



**Chambers
Ireland**
Advancing business together



**Ballina
Chamber**
Advancing business together

Ballina Chamber & Chambers Ireland Local Government Manifesto 2024



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Ballina Chamber Members & Business Community, March 2024.	

About Chambers Ireland

Chambers Ireland is the largest Irish business network, with a geographic reach and membership base that spans cities, towns, and communities nationwide.

Our 38 member chambers represent a wide cross-section of industries and activities, from individual sole traders right through to large multinational companies. This means we are uniquely positioned to represent the views of businesses and understand their concerns in every Local Authority area across the country.

We realise the vital role that the business community plays in adopting and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in Ireland, and we support businesses' commitments to achieving the Goals in every sector.

In February 2023, Ballina Chamber conducted a business survey, supporting the Chamber plan and strategies for its members and that of the wider business community.

The information gained from the survey allowed for the tailoring of Ballina Chamber's lobbying positions heading into 2024, an election year, and feeding into the wider Chambers Ireland manifesto.

In addition to Ballina business priorities, the report touched on issues such as safety, transport, legislation, and the minimum wage. Given that 2024 is an election year, the Chamber's efforts to align its lobbying positions with the priorities of the business community are strategic. This collaboration can contribute to a unified voice in advocating for policies that benefit both Ballina and the broader business landscape.

Continued engagement with Chamber members, regular updates, and a proactive approach to addressing emerging issues will be essential in successfully executing the Chamber's plan and strategies for the upcoming year, and that is why we need your voice: "Challenges Facing Ballina in 2024".

The survey is included at the end of this lobby report, as are the recent submissions to Mayo County Council for the Ballina draft LAP and draft LTP.

Introduction

This manifesto outlines several critical points for the future of Local Government in Ireland, particularly focusing on the role of Local Authorities in responding to challenges such as the Covid-19 crisis and driving essential infrastructure development. Here's a breakdown of key themes and recommendations:

- **Emergency Response and Community Support:** Acknowledging the pivotal role of Local Authorities in managing crises like the Covid-19 pandemic, the manifesto emphasizes the need for continued coordination, responsiveness, and collaboration with stakeholders to ensure the safety and well-being of residents.
- **Ambitious Leadership and Understanding of Policy Issues:** Candidates running for election are encouraged to demonstrate ambition, a deep understanding of pressing policy issues, and a commitment to improving local communities, the economy, and the environment. This highlights the importance of elected representatives being well-informed and proactive in addressing key challenges.
- **Infrastructure Development:** There's a call for increased accountability and transparency in delivering essential infrastructure projects, including housing, transport, water, grid connections, and green energy. The manifesto stresses the urgency of addressing community deficits and driving meaningful, timely, and sustainable change in infrastructure development.
- **Collaborative Approach:** Recognizing that achieving these ambitions requires collective effort, the manifesto calls for collaboration among various stakeholders, including Local Authority executive teams, government departments, law enforcement agencies, planning boards, courts, and community organizations. It emphasizes the need for shared responsibility and engagement to drive progress.
- **Business Engagement and Economic Growth:** The manifesto urges elected councillors to work closely with the Chamber network and local businesses to advance shared goals and objectives. This highlights the interconnectedness between local government policies, economic development, and business competitiveness.

Overall, the manifesto serves as a roadmap for driving social, economic, and environmental development at the local level in Ireland. It emphasizes the importance of strong leadership, collaborative governance, and proactive engagement with stakeholders to address pressing challenges and achieve shared objectives over the next five years.

Mary Moyles, President 2024

Mags Downey Martin, Chief Executive 2024

Priorities

In drafting this Local Election Manifesto, Chambers Ireland held consultation meetings with a wide variety of stakeholders from across its network. This Manifesto reflects their 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 or 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 Local Councillors to recognise and promote the opportunities associated with the green transition within their cities and counties, 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)

Chambers Ireland 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 contribute 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 instil confidence in businesses to integrate the SDGs into their work and activities 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 our 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

Chambers Ireland 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.

Each 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 Local Authorities 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 country 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 cities and towns right across the country 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 Local Authorities to implement planning department one-stop-shops in every growth city and town 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. Each 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.

Our members have 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 a 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.

Ballina Chamber

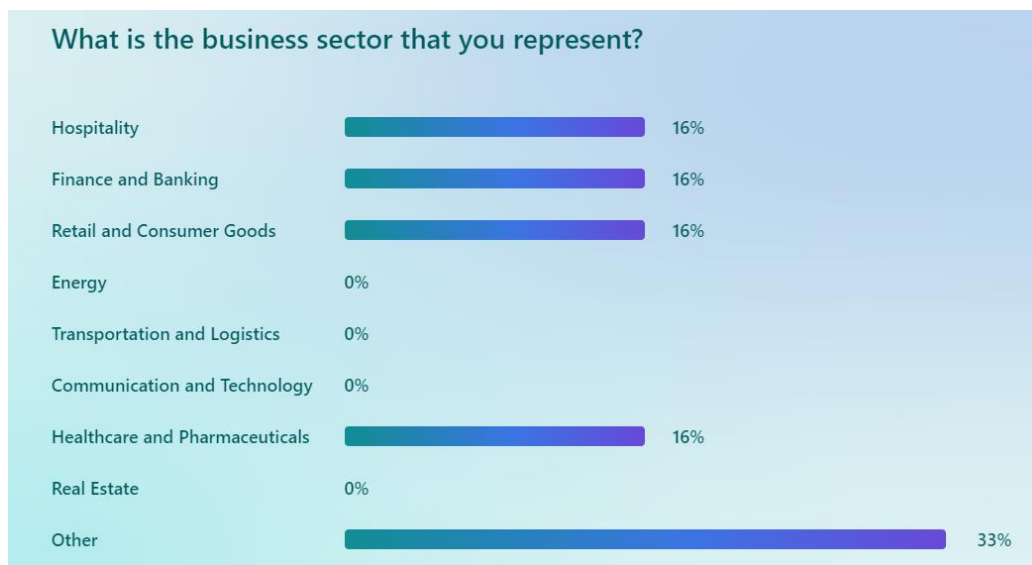
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Raising the issues that matter to you - Ballina Chamber Members & Business Community, March 2024.

Ballina Chamber recently carried out a survey among its members, requesting them to pinpoint three priorities for candidates, including those running for local and European elected positions. Here are the results of the survey.



What are your 3 main asks of Local Elected Officials both now and following the upcoming Local Elections in June.

Some of the responses include:

1. Why are our elected reps offering nothing other than knee jerk reactions to issues
2. What project have you played a key part of, in the last 5 years or offering for the next 5 years.
3. Why have you allowed local funding to town organisations to reduce or dilute. eg, Christmas lights

Parking, traffic control, public toilets on that order

1. Better advocacy on policing in Ballina including public areas and antisocial behaviour.
 2. Better representation on roads, infrastructure and transport issues including safety around the town.
 3. An ability to challenge the council on their decisions or, better still, to be involved in local decisions before they happen & then channel information back to the town with better communication.
-
1. Actively seek out ways to promote the commercial centre of Ballina. Engage in a structured and accountable process with local businesseseg by literally asking what businesses (and especially) their customers want. Set up the structure asap.

2. Actively ensure that once identified, these business and customer needs take precedence over new misguided traffic and town plans that have not researched any of the above. Whereas there was a “consultation process” it assumes the average customer or business owner has the expert knowledge, and time to struggle through hundreds of pages of plans and then have the time and financial resources to make individual submissions. Even a submission by the Chamber, representing many, many businesses, only counts as one submission in this flawed process. This is where Councillors can and should represent the real, on the ground concerns of businesses and their own rural constituents, e.g. those who need cars to access work, shops or services in Ballina - yet are being squeezed out of the town centre by the removal of central parking spaces, the proposed removal of on street parking for customers, and proposed bicycle lanes instead. There seems to be a complete lack of awareness of the real negative impacts on SMEs and their employees of these misguided policies. We haven’t the weather, the cyclists, the public transport or the density of population that can make these sorts of schemes work - Ballina is not Amsterdam.
3. if in any doubt as to what is really happening, ask why Ballina has THE HIGHEST RATE IN CONNACHT OF EMPTY COMMERCIAL PREMISES. Why are even AAA town centre locations left empty for years (eg both corner units junction of Tone St/ Tolan st, prime locations, one now occupied after 3 years empty, the other still empty)? Yes, online shopping damages bricks and mortar town centres, but why is Ballina the worst in Connacht? What can be done to improve potential new business confidence in investing in Ballina Town centre? (Hint: removal of on street parking, and adding bicycle lanes and park and stride is not a good start 😞) What brainstorming can we do to come up with business and customer experience improvements?

Sustainable travel, Traffic management, Road’s infrastructure

- To serve as good community leaders, responsive to the needs of the local community and businesses
- To take a long-term vision of what is needed in the local area, not just short term solutions to focus on re-election. To consider local rates - how they are calculated and what they deliver.
- The rates fees will close some businesses as their calculation is just not equitable. It should be based on turnover.

What are your 3 main asks of Mayo County Council, (& Ballina Municipal District Council) both now and following the upcoming Local Elections in June.

Some of the responses include:

1. Why has the Ballina area has become more disadvantaged and deprived in the last 5 years of record national economic growth (Pobal)
2. Since the abolition of town councils, please demonstrate how MCC has managed the gap in town governance, e.g., where is the major town policy that should have been developed, given MCC are the sole custodians of our local authority.

3. Why has customer service delivery in Ballina been reduced?

1. Learn how to communicate.
 2. Include the public in the processes.
 3. Collaborate and be more inclusive of the residents and businesses.
- Engage with businesses and shoppers in a meaningful manner about what retail and commercial enterprises need to survive. Go beyond a notice in the paper and a token consultation day for town plans. Engage further and listen before implementing.
 - Acknowledge that the car is the primary means of transport for work, shopping and accessing services in rural areas. Plan accordingly for this reality. Forward planning for green town and green agenda is important too but are decades away without realistic transport alternatives in place. We don't have these alternatives yet. In the meantime, forward loading these policies runs the very real risk of decimating town centre retail if Council plans continue making life difficult for car using shoppers, and essential service users. These will eventually just give up on town centre as a destination, with further impacts on occupancy levels. Stop and think.
 - Survey the needs of staff parking (as opposed to customer parking) in our large towns with properly structured professional surveys. A one afternoon assessment, by volunteers, of the number of cars parked is not the sort of structured study that's needed. Use the information gathered to address customer parking and staff parking needs. Acknowledge that there are not enough residents in town centres to sustain the retail core; acknowledge that in rural areas, customers want to park as near as possible to (not 400 metres away from) shops and services. Acknowledge the overwhelming reality of car usage vs bicycle usage vs walking for customer shopping in rural areas. Adapt current policies to reflect reality now.

Bike lanes for cycling to work Safety on town streets.

Leadership in climate action Ambition to look at new ways and approaches to development for Ballina and its hinterland Not always putting cars as the first step in solutions and listening to people as well as businesses to hear what the community really wants.

What are the main asks you have of sitting MEP's and candidates in the European Elections?

Can you deliver disadvantaged grants to Ballina?

don't now them having sen one in Ballina in 7 years (transparency with all refugees)

Do something for the people and/or the area and communicate it back. Stop being so self-serving and anonymous after getting elected.

How are you going to reverse the population drain from the West to the East of Ireland? What policy have you to support rural areas in attracting major international investment to disadvantaged areas (as it is clear current policies aren't working)? How are you going to reverse the brain drain of whole classes of our brightest and best professionals being recruited en masse to work in Australia/ New Zealand/ Dubai? They are not just going travelling for a couple of years, many are staying there for life. Will you support and actively seek and deliver funding for public private partnership (or other initiatives) designed to deliver locally in the key areas of health, housing and education?

They are invisible.

To be active in the constituency & be present for the people and businesses they represent. To communicate and create dialogue between their work in Europe and their constituents. To be present in their work and do the job they've been hired to do