



Kilkenny PPN Submission: Kilkenny County Council Draft Climate Action Plan

Kilkenny Public Participation Network (PPN) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to Kilkenny County Council in relation to the Draft Climate Action Plan 2024-2029.

Preface

Kilkenny PPN is a Sustainable Development Goal PPN. Established in 2014, a new framework for public engagement and participation was established in Kilkenny called the Kilkenny Public Participation Network. This is a network that represents groups and organizations in the community, voluntary, and environmental sectors in Kilkenny City and County and enables the public to take an active formal role in the policy-making and oversight activities of the Local Authority. Currently, there are 445 community groups across the three colleges - community and voluntary, social inclusion, and environmental affiliated with Kilkenny PPN.

The Kilkenny PPN aims to facilitate and enable local community organizations to articulate a diverse range of views and interests within the local government system, not to reduce or homogenize this diversity. A parallel and equally important aim should be to facilitate the local authority in making better and more timely decisions.

Consultation

This submission is based on our consultation in November, and our Vision for Community Wellbeing Consultations. A survey was sent to our membership for feedback on the Draft County Council Climate Action Plan 2024 - 2019, and our PPN Representatives have put together a joint submission from this feedback and the Kilkenny PPN Vision of Community Wellbeing following this Survey. The Secretariat of Co Kilkenny is grateful to all those who contributed to this submission.

Background to Kilkenny PPN Vision for Community Wellbeing

The Vision for Community Wellbeing acts as a guiding vision for everything done by the network. It's a benchmark for PPN Representatives and the Secretariat — feeding into policy decisions and planning activities. It's a shared vision for the well-being of our communities for this and future generations.

The model we use:



This community wellbeing initiative was run in conjunction with the Department of Rural and Community Development, Social Justice Ireland, the Irish Environmental Network, and our Environmental Pillar. The Kilkenny PPN Vision for Community Wellbeing can be viewed through the following link on our website www.kilkennyppn.ie/news/vision-for-community-wellbeing/

Kilkenny PPNs Vision for Environment & Sustainability

In Kilkenny, we envision a thriving and sustainable city and county that prioritizes the protection and preservation of our natural environment. Our commitment to environmental stewardship is deeply rooted in our desire to create a healthy and resilient community for current and future generations. We strive for a future where Kilkenny is renowned for its sustainable practices, innovative solutions, and harmonious coexistence with nature.

Our community seeks to enhance the well-being of its residents by promoting sustainable practices that protect our environment and support climate action. We believe that a healthy environment is essential for the health and happiness of our community, and we recognize that our actions have an impact on the global climate.

General Observations on the Draft County Council Climate Action Plan 2024 - 2029

The Kilkenny PPN welcomes the Local Authority Climate Action Plan and supports its vision for a greener and more sustainable County Kilkenny.

While the draft Climate Action Plan outlines many good points that will be beneficial in tackling the climate crisis, the overall view is that it is overly strategic in both design and ideas promoted and is therefore lacking in specific actions. There are gaps that Kilkenny PPN hope will be filled.

We would greatly emphasize the importance of influencing policies and including practical ideas for wider community action, as the emissions of the Kilkenny County Council are relatively small in comparison.

It is felt that the Climate Action Plan could gain broader community support by emphasizing the positive impacts of mitigating adverse climate change, such as cleaner air, better health, and improved ecosystems. There's a need for clarity on how additional studies and plans contribute to cutting emissions, with specific timelines for implementing identified actions.

To address the urgency of the situation, involving community-based actions across the County can showcase the immediacy of needed changes and spur further transformations. The Council, with its authority and connections, can convene diverse 'green teams' comprising government, private industry, and local groups to drive specific changes swiftly. These teams could dissolve upon completing their initiatives.

Engaging a broader range of organizations is crucial, and the Council can be both a promoter and a facilitator of local actions. Partnering with groups like the PPN, the Council can act as a central collaborator, connecting community groups to support and execute on-the-ground actions for change. This collaboration is essential for achieving widespread change.

The plan needs concrete targets, timelines, and regular updates to ensure accountability.

Groups noted that it is difficult to understand, given the internal engagement on the Plan, how certain decisions are being made.

Moreover, there is a call for increased accountability and transparency in Council proceedings, giving online public viewing access to Plenary and other meetings, as well as ensuring detailed Council/Committee meeting minutes are published on the Kilkenny County Council website promptly after approval.

Small actions like traffic calming or "car-free" days are within the Council's authority and could inspire hope in the community without needing extensive studies, especially considering the urgency of addressing the climate emergency.

More points were made under the following themes on behalf of Kilkenny PPN membership to be included in the plan:

- Transport & Mobility
- Renewable Energy
- Flood Control & Water
- Circular Economy & Litter Management
- Climate Justice
- Land Use & Planning
- Biodiversity
- Heritage
- Disability

Transport & Mobility

- Expand rural public transport to serve all towns and villages, to reduce car usage and enhance connectivity.
- Improve bus stops and routes in rural areas to ensure equitable transportation and reduce isolation.
- Raise awareness about the health impacts of car idling, advocating for engine shutdown to save CO2 and curb unhealthy emissions — particular matter, especially from diesel engines, are produced at much higher rates from idling engines than during driving.
- Enforce strict bans on idling near schools and install clear signage to protect young people from harmful vehicle fumes.
- Explore 'Go Car' car-sharing options in smaller communities like Gaignamagh to reduce reliance on second cars.
- Increase the 'Go-Car' fleet in Kilkenny City to provide a genuine alternative to private vehicles.
- Promote 'school trains' to encourage walking groups of students to school, reducing car usage.
- Develop a parking app for pre-booking parking spots to reduce driving time spent searching for parking.
- Expand the availability of Bolt Bikes in Kilkenny City for alternative transportation.
- Implement two-way cycle lanes on one-way streets and rapid build cycle lanes to enhance cycling infrastructure.
- Extend city bus services in Kilkenny City with smaller electric buses to ease traffic congestion and promote sustainability.
- Advocate for energy efficiency with initiatives like a 'car-free day' campaign and no parking zones in areas like the Brewery Quarter.

Renewable Energy

- More campaigns highlighting the benefits of solar & wind power on reducing consumer electricity bills, and bolstering Ireland's overall energy independence.
- Ensure clarity in the Climate Action Plan regarding the implementation and measurement of proposed renewable energy measures.
- Encourage homeowners to adopt newer energy sources like heat pumps and explore gas supplies generated by the farming community through biodigesters.
- Investigate reinstating small water wheels for local electricity generation and community-based actions.
- Implement energy-efficient lighting solutions, such as utilizing LED lights to save energy and reduce light pollution, supplemented by motion-sensor-activated public lighting. Implement solar-powered lighting wherever feasible to further enhance energy efficiency.
- Encourage increased water retention in estates.

- Provide incentives for community areas to install solar panels.
- Fit all new schools with accessible and affordable solar panels.
- Raise awareness and understanding in rural areas regarding the impact of windfarms on communities and the environment.

Flood Control & Water

- Prioritize nature-based flood control solutions like wetland restoration and green infrastructure to complement existing measures.
- Restore rivers by removing culverts to allow them to spread into flood plains and limit downstream flooding risks.
- Climate-proof rezoning plans, avoiding residential development in flood-prone areas.
- Prohibit development permissions in present or future flood plains.
- Monitor and publicly report river pollution regularly, penalizing incidents.
- Prioritize an allocation of resources for farm and septic tank inspections to improve environmental enforcement.
- Create local water reservoirs to conserve water, enhance biodiversity, and mitigate flooding.
- Plant trees along riverbanks to stabilize them.
- Halt drainage of bogs to maintain natural water retention.
- Prohibit building on flood plains, including housing developments.
- Ban pesticide use near water sources to protect water quality.
- Restrict fertilizer use and prevent dumping by farmers into rivers.
- Implement stricter controls and testing of industrial water discharge.
- Monitor and regulate unmonitored pipes, such as those discharging untreated wastewater into canals.
- Conduct awareness campaigns and education on environmental sustainability, focusing on issues like nitrates in rivers and their causes/effects.

Circular Economy & Litter Management

- Collaborate with local Social Enterprises to drive circular economy initiatives and generate fresh ideas, such as repurposing waste within the 'waste disposal' infrastructure.
- Expand Civic Amenity sites to accommodate repair activities by entities like Mens' Sheds or private businesses, refurbishing furniture and electrical appliances for resale.
- Implement a ban on disposable coffee cups in Kilkenny City, learning from the success of Killarney's similar initiative to reduce emissions and litter.
- Introduce incentives for recycling plastic bottles through coupons or monetary rewards.
- Offer picker pals courses in schools to promote litter picking.
- Encourage shopping at local markets and the use of reusable bags in supermarkets.

- Promote permanent swap schemes for clothes and other items to reduce waste.
- Establish Kilkenny County Council as a sustainability leader by implementing visible changes to combat adverse climate change and reduce carbon footprint.
- Compile a list of food cloud registered companies in the County.
- Strengthen littering and waste by-laws for better enforcement.
- Provide clearer guidelines on recycling options for the public.

Climate Justice

- Provide support to disproportionately affected vulnerable communities due to climate change.
- Implement meaningful actions to aid individuals in poverty or marginalized groups lacking resources for upgrades like insulation, heating, or solar panels.
- Consider the impact of increased taxes on fossil or solid fuels, acknowledging the risk of driving vulnerable individuals into fuel poverty.

Land Use & Planning

- Consider allowing private individuals to build small, affordable dwellings, exploring the potential of 'Tiny Houses' as an alternative housing solution.
- Encourage diverse community land uses, integrating housing with shops, supermarkets, post offices, banking, recycling centers, green spaces, walking/cycling paths, retirement communities, and healthcare centers to minimize driving and promote diversity.
- Favor denser housing development over ribbon development to mitigate problems like increased car use, delayed emergency responses, elderly isolation, and biodiversity loss.
- Retrofit existing buildings to meet the need for 1/2 million new homes by 2040, addressing schools and other essential services while managing the carbon budget.
- Reduce car parking provision in new developments to discourage car ownership.
- Adopt the concept of the 15-minute city or community in urban planning approaches.
- Prioritize district heating systems for new housing estates.
- Allow high-energy usage developments like data centers only if they can provide low-cost district heating to nearby residential areas.
- Incorporate Universal Design in social housing to prevent later adaptations for persons with disabilities.
- Ban patio heaters and improve building insulation standards to retain heat, reducing energy consumption.
- Redevelop derelict houses to address housing shortages.
- Allocate land for community gardens and allotments.
- Expand EV charging infrastructure.
- Convert empty shops into community or residential spaces.

- Reform planning laws for more effective and sustainable development.

Biodiversity

- Implement measures to protect hedgerows and trees, recognizing agriculture's significant emissions contribution.
- Enforce strict penalties for unauthorized tree felling.
- Minimize tree felling, allowing it only in exceptional circumstances and maintaining a record of felled trees by the Council.
- Manage public and residential green spaces in line with the All Ireland Pollinator Plan, promoting native pollinator-friendly plants and limited mowing.
- Increase tree planting in urban areas to mitigate urban heat island effects, acknowledging their role in cooling during hotter summers.
- Monitor and maintain hedgerows as essential ecological routes, ensuring proper trimming practices to preserve biodiversity and carbon storage.
- Ensure Council-led hedgerow trimming adheres strictly to Teagasc recommendations and report trimmed lengths annually.
- Report illegal hedgerow destruction to the NPWS and enforce corrective actions promptly.
- Introduce a licensing scheme for private hedge trimming contractors, requiring completion of a trimming course for eligibility.
- Create informational leaflets on hedgerow benefits and proper trimming techniques for distribution to landowners and contractors.
- Educate schools on proper hedge trimming, involving children to influence parental practices.
- Encourage Tidy Towns committees to promote biodiversity through initiatives like pond development, wildflower gardens, and 'let the long-grass grow' projects.
- Provide training to committees through the local Education and Training Board and use educational boards to foster community support for biodiversity initiatives.
- Lead by example in biodiversity efforts, including more thoughtful approaches to moving and hedge cutting by Kilkenny County Council.
- Stop cutting rough areas utilized by wildlife and eliminate the use of weed killers by councils.
- Encourage wild areas in gardens, vertical walls of plants, and utilize flat roofs for urban gardens, considering models like the cork rooftop farm.
- Promote wildflower mixes with native plants and encourage leaving more areas to go to seed, advocating for the acceptance of "messy gardens."

Heritage

- Utilize historical societies' knowledge of past changes and social impacts to facilitate focused talks in libraries, fostering acceptance of proposed changes through historical perspectives.
- Prioritize renewing heritage sites over demolition to preserve cultural and historical significance.
- Implement improved planning regulations and cohesive strategies to preserve Kilkenny's aesthetic and facilitate entry into UNESCO, ensuring medieval architectural preservation.

Disability

- Align SUMP, LACAP, and DZ with the Local Authority Disability Strategy.
- Include a disability officer in working groups to ensure inclusive representation.
- Emphasize "Universal Design" across all aspects, not just architecture, including training courses, event planning, service provision, etc.
- Integrate the Disability Strategy 2023-2027 whenever the action plan refers to "aligned with LECP and SUMP."
- Modify action tables:
 - Address flood warning procedures for individuals with disabilities.
 - Apply consistent policies countywide, including air quality monitoring and incident reporting for the public, not limited to CoCo staff.
 - Support businesses through LEO to implement inclusive measures.
 - Align Planning and Policy supports with KKCOCO disability strategy.
 - Ensure accessibility of bottle banks for wheelchair and height accessibility, avoid curbs for proximity, list food cloud-registered companies.