

# East Meath – North Dublin Grid Upgrade

## Community Forum

**7.00pm, 5<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2024, Forrest Little Golf Club**

**Attending** (members): Helena Merriman (St. Margaret's Parish Hall Committee), Sheelagh Morris (St Margarets Action Committee), Liam O Gradaigh (St. Margaret's GAA), (Pearse Sutton (St. Margaret's The Ward)

**Attending** (guests): Catherine O'Toole (Irish Environmental Network), Hans Visser (Biodiversity Officer, Fingal Co. Council), Grainne Duffy (EirGrid)

**Apologies:** Deirdre Arthur (Craobh Chiarain GAA), Sheila Dempsey (Scoil Bhríde, Kilbride), Philip McCormack (Batterstown Village Enhancement Assoc.), Cllr. Maria Murphy (MCC Ratoath MD), Denis O'Leary (Kilbride Tidy Towns), Aidan O'Toole (Craobh Chiarain GAA), Pat Smith (Co. Meath Chamber)

**Facilitation:** Harriet Emerson

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### Welcome & Agenda

All those present were welcomed and thanks was extended to Catherine O'Toole (Irish Environmental Network) and Hans Visser (Biodiversity Officer, Fingal Co. Council) who kindly agreed to attend and talk about biodiversity and community actions to support this.

### Minutes of meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2024 & matters arising

The draft minutes of the previous meeting (4<sup>th</sup> September 2024) held at the Roganstown Hotel were previously circulated. These were approved. No matters arising were identified for further discussion.

### Presentation by Catherine O'Toole (Irish Environmental Network) - slides attached

Catherine began by looking at what we mean by biodiversity; usually measured by the diversity of species, diversity of habitats and genetic diversity within species in a particular area, and the current decline in nature globally. This is seen in increased extinctions, declining numbers and habitat, and collapsing ecosystems on which we all depend. She outlined the state of biodiversity in Ireland presently and its importance for all life, giving examples from a variety of species, highlighting habitat loss as the main threat to biodiversity. The most common causes of habitat loss are degradation, fragmentation, unsustainable exploitation, pollution, and invasive alien species, and she pointed to how much we have lost in Ireland.

Catherine stressed that communities can have a positive impact on biodiversity. Importantly, communities need first to identify the habitat and species that they have (or could have) in their area, pointing to a number of sources where information can already be found. With this information, a community can then go on to develop a Biodiversity Action Plan for their area; including appropriate actions that will enhance habitat and support species. Catherine included examples and links to information and support on how to do this work. Creating but also connecting habitats is critical and Catherine presented a quick tour of habitats, examining what are healthy and species rich versus species-poor habitats, including forests, grassland, freshwater bodies and rivers, and peatland. She spoke about the importance of elements in the landscape like old walls and buildings as habitat to support species, and she looked at various community projects tackling types of pollution (from chemicals to light), providing nest boxes, managing hedgerows, dealing with invasive species. Throughout her presentation, Catherine pointed to examples of community initiatives and the references and links to these and a range of resources are in her slide presentation and notes (attached).

### **Presentation by Hans Visser (Biodiversity Officer, Fingal Co. Council)**

Hans pointed to the need to recognise the vital importance of biodiversity and ensure our actions genuinely benefit that. He introduced the Biodiversity Plan for Fingal that is complete and available now (<https://www.fingal.ie/biodiversity-fingal>), detailing proposals to support biodiversity in the County. A similar Plan is being compiled for County Meath. A huge amount of data about habitats and species in the County is available that can help inform actions to support biodiversity; making sure that appropriate actions are taken in the right locations to achieve maximum impact.

Hans outlined a range of initiatives that have been carried out, or are ongoing, in the County and the measures of success that have been seen, for example in planted no-mow margins next to hedgerow boundaries which have supported large numbers of diverse species. There will be a competition through which a limited number of housing areas will be selected for support to achieve a “biodiversity makeover”; a programme which can be replicated by other areas. Hans and his team in Fingal County Council can also be contacted for advice and assistance.

In discussion, there were comments about the reduced numbers of songbirds and other species in the St. Margaret’s area. However, the acres bought by the DAA and “set aside” for nature does appear to represent a habitat for species which spill over into surrounding areas.

In response to a question, Grainne indicated that each of the strands of the Community Benefit Fund would need to be spread proportionally along the project area on an approximately pro-rata basis. This would have an impact on the size of projects considered.

The importance of putting together a good baseline survey of what habitats and species a community has was recognised. In answer to a question, Grainne did not believe, that this initial “feasibility” type work would be funded through the Community Benefit Fund but that an application to LEADER for support to do this would be possible. Members present indicated that they felt it should be possible to build in data collection at the start of a project, and at the end (monitoring of impact) as part of an application under the Community Benefit Fund.

Members present indicated that there have been initiatives by the local community to support biodiversity but that the evening’s presentations had provided ideas for many more that could be explored.

Harriet passed on apologies from Ben Malone, Meath County Council Biodiversity Officer, who was not able to attend the meeting, but who can be contacted for information in relation to biodiversity in Meath.

### **East Meath / North Dublin Grid Upgrade Update**

Grainne informed the Forum that it is still not clear whether An Bord Pleanala will make a decision on the planning application for the grid upgrade before Christmas. As soon as a decision is reached, the Community Forum members will be informed.

### **Fingal to East Meath Grid Reinforcement Project (Separate Project)**

Grainne thanked those members of the community that had attended the information days about this new grid upgrade project proposal for two new substations in this area and associated infrastructure. She will keep the Forum posted on developments. More information can be found at <https://www.eirgrid.ie/fingaleastmeath>

### **Next meeting**

The next meeting will be scheduled once a decision has been made by An Bord Pleanala on the planning proposal. Harriet will contact all Forum members at that point.

The meeting ended at 9.10pm.