



Galway City Community Network
Líonra Pobail Chathair Na Gaillimhe

GCCN CLIMATE CONVERSATION

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April 15th 2021

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National Dialogue on Climate Action

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

“Climate change is the defining issue of our time – and we are at a defining moment. We face a direct existential threat. Climate change is moving faster than we are – and its speed has provoked a sonic boom SOS across our world. If we do not change course by 2020, we risk missing the point where we can avoid runaway climate change, with disastrous consequences for people and all the natural systems that sustain us.”

António Guterres, UN Secretary General (2018)

Introduction

Galway City Community Network was selected as one of the pilot areas for the Climate Conversation initiative supported by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and the Department of Rural and Community Development as part of the Government's National Dialogue on Climate Action.

GCCN held a Climate Conversation on the 15th of April. The workshop was attended by representatives of organisations from the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in Galway City and represented issues such as disability, Traveller community, young people, socio-economic disadvantage, as well as environmental concerns. The following is a note of the outcomes of the discussion.

The report drew on previous work undertaken by GCCN and outlined in the [GCCN Policies and Positions](#) document and the [GCCN Submission to the Galway City Development Plan](#) process. The text in italics are quotes from participants.

Macro/Micro Level

There was consensus that while micro-level, individual or community-based initiatives have a role to play in seeking to mitigate or adapt to the impacts of the climate changes and biodiversity crises, the State needs to ensure emphasis on the macro-level, ensuring fundamental changes in how the country deals with climate change.

We don't know what the levels of transport-related emissions are in Galway – there are no measurements and without measuring you cannot set targets to reduce

There was consensus that a new model of planning needs to be identified that recognises that there are climate and biodiversity emergencies as a starting point, is based on achieving the emission reduction targets in the Programme for Government of an average 7% per annum, year on year to 2030 and is centred around the needs of residents and facilitating them to live in a sustainable way.

Process

There was agreement that process is critical and engagement with and the participation of communities will be crucial to the success or otherwise of what will probably be significant lifestyle changes for most. Young people need to be included in this and there was criticism for the deficit in engagement with young people.

Young people looked at the online consultation. It was really depressing – no more than a tick-box exercise

There was also criticism of the fact that the current consultation process is very much focused on the individual/micro community level, and while these have a place in changing behaviours, the main focus needs to be on structural, high level, change.

Community Initiatives

There is a wealth of community initiatives across Galway city that contribute to climate action and use an environmental justice framework to respond to the climate and biodiversity crises. Communities have self-organised to develop local solutions that address the thematic areas. However, the most significant barrier faced by communities in implementing and advocating for these solutions is the lack of institutional support and facilitative policy and practice at a local and national level.

There is an important value in the 'holistic approach' taken by many community and voluntary organisations is carrying out their work and this needs to be encouraged and supported.

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- *It may be the cycling campaign doing an open day...but you're unlikely to see them leaving piles of rubbish behind.*
 - *It may be the resource centre running a community resilience course...but you are unlikely to see them excluding people because of their background, race or gender*
 - *It may be the energy co-op doing a demo on solar panels...but you are unlikely to see them disregard any wildlife living on or under the rooftop.*
 - *It may be the conservation volunteers sowing seeds...but you are unlikely to see them damaging an archaeological or heritage site of importance*
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Food

There are a number of projects focused on sustainable food growing including a network of community gardens and allotments. There are also demonstration sites and permaculture projects by Third Space Galway.

Local growing projects should be supported to develop more sites, to broaden access to a wider range of communities. These sites can be spaces for education, experiential learning and developing practical skills. Access for young people should also be ensured through work with schools and youth projects. There should be a particular focus on marginalised communities and consideration of equitable access to land for growing across the city. Planning to accommodate the predicted population growth of the city must be cognisant of this equitable access and all new housing developments must ensure access to green space.

Detroit has used a model of urban farming to support food sovereignty in the city with a particular focus on socio-economically disadvantaged areas. Keep Growing Detroit supports the establishment of family, community, school, and market gardens and has a demonstration farm which is a space for educational activities. This model provides a useful framework for scaling up local growing through community led initiatives.

Participants would like to see a covered farmer's market in Galway to facilitate access to food produced locally and a vastly increased number of allotments and community gardens.

Environment

Projects supporting biodiversity and protection of the natural environment include Friends of Merlin Woods, Terryland Forest Park, Conservation Volunteers and Friends of Barna Woods. There is also an active campaign for Galway to become a National Park City. These projects include a focus on education, awareness raising and nature-based solutions. However, the Green and Blue Network

needs to be connected rather than isolated pockets within the city. Boston has developed wild corridors around the entire city, and this is a model which could be replicated.

It was agreed that it is not possible to reduce emissions to zero and at least 40% of green space is required to sequester sufficient levels of carbon.

Don't Mow - Let it Grow

It is critical to support increased education and awareness of actions to support biodiversity and wildlife in local areas, including support for the All Ireland Pollinator Plan, replacing hard surfaces with planting to increase green spaces and prevent localised flooding.

Travel

There are five cycling groups active in Galway working towards safer streets, sustainable transport infrastructure and better urban design including Galway Cycling Campaign, Galway Urban Greenway Alliance, Connemara Greenway Alliance, Bus Rothaíochta na Gaillimhe/Galway Cycle Bus and An Mheitheal Rothar. Gluas is also campaigning for sustainable transport solutions for the city by constructing a 'very light rail' system. These active campaigns highlight the lack of sustainable transport in the city, including safe cycling infrastructure. An increase in active travel will only be possible with safe segregated cycling and pedestrian infrastructure. National pressure is needed for this, and other sustainable transport solutions, to happen at a local level.

Circular Economy - Shopping, Recycling, Reuse

There are a number of local projects focusing on recycling, reuse and circular economy including Bounce Back Recycling and An Mheitheal Rothar. *Bounce Back Recycling* is a social enterprise established by Galway Traveller Movement. It employs a number of Travellers to recycle mattresses and upcycle used furniture. An Mheitheal Rothar's *Recycle Your Cycle* initiative repairs bikes sent for scrap to Galway City Council's waste depot. Both organisations provide training and employment opportunities for people who are long term unemployed, and both would benefit significantly from increased supports from the State and the local authority.

Additional research is required into how to recycle or reuse what are currently considered to be waste products that go to landfill.

There was criticism of changes in SEAI schemes that have resulted in community-based organisations losing the status they once had in tendering for schemes. In Galway, this resulted in the closure of First Class Insulation – a Traveller-led social economy project that had developed skill and expertise in retrofitting homes.

Energy and Buildings

Globally the energy transformation to socially fair, democratic, and decentralised energy is most effective when communities are at the helm of local renewable energy projects. Research has shown that investment in social economy energy cooperatives delivered two to three times more value to

the local economy than private enterprises.¹ The Galway Energy Cooperative is a local example of a community led energy project.

Participants called for more investment in District Heating Schemes to democratise access to heat in a sustainable way, and further called for retrofitting of homes to be implemented on a scale unprecedented to date.

There was a call for all new buildings to have roof-top gardens and be fitted with solar photovoltaic panels and/or solar thermal collectors

Climate Justice

There was consensus that climate justice needs to be at the heart of all we do in the area of climate change in recognition of the fact that the impact of climate change falls most heavily on those that have done the least to cause it and have the least resources to respond. There was consensus that we need to ensure that marginalised communities, struggling with fuel poverty, increasing food poverty and likely to live in communities most affected by air pollution, are supported to make a just transition. There was agreement that support for community workers and youth workers as a bridge into marginalised communities is critical in this regard.

Climate Action Fund

The fund should focus on principles of Climate Justice and Just Transition. It should have a particular focus on marginalised communities and youth.

Given the high levels of unemployment and precarious work the fund should include a focus on training and skills in the green and circular economy, repair and sustainability generally. This area could support community skills initiative to link with community education providers.

Similar to the Community Enhancement Programme, funding should be ringfenced for small community organisations. There should be different application processes for community groups and professional organisations. Funding should be long-term to enable strategic approaches rather than project or initiative focused.

Funding should be allocated through the Local Community Development Committee as this includes varied representation from local government and the community sector. This local expertise is vital to ensure the best results.

There should be supports in place for voluntary groups in relation to the application process and reporting requirements. Timescales for reporting should be cognisant that volunteer groups will need longer timescales than professional organisations.

Climate Action Plan and National Policy

There are climate and biodiversity emergencies, and national policy needs to reflect this across all sectors. Systemic change is needed which requires a strong legislative basis. A pressing example is the need to ban all Liquefied Natural Gas projects and the importation of fracked gas.

¹ Énergie Partagée/Shared Energy (2019), 'Statistical field study of the local economic benefits of citizen projects', accessible at: [Les retombées économiques locales des projets citoyens d'énergie renouvelable : bénéfices pour les territoires | Énergie Partagée \(energie-partagee.org\)](https://www.energie-partagee.org/en/retombees-economiques-locales-des-projets-citoyens-denergie-renouvelable-benefices-pour-les-territoires)

All climate action measures should be equality proofed and assessed using Climate Justice and Just Transition principles. Socio-economically marginalised communities should not be disproportionately impacted by measures.

National policy should facilitate community initiatives on circular economy. A national structure should be established to facilitate access to Civic Amenity Sites so community initiatives can access waste for reuse, repurposing and recycling.

Infrastructure and funding to support linking up of state training and education supports to community skills initiatives for the circular and green economies. There should be specific supports for workers from industries such as fossil fuels to retrain. There should be supports for Traveller projects to develop community enterprises based in the circular and green economies.

An overhaul of Cooperative Legislation (Friendly Societies Acts 1896 to 2014) is necessary to create legislation which is fit for purpose and facilitates community led solutions such as energy cooperatives. Strong national policy supports for Community Energy Cooperatives and projects.