



**Submission on
Kildare County Council's Draft Climate Change Adaptation Strategy**

By

The Environmental College of Kildare Public Participation Network

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Kildare Public Participation Network
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Introducing County Kildare Public Participation Network

County Kildare 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 Kildare PPN has 940 diverse member groups, some of these groups are networks in their own right, including the Kildare Environmental Network. PPN representatives serve as a voice for the community on structures including: the Local Community Development Committee; Economic Development Enterprise & Planning Strategic Policy Committee; Environmental Services & Water Strategic Policy Committee; Local Community & Cultural Strategic Policy Committee; Housing Strategic Policy Committee; Transportation, Safety & Emergency Services Committee; Joint Policing Committee and Co. Kildare Heritage Forum. 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 the PPN Environmental College, Co Kildare PPN engaged a facilitator to lead out on a workshop aimed at developing a submission in response to County Kildare Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019 - 2024 on Tuesday 2nd of July in *Solas Bhríde*, Kildare. The purpose of the workshop was to present a synopsis of the Kildare County Council Draft Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and through discussion in participatory breakout groups to gather participant responses and ideas with the intention of formulating a set of commentaries and recommendations on the Strategy. Printed copies of the Strategy were also available on the evening as well as being available on the KCC and PPN websites.

The facilitator presented a synopsis of the Strategy on PowerPoint, focusing on the vulnerabilities within the county, the duties of the local authority in identifying, implementing and monitoring the High Level Objective and key points which the PPN needed to have special regard to. The facilitator also outlined key points in relation to climate justice, which needs to underpin climate change responses, including the Adaptation Strategy. Vulnerabilities in County Kildare were listed as:

- Warming in Kildare will continue, especially in the summer and winter
- The County will experience more extreme weather conditions including rainfall events and storms
- There will be an increased likelihood of fluvial flooding

- Winters will be wetter and summers will be drier (which could lead to water shortages)
- These climate changes will impact the type, distribution and lifecycles of species

The challenges arising from these vulnerabilities were identified in the Strategy under the twin headings of Adaptation and Mitigation:

Adaptation to ensure communities, and society as a whole, become resilient to the impacts and risks of climate change

- Flood prevention/alleviation
- Enhancement of natural environment
- Community awareness
- Emergency Response

Mitigation to considerably reduce greenhouse gas emissions - actions that help to reduce the negative effects of climate change

- Reducing energy consumption
- Decarbonising transport systems
- Increasing renewable sources of energy
- Protecting/conserving carbon sinks (ocean, plants, land)

The 6 High Level Objectives listed in the Strategy are:

1. Local Adaptation Governance and Business Operations – functions and activities of Kildare County Council
2. Infrastructure and Built Environment – climate resilient infrastructure
3. Land use and Development – behavioural change in how we use land
4. Drainage and Flood Management – better understanding and successful management of risks
5. Natural Resources and Cultural Infrastructure – protecting key natural and cultural resources
6. Community Health and Wellbeing – need informed, empowered and cohesive communities with capacity to champion climate action at local level

After the presentation, participants broke into small groups to interrogate the Strategy and identify issues, additions and suggestions for inclusion in a submission to Kildare County Council.

It was acknowledged that the turnaround timeframe was very short (submissions closing on the Wednesday following the workshop).

The small groups were asked to consider the following in their deliberations:

- The Strategy deals with Local Adaptation Governance and Business Operations within the local authority – essentially the functions and activities of Kildare County Council. It does not encompass the totality of issues and responses on any matter.
- The key areas of focus (other than the direct corporate and management responsibility of Kildare County Council – see below*) in the Strategy are:
 - Infrastructure and Built Environment – ensuring climate resilient infrastructure
 - Land use and Development – promoting and ensuring behavioural change in how we use land
 - Drainage and Flood Management – ensuring a better understanding and successful management of identified and emerging risks
 - Natural Resources and Cultural Infrastructure – protecting key natural and cultural resources against any risks
 - Community Health and Wellbeing – emphasizing the need for informed, empowered and cohesive communities with capacity to champion climate action at local level

*Co Kildare 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. Citizens are therefore looking to Kildare County Council to lead the way in developing and implementing solutions in collaboration with communities.

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

From the beginning it was acknowledged, that the Earth’s climate 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, but an obvious impact of climate change
- Social hardship on people and communities likely to disproportionately suffer due to extreme weather events – the climate justice factor

Issues and recommendations from the workshop

1. Local Adaptation Governance and Business Operations

The workshop welcomed the Adaptation Strategy noting that there is too little in terms of mitigation actions, despite mitigation being stated as part of a two pronged approach in the Strategy. Mitigation is a vital action area alongside building resilience to the more immediate and medium term impacts of climate change.

The 2050 goal to stabilise or reduce greenhouse gases was regarded as too far away – overall plans need to be accelerated with greater urgency. Effective responses will require a blend of actions with clear sequential steps set down and implemented.

There was some concern that there is no representative of the PPN membership on the Climate Action Steering Group (CAG) despite the significant contribution required of community organisations in the Strategy.

The draft Strategy needs to be clearer in setting down the process - frequency, mechanisms etc., - of the Strategy review procedure.

There were questions about the environmental science expertise required to oversee the implementation of the Strategy and whether this need is integrated into the recruitment policies of KCC. Perhaps such expertise already exists within the existing staffing compliment, but this needs to be made clear.

KCC need to make public and demonstrate their 'green' procurement achievements in order to generate trust that these will be core to the procurement process into the future. For instance, new schools and new community facilities, including the number of staff and pupils involved, should be located within the range of active travel modes such as cycling.

Suggestions: A Mitigation Strategy needs to be developed as an urgency to accompany the Adaptation Strategy. Only mitigation will redress the imbalances in our climate system created by fossil fuels and other greenhouse gases.

There should be representation drawn from the PPN membership on the CAG and PPN community representation on appropriate working groups.

Consideration should be given to including a specialist climatologist on the CASG. This would inform the review/updating of the Strategy and would assist the Council and the PPN in gaining an informed scientific perspective on Strategy matters.

A summary document of the Strategy that is accessible and concise should be produced for the general public to bolster support from the wider community.

KCC needs to insist on compulsory disclosure on the carbon footprint of tendering partners as a matter of routine.

2. Infrastructure and Built Environment

Infrastructure and the built environment are essential areas of local authority responsibility. Participants acknowledged the expertise within KCC and their growing capability to maintain infrastructure during significant extreme weather events to date. However, the level of challenge for KCC is likely to increase as the Earth's temperature increases, calling for greater engagement and communication with local communities in the maintenance of transport and communication systems.

Road infrastructure will need to be resilient as well as being reconfigured to facilitate alternative transport methods, such as electric vehicles and cycling. Priority also needs to be given to the development of public transport systems, including heavy and light rail and non-carbon emitting bus systems.

Suggestions: Mechanisms for communication between KCC and local communities on the planning and maintenance of transport infrastructure need to be developed as a priority.

Planning for future durable transport systems that facilitate electric vehicles, public transport, cycling and other emerging forms of non-carbon emitting personal transport need to be initiated as an urgency.

3. Land use and Development

There was considerable concern expressed about expecting the massive changes required to manage climate change to emerge in a market economy driven by unlimited expansion. The required changes will not happen if the climate change agenda is subservient to production and growth - untrammelled growth is what created the problem in the first place. It was considered that there was little in the Strategy that supported the transition to a low carbon economy.

Protection of biodiversity is a concern related to land use. Intensive farming need to be discouraged because of its effect on the biosphere. Soil conservation is a factor in biodiversity and heavy grazing contributes to weakened resistance to flooding. Land use change for beef and dairy farmers can be linked to local food production strategies, but it will require drastic reductions in herd size.

Spraying by farmers and KCC needs to cease or be restricted. Such a shift will only happen if it is incentivised.

Wetlands and peatlands need to be protected, as these provide run-off and storage potential to alleviate flooding. This interconnectedness and need to restore natural capital is clearly indicated in the SDGs, emphasising the need for the SDGs to be the overarching paradigm for the Strategy.

Bogs are an obvious area of focus. They should be closed or covered to prevent CO₂/methane escape and may provide a source to which to re-route flood water. It is essential to maintain the restrictions on planning permission in bog areas in the new County Development Plan.

Suggestions: The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) should be the cross-cutting framework applied and referenced in each action. The SDGs form a comprehensive paradigm for the implementation of appropriate and effective climate change and climate justice measures.

Actions to encourage the transformation to a sustainable economic model need to be investigated and identified. This needs to be a collaborative action between different interests/sectors at local level based on a framework developed at national level.

Actions to maintain or rebalance biodiversity should be strengthened, including actions to encourage change from intensive production of food to sustainable production. Farming will have to undergo massive changes. This can be encouraged through the reduction of land use that facilitates large scale beef and dairy production.

Mitigation actions to restore wetlands and peatlands for their capacity to absorb excess water in times of flood needs to be part of the Strategy. Reinstating these environments, plus an increase in afforestation, would increase the county's capability to store carbon gases. The creation and support of Sustainable Energy Communities would assist this process.

4. Drainage and Flood Management

The Climate Action Steering Group needs to build in water capture as an important means to raise the county's resilience to drought. This will require grants to be made available for water storage. A related matter would be to enhance existing grants to address leaks in such systems.

Encouraging the installation/conversion of toilets to compostable systems, by the placing of bottles of H₂O to the cistern, would also reduce water usage at a family and community level.

Responding to intensive weather situations will require KCC staff to develop greater response strategies and greater elaboration of actions than exist at present. Urgency and information will be a key requirement for KCC in terms of providing a motivational message and embedding confidence and clarity of purpose in KCC staff.

The closing of significant institutions such as schools has both work and social implications – restarting systems, work and parenting rescheduling, rearranging childminding etc., - which will need to be considered in the required responses.

The necessity of communications on extreme weather alerts/conditions being a two way up-down process between local authority and communities was stressed. The need to clear goods and footpaths for vulnerable people and to formalise heating/cooling for such people, especially older people, during emergencies will need collaborative planning across agencies, authorities and communities.

Suggestions: Making grants available to encourage and maintain water storage will be essential to secure water supply in times of drought.

Identifying and promoting the use of non/low water toilet cisterns will require investigative collaboration across counties and with central government. This matter will most likely need to be driven by KCC.

Information systems for the dissemination of weather warnings and associated two-way communications with affected communities need to be devised.

5. Natural Resources and Cultural Infrastructure

National heritage protection will require a mapping exercise to identify vulnerable heritage sites.

The CASG needs to focus on devising an irrigation system for the Curragh, which is a unique environment that is particularly susceptible to the effects of climate change.

The rivers of Kildare are a natural asset that will need additional assessment and engineering to resist flooding and assist the sustainability of water in times of drought. Similarly the large bog lands within the county will need to be restored and maintained for their ability to store greenhouse gases. This will call for some imaginative thinking regarding the balancing of use and function.

The canal system in the county will also need consideration in terms of its ability to store water, continue to provide leisure opportunities and possibly reviving its transport potential. Again, this will require collaboration across counties.

There is a significant historical legacy in the county, including bridges, notable town buildings and many historical houses dating from the colonisation period. Some of these are vulnerable in terms of their placement close to rivers and flood plains. Every effort should be made to list and secure these buildings.

Suggestions: A survey of vulnerable infrastructure should be undertaken as a priority. Priority should be given to the sustainability of the unique landscape of the Curragh which is unlikely to survive in its existing form without contingency planning.

Water sources such as Pollardstown Fen, and the substantial waterways in the county will need assessment and contingency plans to minimise the consequence of climate change.

An assessment of the vulnerability of identified cultural infrastructure should be a priority action of the Adaptation Strategy. Kildare is particularly rich in this heritage placing a wider responsibility on the local authority, although this needs to be shared with national bodies such as the National Monuments Service, An Taisce and the UK-Irish Blue Shield Group whose specific remit is the protection of heritage sites.

6. Community Health and Wellbeing

Public engagement will be crucial to the success of key elements of the Strategy, therefore this needs to be incentivised and given appropriate attention.

There is some frustration about what exactly is expected of communities and where they will engage. Undoubtedly this will become clearer in due course but local action will require a better sense of how actions can be cohesive and collaborative in attaining the common goals aspired to in the Strategy.

Food and medical security is a concern, in particular ensuring food security and medical infrastructure security. Preserving lung health and mental health were particularly flagged. Promoting self-sufficiency through grow-your-own food initiatives and area based carbon-positive sinks.

Climate justice needs to be a central component of communication and engagement strategies. Vulnerable communities and communities of interest such as Travellers and Roma will need affirmative actions if they are not to disproportionately suffer the negative impacts of climate change.

The need to bring about behavioural change relies heavily on community activation and appropriately focused communication. It will be vital for community interests to be involved in this determination in order for actions to be informed and viable. Workshops using a town/area 'health check' approach could be a means of identifying priorities. In terms of promoting innovation and inventiveness KCC need to be open to investing and supporting communities to experiment and take risks.

Young people and children have been to the fore in pushing adequate responses to climate change. Therefore they need to be fully integrated into the processes around climate change, including this Strategy and its flowing actions. Education establishments will be important players in setting new behaviour patterns at grassroots level. Younger children need to be made aware of weather, climate and biodiversity – which many schools already do.

Actions areas for community involvement and engagement might include:

- Community gardens;
- Cycleways;
- Men's sheds and repair sheds and environmental sheds;

- Sustainable energy committees (with support from SEAI).

Suggestions: Climate justice needs to be a strong consideration in the Strategy and its ensuing actions. The Strategy needs to be presented to rural communities such as Lullymore, Allenwood, the isolated farming communities and the rural poor in order to engage with the most vulnerable at an early stage. These communities will find it much harder to engage on an equal footing with more advantaged areas/communities unless they are consciously targeted.

Young people's engagement will be central to the development of behavioural change. Fortunately many young people are already more conscious and committed to the need for urgent action on climate change than most adults. The commitment of young people needs to be supported and reinforced through deliberate engagement with schools and youth groups in the development of collaborative climate change actions. Resourcing 'green' school and campus plans will need to be encouraged and time allocated to climate change actions within the school/academic schedule.