

Coole Eco-Community Submission Draft Offaly County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 Introduction This submission is being made on behalf of Coole Eco-Community which is planning to create a land-based ecovillage on 38 acres near Ferbane. The project is based on principles of permaculture and sustainability and will be a model for regenerative agriculture, cooperative livelihood and rural revitalisation. It will pioneer ways of attaining carbon negativity; removing more carbon from the atmosphere than it emits. Coole Eco-Community is a response not only to the growing level of interest in 'getting back to the land' but also the strong desire of many people to 'live in community', supporting each other to grow food, restore ecosystems, develop land-based enterprises and minimise carbon footprint. Such community initiatives have many advantages: they help to curb rural isolation, promote resilience to current and future crises, encourage cooperation and lead to more efficient use of resources. We welcome this opportunity to make a submission on the draft Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027. While we commend many aspects of the plan, we would like to submit recommendations which we feel would make it even more likely to achieve its strategic vision and objectives.

Context We are acutely aware of living in a time of rapid change and uncertainty and that as a society we face massive challenges such as climate change and loss of natural biodiversity. The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the instability and perilous nature of our way of life. It has also led many people to question the sustainability of their current lifestyle and created in them a determination to return to the land, grow their own food, reside in a close-knit community and live in closer harmony with nature. The recent dramatic increase in remote working/working from home and an upsurge in interest in rural properties are indicators of a movement away from urban living. It is the belief of Coole Eco-Community that this demographic pattern will escalate as we face the much bigger crisis of climate change and likely financial recession. It is vitally important that the new Offaly County Development Plan recognises and is responsive to these trends. In order to build resilience to the challenges ahead it is imperative that we move towards localisation; meeting a much larger share of our needs, such as food and energy, from small-scale, local production and distribution. Agriculture will need to rely less on mechanisation and more on labour and landworkers' ingenuity due to decreasing dependence on, and possible shortages of, fossil fuels. This will inevitably require more people to move to the countryside to live and work on the land. Such a demographic trend confers a range of added benefits: reversal of rural depopulation, increased demand for services (schools, libraries, post offices etc), revitalisation of declining rural areas, revival of local economies, etc. The development of land-based, small-scale rural

ecovillages presents a local solution to several of the challenges facing us nationally and globally as well as meeting many of the social, economic, environmental and cultural objectives contained in the draft County Development Plan. An Ecovillage is defined as a "human-scale full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development, and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future". Recommendations We recommend that the County Development Plan provides a framework that permits people who want to live and work in the countryside to build their own home there, on condition that they achieve a drastically reduced ecological footprint, engage in restoring biodiversity and make at least 50% of their income from land-based enterprises. Such a framework exists in Wales, where it is known as One Planet Development. For more information see the following links: <http://www.oneplanetcouncil.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/One-Planet-Council-leaflet.pdf>

<https://gov.wales/planning-permission-one-planet-developments-open-countryside> We are calling for a paragraph to be included in the County Development Plan stating that favourable consideration will be given towards clustered housing in the countryside provided that inhabitants commit to meeting the standards outlined above in terms of ecological impact and income generation. This would enable the development of small-scale, land-based ecovillages which, as stated above, meet many of the social, economic, environmental and cultural objectives contained in the draft County Development Plan. Coole Eco-Community VISION In 2025:

- An intentional community of people is living simply but comfortably in a peaceful rural environment.
- Members' social, economic and cultural needs are largely being met from the land, the community and the local area.
- Community members are committed to cooperation, sharing and mutual support.
- They have developed a range of small-scale enterprises, providing goods and services to mainly locals and visitors.
- Strong ties have been built with the wider local community and with key service providers.
- The natural environment in which the community is placed is vibrant and flourishing.
- Biodiversity is continuing to expand as evidenced by a growing number and range of birds, insects, plants and small animals. Trees are starting to define the landscape, in conjunction with shrubs and hedgerows. The soil is alive with biology and fertility, providing life-giving food to residents and the local neighbourhood.
- The project is a magnet for visitors, learners and volunteers keen to experience and learn about resilience and regeneration of nature and community.
- It is a place of retreat, healing and connection with nature.
- The community is living in close harmony with, and having a restorative effect on, the natural environment, practicing a zero-waste policy, providing

much of its own energy needs and all of its water requirements. Currently, membership is made up of people with qualifications and experience in the following areas: regenerative agriculture, horticulture, adult & community education, community development, Non-violent Communication (NVC), permaculture design, invertebrate ecology, art, project management, green building design, crafts, environmental management, mediation, entrepreneurship, mechanical engineering, psychotherapy, reflexology and yoga. Note: It should be noted that, contrary to general belief, clustered settlements were traditionally a feature of the Irish countryside. Dr Barry O'Reilly has conducted research on this topic and concluded that there were thousands of such vernacular settlements throughout Ireland. O'Reilly, Barry. The Vernacular Settlements of Ireland: Their Context, Morphology and Continuing Evolution. Conference paper, April 2012. Video: The Traditional Hamlets of Ireland, Barry O'Reilly. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtFMR4MT8t0>

Coole Eco-Community

Submission

Draft Offaly County Development Plan 2021 – 2027

Introduction

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Coole Eco-Community is a response not only to the growing level of interest in 'getting back to the land' but also the strong desire of many people to 'live in community', supporting each other to grow food, restore ecosystems, develop land-based enterprises and minimise carbon footprint. Such community initiatives have many advantages: they help to curb rural isolation, promote resilience to current and future crises, encourage cooperation and lead to more efficient use of resources.

We welcome this opportunity to make a submission on the draft Offaly County Development Plan 2021-2027. While we commend many aspects of the plan, we would like to submit recommendations which we feel would make it even more likely to achieve its strategic vision and objectives.

Context

We are acutely aware of living in a time of rapid change and uncertainty and that as a society we face massive challenges such as climate change and loss of natural biodiversity. The Covid-19 crisis has highlighted the instability and perilous nature of our way of life. It has also led many people to question the sustainability of their current lifestyle and created in them a determination to return to the land, grow their own food, reside in a close-knit community and live in closer harmony with nature.

The recent dramatic increase in remote working/working from home and an upsurge in interest in rural properties are indicators of a movement away from urban living. It is the belief of Coole Eco-Community that this demographic pattern will escalate as we face the much bigger crisis of climate change and likely financial recession. It is vitally important that the new Offaly County Development Plan recognises and is responsive to these trends.

In order to build resilience to the challenges ahead it is imperative that we move towards localisation; meeting a much larger share of our needs, such as food and energy, from small-scale, local production and distribution. Agriculture will need to rely less on mechanisation and more on labour and landworkers' ingenuity due to decreasing dependence on, and possible shortages of, fossil fuels. This will inevitably require more people to move to the countryside to live and work on the land.

Such a demographic trend confers a range of added benefits: reversal of rural depopulation, increased demand for services (schools, libraries, post offices etc), revitalisation of declining rural areas, revival of local economies, etc.

The development of land-based, small-scale rural ecovillages presents a local solution to several of the challenges facing us nationally and globally as well as meeting many of the social, economic, environmental and cultural objectives contained in the draft County Development Plan. An Ecovillage is defined as a "human-scale full-featured settlement in which human activities are harmlessly integrated into the natural world in a way that is supportive of healthy human development, and can be successfully continued into the indefinite future".

Recommendations

We recommend that the County Development Plan provides a framework that permits people who want to live and work in the countryside to build their own home there, on condition that they achieve a drastically reduced ecological footprint, engage in restoring biodiversity and make at least 50% of their income from land-based enterprises.

Such a framework exists in Wales, where it is known as One Planet Development. For more information see the following links:

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Note:

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