility and viability planning, upskilling, co-working spaces.
- The ethos of the move towards more sustainable development including alternative energy production;
- The move towards online working and localisation due to Covid-19 with increasing demand for co-working centres;
- Private, public, community and sector willingness to collaborate;
- Availability of funding for long term unemployed with social enterprises through SICAP;
- Regional support for economic diversification, with EMRA keen to be involved in a Lough Ree Biosphere project discussion, and potentially able to source EU funding through the Irish Regions European Office (IREO)²⁴.
- Formal groups such as the High-level Lough Ree Biosphere Working Group, Upper Shannon Erne Future Economy (USEFE) Project (Cavan, Leitrim, Longford, Roscommon, Bord na Móna, ESB)²⁵, Lanesborough Ballyleague Collaboration Group, Ballyleague Renewal Group.

It is essential that the community buy-in to and support the development of key projects in Lanesborough Ballyleague; this is their community. The requirement for the Collaboration group was identified in the Ballyleague-Lanesborough Local Area Plan (2018) and in addition to community representatives includes:

- Three elected members from each of the two Municipal Districts; and
- Representatives from the executives of Longford and Roscommon County Councils, including Directors of Services.

Hindrances to effective implementation may include:

- A lack of skillsets for project implementation at a community level;
- A significant number of disparate projects being implemented with a lack of coordination;

²⁴ <https://www.ireo.eu/funding-financing/eu-funding-programmes-and-financial-instruments/>

²⁵ <http://www.uppershannonerne.ie/>

- A lack of cohesion between local authorities in terms of project applications and implementation, driven by the requirements of funding programmes focussed on applications by county not settlement.

KPMG Future Analytics recommend that:

- **A meeting be held within the context of USEFE to discuss the potential of the Lough Ree Alternative Energy project on the site of the former Lough Ree Power Station**, to include CE's of Longford, Roscommon, ESB and Bord na Móna.
- **EMRA via Clare Bannon be kept informed of discussions** regarding the Biosphere to enable identification of collaboration and funding opportunities.
- **A resourced Strategic Project Implementation Advisor role be established as a priority to lead implementation given the scale and potential of the projects, locally and regionally.** This could be located within one of the county councils, or ideally be an independent external position either jointly funded for a defined period (e.g. 5 years) by Longford and Roscommon County Councils, and/or with additional resourcing from Just Transition.
 - **KPMG-Future Analytics** are currently engaged on a significant project with Fingal County Council regarding Sustainable Swords. While we are responsible for the project which involves nine other consultants, we are effectively sub-consultants to Turner & Townsend who are acting as project managers under a framework agreement with FCC. This model, i.e. **the employment of outsourced professional project managers under a framework agreement** may be an effective way of ensuring delivery on time and on budget for a variety of projects, given the scale of capital required.

6.5 Capital Project Proposals

The projects identified here are those that have the greatest potential to grow the employment base and to bring increased vitality to Lanesborough-Ballyleague. **At the outset it must be recognised that those proposals reaffirm findings from previous studies, research and reviews of the area that have taken place previously. This demonstrates the strength of the concepts and the validity of previous thinking.**

Key considerations for the inclusion of projects are:

- whether they are achievable and realistic in Lanesborough-Ballyleague;
- whether there is community support for the initiative;
- potential for re-use of existing infrastructure;
- potential to target current and future funding programmes;
- potential for the creation of high-quality jobs, relevant for former Bord na Móna employees.

The objective of the identified projects is to collectively achieve the stated vision. Each will have a significant benefit for Lanesborough-Ballyleague, but implementation of the projects iteratively will have a significantly greater impact through:

- Creation of a cluster of enhanced visitor experiences;
- Development of a range of employment opportunities; and
- Enhancement of the community as a place to live;
- Raising awareness of Lanesborough-Ballyleague as a place to live, work and invest.

Together implementation of these projects will make Lanesborough a location of choice and bring increased vitality to the town and produce catalytic opportunities for viable businesses.

The **4 project pillars, 10 project themes, and 15 transformational projects** are illustrated in Table 4 and Figure 6. Detailed information is provided below for each project.

While this is a long-term strategy focussed on more sustainable development, there is an urgent **need to deliver employment opportunities in the short term**, to support those workers that are being made redundant and to ensure that the town doesn't fall into irreversible decline. The projects outlined below have been identified for their ability to deliver on this objective and prioritised according to their **capacity to deliver employment**, as well as their **deliverability** and **potential medium-long term impact**.

Table 4 Proposed Capital Projects

Pillar 1: A Better Place to Visit - Maximise Tourism Opportunity		
Theme	Project	Project Summary
1 Develop Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre - Tri-located	1 Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre 1 – Lanesborough – visitor hub	Principal Visitor Hub for the 20,000 ha Lough Ree Biosphere located next to the Lough Ree Distillery near the North Commons. Including world class interpretation of biodiversity and cultural history, visitor services, retail, restaurant and visitor information. Linked by electric bus to #2 and #3. New build architecturally distinctive high-quality lake side building. This project includes an associated link road and potential for a venue based in the former quarry site, which was included within the application for design stage funding to ERDF.
	2 Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre 2-Ballyleague – water/land activity	Water and land sports activity centre to include boat trips to Inchcleraun and along the Shannon, kayak and bike hire, kayak tuition, angling tackle shop and guide services. Community run and branded as part of the Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre. Opportunity for boat building. Physically linked to greenways, walking trails and Blueways.
	3 Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre 3 – Cloontuskert - story of re-wilding, people and organic farming	Conversion of the Clontuskert Bord na Móna Machinery works, located just north of Ballyleague to a visitor experience based around the story of the people who worked on the bogs, the programme to re-wild the bogs, and an organic farm. Linked to Lanesborough via Kilnacarrow Bridge via a restored bog train.
2 Increase availability of visitor accommodation	4 Seek to develop Ballyleague campervan site	Development of landscaped campervan site with associated site services – potential sites include ones adjacent to Hanley’s Marina and the Waterways Ireland Marina subject to landowner agreement. Two stage project, feasibility study and design/build.
	5 Encourage and facilitate adaptive re-use to provide alternative/experiential visitor accommodation	Identification of effective and incentivised adaptive re-use model to encourage owners of empty properties on the Main Street of Lanesborough-Ballyleague to bring buildings back into use as short-let rentals.
3 Enhance and link recreation infrastructure	6 Continue to develop Green and Blue Infrastructure Network	Further investment in walking/cycling trails network development, inner lake boardwalk, Blueway infrastructure and angling infrastructure in partnership with key agencies.
4 Increase destination legibility	7 Seek funding for Wayfinding and interpretation Initiative	Design and implementation of an orientation and wayfinding scheme for Lanesborough-Ballyleague.

Pillar 2: A Better Place to Work & Learn - Creating New Opportunities		
Theme	Project	Project Summary
5 Build on history with a new alternative energy R&D hub	8 Support development of Lough Ree Technology Cluster	Completion of a research study and site identification for the development of an Alternative Energy Hub / Research and Development Centre
	9 Support development of an anaerobic digester at Mount Dillon	Feasibility study to determine optimum site for development of an anaerobic digester, with the optimum site envisaged to be the Bord na Mona Mount Dillon site. Development of the AD.
6 Develop new co-working centre/training hub and 2nd landing site	10 Support Lanesborough-Ballyleague Co-working Centre to include training and R&D hub	Feasibility study to be commissioned to support the development of a co-working centre in Lanesborough development in partnership between Longford County Council, Roscommon County Council and the local community.
	11 Seek funding for feasibility/site assessment for second landing site for new businesses	Development of a second landing/incubation hub for SME (1-50 employees) in technology, R&D, light industry in either Lanesborough or Ballyleague.
7 Capitalise on Lanesborough-Ballyleague's food and drink reputation	12 Continue to support Premier Lakelands Food Hub	Development of a high-quality food grade incubation space in Lanesborough. The facility will also provide food standard facilities for new incubation units and businesses leveraging off the BnM products and other food processing initiatives to facilitate existing and new food-based start-ups in the micro-food sector.

Pillar 3: A Better Place to Live – enhancing sense of place and vitality		
Theme	Project	Project Summary
8 Enhance appearance of town centres environment	13 Commission and implement joint Public Realm project for Lanesborough-Ballyleague	Joint public realm project commissioned and implemented for Lanesborough-Ballyleague to enhance the town centre.
9 Facilitate increased residential density in town core	14 Provide serviced sites for residential development in core areas of Ballyleague and Lanesborough	Sites in the ownership of each local authority to be identified and prioritised for provision of site services on a phased basis to encourage increased residential density in the town centre. Sites to be then sold to private individuals for construction of one-of housing in the town centre.

Pillar 4: Increase the Visibility of Lanesborough-Ballyleague		
Theme	Project	Project Summary
10 Marketing and Promotion of Lanesborough-Ballyleague to Maximise Opportunities	15 Seek funding for a Digital Marketing Strategy for Lanesborough-Ballyleague	The commissioning of a comprehensive digital marketing strategy for Lanesborough-Ballyleague would focus on promoting the town as a sustainable community that is a desirable place to live, work, visit and invest.



Figure 5 Indicative Location of Proposed projects

Pillar 1: A Better Place to Visit - Maximise Tourism Opportunity

The objective of this pillar is to maximise the economic opportunity of tourism for Lanesborough-Ballyleague through harnessing natural and cultural heritage assets in terms of Lough Ree, the River Shannon and the Mount Dillon bog, Sliabh Bawn mountain, and the cultural history of the towns. The focus is on encouraging low-impact sustainable tourism based around the Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands theme of ‘Active in Nature’.

Within this pillar there are four themes:

1. Develop Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre - Tri-located
2. Increase availability of visitor accommodation
3. Enhance and Link recreation infrastructure
4. Increase destination legibility

Each of these themes includes between one and three projects. The objective of grouping projects together is to enable consideration of co-funding and support.

Pillar 1: Better Place to Visit	
Theme 1: Develop Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre - Tri-located	
Project 1: Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre - Lanesborough	
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Principal Visitor Hub for the 20,000 ha Lough Ree Biosphere located next to the Lough Ree Distillery near the North Commons. Including world class interpretation of biodiversity and cultural history, visitor services, retail, restaurant and visitor information. Linked by electric bus to #2 and #3. New build architecturally distinctive high-quality lake side building. ➤ This project would seek to develop a regionally important scalable visitor centre that would be the hub for the proposed Lough Ree Biosphere Nature Reserve. The Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre would have three hubs – an interpretative and visitor facility hub located in Lanesborough, a water and land adventure/activity hub in Ballyleague (see project 1.2), and a visitor centre/organic farm located in Cloontuskert telling the story of bog-rewilding (see project 1.3). ➤ The Lanesborough centre would be the principal visitor centre and include interpretation, visitor facilities, cafe/restaurant. This engaging and immersive centre would be housed in a contemporary building with an emphasis on sustainability (e.g. wood frame/grass roof etc) and a hub for visitors to learn about the flora, fauna and history of Lough Ree, the Shannon River and the bog industrial heritage history and rehabilitation process. Visitors would learn about the history of the area through a range of engaging interpretation. Visitor would be able to hire bikes, and purchase tickets for boat trips to Inchcleraun and along the Shannon at this one-stop-shop hub with those trips starting from the adventure hub in Ballyleague. ➤ A network of green infrastructure (walking and cycling trails, lakeshore boardwalk, bog train) would run from the visitor centre to Mount Dillon Bog and along the shore of Lough Ree (see project 6). The heritage trail currently being developed would link to the visitor centre, as would wayfinding signage. ➤ There would be promotional and transportation linkages with the OPW’s Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre which tells the story of the history of the bogs but only attracts 6,500 visitors p.a. (the Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre must be complementary and not displace Corlea) and Sliabh Bawn. ➤ This project would incorporate previously agreed elements under ERDF funding for an amphitheatre venue at the former quarry site at North Commons, and a link Road to the south of Main Street.
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The concept of the biosphere is in keeping with the character of the area and would-be year-round offer focussed on low impact tourism associated with the river, supported by and supportive of Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands and strategic policy objectives.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The aim would be to increase visitor dwell time and encourage increased spend in the area. Linkage with the recreation hub in Ballyleague under a single concept heading would increase the scale of the offer and link boat trip to Lough Ree Islands and along the Shannon to the visitor hub. ➤ Promotion of outdoor activities would be a strong fit with post -Covid visitor aspirations. ➤ Provision of a range of environmental classes within the Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre building
Priority (High/medium/low)	High – capable of transformative regional impact
Project ownership: Lead/Support	<p>Ideally this would be driven by a steering group consisting of a multi-stakeholder framework to implement e.g. Longford County Council/Roscommon County Council/Westmeath County Council/Bord na Móna/Fáilte Ireland/Waterways Ireland/OPW/NPWS/Coillte; and implemented by a full-time project manager.</p> <p>There is support for the concept from Fáilte Ireland, Longford and Roscommon County Councils, Waterways Ireland, Bord na Móna, NPWS, and the local community. Concept is supported in the Ballyleague Lanesborough Local Area Plan 2018, Longford County Development Plan (current and draft), will be supported in the draft Roscommon County development Plan, in the Programme for Government, EMRA RSES and the Shannon Masterplan.</p> <p>Fáilte Ireland view this project as having potentially regional impact and are fully supportive of this project at this location.</p>
Funding Status including required funding/cost/funding options	<p>Funding has been approved under RRDF for a project entitled: ‘Enhancement of Attractiveness of Lanesborough as Tourism Destination’ (€468,750). This includes a visitor centre in Lanesborough to highlight the history, heritage and biodiversity of the area to visitors, link road and quarry amphitheatre. Funding has also been indicated for €212,500 for a feasibility study for a visitor centre under Just Transition Strand 2.</p> <p>Cost: Design €500-600k? Build €2-2.5m? ORHT to confirm</p> <p>Funding options: Just Transition, RRDF, Platforms for Growth (Round 2 focussed on water-based activity),</p>
Location	<p>Commons North, Lanesborough. While re-use of an existing building would be ideal the ambition for this visitor centre means it would be appropriate for a new scalable building that would be capable of growing with demand with a direct view of Lough Ree. The optimum location would be on the site of the St Mary’s Community Hall, and the car park to the rear. This would be adjacent to the new Lough Ree Distillery opening Q4 2021/Q1 2022.</p> <p>There is potential for a phased approach with an interim visitor centre being provided in an alternative building e.g. St Mary’s Parish hall or the former convent building.</p>
Potential Jobs	20-30 to 40-50 after 5 years?
Delivery Timelines	2021 design, 2022-2024 build


Pillar 1: Better Place to Visit	
Theme 1: Develop Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre - Tri-located	
Project 2: Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre 2-Ballyleague (Water and land based-activities)	
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Water and land sports activity centre to include boat trips to Inchcleraun and along the Shannon, kayak and bike hire, kayak tuition, angling tackle shop and guide services. Community run and branded as part of the Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre. Opportunity for boat building. Physically linked to greenways, walking trails and Blueways. ➤ The Lough Ree Visitor Centre (Ballyleague) would consist of the current project being developed by Lough Ree Access for All CLG at the Waterways Ireland building in Ballyleague next to the old harbour. Lough Ree Access for All CLG received funding in 2020 for an innovative wheelchair accessible boat enabling angling trips and trips to the islands of Lough Ree. An application to Strand 2 of the Just Transition Fund was successful and will enable construction of a new land and water activity hub and

	<p>include delivery of a new larger boat which will enable passenger trips to Inchcleraun and river trips on the Shannon. The ambition is for kayak and boat hire, a tackle shop, angling guides and boat hire.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ There is opportunity, subject to demand, to scale up the boat trip offer to Inchcleraun in the future. There is an opportunity to develop a community-based boat building experiential offer, with local skills available.
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ This project has received significant funding and is supported by Waterways Ireland and IFI. Fáilte Ireland view this project as having potentially regional impact and are fully supportive of this project at this location. ➤ This community-based project will utilise an existing vacant building and provide employment that is matched with the skillsets of former Bord na Mona employees (with a skills audit undertaken to inform the application). ➤ The rationale for including this as part of the Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor centre is that this would enable visitors to learn about what is important regarding the local environment and biodiversity and then visit it on the ground by bike or foot. ➤ Grouping this water and land activity hub as part of a single branded Lough Ree Visitor Centre enables each to be more than the sum of their parts and creates a visitor cluster of scale, aligned to the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brand. It would also enable economies of scale and increase the economic opportunity for the activity hub. ➤ The Shannon Navigation runs on the west side of the river which means this is the optimum side to locate water-based activities. It would also enable linkages with the Shannon Blueway e.g. the 10km kayak trip to Clondra. ➤ Development of an activity hub will provide more things for visitors to see and do in the area, one of the principal reasons why more cruisers do not currently overnight in the town according to Carrickcraft. ➤ A high-quality multipart offer under a Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre brand would, in tandem with the new Lough Ree Distillery provide a clustered offer that would encourage overnight stays and reinforce Lanesborough-Ballyleague's location at the north of Lough Ree, with Athlone to the south. ➤ There are opportunities to utilise local skills in boat building/Mens Shed (Tom McGill) for experiential classes and demonstration either on a one-off basis or on a more regular basis. John Hannon provides kayak lessons locally.
Priority (High/medium/low)	High – capable of transformative regional impact
Project ownership: Lead/Support	Project is currently being driven by Lough Ree Access for All CLG. Ideally this would be driven as part of LRVC by a steering group consisting of a multi-stakeholder framework to implement e.g. Longford County Council/Roscommon County Council/Fáilte Ireland/Waterways Ireland/Lough Ree Access for All CLG. and implemented by a full-time project manager.
Funding Status including required funding/cost/funding options	Funding of €471,693 secured from Just Transition Strand 2. Total project cost c.€800k
Location	Former Waterways Ireland building in Ballyleague on banks of River Shannon north of the bridge
Potential Jobs	15FT and 20PT jobs
Delivery Timelines	2021+ Potential to scale up a ferry service to Inchcleraun subject to demand

Pillar 1: Better Place to Visit	
Theme 1: Develop Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre - Tri-located	
Project 3: Lough Ree Biosphere Visitor Centre 3 – Cloontuskert (link by bog train, bog worker/people history)	
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Conversion of the Clontuskert Bord na Móna Machinery works, located just north of Ballyleague to a visitor experience based around the story of the people who worked on the bogs, the programme to re-wild the bogs, and an organic farm.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ This would form the third part of the Lough Ree Visitor Centre cluster, be branded as such, and be linked through ticketing, servicing, promotion, and through transport connections through an electric bus and linked to Lanesborough via Kilnacarrow Bridge via a restored bog train. ➤ The purpose of such a centre would be to create an informative visitor centre for the documentation of the Midlands transformative process to a low carbon economy and the eco-sustainability of Ireland’s climate change policies and programmes. The history and memory of Bord na Móna and the ESB activity over the last seven decades should be incorporated in one central photographic /oral history archive. ➤ The centre could also be used to facilitate primary and secondary school visits, in particular transition year student visits, to support climate, environmental and other natural sciences education.
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The concept of a centre that communicates the story of Just Transition is supported in the Just Transition Progress Report published in April 2020 which states: ➤ <i>“It is essential for current and future generations to understand the vital need for Climate Change policies and actions and Ireland’s role in meeting Kyoto and EU emission targets. A Centre to record and document this change would be an important addition to the “story” of the Just Transition in the Midlands and the movement towards the non-use of fossil fuels in Ireland. Now is the time to record this transition and the contemporary memory around the peatlands rehabilitation. As I indicated earlier in my Progress Report such a Centre should be based in a Bord Na Móna facility and it would serve the dual function of a visitor attraction and an information centre for our primary and secondary school students.”</i> ➤ Development of a tri-located visitor centre would have the effect of dispersing visitors through the area and providing three different element of the local story – visitors can learn about the importance of biodiversity at Lanesborough, they can experience the area on land and water from Ballyleague, and can discover the history of the bog re-wilding and Just Transition process from former bog workers at Cloontuskert. ➤ The Cloontuskert project would further include an organic farm which would supply businesses in the area and could potentially provide birch trees and herbs to Bord na Mona.
Priority (High/medium/low)	High – capable of transformative regional impact
Project ownership: Lead/Support	Project is currently being driven by Roscommon County Council/Cloontuskert Tidy Towns Ideally this would be driven as part of LRVC by a steering group consisting of a multi-stakeholder framework to implement e.g. Longford County Council/Roscommon County Council/Fáilte Ireland/Waterways Ireland/Lough Ree Access for All CLG. and implemented by a full-time project manager.
Funding Status including required funding/cost/funding options	Roscommon County Council successfully applied for Just Transition funding under Strand and were awarded 212,000 for the design of a visitor centre and organic farm at Cloontuskert. Roscommon County Council successfully applied for Just Transition funding under Strand and were awarded 212,000 for the design of bog train visitor attraction operating from Cloontuskert.
Location	Ballyglass former Bord na Móna buildings, Cloontuskert
Potential Jobs	TBC
Delivery Timelines	TBC

Pillar 1: Better Place to Visit	
Theme 2: Increase availability of visitor accommodation	
Project 4: Seek to develop Ballyleague campervan site	
Summary	Lanesborough-Ballyleague currently lacks visitor accommodation. While and investor would be unlikely to currently target the town for a hotel, there may be an opportunity develop a campervan site in Ballyleague.

Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Provision of a campervan site would encourage increased overnights; revenue spend and footfall in the town. ➤ This could act as a precursor to further accommodation investment such as B&B, adapted existing buildings, glamping, hostel and eventually a high-end hotel focussed on nature-based activities.
Priority (High/medium/low)	High
Project ownership: Lead/Support	Joint RCC/LCC feasibility study Local landowners
Funding Status including required funding/cost/funding options	Feasibility study required, which would include environmental impact analysis and optimum site selection in collaboration with key stakeholders including landowners. Cost: TBC Funding source: Leader?
Location	<p>While a feasibility study would be required there are at least two potential sites. One is the lands to the north of the Ballyleague Marina which would provide a cluster of recreational sites adjacent to the lake shore, however the lands are in private ownership.</p>  <p>The second is a site to the south of Hanley's Marina, which is the ownership of the Hanley family, and where they have recently constructed 3 short let apartments and a service block (toilets/showers). The family would be open to discussing a campervan site at this location. The ideal site would likely be that adjacent to Hanley's Marina, subject to landowner agreement.</p>
Potential Jobs	2-4 plus indirect
Delivery Timelines	2021-2022

Pillar 1: Better Place to Visit	
Theme 2: Increase availability of visitor accommodation	
Project 5: Encourage and facilitate adaptive re-use to provide alternative/experiential visitor accommodation	
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identification of effective and incentivised adaptive re-use model to encourage owners of empty properties on the Main Street of Lanesborough-Ballyleague to bring buildings back into use as short-let rentals.
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lanesborough-Ballyleague has several key vacant properties in the core area. These currently detract from the sense of commercial vibrancy and which could be repurposed as visitor accommodation. ➤ Provision of short-let properties would encourage increased overnights; revenue spend and footfall in the town. This could act as a precursor to further accommodation

	<p>investment such as B&B, glamping, hostel and eventually a high-end hotel focussed on nature-based activities. Alternative types of accommodation could be encouraged such as water based.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Accommodation would enable Lanesborough-Ballyleague to act as a trail head on walking and cycling routes. While product development will encourage this type of investment and will likely need to come first, there is potential for the town to emulate destinations such as Northern Spain which have a range of B&B's and accommodation providers focussed on walkers.
Priority (High/medium/low)	Medium
Project ownership: Lead/Support	LCC/RCC, property owners
Funding Status including required funding/cost/funding options	No funding in place Cost? ORHT
Location	Main street of Lanesborough and Ballyleague
Potential Jobs	Potential employment generator through operation, cleaning and increased footfall.
Delivery Timelines	2022+ Future phases could be encouragement of a delivery of higher end accommodation providers e.g. B&B, glamping, boutique hotels focussed on outdoor activities.

Pillar 1: Better Place to Visit	
Theme 3: Enhance and link recreation infrastructure	
Project 6: Continue to develop Green and Blue Infrastructure Network (walking trails, cycling trails, Blueway, angling infrastructure)	
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Further investment in walking/cycling trails network development, Blueway infrastructure and angling infrastructure in partnership with key agencies.
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Longford County Council and Roscommon County Council working with partners, Waterways Ireland, Bord na Móna and Fáilte Ireland, are <u>developing a lattice of cycling/walking trails throughout the Counties to help establish the region as an ideal destination for slow leisure tourists who like to explore the great outdoors.</u> ➤ The county councils have identified a series of routes on existing railway embankments on Bord na Móna lands that would support its efforts to have an integrated network of trails. ➤ <u>The development of the Bord na Móna bridge across the Shannon to link Greenways in Longford and Roscommon, a joint initiative, has the potential to link east and west and provide opportunities to consolidate the attractiveness of greenways on both sides of the Shannon.</u> This will create a continuous Greenway from Dublin along the Royal canal to the Shannon in Clondra and south to a Shannon crossing point via the Bord na Móna railway bridge north of Lanesborough. This would extend the longest Greenway in Ireland to west of the Shannon allowing the authorities in the west to eventually link it to the Greenway in Mayo. ➤ <u>There is potential to develop a significant greenway network along the eastern shore of Lough Ree, linking Lanesborough-Ballyleague to Athlone as a future project.</u> There may be a future opportunity then for a greenway along the Shannon from Athlone to Shannon Harbour, thus linking the Royal and Grand Canals with a long-term ambition of a greenway from Dublin to the Shannon along either the Grand or Royal Canals and linked along the Shannon. ➤ <u>Tea Centres on Bord na Móna bogs also provide infrastructure to support the attractiveness of the greenways to tourists.</u> There is concern that these important pieces of infrastructure could be lost during the rehabilitation of the bogs. These centres, in a lot of instances, have access roads, parking facilities, power and water supplies and, in some cases, broadband connectivity. There are many opportunities for re-use of these structures including overnight visitor accommodation or bird hides.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Enhancement of the trail network would support development of bike hire businesses e.g. at the Ballyleague Recreation Hub (see project #2). ➤ <u>Development of a bog train route as part of project #3 would need to be coordinated as part of an overall joint local authority plan for recreation development in the area.</u> The bog train would offer opportunities to link walking and cycling trails between Cloontuskert, Lanesborough-Ballyleague, Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre and for visitors to complete part of their journey and part by bike. ➤ <u>The proposed Lough Ree Bay Boardwalk has potential but would likely require significant capital investment in its current form (c.3,000/metre according to Waterways Ireland to include structure and piling. This project would likely be better delivered in phases and as part of an overall coordinated recreation network.</u> ➤ Cruiser infrastructure is considered high quality including electric hook ups and pump out facilities. ➤ Visitors participating in angling have contributed to the local economy for many years. The loss of the 'hot water stretch' with the closure of the power station will undoubtedly impact on this. <u>There is an opportunity to position Lanesborough-Ballyleague as an Angling Centre of Excellence.</u> Provision of enhanced facilities could mitigate this impact for example increasing the number of angling stands in the town centre e.g. on the west side of the river to the south of the bridge; consideration of a new stocked lake visitor attraction (similar to Annamoe Trout Fishery in Wicklow) to the west of Ballyleague Marina; and development of the Kilnacarrow Bridge section of the river (small roadway and carpark leading down to the river and developing more fishing stands/pegs which would facilitate more local anglers and would also make the area more attractive for angling tourism). ➤ Inland Fisheries Ireland have indicated they would be happy to play a part in the promotion of Lanesborough-Ballyleague, identify new marketing opportunities for angling and angling tourism, facilitating media visits or attending trade promotions overseas. ➤ USEFE's proposals for a calendar of festivals and a September festival of angling should be pursued in 2021. ➤ The new access for all centre (see project #3) would open up opportunities and give access to the water to people who may never had previously had access to it.
Priority (High/medium/low)	High
Project ownership: Lead/Support	David Brennan said BnM would be open to discussion of use of the lands for recreation purposes, including the bridge e.g. looped walks Key agencies Longford CoCo, Roscommon CoCo, Bord na Mona, Waterways Ireland, Inland Fisheries Ireland
Funding Status including required funding/cost/funding options	€102,000 awarded under Just Transition Strand 2 for 'Mid Shannon Wilderness Greenway' for Longford County Council. Funding awarded for feasibility study for 'Lough Ree Bay Boardwalk' feasibility study to Roscommon County Council Funding options: ORIS, Just Transition
Location	See Figure 7
Potential Jobs	Employment during construction and enhancement of employment opportunities in bike/kayak rental, guiding and maintenance
Delivery Timelines	2021 + Future phases could see greenways being extended south along the eastern and western shore of Lough Ree to Athlone.

Economic and Enterprise Development Strategy for Lanesborough /Ballyleague

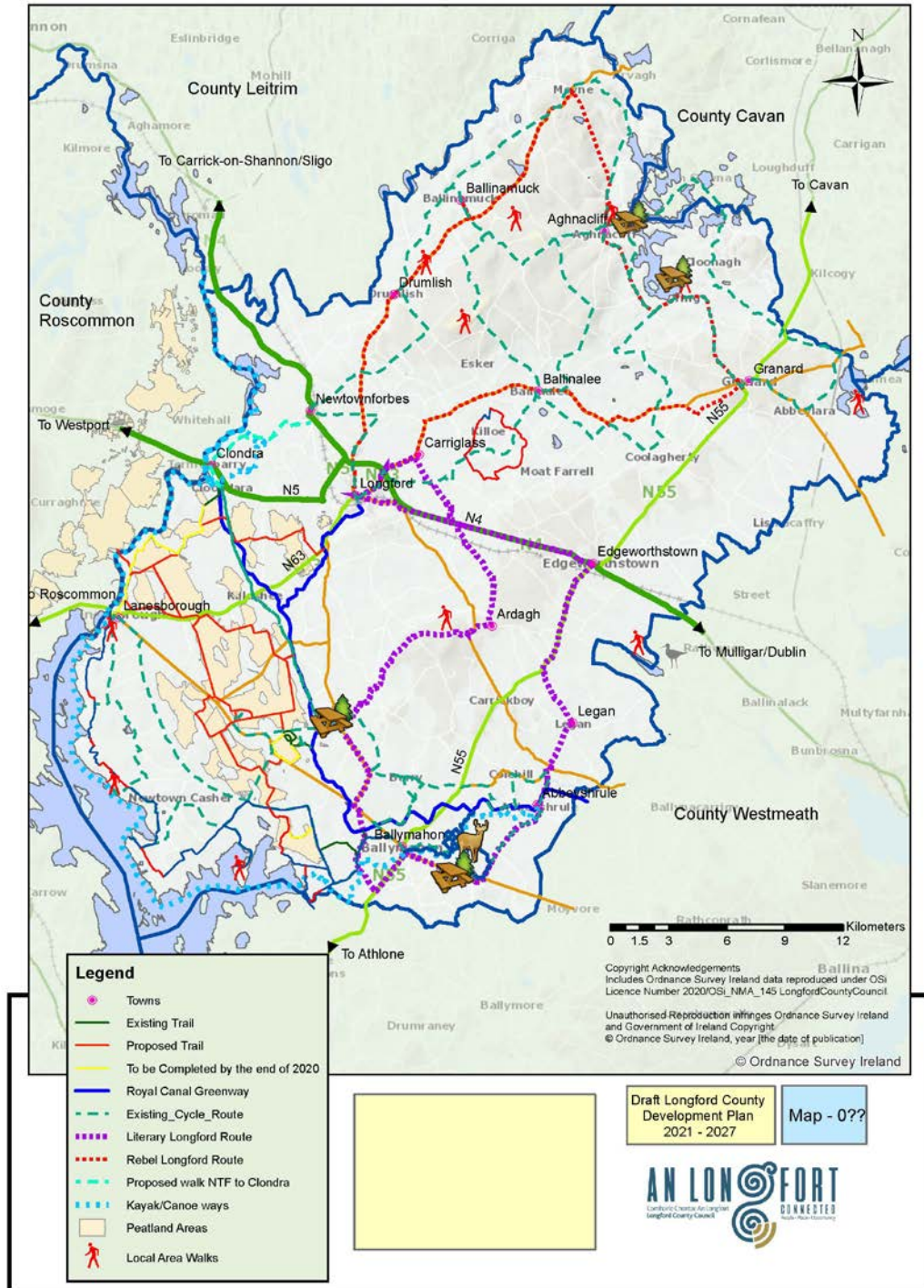

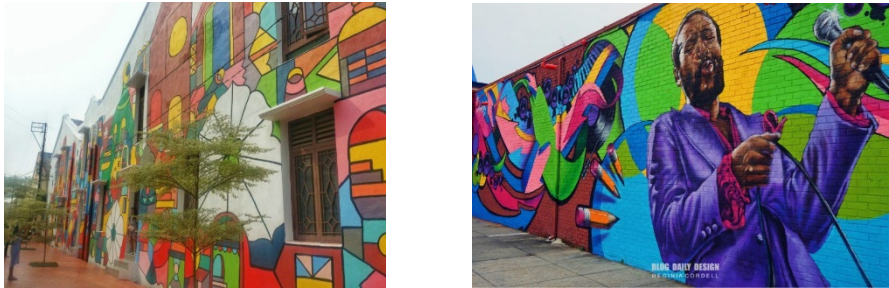


Figure 6 Existing and Proposed Trail Network County Longford (Draft County Development Plan)

Pillar 1: Better Place to Visit	
Theme 4: Increase destination legibility	
Project 7: Seek funding for Wayfinding and interpretation Initiative	
Summary	Design and implementation of an orientation and wayfinding scheme for Lanesborough-Ballyleague.
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Development of an orientation and interpretative wayfinding project, linked to key visitor focal points, will focus on communicating the wider offer of Lanesborough-Ballyleague and ensure that visitors can explore the town on foot with confidence, to local attractions, Lough Ree, River Shannon, walks and cycle routes, or just for a stroll around town with stories communicated through effective interpretation. ➤ Wayfinding Plan to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ welcome signage on approach roads to Lanesborough-Ballyleague and town centre; ➤ signage to tourist hubs from entry points to town; ➤ walking trail to connect tourist attractions within town centre with story boards at each site, interpreting story of each area and linking together in a cohesive way; ➤ The Wayfinding Plan would include audit of current signage and decluttering, before installing signage to include welcome and wayfinding signage. This will create a sense of welcome, direct visitors to the town centre and new visitor hubs, acting as a starting point for the walking trail. Currently there is no cohesive signage plan in place. A Wayfinding Plan will address these issues, creating a welcoming and informative atmosphere. Walking trail interpretation will tell the Carlow story through interactive signage erected at key locations, to enhance visitor experience and reinforce sense of place for the town.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A public art project on various buildings along a walking trail will enhance the trail and improve the look of vacant or derelict buildings around the town centre, acting as extra points of interest. Contemporary examples from Washington DC and Malaysia shown below.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A wayfinding plan to enhance visitor welcome and improve navigation and legibility will further improve visitor experience. Providing effective digital map-based signage will enable visitors to explore the town with ease, encourage the visitor to linger and increase spend in the retail and hospitality, thereby improving the local economy. The knock-on effect will be an increase in business and employment, increased investment in the town centre, reinforce sense of place and local pride in the town.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Highlighting points of interest while creating interesting stories about these locations should encourage both locals and tourists to walk the town in a way previously not envisaged, bringing them to parts of the town off the beaten track and opening up the full extent of the town and its attractions. As people walk through the town it is likely they will discover buildings of note and river walks previously overlooked. This will bring enjoyment to the visitor, business to the traders, and life to parts of the town which are currently quiet. Effective signage will also encourage the visitor to use Lanesborough-Ballyleague as a base to visit the attractions within twenty minutes of the town centre, creating enough to do in Lanesborough-Ballyleague for more than a one-night stay, and thus improving visitor experience and increasing visitor spend. ➤ This project is supported in the Ballyleague+Lanesborough Local Action Plan.
Priority (High/medium/low)	Medium
Project ownership: Lead/Support	Joint Longford CoCo and Roscommon CoCo funding application
Funding Status including required funding/cost/funding options	Would require funding Cost approximately 250,000 (TBC) Funding options: ?
Location	Lanesborough-Ballyleague
Potential Jobs	None during construction but would indirectly lead to increased visitor dwell time and increased associated revenue opportunities
Delivery Timelines	2022-2023

Pillar 2: A Better Place to Work & Learn - Creating New Opportunities

The objective of this pillar is to identify the optimum projects which have transformational potential and can act as a catalyst to increase short, medium- and long-term employment opportunities. The identified projects are also targeted towards existing funding programmes, including projects which have been funded under Just Transition.

Within this pillar there are three themes:

5. Build on history with a new alternative energy R&D hub
6. Develop new co-working centre/training hub and 2nd landing site
7. Capitalise on Lanesborough-Ballyleague’s food and drink reputation

Each of these themes includes one or two projects.

Pillar 2: A Better Place to Work & Learn - Creating new opportunities	
Theme 5: Build on history with a new alternative energy R&D hub	
Project 8: Support development of Lough Ree Technology Cluster	
Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Completion of a research study and site identification for the development of an Alternative Energy Hub / Research and Development Centre ➤ The proposals are a joint initiative between Ballyleague native John Hanley of FDB Consulting Engineers and Project Managers and Peter Duffy of the Irish Energy Storage Association (IESA). ➤ The proposals were first mooted to the local Lough Ree Collaboration Group (LRCG) in October 2019. ➤ Features of the plan include an electrical transmission station with multiple 110kV lines with up to 90MW generating connection capacity. This would feed into provision for an energy park containing a solar farm and battery energy storage.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Other elements of the plan include a Technology Park including a Data Centre and the potential for other high-tech industries and a research centre, with a focus on energy stories and emerging technologies. In addition, the project would include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Research and development regarding bioeconomy building on work being undertaken in IT Tralee. This would include focussing on the value chain e.g. bio-products from milk production. This is about an alternative agri-economy. ➤ Research and development regarding aquatic bioeconomy e.g. Lough Ree fish farming or a more niche high value product such as bio-algae. ➤ A hydrogen study to maximise the opportunity presented by the significant local grid connection. This could include converting excess grid electricity to heat or air, storing up to 500MW and then supplying to the grid over a 9-12-hour period. Examples of storage options include liquid air or volcanic rock. This element would need 5-6 highly skilled employees. ➤ A data centre that could also have an energy storage function ➤ Training, R&D, education component. ➤ Future potential for visitor experience.
<p>Rationale</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ This facility could be located at Slieve Bawn, Mount Dillon or Lanesborough-Ballyleague depending on which site is achievable. From the perspective of this strategy a town centre site would be the optimum site given the potential for animating the town through increased footfall and providing local employment. ➤ The optimum site would from the project owners perspective would be the former Lough Ree Power Station, with the main structure demolished but the foundations retained along with site services (roads/lighting/waste), with the site gifted to Longford County Council by ESB, and the site services taken in charge by the council. ➤ From the ESB's perspective the power station building is a liability with ongoing maintenance issues and demolition is preferred. Most of the internal structure is a giant boiler which requires 800,000 tons of peat to start and is not easily repurposed. Re-use of the building as e.g. a visitor centre or climbing centre is not considered practical. However, the site is of great value to ESB. It is close to the grid connection and is therefore an asset. Potential uses for the site include a hub for alternative energy e.g. solar or wind, for a battery, or for other uses associated with their business model. ➤ Demolition is also perhaps a way for the town to move on without a visual reminder of the past. ➤ The power station site is owned by ESB, the grid connection is owned by Eirgrid. The lands to the east adjacent to the river are owned by SSE. Lands to the east and north of the power station are owned by Bord na Mona. ➤ Were the SSE site to be available then a large battery could be placed on the site as part of the project. ➤ This project could lead to significant regional and local employment, be a suitable use for the former power station site in the context of Just Transition and contribute to an objective of making Lanesborough-Ballyleague a 'Green' village. ➤ The Just Transition Report states the following: <p><i>“Before the decommissioning and dismantling operation begins, I recommend that the DCCAE, the ESB and other relevant interests in the renewable energy sector should conduct a study of the future potential of these plants and sites for the establishment of a dedicated "Energy Hub" in the Midlands. I understand there may be some provision for consultation with An Bord Pleanála in relation to the completion of the planning requirements for removing the plants. If necessary, this should be availed of to facilitate this suggested study.</i></p> <p><i>The study would have at its focus, matters relating to energy storage, the usage of this energy to facilitate/back up other low carbon energy sources, a centre for exploring/evaluating new technologies in energy provision, and an R&D component based on the expertise available in the AIT/University of Limerick (UL) Technology University/Maynooth University nexus. Such an R&D component could draw in knowledge and expertise from Universities both local and abroad, and private sector expertise in renewable energy technologies, and thus develop a “Centre of Excellence” facility in the</i></p>

	<p><i>region which would have the potential to collectively create high quality employment and attendant spin-offs.” Page 60 JT report 2020</i></p> <p>➤ <u>There is further potential for a retrofitting training hub on site. While there is a significant budget under Just Transition for retrofitting this can exclude those without sufficient training as local authorities have to issues public procurement for such work. Were the process to be amended at national level so that procurement could include a multi-annual budget including training and implementation, this would provide local benefit.</u></p> <p>Share text on energy section with John for review to make sure correct.</p>
Priority (High/medium/low)	High – capable of regional impact
Project ownership: Lead/Support	Project is being led by FDT Consulting Engineers and PM Limited Longford County Council and Roscommon County Council would be supporting the project
Funding Status including required funding/cost/funding options	The project has received funding for a feasibility/research study ‘Lough Ree Technology Cluster Study’ under Strand 1 of Just Transition Funding Funding options: SEAI for energy centre, RRDF, Just Transition
Location	Ideally site of former Lough Ree Power Station
Potential Jobs	TBC
Delivery Timelines	TBC

Pillar 2: A Better Place to Work & Learn - Creating new opportunities	
Theme 5: Build on history with a new alternative energy R&D hub	
Project 9: Support development of an anaerobic digester	
Summary	Feasibility study to determine optimum site for development of an anaerobic digester.
Rationale	<p>➤ This project would support the Government’s climate change agenda, providing direct employment opportunities and creating a renewable energy source available locally to support further employment creation opportunities.</p> <p>➤ Longford County Council is seeking funding for the extension of the Gas Pipeline from Ballymahon to both Longford and Edgeworthstown to facilitate connections to high energy users allowing them to reduce their energy usage, utilise energy efficiencies and apply renewable technologies while exploring expansion potential.</p> <p>➤ The installation of an injection point on this expanded network will be carried out in tandem with the development of AD facilities in the Lanesboro/Mount Dillon area as part of the Just Transition Process following the closure of Lough Ree Power station.</p> <p>➤ The model would be based on the Teagasc facility in Grange, Co. Meath taking in anaerobic material from local farmers and the local community to include waste from the proposed food hub to produce gas/electricity that could then be used to provide power to local businesses again to include the proposed new food hub. This concept could be extended further with the construction of a polytunnel complex. Food produce grown indoors could supplement outdoor crop, provide for year-round harvest and protect against risks of growing exclusively outdoors. This project might work best if run in conjunction with Bord na Móna and while we haven’t yet spoken to the Resource Recovery unit in Bord na Móna on such a proposal it would complement their food harvesting/production plans and provide further employment opportunities for Bord na Móna workers.</p> <p>➤ An option worth considering in relation to an anaerobic digestion project is a form of worker’s co-operative where the workers might own the majority of shares. Such a model might work well in a sector such as renewable energy creating and maintaining sustainable jobs which contribute to the benefits of their community and wider society.</p>
Priority (High/medium/low)	Medium
Project ownership: Lead/Support	Lead: Longford County Council Support: ESB/Bord na Mona

Funding Status including required funding/cost/funding options	Funding approved for a ‘Lanesboro Anaerobic Digestion Facility: Feasibility Study’ under Strand 1 of Just Transition. Potential cost – Anaerobic Digester - €1m on site contributed by ESB or Bord na Móna
Location	The optimum location for such a facility is at an out of town location to minimise traffic in the town centre. Two sites options could be the northern or western part of the former Lough Ree Power Station site, or the Bord na Mona Mount Dillon complex on the N63 east of Lanesborough.
Potential Jobs	TBC
Delivery Timelines	TBC

Pillar 2: A Better Place to Work & Learn - Creating new opportunities	
Theme 6: Develop new co-working centre, training hub and 2nd landing site	
Project 10: Support Lanesborough-Ballyleague Co-working Centre to include training and R&D hub (10 & 11 could be combined)	
Summary	Feasibility study to be commissioned to support the development of a co-working centre in Lanesborough development in partnership between Longford County Council, Roscommon County Council and the local community
Rationale	<p>The role of the local authorities includes acting as a catalyst to facilitate SME development. One increasingly popular way of doing so is the provision of a range of facilities including a co-working or co-located working space. The current COVID-19 crisis has demonstrated a significant capability and desire for remote working. Longford County Council are currently capitalising on this with investment in the Co-Worx hub in Edgeworthstown. Provision of such a centre in Lanesborough-Ballyleague would provide a space for people to work and gather, increase networking opportunities, and increase footfall and vibrancy in the town centre.</p> <p>The provision of such centres is supported in a range of strategic documents and policies and is highlighted in the Just Transition report as providing economic opportunities in the Midlands Network for Co-working Facilities, under Enterprise Ireland’s “Empowering the Regions” plan for remote working hubs and innovation Centres. Provision of a centre is supported by the community as evidenced by the online survey and strategic conversations held as part of this study as from previous consultation undertaken for the Ballyleague + Lanesborough Local Action Plan. Promotion and pitching of co-working spaces are also an action from the Midlands Enterprise Plan.</p> <p>Discussions with ESB indicate that ESB staff would be open to working in such a facility, with many open to the idea of co-locating in the Midlands and Dublin.</p> <p>The Co-Worx hub in Edgeworthstown includes a training facility and a similar facility would be recommended for a co-working centre in Lanesborough-Ballyleague.</p> <p>To enable businesses to grow it is recommended that a feasibility study for a co-working centre include consideration of the provision of a second landing site facility, providing own door scalable premises for SME’s/light industry.</p>
Priority (High/medium/low)	High
Project ownership: Lead/Support	Ideally this project would be led by a key person in the local community, with support from Longford County Council and Roscommon County Council. There is a potential community ownership role from Vincent McGowan.
Funding Status including required funding/cost/funding options	Funding options: DEBI, Leader, Digiwest
Location	It is recommended that the former convent building would be ideal and is currently for sale. A training facility, and potentially 2 nd landing site could be provided to the rear. The convent was formerly an enterprise centre.

Potential Jobs	TBC
Delivery Timelines	Provision of such a centre is considered critically important and should be initiated during Q1/Q2 2021 with a temporary centre established within the first 6 months. The imperative for this is that many people are establishing co-working practices at the moment and it would be important to tap into this market as soon as possible.

Pillar 2: A Better Place to Work & Learn - Creating New Opportunities	
Theme 6: Develop New Co-working Centre, training hub and 2nd landing site	
Project 11: Seek funding for second landing site for new businesses	
Summary	Development of a second landing/incubation hub for SME (1-50 employees) in technology, R&D, light industry in either Lanesborough or Ballyleague.
Rationale	Initiation of a feasibility study into the optimum location for a second landing site would help create short term local employment opportunities over the next two years. Land and units to accommodate entrepreneurs to set up in the area is a good starting point. This will demonstrate the Local Authorities commitment to the area and provide support to those becoming redundant in the short term. Longford County Council opened the small estate on the Longford Road 15 years ago and that attracted John Dolan who now employs 30 people from his depot. Provision of a second landing site in a town centre location would increase footfall and vibrancy.
Priority (High/medium/low)	Medium
Project ownership: Lead/Support	Joint feasibility study commissioned by LCC/RCC LEO Enterprise Ireland Leader
Funding Status including required funding/cost/funding options	Leader? Cost dependent on location
Location	Site to be determined as part of feasibility study. Opportunities include former power station lands i.e. co-location with technology cluster project, former Bord na Mona site at Mount Dillon, former Bord na Mona lands at Ballyglass, Cloontuskert.
Potential Jobs	Potential employment dependent on location.
Delivery Timelines	2021 feasibility/business case, 2022/2023 delivery

Pillar 2: A Better Place to Work & Learn - Creating New Opportunities	
Theme 7: Capitalise on Lanesborough-Ballyleague's Food and Drink Reputation	
Project 12.1: Continue to support Premier Lakelands Food Hub	
Project 12.2: Continue to Support Taste of the Lakelands Food Festival and brand	
Summary	<p><u>Premier Lakelands Food Hub</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Development of a high-quality food grade incubation space in Lanesborough. The facility will also provide food standard facilities for new incubation units and businesses leveraging off the BnM products and other food processing initiatives to facilitate existing and new food-based start-ups in the micro-food sector. ➤ A community based Designated Activity Company (DAC), Premier Lakelands Hub, is developing a project to build 15-18,000 sq. ft. of food grade incubation space ➤ Longford County Council will provide the site necessary for the unit and a financial commitment. It is hoped Bord na Móna will provide a financial commitment and become an anchor tenant in the hub. The proposed hub will have 3 main strands: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A central processing unit to process crops to be grown and harvested by Bord na Móna on reclaimed bog land, to include birch water, herbs and root vegetables.

	<p>All these products are undergoing extensive trials by Bord na Móna’s New Product Development team and a centralised processing unit will help to create efficiencies in determining value from the harvested crops.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Four small food incubation units to facilitate the creation of new food start-up enterprises with new entrepreneurs working independently or in a complementary manner with Bord na Móna. ➤ A small food grade kitchen available for use as a training centre or for hire by part-time entrepreneurs. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Each strand can be delivered as distinct and individual projects. ➤ With the support of the Midlands Transition Team and Bord na Móna, significant progress could be made on this project in 2020 as the Part 8 process is almost complete. ➤ It was also envisaged that the centre could potentially act as a nationwide distribution centre, a training and education centre, food research centre and subject to available space could also provide a facility for primary food production. ➤ It will be divided into four start-up spaces of six hundred square feet, along with an eight hundred square feet community kitchen. ➤ The Premier Lakelands food hub sees the potential of the additional €1m from the Just Transition fund to complete the original specification of 20,000 sq ft. Food Centre of Excellence which was envisaged from the beginning. <p><u>Taste of the Lakelands Food Festival</u></p> <p>The second part of this project relates to the Taste of the Lakelands Food Festival (started 2016) www.tasteofthelakelands.ie which has significant potential for raising the profile of the towns and which should continue to be supported by both local authorities. There is potential to develop this concept further with a food trail around Lough Ree.</p>
Rationale	<p>This project offers the potential to support Bord na Mona new product and business development opportunities while providing incubation food grade units for smaller enterprises. This would increase employment and footfall in the town centre.</p> <p>The project would have synergies with the town’s reputation from the Taste of the Lakelands Food Festival and offer opportunities for future experimental food tourism.</p> <p>The Taste of the Lakelands Food Festival attracted significant numbers of visitors in 2019 and, in tandem with the development of the food hub and Lough Ree Distillery offers an outlet for local producers and contributes to defining the market profile of the town as a desirable place to live, visit and invest.</p>
Priority (High/medium/low)	High
Project ownership: Lead/Support	<p><u>Premier Lakelands Food Hub</u> The partners in the DAC include members of the local community, Longford County Council and Bord na Móna.</p> <p><u>Taste of the Lakelands Food Festival</u> Local community led</p>
Funding Status including required funding/cost/funding options	<p><u>Premier Lakelands Food Hub</u> €1.3 million in funding from Regional Enterprise Fund (Enterprise Ireland) €1 million funding Just Transition Longford CoCo. €250,000 Bord na Móna €750,000 (Pending) Mortgage €530,000</p> <p>The company, Premier Lakelands Hub, received €1.3m from Enterprise Ireland under the last call for REDF funding (December 2019). The total estimated cost of the project is €3.75m. With expected partner contributions it has a budget of approximately €2m in addition to a mortgage commitment of €400,000. However, to build the unit to the required scale to suit Bord na Móna’s requirements and deliver the incubation units and food grade kitchen, requires additional funding of €1.2m. Building a smaller unit or building in a</p>

	<p>modular fashion with a smaller budget, would compromise the sustainability of the project and limit the development and commercialisation of the Bord na Móna enterprises. The whole premise of the project is to work with and accommodate the needs of Bord na Móna's own transition team.</p> <p>The Midlands Transition Team could also support the DAC in making a submission to ESB for further funding support.</p> <p>Faillte Ireland can provide training and Service Excellence standards were a future phase to involve an experiential tourism component.</p> <p><u>Taste of the Lakelands Food Festival</u> TBC</p>
Location	<p><u>Premier Lakelands Food Hub</u> A 4.5 acre site has been donated by Longford County Council opposite the Nissan garage adjacent to the fire station on the Longford Rd out of Lanesborough.</p> <p><u>Taste of the Lakelands Food Festival</u> TBC</p>
Potential Jobs	<p><u>Premier Lakelands Food Hub</u></p> <p>The project has the potential to create up to 60 jobs in the form of growing crops, harvesting, processing and distribution. In addition, the 4 incubation units could create an additional 12 jobs. Many of the jobs involved would be suitable for existing or ex-Bord na Móna employees. An indication of potential is the Drumshambo Food Hub, which now employs 120 after 15 years of operation. There is further potential in relation to the production of food for the food hub, e.g. organic farming at Cloontuskert or the production of birch trees for Bord na Mona's Birchwater process; local Bellheather honey production, artisan farming etc, and hydroponic farming on some bog areas with energy drawn from solar.</p> <p><u>Taste of the Lakelands Food Festival</u> TBC</p>
Delivery Timelines	<p><u>Premier Lakelands Food Hub</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Next steps involve confirmation of partner commitments and selection of a project management team to oversee design, procurement and build. ➤ Construction could start during Q2 2021 with a 12 to 14 month build schedule. ➤ Talks with Local authorities, and local community with Bord na Móna as anchor tenant at the Centre, for the space for birch water harvesting and medicinal herb/ root / vegetable processing as part of their brown to green initiative. ➤ Engagement talks with Enterprise Ireland in relation to project metrics. ➤ Liaison with Longford CoCo on drawing up plans on project offer to tender. ➤ Continuing engagement with potential client / tenants. ➤ Exploring possibilities of Centre technologies, sponsorship/match funding. ➤ Compilation of board of directors, advisors, steering group, consultants to project, intern project manager, media and marketing promotions. ➤ Collaboration with Drumshambo Food Hub, Athlone institute of technology, St Angela Food Centre Sligo. <p>There is potential to develop the offering of the food hub to include experiential tourism as a part of a future phase.</p> <p><u>Taste of the Lakelands Food Festival</u> TBC</p>

Pillar 3: A Better Place to Live – Enhancing Sense of Place and Vitality

The objective of this pillar is to identify projects which will transform the appearance of the town and help to attract investors future residents and visitors. Increasing the residential density in the town core help to increase vitality and viability for existing and future visitors.


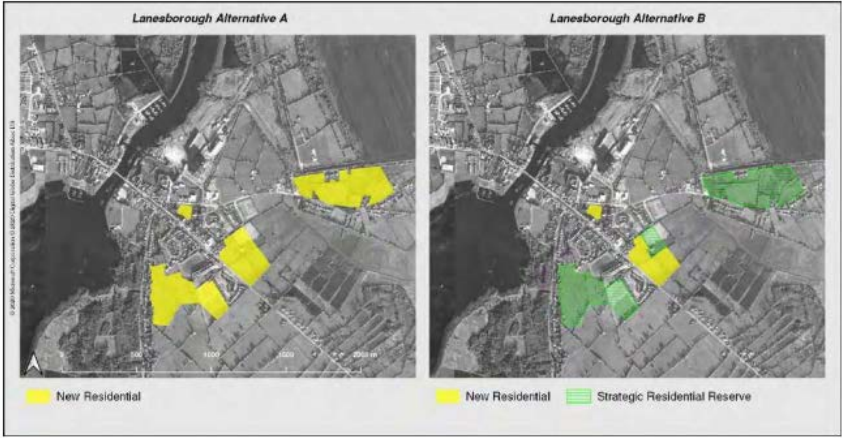
Within this pillar there are two themes:

8 Enhance appearance of town centres environment

9 Facilitate increased residential density in town core

Pillar 3: A Better Place to Live – Enhancing Sense of Place and Vitality	
Theme 8: Enhance Public Realm and Residential Density	
Project 13: Commission and Implement Joint Public Realm Project for Lanesborough-Ballyleague	
Summary	Joint public realm project commissioned and implemented for Lanesborough-Ballyleague to enhance the town centre.
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The town is currently very linear with a lack of focal point. It is also important to preserve and enhance the heritage of the town and the sense of place. Enhancing the streetscape of the tow is an action of the Ballyleague+ Lanesborough Local Action Plan 2018. ➤ This could also include improvements in public lighting throughout the town, linked to a proposed renewable energy hub. ➤ Removal of overhead wires would benefit the appearance of the town as would increase the width of footpaths and creation of a central public space. ➤ Any new public realm strategy should consider detail included within the Ballyleague Village Design Statement 2008 including comment on protecting views, street furniture, pavements, car-parking, as well as consultation outcomes from the community in general and school children specifically.
Priority (High/medium/low)	Medium
Project ownership: Lead/Support	Joint RCC/LCC project, designed in conjunction with the community.
Funding Status including required funding/cost/funding options	Application to be made to RRDF
Location	Main street of Lanesborough and Ballyleague.
Potential Jobs	None directly (unless local employment requirement) but indirect employment through enhancement of quality of the urban realm.
Delivery Timelines	2021-2022 application

Pillar 3: A Better Place to Live – enhancing sense of place and vitality	
Theme 9: Enhance sense of place and residential density	
Project 14: Provide Serviced sites for residential development in core area	
Summary	Sites in the ownership of ach local authority to be identified and prioritised for provision of site services on a phased basis to encourage increased residential density in the town centre. Sites to be then sold to private individuals for construction of one-of housing in the town centre.
Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Enabling and encouraging increased town centre residential density, rather than linear sprawl or one of housing would enhance sustainability of services and increase viability of town centre businesses due to increased footfall. ➤ Many towns in Ireland suffer from the same issue, the existing housing are not the type of housing sought in today’s market. ➤ Each authority has strategic residential sites l the town centre. If site services were to be provided on these sites on a phased basis in the town centre for individuals to purchase and build houses this would ensure increased town centre density.

	 <p style="text-align: center;">SEA Environmental Report for the Draft Longford County Development Plan 2021-2027</p> 
Priority (High/medium/low)	Medium
Project ownership: Lead/Support	Roscommon County Council, Longford County Council
Funding Status including required funding/cost/funding options	TBC
Location	TBC
Potential Jobs	TBC
Delivery Timelines	TBC

Pillar 4: Increasing the Visibility of Lanesborough-Ballyleague

The objective of this pillar is to identify the means to raise the profile of the town for investors, visitor and future residents, while ensuring that this is pragmatic, targeted and is linked to existing promotional campaigns.

Within this pillar there is one theme:

10: Marketing and Promotion of Lanesborough-Ballyleague

Pillar 4: Increasing the Visibility of Lanesborough-Ballyleague

Theme 10: Marketing and Promotion of Lanesborough-Ballyleague	
Project 15: Seek funding for a Digital Marketing Strategy for Lanesborough-Ballyleague	
Summary	<p>The commissioning of a comprehensive digital marketing strategy for Lanesborough-Ballyleague would focus on promoting the town as a sustainable community that is a desirable place to live, work, visit and invest.</p> <p>This would include a new and enhanced website for Lanesborough-Ballyleague. The website would include information and links to principal visitor attractions include the proposed Lough Ree Visitor Centre (projects 1-3), the new Lough Ree Distillery (for which €1m in funding has been granted under Strand 2 of Just Transition and which will be operational on a town centre site by Q4 2021/Q12022), as well as support for the promotion of a Taste of Lakelands brand and Food Festival and angling festivals.</p> <p>The website and associated promotion would also target those seeking a rural co-working location and those seeking to re-locate to a rural location with a high quality of life and lower house prices than Dublin or Dublin commuter suburbs.</p> <p>A first step in raising in re-launching Lanesborough-Ballyleague as a town in transition from one way of life based on a carbon economy to a new more sustainable way of life would be an event to bring the community together. One such proposal has been provided to Longford County Council by Republic of Culture & Associates for their Earth/Man/Machine creative response to the calling of time on a way of life in the Midlands.</p>
Rationale	<p>The development of a brand for the town is supported in the Ballyleague and Lanesborough Local Action Plan 2018 which states:</p> <p><i>“The development of a clear and easily understood brand for Ballyleague+Lanesborough will have both an internal and external impact. Internally it will help the community to celebrate the unique attributes of the area, as reflected in the quality of the natural amenity and the general quality of life. Externally it will help the community at large to understand the unique offerings of the area, and the offerings that they might expect to find in Ballyleague+Lanesborough and its environs. Whilst of considerable and obvious importance to the task of attracting visitors to the area, the creation of a distinctive image for Ballyleague+Lanesborough will equally aid general enterprise development as well as social and community development.”</i></p> <p>Any such digital marketing strategy must be closely linked to other promotional campaigns e.g. Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands, seeking not to replicate but to support such campaigns. The objective of the campaign should be to increase business activity in Lanesborough-Ballyleague. A key element will be linkage and networking with existing networks and promotional campaigns e.g., Local Authorities, Fáilte Ireland, Roscommon Tourism, Longford Tourism, and Mid Ireland Tourism. A digital marketing strategy would also need to be cognisant of the potential involvement of other elements e.g. those projects as identified above as well as others such as Lough Ree Distillery. Linkages with other nearby attractions such as Strokestown House, Corlea Trackway Visitor Centre, would help to develop a clustered approach. Existing drone footage could be used, with the permission of the owners e.g.:</p> <p>http://loughree.ie/heritage/ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utLg0Zz0YuY https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4aUqml-0xl</p> <p>Consideration could also be given to future events associated with angling and a ‘Green Spirit Festival’.</p>
Priority (High/medium/low)	Medium
Project ownership: Lead/Support	Lanesborough Ballyleague Collaboration Group Support from local community business, Local Enterprise Offices in Roscommon and Longford
Funding Status including required	30-50k? Rural Development Programme (Leader)

funding/cost/funding options	
Location	N/A
Potential Jobs	TBC
Delivery Timelines	2021-2025

7.0 Implementation Framework and Action Plan

Regional Catalytic Projects						
	Action	Lead Agency	Partners	Timescale	Key Performance Indicator	Indicative Budget/Potential Sources of funding € - annual
01.01	Collaborate to Establish the Lough Ree UNESCO Biosphere Nature Reserve	Department of Heritage	Longford County Council Roscommon Council Westmeath County Council Failte Ireland Bord na Mona NPWS Coillte Local community	2021-2022	Designation granted by UNESCO	N/A
01.02	Collaborate to Encourage Sustainable Villages Cluster - establish a demonstration clustered SMART Villages concept in east Roscommon and west Longford	Roscommon County Council Longford County Council	NWRA EMRA	2021-2024	Sustainable Villages Cluster Concept Established	TBC

Pillar 1: A Better Place to Visit - Maximise Tourism Opportunity						
	Action	Lead Agency	Partners	Timescale	Key Performance Indicator	Indicative Budget/Potential Sources of funding € - annual

01.01	<p><u>Lough Ree UNESCO Biosphere Visitor Centre</u> Engage with Just Transition Team regarding a single revised application for funding around a visitor experience plan, business case and design project for a Lough Ree UNESCO Biosphere Visitor Centre in three locations. This to incorporate previously agreed funding for design for the Lanesborough Tourism Hub (€212,500), Clontuskert Ballyleague Visitor Centre and Organic Farm (€212,000), Clontuskert Ballyleague Bog Heritage Train (€212,000) i.e. €636,500 (Capital funding of 471,693 has ben awarded to Lough Ree Access for All for implementation)</p> <p>Commission multi-disciplinary 3 phase design study for Lough Ree UNESCO Biosphere Visitor Centre located at Lanesborough, Ballyleague and Clontuskert. Study to include: Phase 1: Concept development including research, benchmarking, consultation, visitor experience plan (visitor journey, projections, interpretation concept plan), consumer testing, site selection, site investigation; Phase 2: Business Case (Cost Benefit Analysis/Public Spending Code) and operational/governance model; Phase 3: Design and planning including EIA/AA.</p>	Longford CoCo Roscommon CoCo Lough Ree Access For All CLG	Failte Ireland Bord na Mona NPWS Lanesborough- Ballyleague Collaboration Group	Q1 2021 Q2 2021	Approval given for single project approach Tender issued for design	Ballpark fee €500-€600,000 ex VAT
01.03	<p>Discuss potential for use of St Mary’s Parish Hall site, car park and dive club buildings for site of Lough Ree UNESCO Biosphere Visitor Centre.</p> <p>Reciprocal agreement to be given for Longford County Council engagement in providing a new community centre at an alternative location, and community engagement in developing a new co-working centre; plus provision of a new dive club building and rescue service building at al alternative location (e.g. north Commons or on SSE land near the Eirgrid station)</p> <p>Dive Club: Frank Casey (Chairperson)Mobile:087 981 7784</p>	Longford County Council Chief Executive	Francis Duffy, Bishop of Ardagh and Clonmacnoise Frank Casey, Lough Ree Sub- Aqua Club Lanesborough Tourism Co- operative Waterways Ireland Lanesborough- Ballyleague	Q1 2021	Discussion held; agreement gained for use of site	N/A

			Collaboration Group			
01.04	Commission feasibility study into optimum site for campervan park including landowner engagement	Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group	Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group	Q1 2021	Lanesborough-Ballyleague Campervan Park feasibility study commissioned	25,000
01.05	Commission feasibility study and trial of innovative adaptive re-use of vacant town centre Main Street buildings for overnight short-let visitor accommodation, including engagement with building owners, case studies of similar projects, consideration of local authority incentives	Roscommon County Council Longford County Council	Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group Building owners Failte Ireland	Q4 2021	Visitor Accommodation Adaptive Re-use Study commissioned; 2 vacant buildings brought back into use	25,000
01.06	Commission multi-phase recreation strategy (design and implementation) for coordinated approach to development of walking routes, Greenways, Blueway enhancement, lake shore boardwalk (Inner Lake), visitor infrastructure (e.g. tea houses) and angling infrastructure within the Lough Ree Biosphere area, and to include linkages to key hubs including Clondra, Athlone and Portun. Seek phase 2 extension of funding under Just Transition (building on 102,000 funding gained for 'Mid Shannon Wilderness Greenway' Strategy to consider asset management and asset lifecycle	Roscommon County Council Longford County Council	Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group National Trails Office Bord na Mona NPWS Waterways Ireland Failte Ireland	Q2 2021 Q4 2022-2023	Lough Ree Biosphere Recreation Strategy commissioned Application for capital funding made to Just Transition and/or ORIS	50,000 – design ?? capital
01.07	Commission design and implementation of an orientation and wayfinding scheme for Lanesborough-Ballyleague	Roscommon County Council Longford County Council	Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group Failte Ireland	Q4 2021/Q1 2022	Orientation and wayfinding scheme study commissioned	75,000

Pillar 2: A Better Place to Work & Learn - Creating New Opportunities

	Action	Lead Agency	Partners	Timescale	Key Performance Indicator	Indicative Budget/Potential Sources of funding € - annual
02.01	Lough Ree Technology Cluster study to identify optimum site for project	FDT Consulting Engineers and PM Limited	Longford County Council Roscommon County Council	Q1 2021	Site and operational mode identified	N/A
	Construct Lough Ree Technology Cluster in phases			2022+	LRTC operational	TBC
02.02	High level CE meeting to be held to discuss opportunity for Lough Ree technology Cluster at site of former Lough Ree Power Station	Longford CoCo Roscommon CoCo KPMG-FA	KPMG-FA ESB Bord na Mona SSE Eirgrid KPMG-FA FDT Consulting Engineers and PM Limited	Q1 2021	Meeting held and decision made, (ideally with letter of commitment from ESB/SSE/Eirgrid and Bord na Mona/LCC/RCC and photo call)	N/A
02.03	Feasibility study to determine optimum site for development of an anaerobic digester (funded through Just Transition)	Longford CoCo	Bord na Mona ESB	Q1 2021	Optimum site selected	N/A
	Seek funding for construction of anaerobic digester		Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group	2022	AD operational	TBC
02.04	<u>Development of co-working Centre</u> 1 Agreement signed between LCC and Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group for Group to lead implementation of co-working centre 2 Purchase of former convent building initiated 3 Feasibility study commissioned for development of a co-working centre in Lanesborough with agreement from community to drive project 4 Seek funding for and construct co-working/training centre	Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group	Longford CoCo Leader Digiwest DEBI	Q1 2021	Feasibility study commissioned	2 – 300,000 3 – 30,000 4 – TBC ORHT

Economic and Enterprise Development Strategy for Lanesborough /Ballyleague

02.05	Feasibility study commissioned to identify optimum location for a second landing site; design of site Seek funding for construction of site	Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group	Longford CoCo Roscommon CoCo	Q3 2021 2022	Feasibility study commissioned Site constructed	40,000 TBC ORHT
02.06	Food hub Provide capital support for Premier Lakelands Food Hub Seek commitment from Bord na Mona to be anchor tenant in food hub Seek extension to food hub concept under Just Transition	Longford CoCo	Bord na Mona	Q1-2 2021 Q1 2021 2023-2027	Food Hub project supported Commitment provided from Bord na Mona as anchor tenant	250,000 N/A TBC

Pillar 3: A Better Place to Live – enhancing sense of place and vitality						
	Action	Lead Agency	Partners	Timescale	Key Performance Indicator	Indicative Budget/Potential Sources of funding € - annual
03.01	Seek funding for Joint Public Strategy Commission and Implement Joint Public Realm Project for Lanesborough-Ballyleague	Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group		2022-2023	Funding application for public realm strategy Design and Build Public Realm Plan commissioned	TBC TBC
03.02	Identify site for provision of site servicing to encourage residential development in core area Provide site servicing	Longford CoCo Roscommon CoCo	Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group	2022-2023	Serviced sites available in town centre	TBC

Pillar 4: Increase the Visibility of Lanesborough-Ballyleague						
	Action	Lead Agency	Partners	Timescale	Key Performance Indicator	Indicative Budget/Potential

Economic and Enterprise Development Strategy for Lanesborough /Ballyleague

						Sources of funding annual € -
04.01	Seek funding for a Digital Marketing Strategy for Lanesborough-Ballyleague	Lanesborough Ballyleague Collaboration Group				40,000

Appendix 1: Relevant Capital Grant Applications

A1.1 Just Transition Fund 2020 Projects

Successful projects under the 2020 Just Transition Fund call are shown in Figure 1²⁶, with those awarded to Lanesborough-Ballyleague highlighted.

Table 5 Just Transition Fund 2020 Stage 1 Successful Applications

	Applicant Name	Project Title	Will operate in/ aimed at
1	Moore Community Council	Provision of Remote Working Hub & Training Facility: Moore Community Hall	Roscommon
2	Enterprise Ireland	Mide	Kildare, Laois, Offaly, Westmeath
3	Ballycommon Telework & Training Centre CLG	Training Workshop	Kildare, Laois, Offaly, Westmeath
4	Green Offaly	Geopark and Biosphere Research Study	Offaly
5	Umeras Community Development	Umeras Peatlands Park: Design Study	Kildare, Laois, Offaly
6	Roscommon County Council	Lough Ree Bay Boardwalk	Roscommon
7	Athlone Co-Working Hub (CWH)	Athlone Co-Working Hub	East Galway, Longford, Offaly, Roscommon, Westmeath
8	Birr 20:20 Vision Company Limited	Producing and Promoting Green Energy Birr and SW Offaly	East Galway, North Tipperary, Offaly, Roscommon
9	Peatland Biodiversity Boardwalk Fourth Final Phase - Lullymore	Extension to Peatland Biodiversity Boardwalk 4th Final Phase	Kildare, Offaly
10	Lumcloon Energy Limited	Alektra: Feasibility Study Stage 2	Offaly
11	RR Power Projects	PolySafe	Kildare, Laois, Longford, Offaly Westmeath
12	Longford County Council	Lanesboro Anaerobic Digestion Facility: Feasibility Study	Longford, Roscommon
13	Offaly Local Development Company	West Offaly: Quality of Life, Place & Experience	Offaly
14	FDT Consulting Engineers and PM Limited	Lough Ree Technology Cluster Study	Longford, Roscommon
15	Ballyforan Area Transition Team	Ballyforan Area Development Feasibility Study	East Galway, Roscommon
16	Baylin Development Association	Baylin Bog Trail	Westmeath

²⁶ <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ed10d-just-transition-fund/#>

Table 6 Just Transition Fund 2020 Stage 1 Successful Applications

	Project Name	Lead Applicant	JFT Funding Amount Sought (€)	Counties impacted
1	A Brown to Green Jobs Transition to Eliminate Energy Waste in Midlands Homes	Hub Controls Ltd	1,000,000	All counties
2	Ballyforan Greenway Loop	Ballyforan Area Transition Team	977,500	East Galway, Roscommon
3	Bord na Móna Employee Supports - Training and Upskilling Project	Bord na Móna	1,000,000	All counties
4	Bord na Móna Medicinal Herbs Project	Bord na Móna	1,000,000	All counties
5	Building Resilience and Adaptability in Primary School Children through STEM in Impacted Communities	Offaly County Council	119,000	Offaly
6	Climate Action Training and Mentoring Programme	Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office	255,000	All counties
7	Clontuskert Ballyleague Bog Heritage Train	Roscommon County Council	212,000	Roscommon
8	Clontuskert Ballyleague Visitor Centre and Organic Farm	Roscommon County Council	212,000	Roscommon
9	Community Led Just Transition North Tipperary	Energy Communities Tipperary Cooperative CLG	995,000	North Tipperary
10	Connecting Communities with Peatlands	Irish Rural Link	277,079	All counties
11	Conservation and Pollination - Medieval Churches in Laois and Offaly	Laois County Council	748,000	Laois, Offaly
12	Digital Learning Hub - Longford	Longford Westmeath ETB	1,000,000	Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath
13	Edenderry Carbon Challenge: Feasibility Study	Edenderry Tidy Towns	70,000	Offaly
14	Employment Development Information Centre Transition Campus	Employment Development Information Centre Longford	359,846	Longford, Offaly, Roscommon, Westmeath
15	Empower Eco	Athlone Institute of Technology	907,765	All counties
16	Enablers of a Just Transition for Communities in the Midlands Region	University of Limerick - Centre for Environmental Research	217,600	All counties

17	Ferbane Food Campus and Innovation Centre	Ferbane Business and Technology Park CLG	595,000	Offaly
18	Green HQ for Offaly	Offaly Local Development Company and Green Offaly	960,298	Offaly
19	Ballinahown Village Hall Revitalisation Project	Ballinahown Community Development Ltd	212,500	Westmeath
20	Kinnegad Economic Enterprise Space	Westmeath County Council	841,657	Westmeath
21	Lanesboro Food Hub	Premier Lakelands Hub	1,000,000	Longford, Roscommon
22	Lanesborough Tourism Hub	Longford County Council	212,500	Longford, Roscommon
23	Littleton Labyrinth	Tipperary County Council	663,719	East Galway, Laois, North Tipperary
24	Lough Boora Discovery Park and Midlands Cycling Destination - Sustainable Connections 2020	Offaly County Council	998,155	All counties
25	Lough Boora Enhancement: Cycle Way and Feasibility Study - Industrial Art Space	Bord na Móna	448,314	All counties
26	Lough Ree Access for All	Lough Ree Access for All CLG	471,693	Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath
27	Lough Ree Distillery - Phase 2	Blacksmith Ventures Limited	1,000,000	Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath
28	Midland Bioenergy Development Project	Irish BioEnergy Association	255,000	All counties
29	Midlands Ireland.ie Digital Roadmap	Laois County Council	998,750	Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath
30	Midlands Network of Co-working Facilities - Business Development	Laois County Council	255,000	Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath
31	Midlands Retrofit Growth	KORE Retrofit Ltd	948,600	All counties
32	Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park Greenway	Longford County Council	102,000	Longford, Roscommon
33	North Kildare Business and Learning Campus: Site Expansion Works	Allenwood Community Development Association CLG	810,394	Kildare
34	Pedestrian and Cycle Link - Killucan to Royal Canal	Westmeath County Council	391,000	Westmeath
35	Pulse Hub: Creation of Remote Working Hubs in Ballinasloe Town	Ballinasloe Area Community Development CLG	490,747	East Galway, Offaly, Roscommon, Westmeath
36	Real Leaf Farm	Galway Herb Farm Limited t/a Real Leaf Farm	1,000,000	Offaly

37	Regenerating Abbeyshrute for Technology, Tourism and Culture	The Yard Hub CLG	189,572	Longford
38	Renovation of the Harbour Building, Kilbeggan	Kilbeggan Grand Canal Harbour Amenity Co Ltd and Westmeath County Council	622,073	Westmeath
39	Rhode Green Energy Park	Offaly County Council	807500	Offaly
40	Rhode Green Energy Park Integration Study	Newleaf	100,000	Offaly
41	Social Enterprise Exchange	The Cluster Centre	170,978	East Galway, Laois, Longford, Offaly, Roscommon, Westmeath
42	St Joseph's Community Centre Development	Kilcormac Development Association	435,853	Offaly
43	Strategic Area Response Plan Implementation	Shannonbridge Action Group	405,960	East Galway, Offaly, Roscommon, Westmeath
44	Superhomes Midlands	Tipperary Energy Agency CLG	603,625	All counties
45	The Lir Project	Fergal Moran and Brian O'Carroll	1,000,000	Offaly, Roscommon, Westmeath
46	Traveller Community Enterprise and Social Farming Project	Offaly Traveller Movement	997,738	Offaly
47	Tullamore Enterprise Space and Infrastructure	Offaly Innovation and Design Centre CLG	476,000	Offaly
			Total: €27,815,416	

A1.2 Past and Current Grant Funding Applications Under Other Schemes

Significant projects that have received funding to implementation or feasibility stage include:

- Enhancements around the community park and access to Lough Ree Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2016);
- Development of infrastructure to provide free Wi-Fi within the area (Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2017);
- Construction of a link path from Lanesborough to Knappogue through Bord na Móna bog lands, with a second stage linking Lanesborough-Ballyleague to the Royal Canal Greenway via Clondra;
- Enhancements around the community park and access to Lough Ree, particularly the provision of a floating jetty to accommodate triathlon and other such events (Town and Village Renewal Scheme 2016);
- *'Enhancement of Attractiveness of Lanesborough as Tourism Destination'* (€468,750). This includes a visitor centre, quarry amphitheatre and link road (Category Two funding from Rural Regeneration and Development Fund/RRDF);

- Premier Lakelands Food hub project (€1.3 million in funding from Regional Enterprise Fund (Enterprise Ireland));
- The community received CEDRA Agri-Tourism funding in 2016 which led to the creation on the Taste of the Lakelands branding and the subsequent annual food festival;
- LEADER funding helped develop a new astro-turf pitch and soccer pitch at the athletic track on the Lanesboro side.

Appendix 2: Consultees

KPMG Future Analytics contacted a range of consultees during August-November 2020.

We would like to thank all of those who gave their time for these discussions, which were essential in enabling this strategy to be produced.

Consultees included:

- Northern and Western Regional Authority (NWRA)
- Eastern and Midlands Regional Authority (EMRA)
- Just Transition Team
- Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage
- Bord na Móna
- ESB
- Fáilte Ireland
- NPWS
- Waterways Ireland
- Midlands Ireland
- Inland Fisheries Ireland
- AIT
- Roscommon County Council – Planning, Tourism
- Enterprise Ireland – Longford
- Enterprise Ireland – Roscommon
- Longford Community Resources Ltd
- Roscommon Leader Partnership Ltd
- Relevant TD's and councillors
- Bord na Móna Workers Retraining and Jobs Club
- Ballyleague-Lanesborough Collaborative Group
- Ballyleague Renewal Group
- Cloontuskert Tidy Towns Committee
- Mid Shannon Wilderness Park
- Local businesses

Appendix 3: Supporting Analysis

A3.1 PESTEL Analysis

Political (Government Policies, Guidelines and Funding Opportunities)

Just Transition Framework

Just Transition is a framework that encompasses a range of social interventions needed to secure livelihoods when economies are shifting to sustainable production. The Just Transition approach emphasises a coordinated, long-term, and multi-pronged response involving social partners, industry, and Government. The Midlands will be the first region facing this disruption, and as such will present important opportunities to learn for other areas and sectors affected in the years ahead. As part of the announcements made in Budget 2020, the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment announced his intention to appoint a Commissioner to help ensure a coordinated and effective approach to Just Transition for communities and workers affected by the imminent ending of peat harvesting for power generation in the Midlands region. The Just Transition Commissioner was appointed by the Minister in November 2019 with a mandate to engage with relevant stakeholders in the Midlands region and to recommend the essential elements of a just transition for workers and communities in the Midlands. The process is also supported by an €11 million Just Transition Fund, to which the ESB has contributed €5 million in recognition of their long-standing relationship with communities in the Midlands. This funding aims to support the retraining and reskilling of workers and to assist local communities and businesses in the midlands to adjust to the low carbon transition.

The 2020 call for applications the Just Transition Fund closed on 17 July 2020. Provisional offers totalling €1.2 million have been made to 16 successful applicants under the 2020 Fund. The offers relate to Strand 1 applications for less than €100,000 in funding. Applications seeking more than €100,000 from the Fund were given provisional offers in November 2020, with details provided in Appendix 1.

Town Centre Renewal – Government Policies and Funding

Under Project Ireland 2040, the Government have signalled their commitment to rejuvenating rural towns and villages, sustaining vibrant rural economies and communities. The Rural Regeneration and Development Fund, administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development, will provide €1 billion in investment over 10 years to support the renewal of small towns, villages and outlying rural areas. The purpose of the fund is to support job creation in rural areas, address the de-population of rural communities and support improvements in towns and villages with a population of less than 10,000 people, and outlying areas.

Initial funding of €315 million is being allocated on a phased basis over the period 2019 to 2022. So far, the Fund has provided €148 million for 110 projects across Ireland, worth a total of €212 million. Medium and larger towns in Ireland (with populations between 1,500 and 10,000) may be eligible for investment under either the Rural or Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, subject to the nature of the proposal. As of June 2020, a further 24 projects have been allocated €13 million under the Rural Regeneration and Development Fund. As part of this announcement, **€468,750 in funding has been allocated for the ‘Enhancement of Attractiveness of Lanesborough as Tourism Destination’ (see Appendix 1).**

At national level, there is also the Town and Village Renewal Schemes and complementary funding in areas such as housing, rural water, transport, broadband and community facilities in addition to other measures such as the Community Enterprise Centre Scheme, the Community Enterprise Initiative Scheme, the Competitive Local Enterprise Office Fund and the Regional Enterprise Fund.

With regards the Regional Enterprise Fund (Enterprise Ireland), **Lanesborough / Ballyleague have been successful in securing €1.3 million for the Premier Lakelands Food hub project (see Appendix 1).**

Flexible Working Solutions - Government Policies and Funding

As the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (DBEI) notes, extensive work is underway from multiple bodies to promote remote work as a tool for rural and community development, a large volume of which, similar to work from a regional development point of view, is focused on supporting the creation of hubs and the practice of hub-working. Indeed, this work had advanced prior to the COVID-19 crisis, a situation which has placed greater urgency and necessity on this stream of work.

A research paper entitled ‘Remote Work in Ireland – Future Jobs 2019’ was published by DBEI in December 2019. Future Jobs Ireland, from which this paper stems, has placed emphasis on remote working as a way to attract and retain talent and to increase participation in an increasingly tight labour market. This was reflected under Pillar 4: Increasing Participation in the Labour Force, which called for this research paper. The Climate Action Plan, which was published shortly thereafter, cites the importance of remote work from an environmental point of view in reducing commuter transport energy use and carbon emissions. In addition, it was also reported in December 2019 that DBEI are to set up an interdepartmental group to develop clear guidelines for employees and employers on remote working.

Moreover, the 2019-2020 Regional Enterprise Plans contain actions aimed at facilitating and promoting the uptake of remote work in hubs across a number of regions. Enterprise Ireland’s new regional plan ‘Powering the Regions’ also emphasises the importance of smart working and commits to the creation of co-working spaces across the regions. As part of this plan, Enterprise Ireland has also launched the three-year **#Worksmartchallenge campaign to support 10,000 co-working and incubation spaces in regional locations. 600 of these are to be located within the Midlands.** The Regional Enterprise Plan also confirms a commitment to implementing a new initiative to **support 40 second site locations by Irish companies across the state.**

At present, there is no data available on the national infrastructure of hubs in Ireland, according to the December 2019 DBEI research paper. This acts as a key barrier to promoting the adoption of remote work in hubs. The paper further highlights the potential benefit of if a national exercise was carried out to understand the number of hubs in existence, their classification, their offering, occupancy levels and awareness of the supports available to them.

As per the Midlands Ireland Audit of Co-Working Facilities, there are currently two such facilities within County Longford, located in Edgeworthstown and Longford Town respectively. A third facility is also at planning stage - ‘The Yard Hub’ project in Abbeyshrule. No official data exists for County Roscommon but there are a further two such facilities in the county, located in Boyle and Roscommon Town.

Under the Just Transition Fund, of the sixteen projects recently funded (June 2020), two are for co-working facilities. These are to be located in Moore, County Roscommon and Athlone, County Westmeath.

Economic

Economic Growth and Employment – National, Regional and County Level

It should also be noted that this study commenced just prior to the full onset of the Covid-19 global pandemic. The Covid-19 pandemic has rapidly spread throughout the world in 2020, with flights grounded on an unprecedented scale and all unnecessary domestic travel largely halted between March and June 2020. Beyond the substantial health impacts, it has been reported that the Irish economy shrank 6.1% between April and June. This decline in economic activity in the second quarter surpassed the 4.7% reduction recorded in the fourth quarter of 2008 – at the height of the financial crisis.

Up to the end of 2019 and in line with the expansion of economic activity that had been taking place in the economy, the retail sector was experiencing growth to varying degrees across the State. However, the impact of Covid-19 resulted in a substantial fall in the volume of retail sales recorded for March (-12.5%) and April (-35.8%) 2020. The volume of retail sales increased by 29.5% in May 2020 when compared to April 2020 on a seasonally adjusted basis. This was the largest monthly increase on record. However, on an annual basis, retail volumes were still 26.6% lower in May 2020 compared with May 2019. Retail sales in May were 27.3% lower than in February before the crisis started. When Motor Trades are excluded, the volume of retail sales increased by 9.3% in May 2020 over the previous month and decreased by 16.2% when compared with May 2019.

Undoubtably Covid-19 will also have a long lasting and transformational impact on the tourism industry of Ireland, from which the industry may take several years to fully recover. It is likely the joint impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit will result in a significant decline in international visitors during 2020 and 2021, with a slow increase, thereafter, impacting upon revenue and employment targets at national, regional and county level. While tourism agencies expect a return to the underlying long-term trend of strong global growth from 2022 onwards, particularly if a successful vaccine programme is implemented, it is likely that in the current period and in early stages of recovery from the Covid-19 health crisis, the domestic tourism industry will experience earlier opportunities for revival, in contrast to international tourism which may experience a longer-term slump. Following long periods of lockdown, it is anticipated that people will seek out more localised travel opportunities as tourist confidence builds and returns. This could have significant benefits for Lanesborough/ Ballyleague.

Reviving other sectors of the economy must also be a critical policy concern. The complexity of the task should not be underestimated. It will require an innovative and collective response from government, state agencies, local authorities and businesses. For Lanesborough/ Ballyleague, this will require an in-depth understanding of the key drivers and opportunities for economic growth as well as potential barriers and threats.

The Climate Action Plan also tasked the National Economic and Social Council (NESC) with identifying steps that could be taken to address the vulnerability arising for workers, firms, and sectors in relation to the transitions to low carbon and more digital and automated future. In response to this request, NESC has recently published its report, Addressing Employment Vulnerability as Part of a Just Transition in Ireland

Economic Trends – Towards Flexible Working Solutions

In 2019, the World Bank published its World Development Report entitled ‘The Changing Nature of Work’. Among the key trends identified is the rise in the ‘gig’ economy due to advances in technology. The gig economy is the rising labour market that hires temporary, contracted workers instead of traditional employees. Companies are outsourcing tasks to already-trained, non-benefited workers, and workers have a chance to work for multiple companies in temporary positions and quick gigs or to fulfil ongoing work. The report acknowledges that it is still difficult to estimate the current global size of the gig economy but indicates the total freelancer population worldwide is estimated to be 84 million. In June 2019, the Guardian reported on the rise of the gig

economy in the UK which had more than doubled over the previous three years and which accounted for 4.7 million workers.

In line with this, remote working continues to grow in popularity in Ireland. While the term is still somewhat misunderstood owing to the wide range of different working arrangements it can encompass, DBEI adopts the following definition in their ‘Remote Work in Ireland’ research paper:

“A form of organising and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract / relationship, where work, which could be performed at the employers premises is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis”

Two forms of remote working solutions are explored by DBEI;

- Homeworking – where employees work from their homes;
- Hub-working – where an employee works from a hub close to or within their local community. This includes co-working, which involves attendance at a co-working space where collaboration and networking outside of one’s team or organisation is encouraged.

According to the 2016 Census, 56,774 people in Ireland (excluding those in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector) are homeworkers. This is an increase of 20% from the 2011 figure, which was 47,193. In 2018, the CSO undertook a pilot survey to inform the 2021 Census. The results of this pilot found that 18% of respondents work from home, mostly one or two days per week.

Enterprises in Ireland are increasingly engaging in remote working solutions. In 2016 an Ibec survey of their membership found that 30% (110) of companies had a practice of remote work (referred to as e-working/ homeworking), on one or two days per week, while 5% have a practice of remote work five days per week. The 2018 iteration of this report saw these figures rise to 37% (152) and 7% respectively. According to data from Indeed, there has been a steady increase from 6.5 to 13.5 per thousand of job postings in Ireland offering remote work in the last 3 years, from late 2016 to the third quarter of 2019.

The current Covid-19 crisis has seen an unprecedented shift in working patterns in 2020, with remote working now a feature of daily life for many. **The need for social distancing measures into the medium to longer term will see demands for flexible working solutions continue to grow in importance. Enabling and facilitating this shift will be a critical policy objective for regions across Ireland.**

Commercial Activity and Vacancy Rates - National and County Level

The GeoView Commercial and Residential Property Reports provide quarterly analysis of the commercial and residential building stock across Ireland, including detail around vacancy and dereliction. At the end of 2019 (Quarter 4), the national commercial vacancy rate stood at 13.3%, with vacancy rates continuing to rise in most of Ireland’s counties (sub regional territories which demarcate areas of local government).

Within the current context, the Covid-19 pandemic has added another layer of complexity to these existing trends. The three Regional Assemblies of Ireland have recently prepared a “COVID-19 Regional Economic Analysis” (2020) to identify which regions, sub-regions, counties, cities and towns are more likely to be exposed to economic disruption caused by the measures necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The overarching purpose of the document is to ensure that national, regional and local bodies are adequately equipped in designing appropriate policy responses to this unprecedented crisis. Using the GeoDirectory commercial database, and specifically the NACE codes allocated to commercial units as of September 2019, the report

identified each geographical area’s reliance on the sectors that are likely to be severely affected by the public health measures needed to curtail the spread of COVID-19.

On foot of this, “COVID-19 Exposure Ratios” have been developed for each of Ireland’s regions, sub-regions, counties, cities and for 199 settlements. Specifically, a geographical area’s “COVID-19 Exposure Ratio” represents the total number of its commercial units that were operating in the sectors likely to be worst affected by the COVID-19 outbreak, as a proportion of its total commercial stock as of September 2019. The higher this ratio is for an area, the more likely this area is exposed to significant economic disruption as a result of the crisis.

These sectors viewed as having likely experienced the greatest disruption had two primary characteristics:

- Commercial units operating within these selected sectors rely completely on human interaction and therefore have been forced to either close or downsize their operations dramatically due to social distancing measures.
- The nature of their operations largely prevents them from operating remotely, exposing them to a significant decline in revenue.

Overall, the study found that 46% of Ireland’s commercial units (of those allocated a NACE code) were operating in the worst affected sectors. However, the study also reports that coastal and rural counties are more likely to be exposed. The COVID-19 Exposure Rate for County Longford is 50%, with County Roscommon standing at 48.8%. To contextualise this, County Kerry records the highest overall rate at 53.8%, with Dublin the lowest at 39.4%.

Key Economic Threats and Risks

Ireland, as a highly open, export-focussed economy is particularly sensitive and exposed to changes in global economic and trading conditions. This is recognised in the annual National Risk Assessment (NRA) which provides an opportunity for the identification, discussion and consideration of risks facing Ireland over the short, medium and long term. Since the NRA was first published in 2014, the annual Report has served as an important indicator of national level risks and has called attention to various risks that subsequently became major issues for Irish society. The 2019 report identifies 27 strategic risks across 5 core risks themes – Geopolitical, economic, social, environmental and technological. Among the risk themes, Brexit is central. The report states that the decision of the UK to leave the EU presents uniquely significant and unprecedented political, economic, social and diplomatic challenges for Ireland, given the extent of the inter-connectedness of our economies and people.

In March 2019, the ESRI and the Department of Finance produced updated estimates (following an initial impact assessment in 2016) of the potential macroeconomic impacts of Brexit on the Irish economy. This study finds that, compared to a no Brexit baseline, the level of GDP in Ireland ten years after Brexit would be around 2.6 per cent lower in a deal scenario and 5.0 per cent lower in a ‘Disorderly No Deal’ scenario, respectively. The study also emphasises the negative impact Brexit will have on the Irish labour market. The results from the study show that employment, in the long run, would be 1.8 per cent lower in a deal scenario and 3.4 per cent lower in a “Disorderly No Deal” scenario, compared to a scenario where the UK stays in the EU.

The study states that there are also significant sectoral and regional dimensions to this economic impact and some sectors and regions will be more affected than others. Indeed, the negative impacts will be most keenly felt in those sectors with strong export ties to the UK market – such as the agri-food, manufacturing and tourism sectors and also SMEs generally – along with their

suppliers. The impact will be particularly noticeable in the regions where there is a reliance on these sectors and businesses as firms adjust to potentially higher tariff and non-tariff barriers, as well as currency fluctuations.

More generally, Brexit has introduced a level of uncertainty which may result in foreign enterprises holding off on investment decisions until greater clarity emerges. At their annual conference in January 2020, Enterprise Ireland stated that it expects an increase in jobs created again in 2020, growth is slowing due to Brexit and the difficulties in finding staff in an economy that is at full tilt. The Agency has approved funding of €125 million for Brexit-exposed companies over the past two years and is continuing to work with clients on a one-to-one basis on preparing for the UK’s exit from the European Union.

Ireland also faces a significant new economic and health threat in the form of the Covid-19 pandemic. As stated previously, the necessary restrictions to limit the transmission of the Covid-19 virus have resulted in an economic downturn and unprecedented levels of unemployment. Recent research from the ESRI indicates that real GDP in the Irish economy will decline by 13% and 0.26% in 2020 and 2030, respectively, compared to its business-as-usual (BaU) pattern. In other words, even if the Irish economy goes back to its structural setting in 2021, the COVID-19 crisis will have a continuing impact on real GDP in the coming decade

Consumer Behaviour

Consumer behaviour has changed drastically in recent decades, with the concept of “experiential” shopping now widely proclaimed as the key driver of town centres, according to the ‘*Rejuvenating Ireland’s Small Town Centres*’ report (SCSI, 2018). Essentially, consumers now spend less on comparison goods and instead spend more on experiences, such as food, beverages and services such as beauticians and barbers. It can be argued that a key driver behind these decreases is the increasing digitisation of retail industries.

In line with this, the CSO reports that in 2016, almost 4 out of every 5 jobs in Ireland were in the services sector. This accounted for 78.6 per cent of all employment. This is in stark contrast to the situation 50 years ago when the sector accounted for 41.2 per cent of jobs. Moreover, of the 2,006,641 people at work in April 2016, the personal services group (covering care assistants, chefs and hairdressers among others) accounted for the highest number at 238,743 (11.9%), followed by sales occupations at 207,938 (10.4%)

It is envisaged that the COVID-19 pandemic will have significant impact on consumer behaviour in the short to medium term. In July 2016, PwC polled nearly 4,500 consumers in nine countries including 35 cities on changing urban consumer purchasing habits and behaviours and how global disruption has forced the acceleration of a more digital way of life. The research reveals that the pandemic and the resulting social distancing measures put in place have led to fundamental changes in how consumers shop, live and take care of their health. For example, the results show that while in-store grocery shopping is the main channel of choice, nearly two-thirds (63%) of consumers are now buying more groceries online than before the pandemic. 86% of those who now shop online are planning to continue after social distancing measures are removed. 45% say they are shopping less often for groceries but filling up bigger baskets.

Analysis of debit card transactions by Bank of Ireland²⁷ has revealed that Irish consumers have been spending more on home fitness products, gaming and streaming services during COVID-19. The analysis has tracked debit card spend since March 12th and compared it with the average spend prior to restrictions being implemented by the Government in response to COVID-19 (January 1st –

²⁷ <https://www.bankofireland.com/about-bank-of-ireland/press-releases/2020/irish-consumers-spending-more-on-home-fitness-gaming-and-streaming-during-covid-19/>

March 11th inclusive). It shows that retail spend during that period was buoyed by online activity and a 37% increase in grocery shopping.

However, while online shopping has grown exponentially during the lockdown period, there are also trends suggesting that for certain forms of shopping (groceries in particular) people are spending more money locally. Indeed, research from Accenture²⁸ found that 80% of consumers feel more connected to their communities since the onset of the crisis.

Minister of State for Business, Employment and Retail, Damien English TD, launched a new €5.5 million COVID-19 Online Retail Scheme on 20 August 2020 as announced in the Government’s July Jobs Stimulus package. The new fund, administered by Enterprise Ireland on behalf of the Department, supports retail businesses to enhance their digital capability, drive online sales and grow their customer base.

Social

Demographic Trends

Between 1966 and 2016 Ireland has seen its population grow by approximately 65% from 2,884,002 to 4,761,865. However, the recent decades of growth have not occurred evenly throughout the country. The average growth rate across all counties during this twenty-year period was 31%. The lowest county growth rates were recorded in Sligo, Mayo and Kerry (all 17%), while the highest growth rate was recorded in Meath, which grew by a substantial 78%. During this period, Longford grew by 35%, with Roscommon’s population increasing by 24%.

As the World Bank (2015) notes, profound changes in global demography have and are expected to continue to affect the development outlook and policy agenda. The world population is growing more slowly and aging at unprecedented speed. Indeed, Ireland’s population has been getting steadily older since the 1980’s. In Census 2016, 37.2% were aged 45 and over, compared with 34.4% in 2011 and 27.6% in 1986. Almost a third of the population (33.2%) was less than 25 years old, while 29.5% were in the 25-44 age group. As the CSO Census 2016 results show, the average age of Ireland’s population stood at 37.4 years in April 2016, up by 1.3 years since 2011.

Age dependency, which is measured as the number of younger (0-14) and older (65+) people as a percentage of those of working age (15-64), increased from 49.3% in 2011 to 52.7% in 2016. The number in the 65 and over category increased by 102,174 – more than twice the 15-64 age category, which rose by 44,477 since 2011. These trends will have considerable implications both in terms of public policy, for the health service and for the Government’s finances in the years ahead.

Commuting and Local Jobs

The National Planning Framework has a chapter on ‘Making Urban Places Stronger’ which covers settlements from cities to small towns. In discussing Ireland’s urban structure (p58-59) it looks at population and employment and highlights a ratio of “jobs to resident workforce” as a key indicator of sustainability for a town. Data is provided (in the NPF Appendix 2) on town population, resident workers and jobs in the town for 200 settlements with a population of over 1,500 people in 2016.

The NPF (p176) indicates that a ratio of 1.0 means that there is one job for every resident worker in a settlement and indicates a balance, although not a match, as some resident workers will be employed elsewhere and vice-versa. Ratios of more than 1.0 indicate a net in-flow of workers and of less than 1.0, a net out-flow. The extent to which the ratio is greater or less than 1.0, is also generally indicative of the extent to which a town has a wider area service and employment role,

²⁸ <https://www.accenture.com/ie-en/insights/consumer-goods-services/coronavirus-consumer-behavior-research>

rather than as a commuter settlement. In the NWRA area, where there are 44 settlements with a population of more than 1,500, 7 towns have a ratio of more than 1.5 while 4 have a ratio of less than 0.5.

Towns in the Eastern and Midland Region tend to have lower ratios (most less than 1.0) with more workers leaving for jobs elsewhere. The low ratio for towns in the Eastern and Midland indicates the importance of commuting for many towns and the dominance of the large Dublin City region. Indeed only 2 towns in EMRA have ratios higher than 1.5. These are Longford (1.596) and Athlone (1.591) both of which are on the periphery of the EMRA, less under the influence of Dublin, and both have important employment and wider service functions for their hinterlands.

Technological

Increasing digitalisation of economic activity

Undoubtedly the most significant global change we have witnessed in recent decades has been the increasing digitalisation of economic activity (SCSI, 2018). This has numerous impacts, including the rise of more flexible working solutions (as described previously). It also has repercussions for the composition of the traditional town centre main street. Smaller countries like Ireland that have traditionally relied on indigenous retailers are now exposed to a global market, and this is impacting consumer behaviour. For example, Ireland possesses one of the largest proportion of consumers who purchase online via “cross-border” websites²⁹. The shift from a store-based past to a digital future within the retail industry has continued apace in 2019, with the COVID-19 pandemic rapidly accelerating these trends.

Increasing Broadband Availability

In 2019, the CSO reported that 91% of all households have internet access. However, the availability of high-speed broadband is critical in ensuring greater parity of opportunity across counties and regions in Ireland. The Government have committed to the National Broadband Plan, an initiative to deliver high speed broadband services to all premises in Ireland. Up to 146,000km of fibre will be deployed as part of the State intervention, delivering high speed broadband to over 1.1million people, in approximately 540,000 premises all across the country. This investment, along with private sector investment, means that by 2026 all premises in Ireland will have access to high speed broadband – enabling citizens and businesses to seize opportunities arising from advances in technologies across multiple sectors including Education, Health, Enterprise, Environment, Smart Farming, Social Inclusion & Rural/Regional Development, Tourism and Transportation. According to the Government’s ‘Delivering the National Broadband Plan’ report (2019), access to high speed connectivity is core to Ireland’s competitiveness and key to establishing Ireland as a world leader in this transformational digital age. The NBP will foster innovation and employment growth by ensuring that Ireland’s workforce is connected through world class broadband. It will also allow for and enable new and more flexible ways of working into the future (see section below). It is also a critical facilitating factor in a range of other Government plans and initiatives including Project Ireland 2040, the National Development Plan 2018-2027 and the National Planning Framework.

Portable computers / remote work tooling

A significant technological development over the past number of decades is the increasing proliferation of remote work tooling, in addition to the huge growth in portable computers / laptops. The spread of mobile internet access has also changed approaches to connectivity. Many companies have had to rapidly adapt to the need for mass remote working in 2020 – proving that these shifts are workable and offering a potentially longer-term alternative to ‘normal’ working practices.

²⁹ PayPal Cross-Border Consumer Research Report 2018 indicates that Irish consumers have among the highest incidence of online shopping through websites based out of foreign countries.

Environmental

Agenda 2030 and the Paris Agreement on climate change require a transformational shift of our economies and societies towards climate resilient and sustainable development. The Government has published its Climate Action Plan 2019 which sets out proposals to reduce Ireland’s greenhouse gas emissions. The Plan states that *‘Rising to this challenge is important not just for Ireland’s long term economic and societal interests, but also in relation to the attractiveness of Ireland as a location for Foreign Direct Investment, as a tourism destination, and as a source of safe, high-quality agricultural and food products’*

There is increasing onus on employers to reduce their carbon footprint. The enterprise sector has a dedicated section under the Climate Action Plan 2019 being tasked with reducing Green House Gas (GHG) emissions by 10%-15% by 2030. To meet this target enterprises must undertake initiatives within the workplace and throughout their work practices as a whole that will result in the reduction of GHG. **Remote working solutions (working from home or hub working, for example) can reduce emissions and energy use and contribute towards the achievement this important goal.**

In line with this, the EMRA RSES states that long distance car-based commuting is a key challenge that is leading to congestion of transport networks and negative impacts on people’s quality of life and on the environment. As such, one of the key identified challenges facing the region is the need for better alignment between population growth, location of residential development and employment to create healthy and attractive places. Addressing this core challenge will necessitate a greater focus on creating more regional jobs as well as increasing opportunities for flexible working solutions (demand for which has significantly heightened in the current crisis context).

Legal

In line with economic and technological trends and associated new ways of working, there are legal implications to be addressed. For example, with the rise in remote and flexible working, there are many possible impacts which may emerge when an employee works outside of a main office, both positive and negative. In encouraging the take up of remote work in Ireland, DBEI (2019) identified potential difficulties in implementing a formal HR policy on remote work as a barrier to full roll out of such an initiative. A lack of clarity on Occupational Health and Safety requirements also leads to fear of litigation in the case of an accident. **However, the current crisis and unprecedented shift towards remote working enables key lessons to be learned in a very short space of time.**

A3.2 Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile

A3.2.1 Demography

As defined by its CSO settlement boundary (see Figure 3.1), the population of Lanesborough-Ballyleague was 1,454 in 2016, which represented an increase of 6% from 2011 population levels. This is a higher overall rate of growth than the County Longford rate of 4.8% and the County Roscommon rate of 0.7% during the same period. Between 1996 and 2016, the settlement grew from a population of 388 and as such has grown by a significant 274% in 20 years.

An important indicator for future community and employment requirements is the age structure of the area. Approximately 60% (885 people) of the population were aged between 15 and 64 in 2016 in which broadly represents the labour force for the settlement area. This large cohort is a key driver of the economy, and their importance cannot be understated. Having a substantial proportion of a population fall within this large grouping is vital to an economy, no matter what the scale. It is, therefore, important that this age group have access to vital accommodation, retail and social infrastructure benefits within the town.

Figure 3.2 is a population pyramid which illustrates the breakdown of Lanesborough-Ballyleague population based on predefined age ranges. The largest cohort of the combined population are those aged 30 to 34. The largest cohort of males are those aged 0 to 4, whereas for females the largest cohort are those in the 30 to 34-year-old range. The average age of the entire population of Lanesborough-Ballyleague is 40 years (male 37.7, female 42), which is older than the average for Ireland (36.8 years) in 2016.

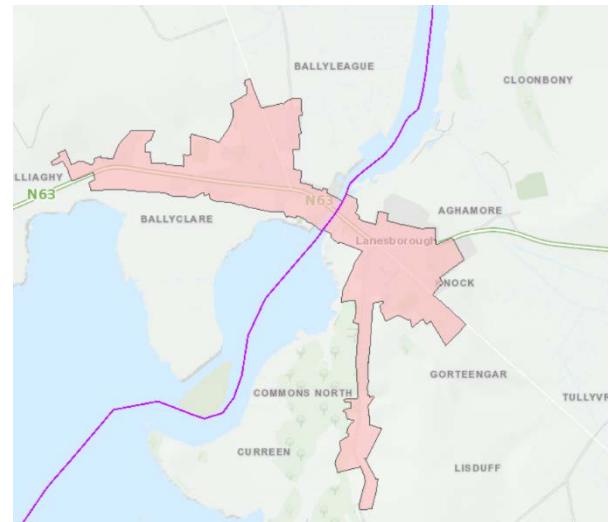


Figure 3.1: Lanesborough-Ballyleague settlement area

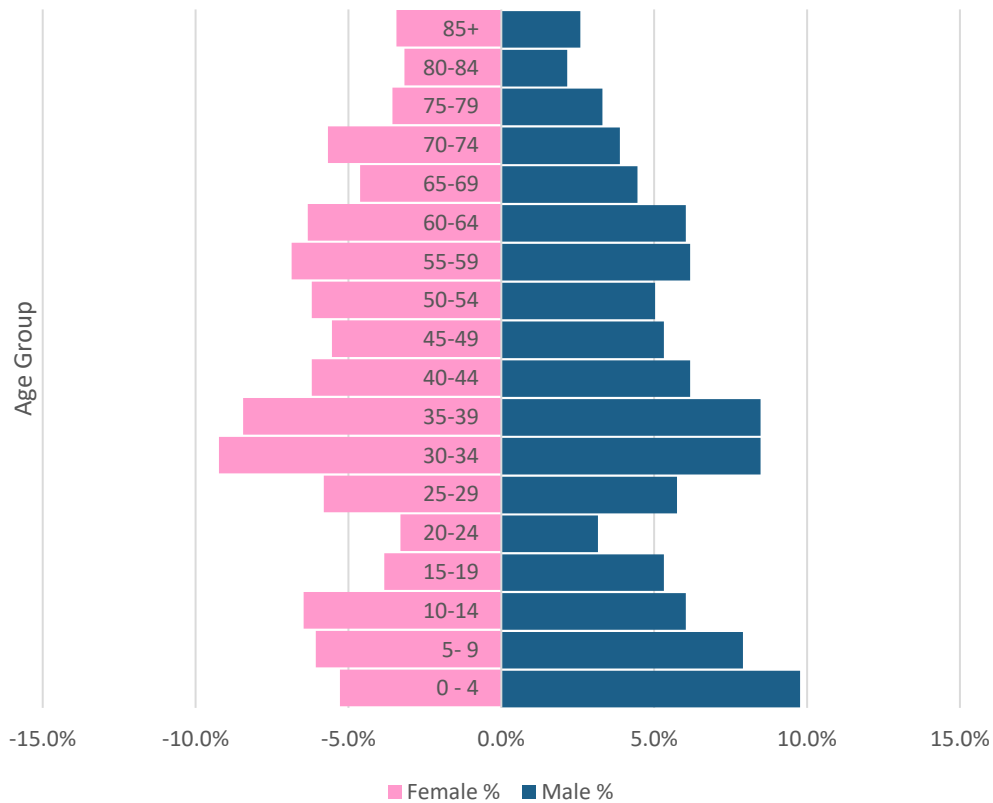


Figure 3.2: Lanesborough-Ballyleague Population Pyramid, CSO

In common with much of rural Ireland, there is a relatively high dependency rate in Lanesborough-Ballyleague. Dependents are defined for statistical purposes as people outside the normal working age of 15-64 (or those considered to be ‘economically inactive’). Dependency ratios are used to give a useful indication of the age structure of a population with young (0-14) and old (65+) shown as a percentage of the population of working age (i.e. 15-64). In the case of the study area, 300 (20.6%) people were aged 14 years or younger in 2016. 269 people (18.5%) were aged over 65 years. Thus, the dependency rate is 60.9%. The national rate in 2016 was 52.7%. However, the CSO notes that dependency ratios are a rather crude measure as variations occur over time due to the number of young people in third level education and people over 65 continuing to work.

Table 3.1: Age dependency

	Lanesborough/Ballyleague	State
Youth Dependency (Under 15)	20.6	32.21
Old Age Dependency (Over 64)	18.5	20.45
Total Dependency (Combined)	60.9	52.67

A3.2.2 Education

Education attainment levels, or the highest level of education a person receives, can offer further insight into the composition of a local population. Although higher education levels do not necessarily result in higher salaries, there is certainly a correlation between the two, with education often linked to improved employment opportunities. Therefore, if higher education attainment levels are identified, it is suggested that residents of this area are in positions where they can demand higher salaries and, therefore, seek out a greater range of housing options.

Figure 3.3 charts the levels of education attained by the population of Lanesborough-Ballyleague, aged 15 or over, as recorded in the Census of 2016. The highest proportion are those who studied until ‘upper secondary’, which refers to the Leaving Certificate, and this category represents 19.6% of the total. A sizeable proportion of the towns adult population, approximately 17.5% of people, have attained a qualification that is at minimum a ‘Level 7’ on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ)³⁰. A level 7 NFQ qualification refers to an Ordinary Degree in a third level institute. Furthermore, 4.7% of the population have achieved a Master’s degree or higher, which is Level 9 on the NFQ. These figures are lower than the State averages, where 28.5% of adults have attained a Level 7, while 10.1% have received a Master’s degree or above.

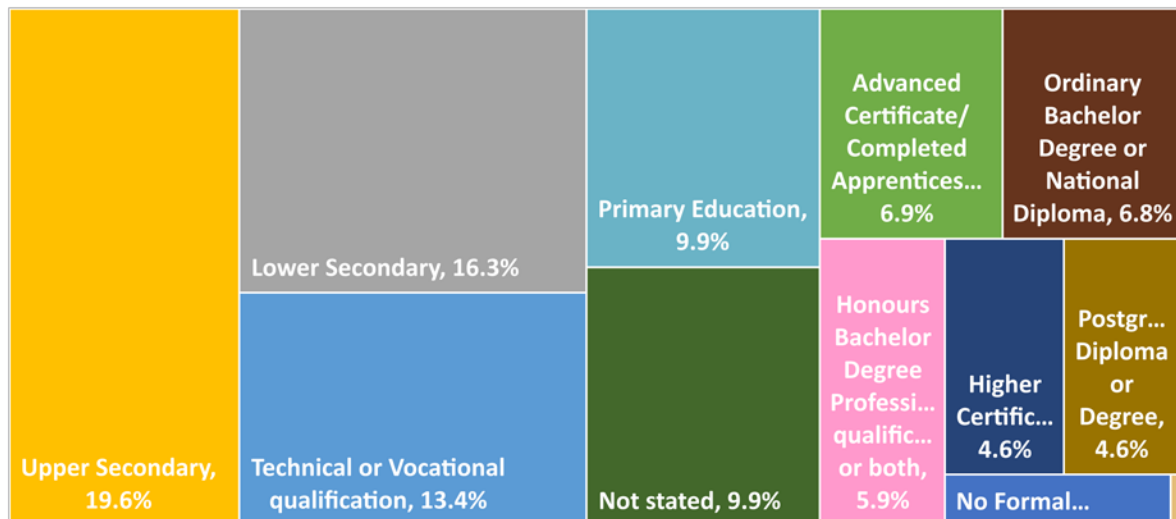


Figure 3.3: Levels of education attained in Lanesborough-Ballyleague

In addition to the levels of education it is worthwhile attempting to understand the type of studies undertaken by those who received a degree-level education. The Census of 2016 records such information and provides the field of study for those over the age of 15. Figure 3.4 provides a visualisation of this information for Lanesborough-Ballyleague. The largest cohort are those who studied subjects in ‘Social science Business and Law’, with 10.2% of the population. ‘Engineering Manufacturing and Construction’ provides the second largest cohort with 9.1%, while ‘Health and Welfare’ is the third largest (8.7%).

³⁰ The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) is a system of ten levels used to describe the Irish qualifications system. The NFQ is based on standards of knowledge, skill and competence and incorporates awards made for all kinds of learning, wherever it is gained. More information available at: <https://nfq.qqi.ie/>

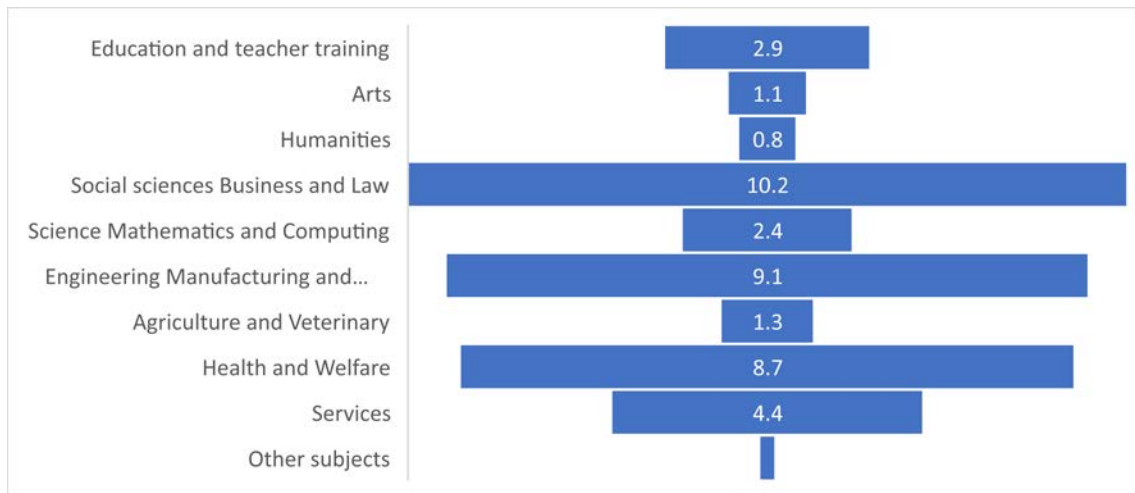


Figure 3.4: Fields of Study

A3.2.3 Labour Force Participation and Principal Economic Status

Principal economic status is recorded in the Census and provides an overview of the composition of a workforce and offers a useful snapshot in time for unemployment, as well as giving an indication of the proportion of students and retirees. Table 3.2 below showcases this information for Lanesborough-Ballyleague. In 2016 almost 50% of the working age population are listed as at work, whereas only 11.2% are ‘unemployed’. **This figure for unemployed is higher than the State average at the time of the census, which was 7.9%.** In the intercensal period the number of people at work grew by 8.3% and the number of people looking for their first regular job grew by 113%. The unemployment level increased by 1.5%.

There is a small proportion of students found in Lanesborough-Ballyleague, with 7% of respondents in this category. In the five-year period the number of students decreased by 9% from 90 in 2011, to 81 in 2016. Students are generally those people who have just finished secondary school and are, therefore, quite a youthful cohort. Retaining this cohort, once their studies have been completed, could be essential for the local economy and important if Lanesborough-Ballyleague is to continue to grow and remain as young, vibrant location. It is important, therefore, that new housing stock which meets the demand of the younger population is developed, allowing younger people from the locality to remain there. This housing stock should be varied and appropriate for young professionals and young families.

Table 3.2: Population aged 15 years and over by principal economic status and sex

Population aged 15 years and over by principal economic status and sex				
Principal Economic Status	Total 2011	Total 2016	(%) change	Actual change
At work	503	545	8.3%	42
Looking for first regular job	8	17	113%	9
Unemployed having lost or given up previous job	128	130	1.5%	2
Student	90	81	-9%	-9
Looking after home/family	117	92	-21%	-25
Retired	214	226	5.6%	12
Unable to work due to permanent sickness or disability	55	60	9%	5
Other	2	3	50%	1

Total	1,117	1,154		
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Socio-economic groups are used to classify populations and brings together persons with similar social and economic statuses based on the level of skill or educational attainment required. The groupings are not ranked to infer importance, they simply provide a means of classifying similar cohorts. Although it is impossible to discern earning capacity for socio-economic groupings, assumptions can be made. For example, it would be assumed that persons in the ‘employers and managers’ or ‘higher professional’ categories have, generally, a greater earning capacity that those in the ‘semi-skilled’ or ‘unskilled’ categories. Table 3.3 offers a breakdown of socioeconomic groupings in Lanesborough-Ballyleague.

Figure 3.5 offers an indication of the skills and positions that the population of Lanesborough-Ballyleague possess. The figure highlights that ‘non manual’, ‘manual skilled’ and ‘semi-skilled’ are the most predominant socioeconomic groups. Almost 10% of the population were classed as ‘employers and managers’.

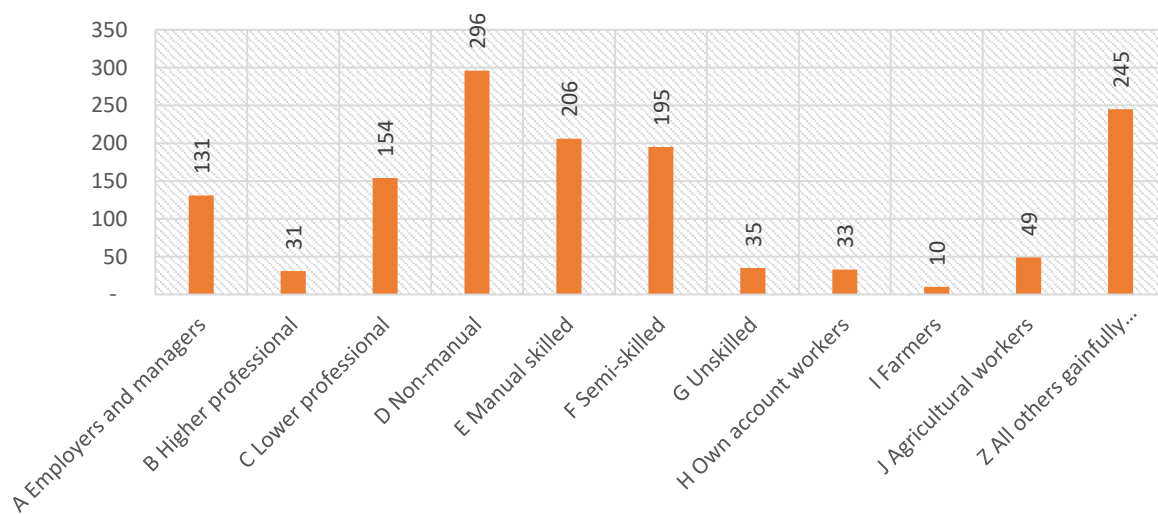


Figure 3.5: Socioeconomic groupings

Table 3.3: Socioeconomic groupings

Socio-Economic Groups	Lanesborough-Ballyleague	(%) of total
Employers and managers	131	9.5
Higher professional	31	2.2
Lower professional	154	11.1
Non-manual	296	21.4
Manual skilled	206	14.9
Semi-skilled	195	14.1
Unskilled	35	2.5
Own account workers	33	2.4
Farmers	10	0.7
Agricultural workers	49	3.5
All others gainfully occupied and unknown	245	17.7

To further explore this inference, it is important to establish the occupation types of the workforce in Lanesborough-Ballyleague. Figure 3.6 charts the occupation types identified in Lanesborough-

Ballyleague and the largest cohort are those who work in ‘elementary occupations’, with 13% of the overall total. ‘Skilled Trades Occupations’ comprises the second largest cohort on 13.2%, emphasising the skilled and educated nature of Lanesborough-Ballyleague’s residents.

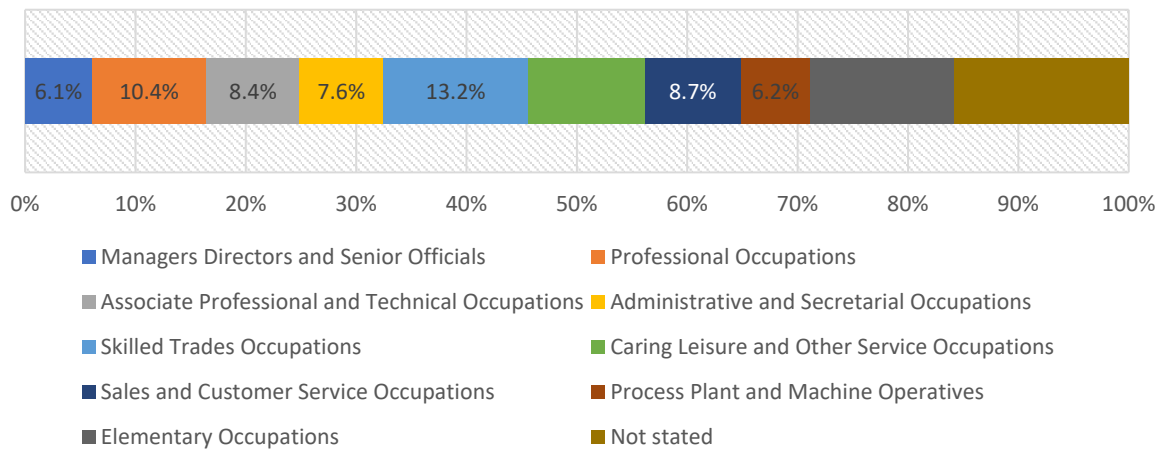


Figure 3.6: Socio Economic status

Finally, it is worth noting the industry types within which residents of Lanesborough-Ballyleague are employed. The Census also records this information and groups respondents into broad industry types. In Lanesborough-Ballyleague the largest industry of employment recorded for residents is ‘Professional services’ which represents 24% of the working population. ‘Commerce and trade’ is the second largest industry of employment, with ‘Manufacturing industries’ the third largest of those stated (13.6%). Once again, these figures would indicate a higher skilled, higher educated, and potentially higher earning workforce in Lanesborough-Ballyleague. Clearly, the town is an attractive location for professional to reside and if this is to continue to be the case further residential development is required to satisfy the needs of this professional cohort.

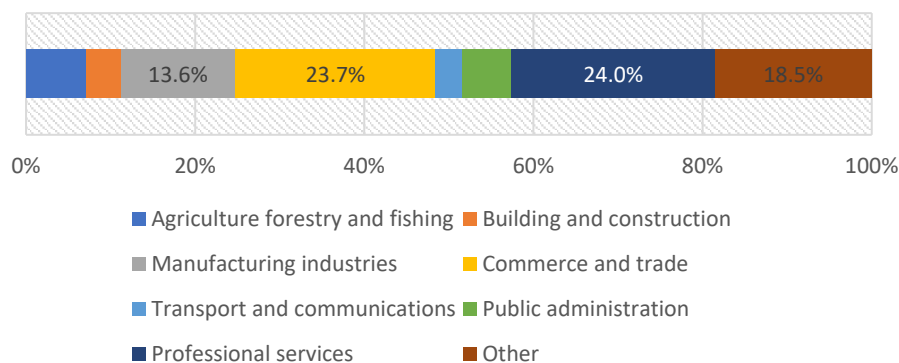


Figure 3.7: Persons at work by industry

A1.3.4 Population Projection Analysis

To assess population projections FAC has put forward a robust and credible evidence-led projection of population in this document which is not influenced by policy measures. Rather the factors driving natural population growth and particularly inter-regional migration have been considered. In other words, a demographically led projection of population indicating the likely growth pattern for Lanesborough-Ballyleague over the next 20 years to 2040.

FAC uses the demographic ‘Cohort Component Method’ or CCM as it is known in practice by the Central Statistics Offices (CSO) and other international agencies to produce population projections. CCM provides a flexible and powerful approach to population projection by developing an array of comparative scenarios, each tailored around the application of qualified assumptions in mortality, fertility, and migration. For the purposes of this research we have considered migratory alignment with the CSO’s own assumptions.

Figure 3.8 charts the projected population change from the recorded census year of 2016 to 2040. As the chart indicates, there are steady increases in the population year on year. In 2031 it is projected that there will be an additional 237 people, which is a 16.2% increase on the 2016 figures. By 2040, the projected population for Lanesborough-Ballyleague is 1,840, which is a 26.5% increase on the numbers recorded in 2016.

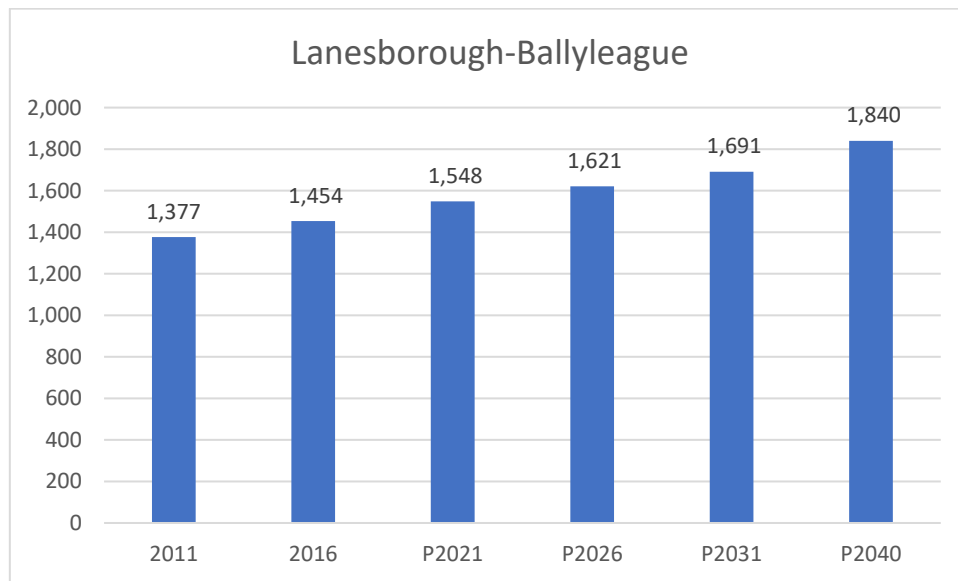


Figure 3.8: Projected Population Change

Table 3.4: Projected population change

Lanesborough/Ballyleague	2011	2016	2021	2026	2031	2040
Lanesborough/Ballyleague	1,377	1,454				
Actual Change		77				
(%) change		5.6%				
Actual Change CCM			1,548	1,621	1,691	1,840
Change CCM			94	73	70	149
(%) Change CCM			6.4%	4.7%	4.3%	8.8%

Table 3.4 highlights the percentage change and actual change between the years analysed. Population growth in the five-year period between 2011-2016 was 5.6%, which is similar to the five-year period between 2021-2026 (4.7%) and 2026-2031 (4.3%). In terms of actual numbers between 2011-2016 the population grew by 77 people, between 2021-2026 it is projected to grow by 73 and between 2026- 2031 the population will increase by 70 people. The 2031-2040 projection actual change is estimated to be 149, which represents an increase of 8.8% during this 9-year period. **Accommodating this increase in population will present certain challenges for the town’s existing infrastructure, not least of which the provision of housing.**

A3.3: Spatial Analysis – Commercial Use

Row Labels	Ballyleague	Lanesborough	Grand Total
NO NACE CODE	13		13
HAIRDRESSING AND OTHER BEAUTY TREATMENT		7	7
RETAIL SALE IN NON-SPECIALIZED STORES WITH FOOD, BEVERAGES OR TOBACCO PREDOMINATING	1	4	5
CROP AND ANIMAL PRODUCTION, HUNTING AND RELATED SERVICE ACTIVITIES	4		4
OTHER HUMAN HEALTH ACTIVITIES	2	2	4
RESTAURANTS AND MOBILE FOOD SERVICE ACTIVITIES		4	4
ACTIVITIES OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS	1	2	3
ACTIVITIES OF SPORT CLUBS	1	2	3
BEVERAGE SERVING ACTIVITIES		3	3
ENGINEERING ACTIVITIES AND RELATED TECHNICAL CONSULTANCY		3	3
ACTIVITIES OF OTHER MEMBERSHIP ORGANISATIONS	1	1	2
DISPENSING CHEMIST IN SPECIALISED STORES		2	2
RETAIL SALE OF AUTOMOTIVE FUEL IN SPECIALISED STORES	1	1	2
RETAIL SALE OF OTHER GOODS IN SPECIALISED STORES		2	2
SALE OF CARS AND LIGHT MOTOR VEHICLES		2	2
WHOLESALE OF GRAIN, UNMANUFACTURED TOBACCO, SEEDS AND ANIMAL FEEDS		2	2
ACCOUNTING, BOOK-KEEPING AND AUDITING ACTIVITIES; TAX CONSULTANCY		1	1
CHILD DAY-CARE ACTIVITIES		1	1
CONSTRUCTION OF BUILDINGS		1	1
CUTTING, SHAPING AND FINISHING OF STONE		1	1
ELECTRIC POWER GENERATION, TRANSMISSION AND DISTRIBUTION		1	1
FIRE SERVICE ACTIVITIES		1	1
FUNERAL AND RELATED ACTIVITIES		1	1
GENERAL MEDICAL PRACTICE ACTIVITIES		1	1
GENERAL PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ACTIVITIES	1		1
GROWING OF VEGETABLES AND MELONS, ROOTS AND TUBERS	1		1
JUSTICE AND JUDICIAL ACTIVITIES		1	1
LEGAL ACTIVITIES		1	1
LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES ACTIVITIES		1	1
MANUFACTURE OF OTHER FABRICATED METAL PRODUCTS N.E.C.		1	1
MANUFACTURE OF OTHER PLASTIC PRODUCTS	1		1
NON-SPECIALISED WHOLESALE OF FOOD, BEVERAGES AND TOBACCO		1	1
OTHER ACCOMMODATION		1	1
OTHER MONETARY INTERMEDIATION	1		1
OTHER PERSONAL SERVICE ACTIVITIES	1		1
OTHER SOCIAL WORK ACTIVITIES WITHOUT ACCOMMODATION		1	1
PLUMBING, HEAT AND AIR CONDITIONING INSTALLATION		1	1
PRIMARY EDUCATION		1	1
REAL ESTATE ACTIVITIES		1	1
RETAIL SALE OF HARDWARE, PAINTS AND GLASS IN SPECIALISED STORES	1		1
RETAIL SALE OF SPORTING EQUIPMENT IN SPECIALISED STORES		1	1
SECONDARY EDUCATION		1	1
WHOLESALE OF MEAT AND MEAT PRODUCTS		1	1
Grand Total	30	58	88

Figure 3.9 Commercial Activity Analysis