

**Social
Democrats**

CLEANER, GREENER COMMUNITIES

*The Social Democrats Climate and Environment
Manifesto for Local Government*



#SustainableCommunities

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Cleaner, Greener Communities

Climate Change is the single biggest threat to our environment, to our living standards, to our existence.

The Social Democrats recognise this threat as a fundamental issue facing our country and our planet. Everybody has to play their part in tackling it and preparing for its consequences. We won't be found wanting.

Throughout this document we set out a range of practical measures that our Councillors will be taking the lead in tackling climate change and protecting and enhancing our environment.

Our clear goal is to make each Council a **Climate-focused Council**.

1. We will drive strong long-term planning and sustainable communities.

- Strive for a climate-focused Council with emphasis on reducing carbon footprint in everything the Council does or plans for - from transport planning and street lighting to tree-planting and recycling
- Agree Local Area Plans that plan for public transport and community facilities before homes are built

2. We will support cycling and public transport.

- Revise the National Development Plan so that spending on public transport and cycling are prioritised over roads
- Build a Network of Segregated cycle lanes and new Greenways, and heavily promote cycling at all age and ability levels
- Pilot no/low fare public transport in a region/city/county in Ireland

3. We will promote biodiversity, recycling, and strong anti-dumping measures.

- Create "Green Communities" with a special emphasis on enhancing biodiversity
- Introduce a completely new waste system so that unrecyclable packaging is phased out and plastic pollution is significantly reduced
- Increase fines for dumping and litter, and double funding for anti-dumping measures

4. We will encourage new energy solutions and put Councils at the heart of delivering them.

- Pilot a new energy group scheme to be delivered by Local Authorities to help reduce costs to consumers and improve energy efficiency in homes
- Insist on high energy standards in every new building sanctioned by local authority planners and in all local authority housing stock



Climate Change

Climate change is a global issue that can only be tackled by every part of government doing its bit.

Nationally, we will continue to advocate for increased support for the development of **off-shore wind**, other **blue energy**, electric cars, and flood defences, **a fair level of carbon tax** that penalises polluters but doesn't push people into poverty, and **a new grants scheme for insulating homes** that is available to everyone.

At local level, we see the new **Climate Change Adaptation Strategies** that are currently being adopted by Councils around the country as a key part in ensuring there is a workable and actionable plan in place to tackle climate change locally, and we will deliver on these plans. Such strategies are particularly important in respect of coastal erosion, flood defence and extreme weather event planning.

As Councillors, there are hundreds of ways that we can make an impact on climate change.

Some practical measures we are proposing include:

- Councils leading by example in **housing design and energy saving** in its own buildings
- Designated **drop off points around our urban centres** within 1 km radius of schools so students walk on dry mornings
- Agree Local Area Plans that plan for public transport and community facilities before homes are built
- **Cycling Buses** for children travelling to school
- Promote the use of surplus heat in **district energy schemes**
- Promote public awareness events on climate change, energy conservation etc.
- Reduce the energy consumption of **public lighting**
- Promote and expand number of **community gardens and allotments** where feasible
- Public recycling bins
- Better collection opportunity at amenity centres for mattresses, sofas, large plastic toys etc
- An **end to single-use plastic** at council events and time-lines to end or reduce them in council supported events



- **Bicycle shelters** & secure lock-ups at all public buildings
- **Wild flower gardens**
- **Water fountains**
- Awards for the most environmentally friendly and most-environmentally improved multiple in your area
- **Car-charging** points in every small town and village
- **Car-pool** initiatives
- Tree-planting initiatives

Please read further for other proposals in this area such as public transport, cycling, waste, dumping and energy



Promoting Public Transport

Traffic is choking our cities, towns and villages. Meanwhile too many Irish communities have no option but the motor car.

This didn't happen by accident. It has been borne out of a longstanding neglect of public transport investment. Under successive Irish Governments, one abandoned or delayed public transport plan has followed another. Our inability as a country to adopt long term plans and implement them comes back to haunt us again and again.

The Social Democrats are committed to significant investment in both urban and rural public transport.

We believe that the National Development Plan was a missed opportunity with too little provided to this sector. We believe the National Development Plan should be redrawn so that public transport and cycling are re-prioritised over roads expenditure. This simply has to happen in order to reduce carbon emissions from the sector and to be able to plan for additional housing and sustainable communities.

Social Democrats Councillors will campaign strongly on behalf of their communities for significant improvements in local Public Transport. We will use every power available to local Councillors to facilitate the expansion of public transport services in our communities.

- We are campaigning in favour of **directly-elected mayors** for Cork, Dublin, Galway, Limerick, and Waterford and we strongly believe that these mayors should assume responsibility for transport planning in each of these cities and counties with strong linkages with satellite counties
- We will put **transport planning** at the heart of all significant housing plans. We must end the practice of building homes before we build the infrastructure that new communities will depend on.
- We will ensure that the needs of people with disabilities are heard and responded to and that the issue of **universal accessibility** is put at the heart of all transport decisions affecting our Council areas.
- We will continue to campaign for lower fares so that the use of public transport is encouraged and congestion reduced.
- We would like to see **no/low fare public transport piloted** in Ireland.
- We will invest heavily in cycling (see below)
- We will promote **active travel to schools** and ensure that every Local Authority prioritises the provision of safe walking and cycling paths around every school in the country, so that



those children who choose to walk, scoot or cycle to school, can do so safely.

- We will ensure that public transport service providers play a full role in Council Transport policy meetings and we will seek to establish good accountability arrangements at these

meetings so that Councillors can raise service issues for constituents.

- We will ensure that the public know about every significant transport and traffic proposal relating to their community and that the **public voice is heard in the decision-making process.**



Getting Ireland Back on Its Bike

The benefits of cycling are enormous. And cyclist or not, everyone gains.

- With more cycling we get less pollution, less congestion, less carbon emissions.
- With more cycling we get healthier lifestyles and a more active population.
- With more cycling we get better mobility and quicker commuting times.
- With more cycling we get safer streets and more liveable neighbourhoods

Cycling saves time, saves money, and saves lives.

The Social Democrats will launch a 12-point plan for cycling. It sets out clear commitments to cycling including:

- Significantly improved **Funding for Cycling**
- **Proper Segregation** for Safe Cycling and Improved Infrastructure
- More **Cycling Greenways** and Urban Bike Schemes
- Safer Cycling to School
- Better Enforcement
- Improved Cycling Tax Schemes
- **Cycling Officers** & Training

Our local Councillors will help put cycling at the heart of the thinking and strategy of each local authority we are represented in. Cycling should be recognised as a core element of transport policy and Social Democrats Councillors will make this happen.



The Plastic Problem and How Our Councils Can Help

Plastic has become endemic in our culture. It is now almost impossible to avoid purchasing daily necessities without also having to purchase some plastic packaging.

And while plastic brings many benefits, there is a growing problem worldwide of plastic pollution and particularly with single use plastics and our “throw-away” culture. In Ireland, only 36% of plastic packaging is recycled and we believe every level of Government must pay its part in improving this record.

The Social Democrats recognise that there is an urgent need to reduce the demand for and supply of plastics and we commit to the following measures:

- The Social Democrats welcome and support **EU initiatives** on this issue. However, we believe a 2030 target for the achievement of some of the objectives around plastics is **not ambitious enough** and we believe Ireland should go much further much sooner.
- As an interim measure, we are seeking a **levy on plastics** that cannot be easily recycled in Ireland at the moment.
- In the medium-term, we would put the **onus back on producers** to recover plastics that they produce or else just stop using plastic in their production.
- In tandem with this, Local Authorities should take a pro-active approach to ensure the development of **further recycling facilities** so that a wider range of material (for instance black plastics and some soft plastics) is recyclable right across the country. Our Councillors will take a lead on this.
- We support the introduction of a **ban on all unnecessary single use plastics** such as takeaway coffee cups, knives and forks, and other items.
- We favour the **immediate banning of micro-plastics** – legislation in this area is taking far too long.
- We would introduce a **deposit return scheme** for recyclable containers (and other waste streams where possible) building on the excellent examples in Norway, Sweden and Germany and Local Authorities can help with the roll-out of such a scheme
- We would aggressively promote the development of **re-fill options** in retail to minimise the unnecessary production of more plastic containers and we will encourage more local authorities to provide **refill water**



- **dispensers** so that the demand for plastic bottles is reduced.
- We will promote beach, canal, and neighbourhood **clean-up days** with a special emphasis on removing plastic pollution
- We will seek to put an **end to single-use plastic at council events** and insist on time-lines to end or reduce them in council supported events



Tackling Litter and Illegal Dumping

We believe our Councils can play a much bigger role in tackling litter and illegal dumping. As judged by the number of fines issued, there is significant variance in the level of enforcement activity by local Councils.

The Social Democrats will ensure that every Local Authority adopts a clear strategy on dumping and takes a no-nonsense approach to offenders.

In general, our Councillors will take the following approach:

- The Social Democrats favour a **naming and shaming** policy for people found guilty of illegal dumping. Our Councillors will explore all legal avenues to bring this in. We will seek to deploy technology wherever feasible to catch culprits.
- We will seek to reverse the trend of Councils removing **public bins**. We are particularly anxious that bins are provided in areas such as bus-stops and taxi ranks, on approaches to schools, outside neighbourhood shops, ATMs etc.
- An estimated 50,000 households dispose of their waste in an unregulated manner. We will focus councils' attention on reducing this figure.
- We will promote the **expansion of Council furniture/junk collection** days as resources allow.
- We will promote and support **residents clean-up days** and work side by side with Tidy Towns committees to deliver cleaner environments in our communities.
- Public facilities for **disposal of non-recyclable material** should have longer weekend and evening opening hours and we will push for extended hours where resources allow. The easier it is to dispose of unwanted goods the less likely there will be a problem with dumping.
- Charges for bringing disposable items to public facilities should be as uniform as possible across the country and should be pitched at a level that discourages dumping.
- We favour **doubling on-the-spot fines for littering and increasing fines for illegal dumping**.
- In turn, we want to **double funding to the anti-dumping initiative** so that detection, enforcement and clean-ups can be improved.
- It is vital that **penalties for illegal dumping** are actually applied. Enforcement bodies are too often failing in their duties to apply appropriate penalties. Our Councillors will work to ensure that fines are applied at a level that reflects the risk posed to or damage exacted on the environment.



Reducing our Waste

People want to do their best for their environment and play their part by recycling as much as possible. However, we are not making it easy for them.

Our current recycling system is a complete mess. There isn't enough basic information for consumers on how and where you can recycle material, and the recycling system in Ireland can't handle lots of goods that are sold in our shops.

The Social Democrats want our Councils to start taking the lead again on recycling.

The three key points our Councillors would concentrate on are that

- (a) **consumers must have much better information** so that they can make informed choices on minimising their waste and maximising their recycling, reuse, and repair opportunities
- (b) we need a **completely new waste process** that is much more effective in minimising waste, so that the amount of unrecyclable products reaching our supermarket shelves is vastly reduced and so that recyclable waste that is currently not collected as part of household collection services can be recycled.
- (c) Local Authorities can play a much bigger role by **expanding the number of Civic Amenity Centres**, making waste charges affordable, expanding opening hours of bring centres, and providing better options for recyclable material that is currently not part of kerbside collection.

We are proposing a mixture of practical local and national measures to vastly improve the effectiveness of Councils' work on recycling and promoting the circular economy;

Better Recycling and Repair Options

We believe that **funding for the development of recycling centres should be reinstated** and the number expanded so that there is at least one civic amenity centre close to the population it is meant to be serving.

We would like to end the practice of waste collected in public bins going to landfill and

we will seek to roll-out segregated public waste bins.

We will promote local repair options for consumers – such as for mobile phones and other electronic devices.

Improved Information and Education for Consumers

We need far better customer information on recycling – what can be recycled, where



and what bin can it go in. While the development of www.mywaste.ie has been welcome, it is far too basic. If waste can't go in a household recycling or compost bin, then consumers should know where in their area an item can be recycled. Such information is not readily available in many local authorities.

And if it's sold here with a recyclable label on it, then it should be actually recyclable here. There is also much confusion among the public as to what the different recycling emblems on packaging mean.

Our Councils can play a much stronger role in such basic information.

We believe education on recycling, reducing and re-using can also be improved in our schools - building on the success of the Green Flag initiative.

New Recycling Targets

We want to see new targets established for the percentage of domestic households and businesses that have recycling bin and compost bin services, with a particular focus on apartments and rural areas.

At the last count, the percentage of households with three bins in some counties remained disgracefully low – about a million homes don't have a brown bin service.

We also want to see **new specific targets set for recycling in places of employment** – an area that we feel has been badly neglected.

Promoting Responsible Disposal and Exploitation of Waste

We strongly support the **principle that waste is treated/disposed of as close as possible to where it is generated.** This is not only in the interests of fairness but it also incentivises waste reduction within regions, and minimises emissions, congestion and pollution risk associated with transporting waste across the country

We will insist on **transparent emissions monitoring** for all waste facilities. We believe current systems are inadequate, especially in respect of waste incinerators.

In some cases, waste licences are being granted on inappropriate sites close to residential homes. We will insist that the EPA and Local Authorities meet their responsibilities in terms of only allowing waste operations on suitable sites and under strict and enforceable conditions. We will insist that the assessment process is properly complied with.

We favour the introduction of a **levy on aggregates such as sand, gravel, and crushed stone that are extracted from the ground** and used in construction and it should be set at a level to encourage the **recycling of construction and demolition waste** and to reduce the amount of waste being landfilled. All proceeds should be set aside for the environmental fund.

We want to see new targets established for the percentage of domestic households and businesses that have recycling bin and compost bin services, with a particular focus on apartments and rural areas.



Setting New Waste Structures

We are calling for a fundamental review of the effectiveness of the **Repak Scheme** in terms of how we approach waste and the respective roles of producers, retailers and consumers.

In particular, we need to re-examine responsibilities of retailers and manufacturers in terms of reducing the amount of plastics used for the packaging of products, especially loose products. Local Authorities end up picking up the costs of this flawed system.

The Social Democrats support calls made by the **More Power to You** campaign but in particular the call that a regulator be appointed immediately to the waste sector.

The Social Democrats believe the **Commission for the Regulation of Utilities** should be established as the regulator of the waste industry, and that in the short-term we should transition to a system whereby competition works on a “**for the market**” basis. We believe this can allow for the **remunicipalisation** of waste services in certain circumstances and we note the savings that accrued in Lyon and some other cities when this happened.

Ultimately, we would like to see a transition to full remunicipalisation where resources, costs and consumer interests allow. We would also set the new regulator the task of introducing a national waiver scheme.



Promoting Biodiversity – Green Communities

There is growing concern worldwide about the impact of human development on biodiversity on our planet. Depletion of wildlife and insect loss have become very significant environmental issues.

The Social Democrats will promote a concept we are calling **Green Communities** whereby Councils would seek to promote biodiversity as much as possible within a given zone.

Under our proposal, the Council would prioritise measures such as:

- The **planting of trees and flowers** in existing and new developments, and on streets.
- Significantly **reduce the use of pesticides** and herbicides in public green spaces and, where possible, in gardens.
- Create native **Woodland Walks** and Wildflower Meadows in existing and new parks.
- Place **more bins** and reduce litter to keep parks, waterways and beaches clean.
- Create **wild picnic bench spots** in developments and near offices and encourage the creation of rooftop gardens in offices and apartments.
- Where feasible we will seek to **recruit biodiversity officers and ecology officers** in the Councils we are represented on or appoint an existing staff member to that role.
- We also favour the development of a **national hedgerow conservation strategy** so that a correct balance can be struck between the interests of land-owners, road users and the habitats of our native wildlife.
- We will vigorously pursue **blue flag status** for beaches in our coastal communities



Energy Communities

The Social Democrats believe that Local Authorities can play a much bigger role in relation to energy.

At the moment, over a million Irish household overpay for their electricity. The number of gas customers who overpay is probably over 400,000. A significant part of the problem is that the consumer model that has developed for gas and electricity is based on the capacity, inclination and confidence of customers to keep switching their energy provider. If you don't switch regularly, you end up paying more. In some cases you will pay more if you switch only once than if you never switched at all.

This model doesn't work and a growing body of international research shows that under this model the most vulnerable pay the highest prices. For this and other reasons, the UK has brought in price controls for three categories of customers.

Meanwhile, those dependent on oil fired central heating face sporadic fluctuations in their heating bills depending on the international price of oil at the time of purchase and how competitive the local market is. There is no regulator for the sector in Ireland and people who can only afford small top-ups pay the highest prices.

At the same time, the SEAI is sponsoring an initiative called *Better Energy Communities*, whereby communities come together to promote energy saving in their communities. This has had some success but most communities in Ireland have not benefitted from it and many have not even heard of it.

The Social Democrats believe that Ireland can do much more to promote sustainable and affordable energy and that Local Authorities can be significant players in this.

Sustainability and Affordability

Too often, the debate on energy pits environmental sustainability against affordability. We have seen this in the debate on higher carbon taxes. This is unfortunate in our view.

Sustainability and affordability should be dealt with side by side. Climate change is a real thing and the role of carbon is undeniable. Equally, energy poverty is a

real thing and blindly lumping more taxes on the most vulnerable in our society is simply creating another problem and undermining public support in the fight against climate change.

UN SDGs

The Social Democrats believe that energy policy should be based on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. These goals set us the objective of **tackling**



climate change and preventing poverty at the same time – ie: the two go hand in hand

In that vein, we believe Local Authorities can play a very significant role in promoting a new community-focus on energy policy.

New ‘Energy Communities’

The Social Democrats are proposing the **establishment of an energy unit in multiple Local Authorities on a regional basis**. These units would facilitate the development of local energy communities (leaning on resources of the SEAI) and would help roll out pilot energy programmes across multiple Local Authorities.

The new units would facilitate a new pilot programme of **group switching of electricity and gas customers and of group purchase among oil customers**. It would be open to all residents in the Councils’ administrative area – whether a tenant or owner-occupier.

Such models have already worked well in Northern Ireland in terms of oil clubs, and there are some good examples in England where group switching has been accommodated by either the Regulator or by Local Authorities.

By grouping together, energy customers can enjoy **savings from bulk purchasing** and do not have to go through the tortuous ritual each year of switching energy provider just to protect themselves against big increases.

Under our proposal, a condition of participation in this scheme would be that

a proportion of the savings accruing from bulk switching would have to be applied to **energy efficiency improvements in people’s homes**.

In this way, the Local Authority can play a very significant role in reducing the unit-cost of energy faced by residents, reducing the overall cost of energy by energy efficiency measures, and facilitating the retro-fitting of hundreds of thousands of homes in Ireland.

Other Proposals on Energy

We will heavily promote the **retro-fitting of existing Local Authority Housing** stock to reduce carbon emissions from this sector.

We will ensure that **housing energy standards** on all new developments is rigorously applied in planning conditions.

We will use all influence available to the Council to promote, facilitate and **grow community micro-generation**.

Bodies such as the Tipperary Energy Agency have shown the enormously positive impact communities can make. We will seek to emulate this right across the country.

We will extend the number of **public charging points** for electric vehicles.

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