



POSITION PAPER

OF THE



Waterford Youth Advisory Climate Council (YACC)



Who We Are

“Without the earth we have no home.” – Ireland's Youth Advisory Climate Council
 “Those who have the privilege to know have the duty to act.” - Albert Einstein.

We are a group of young European, specifically Irish, citizens passionate about making a change in our environment for the better. We are dedicated to addressing environmental challenges in our local community and care about the planet and our future generations. As members of the global community we have become aware that human activities are having a negative impact on us but more profoundly on countries in the global south. We recognize the urgent need for action to mitigate the effects of climate change and protect our people and planet. We care about the protection of our home, the planet earth, and the animals, sea life and humans that live on it. Our group specifically has some serious environmental concerns such as laziness around recycling, food and water waste, fast fashion, littering, single-use plastics, unnecessary car journeys and letting car engines run when you could turn them off. We especially have a love for bees. In addition, the unsustainable manufacturing processes and methodologies used by companies continues to be a grave concern. In particular when it comes to electronics - the lack of compatibility or ability to replace parts encourage unsustainable consumption practices i.e. buying new rather than replacing. We got interested in taking action after visually seeing litter in our communities, understanding how bad climate change really is, hearing and learning from the news, school projects and workshops about animal extinctions and upsetting events such as extreme weather events due to global warming e.g. forest fires. We also have a passion for educating others who are uninformed on where the climate is going and encouraging them to get involved and make a change.



The Emergency - Ireland

“Lack of empathy, sympathy and too much apathy”. – Ireland's YACC.

In Waterford, but also in the rest of Ireland, we see so many issues that are of great importance and fall in line with the interconnected UN Sustainable Development Goals. The three sustainable development goals (SDGs) under consideration are SDG 11, 12 and SDG 13. Within this framework, communities in Ireland face a multitude of challenges that directly impact their quality of life and well-being. The issues encompass a wide spectrum ranging from environmental concerns to social and economic aspects. Apathy is prevalent, as is climate change denial, which leads to lack of concern or actions and this is then mirrored in the slow moving efforts from those in charge. Connected to this there is a lack of education around these critical environmental issues. Effective waste management is a huge problem across the nation, particularly the mishandling of recyclables, littering and pollution. The absence of water bottle refill stations contributes to the proliferation of single-use plastic and over half our waterways

are polluted. (SWAN, 2019) A Gov.ie report lists the biggest litter culprits: Cigarettes 53.9%; Packing litter 14.9%; Food related 12.3%; Sweet related 9.4%. (Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications , 2021) Insufficient pollination for bees, lack of nature reserves and wild natural spaces are a threat to biodiversity. The lack of entertainment options for teens that do not involve money fosters unhealthy behaviours, apathy and feelings of a lack of community and belonging. Moreover, the gender pay gap persists, hindering inclusive economic growth. While abandoned buildings underscore a limited retail variety, the lack of local businesses exacerbates the challenge, without which achieving goal 13 and 11 will not be possible. We wonder are the lack of locally owned shops due to the high cost of rent and lack of government funded incentives. Homelessness is another issue - at the end of January 2024 95 people were homeless in Waterford which is almost twice as high as other counties in the South-East (Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, 2024). However, this number does not include young people who cannot afford to leave home and the number of young adults still living in the family home is rising enormously. According to the RTE.ie there are 81712 vacant properties in Ireland which could address these issues. (Wilson, 2023) Cycling infrastructure also continues to be a safety concern with lanes disappearing and reappearing randomly, no protection in cycle lanes and speed limits far too high in school areas to allow students to cycle to school to name a few.

In Detail:

SDG 13: (13.3) We see most of our issues in the context of this goal but a lack of education on the environment and climate suggests a need to address climate change awareness and action.

SDG 11: (11.7) Lack of fruiting trees in public spaces and abandoned buildings contribute to an aesthetically unpleasing urban environment. The absence of free entertainment options for teens and insufficient nature reserves align with SDG11's target to provide universal access to safe inclusive and accessible green and public spaces. (11.6) Absence of separate bins, paper waste, and lack of water bottle refill stations contribute to inadequate waste management.

SDG 5: The gender pay gap continues to persist and is a manifestation of gender inequality.

SDG 12: (12.5 and 12.1) Fast fashion and excessive waste contribute to unsustainable consumption and production patterns and well as the proportion of water used in the industry. Receipts not being recyclable and other litter issues also highlight concerns related to this.

SDG 15: (15.5) Lack of pollination for bees is connected to the broader issues of biodiversity loss and the need for sustainable land use.

SDG 8: (8.3) Lack of support for local businesses and the absence of a strong local community, particularly in the heart of Waterford city, is connected to the goal promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth.





Local & National Policies

Local and national policies have some issues, they can be unapproachable, don't cover enough and are not well implemented. It can be hard to find documents and then dig through them, the language can be confusing as well as aspirational rather than concrete with no real hard deadlines or roadmaps for implementation. There's a lack of transparency and clear results, perhaps a percentage completed on projects would be good oversight of the work. Waterford council "Aim to be carbon neutral by 2030" but there are no concrete answers on how they plan to achieve this. They also have a Single-Use Plastic policy to eliminate single-use plastics in their offices and at events, but there has been first-hand evidence of plastic water bottles still being used in council meetings. It would be great to see more policies to do with every day running and sustainability such as: No-Printing, Waste Management, Parks Management to include fruiting trees and bushes. etc. Websites are hard to navigate and seem to not be regularly updated making it hard to find relevant policies. These issues are seen at the local level and then become even more evident at the national level.

There are a number of promising policies and actions though. The new Climate Action Plan covers a lot of ground, and we were lucky to be involved in the consultation process of this. Public consultations are held, which is wonderful, but they could be adapted to make them more accessible for young people and people from different socio-economic backgrounds to attend such as - where they're held, when they're held, language used, communication channels not satisfactory, etc. The new TFI bikes are a welcome addition to the city as is the recent reduction in public transport fares. This is a great initiative to encourage more use of the public transport system, but we believe there should be one price for everybody regardless of whether they hold a leap card or not. Although there's issues with greenwashing, it is promising to see small steps being taken to a more sustainable future by organisations and companies. The deposit return scheme recently introduced is another positive step in the right direction. Although it has its own teething problems we see this financial incentive on recycling as an overall positive and believe it will become very effective. The introduction of the climate action fund for community groups is greatly welcomed and we hope many groups avail of this. The national biodiversity data centre is an incredible resource and it's wonderful to see this so well supported. Policies on no hedge cutting during nesting season, cutting down on mowing during summer months on council land and roadways and wildflower planting are also comforting to see.

Recommendations

Strengthen Communications (with a focus on including young voices): We suggest an overhaul of how policies are communicated to make them accessible, in simple language and clear using various channels that young people use (the local council still do not have an Instagram account). If young people are to be involved and included in local policies and decisions, they must be facilitated to allow them to do this. We would like to see new policies addressing a variety of environmental issues and more of an effort to enforce the policies already in place. We see the local website is being updated and would like to see an area where policies are clearly accessible, regularly updated and easy to understand. Use more concrete language in policies and documents and include outlines of how they envision them becoming a reality e.g. a roadmap that a general reader could understand.

Waste Management: Waterford council should implement comprehensive waste management strategies especially in businesses and managed apartment building to ensure a selection of waste streams are available. Also positioning of segregated bins (recycling/compost/general) in key locations across Waterford They must prioritize reduction and composting first and then



recycling. Investing in education programmes and infrastructures for waste separation and collection will help minimise the amount of waste sent to landfills and incinerators. We believe Waterford could be a best practice case study for waste management and could be used for implementation across all 32 counties.

Education: Fostering a feeling of care and ownership is crucial in making better policies and decisions about our people and planet. We can see, and have experienced, the great environmental education that happens at a primary level. However, there is a massive gap in this education from secondary cycle up. We suggest locally that more collaboration and support, funding or otherwise, from the council and decision makers with organisations working in these areas is vital and should be considered and implemented. We suggest a national consideration of including mandatory environmental and social justice education in all education facilities such as secondary schools, ETB's, Universities, early school leaver programmes and other education facilities. This type of education must use creative, participatory, and inclusive methodologies to ensure all citizens have experience of this education. We suggest national support and crucial funding of those organisations who are already working in this area.

Treat Climate Change Like Covid: In addressing climate change, governments should adopt a proactive and coordinated approach similar to their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Just as the pandemic required swift and decisive action to mitigate its spread and impact, the climate crisis demands urgent and collective efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, adapt to environmental changes, and build resilience. Governments must prioritize climate action as a top policy agenda, mobilizing resources, implementing stringent regulations, and fostering international cooperation. Like the pandemic, climate change poses existential threats to global health, economies, and security, necessitating a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach. By treating climate change with the same level of urgency, determination, and solidarity as COVID-19, governments can effectively tackle this planetary challenge and safeguard the well-being of current and future generations. Then keep this momentum going.

Establishment of Grant Programmes: Local councils should establish grant programmes specifically designed to support local businesses occupying vacant buildings. These grants could cover a portion of the renovation costs, facilitate access to capital, or provide tax incentives. To ensure accessibility and ease of participation, the application process should be streamlined and user-friendly. Clear guidelines and support resources should be provided. They should be designed to accommodate a diverse range of businesses, including startups, small enterprises, and social enterprises. Flexibility in eligibility criteria, such as allowing for mixed-use developments or creative business concepts, would encourage innovation and diversity in the use of vacant buildings. Another option would be to work with local schools e.g. during their TY mini business projects.

Energy & Solar Panels: There needs to be a meaningful push on renewable energy particularly solar panels from local and national governments. There should be solar panels on every building in Ireland. There is a rollout of solar panel installation on schools, but the government could make an investment in the future by rolling this out to more businesses, buildings and homes with the trade-off being the excess energy goes straight back to the grid. This will have the knock-on effect of encouraging more EV drivers as they will be able to recharge at work. On-shore and off-shore wind farms should also be considered - there's plenty of area for expansion in Waterford.

Cycling Infrastructure: Authorities need to promote safe cycling infrastructure especially in school areas to encourage young people to cycle to school. A reduction in speed limits should be

implemented in key areas. The creation of a cyclist awareness programme would be beneficial for the safety of our cyclists and encourage more people to cycle. These specific projects need to be delivered in a timely fashion.

Conclusion

The environmental and social challenges facing Waterford and Ireland, require urgent and concerted action from all stakeholders, including local and national government, businesses, community organizations, and residents. Waterford’s Youth Advisory Climate Council urges policymakers to prioritize sustainability, equity, and resilience in their decision-making processes to ensure a better future for generations to come. The YACC recommends meaningfully engaging with and implementing these suggestions. By working together and implementing innovative solutions, we can build a greener, healthier, and more vibrant Ireland for all.

Sincerely,

The Waterford YACC

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