

Local Climate Conversation

15th March 2021, online

Hosted by Clare PPN

on behalf of the Dept of Environment, Climate & Communications

Introductory group discussion

During initial group discussion points were made regarding the need for:

- Nature-based solutions, utilising the biodiversity and carbon storage capacity of our wetlands and fens, of which Co. Clare has many under threat. This also promotes habitat generation, protection, and biodiversity protection.
- That our society needs to be on a war-footing in relation to climate change and that we need to deal with the issues on a multi-level, strategic way; using a strategic / business planning type approach that joins up single actions.
- There needs to be National and Local government actions for departments and targets to be met.
- Regarding personal responsibility, it is important to judge the 'push/pull' effect and be mindful of the gap between what people can do as opposed to telling them what they should do. It is important to frame the messages in a way that does not frame / focus entirely on the negative effects, but also shows the opportunities, particularly opportunities for jobs, quality of life and change in the pace of life.
- We must hold the government to account. It is important to turn the plan into actions with NO LOOPHOLES. There is a real concern that zero-carbon emissions by 2050 is insufficient. We can not tolerate anymore delays to action as delay means more work to be done in a shorter time.
- We need a serious ANNUAL assessment, no more kicking the can down the road.
- We are walking a thin line between the positive opportunities message and really scaring people. Clare and Louth are the two most vulnerable counties for climate change, and this has to be shown, not sugar-coated.
- There is a need for jobs in Clare, however they need to be SUSTAINABLE jobs, and this needs imagination and innovation. E.g. wave / tidal power and off-shore wind developments instead of bringing LNG into Shannon Estuary.

Hopes and Concerns

Via Chat

Hopes: 100% organic, 100% chemical free, 100% GMO free.

Concerns: Too little too late.

Move from the shock of the facts into taking action. Try small steps first and then develop, but above all, act.

Hope: that the level of knowledge and participation in Clare can really influence some good policy making.

Concern: Policy coherence is a concern. Farming policy and environmental policy are at loggerheads.

Hopes: Significant, just, equitable changes to a stakeholder-moderated economy where environment has a much bigger say.

Hope: that communities in Clare can build resilience to the impacts of climate change, while reducing our impact on the environment.

Concern: that people are ill-informed and that there won't be adequate resources given to rural Ireland to make the necessary changes.

Hope: that we can improve on the delivery of renewable energy; clarity on new development at Moneypoint; farming policy and helpful guidance on reducing methane emissions.

Hope: playing our part in reaching the 70% renewable energy target.

Concerns: effort needed to get public buy-in for the infrastructure development for wind energy.

Concerns: harmful environmental practices are prevalent in my locality, including burning of plastics, dumping of rubbish and harmful hedge-cutting practices.

Hope: that a change of culture could take place whereby the environment is placed centre-stage, in all aspects of life.

Hope: Food security and sustainable food production.

Hope: renewable energy projects to be community owned and have community consent.

Concern: that all basically continues as before, same level of consumption under a green flag.

Hope: that holy Irish cows get replaced with vegan agriculture – our only hope for food security in 10 years' time. The land needs to be used for reforestation (and rewilding) as the missing tree feedback loop is spinning out of control. Same for the Arctic feedback loop. We cannot add any more methane.

Chemical and GMO free implies biodiversity.

Hope: that long-term biodiversity and environment can be centre-stage and underpin other aspects of the economy. Policy coherence and synergy. Also, emphasise the value of biodiversity to climate adaptation and mitigation. Individual actions take place within a framework of national policy – the two go hand in hand.

Concern: the agri-food strategy being finalised at the moment is being driven by the industry and does not serve small farmers or the environment.

We didn't sugarcoat COVID-19 and we got the response we needed because the government led with authority and inclusivity – a sense of shared purpose.

Concern: I think we have run out of time for small steps and we need to be radical. It's high time to transfer subsidies from cows to beans, oats, quinoa, nuts. We can't afford to feed animals first. We must be organic. Wildlife needs the space that cattle are taking, under trees. And we need wildflowers instead of lawn.

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

Breakout Room 1:

Question 1 Current Action and Ambitions: Climate Action Plan

What community-led, climate action initiatives are happening in our area that work well?

Seedsavers, Moy Community Farm, Wild About Miltown, CELT, Shannon Wetlands, East Clare Co-op, Burren Life Project, All Ireland Pollinator Plan, Jim Cronin Farming for Nature, Talamh Beo (members in Clare) Futureproof Clare, Fridays for Future Clare, Extinction Rebellion Clare, Ennis Tidy Towns (biodiversity project) Grow it Yourself, Operation Deplastification, Clare-based work of Food Cloud, Three for the Sea, Burren Ecotourism Network,

Any new ideas or existing actions we'd like to further develop?

- Sustainable Energy Communities with locally owned energy generation. County level access to the national grid to be facilitated for individual or community co-op energy generation projects.
- Establishment of a well-resourced and fully staffed Local Authority or community-based Climate Change, Energy and Biodiversity Directorate on a legal footing to oversee a county-wide strategy (either annual or bi-annual) for supporting transition to sustainable livelihoods and practices and carbon neutrality. The case was also made for a dedicated Biodiversity Officer. Currently, biodiversity is halved and quartered into several chunks in various offices and committees
- An 'Organic Clare' brand and culture change which would help with biodiversity, sustainable livelihoods, soil health, food sovereignty and help farming to transition.
- One participant noted that we need to end cow dependency immediately and adopt and support vegan diets and lifestyles; and that all other aspects of our discussion are too little too late.
- A point about what actions our participants wanted was the immediate end to environmental damage being done during hedge cutting and other practices by Local Authority staff and by those funded through the local authority's hedge cutting schemes. It was also noted that the proper management of trees and hedgerows presents an opportunity for green jobs and apprenticeships in all counties and that this should be investigated and resourced.
- It was also raised that a whole culture change around agricultural waste and other forms of waste and the burning of such waste needs to be created – with education, supports for change and finally strong sanctions for those who transgress.
- Participants noted too that there is too much negativity around the changes needed for Climate Mitigation and Adaptation and that some of the changes will improve people's wellbeing, sense of place, environment and livelihood in rural areas. They would like to see this focussed on – a picture of a good life post and even during transition needs to be advanced by Govt without minimising the stark emergency of the situation we are in.

Question 2 Enabling Community Action: Climate Action Fund

Thinking about what we'd like to do more of, or start doing, what are our recommendations for the design of the Climate Action Fund?

- A focus on 'enabling' Climate Action – so for example a directorate or Climate Action Support Team in every county to ensure that the enthusiasm, energy and commitment of local groups is harnessed and facilitated and supported where necessary by expertise, research and technical/planning supports. Our participants would as previously mentioned like to see baseline inventories of natural resources and the state of land, water and forestry and energy production and consumption etc developed from which County Climate Action Strategies could be developed and which listed target actions to be completed and allocated responsibility for completing them. Participants felt that the Climate Action Fund could be used to establish these. Participants also felt the establishment of such a team would help community groups to access other funds to enable substantial climate action. Participants also wanted to see the National Parks and Wildlife Service supported, expanded and put on a solid financial footing.
- Participants noted that in rural areas funding to ensure that those involved in microgeneration or community energy schemes need supports to connect in to the national power grid in order to sell their excess energy.
- A focus on production and consumption methods and a change towards a local circular or stakeholder economy. (Milk bottle schemes, repair cafes, rediscovery centres, community supported agriculture schemes, tool libraries etc). One participant noted that the reduction of single use plastics was essential to ending fossil fuel dependence and was a tangible action for individuals and for policy and regulation initiatives.
- Participants noted that funding will be required to deal with County Clare's exposure as one of the counties most vulnerable to flooding. Pilot projects particular to Clare such as a planned retreat from flood plains should be established with community consent.
- Simplicity – our participants observed that the process for example for LA Agenda 21 Funding is easy to navigate for community groups with minimal bureaucracy and funds such as this can help with awareness, education and community buy in.
- Participants noted that the effort and public awareness around the Covid-19 pandemic provides a model for what is needed on Climate Action) A national awareness raising campaign is needed- mentioning the regular advertisements and campaigns around for example excess alcohol consumption and road safety and the absence of similar motivational campaigns on the overall issue of climate emergency. (They did note reduce, reuse, recycle campaigns and anti- littering campaigns but would like to see more on the changes that are necessary to help mitigate and adapt to Climate Change)

What funding categories would suit us?

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Any supports that might help (collaboration, access and management of funds)? Climate Action Enabler Team/Directorate.

Question 3 Informing National Policy: Climate Action Plan

Reflecting on local concerns and ambitions, what broader suggestions do we have for the Climate Action Plan?

- Climate Action will depend on policy coherence- the current lack of coherence between agriculture and climate policy, between agriculture and protection of river basin management, between industry and energy policy and carbon reduction targets etc must be addressed or Climate Action Plans will not be effective.
- Supporting Local Authorities so that they can engage in proper environmental management and take strong actions to minimise climate change and to create resilient communities in their transition to sustainable practices. Currently our LA is not resourced and does not have the expertise to oversee these transitions or to plan for future developments in the county.
- Our participants would like to see the Climate Action Plan list achievable targets with those responsible named and with accountability for meeting those targets. This process should include local level land, water, energy, air and biodiversity inventories and accountable Climate Action Strategies developed on foot of these and overseen by qualified personal who are resourced to support community level action.

Thinking about how national policy might have enabled or constrained your ambitions before - what new actions could address this?

- Lack of coherence between departments and policies has ensured we continue to damage our environment and biodiversity.
- Ireland's economic development and enterprise model needs to be accountable under climate legislation. Environmental Impact Statements for individual projects do not mean that projects are compatible with an overall change towards sustainable practice and so sustainable practices need to be enshrined in national policy- for example how much of Ireland's energy production capacity can be allocated to data centres? How many strategic wind energy sites can be dedicated to supplying such projects? Where is the overall policy that has analysed this?
- One participant wanted to see supports and culture change towards vegan diets being included in all Climate Action Plans and funds.

- Our participants wanted policies on the promotion, resourcing and education about circular economic practices at national government level. They commended and recommended the expansion of social enterprise and cooperative models of local production and consumption/
- Our participants would like to see Ireland complying with existing environmental directives- and that the Climate Action Plan and Act should hold us to account on these. They would like to see education programmes such as An Taisce Green schools projects continued but also expanded out into adult and third level education programmes and to industry and commerce.
- They would like to see an end to tolerance for poor environmental practices with education, supports, monitoring and finally sanctioning being put in place for any person or public or corporate body who acts in a way which damages or pollutes the environment.
- Participants wanted an end to fossil fuel subsidies and for state bodies to lead by example in acting sustainably internally and in their external actions. For example a commitment to 'de-plastification'
- Participants wanted policies and funding in place to support and expand rural public transport networks and to minimise the development of roads.
- As mentioned above participants wanted increased support for the National Parks and Wildlife Service and for the National Biodiversity Data Centre

Discussion from breakout room 2:

Question 1: What community-led, climate action initiatives are happening in our area that work well? Any new ideas or existing actions we'd like to further develop?

- Would like to see a centre in Clare / mid-west, akin to The Rediscovery Centre at Ballymun, which focuses on teaching and facilitating workshops and skills for the circular economy.
- Kulyana initiative a few years ago had a community action / exhibition touring towns and villages on food security / safety. This really resonated with many Clare communities and started a number of farmers markets and community gardens
- Irish Seed Savers at Scariff really need support, including financial and support for their seed guardians.
- We are really disheartened to see the continual use of round-up in the community, including by Local Authorities and other community organisations. The really bad hedge-cutting and butchering of trees, in terms of timing and insensitive / poor pruning / tree 'surgery' is really upsetting and annoying.
- In East Clare there is a community co-op with a community garden / rainwater harvesting / second-hand shop which really feed into the circular economy idea. This receives Pobol / Local Authority funding, particularly for part time jobs of ~19.5 hours per week. Having people paid to work with recycling materials and food security makes it more central to their lives and helps people see their lives' work & purpose as circular rather than linear.
- Within the local community (and Nationally) it is vital to get the message out that we (Ireland) must keep to our European Nature Directive obligations such as in the Habitats and

Birds Directives. We should make it essential that people are brought to judgement for crimes against nature (within the legal system?) and that the directives and environmental crimes are subject to enforcement.

- In relation to climate action we should not lose sight of the value of campaigning;
 - as a way of holding local and national government to account,
 - to raise public awareness,
 - to resist inappropriate developments and infrastructure (e.g. Shannon LNG)

Question 2: Thinking about what we'd like to do more of, or start doing, what are our recommendations for the design of the Climate Action Fund?

- More supports and incentives for social enterprises / co-operatives particularly for their human resources /to have part time jobs. Having people paid to care does help, having part time jobs to support the circular economy.
- For the next generation want school tours / digital links and change in emphasis of school curriculum to put biodiversity and environmental concerns front and centre, building on the An Taisce Green School programme.
- Any application for the climate action fund need to be simplified (as compared with say Pobol) and to think the best of people who are applying (rather than assuming they are trying to somehow 'play' the system for their own benefit).

Question 3: Reflecting on local concerns and ambitions, what broader suggestions do we have for the Climate Action Plan?

- On a broader National policy perspective it is imperative that government subsidies for fossil fuels (and any GHG releasing energy technology) are phased out fairly rapidly and those subsidies are transferred to subsidise the development, and uptake of Renewable energies, particularly those that do not involve GHG such as tidal, wave and wind energies.
- It is important for National and Local government to lead by example in terms of their carbon foot print and energy usage; so all public buildings should be thoroughly insulated and supplied by only renewable energy, there should be an emphasis and expectation that public transport will be used or electric vehicles as a second choice.
- We should make it more useful and accessible for local communities to use Renewable Energy via local networks and microgrids.
- We do not want just lip-service to Renewable energies, but real take up. It is important that smaller schemes and individuals are able to avail of supports (without having really pedantic obstacles imposed)
- We really want to avoid Natural Gas coming into Moneypoint on the Shannon Estuary and fully support this being the landing point for tidally generated power coming into the grid (subject to rigorous EIA).

- Stop building roads.
- Significantly improve (and electrify) the rural transport network.
- Level schemes / systems for local electricity generation and battery storage.
- Use joined-up thinking with energy and public buildings, e.g. solar panels on school roofs, used by school for term time and feeding into the national grid out of term time, or having electric vehicle charging points at GAA grounds people can plug into during a match.
- An electric bus for each village that can link up to other villages creating a transport net.
- Update the school curriculum for biodiversity, particularly for Agriculture to put environment and biodiversity front and centre.

— End of Breakout Room discussion —

Points from main group round-up conversation:

- IMPORTANT - Get biodiversity, climate action, and agriculture policies to converge not conflict, with the priority on environmental protection, as that underpins everything else, especially agriculture.
- Want to see a significant change and cessation of the current tolerance for environmental damage, within Clare and Nationally. We do not want to see, damaged / grubbed out hedgerows, dumped rubbish, burning plastics and the like tolerated at all.
- Clare PPN has made a significant number of submissions on all sorts of topics, we want to see that these are really taken on board, locally and nationally.
- Within Clare PPN should we be pushing for 100% organic Clare as a concept and an umbrella brand that encompasses so much of the above conversation?
- Want to see recycling centres developed further to incorporate 'Bring and take for reuse' centres, as currently you cannot reclaim (scavenge) anything from a recycling centre that you might see and have a use for. (would also be a job creation opportunity)
- We see a real need for a major public information campaign about climate action and biodiversity emergencies, framed realistically and positively to engage public support and actions. (we managed it for the COVID-19 public health emergency).
- We want to see a road show or information campaign on the role and importance of the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The NPWS needs funding, staffing and resourcing to match and build its capacity for its responsibilities under EU Directives and the needs for Biodiversity and Climate Action.
- We also want to see significant co-ordination, fully staffed, between the Local Authorities and NPWS (and other public & semi state bodies) so that actions on biodiversity and climate action are co-ordinated at a local level and feed into the strategic plan at local and national level.

Notes taken and transcribed by Tracy Watson, Sarah Clancy and William Hederman