



[Cork Climate Conversations]

Public Consultations facilitated by
Change by Degrees, for Cork City Council

Part of the Cork City
Climate Action Plan 2024-2029



Comhairle Cathrach Chorcaí
Cork City Council

Contents

- 1 Introduction** 2
 - 1.1 Conversations Summary** 4
 - 1.2 Approach** 6

- 2 The Conversations** 8
 - 2.1 Public Sector Workshop**10
 - 2.2 Communities Workshop**12
 - 2.3 Councillors Workshop**14
 - 2.4 Business / Private Sector Workshop**16



Introduction

A series of four workshops

Change by Degrees was engaged by Cork City Council to facilitate a series of four workshops to consult with stakeholder groups on the forthcoming Cork City Climate Action Plan (CC CAP). Local authorities are mandated to produce a Climate Action Plan (CAP) by the *Climate Action and Low-Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021* and the national *Climate Action Plan 2023*.

Cork has also been selected by the European Commission as one of 100 cities that will participate in the EU Climate-Neutral and Smart Cities Mission. This sets the ambition high for the CC CAP, which will build upon the Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028, the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024, and the Cork Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy 2040.

The purpose of the consultation workshops was to listen and to gather ideas and insights from the different stakeholder groups to inform the CAP. As such, the focus was on identifying impactful and innovative ideas, on promoting

collaboration, and on actions that deliver co-benefits and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Four workshops were held during May and June 2023 for the Public Sector, Community Sector, Business Sector and for Cork City Councillors.

Members of Cork City Council's Climate Action Unit attended all four workshops, as did Ann Doherty, Chief Executive of Cork City Council, who delivered opening and closing remarks, and with input from Fearghal Reidy, Director of Services, and Peter Medway, Community Climate Action Officer.



“We have license to innovate.”

Ann Doherty,
Chief Executive of Cork City Council

1.1 Conversations summary

The four workshops revealed a high level of interest in climate action, excitement about the Mission City ambition, and creativity and bravery to try new things. There are big ideas that will need significant investment and coherent and cohesive leadership. But there is also permission to try, to ask for help, and to challenge others to find solutions rather than obstacles.



Greater collaboration between public sector bodies, a large-scale retrofitting programme for public and private buildings, establishing a 'Forum of Failures' for city stakeholders, and reducing traffic in the city centre, are some of the stand-out themes that arose during each of the conversations.

Given that the two main sources of greenhouse gas emissions for the city are transport and buildings, focusing investment on upgrading city buildings and making the streets attractive to people to walk, cycle, dine, shop and socialise are priorities. Innovation will be needed and ambition to mobilise the resources needed to make this happen – from co-ops to EU grants, every avenue should be explored.

A recurring opinion of participants in all sessions was that there is a greater likelihood of success if the focus is on delivering social good rather than emissions reductions – making homes cozy and cheap to run, providing efficient public transport, reducing car usage in the city centre, ending dereliction are headlines that could gain broad support and deliver climate benefits.

In summing up, Ann Doherty stressed the need to use the structures we have to drive change, to increase the pace of action, to prioritise behavioural change and to use the City's license to innovate wisely. Building support from the bottom up for systemic change will be key.

Common themes and ideas that emerged:

- The need for **more collaboration between public sector bodies in the city on an ongoing basis** (e.g., a permanent forum).
- The opportunity to pool resources and collaborate to find shared solutions to transport, building retrofit and legislative barriers.
- The need to work with partners outside the city to have an impact – biodiversity, people and emissions connect in and out of the city via the county and beyond.
- The importance for leaders in the city, in environment or in communities, to cede or share power in order to scale-up change.
- The need for authorities and groups to build and earn trust.
- The desire to think big, beyond pilots and to take risks and try new things to achieve the city's climate and sustainability goals.
- People are so time-poor we cannot add to their workload or mental load – we must go to them, where they already gather, volunteer and spend their free time.
- We need to **tell stories, speak plain English and make climate action a feeling.**

Discussions throughout the workshops focused on:

- **Improving communications and changing the narrative** to drive action.
- **Mobilising resources** behind big ideas for cork – like financing a solar city (starting with all publicly owned buildings and homes) and retrofitting buildings. This could involve the Council getting a loan (guaranteed by the State), applying for funding from the EU, acquiring investment from the State.
- The need to learn from COVID-19 when we acted in emergency mode and changed norms and rules to achieve outcomes. The same needs to apply to the climate and nature emergencies. How can Cork show what is possible?
- Readiness to work together to get things done.

Throughout the workshops, it emerged that many of the ideas that surfaced were essentially social ideas – and that making Cork a city that is more liveable will drive down emissions and increase resilience.

Engaging the public with campaigns to bring people back to live in the city centre, to end dereliction, and to reduce air pollution and congestion – are more likely to gain public and business support than projects labelled as 'climate action'.

1.2 Approach

The roundtable workshops were designed to be interactive – introducing the context and background to the workshops, including presenting the breakdown of greenhouse gas emissions for Cork City (Fig. 1), conducted by UCC.

This recent research was shared to focus minds on the challenge of achieving climate neutrality and the need to address transport and the built environment emissions to have an impact.

Emissions Breakdown by Sector for Cork City

Sector	CO ₂ -eq (ktonnes)
Household	332
Road Transport	290
Commercial Services & Industry	216
Public Services	65
Agriculture, Land Use & Fishing	62
Waste	22
Total	987

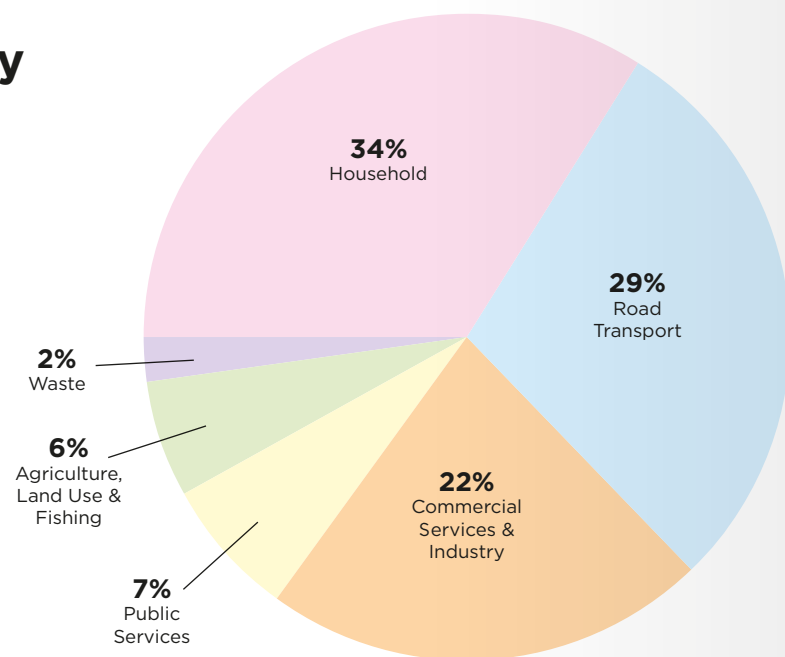


Fig. 1 Breakdown of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions by Sector for Cork City (UCC, 2023)



This was followed by an Inspire session, to promote creative thinking, and an Involve session, to gather ideas and promote discussion on collaboration and collective action.

Each workshop was also reminded of Cork’s membership of the EU Cities Mission and the ambition and timeline of the actions needed to achieve its goals.

The workshops were tailored to the audience, allowing for differentiated approaches, and each contained a component of pitching the most innovative and impactful ideas to the room.



Decent Public Transport
 > smaller buses

- Cycle lanes aren't designed safely. Cars should not be able to cut through lanes.
- Pedestrians should be given priority with green lights to cross regularly, automatically and stay green for longer.
- Rivers should be opened for transport with solar panels should be given free to homes with south-facing roofs - as in Germany.
- Need for electric charge points

2

The Conversations

2.1 Public Sector Workshop

This workshop was attended by representatives of public sector bodies in Cork, from third-level institutions to the Port of Cork, the HSE, Bus Eireann and Irish Rail, among others.

During two discussion sessions, participants were asked:

What MORE can you do to reduce public sector emissions in Cork?

What can you do to decarbonise Cork, beyond the public sector (e.g., in Transport and the Built Environment)?

Participants were asked to consider the following three parameters when selecting their best ideas:

Does your idea:

- materially reduce emissions?
- create societal co-benefits (health, nature, jobs, etc.)?
- benefit from radical collaboration?

Each table put forward **one idea** in response to each of these questions and gave a one-minute pitch to the plenary.

The whole group then voted for the most popular ideas, which were:

- **Radical collaboration** to break down siloes and work together to make the case for new regulation and funding models that can accelerate climate action. This would enable visionary ideas like **integrated transport linked to Nature Based Solutions and floodwater management**.
- **Buy a wind farm** and develop a private wire to Cork City Council to procure the city's own renewable energy.

These ideas were closely followed by:

- Create a **state-backed insurance product** to de-risk the purchase and use of re-used and repaired goods and furniture, enabling public sector entities to participate in the circular economy.



Other ideas emerging from the discussion groups were:

Collaboration

- Establish a permanent forum of public sector bodies in Cork City to lead on reducing the 7% emissions from the public sector. Use technology to show the results to the wider public – visualise the actions and impact to inspire others.
- Create a Cork City Network of public sector workers responsible for climate action to help each other, pool resources, share skills and find solutions.
- Collaborate to pool funding and take risks with public money – share public resources between bodies to do more and maximise impact.
- Culture change – employee engagement to encourage behavioural change. Create awareness, provide information and share knowledge.
- United estates – collaboration and sharing of information between public sector bodies to enable faster and more effective retrofitting and management of facilities. Get all public sector bodies to do roof-top solar (and wind where possible), share knowledge and resources, get the best rates and change legislation if needed.
- Align planning cycles across the public sector to enable data sharing and planning. Consider joint support for mobility projects, shared data and shared budget with a central resource for mobility.
- Collaborate on the design of Cork City – use combined purchase power to drive change.

Mobility

- Public sector catch-up with the private sector on remote working – adopt more generous remote working options, share public sector buildings for hot desking to reduce commutes, and eliminate parking spaces for public sector workers but offer free shared 24-hour transport instead.
- Eliminate or pay for public sector employee parking.
- Make every day a no-school day on the roads – work from the schools out to reduce congestion and commuting. Drive down transport emissions by ending private car use for travel to education from third level to creches.
- Shared public sector transport – provide free, shared public transport to public sector work venues. Use more virtual appointments with GP, Emergency Department etc. to reduce travel.
- Tackle nimbyism through collaboration. Make housing estates permeable to provide easy access to buses.
- Pedestrianise neighbourhoods – embark on tactical urbanism. Test and try!
- Integrated ticketing and transport – for example park and ride + EV charging + roof solar + connected cycle paths.

2.2 Communities Workshop

This workshop was attended by individuals in a personal capacity or representing their community or residents' groups.

Again, participants were shown the sources of Cork City's emissions and were asked to reflect on what role they could play in creating interdisciplinary solutions to reduce emissions while creating a societal co-benefit.

For the **Inspire** section of the workshop, Mark Mellett presented on the need for courageous leadership, building trust and the importance of equity.

Work in California was highlighted as an example of how social equity played a crucial role in reducing emissions while improving air quality in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Copenhagen was also identified as a city where actions taken were reducing emissions and creating multiple co-benefits for society.

What is your big, bold, disruptive idea for achieving climate neutrality by 2030?

After a brain-storming session, each table took one minute to deliver a pitch on their big, bold idea. Ideas included:

- **Implement existing plans** – the city has many detailed plans for transport, biodiversity and community development. Implementing these should be the first step.
- **Think big and act big** – make cork city a solar city – pay for solar on every roof.
- Dig up the streets and **maximise river transport**.
- Make Cork a **car-free city centre** – start one day a week.

- **Create a Forum of Failure** – to share mistakes and failures as well as successes to drive change and avoid repeating mistakes.
- **Authorities should listen more and talk less** – communities have ideas, they need to be heard and supported.
- **Support the development of co-ops and provide interest-free Green Loans** to communities to empower them to deliver action.

In the **Involve** section of the workshop the topic of inclusivity was covered, looking at ways to bring all voices to the table and leave no one behind in a **Just Transition**.

The following question was asked:

How can we work together better to scale up action and impact?

Examples from Paris and Costa Rica were highlighted, where problems like inclusivity and hard-to-reach audiences were tackled effectively.

A discussion was held then on the question: **How can we engage more people and make good, quick decisions?** Each table reflected on this question under the headings below, noting their key points:

Who else needs to be at the table?

- Future generations, Children, Youth, Elders
- Working-class families
- Minorities, Travellers, Migrants
- Single parents
- Homeless people
- Time poor / squeezed middle
- Politicians
- Influencers
- Planners
- Teachers / educators
- Corporates
- Energy companies
- Clubs and societies
- Residents' associations
- Citizen scientists
- Credit Unions

How can we get them involved?

- Invite them in – e.g., Town hall meetings
- City Council to provide a 'hub of tools' for people to use
- Go to them where they gather already (in communities, clubs, societies, at work, in schools, libraries, public spaces, allotments, chippers and pubs, music concerts, festivals)
- Accessible, non-technical conversations
- Tell stories and use simple language
- Outdoor classrooms
- Teach-a-skill days
- 'Show and tell' and 'How to' Roadshows
- Address social problems like housing and dereliction
- Days & events to celebrate the environment
- Participatory budgeting
- Centralised community function, as in Sydney
- Focus messages on public health - not climate – as in Costa Rica
- Peer-to-peer discussions

How do we keep them involved?

- Empower people through involvement
- Demonstrate health and wellbeing benefits
- Provide a support network
- Address eco-anxiety
- Make it convenient – especially access to supports
- 4-day working week – so people have more time
- Make it about people
- Make it a positive feeling
- Make it fun
- One campaign at a time – show results
- Design and use incentives
- More than digital communication
- Connect local to global
- Make it OK to fail
- Create community hubs
- Celebrate success
- Make friends
- Provide childcare
- Really listen

In closing, one participant took the floor to emphasise the need for a *change of heart*, to focus on the values that tie us together as communities and to help people to belong.

Cultivating gratitude and care in Cork's communities could go a long way to creating the social dynamic and mindset needed for the cultural shift to deliver climate neutrality.

2.3 Councillors Workshop

This workshop was attended by Cork City Councillors, including the Lord Mayor. As with the other workshops, participants were shown the sources of Cork City’s emissions and received contextual information to ground the discussion.

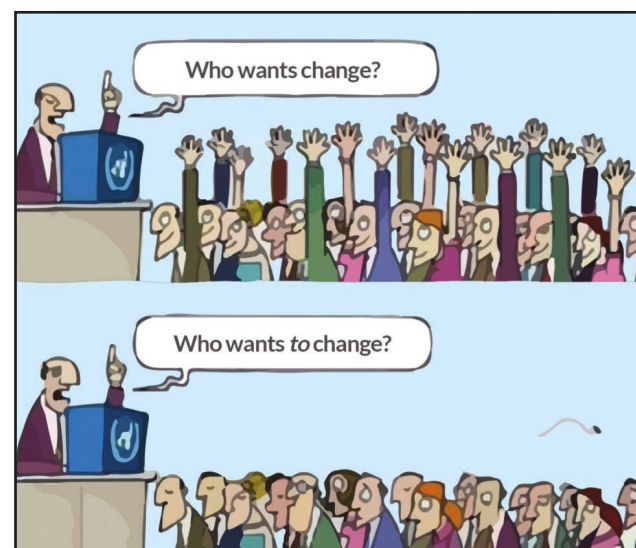
For the **Inspire** section of the workshop, Councillors were invited to reflect on their role as **influencers** and **communicators** and asked how they can use their messaging to help Cork achieve climate neutrality by 2030. The participants reflected on messaging and communications that have gone well in driving the city forward and others that have been more difficult and why.

There was a discussion on why people oppose change when surveys show overall support for climate action. The need to adopt new mindsets, to have better messages and more diverse messengers and think big were all emphasised. Reaching new audiences was identified as a priority.

Councillors were introduced to some climate communications tools and rules and then were challenged to write a tweet putting these into action.

The **Involve** session, focused on the role of Councillors as leaders. Leadership was explored in the context of self, others, and collective, and then each table answered the question:

How will you lead differently to achieve Cork City’s vision?



Discussion prompt used during the workshop

Throughout the workshop, planning and process were identified as barriers to leadership and success. However, it was acknowledged that as leaders, Councillors have power and a responsibility to use this power to deliver a safe, resilient, climate-smart city for the citizens of Cork. Ideas collected as part of this exercise are presented below:

What Can You Do Differently?

Self

- Have confidence to engage on climate topics.
- Be brave.
- Build new skills and educate ourselves.
- Use public transport more.
- Cycle.
- Highlight the co-benefits of climate action.
- Don't be overly critical.
- Change the narrative – focus on the positives and not just the costs.
- Talk to people about climate more – and allocate time for listening.

Who do you need on your side?

Others

- The people of cork – we need to feel their support.
- Especially diverse and minority groups.
- Need to engage other Councillors.
- Need to engage the media, community groups and faith groups.
- Leverage contacts in central government and the EU.
- Engage with scientists and state agencies.

What mechanisms would increase collaboration?

Collective

- Better and honest communications.
- More incentives – ‘it can’t be all stick’.
- Align strategies and plans with the appropriate facilities, goods, and services to support behaviour change.
- Create safe spaces for discussion.
- Specialist forums.
- Focus on fairness.
- Involve central government.
- Work with schools.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate.

2.3 Business / Private Sector Workshop

This workshop was attended by representatives of the business community in Cork, ranging in size from micro-businesses to multinational companies. Participants were shown the sources of Cork City’s emissions and were asked to reflect on what role they could play in creating interdisciplinary solutions to reduce emissions while creating a societal co-benefit.

For the **Inspire** section of the workshop, Change by Degrees presented three examples of cities transforming their transport and energy systems, with a focus on buildings. Copenhagen (Denmark), Bristol (UK) and Curitiba (Brazil) were identified as cities where actions taken were

reducing emissions and creating a plethora of co-beneficial outcomes for society. We then heard from three **inspiring** Cork businesses, who delivered short stories of their own sustainable activities that resulted in cost-savings, reputational gain and emissions and waste reductions.



Justine Looney
The Cork Flower Studio

Justine Looney, co-owner of The Cork Flower Studio, shared insights on step-by-step ways to reduce waste and emissions in a small business. Starting with one change – providing reusable glass vases instead of plastic wrap for flowers – Justine and her team gradually introduced more and more sustainability measures: they only sell coffee in reusable cups; they deliver flowers in the city on their cargo bike; and they close on a Saturday to take care of themselves and their families.



Kevin Cottrell
Cyprus Avenue / Old Oak

Kevin Cottrell, General Manager and Accountant at Cyprus Ave and The Old Oak, spoke about the cost savings gained by installing 94 solar panels and plans to install 47 more, with an expected payback in 3.5 years. They are now also exploring water harvesting and heat transfer from their appliances as next steps.



Barbara-Anne Richardson
Heineken Ireland

Barbara-Anne Richardson, Sustainability and Public Affairs Manager at Heineken, shared their story of success in building interest and accountability amongst employees through a range of activities, including their ‘What’s the Suss’ employee engagement programme on sustainability.



Two discussion sessions followed. Focusing first on the business scale and then the city scale, they addressed:

What’s not working? What’s the nut you can’t crack when it comes to sustainability?

What can you do to decarbonize Cork? What’s your big, brave, bold idea?

Participants were asked to consider the following three parameters when selecting their best ideas:

Does your idea:

- materially reduce emissions?
- create societal co-benefits (health, nature, jobs, etc.)?
- benefit from radical collaboration?

Each table put forward one idea in response to each of these questions and gave a one-minute pitch to the plenary for discussion.

1. What’s not working? What’s the nut you can’t crack when it comes to sustainability?

Topics that emerged as problem areas for businesses included:

- **Supporting and upskilling suppliers** to have sustainability policies and procedures so that they can successfully continue to do business together.
- **Convincing employees** that the business is genuinely committed to transformation.
- **Mandated sustainability actions by larger corporations onto smaller businesses** that in theory appear sustainable but pass on the burden of responsibility to the small business (i.e., packaging from big organisations that passes the burden of disposal or recycling to smaller businesses).
- **Landlords disinterest in retrofitting buildings.**

In the discussion, participants reflected on the fact that taking a first step and showing success can create the right mindset amongst employees to move on to more ambitious climate and sustainability actions.



2. What can you do to decarbonise Cork? What's your big, brave, bold idea?

There was broad-based agreement on the need for appropriate structures to be put in place to help with radical collaboration and the implementation of existing plans. Without the right mechanisms for enabling collaboration, it simply won't happen. Building on the structures that are already in place (getting people where they already gather) is an excellent start, then adding innovations to make it easier for people to find and collaborate with others.

Big, Brave, Bold Ideas

Transport

There was a focus on transport and the suggestions included congestion charges, more car parks, park-and-rides, 24/7 public transportation, free public transport, underground bike storage, cargo bike deliveries and the establishment of a car-free city centre. There was detailed discussion on permeability and how to make public transportation accessible, especially when accounting for suburban dwellers. The ambition is to link this sustainability action to the multiple co-benefits that would ensue should it occur.

Built Environment & Retrofitting

There were suggestions for high-density development and urbanisation with public/private financing and participatory budgeting. The result would see vast urban renewal, reduction in dereliction and a lowering of price barriers for retrofitting.

Others suggested a co-operative model for a radical retrofitting of the entire city with financial packages (0% loans) to scale-up adoption.

Some participants planned for the establishment of 'Viva Cork', a net-zero campaign driven by public/private sector investment with coherent structures to facilitate financing and partnerships, to help with required actions that would result in transformation. They wanted a CMATS (Cork Metropolitan Area Transport System) for retrofitting and ending dereliction, to breathe life back into the city and reduce emissions as a co-benefit.

Community

Participants wanted to create a community driven solution where local groups and organisations are empowered to create change 'from the inside out'. They suggested local businesses and school education could speed up the process of upskilling and large-scale support for immigrants to integrate better and at speed. They also suggested local loans to fund community projects.

A Forum of Failure

The concept of a Forum of Failure was raised in other workshops and the business sector group were strongly in favour of this form of networking, where they could learn from one another and share best practice and 'warts and all' stories of successes and failures.



Comhairle Cathrach Chorcaí
Cork City Council