

EirGrid Laois Kilkenny Reinforcement Project

Community Benefit Fund

Scoping Study Report, October 2021





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1. INTRODUCTION

EirGrid and the Laois Kilkenny Community Benefit Fund

In July and August 2021, a Scoping Study for the Laois Kilkenny Community Fund was completed by M-CO on behalf of EirGrid. The purpose of the study was to identify the community needs and priorities in the areas near to the Laois Kilkenny Reinforcement Project being developed by EirGrid, and to make recommendations for how a fund could be distributed to benefit the local communities in an impactful, effective and transparent way.

This Scoping Study presents our findings from discussions and review of any information available for the areas impacted by the reinforcement. Our findings highlighted that:

- There are strong community organisations who are working to create vibrant and attractive community services all along the line.
- Overall, the communities who participated in the consultation identified a clear set of needs that focus on maintaining a strong and inclusive sense of community, which is challenged by recent COVID and also by a shift towards more urban centres. The need to attract younger volunteers and ensure that younger families continue to get involved was highlighted as being important.
- There are a wide range of organisations that have projects that would benefit from additional funding from the community benefit fund- these span sports, culture, heritage, youth services and community centres.
- The Ratheniska, Timahoe and Spink (RTS) Action Group, in Co. Laois, are opposed to the works and funding. There is also widespread support for the funds across these communities.
- The scale of funding being sought varies, and in some cases would be in addition to funding from other sources such as Sports Ireland, the Music Network, potentially Leader programmes and fundraising within the community.
- Awareness of the works was stronger in Co. Laois, and it will be important to continue to raise awareness of the fund in both Laois and Kilkenny, and to ensure that any community groups who might benefit are aware of the grant process.

EirGrid has begun works to reinforce the network within the Laois-Kilkenny region, with the development of a substation at the Kilkenny end of the line. This reinforced line will run from Coolnaback in Co. Laois to Ballyragget in Co. Kilkenny.

In recognition of the communities' role in the facilitation of electricity infrastructure, EirGrid has established a Community Fund with a value of €511,500. This Community Benefit Fund will provide funding to projects in the affected area proposed by local charities, community groups and not-for-profit organisations that demonstrate broad community benefit.

So, this scoping study was conducted to meet with representatives and community leaders to understand what they would like to see supported with community funds and their views in relation to the fund.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1. About EirGrid and the Community Benefit Fund

EirGrid is the state body responsible for a safe, reliable and secure supply of electricity to communities and business. They develop, manage and operate the electricity transmission grid on behalf of the ESB, bringing power from where it is generated to where it is needed in Ireland.

When adding new transmission infrastructure to help make the grid more efficient, EirGrid aims to create as little disturbance as possible. However, at times this work can involve some disruption to communities. The Community Benefit Fund was established in recognition of the impact this work can have on local communities adjacent to these works, and the importance of their support during the process. The value of each fund established is based on the length, voltage, technology and additional infrastructure of each project.

The purpose of the fund is to support local good causes and help communities transform their area. The overall aim is to increase public wellbeing in the community and leave a positive legacy in the communities hosting EirGrid infrastructure.

To ensure fair and transparent award of funds, they are administered via an independent administrator. As part of the fund design a scoping study is undertaken to identify the communities adjacent to the project, discuss their community needs and activities and make recommendations on the structure and focus of the funds.

The funds are typically distributed in three stages:

1. At the start of the construction
2. Approximately mid-way through construction
3. Project completion

2.2. The Laois Kilkenny Reinforcement Project

The Laois Kilkenny Reinforcement Project consists of multiple sub-projects to meet the need of improving the quality of supply to Laois, Carlow, Kildare, Wicklow and to improve the security of supply to Kilkenny.

The new Ballyragget 110/38 kV substation construction has been ongoing from mid-2020. Civil works are coming to a close with electrical contractors due to start in September 2021. The fulfilment of independent hydrogeologist recommendations at Coolnabacky have been ongoing on site in 2021. The final energisation of all elements is scheduled for 2025, however this date cannot be confirmed at present.

Based on the scale of the project, the Community Benefit Fund has been established with a value of €511,500. The community fund is disbursed once work has commenced and in recognition of the disruption that works may have caused and the role of communities in the improvement of the Grid.

The tentative timeline for the distribution of the three phases of funding is:

- **Phase 1:** 40% - Starting construction (2021)
- **Phase 2:** 30% - Line stringing/cable jointing (2023) TBC
- **Phase 3:** 30% - Energisation (2025) TBC

As construction has commenced on this project, phase 1 of the fund will be disbursed in 2021 and projects can apply for funding based on what is currently available and confirmed.

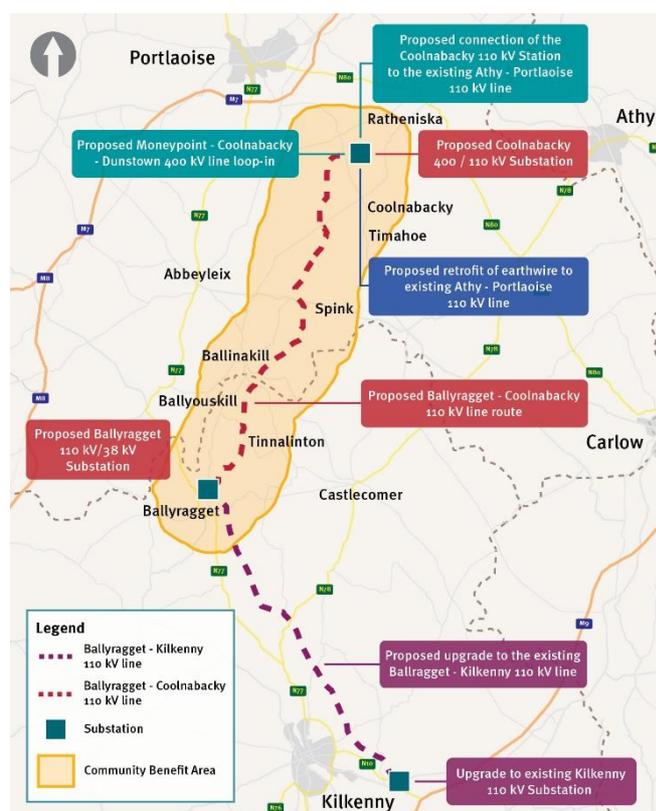


Figure 1: Map (provided by EirGrid) of the Laois Kilkenny Reinforcement Project line and the existing Kilkenny 110 kV Substation. The area circled in red is the area subject to the community fund.

2.3. Laois Kilkenny Community Forum

A Community Forum has been established, comprising local representatives of community groups and associations, and elected representatives in Laois and Kilkenny, surrounding the proposed line and membership is spread across the area. This forum is independently chaired by Irish Rural Link.

The Community forum will meet according to need, approximately 4 times a year, to provide advice and guidance on the Community Fund, including:

- Criteria and parameters of the fund
- Proposals for discussion and consideration
- Provision of community sector perspectives
- Share knowledge and fully inform about local services, needs and plans for the future
- Provide guidance on local needs and priorities
- Provide feedback at key stages in the process

The Community Forum will also assist EirGrid and ESB to develop mechanisms to communicate feedback and key milestones to the wider community.

3. SCOPING METHODOLOGY

3.1. Scoping Area

EirGrid have indicated a proximity of 3km from the line as a funding guideline. This does not exclude communities and organisations outside of the 3km radius but will prioritise those closer to the line.

The line starts and finishes at two central hubs; Coolnabackey in Co. Laois and Ballyragget in Co. Kilkenny. The main communities falling within the funding area, in Co. Laois, include Coolnabackey, Timahoe, Ratheniska, Spink and Ballinakill. In Co. Kilkenny, the main communities are Ballyragget, Ballyouskill and Tinnalinton. The proposed new line has avoided centres of population such as Abbeyleix, Timahoe and Ballinakill.

A Google Map was created, outlining the 3km radius from the line, highlighting community groups and organisations within the funding area (see Figure 2).

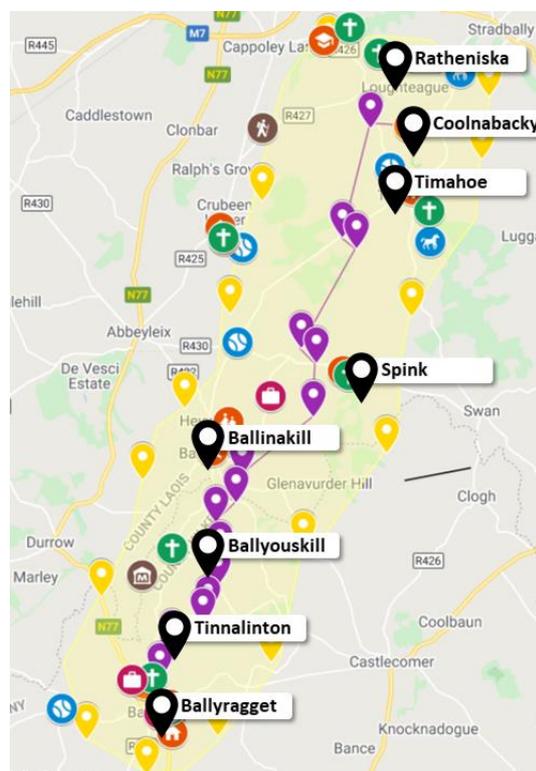


Figure 2: Map of the Laois Kilkenny Reinforcement Project line (purple) and funding area (yellow).

3.2. Scoping Methodology

EirGrid asked M-CO to listen closely to what would help communities and to create a funding approach that is accessible to both small and large projects, simple to apply for and would have long term impact.

The scoping study was directed mainly by feedback from local representatives and community leaders or development workers but was also informed by best practice for community funding and the unique nature of EirGrid projects.

The scoping methodology was multifaceted and comprised of:

1. A desk review of publicly available data including census and area profile data provided by the Central Statistical Office (CSO) and Pobal, and local community websites.
2. A survey circulated to community groups which asked thoughts on local issues and community groups in the area (for a full list see Appendix 1).
3. Interviews with local community representatives and leaders (for a full list see Appendix 2) and engagement with the Community Forum. Seven local political representatives were interviewed (listed in Appendix 2) from a range of political affiliations and locations. The focus of the interviews was on the local community needs and current community projects.
4. A field visit to view the ongoing and proposed works and confirm the key towns and communities adjacent to the line.

4. LOCAL COMMUNITIES FEEDBACK

The section below outlines the key socio-economic details of each townland and the key findings.

Field visit findings

While driving along the route, M-CO noted that the visibility of the proposed line is not very obvious or impactful on the aesthetics of the landscape. This was reinforced by a lack of awareness by some people in the Ballyragget area that the work on the substation had already taken place. The works on the substation at Coolnabacky are currently on hold, and we did not visit this site.

To understand the needs of the communities adjacent to the line, M-CO spoke directly with a number of local representatives, community organisations, PPN and Leader representatives for both Kilkenny and Laois to get an overall picture of development needs and projects in the area and provided surveys to representatives from communities along the line.



4.1. Co. Kilkenny

Ballyragget

In Co. Kilkenny there is a very active community development group for Ballyragget, and there were strong connections into the local Leader programme. Ballyragget is the main town affected on the in Co. Kilkenny. As of the 2016 census it has a population of 1,082 people. Agriculture and the Agri-Food industry are the largest employers, with the large Glanbia factory across the river driving the town's industry for the past forty years. The town is built around a large medieval keep (known as Ballyragget Castle) and its adjoining walls. A large mid-19th-century Catholic church sits on a rise overlooking the town's central square. The main groups mentioned in development plans were the Community Development Association, St Patrick's Ballyragget GAA, Brookville soccer club, Tidy Towns and the Active Retirement group.

Ballyragget is a central hub for the other communities identified in the Kilkenny of the line, and community activities here appear to benefit a larger surrounding catchment area. The Ballyragget community are currently creating a new 5-year development plan and applying for Leader funds. We spoke with two community development volunteers and received a number of survey responses, and input from Community forum measures.

Ballyragget appears to have a very dynamic and involved group of community volunteers, who are looking to create a community centre that is both sustainable and inclusive. They recently developed a local playground and are keen to involve all ages within community activities. They recognise that they have a very attractive outdoor setting and want to create walkways and opportunities to enjoy the outdoors, as well as attracting visitors. Younger people are also seen to need better resources and to be supported in both mental health and positive lifestyles. There is interest in building capacity and increasing more participation from the next generation through training and support, as the current volunteer group appear to be very busy. There is a local hall, but it is seen to need upgrading, and potentially to be upgraded in a sustainable way to both reduce costs and reduce the climate impact.

A wide range of organisations have contributed to the scoping study, and some volunteers are active across a range of organisations. These included the community hall group, scouts, GAA, walkway development, local schools and meals on wheels.

The specific projects below are ideas of some of the areas that would need support:

- **Ballyragget Community Centre/Hall** plays a key role for a number of community groups, including Ballyragget Scouts, it is in need of refurbishment and renovation, particularly the roof. This work has been unable to source funding from elsewhere.
- **Ballyragget GAA club** is seen as a community centre, accessible by all members of the public. Developing facilities at the GAA club would improve facilities for people to exercise safely and away from the traffic on public roads.
- **A river walk** is being considered in Ballyragget and would be great from a community point of view, also would feed into the biodiversity piece and mental health.
- **Ballyragget scouts**- attract younger people from both the town and surrounding areas and offer an important amenity for younger people.
- There is need for **improved amenities for youth** (e.g. playgrounds, a running track around the green).

- One suggestion that would impact all the communities was that the fund could help to establish '**Local Hero Awards**' to recognise the remarkable volunteers who connect communities and keep them going.

Ballyou skill

The nearby townland of Ballyou skill is also affected. The townland of Ballyou skill has a population of over 700 people. A 2017 article by Sean Keane in Kilkenny People states that Ballyou skill "has lost its primary school, shop and post office and needs a focal point to supplement the worthwhile work going on there". While Ballyragget offers some community services for Ballyou skill there appears to be potential to provide some additional separate services to this community.

We spoke with a local representative who outlined that Ballyou skill has been facing a loss of key community infrastructure and needed some investment to create a community hub or place for people to come together.

He identified the following projects specifically for Ballyou skill:

- **Ballyou skill Community Hall Re-Development Committee** are working to provide a hub of activity in the parish. This will be a multipurpose facility encompassing the whole demographic of the community. The hall is in constant use as a creche, for pilates, cards, Irish dancing and a study group. The local branch of the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) holds their monthly meeting there as does Attanagh Group water scheme.
- **Ballyou skill Way** is an original famine relief road built in 1848. This walkway incorporates the highest point in North Kilkenny with a view of the Wicklow mountains and Slieve Bloom.

Tinnalinton

Tinnalinton is a small settlement that is serviced by Ballyragget. There were no community services or organisations identified as part of the desk study.

4.2. Co. Laois

Timahoe

Timahoe is a small village with a population of 569 people as of the 2011 census. It is 13 kilometers from Portlaoise and 9 kilometers from Stradbally.

At the heart of Timahoe is a Round Tower dating back to the 1100s with a heritage centre, community toilets, a playground and a coffee shop

The Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023 mentions Timahoe Round Tower and Timahoe Esker Nature Reserve as key heritage assets for the county and a Conservation Plan for the monastic site of Timahoe was published in 2018. Under the Laois County Development Plan 2017-2023, Timahoe received Town and Village Renewal Funding in 2018 for village enhancements.

Community groups identified include The Stradbally, Vicarstown and Timahoe (SVT) Community Sports Hub and Tigh Mochua Le Cheile - a community group based in Timahoe, and covers heritage, tidy downs, playgrounds and festivals. Timahoe GAA is a focal point for the community. Funded by the Heritage Council and Laois County Council, the Connecting Communities Programme, which draws together communities and their local heritage, focused on Timahoe in 2019.



We spoke with two local representatives for Laois, who both highlighted that Timahoe has an active community volunteer group and would benefit from more support. It is seen as a good hub for providing support both to Timahoe and to the community in surrounding areas. They identified a number of needs and potential projects in that could centre on Timahoe.

- **Income generation** - One Councillor outlined that there is a need to encourage income generation in the area, and that Timahoe has real tourism potential. She suggested support for the establishment of a **social enterprise**, where profits go back into the community. She also talked about the beautiful countryside and need for tourism facilities in Timahoe. Perhaps supporting camping or glamping facilities around the round tower.
- **Local School - Childcare was identified** - There is one primary school in the village of Timahoe which caters for pupils in the area. There are no community childcare facilities within the area. Child minding is provided in a private capacity. Laois County Council are currently liaising with the Department of Education with regard to the monitoring of capacity and expansion needs of educational facilities in County Laois.
- **Community Centre** - The Community Centre is located to the rear of the church and is used for sporting facilities and the commencement of youth club activities which caters for a wide catchment area. Within this area also is the Bring centre for recycling material which is kept in a orderly fashion.
- **Social facilities** - The Laois development plan outlined that it is essential that adequate social facilities are present in Timahoe to maintain the sustainable development and community vitality of the village.
- **Special education needs** - Timahoe also has an early intervention centre which always needs funding and support.
- **Timahoe GAA club** - Pitch resurface, carpark, showers and changing facilities.
- **Meals on Wheels Stradbally** - Although based in Stradbally, Meals on Wheels services Timahoe and surrounding areas. They are in need of funding support.
- **Timahoe La Céile** - the local heritage group, are looking to upgrade heating and the ceiling in the heritage centre, located beside the round tower. Timahoe's rich heritage is an important asset to the community.

Ratheniska

Ratheniska is a rural settlement consisting of a School, Roman Catholic Church, Ratheniska Community Hall, GAA Grounds and ancillary buildings and is situated to the North of the Coolnabacky substation. There are 87 postal addresses within the 4km diameter circle that is the substation study area. Ratheniska has hosted the National Ploughing Championships in 2013, 2014 and 2015. It was also set to host the National Event and the World Ploughing Championships in 2021. Park/Ratheniska GAA club incorporates two hurling teams and is at the heart of the Ratheniska community.

Spink

Spink is a small village situated near the Kilkenny border on the R430 regional road. We received a number of responses to the survey from community members, and also contact from some organisations to express that they did not want to engage with the fund.

There are a wide range of community organisations active in Spink currently catering for the needs of the community. We spoke with representatives from Spink Comhaltas, an organisation that offers for both younger and older age groups, and had online submissions from community members. Spink is a relatively small community but offers a range of community services and those who shared their views, felt they are very important in encouraging a vibrant community.

One community group, Concerned Residents of Spink, outlined that they would like their objections to the fund noted, and that they would not apply for any funding as it arises from the EirGrid upgrade project. A number of community groups, who had members in the Concerned residents of Spink, outlined that they would not be applying for based on these views.

Of those community members who did share their views, the key challenges to the community identified for Spink were lack of funding and resources. A key challenge is to ensure that the community continues to attract new families and visitors, by having vibrant social activities both sporting and cultural; having attractive places for people to get together safely.

Areas that were mentioned as being potentially projects that would benefit from community funding based on feedback received were the local community hall, where a range of activities take place. More specifically based activities relating to musical training and as a regional centre for musical competitions.

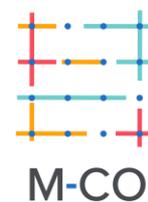
- **Traditional Irish Music and local musical talent** - Spink has a very strong Comhaltas organisation that provides training for people both in Spink and surround areas. The branch of Comhaltas is very active and has strong local support. They have successfully raised funds for an instrument rental scheme and lending library. The organisation sees its role both in training local musicians and also providing opportunities for the community to come together and enjoy the music. They mentioned a range of areas where the community funding could benefit both their organisation and the community: Upgrading the facilities where they provide training within the local community hall, support for a Feis or festival to provide masterclasses and attract people to Spink, bringing in experts to help set up a training or summer camp for local teenagers and encourage them to keep playing. They also highlighted their approach to creating a sustainable organisation by providing training to the next generation and keeping the organisation going.

Coolnabacky

Coolnabacky is a small townland in Timahoe Electoral District. A substation for the Laois Kilkenny Reinforcement Line is being constructed in Coolnabacky and there has been an ongoing protest at the site from members of the community and surround areas. No feedback on community needs or projects was received, but we did receive some feedback that any funding would not be welcome until the works had actually commenced.

Ballinakill

Ballinakill had a population of 445 people as of the 2016 census. Heywood Gardens, located just north of Ballinakill, is a formal garden on the former Heywood Estate which was designed by Edwin



Lutyens and Gertrude Jekyll in the early 20th century. The gardens are now managed by the Office of Public Works and open to the public.

Ballinakill GAA are currently seeking for the redevelopment of its pitch and facilities.

Additional local amenities near the proposed route include heritage towns, a scenic landscape and walkways, outdoor activities, forestry, rivers (the River Nore) and lakes, and sporting facilities and clubs, scouts and youth groups.

5. LOCAL REPRESENTATIVES AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT EXPERT FEEDBACK

To understand the needs of the communities adjacent to the line, M-CO spoke directly with a number of local representatives, PPN representatives and LEADER representatives for both Kilkenny and Laois to get an overall picture of development needs and projects in the area. We have included any feedback on support for the project in the final section. The majority of those consulted focused on how the funding would best benefit the local area and they type of projects and organisations to include.

Local Representatives

There was a variety of opinions and level of awareness of local councillors around the EirGrid Laois Kilkenny Reinforcement Project. Overall, most councillors felt that there would be a strong community interest and benefit for the fund, but in one area of Laois it was felt that the fund would not be welcomed as there were strong objections to the project. Of those who felt that there would be a benefit to the community, they felt that there would be a lot of interest in the funding, particularly for projects that supported the older population and for improving community facilities that would allow the community to re-emerge from Covid. A range of community organisations were highlighted in Spink and Timahoe. These included Sports, culture, older people and improving the outdoor amenities.

Kilkenny

While awareness was low for the EirGrid community benefit fund and line upgrade, there was a strong interest in the availability of funds to support a wide range of activities that are already underway or are being planned. The community in Ballyragget was mentioned and in particular efforts to upgrade the community hall. One Kilkenny councillor also suggested looking at the Castlecomer community school as it had students from both the Kilkenny and Laois area, so could benefit one large catchment area. The need to make the most of the local heritage and to encourage tourism was also highlighted. The level of community activism and engagement with Leader was also called out. It was felt that there would be very strong local engagement with the funds and the capacity to spend them well and sustainably.

Laois

In Co. Laois, there were mixed views on how the community funds would be supported but some felt that there was an active community sector and plenty of areas that would be interested in receiving support. The main focus mentioned was supporting older people, providing better sporting and leisure facilities and also in looking at showcasing the heritage and culture of the local areas, both for the community and for attracting more visitors. The focus on Laois was more on individual organisations, with no mention of a community development plan or larger project.

Public Participation Network and Leader representative feedback

The Public participation network in both Laois and Kilkenny are both active and are happy to share information on the fund once it is approved. The Laois PPN representative pointed out that some members may not be happy to be included on this, and that they would not actively participate with the fund because of this, but would share information. A range of different areas are currently



included and supported by the PPN such as tidy towns. Kilkenny PPN also circulated the scoping study via a weekly newsletter issued in June. The PPN is very active in Kilkenny however our contact was new to the role and unfamiliar with the specific communities relevant to the scoping study, they are willing to help promote the fund through their network.

Laois Leader Partnership has a number of programmes aligned with the ambitions of the Community Benefit Fund. They have previously worked with Spink Comhaltas and Tidy Towns. The Kilkenny Leader partnership also mentioned that they would share information on the Eirgrid fund once approved, and potentially explore any co funding opportunities. They mentioned that they were conscious of not undermining any community objections to the project. Leader funding is not intended for large scale projects and a ceiling of €200,000 currently applies. In most cases, however the finite nature of the funding and the focus of the local development strategy will mean that the average grant is likely to be much lower than the maximum figure. Community based projects may receive up to 75% and 90% rates respectively. Training projects can receive up to 100% funding. So, some level of co funding or community funding is normally required.

Kilkenny LEADER Partnership has supported:

- Ballyragget Playground Committee received €45,534 for the construction of town playground from LEADER
- Kilkenny County Council received €266,206 for Ballyragget village wirescape and associated works
- Kilkenny LEADER Partnership also approved funding for to Kilkenny County Council for the town renovation of Ballyragget.

Laois LEADER Partnership has supported:

- Laois Partnership is actively supportive of the work of the various Tidy Towns Committees in Laois. As part of a recent initiative, the Partnership secured funding to assist 16 local groups to bring in specialist help to draw up 3-Year Management Plans. It is anticipated that these plans will serve as a “road-map” to guide the work of the local groups over the coming years.
- Spink Comhaltas were funded under the Rural Development (LEADER) programme to establish an bank. The purpose of this is to have a collection of instruments available to young people who wish to learn Irish traditional music.

Support for Laois Kilkenny Reinforcement Project

Of the communities identified, there is generally support for the upgrade project and very little impact was noted by communities where works on upgrading the Ballyragget substation and restringing took place.

However, there is some local opposition to the construction of the substation at Coolnabacky with a group known as Ratheniska, Timahoe and Spink (RTS) Action Group maintaining a presence at the entrance to the site every morning. A local Laois Councillor did not want to engage with Eirgrid, whilst the opposition at Coolnabacky was ongoing. Other representatives had more mixed views and felt that some communities might benefit from the fund, or did not feel that their constituents had strong feelings on the EirGrid project.

We spoke with representatives from all the communities identified adjacent to the line, to identify projects and organisations that might be interested in applying for the community funds. Of those who responded, a few highlighted their objections and dissatisfaction with the project. These



respondents stated that the project will divide the community and have a negative impact and they did not feel the community fund should be opened until all issues are resolved.

We have consulted with all these areas and included their suggestions for areas and types of projects that might be supported. The decision to apply for funding is completely at the discretion of the individual community organisations.

6. CROSS COMMUNITY CHALLENGES

The scoping study indicated that the Laois-Kilkenny Community Benefit Fund has the potential to make a significant contribution in the eligible geographic areas, in particular in Ballyragget, Spink and Timahoe which were identified as the key hubs for providing community services and which provided strong feedback on potential community funding.

There were a number of organisations who had projects in need of funding but faced challenges securing funding elsewhere. We have listed below some of the specific local issues that were suggested as a focus for the Community Funds.

- Invest in safer amenities and providing secure access, and upgrading of facilities. Improve buildings, sporting facilities and other amenities to increase participation for all age groups.
- Social inclusion for young and old, and facilities to engage in positive or well-being activities. Older people need support and encouragement to begin socialising again, especially in relation to activities and having safe places to go.
- Loneliness, access to amenities, the need has been amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdown.
- Strong community volunteers, and a younger cohort coming up but need help to learn how to organize.
- Support for those who want to study to pursue personal and community development.
- Drug abuse is an issue and supporting programmes that address drug abuse would be useful.
- Recruitment of volunteers for community work.
- Lacking tourism facilities and promotion, which has been highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic with the increase in “staycationing”.
- Focus on sustainability and climate resilience
- The Covid-19 pandemic has shown the value of community groups and volunteer-led organisations who look to provide and improve facilities for the community. The pandemic has also severely impacted many of the sources of income of these organisations and they need support to ease financial burden.

Based on our discussions with the community and feedback from these groups and others, we see a range of different themes where the funding would support longer term impact and be in line with EirGrid CSR:

- Connecting communities through the provision of both infrastructure, equipment and any upgrading required to key community centres of facilities- community halls, street furniture, town centres, etc.

- Providing services to support older people to get out and about and stay involved, and to share their knowledge and experience.
- Supporting vibrant communities, by encouraging younger people and younger families to connect and stay involved in sport or culture, and providing them places to play.
- Celebrating and sharing the heritage of the areas and attracting new visitors to the area.
- Sustainable communities- helping communities to develop sustainably either through biodiversity projects or encouraging new sustainability initiatives at a community level.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

We asked those we spoke with to identify projects and organisations that will benefit the community, and are already supporting the community. Some of the principles or parameters that have emerged from our discussions are:

- The funding should be focused on communities that are most affected by the project and the key communities identified are all within a three kilometer radius- the main towns and townlands are those mentioned in the report: Ballyragget, Ballyousskill, Ballynakill, Timahoe and Spink- with smaller townlands of Tinalton, Coolnabacky and Heywood.
- There are strong community organisations operating within the proposed community benefit boundaries. They have a strong history/ track record of supporting the community should be supported and have successfully initiated a number of initiatives to create vibrant and connected communities. This funding would support them in continuing and expanding these efforts.
- Most of the projects mentioned would require relative medium to small amounts of funding, but there was a larger town development fund mentioned where larger funding might be required and potentially other infrastructural support. Where larger funding is required a clear plan on how this would be maintained or sustained would be required, along with any ways to ensure running costs are within the means of the community.
- Projects that can be co funded or receive future funding from other sources should be considered as they can also benefit the community.
- All communities along the line should be entitled to funding, and there should be a relatively even spread of funding across both counties.
- The local volunteers are obviously very busy and committed individuals, and it is important to support them where possible with training or personal development and also to encourage them to bring new people on board where possible.
- Larger levels of funding should be available for projects that benefit the entire community, or there is potential to benefit multiple communities- (e.g. river walk or joint heritage trail).
- Across both Laois and Kilkenny, the importance of the longer-term sustainability of projects was emphasised and exploring opportunities for matching funding with Sports Ireland and the Leader programme. The PPN representatives suggested that once off grants need to be backed by solid business plans showing that the project will self-sustain in years to come.



Areas to be covered

Our approach in this scoping study is to be inclusive and open and to reflect needs that the communities themselves identify. We are including the types of areas that should be considered, and these may expand as more groups give us feedback. We received a wide range of suggestions of project types to be supported, and a variety of needs within these projects. At a broad level the main areas for support are:

- Community infrastructure- community halls and outside spaces, playgrounds and river walks.
- Sporting facilities- support for changing spaces, maintenance and developing the grounds.
- Cultural activities- Infrastructure, events, workshops and training
- Environment/ Outside space- Support for equipment to improve outside spaces
- Heritage- Support for heritage groups
- Older person support- Equipment and services to upgrade community facilities
- Younger person support- Provision of spaces and services to improve mental health, activities such as scouting, music and support.

Project Selection/Prioritisation

The main criteria for the projects is that this benefit fund is used to create a longer term benefit for as many people within the community as possible, so we would recommend the following criteria as a way of prioritizing the project selection process:

- Projects should benefit as many people as possible within the community, or a group that is currently underserved.
- Organisations that are applying should have a history of being involved in community development, ideally being part of the local public participation networks.
- Where possible projects should be sustainable, particularly if they have ongoing running costs it would be helpful if projects think about how they can meet future funding or maintenance costs- as this is a once off fund.
- Projects need to be linked to community needs and should show that they have consulted with this group/ reflect their needs.
- Ideally for larger funding we would encourage cross community applications or even applications from multiple communities (e.g. community hall used by multiple groups, connecting walk way.)
- Where the funding is likely to be part of a larger project, it would be useful to provide a range of funding amounts required- to ensure that some level of funding can be provided.
- While multiple applications can be submitted within communities, we would encourage individual organisations to only submit one application.

Structure of the Funds

The EirGrid fund is scaled to reflect the works that are proposed and that have taken place. While the overall fund proposed is €511K, this will be disbursed across three phases. This fund is focusing on how to disburse phase 1 funding of €204K.

- **Phase 1:** 40% - Starting construction (2021)
- **Phase 2:** 30% - Line stringing/cable jointing (2023) TBC
- **Phase 3:** 30% - Energisation (2025) TBC

Within this funding we would recommend the following structure for phase 1:

Large grants: €20,000-40,000 – Projects here should relate to infrastructure or larger community support projects. The funding could be part of a larger project or used to support the development of larger projects through consultancy and plan development. Projects that apply for support in phase 1, could apply for support in phase 2 if this is the first phase of a project- however at present there can be no guarantee of funds in phase 2.

Small to Medium grants: €500- 15,000 – This type of grants are for smaller organisations or types of support that are for smaller expenditures on equipment, small infrastructure, training or other services.

If any of these categories are undersubscribed, or any funds remain after all applications have been reviewed, the remaining amount can be moved to a different category if it is oversubscribed.

8. NEXT STEPS

Next steps

- Follow up to contact communities that have not responded to get their views - welcome any outreach from the Laois Kilkenny Community forum.
- Prepare and share a draft of the scoping study for input and approval from the community forum.

Phase 1 Funding Timeline

- Scoping study circulated for approval by Community Forum – September 2021
- Community forum to sign off Scoping study – Mid-September 2021
- Design of fund presented and support documents prepared – September 2021
- Fund launched and open for application – End of November 2021
- Grant committee to meet – December/January 2021
- Grant offers made for Year 1 and approved – February 2022

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: Organisations who were sent the survey, not all of whom responded, we also got responses from community members (the survey was also forwarded on by the Laois Kilkenny Community Forum members and interviewees).

GAA clubs

Lisdowney GAA Club, Ballyraggett, Co. Kilkenny
Colt GAA Club, Raheen, Co. Laois
The Harps GAA, Loughnamuck, Co. Laois
Ballypickas GAA Club, Ballypickas Lower, Co. Laois
Crettyard GAA Club, Crettyard, Co. Laois
Erins Own (Kilkenny) GAA Club, Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny
Ballinakill GAA Club, Ballinakill, Co. Laois
St. Joseph's GAA Club, Kellyville, Co. Laois
Timahoe GAA Club, Timahoe, Co. Laois
Ballyroan Abbey GAA Club, Ballyroan, Co. Laois
St. Patrick's Ballyraggett GAA, Ballyraggett, Co. Kilkenny
Park/Ratheniska GAA Club, Ratheniska, Co. Laois

Other sports clubs

Deen Celtic, Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny
Castlecomer Golf Club, Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny
Western Riding, Timahoe, Co. Laois

Other Community

Durrow Scout Den, Durrow, Co. Laois

Schools and Childcare

Heywood Community School, Ballinakill, Co. Laois
Castlecomer Community School, Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny

Mhuire Fatima Catholic National School, Timahoe, Co. Laois
Knock National School (Scoil Naisiunta Molaise) Knock, Abbeyleix, Co. Laois
Croía Childcare, Ballyraggett, Co. Kilkenny
The Wishing Well Creche & Montessori, Ballyraggett, Co. Kilkenny
Ballinakill Mixed National School, Ballinakill, Co. Laois

Older people's services

Sue Ryder Foundation, Ballyroan, Co. Laois
Brookhaven Nursing Home, Ballyraggett, Co. Kilkenny
Droimnin Nursing Home (Brookhaven Healthcare), Co. Laois

Outdoor amenities

Irish Fly-Fishing & Game Shooting Museum, Attanagh, Co. Laois

Others

Ballyragget Development Association, Ballyragget, Co. Kilkenny
Kilsaran Ballinakill, Co. Laois
Timahoe La Céile, Timahoe, Co. Laois
Timahoe Early Intervention Centre, Timahoe, Co. Laois
Tidy Towns, Timahoe, Co. Laois

APPENDIX 2: Full list of public representatives or local development interviewees

(invites were sent out to representatives from the Carlow-Kilkenny constituency, the Laois-Offaly constituency, Castlecomer Municipal District, Graiguecullen-Portarlington Municipal District and Portlaoise Municipal District, - the list below were available to be interviewed).

1. Councillor Mary Hilda Cavanagh (Fine Gael), Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny
2. Councillor Pat Fitzpatrick (Fianna Fáil), Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny
3. Councillor John Brennan (Fine Gael), Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny
4. Councilor Pdraig Fleming (Fianna Fáil), Graiguecullen-Portarlington, Co. Laois
5. Councillor Aisling Moran (Fine Gael), Graiguecullen-Portarlington, Co. Laois
6. Councillor Tom Mulhall (Fine Gael), Graiguecullen-Portarlington, Co. Laois
7. Councillor Paschal McEvoy (Fianna Fáil), Graiguecullen-Portarlington, Co. Laois
8. Laois Public Participation Network
9. Kilkenny Public Participation Network
10. Kilkenny LEADER Partnership
11. Laois LEADER Partnership



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2. <https://www.kilkennypeople.ie/news/home/243676/ballyouskill-battling-hard-to-prosper-as-it-looks-to-the-future.html>
3. <http://www.eirgridgroup.com/site-files/library/EirGrid/Appendix%20F-2%20Assessment%20of%20Alternative%20400-110kV%20Substation%20.pdf>