



EirGrid.ie

The Celtic Interconnector

# Community Benefit Fund Strategy

March 2023



Our community benefit funds stem directly from EirGrid’s corporate strategy 2020 – 2025. Launched in September 2019 the strategy implemented a fresh approach to stakeholder engagement as a key pillar of how EirGrid fulfils its duty as Ireland’s grid operator. This refreshed corporate strategy has been instrumental in how we have developed engagement with our stakeholders over the subsequent years. Meaningful and effective engagement is essential for EirGrid to achieve our purpose - to transform the power system for future generations.

Our community benefit fund recognises the importance of local communities who support our work. A community benefit scheme has been created in proportion to the scale of the project and we have established a community forum on the Celtic Interconnector project to ensure the scheme is designed for the local community, by the local community.

EirGrid will use the Celtic Interconnector Community Benefit Fund Strategy to structure how we work with experts and stakeholders on the ground. This strategy is key to how we collaborate with partners and communities to achieve a cleaner energy future together.

This strategy has been prepared for EirGrid by SECAD Partnership CLG, the Celtic Interconnector Community Forum and the wider Celtic Interconnector communities.

We would like to sincerely thank SECAD and the local communities for their work and input to date.

This fund will provide an opportunity for communities to transform their area and leave a positive legacy in the area hosting the Celtic Interconnector infrastructure.

We look forward to further collaboration and engagement with all our stakeholders as this project progresses.



SECAD Partnership CLG  
[www.secad.ie](http://www.secad.ie)



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# Introduction

The €2.4 million Celtic Interconnector Community Benefit Fund has been established by EirGrid, in recognition of the importance of the local communities who support our work and the temporary disruption which may be caused within proximity of the cable line during the construction phase of the project. The fund will be delivered in three phases over the project period 2023-2026 and will focus on three core streams: **Community, Sustainability and Biodiversity.**

Since its appointment as Fund Administrator in July 2022, SECAD Partnership CLG has worked closely with EirGrid, the Celtic Interconnector Community Forum, local communities and stakeholders to develop a community benefit strategy relevant to the geographical area of the project. Significant stakeholder and public engagement are at the core of the development of this strategy, and the outcome of this engagement underpins the strategic focus for the fund.

This is a strategy that has been designed collaboratively for the local community, by the local community. It is anticipated that the fund will actively support communities within the Celtic Interconnector project area to deliver on projects and initiatives which strengthen opportunities and address challenges across the three funding streams.

This strategy covers the period of the Celtic Interconnector Community Benefit Fund and is intended to guide the process for prioritising, selecting and supporting projects for investment under this initiative.



Image 1: Members of the SECAD team and EirGrid Public Engagement team

## About EirGrid

EirGrid develops, manages and operates Ireland's electricity grid. We are responsible for the safe, secure and reliable supply of Ireland's electricity. EirGrid is also leading the secure transition of the grid to a sustainable low-carbon future.

The grid brings power from where it is generated to where it is needed throughout Ireland. It supplies power directly to industry and businesses that use large amounts of electricity. The grid also brings power from generators to the domestic network that supplies the electricity you use every day in homes, businesses, schools and hospitals.

This critical infrastructure supports the current development of our society and economy. But just as importantly, work carried out now to improve the grid will help to create a more sustainable future for future generations.

## About SECAD Partnership CLG

SECAD Partnership CLG is a local development company that works with a variety of stakeholders in rural areas including community and voluntary groups, disadvantaged target groups, job seekers, businesses (including private and social enterprise), farmers, schools and the corporate sector. SECAD facilitates a wide range of funds and services including social investment and employment support programmes implemented on behalf of several Irish Government Departments, State Bodies and energy clients. SECAD currently delivers major programmes such as LEADER and Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) along with other smaller schemes and initiatives, including a number of community benefit funds across Ireland.

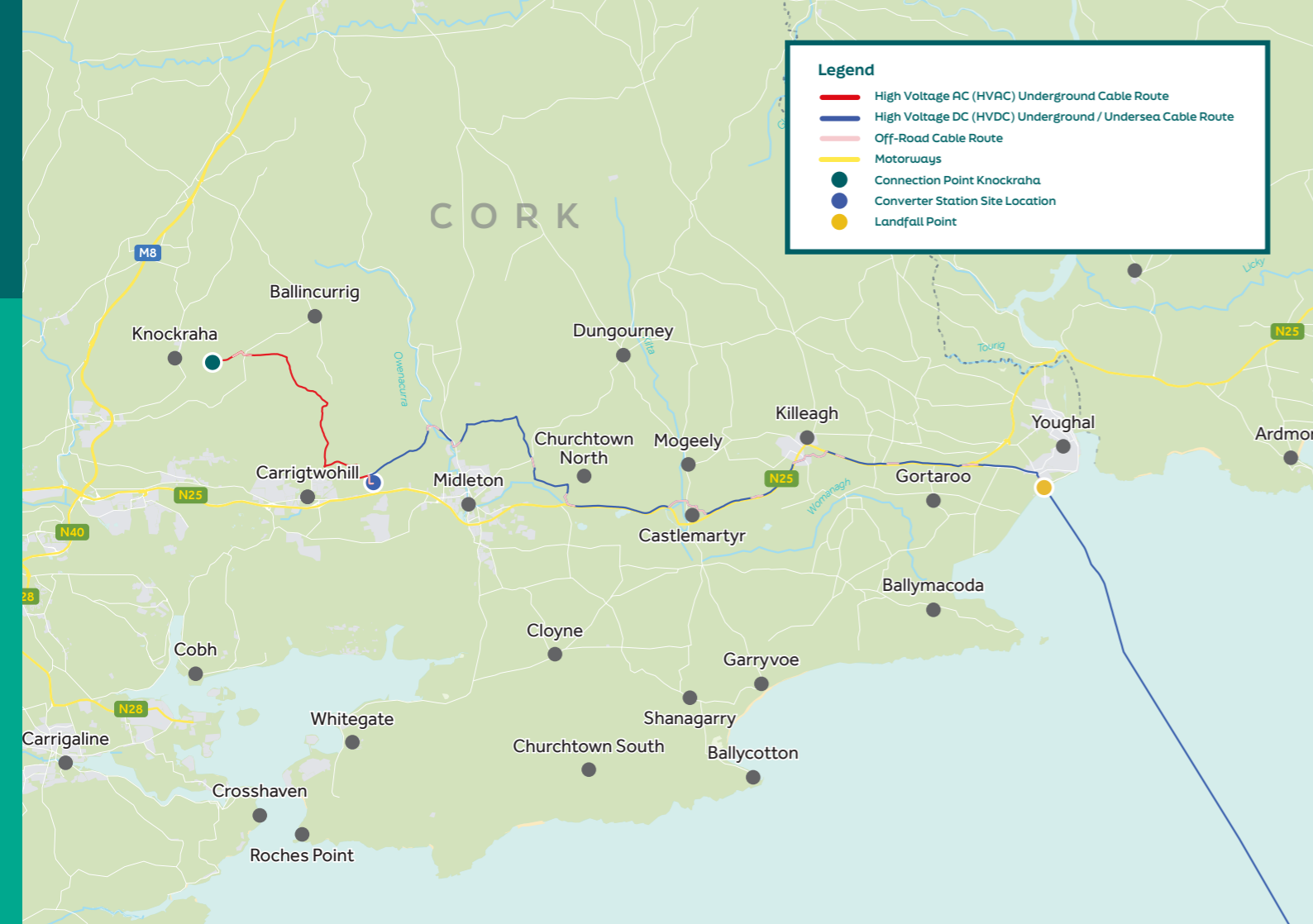
## The Celtic Interconnector Project

The Celtic Interconnector is an electrical cable link which will enable the movement of electricity between Ireland and France. Developed by EirGrid and its French counterpart Réseau de Transport d'Électricité (RTE), the Celtic Interconnector is a 700-megawatt high-voltage submarine power cable linking the southern coast of Ireland and the north-west coast of France. It will be the first interconnector between Ireland and continental Europe.

The Celtic Interconnector is a key part of EirGrid's strategic goal to transform Ireland's power system and increase the use of renewable electricity. Interconnection with France makes the power system more resilient and efficient and facilitates renewables as a primary energy source on the national grid. The construction phase of the project is due to commence in mid-2023 and it is expected to be complete and operational by 2026.







## EirGrid's Community Benefit Fund Policy

EirGrid's enhanced Community Benefit Fund Policy recognises the importance of the local communities who support their work. Under this policy, a community benefit scheme is created in proportion to the scale of the relevant project.

Under this new approach, the policy allows communities to gain from fund investment across three core streams:

- Community
- Sustainability
- Biodiversity

The decisions on how these funds are prioritised in local communities are the result of open, participatory and inclusive community consultations which result in the development of a strategy which is specific to each project area's needs.

The overall aim of these funds is to leave a positive legacy in communities hosting electrical infrastructure.

Image 2: Celtic Interconnector Project Map (Source: EirGrid)

## EirGrid's Public Engagement Strategy

EirGrid's Public Engagement Strategy reinforces the company's commitment to put communities at the heart of decision-making through early and regular engagement. A critical innovation under this approach is the creation of representative community forums at an early stage in the project development phase. The forum represents the communities' interests in the development and delivery phases of the project and plays a key role in ensuring community involvement in the development of the community benefit strategy. The Celtic Interconnector Community Forum was established in June 2021 and represents stakeholders in the project area.

The Community Forum serves to bring together key stakeholders in the community to:

- a. Represent the views of their organisation or community in relation to the project and its proposals.
- b. Consider the project and provide guidance on local needs and priorities.
- c. Assist in enabling the resolution of local issues resulting from the project in a timely manner.
- d. Support the project team in identifying local sources of information and analysis, strategies and proposals which may impact on, or need to be taken account of during project delivery.
- e. Provide feedback at key stages in the delivery of the project.
- f. Facilitate a 'local voice' and communicate information to a wider group of regional and local stakeholders.



# The Celtic Interconnector Community Benefit Fund

Based on the scale of the project, a community benefit fund has been established for the Celtic Interconnector area with a value of €2.4 million.

This is divided into 3 streams with an equal balance of funds across each stream as follows:

- Community stream: €800,000
- Sustainability stream: €800,000
- Biodiversity stream: €800,000

The community benefit fund will be released on a phased basis as the Celtic Interconnector project progresses.

The anticipated timeline for release of funds is as follows:

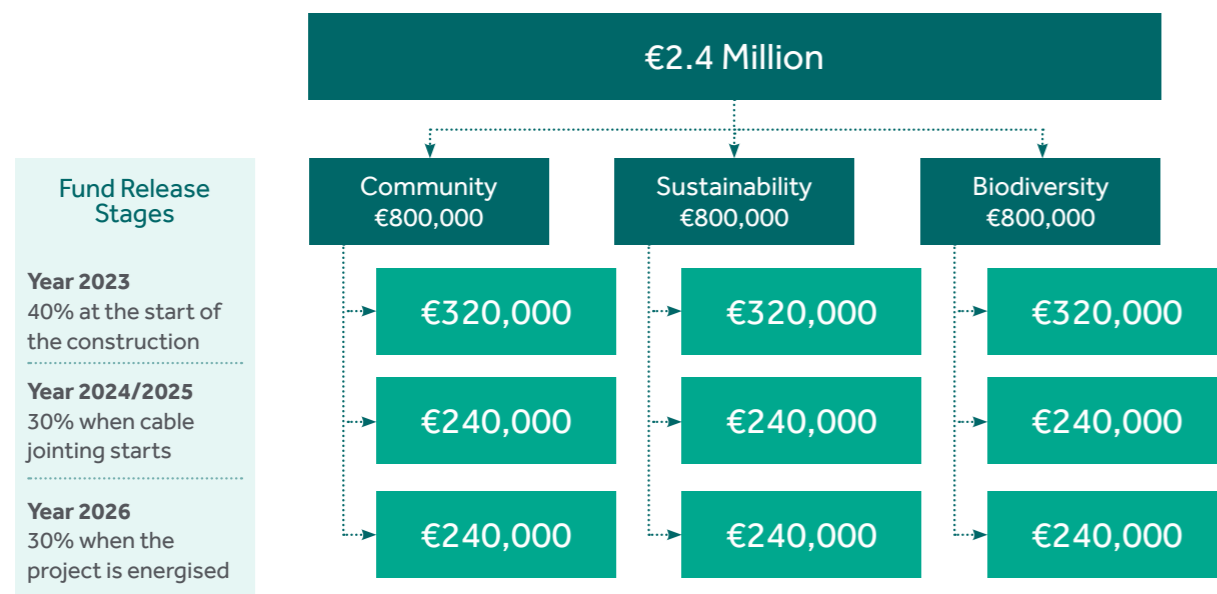


Figure 1: Stages of the fund and timeline

# The Policy Context

Current community, sustainability, and biodiversity policy literature at national, regional and local level has contributed to setting the context for the development of this strategy. This integrated approach ensures that the community benefit fund strategy aligns with wider policies and will provide local communities with greater opportunity to benefit from a broader range of supports. Policies, strategies and action plans considered can be found in Appendix 1.

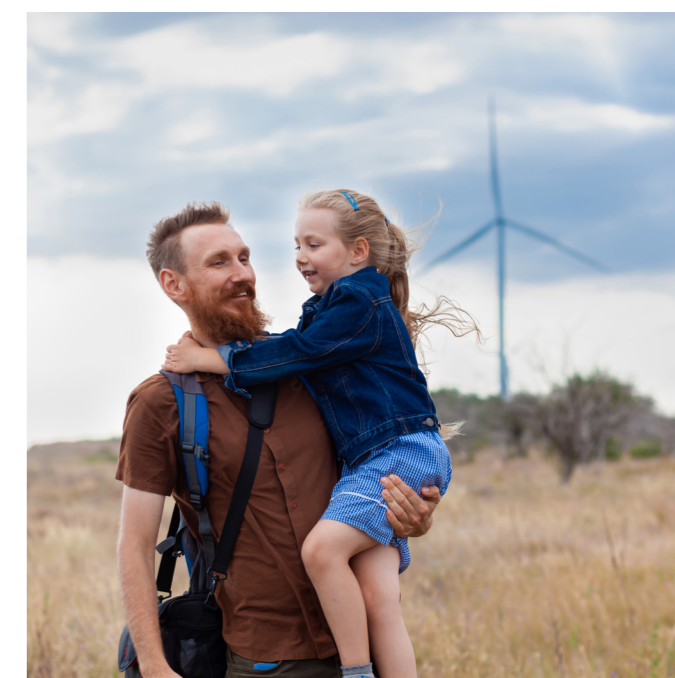
At a national level, government policies and plans such as 'Project Ireland 2040', 'Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 - Our Rural Future' and 'Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024' have been considered as relevant to the development of this strategy. Throughout this literature, a consistent focus on promoting an integrated, cross-sectoral, collaborative approach to the development of rural areas exists. The power for communities to research, develop and implement actions and activities which address specific local needs is critical to the growth of sustainable, vibrant rural communities.

Additionally, 'Climate Action Plan 2023 - Changing Ireland for the Better' is an important driver to this work. The plan is integral to the National Development Plan 2021-2030 and puts climate solutions at

the very heart of our social and economic development. It is acknowledged that the national plans have a keen focus on system change and that these changes in turn will impact on local activity. To achieve the change needed however, alongside the actors at national, and regional level, Individuals and communities will continue to be key drivers of the low-carbon transition required by society and they are at the centre of this benefit fund strategy.

At a local level, this strategy also seeks to support the objectives of the Cork County Development Plan and Cork County Local and Economic Community Plan (LECP). The purpose of these plans is to set out the objectives and actions needed to promote and support the economic and community development of County Cork, both by Cork County Council, and in partnership with other economic and community development stakeholders.

Where local town/village-based plans and strategies exist, these have also been considered in the shaping of this strategy.





# Key Policy Trends

A number of key interlinking policy trends have been identified which have relevance across the three streams of the Celtic Interconnector Community Benefit Fund.



## Social Inclusion

Across all policy literature, a growing emphasis is placed on supporting increased participation in society, with a particular focus on inclusion of under-represented groups. With increasingly diverse communities, it is critical that future planning and development leaves no-one behind. Diversity of experiences, abilities, identities and cultures should be acknowledged in all aspects of development and reducing inequalities must be promoted as a means of achieving greater social inclusion.



## Smart Villages and Rural Towns

The EU Action for Smart Villages initiative was launched by the European Commission in 2017. This approach advocates for community groups and individuals to explore and implement practical solutions to overcome challenges in their towns and villages. Communities are encouraged and supported to identify solutions which address shortcomings in local services such as energy, transport, social services and retail. This approach has the potential



## Community Health and Wellbeing

A more holistic way of thinking about overall community health and wellbeing is highlighted across the policy literature. On a national and local scale, an emphasis is placed on supporting actions which focus on improving quality of life, ensuring equality and addressing economic, environmental and social influences. Collaboration, interaction and co-ordination at a local, level can significantly improve physical and mental wellbeing for all in the community. Social interaction and supporting social connectedness are key to building strong communities for health and wellbeing.



## Outdoor Recreation

In the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is increasing policy focus on encouraging communities and individuals to get outdoors and get active in nature. The community and wellbeing benefits of outdoor recreation are recognised across national policy and reflected in local area plans. The development and promotion of outdoor recreational amenities encourages greater community activity, creates more vibrant and connected communities, supports connection to the natural environment and supports healthy, active lifestyles.

to greatly improve quality of life for people living in rural areas and can play a key role in the development and sustainability of rural Ireland.



## Protection of the Natural Environment

Current environmental policy recognises the critical and urgent need to support and protect the natural environment on a global scale. On a local scale, the County Development Plan supports the protection and conservation of County Cork's green infrastructure assets such as waterways, coasts, mature trees, wetlands, woodlands and hedgerows. Approaches promoting harmonisation, connectivity and common standards of good practice are encouraged to ensure the natural environment is sensitively managed and protected.



## Promotion of Biodiversity

Biodiversity is increasingly recognised as an adaptation tool for other sectors with investment of the restoration and sustainable management of eco systems, providing multiple benefits. Both the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan for 2021-2025 and the work currently underway regarding the next National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023 -2027 are key to the positioning of Biodiversity as a central theme in this work.



## Sustainability

Climate change considerations permeate the policy landscape at a local, national and international scale. Commitments to reducing carbon emissions and adapting to the impacts of climate change run from the UN Sustainable Development goals right through to local action plans and strategies. The transition to carbon neutrality requires a collaborative effort by government, business, communities, and individuals. The importance of ensuring that the transition to a climate-resilient and carbon-neutral economy is fair, equitable and inclusive is widely recognised. To achieve this, communities must be supported to build resilience, participate in renewable and low carbon energy projects and implement ambitious changes at a local level.





# Sustainable Development Goals

The Celtic Interconnector Community Benefit Fund will be underpinned by the objectives of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The Sustainable Development Goals are a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and improve the lives and prospects of everyone, everywhere. The 17 Goals were adopted by all UN Member States in 2015, as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which set out a 15-year plan to achieve the Goals.

Ireland's Sustainable Development Goals National Implementation Plan 2022-2024 provides a whole-of-government approach to implementing these goals. A key strategic objective of this plan is to achieve greater partnerships for delivery of the SDGs, with an emphasis on the active role which civil society and communities can play. The call to 'think global, act local' highlights the fact that universal challenges can only be met through local action.

*"SDGs provide a critical framework for community development as they reflect the social justice, economic justice and environmental justice concerns of community work and community workers and designate the processes of participation, empowerment and collective action required to achieve change."* (Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: 5 Year Strategy to Support the Community and Voluntary Sector 2019-2024, Government of Ireland)

To support this call to action, the Celtic Interconnector Community Benefit Fund, will place a strong focus on supporting initiatives that align with one or more of the Sustainable Development Goals. The fund will encourage creative and innovative thinking around providing solutions on a local level which address sustainability challenges in communities. Each call for funding will require applicants to demonstrate how their project aligns with the SDGs and explain how it contributes to the achievement of the goals.

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Image 3: The Sustainable Development Goals





# Area Profile

The Celtic Interconnector infrastructure development occurs in a linear pattern which runs from Knockraha to Youghal in east Cork. The area falls within the administrative boundaries of two municipal districts - East Cork and Cobh.



Key Settlements in close proximity of the Celtic Interconnector Project Area		
Small Towns	Medium Towns	Large Towns
Killeagh Knockraha Mogeely Leamlara Ladysbridge	Youghal Carrigtwohill Castlemartyr	Midleton

## Demographics

According to 2016 census figures, the total population for the area outlined in the map above is approximately 32,200. It is a growing population and predicted to further grow in line with housing and infrastructure plans outlined in the County Development Plan. Settlements within the project area have relatively young populations with an average age slightly below the national average. Overall population trends also show an ageing population with an increase in the age groups 60 – 80+ years.

## Incidence of Disadvantage

According to Pobal's HP Deprivation Index, the area comprises 'Small Area Populations' (SAPs) ranging from 'Very Disadvantaged' to 'Affluent'. There are no SAPs classified as 'Extremely Disadvantaged' and 4 SAPs classified as 'Very Disadvantaged' which are located in the Youghal Urban area and represent under 1% of the total population of the area. The overall area average Deprivation Score is 0.53 which is classed as 'marginally above average'.

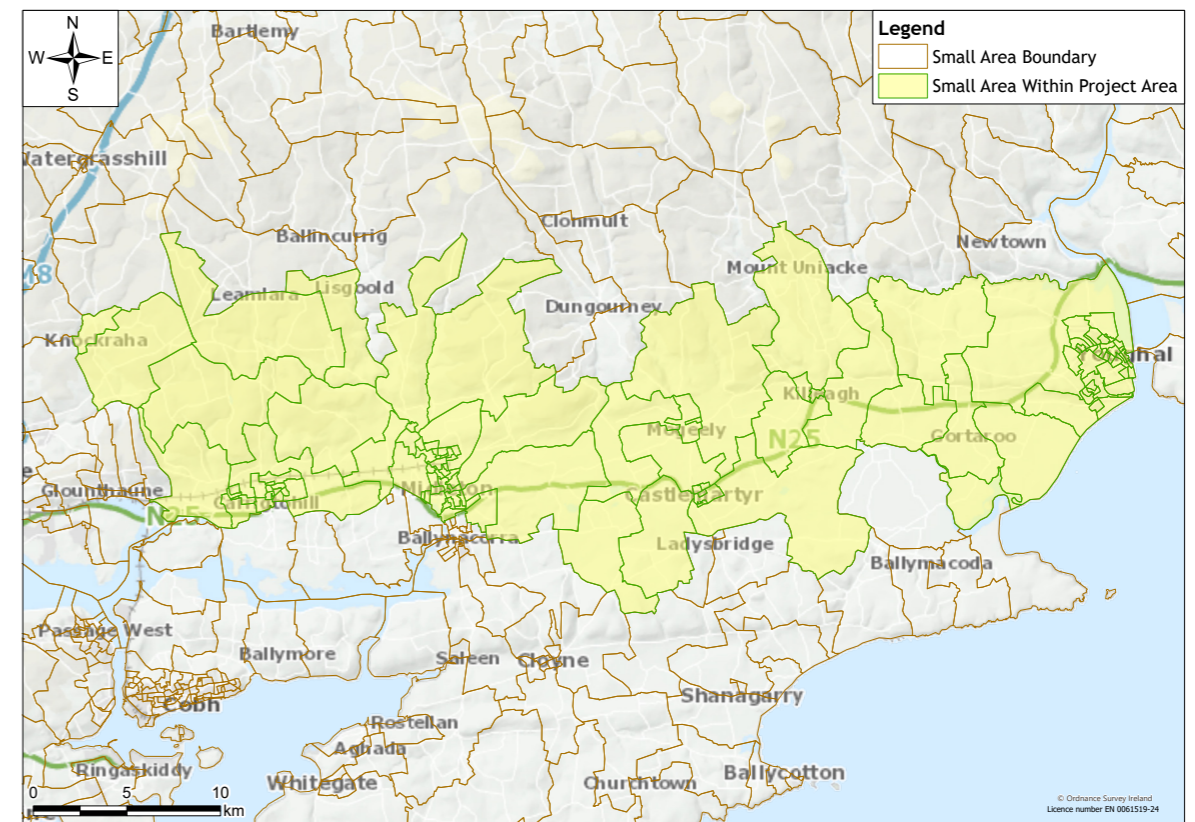


Image 4: Small Area Populations within the Project Area (Source: Pobal, 2022)

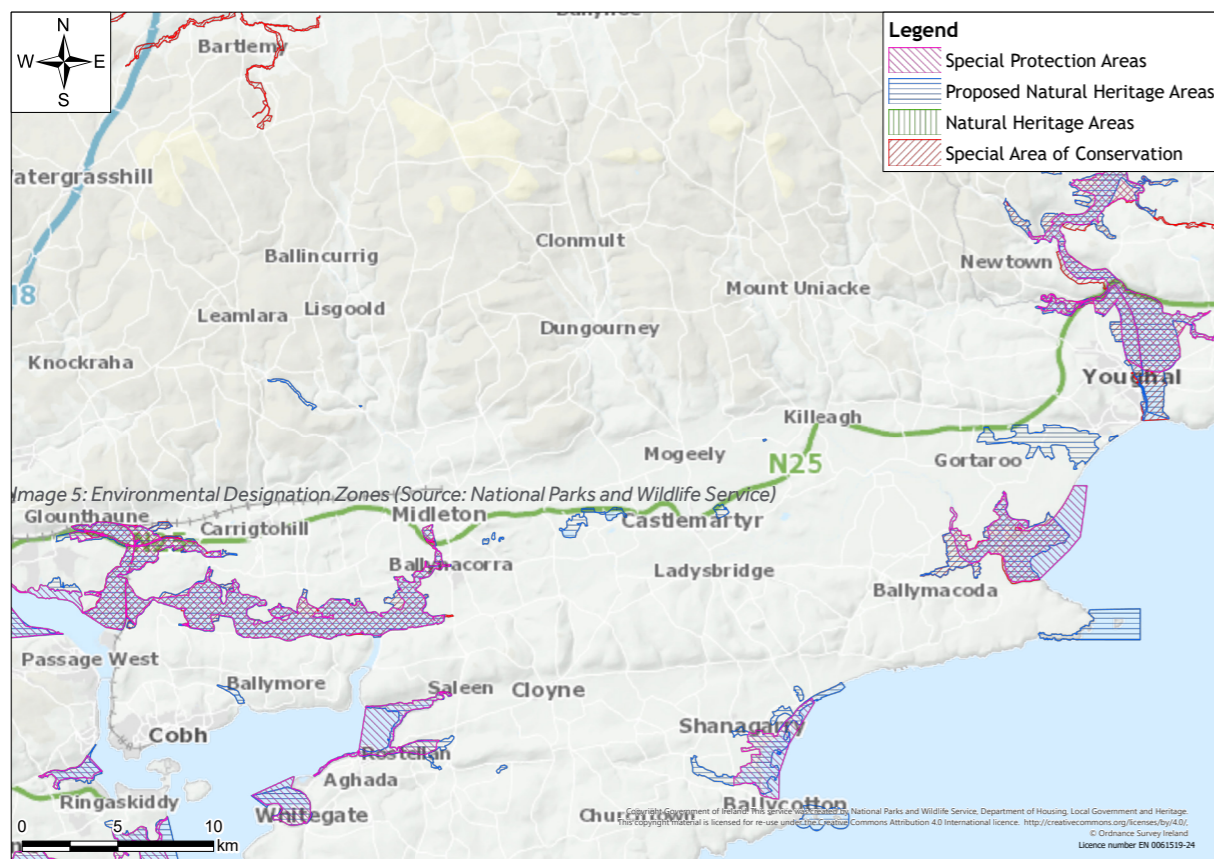
## Economic Activity and Infrastructure

The east Cork area is particularly diverse, with communities that range from coastal to deeply rural, and from peri-urban to peripheral. Consequently, the economy of the area is also diverse, ranging from the commuter belts of Cork and Waterford Cities, to maritime and agricultural.

The countryside of east Cork is a key natural asset and countryside recreation is an important component of modern living. It is valued highly for its social, economic, health and educational benefits. There is considerable recreational potential that is available in the rural environment of the area and the potential role of this sector in terms of rural diversification and supporting the rural economy is significant.

Providing more efficient transport options is also a crucial part of the solution to future economic, energy, environmental and social inclusion challenges in the area. In particular, the provision of transport choice to those living in rural areas is important in bringing a better quality of life to citizens.

There are significant tourism opportunities due to the scenic landscape, natural resources, heritage, proposed greenways and cycleways, and existing key tourism projects in the area. Renewable energy also offers sustainable alternatives to a dependency on fossil fuels in east Cork. It is also a way of reducing harmful greenhouse emissions and a reduced reliance on imported fuels having a positive impact on the local environment. Opportunities to increase the level of community participation in renewable energy projects can increase the benefit to communities from local renewable energy projects.



### Environmental Designations

Within the vicinity of the Celtic Interconnector cable route, there is a range of designated environmental sites which are protected by national and European legislation. Some sites have both onshore and offshore designations. These include Special Protection Areas, Proposed Natural Heritage Areas and Special Areas of Conservation.

# How We Developed This Strategy



### Approach and Methodology

To place communities at the heart of this strategy, a collaborative, ‘bottom-up approach’ has been adopted whereby local communities and stakeholders have been provided with an opportunity to inform and shape the community benefit fund priorities for the Celtic Interconnector project area. This process involved an in-depth community consultation which took place over the period July 2022 – February 2023.

The purpose of this consultation was to:

- engage communities, individuals and local stakeholders in strategy development.
- allow as many voices as possible to be heard when shaping strategic priorities.
- ensure maximum input from those impacted and living in the Area of Benefit.

### Overview of the Consultation Process

The table below outlines the activities undertaken to engage and consult with local communities in the development of this strategy.

Consultation Activity	Description
Community Forum Strategy Workshops	3 x Community Forum workshops carried out with Community Forum members to explore strategic approaches and opportunities to maximise impact of investment for local communities.
Community Forum Member Interviews	Interviews were conducted with Community Forum members to identify local plans, priorities, opportunities and challenges for communities within the project area.
Online Community Consultation Survey	496 online submissions were received. Approximately 70% submissions were received from individuals with 30% from community representatives and stakeholders.
Information Drop-in Sessions	6 x drop-in information sessions were held across the area in Knockraha, Carrigtwohill, Midleton, Ballintotis, Killeagh and Youghal. The purpose of these sessions was to provide information on the consultation process and provide assistance with the online survey if required.
Online Information Session	An online evening information session was held to provide details of the community benefit fund and the online consultation process.
Meetings with Relevant Agency Stakeholders	As part of the strategy development process, interviews were held with a range of stakeholders including Local Authority Staff, Coillte, SEAI, PPN and Social Finance Providers.



### Key Stakeholders

In planning for the community consultation, a number of stakeholders were identified as key contributors to the development of this strategy. These stakeholders have played a vital role in ensuring that the fund is shaped around the opportunities and needs of those living in local communities.



### The Celtic Interconnector Community Forum

The Community Forum has played a significant role in supporting the development of this strategy. Through active engagement and participation in workshops, consultations and discussions, Forum members have advocated for the needs and priorities of local communities ensured that these have been reflected throughout this document.

Forum members will continue to play a key role in the delivery of this strategy through actively promoting the Community Benefit Fund in their area and encouraging organisations to engage.

### Online Community Consultation Survey

Through engagement with the Community Forum, a range of thematic priorities emerged across the project area alongside a number of challenges where local needs were not currently being met. These considerations informed the development and design of an online consultation survey which opened on 23rd November 2022 and remained open for submissions until 20th December 2022.

All those living or operating within a two kilometre radius of the Celtic Interconnector route were invited to make submissions, including individual households, community and voluntary organisations and local stakeholders. This was supported by a number of information events held online and in community locations in close proximity to the project area.

Just under five hundred submissions were received via the online portal. The consultation engaged with various local groups and individuals representing a broad remit of different population cohorts, activities and geographic areas of relevance.

The high level of local participation and engagement in the process indicates a genuine desire for local communities to ensure that this investment meets local needs and priorities over the lifetime of the community benefit fund.

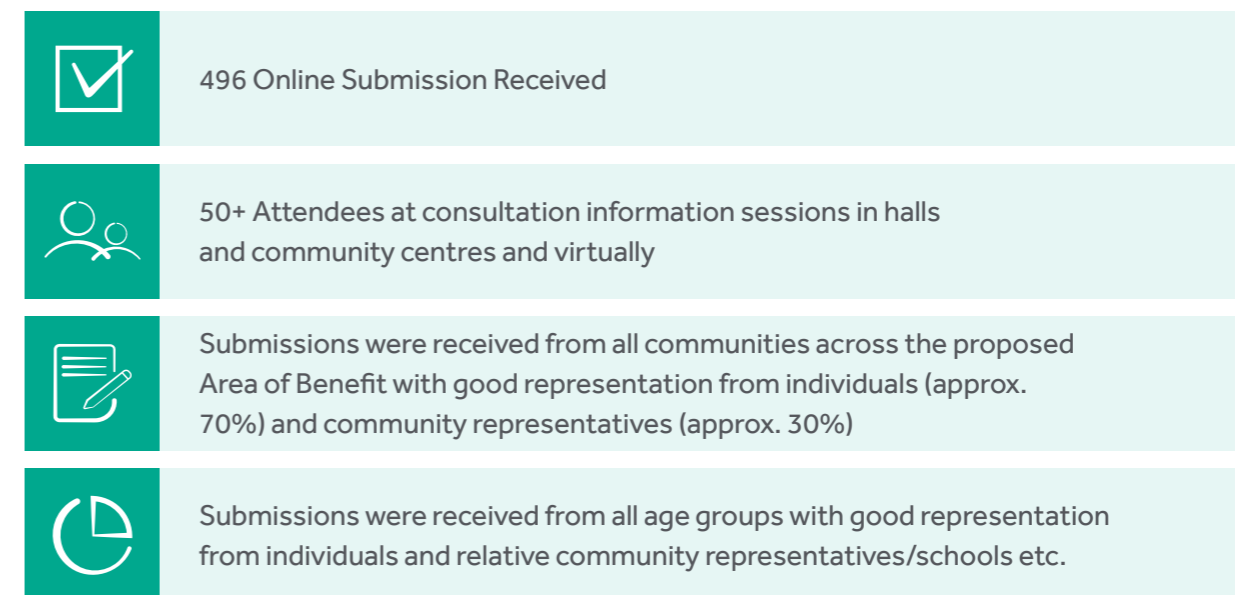


Figure 3: Engagement with the Online Community Consultation Survey

### Local Stakeholder Agency Consultations

Many key local stakeholders, agencies and groups participated in the online survey and a number of short interviews were also held with agencies and organisations where potential collaborations were identified as part of the community consultation process. This included representatives from the Local Authority, PPN, Coillte, SEAI and social finance providers.

Some important observations, recommendations and inputs were gathered through this process and can be summarised as follows:

- The Community Benefit Fund has significant potential to provide valuable match funding for a number of existing funding programmes.
- Communities should be encouraged to engage with SEAI to establish themselves as Sustainable Energy Communities and develop their energy masterplans. This would allow for a set of actions to be identified that could be supported through the Community Benefit Fund and other funding streams such as LEADER and the Community Energy Scheme (formerly Better Energy Communities).
- Providing support for Animation / Planning / Co-ordination / Facilitation costs has the potential to enable communities to establish impactful initiatives and projects across the area of benefit.
- While many agencies are keen to work with and support new community projects and initiatives, there are often complex

compliance and regulatory requirements to be met which can be difficult for community groups to navigate.

- There is great potential for communities to 'think outside the box' in developing their projects. Communities should be encouraged to use their imaginations to create innovative, vibrant project proposals which ensure their local areas are attractive places to live, work and visit.
- The Sustainable Development Goals should play a strong role in shaping the development of the strategy.
- It is important that the fund is accessible to smaller and new groups and adequate support is provided to assist them with their applications.

### Needs Analysis and Data Review

Data gathered from the consultation process was analysed and categorised in order to identify local priorities and needs. A SWOT analysis was conducted (see Appendix 3) to greater understand the opportunities and challenges for communities within the local area and to identify supports which may be required to facilitate new projects and ideas. The findings of this process have informed the strategic priorities for the Community Benefit Fund.



Figure 4: Collaborative process for applying consultation findings to strategic recommendations



# The Celtic Interconnector Community Benefit Fund Strategy

The following outlines the strategic approach for the delivery of the Celtic Interconnector Community Benefit Fund within the framework of the EirGrid Community Benefit Fund Policy.

The strategy is outlined in a series of 'strategic statements' that have emerged from the inputs received across the consultation process, guidance and advice received from the Celtic Interconnector Community Forum and the experience brought to this process by the EirGrid and SECAD teams.

This strategy covers the period of the Celtic Interconnector Community Benefit Fund and is intended to guide the process for prioritising, selecting, and supporting projects for investment under this initiative.

## Overarching Strategic Principles

The following principles underpin the Celtic Interconnector Community Benefit Fund strategy:

- The fund shall support projects which are community-led
- The fund shall seek to leave a positive legacy within communities which host Celtic Interconnector infrastructure
- The fund shall support projects which align with the Sustainable Development Goals
- The fund shall be delivered using a fair and balanced approach.

## Area of Benefit

A 2 kilometre area of benefit (AOB) will be applied to the cable line and priority will be given to projects located within this zone. Evaluation criteria will be weighted to prioritise projects closest to the cable line. In areas, however, where the nearest main service centre is outside of the 2 kilometre zone, projects and initiatives may be considered where a proven direct benefit to residents within the AOB can be demonstrated.

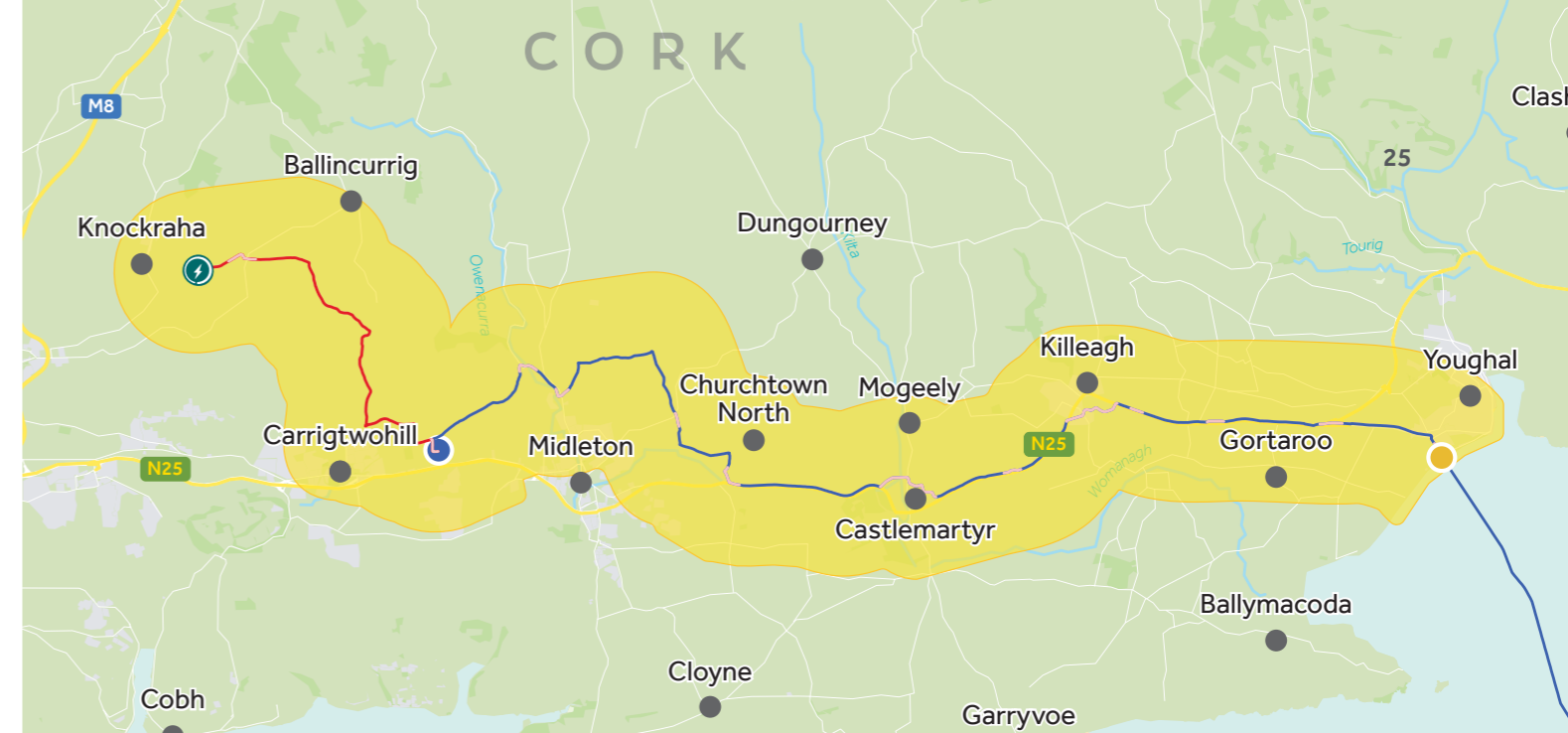


Image 6: Map demonstrating 2km Area of Benefit

## Fund Priorities

The fund will support projects which align with:

- ✓ Priorities identified through the community consultation
- ✓ EirGrid Community Benefit Fund Policy
- ✓ Sustainable Development Goals

A broad range of local priorities under each of the three Community Benefit Fund streams were identified through the local consultation process.

## Community Stream

The community stream aims to reinforce community cohesion, wellbeing and education. It will support communities to implement projects which leave a positive legacy for those living within the Area of Benefit.

Priorities under this stream include:

- ✓ Development of outdoor recreation space
- ✓ Development and enhancement of community meeting space
- ✓ Development and upgrade of sports facilities
- ✓ Youth facilities and initiatives
- ✓ Town and village enhancement
- ✓ Promoting accessibility and inclusion
- ✓ Supporting culture, heritage, community-led tourism and festivals
- ✓ Community wellbeing initiatives
- ✓ Addressing dereliction
- ✓ Integration of new communities





## Sustainability Stream

The sustainability stream aims to enable communities to take positive sustainable action across a broad range of activity. This includes transforming how communities think about, generate and use energy and resources. It will also support communities to implement projects which address climate change, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, strengthen resilience and contribute to an inclusive and sustainable future for people and planet.

Priorities under this stream include:

- ✓ Community renewable energy initiatives
- ✓ Community building energy upgrades
- ✓ Sustainable energy communities
- ✓ Cycling and walking infrastructure
- ✓ Community transport
- ✓ Community gardens and 'grow your own'
- ✓ The circular economy, waste management and recycling initiatives
- ✓ Supporting sustainability through schools
- ✓ Training and education
- ✓ Establishment and development of collaborations and networks

## Biodiversity Stream

The biodiversity stream aims to contribute to significantly improving the biodiversity of an area and ensure its ongoing sustainability, leaving a lasting positive biodiversity legacy.

Proposed biodiversity projects must comply with relevant environmental licensing. While communities will own their projects, they must have a strict inspection schedule and comply with relevant regulations.

Priorities under this stream include:

- ✓ Conservation of lakes, forests, rivers and coasts
- ✓ Enhancement of greenways, walkways and cycle routes
- ✓ Trails
- ✓ Pollinators, parks and gardens
- ✓ Native tree-planting and community woodlands
- ✓ Enhancing infrastructure and information at biodiversity sites
- ✓ Training, education and information
- ✓ Management of invasive species
- ✓ Research, mapping and specialist ecology support
- ✓ Digitalisation of biodiversity information
- ✓ Inter and cross-community collaborations

## Grant Size and Value

- The fund will support legacy projects.
- The fund will facilitate small projects.

The consultation process indicated a broad range of projects and initiatives requiring varying investment levels. In line with these findings, the fund will support small to large-scale projects with grant awards ranging from €1,000 - €125,000.

## Large-scale Investment Projects

- The fund will support large-scale investment projects which will be of benefit to the entire community and engage multiple local user groups.

Large-scale capital, facilities and equipment projects must demonstrate how they will be of benefit to the entire community and engage multiple local user groups. It is expected that, where other applicable funding streams exist, the community benefit fund will be utilised as matching or additional finance.

An exception to the maximum grant amount may be considered for a significant, high-impact, area wide project or initiative.



Image 7: EirGrid supporting Sustainability



Image 8: EirGrid supporting Biodiversity



### Umbrella Projects

- ✓ The fund will support new, multi-community and smaller groups/initiatives through 'umbrella projects'.

The fund will support new, multi-community and smaller groups initiatives through 'umbrella projects'. An umbrella project is where a lead applicant, such as a Community Council, might make an application on behalf of several smaller groups or projects within the community. The lead applicant can "bundle" together a number of sub-projects or initiatives and will take responsibility for managing administrative and compliance requirements of the overall grant application. This can help shorten the application process for small beneficiaries, reduce the amount of paperwork and make it possible to involve target groups that would otherwise be difficult to reach.

### Types of Funding Support

Through the community consultation process, a variety of supports were identified as necessary to develop and implement impactful projects across all three streams. This strategy aims to provide investment which will support communities to build on opportunities and overcome challenges to developing impactful projects.

The fund will support community projects through grant investment in:

- ✓ Capital investment
- ✓ Purchase of equipment
- ✓ Technical support
- ✓ Training
- ✓ Research
- ✓ Capacity building

### Technical Support

- ✓ The fund will support communities to procure specialist skilled technical expertise required to support a project for a specific purpose such as to research, plan and finalise details for high-impact projects

Communities will be supported to procure professional expertise where it is deemed critical to the development of high-impact projects or initiatives (e.g. qualified and experienced project manager/ consultant/ engineer/ accountant / architect/ ecologist/ etc.).

### Land Purchase

- ✓ Land purchase costs may be considered eligible where a clear need has been identified within the community for land ownership in order to develop a high impact project under one or more of the fund streams.

Support for land purchase will be considered where communities can demonstrate how land purchase will enable project delivery, and the community purpose and planned use(s) of the land are clearly identified.

### Development Support

- ✓ The fund may support project-focussed support roles which have a defined purpose and clear project outputs relating back to expanding social, sustainable or environmental services in the community.

Support will be considered for new roles which develop and/or establish sustainable, community-based projects/initiatives that are critical to delivering on the applicant organisation's plan and whose outputs directly relate to expanding social, sustainable or environmental services in the community.

### Approval in Principle

- ✓ The fund will support high-potential projects that have a clear project plan, but require additional time to complete full project applications through an 'approval in principle' approach.

'Approval in Principle' will provide high-potential projects with a conditional award of funding which will enable leverage of other funds and investment required to deliver the project. Eligible projects must be significantly developed e.g. asset in place, project plan developed etc.

### Achieving a Balanced Approach

#### Supporting A Fair and Geographically Balanced Approach

- ✓ While recognising the multiple and diverse communities which are located across the area of benefit, the fund shall seek to achieve a fair and balanced geographic approach towards the distribution of funds over the lifetime of the fund.

The geographic balance of funds across the Area of Benefit will be reviewed by SECAD Partnership and EirGrid after each funding round and communities which have not yet secured funding will be encouraged and supported to submit applications in future rounds.

Communities which have not been awarded funding in earlier rounds will be given priority in the third phase of funding, subject to the submission of quality funding applications towards eligible projects.

### Encouraging and Supporting Balanced Investment across the Fund Streams

- ✓ In line with EirGrid's Community Benefit Fund Policy, balanced investment across the three streams shall be maintained. Any change to this would be exceptional.

SECAD Partnership and EirGrid will work together with communities to achieve a balanced investment across the funds three streams as outlined in EirGrid's Community Benefit Fund Policy.

- ✓ The fund will encourage communities to consider all three funding streams in preparation of their project plans and funding applications.

SECAD Partnership and EirGrid will work together with communities to explore opportunities to address all three streams in the development of their projects and initiatives. Flexibility will be allowed for projects to draw funds from across streams where applicable to the project.

### Collaboration and Other Funding Supports

- ✓ The fund will encourage collaboration and co-financing of investment where other funding streams exist.

It is important that this community benefit fund supports and supplements existing funding streams that local communities have access to. For projects to be sustainable, collaboration is key. EirGrid and SECAD Partnership CLG will work closely with communities, local authorities, NGO's and State agencies to ensure that communities maximise the opportunities open to them in transforming their area to meet their needs.

## How will the Fund Work?

As the appointed Fund Administrator for the Celtic Interconnector Community Benefit Fund, SECAD Partnership will work with EirGrid to ensure the effective management of the funds within the framework of EirGrid's Community Benefit Fund Policy and in line with the Celtic Interconnector Community Benefit Fund Strategy.



Figure 5: Community Benefit Fund Application Flowchart

### Opening of Funds

The opening of each round of funding will be widely publicised through a range of communication channels. The funds will remain open for applications for a period of six to eight weeks, and applications will be submitted via an online portal. Application guidance documentation will be provided and support will be available to applicants from SECAD Partnership throughout this time.

### Evaluation and Award of Funds

Following the closing date, applications will be evaluated by an impartial grant making panel. This panel will be comprised of SECAD Partnership, EirGrid and an independent, external community consultant with subject matter expertise. Additional expert guidance may also be sought as part of the project evaluation process if applicable. Funding will be allocated at each round following a competitive application process.

### Fund Management

- Should the case arise where a full budget is not fully allocated under a funding round, any unused funds (i.e. underspends) will be rolled forward to be available at the next round.
- Funds which may be committed to a project but not utilised in full (i.e. project underspends) will be rolled forward to be available at next round.
- SECAD Partnership and EirGrid will undertake a review of any unallocated funds following the final funding round and consider recommendations for best use of funds to ensure full allocation.



# Staying Connected

Further information and updates on the Celtic Interconnector Community Benefit Fund can be found on SECAD Partnership's website at [www.secad.ie/what-we-do/celtic-interconnector-community-benefit-fund](http://www.secad.ie/what-we-do/celtic-interconnector-community-benefit-fund). You can also follow SECAD on [Twitter](#) or [Facebook](#).

For information in relation to the Celtic Interconnector infrastructure project, please visit <https://www.eirgridgroup.com/the-grid/projects/celtic-interconnector/the-project/>

or contact



**Michelle Walsh,**  
Community Liaison Officer,  
+ 353 (0) 85 870 4999

# Appendix 1

## Contributing Reference Documentation

Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities:  
A Five-Year Strategy to Support the Community and  
Voluntary Sector in Ireland 2019-2024

Rural Development Policy 2021-2025 - Our Rural Future

Project Ireland 2040, National Planning Framework, Government of Ireland

Town Centre First, A Policy Approach for Irish Towns

National Implementation Plan for the Sustainable Development Goals 2022-2024

Healthy Ireland - A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013 – 2025

'EU action for Smart Villages', European Commission, 2017

Roadmap for Social Inclusion 2020 - 2025

National Positive Aging Strategy (NPAS)

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, The national policy framework for children  
and young people, 2014 - 2020

Climate Action Plan 2021 'Securing Our Future'

All-Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025

Embracing Ireland's Outdoors: National Outdoor Recreation Strategy  
2023-2027, Government of Ireland

Sport Ireland Policy on Sport and Physical Activity in the Outdoors, 2020

The People's Transition: Community-led Development for Climate Justice, 2020

Cork County Development Plan 2022-2028

Cork County Local Economic and Community Plan (LECP)

Cork County Biodiversity Action Plan

EirGrid Community Benefit Fund Policy 2022

EirGrid Stakeholder Engagement Plan 2022

Local Energy Masterplans, Sustainable Action Plans, Biodiversity Action Plans and  
Community Development Plans where available.

## Appendix 2

### Contributing Organisations and Groups

Ballintotis Area Community Council	Glounthaune Tidy Towns
Ballintotis Tuesday Club	Greywood Arts CLG
Birdwatch Ireland Cork Branch	Harpers Island Wetlands Steering Group
Bishop Aherne National School	Imogeela Community Sports Hall CLG.
Brú na Sí, Craobh Eochaille	Inch Community Council
Bunscoil Mhuire, Youghal	Inch United Soccer Club
Carrigtwohill and District Historical Society	IRD Duhallow
Carrigtwohill Community Council CLG	Killeagh GAA
Carrigtwohill Community News	Killeagh Inch Community Council
Carrigtwohill Family Resource Centre	Knockraha Area Community Association
Carrigtwohill Flower and Garden Club	Knockraha Environment Group
Carrigtwohill GAA Club	Knockraha History and Heritage Society
Carrigtwohill Tidy Towns	Knockraha ICA
Carrigtwohill Tuesday Club (Active Retirement)	Lisgoold / Leamlara Community Council
Carrigtwohill UTD FC.	Lisgoold / Leamlara Tidy Towns Committee
Castlemartyr Community Council	Lisgoold GAA Club
Castlemartyr GAA	Local Authorities Water Programme
Castlemartyr HandF Club	Midleton Area Historical Society
Castlemartyr Mogeely Community Alert	Midleton CBS Primary School
Castlemartyr Primary School	Midleton Flood Relief Scheme
Castlemartyr Tidy Towns	Midleton GAA
Castlemartyr/Ballintotis Foroige youth club	Midleton Mens Shed
Castlemartyr Family Carers and Disability Support Group	Midleton My Place CLG
Churchtown North Residents Association	Midleton, Ballinacurra and Area Heritage Society
Clann Credo	Mogeely Development Community Council
Cloyne Diocesan Youth Services	Mogeely FC
Cobh Golf Club	Pobalscoil Na Tríonóide
Coillte	Redbarn Community
Cope Foundation	Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland
Cork County Council	South Abbey National School (Youghal)
Cork County Council - Public Representatives	St Ita's GAA Club
Cork County PPN	University College Cork
Cork Education and Training Board	Youghal Active Retirement Association
East Cork Glenmary Basketball Club, Carrigtwohill	Youghal Blue and Green Community Network
Erin's Own GAA club	Youghal Chamber of Tourism and Development
Families of Castlemartyr, Mogeely and Ladysbridge	Youghal Community Bus
First Cut Youth Film Project	Youghal Family Resource Initiative/Barnardos
Foroige	Youghal Fishermen
Fr O Neills GAA	Youghal GAA
Glenbower Woods	Youghal United AFC

## Appendix 3

### Area SWOT analysis

A SWOT analysis was conducted across the three streams of the Community Benefit Fund. This was informed by a range of information sources and processes including objective evidence and analysis from the socio-economic profile of the East Cork area, the needs analysis, the consultation

findings, national and County specific policy documents, the LECP and the experience of the Fund Administrator (SECAD Partnership CLG) in their capacity as Local Development Company.



## Community

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Active, well-established community organisations operating in most towns and villages.</li> <li>Strong community spirit and voluntary contribution across the area.</li> <li>Strong and growing population base</li> <li>Family and community resource facilities have developed in many of the towns.</li> <li>Growing number of new social inclusion focused activation groups developing in the area.</li> <li>Positive demographic balance across the area.</li> <li>Greater levels of partnership between state supports, local government and local development companies in planning and providing services.</li> <li>Active and participative PPN structure.</li> <li>Good cultural heritage and tourism potential</li> <li>Desire to share knowledge and build networks and collaborations.</li> <li>Strong local knowledge and affinity to the local landscape, history, culture and heritage</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aging community facilities in need of upgrade and refurbishment.</li> <li>Inappropriate facilities to meet population increases.</li> <li>Low levels of basic amenities / community facilities in some areas.</li> <li>Growing demands on volunteers and low levels of volunteer rotation/ capacities.</li> <li>Increasing pressures on volunteering and volunteer-based services but related support programmes such as the Community Services Programmes are limited.</li> <li>Lack of youth development space.</li> <li>Growing ethnic mix and most communities are not resourced to meet the challenges this brings.</li> <li>Rural transport provision is under-resourced and this negatively affects quality of life, particularly in very rural communities.</li> <li>Emerging communication and digital divide.</li> <li>Lack of safe outdoor recreation space</li> <li>Lack of availability of land for community development</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investments in communities to focus on integration and service provision.</li> <li>Co-funding of investment with other funding.</li> <li>Opportunity to create infrastructure to provide space and supports for communities and young people appropriate to the geographic area and demographics.</li> <li>Opportunities for social enterprise to meet with gaps in service provision.</li> <li>Support for the enhancement of the quality of life in rural communities.</li> <li>Mental health and wellbeing initiatives</li> <li>Services to improve quality of life for the elderly and those with disabilities and their carers.</li> <li>Participative community planning and inter-community collaboration to strengthen rural communities.</li> <li>Community-led tourism and heritage opportunities</li> <li>To engage with individuals across generations and communities to participate in community actions</li> <li>Development of strong community network to encourage integrated and local area based development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Slow-down in economic growth, particularly in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and Brexit</li> <li>Inflationary costs of materials, food, energy etc.</li> <li>Imbalanced development across the area</li> <li>Lack of support of policy makers to develop basic infrastructure for communities, including socially excluded individuals and groups.</li> <li>Lack of investment to support volunteers in terms of capacity building, lack of investments in staffing of volunteer services (e.g. CSP) and lack of incentives to develop social and community enterprises and services.</li> <li>Under-representation of young people in civil society bodies and decision-making structures.</li> <li>Further cuts in direct funding to community and voluntary groups.</li> <li>Housing crisis and affordability in towns and villages poses a potential issue for out migration of younger people.</li> </ul>

## Biodiversity

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Growing appetite to support biodiversity protection within communities.</li> <li>Several biodiversity organisations already active in communities.</li> <li>Strong, bio-diverse landscape.</li> <li>Diverse range of water resources.</li> <li>Excellent soil resources – fertile soils.</li> <li>Good forestry resources.</li> <li>The natural landscape supports a range of protected birds, flora and fauna.</li> <li>High quality beaches and seashore.</li> <li>Proximity to countryside – all communities are located near/within open countryside.</li> <li>Active PPN structure representing community interests.</li> <li>Increase in investment by government departments, agencies and other stakeholders.</li> <li>Strong policy context on a global, EU, and national level for protection of biodiversity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of community level understanding of biodiversity issues, impacts and responses.</li> <li>Lack of knowledge and awareness of best practice.</li> <li>Water quality (coastal and ground) decreasing.</li> <li>Low levels of re-use/storage of water supplies.</li> <li>Loss of natural habitats and biodiversity.</li> <li>Increasing issues related to invasive flora/ fauna.</li> <li>Degraded river habitat.</li> <li>Coastal erosion.</li> <li>Lack of awareness and motivation to address environmental issues.</li> <li>Loss of natural flood plains.</li> <li>Negative impact of 'intensive farming' techniques (loss of hedgerows and habitats).</li> <li>The greater Cork Harbour Area under pressure from industry and the city.</li> <li>Lack of availability of land for biodiversity use.</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased policy focus and support to support biodiversity activity and green infrastructure at community level.</li> <li>Potential to link with plans for new walkways, cycleways and greenways.</li> <li>Opportunity for inter-community and cross-stakeholder collaboration.</li> <li>Opportunities to connect people with nature through Citizen Science initiatives.</li> <li>Opportunity to develop 'landscape' based approaches for greater impact.</li> <li>To promote existing initiatives relating to biodiversity protection and enhancement, such as 'Don't Mow, Let it Grow' and Rewilding, in order to change behaviours and attitudes.</li> <li>Identify good practice and create shared learning opportunities.</li> <li>Technical assistance to support research and develop biodiversity action plans.</li> <li>Mental health and wellbeing in nature</li> <li>Tidy Towns – habitat / biodiversity initiatives</li> <li>Develop river catchment management plans.</li> <li>Development of Community Gardens.</li> <li>To improve biodiversity through conservation of pollinators.</li> <li>Water conservation measures.</li> <li>To celebrate and promote local biodiversity and landscapes – encouraging Active Hopefulness and promoting personal connections to nature as a positive climate action.</li> <li>To ensure biodiversity is protected and enhanced through Planning and development decisions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Loss of ecosystem services (for example, flood control, pollination, natural pest regulation).</li> <li>Coastal erosion and rising sea levels.</li> <li>Lack of knowledge of best practice could cause 'more harm than good'.</li> <li>Protecting the natural environment, whilst meeting the growth in demand for outdoor experiences.</li> <li>Dumping and mismanagement of waste</li> <li>Flooding.</li> <li>Intensive agriculture practices.</li> <li>Invasive species (particularly Japanese Knotweed).</li> <li>Littering.</li> <li>Air pollution.</li> <li>Danger of extinction of natural pollinators.</li> <li>Poor and inconsistent communication on biodiversity issues and opportunities.</li> </ul>

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growing appetite to support sustainable actions within communities.</li> <li>• A small number of local sustainability groups and networks already established in the area.</li> <li>• A number of Sustainable Transport plans already underway in some areas.</li> <li>• Reputation of Cork Harbour as an energy hub</li> <li>• Significant industrial market for renewable energy products.</li> <li>• Strong network of Civic Amenity Sites ('bring' bank centres).</li> <li>• Increase in investment by government departments, agencies and other stakeholders.</li> <li>• Many communities have engaged with SEAI and indicated an interest in establishing Sustainable Energy Communities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of community level understanding of sustainability issues, impacts and responses.</li> <li>• Limited number of established Sustainable Energy Communities.</li> <li>• Lack of public transport for those living in rural areas.</li> <li>• Lack of community-based responses to energy issues and challenges.</li> <li>• Dereliction in rural towns.</li> <li>• Excessive car dependency.</li> <li>• Too much waste going to land fill sites.</li> <li>• Lack of availability of affordable land.</li> <li>• Inconsistent practices by stakeholders to planning, developing, maintaining and promoting initiatives to address sustainability.</li> </ul>
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased policy focus and support.</li> <li>• Explore innovative solutions through pilot projects.</li> <li>• Developing alternatives for scarce natural resources at a local level.</li> <li>• Establishment of Sustainable Energy Communities.</li> <li>• Opportunity to create Local Networks and collaborations.</li> <li>• Renewable energy and micro-generation opportunities.</li> <li>• Developing Active Travel infrastructure - cycling and walking network.</li> <li>• Developing integrated public transport – including bus, taxis, car sharing</li> <li>• Development of Community Enterprises to address specific local needs.</li> <li>• Opportunities for sustainable food initiatives, Community Gardens and 'Grow your own' initiatives.</li> <li>• Addressing food waste through education, awareness campaign; developing networks of retail, cafes, restaurants, hotels to reduce food waste/contributing to circular economy.</li> <li>• Reduce waste through campaigns such as eliminating single use plastics or disposable cups from village/town/campus.</li> <li>• Job Creation in the renewable energy sector.</li> <li>• Micro generation using waste, wood, water and solar and community-based approaches.</li> <li>• Address fuel poverty through improved insulation measures.</li> <li>• Tidy Towns – Sustainability category</li> <li>• To improve Planning, Transport and Development approaches and decisions to ensure integrated land uses and infrastructure to support sustainable towns and villages.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Negative impact of climate change due to increasing carbon emissions.</li> <li>• Global warming.</li> <li>• Rising costs of energy.</li> <li>• Inefficient community facilities unable to meet rising energy costs.</li> <li>• Unstable energy supplies impacting service delivery.</li> <li>• Flooding.</li> <li>• Coastal Erosion.</li> <li>• Food availability, impacts of production.</li> <li>• Inflationary costs of materials, food, energy etc.</li> <li>• Poor and inconsistent communication and engagement in sustainability issues and actions.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 4

### Other Relevant Funds and Programmes

Below is a list of potential funding supports which might be considered by applicants. Please note that is an indicative list of the types of funding programmes which may be relative to community projects and the list is not exhaustive.

Rural Development and Social Inclusion Programmes (e.g. LEADER, SICAP) – [www.secad.ie](http://www.secad.ie)

Town and Village Renewal Scheme - [www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/01125e-town-and-village-renewal-scheme](http://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/01125e-town-and-village-renewal-scheme)

Sports Capital Programme - [www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie/](http://www.sportscapitalprogramme.ie/)

Rural Regeneration Development Fund - [www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/c77144-rural-regeneration-and-development-fund/](http://www.gov.ie/en/policy-information/c77144-rural-regeneration-and-development-fund/)

Local Authority Amenity Grants - [www.corkcoco.ie/en/resident/municipal-districts](http://www.corkcoco.ie/en/resident/municipal-districts)

Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland - [www.seai.ie/grants/community-grants/](http://www.seai.ie/grants/community-grants/)

Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme - [www.gov.ie/en/service/d14e1-outdoor-recreation-infrastructure-scheme/](http://www.gov.ie/en/service/d14e1-outdoor-recreation-infrastructure-scheme/)

Community Water Development Fund (LAWPRO) – [www.lawaters.ie/community-water-development-fund-2023/](http://www.lawaters.ie/community-water-development-fund-2023/)

Community Climate Action Programme under the Climate Action Fund (CAF) - [www.gov.ie/en/publication/de5d3-climate-action-fund/#community-climate-action-programme](http://www.gov.ie/en/publication/de5d3-climate-action-fund/#community-climate-action-programme)

Brexit Blue Economy Enterprise Development Scheme, BIM – [www.bim.ie/fisheries/funding/brexit-blue-economy-enterprise-development-scheme/](http://www.bim.ie/fisheries/funding/brexit-blue-economy-enterprise-development-scheme/)

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The Oval, 160 Shelbourne Rd,  
Dublin 4, D04 FW28  
01 627 1700 | [EirGrid.ie](http://EirGrid.ie)

