



MAKING SPACE FOR NATURE IN CORK CITY

SUMMARY REPORT

INTRODUCTION

This report contains a summary of the discussions that took place on July 9th 2022 at the 'Making Space for Nature in Cork City' event, organised by UCC Green Campus and Cork Environmental Forum. The purpose of this event was to facilitate open dialogue and unify local groups and individuals with a common interest in nature and sustainable development.

BACKGROUND

We have all witnessed the continued destruction of our biodiversity in recent years, from tree cutting, to hedgerow removal, and harmful planning decisions that further restrict available green space for all species and people of Cork. The recent Bishop Lucey Park decision by Cork City Council was the final straw.



Biodiversity in Ireland is rapidly declining and the lack of leadership being shown in this area cannot continue. To address these devastating losses, we need immediate, ambitious, and transformative action and we need it now.

However, it's clear that our elected representatives will not act, unless we come together and demand that nature is prioritised.

AIM OF THIS EVENT

There is significant power and a wealth of knowledge in our communities. We wanted to **bring local groups and individuals together, and begin building 'one voice' for nature in Cork City.**



This public event was organised to give people an opportunity to make their voices and concerns heard in relation to biodiversity loss and protection in Cork City. We used this event to not only identify areas of common concern but potential areas for community collaboration and action.

An all-of-society approach is required to reverse nature losses and enable the protection, conservation, and restoration of our habitats and green spaces. and we need people from across Cork to come together and demand action from our leaders.

This event was just the first step. We will start from here and work to keep building this initiative and make it as impactful as possible.

SESSION 1:



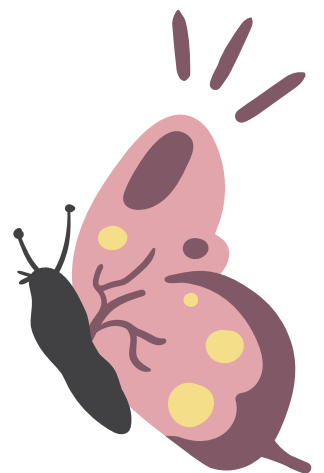
PROTECT, ENHANCE & RESTORE



This session was held to help identify areas of our nature (land and marine) that we need to protect, enhance, and restore in Cork City. Participants were given prompts under three headings (protect, enhance, and restore) and asked to give their thoughts and insights.

PROTECT:

- The city needs to combine social and natural spaces, designing spaces for both nature and people.
- Biodiversity protection needs to be embedded into Cork City Council discussions, planning, and development.
- Cork City Council & key stakeholders need to fully understand these issues to achieve this.
- No more reckless felling of trees and private development of green spaces. We cannot afford to lose any more nature.
- People must be empowered to protect nature.



PROTECT:

Murphys Rock was highlighted as a key concern by some individuals. This area has been earmarked for development and there are calls for this area to be designated as a regional park and special area of conservation.

There are great opportunities to utilise **citizen science** to document existing nature and use this information to promote and facilitate the protection of biodiversity in Cork.

We need to **collaborate with existing groups in Cork** who are working in these areas and strengthen the movement. Some examples that were given include:

- Save Our Bride Otters
- Trees Please
- Wild Work
- Green Spaces for Health
- Cork Nature Network

Public participation is key to ensuring that biodiversity is protected in Cork. However, people raised concerns about the planning process, saying that the length of time given to the public to make a submission is too short and many don't feel adequately equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to make an impactful submission.



ENHANCE:



Importance of Community:

- Our **local communities and Cork City Council need to work together** to protect, enhance, and restore biodiversity.
- We need to **build ‘one voice’ for biodiversity** to maximise impacts.
- Establish and build a **sense of community** by getting locals involved when developing new park layouts/green initiatives.
- Install murals to get people talking about issues related to nature.
- **Universal involvement** and trainings to enhance nature.
- Education and co-creation is key.



There are **funding mechanisms available** to small groups for planting initiatives from Cork City Council, but there hasn't been a huge uptake here. There is an information gap. How can we overcome this and communicate this resource? We need to have support within the Council and need expertise available to guide people through these mechanisms.

The pages related to public consultations are too difficult to find and navigate. We need to have a **focused group** (like the Transport and Mobility Forum but dedicated to biodiversity in Cork) that works on these issues, can monitor consultations and planning applications, and have information and research ready to input into these submissions.

ENHANCE:

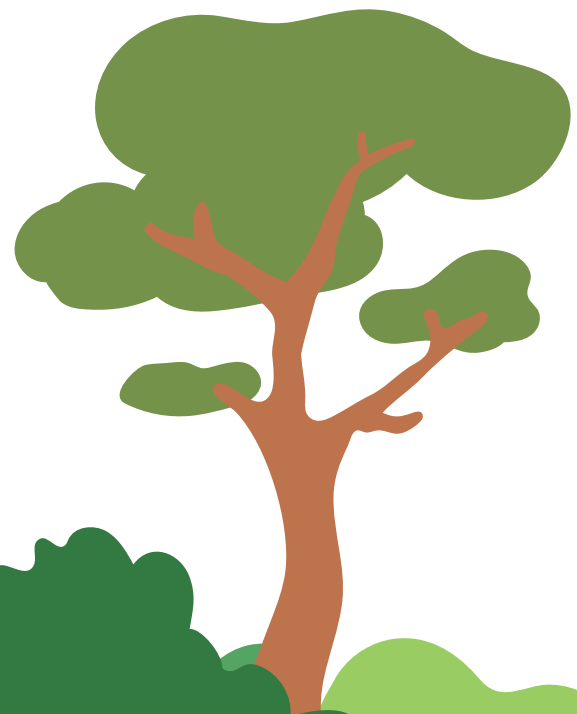
- **Public parks should be prioritised** over parking infrastructure.
- Ensure **‘no mow’ policies** in our green spaces. We must ensure that our spaces are managed for biodiversity and the policies that are created to protect nature are actually being enforced.
- If there is concern around the potential damage from trees, why not evaluate what species would work best (for example: using smaller trees and hedgerows).
- Utilise initiatives like **green roofs** (make sure native species are being planted) to ensure no net-loss of biodiversity.

Some examples of good practice:

- Brussels train station has ‘wild’ green areas in it.
- St Finbarrs ‘growth’ areas. Landscaping carried out by the community.
- Green roofs and lots of connected parks in London.

What are some challenges?

- Mindsets.
- Limited Resources - time, funding for projects, and dedicated staff.



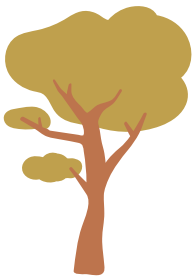
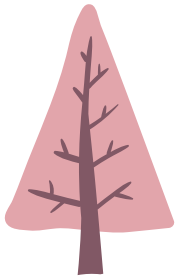
RESTORE:

Potential actions:

- **Plants and vertical gardens on buildings** (pollinators-friendly and structures for birds). Use native plants, create 'wild' areas so maintenance is low.
- **Clean up our walk-ways** and leave some areas to restore themselves.
- Use existing dereliction sites to incorporate more green spaces in the city.
- Traffic out, trees in.
- Need **active advocates** to drive restoration.

Some examples of good practice:

- Cork City Clean Up. Are there any Cork City Tidy Towns? Do we need pockets of these around the city?
- Kennedy Park: good example of restored area.
- Netherlands initiative: Locals care for the park. They receive funding from their local council and receive guidelines on what they can and cannot plant.
- Japan - use specialised equipment to uproot trees and replant them.
- Rotterdam model: If you cut down a tree, you must replace it.



Creating Shared Spaces

- **Give local people autonomy over their public parks.** How can we establish a culture of shared, positive spaces and cultivate care for our space? This would give young people a safe and free place to socialise.
- Example of good practice: There is an initiative in The Netherlands that gives responsibility to young people to care for the space through local schools.
- Must include as many people as possible.

SESSION 2: CAMPAIGN

This session is centred around how we can build up our campaign. Some ideas that have been mentioned previously include writing an open letter that has been signed by Cork groups/individuals, delivering it to Cork City Council and publishing online, and organising public demonstrations.

Create a Nature Forum:

- We need a forum (modelled and inspired by the Transport and Mobility Forum), not a campaign.
- This would require fundings, resources, and a paid position to be an information holder (avoid duplication of efforts), mapping existing activities.
- Link in with key stakeholders and advise what actions they should take/not take.
- Limited capacity and resources at the moment.
- Create a 'template' for submissions to share with the public.

SESSION 2: CAMPAIGN

Main message: The importance and value of protecting nature, rights of nature and ecosystems.

- Collaboration is key. Informed and community-led, multi-disciplinary actions.
- Actions and ideas for solutions must be followed up on.
- Marches can provide a sense of community and gather media attention.
- Build a position of authority to support and demand change.
- Some examples of good campaigns include Bad Parking Cork and Derelict Ireland. Developing an impactful campaign requires an effective 'hook' to engage with people and stakeholders.
- Space for nature in your city and your life (highlight spaces to socialise, space for nature, spaces to live/work, green spaces that have been taken away).
- How to take well-informed steps.
- Campaign around air quality (health implications, social inequalities associated with air pollution, benefits of green spaces and trees).



SESSION 3: NEXT STEPS

This session focused on where we can go from here to build momentum and work to maximise our impacts.

One of the key discussions at this event centred around the idea of setting up a Nature Forum (similar to Transport and Mobility Forum in format and structure but with stronger links to community groups).

To do this, the following will need to be carried out:

- Establish a **dedicated core committee** group of relevant stakeholders and key organisations to drive the formation of this Nature Forum.
- Carry out a **policy overview** and audit as being able to make impactful submissions and supporting others groups to do the same would be a key role of the Forum.
- Plan for Nature: **develop a Charter for Nature in the City**. Establish what does success look like? For example: what do nature-based solutions in an urban setting look like?
- **Building understanding** of biodiversity issues would be a key component of the Forum (experiential learning, research, citizen science, best practices from other areas and countries).
- **Anchor education under 3 discussed pillars** (protect, enhance, restore).
- Brainstorm and develop a clear **mission statement, vision and 3 key pillars of action** for the Forum.

SESSION 3: NEXT STEPS

Some other steps that were discussed at the event are as follows:

- Organise a unifying action to bring groups together?
- Work to develop messages that would resonate with people.
- Align with upcoming climate marches (Fridays for Future will be organising in Late September/October).
- Not every action or event will suit everyone, that's normal. There is something for everyone.
- Should we have an action to align with Biodiversity COP 15 in November?
- What does a city that takes biodiversity seriously look like? Identify examples of best practice in this regard.



ONLINE FEEDBACK:

To include those who could not attend the event on the day, a short google form was created and shared online to gather as much feedback as possible.

Here is a summary of the online feedback that was received:

Q1. What are your main concerns in relation to the protection of nature (both land and marine) in Cork City?

- General lack of green natural spaces in the city and inadequate existing public green spaces.
- Pollution in our green and blue spaces.
- The erosion of the existing green spaces for building houses when we have lots of derelict crumbling buildings all over the city.
- The cutting of mature trees and replacement with saplings (saplings do not equate to a mature tree).
- Poor understanding among Councillors and City Council Executive of the importance of preserving green spaces for biodiversity, public health, and liveability in the city. Commitment in words only by Cork City Council to sustainable development, climate mitigation and adaptation. Lack connection between the policy and the action.



ONLINE FEEDBACK:

Q2. Do you see any opportunities to enhance nature and green spaces in Cork City?

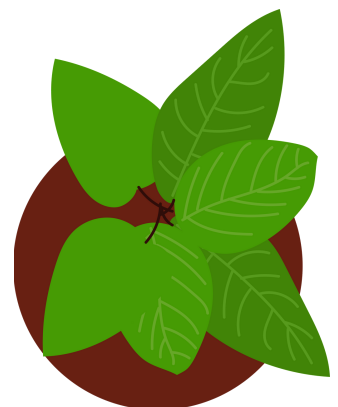
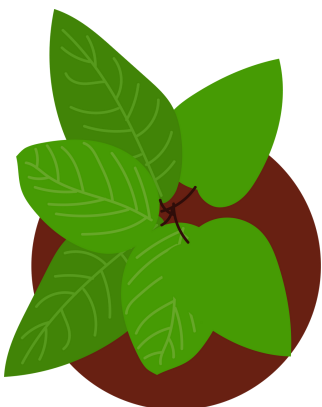
- Very large footpaths on Patrick Street/Grand Parade/Coal Quay: potential to plant native trees, grass, seats, moss benches, more wildflowers and plants.
- On the docks towards the Marina, some buildings/land are unused and could be turned into green spaces or shared gardens.
- Through the City Development Plan and protecting existing green spaces from redevelopment.
- Where housing has to be facilitated, it should be mandatory to include significant green spaces such as courtyards, green rooftops, nature supporting build designs and materials.
- Adequate financial and human resources staff to tackle these issues.
- Collaborate with existing groups and showcase good practice in Cork and further afield.
- Develop a Tree Strategy starting with a tree audit of the city and seek to preserve and maintain our trees.



ONLINE FEEDBACK:

Q3. Are there any actions you would like to see taken by Cork City Council in relation to the protection, enhancement, and restoration of nature in the city?

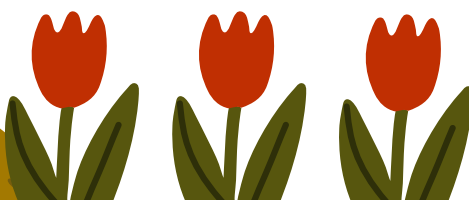
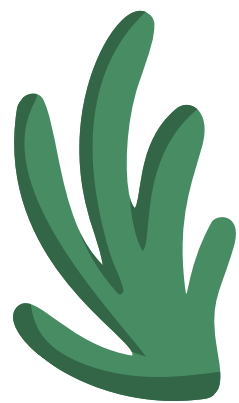
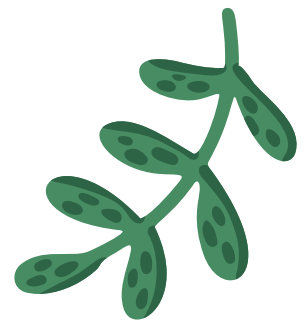
- More protection towards our existing biodiversity, make nature a priority.
- Shift the focus of economic development to sustainable development.
- Proper engagement and consultation with communities when development is planned in green areas.
- Lets stop building car parks - if you build car parks, you get cars. if you build cycle paths and walkways, you get cyclists and walkers!
- Designing the urban realm with greening initiatives, such as trees, planting. Allocating derelict city spaces to urban city gardens and pocket parks.
- Have nature represented at all meetings in City Hall and when a decision is being made the impact on nature is automatically addressed as the question is asked, how will this decision impact nature?



ONLINE FEEDBACK:

Q4. Are there any examples of initiatives or good practice that you have seen being implemented in other areas or countries that you would like to see in Cork City??

- Pedestrian-only streets with more green (trees, plants, flowers) on these streets. Better bike lanes with green lane sections.
- Shared gardens, green towers, bee hives on roofs, enhancing urban agriculture on roofs, adding grass on flat unused rooftops (like in Bâle).
- Lots of good practice in Cork. Cork Nature Network and Green Spaces for Health are doing a lot of work in this space. Countries such as Holland, Finland, Sweden and Denmark have strong climate policies matched with strong action - this is what is needed
- Across London, Amsterdam, Utrecht, Rotterdam, recent initiatives in Paris, Berlin etc. Many European cities are great examples that can be translated here.



ONLINE FEEDBACK:

Q5. Do you know of any resources or expertise that would be useful in the development of this initiative?

- Green Spaces for Health, SHEP Earth Aware, Cork Healthy Cities, Cork Nature Network, Cork City PPN, Transport & Mobility Forum, Cork Air Quality Partnership, Green Schools, CRAC Lab UCC, ERI at UCC, Cork Learning Cities, Environment SPC in Cork City Council.
- A detailed directory of all the groups, organisation in the city dedicated to nature, the environment.
- A map of the green areas in Cork City.
- A green hub area through which groups can pool resources, meet, exchange information, work together on initiatives and respond efficiently and effectively when there is voting events at City Council level that need a campaign of all timed canvassing.





Contact

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if you have any questions or queries.