

Development Plan Review
Planning Department
Clare County Council
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Clare County Development Plan 2022 – 2028

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the preparation of *Clare County Development Plan 2022-2028*, covering as it does a period which is critical for adaptation efforts in relation to local, national and global crises in a number of inter-connected domains such as biodiversity, climate, food, water, health, energy and supply chains.

Many have already been reconsidering their life and work in the light of climate and biodiversity emergencies, as well as the fragility of natural and human-created systems. With the emergence of Covid19 in 2020, the need to focus on diverse and resilient natural and human systems has only become more urgent. Building a green recovery has the potential to provide jobs which set local economies on a lower-carbon future.

Clare County Council has already developed the excellent *Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024* and it is heartening to read that **adaptation will be at the forefront of service delivery by the Council** (p.4). The challenges for the Council, and inhabitants of Co Clare, of moving from business-as-usual towards adaptation are not trivial.

Development of Local centres

During the lifetime of the next Development Plan, consideration should be given to a programme of creating and enhancing local centres/buildings, bringing them into public ownership and away from privately funded/grant-driven models which are difficult to develop and sustain in rural communities: a bold adaptation strategy to serve Co Clare. In complex, and sometimes fragile, social and economic environments, public spaces such as this need to be funded, nurtured and safeguarded and become a powerful and visible expression of the values we prioritise as a society.

Connection and resilience in both small and large communities would be promoted through such centres, providing spaces (including sheltered outdoor spaces) for meetings, work, business, training and education, repair shops, local history, entertainment, café, rentable desks, tourism, community garden, visiting community services (such as medical and library), information and mutual aid.

Climate adaptation and biodiversity champions could be present at the centres at times to work with communities, to help develop local adaptation initiatives. These centres could be a hub for citizen-scientists to share and showcase local research. Often the results of excellent research are anonymised into broader results / reports and local communities miss the opportunity of knowing what is happening in their own townlands.

Renewable energy, water supply and communications redundancy in these public spaces could ensure they are useable as community and distribution hubs in emergencies, or if

supply chains are disrupted, as well as being demonstrator projects for those in the community who may be adapting at home and in business, or exploring the development of low carbon/green technology businesses, a goal of the Council's *Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024*. The Council could consider working with third level institutions in Limerick and Galway to develop such businesses, showcasing them in these local centres and potentially sparking new and diverse ways for people to make a living. Community solar and other energy-generating installations could power some public lighting / other facilities.

A network of such local centres across Clare could cooperate and funding from private sources could be sought for e.g. demonstrator projects, naming opportunities, franchises.

The *Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024* has the objective of: *empowered and cohesive communities with strong understanding of climate risks, increased resilience to impacts of climate change with capacity to champion climate action at local level (G3, objective 3)*. Awareness of adaptation is key and rolling out information, using multiple methods, to Clare's citizens, is important.

Green infrastructure

The health of Clare's land, water and other-than-human life is not separate from the wellbeing of its human inhabitants.

The *Climate Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024* states that sustainable modes of transport such as walking and cycling will be promoted and green infrastructure to support this provided where required. In addition, objective G5.1 of this Strategy states that Clare County Council will:

Facilitate the on-going development of green infrastructure in County Clare, including green networks, green amenities and linked green corridors which ensure the provision of recreational amenities, natural areas for the growth of wildlife and biodiversity, and a network of infrastructure which results in a better quality of life for visitors and inhabitants alike.

These aims should be prioritised in the next Development Plan and, while fully acknowledging the economic benefits and life which many tourism initiatives bring to the coastal areas of Clare in particular, decisions need to prioritise the quality of life for inhabitants rather than visitors and the wording of objective G5.1 needs to reflect this. In some parts of coastal Clare in particular, a balance in favour of quality of life for inhabitants rather than visitors needs to focus on issues such as motorised traffic (volumes, size, speed) and housing (over-impact of tourism on a number of locations has already been identified in *Clare County Development Plan 2017-2023 e.g. Vol 1, p.66 CDP4.13*).

In addition, to promote resilience and a healthy future, the following initiatives could be considered under the broad heading of 'green infrastructure':

- The creation and protection of woodlands on public lands referred to in the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024 might also include fruit and nut orchards
- Extend the pollinator plan to as many public / open grassed areas as possible and encourage house and business owners to do the same.

- Encourage dog owners to keep dogs on leads while out in wild places (the estuary at Lahinch is one example of an area where coastal birds, including curlew, are often disturbed by dogs).
- Focus on water quality (the information and inputs at the Clare Beach Closure Community Information webinar on 24 August 2020, in which Clare County Council participated, were very informative). The work of the Local Authorities Waters Programme deserves extensive publicity. There appears to be a lack of information available to the public on the impact of human activity on off-shore other-than-human life.
- Planning should require the storage and use of rain or grey water for e.g. toilets, gardens and power hoses, and the use of expensively treated and piped drinking water for such purposes should be stopped.
- Reduction of utility connection fees for new builds which meet carbon targets, including the retention/creation of woodlands and green infrastructure.
- Prioritise county-wide use of the lowest-impact lighting e.g. public lighting, increasingly bright LED business advertising and security lighting, to mitigate the identified systemic disruption caused by artificial lighting. For example, see http://www.tara.tcd.ie/bitstream/handle/2262/91582/Lighting_guidelines_13Feb2020.pdf?sequence=1 and <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41559-020-01322-x> and <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/nov/02/treat-artificial-light-form-pollution-environment>
- Clare County Council should lead the way in stopping the use of herbicides, pesticides and leaf blowers and only using power hoses with rainwater.
- Showcase and promote organic and regenerative farming and farming for nature initiatives in the County (there are several excellent examples) and encourage moving away from intensive / monoculture practices.
- Encourage / offer supports for organic market gardening, fruit and berry farms with farm shops and pick-your-own, especially in more built-up settings, thereby increasing local resilience into the future.

Sincerely

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