CLARE

DIGITAL STRATEGY

2023

A 5 YEAR STRATEGY

COMHAIRLE CONTAE AN CHLÁIR | CLARE COUNTY COUNCIL

FOREWARD

Clare Digital Strategy
Introduction by the
Mayor and Chief Executive:

We are delighted to introduce the Clare Digital Strategy.

The overarching theme of this strategy is a whole of county focus on rural development. While a strategy in its own right, this blueprint is a critical facilitator which will enable Clare County Council to further the objectives of the Clare Rural Development Strategy 2026. The Council will develop partnerships with other external stakeholders in order for this Digital Strategy to contribute to the building of sustainable rural communities across the county.

This strategy is written in the context of the National Broadband Plan (NBP) and acknowledges that many rural areas of Clare are disadvantaged because of a lack of access to affordable, high-speed broadband services. This particularly applies to businesses that are unable to avail of the higher broadband speeds that are necessary for them to exploit the increasing number of ICT applications and services critical for growth.

Fast, cost-effective broadband services are key to attracting inward investment and creating more jobs in the future. This strategy, complemented by the rollout of the National Broadband Plan and the Clare Rural Development Strategy 2026, seeks to ensure that broadband is leveraged to help alleviate the root causes of rural depopulation rather than reinforcing any further migration to urban spaces.

We wish to acknowledge the work carried out by the staff of the Rural Development Directorate of Clare County Council and the members of the Clare Rural Development Forum in preparing this strategy. which seeks to bridge the digital divide as well as create smarter communities in Clare.

Le meas,

Cllr. Michael Begley
Cathaoirleach,
 Clare County Council

Pat Dowling
Chief Executive
Clare County Council

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INTRODUCTION AND VISION STATEMENT

The **Clare Digital Strategy** was commissioned by Clare County Council in the context of providing a vision and associated roadmap for supporting the digital economy in the county over the next five years and beyond. This document seeks to build on the National Broadband Plan[1], The Action Plan for Jobs[2] and both national[3] and Clare Rural Development Strategy: Realising Clare's Rural Potential and the Clare County Development Plan 2017-2023.

All stakeholders, large or small, and irrespective of sector (agriculture, tourism, local services, international business or other), should be enabled to make optimal use of digital technologies as appropriate for their specific community, size and geographical location.

Furthermore the Clare Digital Strategy aims to establish County Clare as a leader internationally in leveraging broadband and digital technologies for rural regeneration at a county level.

In the context of the National Broadband Plan, Clare County Council has a vision for all enterprises, communities and citizens across the county to have:-

- **Access to "fit for purpose" digital infrastructure,**
- **Awareness of the potential uses and benefits of this infrastructure,** and the
- **Ability and Skills** required to realise the digital opportunities arising.
- **Enhanced Job Creation** prospects as a result of the digital economy

[1]National Broadband Plan : Connecting Communities – Ireland's Broadband Intervention Strategy, December 2015
[2]Action Plan for Jobs 2017
[3]Realising our Rural Potential – Action Plan for Rural Development

THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

Over the last four decades the rollout of high speed telecommunications and associated information technologies has transformed national and global economies. It started with the major cities and economic centres being joined with metropolitan area fibre optic networks and has since gradually expanded in reach and impact. The new networks made real-time collaboration across long distances possible driving overall productivity, employment and living standards.

The areas connected to this infrastructure (so called Connected Communities) have benefited enormously from this access, and associated job creation and improvement of services and living standards. Young people in these areas have enhanced economic opportunity to stay in the community and raise a family.

In 2012 ITU - International Telecommunications Union, the United Nations specialized agency for ICTs and telecommunications, examined the impact of broadband on the economy and found compelling evidence in support of the considerable impact of such infrastructure on the economy, both in terms of fostering growth and creating employment.

More recently in Ireland, Indecon's 2016 Assessment of the macro-economic impact of the internet and digital on the Irish economy, commissioned by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment shows that:

- the digital economy represents 6% (€12.3bn) of Ireland's GDP and this is expected to grow to €21.4 billion or 7.9% of GDP by 2020
- it is growing fast, at approximately 40% since 2012
- currently almost 116,000 direct and indirect jobs are supported, of which 68,000 are directly linked to digital
- approximately one in seven Irish people (13.5% of the adult population) make a supplementary income on the internet.

But the Broadband Economy has also brought significant challenges for some areas. Rural communities in particular have suffered from delayed access to broadband services and are now grappling to catch-up and avail of the opportunities broadband and digital technologies offer for its citizens. Even in some urban areas, where access may be more readily available, the ability of communities to access the digital opportunities on offer has proved elusive, for reasons of affordability, awareness or skill. Indeed the **Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development** (a joint initiative of UNESCO and ITU) agreed in 2016 on the need for a new set of connectivity targets to help governments harness broadband networks and services more effectively to meet the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) established by the UN in 2015.

In the 2018 independent Digital Readiness Assessment by Indecon, Clare performed above average on a majority of the indicators while there was a recognition that further progress is needed in relation to the rollout of additional Digital Services and Digital Infrastructure. The report further recognises that Clare faces a number of structural challenges regarding digital infrastructure, challenges which may in part be addressed through the National Broadband Plan

So in summary, both internationally and across Ireland, the impact and challenges presented by the broadband and associated Digital Economy on sustainable development are significant and evolving.
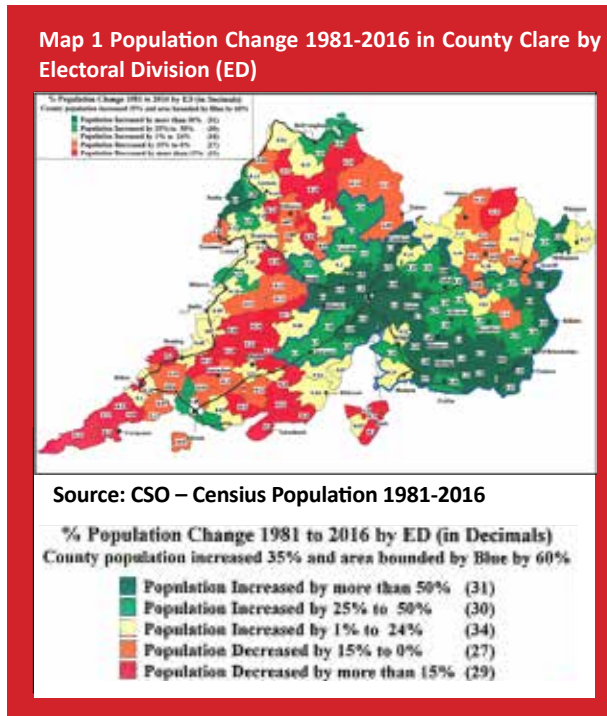

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[4] The Impact of Broadband on the Economy: Research to Date and Policy Issues, April 2012, ITU

THE RURAL CONTEXT IN COUNTY CLARE

Internationally the share of the population living in rural communities is shrinking as large urban centres continue to grow. County Clare is no different.

As Map 1 shows, between 1981 and 2016, Rural Clare's share of the County's population declined from 40% to 29% while the Ennis/Shannon/Limerick urban corridor experienced population growth of 61%.

Map 1 Population Change 1981-2016 in County Clare by Electoral Division (ED)

Source: CSO – Censius Population 1981-2016

% Population Change 1981 to 2016 by ED (in Decimals)
County population increased 35% and area bounded by Blue by 60%

Population Increased by more than 50%	(31)
Population Increased by 25% to 50%	(30)
Population Increased by 1% to 24%	(34)
Population Decreased by 15% to 0%	(27)
Population Decreased by more than 15%	(29)

These trends coincide with the growth of the Broadband Economy internationally between the early 1980s and today.

The reduction in share of the population is often accompanied by reduced access to services, including broadband, relative to larger urban areas, with a subsequent reduction in opportunities for education and employment. As a result many of the youngest and brightest leave rural communities to seek employment and enhanced opportunity elsewhere, further embedding the cycle as schools consolidate, shops close and social activity starts to fade.

So in this context and the context of the Rural Development Strategy for County Clare, the imperative for broadband connectivity increases and the need for community support to leverage digital opportunities is accentuated.

BROADBAND IN COUNTY CLARE

The broadband situation in County Clare reflects the situation across many counties in Ireland and indeed many regions across the globe. Over the last two decades, investment in broadband networks initially focussed on connecting the Shannon-Ennis economic corridor with national and international networks along with building resilient networks at key industrial locations including the Ennis Information Age Park, Shannon Free Zone. Subsequently, the focus moved to gradually connecting additional industrial parks, towns, villages and rural areas.

Clare County Council has played a strong leadership role in advocating and facilitating this investment by telecommunications operators, initially through its involvement in the Shannon Broadband fibre networks programme for Ennis and Kilrush under the Government's Metropolitan Area Networks Programme and subsequently via initiatives such as Shannon Connect and the National Broadband Scheme. More recent innovative projects such as 'Ennis Wifi' and 'Kilrush Innovation Hub' deliver practical supports to underserved areas of the county.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) is the current framework for the provision of high speed broadband through a combination of commercial and State investment. The Plan aims to deliver high speed broadband services (minimum speed of 30Mbps download and 6Mbps upload) to all businesses and households across the country. This is being achieved through a combination of commercial investment by the telecommunications sector and a State Intervention in those areas where commercial providers acting alone will not provide the required services.

Map 2: National Broadband Plan Map for Co. Clare.
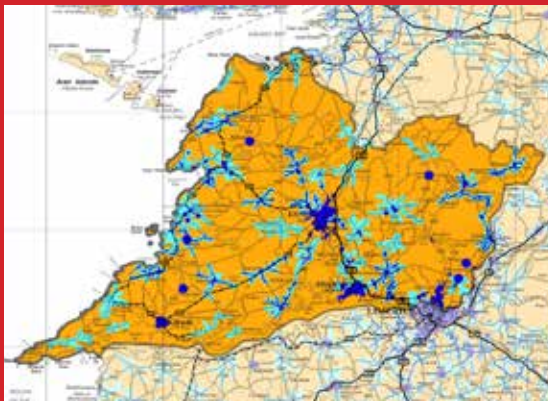
© Ordnance Survey Ireland | DCCAE

Total Number of Premises in Clare	68,447
State Intervention Area	34%
Commercial Deployment	53%
Commercial Planned Deployment	13%

The NBP identifies areas across County Clare where intervention will be required under the lifetime of the Programme and these are illustrated on an interactive map on the Department's website.

This map is updated at regular intervals and identifies locations and premises as being AMBER, BLUE or LIGHT BLUE as follows:-
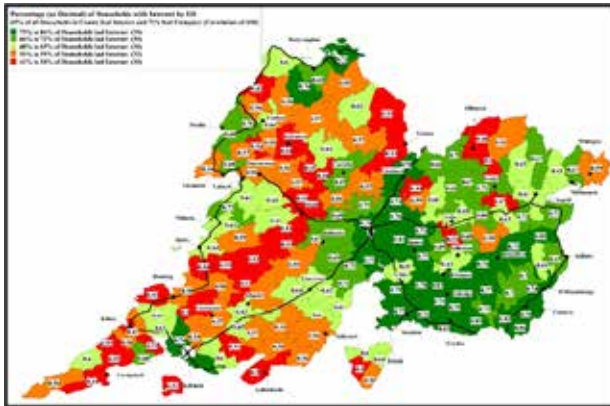
AMBER areas - which are the target areas for the State Intervention of the National Broadband Plan. The Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce has identified measures in the short term to improve broadband connectivity including in the Amber areas and work is underway to implement these measures.

BLUE areas - where commercial operators are delivering or have indicated plans to deliver high speed broadband services. Operators are continuing to enhance their services in these areas to improve access to high speed broadband and to increase speeds to meet consumer demand and customer requirements.

LIGHT BLUE areas - new areas where commercial operators have committed to concrete plans to deliver high speed broadband in rural areas. The commercial rollout to these areas is primarily Fibre to the Home (FTTH). By 2018, all homes and businesses in these Light Blue areas can expect significant improvement to their broadband services.
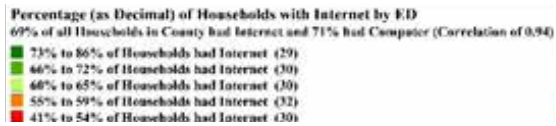
Currently 47% of premises in County Clare are in Amber Areas or Light Blue Areas, suggesting that a majority of premises in the county do not currently have access to 30Mbps.

From a domestic perspective, as Map 3 shows, in 2011, 69% of all Households had some form of Internet while 71% had computers (correlation of 0.94 at ED level as one might expect). However, once again significant differences are evident across the county with internet penetration more prevalent in the east as illustrated below.

Map 3 Pecentage of households with Internet by ED

Source: CSO 2015

Percentage (as Decimal) of Households with Internet by ED
69% of all Households in County had Internet and 71% had Computer (Correlation of 0.94)

- 73% to 86% of Households had Internet (29)
- 66% to 72% of Households had Internet (30)
- 60% to 65% of Households had Internet (30)
- 55% to 59% of Households had Internet (32)
- 41% to 54% of Households had Internet (30)

LEVERAGING BROADBAND FOR DEVELOPMENT OF BOTH RURAL & URBAN AREAS

As previously outlined, the global trend towards urbanisation is very much in evidence in County Clare with the Shannon-Ennis corridor benefiting in recent years from population growth and enhanced fibre networks and other broadband infrastructure development.

As a result, a key priority for the County is ensuring that broadband is leveraged to help alleviate the root causes of rural depopulation rather than reinforcing any further migration to urban spaces. Building sustainable rural communities across the county is therefore considered of critical importance in devising the Clare Digital Strategy. In this regard the alignment of the Clare Digital Strategy with the Clare Rural Development Strategy is considered of critical importance.

Clare is not alone in facing this challenge. Many rural communities across the globe are grappling with the need to identify new ways to leverage broadband technology as a tool for community development and building local capabilities in advance of the arrival of enhanced connectivity.

In recent times the concept of **Smart Cities** has gained widespread recognition (nationally and internationally) as a strategic response to increased urbanisation through the application of digital technologies to drive efficiencies and enhanced public services across communities characterised by high population density and scale. The focus of Smart City projects is on *making cities work better*. Technology providers have invested heavily in marketing smart city concepts and many large scale funded research projects are further developing and piloting the associated frameworks and technologies at local, national and international levels.

The Clare Digital Strategy recognises the value of engaging with the Smart Cities research community over the lifetime of the Strategy. However, Smart City concepts aren't immediately transferable to large rural catchments experiencing challenges of scale and density and where broadband connectivity is only emerging. Simply reapplying Smart City concepts to Clare communities is unlikely to work.

An alternative but complimentary response that has emerged internationally in recent years is the concept of **Intelligent Communities**. According to the international Intelligent Community forum[5], such initiatives focus less on the application of digital technology to drive efficiencies and *making better communities* - places large and small, urban and rural, where citizens and employers can thrive and prosper in the broadband economy. While Intelligent Communities leverage digital technology they focus more on ensuring communities have the skills and competences to prosper in the broadband economy. Examples include the €4 million Minnesota Intelligent Rural Communities investment programme which focussed on building the capabilities of 11 rural communities across rural Minnesota over a 2 year period.

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[5] http://www.intelligentcommunity.org/from_smart_cities_to_intelligent_communities

SPECIFIC CHALLENGES TO BE OVERCOME

ACCESS

As outlined earlier, 55% of premises across County Clare cannot currently **access** high speed broadband as a result of a lack of telecommunications infrastructure. The NBP defines **high speed broadband** as a minimum **speed** of 30Mbps download and 6Mbps upload. This remains a key issue and the actions to be undertaken under the National Broadband Plan aim to address this major deficit in connecting communities through a combination of planned commercial sector rollout and state intervention.

However it is also recognised that access alone is not the only barrier to citizen and enterprise engagement in the broadband economy. Research shows that **"demand gaps"** exist where urban and rural communities have access to broadband but do not acquire the service.

While current data is not available on the precise size of this demand gap across County Clare research elsewhere has shown that this gap between service availability and service uptake can range from 7% to 40% in some countries. In general the demand gap is larger in less-developed areas. To attract new service providers to an area it is clear that measures to reduce the demand gap will be positively viewed as they help to improve the commercial viability of the service provision.

Mobile Broadband adds a further layer of complexity to the issue of broadband access. While there are common areas, the issues of coverage, access devices and applications in the case of mobile broadband differ from those relating to fixed broadband. Some policy makers suggest that in settings such as Clare, where there is less fixed broadband coverage, the substitution power of mobile broadband is significant. While mobile broadband applications tend to be more narrowband in nature, their adoption contributes to closing the digital divide.

A further complication is presented by the **evolving nature of Broadband** itself. For example as of February, 2015, the United States Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) benchmark for broadband was 25 Mbps for downloads and 3 Mbps for uploads. More recently the National Broadband Plan specifies high speed broadband services as a minimum speed of 30Mbps download and 6Mbps upload. Indeed **Nielsen's law of Internet bandwidth** states that a high-end user's connection speed grows by 50% per year and this rule of thumb has proven to be relatively accurate since it was published in 1998. Hence in 2002, "broadband" was considered to be 200kps and assuming Nielsen's Law continues to hold true, common definitions of broadband in 2022 are likely to specify a minimum speed of 200Mbps download.

Overall the Clare Digital Strategy needs_ to address connectivity and demand gaps; recognise the evolving nature of broadband; adopt a "fit for purpose" approach to defining community broadband needs of the various community stakeholders (Domestic, Enterprise and Society) while at the same time enhancing their ability to live and work in as well as visit the local community.

AFFORDABILITY

Service affordability is recognised as a key barrier to broadband service adoption in areas where such services are available. The Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development has proposed the affordability target of 5% of GNI. However, the recent 'State of Broadband' report released September 2016, indicated that in many regions around the world, fixed broadband average costs were 31% of GNI, and 64% of average income in Africa. This clearly makes such services, and hence participation in the digital economy, out of the reach of the majority of citizens[6].

In more developed countries research shows broadband service costs are on average 1.7% of GNI which is more reflective of the situation in Ireland and indeed in County Clare. That said in poorer communities and households, service and device costs are a real impediment to broadband adoption and closing the demand gap.

When considering affordability more generally, one must also consider the costs of associated infrastructure and services. This is particularly pertinent for enterprises where there are very significant financial costs of adopting associated IT systems, ensuring cyber security and implementing process.

AWARENESS

Studies show that "lack of relevance" consistently outranks affordability as a barrier to the adoption of broadband. For example a UK study by OFCOM of non-adopting households found that a "lack of relevance" was the reason for 66% of households not purchasing broadband whereas only 16% cited "affordability". Furthermore the non-broadband households that cite lack of relevance tend to be lower income households.

This suggests that any strategy to tackle broadband adoption in County Clare needs to address the perception that broadband access is irrelevant and the lack of awareness of its potential benefits. This is particularly true as Access and Affordability barriers are removed as the National Broadband Plan is rolled out across the county.

The difficulty with addressing this challenge of course, is that often with new technology and related services, we don't truly appreciate the potential value until we have them. For example who knew there was a need for mobile phone Apps until they were available? Hence there is a need to paint the potential benefits and potential future for citizens and enterprises across the county.

[6]http://www.broadbandcommission.org/Documents/reports/bb-annualreport2016.pdf
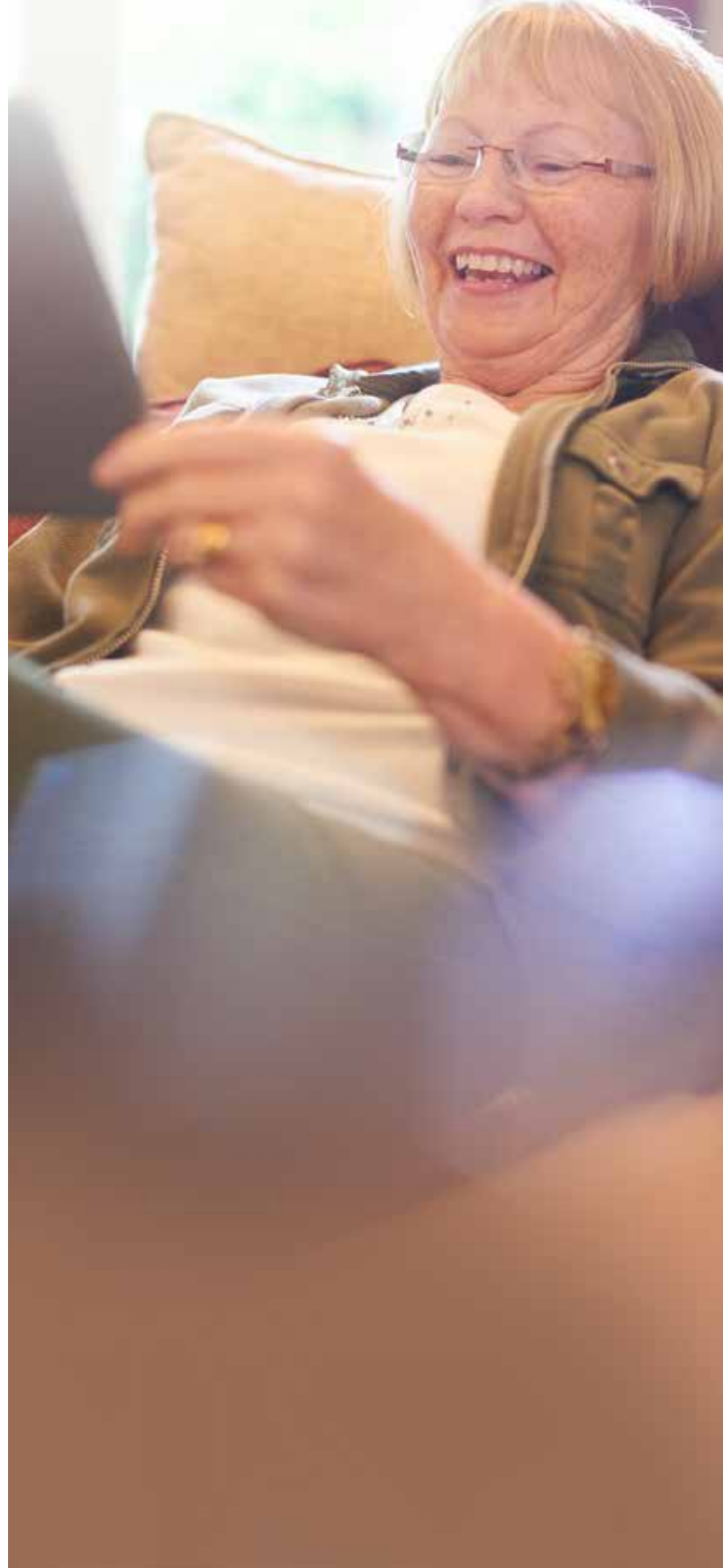
ABILITY

For many communities a further barrier to adoption is the lack of digital literacy. Digital literacy is defined as the ability to navigate, evaluate and create information effectively **using a variety** (not just a computer) of digital technologies. Studies have shown digital literacy is related to a number of factors including:-

- ▶ Age: Studies do point to a generational gap in relation to digital literacy. In the UK for example the average age of a non-adopting household is over 65[7]
- ▶ Education
- ▶ Lack of training
- ▶ Disability
- ▶ Income level (as correlated with education level) is a contributing factor.

Unsurprising then that digital illiteracy has been shown to be particularly high in certain socio-demographic groups such as the elderly, the unemployed and the disabled.

[7]OFCOM: Adults media use and attitudes report, http://stakeholders.ofcom.org.uk/binaries/research/media-literacy/media-use-attitudes/adults-media-use-2.pdf (2012)

POSITIONING COUNTY CLARE IN THE DIGITAL ECONOMY

The following SWOT analysis summarises the overall position of County Clare in the context of the evolving Digital Economy.

STRENGTHS

- Strong Council track record with Broadband
- LIT/NUIG linkages
- Proactive Stakeholders
- Good Connectivity (East)
- Nascent tech sector & good FDI cluster in Shannon/ Ennis
- Quality of Life in Clare
- Strong county identity
- Exemplars (Kilrush, Burren, etc exist)

WEAKNESSES

- Rural Urban divide across County
- 55% Premises without broadband
- Some communities and enterprises perceive limited benefit from broadband
- Poor Connectivity (West)
- Digital Skills and Education amongst certain groups is low (Age, Education Levels, Income levels)
- Take-up on some digital supports for enterprises is low (e.g. online voucher scheme)
- No definitive measure on community or enterprise readiness/maturity levels in terms of broadband adoption

OPPORTUNITIES

- Broadband technologies offer potential to underpin the Clare Rural Development Strategy and to provide new support to rural communities across all sectors
- Greater collaboration to deliver support for communities and enterprises to tap into the potential
- Economic growth and Job Creation opportunities
- Digital can help make services more accessible – health, education, security etc
- Council can lead by example in the services it offers and the way it uses digital technologies to deliver those services
- Clare County council can be a leader internationally in leveraging broadband and digital technologies for rural regeneration

THREATS

- Rapid rate of digital change
- Rural decline threatens many communities and the lack of broadband infrastructure results in an inability for such communities to compete in a globally connected world
- Competition is now global in nature
- Economic uncertainties (incl Brexit) could have significant national and local impact and timely investment in the NBP
- While many areas across County Clare do have exceptional tourism potential which provides some counterbalance to urbanisation, even in these communities, connectivity with the global economy is key to being able to communicate with, attract and maximise the tourism potential of the area.

STRATEGIC ACTIONS

In the context of the challenges to be overcome and the SWOT analysis, Clare County Council has identified a number of Key Strategic Action areas to establish County Clare as a leader in the realisation of the benefits of the digital economy for its citizens.

These Strategic Action Areas are:-

1. Improving Access to Digital Infrastructure
2. Empowering Intelligent Communities
3. Supporting Digital Enterprise & Employment
4. Leading by Example – A Digital Council
5. Measuring & Evolving

Key Action Areas of Clare Digital Strategy

STRATEGIC ACTION AREA 1:
IMPROVING ACCESS & INFRASTRUCTURE

"FACILITATING THE ROLLOUT OF 'FIT-FOR-PURPOSE' HIGH SPEED BROADBAND ACCESS FOR ALL"

Access ✓ → **Affordability** ✓ → **Awareness** → **Ability**

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- ▶ A digital Clare will encourage new investment, job creation and sustainable employment
- ▶ Digitally connected communities will benefit socially and economically and help reverse rural decline
- ▶ Every citizen should have the ability to access "on-line" services which can improve quality of life

WHAT IT MEANS

- ▶ Improving broadband access and associated infrastructure across the county
- ▶ Coordinating the county's actions under the NBP
- ▶ Rolling out SCAH and SCPs across the county

HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE THE DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE PRIORITY?

ACTION 1.1: Appointment of a **Broadband Officer**

ACTION 1.2: Liaison with Service Providers to facilitate the roll out of broadband networks

ACTION 1.3: Rollout of **Broadband Connection Points** across the County

ACTION 1.4: Rollout of **Innovation Hubs** and **Micro-Hubs** across the County

ACTION 1.5: Digital-proof future capital and development projects in the region

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTIONS

As previously outlined, affordable fit-for-purpose broadband access across large parts of County Clare remains elusive. The National Broadband Plan sets out the framework for state intervention to address this key strategic action area and is the foundation of the successful delivery of the Clare Digital Strategy. While Clare County Council does not have responsibility for the delivery of the National Broadband Plan, it does have a role to play in helping facilitate its implementation in Clare. In this context, the Council will undertake two key actions:-

ACTION 1.1: Appointment of a **Broadband Officer** for the lifetime of the plan to coordinate actions arising from the **National Broadband Plan (NBP)**

ACTION 1.2: **Liaison with Service Providers** to help facilitate the roll out of broadband infrastructure

The "Report of the Mobile Phone and Broadband Taskforce : 2016" identifies 40 actions for delivery by Departments, Agencies, Local Authorities, ComReg and industry providers that will address barriers to the delivery of the NBP and also to the delivery of enhanced mobile device reception in rural areas in the short term. The Broadband Officer will be the designated contact for the council on such tasks.

Furthermore the Broadband Officer will be a single point of contact to ensure consistency in engagement with service providers wishing to provide or enhance services across the county and will assist in the rollout of critical telecommunications infrastructure in the coming years.

Discussions with industry have indicated that it will take at least 3 to 5 years to roll-out the NBP to all areas. Therefore shorter term actions will be undertaken to provide strategic access for enterprises, communities and citizens in underserved areas of the county in the interim. Three actions in particular will be taken:-

ACTION 1.3: Rollout of **Broadband Connection Points** (BCPs) across the County

ACTION 1.4: Rollout of **Innovation Hubs** and **Micro-Hubs** across the County

ACTION 1.5: **Digital-proof** future capital and development projects in the region

It is envisaged that both BCPs and Hubs will play a significant role in stimulating awareness of the benefits of broadband and associated service demand amongst users in their vicinity, thereby ensuring the communities are well placed to adopt new services as they become available across the wider community area.

In the delivery of these actions Clare County Council will work closely with the Department, Broadband Providers, Clare LEO and Local Communities to develop the case and operational guidelines for these locations to ensure that the needs of surrounding communities are served until full deployment of the NBP has been completed. Clare County Council will take the lead on this work given its knowledge of the localities and in particular of public owned and accessible buildings and structures.

It is envisaged that some of these projects will be delivered under the NBP's Strategic Community Access points and Strategic Community Access Hubs schemes whereas others may be delivered in partnership with private enterprise including the Banks, Local Enterprises and others. The collaborative delivery of the proposed new **Community and Enterprise Digital Support Programmes** at these locations should be investigated.

STRATEGY IN ACTION:
THE KILRUSH INNOVATION HUB

West Clare, like so many parts of rural Ireland faces infrastructure challenges including below par broadband in many areas. While resolving the issue of broadband remains a priority of the National Broadband Plan, under its new Digital Strategy, Clare County Council, in conjunction with Clare LEO have shown creativity and forward planning in the development of Kilrush Innovation Hub to assist businesses in the area while the NBP is being rolled out.

The centre is served by a dedicated high speed broadband connection and associated facilities including 14 hotdesks, training and conference facilities and integrated business supports to assist business from all sectors (food, tourism, agriculture as well as remote workers) to build sustainable employment the centre of west Clare's largest town.

The Kilrush Innovation Hub is the first of several Innovation Hubs that will be rolled out across the County in the next five years under the new Digital Strategy.

The Kilrush Hub

STRATEGIC ACTION AREA 2:
INTELLIGENT COMMUNITIES

"BUILDING INTELLIGENT CONNECTED COMMUNITIES IN RURAL CLARE"

Access	Affordability	Awareness ✓	Ability ✓

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

▶ Increased access to reliable and high-speed broadband is vital for the economic and social development of rural areas and communities

▶ Connected Communities have access to greater economic opportunity and support services

▶ Digital technologies have benefits for both young and old and hence contribute to the retention of all ages in their community

▶ Every citizen should have the opportunity to develop the capability to access "on-line" services which can improve quality of life

WHAT IT MEANS

▶ Empowering individual communities to make better use of the opportunities presented by broadband connectivity and associated digital technologies

▶ Raising awareness and familiarity with the potential benefits offered by broadband

▶ Improving the ability of community groups and members to exploit these opportunities

HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE THE THE INTELLIGENT COMMUNITIES PRIORITY??

ACTION 2.1: Building Community **Awareness**

ACTION 2.2: Enhancing Community **Ability**

ACTION 2.3: Collaborate with the Education and Learning providers to support **skills development** of Clare Citizens

ACTION 2.4: Monitoring Community Indicators

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTIONS

Strategic action is needed at a county level to focus on empowering individual communities to make better use of the opportunities presented by broadband connectivity and associated digital technologies. Bottom-up action is required to ensure longer term sustainable impact, but this action needs to be encouraged and supported with practical county wide programme interventions if it is to be successful.

Therefore to achieve greater impact at a community level, Clare County Council will introduce a **Clare Community Broadband Planning Programme** (CBBP) to help communities better exploit and leverage their existing high-speed broadband as well as the expanded high-speed broadband that will be available to a greater extent in the near future

The goals of the CBBP are to:

- increase community awareness of the importance and benefits of high-speed broadband;
- improve the ability of community groups and members to exploit these opportunities
- develop and implement community-based broadband plans that are updated and revised regularly.
- measure and track progress of communities broadband engagement plans.

These goals are intended to be, like the model itself, easy to understand and implement in local communities. If taken together and successfully achieved, these interventions will achieve a long term sustainable impact on the County's capacity to compete and thrive in the global Digital Economy. The programme will be made available to all communities across the county – rural and urban – via a combination of the **Rural Community Development Officers** (RCDOs) and a new **Digital Communities Officer** who will

- carry out an initial awareness and readiness assessment and work with individual communities to develop a digital plan,
- support funding applications for related activity including Hubs, MicroHubs and exemplar community based projects which leverage broadband and digital technologies to deliver new sustainable community supports in areas such as youth services, education, elderly services, farming, remote working hubs, social enterprise and tourism.
- help track progress towards stated community goals by leveraging broadband.

In this context, RCDOs will need a basic knowledge of broadband and its potential benefits for different aspects of community life and this will need to be augmented via training on an ongoing basis. In addition the new Digital Communities Officer will augment this with more in-depth knowledge and skills which may not be available within some communities.

A series of sub actions will augment
this overall activity as follows:-

ACTION 2.1: **Building Community Awareness**

As previously outlined people who have never used a computer or accessed the Web may think they have nothing of value to offer. Research suggests that older adults are more likely than young people to feel this way. Hence an-going **Community Awareness Campaign** will be introduced to develop and disseminate:-

- Information Resources (e.g. "Digital" Ladder of Life Infographic for building Community Awareness of how different age groups each benefits from broadband across areas such as Education, Health, Agriculture, Remote work, Community Enterprise & Social Business)
- Community workshops and forums (focussed on supporting community development leaders to share experience and to identify the opportunities offered by broadband and digital technologies to their own communities)

The development and rollout of this campaign will be led by the Rural and Community Development team in Clare County Council including the Digital Communities Officer and with the involvement of key stakeholder groups and organisations as well as geographic communities and communities of interest.

ACTION 2.2: **Enhancing Community Ability**

Awareness building is a beginning and not an end. To help individual communities to harvest their potential, they must plan the improvements they want to achieve. As part of such a programme led by RCDOs and Digital Community Officer, initial one to one community workshops will focus on establishing project plans and objectives, while subsequent quarterly meetings will offer a disciplined check-in on results.

To be successful this programme needs to engage the community champions, community team and those who have involved themselves in the work as well as reaching out to youth and other groups that may not be normally involved in community development activities. It also needs to overcome issues of resistance to change of some members of the community.

It is also recognised that without a targeted, specific and engaging purpose participation in such activity by individual communities is unlikely. Therefore the participation of **Clare Local Development Company** and a short term focus on developing community specific applications for instruments such as the **LEADER** broadband support and **Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme** (SICAP) are expected to prove critical to the early delivery of this action area.

In respect of individual community driven projects, it is anticipated that many will have their own unique nature and context but the support and involvement of key actors (including but not limited to **GAA, Macra, LCETB and other Educational bodies, Schools, HSE, Teagasc, Tourism bodies, Clare LEO** and many others. Furthermore it is anticipated that in drawing up their plans, communities will leverage the new **Broadband Connection Points** and **Innovation Hubs/Micro-Hub** infrastructure planned as part of the Digital Strategy as well as utilising existing local and national programmes (e.g. **Digital Skills for Citizens Programme, Age Action's Getting Started Computer Training, Coder Dojo, Co-working.ie, etc.**)

ACTION 2.3: **Collaborate with the Education and Learning providers to support skills development of Clare Citizens**

Linked to the previous action, Clare County Council plans to work with the third level providers in the region to ensure there is enhanced access to college courses across the county via the new broadband networks and associated infrastructure. This will contribute to both the sustainability of rural communities and enhanced job creation prospects for all.

ACTION 2.4: **Monitoring Community Indicators**

The things we measure are the things we improve. Hence a key aspect of ensuring individual communities improve their engagement with the digital economy is that a baselining and tracking system is put in place to monitor their individual progress and the impact of their actions.

Hence Clare County Council will introduce a new community readiness index for this purpose. The new index will include information on connectivity, infrastructure, skills, adoption and benefits experienced. The index will baseline the starting position of individual communities that engage with the programme and subsequently track progress. Furthermore the index will allow communities to self-assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and obstacles, and identifies areas where the community can most effectively focus its efforts to make sustainable progress in the adoption of digital technologies.

The index will provide information on each community's digital engagement at different points in time. This will facilitate both the monitoring of progress and the identification of appropriate interventions.

STRATEGY IN ACTION 2:
THE BURREN ECOTOURISM NETWORK

The Burren EcoTourism Network is a world class example of Intelligent Communities in Action.

This Community driven initiative was established in 2008 and currently has 50 members in the region. Its objective is to establish the Burren and Cliffs of Moher UNESCO Global Geopark as a premier internationally-recognised sustainable tourism region, ensuring the future economic and social growth and sustainable development of its communities, environment and heritage. The Network, in partnership with the Geopark, supports continued training, mentoring and accreditation in sustainable tourism for its members. Broadband is vital for the members of the Network to stay connected with each other and with their support services. Networking has reduced the feeling of isolation and has encouraged shared promotion, shared visitor experience development and peer support. The Network has been trained on the use of online platforms and on social media marketing campaigns. The Network use facebook to communicate with each other and all voices and opinions can be heard in this forum. Broadband is absolutely vital for business, visitors expect an online presence and more marketing is now done more cheaply and effectively online. The Network's sustainable credentials are now recorded and measured on line, in an efficient system that provides users with multilayered information, research and data in seconds. Broadband is a lifeline for the Network and increased connectivity will be a major influence on their future growth and sustainability as an 'intelligent community'.

Picture Credit: Clare Herald

STRATEGIC ACTION AREA 3:
DIGITAL ENTERPRISE & EMPLOYMENT

"ENHANCING THE DIGITAL MATURITY OF CLARE ENTERPRISES AND WORKFORCE"

Access → **Affordability** ✓ → **Awareness** ✓ → **Ability** ✓

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- Increased access to reliable and high-speed broadband is vital for both the establishment and growth of modern business in the global economy
- Digitally connected regions with a digitally skilled workforce, attract greater investment, job creation and employment

WHAT IT MEANS

- Benchmarking the level of engagement of Clare Enterprises with the Digital Economy
- Raising awareness and familiarity with the potential benefits offered by broadband
- Providing supports to help businesses across County Clare improve their adoption and exploitation of digital technology.

HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE THE DIGITAL ENTERPRISE & EMPLOYMENT PRIORITY

ACTION 3.1: Building **Enterprise Awareness**

ACTION 3.2: Enhancing **Enterprise and Workforce Ability**

ACTION 3.3: Identify, Support and Promote **Digitally Focussed Projects of scale** throughout the County

ACTION 3.4: Monitoring Enterprise **Digital Maturity** Indicators

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTIONS

Encouraging the greater adoption of digital technologies and broadband usage by enterprises of all sizes and from all sectors, is a critical component of the Clare Digital Strategy. Although there are ongoing efforts both locally and nationally to encourage firms to increase their online presence, there remains a pressing need for an integrated **Digital Enterprise Support Programme** to build on existing supports (e.g. Online Voucher Scheme) but also address gaps in company awareness, digital strategies development, accessing relevant supports as well as monitoring and tracking progress at both an individual and macro level. Exemplars of such programmes exist (e.g. DigitalBoost in Scotland). However they need to be tailored for: the funding and operating environment in

Clare; for clusters of firms; for leveraging the new **Hub** and **MicroHub** infrastructure as it becomes available.

In devising such a programme it must be recognised that for many firms competing in today's digital economy, broadband and digital adoption is about much more than building a marketing presence online. It is a longer term journey which presents the firm with many challenges including skills development/acquisition, cyber security planning, social media integration, cloud adoption and financing. This is as true of small micro tourism enterprises as it is of technology start-ups or larger established SMEs.

Digital Maturity Graph.

Reference: The Digital Enterprise Scheme, which is a partnership funded and supported by the European Regional Development Fund, Leeds City Region Enterprise Partnership and local councils in the UK.

The **Local Enterprise Office in Clare** is ideally positioned to be the lead partner in the development and overall coordination of this new programme with the support of the **County Council, Enterprise Ireland** and other relevant stakeholders who it is anticipated will assist with the delivery of individual actions.

A series of sub actions will augment this overall activity as follows:-

ACTION 3.1: Building Enterprise Awareness.

While awareness of the benefits of broadband and digital technologies has become ever more widespread in recent years, ongoing effort is still required to keep enterprises up to date and to reach out to less engaged firms or sectors. Hence a **Digital Enterprise Awareness Campaign** for Clare enterprises and workers will be introduced to develop and disseminate:-

- Information Resources (e.g. Digital Maturity Models, Case Studies, Adoption Guides)
- Workshops and forums (focussed on supporting enterprises to share experience and to identify the opportunities offered by broadband and digital technologies to their own business)

The development and ongoing delivery of this campaign will be led by the **Clare LEO** with the involvement of key public and private stakeholder groups and organisations. Workshop events will make use of the new Hub and MicroHub infrastructure were possible.

ACTION 3.2: Enhancing Enterprise and Workforce Ability.

A two pronged approach will be adopted to address the needs of enterprises and the broader workforce within this action area of the strategy.

Enterprise Support Approach

A programmatic approach will be adopted to assisting enterprises improve their digital adoption performance. Initially the Clare LEO will (either directly or through partners) conduct a "digital maturity" assessment of the enterprise with a view to understanding which aspects of the enterprise's digital operation needs improvement and how. Based on the outcomes of this assessment, the LEO will signpost suitable existing supports (skills development, financial, other) or coordinate the development of new supports which can assist the enterprise improve and evolve.

As part of this action, it is anticipated that new skills development courses will be needed across the county in areas such as Digital Strategy Development, Digital Marketing, CRM, Social Media and Cyber security. In some cases the new courses may involve a repackaging of existing offers to improve their impact or may involve a clustering of firms to aid delivery and address uptake issues. The LEO will involve key stakeholders such as the T**hird Level institutes, LCETB, Skillnets** and other **Enterprises Support Agencies** in course development and delivery as required.

Workforce Support

To complement the upskilling of enterprises across Clare, the County Council and Clare LEO will work with Limerick Institute of Technology and NUIG to identify and remotely deliver a range of suitable third level modules and courses via the new **Hubs**. These will enhance the skills and flexibility of the broader workforce and hence increase the attractiveness of Clare as a location for further investment and economic growth.

ACTION 3.3: Identify, Support and Promote Digitally Focussed Projects of scale throughout the County.

Clare County Council over the lifetime of this plan, will continue to identify and support locally identified projects across the county with a view to building the infrastructure, skills and impacts of digital technologies across the relevant catchments.

ACTION 3.4: Monitoring Enterprise Digital Maturity Indicators.

Critical to the sustainability and longer term assessment of Clare's position in the Digital Economy is the need to ensure that robust baselining and monitoring of the digital maturity of firms takes place.

The purpose of this monitoring includes:-

- providing a deeper understanding on the level of engagement of Clare Business' with the Digital Economy
- allowing for benchmarking and progress to be measured over time
- providing an insight into which areas businesses may require extra support to improve their adoption and exploitation of digital technology.

Therefore as part of the overall Digital Enterprise Support Programme, a new maturity index for enterprises will be developed and rolled out across the county. It will be modelled on similar successful indices internationally (e.g. Scotland's Digital Economy Maturity Model), and will benchmark the level of digital adoption, skills and benefits attained by Clare enterprises individually, while measuring their collective progress towards digitisation year on year.

STRATEGY IN ACTION 3:
CHAPEL GATE IRISH WHISKEY COMPANY

For a small global business like mine which operates on a Lean Start-up principal, flexibility in work space and location is imperative as is broadband access. Anyone can start a business now and earn a living through the advent of the online remote Gig Economy. Young entrepreneurs just need a push in the right direction to get them to take the leap that people all over the world are already making. A shared co-working space properly managed to facilitate collaboration formally and informally would be a Game Changer. It is exactly this kind of forward thinking initiative that we need to ensure the success of rural regeneration in this county.

Louise McGuane,
Founder of Chapel Gate Irish Whiskey Company

STRATEGIC ACTION AREA 4:
DIGITAL COUNCIL

"LEADING BY EXAMPLE"

Access ▶ **Affordability** ▶ **Awareness** ▶ **Ability** ✓

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

- ▶ Improved Public Satisfaction with the Council's Services
- ▶ Reduction in organisational running costs
- ▶ Improved staff satisfaction levels
- ▶ Enhanced digital access
- ▶ Increased public communication and engagement

WHAT IT MEANS

- ▶ Digital technologies can bring efficiencies and increased productivity to the Council through better ways of working
- ▶ Providing more efficient internal operations and citizen engagement through the use of digital technologies
- ▶ Delivering a robust information security to protect council, citizens and business data from misuse and cyber threats and digital identities protected.
- ▶ Improving the digital skills of the councils workforce

HOW WILL WE ACHIEVE THE DIGITAL COUNCIL PRIORITY?

ACTION 4.1: Continuing to enhance the Council **website and online service delivery**, ensuring better accessibility to Council services on all devices

ACTION 4.2: Invest to **replace an ageing technology infrastructure** to support a digital workplace in areas such as document and records management, collaboration, CRM and cloud adoption (e.g. Integrated Housing Management System)

ACTION 4.3: Develop a **Digital Learning Framework for staff** including digital information security

ACTION 4.4: Improve the **efficiency and effectiveness of council services** to customers and elected members.

STRATEGY IN ACTION 4: ENNIS WIFI

Clare County Council has commenced the rollout of free public Wi-Fi to Ennis town centre as part of a wider plan to introduce Broadband Connection Points to other Clare locations.

Open Wi-Fi access was recently introduced to the Upper Market area, Parnell Street and Carpark, Abbey Street and Carpark, O'Connell Street and O'Connell Square. Clare County Council, which is funding the initiative, is working with local businesses to install the Wi-Fi hotspots in an effort to draw shoppers and businesspeople to the town. The initiative will help attract people into the town centre and encourage them to stay longer and position Ennis to compete with other urban centres.

The service has been designed to provide members of the public visiting Ennis with a free, easily accessible and reliable Wi-Fi service to access online services and for broader needs. The service taps into the high speed broadband infrastructure in the town and is available to use 24/7. The facility will also enable Clare County Council and the local business community to promote the town and county in the future Social media platforms and other web technologies.

STRATEGIC ACTION AREA 5:
MEASURING AND EVOLVING

Critical to the success of the Digital Strategy and securing Clare's position in the Digital Economy in the coming years is the need to ensure that there is a robust system to monitor progress against the actions set out. Clare County Council will develop a workplan and track its implementation annually across the main areas of strategic action.

This workplan will be linked to the Clare Rural Development Strategy and will include but not be limited to:-

ACTION 5.1: Identification and delivery of projects under the **Strategic Action Area 1: Improving Access and Infrastructure**

ACTION 5.2: Monitoring of actions and Community Indicators under the **Strategic Action: Area 2 Intelligent Communities**

ACTION 5.3: Monitoring actions and Enterprise Digital Maturity Indicators under the **Strategic Action Area 3: Digital Enterprise and Employment**

ACTION 5.4: Monitoring actions under the **Strategic Action Area 4: Digital Council**

As previously highlighted what gets measured gets improved. This is particularly true of the implementation of the Clare Digital Strategy in the coming years. Hence under this action, the introduction of these baselining and tracking systems will provide the foundation for longer term continuous improvement and digital engagement in all enterprises, communities and citizens across the county as the Council seeks to facilitate:-

- Access to "fit for purpose" digital infrastructure,
- Awareness of the potential uses and benefits of this infrastructure,
- Ability and Skills development to realise the digital opportunities arising.