

10. Community Benefit Opportunities

As with all strategic infrastructure projects, the planning process requires that due consideration of community gain is undertaken by the planning applicant. Irish Water has already set out its approach to community gain for the Water Supply Project Eastern & Midlands Region (WSP) in Section 10 of the Preliminary Options Appraisal Report (POAR) published in November 2015. Section 10 in the POAR indicates that there is potential for a significant element of community gain for those living and working in the area selected for the new Eastern and Midlands Region water supply.

10.1 Legislation

The Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended by the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006 Section 37 G (7)(d))³³ specifies that in the event that planning permission is granted for a Strategic Infrastructure Development, An Bord Pleanála (*the Board*) can make provision for community gain arising out of the development:

The Board may attach a condition providing for community gain³⁴ which may require the construction or the financing, in whole or in part, of a facility or the provision of a service in the area in which the proposed development would be situated and which the Board considers would constitute a substantial gain to the community.

10.2 Community Gain at a national level

The project will provide necessary treated water, delivered in a way which brings a secure and sustainable supply to over 40% of the Country's population resident in the Eastern and Midlands Region.

This will facilitate economic development in suitable locations throughout the entire area of the pipeline. Resilient utilities rank second only to access to finance, in decisions to locate industry in Ireland.

Overall the project will demonstrate to potential inward investors (FDI) that Ireland offers a modern, efficient and sustainable water supply infrastructure to support the needs of their businesses well into the future.

10.3 Community Gain – Across the Pipeline Route

In addition to improved and sustainable domestic and commercial water supplies, there are some specific additional benefits to communities along the route of the pipeline.

The project represents approximately €700–€900m of investment in equipment, facilities etc. Many products and services will be sourced from local businesses within the Pipeline Corridor allowing them to grow in size and skills.

The project will deliver up to 1000 construction jobs in the three to four years it will take to build the head works, pipeline, and ancillary infrastructure many of which may go to local people and all of which will bring business to the area in terms of workers needing accommodation, meeting catering requirements and spending money in local shops and businesses.

Irish Water propose to engage with Local Authorities and other relevant bodies with a view to sponsoring training schemes to enable those local businesses/ workers to develop the necessary skills to be employed on the project - e.g. welding, metalwork, plant operators, skilled operatives, general operatives. Irish Water also proposes to contribute towards achieving the conservation objectives of the Lower Shannon Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the objectives of the River Basin Management Plans, and the development of environmental education and protection initiatives and sports & leisure facilities.

³³ <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2006/act/27/section/3/enacted/en/html>

³⁴ As specified in section 34(4) of the 2000 Act.

The project will deliver up to 15 permanent jobs in the water treatment plant and pumping stations in Tipperary which is an integral part of the project. In addition to permanent jobs, the project will give rise to numerous (50+) contract / part time jobs necessary for on-going operation and maintenance of the new water scheme.

By making potable water supplies available at a consistent quality and reliability across the Midlands, matched by commensurate wastewater treatment capacity where required, the attractiveness of the region for foreign direct investment in water-using industrial sectors will be increased. Irish Water will ensure that both incoming water supply, and outgoing wastewater infrastructure, will not become an impediment to regional economic development.

10.4 Additional Community Benefits – Based on further research and feedback from Consultation

Irish Water proposes to establish a 'Community Gain Fund' with a view to supporting community-based initiatives, primarily in the Environmental / Sport & Leisure / Training & Education areas, which meet specific criteria and / or contribute to achieving the objectives of the River Basin Management Plans and conservation objectives of the Lower River Shannon SAC. These community based initiatives would be assessed on their ability to improve the environment or support the community.

10.5 Proposed Approach for the Administration of Additional Community Benefits

Irish Water aims to provide An Bord Pleanála with a realistic, specific, measurable community gain proposal(s), with an associated administrative structure, which the Board can adequately assess, and consider as part of the overall planning application. The proposed approach for the administration of additional community benefits is outlined below:

1. Community and Environmental Needs Analysis Study to be conducted.
2. Set the parameters and criteria under which funding can be allocated.
3. Establish an administrative structure to administer the fund.
4. Allocation of Fund by principal categories is established and applications are sought from clubs, associations, and other such groups in the locality for support for various environmental and community-based initiatives and improvement projects.
5. Irish Water administers each scheme and an awards committee is drawn from the local communities. This committee decides which projects are granted financial support. The funding has the potential to benefit the environment, schools, sports clubs, general amenity, social initiatives, as well as community facilities.