

Themes Emerging from the Garryowen Decarbonising Together Project 2022

In July-September 2022 Garryowen CDP and Garryowen Residents Association, with artists Veronica Santorum and Daniel Clancy, facilitated a series of community conversations on the theme of decarbonising on walks through Garryowen. The walks and workshops were attended by 12-15 people on average, mostly older women. This is a summary of the main themes that emerged from the conversations. They can be used to help develop new projects, in funding applications, in developing questionnaires or other research tools if more information is required on a particular topic.

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People's perceptions of climate change

People expressed concern about climate change.

Decarbonising is about making it better for the grandchildren coming along, the future generation.

If we don't do it, there won't be a future. There won't be a future for the generations to come.

Judging by the fires that we are seeing all around Europe and around the world, we need to do something, it's really getting out of hand.

We're not just thinking about the environmental impact, but the health impact of constant flooding and people's lives being distressed. People have awful difficulties trying to get insurance and just to live a happy life, you know?

The reality is like, it's our children and grandchildren, that's going to face the consequences. And us, we're going to face the consequences.

People are also very conscious of economising and this is driving decisions rather than environmental concerns.

It's more about saving my bill than saving my energy!

Home Energy and Garryowen

Garryowen has some of Limerick's earliest housing estates. There is a relatively high level of home ownership with the community having worked together to buy their own homes from the council when this became possible. As well as the different original house designs, residents have added to and modified their homes over the years to create an interesting streetscape of diverse homes. However, Garryowen's housing stock is aging with its oldest residents.

There is a need for accessible information about energy solutions and grants as there is misinformation and confusion. They spoke with longing for an A-rated, small, easy to heat and maintain home and looked with some envy at the new homes being built. People are scared of dealing with contractors and long forms and figuring out eligibility. They are worried about energy bills and the cost of living. This is the highest priority of the themes encountered.

Energy saving in the home

People are trying to save energy at home.

A lady told me that she fills a flask with hot water in the morning. Oh! Do you? I only heard that the other day. She fills a flask and she uses the hot water throughout the day.

Normally I would've left the lights on in the hallway and I would've left the lights on in the landing always. What I do at night now is, the rooms that I'm not in, I turn off the lights.

The only lights that are on, are the lights of the room that I'm in.

You turn off at the switch, you turn off at the mains.

I save electricity, save energy, for a lower bill to keep my costs down.

I used to leave the bathroom one on all the time. Now I turn it off. And I'm like you, I turn it off now.

"When you're brushing your teeth, use a glass for water instead of letting the tap run."

"And when you're doing your wash- in the washing machine have a full wash. Yeah. And, do the washing in the evening, after seven."

The challenge of old housing stock

Homes were seen as a burden and worry to some older people as they struggle to deal with grants and building contractors to make their houses warm and fuel efficient.

My house is the coldest house.

The minute you turn off the heat, a half an hour later, the house is cold. You know, it must be the seventies they were built.

I'm not looking forward to winter coming

The windows need to be replaced. And you know, I think every morning when I get up in the morning, I think, God, where do we start with this? You know, it's terrible.

People are trying to find solutions but are not always clear on how to proceed.

Solar panels. Are they a success? Are they for a hot country?

How to generate energy from the river?

Peer-to-peer learning about home energy

People shared their experiences on the walks and at workshops.

Insulation would be the first thing

If you go and have a look at your meter when your electric shower is running and see how fast it whirrs around and around. The electric showers, you use an awful lot of electricity. Now, with the solar panels, when you turn on the electric shower, you are using electricity for the pump, but the actual water is heated by the solar panel.

My mother got her house totally refitted last year. So, outside insulation, attic insulation, new central heating system, energy efficient lights, energy efficient controls, so you have a separate [control] for the water and that. So it was a complete front and back insulation of the house, but she got it done for nothing, and that was done through SEAI.

Travel and Garryowen

Walking

Garryowen is regarded as well situated for walking.

You are accessible to everything here.

I walk everywhere. We don't have a car.

It's a lovely walk actually up around there.

It's very central here to town, I'd say most people walk.

I walk to town mostly.

So that's the only obstacle I would see, the weather. Other than that, I think everything is easy enough to get around.

Difficulties with walking in Garryowen

Personal Safety

Worries about personal safety were expressed. Some people said they were too frightened to walk on their own and this is why they had joined the project, to walk in a group.

I be afraid to go up to that graveyard. I bring a little personal alarm. My son lives over the wall and he says ma'am gimme a shout. Lot of good that'll be by the time he get over the wall.

Road and pavement safety

There are other difficulties with walking. These emerged when talking about taking grandchildren to school. Safe road crossings, narrow pavements, and a lack of barriers to protect children from traffic were highlighted. This is an area very suited to community and school collaboration. A walkability audit may be a good follow-up and if the Safe Routes to School Scheme should reopen an application could be made. (<https://greenschoolsireland.org/saferoutestoschool/>)

The grandkids tell you, oh, we'd love to cycle or walk, but it's just too dangerous cos they have to cross at St. John's.

They are aged 13, 12. I'd still say no, I'll collect you. The roads are just crazy. you want to make sure they're okay

The footpath, its very, very small on the left hand side of the cathedral.

The path is very narrow. We have to walk down one at a time.

They narrowed the footpath a few years back. You would imagine it was skinny and the trucks were coming in on top of you. Its kinda interesting the way they prioritize the traffic over the people walking.

barriers, um, going all along the side of the school and on the other side, and then, um, maybe two traffic wardens there in the center of the, you know, one at the top of the street, one at the bottom of the street.

If there was a barrier the whole way along those footpaths, then there's no fear of the children with the traffic. They're well protected.

School travel

School traffic is causing congestion, pollution and making it unsafe for children to walk or cycle to school. A suggestion for a real time monitor of air quality was made and is being followed up by the Resident's Association with a researcher in University of Limerick.

Outside the school? It is very hectic there. A lot of cars be parked there. A lot of trucks passing by, well, it is the main road.

It's just very dangerous, but a lot of kids do walk. But having said that there's still an awful lot of cars outside the school.

During the COVID, we did air quality control testing. And it was actually really high. There was nobody around, there was no traffic around and air quality was very high.

We need a real time monitor of air quality, you know, that showed them how much petrol they're using. People double park in front of the school. They're sitting there for five or 10 minutes with their engines on and the stream of traffic is blocked and held up as well. So they're going slower. And that pollution's building up in the air.

Cycling

Cycling was seen as very unsafe due to traffic.

There's every kind of obstacles in the area to cycling or traveling around. It's very dangerous on the road, especially the main road and up by UL in there.

The traffic is too fast and there's no one gives anyone a chance on the bike.

Speed of those cars.

I don't think these roads were built for cycling.

No cycle lane

The cycle lane seems to go for a little stretch. And then all of a sudden, you're like, where do I go?

I suppose that's one of the things we'd want to highlight as well, that the cycle lane should be continuous and safe, you know, for anyone to use 'em.

The bike rental scheme is not used as people do not know how to register.

The Coca-Cola bikes... they're no longer the Coca-Cola bikes, the NTI bikes. I've never used them. I don't know how to use them. You have to have a card and your account. I dunno anybody that does use them.

Mobility for people with disabilities

The difficulties for people with disabilities and mobility scooters were raised, in particular the design of footpaths and curbs.

Those motorized little chairs that people use instead of wheelchairs, I've seen a lady try come up one of those roads near Griffin's funeral home. And her little mobile thing was going off. She couldn't control it. It was sliding off. And because you see you get a dip [on the footpath] and it goes down, but these are for cars, they have to be slanted [the bit of the footpath that meets the driveway]. But I do think that is an issue for people and she struggled.

I do feel for people that need to use a mobility scooter. It must be an obstacle course for them.

For a lot of people who can walk it's, its not too much of a problem, but for people maybe with mobility issues or mightn't be as mobile as others, that, that, that exactly. Then it is a problem. Yeah, it is.

People mightn't be as mobile as others.

Can you imagine if someone disabled, how would they get anywhere?

Bus Travel

Bus travel was the most heated travel issue raised. Some people were avoiding using the buses due to

- lack of marked bus stops and printed timetables,
- buses not stopping,
- buses not following timetables
- unreliable electronic timetables in town,
- long distance to walk from homes to bus stops (15 min, 5-7 minutes considered acceptable)
- lack of places to sit and rest with bags
- lack of shelter

Some people did not know there were bus stops in Garryowen or were not clear on their location.

I didn't know there was a bus.

There isn't a bus service, as far as I know.

There's a bus stop around here someplace, right?

As many bus stops are not marked, there is a problem with buses not always stopping.

Bus drivers don't stop when they don't see a sign

The bus stop down there it's not marked. It's not marked.

There's a bus stop just outside the shrine. There's no stop sign. Sometimes the drivers don't know the stop is there, but it is.

November 2022, Veronica Santorum

The Residents' Association have raised the issue of unmarked bus stops with the local authority, Bus Eireann and the NTI but the problem has not been resolved.

We've highlighted that issue constantly. On Pennywell road as well.

Bus Eireann are not in charge of the signage. It's the NTI, National Transport Authority of Ireland. They're in charge of the signage. The left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing.

People were frustrated by buses not keeping to schedule and the absence of schedule information.

With the bus being late you could be standing at a bus stop for, for a half an hour.

You want to be prepared just to stand and wait because you're never sure, you never know when it's going to come.

There's no timetables now either

The distance that people have to walk to reach a bus stop is also a problem, particularly if carrying shopping.

So I'm walking 15 minutes just to get to a bus. If you have anything heavy, your groceries or anything. It's a No Go. So you just don't do that.

I use that bus and I get off at the well, and I walk up through the crossroad. If you have messages, it's not easy.

If you have shopping, you know, you're dragging those bags.

5-7 minutes, that's the most you'd want to be walking to catch the bus.

There is no shelter at the bus stops.

If you're having the weather and it's milling rain, you know, and you're thinking, well, why would I be going into town and getting wet? Cause obviously there's not going to be any shelters.

If it's raining, you'd like a bus shelter there as well.

While for some people the cost of travel was an issue, most of the group had travel passes and cost was not the factor limiting their use of public transport.

The buses, the trains, should be free. That's the only way we're gonna meet these sustainability goals and bring down emissions.

Garryowen and Green Space

In the past people had access to nature with the swamp and rivers as place of play and biodiversity. This has been lost. Garryowen has long views out to the hills of Clare and Tipperary and people have memories of wild places like the Groody river and the swamp, but access to nature is very limited now for children and for people who do not have a car. In the discussion, it was suggested that the proposed Community Bus could provide people access to places like the beach, Glenstal Abbey. Maybe the community could also organise group trips on public transport to familiarise people with journeys they could make, particularly for retired people who have free transport.

Access to nature in the past

People's experiences of Garryowen 50 years ago were much freer with access to the natural environment at the local rivers and a wetland which has since been drained, known as 'The Swamp'. The social aspect of these wanderings was also very important to people.

It was just a great place to grow up. There was so much freedom here. Everyone was out on the road, down the swamps here, kicking ball.

We knew what to eat off the trees. We knew what was edible. You were reared to it. The older ones taught the younger ones.

The swamp was fun. It was just a haven, an absolute haven. There was reeds and just wild, open ground, and a stream running at the back of it.

The wild leeks used to grow and you pulled them up and there was a stump on them and then there was Stump war!

We used to be netting down there for little minnow fish and also catching, I dunno if you've ever done it, but we used to catch bees in bottles, it was a fun thing.

My kids don't understand. I mean, you played in a swamp? yes, we did! But there were so many hiding places there, you know, playing Cowboys and Indians. There used to be a place called the Groody. It was a river. The Dublin roaders would go to this side and the Garryowners would go to the other side and they'd meet in the middle.

They'd come down through the fields from one side from Garryowen and we'd go to Dublin road.

The Groody, that would have been a very social place to be. It was a big field with just a river that went through it.

And you'd go across the fields and come out at the third bridge up at Plassey. And then Plassey was a wonderful place. Beautiful.

Just going swimming, meeting people and chatting and that type of thing. Oh, oh yeah. We were all kids. Yes. Yes. And everyone was left out together. Weren't they? Yeah.

I'm sure people would remember the fish there. My husband would fish out the Groody.

And we'd take frying pans up and cook sausages and we knew every plant you could eat.

You'd bring the fry pan and you'd be build a little fire. Everybody from Garryowen, all the area, went up there. Oh, every age. That was your day out. Wasn't that up to classy for the picnic.

Certain times of the year, the travelers would come and they'd bring their caravans or their tents there. We used to have great fun, have great fun. And one year there was one girl getting married. Afterwards all the neighbors were invited, and we're all sitting around this big fire and singing. I have lovely memories of it.

There was a nightclub down here as well, The Parkway. You had to have a tie going in. One lad, he had the tie and he'd get in and go around to the loo and hand the tie out the window to get everyone in.

The Circus used to come into the field - all the animals and elephants. It was crazy.

There used to be some kind of playground, I remember there being seats and stuff there and it was nice for people to sit down and relax. If they were out with the children, children could play in the green and the parents could sit there and just watch 'em.

We always used to meet in the Green and play a game of soccer or rounders. Everyone used to come from all over Garryowen, like up the Green Hills road and Downey Avenue, and you know, everyone got to know each other that way.

You'd be gone from nine o'clock in the morning. You went home when you were hungry and I'd say it would keep you kind of fit.

Local landmarks and associated stories

The Marian Shrine and St Patrick's Well are significant landmarks and held many memories and have local stories associated.

St. Patrick was actually here and blessed the well. His brought his donkey with him and it got stolen!

Just under the white Archway there was hoofprints of the Donkey.

It's a Freshwater Well. It's older than the Egyptian pyramids. It was a pagan well, used before it was known as St. Patrick's.

It's supposed to have great healing properties for your eyes. Now you'd be brave enough to put your hand in it.

This was the high area looking down onto the city. When William of Orange came and attacked the walls of Limerick and when the Vikings came, they set their base and camp up here to attack the city. They used the well as their drinking water.

There used to be mass here the whole time, an outside mass. Hundreds of people used to gather here.

She'd always come St. Patrick's Day to leave a potted plant or some flowers there. It was a nice tradition.

People used to go to the shrine every single night just waiting to see Our Lady cry.

There was just great devotion to her, you know, and it wasn't just women. It was men and children.

One night my mother, she said, 'I can see her cry, I can see the tears coming up' We said, 'Would you go away Mam! You need glasses.'

Changes to access and management of green spaces within Garryowen

The consensus was that children have less freedom and access to the natural environment nowadays.

There was just so much freedom in comparison to today. You know, you're afraid to allow your children out. Whereas we'd be gone in the morning. Our parents wouldn't see us! You'd come back in when it was late, just for a bit of food.

It's all polluted now

Concern was expressed at the way gardens are being lost.

Those gardens were maintained by the hospital. They would've used that for food. Shame to see it taken away, turned into concrete, you know.

You see people are cutting down on hedges and slabbing all their gardens. That's why we get all the floods and there's no nature around anymore. There's no garden, no drain anymore.

You put all this pavement here, the water's got nowhere to go. Yeah and the heat, the heat and concrete.

People agreed that there have been some positive developments, such as the development of sports pitches and removal of the electricity pylons.

The pitches have really developed.

It's wonderful, absolutely fantastic to see the trees and to see the pylons gone. That's one of the best things they've ever done around here.

The pylons got moved for the safety of everybody around the place and the actual trees planted down the whole way look brilliant.

The pylons were used for rubbish, throwing rubbish into the centres and they're gone now. You can't have anybody throw stuff in them anymore. So it's an improvement and visually it's better without them.

Ideas for Garryowen's green spaces going into the future

There was knowledge and pride in Garryowen's history as the market garden of Limerick but people did not express great interest in growing or buying local food on the walks. This may be due to the age profile of the participants. At the Women's Shed, several people referred to the greenspace discussions on the walks and said that they would like to have a growing space with raised beds that they could grow in. People were very happy with the work of the Residents' Association in planting flowers and maintaining areas such as the Marian Shrine and St. Patrick's Well which held important memories for them.

My nanny used to mind the shrine as well. You could see it from our front door, and it'd be, 'look, it's looking well'. You know, we're looking up at it still and it's just very nice to see it's living on.

Interest was expressed in developing the green spaces. Garryowen's many smaller greens could become genuine neighbourhood outdoor spaces, with more biodiversity and more

interest for people to spend time there. Community garden, sensory garden are options that people were excited about.

One of the things I was thinking, just walking around is that there's lots of small green spaces here. And you think, well, what would I do with those if it was up to me? It's good to keep green spaces, but on the other, they're not really being used for anything and people don't particularly enjoy them or use them.

There's a fantastic green above St. Lawrence Park. A man keeps it and they plant flowers in it.

It's about wellness and communities.

It's just an open space and that's fine. But you want these little corners to hide and trees and shade and, you know, creating that excitement and creativity and getting 'em out, getting 'em active.

We chased a grant to try and get investment into Garryowen. It's called the URBACT project, which is a European initiative, a green area incentive and initiative. It is based around decarbonizing, sustainability, getting communities back out, socializing, a thing that we've all missed from the pandemic and everything.

The St Patrick's Men's Shed, they have a lovely garden going on there.

He grows his vegetables. And he does preserves and stuff, and he feeds himself for the winter off of a lot of it.

Other observations and comments from the walks

Community Hall

The need for a community hall was raised on every walk and workshop. A new community hall has the potential to demonstrate sustainability in Garryowen as well as provide a vibrant hub for community activity. In a 'visioning' exercise, a carbon neutral, community centre was described.

Can you see that lovely community centre? It was completed in 2025. Well, maybe, or was it six or seven? I can't remember. We took great care of the design. With all the solar panels. We also have heat pumps. That's got a carbon neutral footprint. You can walk out next to the creche area and the children's playground and the shrubbery that's been put in, stretching around there. There's a really vibrant area. The senior space faces onto the community cafe. You can be helping yourself to tea and coffees and come in for a chat. And you can have classes in the multipurpose room. It's a great addition to the community. I can hear the laughter of children in

the play area. The little community cafe here, you've got sun loungers and people can have their, their tea and coffee and just chat and meet.

Community Energy

Community energy generation was discussed with the possibility of solar panels on the roof of the Markets Fields Stands and other sports facilities in Garryowen raised. This is subsequently being explored by the Resident's Association with the relevant sporting organisations and Ballyhoura Development.

Other matters raised were the need for council support and a local employment scheme for the maintenance of areas and to develop new initiatives.