



**Submission to the Public Consultation on
Wicklow County Council Draft Climate Change Adaptation Strategy**

By

County Wicklow Public Participation Network

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Introducing County Wicklow Public Participation Network

County Wicklow Public Participation Network (PPN) was established in July 2014 under the directive of the Department of the Environment, Community & Local Government and in accordance with legislation in the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (Section 46). Public Participation Networks were established to be an independent structure that would become the main link through which local authorities connect with the community, voluntary and environmental sectors in a process to facilitate communities to articulate a diverse range of views and interests within the local government system.

Co Wicklow PPN has 290 diverse member groups, some of these groups are networks in their own right. PPN representatives serve as a voice for the community on structures including: the Local Community Development Committee; Housing & Corporate Estate Strategic Policy Committee; Planning & Development Strategic Policy Committee; Transport, Water & Environment Strategic Policy Committee; Community, Cultural & Social Development Strategic Policy Committee; Economic Development & Enterprise Strategic Policy Committee; Wicklow County Childcare Committee; Co Wicklow Children & Young People's Services Committee; Co Wicklow Local Sports Partnership; Wicklow County Tourism Board; Co Wicklow Volunteer Centre, County Wicklow Partnership, and Co Wicklow Joint Policing Committee. PPN Representatives strive to ensure that the needs of the community sector is prioritised within local policy processes.

Introduction and Context

At the request of some member groups in the PPN Environmental College, Co Wicklow PPN facilitated "Let's Talk About Climate Change" on Monday 24th June in Kilcoole Community Centre. The aim of the meeting was to present the Wicklow County Council Draft Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and through workshops, gather members' thoughts, issues and recommendations on the Strategy. Prior to the meeting Co Wicklow PPN circulated the Draft Strategy to members and we have taken Email feedback to facilitate those who could not attend and any after thoughts of the participants.

Jim Callery, environmental officer from Wicklow County Council, presented the Strategy, sharing his knowledge and expertise in a way that was easy to understand. The PPN is grateful for Jim's time, patience and courtesy. After the presentation, groups were asked to consider the following:

- Have all the possible risks and vulnerabilities been identified in the plan?
- Will the actions support Co Wicklow to cope with the impact of future climate change related events on the environment, economy, & our citizens?
- Will this plan ensure that a Climate Change focus is mainstreamed in all WCC services?

Co Wicklow PPN understands that the Strategy is a climate risk analysis in relation to how the local authority can adapt its own operations to climate changes and some of the issues raised

and reported on in this document are outside the scope of the Strategy as it stands. However these issues are extremely important to people and citizens are looking to Wicklow County Council to lead the way in developing and implementing solutions in collaboration with communities.

Consultation on the Review of the Wicklow County Council Draft Climate Change Adaptation Strategy

From the beginning it was acknowledged, that the Climate System is warming due to many human practices including the use of fossil fuels; agricultural activities; travel; urbanisation, deforestation, reforestation and desertification. The impacts of which include:

- More intense storms and rainfall
 - Increased river and coastal flooding
 - Water shortages in the summer
 - New pests and diseases
 - Poor water quality
 - Loss of animal and plant life
 - Climate migration (not considered in this strategy)
 - Social hardship on people and communities that suffer due to extreme weather events
- While the Adaptation Strategy was welcomed it was agreed that a Mitigation Strategy is vital to building resilience in the county and is the ultimate tool to deal with Climate Change. It was acknowledged that some mitigation measures were included in the strategy as well as being included in the County Development Plan however; people strongly expressed their disappointment that mitigation was not addressed fuller in this plan. The strategy states that WCC is committed to mitigating its own dependency on fossil fuels but it is not specific enough on the work it intends to do to encourage and facilitate the creation of new Sustainable Energy Communities

Suggestion: Wicklow County Council should investigate and document all current mitigation measures, identify any gaps and develop a Mitigation Plan for the county as soon as possible. Initiatives including Sustainable Energy Communities should be supported by the local authority

- Participants were concerned that the language in the Strategy can be difficult to understand in parts and there seems to be a lot of repetition particularly in the assessment of risks. Actions are broad and will not be easily monitored and evaluated. There are no clear outputs.
- Concerns were raised that proposed impacts of the plan focus on the economy in the first instance, followed by people and then the environment when it should really be the other way around.

Suggestion: The plan needs to be written in plain English, with clear and measurable outcomes and the development of targets and indicators in order to measure progress

- The meeting was informed that all the weather data for the Strategy was sourced through Met Eireann and Climate Ireland. No data was sourced from weather stations in Wicklow.

Suggestion: Wicklow County Council should investigate the status of any weather stations in the county and formalise a relationship to ensure that information can be shared and documented for use in the future. It was thought that there are weather stations in Ashford and Aughrim. Weather monitoring should be ongoing so as to learn from future events and changes in weather conditions and impacts.

- Sectoral issues discussed included afforestation in Co Wicklow and the use of pesticides in their management. There is very little focus on the Marine environment and a concern that the Marine Strategy might not go far enough in addressing issues. Risks such as pollution, sedimentation, and changes in bio-diversity (alien species) need to be taken into consideration along with flooding, and impacts to railway & harbour infrastructure. It was pointed out that there are other sectoral strategies to cover the forestry and marine sectors. This gave rise to fears that this could cause an uncoordinated approach to adaptation with the onus of responsibility being shifted from one organisation to the other at the risk of causing delays and worsening conditions. Bio-diversity is not adequately addressed nor is its ability to mitigate against many climate change issues recognised in this plan.

Suggestion: Wicklow County Council should work collaboratively across sectors and take the lead in coordinating any plans and strategies that have a direct impact on the county, thus ensuring clear lines of responsibility for implementation measures.

- Poor historical planning decisions have resulted in disconnected and car reliant communities. Building on flood plains is a mistake. Participants felt that the national guidelines fall short of developing sustainable communities and lack of funding is a huge issue.

Suggestion: A more ambitious approach in the County Development Plan is needed. Transparency and accountability is key and all procurement, policy and funding decisions should be environmentally proofed. Wicklow County Council should support resilient communities through funding and planning initiatives. There should be a focus on international best practise.

- Lack of knowledge, false knowledge, and apathy are undocumented risks. All citizens, sectors, communities and governments (both local and national) must work together if the effects of Climate Change are to be reduced.

Suggestion: Training is needed for elected councillors and local government officials to develop a deeper understanding of the current climate risks and any counter measures. Wicklow County Council must work closely with local experts and communities on the ground as their input is best placed in shaping the future of developing resilient communities. The Green Schools Programme is currently the best educational outreach initiative for teaching our younger citizens and their parents. This should continue to be supported and rolled out through all schools in the county.

- Concerns were raised that many plans and policies, no matter how good, are never implemented, or only partially implemented. Participants wondered how the plan will be monitored and reported on and if the public will have an opportunity to feed into the monitoring and evaluation process. The development of a new Climate Change & Biodiversity Strategic Policy Committee was welcomed and people speculated on how it might operate and what its role would be in ensuring the plan is facilitating the key adaptive practises that will deliver the results needed to meet local and national targets and impact positively on the well-being of the community. Other concerns highlighted the lack of clarity of the line management and communication process between those responsible to ensure that actions are implemented and those that will actually implement the actions on the ground.

Suggestion: The county manager should have ultimate responsibility for the plan which should be audited and reviewed annually. The Climate Action Officer needs to ensure that Climate Change & Biodiversity is to the forefront of every service, plan and action implemented by the local authority. The new Climate Change & Biodiversity SPC must play an active role in shaping and adapting the plan to the needs of communities in Co Wicklow as well as monitoring and evaluating all its actions on a regular basis. Co Wicklow PPN should be allocated a maximum of 5 seats (one for each Municipal District) and minimum of 2 seats (one for coastal and one for rural input) on the Climate Change and Biodiversity SPC to represent the voluntary and community sector. The PPN will in turn support the work of the committee by disseminating information to and feeding back from the communities on the ground.