

Climate Action Strategy

Executive summary

DRAFT

#MAKEITMEATH

MAKING MEATH CLIMATE READY

As Europe’s Business Ready Region, we are committed to ensuring Meath is a great place to locate your business now, but also into the future. We’re working hard to make sure we ensure that County Meath is future proof, and this includes how we consider the impact of climate change.

This means making sure that Meath remains physically connected and not disrupted by extreme weather events like flooding. It means generating low carbon energy to attract big business. It means making our homes more energy efficient to improve health and save our residents money. It means developing the county in a way that supports, active healthy lifestyles.

We believe our vision for climate change action presents a bold, exciting future for the county. If we do it well, we are confident that our residents and businesses will realise those benefits. This is why I am pleased to support this Climate Action Strategy, and to make it a priority for our team here at Meath County Council.



Jackie Maguire
Chief Executive Meath County Council



A Local Authorities will be at the coal face of advancing climate change adaptation in Ireland and we look forward to working with other Counties as part of the Regional approach and for which Kildare County Council have been nominated as Lead Local Authority for our region.

The regional approach will enable the sector to have a comprehensive approach to climate change and there is no doubt that a collaborative response is needed to ensure that Meath and Ireland are climate change ready as part of all the services we provide.

Meath County Council like all other Local Authorities are greatly positioned in interacting with the local community and will work through the Public Partnership Networks and the Strategic Policy Committees in bring the community on board in effecting a mature approach to the climate change agenda.



Gerry O’Connor
Chief Executive and Cathoirleach Cllr

MakeItMeath.com
[#MakeItMeath](https://twitter.com/MakeItMeath)



INTRODUCTION

Climate change refers to the long term, large scale change in global and regional climatic patterns. In recent years, average global temperatures have been rising. Between 1901 and 2012, the average global temperature has increased by 0.89 °C; a change which is significant and rapid when considered in the context of the rest of the Earth's history. This has been predominantly attributed to human activity, and its relationship to the 'greenhouse effect'. The increasing rate of carbon dioxide emissions, and other greenhouse gases such as methane and nitrous oxide, since the industrial revolution, has resulted in the 'greenhouse effect'. Many human activities generate these gases; the production of electricity, industrial activity, transportation and agriculture are just a few examples. These gases build up in the Earth's atmosphere and are responsible for trapping an increasing amount of the sun's energy, creating an overall shift in global atmospheric patterns.

As a result, Ireland and County Meath's climate is also changing and the scientific consensus suggests that this is only going to accelerate in the coming years. Incremental changes in the climate are already evident, including increases in average temperatures, wetter winters, more intense rainfall, more flooding, increases in summer droughts and rising sea levels. As these climatic changes intensify, there could be wider implications such as damage to existing ecosystems and biodiversity or the introduction of new pests which could impact agricultural production,. There may also be some positive impacts (such as fewer very cold days) but these positives are unlikely to outweigh the negatives. Although the type and magnitude of these potential impacts are uncertain, concerted action is required to prepare for and manage these changes in Ireland. For this reason, it is necessary to implement measures that will help the public to adapt to these changes, effectively combining an adaptation and mitigation approach to climate change in Ireland and County Meath.

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015 seeks to address this by establishing a national goal to move to a low carbon, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable economy. The Act provides the statutory platform for the institutional arrangements necessary to pursue and achieve the goals that are outlined for the period up to 2050. The primary focus is on the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions that are responsible for climate change, and the adaptation of Ireland to the current and future impacts of climate change.

In 2017, members of the senior management from Meath County Council established a Climate Action Team. This team is made up of senior staff members who will be key in instilling a cultural change in relation to designing, building and developing sustainably and taking account of climate change within the County.

In response to this, and recognising the significant benefits of taking action, the Meath County Council Climate Action team commissioned this Climate Action Strategy. The purpose of the strategy is to outline practical actions that will help County Meath adapt to and mitigate against climate change. A strong adaptation and mitigation strategy are relevant to Meath for three main reasons:

1. Thinking ahead and moving faster than others has the potential to create a competitive advantage for Meath and its businesses. greenhouse gases and supporting national programmes to deliver the commitments made by Ireland to reduce greenhouse gases to 20% below 2005 levels by 2020.
2. Making the right decisions now will ensure that County Meath, its businesses and its residents will be ready for the future. Many decisions that are made on new developments and infrastructure will have long term implications, and the decisions made by the council, its officers, and the local community should anticipate this. A strong adaptation strategy will keep the county running in more extreme weather conditions, and avoid unforeseen shocks to services, residents and businesses.
3. County Meath wants to play its part in reducing

OUR VISION

‘To make County Meath a climate ready region that supports jobs, growth and healthy lifestyles’

TARGETS

1. Reducing Meath County Councils emissions by 33% by 2020.
2. Reducing CO₂ emissions of the county by at least 40% by 2030.
3. Increasing our resilience by adapting to the impacts of climate change.
4. Sharing our vision, results, experience and know-how with fellow local and regional authorities within the EU and beyond through direct cooperation and peer-to-peer exchange, namely in the context of the Global Covenant of Mayors.

BENEFITS

- Saving households and businesses money. Using energy more efficiently and reducing emissions would help all families—especially low-income families—lower their energy bills. It is crucial that this strategy helps to deliver cost-savings to families in order to provide additional spending power, which could be spent on local businesses.
- Competing internationally. The clean energy economy is poised to be the growth industry of the future. With increasing numbers of big businesses signing up to commitments including 100% renewable energy and science based carbon reduction targets, Climate Action will become increasingly important if County Meath wants to continue to attract inward investment from big businesses.
- Helping avoid the costs of climate change. The impacts of climate change are already being felt across Ireland, with many counties experiencing the costly effects of climate change already. A strong adaptation strategy will help to ensure that the county can continue to run effectively during more extreme weather and avoid unforeseen shocks to our services, residents and businesses.
- Creating jobs. Irish corporate leaders on climate change have identified that tens of thousands of jobs could be created across Ireland by moving to a low carbon economy. For example, SEAI estimate that more than 10,000 Irish jobs will be created by the implementation of Smart Grid infrastructure and its associated technologies.
- Health and wellbeing. By moving to more active modes of transport, transport policy changes that reduce private car use and increase walking and cycling would reduce obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease. In addition, by moving to cleaner modes of transport, we can improve air quality.
Good quality, accessible green space and infrastructure can provide many potential health and well-being benefits including increased life expectancy and reduced health inequality
- Less congestion. By getting people out of cars and into shared modes of transport, we will future proof against congestion on our roads, which is one of our key USPs in the economic development plan.
- Energy security. Power generation in Ireland relies essentially on gas, imported mainly from the UK. Increasing our renewable energy will improve our resilience.
- Improve profits. A business can now be an energy generator as well as a consumer. Self-generation of renewable power to cover a firm’s own needs and selling the surplus to the grid in effect makes energy a profit centre rather than a cost.
- Stronger communities. Community renewable energy schemes can deliver a range of social and economic benefits to local communities including increased autonomy, empowerment and resilience by providing a long term income and local control over finances, often in areas where there are few options for generating wealth.
- Land regeneration. Previously developed, derelict, underused or neglected (brownfield) land in and around urban centres can deliver social, environmental and economic benefits via conversion to green infrastructure.

OUR PLAN

Our plan is linked to the County Development Plan and covers the period from 2019-2025. We want our strategy to be ambitious but grounded in pragmatism. The success of this is dependent on recognising what is within Meath County Council's control, where we can enable others to take action, and inspiring others to lead. This means our actions will focus on the following key areas;



Lead:

We will take action ourselves

We have a unique leadership opportunity to influence and drive significant changes through our own operations.

However, much more needs to be done and Meath County Council must provide leadership through our own operations and continue to develop further initiatives to tackle climate change across the domestic, commercial, industrial and transport sectors.



Enable:

We'll support others to deliver

The responsibility for changing our energy system and adapting to climate change lies not only with Meath County Council, but with many of our businesses, social enterprises, public bodies and communities.

Furthermore, there may be opportunities where Meath County Council does not have appropriate jurisdiction to take a lead role and we will therefore strive to collaborate, empower and enable these organisations through initiatives that may help in securing funding, providing resources, sharing skills, knowledge and expertise and providing political support.



Inspire:

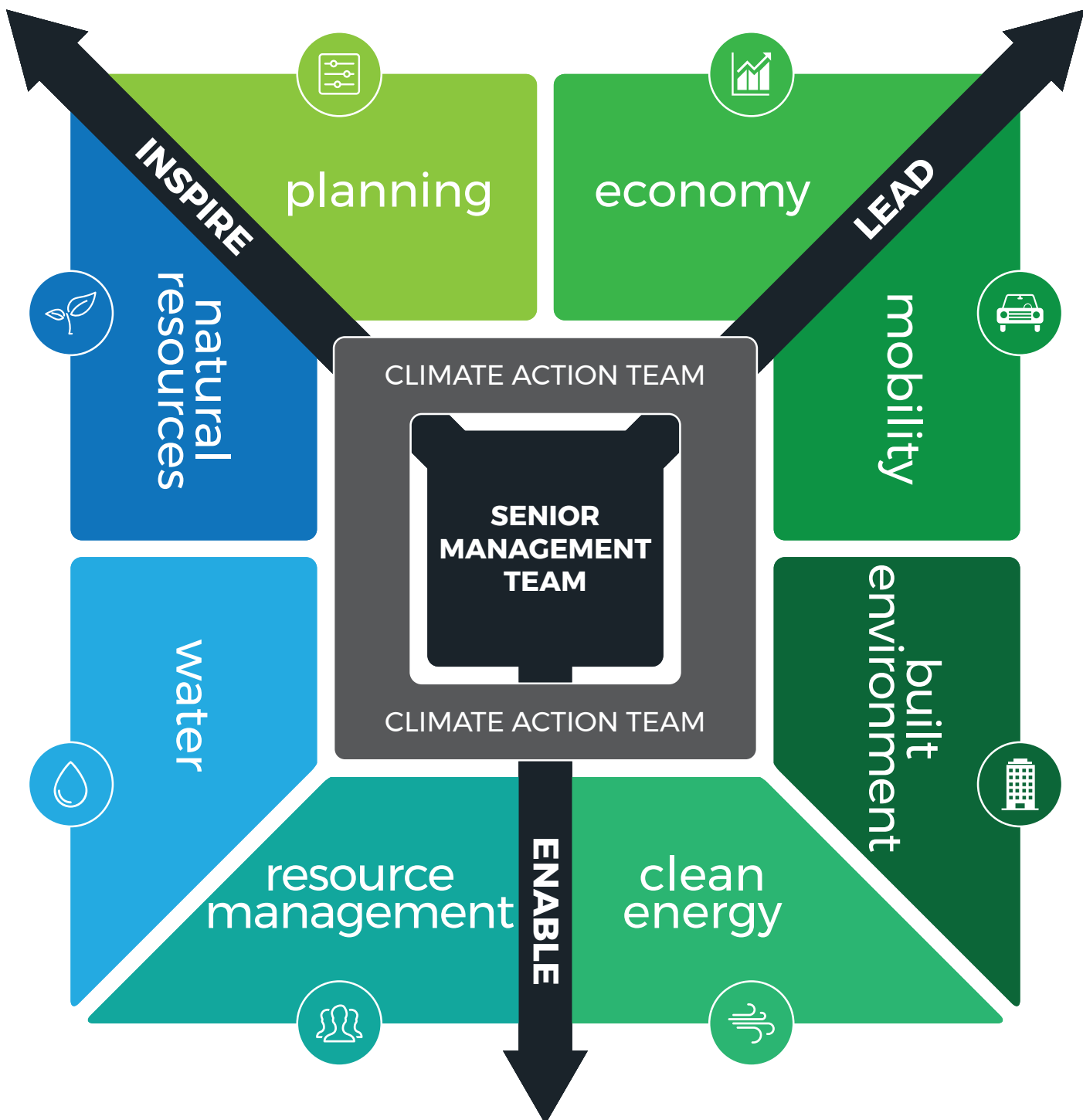
We'll inspire others to take action

Ensuring that County Meath is a thriving, climate resilient county, is an opportunity to inspire active public participation.

Through our engagement, we have identified a number of areas to inspire community action, from community energy projects, to planting trees. The key to working with citizens will be expanding and finding new ways to engage, from social media to a variety of public events across the region.

OUR AREAS OF FOCUS

To deliver our plan, we have focused on 8 key themes. Action against these themes will be driven and championed by our Senior Management team and delivered through our Climate Action Team.





ECONOMY

Meath County Council now has primary responsibility for the economic development of the county. We will seek to enhance our economy through climate action by:

- Marketing County Meath as a Climate Ready region to support inward investment
- Provide additional resources to help our businesses transition to cleaner, cheaper energy.
- Promote local jobs and local workspaces to reduce commuting.
- Help businesses grow through spotting opportunities for innovation, increasing resilience and saving money.

MOBILITY

E Mobility is fundamental to how we live and work. A well-performing transportation system is essential to the functioning of society and the economy as a whole. The promotion of use and increased delivery of sustainable modes of transport is fundamental to achieving Ireland's carbon emission reduction requirements of 20% by 2020 and 30% by 2030. We will seek to make mobility climate ready by;

- Increasing the efficiency of the transport system by making the most of digital technologies, sharing platforms and further encouraging the shift to lower emission transport modes.
- Moving towards zero-emission vehicles, with a focus on how we can help roll out of electric vehicles.
- Promoting active transport.
- Providing opportunities for flexible working, reducing the need to commute on a daily basis.
- Ensuring critical transport infrastructure under our control is resilient to climate change, including roads.



BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The world's buildings account for a large share of the global final energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, with major potential for energy savings of up to 50–90% in existing and new buildings. We will seek to make the built environment Climate Ready by:

- Making sure that all council-owned buildings are retrofitted to improve energy efficiency or are built to best-practice standards.
- Ensuring that we manage our estate better, with a strong focus on energy efficiency & renewable energy.
- Ensuring that climate resilience is considered for all council-lead developments, including future temperature increases and increased risks of flooding.



CLEAN ENERGY

Energy use is changing fast. The shift to renewable sources, however, needs to happen faster. This is not just in terms of how power is generated but also in terms of how it is used in heating, buildings and transport. We will support the transition to clean energy by:

- Develop Local Authority Energy Strategy
- Develop an energy master plan detailing planning and other areas the County can affect policy. Planning requirements being the major area.
- Strategy for roll out of solar (PV) on council buildings.
- Support Community Energy Groups and projects.
- Encourage a renewables positive policy and set targets for new build.



RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Demand for raw materials has seen exponential growth due to a rapidly expanding global population coupled with rising standards of living. Yet the resources on which we all rely are depleting quickly which is exacerbated by our culture of single use of resources, which uses significant amounts of energy to extract and process.

We will seek to make our Resource Management Climate ready by:

- Implement waste management plans;
- Inspire our communities to help us recycle more; and
- Undertake research to explore opportunities for accelerating towards a more circular economy within County Meath.



WATER

Climate change will increase the frequency of heavy rainfall events, storm surges and their duration, thereby increasing the risk of flooding in vulnerable areas of the county. Equally, increased temperatures and prolonged dry spells will increase the likelihood of drought and water shortages. We will seek to make our Water Resources Climate Ready by:

- Investigate land management opportunities for water attenuation in council owned land.
- Review of infrastructure to identify assets at risk from flooding/extreme rainfall to inform low-cost 'minor works' flood relief schemes.
- Secure water resources for County Meath in conjunction with Irish Water
- Continue to support Irish Water's Water Conservation Programme to conserve valuable resources by reducing leakage.



NATURAL RESOURCES

Future trends mean that the benefits we get from biodiversity, green infrastructure and our wider natural resources have never been so valuable. Using our natural resources more effectively will not only play a key role in helping us to adapt to a changing climate but will also create multiple benefits for our residents, including improved health and wellbeing. We will seek to make our Natural Resources Climate Ready by:

- To engage with the agricultural community to understand how we can help make the sector more resilient.
- Use natural resources to help us mitigate and adapt to climate change.
- Explore how we can protect our coastlines using natural methods.
- Use the natural world to inspire school children to take action.

PLANNING

One of our key roles is to ensure County Meath is properly planned. If we can do this with climate change in mind, it will help us to avoid 'locking in' high carbon and climate-vulnerable developments and land use patterns in the long-term.

By planning properly, we can increase the viability of new public and active transport routes renewable energy projects and business cases for investing in areas of currently underused and low quality greenspace. New developments served by such infrastructure will become a significant part of the appeal for existing and new domestic and commercial occupants. We will make sure our Planning is Climate Ready by:

- Using planning policy to:
 - promote near zero energy buildings for new development;
 - promote clean energy and energy efficiency;
 - promote Green infrastructure and protect and enhance our natural resources;
 - protect and enhance our flood defences;
 - support roll out of electric vehicles;
 - ensure new developments are located close to public transport and are well-served by walking and cycling facilities;
 - help conserve our water resources
 - improve waste management
 - keep our communities safe.

