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CLARE COUNTY EXECUTIVE
IFA Office, 40 Kenyon Street, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary

Telephone: (067) 32213

E-mail: tipperary@ifa.ie IFA Website: www.ifa.ie



Clare IFA Executive

PRESIDENT, JIM ENRIGHT; CHAIRMAN, THOMAS LANE; VICE-CHAIRMAN, TONY HORAN; VICE-CHAIRMAN WEST, LARRY DUNPHY; VICE-CHAIRMAN EAST, MICHAEL BAKER; SECRETARY, CIARAN CONEELY; TREASURER, WILLIE HANRAHAN; PRO, TONY HORAN; ANIMAL HEALTH, MICHAEL DAVOREN; FARM BUSINESS, ROSALEEN O'REILLY; FORESTRY, MARTIN MURPHY; LIVESTOCK, JOE O'CONNELL; ENVIRONMENT, KIERAN WOODS; RURAL DEVELOPMENT, DENIS TUOHY; SHEEP, THOMAS HOLMES; HILL FARMING, STEPHEN WALSH; FARM FAMILY, GERALDINE O'CONNELL; AQUACULTURE, HUGH O'MALLEY; PIG, COLM RYAN; DAIRY, ANDREW DUNDAS

Submission to Clare County Council

Strategic Issues Paper

Clare County Development Plan 2022-2028

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Thomas Lane,
Clare IFA, County Chairman



Introduction

The agriculture sector is of significant importance to the economy in Co. Clare with in excess of 6,500 farm holdings and a farmland area of almost 218,000 hectares. There are 3,423 people employed directly in the agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors, which accounts for approximately 13% of total employment in the County. Agriculture in Clare supports thousands of jobs in the rural economy: both directly in food and drink processing and also indirectly in the wider agricultural industry. This includes; input suppliers, agricultural contractors and employment in auctioneering, transport and engineering, accountancy, legal services, veterinary and other advisory services. A report compiled by the IFA in 2016, calculated the value of agricultural output in Clare at €204m and the value of agricultural exports arising from the agricultural output in the county at €299m. Agriculture has a huge knock-on effect in the wider economy, with every €100 of agricultural output producing a further €73 in the rest of the economy.

The impact of Brexit continues to have a damaging effect on the price of agricultural goods. Once again, the risk of a no-deal Brexit is real with both sides reporting little or no progress in the current EU-UK negotiations on this future relationship. At a national level, the government's Brexit Readiness Action Plan published in September 2020 estimates that import tariffs on Irish food into the UK could cost €1.35bn to €1.5bn based on the value of 2019 Irish exports.

Clare is home to approximately 288,000 cattle of which approximately 33,700 are identified as dairy cows, 70.5K as beef cows and the remainder of the animals are classified as beef animals. Beef farmers in particular have suffered severe income losses due to Brexit. In May 2019, this was recognised by the EU and the Government within the announcement of a €100m support scheme covering losses since September 2018.

A report compiled by Alan Renwick, Professor of Agriculture and Food Economics UCD entitled "The Importance of the Cattle and Sheep Sectors to the Irish Economy" estimates that;

- Specialist cattle and sheep farms spend around €2bn on direct inputs and overhead costs.
- For each €1 of output produced on cattle farms, due to the multiplier effect, an additional €1.49 of output is generated in the Irish economy. For sheep farms, the additional direct and indirect output is €1.33.
- For each €1 of output produced on cattle farms, due to the multiplier effect, an additional €0.38 of GDP is generated in the Irish economy. For sheep farms, the additional GDP is €0.73.
- It is estimated therefore that the €2.3bn output in 2012 from beef and sheep production, contributed over €5.67bn to overall output and €3.23bn to GDP in the Irish economy.
- Each €1 of support for cattle (sheep) underpins €4.28 (€2.7) of aggregate output in the Irish economy; €2.37 (€1.99) of GDP and; €2.07 (€1.72) of household income.
- It is estimated that around 45,000 jobs in the wider economy (beyond the farm and processing sectors) are supported by the cattle and sheep sectors.
- At a micro-level, an analysis of cattle farming in Co. Clare illustrates the extent to which the sector is embedded in the local economy, with 80% of cattle output sold within the county and just under 90% of inputs sourced from within the county

This submission outlines IFA's concerns, particularly IFA members in Co. Clare in relation to a number of key strategic issues identified by members, which they would like to see addressed in the Clare County Development Plan 2022-2028.

Clare IFA's submission on the forthcoming County Development Plan has been devised with an emphasis on collaboration with the council in order to ensure an effective and workable outcome for all concerned.

1. Development Contribution Charges

1.1 Agriculture

Currently development contributions for new farm buildings are subject to rate of €5 per m² excluding the first 800m², and horticulture developments are subject to a rate of €5 per m².

Clare IFA Position:

Farm enterprises require regular re-investment in order to improve the efficiency of operations, improvements to health and safety and increase the provision of enhanced biodiversity and ecosystem services. However, farming is a low-income sector with the average farm family income in 2019 at €23,964 according to Teagasc's National Farm Survey. The average cattle rearing farm income was €9,191 and the average sheep farm family income was €14,630. Any increase in development charge would prevent farmers from undertaking necessary investments some of which would be to comply with environmental legislation, quality assurance schemes and/or health and safety.

The growth in agriculture over the past decade particularly in the dairy and livestock sectors demonstrates the capacity of the sector to contribute to the economy through increased output, export earnings and job creation. Farm buildings will add very little additional traffic to the County's roads compared to the other development categories in the scheme.

Clare IFA is opposed to any increase in development contribution charges to agricultural development as it will stifle the development of the agriculture and food industry in Co. Clare and jeopardise the existing jobs in the sector. Changing the status quo would have a detrimental impact on the future development and expansion of the industry.

Clare IFA proposes that all agricultural developments should benefit from reduced development contribution levies and would suggest the following class of agricultural structures be included in the list of exemptions from development contribution levies allowed under Section 48(C) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 –

- (Class 8 structures as contained within the Exempted development –Rural Section of the Planning and Development regulations 2001) Roofless cubicles, Feed silo's.
- (Class 10 structures) unroofed fenced area for the exercising or training of horses or ponies, together with a drainage bed or soft surface material to provide an all-weather surface.
- (Class 4 structures) The construction or erection of any wall or fence, other than a fence of sheet metal, or a wall or fence within or bounding the curtilage of a house.
- Tunnels/underpasses for agricultural purposes.

Additionally we propose specific supports for renewable energy development with a capacity up to 1MW for all farmers and community owned co-operatives, by proving exempted development contributions levies on these developments up to this scale.

1.2 Residential:

The current residential development contributions may be appropriate for large-scale developments where the cost can be added to the sale price of the property. However, for rural dwellers who wish to live and work in their own community this cost is exorbitant. Single residential development should be exempt from development contributions, as this would help retain rural dwellers in Co. Clare and attract new families to live in rural communities.

Clare IFA proposes that single residential development should be exempt from development contributions.

Clare IFA proposes that where there is an established road/laneway/entrance off the national primary/secondary or regional road that planning permission should be granted to the farmer seeking to build.

New developments from existing access to national roads or additional access points to roads with speed limits of greater than 60km/h apply, should allow categories of development which include individual houses in rural areas, irrespective of the circumstances of the applicant once all safety issues and considerations are adequately addressed in accordance with the NRA's Design Manual for Roads and Bridges and the proposed development will not result in the creation of a traffic hazard.

An approach which adopts a greater degree of flexibility to allow rural landowners, extended family networks and other interested parties to develop structures on their lands should be adopted. Extended family networks are commonly the core of townland and parish activity in rural Ireland.

Whilst not being employed directly on family farms, extended family members often provide seasonal assistance at busy times of the year. Other community life such as organisation of sporting activities, community development work and social gatherings are often co-ordinated by these same people. The County Development Plan must acknowledge the importance of farming and vibrant rural communities and recognise the need for rural housing for farmers and their extended family network members who have an intrinsic link with the rural community. It is important that people who have roots in a rural community are allowed to build a home in that area. Any measures that result in young people returning to live and contribute to rural communities should be welcomed.

2. Renewable / Solar Energy

The IFA is supportive of the government's ambitions to produce 70% of electricity using renewable energy by 2030 as set out in the Climate Action Plan and National Planning Framework 2040. Many of our members throughout the County and Country are key to these ambitions.

Renewable energy including solar, wind, tidal and biomass provide a diversified income stream for many of our members and will support future generations to remain on the land and ensure a secure income to supplement on-farm incomes.

Energy costs and the response to climate change are significant challenges faced by the agriculture sector. Clare IFA supports the development of renewable energy initiatives which will enable farmers to develop alternative income streams while further decarbonising food production and allow for the sustainable expansion of primary agriculture and Ireland's agri-food sector by reducing

input costs and dependence on fossil fuels. Clare IFA asks Clare Co. Council to have a pro-active approach.

We call on the County Council through the development of the new county development plan to set more ambitious policies in support of micro-generation of renewable energy projects on lands that are suitable to be developed. Within the new County Development Plan the planning process needs to be streamlined to ensure that restrictions and requirements must be appropriate to scale. One-stop advice clinics should be provided to assist project developers to submit successful applications.

Additionally, we would welcome the County Council's support to promote the deployment of solar on all homes, business and farms by ensuring to work with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to remove barriers such as planning permission restrictions.

All of our members can contribute positively towards the issue of climate change and we believe policies should be introduced to encourage this by the County Council. As part of the development of the Draft Development Plan, renewable energy can be supported through the County council by;

- Supporting all renewable projects to assist in the decarbonising of our local economy.
- Support the installation of solar on farm buildings and areas around the farm to allow them to decarbonise their processes.
- Support renewable energy development with a capacity up to 1MW for all farmers and community owned Co-operatives, by providing exempted development contributions levies on these developments.
- The planning process needs to be streamlined to ensure that restrictions and requirements must be appropriate to scale. One-stop advice clinics should be provided to assist project developers to submit successful applications

3. Tackling litter in the countryside

Clare IFA suggests that Clare Co. Council take on board the following points:

- *Stronger penalties to tackle litter dumping* - Over 95% of IFA members' surveyed support the introduction of tougher penalties being imposed on anyone who dumps litter in the countryside.
- *Enforcement of anti-littering laws* - Clare Co. Council must enforce anti-littering laws effectively and encourage the general public to report offenders.
- *Changes to litter legislation* - The Department of the Environment must review the anti-litter legislation and remove the threat of fines and prosecution of farmers on whose land's others dump litter recklessly.
- *Civic amenity sites on the outskirts of towns and villages* – Clare County Council should consider establishing a network of strategically located skips on the outskirts of all towns and villages where people can safely dispose of rubbish, rather than litter the countryside.
- *Communication and education campaign* - Clare County Council environmental enforcement officers should liaise directly with the public to highlight the problem of rural littering, and encourage people to take their litter home and dispose of it correctly. This should be supported by a major local radio and print media campaign to highlight the issue.

4. Dog attacks on sheep flocks

Dog attacks on sheep flocks continue to be a growing issue in County Clare. While farmers have a right to protect their flock, in the first instance dog owners must take responsibility for their pets. By law, dog owners can be held responsible for the losses involved with serious financial and legal consequences.

Farmers who encounter a dog attack on their sheep flock must be fully protected by Clare Co. Council and An Garda Síochána. The Department of the Environment must resource a well-timed and targeted communications campaign to make dog owners fully aware that they must take responsibility for their dogs and prevent unnecessary and avoidable losses to farmers.

5. Road Development, Tunnels and Underpasses

The National Development Plan envisages that almost €6bn will be spent on national road schemes. This will lead to considerable upheaval for farm families impacted, as their farms are carved up to facilitate the development of the national road network. Any road development must ensure a partnership process is observed that encompasses the substantial concerns and wishes of the community while respecting landowners' rights and concerns.

Clare Co. Council should encourage tunnels and underpasses in the County for safety and welfare reasons. All costs, restrictions and bureaucracy that the Local Authority have imposed needs to be reviewed.

Road maintenance

There is a pressing need for a more co-ordinated and pro-active approach by local authorities in securing the assistance of local farmers and community members to treat all regional roads and local roads, which have been seriously impacted by the weather as part of the winter road service plan.

There is also a need to increase the extent of improvement and maintenance works carried out on regional and local roads. These local and regional roads play a very important role because they make access to and from towns easier, safer and quicker. The provision of good quality regional and local roads is essential for balanced regional development and for social inclusion providing vital linkages among communities, and between communities, their towns and larger urban centres. Primary responsibility for improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads rests with local authorities.

The lack of adequate investment in this infrastructure has hindered the capacity of rural towns and villages to compete for industrial investment and other employment opportunities. This impacts on the economic and social well-being of rural areas, with damage to road vehicles and families and businesses experiencing difficulties in accessing services. Increased allocations to the road budget must be delivered with funding from the Department of Transport ring-fenced for rural roads each year and allocated to local authorities as part of a planned annual repair and maintenance programme. Each local authority must publish LIS expenditure on a quarterly basis each year and also set out their LIS awareness campaign to maximise uptake.

6. Rural Villages

Clare Co. Council needs to formulate a plan to grapple with the decline of rural villages in the County. Derelict villages, vacant buildings or structures reflect a poor image in any local town or village. Incentives such as exemption of development charges and rates need to be reviewed in order to kick start economic development and local employment. The development of rural innovation hubs to support entrepreneurs, provision of high-quality ICT infrastructure, enhanced town and village renewal supports (either through direct supports or assistance to community bodies) to leverage financial support from national or European funding sources can all assist to enrich the economic, social and cultural vitality of rural Ireland.

Clare Co. Council must formulate a fully resourced action plan with a dedicated budget to ensure that the full potential of rural Ireland can be realised. Small businesses starting up in rural Ireland are faced with significant administrative and regulatory costs. This often acts as a disincentive to increase the number of employees. The high cost of local authority rates can often absorb cash flow which could alternatively be used to increase employment and to grow and develop the business. New business start-ups and key rural service providers, should receive incentives such as exemptions from rates for an initial time period to encourage innovation and enterprise in rural communities.

Enhancement of local services

Local services in the community such as provision of supports to rural GPs, the rural post office network, rural schools and the local grocery/convenience shop should be seen as a key component of the character and life of any village in rural Ireland. These pillar emblems of rural economies and communities need to be assisted in every way possible through a combination of diversification, entrepreneurship, food and drink networking, tourism, co-operation, renewables, communication structures, producer groups and financial instruments.

Mobility and Transport

To achieve greater accessibility to services in rural areas, it is necessary to improve the frequency and reach of public transport services. This would connect isolated families in rural areas to their wider communities, while also creating employment opportunities. The rural link transport service needs to be promoted and assisted where possible to achieve a greater level of service to rural dwellers throughout the County.

The lack of infrastructure to access local inshore and offshore islands, greatly restricts these important resources for the agricultural, tourism and the transportation sectors. The importance of ports, jetties, harbours, quays and piers to the local economy as well as their role as recreational and amenity facilities needs to be greater emphasised. There also needs to be additional capacity invested at some sites to allow a safe environment for the shared use of facilities, such as adequate provision of access, set-down and parking areas, alongside the recreational and amenity needs. The County Development Plan needs to find solutions for these areas.

7. Tourism & Recreational routes such as Greenways & Blueways

Ireland's tourism sector including farm families have taken a huge economic hit as a result of Covid-19. Many working farms also operate B&Bs and guesthouses. For people curious about farming, food production and agriculture, it's a great way to experience how an Irish family farm operates first hand.

Diversification is the key recommendation for the farming sector in Ireland's emerging Climate Action Plan. Developing on-farm tourism businesses and encouraging the re-use of redundant farm buildings for agri-tourism enterprises needs to be encouraged and promoted within Clare. Recreational routes such as greenways and blueways have an important role to play in promoting agri-tourism and economic activity in rural areas.

Agri-tourism is a perfect way to stimulate and encourage footfall out of the towns and cities. There is huge diversity in rural Ireland's visitor activities and attractions, as well as in our specialist farm food producers, all of which make a very compelling case to venture out of the city boundaries.

Clare County Council has many departments which engage, regulate and assist many aspects in a rural diversification project, in the form of training, advice, regulation, promotion, those offering financial supports and grant aid. Clare County Council should actively participate in the assistance of both on and off-farm rural diversification projects.

Clare IFA recommends the provision and funding for a sole contact point/team such as a Rural Resource Development Team to help prospective customers in the support of rural business and community developments.

Greenways , Blueways & Peatways

Clare IFA suggests that all such projects should only be implemented after extensive consultation throughout the process, with land owners and adjoining land owners and not by Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO). Clare IFA opposes vehemently the imposition of the CPO process in developing these trails. Greenways, Blueways and Peatways must remain a non-critical infrastructural development. Farmers and their families are the most important stakeholders in any infrastructure development, as projects such as Greenways will have an ongoing impact on their livelihoods and farm businesses.

Delivering a co-design approach for amenity infrastructure

The co-design collaborative development of amenity infrastructure, such as Greenways, involves real, honest and genuine engagement with farmers along all stages of the project development. Local authorities must adopt a consultative and proactive manner with potentially affected landowners, that is sensitive to their needs, that maximises their support and goodwill towards, the proposed greenway, blueway or peatway.

This requires measures including:

- Consultation with landowners at the constraints study phase and in advance of the route selection being announced.
- The appointment of an agronomist to advocate landowners' perspectives from constraints study phase onwards.
- Consideration of the impact on the viability of the farm business.
- The completion of an Agronomic Impact Assessment Report at constraints study stage
- The appointment of a Project Liaison Officer by local authorities to hold community clinics to address queries and concerns.

8. Water, Flooding and Wastewater Services

Water Abstraction

Clare IFA requests the Co Council to acknowledge that every farmer in the County has a right to bore a well on his/her lands and source water for their family, holding and livestock.

Where Clare Co. Council maintain a bore hole or abstraction source for public use, any restrictions on a landowner in that area needs to be dealt with and proper compensation for income and capital loss needs to be addressed.

A balanced approach needs to be achieved between meeting national priorities for water supply, and addressing local concerns about the potential impacts of the proposed water supply project for the Eastern and Midlands region from the Parteen basin. A full package of measures must be introduced including compensation where farmers endure crop, yield and income losses when Irish Water and local authorities install water abstraction points on farmers' lands, or lands with a defined proximity of the abstraction point.

Clare IFA proposes that all such projects should only be implemented after extensive consultation throughout the process with land owners, adjoining land owners, and all affected land owners that may be subject to changes to their current farming practices due to this water supply project.

Agricultural Waste

Where Clare Co. Council specifies changes to the default distances outlined in PART 4 of the EUROPEAN UNION (GOOD AGRICULTURAL PRACTICE FOR PROTECTION OF WATERS) REGULATIONS 2017, any restrictions & limitations on a land owner in that area needs to be dealt with, and proper compensation for income and capital loss needs to be addressed.

Flooding & River Management

Flood Management on the River Shannon, local rivers, costal & estuaries in the County.

While we welcome the commitment by the Government to establish a single Agency for Flood Management, a maintenance drainage programme needs to be introduced immediately. Ongoing flooding has caused severe hardship to farmers within the catchments area. If this is not addressed urgently, it will continue to cause severe hardship to farmers in the catchment area and have a detrimental effect on the environment or wildlife in the County. The water level on the River Shannon should be closely monitored and a buffer in water levels should be maintained outside of the summer recreational season to stop flooding in times of heavy rain.

The plan should address the areas of the County where storm and flood damage has wreaked havoc on many coastal and river catchments. Storm and flood damage have caused damage in many areas throughout the County. Examples include: rock and debris being strewn across farmland along the Atlantic shore flood defences where barriers have been breached with seawater and vast areas of residential, business and farmland areas flooded adjacent to the River Shannon. The land and the coastal defences require remedial works which take many months and great expense to remedy.

Regular remedial works combined with assessments of flood risk management, flood prevention, protection and mitigation works are essential in reducing the risk of embankment failure under extreme conditions. Current flood defence embankments and the new construction of sustainable flood defences in coastal and estuarine areas, combined with appropriate management of water levels, works to improve the capacity of channel conveyance on the River Shannon and all rivers across the county is critical to protect people, property, farmland and the environment from high flood and storm water level.

The full implementation of the National Catchment Flood Risk Assessment and Management (CFRAM) programme proposals must be a priority and areas where plans have not yet been finalised must be dealt with throughout the county. The current Minor Works scheme to alleviate flooding is too onerous, leading to a significant underspend in many local authority areas. Local authorities must ensure maximum annual drawdown of funds available to alleviate and remedy flooding works.

Local authorities must also undertake analysis and risk assessment works of all current flood embankments and flood prevention measures as they can become less effective over a period of time for a number of reasons such as: increased frequency of flooding due to climate change, an increase in the required standard of service or other functional requirements, and long-term deterioration from the intended condition - as constructed or maintained.

The overreliance on green infrastructure, rather than using traditional 'grey infrastructure' such as embankments and dykes to manage flood events has not worked to the degree it should. Local Authorities should ensure that lands that benefit under the arterial drainage scheme, drainage districts or embankments, permit any authoritative body that wishes to undertake works have their respective maintenance responsibility recognised, whether it's the OPW for the arterial drainage scheme and Local authorities for the drainage districts.

9. Zoning of lands within development plans and local area plans

Local authorities regularly draw up development plans and local area plans for their areas. Among other things, these plans outline the use to which land may be put. E.g. land may be designated for residential use, for industrial, commercial, agricultural or recreational use, as open space, or a mixture of those uses. This is generally described as 'zoning'. From time to time, the Local authority may consider changing the designation of particular lands ('rezoning').

Clare IFA requests that when local authorities engage in a formal public consultation process, no land should deviate from its current designation without direct consultation with the landowners.

10. Forestry, Bio economy & Bio-based products

Clare achieves the third highest (17.2%) percentage of forest cover within the Country. The forestry sector as a whole is the largest and most readily available biomass resource within Ireland and has significant scope for wood fuel to replace consumer dependence on fossil fuels. Forestry has the potential to provide economic, environmental and social gains across the County of Clare.

Forests, farms and everyday organic waste can provide us with biomass fuel but sources vary in availability, cost and the amount of CO₂ they save. Other energy crops like wheat, oil seed rape (OSR), short rotation coppice (SRC), willow, hemp, miscanthus and grass silage have a large

potential. Crops like grass silage are widely available and crops like short rotation willow have significant potential. However because farming them needs to be a viable prospect, they need higher market prices to make financial sense. Other by-products and wastes such as brown bin food and garden waste, biodegradable municipal solid waste (MSW), tallow, cattle and pig slurries and used cooking oil (UCO) could all play a role in the biogas economy.

Forests are a very valuable recreation resource attracting millions of visitors each year. Forests as tourism infrastructure contribute significantly to the economic output of the Country. The public good benefits are also extremely valuable in supporting the forest industry by increasing the return on investment and gaining support for improved investment in forest-related activities. Access to native woodlands areas, urban forests, public forests managed for recreation, walking trails & national parks all provide communities the ability to explore forestry for recreational benefits and increase peoples appreciation and respect for the forest, the countryside and Ireland's natural heritage.

Forest owners and managers are keen to develop recreational opportunities. Other key players involved, such as local communities, outdoor activity and sporting interests, environmental groups & local authorities should be facilitated and encouraged to develop sustainable landscape, tourism and recreational amenity projects. Glamping pods, walking trails, picnic areas, educational resources, recreational hunting, outdoor adventure centres, provision of parking and service facilities etc. for rural amenity users within the forests and woodlands of County Clare.

Forestry Biomass in the forestry industry is increasing and being used to add value to forest owners through using it for energy. Biomass from Irish forests is seen as a clean renewable energy source. The industrial, commercial and domestic use of woodfuels is increasing year on year. For the wood energy sector in Ireland to be competitive, biomass must be delivered to the energy plant or end user at the lowest cost possible and transport plays an important role along the forest supply chain.

Clare IFA proposes that a feasibility study be undertaken on the future of privately owned forestry within the Country and region to see what needs to be developed to facilitate this industry i.e. deep sea port (Kilrush/moneypoint) for the export of timber and the potential redevelopment/redeployment of the old chipboard factory in Scariff.

Clare IFA request the promotion and facilitation of rural industries generally and to facilitate certain kinds of rural industry, especially those that are natural resource dependent (e.g. forestry, biomass or crops).

11. Public profile of farming in Clare

There is an ever increasing need to provide the general public with information and education on the importance of agriculture and food to the Irish & Clare economy. Clare Farmers are ranked in the top 10 highest participation rate in the Department of Agriculture flagship Agri-environmental program, Green, Low- Carbon, Agri-Environment Scheme (GLAS) where c.60% of all holdings in the County are active participants. Examples of these participants' achievements include the installation of 46.8k bat boxes, 58.1k bird boxes, management and conservation of 137k hectares of farmland for the hen harrier and the maintenance and enhancement of 6,525km of traditional freestanding stonewalls.

Agri Aware was founded in 1996 by Bord Bia, FBD, the Irish Dairy Board, the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) and the Irish Farmers' Journal. Agri Aware is a charitable trust that is funded by the farming and agri-food industry. Its role is to convey the importance of the agri-food industry amongst the general public. Clare County Council needs to increase the role it plays in communicating messages to the general public on the value of modern agriculture and farming, the benefits of the rural environment, animal welfare, benefits of shopping local and sourcing local foods and the benefits of nutritious Irish food. This could be achieved in collaboration with Agri Aware & Bord Bia origin Green programme.

Additionally there is a need to educate the general public and visitors on countryside access rights and the Comhairle na Tuaithe countryside code to convey to visitors and recreational users on their obligations and responsibilities such as rights of way, responsibility of recreational users for their own safety and that of others, responsible enjoyment of the countryside (e.g. Leave No Trace programme www.leavenotraceireland.org) and also responsible dog ownership whereby owners must ensure that their pets are under full control at all times and not allowed roam freely in the countryside where they could possibly inflict horrific damage on a sheep flock.