



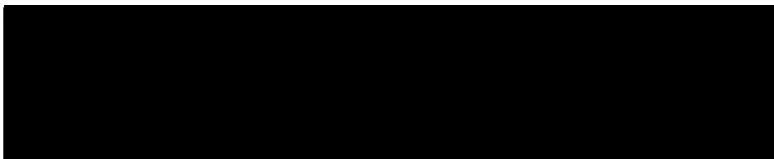
**Clare Women's Network**

NCCWN - National Collective of Community-based Women's Networks



**Submission by  
NCCWN Clare Women's Network  
to Clare County Council  
on the  
Clare County Development Plan  
2022 -2028**

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## **About NCCWN Clare Women's Network**

NCCWN Clare Women's Network is part of the umbrella organisation, the National Collective of Community-Based Women's Networks (NCCWN) who support women that experience disadvantage and marginalisation as a result of barriers and lack of opportunities. We are one of 17 projects located throughout the country

*The vision of the NCCWN is a just and equal society for women.*

NCCWN Clare Women's Network work with the aim to advance equality for women experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation. We support and encourage the coming together of women's groups and individual women in Clare. The work carried out by NCCWN Clare Women's Network is guided by women's equality, inclusion, community development and feminist principles.

## **NCCWN Clare Women's Network Core Values**

- *Feminism* – the NCCWN is a grassroots feminist organisation and carries out work under feminist principles
- *Women's empowerment* – working in a way that supports women experiencing disadvantage to take leadership and make decisions on issues affecting them
- *Social Inclusion* – working in an inclusive way with an anti-poverty focus
- *Equality and recognition of diversity* – challenging discrimination and supporting and promoting the equal rights of women especially those experiencing disadvantage and marginalisation
- *Collective analysis, collective action and collective outcomes* – the NCCWN was formed on the basis that working together secures better outcomes for women experiencing disadvantage, as a group rather than individuals
- *Solidarity* – recognising that women experiencing disadvantage encounter greater barriers that are not shared by all women, the NCCWN is committed to taking action to overcome the challenges that face the women we represent
- *Community Education* – working from the grassroots up, combining an adult education approach with community development principles, understanding the importance of women's lived experiences and the benefits of participatory learning

### **Purpose of the Submission**

NCCWN Clare Women's Network welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Clare County Development Plan. The purpose of this submission is two-fold.

First, to ensure that women and women's lived experience is fully acknowledged and taken into consideration by Clare County Council as they set out the strategic spatial vision and future direction for Clare.

Second is to supply Clare County Council with the information required for them to produce a Development Plan that is inclusive, equitable and works towards improving the lives of all citizens in County Clare, especially those currently experiencing the most disadvantage and marginalisation.

### **Submission Methodology**

This submission has been developed using a number of methods, both qualitative and quantitative. Through research and development from the almost 20 years of engagement we have had with women living in Clare. Gathering and acknowledging information and statistics from relevant organisations and stakeholders based all across the county and country, where applicable. Encapsulating information shared with us from local women through our recent COVID-19 Women's Impact Survey. Finally, through feedback and consultations facilitated locally where the opinions, suggestions, expertise and experiences of local women were kindly shared with us.

## Glossary of useful terms

*Feminism* – a range of social movements, political movements, and ideologies that aim to define, establish, and achieve the political, economic, personal, and social equality of women,

*Patriarchy* – a social system in which power and privilege is held by men, through political leadership, cultural norms and customs that favour men and withhold opportunity from women,

*Gender Bias* – is a preference or prejudice toward one gender over the other. Bias can be conscious or unconscious, and may manifest in many ways, both subtle and obvious,

*Gender Lens* – applying a gender lens reveals that economic and social development is determined by power relations between men and women. It highlights how a gender bias can lead to systematic, unfavourable treatments of individuals based on their gender, denying them rights, opportunities and resources.

*Sexism* – prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination against women,

*Misogyny* – is the hatred of, contempt for, or prejudice against women or girls. Misogyny manifests in numerous ways, including social exclusion, discrimination, hostility, patriarchy, male privilege, belittling of women, disenfranchisement of women, violence against women, and sexual objectification,

*Social Exclusion* – exclusion from the prevailing social system and its rights and privileges, typically as a result of poverty or the fact of belonging to a minority social group,

*Social Inclusion* – is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society—improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity,

*Oppression* – a situation in which people are governed in an unfair and cruel way and prevented from having opportunities and freedom,

*Disadvantage* – something that puts one in an unfavourable position or condition. The absence or deprivation of advantage or equality,

*Marginalization* – to treat individuals (or groups) as if they are not important or significant,

## **Preamble**

NCCWN Clare Women's Network call on Clare County Council to gender proof this and all subsequent plans, policies and budgets, this also includes the implementation of gender budgeting. Gender proofing and gender budgeting are about real social inclusion will ensure that the women of Clare, especially those who are most vulnerable and experience multiple forms of marginalisation and disadvantage, will always be taken into consideration when decisions are being made and that they will never again be left out of the conversation or thought process. The implementation of gender proofing and gender budgeting helps us to notice conscious and unconscious bias that might prevent real social inclusion. They are useful tool for any planners and policy makers to regularly draw on. In the next sections we explain 'gender proofing' and 'gender budgeting'.

### *Gender Proofing*

Gender proofing ensures that checks are carried out on any policy proposal to ensure that any potential gender discriminatory effects arising from that policy have been avoided and that gender equality is promoted.<sup>1</sup> Gender proofing can happen at all levels of Government and individual Departments.

### *Gender Budgeting*

Gender budgeting is a way for (local and national) governments to promote equality through the budget process<sup>2</sup>.

It is important to note that gender budgeting is not about creating separate budgets for women, or solely increasing spending on women's programmes. It is concerned with addressing budgetary gender inequality issues, such as how gender hierarchies influence budgets, and gender-based unpaid or low paid work.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1202>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.oecd.org/gov/budgeting/gender-budgeting.htm>

Gender budgeting comprises activities and initiatives for preparing budgets or analysing policies and budgets from a gender perspective, it embeds gender-specific goals into fiscal policies and in general into the public financial management stream<sup>3</sup>.

**Gender responsive budgets, and related policies, will contribute towards achieving gender equality and will simultaneously improve the population's welfare and lead to more sustainable and inclusive growth and employment.<sup>4</sup>**

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.iasparliament.com/current-affairs/gender-budgeting>

<sup>4</sup> <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/methods-tools/gender-budgeting>

## Placing the measuring of wellbeing at the heart of the Clare Development Plan

We have an opportunity moment in Clare as we enter the first stages of the Development Plan and look ahead to rebuilding the county after COVID-19. The pandemic and the resultant lockdowns and isolation is having a huge impact not only on the economy of the region, but on the mental health and wellbeing of our people. There was a mental health crisis in Clare before COVID-19, it is imperative that we make addressing the health and wellbeing of people in Clare a core priority of the Development Plan.

“What you measure affects what you do” (Stiglitz, Fitoussi and Durand, 2018) and thus, high quality data on well-being is crucial to inform policy action. We need to start measuring our progress as a region not just by economy factors, but by how our lives are improving, not just by our standard of living, but by our quality of life. Developing a robust set of wellbeing indicators will provide a framework from which policy decisions can be assessed in terms of how they will impact people's quality of life.

To obtain a balanced view of well-being, we need comprehensive dashboards of statistics that reflect what matters to people, covering wide-ranging outcomes such as people's income, health, social connections, safety and the environment. We need to look beyond country averages to understand not only whether life is getting better, but also for whom. Finally, we need to not only measure well-being today, but also the resources that help to sustain it into the future (OECD. 2020. Better Life Initiative).

The Clare County Development Plan needs to have as its focus the rebuilding of a thriving region post-COVID 19 – working to maximize the well being of the people of Clare, and reduce inequalities after the pandemic. **Better policies for better lives should be the ultimate goal of policymaking.** Public policies will only be truly efficient and effective in delivering upon this promise if they go beyond supporting the economy, to focus on improving people's well-being, both “here and now” and for generations to come.

For well-being measures to start making a real difference to people's lives, they have to be explicitly brought into the policy-making process. The OECD wellness report, published in March of this year, shows that one of the biggest issues is the lack of connection with people,



community, and government. We are aware that the planners and policy makers strive to listen and dialogue with all stakeholders, we suggest that a focus on well-being rather than just economics keeps a healthy balance between a thriving economy and a healthy people. We want both in Co Clare.

The importance of well-being is increasingly being recognised by national governments, several of which have designed well-being frameworks similar to the OECD's (Exton and Shinwell, 2018; Exton and Fleischer, 2020). Some OECD governments have also started to develop tools for integrating people's well-being into their strategic objectives and agenda setting, policy analysis and budgetary processes (Durand and Exton, 2019; OECD, 2019; Fleischer, Frieling and Exton, 2020).

## Population and Housing

### *Women in Homelessness*

- The number of homeless families has increased by over 300% since November 2014
- The current rise in family homelessness is driven primarily by structural economic factors
- Domestic violence is a contributor to women's homelessness, yet women who are residing in emergency domestic violence refuges are not counted in the monthly homelessness figures
- A high percentage of women in homeless services have experienced some form of violence or abuse at some point in their lives<sup>5</sup>

Homelessness is a significant issue faced by many women across Ireland. Women in violent relationships are particularly vulnerable. This is due to the fact women are forced to leave the family home because of domestic violence which effectively makes them and their children homeless, while the abuser remains in the home. Provisions need to be put in place so women who are in violent relationships are safe to disclose their circumstance, fully protected from becoming homeless and supported to stay in the family home where possible. Homelessness makes vulnerable people far more vulnerable.

Additionally, women from the Travelling community are disproportionately affected by the current homeless crisis. The Travelling community make up just 1% of the overall population but make up 15% of the homeless population<sup>6</sup>.

The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017 – 2021 states, *“There should be adequate provision of accessible, suitable and culturally appropriate accommodation available for Travellers. Delivery of Traveller accommodation should be underpinned by a robust monitoring and evaluation framework, with a view to ensuring full expenditure of funds allocated for Traveller specific accommodation.”*<sup>7</sup>

Specific funding is made available to Clare County Council by the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government for the provision of Traveller Accommodation. In addition to this funding there is a separate stream of funding provided by the Department of Housing,

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.focusireland.ie/shining-light-womens-homelessness/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.paveepoint.ie/pavee-point-manifesto-ge-2020/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/National%20Traveller%20and%20Roma%20Inclusion%20Strategy,%202017-2021.pdf/Files/National%20Traveller%20and%20Roma%20Inclusion%20Strategy,%202017-2021.pdf>

Planning and Local Government which provides for the provision and refurbishment of Traveller Specific accommodation and other such projects (subject to Department approval and the availability of funding). Clare County Council need to guarantee that all annual funding they receive in relation to Traveller Accommodation is drawn down and not returned.

Social housing availability that meets the needs of individual women and families, for example; larger houses to meet the needs of larger families, appropriate accommodation for single women and for women with disabilities - these dwellings should be near to shops / towns / access to transport / services to allow integration into the community and to prevent isolation. Housing should be made available for people transitioning from Direct Provisions and the resettlement programme for refugees needs to be expanded.

### **Economic, Enterprise, Tourism and Retail Development**

Nationally we know that 50% of women work for €20,000 a year. Women make up 86% of lone parents. The Clare County Development Plan should strive to economically improve the lives of all people living in Clare. This includes all workers earning a living wage and less reliance on tourism as a means of employment as this results in some people only gaining employment for certain seasons and not an all year round income.

Aid local communities in the establishment of co-operatives and community based agriculture.

Make sure all public buildings in County Clare are fully accessible for people with disabilities., this is in accordance with section 25 of the Disability Act 2005.<sup>8</sup> This should include appropriate toilets and changing facilities. Footpaths should be wide enough and safe enough so wheelchair users can move around towns and villages at ease.

People with disabilities are only half as likely to be in employment as others of working age.<sup>9</sup> In a 2018 employer survey the Employer Disability Information Service found that, employers reported that information resources and financial support would encourage them to employ people with disabilities.<sup>10</sup> Could such supports be made available to employers in County Clare?

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2005/act/14/section/25/enacted/en/html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://nda.ie/Publications/Employment/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://nda.ie/Publications/Employment/Employment-Publications/Comprehensive-Employment-Strategy2018-NDA-Review1.pdf>

## **Towns and Villages and Rural Development**

Creation of a number of multi-service community centre's across villages in County Clare, with the view of them becoming staffed and self-sustaining. These would be spaces where local events could be held, community groups could meet and rooms could be rented for a variety of functions. Such spaces would move the focus and reliance from larger towns and allow people to network and communities to grow and thrive in smaller villages where such activity cannot take place at present. Thus resulting in more social inclusion in rural areas, less isolation and making villages in County Clare an attractive option for relocation.

There is a dire need for quality broadband connection and access to the internet be made available to each and every person living in Clare. Not only does this bring a vital connection to people who otherwise might be cut off from their community but it also makes education more accessible for people and gives people the opportunity to meet with people and attend events online such as the regular events hosted by NCCWN Clare Women's Network. We have a weekly online mediation and mindfulness session and a fortnightly 'Conversations Group, this is a space for women to gather and chat about their opinions and experiences and what is going on for them. We also regularly run one-off events and courses that have had to move online due to COVID-19 and public safety. Such opportunities for people are vital for them to maintain positive mental health, especially during 'lockdowns'. Little or no access to broadband and the cost associated with it has a particular impact on single mothers whose children require WIFI for school and contact with friends. Buying credit / data top up is a costly business, particularly from a Direct Provision payment. In the few centre's where WIFI is available it is often only in the office area and people are not permitted to gather there with current Covid-19 restrictions.

Additionally, good broadband connection could allow for people to relocate from bigger cities to smaller towns, villages and more rural areas if they could work from home – this option is becoming increasingly attractive for people.

Every town and village in Clare should have access to a functioning post office.

Towns, villages and rural areas should be supported to create and establish local amenities based on their individual needs

### **Transport and Infrastructure**

Good public transport is a large gap in terms of the development of County Clare. Travelling from different towns or to Ennis town for specific appointments from other areas for people who do not drive can be a very long and time consuming process. Having services that only pass by an area once a day at a certain time is not only inconvenient but puts a lot of constraints on people and in some cases could result in people having to take a day off to attend an appointment when if public transport was more readily available it might have been a couple of hours.

Accessible public transport would facilitate more people with disabilities gaining employment and allow for more independence.

## **Built and Natural Heritage, Landscape and Green Infrastructure**

During lockdown local green areas, walk ways parks became literal life savers for people. The development of more green spaces, play spaces and safe walk ways all over the county is vital the public's mental health. Spaces for people everywhere to meet, connect and gather outdoors where it is currently safer to do so.

## Climate Change, Renewable Energy and Environment

### *The Challenge*

The Paris Climate Accord acknowledges that global heating is accelerating and aims to keep this heating below 2 degrees Celsius. Even if this is achievable, we are a long way from stabilising the climate, and Clare is particularly vulnerable to the accelerating effects of climate breakdown. This is a low lying county, already suffering from coastal erosion and frequent flooding in the North East of the county. Winter 2020 saw an unprecedented structural risk from flooding to bridges in Ennis. Global heating also brings more frequent and violent Atlantic storms. Storms once considered 'once in a lifetime' events, such as those that have battered and flooded Lahinch in recent years, are the 'new normal'.

### *How will the climate crisis 'play out' for Clare people?*

Climate breakdown affects the poorest first, in terms of housing and food security, and will have a disproportionate effect on the lives of women. Nationally we know that 50% of women work for 20k a year. Women make up 86% of lone parents.

- 5k Clare homes at risk of flooding
- Some already uninsurable according to insurance company data
- Anecdotal evidence that elevation affects house price; cheapest homes on potential flood planes
- Coastal erosion means some will have to relocate
- Ireland is a net importer of food and at the very end of the European supply chain. Evidence that climate breakdown already effecting crops yields in Europe. Shortages will drive up costs effecting the poorest disproportionately
- Current 100 year extreme water level coastal event likely to occur ever 1-2 years with 0.48 sea level rise predicted for 2100. What happens to the 50 million tonnes (2010) of toxic sludge on a land bank at Aughinish Ilumina in the Shannon Estuary? Spillage of similar sludge



resulted in deaths - The Hungarian national disaster unit stated, "The sludge contains heavy metals, such as lead, and is slightly radioactive. Inhaling its dust can cause lung cancer."

### *What can we do?*

Clare is uniquely placed to help protect the global biosphere. Given our strong and supportive community, opportunities exist to protect our rich heritage, including biodiversity, to improve our renewables infrastructure and to prevent further damage to the global environment. The Shannon region is one of the most heavily industrialised in Ireland. Shannon LNG is one of the most significant and destructive fossil fuel projects in Europe. Clare is a close knit community and here we have opportunities to make change, create better processes, innovate and lead.

### *Energy*

- Proposed terminal for imported US fracked gas Shannon LNG should not be built in the Shannon Estuary. This gas is known to be 87 times potent as a greenhouse gas than conventional fossil fuels like coal over a 20 year period. Clare County Council should agree a motion against Shannon LNG and against imported fracked gas into Clare, including Moneypoint Power Station. Should Shannon LNG be built, it's life cycle is 30-40 years. A dependence on cheap US fracked gas will be built, at a time when we desperately need to transition to cleaner fuels. There are also very significant consequences for life in the Shannon Estuary should plans go ahead. The Tarbert site, opposite Moneypoint, is one of the few 'clean' stretches of this heavily industrialised river left, and even here anecdotal evidence suggests there is a drastic reduction in fish already. The company behind Shannon LNG, New Fortress Energy, has recently lost planning permission, and is likely to reapply for a smaller terminal than first envisioned with an as-yet-unknown capacity.

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<https://www.friendsoftheirishenvironment.org/eu/38-papers-today/pollution/13620->

<https://www.climatechangepost.com/ireland/coastal-floods/>

[https://ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/global-food-nutrition-security/topic/climate-extremes-food-security\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/knowledge4policy/global-food-nutrition-security/topic/climate-extremes-food-security_en)

<https://www.agriland.ie/farming-news/ireland-has-been-net-importer-of-food-since-2000-un-data-reveals>

<https://www.irishexaminer.com/breakingnews/ireland/60000-homes-at-a-significant-risk-from-flooding-916190.html>

However, any terminal would involve 'regasifying' the frozen LNG - using vast quantities of river water to raise the LNGs temperature. The water would then be returned to the river at a drastically cooler temperature than 'bottom of the food chain' river life is designed to survive. This could have devastating consequences for biodiversity along this stretch of a river which is already in crisis.

- Moneypoint Power Station is the only coal fired producer of electricity in Ireland and as the country's largest single emitter of greenhouse gases, is set to cease burning coal in 2025. Moneypoint represents an ideal opportunity to become the largest processor of community and worker owned renewable energy in the country, and can be developed as such. Exploration in terms of efficiency and economic viability needs to be ongoing, so that when the time comes, the transition from coal to renewables is as seamless as possible for employees and for electricity supply.
- Clare needs community energy schemes using renewables such as solar and wind, giving energy to the grid.
- Wind farms have caused complaints and controversy in Clare. People who live nearby complain about noise. Others are concerned about devalued house prices. All wind farms in Clare are privately owned. However, in Denmark, all wind farms are community owned, by local energy co-operatives, and they are very popular with local people.
- Introduce incentives for schools, public buildings, churches, factories and businesses to install solar pv to sell to the grid.

#### *The Clare Biodiversity Crisis*

- Special protection needs to be afforded to native hedgerows, which constitute the majority of native Irish trees in Clare. Only 2% of trees in Ireland are native, and the ratio of native versus non native trees is even lower in Clare. Native trees support more plant and fungi species diversity and provide precious habitat for wildlife. Any development should undergo a professional ecological assessment to account for and minimise environmental impact, including paths, roads and carparks.



- The transport network needs massive expansion
- There is an urgent need for more cycle lanes in Ennis and all Clare towns.
- Rush hour is a huge challenge in Clare. Right now, children need to live two miles from school of avail of a bus service but for many this is too far to walk or there are no safe cycling routes. The Clare Bus service for school children needs urgent expansion.
- Free parking at the Ennis train station would encourage use of the service.
- More charging points for electric cars needed in rural Clare, for example in local service stations.

#### *The Built Environment in Clare*

Plans are urgently needed to accommodate the circa 5k Clare homes which are uninsurable due to flood risk. What happens when a flooding event happens? Is there social housing stock available to accommodate these people?

Reduce energy demand and emissions by designing them out of County Clare's building stock. As Ireland declared a Climate and Biodiversity Emergency in May 2019 it is only appropriate that Clare County Council takes the position to proactively promote and adopt a higher building standard to make the best use possible of natural resources, to reduce emissions and to protect and enhance biodiversity for all new development projects in Clare.

Passive House; reducing buildings' energy demands.

Emissions can be reduced by adopting the Passive House standard as the minimum standard for new builds in Clare. Similarly existing buildings should be retrofitted to the Enerphit equivalent Passive House standard for existing buildings. Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council's Development Plan 2016-2022 adopted the Passive House standard for all new builds, specifically to reduce the energy demand of their constituency in line with national and global emission reduction targets. This step encouraged new developments there to surpass even the more onerous 2019 national building standards which now apply. On this note it might be an

idea for Clare to push the boundaries further, in line with changes needed to ensure a safe future, and encourage energy neutral or even energy positive buildings the likes of which the Powerhouse collaboration are currently building.

Passive houses (which include non-domestic buildings) have an extremely small heating energy demand and can be kept warm passively, solely by using the existing internal heat sources and the solar energy entering through the windows as well as by the minimal heating of incoming fresh air. Passive house design uses an integrated energy concept with a fabric first approach, combining superior thermal insulation and windows with careful design, detailing and superior execution to avoid thermal bridging and a high standard of airtightness<sup>2</sup> which together reduce the heat losses of the building. This is coupled with heat recovery ventilation which provides good indoor air quality for the users and reuses the heat of extracted stale air. Correct orientation, towards the sun, and compactness of building form are costless design decisions which will reduce the energy demand over its entire life span.

The Passive House Planning Package (PHPP) is an inexpensive methodology/ software tool which allows designers and similarly local authorities to certify that buildings comply with Passive House Standards. Similarly LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) and BREEAM (Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method) are two platforms to monitor the in-use performance of public/ commercial buildings. The method calculates the actual building energy consumption and incentivises reduction of energy use, water use and waste within specific building types; hotels are benched marked against other hotels, libraries are compared with libraries, etc.

Lower Embodied Energy; lower impact buildings.

Furthermore, a much more proactive approach should be taken in relation to the embodied energy of the building. By using lower embodied energy materials the over all carbon footprint of each building is reduced further ensuring that the building has less of an impact on limited natural resources and on the environment caused by the manufacturing processes and transportation of materials. On this vein, it is equally important to do full Life Cycle Analyses of buildings and to use materials which can be readily recycled in Ireland.

### Offsetting Clare's Built Environment

By calculating the embodied energy of a building, the in-use energy demand, waste and emissions and its end of life disposal, the full impact of buildings can then be assessed and offsetting measures can be put in place. For example the overall footprint of the building can be used to enforce a proportional offsetting requirement. This could be used by Clare County Council to create much needed public owned nature corridors, increased biodiversity rich green spaces within towns and villages, natural flood prevention along water ways and entire county parks. These would simultaneously reduce the impacts of the built environment and increase the well being of Clare's residents and visitors as well as the endless, yet vital, benefits urgently needed for Clare's threatened biodiversity and to prevent further climate breakdown.

### Reduce the pressure Clare's Built Environment puts on our Water Systems

The importance of good waste water treatment has always been neglected in County Clare. Even on 12/11/2020 the Irish Times reports 'Raw sewerage flowing into rivers and seas from urban settlements in Ireland', including Kilrush, Kilkee, Ennis South, Shannon and Ballyvaughan. In 2019 the EPA reported that 11 out of 24 of the sewerage treatment locations in County Clare were not functioning or non existent. They also reported that 59% of domestic wastewater treatment systems, of the ones that were tested in County Clare, also failed<sup>3</sup>. As an immediate measure to reduce the negative impacts on our water courses Clare Country Council should actively raise awareness of the impacts of over-use of toxic cleaning products both in homes and business and in gardens that contaminate our waters and accelerated biodiversity loss.

It is also vital that Clare County Council proactively secures a high standard of wastewater treatment for urban settlements with out delay as well as supporting remedial work to failing domestic systems. The former is vital to the proper spatial planning for future developments in Clare. Condensing development into well thought out and well serviced urban clusters will reduce the embodied energy of spread out services and maintenance provided by Clare County Council and the high levels of emissions created by the constant movement of a growing rural population, to and from urban centres for schools, commerce and healthcare. It is also important that Clare County Council encourages the protection of our limited water supply by encouraging rainwater harvesting and the reuse of grey water within the home. This will reduce

the impacts of droughts and reduce the pressure on Clare's overloaded wastewater treatment systems.

Demand better buildings now; reduce energy demand for longer.

Clare County Council, as the responsible authority on building control should take a more proactive approach to a higher energy efficient standard of the building stock of the county by ensuring that a higher standard of construction is actually achieved on site. In many European countries it is common practice for the council to inspect building sites during construction to ensure that construction methods and workmanship are to a high standard and that health and safety regulations are followed correctly. Many studies<sup>1</sup> have demonstrated that there is a huge gap between the design energy efficiency, on paper, and the actual operational energy usage of the building over its life time. Often this is caused by poor quality workmanship and incorrect installation and tweaking of services.

Clare County Council should proactively encourage the upskilling of trades people by organising mandatory continual professional development courses which bring trades people up to date with the improved construction techniques and the ever increasing range of products developed to save water and recoup heat from air and water leaving the building. Likewise a demand would be fostered by awareness campaigns, aimed at the general public, about the proven large benefits of improved airtightness and thermal detailing to reduce heat loss and that proper ventilation is essential for their own health and that of the building fabric. People should also be aware that proper installation and maintenance of ventilation and heating systems will provide them with healthier homes and reduced energy bills. The better the quality of design, including the flexibility for adaptation for future needs and the higher the standard of construction the more sustainable buildings will be because people will enjoy living in them, they will take better care of them, adapt them and therefore the building will last for much longer.

Studies have also demonstrated that although a sixty year life span is generally accepted for a building, often buildings are in use for more than a hundred years. This is often thanks to good design and good construction. Therefore it is very important that a consistent approach is taken towards improving energy standards through specification and detailing at the earliest design

stages. Most forward-looking energy-specific investments can be recouped over the life cycle of the building due to reduced energy usage yet quality and energy efficiency is often compromised due to tight budgets during the build. This extra initial expense is something that Clare County Council could help with, by for example providing a low interest rate funding scheme, like a green mortgages, specifically to promote the upgraded performance of the building envelope for new buildings.

These proactive strategies will improve the well being of people and biodiversity in Clare as well as contribute directly to a reduction in County Clare's energy demand and therefore in County Clare's overall emissions.

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<https://www.usablebuildings.co.uk/UsableBuildings/Unprotected/FlyingBlind.pdf>

<https://passivehouseplus.ie/magazine/guides/the-ph-guide-to-airtightness>

[https://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/water/wastewater/OEE%20-](https://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/water/wastewater/OEE%20-%20Domestic%20Waste%20Water%20Treatment%20Systems%20Report%20-%202009%2007%202020.pdf)

[%20Domestic%20Waste%20Water%20Treatment%20Systems%20Report%20-%202009%2007%202020.pdf](https://www.epa.ie/pubs/reports/water/wastewater/OEE%20-%20Domestic%20Waste%20Water%20Treatment%20Systems%20Report%20-%202009%2007%202020.pdf)



## **Social, Community and Cultural Development**

Diversity and inclusion are a powerful driver towards cultural development and can result in positive community-wide social, economic and environmental impacts. Peoples' lifestyles, individual behaviour, consumption patterns and our interaction with the natural environment can be influenced by their cultures. Cultural development cannot truly happen without embracing the diverse nature of the growing population in County Clare. The acknowledgement and social inclusion of people from all backgrounds and cultures in the Development Plan and all subsequent Council policies and actions can lead to improved quality of life and increased the general well-being of individuals and communities. This can also greatly help in reducing the belief in stereotypes, stigma, racism, suicide and other mental health issues faced more so by certain communities in Clare.

NCCWN Clare Women's Network has worked very hard over the past few years to bring social inclusion, cohesion and diversity to County Clare by organizing numerous events and bringing together people from different cultures in order to develop and make the community more liveable. Events run by NCCWN Clare Women's Network and other community based organisations can bring about significant social, community and economic benefits to the county and its population. Our last Silence + Voice Festival, which took place in 2019, saw the gathering of over 160 women in County Clare over a two-day period, with attendees travelling from all over the country and some travelling internationally to attend and stay overnight. Clare County Council should recognise, see the value of and support events like these so that they might continuing growing and having positive impacts on the community. Additionally, events such as this create a much needed space for women to come together and network, learn about different cultures and meet women from a variety backgrounds. A number of important projects have come from this festival such as The Women's Peace Camp, training programmes on challenging racism, strong links women living in Direct Provision and women from the Travelling community.

This call out for submissions is a listening process which we are happy to engage with because we believe that organisations who work in the community are best placed to express the needs of the community as they are working directly on the ground. Involving and hearing such

organisations and taking on board their insights and expertise will result in immense benefits for both targeted and wider community members and improve quality of life.

### *Return Maternity Care to Clare*

There are no maternity services in Co. Clare.

The Central Statistics Office attributes 1,362 births to Co. Clare in 2019. The key word here is 'attributes', in fact, this number reflects the place where the mother/parent was living at the time of the baby's birth. This is not the place where birth took place.

The last maternity unit at Cahercalla Hospital, Ennis, closed in 1987. For more than thirty years pregnant people and their families have had to travel to either Limerick or Galway for all hospital appointments during pregnancy and also when in labour. For those living in West Clare, and other rural areas, this can mean journeys of up to 2 hours each way, each time.

Uprooting birth from local communities has serious implications in relation to transport, infrastructure, sustainability and environmental considerations. It is imperative that any future development plan for Co. Clare considers ways to return maternity care services to the county. On page 22 of the proposed development plan when considering the progression of green infrastructure there are references to population growth and therefore, indirectly, maternity care.

*"The provision and maintenance of high-quality service infrastructure is vital to attracting and retaining economic development and improving the quality of life in the County. ... Population growth will be identified in areas with existing and planned public services and facilities."*

While this section of the proposed plan is concerned with services such as water and broadband, NCCWN Clare Women's Network strongly recommend that the ambition to grow such services alongside population growth must also include the issue of maternity care. There is a direct connection between population growth with maternity services which should be embedded within local communities alongside other public services and facilities. Now is the time to take this critical issue into consideration.

There have been campaigns to reinstate maternity services within the county in the past. In the early 2000s a dynamic group of community activists, Clare Birth Choice, lobbied extensively

for maternity services to be made available within the county. One of their suggestions was the establishment of a midwife-led-unit at Ennis General Hospital.

At present there are two midwife-led-units in the Republic of Ireland, with a population of 4.9 million. Whereas there are 8 midwife-led-units in Northern Ireland, with a population of 1.8 million. A midwife-led-unit in Co. Clare would be a considerable development for families in the county and would return birth to Clare. The 2016 National Maternity Strategy, as yet unimplemented, called for more midwifery-led units.

There are interim steps that could be taken en route to returning full maternity services to the county, for example, having access to maternity clinic appointments throughout pregnancy at local health centres would help reduce the reliance on private cars, reducing carbon emissions from unnecessary travel to Limerick and Galway. This would contribute to a more sustainable way of life. It would also reduce the time and stress families often face during pregnancy to co-ordinate complex childcare needs and time off work to travel long distances for clinic appointments. It should also be noted that a lack of local access to other consultants / clinics / medical services has similar implications for people living in Clare who require treatment for illnesses or various therapies.

It is important to point out that during the Covid-19 restrictions surrounding maternity services pregnant people are being forced to attend clinic appointments and scans alone.<sup>11</sup> They are also expected to labour alone, as partners are only allowed in for the actual birth and for a short time afterwards. This is utterly unacceptable. It is leading to enormous stress for all involved, it will be some time before we truly understand the consequences of this policy.

This situation has led to a national campaign, 'In our shoes – Covid pregnancy'<sup>12</sup>, lobbying for the admittance of partner's to clinic appointments and most importantly during labour and afterwards. This campaign was in conjunction with the National Collective of Community Based Women's Network (NCCWN) campaign calling on the Government to ease Covid-19 maternity service restrictions.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2020-09-30/section/293/>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/inourshoesocovidpregnancy>

<sup>13</sup> <https://nccwn.org/latest-news/covid-19-restrictions-in-maternity-services-get-involved/>

It also highlights many of the limitations of our currently highly centralised maternity service. When one considers that in 1973 there were 108 maternity units in Ireland while in 2020 there are just 19 for the whole country, a clear picture begins to emerge of the kind of stresses and strains that people experience when trying to access maternity care anywhere in Ireland and this is particularly pertinent to Co. Clare. It further highlights the impact that the centralisation of maternity services has on the environment and raises questions about the sustainability of our health care system.

We are also seeing an increase in home births during the current pandemic. Although home birth is proven to be as safe as hospital birth<sup>14</sup>, our national home birth rate is currently approximately 1% -this is clearly not the preferred option for most people at present. It must also be acknowledged that unlike Northern Ireland where there is an expanded home birth service<sup>15</sup>, the current home birth service is very limited and sporadic so that if a family wants to avail of this service it may not be available to them.

Families living in county Clare deserve the opportunity to give birth to their children within their local communities. Embedding maternity care within our local communities will also support a more environmentally sustainable place based maternity care service. This is a wonderful opportunity to incorporate maternity care within this development plan and return maternity care to Clare.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://aimsireland.ie/did-you-know-home-birth-is-as-safe-as-hospital-birth/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.rqia.org.uk/getattachment/6e771d2e-ae75-4929-b254-82b7515744b6/Home-Birth-Guideline-Booklet.pdf.aspx>

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/0ac5a8-national-maternity-strategy-creating-a-better-future-together-2016-2/>

Holding the state to account: 'Picking Up the Threads' for women who have died in our maternity services (forthcoming publication) by Dr Jo Murphy-Lawless

[http://homepage.circom.net/~maternitymatters/maternity\\_matters\\_marie\\_talk\\_03.htm](http://homepage.circom.net/~maternitymatters/maternity_matters_marie_talk_03.htm)

<https://www.rqia.org.uk/ROIA/files/3a/3a7a37bb-d601-4daf-a902-6b60e5fa58c2.pdf>

<https://www.aims.org.uk/journal/item/the-journey-to-hospital>

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Lastly, we would like to thank Clare County Council for the opportunity to make a submission to the 2022 – 2028 County Clare Development plan. We sincerely hope that our suggestions are taken into consideration by the Council going forward and help to shape a more inclusive and equal community.

