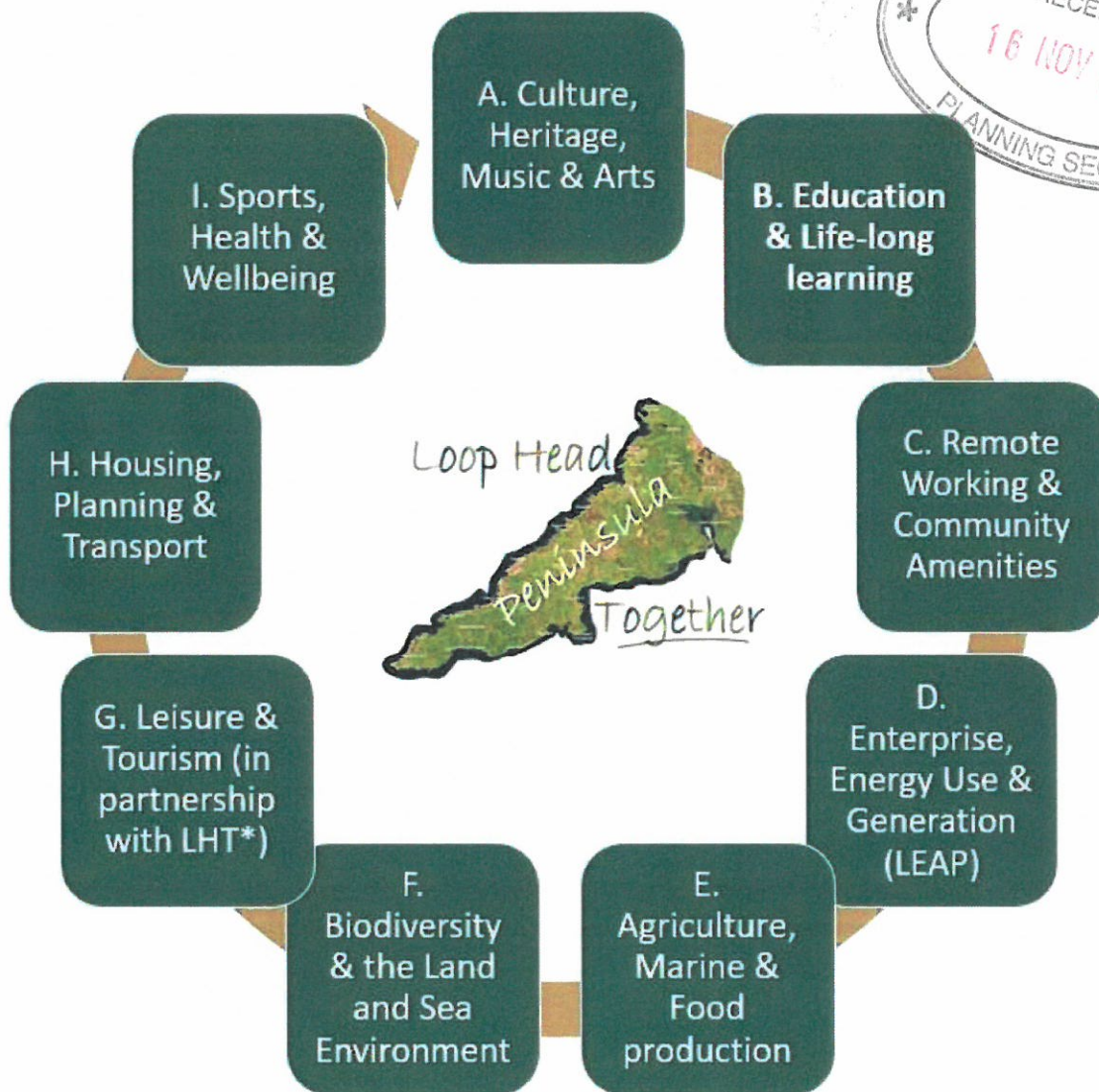


Clare County Council

Development Plan Review by Loop Head Together



Part of a strategic approach to partner with the County Council and other important stakeholders to reverse the population decline of the Loop Head Peninsula.



The 10 electoral districts in the west

“To support enterprise creation and development, maintain and restore the rural cultural heritage, support and protect existing towns and settlements, facilitate safe and secure rural communities and foster an increased quality of life for all rural dwellers”.

Government’s Charter for Rural Ireland (2016)

***Strengthening Ireland’s rural fabric
and supporting the communities who live there;
Planning for the future growth and development of rural areas, including
addressing decline, with a special focus on activating the potential for the
renewal and development of smaller towns and villages;
Putting in place planning and investment policies to support job creation in
the rural economy.***

Project Ireland 2040 National Planning Framework

***Working together to ensure that the Loop Head Peninsula is a place where
everyone can thrive, in a way that what is great about the place is safely
past onto the next generation, while also developing the area to be
a place where both resident and visitor love to be.***

Loop Head together (2020)



Contents

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Loop Head Together Planning Process.....	3
3. Addressing Population Decline.....	4
4. Employment.....	5
5. Quality of Life.....	5
6. Submissions for County Development Plan.....	6
7. Follow up.....	18

1. Introduction

Loop Head Together (hereunder referred to as ‘The Group’) is an initiative formed during 2020 to support the vitality of the economy, communities and environment of the Loop Head Peninsula. It is formed by over 20 local community-based organisations that unite the 10 electoral districts of the three most western parishes of County Clare – Kilballyowen, Carrigaholt and Kilkee, and stretching from Moyasta to Loop Head Lighthouse. We are a large pro-active group with an ethos of working in partnership and collaboration with our neighbouring communities, counties, external agencies and state bodies. The driving force behind this initiative is the deep concern felt throughout the peninsula at the level of ongoing population decline, a trend totally at odds with the average situation in County Clare and nationwide.

The Group wishes to work in a collaborative approach with all stakeholders to develop a progressive plan for the area that reflects and addresses all concerns, in a way that helps us all engage in its successful implementation over the coming years. The challenges faced are serious, structural and systematic. Only genuine ground-breaking partnerships will reverse the negative trends. Time and again in our history it has been shown that together this can be done. The groups first priority is to prepare a medium-term plan to 2025 that begins to address the key challenges for the area, population decline being foremost in people’s minds, with the implementation of initiatives that form a solid foundation for longer term sustainable development across the area.

Realising that the sustainable development challenges faced here on the Peninsula are spreading into more and more other communities, to be at the opening edge of innovation, the Group would like to have the area be considered for pilot testing of any progressive programmes that are being considered for wider implementation across the county or nationally, and will actively partner with others to facilitate this.

2. Loop Head Together Planning Process

This submission has been prepared for the purposes of influencing and supporting policy in the forthcoming Clare County Development Plan 2022-2028 and reflects the views and initiatives emerging from the planning steps the group is taking. These views and initiatives will culminate



The 10 electoral districts in the west

during the Spring 2021 with the publication of a plan for the area which will guide all actions over the medium term. The group has had some input to its planning process from County Council representatives' to-date and is very appreciative of this. As it progresses its plans over the coming months it would appreciate further opportunities for engagement and feedback from Clare County Council on emerging ideas as a means of arriving at an approach that all stakeholders can align on.

3. Addressing Population Decline

The Southern Regional Assembly Regional Spatial Economic Strategy (RSES) has projected population growth in County Clare to an approximate increase of 18,000 by 2031, as compared to that recorded in the last census (i.e. from 119,000 persons to 137,000 persons). The National Planning Framework has a stated objective (NPO15) to "Support the sustainable development of rural areas by encouraging growth and arresting decline in areas that have experienced low population growth or decline in recent decades and by managing the growth of areas that are under strong urban influence to avoid over-development, while sustaining vibrant rural communities". This is reflected in RSES under Regional Planning Objective RPO 27, which supports rural populations, and in the Clare County Development Plan 2017-2023 under Objectives CDP3.5 & CDP3.6. In addition, we note Clare County Council's stated objective in relation to the reversal of population decline in its own Rural Development Strategy.

Electoral District	Total Population								Ch 1981 to 2016
	1981	1986	1991	1996	2002	2006	2011	2016	
Einagh	342	334	323	276	276	299	324	328	-4%
Kilballyowen	405	380	298	288	282	297	286	262	-35%
Kilfearagh	317	315	307	319	294	328	383	350	10%
Kilkee	1,389	1,448	1,315	1,331	1,260	1,325	1,037	914	-34%
Moveen	111	105	89	83	86	83	94	86	-23%
Moyarta	313	315	281	255	240	266	237	224	-28%
Querrin	218	200	172	177	166	170	199	190	-13%
Rahona	401	370	341	374	396	379	349	328	-18%
St. Martin's	107	109	93	99	105	108	104	100	-7%
Tullig	151	134	114	129	137	144	121	110	-27%
Loop Head Peninsula	3,754	3,710	3,333	3,331	3,242	3,399	3,134	2,892	-23%
Co Clare	87,567	91,344	90,918	94,006	103,277	110,950	117,196	118,627	+35%

Figure 1: Population trend for the area (CSO data)

As evidenced by the data presented in Figure 1, population for the area has declined from 3,754 to 2,892 over the past 35 years (-0.66% per year). This has intensified over the past 10 years from 3,399 in 2006 to 2,892 in 2016 a reduction of 15% (-1.5% per year). The outcome is more pronounced for the town of Kilkee where population has decreased at the higher rate of 30% falling in 10 years (-3% per year).



The 10 electoral districts in the west

The continued decline in population for the area is contrary to the current Clare Council Development Plan 2017-2023 which targets significant growth for the area, including for example an increase for Kilkee to 1,615, the equivalent to an additional 160 households.

The principal concerns of the Group is with regard to this level of population decline in the area and as such they have positioned its reversal as their core objective and set an ambitious target to get to an area population of 5,000 by 2040. The Group recognises the scale of change this represents and are preparing plans that will reflect this level of ambition required to achieve this target. They also recognise that reversing this population trend and setting it on a growth path will require an unprecedented effort across all stakeholder groups. With this in mind they are now taking the time to consider the interventions that may be required before engaging widely with all stakeholders as part of a process to develop a long-term plan for the area.

4. Employment

Tourism and agriculture have traditionally been the primary industries in the area generating employment for many and contributing widely to incomes. The Group recognises the importance of these industries to the area and wider county along with the significant challenges they are undergoing and are considering how they may be further developed in a manner that is sustainable while continuing to be integral to the local economy. The Group acknowledges the good work done by the County Council in creating the 10-year Clare Tourism Strategy entitled 'Guiding our Journey to a Vibrant New Future in Tourism'. The Group looks forward to creating a local version of this in partnership with all stakeholders.

The Group recognises further that approximately 8million euros worth of energy is imported into the area each year, a number that reflects significant level for local employment creation if this energy were to be generated locally. The Group also recognises that the approximately 15,000 head of cattle on the peninsula are used to provide primary material to enterprises outside the peninsula with nearly zero add-value being undertaken on the peninsula. Therefore, there is much potential.

The Group is open to partnerships to explore ways of addressing the above so that the traditional industries are supported to harness the opportunities of creating added-value through local processing while opening up new areas of employment and income creation that could be sustainable in the community and are consistent with a progressive vision for such a rural area. These areas are likely to include opportunities presented by the move to remote working, clean energy, the digital world and our collective need to respond to climate change.

Such developments would ultimately widen the economic base of the area and increase resilience and mitigate the effect of economic shocks.

5. Quality of Life

We note Clare County Council's commitment to *"A County Clare where healthy and sustainable communities are developed and integrated with the timely delivery of a wide range of community, educational and cultural facilities and where, through a commitment to equality, participation,*



The 10 electoral districts in the west

accessibility and social inclusion, the county develops as a unique location with an enhanced quality of life for its citizens and visitors". This gives great hope and the Group looks forward to proactively partner with the County Council to deliver their aim here.

An added dimension to the Peninsula's population decline is that the age demographic of the area has shifted towards an older base. This shift has meant that the fabric of the local communities is under immediate threat. For example, several of the Primary Schools have recently closed and the viability of the remaining schools to remain open or retain staff numbers is a great concern. This is perhaps a missed opportunity to promote and develop inter-age public education in line with best educational practice. A practice that in turn can act as a draw to remote workers with young families. Building local population in this way would in turn help the local economic situation no end and help return funds to the schools through taxation.

The loss of educational facilities demonstrates the risk of further diminishing community and social facilities associated with both population decline and an ageing demographic. Such losses pose a threat to the quality of life which can be afforded to residents of the area. We wish to address this by working within existing frameworks and policies promoted by the Clare County Council such as those set out in, inter alia, the National Planning Framework (NPF), the Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES) and the County Development Plan (CDP). We note and welcome Clare County Council's pro-active commitment to working with and supporting community groups such as Loop Head Together, an approach which had been taken before the requirement to do so was placed upon the Local Authorities by RSES Regional Policy Objective (RPO) 180 concerning Active Citizenship.

In this regard, the coalition of communities embodied by Loop Head Together is itself in keeping with the Rural Partnership Model which is a stated objective of RSES at RPO 47.

Another important contributor to quality of life is engagement with the arts and the provision of facilities that enable this for all residents and visitors to the area. The group, in recognition of this, is considering what the associated requirements may be as part of its planning processes and will bring forward proposals in its emerging medium-term plans.

6. Submissions for County Development Plan Review

On the basis of the foregoing we submit as follows:

- A. We note that the overarching goal of County Clare's current Urban & Rural Settlement Strategy is: *"A County Clare with strong and balanced urban and rural areas providing key services and a good quality of life and where people have the choice to live in the area where they are from"*. We further note in relation to small towns and villages that the current objectives are to maintain and strengthen existing towns and villages (CDP 3.14) and maintain existing population levels and services (CDP 3.5 and CDP3.6). Furthermore, RSES objectives include *"to re-position the Region's strong network of towns, villages and diverse rural areas in an economically resilient, imaginative and smart way to foster sustainable competitive advantage"* (RPO 2), and the responsibility of Local Authorities to include policies for the protection of the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements as a key priority within



The 10 electoral districts in the west

Development plans. Regional Policy Objective RPO 27 (RSES) seeks that development plans have regard to the viability of smaller towns and rural settlements and provide for flexibility in zoning and density requirements. These objectives are ultimately underpinned by National Policy Objective 15 (National Planning Framework 2040) to “*support the sustainable development of rural areas by encouraging growth and arresting decline in recent decades ...while sustaining vibrant rural communities*”.

Bearing this in mind, we propose that:

- **Zoning for residential, tourism and community development is not decreased anywhere on the Peninsula but is at the very least retained at current levels in the town of Kilkee and the villages of Carrigaholt, Cross, Kilbaha, Moyasta, Doonaha and Querrin to facilitate potential population increase in existing population settlements. Should a need be identified to increase this zoning, we propose that such a conversation be undertaken proactively between the Group and Clare County Council.**

The Loop Head Peninsula area has suffered the greatest levels of population loss in County Clare over the last 40 years. The retention of current zoning is vital if we are to retain our existing population levels and be enabled to rebuild our population by giving the local community an opportunity to explore imaginative, smart and environmentally sound alternative energy sources, sewerage treatment systems and social enterprises with resulting employment regeneration and economic resilience. These opportunities did not previously exist and so were not available to previous generations in order to stimulate population growth and we submit that it is inequitable that we be limited in our growth by the position that we occupy currently. **We cannot state in stronger terms how critical our population position is and how it has rallied our communities to come together to address this.** We seek an opportunity to do so in a spirit of partnership and collaboration with our local authority. Failure to retain zoning at current levels will place our area in a state of terminal population decline.

- **Clare County Council work with the Group and other stakeholders to assess and provide any infrastructure required on the Peninsula to progress development on zoned land, stating an intention on this in the Clare County Development Plan.**

In order to realise development on zoned lands, necessary infrastructure, and in particular appropriate sewerage treatment facilities, will need to be put in place. Without such infrastructure the sustainable growth of these settlements is not possible

- B. RSES RPO 94 concerns “Decarbonisation in the Agricultural Sector”** (in which it is an objective to support initiatives that advance an approach to achieve carbon neutrality for agriculture and land-use that does not compromise sustainable food production) and in addition RPO 58 relates to Bio-economy and Rural Areas in which the stated objective is to support a sustainable and economically effective agri-food sector. We refer also to RPO 110



The 10 electoral districts in the west

regarding Eco-System Services, RPO 112 which concerns water quality generally and refers specifically to the objective “to support commitments to achieve and maintain “At Least Good” status, except where more stringent obligations are required, and no deterioration of status for all water bodies under the Marine Strategy Framework Directive and its programme of measures, the Water Framework Directive and the River Basin Management Plan.” Also RPO 60, regarding Social Enterprise, states the objective to develop social enterprises and the circular economy within local communities to benefit environmental protection, employment generation and community development.

We propose that:

- **Clare County Council partner with the local communities of the Loop Head Peninsula to embark on a pilot scheme for alternative sewerage treatment systems such as an integrated constructed wetland to ensure pro-active compatibility between our joint commitments to the environment, rural development and the reversal of population decline in rural County Clare.**
The development of such wetlands would also ultimately provide a recreational, environmental and flora and fauna habitat asset to the local area as an eco-system. The lack of waste-water treatment has been an obstacle to the development of communities in our area for decades, including the expansion of local employment creating businesses, and is an issue that has been raised time and time again. The innovative developments in wastewater treatment now present an opportunity to develop a community led pilot project in collaboration with Clare County Council on an environmentally sound basis. A site in Carrigaholt has been identified for this should this prove to be the most appropriate location. Further, a set of local home owners would also be open to partner for such a project to prove concept for more rural housing should this be deemed useful.
- **Clare County Council commit to collaborating with the local community in the feasibility assessment and potential development of anaerobic digestors as a community energy infrastructure project which would not only contribute to County Clare’s renewable energy tally but would have benefits to local farmers in providing solutions to the difficulties experienced by them in slurry management; while at the same time providing green energy for local community buildings.**
Such a development would also result in job creation in an area which is seriously affected by employment seasonality and opportunities which we would propose to operate on a social enterprise model.
- **Clare County Council commit to collaborating with the local community in the feasibility assessment and potential development of an abattoir in the community to enable a grass-based beefed production to be sold as the 100% locally produced premium product that it is.**
Such a development would also result in job creation in an area which was the backbone of the local economy for years. It will also help the promotion of sustainable tourism through fully locally produced menus for the restaurants.



The 10 electoral districts in the west

- **Clare County Council commit to collaborating with the local community in the feasibility assessment and potential development of a cheese, milk, yogurt and vegetables industries to enable the Loop Head Peninsula to optimise the use of its natural resources.**

Such a development would also result in job creation in an area which was the backbone of the local economy for years. It will also help the promotion of sustainable tourism through fully locally produced menus for the restaurants.

- C. We refer to RSES RPO 28 *“To support initiatives between local authorities for cross-boundary collaborations and project partnerships that sustainably develop shared assets, revitalise settlements and strengthen rural communities in county boundary locations.”* In this spirit, we note Clare County Council’s commitment to The Strategic Integrated Framework Plan (SIFP) for the Shannon Estuary along with Counties Limerick, Kerry and Tipperary, all of whom share the objectives of RSES. We further note RSES recognises the potential of the Shannon Estuary as a regional driver of growth (RPO 30) in addition to expressly identifying the Shannon Estuary and Loop Head Peninsula as tourism assets in the Mid-West.

The SIFP has provided for Strategic Development Locations and currently Inishmurry /Cahiracon and Moneypoint are the only such noted locations in County Clare. We note that the SIFP relies on the partnering from County Councils to provide statutory backing to the sites named within the SIFP by adequately zoning the areas of land identified in the SIFP for Marine Related Industry through their relevant County / City Development Plans. Clare County Development Plan has facilitated this by way of objectives set out in Chapter 11.

We submit that:

- **The Strategic Integrated Framework Plan (SIFP) for the Shannon Estuary (CDP 11.2, 2017-2023) be amended to include Carrigaholt as a Strategic Development Location and that CDP Chap 11 be amended to reflect this position.**

Carrigaholt as a large village with land access from the Atlantic Ocean on the Shannon Estuary with established infrastructure and facilities, offers significant potential for development as a strategic location – the closest safe harbour to the open Atlantic - that could further benefit many industries, marine, off-shore wind energy and tourism in particular. A strategic view on this will be essential, as it will enable not only Carrigaholt but also the Shannon Estuary to play a major role in the future marine tourism and energy generation industries going forward.

We further request that, in the event that such an amendment to the SIFP cannot be facilitated, that Clare County Council commits to the inclusion of Carrigaholt in the County Development Plan as an area of county level strategic development importance on the Shannon Estuary and commits to engaging on this basis with Shannon Foynes Port Company (SFPC), which we accept has statutory jurisdiction and is responsible for all commercial maritime activities on the Shannon Estuary.

- D. CDP at 1.8 states *“When making a development plan, the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) requires planning authorities to consider the proper planning and sustainable development of the area”*. While there is no definition of the term in the Act, for



The 10 electoral districts in the west

the purposes of this Plan, proper planning and sustainable development is defined as *“achieving the correct balance of economic, social, cultural and environmental considerations in the interests of the common good and securing long term benefits to County Clare.”* In the view of the Group, achieving this balance is arguably an even greater consideration in an area which is noted for its contribution to the county’s tourism economy due to the resulting inflationary effect on property which may then be only temporarily occupied.

This issue is further exacerbated for the communities within the area of Loop Head, located within a geographic matrix which the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020 describes as having a weaker agricultural base and a weak urban structure which has *“led to population and economic decline. These areas are generally distant from major urban areas and the associated pressure for residential development. In general, any demand for permanent residential development in these areas should be accommodated as it arises, subject to good practice in matters such as design, location and protection of landscape and environmentally sensitive areas. The long-term answer to strengthening structurally weak areas requires the strengthening of the structure of villages and towns in these areas. ... County development plans and county strategies should therefore contain policies of reinforcing weaker settlements to create more attractive conditions to support investment in rural development opportunities”*. It goes on to note that measures to be considered include, *inter alia*, supporting affordability for rural dwellers in the context of housing strategies under Part V of the Planning and Development Act 2000. Interestingly, despite much of the NSS being rejected in later national policy making, this view has continued into the current National Planning Framework which has a stated objective at NPO 15 of encouraging growth and arresting population decline in areas that have experienced such decline in recent decades and sustaining vibrant rural communities. NPO 16 specifically refers to sustainable targeted measures that address vacant premises and deliver sustainable reuse and regeneration outcomes and NPO 18B refers to the provision of serviced sites with appropriate infrastructure to attract permanent residents.

On this basis we propose that:

- **Clare County Council implement an affordable housing initiative on lands held by them in the town of Kilkee.**

Heavily promoted as a holiday location, individuals who wish to reside on a full-time basis in the local area are placed in competition with those seeking a holiday home. This can result in the inflation of house prices to levels which individuals working in the local economy cannot reach. This has a negative impact on potential population gain for the area as a whole. We view this in light of the current strategic position on rural depopulation and affordable housing, coupled with the difficulties experienced by individuals who wish to reside on a full-time basis in our local area. This is not only important for the vibrancy of the local communities; it is equally important for the people running businesses who need housing for the employees to service these businesses. Addressing this can help boost the tax revenue from the area, resulting in a solid return of investment from the County Council.



The 10 electoral districts in the west

- **Clare County Council include review of the Settlement Statements and land use maps for each Municipal District to ensure these allow for further appropriate expansion of each of the established clusters.**

Fulfilling an objective of population growth for the area, outside of that for Kilkee town, will require additional residential development. In line with good policy the group favours that further development (outside of that required by the specific demands placed on those engaged in farming / forestry / family lands / tourism) will take place in the existing villages, or appropriately in the countryside should this not be deemed necessary, and asks that zoning and associated infrastructure plans allow for this to be achieved. A local discussion on this would be welcomed in 2021.

- **The County Development Plan ensures that opportunities for infill developments in the town of Kilkee are enabled while supporting no further zoning beyond current footprint.**

This is to provide for additional residential development for permanent residents within the existing town footprint, increasing town population density, addressing development gaps and dereliction, in a manner that is consistent with Clare County Council sustainability objectives and best planning practice.

All future housing built within the Kilkee and the other settlements in Loop Head should be for permanent residential use only. With respect of the same, Clare County Council will need to put measures in place to ensure that any new residential development is used by future occupiers/purchasers on a permanent and not as holiday homes which are vacant for most of the year. If such measures were copper fastened then the price of residential property would naturally lower making property affordable to local residents.

With respect to the above, the group implore that enurement clauses are strengthened to ensure permanent occupancy and that appropriate planning enforcement ensures permanent occupancy of new residential developments in the settlements of Loop Head

- **Clare County Council undertake a dereliction audit of properties with a view to utilising the measures available to them to address dereliction. The Group is available to support and collaborate on the undertaking of any such audit.**
This as a further measure to enhance address of dereliction. We believe that the re-use of vacant and derelict properties as affordable housing will assist in the regeneration of our town and village centres. We note in this regard the pro-active position taken by Limerick County Council on this issue which is itself subject to the same legislative and national and regional policy measures as County Clare and ask that lessons be learned and applied to the benefit of the Loop Head area.
- **We propose that Clare County Council develop and apply policies to support restoration and return to use of derelict buildings up to and including Compulsory**



The 10 electoral districts in the west

Purchase Order after all available escalation measures are exhausted and fail to motivate a landowner to take action.

There is a frustration with the scale of dereliction in the area, at rural, village and town of Kilkee levels, with a desire to repurpose such buildings for productive use. Hence the group supports any progressive policies that the Council can draw on, or influence the development of at a national level, to motivate owners of such buildings towards progressive action. Such measures could include the offer of incentives or tax benefits as well as those that may be considered more punitive.

- **Clare County Council commit to a programme of Rent to Buy accommodation and/or social housing in some or all of the following areas: Kilkee, Carrigaholt, Cross, Doonaha, Kilbaha, Moyasta Querrin**

- E. RSES RPO 9 states a commitment to a holistic approach to delivering infrastructure to include inter alia, transport and sustainable travel, green infrastructure, community and social, renewable energy, recreation and future-proofing. In addition, RPO 56 refers to the *“use of renewable energy sources in existing buildings, including retro fitting of energy efficiency measures in the existing building stock, energy efficiency in traditional buildings and initiatives to achieve Nearly Zero-Energy Buildings (NZEB) standards in line with the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD)”*. We note that RPO 53 sets a regional objective to *“sustainably develop walking and cycling trails opening greater accessibility to the marine and countryside environment by sustainable modes and promote the sustainable designation and delivery of Greenway and Blueway Corridors.”* In this regard we also note the RSES commitment in RPO 173 and RPO 174 to the provision of safe tourism corridors along the Wild Atlantic Way and safe walking and cycling networks. We further note the intention in RPO 92 to provide electric vehicle infrastructure. In addition, Clare County Council’s Rural Development Strategy refers to the combining towns to *“achieve scale and comparative advantage that would generate ... value for money for public investment”* and in this regard has identified Kilrush and Kilkee as being linked. We note also the current development of cycling routes within the town of Kilrush which present an opportunity for the creation of further links.

On the basis of the foregoing we propose that:

- **Clare County Council retains its commitment to the delivery of the West Clare Railway Greenway Project and in particular, the section of it from Kilrush to Kilkee, taking whatever steps are within its power to progress this as a priority.**
This proposed Greenway links two areas of West Clare, Kilrush Urban and Kilkee, that are categorised as among the most deprived areas in the County and the potential gains in amenity provision coupled with the potential economic benefits would be significant in such an area. In addition, it would provide a sustainable transport link between the largest service town in West Clare Municipal District with the tourist town of Kilkee. This initiative alone promises to be a ‘game changer’ for the area, with extended benefits across the full county, as similar developments



The 10 electoral districts in the west

have been for other rural communities over recent years. The group is keen to see that its development is prioritized and is available to support in any way feasible.

- **Clare County Council and the local community work with landowners to create a mutually beneficial plan to extend the greenway planned from Kilrush to Kilkee westward from Kilkee along the coast to Loop Head Lighthouse, then eastward by the Shannon Estuary back to the Greenway at Moyasta, forming a looped coastal pathway, and that an assessment of the feasibility of this be provided for in the Clare County Development Plan.**

This would incorporate Loop Head Peninsula coastal pathway into the Greenway in a way that celebrates the area's designation as a heritage landscape. This would be carried out in such a way as to help build sustainability into the local communities and their economies, in particular through slow tourism. This coastal route is unique in landscape offering both estuary and Atlantic views, unequalled in the county, nationally or internationally, and offers an unrivalled experience to visitors. It is furthermore recognised in the current County Development Plan as one of a small number of county areas designated as Heritage Landscape. The group would like that the route be developed, in a manner that is respectful of its unique heritage and in conjunction with all land owners, as a walking and cycle trail. This could be further supported by the development of a network of biodiversity walking trails that the Group are currently investigating with land owners in the wider area. These would provide loops from the coastal route to areas of interest, amenities and accommodation on the Peninsula. Kilkee would be the principal hub for all such trails with each of the villages acting as local trailheads. This would become one of the drivers for repopulation.

- **Clare County Council will work with local communities to explore and encourage the development of Sustainable Biodiversity Hedgerow Walkways by the sides of fields linking all of the villages of the Loop Head Peninsula to the planned Kilrush to Kilkee Greenway and Peninsula Cultural Heritage, Biodiversity and Community Vibrancy Centres.**

The Group envisages this being carried out as a partnership with landowners, community groups and local schools in a way that contributes to our social capital, biodiversity and climate action.

- **Clare County Council will work with local communities to explore and encourage the development of skills and jobs in the renewable energy sector through partnering with the Loop Head Peninsula Energy Action Partnership (LEAP)'s Energy Academy.**

This Academy is entering its second year as a partnership with landowners, community groups, local schools, the University of Flensburg, and unofficially with SEAI, NUIG & LIT. It is being conducted in a way to build local social capital to address some of the challenges of our times. All input will be welcomed.



The 10 electoral districts in the west

- **Clare County Council engage with public swimming facility operators and assess their operations to facilitate conversion to renewable energy so that the necessary inspections and assessments are completed to enable such operators to proceed with retro fitting initiatives as such schemes become available.**

There is one public swimming pool in the area, at Kilkee, with this considered to be an important resource for the resident and tourist communities. The swimming pool is closed outside of the summer season. The local community would like to be able to use the facility all year round and request that the Council consider this. The Group understands that the County Development Plan does not address specific site requests, such as this, though would like to engage with the Council to see if the requirement can be addressed.

- **That Clare County Council ensure the Wild Atlantic Way route and road network within the Loop Head area is developed and improved to meet local and tourist needs.**

We refer to this specifically as we note due to drains etc. along the route, there are infrastructural deficiencies that have raised safety concerns within the community regarding the road network particularly for tourists and visitors to the area who are unfamiliar with it. Developing a walking route separate to the roads used by cars will enormously help this issue be addressed, and will of course help the area develop its slow tourism potential to the extent that such investments will result in increased tax take to support such investments.

- **Clare County Council provide for the installation of EV charging stations in settlements within the Loop Head area with capacity which is reflective of the increase in demand over the summer months.**

There is currently no fast charger or semi-fast charger – on the peninsula – thus discouraging green tourism.

- F. RPO 1 concerns appropriate environmental assessments and ensures the integrity and safeguarding of biodiversity and natural heritage. The RSES states that it *“takes a progressive approach to conserving and enhancing the natural and built heritage and the natural resources of wildlife and landscape.”* In this regard we refer to the stated objective of RPO 53 to *“Identify and map catchment areas concerning Culture, Heritage and Tourism of regional significance/scale. Such catchments should have the potential to deliver small-scale economic development and using wider local services such as Post Offices and local public transport”*. RSES itself has noted that the Loop Head Peninsula is a tourism asset in the Mid-West region. We further note that the Draft National Marine Planning Framework, in its efforts to fully capture the intentions of the EU’s Maritime Spatial Planning Directive has among its objectives *“To promote the preservation and enjoyment of marine-related cultural and heritage assets”*.

In light of this we submit that:



The 10 electoral districts in the west

- **A pro-active approach be taken by Clare County Council to lead and support local environmental and biodiversity groups such as the West Clare Wildlife Club.**

This will ensure local people understand, appreciate and partner in preserving and enhancing the rich natural heritage we have on the Loop Head Peninsula and will assist and empower the celebration of what is local and extraordinary. The implementation of such proactive engagement at County Council level will facilitate environmental protection at local community level.

- **Clare County Council lead initiatives that encourage and empower those engaged in agriculture to explore options and supports that can help make the changes they would like on their farms to help nature flourish.**

This will ensure the farming and landownership communities have the support they need to carry out the biodiversity protection and enhancement work they know is required but are often discouraged to due to lack of support.

- **Recognition be afforded to traditional work boats such as our unique West Clare Currach and traditions of turf boats as social, cultural and heritage maritime assets.**

This will enable the experiencing of our rich maritime history, skills sharing, knowledge transfer and generally help people to gather socially and celebrate their past while continuing to learn. It will also ensure that our old piers from Querrin, Carrigaholt, Kilbaha and Kilkee will be used and appreciated by locals and visitors alike, and in some cases, help justify the maintenance work some of them need.

- **Clare County Council will initiate actions that will ensure the promotion and support of the unique West Clare Currach.**

This would ensure the protection and cultural survival of the West Clare Currach tradition by encouraging their building, their use and regattas in the area and recognising that unless we use them as part of our living heritage the skills specific to building and handling these canoes will be lost.

- **The skills of traditional wooden boat building existing on Loop Head are recognised nationally and groups promoting such skills are supported.**

On that basis community led examples such as Seol Sionna would be supported as critical custodians of such skills in order to keep the skills of traditional sailing and living heritage alive in the area.

- **Clare County Council recognise the geology of the Loop Head Peninsula as a unique environmental and cultural asset.**

This area is used as a learning environment for geologists from around the world which merits its being recognised as such within the County Development Plan to further facilitate it being understood and appreciated by people who live and visit Loop Head. While the coastline around the peninsula is currently designated as a Heritage Landscape by the Clare County Development Plan the Group would like to explore the implications of extending this designation to the entire area of the



The 10 electoral districts in the west

peninsula thus giving it support to protect and enhance its environment similar to that of the Burren.

- **Clare County Council recognise and note the various birdlife supporting habitats on the Loop Head Peninsula, including the Bridges of Ross as a location of ornithological significance.**

This area has been highlighted internationally as an excellent example of a place to view annual migration of birds to the Arctic in Spring and moving south again in late summer. This story of wildlife should be shared throughout the community, with visitors and with the world at large so all can appreciate the extraordinary richness that is around us every day. This in turn should be done in a way to support slow tourism in partnership with the communities.

- **Clare County Council initiate actions that will encourage and promote the tidal pools as an environment to help families learn about our marine environment along our shores and our role in protecting it.**

This would include the promotion of the Pollock Holes in Kilkee as a unique, accessible and safe environment for people to swim and explore our natural marine environment in a tidal zone.

- **Natural bogs are promoted and supported as crucial habitats.**

This will assist a wider understanding that natural bogs, such as Lisheen bog, are vitally important which will help people understand the endangered wildlife they give protection to including Hen Harriers and owls, and the great Carbon sink that they provide.

- **Clare County Council drive initiatives that help raise awareness of our rich maritime wildlife along our coast.**

County Clare, with over 350km of coastline, can play a major role to help appreciate and protect our marine species. The cliffs of the Loop Head Peninsula along its 70+km of coast line offer ideal locations to promote sea watches for Bottle Nose Dolphins, Basking Sharks, Minkie Whales, Humpback Whales, Common Dolphins, Flue Fin Tuna at different times of the year.

- G. We note the commitment in RSES to cultural development, remote working and the return to use of our Heritage Buildings (RPO 192). The commitment to training and development referred to therein is further underpinned by the RPO186 concerning Lifelong Learning which refers specifically to both urban and rural centres of population.

In this regard we propose that:

- **Clare County Council work with communities, business groups and government policy makers to ensure that internet providers advertise and commit to a minimum download and upload speed for the internet access they provide.**



The 10 electoral districts in the west

Currently, many internet providers advertise a maximum internet speed that they rarely meet in any meaningful way. This becomes a huge deterrent for people who wish to set up business that relies on remote working as they do not know what the baseline internet speed is that they can rely on as they set up their digital infrastructure.

- **Clare County Council collaborate with the community in identifying an appropriate building in which to develop an interpretative centre to develop and promote the scope and capacity of our Heritage (including agriculture and maritime), Traditions, History, Culture, Genealogy & Biodiversity to contribute to the sustainable development of the Loop Head Peninsula, and in turn play its part in national biodiversity and climate action.**

We note that there are several buildings in the area left to either dereliction or non-use, some of which are in the ownership of the local authority or non-governmental organisations. An audit of such buildings would assist us in a cost-benefit analysis to assist in identification of the most suitable and economically viable location for an interpretative centre which could house and promote Loop Head and its future development. The overall goal being to empower people (local community and visitors) to incorporate the preservation and enhancement objectives as set out above as a vital element of a living and thriving local community, economy and environment.

- **Clare County Council commit to the return to multiple uses of Coláiste Uí Chomhraíde in Carrigaholt.**

Established in 1912, before the foundation of the State, the Coláiste is one of the oldest Irish language schools in the country. The old Coastguard Station building in which it is located is itself of historic and heritage value. It is the only registered Irish language Summer School in County Clare. However, this cultural and heritage asset is currently lying unused due to the need for physical renovations of its building infrastructure. The return to use of the Coláiste both as a Summer School for Irish language and a year-round educational, activity and remote working support centre would be an economic game changer for the entire area and has enormous potential to generate employment and further enterprise initiatives.

- **Clare County Council commit to the development of Heritage Skills Training Programmes to ensure the retention of skills and practices which are in danger of being lost.**

In this regard we refer to local skills, for examples West Clare currach boat-building and maintenance, stone masonry skills, traditional house building, steelwork, etc. that are now practiced by an ageing cohort of our population with the risk of loss of knowledge in the event that these skills are not passed on. As the County custodian of many of our heritage and cultural assets Clare County Council are well placed to work with other relevant stakeholders and community groups with the objective of



The 10 electoral districts in the west

protecting, promoting and re-establishing our knowledge base in heritage skills. This could further be linked to the rejuvenation of derelict homes and other buildings on the Peninsula

- **Clare County Council support the accessibility to and recognition of archaeological and heritage sites in the Loop Head area**

We note the rich archaeological heritage of Loop Head and seek the support of Clare County Council in assessing approaches which would support and encourage local landowners to make these sites accessible. The development of a mutually beneficial solution could be replicated across the County and render Clare a leader and innovator in bringing heritage sites to the public.

7. Follow up

The Group acknowledges all the great work being conducted by the Clare County Council in the forward planning for our County; and are fully aware that some of the submissions above may not get inclusion.

However, as you review this submission, should you feel that Loop Head Together Group should be talking with anyone in your network, please do let the Group know at [REDACTED] the Group will very happily and positively engage with the said person or entity as the Loop Head Development plan is drafted over the next month.

Further, should you feel that there may be some synergies between what the Group is trying to do and other entities you are aware of, please feel free to forward this document to them.