



Global Action Plan

Submission to Fingal County Council on the Draft Climate Action Plan 2024-2029

October 2023

Global Action Plan welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of a holistic and strategic Climate Action Plan for the Fingal area, and congratulates Fingal County Council on the quality of the draft Plan, as presented to the public for consultation.

We welcome the draft Council's emphasis in the draft Action Plan on measures focused both on mitigation and adaptation, in line with best practice recommendations, including those by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

At Global Action Plan, we believe that Ireland must do its utmost to urgently reduce the level of greenhouse gas we emit, and make transformational changes to the way we organise our society, ranging from energy generation and industry, to how we plan and manage cities, transportation and food systems. What we need is radical change at all levels: individuals, communities, companies and countries. We need to change the rules, change our habits and change our mindsets.

Ireland is, per capita, one of the worst climate polluters and a large part of our national greenhouse gas emissions is related to how we have chosen to live our lives. The decisions we make at home contribute directly to our poor climate track record as a country: how we heat our homes, how we cook, what we eat, how we travel, and the products we buy.

To achieve that, Global Action Plan helps people understand the extent of their own personal contributions to our unsustainable lifestyles, and we support people in devising strategies to reduce their own impact. These actions are important in themselves, and they also inspire others to make the changes that we so urgently need.

In that context, we welcome the central position (on page 11) that education, awareness and behaviour change take up in the diagramme of the required strategy.

Overall aims

We also welcome the **Vision and Mission statements** in the draft document. Fingal has played a leadership role as a Local Authority in many of the relevant areas, and can continue that role. However, we recommend that Fingal sets more ambitious goals, for instance by moving the target for climate neutrality from 2050 to 2040, if not sooner - as other local authorities have done.

We welcome the inclusion of **Inclusion and Engagement** as a critical element of the strategy. This is an important overall objective, and the consultation process itself shows that the implementation of this aspiration is very difficult. For instance, the Draft Action Plan - a is a 150+ page document, which is virtually inaccessible to people with a disability or literacy challenges. In recognition of this fact, the Council has produced videos and is organising public consultation events, but good practice would have suggested that a greater effort to reach out and consult with communities - particularly marginalised communities - in a more direct way would be good.

GAP welcomes the fact that the Action Plan is situated explicitly in **the wider policy context**, as set out on page 14. At the same time, it would have been helpful to have included clear references to an overall strategy for the entire Dublin region (even if some of the targets on page 16 do refer to Dublin as a whole). The document is also good on setting out the wider context of climate change and the climate action required in response.

Just Transition

The references to **Just Transition** are very important and valuable. Climate change required societal change at all levels, but it equally requires specific and deliberate action and policy initiatives to ensure that the costs of the transition, as well as the benefits of the changes, are spread equitably across society, with those most affected by climate change and those least able to shoulder the burden of change are protected and supported.

It is encouraging to see the draft Action Plan refer to the concept of Just Transition, but we feel that the practical implications of Fingal adopting the concept should be more clearly articulated in the document.

Unleashing community potential for change

Our main observation about the draft Action Plan is that, while the paper makes ample reference to the need to “**actively engage and inform communities**” (eg on page 16), it is missing a reference to what should be the aim of such engagement activities: the encouragement and development of **local informed climate actions**.

There is a wealth of information indicating that people in Ireland are worried about the climate crisis. They believe action is necessary and are willing to do their part, but there are practical reasons why this awareness does not translate into action: For instance, media coverage focuses on stories of doom and gloom, with little perspective of hope offered, contributing to an environment of fear and a belief that a transition to a post-carbon society will involve costs, sacrifice and a loss of freedom. This belief, coupled with the relative lack of visibility of existing climate action initiatives, can lead people to think that the rest of society does not share their climate concerns, or that personal climate action is meaningless, until such time that “others” have changed their behaviour first.

The Fingal Climate Action Plan must **address the barriers people experience** in trying to tackle climate change. Such barriers relate not only to funding and knowledge, but also to values and perceptions of disempowerment. The Action Plan must address the ‘**spiral of inaction**’ that results from the a combination of factors:

- People do not see enough other people take action;
- People feel their concerns are not widely shared, as climate is not a topic regularly brought up in public and private discussions;
- People believe that climate change is not going to affect them in the here and now, but that it is a future or remote problem;
- People worry about the financial costs and practical inconveniences of transitioning to a more low-carbon lifestyle;
- People are unsure which actions will have the greatest impact on their carbon footprint.

This combination of factors is detrimental to people's wellbeing and their willingness to try and take action to tackle climate change in their own communities and homes - and in the process they end up reinforcing the misperception that others don't care about climate change.

Yet we know that this 'spiral of inaction' can be reversed: When people see that others care about the environment, and when they hear their friends and peers talk about climate change, they will understand that their own concerns are more widespread than they assumed, and they will be more likely to feel that their own efforts do matter. And as more people share knowledge on climate action, more people will demand sustainable practices and products, and the prices of alternatives to our current carbon-intensive products will begin to come down. The 'spiral of inaction' will then have turned into a **self-reinforcing 'virtuous cycle' of informed and effective climate action.**

The Draft Action Plan would be significantly strengthened if it addressed these barriers to change, and presented proposals on how Fingal County Council can help unleash the power of the virtuous cycle. Potential strategies in the context could include, for instance:

- Public communications strategies that emphasise what needs to change, who needs to change, and the extent to which change is already happening;
- Highlighting the many encouraging examples being set by businesses, citizens groups and local authorities all over Ireland, as templates and inspiration for local action;
- Framing climate action as a positive step that individuals and groups can take to realise greener, fairer and more liveable communities;
- Acknowledging that climate action is a journey, where each step matters, both for its own climate impact and for its potential to inspire others;
- Working with communities to encourage them along their climate action journey, by providing safe and nurturing spaces to deconstruct problems from a local and global perspective, and exploring challenges, barriers and opportunities;
- Supporting communities to develop tangible community action plans;
- Connecting communities with initiatives locally and nationally, to promote knowledge sharing and mutual inspiration.

We welcome the Council's recognition of the importance of community engagement, and the related appointment of a **Fingal Community Climate Action Officer** to guide and support communities in developing projects and initiatives. We would encourage Fingal to ensure this role is enabled to put a particular emphasis on local climate action, particularly in the more disadvantaged communities and local areas.

Community gardening

GAP welcomes the many references to the need to re-think the use of land, and the benefits of changing approaches to gardens and public green spaces. The emphasis on community rain gardens, discouraging hard paving in private gardens and retrofitting rain gardens and water butt installations is very important from an adaptation and mitigation perspective.

In addition, we wish to highlight the many benefits of community gardens, including the 'GLAS @ TU Dublin' garden supported by Fingal County Council in Blanchardstown/Corduff. There is a wealth of evidence from academic studies that such green urban spaces have many benefits, not only in terms of food production, health and biodiversity, but also in relation to social inclusion, solidarity, and mental health.

We would welcome a more explicit emphasis on the reasons why Fingal County Council will support allotments and community gardens.

Green Procurement

It is positive to see Fingal County Council's intention to lead by example through Green Public Procurement actions, in order to reduce its own waste and improve its land use management.

We would encourage the Council to work with established organisations in this area, including the Community Resources Network Ireland.

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