

July 4th, 2019

Submission to public consultation on Wicklow County Councils Climate Change

Adaptation Strategy

**By members of The Bray Heads University of the Third Age
Climate Action Sub-group**

1. This submission is made by members of The Bray Heads U3A Climate Action Group. We are a group of senior citizens from the Bray area who are concerned about the impacts of climate change on our grandchildren and future generations and the need for urgent action.
2. We would like to express our gratitude to Jim Callery of Wicklow County Council for presenting the Adaptation Strategy at our meeting on June 26th. His understanding of the issues and the way in which he shared his knowledge with us in a way that was easy to understand was much appreciated. He gave us important insights into the purpose of the document and was a great help in preparing this submission.
3. We accept the scientific evidence and consensus that climate change and biodiversity loss represent critical threats to the future of life on earth - threats which humans have largely created but which we also have the power to mitigate
4. The aim of the Sub-group is to inform ourselves and generate awareness of the causes of, and solutions to, this looming crisis. We seek to identify ways that we ourselves can play a part in combating the threat; and also to encourage, organise and participate in actions with this objective at our family, Group, local and national level.
5. We welcome the publication of Wicklow County Council's (WCC) Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and for the opportunity to make a submission as part of the public consultation process.
6. We also welcome the fact that WCC's is at the forefront as the first county to declare a climate and biodiversity emergency.
7. We recognise the thorough research which underpins the Strategy and in particular the way in which climate change will impact specifically in County Wicklow in a clear and accessible manner. This enables the reader to relate directly to the threats and therefore the need for urgent action.
8. While the document is clearly intended as an Adaptation Strategy, it does make reference to Mitigation and also notes that some of the adaptation actions could also contribute to a reduction in greenhouse gases. We note that the Strategy is intended to be an evolving document as circumstances change including, presumably, the

recently published Government's Climate Change Action Plan.

9. WCC needs to move rapidly from adaptation to focusing on mitigation and the implementation of actions which will really make a difference to making our communities sustainable and green. These include, for example, planning, retrofitting of buildings, and increasing penalties and enforcement of environmental damage including felling of mature trees, illegal dumping etc. It is critical that any transition to a low or zero carbon society adheres to the principles of climate justice, safeguarding those who are likely to be adversely affected, for example, through increased carbon taxes or loss of jobs.
10. The actions proposed appear to be reasonable and underpinned by evidence given the statutory remit of WCC. It is focused on risk assessment for the Council's own operations for the use of its staff and it is a work in progress. It is, however, a cause of concern that many of the key actions at this point do not have a budget attached to them and the key performance indicators are yet to be developed. There is therefore a real risk that the Strategy will simply be aspirational, given competing budgetary demands. It is essential, we believe, that the Strategy is implemented in full and that all actions have an associated budget and firm timelines.
11. Of particular concern is in respect of Theme 6: Community Health and Wellbeing is not fully developed. This theme is particularly important given that addressing the challenges of climate change requires us all at individual, community, regional, national and global levels to radically change the way we live and work and our expectations for the future. Ultimately, climate adaptation aims to build resilient communities. It is therefore essential for WCC to provide the necessary leadership and to ensure that they can garner the support of citizens. The Strategy does not tell us as concerned residents of County Wicklow how we fit in to the Strategy and what therefore we should be doing. Clearly, the WCC Climate Change Adaptation Strategy represents only part of the picture of what is required across the country. For many reasons, WCC is in a strong position to play a leading role in combating climate change and biodiversity loss and a critical element of this will be to bring together all the key players. A strongly delivered Theme 6 has the potential to fully engage the people of Wicklow to be active participants in adaptation and mitigation actions and in time encourage and enable Wicklow's citizens to provide bottom up political pressure.
12. Finally, and on a related matter, the younger generation across the world are playing a leading role in demanding action on climate change and biodiversity loss. We would therefore strongly encourage the Council to further develop the Green Schools Initiative. This is an excellent outreach programme and has a critical role in generating an understanding of the issues and the actions required among young people.

Jane Grimson on behalf of members of the Climate Action Sub-group

Jane.grimson@tcd.ie