



**Kilkenny
Chamber**
Advancing business together

Kilkenny Chamber Local Government Manifesto 2024



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About Kilkenny Chamber of Commerce

Since its establishment in 1948, Kilkenny Chamber has been the voice of business at every meeting and event in which key decisions were being made about the future direction of Kilkenny Inc.

Over the years it has provided supports for businesses in the areas of Training, Networking, Trade Services, Lobbying and promoting Kilkenny as a great place in which to do business.

In recent times Kilkenny Chamber has been particularly prominent in its engagement with Yulefest, Kilkenny Age Friendly initiative, the #ShopKilkenny shop local campaign and the provision of targeted training to the Retail Sector aimed at combating the challenges from online shopping.

Some of the unique initiatives and events which simply would not happen without Kilkenny Chamber include the Kilkenny Business Awards, Kilkenny Chambers Corporate Golf Challenge in Mount Juliet, the Kilkenny Gift Voucher scheme, the Medieval Mile Pass and International Trade Development Services.

Kilkenny Chamber is a vital cog in the wheel of commerce in the city and county with the clear objective of advancing business together.

Established now for 75 years, it is solidly positioned to continue its work of supporting the business dynamic in Kilkenny well into the future.

Introduction

Looking back over the last five years in Ireland, Local Authorities have been at the forefront in navigating challenging social and economic headwinds. In the face of the Covid-19 public health crisis, Local Authorities were instrumental in coordinating emergency response efforts, providing essential services to communities and protecting the safety and wellbeing of residents within tight turnaround times and in line with constantly evolving public health guidance. This urgency, responsiveness and open collaboration with different stakeholders in delivering a unified community strategy are characteristics that will be needed more than ever in the next Local Government.

In 2024, running for election to represent our counties and largest cities requires councillors that are ambitious, have an understanding of the pressing policy issues that are facing Ireland, and are committed to improving local communities, the economy and the environment.

This ambition needs to be complemented by rapid action and sustained pace of change. For too many years, there has been slow and insufficient progress in developing key infrastructure, including housing, transport, water and grid connections, and green energy. This has created community deficits that directly impact the vibrancy of towns and cities across the country. We call for increased accountability and transparency from Local Authorities on the future delivery of essential infrastructure projects, as communities have a vested interest in ensuring their elected representatives are driving meaningful, timely and sustainable change.

We recognise that the ambitions outlined in this Manifesto cannot solely be achieved by Local Councillors but need collective buy-in and support from Local Authority executive teams; the Government, in particular the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the Department of Rural and Community Development; An Garda Síochána; An Bord Pleanála; the Courts system; and many other community stakeholders. Therefore, the Manifesto should be used to stimulate conversations, foster engagement and drive progress across all such actors.

We call upon our members to use this Manifesto as a tool for communicating Kilkenny Chamber's priorities with candidates running for election. It sets out our high-level ambitions and vision for Ireland's future social, economic and environmental development, which has a direct impact on business growth and competitiveness across the country. We call on elected councillors to work with Kilkenny Chamber and with businesses in our city and county in progressing these goals and objectives over the next five year term.

Anne Barber, President

John Hurley, Chief Executive

Priorities

In drafting this Local Election Manifesto, Kilkenny Chamber engaged in consultation meetings with a wide variety of stakeholders under the Chambers Ireland banner. This Manifesto reflects our collective concerns and key priorities for the five years ahead, but it also charts a course for the broader future for Ireland and our social, economic and environmental security and prosperity.

There are three key priority areas included in the Manifesto with recommendations outlined in each section:

1. Vibrant Towns and Cities
2. Infrastructure for the Future
3. Green Ambition

Vibrant Towns and Cities

This section reflects the importance of fostering thriving and inclusive towns and cities that are attractive places for our growing population to live, work, visit and invest. We want to highlight the issues that are currently facing our towns and cities, as we call on Local Councillors to address these needs and work with the local communities on a shared vision and ambition for the socioeconomic development and cultural vitality of their city and county.

Vibrant towns and cities in Ireland are vital for economic growth, serving as centres for businesses, innovation and employment. They facilitate cultural exchange, social interaction and community engagement, contributing to a sense of identity and belonging. Additionally, they attract tourists, supporting local businesses and boosting the tourism industry. Providing essential infrastructure and services like transport, healthcare, education and entertainment, they enhance the quality of life for residents. Concentrating development in urban areas also promotes efficient land use, reduces urban sprawl and supports environmental sustainability.

Infrastructure for the Future

Infrastructure at a Local Authority level in Ireland is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it supports economic development by providing essential services like housing, public transport and utilities that facilitate business activities and attract investment. Secondly, it enhances the quality of life for residents by ensuring access to healthcare, education and recreational facilities. Thirdly, infrastructure contributes to public safety and improves overall community resilience. Additionally, well-maintained infrastructure can support environmental sustainability and social inclusion. Overall, investing in local infrastructure is vital for fostering economic growth, social well-being and sustainable development within communities across Ireland.

The development and successful deployment of key infrastructure across Ireland over the coming years is going to be essential in ensuring our long-term competitiveness. Our collective ambitions for housing, energy, transport, utilities and the environment all depend on swift, efficient and streamlined planning decisions. We need a fit-for-purpose planning system in Ireland and incoming Councillors should be ready to tackle this issue constructively as an immediate priority.

Green Ambition

Ireland's green energy potential represents an enormous opportunity for the country. If we can make the most of the abundance of natural resources on our doorstep, we will reduce our reliance on imported fossil fuels in the first instance, thereby enhancing energy security and reducing vulnerability to price fluctuations in global markets. Investing in green energy will also be crucial in mitigating climate change and reducing greenhouse gas emissions in line with our international commitments. At a local level, renewable energy will also create jobs and stimulate economic growth.

We call on our Local Councillors to recognise and promote the opportunities associated with the green transition within our city and county, so that we can increase our competitiveness in a global market, position Ireland as a leader in clean energy innovation, and build a more resilient, sustainable and prosperous future.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Kilkenny Chamber is an affiliated member of Chambers Ireland which has been appointed as a national Sustainable Development Goals Champion as part of the 2023-2024 SDG Champions Programme. The programme has been developed by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications to raise public awareness of the SDGs and to demonstrate that everyone in society can make a contribution to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Chambers Ireland is the only business representative organisation appointed to be a champion and, in this capacity, our role is to act as an advocate and promoter of the SDGs and to help businesses realise the opportunities these Goals create. By showcasing the opportunities, we aim to instill confidence in businesses to integrate the SDGs into their work and activities in order to achieve meaningful results.

We promote how the Goals positively impact businesses, communities, and livelihoods. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.

Chambers Ireland and ICC Ireland, together with Kilkenny Chamber and the nationwide network of affiliated Chambers have unanimously pledged to support the Goals. We have worked with our Network and our Sustainable Business Council to help to educate the 9,000 businesses we represent about the Goals.

All of our policy outputs, including this Local Government Manifesto, are aligned with our selected Sustainable Development Goals and seek to help our members address the challenges of an increasingly 'shock prone' world. Chambers Ireland focuses on five key SDGs, which we feel we can contribute directly towards and champion through our work. The five goals are:

SDG 5 – Gender Equality

SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth

SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure

SDG 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities

SDG 13 – Climate Action

Vibrant Towns and Cities – SDG 5, 8, 11

Fostering thriving local communities

Kilkenny Chamber has supported and promoted both the Living City Initiative and Town Centre First since their initial inception. We have however always said that these programmes were not ambitious enough to deliver on their goals and that both have been implemented in ways that limit their effectiveness.

The Living City Initiative needs to be both radically reformed – to make it effective – and expanded to allow it to incentivise the improvement of all the cities and the growth towns in the National Planning Framework.

The ambition for Town Centre First needs to be radically increased. It cannot deliver for the country at its current scale. A parallel track needs to be created to address the needs of our towns which are larger than 10,000 people and this needs to be integrated with the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund.

Kilkenny Local Authority should have a dedicated EU Funding team that works with local councillors, regional authorities and similar regions across the EU to ensure that we maximise the benefits from EU funding programmes while also allowing us to draw from the experience and best practices of our peer nations within the EU.

Creating safe, welcoming and thriving public realm spaces ensures that our city-centres and town-centres are appealing to anyone wishing to live, work, visit or invest. The most effective way of doing this is through investing in attractive and appropriate urban built environment developments. Public amenities have an important role to play in creating safe, social spaces for community engagement, which in turn can have very positive results in promoting regional growth, boosting tourism, reducing anti-social behaviour and improving local economies.

As well as encouraging and developing welcoming physical spaces for community engagement, we would also like to see Kilkenny Local Authority adopting a more strategic focus on fostering social cohesion and ensuring inclusive civic engagement. Investing in initiatives that address language needs and create employment opportunities will enhance integration across our towns and cities and ensure that diversity is championed and every member of society is valued for their skills and experience.

- **Greater policy ambition for city and town centres:**
 - More funding is needed for town teams in the immediate short-term if Local Authorities are to be effective and responsive to community and business needs. Similarly, we call for an expansion of powers for town teams to take meaningful action and affect real change for local communities.
 - There needs to be better collaboration and communication between Local Authorities and the Departments of Rural and Community Development and Housing, Local Government and Heritage in pushing for change to national policy initiatives including Town Centre First and the Living City Initiative that have a direct impact on towns and local communities.
 - Local Authorities should produce annual public reports on the progress of the Town Centre First and Living City Initiative with consistent reporting on clear and measurable results.

- Urgent action is needed from the outset of the new Local Government term to fully implement and activate the goals and objectives of the Town Centre First initiative. Progress to date has been too slow in realising the full potential of the programme of reforms for the current towns that fall within scope.
- The Town Centre First Programme needs to be expanded to reach a wider number of towns over the next 5 years, and a parallel programme for larger towns that were not initially included should be implemented.
- Reforms to the Urban and Rural Regeneration and Development Funds are needed to ensure that they are effective and focused on the Town Centre First goals and methodologies.
- The Living City Initiative should be extended and be established on a long-term basis out to 2035. The existing timeline is too limiting given the nature of construction projects. It should also be expanded to include long-term vacant commercial properties built post-1915.
- The Living City Initiative should be extended over the next 5 years to the cities and towns specified in the National Planning Framework and reformed to include acquisition costs of Living City Initiative qualifying properties.
- For the cities where it is active, the Special Regeneration Areas should be expanded in the short term to bring more potential housing stock under the Living City Initiative.
- Establish EU Funding Teams at Local Authority level to improve the application process for accessing and utilising EU funding.
- High street retail/commercial zones should be allocated with supports in place to protect and support physical shops operating in town and city centres.
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- **Safe and thriving public realm spaces and amenities:**
 - Local Authorities should publish annual reports on the developments that have been made to public realm spaces and amenities in each calendar year. This will ensure greater transparency and better community engagement.
 - There should be increased development of public realm spaces, which are vital in attracting people to live, work and visit our town and city centres.
 - Planning and investing in better lighting in urban areas, better siting of transport hubs and places for nature within our urban settings are key to making people choose to spend more time in our towns.
 - Temporarily vacant spaces should also be activated for community activities through the application of meanwhile use.
 - Local Authorities should adopt a five year strategy with dedicated funding for ensuring greater social cohesion in their locality.

The impact of urban decay

Our membership across the county is experiencing the long-term costs of sub-optimal government social and economic policies. This has created overlapping problems that impact the quality of life for those that are living and working in our cities and towns. A lack of adequate and affordable housing has seen a marked increase in rough sleeping in our cities, and an expansion of this problem to towns across our State. Decades of dereliction severely damage entire streets within our urban cores. Vacancies detract from the economic vibrance of locations and discourage footfall. Voids

become foci for dumping, littering and social problems. Derelict buildings often directly damage properties on adjacent sites. Every vacant, unused or derelict site in an urban area is a demonstrable market failure that imposes severe externality costs on the surrounding community, businesses and Local Government.

A concerning trend over recent years arising from this neglect of urban centres has been a significant increase in anti-social behaviour and crime. Our membership from the city and towns right across the county are being significantly impacted, both directly in terms of theft and other criminal activity and indirectly in terms of reduced footfall and business traffic. At a community level, the increase in crime erodes community confidence in the safety and security of town and city centres, which can result in a decline in community cohesion and public engagement. At an economic level, it can deter investment and diminish the attractiveness of an area for residents and visitors alike. Overall, crime and anti-social behaviour create a cycle of decline in towns and cities, affecting residents' quality of life, damaging the local economy and undermining the social fabric of the community. Addressing these issues should be a key priority for each Local Government.

Correspondingly, the district level centralisation of Garda resources has led to a dislocation of Gardaí from the communities they serve which neglects the crimes that directly impact communities. We are frequently told by our members that they do not report crimes because the time they spend awaiting a response from Gardaí is often better applied within their business.

Our members strongly support the aims of the National Planning Framework and recognise the need for our communities to adapt if we are to live in a more sustainable way. This will require a densification of our cities and towns so that people can rely on public and active transportation. This will allow for social services (such as Healthcare and Education) to be provided in a more efficient and effective manner. Greenfield developments are three times more expensive to service (with roads, schools, GPs etc.) than developments within our existing urban areas. Promoting denser communities will reduce the costs of meeting the needs of the population and so will allow for lower levels of taxation on the private sector. For businesses, denser living means that more customers are reachable more easily. Better public transport means that people will have a higher disposable income which allows for more economic opportunities and density increases the number of potential workers, with a wider range of skills, for businesses that are trying to expand. For individuals, density makes for less commuting, better access to higher quality social services and a wider range of higher-quality jobs. Community interests are aligned but the decades long neglect of our urban centres is standing in our way.

Local Authorities face the burden of servicing the local consequences of this national neglect. They are responsible for local emergency housing, for littering, for taking challenging dereliction orders, for investing in the built environment, for planning decisions and for transport infrastructure.

More funding and powers are needed to ensure that the planning departments of Local Authorities have the capacity and the resources to meet the needs of their communities.

- **Vacancy and dereliction:**
 - Resource Kilkenny Local Authority to implement planning department one-stop-shops in our growth city and towns to streamline planning and fire-certification for change-of-use construction projects and above-the-shop conversions. This should be an immediate priority for the next Local Government term in order to see meaningful change over the coming five years.

- These planning one-stop-shops should offer guidance and advice to individuals on how to successfully apply for the Vacancy Property Refurbishment Grant.
 - Expand and strengthen the powers of Local Authorities to acquire vacant sites through purchase orders or to force their sale through a compulsory sales order.
 - Having reviewed the vacancy rates, the Department of Housing should set vacancy reduction targets for Local Authorities at the electoral district level that are measurable annually.
 - Substantially increase the capital spending for housing and regeneration in urban areas identified by the National Planning Framework.
- **Crime and Garda resourcing:**
 - Local Authorities should work with An Garda Síochána in altering Garda incentives to promote a focus on street crime rather than headline grabbing crime.
 - Independent data collection regarding the frequency and impact of crime at the Local Authority level should be carried out by a multidisciplinary team independent of the Department of Justice and An Garda Síochána with full Local Authority engagement and cooperation. This should be a priority action for the upcoming year and should inform local garda strategies for tackling crime and responding to community concerns.
 - Establish local community networks for better collaboration and information-sharing between local Gardaí and the business communities they serve. Kilkenny Local Authority should seek to implement this recommendation immediately in order to help restore business confidence.
- **Tackling homelessness:**
 - More resourcing at the Local Authority level is needed immediately to provide stable accommodation for those that are unhoused.
 - A longer-term focus on a Housing-First model needs to be applied to reduce the impact of people with a high level of needs on their wider community. This will require greater co-ordination between Local Authorities, health and social services, along with the Gardaí and the Department of Justice. The gains from such policies are felt across these other sectors, but the costs are imposed on Local Government and local health services/professionals.
 - A strategic plan to provide better support services for those that are experiencing addiction across a wider range of towns and cities should be adopted over the next 5 year Local Authority term.

Nurturing growth

Fostering thriving local economies is contingent on supporting local employment. SMEs are the backbone of communities right across the country. Not only do they provide essential services and produce goods for consumption, they also employ seventy percent of the active workforce. Ireland's employment rate is currently at a record high with over 2.6 million people working across the country. This has made it more difficult to recruit and retain staff and competition for talent has impacted the growth and expansion of businesses across the country. Therefore, Local Authorities

need to promote pro-business policies that stimulate growth, create jobs and foster entrepreneurship and innovation.

In many areas across the country, Local Authority income is heavily dependent on business rates, which can fluctuate and vary significantly over periods of time. Operating with such a narrow tax base creates risk and uncertainty. Chambers Ireland have advocated for a number of years for Local Authorities to rebalance their accounts with more stable forms of income, such as local property taxes, which are still underutilised in many areas. Such a move would also be welcome by businesses that are struggling with inflation, increased costs and new employment legislation. Higher energy prices, the introduction of statutory sick leave, increased PRSI, new work life balance legislation, increases to the minimum wage, the phase-in of a living wage, pension auto-enrolment and the right to request remote working have all increased the legislative compliance and financial burdens facing businesses. As a result, we are seeing businesses that survived the Covid-19 restrictions being forced to close. Local Authorities should ensure that they are supportive of local enterprises and limit the obstacles to their successful trade and operations in the area.

Effective labour force activation is becoming an increasing focus with a restricted labour market. Therefore, optimising our current workforce and empowering individuals to take up employment should be a key focus of each Local Authority. Ensuring access and affordability of childcare, running targeted upskilling and reskilling programmes, supporting flexible working, and creating pathways to employment for vulnerable or marginalised groups will ensure more people in a locality can take up work that suits their circumstances.

- **Supporting businesses and employment:**
 - Create more stable revenue models in urban areas by ending the over reliance on business rates and incrementally increasing the proportion of the Local Authority income that comes from local property taxes (LPT). This should be a longer term objective that is initiated within the next Local Government term.
 - Protect and support childcare facilities to open and operate in local areas, as such services are crucial in ensuring parents can return to work. This should be an ongoing commitment by Local Authorities, as our members have expressed concerns that such facilities are closing due to costs or are at capacity.
 - Carry out local skills assessments every two years and create targeted skills programmes that align with requirements.

Infrastructure for the future – SDG 8, 9, 11

Building homes for growth

The National Planning Framework targets have not been ambitious enough to meet the needs of our communities and economy. It is clear from the housing needs estimates that have emerged from the Housing Commission and the ESRI, which have centred on an average annual housing development need of approximately 50,000 from now out to 2050, that our housing crisis has been compounding over the last council cycle.

Kilkenny Chamber has long said that our national targets were not sufficient to meet the needs of our communities and although the proposed revision is welcomed, we are concerned about the capacity of the political and administrative system to address these needs, as well as capacity constraints within the building sector. Current housing delivery numbers put us at an increased shortfall in housing of about 150k homes by the end of the decade.

In order to reasonably address these needs housing delivery needs to more than double by 2027. The slower the ramp up to these increased delivery targets, then the higher the annual output will need to be if it is to make up for the growing deficit.

Amplifying the fact that our national targets have been too low, Local Authorities have typically taken the original 2040 targets to be limits as opposed to minimum standards and this has had a significant knock-on effect on the ambition of Local Area Plans. Given the recognition that a massive increase in Housing output is needed, almost all Local Authorities will need to review their Local Area Plans well in advance of the next cycle.

Doubling the delivery of current housing provision per annum by 2027 and maintaining it at that level out to 2030 will only see the housing situation stabilise but not improve. To remedy the housing crisis within the next decade will require expanding housing delivery to circa 80,000 units per annum by 2030 and then reducing it to a longer-term delivery figure of 50,000 per annum. Such a level of delivery will see us build almost 1.5 million homes by 2050.

- **Housing that meets community needs:**
 - Councils need to ensure that their purchases of new housing from developers, as well as existing housing stock does not inadvertently reduce the availability of housing on the private market – it is essential that such housing is in addition to the housing supply that would otherwise be built as Local Authorities are both inflating the cost of housing and creating market inefficiencies with such purchases.
 - Water projects need to be prioritised immediately across the country to ensure that there is sufficient capacity to meet the needs of the increased housing delivery targets.
 - In the next 5 to 10 years, Local Authorities should encourage and promote modern methods of construction as a viable means of increasing the housing stock in their area. This will incentivise development, improve construction efficiencies and minimise capacity constraints in the construction sector.
 - Local Authorities should advocate for affordable housing targets. These are already in place for some Local Authorities but are not standard across the country.

- Local Authorities need to work with communities, developers and utility providers in identifying suitable land to rezone for housing.

Innovative and effective planning

Resourcing our Local Authorities' planning departments is vital. Investment in Regional Authorities, so that they can offer specialist expertise to Local Authorities that may be dealing with novel projects – such as their first high-rises, super-blocs, or master-planning – or projects that may be once in a generation for a Local Authority including the expansion of ports, the implementation of tram systems, or rail realignments – will be needed.

Councillors should receive detailed guidance and upskilling in relation to key national policy objectives and infrastructure developments where planning at a local level can have significant impacts on the progress of such plans. This will also need to be complemented with additional training for council officials and members of the Local Authority Strategic Policy Committees where relevant.

Supporting the increase in housing developments will require a major acceleration in the delivery of National Development Plan projects. This will require continued capacity development within the Local Authorities and An Bord Pleanála, along with an increase in public engagement resources for projects that are in the planning pipeline to ensure that there is sufficient local support to ensure their early completion.

- **Resourcing of planning departments:**
 - Strengthen and resource the planning professionals in Local Authorities and other relevant State agencies. We need multidisciplinary teams that are capable of making comprehensive decisions that can withstand scrutiny. . This should be an immediate priority for the next Local Government term in order to see meaningful change over the coming five years.
 - Upskilling of officials, councillors and members of Strategic Policy Committees should be carried out every two years. Such training on essential policies will be crucial in meeting our planning and infrastructure needs.
 - National Development Plan supporting projects including major transport investments need to be rapidly advanced.
 - There should be greater facilitation of pre-planning meetings in a timely fashion where requested by a developer, as such meetings are crucial in negating potential delays further down the line in the planning process.
 - There should be greater scrutiny of planning observations to ensure coherence with legal requirements.

Green Ambition – SDG 8, 9, 11, 13

Transportation

Local Authorities have a bigger impact on individuals than any other part of the State. In the first instance, decision making at the Local Authority level shapes where we can live. From there, those decisions made by Local Government define where we can work and where we can study by determining where we can travel. Getting transportation correct determines whether our areas and communities can be successful.

With the shift towards a decarbonised economy transport planning is becoming increasingly important if we are to deliver on our CO₂ emission targets. According to the SEAI transport emissions accounted for almost 40% of our total emissions in 2022. If we are to move towards being low emissions by the 2030s and net zero emissions by 2050 we need to make enormous changes to how we move around in and between our cities and towns.

For this to be possible, people need to have lower carbon and no-carbon options which are available to them. Whether they do will be determined during our next Council term. A failure to deliver sustainable transport options will result in it being impossible for individuals to alter behaviour.

Public transport, active transport or electrically powered transport will need to be made available for all existing residences and all new housing developments will need to be built around long-term high-capacity transport options that are sustainable.

- **Green travel:**
 - Ensure that Transport Orientated Development principles form the core of all new developments.
 - A longer term vision for our towns and cities requires traffic reduction measures to be prioritised, while expanding local active travel and public transport options.
 - Local Authorities for NDP growth cities and towns which are not currently included in BusConnects should push to have their regions included in future expansions of the project.
 - Local Authorities should increase investment in shared cycling schemes and cycling infrastructure over the coming five years.
 - Local Authorities should create an EV charging framework for the future development of charging infrastructure in their county/city.
 - Ensure that road usage plans that are initiated over the next five years prioritise high-capacity public transport and active travel uses.

Energy and Climate Resilience

Our members have suffered tremendous shocks arising from geopolitics and the international energy markets. Ireland is almost unique within the EU in having the Green Transition as being almost entirely win-win. We do not have large legacy industries which are dependent on particular fossil fuel feedstocks. We do not have extraction industries on which a large proportion of our population is dependent but we do have enormous, untapped, green energy resources that can be used to facilitate not only becoming energy independent but also allow us to become net energy exporters (and so help our EU peers and neighbours decarbonise).

Local Authorities must stop hindering the transition to a cleaner electricity supply. More green energy production is needed in every local authority area, and local areas need to be linked together by our national grid to ensure that they have resilient supplies of energy regardless of the political or environmental climate. However, Local Authorities are at present limiting the capacity of existing windfarms to grow through repowering existing turbines and are also shutting down windfarms that have contributed millions to their local areas through Local Authority Commercial Rates and direct transfers to community funds.

Further work is needed so that Local Authorities begin building climate resilience into their areas, creating pathways for landowners to provide flood protection services to areas downstream, ensuring that quality of water sources and courses are improved and made sustainable. Urban areas need to see an increase in tree planting so that when temperatures rise there will be sufficient shade to ensure that we limit the impact of urban heat islands and maintain comfortable conditions for people who live and work there.

- **Green transition:**
 - Local Authorities should be strong advocates for wind, solar and biomass energy creation in their areas. This should involve regular engagement with constituents on the benefits and opportunities of such developments.
 - Local Authorities should promote the retrofitting of buildings in their locality by ensuring a programme of retrofitting public buildings is initiated and signposting is available to individuals on supports and initiatives that are available.
 - Support for increased grid connectivity throughout the country should be promoted at a local level with support for grid infrastructure projects.
 - Local Authorities need to do more in planning and implementing climate adaptation and mitigation measures that will protect communities in the long-run against the unknown impacts of climate change.
 - There needs to be better alignment of county development plans with national policies on climate action and renewable energy. An audit should be carried out as a priority by the next Local Government to assess where gaps exist.
 - Permitting for existing wind energy assets in county development plans should be extended where the asset has reached end of life and repowering or redevelopment is being pursued by the developer.
 - Local Authorities should create biodiversity preservation plans for the long-term sustainable recovery and growth the natural environment.