

**PEOPLE BEFORE PROFIT**

**FIGHTING FOR WORKERS & ECO-SOCIALISM**

**A  
SOCIALIST  
MAYOR  
FOR  
LIMERICK**



# **INTRODUCTION: WHAT KIND OF MAYOR DOES LIMERICK NEED?**

Some argue we need another corporate politician, who will take the bloated salary, cut ribbons and hobnob with vulture funds and big businesses lobbyists? People Before Profit disagrees.

We believe we need an activist Mayor, a campaigner for working people and public services. That's why I'm standing.

I want to be a workers' Mayor - that's why I've pledged to only take the median wage of full time workers in Limerick. We don't need a Mayor who wants a big salary and flashy chains, we need a Mayor who wants to use that platform to help build the movements we need to make Limerick a great place to live, work and raise a family.

In the following pages I detail my vision on all the key issues affecting Limerick, and explain how I see the role of Mayor, but here I wanted to highlight 5 key priorities I will be pushing for as Mayor:

## **1. Get Back Building Public Housing**

Local council and national government created the current housing crisis by refusing to build public housing. FF, FG, Labour and the Greens imposed savage austerity which saw the number of new council houses built in Limerick fall to 0 for years. Still to this day, the supply of public housing is being restricted, driving private rents and prices up, while public land banks and buildings lie empty. As Mayor I will push for a rapid roll out of public housing on the public land in Limerick- from the Opera Centre and Cleeves, to the vast site in Mungret and beyond. I will also push for Limerick to become a pilot council for Universal Public Housing - opening it up to all by lifting the restrictive income limits.

## **2. Take Back Control of Refuse & other local services**

We need to reverse the decline in powers of local councils. The council should play a key role in water services, housing, public transport and refuse collection. Privatisation of bin services has seen prices rise and rise, an explosion of fly-tipping and wasteful duplication. Limerick should lead the way, bringing refuse collection back into public control, banning incinerators and promoting free and accessible recycling.

### **3. Organise for Action on Healthcare**

The centralisation of A&E services in UHL has been a disaster, it should be reversed. As Mayor, I will organise a major Town Hall meeting in the Autumn, inviting the Minister, HSE and UHL management as well as health campaigners to come together and discuss the issues. In particular, this Town Hall should be open to all the public, so those in power can hear the issues for themselves. I will push for commitments from all parties in their General Election manifestos to re-open Ennis, Nenagh and St. John's A&Es, and provide the extra beds and staff UHL needs, and use the position of Mayor to help build a movement on this issue in the run in to the elections.

### **4. A Limerick for Workers**

As a Workers' Mayor on a workers' wage, I want to put workers' rights at the heart of council policy. A workers' rights clause should be inserted in any council contracts, ensuring that any company getting council money recognises unions and pays a living wage, blacklisting any companies known for abusing workers' rights and giving preference to cooperatives where possible.

### **5. Free Public Transport**

Across the world more and more places are introducing free public transport; I will push for Limerick to be the pilot county for this in Ireland. This helps to tackle the climate and the traffic chaos, and put money back in people's pockets. We must also increase the frequency and reliability of bus services in particular, including in our county towns, in order to make it a real alternative to the car.

These are bold ideas, and they will require building strong coalitions and campaigns to achieve them. However, now is the perfect time for such a bold approach, putting these major issues on the national agenda and putting pressure on the big parties. Taken together with the other ideas in this manifesto, this socialist vision could transform Limerick and make it a leading light nationally and internationally.

Let us take inspiration from the anti-austerity movement and in particular water charges revolt, where people stood together and won. We need to do that again - but this time, we must change not just one policy, but challenge the whole system.

Together we can win - and that change starts on June 7th.

*Ruairí Fahy*



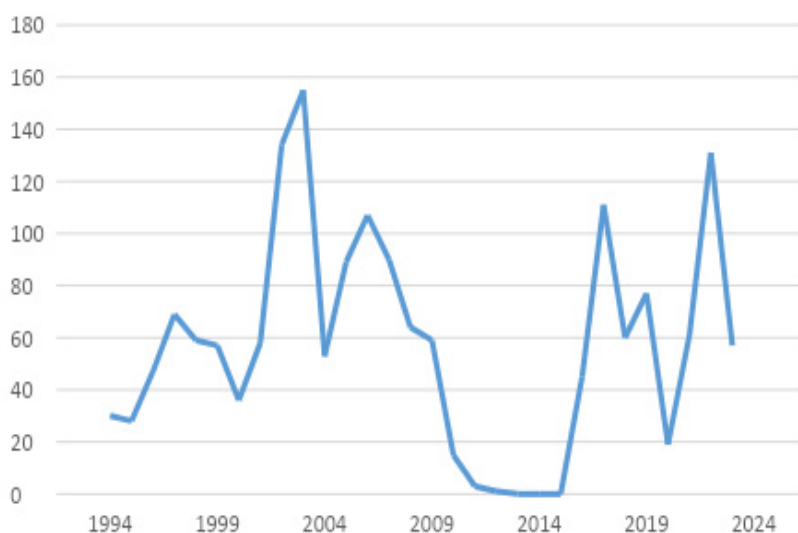
# ON THE KEY ISSUES

## *Drive a Socialist Solution to the Housing Crisis*

For over 10 years Fine Gael & Fianna Fail have been driving up house prices, regardless of whether working people can afford them or not.

They've created a situation where property speculators and international investors were given sweetheart deals to hoard land and leave it empty while over two-thirds of young people left living at home with their parents well into their 30s.

The Land Development Agency (LDA) and Limerick 2030 has slowed down the delivery of housing in Limerick and is following the same path as the National Asset Management Agency (NAMA) reducing democratic accountability and pushing privatisation of public lands. The LDA for instance are opening up the remaining publicly owned lands to private developers with no regards for affordability or buying up undeveloped sites worsening the already disastrous land value speculation that has driven up the prices of homes. Meanwhile Limerick 2030 are moving at a snail's pace, and seem more focused on building office blocks than public housing.



*The number of direct build council houses in Limerick since 1994. Almost no houses were built from 2010 to 2016, and still the number is far too low.*

This reliance on private investors and developers to build up the necessary housing capacity, allows them to set whatever price they like and even change the laws to increase their profits. We need to be pushing for a state construction company, to build and maintain public housing.

The private market has failed to provide secure affordable homes for people. Only public housing, available to all with rents linked to no more than 25% of people's incomes, can provide the security people need to avoid living in constant fear of eviction or to raise a family.

Rents have more than doubled since 2014, evictions are through the roof, 4,000 children are growing up in hotels and homeless hubs and tenants are afraid to stand up for their rights.

## To tackle the housing crisis we want to:

- Develop public housing on public land, including Opera, Cleeves and mungret sites, which is 100% accessible to all, with rents linked to incomes.
- Use the mayoral budget to take the shutters off of council buildings and get families out of hotels and into homes.
- Include spaces for local services including shops, GPs and schools alongside all large housing developments.
- Demand a return to direct build council housing to keep estates under democratic accountability.
- Push for a regeneration programme for the city centre and town centres, to bring the high number of vacant buildings into public ownership and develop them as quality public housing, revitalising our towns and the city centre.
- Fight for long term contracts and proper working conditions for apprentices to ensure we have the skilled workers for maintenance, retrofits and a mass public home building program.

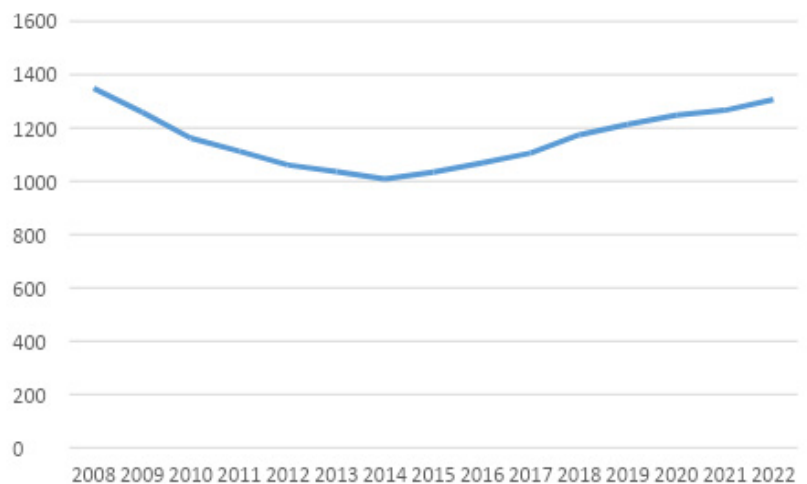


*Former garda station, empty for 30 years.*

## Expand local democracy

People feel that their voices are ignored. Public consultation is carried out, but for the most part the plans appear pre-determined with little more than a few aesthetic changes possible from the public. The choice seems to be: take what's offered, if you don't, there won't be another offer.

This problem is growing across the world as more and more decision making is taken out of the hands of democratically accountable institutions and moved into hands of private corporations, unelected technocrats and opaque semi-state companies. In Ireland the problem has been compounded by the slashing of funding for councils and instead imposing the unfair Property Tax on the family home.



*Total number of council staff - we are still below 2008 levels, despite rapid growth in population since then.*

This needs to be reversed. People's voices need to be included at the start of changes, not when the ideas are already decided.

## For real local democracy we want to:

- Expand public consultation to ensure local knowledge makes its way into any proposed

plans.

- Bring community voices into the budgeting process and make it transparent.
- Push for the elected council to have the final say on Limerick 2030 projects, like with Part 8 plans.
- Advocate for devolving more powers, such as public transport and housing, to local level and bringing water and refuse services back under council control.
- Tax big businesses, not ordinary workers. The rates & rebate scheme shows how we can increase taxes on the major companies while protecting small business.

## ***For an Activist Mayor, fighting For Better Services***

The creation of a directly elected mayor was billed as a real change in the powers of local democracy but in reality what has been delivered is a position still tightly reigned in by grants and plans from Dublin and the myriad of institutions that treat local wisdom with disdain.

As always in Ireland the only way to achieve real change is through organised collective action, and Limerick has a long and impressive history of the people united, standing up for their interests. From the protests against the water charges, to the rent strikes, the people of Limerick, under their own steam, have long been a thorn in the side of those in power.

We need a Mayor who will lead from the front, rather than hiding behind the restrictive legislation, and actually work with community and campaign groups to push national government to provide the investment Limerick needs.

### **To develop effective local government we will:**

- Organise people and communities to fight to increase local spending.
- Use every available opportunity to highlight the crisis in the Limerick and Midwest health service, and support those campaigning for reopening of the smaller A&Es and building a quality Irish NHS.
- Fight for a safe injection and drug taking centre as well as expanded holistic drug treatment to start tackling addiction and dependency at its root.
- Democratise investment decisions and fight against the increasing erosion of democratically accountable council spending.
- Campaign for Limerick City and County to become a pilot area for free, fast and frequent public transport.



## ***Communal Luxury, not Individual Isolation***

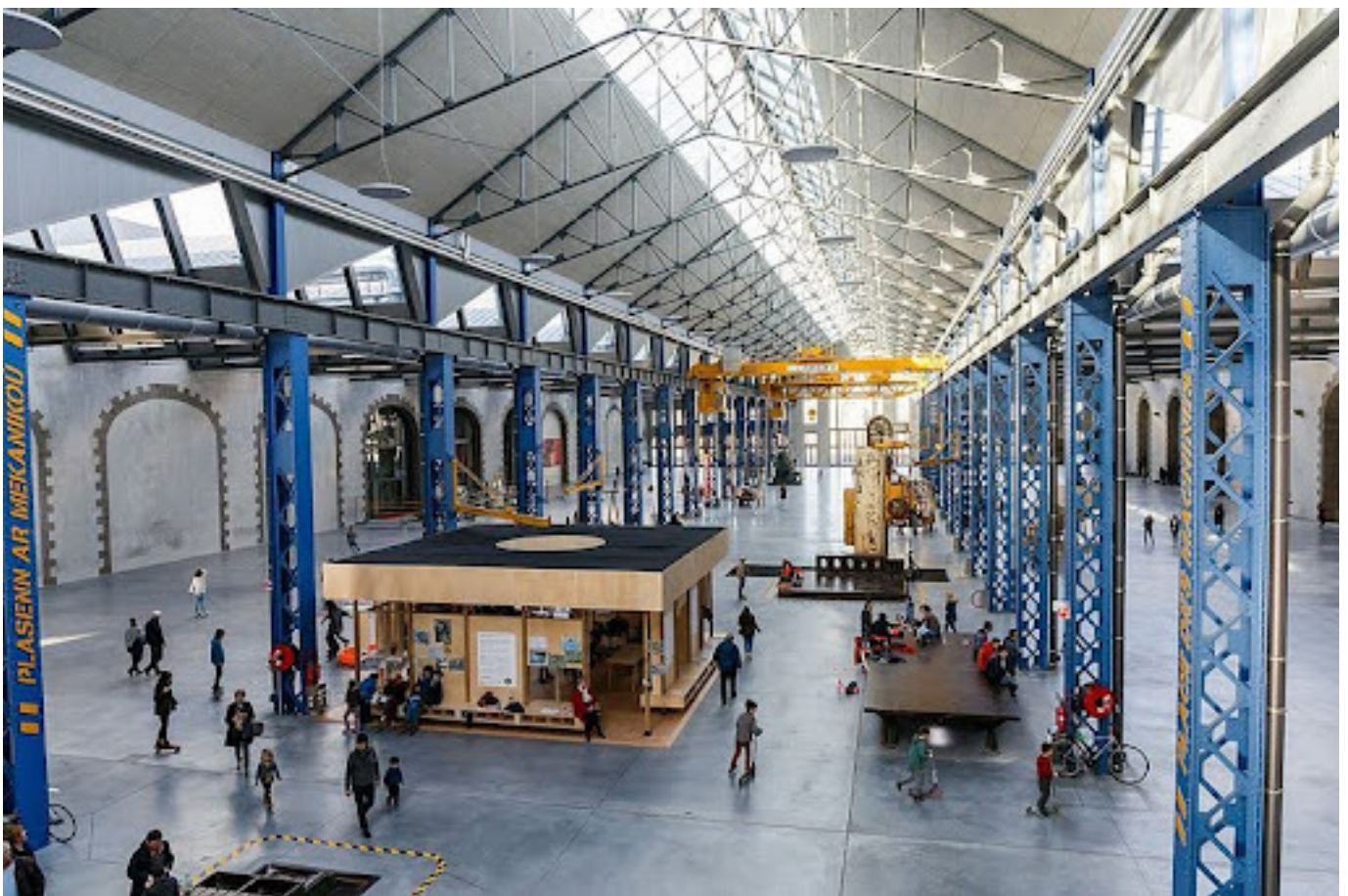
Even though the actions that can be taken locally are constrained by funding and plans by both central government and the EU there is still room to leverage the climate action fund and other funding streams to work towards the creation of communal luxury right now.

The only way to make this work is to have communities at the heart of this spending as well as helping to roll out more parks, sports and play areas as well as urban forests.

These areas also need to be linked up with better walking and cycling infrastructure, including between communities in towns and villages so they aren't just for people who can afford a car.

### **To build up communal luxury we want to:**

- Turn the Cleeves site into Limerick's living room.
- Develop community led planning and implementation of local amenities and parks.
- Provide more sports and cultural spaces for teenagers to socialise and enjoy themselves.
- Create urban Gaeltacht spaces to expand and promote the use of Irish language on a daily basis
- Expand walking and cycling infrastructure so more people can ditch their car without becoming disconnected from society.



*Former factory converted into covered public space, accessible to all, acting as a living room for the people of Brest, Brittany.*

*Kergourlay, Espace public ateliers des Capucins, CC BY-SA 4.0*

## ***Celebrate and Revive Limerick's Trade Union past***

Limerick has a strong and proud history of trade union activity, from the famous 1919 general strike when the workers ran the city to the strike wave of the '70s.

The Dunnes workers solidarity strike against apartheid in South Africa, alongside a new regime of finance, brought a backlash against trade unions placing limits on strike action and made it harder for workers to take collective action for better wages and conditions. We need to reject the racism and hatred being spread by the establishment parties and their far-right allies and instead build a united movement of all workers and poor people to fight the bosses.

### **To ensure workers get the value of their labour we want to:**

- Give preference to unionised companies and cooperatives for council contracts.
- Require all companies who receive council contracts to pay a living wage.
- Blacklist companies known for abusing workers rights
- Make Limerick City and Conuty Council an apartheid free zone by amending procurement policies to exclude companies complicit in supporting apartheid Isreal
- Fight alongside unions for a 4 day work week with no loss of pay, collective bargaining, and to replace the 1990 industrial relations act.
- Work with trade unions to develop festivals and forums to commemorate Limerick's trade union history as well as gathering workers together to plan a return for strong unions in Limerick.



## ***Confront Capitalism's Climate Catastrophe***

Limerick and the mid-west is Ireland's pollution capital. Aughinish Alumina burns more than 10% of Ireland's gas, Irish Cement is burning old tires and we have new efforts to start mining in Kilmallock. Underfunding from government has made these polluting industries, that are harmful to both human and animal life, integral to balancing the council budget —putting our health at risk in service of these corporate interests.



To tackle the growing threat of climate disaster we need to bring an end to the logic of our current economic system which requires annual, compounding growth or else it will collapse. Right now in order to keep the system from collapse, fossil fuels are being burnt at record levels and the only solution that can be accepted by those in power is a transition that will require strip mining vast swathes of the planet—with Limerick on the chopping block.



To ensure there is a livable planet for our children, and a more tolerable planet for ourselves and our parents, we need to move away from a system that treats our air, water and soil as expendable in the constant drive for profit and capital accumulation.

### **To build for a sustainable future, we want to:**

- Support the creation of real green industry and low-carbon care jobs, not greenwashing by those with vested interests in the continued burning of carbon.
- Tackle opposition to renewables with publicly owned energy generation.
- Fight to bring an end to Limerick being Ireland’s dumping ground for dirty industry.

## ***A Sustainable Food Future***

During the war of independence workers in Limerick led the way by taking over the food processors, raising their own wages while also lowering the price of food for the people of Limerick. After the success of the counter-revolution, agriculture reverted to servicing the for-profit export industry instead of ensuring food sovereignty and sustainable food production.

Through the EU and the Common Agricultural Policy this climate and soil destructive model of agriculture has not only continued but accelerated. The removal of dairy quotas in 2014 combined with a push from Fine Gael to make farmers “get big or get out” has made it nearly impossible for small farmers to continue to support themselves while also providing sustainable local food while also acting as stewards of the land for our children.

### **For food sovereignty we want to:**

- Provide supports and links to buyers to elevate local food production.
- Work with elderly farmers to provide land for those who want to grow sustainable food but can’t due to lack of access to land.



## ***Punish waste producers, not consumers***

Like all ideas that bubble up from the climate movement, the circular economy has been captured and repurposed as a tool for profit making rather than one for reducing our impact on the planet.

The deposit return scheme places a levy on consumers to return a product which can't be recycled economically while drinks companies try to cut their contribution to council waste collection. Drones and cameras are being rolled out while bins are regularly taken off highly trafficked streets.

### **To tackle rubbish we want to:**

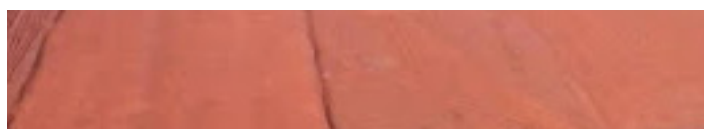
- Take household waste collection back into public ownership.
- Promote community swap days to match furniture, clothes and appliances to people who need them.
- Campaign for reduced packaging and a right to repair.
- For a county-wide ban on incinerators and gasification plants.

## ***A retirement plan for family businesses***

There is a growing problem in rural Ireland where local services from shops to pubs and from post offices to pharmacies are owned and operated by people approaching retirement age but with no succession plan.

In the past they could have relied on their children to take over the business and continue providing services to the area but whether it's emigration, lower birth rates or general rural decline these businesses are likely to close, and possibly never be replaced.

This creates a danger that the abandonment of rural areas will accelerate if no alternative is provided to ensure communities have all they need to survive, let alone thrive.



### **To make our towns and villages thrive we want to:**

- Develop new schemes of communal ownership to ensure that these services aren't lost.
- Provide ways to allow owners to retire while receiving a dividend from the ongoing operations in recognition of the services they provided throughout their working life.

## ***Make Limerick the first choice for artists to settle and create in***

The laws have been rewritten to allow for massive tax breaks for film companies using facilities here in Limerick but without a necessity for the companies receiving these grants to provide adequate support for the people they hire.

While these film studios make huge profits off the back of public money the actors, designers and local crew are denied recognition by film producers of their service to the industry and other employment rights, actors and others forced to sign unfair buy-out contracts, which deny them the legal entitlement to royalties or down-stream revenues for their work.

For artists the paid avenues to create art are almost non-existent in the county and with rents at eye-watering levels there's a danger that the creation of art will be limited only to those who comes from the wealthiest of backgrounds.

### **To support artists we will:**

- Repurpose vacant and derelict sites as low cost artist studios and accommodation.
- Make Limerick's laneways a home for displaying Limerick's artistic talents.
- Fight for an increased public arts budget to develop and showcase Limerick's talents.

*Joanna Bourne, "Old courtyard in Paris once a mews 5"*

## ***Support tenants' rights, local journalism and communities***

The €150K salary for the mayor is obscene. Like all other People Before Profit representatives, I wouldn't accept that wage; it's far beyond what the vast majority of workers in Limerick earn. Instead I would take the median wage of full time workers in Limerick and use the rest to support community initiatives, ensure tenants' rights are respected, and keep the council honest by supporting investigative journalism.

The Ditch has broken extremely important stories through their journalism bursaries, Féile na Gréine have shown what can be achieved to showcase Limerick's art, music and cultural talents on a shoestring budget, and between Limerick's rent strikes and the Community and Tenants Union (CATU) we've seen how tenants standing together can tackle housing injustice.

### **With the excess mayoral wages I will:**

- Create investigative journalism bursaries
- Fund community run cultural festivals
- Build a tenants' support network including private and social housing tenants to collectively fight for lower rents and better maintenance.

# A MESSAGE FROM RUAIRÍ

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Since the founding of the free state the government has tolerated local democracy at the best of times and is outwardly hostile the rest of the time.

From the very beginning the state postponed local elections out of fear that radical and anti-treaty forces would be elected in their droves. Then they gave the minister power to dissolve a local authority if a report deemed them not up to scratch. All of this was done to take almost all decision making away from local areas and hand it over to technocrats and civil servants.

We've had 100 years of this, first through Cumman Na nGaedhael and then by Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and most recently the Labour party too, who removed the town councils.

While this new Democratically Elected Mayor is supposed to start undoing all of that destruction of local politics, the reality is that we're just moving the unelected managers further behind the scenes while keeping the council's hands tied; fighting for grants and dancing to the tune of the Department of Transport or Housing or Health or whichever department is keeping a tight grip over local services.

**BUT that's why I'm running. Even though the state doesn't want to hand over power to people willingly, it doesn't mean that people can't make them do it unwillingly.**

Limerick has such a long history of pushing back against against these external restrictions on democracy from the general strike in response to the British military locking down the city in 1919 to the rent strikes in the 1970s led by Limerick's mothers to the repeated fights against water charges with Limerick being the most organised and effective during the 2014 to 2016 fight.

None of that was delivered by people who were closely linked with the vested interests. Not the council executive, not the big business owners but was it led by regular people who refused to be stepped on by those in power.

Lately there's been talk of a return of brutal austerity to tackle inflation while transnational companies are making record profits. There's no room for discussion there either. Unelected technocrats will tell governments to impose austerity and without people getting organised our services will be worsened or sold off to for-profit interests for "efficiency".

**So we need somebody who won't stand for the system or who will be nice and cosy with those who already hold the reins of the city. We need someone who won't accept the limits of the Mayoral legislation and demand more.**

More democratic decision making with real engagement, giving people agency over what happens in their communities.

More money for councils to spend on services. We are 4 times below the average when it comes to democratically accountable local spending on services compared to the rest

of Europe. We're 6 times behind Denmark. We need to know where the money is being spent and give people more say over how it's spent instead of just letting the Mayor deliver a budget that's tightly linked to what the government and the departments up in Dublin decide.

I won't take the bloated €150k salary. How can someone who's nominally leading the county accept that and live like the majority do scrimping and saving to get by?

Now, communities have to hold out the begging bowl for FDI accepting mines and gas terminals that increase cancer rates where they've been built elsewhere or the few scraps from a community benefit fund from "green" and polluting industries while the companies behind them get to hike up energy and commodity prices.

That's why we need to fight for public goods, built and developed with community engagement and with communities at their heart so that people can decide where the whole of the output goes, not just the crumbs.

We've seen how Socialist Mayors from France, to Austria, to the US to Chile have helped people go beyond what was legally allowed for mayors and to really improve people's lives. They've tackled poverty, hunger, and worked to lower people's living costs.

Here in Limerick there's an even greater chance to link both the city and county to build a local food and production system to share and develop our collective wealth and funnel it back into housing, transport and better public spaces.

People are desperate for these shared public commons after years of austerity, privatisation and underfunding have made almost every service only available to those who can afford them.

We can't afford to let these services be delivered only if someone can profit from them, they need to be built, delivered and maintained because people need them to live good, healthy and quality lives.

Right now housing is being led by the demands of the market. The state is making the council hand land over to the LDA while the LDA is pushing up prices by buying back land at 2 or 3 times the price that it was sold by NAMA.

We've got evictions, often illegal, but only the toothless residential tenancies board who aren't even fighting in tenants corners.

Landlords are getting away with renting out barely livable places at extortionate prices, breaking rent caps and people are too afraid to challenge them. I'm not a landlord and if we want to see any real shift on housing in the city and county we can't have a landlord as mayor.

Even when it comes to council developments they are usually wooed by what the international markets want rather than what people in Limerick need. The hanging gardens, the Opera Center and now the Cleaves Site are all delivering "executive" office space but we have almost nowhere people in the city centre can just go and exist with a roof over their heads without having to pay, let alone anywhere affordable to live.

We need to see a mass roll out of direct build public housing on public land where rents are set at no more than 20% of anybody's income, and we need public buildings to be

designed for the needs of people not the market. With hundreds of millions being spent on these commercial projects we should be getting a living room for the city.

We need these public spaces so children can socialise, learn and play in the evenings after school and everybody else has a place they can just be without having to pay for the pleasure of a place to sit.

If we want a better life for our children we need to seriously tackle climate change.

This can't be done in a way that makes people's lives worse.

It can't leave them sitting in the cold and the dark—and we speak to people who are sitting in the cold and the dark in Limerick on a regular basis.

We've got the government ready to change planning laws to allow companies to do what they like and to take some of the €8 billion they have unspent and instead of spending it on housing, or re-opening A&Es or even just building publicly owned renewables they are getting ready to make it cheaper for private financiers to build renewables off the Shannon Estuary while also driving up electricity prices again.

**Where is the democracy in this? Why don't we get a say in whether we want the state to build out an electricity system to serve our needs instead of the demands of the companies who are now set to profit off higher energy costs AND from the sweetheart tax and infrastructure deals we give them?**

We need a public energy system, designed around giving people a good life not around servicing American data centres and Russian Alumina plants.

To climate change we need to free up our streets—we need better public transport. It needs to be free, it needs to be frequent AND it needs to make sure bus drivers aren't getting screwed by contracts that make it nearly impossible to support a family.

We have the green party arguing against free public transport because they fear people will take unnecessary journeys. Who cares? Who are they to decide? If we have people spending their days travelling around the city on buses because their houses are cold or there's nothing else they can afford to do, that should be tackled by retrofits and community centres, not confining them to their homes.

Last year, the Socialist mayor of Montpellier made public transport free, overnight the number of people using it tripled with half of the city using it now.

We need free and frequent public transport so people feel confident that they can sell off their car and reclaim their driveways and streets and not be afraid that they won't be able to get around.

This is just a few things that I want to get people organised and fighting for but it must be said that none of these demands should be considered radical.

They are the bare necessity for healthy and happy communities—together we can fight for them.

**2024 is our chance for change.**

**It's our chance to ditch the duopoly of Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael that has been in control of the state for 100 years.**

**It's our chance to fight for a living planet for our children.**

**It's our chance to look beyond the political limits of what the government says is "possible" and fight for a socialist future.**

**This can only happen if people get organised in the workplaces and in their communities.**

***- Ruairí Fahy***