

# Lanesborough Ballyleague

SEPTEMBER 2021

Economic and Enterprise Development Strategy for Lanesborough - Ballyleague



Prepared by:



Future Analytics

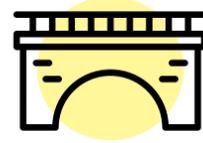
On Behalf of:





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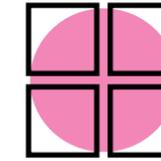
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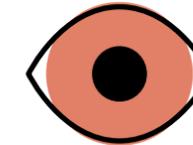
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# Executive Summary

## REPORT PURPOSE

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.



## REPORT STRUCTURE

This report comprises:



### AN OVERVIEW OF LANESBOROUGH-BALLYLEAGUE IN SECTION 2.0 INCLUDING:

- Socio-economic profile analysis and population projection analysis;
- Spatial Analysis, including a survey of land uses, vacancy, and dereliction within Lanesborough-Ballyleague and identification and prioritisation of potential development sites;



### SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION AND ENGAGEMENT UNDERTAKEN AS PART OF THIS PROJECT IN SECTION 4.0

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;



### VISION AND PROJECT PROPOSALS IN SECTION 6.0;



### RELEVANT POLICY LANDSCAPE AND RESEARCH FINDINGS IN SECTION 3.0

(with further detail provided in Appendix 3) to inform our understanding of the context for development of the local economy;



### SWOT ANALYSIS

to identify key issues and opportunities to revitalise the economy of Lanesborough-Ballyleague, and summary of emerging projects in section 5.0;



### IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK AND ACTION PLAN IN SECTION 7.0.

## 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.

An opportunity is presented by the availability of funding under Just Transition, with several projects funded to feasibility of capital stage in Lanesborough-Ballyleague as described in section 3.1, as well as a range of other funding programmes such as Town and Village Funding and the Rural Regeneration Development Fund, 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, work, visit, 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.*



Four Regional Catalytic Projects are recommended:

**A**

Collaborating with all stakeholders/agencies/private sector to develop A Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020-2030 initiatives as part of Discovery Zone 2 including the Lough Ree Biosphere Nature Reserve, and to maximize the key opportunities of Ireland Hidden Heartlands and wetlands;

**B**

Collaborate to encourage Sustainable Villages Cluster - establish a demonstration clustered SMART Villages concept in east Roscommon and west Longford;

**C**

Collaborating to establish the employment, enterprise and tourism potential of BNM brown to green synergy in Ballyleague/Lanesborough and its catchment area of Roscommon and Longford;

**D**

Collaborating to maximize funding opportunities under Just Transition and other schemes.

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, work, visit, and study, and to raise awareness of the town's offering targeting investors, those seeking to relocate, and visitors. Thirteen transformational projects are defined under the four pillars. 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 does not fall into irreversible decline.

The projects included in this strategy 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.

## SECTION ONE

# Introduction

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.



The closure of the Lough Ree Power Station means...



**THE LOSS OF**  
20-25 permanent jobs



**THE LOSS OF**  
15-20 casual jobs

## 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 at the end of 2020.

The closure of the Lough Ree Power Station means, 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 major; 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 counties<sup>1</sup>.

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 regions<sup>2</sup>, are currently undergoing a 'Just Transition' process.

1. [https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/midlands\\_regional\\_profile\\_-\\_start.pdf](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).

## 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 behind<sup>3</sup>. 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, 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 Section 3.1. The offers relate to Strand 1 applications for less than €100,000 in funding. Offers totalling €27m were made to applications seeking more than €100,000 from the Fund at the end of 2021.

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 benefits<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup>.

3. [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en)

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/>

## Focus of this Strategy

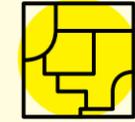
It is within this overarching context that Longford and Roscommon County Councils commissioned an Economic and Enterprise Development Strategy (EEDS) for Lanesborough-Ballyleague. This strategy includes the development of an ambitious, distinct, and wholly achievable vision for the economic development 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.

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 Section 3.1. These have been made under several different funding initiatives including:



### JUST TRANSITION



### RURAL REGENERATION AND DEVELOPMENT FUND (RRDF)



### LEADER TRANSITIONAL FUND



### TOWN AND VILLAGE RENEWAL SCHEME



### LEADER

**“The process is 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.”**

SECTION TWO

# Lanesborough -Ballyleague



## 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 as illustrated in Figure 2-1.

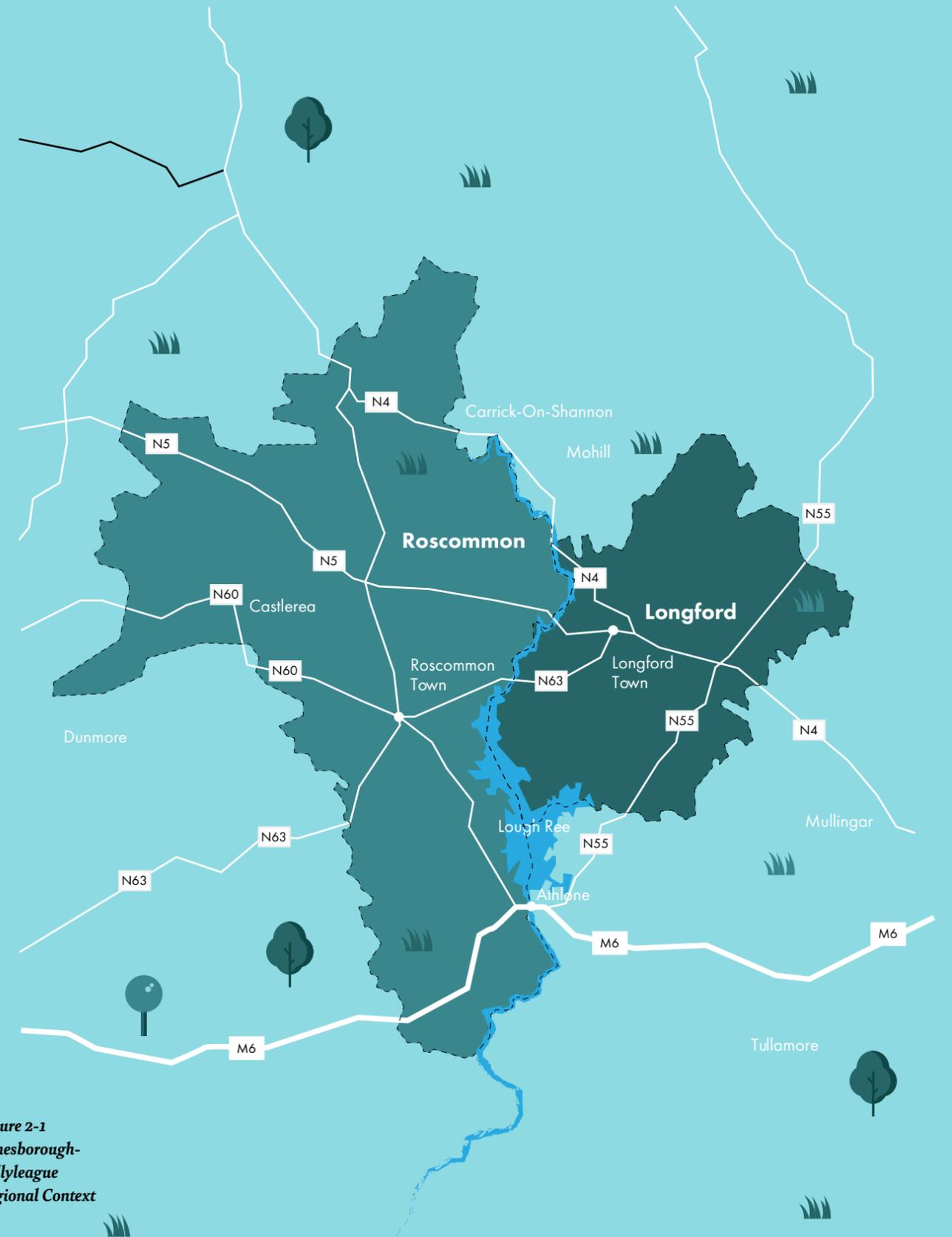
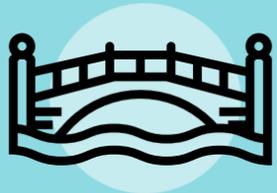


Figure 2-1  
Lanesborough-Ballyleague  
Regional Context

*“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...”*



**1000AD**

**THE FIRST BRIDGE**

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



**1140AD**

**PERMANENT BRIDGE**

with a more permanent bridge built by Turlough O’Connor, High King of Ireland around 1140



**1706AD**

**NINE-ARCH BRIDGE**

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

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.



**“ORIGINALLY KNOWN BY ITS IRISH NAME OF BEAL ATHA LIAG”**

*...its Irish name of Beal Atha Liag or ‘the mouth of the ford of the flagstones’..*

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.

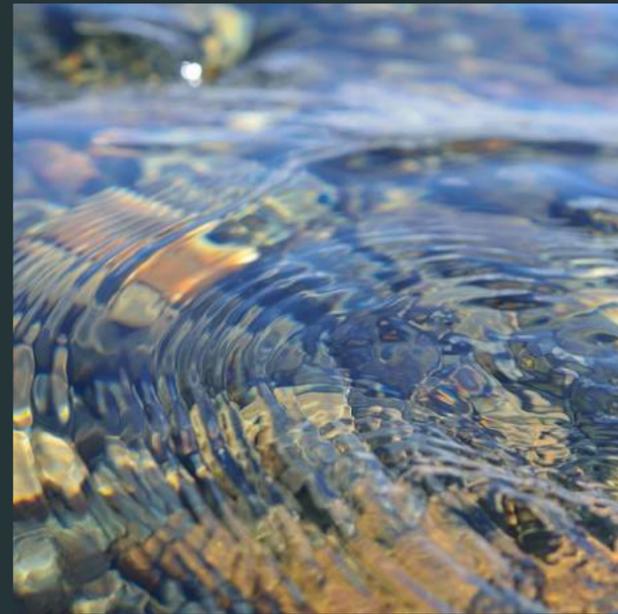


Figure 2-2  
Lanesborough-  
Ballyleague and  
Lough Ree Context

“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”

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**<sup>6</sup>.

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**

**LANESBOROUGH TRIATHLON CLUB**

**LOUGH REE SUB-AQUA CLUB**

6. Conversation with Carrickcraft November 2020

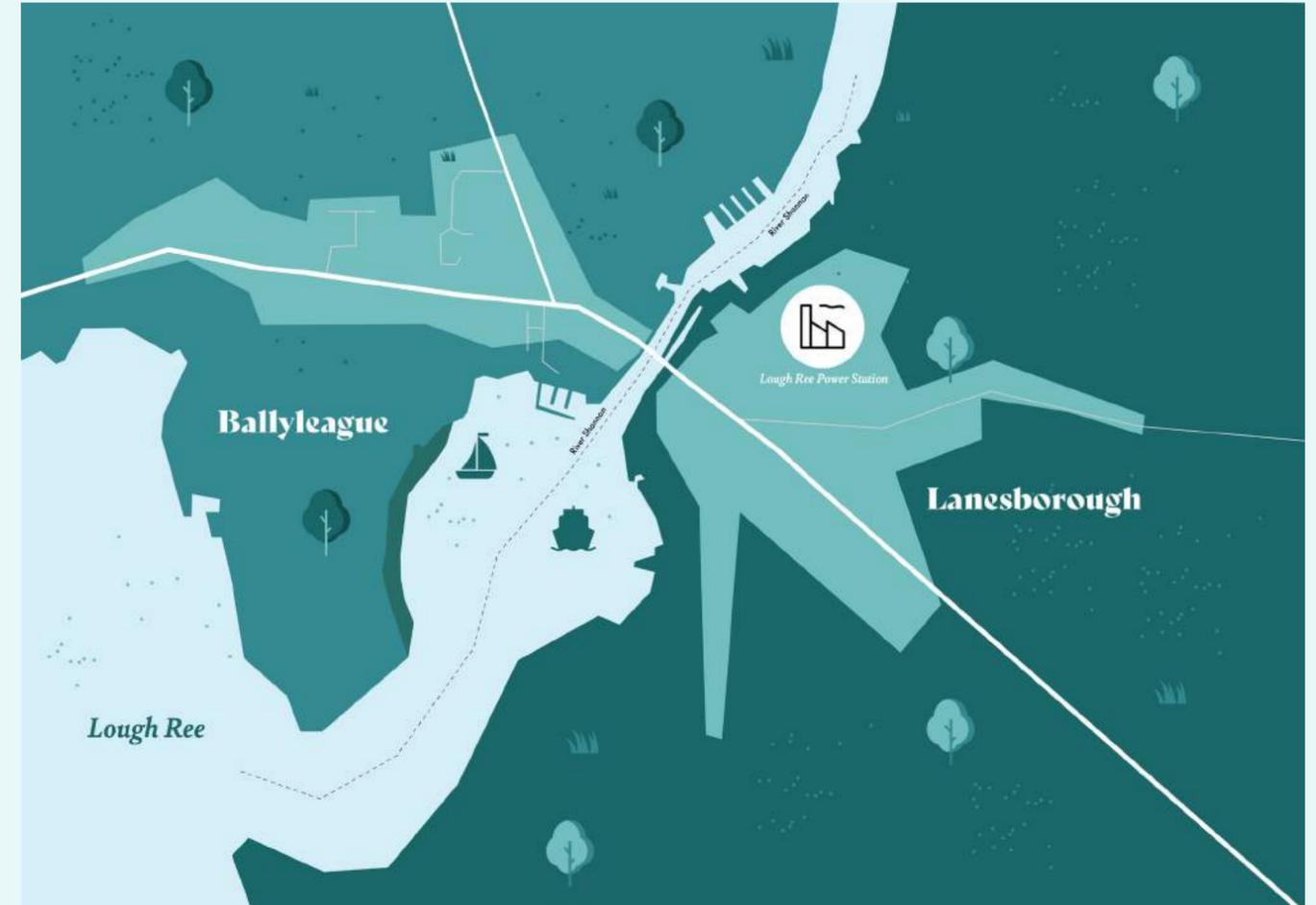


Figure 2-3 Lanesborough-Ballyleague Local Context

“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.”



## 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 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 because 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 1. 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 1 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

## 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. Detail on this is provided in Appendix 3.

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.

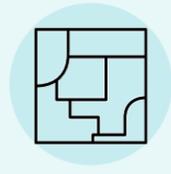
The results of the land use survey undertaken by KPMG Future Analytics indicates:



#### DERELICT STRUCTURES

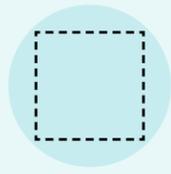
>> Two derelict structures overlooking the River Shannon on the Ballyleague side one of which is the old Malt/Kiln House building on the northern side, in private ownership, which was partly the subject of the Ballyleague North and Harbour Conservation Plan in 2014.

>> A derelict structure near the bridge on the Lanesborough side.



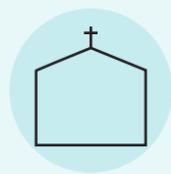
#### REQUIRE INFILL

>> 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.



#### VACANT STATE

>> 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.



#### CONVENT BUILDING

>> 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.

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 Sectio 3.1).

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 Cloontuskert;

The Bord na Móna site at Mount Dillon.



There is potential to use vacant upper floors and empty buildings for community and visitor accommodation use, subject to owner engagement.



#### Key opportunity sites include:

the Lough Ree Power Station site, subject to outcome of ESB assessment;

privately owned lands such as lands on the Commons adjacent to the inner lake of Lough Ree; adjacent to the Waterways Ireland marina to the south of Ballyleague; to the west of the Waterways Ireland building in Ballyleague; to the south of Hanley’s Marina, subject to landowner agreement. Responsibility for developing such sites is that of the landowner, subject to relevant planning policy.



There is potential for re-use of brownfield sites to maximise use of land and to support objectives of the National Planning Framework and the Northern and Western Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy 2020-2032 (RSES).



## SECTION THREE

# 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 Appendix 3.*

## Policy Landscape

### 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:



### JUST TRANSITION COMMISSIONER

the appointment of a Just Transition Commissioner

## €6M

### TRANSITION FUND

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

## €5M

### BOG RESTORATION

the allocation of €5m for bog restoration and rehabilitation which will restore bogs to their natural habitat and become sinks that absorb carbon

## €20M

### HOUSING RETROFITTING

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:

## CARBON TAX

--

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;

## RETROFITTING

--

Fund a socially progressive national retrofitting programme targeting all homes but with a emphasis on the Midlands region and on social and low-income tenancies;

## REPS-2

--

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.



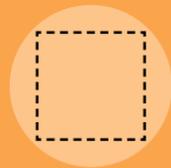
Of the €238m, a total of €70 million is to be allocated to the continuation of the 2020 carbon tax investment programme, which includes energy poverty schemes, creation of a Just Transition Fund and increases in allocations to greenways and urban cycling programmes. According to Budget 2021: The Use of Carbon Tax Funds 2021, €6 million will go to Just Transition fund, the same amount 2020<sup>7</sup>, 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.

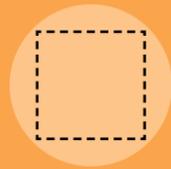


Provisional offers totalling €1.2 million were made to 16 successful applicants under Strand 1 of the 2020 Fund. Under Strand One provisional offers of funding, totalling €27.8 million, have been made to 47 projects in the Midlands under the Just Transition Fund for applications for €100,000 and above<sup>8</sup>.

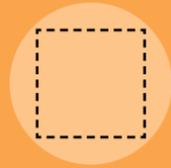
#### Relevant successful projects for Lanesborough-Ballyleague in Stage 1 (under €100,000) included:



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)

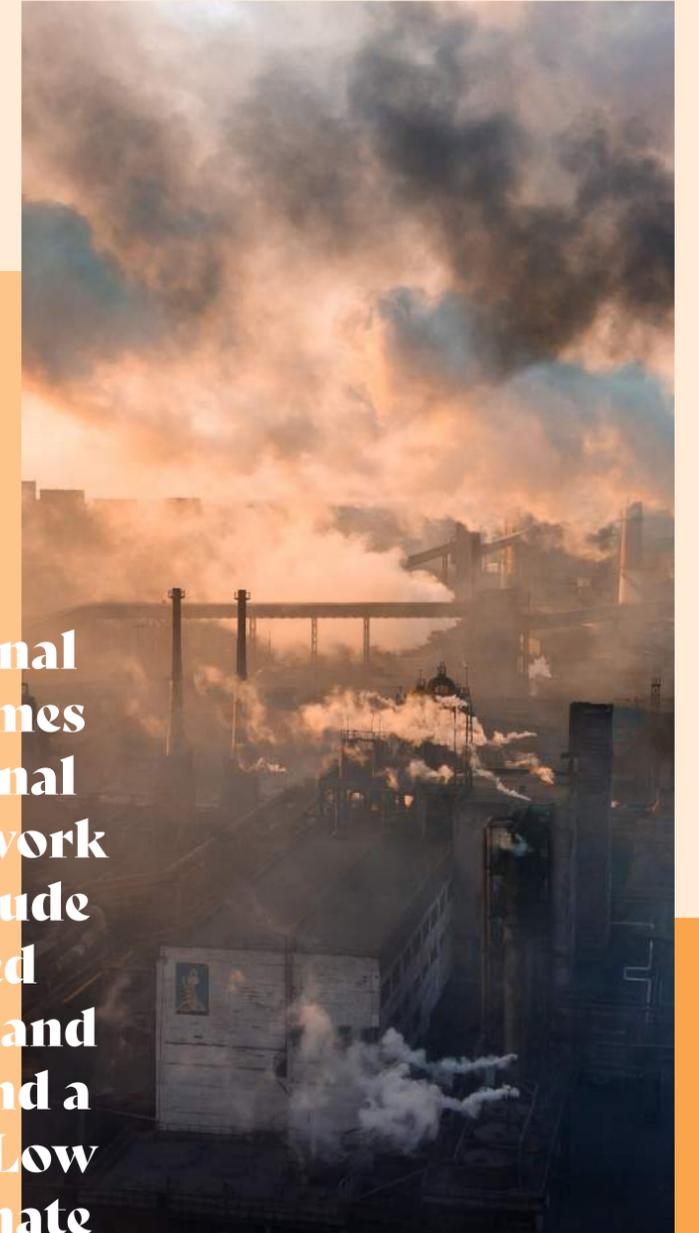
Relevant successful projects for Lanesborough-Ballyleague in Stage 2 (over €100,000)<sup>9</sup> included those in Table 2, along with other stage 2 funded projects will an all-county focus that are also of relevance to Lanesborough Ballyleague.

**“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’**

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

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

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



**PROJECT NAME** A Brown to Green Jobs Transition to Eliminate Energy Waste in Midlands Homes

**LEAD APPLICANT** Hub Controls Ltd

**JFT FUNDING AMOUNT SOUGHT (€)** 1,000,000

**COUNTIES IMPACTED** All counties

**PROJECT NAME** Bord na Móna Employee Supports - Training and Upskilling Project

**LEAD APPLICANT** Bord na Móna

**JFT FUNDING AMOUNT SOUGHT (€)** 1,000,000

**COUNTIES IMPACTED** All counties

**PROJECT NAME** Bord na Móna Medicinal Herbs Project

**LEAD APPLICANT** Bord na Móna

**JFT FUNDING AMOUNT SOUGHT (€)** 1,000,000

**COUNTIES IMPACTED** All counties

**PROJECT NAME** Climate Action Training and Mentoring Programme

**LEAD APPLICANT** Eastern and Midlands Climate Action Regional Office

**JFT FUNDING AMOUNT SOUGHT (€)** 255,000

**COUNTIES IMPACTED** All counties

**PROJECT NAME** Cloontuskert Ballyleague Visitor Centre and Organic Farm

**LEAD APPLICANT** Roscommon County Council

**JFT FUNDING AMOUNT SOUGHT (€)** 212,000

**COUNTIES IMPACTED** Roscommon

**PROJECT NAME** Empower Eco

**LEAD APPLICANT** Athlone Institute of Technology

**JFT FUNDING AMOUNT SOUGHT (€)** 907,765

**COUNTIES IMPACTED** All counties

**PROJECT NAME** Lanesboro Food Hub

**LEAD APPLICANT** Premier Lakelands Hub

**JFT FUNDING AMOUNT SOUGHT (€)** 1,000,000

**COUNTIES IMPACTED** Longford, Roscommon

**PROJECT NAME** Lanesborough Tourism Hub

**LEAD APPLICANT** Longford County Council

**JFT FUNDING AMOUNT SOUGHT (€)** 212,500

**COUNTIES IMPACTED** Longford, Roscommon

**PROJECT NAME** Lough Ree Access for All

**LEAD APPLICANT** Lough Ree Access for All CLG

**JFT FUNDING AMOUNT SOUGHT (€)** 471,693

**COUNTIES IMPACTED** Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath

**PROJECT NAME** A Brown to Green Jobs Transition to Eliminate Energy Waste in Midlands Homes

**LEAD APPLICANT** Hub Controls Ltd

**JFT FUNDING AMOUNT SOUGHT (€)** 1,000,000

**COUNTIES IMPACTED** All counties

**PROJECT NAME** Lough Ree Distillery - Phase 2

**LEAD APPLICANT** Blacksmith Ventures Limited

**JFT FUNDING AMOUNT SOUGHT (€)** 1,000,000

**COUNTIES IMPACTED** Longford, Roscommon, Westmeath

**PROJECT NAME** Mid-Shannon Wilderness Park Greenway

**LEAD APPLICANT** Longford County Council

**JFT FUNDING AMOUNT SOUGHT (€)** 102,000

**COUNTIES IMPACTED** Longford, Roscommon

**PROJECT NAME** Enablers of a Just Transition for Communities in the Midlands Region

**LEAD APPLICANT** University of Limerick - Centre for Environmental Research

**JFT FUNDING AMOUNT SOUGHT (€)** 217,600

**COUNTIES IMPACTED** All counties

Our Rural Future - Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 is the national blueprint for the post-COVID-19 recovery and development of rural Ireland over the next five years. It seeks to transform the quality of life and opportunity for people living in rural areas. It focuses on nine thematic objectives:



**SUPPORTING EMPLOYMENT**  
and career opportunities in rural areas



**OPTIMISING DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY**  
and the opportunities for rural communities from high speed broadband



**REVITALISING RURAL TOWNS AND VILLAGES**



**ENHANCING PUBLIC SERVICES**  
in rural areas



**SUPPORTING A JUST TRANSITION**  
to a climate neutral economy

Each of these forms a focus for investment in infrastructure, such as in remote working infrastructure and in rural town and village enterprise hubs.

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.



**SUPPORTING THE SUSTAINABILITY**  
of Agriculture, the Marine and Forestry



**SUPPORTING THE SUSTAINABILITY**  
of our island and coastal communities



**NURTURING**  
our culture and heritage

**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<sup>10</sup>."

**"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. "**

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.**

<sup>10</sup>. 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"*<sup>11</sup>.

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"*<sup>12</sup>.

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.

**“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”**

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

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

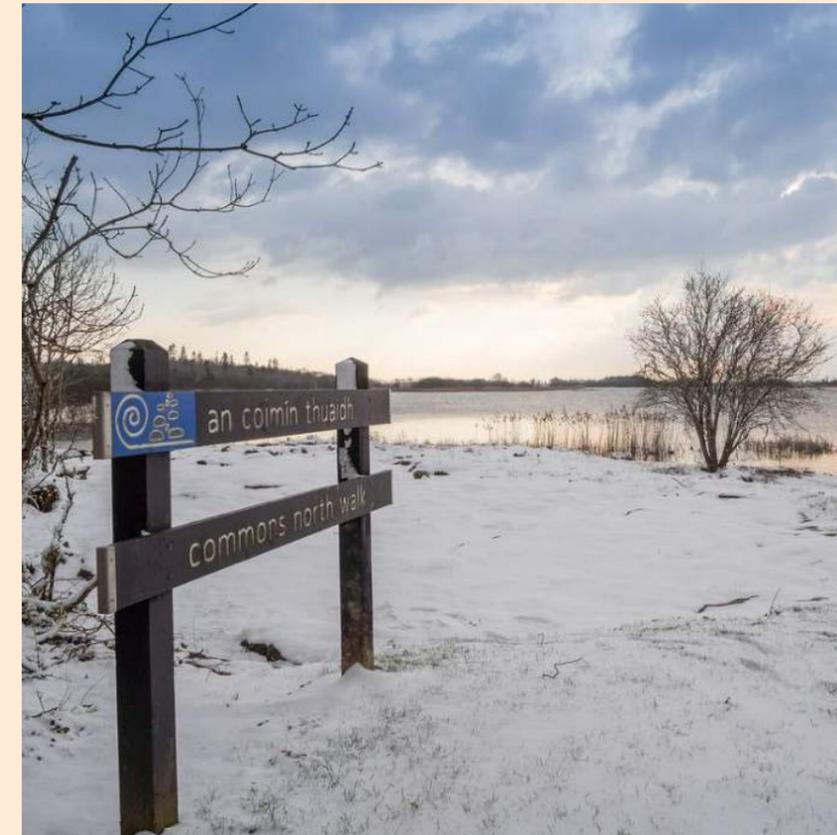
## LOCAL POLICY

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 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.



# Consultation and Engagement Summary

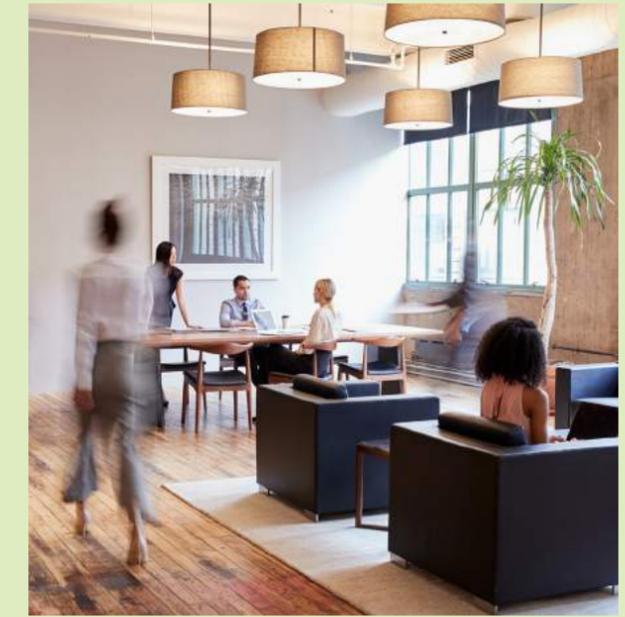


*This section summarises consultation undertaken to inform this study. This includes the outcome of an online survey that was prepared to capture information on employment and commuting patterns in Lanesborough-Ballyleague, as well as perceptions around the viability of an enterprise hub for the town 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.*

## 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.

**"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."**



### 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).



### EMPLOYMENT (CONTINUED)

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).

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
EMPLOYMENT (FULL TIME)	61.9	44
EMPLOYMENT (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
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>71</b>



### 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).

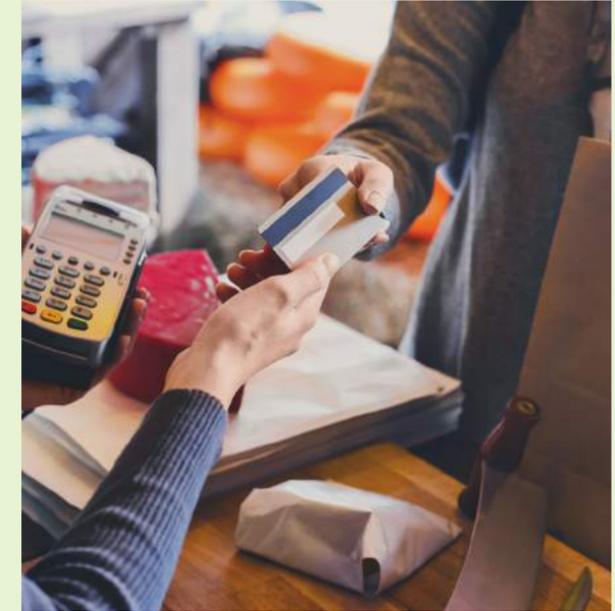


### ALTERNATIVE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

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:

**44%**

Attracting more business to the area (44%)

**29%**

To retain and expand locally owned businesses / industries (29%)

**13%**

Attracting more visitor / tourists to the area (13%)

**13%**

Growing a specific sector and attracting jobs in that field (13%).

**8%**

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

ANSWER CHOICES	1	2	3	4	5	TOTAL	SCORE
Attracting more business 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	19.55% 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% 14	21.05% 8	38	2.92
To retain and expand locally owned businesses / industries	28.57% 12	23.81% 10	19.05% 8	16.19% 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.

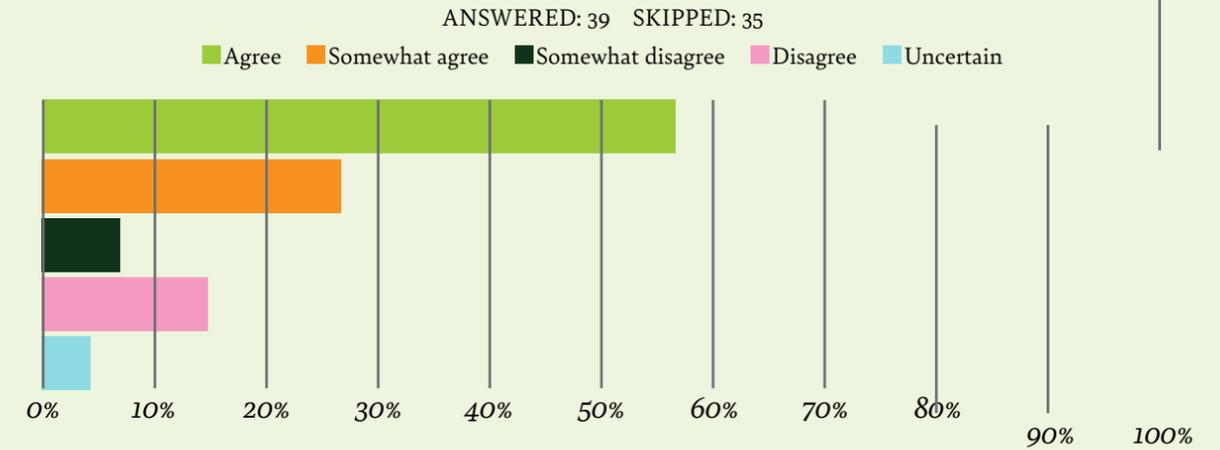
» Respondents were then asked how they themselves or other members of the community and local businesses help achieve their vision. This was answered by 25 respondents, with some answers included below:

- 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:

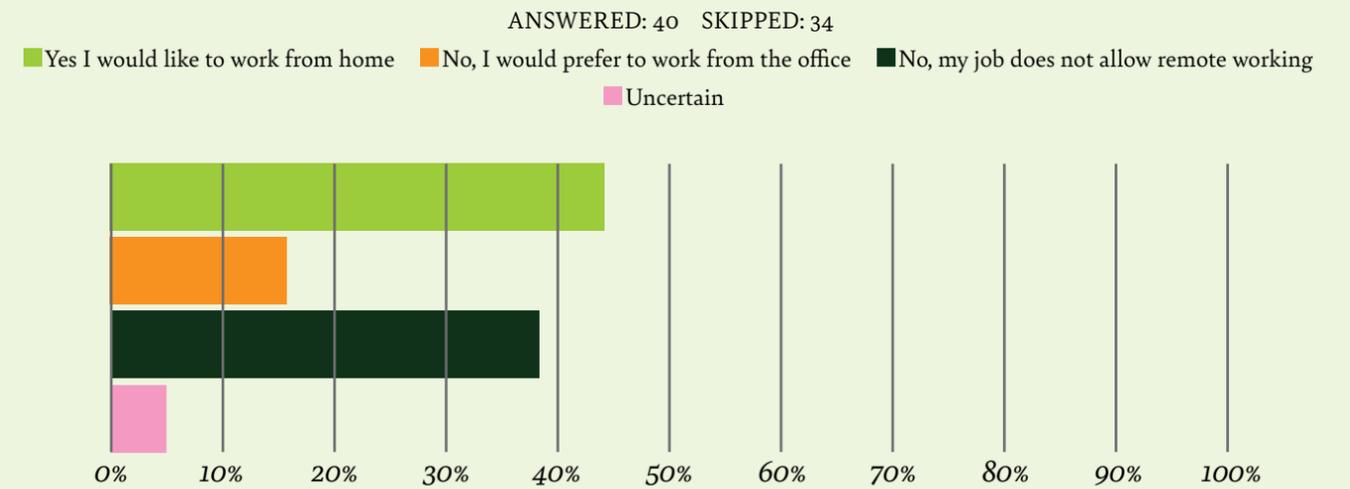
*Between March and July 2020, I have spent more money locally on goods and services provided within Lanesborough-Ballyleague than I typically would.*

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

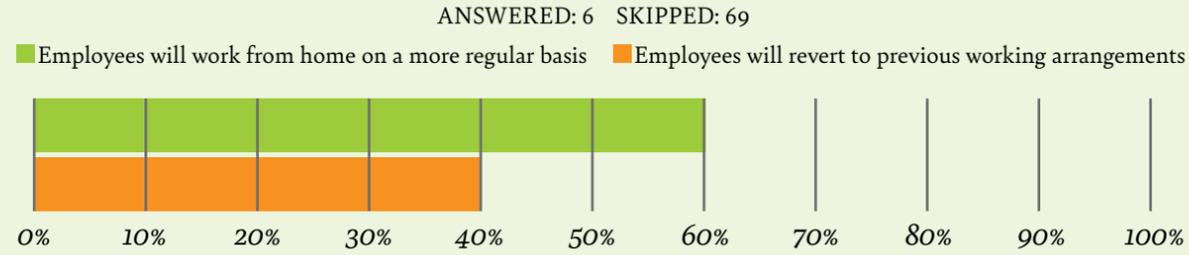


*When society and businesses begin to open up once again, I would be interested in working from home on a more regular basis (with the agreement of my employer).*

» 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.

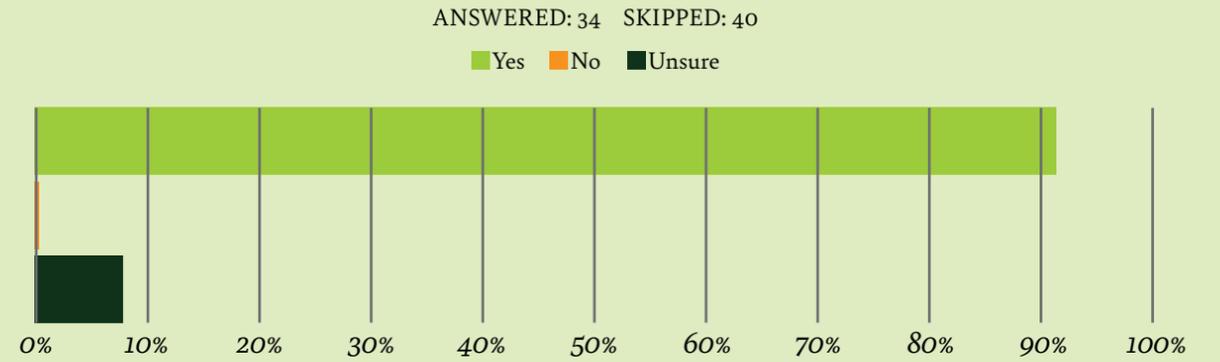


**SECTION 3: DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES**

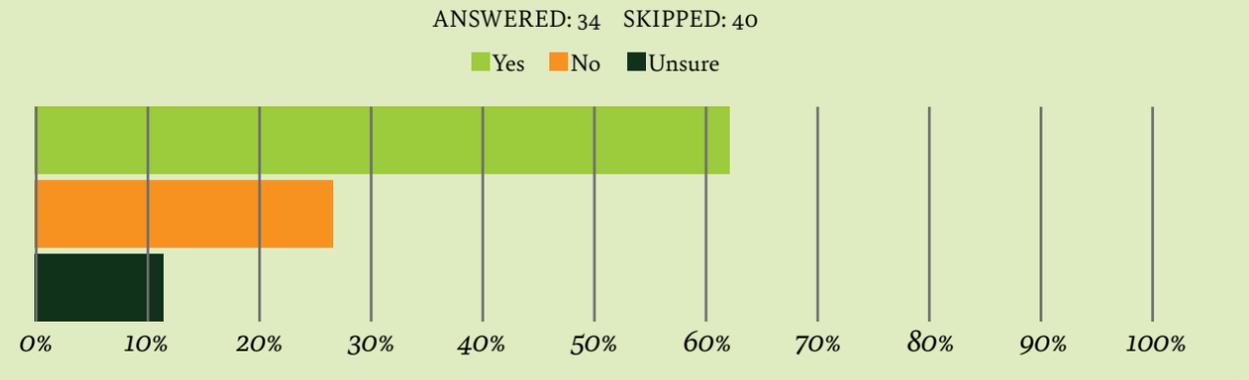
Finally, respondents were asked to provide their opinion on the viability of an Enterprise Hub for Ballyleague/ Lanesborough, and to identify other development proposals that should be prioritised in the EED.

» 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:

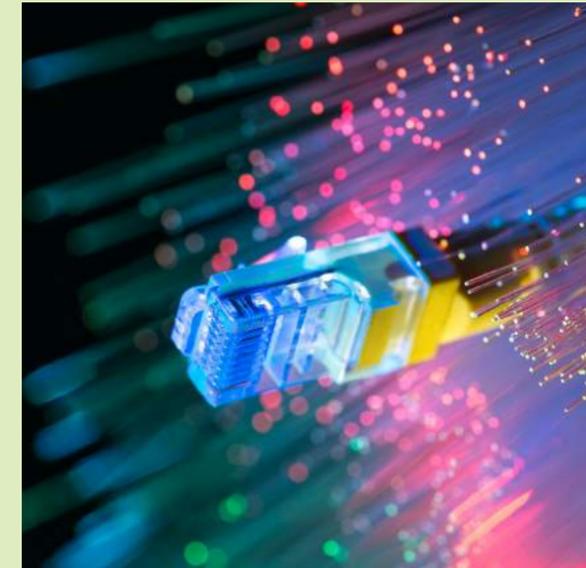
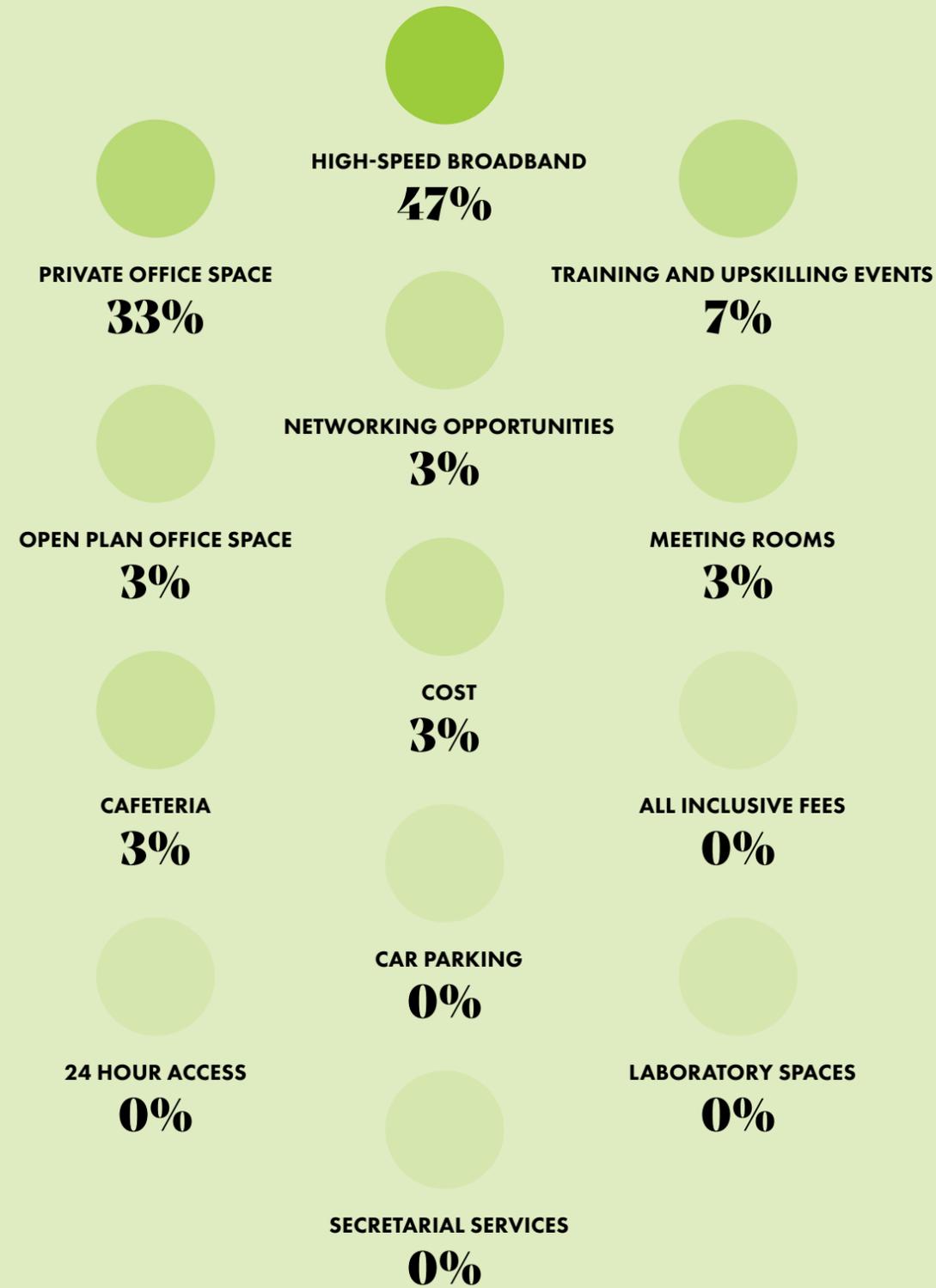
- » It would attract more businesses and employment.
- » It would meet a demand for office space for people who used to commute but have been forced to work at home due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- » It would allow for flexibility in pursuing seasonal trades.
- » Bringing people together to work can help 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:



» 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.

**“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.”**

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 1. 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.
- » **Implementation of the Enterprise and Economic Development Strategy was raised as a concern** due to local resource constraints and skills gaps.
- » **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.



“47% of respondents chose fast broadband as a facilities or services that would influence their decision to utilise such a hub”

# SWOT and Emerging Projects



*“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”*

13. 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.

## 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;



### 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;



### COMMUNITY AND GOVERNANCE

Collaboration Group in place providing community-local authority oversight and input to proposals<sup>13</sup>;

Strong local community/sense of community;



### MARKETING AND AWARENESS

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



### 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;



### 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;

## 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 Cloontuskert 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 birdwatching;

Potential for employment of former Bord na Mona 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.

A wide range of projects are being considered, planned or are actively in development for Lanesborough-Ballyleague. These include projects related to food and drink, tourism and recreation, 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 multi-agency collaborative approach to implementation considered to be essential.

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



## SECTION SIX

# Vision and Project Proposals

## Vision

The proposed vision for Lanesborough Ballyleague in the context of this study is:

*By 2040 Lanesborough-Ballyleague will be a better place to live, work, visit, 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 significant employment and visitor hub.

## Regional Catalytic projects

**A:**

*Collaborating with all stakeholders/agencies/private sector to develop A Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020-2030 initiatives as part of Discovery Zone 2 including the Lough Ree Biosphere Nature Reserve, and to maximize the key opportunities of Ireland Hidden Heartlands and wetlands.*

## The Shannon Mighty River of Ireland - A Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020-2030

This important new strategy, discussed in detail in section 3.1.2, is key to guiding development of the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands (IHH) region. IHH, as a relatively new brand, capitalised on the growth in domestic visitors over 2020-2021 while more established brand regions saw the loss of what, were previously considered stable, international visitor markets. As the tourism industry rebuilds, Failte Ireland expect IHH offerings to exhibit sustainable growth, therefore an alignment of Just Transition and Failte Ireland strategies has the potential to optimise the potential of skills transference, nurture entrepreneurial innovation and secure firm footings for start-ups or those SMEs aspiring towards growth.

The Shannon Masterplan was developed to reposition the combined Shannon Navigation and Shannon Erne Waterway as a key tourism destination within Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, identifying world class visitor experiences based on the region's natural and cultural assets. The Masterplan presents a co-ordinated strategy and development framework of scale to guide sustainable development of the Shannon. It should be the reference and roadmap for future tourism investment in the area.

In the context of the Shannon Masterplan, Lanesborough and Ballyleague sit in 'Discovery Zone 2' (DZ2): Stretching from Clondra/Tarmonbarry in the North to Portumna in the South. DZ2 promises the visitor the chance "to escape to the waters and the wild through the integrated mosaic of habitats and species offering real opportunities to immerse in nature". An Interpretative Framework was developed for the Shannon Navigation and identifies that DZ2 should adopt the key Shannon theme of 'Natural Shannon' and this should underpin the range of immersive experiences proposed for DZ2. The Shannon Masterplan detailed new or potential experiences, but below are some priority projects identified for the Lanesborough-Ballyleague area:

1. Visitor access to the islands of Lough Ree with relevant harbours identified as Lanesborough-Ballyleague and Portun-Lecarrow. There is an important opportunity for the development of Lanesborough as a premier water recreation and angling destination. This can include development of Blueways (Shannon-Lough Ree Canoe Blueway from River Inny to Lanesborough).

2. Wet n'Wild Peatlands of the Mid Shannon – an integrated Discovery Zone focussed on peatland's environmental heritage and industrial histories; recreational opportunities such as walking, hiking, cycling, guided tours or bog trails. This could include a Surf n Turf Wave Centre, Ireland's first artificial surf wave centre in a cutaway bog powered by renewable energy. While Center Parcs appeals mainly to families, a surf centre would have the potential to appeal to older teenagers and younger, unconstrained adults. These also have the tendency to be interested in conservation, sustainability, green issues. So there would be a good match/complementarity to contextualise it within a rewilding, sustainable biosphere. This could extend to range of family fun such as 'bog snorkelling' or even mudslinging.
3. Outdoor educational classroom/summer schools to demonstrate climate change in action. For example this can include the annual Lough Ree Environmental Summer School at Lanesborough engaging visitors in active exploration of the Shannon's natural environments.
4. Creation of 'slow' initiatives such as bog carving and sculpture, photography and art in the open
5. Linkages with the Corlea Iron Age Trackway Visitor Centre.

Projects associated with these opportunities are explored further in section 6.5, which discusses potential capital projects, and in section 7.0, which outlines the proposed implementation framework and action plan.

The aims of the Just Transition Fund and those of Fáilte Ireland, in particular with regards to the development of tourism in the Midlands, share a strategic outlook rooted in the principles of the VICE model of sustainable tourism, which seeks to maximise the economic, environmental and societal return on state investment. To ensure effective investment of state funds in tourism projects under the JFT it is essential that there be continued close collaboration between Longford and Roscommon County Councils and Failte Ireland and the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands' team, particularly in the areas of:

- Identifying and scoping commercially viable, sustainable tourism projects that align with, and deliver on, the IHH proposition;
- Training and upskilling programmes to support and facilitate the delivery of appropriate, quality, and sustainable tourism projects and experiences in the short, medium and longer terms.



14. Conversation with NPWS November 2020

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

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

17. Ibid, page 58, our emphasis

18. NWRA RSES 2020-2032, 2019, page 82, our emphasis

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

20. Conversation with Martin Lydon, Roscommon County Council, November 2020

## 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<sup>14</sup>.
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**<sup>15</sup>”.
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***<sup>16</sup>”. The same document further supports “the development of a **cross sectoral approach to maximise the tourism potential of the River Shannon and Lough Ree**, involving Westmeath, Roscommon and Longford County Council and relevant stakeholders<sup>17</sup>”.
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***<sup>18</sup>”.
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***<sup>19</sup>”. It is understood that the forthcoming Draft Roscommon County Development Plan will include similar supporting policy<sup>20</sup>.
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.
11. **Local guides and enterprises would be able to deliver active nature experiences for visitors to the Shannon** as part of the UNESCO Biosphere for Lough Ree and Environs bringing local economic benefit.

KPMG Future Analytics recommend that it is important that high-level support is given implementing opportunities arising from A Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020-2030 and creation of a Lough Ree UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. This should include Longford, Roscommon and Westmeath County Councils, Fáilte Ireland, NPWS, NWRA, EMRA, Born na Mona, Waterways Ireland, and Coillte.

## 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’<sup>21</sup> 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’<sup>22</sup> 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 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 ENRD affirm that ‘smart’ means thinking beyond the village itself<sup>23</sup>. 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 Programme<sup>24</sup> and to Regional Assembly projects regarding slow tourism, gastronomy, and greenways.**

A new implementation entity of group is not suggested or recommended. A Smart Villages strategy could be commissioned with key recommendations to activate the concept, building on similar projects elsewhere nationally and internationally.

21. [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/eu-action-smart-villages\\_en](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/news-events/news/eu-action-smart-villages_en)

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

23. [https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/enrd\\_publications/publi-enrd-rr-26-2018-en.pdf](https://enrd.ec.europa.eu/sites/enrd/files/enrd_publications/publi-enrd-rr-26-2018-en.pdf)

24. <https://smart-europe.eu/project>

*Collaborating to establish the employment, enterprise, and tourism potential of BNM brown to green synergy in Ballyleague/Lanesborough and its catchment area of Roscommon and Longford*

Bord na Mona are committed to supporting and creating sustainable employment in the Midlands under its Brown to Green Strategy. Two of the key projects currently underway in the Longford / Roscommon region which will create, and support employment are:

**1. Alternative Energy**

Wind and solar can each provide a viable solution to future energy needs and make positive use of the natural assets in the area. Location and environmental impact of alternative energy infrastructure must be carefully considered to minimise any negative impacts.

*To maximise the employment opportunity opportunities arising from the transition of Bord na Mona's business activities from peat harvesting and energy generation based on peat, to more environmentally sustainable activities, KPMG Future Analytics recommend that the public private and community sectors collaborate to identify suitable opportunities in conjunction with Bord na Mona.*

**2. Peatland Climate Action Scheme (PCAS)**

Bord na Móna has recently announced the cessation of peat production on all their bogs. Peat had been extracted from these Bord na Móna bogs under Integrated Pollution Control (IPC) licences issued and administered by the Environmental Protection Agency. As part of Condition-10 of this licence, decommissioning and rehabilitation must be carried out when industrial peat production ceases. In line with Bord na Móna's accelerated decarbonisation strategy, and the availability of government funding, the company has also committed to ambitious enhanced peatland decommissioning, rehabilitation, and restoration measures, targeting circa 33,000 hectares in over 80 Bord na Móna bogs. This strategy has been developed to optimise ecosystem service benefits of peatland rehabilitation and restoration, particularly carbon storage and reducing carbon emissions. In addition, this will also benefit biodiversity and water (water quality and catchment management), as well as providing space for local communities and people to enjoy the outdoors. The implementation of the Peatland Climate Action plan will provide employment for approximately 350 employees throughout the midland counties with a significant portion in Roscommon and Longford counties. Further details are available at the following link <https://www.bnmpcas.ie/>

*Collaborating to maximise funding opportunities under Just Transition and other schemes.*

There are significant funding opportunities because of feasibility and capital funding provided for Just Transition. There are in addition a range of other capital grant funding opportunities from other programmes including Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RDF) to Outdoor Recreation and Infrastructure Fund (ORIS), Town and Village Funding, and LEADER.

*To maximise the opportunities arising from existing and future funding programmes, KPMG Future Analytics recommend that Longford and Roscommon County Council's continue collaborating on joint funding applications.*



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



**TOURISM CHAPTER**  
of the Draft Longford County  
Development Plan



**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**  
for Draft Roscommon County  
Development Plan 2021-2027



**LOUGH REE DISTILLERY**

**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 a Mid-Shannon 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 Mid-Shannon Visitor Centre located at Lanesborough in partnership with Roscommon County Council to act as a visitor hub and interpretative centre with an associated water and land adventure activity centre located in Ballyleague. “*

**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 the creation of walking and cycling connections across the proposed Bog Greenway with Ballymahon and with Lanesborough as part of a Mid-Shannon Discovery Centre.”*

**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:

 <p><b>SUPPORT</b> for public realm enhancement;</p>	 <p><b>THE BUILDING</b> of a resilient locally driven economy,</p>
 <p><b>STRONG</b> focus on regeneration, revitalisation and sustainable growth;</p>	 <p><b>INCREASED EMPHASIS</b> on walking and cycling infrastructure;</p>
 <p><b>SUPPORT</b> for remote working opportunities, including designated hubs/co-working spaces;</p>	 <p><b>GENERAL SUPPORT</b> for renewable energy;</p>
 <p><b>SUPPORT</b> for sustainable rural development sectors, including agriculture and agri-food, forestry, renewable energy production and carbon reduction rural tourism and recreation;</p>	 <p><b>SUPPORT</b> for the sensitive development of greenways, blueways, peatways etc.</p>

**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 Mid-Shannon Discovery Centre within The Commons area of Lanesborough Town.”*

**We recommend that policy A10.25 which states:**  
*“Facilitate the development of high-quality tourist accommodation such as hotels, hostels, B&B’s/ guesthouses, camping and glamping etc. at suitable locations, in both urban and rural settings throughout the county, subject to ensuring a high standard of design, layout, landscape and environmental protection, the provision of adequate infrastructure.”*

Be changed to:  
*“Facilitate the development of high-quality tourist accommodation such as hotels, hostels, B&B’s/ guesthouses, camping, campervan and glamping etc. at suitable locations, in both urban and rural settings throughout the county, subject to ensuring a high standard of design, layout, landscape and environmental protection, the provision of adequate infrastructure.”*

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

The scale of proposed private investment, the use of peat as a botanical in the production of gin and a visitor centre café are likely to create a unique attraction that will be distinct to the area.

**We recommend consideration of 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 unique local visitor attraction"*.

## 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, REDE, Leader, and Fáilte Ireland;
- » Transitional funding in place for LEADER, to bridge the gap between EU LEADER programming periods to 2023. A key focus of the Transitional Programme will be on building capacity within communities which have not received LEADER funding to date. The programme will also support job creation, foster and encourage entrepreneurship, and support projects which address the climate agenda, digital transformation and encourage rural communities to build on their existing strengths and assets<sup>25</sup>;
- » The ethos of the move towards more sustainable development including alternative energy production;
- » Support for revitalising rural towns and villages, employment and career opportunities in rural areas, and digital connectivity in Our Rural Future - Rural Development Policy 2021-2025;
- » 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)<sup>26</sup>;
- » Formal groups such as the High-level Lough Ree Biosphere Working Group, Upper Shannon Erne Future Economy (USEFE) Project (Cavan, Leitrim, Longford, Bord na Móna, ESB)<sup>27</sup>, 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.

Barriers 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;
- » Lack of funding to develop/deliver the strategy and the projects therein.

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, ESB and Bord na Móna.
- » Regional assemblies (EMRA and NWRA) be kept informed of discussions regarding the Biosphere to enable identification of collaboration and funding opportunities.
- » The established Collaboration Group is the appropriate entity to drive implementation of actions arising from this strategy given the representation from both Councils and the local communities.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/c44cc-minister-humphreys-announces-details-of-transitional-leader-programme/>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.ireo.eu/funding-financing/eu-funding-programmes-and-financial-instruments/>

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.uppershannonerne.ie/>

## Capital Project Proposals

The projects proposed 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:

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

Projects to activate the identified vision are grouped under four pillars,

- » Pillar 1: 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.
- » Pillar 2: 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.
- » Pillar 3: 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’.
- » 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.

The 4 project pillars and 13 key projects are illustrated in Tables 3 and 4. Summary 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. It is essential that an increasingly cohesive community, united by a common vision and the established Collaboration Group, lead and deliver projects identified. It is recognised that capacity building may be required to enable this and to ensure success.

**There are a range of short-term potential employment supports available through a range of agencies and those seeking employment and local employers can source further information by contacting the LEO offices in Longford or Roscommon.**

Table 3 Delivery Priority

SHORT-TERM 2021	MEDIUM-TERM 2021-2023	LONG-TERM 2023-2024
Project 1: Maximise food and drink opportunity	Project 2 Support Lough Ree Technology Cluster development	Project 5 Enhance appearance of town centres environment
Project 3 Support anaerobic digester development	Project 8 Maximise tourism opportunity (1): Surf n Turf Wave Centre	Project 7 Increase destination legibility
Project 4 Support Lanesborough-Ballyleague Enterprise Centre development	Project 9 Maximise tourism opportunity (2): Mid Shannon Discovery Centre	
Project 6 Enhance and link recreation infrastructure	Project 10 Maximise tourism opportunity (3): Cloontuskert Ballyleague Visitor Centre and Organic Farm Feasibility Study	
	Project 11 Increase availability of visitor accommodation	
	Project 12 Build local capacity	
	Project 13 Market and promote Lanesborough-Ballyleague to maximise opportunities	
CROSS CUTTING 2021-2024		
Collaborate to establish the Lough Ree UNESCO Biosphere Nature Reserve		
Collaborate to encourage Sustainable Villages Cluster - establish a demonstration clustered SMART Villages concept in east Roscommon and west Longford		
Collaborate to establish the employment, enterprise, and tourism potential of Bord na Mona’s brown to green synergy in Ballyleague/ Lanesborough and its catchment area of Roscommon and Longford		
Collaborate to maximise funding opportunities under Just Transition and other schemes		

**REGIONAL CATALYTIC PROJECTS**

Collaborate to establish the Lough Ree UNESCO Biosphere Nature Reserve

Collaborate to encourage Sustainable Villages Cluster - establish a demonstration clustered SMART Villages concept in east Roscommon and west Longford

Collaborate to establish the employment, enterprise, and tourism potential of Bord na Mona's brown to green synergy in Ballyleague/Lanesborough and its catchment area of Roscommon and Longford

Collaborate to maximise funding opportunities under Just Transition and other schemes

**PILLAR 1: A BETTER PLACE TO WORK & LEARN - CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES****Project 1: Maximise food and drink opportunity**

Capitalise on Lanesborough-Ballyleague's food and drink reputation by continuing to support Premier Lakelands Food Hub, and Taste of the Lakelands Food Festival and brand

**Project 2 Support Lough Ree Technology Cluster development**

Build on energy production history by supporting development of Lough Ree Technology Cluster

**Project 3 Support anaerobic digester development**

Support anaerobic digester feasibility study

**Project 4 Support Lanesborough-Ballyleague Enterprise Centre development**

Feasibility study for co-working centre, training and R&D hub, and second landing site for new businesses

**PILLAR 2: A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE – ENHANCING SENSE OF PLACE AND VITALITY****Project 5 Enhance appearance of town centres environment**

Commission and implement joint public realm project for Lanesborough-Ballyleague

**PILLAR 3: A BETTER PLACE TO VISIT - MAXIMISE TOURISM OPPORTUNITY****Project 6 Enhance and link recreation infrastructure**

Continue to develop joint green and blue infrastructure network

**Project 7 Increase destination legibility**

Seek funding for wayfinding and interpretation initiative

**Project 8 Maximise tourism opportunity (1): Surf n Turf Wave Centre**

Commission feasibility study to explore the potential of developing Ireland's first artificial surf wave centre in a cutaway bog powered by renewable energy

**Project 9 Maximise tourism opportunity (2): Mid Shannon Discovery Centre**

Commission feasibility analysis of a Mid Shannon Discovery Centre located at Lanesborough

**PILLAR 3: A BETTER PLACE TO VISIT - MAXIMISE TOURISM OPPORTUNITY (CONTINUED)****Project 10 Maximise tourism opportunity (2): Cloontuskert Ballyleague Visitor Centre and Organic Farm**

Commission feasibility analysis of a Cloontuskert Ballyleague Visitor Centre and Organic Farm located at Cloontuskert

**Project 11 Increase availability of visitor accommodation**

Encourage and facilitate adaptive re-use to provide alternative/experiential visitor accommodation

**Project 12 Build local capacity**

Provision of training and upskilling programmes to support and facilitate the delivery of appropriate, quality, and sustainable tourism projects and experiences

**Project 13 Market and promote Lanesborough-Ballyleague to maximise opportunities**

Seek funding for a digital marketing strategy for Lanesborough-Ballyleague



## PROJECT ONE

### MAXIMISE FOOD AND DRINK OPPORTUNITY

Capitalise on Lanesborough-Ballyleague's food and drink reputation by continuing to support Premier Lakelands Food Hub, and Taste of the Lakelands Food Festival and brand

#### PROJECT SUMMARY

##### **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. 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 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. 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. 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 potential to develop the offering of the food hub to include experiential tourism as a part of a future phase.

##### **Taste of the Lakelands Food Festival:**

in tandem with the development of the food hub and Lough Ree Distillery, the Taste of the Lakelands Food Festival offers an outlet for local producers and contributes to defining the profile of the town as a desirable place to work, live, visit and invest. Taste of the Lakelands Food Festival (started 2016) [www.tasteofthelakelands.ie](http://www.tasteofthelakelands.ie) 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. 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. Local employment in artisan food and drink production will be supported by festival.

*“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.”*



## PROJECT TWO

### SUPPORT LOUGH REE TECHNOLOGY CLUSTER DEVELOPMENT

Build on energy production history by supporting development of Lough Ree Technology Cluster

#### PROJECT SUMMARY

Completion of a research study and site identification for the development of an Alternative Energy Hub / Research and Development Centre. The proposal is a joint private sector initiative between FDB Consulting Engineers and Project Managers and the Irish Energy Storage Association (IESA). 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. 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 storage and emerging technologies. Future potential for visitor experience. A town centre site would be the optimum site given the potential for animating the town through increased footfall and providing local employment.

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.

The project has received funding for a feasibility/research study 'Lough Ree Technology Cluster Study' under Strand 1 of Just Transition Funding. Project is being led by FDT Consulting Engineers and PM Limited. It is envisaged that Longford County Council and Roscommon County Council would supporting the project while not being directly involved in development.

*“There is further potential for a retrofitting training hub on site”*



## PROJECT THREE

### SUPPORT ANAEROBIC DIGESTER DEVELOPMENT

Support anaerobic digester feasibility study

#### PROJECT SUMMARY

Feasibility study to determine optimum site for development of an anaerobic digester. 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.** 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. The installation of an injection point on this expanded network will be carried out in tandem with the development of anaerobic digester facilities in the Lanesboro/Mount Dillon area as part of the Just Transition Process following the closure of Lough Ree Power station. The AD could take 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, which could potentially include the new food hub.

Funding has been approved for a 'Lanesboro Anaerobic Digestion Facility: Feasibility Study' under Strand 1 of Just Transition. Potential cost of the Anaerobic Digester would be approximately €1m on a site contributed by ESB or Bord na Móna. The optimum location for such a facility is at an out of town location to minimise traffic in the town centre.

**“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.**



## PROJECT FOUR

### SUPPORT LANESBOROUGH-BALLYLEAGUE ENTERPRISE CENTRE DEVELOPMENT

Feasibility study for co-working centre, training and R&D hub, and second landing site for new businesses

#### PROJECT SUMMARY

Feasibility study to be commissioned to support the development of a co-working centre in Lanesborough in partnership between Longford County Council, Roscommon County Council and the local community; and development of a second landing/incubation hub for SME (1-50 employees) in technology, R&D, light industry in either Lanesborough or Ballyleague. **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.

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. 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.

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. A second landing/incubation hub for SME (1-50 employees) in technology, R&D, light industry in either Lanesborough or Ballyleague would help create short term local employment opportunities over the next two years. Provision of a second landing site in a town centre location would increase footfall and vibrancy. Considerations for a feasibility study would include optimum site or sites and demand analysis.



## PROJECT FIVE

### ENHANCE APPEARANCE OF TOWN CENTRES ENVIRONMENT

Commission and implement joint public realm project for Lanesborough-Ballyleague

#### PROJECT SUMMARY

Joint public realm project commissioned and implemented for Lanesborough-Ballyleague to enhance the town centre. 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 town 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.

While this project would not generate employment directly, unless local employment requirement, but would **generate indirect employment through enhancement of quality of the urban realm and increased resident and visitor dwell time.**

“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 town 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.”



## PROJECT SIX

### CONTINUE TO DEVELOP GREEN AND BLUE INFRASTRUCTURE NETWORK

Further investment in walking/cycling trails network development, Blueway infrastructure and angling infrastructure

#### PROJECT SUMMARY

Further investment in walking/cycling trails network development, Blueway infrastructure and angling infrastructure in partnership with key agencies (walking trails, cycling trails, Blueway, angling infrastructure). Longford County Council and Roscommon County Council working with partners, Waterways Ireland, Bord na Móna and Fáilte Ireland, are 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. 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. A range of key projects include:

» **Development of the Bord na Móna bridge across the Shannon to link Greenways in Longford and Roscommon,** a joint initiative, has potential to link east and west and consolidate the attractiveness of greenways on both sides of the Shannon. 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. A key element is the provision of a link on the west side of the Shannon linking Lanesborough/Ballyleague north to Tarmonbarry – Clondra with spurs to Rooskey and Strokestown. This will complete the loop west and east of the Shannon. This link is subject of the joint initiative of Longford County Council and Roscommon County Council.

» **Potential to develop a significant greenway network along the eastern shore of Lough Ree,** linking Lanesborough-Ballyleague to Athlone as a future project. 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. Enhancement of the trail network would support development of bike hire businesses e.g. at the Ballyleague Recreation Hub. Future phases could see greenways being extended south along the eastern and western shore of Lough Ree to Athlone, for which options are currently being explored and for which Roscommon County Council have secured feasibility funding.

» **The proposed Lough Ree Bay Boardwalk** has potential but would likely require significant capital investment in its current form. This project would likely be better delivered in phases and as part of an overall coordinated recreation network.





## PROJECT SIX

(CONTINUED)

### PROJECT SUMMARY

» **Cruiser infrastructure** is considered high quality including electric hook ups and pump out facilities.

» There is an opportunity to **position Lanesborough-Ballyleague as an Angling Centre of Excellence**. 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. 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.

» Under Just Transition Strand 2 €102,000 awarded 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. Employment during construction and enhancement of employment opportunities in bike/kayak rental, guiding and maintenance.

» An example of where Integration of all types of green infrastructure have been successively integrated along with effective zoning of different levels of activity are the wetlands of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Germany.

**“There is an opportunity to position Lanesborough-Ballyleague as an Angling Centre of Excellence. Visitors participating in angling have contributed to the local economy for many years”**



## PROJECT SEVEN

INCREASE DESTINATION LEGIBILITY

Seek funding for wayfinding and interpretation initiative

### PROJECT SUMMARY

Design and implementation of an **orientation and wayfinding scheme for Lanesborough-Ballyleague** to link the towns to recreational opportunities and encourage increased dwell time. 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.

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 town story through interactive signage erected at key locations, to enhance visitor experience and reinforce sense of place for the town. It is noted that Roscommon County Council are currently replacing signage to villages to an agreed county scheme and similarly for interpretation signage as funding is identified.

It is also noted that an approach is preferred to minimise use of signage where possible. The **scale and style of proposed signage should be consistent and appropriate for the scale of the location**, while also ensuring visitors understand opportunities on offer in the area. Wayfinding Plan to include welcome signage on approach roads to Lanesborough-Ballyleague and town centre as required; signage to tourist hubs from entry points to town as required; walking trail to connect tourist attractions within town centre.

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. 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.

**“The scale and style of proposed signage should be consistent and appropriate for the scale of the location”**



## PROJECT EIGHT

### MAXIMISE TOURISM OPPORTUNITY (1): SURF N TURF WAVE CENTRE

Commission feasibility study to explore the potential of developing Ireland's first artificial surf wave centre in a cutaway bog powered by renewable energy

#### PROJECT SUMMARY

Wet n Wild Peatlands of the Shannon: In the context of the Shannon Masterplan, Lanesborough and Ballyleague sit in 'Discovery Zone 2' (DZ2): Stretching from Clondra/Tarmonbarry in the North to Portumna in the South. DZ2 promises the visitor the chance "to escape to the waters and the wild through the integrated mosaic of habitats and species offering real opportunities to immerse in nature". There is potential to develop an integrated Discovery Zone focussed on peatland's environmental heritage and industrial histories; recreational opportunities such as walking, hiking, cycling, guided tours or bog trains. Central to the Ireland's Hidden Heartlands proposition is 'getting active in nature', 'getting off the beaten track' and 'uncovering places at your own pace'. Therefore creating more ways for people to access and uncover 'nature' in the flesh for themselves would be important.

While Center Parcs appeals mainly to families, a surf centre would have the potential to appeal to older teenagers and younger, unconstrained adults. These also have the tendency to be interested in conservation, sustainability, green issues. Development of Ireland's first artificial surf wave centre in a cutaway bog powered by renewable energy would be a highly innovative and contextualise it within a rewilding, sustainable biosphere. Examples of similar attractions that have leveraged the local natural environment and provided innovative and fresh thinking include Adventure parc, Snowdonia in North Wales.

**“There is potential to develop an integrated Discovery Zone focussed on peatland's environmental heritage and industrial histories; recreational opportunities such as walking, hiking, cycling, guided tours or bog trains.”**



## PROJECT NINE

### MAXIMISE TOURISM OPPORTUNITY (2): MID SHANNON DISCOVERY CENTRE

Commission feasibility analysis of a Mid Shannon Discovery Centre located at Lanesborough

#### PROJECT SUMMARY

Principal Visitor Hub for the Mid-Shannon area located at the North Commons area of Lanesborough. This project proposes a regionally important scalable visitor centre, a hub for the Mid Shannon area and for the proposed Lough Ree Biosphere Nature Reserve. The proposed Mid Shannon Discovery Centre would include interpretation, visitor facilities and information, cafe/restaurant, and retail. It is envisaged that the engaging and immersive Mid Shannon Discovery Centre could 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.

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 an adventure hub in Ballyleague. A network of green and blue infrastructure (walking and cycling trails, lakeshore boardwalk) would run from the visitor centre to Mount Dillon Bog and along the shore of Lough Ree. There could 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 Mid Shannon Discovery Centre must be complementary and not displace Corlea) and Sliabh Bawn. It is also envisaged visitors would be directed to the proposed Visitor Centre and Organic Farm at Cloontuskert that is the

subject of a feasibility study funded by Just Transition. This would tell the story of the people who worked on the bogs, the programme to re-wild the bogs, and include an organic farm which would supply businesses in the area and could potentially provide birch trees and herbs to Bord na Mona. 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. The optimum location for this centre is envisaged to be Commons North, Lanesborough. While re-use of an existing building would be ideal it may be appropriate for a new scalable building that would be capable of growing with demand with a direct view of Lough Ree.

The concept of the Mid Shannon Discovery Centre is in keeping with the character of the area and would-be year-round offer focussed on low impact tourism associated with the river and lake, supported by and supportive of Ireland's Hidden Heartlands and strategic policy objectives. 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 Mid Shannon Discovery Centre building could facilitate primary and secondary school visits, in particular transition year student visits, to support climate, environmental and other natural sciences education.



## PROJECT NINE

(CONINUED)

### PROJECT SUMMARY

A water sports centre is 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 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. 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. This project has received significant funding and is supported by Waterways Ireland and IFI. 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. 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 offer would, in tandem with the new Lough Ree Distillery provide a clustered offer that would enable visitors to learn about the local environment and biodiversity and then visit it on the

ground by bike or foot, that would encourage overnight stays and reinforce Lanesborough-Ballyleague's location at the north of Lough Ree, with Athlone to the south.

Ideally feasibility analysis and development of a Mid Shannon Discovery Centre 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. 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.

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. Feasibility analysis must focus on ensuring a sustainable financial model whereby the proposed centre is cost neutral and does not require long term support or subsidisation from local authorities. Employment numbers and visitor projections would be estimated as part of a detailed feasibility study.



## PROJECT TEN

### MAXIMISE TOURISM OPPORTUNITY (2): CLOONTUSKERT BALLYLEAGUE VISITOR CENTRE AND ORGANIC FARM

Commission feasibility analysis of a Cloontuskert Ballyleague Visitor Centre and Organic Farm located at Cloontuskert

### PROJECT SUMMARY

Just Transition Funding for a Feasibility study will examine the feasibility, environmental assessments and detailed design up to planning stage of an important landmark, The development of a visitor centre envisages creating an educational and interactive, audio visual, and virtual reality visitor experience which will bring the visitor back in time to origins of monastic settlements, to the first trackways across the bogs, to the eventual industrial development of the bogs as Ireland's main energy natural resource. It will also educate visitors on the programme to return the bogs to their medieval wetland, wildlife habitat. It is planned to exhibit a collection of the early machinery used to harvest peat from the bogs, and how these were engineering marvels of the day, from a country that had only recently gained its independence. This project is intended to form the centrepiece of a suite of tourist related infrastructure projects, in a drive to increase tourism numbers to East Roscommon, to replace displaced jobs from the closure of the BNM and ESB operations.

“The development of a visitor centre envisages creating an educational and interactive, audio visual, and virtual reality visitor experience which will bring the visitor back in time to origins of monastic settlements, to the first trackways across the bogs, to the eventual industrial development of the bogs as Ireland's main energy natural resource.”



## PROJECT ELEVEN

### INCREASE AVAILABILITY OF VISITOR ACCOMMODATION

Encourage and facilitate adaptive re-use to provide alternative/experiential visitor accommodation

#### PROJECT SUMMARY

Lanesborough-Ballyleague currently lacks visitor accommodation. 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 or for a mix of uses in accordance with development plan zoning and policy. Identification of effective and incentivised adaptive re-use model could encourage owners of empty properties on the Main Street of Lanesborough-Ballyleague to bring buildings back into use as short-let rentals and/or as mixed use i.e. to include retail or enterprise use. 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 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. 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. Potential employment generator through operation, cleaning, and increased footfall. 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.

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 or Lanesborough. 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. See policy recommendation regarding campervan sites in section 6.3.1.

“Lanesborough-Ballyleague currently lacks visitor accommodation. Lanesborough-Ballyleague has several key vacant properties in the core area



## PROJECT TWELVE

### BUILD LOCAL CAPACITY

Provision of training and upskilling programmes

#### PROJECT SUMMARY

A range of economic opportunities are available from investment planned in tourism infrastructure and visitor attractions driven by the public and private sectors. These include a range of initiatives underway and those envisaged above. If tourism activity/visitor economy grows over time it has the ability to generate employment in delivering visitor experiences and in associated hospitality. Notwithstanding the current, COVID-19 related focus on outdoor activities, the area has the potential to become an outdoor activity hub of scale, and Lanesborough-Ballyleague could benefit from this in becoming the accommodation base for the area, also providing a range of supporting services such as food and beverage, and retail. Employment can be provided through, for example, new business opportunities that come with trail development and maintenance, e.g. bike hire, cafes, mobile coffee/takeaway vans, guided tours, shuttle buses, and associated retail opportunities etc. Focusing resources on further developing the Blueway, employment/new business opportunities can arise for activity providers (kayak, canoe, SUP, paddle boarding, cycling, walking, boat tours, angling, sailing), activity centres, wellness activities, guided tours, etc. By engaging the visitor in the fascinating industrial heritage and local stories through a variety of high quality interpretive interventions along walking trails and greenways, e.g. becoming must see, iconic photo opportunities as at Derrygimlagh, Connemara or Kielder Water in the UK, will help to drive and disperse visitors throughout the region, reducing potential for congestion and likelihood of congestion at pinch points.

However to support and facilitate the delivery of appropriate, quality, and sustainable tourism projects and experiences **it is important that local people in Lanesborough-Ballyleague are supported with appropriate training and upskilling programmes.** Several programmes currently exist with the Local Enterprise Office, others are provided by Failte Ireland. Providing information on available programmes and targeting training at those who would benefit is envisaged as a potential partnership opportunity for Longford and Roscommon County Council's, Longford and Roscommon LEO's, the Education Training Board (ETB), and Failte Ireland.

“...it is important that local people in Lanesborough-Ballyleague are supported with appropriate training and upskilling programmes.”



## PROJECT THIRTEEN

### MARKET AND PROMOTE LANESBOROUGH-BALLYLEAGUE TO MAXIMISE OPPORTUNITIES

Seek funding for a digital marketing strategy for Lanesborough-Ballyleague

#### PROJECT SUMMARY

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. 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 Mid-Shannon Discovery Centre, the new Lough Ree Distillery, as well as support for the promotion of a Taste of Lakelands brand and Food Festival and angling festivals. 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. The development of a brand for the town is supported in the Ballyleague and Lanesborough Local Action Plan 2018.

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.

A 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.

<http://loughree.ie/heritage/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utLgoZzoYuY> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4aUqmI-oxI>



# Implementation Framework and Action Plan

REGIONAL CATALYTIC PROJECTS							
	Action	Lead Agency		Partners	Timescale	Key Performance Indicator	Indicative Budget/Potential Sources of funding € - annual
<b>A</b>	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
<b>B</b>	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	N/A
<b>C</b>	Collaborate to establish the employment, enterprise, and tourism potential of Bord na Mona's brown to green synergy in Ballyleague/Lanesborough and its catchment area of Roscommon and Longford	Roscommon County Council Longford County Council		Bord na Mona	2021-2024	Increased employment in Lanesborough/Ballyleague from brown to green economy	N/A
<b>D</b>	Collaborate to maximise funding opportunities under Just Transition and other schemes	Roscommon County Council Longford County Council			2021-2024	Funding opportunities maximised	N/A

PILLAR 1: A BETTER PLACE TO WORK & LEARN - CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES							
	Action	Lead Agency		Partners	Timescale	Key Performance Indicator	Indicative Budget/Potential Sources of funding € - annual
<b>01.01</b>	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		Enterprise Ireland (funder) Bord na Mona	2021-2022 2021-2022 2023-2027	Food Hub project supported Commitment provided from Bord na Mona as anchor tenant	€250,000
<b>01.02</b>	Lough Ree Technology Cluster study to identify optimum site for project	FDT Consulting Engineers and PM Limited		Longford County Council Roscommon County Council IDA	2021	Site and operational mode identified	N/A

**PILLAR 1: A BETTER PLACE TO WORK & LEARN - CREATING NEW OPPORTUNITIES**

	Action	Lead Agency		Partners	Timescale	Key Performance Indicator	Indicative Budget/Potential Sources of funding € - annual
01.03	Feasibility study to determine optimum site for development of an anaerobic digester (funded through Just Transition)	Longford CoCo		Bord na Mona	2021	Optimum site selected	€50,000
	ESB Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group IDA			2022	AD operational		
01.04	Feasibility study for a Lanesborough-Ballyleague Enterprise Centre to include co-working Centre, training and R&D hub, and second landing site for new businesses	Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group		Longford CoCo Leader Digiwest DEBI	2021	Feasibility study commissioned	€50,000

**PILLAR 2: 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
02.01	Commission and implement joint public realm project for Lanesborough-Ballyleague	Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group		Longford County Council Roscommon County Council	2022-2023	Funding application for public realm strategy Design and Build Public Realm Plan commissioned	TBC

**PILLAR 3: A BETTER PLACE TO VISIT - MAXIMISE TOURISM OPPORTUNITY**

	Action	Lead Agency		Partners	Timescale	Key Performance Indicator	Indicative Budget/Potential Sources of funding € - annual
03.01	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 Portrun.	Roscommon County Council Longford County Council		Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group National Trails Office Bord na Mona NWPS	2021-2022	Lough Ree Biosphere Recreation Strategy commissioned Application for capital funding made to Just Transition and/or ORIS	€50,000
03.02	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	Q42021/ Q1 2022	Orientation and wayfinding scheme study commissioned	€60,000

**PILLAR 3: A BETTER PLACE TO VISIT - MAXIMISE TOURISM OPPORTUNITY**

	Action	Lead Agency		Partners	Timescale	Key Performance Indicator	Indicative Budget/Potential Sources of funding € - annual
03.03	Commission feasibility study to explore the potential of developing Ireland's first artificial surf wave centre in a cutaway bog powered by renewable energy	Roscommon County Council Longford County Council		Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group  Bord na Mona NPWS Waterways Ireland Failte Ireland	2022	Feasibility study commissioned	€60,000
03.04	Commission multi-disciplinary 3 phase design study for Mid Shannon Discovery Centre. Study to include: Phase 1: Concept development including research, benchmarking, consultation, visitor experience plan (visitor journey, visitor number 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.	Roscommon County Council Longford County Council		Failte Ireland Bord na Mona NPWS Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group	2022-2023	Feasibility study commissioned	€200-300,000
03.04	Commission multi-disciplinary 3 phase design study for Mid Shannon Discovery Centre. Study to include: Phase 1: Concept development including research, benchmarking, consultation, visitor experience plan (visitor journey, visitor number 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.	Longford CoCo Roscommon CoCo		Failte Ireland Bord na Mona NPWS Lanesborough-Ballyleague Collaboration Group	2022-2023	Feasibility study commissioned	€200-300,000
03.06	Commission feasibility analysis of a Cloontuskert Ballyleague Visitor Centre and Organic Farm located at Cloontuskert	Roscommon CoCo		Failte Ireland Bord na Mona Cloontuskert Tidy Towns	2022-2023	Feasibility study commissioned	
03.07	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 Heritage Council	2022-2023	Visitor Accommodation Adaptive Re-use Study commissioned; 2 vacant buildings brought back into use	€25,000

**PILLAR 4: INCREASE THE VISIBILITY OF LANESBOROUGH-BALLYLEAGUE**

	Action	Lead Agency		Partners	Timescale	Key Performance Indicator	Indicative Budget/Potential Sources of funding € - annual
04.01	Seek funding for a Digital Marketing Strategy for Lanesborough-Ballyleague	Lanesborough Ballyleague Collaboration Group		Failte Ireland	2022-2023	Digital Marketing Strategy commissioned and implemented	€40,000

SECTION EIGHT

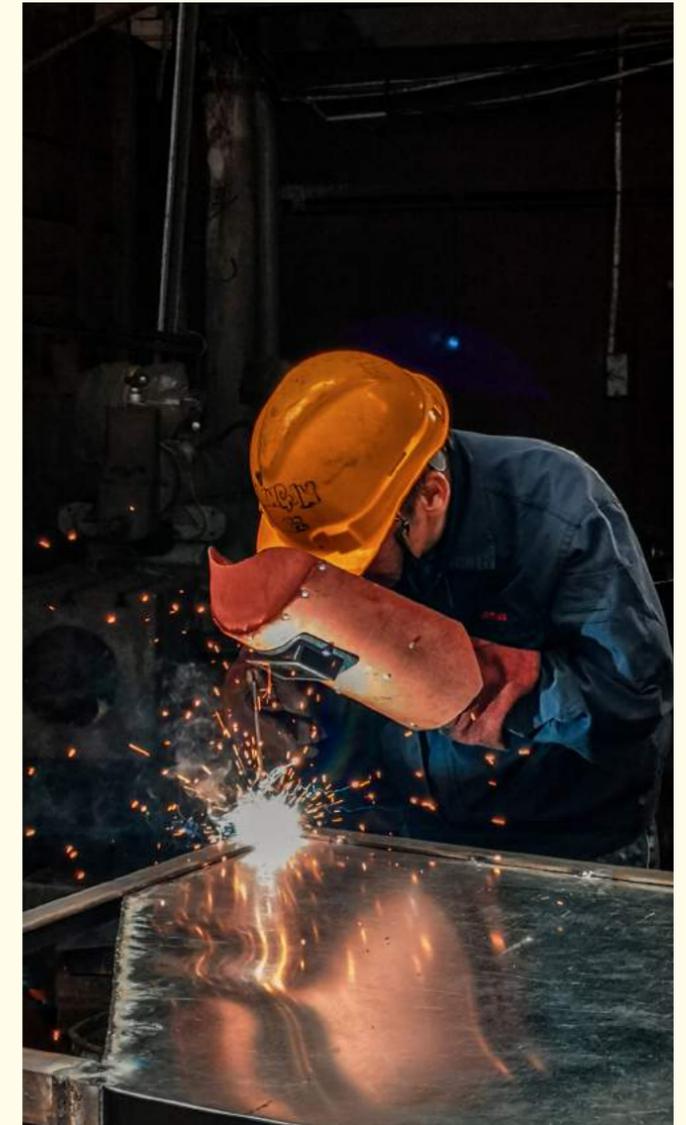
# Monitoring and Evaluation

“It is recommended that this strategy be updated as a live document, to include new collaborative initiatives that arise over the coming years”

The success of this strategy can be judged on the impact it has had on generating employment in Lanesborough.

Economic development is not a static process, nor does economic development of a rural area take place in a vacuum; many external forces are at play. Each project has related actions, which in turn have key performance indicators assigned. Annual monitoring of this strategy could take place to review implementation of actions against an overall timeframe.

It is recommended that this strategy be updated as a live document, to include new collaborative initiatives that arise over the coming years.



APPENDIX 1

# Consultees

KPMG Future Analytics contacted a range of consultees during August 2020 to June 2021. 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:

 <p>Northern and Western Regional Authority (NWRA)</p>	 <p>Eastern and Midlands Regional Authority (EMRA)</p>	 <p>Just Transition Team</p>	 <p>Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage</p>
 <p>Bord na Móna</p>	 <p>ESB</p>	 <p>Fáilte Ireland</p>	 <p>NPWS</p>
 <p>Waterways Ireland</p>	 <p>Midlands Ireland</p>	 <p>Inland Fisheries Ireland</p>	 <p>AIT</p>
 <p>Longford County Council</p>	 <p>Roscommon County Council</p>	 <p>IDA</p>	 <p>Enterprise Ireland</p>

 <p>Longford LEO</p>	 <p>Roscommon LEO</p>	 <p>Longford Community Resources Ltd</p>	 <p>Roscommon Leader Partnership Ltd</p>
 <p>Relevant TD's and councillors</p>	 <p>Bord na Móna Workers Retraining and Jobs Club</p>	 <p>Ballyleague-Lanesborough Collaborative Group</p>	 <p>Ballyleague Renewal Group</p>
 <p>Cloontuskert Tidy Towns Committee</p>	 <p>Mid Shannon Wilderness Park</p>	 <p>Local businesses</p>	

# Lanesborough Ballyleague

Economic and Enterprise Development Strategy for Lanesborough - Ballyleague



Prepared by:

