



Third Green Forum – 9th March 2020

The Acre Project, Celbridge

Special focus on Kildare County Council's 'Open Space Management' pilot programme for the reduction of glyphosate weed killder and biodiversity recovery around the county.

Communication on biodiversity

The Green Forum discussed ways in which communities can assist Kildare County Council with communications in communities around the 'Open Space Management' pilot for Biodiversity recovery and the reduction of Glyphosate across the county. The goal of communications is to raise awareness about why the project is being done and understand different perspectives so that future pilots can be tailored in a way that is positive for communities.

The pilot of the 'Open Space Management' pilot aims to be cost-neutral with available funding being allocated to and additional funding sought for research on alternatives to glyphosate and on the biodiversity impact of the pilot. Hence, communications support should be either also cost neutral or funding sought to support particular actions (e.g. videos, leaflets, signage etc).

Within this context group Forum members discussed ways in which the community could work with Council on communicating about the programme. Members suggested the following priorities:

1. Identify different groups affected by biodiversity loss or recovery pilots

Different aspects of biodiversity recovery programmes can have different impacts, concerns or outcomes for different groups of people. For this reason, it was felt important to identify those most affected understand their views and engage with those people directly. It was also suggested to directly engage with stakeholders such as landowners with regard to glyphosate use.

2. Work with Partners

To maximise communication it is important to include and work through already existing networks that may be interested : e.g. schools, TY's, Eco-UNESCO, Residents Associations, Public Participation Networks, Pre-schools, Guides & Scouts, Clubs, Mens Sheds, Residents Homes, Kildare and Wicklow Education & Training Board (KWETB) and hardware stores for example. Collaboration between networks would also be beneficial for example representatives from Residents Associations could go to Tidy Towns meetings.



Social media is a key platform for reaching people. Kildare County Council's Community Stories page will be a key source and channel for messaging that communities can engage with and share. For people not online then the Church or local papers/magazines such as the Liffey Champion are important channels.

3. Communicating & engaging

Messaging

It was suggested that messaging be done with humility, not assuming superiority because of expertise or ownership of the 'biodiversity' domain. Rather than biodiversity being out there, it was felt that the human aspect of the meaning of biodiversity recovery could be emphasised. For example, the fact that there are health benefits in nature. In this sense it could be helpful to work with mental health groups on exploring this message. For children, this would mean the message would change from 'keep off the manicured grass' to 'keep on the grass' – promoting health benefits and happy children.

It was also regarded as important that messages be truthful. Messages should be communicated as best practice from experience, science and ongoing learning. Also nature is not just cuddly as shown in the UNCBD video but real and wild.

Imagery can be very useful in terms of conveying. Visual communication using videos and telling stories are particularly powerful media. For example, during the referendum on Repeal people's stories were impactful in communicating the key issues involved. For biodiversity, stories for example, from a butterfly's perspective, could work well for generating understanding and empathy. People relate to stories. In that sense, some members felt with regard to the UNCBD video shown that it's not (or not only) about moving from Loss to Love but to personal stories.

Language

All communications should be short and simple. Messages should be understandable by everyone in clear and plain language.

Words themselves carry messages. For example, 'weeds' has a negative implication. The bigger piece around biodiversity recovery requires a change of language and culture. Changing a message using the word 'weeds' to 'wildflowers' results already in a different, and more positive, meaning.

Events & Ideas

Events are useful for highlighting issues and getting people involved. The following events were mentioned as opportunities for raising awareness both about the benefits of biodiversity as well as the pilot. However, due to the Covid19 crisis event based communication cannot take place at least in early 2020, for example, Biodiversity Week, Kids clubs & activities (e.g treasure hunts), biodiversity festival, competitions. Some new events/campaigns were also suggested that could be explored: Town Twinning events,



a Street Piece, game apps (like Pokemon), Biodiversity apps, a quirky character – like the ‘Ask-for-Angela’ campaign, e-signage in towns, french drains in future planning, Earth Hour, Maths Eyes concept for Nature. Ideas such as these may be explored in the future.

Engaging: Understanding & responding to views

Understanding the community’s views, particularly those most effected by biodiversity loss and recovery pilots. Paula stated that to help understand the views of communities her team will be launching a survey. A key action to support the pilot and engagement of communities will be sharing and raising awareness of this channel. The survey is available on <https://consult.kildarecoco.ie/en/content/kcc-parks-maintenance-plan-survey>

4. Understanding the impact

There are two important pillars to knowing if the pilot is successful. One is knowing if it had an impact on biodiversity. For this reason, a baseline of the data and change over time in biodiversity recovery needs to be measured communicated. Paula O’Rourke from the Parks Department in Kildare County Council explained her team’s goals in terms of researching the project with scientific experts. She is currently seeking funding.

Another pillar is understanding if the pilot was successful in terms of the community’s experience of the pilot. Was it successful? Are concerns, impacts and views adequately understood and addressed both during the current pilot and in the continuation and design of future pilots? The survey provides baseline information at the start and as the pilot progresses and gives a channel for ongoing feedback. Due to the crisis direct engagement events cannot take place. The survey results should feed into how the pilot develops over the coming months – in the difficult context of the Covid19 crisis.

Green Forum

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