

# Key Local Council Election Policy Asks for Faster and Fairer Climate Action

**50** Friends of the Earth  
*Celebrating 50 years*



**The climate crisis is hitting home.** We are seeing the fires and the floods, the droughts and the deluges encircling the globe ever more frequently. Ireland is by no means immune, with more intense rainfall and storms, more unpredictable weather extremes, and towns, villages and farms scarred by the impacts.

**We need to eliminate polluting emissions fast enough to prevent complete climate breakdown and fairly enough to leave no one behind.** That means getting off dirty, expensive fossil fuels as quickly as possible, by transforming our energy, transport and heating systems. It means leaving more space for nature and moving to less polluting forms of agriculture. And it means holding whoever is in Government accountable for Ireland doing its fair share to deal with the causes and consequences of climate change, at home and abroad.

**There's been progress over the last five years,** years of campaigning by civil society groups paid off with the passing of a strong climate law and approved binding ceilings on emissions to 2025 and 2030.

**But it's not enough.** The EPA estimates that the actions detailed so far only amount to a 29% reduction in emissions by 2030 compared to 2018, when the climate law sets a 51% benchmark. And

2030 is only a milestone not a destination. The national objective in the climate law is climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest.

**It's not fast enough.** We've already used more than 50% of the agreed 5-year carbon budget to 2025 in the first two years.

**And it's not fair enough.** The evidence is clear that Irish people are concerned about the climate crisis and want to act. But for too many the solutions - whether it's retrofitting, heat pumps, or leaving the car at home - seem out of reach, financially or practically. Meanwhile political and media messaging suggests responsibility lies with individuals, whereas what we need is leadership from Government and local authorities to make the least polluting options accessible, affordable and appealing to all.

**People power is the answer, starting on our own doorsteps.** Candidates and canvassers will be streaming to our doors over the next year looking for our votes. As citizens it is our moment of maximum influence. Polls show that 37% of Irish people are alarmed about climate change and another 48% are concerned. Politicians need to hear it on the doorstep, at the church gate, at the supermarket, wherever we meet them. Put simply, the more we say climate change, the more they will do climate action.

**We Need to...Think climate, talk climate, vote climate.**

Many of the actions needed to respond to the climate emergency are in the hands of local authorities.

Councils can play a crucial role in building communities where people and nature thrive, with well insulated, affordable homes that are cheap and easy to heat, regular public transport, green spaces for all to enjoy, clean water to drink and clean air to breathe.

**The upcoming local election is your chance** to tell your local candidates what you want them to prioritise for the next five years.

When **canvassers call to the door** or when conversations with friends, neighbours or colleagues turn to the election, we need to think about climate and talk about how faster and fairer climate action can mean better public services, more connected communities, and a healthier, cleaner, safer future for all.

### Local Elections demands:

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# If you say one thing at the doorstep say you want **Faster and Fairer Climate Action**

You want your local candidate to:

## Climate Action

Deliver the Local **Climate Action Plans**, by properly resourcing them and holding management to account for implementing them.

Prioritise renewable energy projects and upgrades to the electricity grid, as well as renewable energy for homes and schools, in accordance with Ireland's climate obligations.

Ensure that all emissions that the local authority is responsible for, both directly and indirectly, are correctly monitored and reported, and adopt the latest green procurement guidelines.

Reject carbon offsetting schemes which do not reliably and permanently remove fossil fuel emissions.

Value and encourage community participation and engagement in environmental decision-making ensuring that people have the ability to engage in Council consultations and planning at an early stage, before decisions are made.

Commit to taking a training course on climate and sustainability policies within one year of being elected.



## Warm Homes for all

Identify areas and households at risk of energy poverty and prioritise these as part of all energy renovation programmes and for area-based renovations.

*Enforce energy efficiency improvements in the private rented properties, **so renters benefit from warmer homes too.*** By requiring energy efficiency improvements in rental properties we can lower emissions while ensuring that peoples' homes are warm.

Recruit energy renovation advisors to work with relevant NGOs to target households at risk of energy poverty, as well as to provide accessible information and support on renovation and relevant support schemes.

Develop a multi-annual strategy and increase funding for energy renovation of local authority social housing stock (including solar PV) to ensure the worst performing buildings are prioritised.

Develop dedicated heating and cooling plans focused on phase out of fossil fuel supply and plan for development of district heat networks, particularly in areas dependent on gas.

## Fossil Fuel Phase-Out

**Reject further data centre developments given their long-term reliance on dirty fossil fuels** and the demands they are putting on the electricity grid.

**Support international initiatives to end our dependence on dirty** fossil energy by (i) endorsing the need for a global agreement to phase out fossil fuels (non-proliferation treaty) and

(ii) calling on the Irish Government to step up international efforts, including through the Beyond Oil and Gas alliance and by also endorsing the idea of a future global agreement.

Reject further expansion of the gas distribution network in their area and provide new housing developments with zero-carbon heating solutions, such as district heat, retrofitting, and heat pumps.

Ensure that council pension schemes end investment in fossil fuels within the next five years and, in their place, increase investment in things that benefit communities, like social housing and renewable energy.

Renewable energy such as solar, thermal, PV, and heat pumps are required as the default heating option in local authority and private building developments.



Support and promote district heating, mapping out and developing district heating so it comes from zero-carbon sources.

Ensure transparent publication of any communications from fossil fuel companies. Also, any meetings held with fossil fuel companies during their tenure on the Council should be publicised.

Not supporting events, debates, or activities organised or sponsored by fossil fuel companies.

Propose that the local authority neither seeks nor accepts advertising or sponsorship from fossil fuel interests.

Support the introduction of a ban preventing advertising by fossil fuel companies on Council owned or controlled sites.

## Space for nature, the environment and agriculture

**Ensure communities have access to green spaces.**

**Provide safe water to drink and clean air to breathe by** protecting and restoring ecosystems reducing the impact of agricultural and industrial activities across air, water, waste and noise.

**Ensure communities have access to biodiversity-rich** open spaces and parks and that local authorities double (at least) native tree cover and support the development of green infrastructure including natural flood management, hedgerows, wetlands restoration, woodlands and permeable urban drainage.

## Transport and Active Travel

**Local authorities should audit tree cover in their functional areas** and draw up plans to increase native tree cover and reverse the decline in hedgerows. Develop and implement green infrastructure as part of adaptation plans including natural flood management, hedgerows, wetlands restoration, woodlands and permeable urban drainage.

**Provide guidance and support for the development of green infrastructure** (e.g. natural flood management, wetlands restoration, woodlands and permeable urban drainage) through the planning system.

Ensure each local authority has long-term funded positions for at least one officer/analyst in each of the following areas: **ecology, biodiversity, heritage, climate action**, in line with the operations of the local authority and the associated geographic area.

**Ensure that all environmental monitoring and enforcement activities are properly conducted** including farm inspections, planning enforcement, waste management and air and water quality.

Local authorities stop using **glyphosate on public open spaces**.

Ensure that local authorities have the resources and backing from senior management to protect and restore our ecosystems and enforce environmental standards across air, water, waste and noise. Increased and unhindered inspections and follow-up actions are needed to reduce the impact of agricultural activities on water quality.

**Reduce our dependence on fossil fuel cars by** improving public transport and active travel infrastructure, especially cycling facilities and safe routes to school, and adopt a default 30km speed limit in urban areas.

Design our neighbourhoods and all new housing developments for people rather than the car.

Increase air quality monitoring coverage and establish Low Emission Zones (LEZ) in all urban areas identified as air pollution hotspots; ensure compliance with the smoky fuels regulation.

Work with NTA and TII to dramatically improve public transport with accelerated rollout of light rail in Dublin, Cork, and Galway and active travel infrastructure in order to achieve emission reductions of 50% and a 20% reduction in car journeys by 2030.

Support the development of comprehensive segregated cycle-lane networks across the whole local authority area and improve connectivity and permeability between and within housing developments.

Deliver active travel (walking & cycling) facilities as part of Cycle Connects and Active Travel framework with priority funding given to fast-build active travel schemes, School Streets and Safe Routes to School.

Ensure that public and active travel transport services are affordable, disability-inclusive and child and elderly-friendly by providing appropriate access and space for wheelchairs and other mobility supports, and that streets, footpaths and cycle lanes are designed to ensure that children, older people and people with disabilities can move about safely.



## Recycling and Waste

Smart management of traffic flows and volumes to improve pedestrian and cyclist safety - all road improvements for vehicles should only be justified on road safety grounds as capacity increases.

Support for Electric Vehicles should be aligned with the target of 20% reduction in travel journeys by 2030; large, SUV-style EVs to be subject to the same weight-based road tax as ICE vehicles.

Support the introduction of congestion charges in cities; step up illegal car parking enforcement and consider the introduction of parking levies on free workplace parking. Target EV subsidies at rural drivers who have fewer transport options.

Development plans should prioritise

- Land use planning that prevents car-dependent sprawl
- Mandatory bike parking at new developments
- Maximum, not minimum, numbers of car parking spaces

Support representation from environmental, community and cycling groups on Council Committees.

Imaginative promotion of everyday cycling and walking for multiple journey types.

Prioritise improvements in recycling services over long term contracts to incinerate waste.

Support greater numbers of recycling bins, civic amenity sites and enforcement of litter and waste presentation laws to increase recycling rates and improve waste segregation.

Promote sustainable consumer practices such as repair shops, plastic free shopping, refills and tool libraries.

Adopt circular waste policies in local planning and waste management plans which focus on prevention, reuse and recycling, rather than disposal.

Public procurement policies should require all contractors to practice a circular economy model.

Where incineration contracts already exist, local authorities should commit to working with the Government to create a realistic and rapid pathway to limiting the role of incineration as much as possible, as quickly as possible, including an immediate ban on incinerators burning plastics.

