

# LAOIS COUNTY DEVELOPMENT PLAN REVIEW SUBMISSION

ON

BEHALF OF CLONDARRIG FARM COMMUNITY PROJECT,

BALLYFIN, CO. LAOIS

## **Climate Change, Food Security, Community Resilience and Environmental Protection**

In the context of the climate emergency and impending crisis caused by climate breakdown and loss of biodiversity, the following is a set of proposals that might be implemented locally in a bid to mitigate and/or adapt to the threats to the planet at a local, “on the ground” level. It would also promote sustainable development in the county. In addition it focuses on ways to address rural decline, particularly as it affects the countryside outside of towns and villages.

The County Development Plan should underpin a transition towards localisation, sustainability and resilience. To achieve this, it should facilitate implementation of an urgently required set of measures in the areas of housing, enterprise and the local economy, energy, transport and environmental protection and restoration.

Food security and food sovereignty are vital in the context of climate change and decreasing dependence on, and availability of, fossil fuels. Already there are trends towards more localised production, processing, distribution and consumption of food and this will need to accelerate as the climate crisis deepens and farming has to lessen its dependence on oil. This will require a move away from production of export commodities such as dairy and beef and a return to small-scale mixed farming with a greater focus on organic, agroecological vegetable, fruit and grain (as well as dairy and meat) production. For this transition to take place a substantial number of new entrants to food production, with suitable training, will be required to supplement the declining farming population. In order for these to access land, new arrangements such as community farming, land trusts, share-farming and cooperative farming will need to be implemented.

In a broader context, it is entirely possible that, with accelerating climate change and consequent threats to food supply in countries like Ireland, there will actually be a migration of people away from urban areas and into the countryside.

## **Housing**

These trends have implications for planning of rural settlements and the next county development plan needs to anticipate and facilitate predicted patterns of population movement rather than impede them. Specifically, the plan needs to allow for development of clusters of low-impact, natural-build houses in the open countryside along the lines of the traditional *clachan* system. Such developments would provide a dwelling place not only for those involved in food production and other land-based enterprises but also others who wish to dwell, bring up families and make a living closer to nature. Newcomers can range from young families to older people who want to spend their retirement in the countryside.

There will also be an urgent need to lower the regulatory minimum size requirement of a dwelling in order to allow for ***Tiny Homes***, that have minimal material and energy demand.

Granting of planning permission to the types of clustered developments outlined above should be broadened to include persons who are not originally from the locality but have moved, or wish to move, to the countryside. A provision could be put in place requiring residents of these developments to sign up to a set of ecological principles along the lines of those administered by the ***One Planet Council*** in Wales.

In relation to urban housing development at a county level most especially local authority housing strategies, it is imperative that planners consult with experts in the fields of low impact and co-operative housing and regenerative land use so as to educate themselves on the principles and practices of ecologically integrative housing development and thus incorporate these principles into their strategies.

Incorporating such principles into County Development Plans would directly impact on carbon metrics and general environmental impact via the use of low carbon output materials and methods and integrative social and ecological design .

## **Waterways**

In the context of waterway management in Laois, ie; pollution, flood mitigation and defence etc. it is proposed that the local authority make provisions for the local community waters office and any department, governmental or otherwise to consult with experts in the fields of riparian corridor management through natural and restorative methods as per the Teagasc "***Woodlands for Water***" report and the "***Natural Flood Management***" report compiled by Friends of the Earth. In addition it is proposed that provision for ***community training and engagement*** in natural flood management and resilience is provided for through education and funding.

It is also proposed that the local community waters office works with their team of agricultural advisors to introduce farmers to regenerative land use practices in order to expand said riparian management zones and/or make them ecologically productive e.g. via agroforestry.

### **Social and Community**

In relation to social well-being and fostering sustainable resilient and inclusive communities, it is proposed that provision is made for local community food projects and initiatives to provide education and training on **growing food together** and for communities to be supported in following through by providing space for and supporting the development of food growing initiatives in their local areas. Such initiatives would include permaculture organic food growing using emerging low labor technologies such as “no dig” methods, permaculture and regenerative community farming.

In regard to community health, education for local communities on the importance of “bacterial ecology” and the relationship between “healthy local soil” gut health, nervous, and neurological systems in humans, demonstrates the knock on effect on health and wellbeing that local food produced via allotments, home gardens, or community farms have. These endeavours can also serve as areas fostering social-wellbeing and inclusion activities as evidenced by numerous examples of communities engaged in such initiatives around the country.

One of the numerous positive implications for community health combined with environmental care via the above initiatives is the reabsorption and recycling of bio-circularity council wastes from landscaping, leaf litter collection etc. Initiatives such as the development of community composting areas on lands supported by council for processing of these wastes e.g. biochar, compost, biodigestion) for reuse in community food growing projects are a fine example of how environmental and social care can work in unison.

In summary, until very recently, environmental protection and food production throughout history was deeply rooted in *community* and in the context of the coming years and the expected impact of climate on food security it is vital for local authorities to take the lead in reigniting the social and community aspects of food production and environmental care. Numerous examples such as G.I.Y. allotments, organic education centres, climate resilience hubs, foodcloud (integrating the food waste problem with community and enterprise) community woodlands, community lead energy applications (wood for biomass, district heating etc demonstrate how successful such initiatives can be

***Integration with* rather than the *separation of* humanity from ecology is what makes both strong, resilient and adaptable to change.**

### **Rural Regeneration**

Enabling new people to come to live, work and contribute to building community - with a strong focus on sustainability - would play a role in rural regeneration, while at the same time helping to restore the natural environment and increase biodiversity. It would lead also to a renewed demand for local services, thus reversing the withdrawal of services from rural areas that has been evidenced in recent years.

### **Climate Action and Energy**

Any new clustered developments in the countryside should be, at minimum, carbon neutral, and self-sufficient in energy use. Installation of community-based and owned renewable energy sources such as small-scale wind turbines and solar panels should be permissible under the next county development plan.

With the requirement to reduce fossil fuel emissions, greater emphasis on localisation, and a trend towards healthier lifestyle there is likely to be declining use of private motor transport and an upsurge in walking and cycling as well as public and community modes of transport. The plan should envisage infrastructure such as off-road cycle tracks, walking routes and extended footpaths as well as support for alternative transport models like car-pooling and community bus schemes.

### **Economic Development**

With a renewed emphasis on localisation there will be a growing demand for locally produced and locally sourced products and services. Continued and enhanced support for development of infrastructure such as enterprise units, markets, community kitchens, food hubs, community event spaces, etc. would greatly contribute to the development of the local economy and community self-reliance, and enable locals and new residents to make a living from self-employment and/or employment in their own vicinity.

In addition, new nature-based enterprises could be developed in areas such as eco-tourism and natural therapy services. County Laois which possesses a unique and varied natural landscape, is in a prime position to respond to the growing demand from city dwellers for immersion in, and experience of, nature. Promotion of low-impact, countryside-based accommodation and customised facilities would be vital toward responding to these needs.

The development of greenways in various parts of the country has had a crucial role in the development of sustainable tourism while, at the same time, providing a recreational amenity for local residents. The County Development Plan should contain a commitment to establish greenways and walking routes.

### **Environmental Protection**

The local authority should sign up as a partner to the National Pollinator Plan and follow the best practice guidelines set out by the plan in respect of any work carried out by the local authority or on its behalf.

### **NOTES & REFERENCES**

Friends of the Earth Natural Flood Management Report

[https://www.foe.ie/assets/files/pdf/natural\\_flood\\_management\\_a\\_study\\_for\\_friends\\_of\\_the\\_earth\\_february\\_2017.pdf](https://www.foe.ie/assets/files/pdf/natural_flood_management_a_study_for_friends_of_the_earth_february_2017.pdf)

Woodlands for Water Report

<https://www.agriculture.gov.ie/media/migration/forestry/grantandpremiumschemes/2018/WoodlandWaterLoRes06June18270618.pdf>

Food sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems. <http://www.foodsovereigntyireland.org>

Share farming is where two parties (the landowner and share farmer) carry on separate farming businesses on the same area of land without forming a partnership or company. Both parties share the benefits/risks of farming. There is no fixed payment for the land.

<https://www.teagasc.ie/rural-economy/farm-management/collaborative-farming/share-farming/share-farming-a-short-guide/> <https://www.streamfarm.co.uk>

### ***One Planet Council***

The One Planet Councils policy is a forward-thinking [planning policy](#) providing a genuinely affordable and sustainable way for people to live and work on their own land, bringing social, economic and environmental [benefits](#). It was adopted by the Welsh government in 2011 as part of its [One Wales: One Planet](#) scheme.

One Planet Development is quantified by ecological footprinting, which reveals how much of the Earth's resources people are consuming. When households reduce their own ecological footprints this helps their country reduce its overall footprint.

The One Planet Council provides a bridge between applicants and local planning authorities, with guidance and tools to support anyone making the transition to this more sustainable way of life. It works also with those who have already made that leap, and with policymakers, academics and landowners.

See ; <http://www.oneplanetcouncil.org.uk>

### ***Permaculture***

Permaculture is an ethically based, holistic design system based on ecological principles. It provides a framework for creating productive ecosystems and sustainable human settlements that mimic the patterns found in nature, which deliver diversity, stability, and resilience. Although permaculture is most commonly thought about in connection with gardening & farming, its principles, ethics and design methods can be adapted and used in each individual's own work, home and community.

See; <https://www.permaculture.org.uk/>

### ***Regenerative Farming***

Regenerative agriculture is a conservation and rehabilitation approach to food and farming systems. It focuses on topsoil regeneration, increasing biodiversity improving the water cycle, enhancing ecosystem services, supporting biosequestration, increasing resilience to climate change, and strengthening the health and vitality of farm soil. Practices include recycling as much farm waste as possible and adding composted material from sources outside the farm

### ***Agroecology***

Agroecology – applies ecological science to the design of agricultural systems that can help put an end to food crises and address climate-change and poverty. It enhances soils productivity and protects the crops against pests by relying on the natural environment such as beneficial trees, plants, animals and insects, according to the study.

### ***Cultivate***

Cultivate is a national NGO and Civil Society Organisation focused on education, communication and citizen engagement. Cultivate support a greater understanding of whole systems thinking as a key to sustainability and see community-led projects being essential for a happier, healthier and more resilient future.

See; [www.cultivate.ie](http://www.cultivate.ie)

Earth Bulding UK and Ireland (E.B.U.K.I.)

<http://www.ebuki.co/about.htm#sthash.s2TCsddD.jD40TuCl.dpbs>

Global Ecovillage Network <https://ecovillage.org/>

Co-operative Housing Ireland <https://cooperativehousing.ie/>