

Be ready for the Community Climate Action Programme!

Last year, Wicklow community groups received over €675,000 in Phase 1 of the Community Climate Action Programme CCAP (each county receives a pro-rata distribution of the fund). This fund is for capital projects only and Phase 2 will be open for expressions of interest from the end of October this year.

West Wicklow Environmental Network hosted an information evening recently in Donard, Wicklow for community groups. At the meeting, Julie Sammiller, Climate Action Officer with the council outlined the programme for 2025. Declan Alcock, Donard Community Hall, described Donard Community Enterprises' experience in applying for the fund and implementing their project.

Julie said that about 50% of applications in the last round got through. An example of a successful project was Kiltegan GAA. Their plan included: Solar PV on club house, Water Refill Station, Outdoor Recycling Station, Indoor Recycling Station, Boot/Gear Swap Trolley, Reusable Cups, Bike Rack. What made this application stand out was that it was part of a 3-5 year development plan, Julie said.

Phase 2 of the CCAP will open for applications end October this year. In a change from last year, applicants must make initial contact with the Wicklow Climate Action office *before* submitting an application. This is to ensure projects align with the programme objectives and to stop last minute applications.

What type of community group can apply?

Community groups must be constituted in some way – eg a member of the PPN, hold annual AGMs etc. There should be evidence of good governance. A treasurer needs to be on board, and the group will need to have the capacity to borrow funds on the basis of vouched expenditure - money is only paid when the project is completed.

(Community Finance Ireland, recommended by the Donard committee, provide funding with a short draw-down period, which reduces interest paid by groups)

Five CCAP themes

1. Travel
2. Food & waste
3. Shopping & recycling
4. Community energy
5. Local climate and environmental action

The good news is that CCAP provides 100% grant funding. The maximum grant is €100k. Small, medium and larger projects are accepted.

Julie recommends that community groups now decide on a project. This is an 18month programme, so your project will need to be completed in that timeframe.

What's it like for a community group to apply for the CCAP?

Declan Alcock from Donard Community Enterprises spoke about his community's experience with applying for and successfully implementing an energy upgrade to the hall.

Like all community halls Declan says Donard is a 'very busy hall' with an important role in the rural community, in particular as Donard has lost its post office, health centre and credit union in recent years. Many in the area rely on the hall for social contact.

Before implementing their plan, the hall cost approximately €14k to run annually.

Using local voluntary expertise, an energy audit of the community hall was undertaken. The hall, built in 1998 had very little insulation. It was freezing in winter. Declan showed us pictures of a cinema evening, where the audience were wrapped up in hats, scarves and blankets to keep warm. And this was inside the hall!

The main recommendations were to insulate, put in solar, an EV charger and provide bike storage. The community hall committee were successful in getting CCAP funding to the tune of €73k. Declan says tap into local expertise wherever possible. And in the application, focus on what you want, 3-4 things you wish to improve and the impact of that, he says.

Declan said they were lucky in that they got one contractor to manage the project. They installed a lot of insulation and 48 solar panels.

The result? A whopping 81% reduction in energy costs, a reduction of 68% in carbon emissions and very positive feedback from the community as the hall is now a pleasant place to use.

What are the main takeaways for those interested in CCAP?

- Contact your Community Climate Action Officer in advance for support with your application.
- Tick as many of the five 'themes' as possible in your application. Don't just focus on one.
- Regarding the energy theme, if you're a member of a Sustainable Energy Community, then use the energy master plan to pick off 'the low hanging fruit,' Julie suggests. For example, perhaps insulation will go a long way to meeting your objectives.
- Collaborative applications, with one group leading the application, would be favourably looked at. This cuts out overlaps, and competition within a community.
- When applying for the fund, you may have access to an energy master plan and be able to come up with statistics as to savings, CO2 reduction etc. This would be welcome. However, some projects may be harder to 'measure' such as installing a nature pond, improving biodiversity etc. Julie suggests describing the improvement/impact instead.
- Applications are via email. They should be brief, succinct and use bullet points. Declan suggests groups 'read the questions and answer the questions' on the application form.

‘Embrace the form’ says Julie. It can help a group ‘think about what they want to achieve’.

- Get the application in on time.
- Procurement rules apply. However, it is only necessary to show proof of seeking tenders. Not all need respond.
- The successful tender doesn’t have to be the best price tender. For example, green procurement, and less airmiles etc may be a consideration. You need to be able to justify why a particular tender is awarded.
- Do your homework and seek testimonials for successful tender candidates.
- Seeking CCAP funding does not preclude seeking other channels of finance (eg Leader, SEAI etc), just ‘no double dipping’. However, ‘you might use one to leverage another aspect of the project,’ says Julie, e.g. using other funds for planning and analysis etc.
- Even though some costs such as interest may have to be paid by community groups as they await final payment of the fund – the cumulative savings over the years will pay back any additional costs.

The evening concluded with round table discussions and networking about the fund. Community groups from Rathdangan, Valleymount, Stratford-on-Slaney, Blessington, Hollywood, and Donard all attended and there was lively chat and sharing of ideas.

Many thanks to Míde Ní Shúilleabháin, WWEN for her work in collaborating with Julie Sammiller, Community Climate Action Officer with Wicklow County Council, Declan Alcock, and Mike Cummins, Donard Community Enterprises in organising a very informative evening. Thanks to the wonderful Donard Hall for their hospitality.

Although this report covers Wicklow County applications, many of the notes in this article should help other groups around the country who would like to apply for this fund.

For further information on Wicklow’s CCAP please contact:

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To learn more about West Wicklow Environmental Network, visit www.westwicklowen.ie