

MALCOLM

NOONAN

Kilkenny newsletter
Nuachtlitir Chill Chainnigh

Green Party TD for
Carlow Kilkenny



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A chara,

As another Dáil term draws to a close I wanted to update you on some of the things I've been working on over the last year. It's been a busy but productive year here in the constituency and in my Ministry, so read on for plenty of good news stories from both.

As Minister for Nature, Heritage and Electoral Reform, one of my achievements over the last year was making it quicker and easier for people to register to vote to encourage greater participation in our democracy. Just visit www.checktheregister.ie and get registered or update your details.

Tá mé ag obair go dian ar do shon.

Malcolm

Teachta Dála do
Cheatharlach Cill Chainnigh



The push to complete the Ring Road

Back in February I was expecting to see significant funding allocated to progress the Ring Road extension. Instead I found out that Kilkenny County Council didn't apply for funding this year, and that money allocated to this project last year was returned unspent. I'm so disappointed at the lack of urgency by Kilkenny County Council towards completing this piece of infrastructure, which is vital for the economic, cultural and social development of the city. While we're making good progress on active travel plans and the success of our bus service is exceeding expectations, we cannot realise our full ambition for walking, cycling and public transport until we take HGVs and other through traffic out of the city centre.

For 20 years we've marched, protested, and petitioned for the Ring Road, but we've been ignored by councillors who have instead prioritised the ill-advised Central Access Scheme, leading to huge volumes of traffic being directed into the Medieval core. Kilkenny City is also expanding on the western environs with thousands of houses underway or in planning, and two schools being relocated. Kilkenny County Council must outline their intentions in relation to the Ring Road, including next steps and a timeline for delivery. I remain in regular contact with the Department of Transport about this, and will continue to do all I can to advance this project.



Speaking at a protest to finish the Ring Road in 2013.



About me:

After 16 years serving the people of Kilkenny city as a councillor, I was elected to the Dáil in 2020 and later that year appointed Minister of State. Since then I've worked hard as a TD for Carlow Kilkenny to secure a sustainable future for our beautiful counties and the diverse communities that call them home. As a Minister I've been working to safeguard our built and natural heritage and introduce important reforms to our electoral system. If I can help with any issues you're facing please drop me a line: malcolm.noonan@oireachtas.ie.



Taking a spin on the newly launched Carlow Town bus route.

Further expansion of bus service is on the cards.

When I first became a councillor I was told Kilkenny didn't have a big enough population to support a bus service. After campaigning for years for a city bus, I was delighted to see routes KK1 and KK2 roll out in 2020. After a rocky start during the pandemic, they're now carrying over 300,000 passengers per year. Now people want to see the expansion of our bus service. Our city is growing and many housing estates, new and old, are not covered by the existing service. Coupled with development of the Abbott facility at the IDA Business Campus and the new Statestreet campus, there are many new destinations to be considered as we look to expand our routes.

Kilkenny County Council is currently undertaking a review with a view to providing more buses and identifying new routes. Like many who enjoy the service, I look forward to its expansion will continue to advocate for further investment in the city bus service, along with a new fleet of electric buses. The success of our KK routes is reflected in the new Carlow town bus route launched last year, and indeed right around the country. With reduced fares, increased investment and improved services it's no wonder public transport figures are at a record high.

A COUNTY MUSEUM FOR KILKENNY?

Kilkenny has a rich and fascinating history dating back centuries, but we don't have a County Museum to showcase the tens of thousands of artefacts associated with our city and county. Ever since my 2009 Mayoralty, when I was involved in the purchase of St Mary's Church and Graveyard, I hoped this might be the space for a County Museum, but the project took a different path and the Medieval Mile Museum was opened. The Museum is a great asset to Kilkenny, but it is constrained from

realising its full potential due to the static nature of the exhibition there. Earlier this year I wrote to both Kilkenny Civic Trust and Kilkenny County Council to ask them to explore the possibility of changing the remit of the museum to a free to enter public museum. This would allow us to showcase collections never seen before in Kilkenny, and display civic archives dating back to the 13th century. It would also open up a whole new avenue of public engagement for schools and academics with archive material and a study centre. I will keep pressing the need to have a County Museum for Kilkenny; it's a vital missing piece of the heritage jigsaw for our city and county.



With Cllr Maria Dollard at the Medieval Mile Museum

Saving our built heritage, supporting traditional skills

Since taking office in 2020, I've worked hard to ensure that communities are supported to conserve and restore the heritage in their care and under my watch, the level of funding for our built heritage has been unprecedented. I introduced the Community Monuments Fund with a modest sum of €800,000; that now stands at €7 million, and combined with the Historic Structures Fund and the Built Heritage Investment Scheme, this year alone saw a record €870,000 invested in some of Kilkenny's landmark buildings.



Visiting the Historic St. Kieran's College, where I was a student in the 1980s.

Our shared built and archaeological heritage is precious. Sometimes we see it as just the big sites that tourists flock to, but it's so much more than that. Our historic churches and graveyards, traditional shopfronts, follies and vernacular houses are all of equal importance to our communities, and that's what makes these funds so important. Some of the projects we've supported in Kilkenny since 2020 illustrate that point. They include the restoration of Shee Alms House, the shopfront on Tynan's Bridge House, and Phil Barron's Cottage in Clogh. And in the year ahead we'll see other restoration projects get underway, including at St Kieran's College and the Club House Hotel.



Expanding and enhancing our National Parks



With my colleague, Minister Darragh O'Brien, launching Ireland's eighth national park in Kerry.

At the outset of my term as Minister for Nature, I wanted to leave a legacy of more land and marine area to nature. Central to this is our National Park network; places where people can appreciate and enjoy biodiversity, and where we can work collaboratively towards a more strategic approach to conservation. Last year I announced Ireland's first new National Park in 25 years at Dowth in Meath, then, this year I established another one - our first Marine National Park. Páirc Náisiúnta na Mara Ciarraí is a 70,000 acre park over land and sea encompassing Sceilg Mhichíl, the Blasket Islands, Little Skellig and Puffin Island, along with the iconic Conor Pass, Inch dune system and Derrynane. Both new National Parks add to our growing network of parks and nature reserves, bringing more of Ireland's biodiversity into state care under the National Parks and Wildlife Service.

The majestic osprey returns to Irish skies



With Derek Mooney of Mooney Goes Wild for the release of our first Irish osprey chicks

I've had many 'pinch me' moments in my tenure as Minister for Nature, but nothing beats the thrill of overseeing the return of an iconic species to our shores. So it was last August when we saw the first osprey chicks return to Irish skies under our long-planned Osprey Reintroduction Programme. Ospreys are thought to have become extinct as breeding birds here over 150 years ago, but they have continued to visit the island. Our milestone release was made all the more exciting by the news, earlier in the summer, that a breeding osprey pair was spotted in Northern Ireland - a positive indicator of the quality of habitats on this island and a powerful reminder that biodiversity action can and does yield positive returns.



Launching an LBAF-funded pond habitat.

Good news for nature

To mark National Biodiversity Week in May, I announced the recipients of this year's €2.7m Local Biodiversity Action Fund. I'm proud to say that 13 Kilkenny-based projects were funded, including hedgerow surveys, the development of pond habitats, invasive species management and recording of the Irish mayfly. This valuable fund highlights the importance of looking after the nature that's in our local areas so we can all share in the benefits of having thriving, healthy nature around us.



New Special Protected Areas in Irish waters

In the past year I designated two new Special Protection Areas, or SPAs, for birds. Designated last year, the North-West Irish Sea SPA was our biggest ever at 230,000 hectares, but earlier this year we surpassed that with the bigger still 'Seas off Wexford' SPA. At 305,000 hectares it's bigger than County Wexford itself and will provide enhanced protection for about twenty species of birds.

With Minister Eamon Ryan and campaigners in Luxembourg.



Nature Restoration Law passes in Europe!

I was in Luxembourg in June for an EU Environment Council meeting when history was made: the Nature Restoration Law was finally approved! With Minister Eamon Ryan, I had initiated a decisive letter signed by 11 Member States, calling on other Member States to join them in adopting the NRL. This helped get it over the line at last. It was a good day for nature, and for the millions of people who understood and who campaigned for the vital importance of protecting and restoring our natural world. This historic vote now provides the opportunity to reverse biodiversity loss and restore nature, strengthening

food security, providing safe drinking water, reducing air pollution, and sustaining livelihoods and wellbeing for every European into the future. Ireland led from the front on this, and I'm proud to say that is down to the Green Party. We ensured cross-party support in Government, brought the majority of the opposition with us, secured the votes of Irish MEPs at a critical time when we thought all might be lost, advocated for nature among our European colleagues, and delivered a €3.15bn Climate and Nature Fund to support the implementation of the Nature Restoration Law at home.

Funding for the conservation of Kennyswell



At the historic Kennyswell.

As a former Kennyswell committee member, I was delighted to provide funding of €30,000 towards the conservation and restoration of the historic Kennyswell under the 2024 Community Monuments Fund. The well holds social and cultural significance for the people of Kilkenny, and as a recorded monument it's vital that the structure is restored and in-river works relating to the collapse of the boundary wall are addressed. I've been working closely with Kilkenny County Council's Heritage Officer on this, and the Council has produced a really good conservation management plan which will inform the works. I'm now looking forward to seeing the work commence.



Later trains for Kilkenny

In more good news for public transport users, Irish Rail recently published some planned timetable alterations which will come into effect from August. Under the new proposals, Kilkenny will soon be serviced by a later evening train and an additional Sunday service, making the train a more viable and attractive option for more people.

With the last train set to leave Dublin at 8:20pm instead of 6:35pm, this is great for tourists, commuters and day-trippers, and it doesn't just offer greater connectivity to those traveling Dublin to Kilkenny - it also offers an evening service from Carlow or Kilkenny, servicing Muine Bheag and Thomastown too.

Check the Register

As Minister with responsibility for Electoral Reform it was my job to steer the 2022 Electoral Reform Act through the Houses of the Oireachtas. The Act ensures that our democracy is supported by robust electoral structures, including a more accurate electoral register. As a result, it's never been easier or quicker to register to vote or update your details. Check the register today at www.checktheregister.ie.



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✓ Delivering on the ambition of 'Housing for All'.

✓ Providing increased cost of living supports for people and families.

✓ Addressing climate change and biodiversity loss.



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