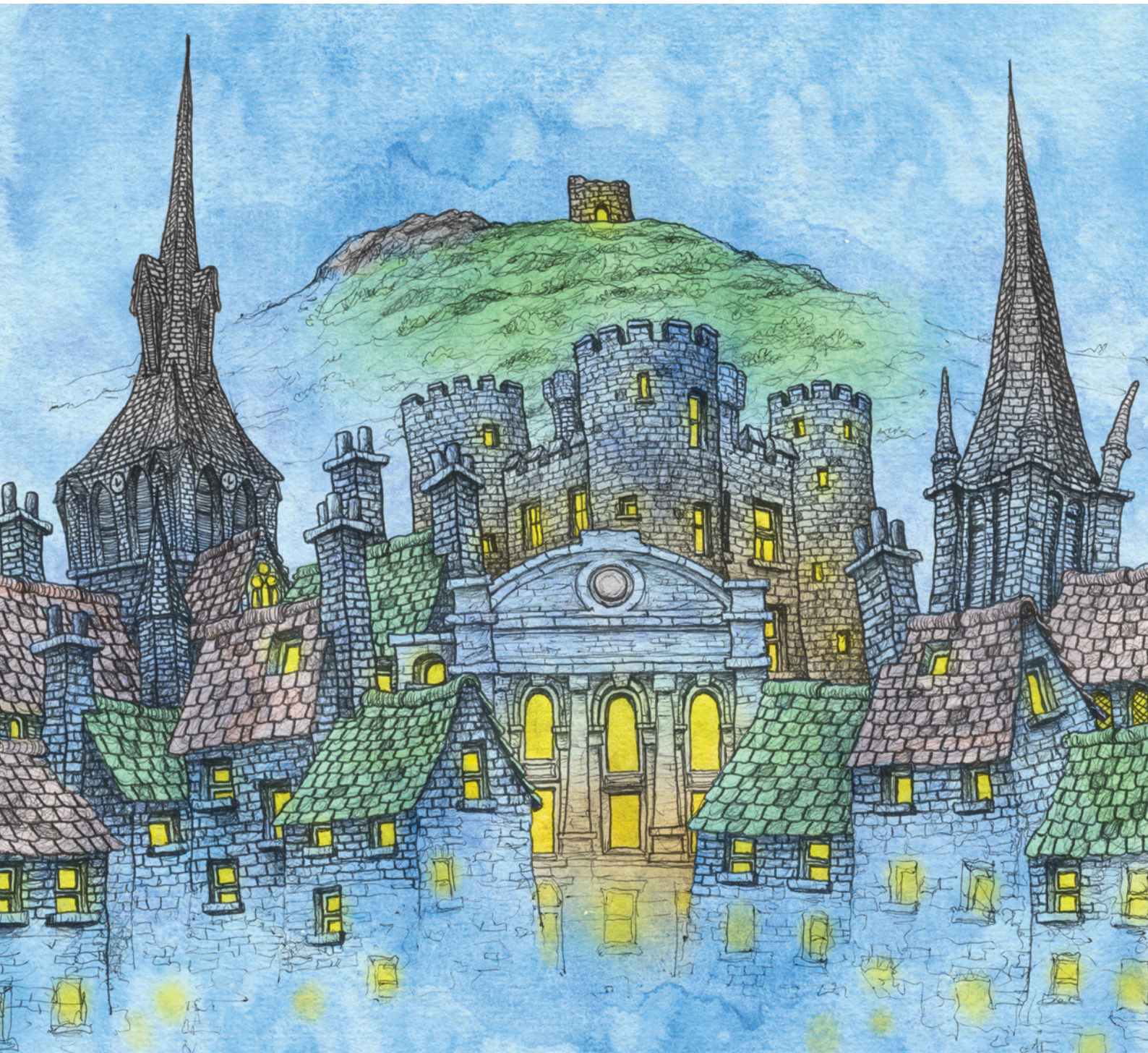


# The People's Transition Enniscorthy

Implementation of Community-Led  
Development for Climate Justice



Addressing inequality and sustaining democracy since 2001

## Acknowledgements

This paper outlines the application of The People's Transition model for implementing community-led development for climate justice solutions in Enniscorthy. Enniscorthy is one of thirty communities on the island of Ireland where The People's Transition model will be applied between 2022 and 2025. This project has been led by the Think-Tank for Action on Social Change (TASC) and backed by AIB.

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Rialtas na hÉireann  
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# Executive Summary

## Executive Summary

The People's Transition describes a model for participative decision-making that is intended to enable a community to benefit from the transition to a zero-carbon society. It aims to design climate solutions that give local people and communities ownership of the assets of transition and enhance public support for climate action by tackling inequality and raising standards of living.

The Enniscorthy People's Transition began in September 2022. The intention of the project was to listen to and learn from the community's needs and abilities in Enniscorthy and then attempt to design a number of climate solutions that would benefit the community and address a number of the main development priorities of the community.

The project had three phases. The first phase was the Mapping Phase. The mapping phase aimed to build a picture of the Enniscorthy community, outlining a geographical scope for the project that represents the people who live there. The key was understanding how people within the community could be included by assessing who was at the greatest risk of being excluded. In addition to demographics and circumstances, the area was studied to understand the distribution of institutions and organisations, such as schools, churches and community groups, that play a significant role in the locality.

The mapping phase informed the rollout of the second phase – the Listening Phase. To gather inputs on community needs, priorities and strengths, the TASC team engaged with local volunteers, active community members and several harder-to-reach groups, such as residents participating in CE employment schemes, members of the Roma community and young adults in the area. As the Listening Stage came to an end, a survey was distributed to gather further input from community members in Enniscorthy and ensure that the emerging picture of the community was correct.

Throughout the various groups engaged, a number of common themes emerged. These included the sense of community within the town and an appreciation for the history and culture present. Several challenges facing the town were discussed. These include the lack of sustainable employment opportunities in the town, a lack of amenities and community wealth alongside the perception that Enniscorthy has been overlooked by decision-makers at a local and national level.

Based on the listening phase, the TASC team worked with experts to identify and substantiate viable climate solutions that would address local needs and build on the community's strengths. The first solution presented in this report focuses on shared mobility. The lack of mobility options within the town was identified as a factor impacting the local economy and people's ability to access services. While there is a growing focus on increasing the uptake of electric vehicles (EVs) at the Government level, the price of EVs may make them inaccessible to many community members. The idea of an Electric Vehicle taxi co-operative is presented in this report. While this is not the only approach to addressing the mobility issue, it could help to create new jobs within the community.

The second solution focuses on community-owned solar energy. A benefit of solar energy is that it can reduce dependence on fossil fuel energy. Developing community-owned solar energy could help to limit reliance on fossil fuels, especially following the increases in costs due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Community-owned energy could also help improve air quality by reducing dependence on solid fuels such as coal, address energy poverty and provide a source of income to invest in community facilities.

These solutions should not be considered the only possible collective climate initiatives community members could undertake in Enniscorthy. Others, looking at the same set of needs and priorities, may land on different climate solutions. However, it is hoped that the process, as much as the proposed solutions, provokes thought about how the investment in climate action can address existing development needs rather than perpetuate them.

## **Key Terms**

### **Climate action**

Political, collective and individual action on climate change can take many forms. Climate action means stepped-up efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen resilience and adaptive capacity to climate-induced impacts, including climate-related hazards in all countries; integrating climate change measures into national policies, strategies and planning; and improving education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity with respect to climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning. There are other challenges that intersect climate action and environmental protection, such as enhancing biodiversity and improving water quality.

### **Community Wealth Building**

Community wealth building or local wealth building is a new people-centred approach to local economic development, which redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people. Community wealth building is a response to the contemporary challenges of austerity, financialisation and automation. It seeks to provide resilience where there is risk and local economic security where there is precarity.

### **Anchor Institution**

An anchor institution is one that, alongside its main function, plays a significant and recognised role in a locality by making a strategic contribution to the local economy. Anchor institutions generally have strong ties to the geographic area in which they are based through invested capital, mission and relationship to customers and employees. These institutions tend to operate not-for-profit. It is much simpler for private businesses to move, so there is no guarantee they will continue serving the local community in the long-term. However, there are examples of for-profit organisations playing the role of an anchor institution.

### **Local Development**

Local development is the identification and use of the resources and endogenous potentialities of a community, neighbourhood, city or equivalent. The local development approach considers the endogenous potentialities of territories. Economic and non-economic factors influence local development processes. Among the non-economic factors, social, cultural, historical, institutional, and geographical aspects can be decisive in the process of local economic development.



## **Sustainable Development**

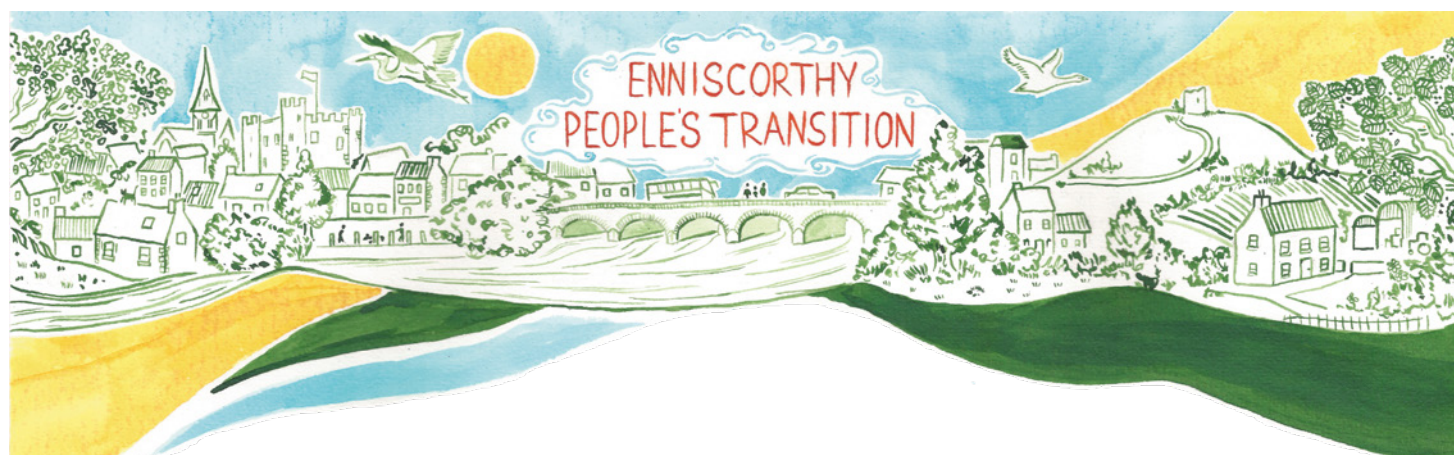
Sustainable development has been defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable development calls for concerted efforts towards building an inclusive, sustainable, and resilient future for people and the planet. For sustainable development to be achieved, it is crucial to harmonise three core elements: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. These elements are interconnected, and all are crucial for the well-being of individuals and societies.



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# 1. Introduction

# 1. Introduction



Tackling climate change requires urgent and unprecedented action in communities across the world. Given the interdependent nature of the crisis, if climate action is to be enduring, it must be inclusive and equitable by ensuring that its burdens and benefits are shared throughout society. While the importance of inclusive climate policy seems to be widely understood, there are few tried and tested frameworks for the co-creation of climate policy in European communities.

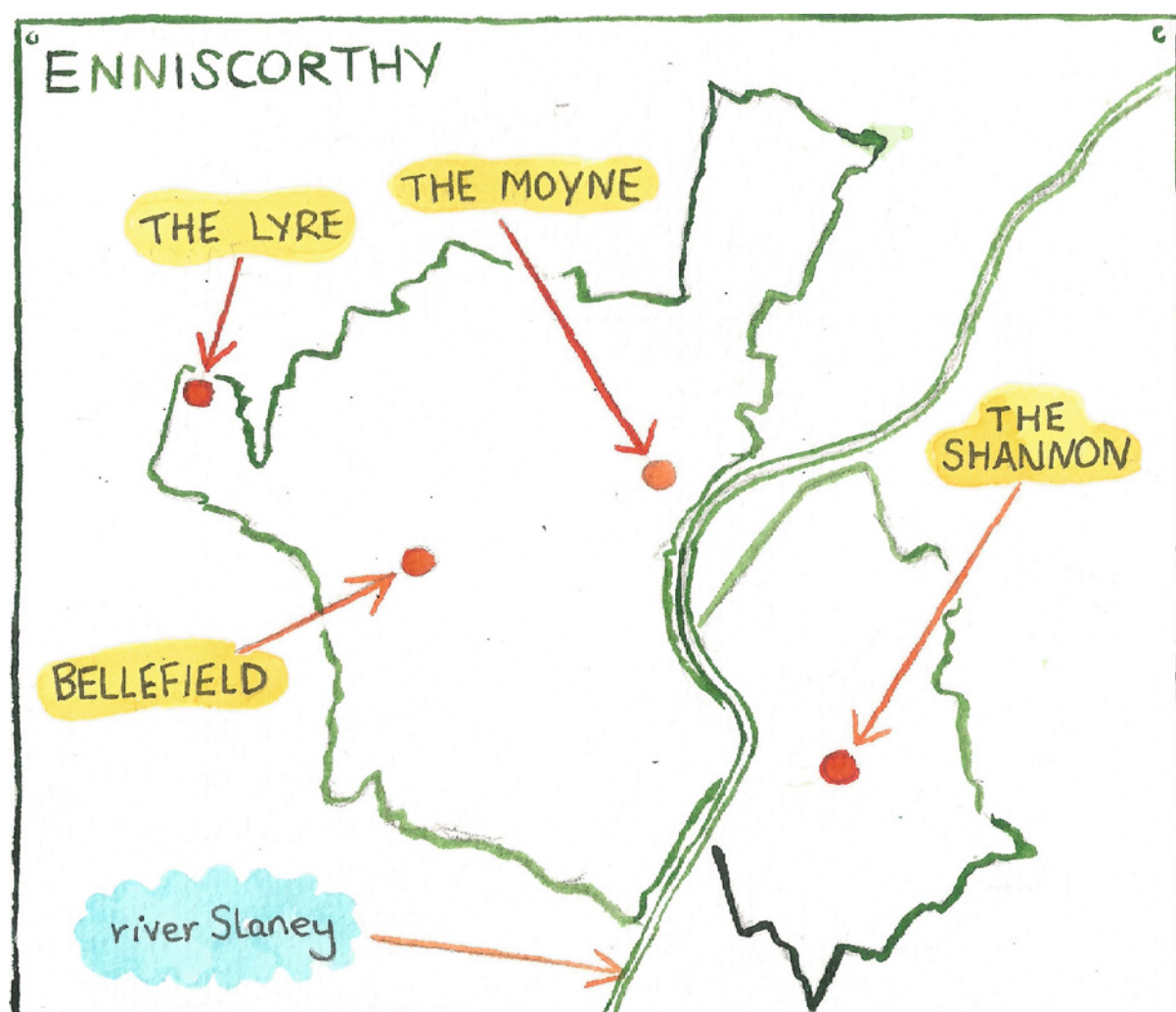
The People's Transition (McCabe, 2020) attempts to address this. It is a participative decision-making model for climate action. It views climate action as an enabler of local development, giving people and communities ownership of the transition to zero-carbon societies. The model, which was developed through extensive consultation with communities and organisations around Ireland, seeks to deliver a bottom-up approach to transition that builds local wealth, enables local ownership of climate action and empowers local people. It aims to tackle inequality and raise living standards by delivering climate solutions, thus proactively building social approval and demand for climate action.

To transfer the People's Transition model into practice, TASC will apply the People's Transition model in thirty communities throughout the island of Ireland over a three-year period. This report deals with the project undertaken in Enniscorthy. Categorised as a medium-large town under the Irish Government's policy approach for Irish towns, Enniscorthy is located centrally in Co. Wexford in the South-East of Ireland (Government of Ireland, 2022b). Situated on the banks of the river Slaney, Enniscorthy has been the site of important moments in Irish history, most notably the battle of Vinegar Hill in 1798. The academy award nominated movie *Brooklyn* was based on the book written by Enniscorthy native Colm Tóibín, with scenes of the movie being filmed in the town. Moving to the present day, unemployment and extreme weather events are notable challenges facing Enniscorthy. The town has been impacted by flooding on several occasions over recent decades. As reported in the census data of 2016, the Enniscorthy Urban electoral division had an unemployment rate that was approximately 20% higher than the national average, standing at 32.1% (Hayden, 2017). A number of developments connected to sustainability are currently taking place in Enniscorthy. This includes its designation as the decarbonisation zone for Wexford County Council and new initiatives to promote sustainable living among community members and businesses.

The project had three phases, leading to the co-creation of solutions that address the needs of the community. First, a mapping phase made use of existing geographical and census data to outline the groups of people that live in the community, giving particular attention to vulnerable groups and identifying challenges and opportunities for climate action. This information was used to design a listening phase, through which the TASC team engaged directly with the community to understand different groups' and individuals' needs and priorities.

The solutions identified and researched in detail are an electric vehicle taxi co-operative and community-owned solar energy. These specific solutions are designed to meet the need for climate action whilst also being realistic and beneficial for the Enniscorthy. They provide a blueprint for how the People's Transition Model might be applied in a specific context.

This report presents the findings of all three phases in a narrative which aims to take the reader through the People's Transition process to illustrate why it is important to consider climate action from a people or community-centred approach. By listening first and ensuring that all voices are heard, it is hoped that climate action will benefit from greater social approval and thus will be in higher demand.





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## 2. Phase I: Mapping Phase

## 2. Phase I: Mapping Phase

The mapping phase aimed to build a picture of the Enniscorthy community, outlining a geographical scope for the project that represents the people who live there. An area was mapped to include the anchor institutions, such as schools, churches and community groups, that play a significant role in the locality. These institutions are important since they make a strategic contribution to the local economy and society on a long-term basis (McCabe 2020). Identifying key actors and community leaders in various fields allowed for the inclusion of the groups associated with them in the project, helping the TASC team to connect with the community and identify their needs and priorities.

There are various social groups in Enniscorthy whose focus ranges from health and care responsibilities to sports and recreation outlets. The Presentation Arts Centre provides access to cultural events, visual arts, and education programmes for the community. A recent initiative in the town is the Enniscorthy Community Allotment. The allotment has been established to provide people living in urban areas with a way of growing their own food in an organic and sustainable way (Enniscorthy Guardian, 2021). The allotment has also been described as diverse and intergenerational as it provides areas for local organisations such as the Hope Cancer Support Centre, Enniscorthy Community Workshop, primary and secondary schools, and the Tidy Towns Association.



Beyond community-based initiatives, Enniscorthy is the site of developments focused on securing a more sustainable society. The High-Performance Building Alliance based in Enniscorthy was designated a UN Centre of Excellence in 2021 (Leonard, 2021). It supports the development of *nearly zero-energy buildings alongside increasing knowledge, capacity and demand for low-carbon emission buildings*



(High-Performance Building Alliance, 2021). Enniscorthy has several historic buildings, such as Enniscorthy Castle and St Aidan's Cathedral. A notable feature of the town is The National 1798 Rebellion Centre. Vinegar Hill, the site of one of the main battles during the 1798 rebellion, overlooks the town. St John's Community Hospital also services Enniscorthy.

The undertaking of desk-based research identified several environmental challenges facing the town. Firstly, Enniscorthy has a long history of flooding (Enniscorthy Flood Defence Scheme, n.d.). Over the past two decades, extreme rainfall has led to flooding. The Wexford County Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy for 2019 to 2024 describes the impacts of flooding on the town (Wexford County Council, 2016). In 2014, Storm Darwin resulted in a status red warning for strong winds. This was classified as a once-in-20-year event with wind speeds reaching 80-90km/h, resulting in severe flooding in Enniscorthy. Between December 2015 and January 2016, Storm Frank caused heavy rain and flooding. The main N11 national road through the town was flooded, while bridges in the town were also damaged (Wexford County Council, 2016).



Alongside flooding, another environmental issue impacting Enniscorthy is air quality. Enniscorthy featured in a report by the Irish Environmental Protection Agency focusing on the impact of burning solid fuels for residential heating in Irish towns (Wenger *et al.*, 2020). The reason for selecting Enniscorthy in this study alongside two other towns (Killarney, Co. Kerry and Birr, Co. Offaly) was the absence of a natural gas supply for the town. At the time of this study, each of the towns were also outside of Ireland's smoky coal ban areas, which is applied to towns with more than 15,000 inhabitants. Of the three sites, Enniscorthy had the highest particulate pollution level. The impact of air pollution in the town led to the claim that Enniscorthy is becoming the 'New Dehli of Ireland' (Pollak, 2019). The report from Wenger *et al.* (2020) found that reducing emissions from all solid fuels, including peat, wood and coal, would improve air quality.

The mapping of organisations and facilities within Enniscorthy gave an idea of some of the places where the community is already meeting and institutions that might be involved in a plan for community-led climate action. More detailed information was gathered from the area using census data. This allowed for an assessment of potentially underrepresented groups so that inequalities in participation could be better addressed during the listening phase. The mapping phase also helped to identify potential barriers that people might face to participate in climate action. On the flip side, opportunities for engaging in climate action were identified, with information collected on resources available to the community that might strengthen the project.

## 2.1 Community data

Data from the most recent census was utilised in the mapping phase. It should be noted that as the full dataset from the 2022 census data was not available at the beginning of this study, data from the 2016 census was used. The combined population of the Enniscorthy Urban and Rural electoral divisions as of 2016 was 12,651. There are several differences between the two electoral divisions. Located in the centre of the town, the Enniscorthy Urban ED has seen a significant population decline over recent decades. Its population has fallen from 4,064 in 1981 to 2,666 in 2016. In contrast to this is the increase in the population of the town's hinterland. The population of the Enniscorthy Rural electoral division has risen from 5,100 in 1981 to 9,985 in 2016.

Regarding age profile, there is a similar divide between the two areas. In total, 1,908 people in Enniscorthy were over the age of 65. This was approximately 15% of the population. While this figure was below the national average of 19.1%, there was a difference between Enniscorthy Urban and Rural (Central Statistics Office, 2017). In Enniscorthy Urban, almost one-quarter of the population was over 65, while the figure for Enniscorthy Rural stands at a much lower level of 12.5%.

Enniscorthy Urban is classed as disadvantaged on the Pobal Deprivation Index, while Enniscorthy Rural is classified as marginally below average (Pobal, n.d.). From analysing census data, a key finding was the high levels of unemployment in Enniscorthy Urban. As of 2016, the unemployment rate for males was 36.66%, and the rate for females was 27.34%. At a total unemployment rate of 32.1%, this was almost 20% higher than the national average for 2016, which stood at 12.9% (Hayden, 2017). While most workers in Enniscorthy Urban were employed in non-manual, skilled and semi-skilled areas, managerial and technical roles were the most common employment source for people living in Enniscorthy Rural. A further challenge facing people in Enniscorthy is the lack of access to personal computers and internet connectivity. Most citizens in Enniscorthy Urban did not have access to a personal computer. A high proportion of the population had a secondary education, but almost one in five left formal education after primary level.

In the area of housing, a majority of the housing stock in Enniscorthy Urban was built before 1945. In contrast to this is Enniscorthy Rural, where over one-third of the housing stock was built after 2001. The age of houses in Enniscorthy Urban may lead to additional challenges for people, particularly in the energy efficiency of housing. Over 5% of homes in this electoral division had no central heating, while almost 30% were fuelled by coal. This is much higher than the national average as around 6% of homes nationally use coal as their main energy source (SEAI, 2017). Around 24% of homes in Enniscorthy Rural used coal for fuel, while a much higher proportion used oil as their heating source. Regarding ownership, 17% of all housing in Enniscorthy was rented from the local authority. Notably, 3% of houses in Enniscorthy Urban were rented from a voluntary or co-operative housing body. This indicates the possibility that community members have participated in co-operative organisations. 42.6% of households in Enniscorthy Urban did not own a car. The percentage for Enniscorthy Urban and Rural combined was 23%.

## 2.2 Active Citizenship

Several community groups are actively engaged in climate action and community development. Established in 2019, Sustainable Enniscorthy focuses on incorporating the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals in the town. The group has held events locally to increase awareness and community engagement. Sustainable Enniscorthy is based on two pillars: sustainability which focuses on energy, biodiversity and securing a sustainable economy, and health and well-being (Sustainable Enniscorthy, 2022).



Wexford County Council nominated Enniscorthy as Wexford's pilot Decarbonisation Zone. The Irish Government's Climate Action Plan for 2019 outlines the requirement for Local Authorities to identify and develop plans for one Decarbonising Zone (Dublin Metropolitan Climate Action Regional Office, 2020). A Decarbonising Zone 'is an area spatially identified by the local authority, in which a range of climate mitigation measures can co-exist to address local low carbon energy, greenhouse gas emissions and climate needs' (Dublin Metropolitan Climate Action Regional Office, 2020 p.4). Reimagining Enniscorthy is a public art and community decarbonisation project which takes a collaborative, place-based approach to responding to the climate crisis (Reimagining Enniscorthy, n.d.). Reimagining Enniscorthy aims to 'raise awareness about decarbonisation and how the daily choices we make can help cultivate sustainable, local resource networks, and protect our food crop heritage and biodiversity for the future' (Reimagining Enniscorthy, n.d.). A further example of active citizenship in the town is the development of the Enjoy Enniscorthy initiative. It seeks to promote tourism, investment and community within Enniscorthy.

It was clear from an early stage that any suggested solutions emerging from the People's Transition would need to complement, rather than duplicate, existing efforts and that the future success of the proposals from this People's Transition project will rely on its adoption by the strong network of community groups. The mapping phase highlighted information that was the foundation of the listening phase. An understanding of the community dynamics, vulnerable groups and demographic data allowed TASC to design a listening phase that was inclusive and built on existing community relations and social fabric. This listening phase set out to understand the needs and priorities of the community, thereby taking steps towards identifying suitable community-led climate solutions to meet societal needs.



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# 3. Phase II: Listening Phase

## 3. Phase II: Listening Phase

### 3.1 Community Outreach

The Listening Phase was designed to foster trust, gather knowledge and build capacity whilst identifying community needs and priorities. A communications plan was developed to bring attention to the People's Transition project, increasing engagement in the listening phase and informing the community of the project's outcomes. A press release was distributed and picked up by local print and online news sources. The team also worked with local rapporteurs in Enniscorthy to ensure the involvement of groups that might not typically have their voices heard. Focus groups were organised with young people, members of the Roma community and people participating in Community Employment schemes, among other community groups. Community gatherings were held with those who volunteered to be involved and others who became aware of the project through its publicity. The aim of these conversations was, first and foremost, to listen. Each focus group was asked the same questions: what do you like most about Enniscorthy, what do you think are the main challenges facing Enniscorthy, and what do you feel is lacking in Enniscorthy? Listening to the lived experiences of a diverse community allowed the project team to build a picture of the challenges facing community members in Enniscorthy.

To gather further data, a community-wide survey was developed. The survey aimed to check the findings from listening to community members about the key issues identified. The survey was digital but distributed as widely as possible. Community organisations such as schools and sports clubs were contacted to share the survey among their members.

The Listening Phase of the People's Transition for Enniscorthy ran from November 2022 to February 2023. There were 142 people in the project, with 80 people participating in focus groups and interviews and a further 62 involved through the completion of a survey.



## 3.2 What we heard – needs, priorities & strengths

### 3.2.1 History, culture and a sense of community

When asked what they like most about Enniscorthy, community members described a range of topics. One of the most common responses was the amount of history and heritage in the town. This included the role of Enniscorthy in the 1798 rebellion and the 1916 Easter rising alongside the presence of Enniscorthy Castle and St Aidan's Cathedral. People also described Enniscorthy as a very scenic town with Vinegar Hill overlooking the town and the promenade along the river Slaney which flows through the town. The town's layout was described as unique, with one community member describing how *'there are very few towns with a hill to the town centre'*. The steepness of the town led another person to quip that:

*'The best thing about this town is you don't need a gym.'*

Despite the town's natural beauty, some community members felt that not enough had been done to make the most of these assets. Alongside the town's historic character, community members also described the cultural and sporting traditions within the town. The hosting of the annual Rockin' Food and Fruit festival during the August bank holiday was described by one young person as being *'the best week of the year'*. Other community events discussed included a Blues festival and events at Christmas. People also described the range of sports groups in the town and community members' support of these teams. Aligned with this was the sense that Enniscorthy has a tight-knit community. Various groups spoke of the sense of community, volunteerism among community members, and how they view Enniscorthy as a friendly town. Another word commonly used to describe Enniscorthy was potential. Several groups also referenced the creation of community allotments as a positive initiative.

### 3.2.2 Lack of jobs

In terms of Enniscorthy's challenges, a range of groups identified the lack of jobs as limiting the town's development potential. Community members spoke of the need for *'better-paid jobs'*, *'more industry – big or small'* and jobs that include *'all in the community'*. The impact of the lack of employment on the town was discussed in several ways. Firstly, given Enniscorthy's location in the centre of County Wexford, there had been a tradition of industry connected to agriculture. Examples of this include a bacon factory, a jam factory and a flour mill. An aluminium plant had also operated in the town but closed in 2001. Community members spoke of previous plans for retail and beverage developments in the town. These plans had not, however, come to fruition.



A consequence of the loss of jobs over the preceding decades was the level of unemployment within the town identified in the analysis of census data. This has resulted in higher-than-average dependence on social welfare due to the lack of job opportunities. One community member

described how Enniscorthy's long-term aim should be to create employment opportunities which would result in more money coming into the town. A further impact of the lack of job opportunities within the town was the view that there would be a drain of people who leave Enniscorthy for college and never return. The need for more opportunities for further and higher education, such as apprenticeships, was also identified as a challenge for people in Enniscorthy.

### 3.2.3 Lack of amenities

When asked what was lacking in Enniscorthy, a significant theme referenced by community members was amenities. Several community groups spoke of the lack of amenities for young people in the town. Examples include the absence of a cinema and bowling alley in the town. While there was a cinema in the town, this closed a number of years ago. The lack of youth clubs and recreational outlets beyond sports clubs were also discussed as amenities lacking in Enniscorthy. As described by one person, *'if you're not into sport, you're at a loss'*. Community members also spoke of a lack of retail within the town. This is illustrated in the comment by one person that *'Enniscorthy is the second biggest town in Wexford, but there is nothing in it'*. When speaking about retail in the town, various groups described how they would have to leave Enniscorthy to go to places such as Wexford and Gorey to shop.



Focusing on young people in particular, there was a perception that for teens and people in their early 20s, there was *'nothing to keep that age group in the town'*. One young person affirmed this by saying: *'anyone wondering why there's no money in town is because you're driving us out of the town'*. The perceived lack of retail in the town resulted in wealth in the community being spent outside of the town. Alongside the lack of retail, the lack of a night-time economy within the town was noted. As described by one person, going to *'Dunnes stores is the most entertainment I get at night-time'*. Aligned with this was the view that at 6 p.m., the only things open in the town were *'pubs and bookies'*. The lack of a nightclub in the town was also viewed as negatively impacting the night-time economy.

A factor influencing issues with retail and the lack of amenities in the town was the impact of flooding. One person described how the town was *'losing so much business with the floods'*. Other comments relating to the impact of flooding on the town include *'everything gets closed in Enniscorthy because of the floods'* and *'shops never stay in the town... they're always changing every six months'*. A consequence of the history of flooding in the town is the difficulty it has caused businesses in getting insurance coverage.



While not directly related to the lack of amenities within the town, some community members spoke of the level of dereliction within the town. As described by one person, while the shop fronts in the town look nice, many are empty or dilapidated. Creating a community hub at the centre of the town was viewed as a measure which could help the town. Alongside empty buildings in the middle of the town, community members spoke of the need for more colour. One suggestion for improving Enniscorthy was by making it 'a more colourful, interactive, expressive town'. While not a theme referenced by all community groups, there was the perception of a disconnection between the two sides of the town. One community member living in the Templeshannon / Enniscorthy East area spoke of how town development had focused on the other side of town and the Templeshannon community had been forgotten. Despite being located beneath Vinegar Hill, the National 1798 rebellion centre was on the other side of town. Aligned with this was the lack of connectivity between Templeshannon and the rest of the town. Similarly, on the other side of town, although new residential developments have taken place in the Moyne area, this area was viewed as lacking resources such as shops.

### 3.2.4 Mobility

While the steepness of Enniscorthy was described as something that made the town unique, it was also viewed as having downsides. A prominent issue facing community members in the town was the impact this has on mobility around the town. Older cohorts and members of the community with a disability were seen as being particularly impacted by the presence of hills in the town and the lack of benches for people to take a break if they have walked a long distance. While Vinegar Hill was discussed by many community members for its scenery, getting there was described as challenging. Community members also highlighted the lack of transport options within the town and getting to places outside of Enniscorthy. This was particularly relevant to non-car users. One person spoke of how their ill mother had to travel to Waterford regional hospital for care. The fact that she did not have a car meant that travelling to Waterford was challenging.



Similar to the issue of unemployment described previously, the lack of transport options means that getting around the town or leaving the town to take part in higher education was a barrier facing community members. One community member discussed how there would be a regular supply of people to fill manufacturing jobs if such development were to take place in the town. An issue in achieving this would be the completion of traineeships by community members if they had to leave the town. While new developments have occurred in the Old Dublin Road area of the town, this was viewed as inaccessible to some community members as there was no bus

route or footpath connecting this area to the town centre. Alongside issues such as health and employment, community members also mentioned that while Enniscorthy is close to the beach, a car is needed to access this amenity. A further issue related to transport discussed by community members was the congestion in Enniscorthy during the afternoon and a lack of parking.

Regarding options for public transport, community members mentioned the presence of rail and bus links within the town. While Enniscorthy station is located on the Dublin to Rosslare Europort line, one community member explained how it is '*as frustrating having a train as not having it*'. This is due to the limited service provided and the fact that it takes approximately one hour longer to travel to Dublin by train compared to driving. While developments such as local links have assisted in connecting villages around Enniscorthy to the town, community members spoke of the benefits of having more options for public transport to get around the town. Ideas discussed included the development of a shuttle bus or taxis. Improving connectivity with other urban centres, such as Waterford and Kilkenny, was also discussed as something that could improve the town's quality of life. More taxi services were described as one measure that could help support the town's night-time economy. A final challenge community members noted regarding mobility was the lack of safe cycling spaces in the town.

### ***3.2.5 A lack of community input in decision-making***

A final topic common among community groups was the perception that there is a lack of community input in decision-making. This was highlighted in the comment by one community member:

*'It seems we're being side-lined.'*

Similar to the focus on community members leaving Enniscorthy to shop in other towns in the county, community members also spoke of the perception that other towns in County Wexford were receiving more funding and more focus while Enniscorthy was being left behind. This is highlighted in the comment:

*'Wexford and Gorey have a lot of funding – they have a lot of facilities for their people.'*

An example of the perception that Enniscorthy had been overlooked was the decision to locate a South East Technological University campus in Wexford town rather than Enniscorthy. Community members described how locating the campus in Enniscorthy would have been more economically feasible as a site which previously hosted a psychiatric hospital could have been converted into a college campus. The presence of a college in the town was seen as something that would have enhanced Enniscorthy. This example was one of a number referenced by community members whereby developments had been promised to the town but did not materialise. One community member did, however, speak of when they first moved to Enniscorthy in the late 1990s, there was a buzz around the town as Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann, the national festival of traditional music, was hosted in Enniscorthy at this time. In 1998, the town hosted a stage of Tour de France while new developments, such as the now derelict cinema and a hotel, had opened around that time.

Community members spoke of the need for greater community involvement within decision-making processes. One suggestion was establishing a committee comprising ordinary community members of different age groups and backgrounds, thereby ensuring a diversity of input. A further suggestion was developing a town hall model similar to what takes place in the United States, whereby community members can engage with elected representatives from the town. Improving communication was also considered necessary to promote Enniscorthy and provide information to community members.

### **3.3 From community needs to community solutions**

Building upon what was learned during the Mapping and Listening phases, the TASC team worked with several stakeholders to flesh out solutions for climate action that address community needs and priorities. Understandably, not all needs identified by residents could be addressed through community-led climate action, so it was necessary to hone in on a number of pertinent issues. It must be stressed that this is not an exact science, and others, looking at the same set of needs and priorities, may land on different climate solutions. However, it is hoped that the process, as much as the proposed solutions, provokes thought as to how the investment in climate action can address, rather than perpetuate, existing development needs.

The engagement process with local communities shone a light on several clear issues that interlink with climate action. For instance, the desire to have a say in local development opportunities featured heavily during the Listening Stage of the project. So did concern for the extreme weather events and the need for decent local employment opportunities. These challenges highlighted the need for solutions that could help increase community wealth. Mobility issues, both within the town and accessing services outside of the town, formed the basis for focusing on a solution relating to sustainable forms of transport. Furthermore, the issue of air quality caused by reliance on fossil fuels pointed to the need for renewable energy that could generate revenue that could be used to improve the level of resources within the town.

By adopting an intentionally inclusive approach and foregrounding groups whose voices are not often heard, the People's Transition for Enniscorthy has sought to enable the creation of solutions grounded in expanding the capabilities of community members. In this way, the project hopes to be a catalyst for community-led local development in a way that works for Enniscorthy. Fundamentally, climate action based on rights, equity and dignity is most likely to proactively build social approval.



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# 4. Phase III: Solutions Phase

## 4. Phase III: Solutions Phase

Having completed the mapping and listening phases, the TASC team worked with relevant experts to identify potential solutions for the community that would accelerate climate action, address local needs and priorities, and build community wealth. The team settled on developing two concepts: an electric vehicle taxi co-operative and community-owned solar energy. These solutions should not be considered the only possible collective climate initiatives that could be undertaken in Enniscorthy, they were just two initiatives which the team felt would be feasible and implementable.



One other solution that had been considered was a worker-owned manufacturing co-operative. The idea of this initiative came from an organisation in Morwell, Australia, called the Earthworker co-operative. Similar to the issue of unemployment facing community members in Enniscorthy, Morwell is a community that has long been dependent on coalmining for employment. Due to the move away from coal, there was the risk that workers would be left behind in the move towards renewable energy. Several trade union members and environmentalists came together to establish the Earthworker co-operative. The co-operative aims to build solutions to climate change by supporting local manufacturing, and providing affordable renewable energy options for households to reduce their energy usage and power bills (Earthworker, 2017). The Earthworker co-operative manufactures heat pump hot water systems, stainless steel storage tanks and solar hot-water systems, thereby providing employment for workers previously employed in coalmining.

While the development of a solution similar to Earthworker Co-operative could help to address the issue of unemployment in Enniscorthy, the TASC team decided that the development of this solution may be too large-scale as an initial starting point for engaging communities in the area of climate action for community-led local development. This was due to the potential upfront cost of creating such an initiative. However, a key aspect of the People's Transition is building capacity whereby successful small-scale developments can help to engage more people and create an economy of scale that can lead to larger projects that are community owned and generate community wealth for communities.

## 4.1 Solution 1: Electric vehicle taxi co-operative



### 4.1.1 Policy context

To reduce emissions from transport, the Irish Government has set the target of increasing the number of electric vehicles (EVs) in Ireland to almost 1 million by 2030 (Government of Ireland, 2022a). By 2030, all newly registered cars must be electric. In 2020, 4013 Electric Vehicles were sold in the Republic of Ireland. This accounted for 45% of all car sales (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2021). In the Climate Action Plan published in 2022, the Government announced a range of incentives to support the uptake of electric vehicles. This includes reducing the Vehicle

Registration Tax (VRT). Alongside increasing access to electric vehicles, the Climate Action Plan also describes actions that will be taken to increase access to EV charging facilities in the five cities in the Republic of Ireland. Electric vehicle home chargers are currently highly concentrated in Dublin and Cork (Expert Group on Future Skills Needs, 2021).

Despite the benefits that EVs might have for the environment, the Climate Action Plan argues that relying on changes in privately-owned vehicles alone is unlikely to lead to substantial improvements for the environment. Alongside increasing access to public transport, another policy focus has been increasing access to electric vehicle taxis. In 2022, the Department of Transport allocated €15 million to enable small public service vehicles (SPSV), such as taxis and hackneys, to buy electric vehicles (Department of Transport, 2022). Drivers of small public service vehicles could apply for grants of up to €10,000 to support the purchase of new, fully-battery electric vehicles. Taxi drivers were also eligible for a €20,000 grant if they scrap an 'older, more polluting or high mileage vehicle and make the switch to electric' (Department of Transport, 2022). A further incentive was provided if the taxi was a wheelchair-accessible electric vehicle. On the 9<sup>th</sup> of February, 2023, the National Transport Authority (2023) announced that the eSPSV grant scheme would reopen.

#### **4.1.2 Electric vehicle taxis (eTaxis)**

Electric vehicles (EVs) are proposed as a solution to reducing emission creation from transport. They use an electric motor powered by a battery and can be recharged at home or in a public charging station (Clairand *et al.*, 2019). Alongside policy measures that seek to increase EV uptake as a form of private transport, there has also been a growing focus on using electric vehicles for taxis (Yang *et al.*, 2018b). Studies focusing on taxis in Manhattan in New York, Sweden, and Hong Kong describe the benefits of eTaxis for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and energy consumption. They also note that the high cost of owning a battery electric vehicle is a significant factor for taxi operators to move towards using more EVs as taxis (Yang *et al.*, 2018b).

There are several environmental, health and financial benefits of adopting eTaxis. Firstly, as there are no tailpipe emissions from electric vehicles, this can help to reduce air pollution by reducing the creation of gases such as Carbon Monoxide (Yang *et al.*, 2018b). This improves air quality in towns and cities (Ahn *et al.*, 2018; Morro-Mello *et al.*, 2019). An interesting finding in the study from Clairand *et al.* (2019) is that the impact of petrol or diesel car emissions on local air quality is worse in high-elevation cities. Given that air quality was identified as an issue in the mapping stage of this study, and community members described the problems that the hilly nature of the town causes people to get around, this highlights the environmental benefits that a move to eTaxis could have for people in Enniscorthy. A further advantage of eTaxis is that they reduce noise pollution (Scorrano *et al.*, 2020).

One report suggests that by 2025, the total cost of owning an electric vehicle will be cheaper than owning an internal combustion engine car in most regions (Krishnan *et al.*, 2022). Clairand *et al.* (2019) and Scorrano *et al.* (2020) describe how eTaxis can compete with standard petrol or diesel taxis. This is because eTaxis can recoup the additional cost in less than one and a half years due to lower fuel costs for the eTaxis (Scorrano *et al.*, 2020). Maintenance costs for a fleet of EVs are also thought to be lower than standard taxis. However, there is limited evidence of this (Carpenter *et*



*al.*, 2014). Yang *et al.* (2018a) also describe how factors impacting the uptake of eTaxi among taxi drivers include vehicle price, purchase tax, registration and license fee, fuel cost, and operation and maintenance. The battery's lifespan was also identified as a factor that influences the willingness of taxi drivers to move towards eTaxi (Yang *et al.*, 2018b).

A final benefit of eTaxi, which address a clear need identified from the engagement with community members, is that it can help improve mobility. The study by Borowiak (2019) describes how having good transport options is an important factor in overcoming unemployment. By having an eTaxi service in place, people could access jobs they would not otherwise do if they do not have a car or another option for public transport is not in place. Furthermore, it could also help people access further education options. Linking back to findings from the listening phase, eTaxi could help promote the night-time economy as people would have a mode of transport to get home. It could also allow people to access services outside the town, such as health centres, universities, apprenticeship providers, and Curraclloe Beach in the summer.



### 4.1.3 Taxi co-operatives

Co-operatives are defined as associations of people who unite voluntarily to meet their 'common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise' (Sandoval, 2020 p.803). Co-operatives differ from standard companies or corporations as their priority is the greater good: rather than prioritising profit at all costs, co-operatives focus on fairness, member involvement in decision-making, equitable pay, and long-term planning (Ji, 2016; Borkin, 2019; Vlačić & Štromajer, 2020). While there is a range of co-operative organisations in Ireland, namely dairy co-operatives, co-operative livestock marts and group water schemes, there are examples of taxi co-operatives internationally and in Ireland. As Vlačić & Štromajer (2020) noted, taxi worker co-operatives have existed for decades and have grown in the past number of years. Cities around with established taxi co-operatives include Paris, Auckland and Edinburgh. Within Ireland, taxi co-operatives exist in Cork City and Ballina, Co. Mayo. The Cork Taxi Co-op has been in operation since 1971. Florence in Italy is one example of a city that has brought the ideas of eTaxi and co-operatives together (Scorrano *et al.*, 2020). A policy

enacted in 2016 mandated the use of electric vehicles for taxi services. Benefits of this transition include customers' appreciation of the quietness of the ride alongside benefits relating to reduced noise and air emissions. A further advantage of this transition is that an agreement was made with an Italian insurance company to have a €600 insurance premium for eTaxis compared to €1,000 for hybrid taxis and €1,500 for diesel taxis. The study by Scorrano *et al.* (2020) also raises issues relating to the use of eTaxis, including the driving range, the need to recharge during the day and foregone revenue from the impossibility of accepting requests for out-of-town destinations.

Alongside addressing issues relating to mobility and providing employment to taxi drivers, Vlačić and Štromajer (2020) also describe how taxi co-operatives can provide additional sources of employment for mechanics, administrative staff, call centre staff and management. One example of a flourishing taxi co-operative development is in Austin, Texas. Austin City Council assisted in establishing a taxi co-op using available budgetary resources and powers. This allowed taxi drivers to control their work more, rather than being dependent on corporate owners (Vlačić & Štromajer, 2020). A further benefit of a co-operative approach is that it can reduce taxi drivers' dependence on the 'gig economy'. In a number of jobs that focus on transporting goods and people, the gig economy results in workers becoming independent contractors who are forced into precarious working situations that offer no guarantee of a minimum wage or employment benefits (McCabe, 2021). A further consequence is that large technology companies can collect vast amounts of data on users without offering transparency on what happens to this data (Borkin, 2019). Since co-operatives are focused on the greater good rather than 'micro-term' profits, co-operatives can offer an alternative to the insecurities of precarious work that hailing apps provide. Given that the focus of co-operatives is to secure a greater good for their members rather than prioritising profits, measures could be taken to provide subsidised rates for marginalised groups or for certain journeys, such as trips to health centres. This would ensure that mobility is accessible and affordable for all in the community.

An issue for taxis is the need to drive around to find passengers. This is not fuel efficient and may result in increased fares to compensate for the wasted fuel (Carpenter *et al.*, 2014). One means of overcoming this is through the development of taxi-hailing apps. The creation of taxi co-operative apps clones the technologies used by other taxi-hailing apps. The difference is that the benefactors are the members of the taxi co-operative rather than multinational companies (Vlačić & Štromajer, 2020). Alongside enabling taxis to find customers, these apps could assist drivers of eTaxis in finding their closest charging stations, with real-time information about charging availability (Clairand *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, it can support reduced energy consumption for EVs (Clairand *et al.*, 2019).

While the creation of taxi co-ops and connected apps can create employment and address mobility challenges, several potential barriers need to be addressed. The first is generating the initial revenue required to develop the co-operative (Borkin, 2019). Measures to manage this include the creation of mutual shares that firstly have the same terms and conditions. The practice of one-member-one-vote, not one-share-one-vote, is also central to co-ops. Aligned with this is the need to limit the amount an individual member can invest to prevent a member from exercising undue influence over the co-operative (Borkin, 2019). While Borkin (2019) notes that a challenge for taxi co-ops is that they lack a geographically-rooted community which creates organisational problems, this would not necessarily be the case for an eTaxi co-op based in

Enniscorthy. Furthermore, while Vlačić and Štromajer (2020) describe how taxi co-ops are exposed to competition from developed taxi-hailing apps, this again would not be overly relevant to Enniscorthy as a medium-sized town with limited alternative modes of public transport.

#### 4.1.4 Challenges for developing eTaxis

While adopting eTaxis could assist in addressing challenges relating to mobility facing community members in Enniscorthy, other potential issues would also need to be addressed. A common theme within studies focusing on electric vehicles is the issue of range anxiety. Range anxiety is 'the fear of battery power depletion in the middle of the journey' (Yang *et al.*, 2018b p.582). While there are different EV types with different battery sizes, larger batteries with a longer driving range are more expensive, while cars with smaller batteries require more charging (Shi *et al.*, 2019). This is illustrated in the comment that the range of an EV is about one-third of a standard petrol or diesel vehicle (Carpenter *et al.*, 2014). For this reason, it requires three times more refuelling. Similarly, taxis travel much longer daily distances than individual drivers. For this reason, they will need to charge their vehicle more regularly (Clairand *et al.*, 2019). In terms of range, the study by Shi *et al.* (2019) on the use of EVs in Beijing found that 45% of taxis had a battery range of between 100 and 200 miles (161km to 322km).

While studies from around the world have identified challenges relating to the uptake of eTaxis, these studies focus on larger cities such as Beijing, New York and Dublin. As Carpenter *et al.* (2014 p.809) describe, large cities with 'widespread points of interest are less suitable than dense cities with concentrated points of interest'. As a medium-sized town, the range issue may not be as relevant to Enniscorthy compared to large cities because the distance to travel from one area of the town to another will be much smaller compared to a city.

Thinking about possible journeys using an eTaxi, a roundtrip for someone living in the Shannon to a supermarket in Bellefield would be between 4 to 5 kilometres. Similarly, if someone lived in Gort na Gréine and needed to go to the Quarry Park Medical Centre, this would also be a roundtrip of just over 5 km. The issue of range anxiety would have greater relevance to supporting mobility for people going outside of Enniscorthy. A roundtrip from Enniscorthy to University Hospital Waterford would be around 113km, while a roundtrip to the South East Technological University in Carlow would be 104km. Both trips would still be well below the typical range of an EV car which is between 250 and 350km (Money Guide Ireland, 2023).

A key factor for supporting the use of eTaxis in Enniscorthy would be developing sufficient charging points. As described by Scorrano *et al.* (2020), in 2012, the Hong Kong government subsidised 48 eTaxis. However, due to insufficient driving range, long charging time and shortage of charging facilities, eTaxis were dismissed (Scorrano *et al.*, 2020). While the market for electric vehicles is growing yearly, a massive introduction of electric taxis could cause issues to the electricity grid (Clairand *et al.*, 2019). This is reflected in the finding by Ahn *et al.* (2018) that if EVs exceed 12.5% of the total number of cars in South Korea before 2030, the supply and demand of stable energy will be threatened. In their study on eTaxis in Dublin, Kinsella *et al.* (2023) found that the current charging infrastructure would not accommodate the intention of having every taxi in Dublin be an EV by 2030. Furthermore, if the electricity needed to power eTaxis comes from fossil fuels rather than renewable energy, the environmental benefits of eTaxis are reduced (Ahn *et al.*, 2018; Clairand

*et al.*, 2019). This results in the need for investment in both the production of renewable energy and the provision of publicly accessible and fast-charging infrastructure (Yang *et al.*, 2018a; Maciel Fuentes & González, 2021). Regarding where charging points are placed, proximity to key locations such as social areas and the sites of public services are described as the ideal charging points for EVs (Morro-Mello *et al.*, 2019; Charly *et al.*, 2023). As listed on the ESB Charging point map, there are currently three charging points in Enniscorthy: the Garda Station car park; a car park at Duffry Gate and a car park on Island Road. Of the 7 chargers, 5 are 22kw which take approximately 3 to 4 hours to charge a car while 2 are 50kw which charge a car in approximately 1 hour (Sevadis, n.d.; Myenergi, 2023).

## 4.2 Solution 2: Community-owned solar energy



### 4.2.1 Policy context

Over the past decade, there has been a growing emphasis on the role of citizens in securing Europe's transition away from fossil fuels (Magnusson & Palm, 2019). 63% of energy must come from renewable sources such as solar and wind by 2040 for the EU to meet its climate targets (Hoicka *et al.*, 2021). This has led to calls for citizens to take ownership of the transition to renewables by becoming producers and consumers of energy. This will be challenging due to the need for capital to invest in renewable energy and technical knowledge (Magnusson & Palm, 2019). Citizen-led groups generating energy from renewable sources are present within Europe, though, as Broska *et al.* (2022) describe, the current numbers are small. Most community renewable energy projects in the UK have focused on using small-scale solar photovoltaic panels to generate electricity (Mirzania *et al.*, 2020). In support of the idea of citizen-led approaches to renewable energy is the concept of energy democracy. Energy democracy emphasises the idea of 'power to the people' whereby communities decide who owns and operates energy systems, and ultimately, who benefits from the production of energy (Sweeney *et al.* 2015). In Ireland, the Climate Action

Plan published at the end of 2022 outlined the need to increase the level of power produced in Ireland. By using natural resources such as wind and solar, Ireland's dependence on imported fossil fuels can be reduced. In September 2022, it was announced that €50 million would be made available from the Climate Action Fund to fit solar panels on schools nationwide (Government of Ireland, 2022a). The Irish Government has set the target of producing 5 gigawatts by 2025. This will require significant changes to land use and infrastructure development to support a move away from fossil fuels. The Climate Action Plan also emphasises the need to include community participation mechanisms to provide technical, financial, and legal support to communities. These include the development of a Small-scale Generation Support Scheme and a Community Energy Framework.

### **4.2.2 Community-owned energy**

A local energy community is described as an association of private households in a neighbourhood or community that come together to operate and use energy that is based on renewable energy (Broska *et al.*, 2022). While there is no one type of community energy, they tend to be initiatives run by groups, such as charities, voluntary neighbourhood networks and co-operatives to promote energy saving and renewable energy generation measures (Magnusson & Palm, 2019). As described by Augustine and McGavisk (2016), to take advantage of the incentives available for community solar projects, some groups have structured their projects as businesses, such as social enterprises, or combined with business entities to help support the initiative. Within community energy, community members participate in the planning and running of renewable energy projects, and communities are the ones who benefit from these developments. This can allow for a more democratic approach to decision-making as citizens are more engaged in the transition to renewable energy (Proudlove *et al.*, 2020).

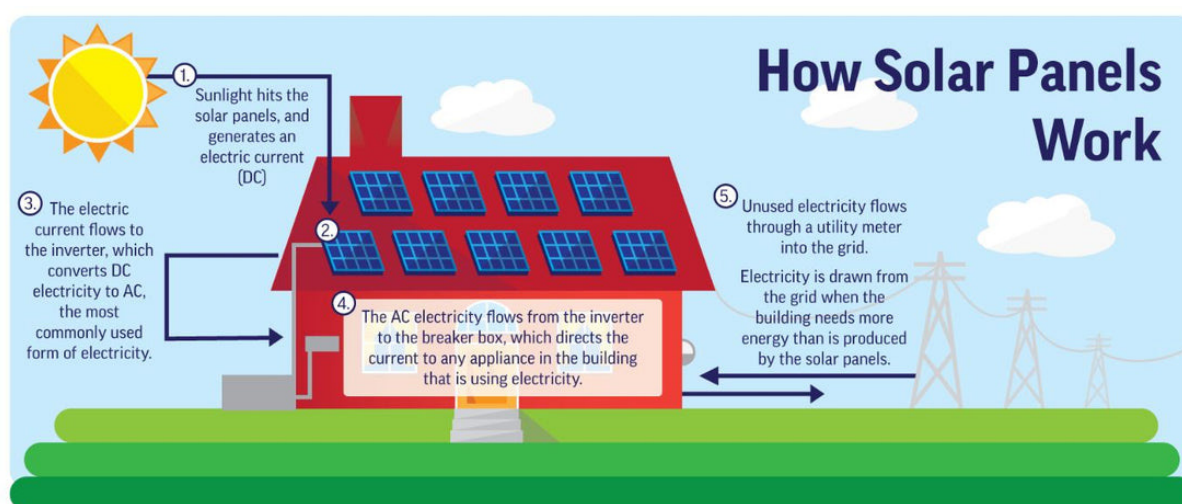
In contrast to current approaches to energy production where profits go to a small number of energy companies, community energy is described as being a measure that can help to encourage the public uptake of, and support for, renewable energy as community members benefit from the production of energy (Curtin *et al.*, 2019; Cuesta-Fernandez *et al.*, 2020; Hoicka *et al.*, 2021). A further benefit is that energy production can be used to generate money to help communities develop in a manner which addresses their challenges (Creamer *et al.*, 2018). As mentioned by Magnusson and Palm (2019), community energy projects are an example of how communities can think globally and act locally. To secure the development of community energy, community acceptance and buy-in are essential. As community organisations are more accessible than Government bodies or energy companies, and have access to local knowledge, this can ensure that an approach to renewable energy that fits community needs can be developed (Berka & Creamer, 2018). However, it is crucial to ensure that renewable energy initiatives do not reinforce local power dynamics, as this may make individuals less likely to participate. For this reason, an inclusive approach is crucial to build community support.

While there is a growing focus on the need to produce more renewable energy to cut back on fossil fuels, community-owned energy is not new. Focusing on renewable energy co-operatives in Spain, the study by Cuesta-Fernandez *et al.* (2020) describes how community-owned energy co-operatives have been in place since the 1920s. There is not one single type of community energy, however. For example, the solar panels used to generate solar energy can be placed on

individual houses' roofs or installed in a central location shared within the community (Norbu *et al.*, 2021). There are also different models for how community energy is owned. Communities could have complete ownership of the energy production process. Alternatively, shared ownership with a financial partner is another model (Hogan *et al.*, 2022). Related to this is the question of how community energy projects are funded. The development of community energy requires the involvement of groups outside of the community to address technical elements, such as how energy is distributed.

### 4.2.3 Solar energy

Solar panels produce energy to power homes or heat water (Joshi & Deane, 2022). Solar energy is harnessed in two main ways. The first is solar photovoltaics (PV), where solar cells on a solar panel convert light from the Sun into an electric current (SEAI, 2021). The second form is a solar thermal system where light from the Sun heats a fluid, such as water, to create steam that can generate electric power. Since 2010, solar PV has become the fastest-growing power generation technology worldwide (Joshi & Deane, 2022). Solar PV systems generate electricity only during daylight hours, and around 75% of annual energy produced by solar PV occurs between May and September (SEAI, n.d.). Solar energy does generate electricity during overcast days in Ireland (SEAI, n.d.). Over recent years, the cost of purchasing and installing solar panels have fallen. The success of solar panels depends on several factors, such as the availability of roof space. Within Ireland, there has been a growth in the number of homes that have invested in solar panels. A typical household in Dublin with 2.4 kW of solar panels could generate over one-third of their annual electricity and save €380 each year in electricity bills (Joshi & Deane, 2022). Furthermore, the system would pay back itself in 7 years. In terms of how long solar panels last, most modern panels last more than 25 years (Joshi & Deane, 2022).



**Figure 1: Image of solar energy process (Suntask, 2022).**

Solar energy is quiet and clean and produces little to no local pollution from its use (Corkish *et al.*, 2016). Solar panels are also low-maintenance but require some maintenance in terms of cleaning and ensuring there are no technical faults (SEAI, n.d.). To succeed, solar energy must conform with existing infrastructure in terms of being able to connect to the electricity grid (Corkish *et al.*, 2016).

The presence of clouds, dust and smoke can also reduce the intensity of sunlight and impact the energy generated by solar panels. A study by researchers in Ireland in 2019 estimated that the investment cost of a 4-megawatt solar PV development would be between €1 million and €1.75 million (Curtin *et al.*, 2019). They describe how a project which consisted of 200 community investors, the equity stake would be approximately €8750. As mentioned previously, the cost may be reduced due to the increased uptake of solar panels in Ireland.

The Community Energy Resource Toolkit for solar energy developed by the SEAI provides a step-by-step guide to developing community solar energy. The first phase is developing an idea for solar energy in terms of seeking advice, securing initial funding, finding a relevant site for solar panels and undertaking a feasibility study. In terms of finding a suitable site, the SEAI describes how four factors must be considered: Local authority zoning, Local grid capacity, Planning constraints and the Planning history of solar PV in the local area. Regarding funding, the SEAI describes how the need for between €10,000 and €15,000 to progress projects at the initial stage may be difficult for communities to gather compared to private developers. For this reason, it describes how communities could opt for grant funding, community loans, personal contributions from the community or local organisations), or even crowdfunding. Other types of support that communities could offer include the development of a local energy agency study and support from local authorities relating to planning processes. However, the SEAI states that projects must remain 100% community-owned to participate in the *Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS)*. The SEAI describes how creating a legal entity, such as a social enterprise or a co-operative, is an important step for developing the project before applying for planning permission. Furthermore, applying for grid application is described as an important step for developing solar energy.

An appropriate amount of time should also be provided to ensure community engagement. Recommended steps include creating a project website which outlines the project, required work, potential benefits and points of contact. The creation of a community liaison officer is also described as important. The third phase of developing solar energy is applying for planning permission alongside sourcing funding for the construction of the project. In terms of where to place solar panels, large, open spaces with minimal shading are described as areas that can maximise energy generation. Buildings that are described as being of architectural, cultural, scientific, historical or artistic interest require additional investigation regarding their suitability for solar PV. This is followed by finding a route to market, completing construction, and developing a community benefit. At the centre of each of these steps is ensuring governance and management are in place.

#### **4.2.4 Benefits of community-owned solar energy**

One of the main benefits of community-owned solar energy is that it can help communities access renewable energy. This means that all members of the community, not just those in a position to invest in solar panels for their homes, can benefit from the move to cleaner forms of energy (Mirzania *et al.*, 2020). Cleaner energy would also have health benefits for community members by reducing the emissions created by burning coal (Augustine & McGavisk, 2016). Community renewable energy projects are one measure that can help reduce energy costs facing community members and potentially generate new income sources for communities by selling excess energy generated from solar panels (Augustine & McGavisk, 2016; Berka & Creamer, 2018). Community-

owned energy projects also benefit low-income households or households that spend more of their income on energy (Luke & Heynen, 2020; Mirzania *et al.*, 2020). Alongside having a climate benefit in reducing dependence on fossil fuels such as coal, community-owned renewable energy projects also focus on addressing immediate community needs, such as providing energy to local amenities and creating new sources of wealth for communities (Berka & Creamer, 2018).

Another benefit of community energy initiatives is that they are more responsive to local needs (Guerreiro & Botetzagias, 2018). One of the advantages of this is that it can help to empower communities to take ownership of local needs. Berka and Creamer (2018) describe how community energy projects that are designed and driven by community members can create platforms for public engagement whereby community members can come together to address other challenges facing their local community. Involvement in community energy projects can therefore act as a starting point for developing community capacity to change their local communities. The coming together of community members in renewable energy projects can also support integration within communities and help to build new connections within communities (Magnusson & Palm, 2019).

Community renewable energy projects can also help foster new community skills and capacities. This includes the need for teamwork, organisation and communication and increasing technical knowledge related to renewable energy technology and energy efficiency (Berka & Creamer, 2018). There is also the potential for renewable energy projects to generate jobs in areas of construction, operation and maintenance of solar panels. Similar to the potential for community energy projects to empower communities, developing these initiatives could foster the development of specialised skills, thereby leading to future employment opportunities related to solar energy. Another benefit of community renewable energy projects is that they can help to reduce opposition to infrastructure related to increasing renewable energy. The study by Curtin *et al.* (2019) describes how objections against wind farms, pylons and transmission cables can cause significant delays. Community ownership has been found to lead to increased levels of local acceptance of renewable energy and the view that it leads to fairer processes and outcomes (Berka & Creamer, 2018; Hogan *et al.*, 2022).



#### 4.2.5 Challenges

Regarding the challenges of developing community-owned solar energy, a primary issue is raising the funding needed for development. As Magnusson and Palm (2019) explain, communities that can afford to invest in shared energy generation projects tend to be well-to-do rather than



economically disadvantaged. Related to this is the negative impact that long waiting times and a lack of assurance from funding bodies can have on the willingness of communities to apply for financial support (Guerreiro & Botetzagias, 2018). Within an Irish setting, Curtin *et al.* (2019) outline how low-income households tend to be less willing to invest in community energy projects. This highlights the importance of building trust and providing necessary education and communication regarding the benefits of community-owned energy. Another potential barrier to supporting community-owned energy is that community members may feel that they do not have the skills needed to make it viable (Berka & Creamer, 2018; Curtin *et al.*, 2019). These might include skills relating to the technicalities of solar energy, financial and legal considerations, and business management. For this reason, there is a need for policymakers and organisations that focus on community energy to assist these communities to build their capacity. As referenced previously, the changes that increased levels of small-scale community-owned energy will have on the production of energy may disrupt the energy grid. For this reason, the successful development of community-owned energy will depend on actions taken by decision-makers outside of local communities (Proudlove *et al.*, 2020).

#### **4.2.6 A community perspective: Claremorris and Western District Energy Co-Op**

One community that has been at the forefront of developing community-owned solar energy in Ireland is Claremorris in Co. Mayo. The Claremorris and Western District Energy Co-Operative was founded in 2015 to secure the benefits of community-owned renewable energy and address climate change in the West of Ireland (Claremorris Energy Coop, 2021). The Co-op has 50 members and initially began by working on small-scale projects such as installing solar panels on the roof of the local school and retrofitting local buildings (The Journal, 2021). From this, it has moved towards the aim of becoming energy-independent and free from fossil fuels.

In June 2020, Claremorris and Western District Energy Co-operative received planning permission for two 5MW 100% community-owned solar sites. This energy will be exported to the national grid. They were also one of seven communities to be supported by the Government's first Renewable Electricity Support Scheme (RESS 1). The co-op is partnering with Mayo County Council to transform a landfill into a greenfield solar site (Claremorris Energy Coop, 2021). The example of Claremorris highlights how a co-operative approach, with the backing of schemes coming from government bodies, can support community-led local development that benefits people and the planet.

The Claremorris and Western District Energy Co-Operative is also a member of Community Power. Community Power is Ireland's first community-owned electricity supplier (Community Power, 2019). It is a partnership of community energy groups and originates from the Templederry Wind Farm in Co. Tipperary, Ireland's first community-owned wind farm. Community Power buys renewably generated electricity from small and micro hydro and wind generators across Ireland and sells it to its customers to use in their homes, businesses, farms and community buildings (Community Power, 2019). Community Power is working with Irish communities to develop renewable energy projects owned by communities.



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# 5. Conclusion

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The model described in *The People's Transition: Community-led Development for Climate Justice* aims to systematically include people and communities in the design, implementation and ownership of climate action such that communities would begin to see the benefits of sustainable development in their lives and thus would support a rapid, deep decarbonisation push towards zero-emission societies. It also recognises that public investment in climate action, if directed towards community-led initiatives, could boost local development across Ireland and address issues of inequality throughout the island.

But theory is one thing, and practice is another. Thanks to the backing of AIB, TASC has been able to work with the community of Enniscorthy to bring the People's Transition model to life. While Enniscorthy has faced many challenges over recent years between the loss of industry and the impacts of extreme weather events, there is an active and dedicated group of local actors who have been extremely helpful throughout this initiative and have helped to guide the TASC team. The willingness of experts in the areas of research relating to mobility and geography alongside community energy to engage with TASC on the development of solutions was also central to our research.

Among the various groups with whom the TASC team engaged with, a common topic was the lack of amenities within the local community and the impact which this has in terms of causing people to leave Enniscorthy. This underlines the potential benefits that creating community wealth through the undertaking of climate action can have for communities. By investing in community-owned assets, such as the generation of renewable energy from solar, a community wealth fund can be developed that provides finances that can be channelled towards developing community-owned amenities. This can ensure that actions aimed at reducing dependence on fossil fuels can provide tangible benefits for communities and highlight the benefits of a just transition.

In terms of next steps, while the three phases of the People's Transition model have been completed, this is not the end of TASC's connection with Enniscorthy. Upon the publication of this report, TASC will continue to engage with community members to identify actions that can help to support the development of the solutions proposed in this report. This includes identifying funding sources for the progression of an idea focused on shared mobility and acting as a broker to connect community members with other organisations focused on developing community-owned energy in Ireland.

We hope that the solutions outlined in this research serve as a blueprint or a catalyst for community members in Enniscorthy, in the Model County of Wexford and across the island of Ireland to engage in community-led climate action and seek to build community wealth through responses to climate change.

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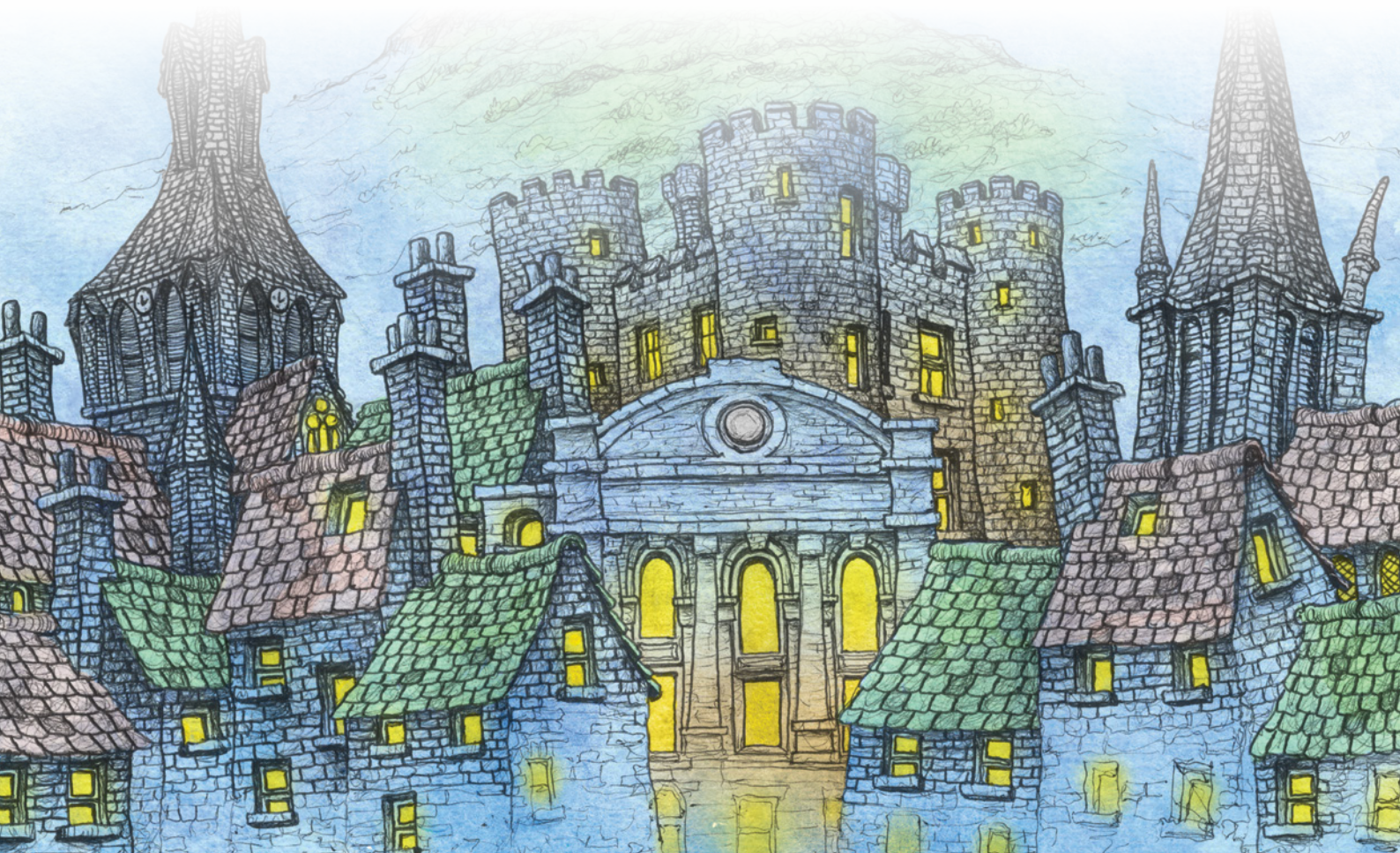
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The People's Transition describes a model for participative decision-making that is intended to enable a community to benefit from the transition to a zero-carbon society. It aims to design climate solutions that give local people and communities ownership of the assets of transition and enhance public support for climate action by tackling inequality and raising standards of living. This report details the application of the People's Transition model in Enniscorthy.



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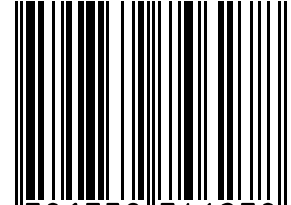
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