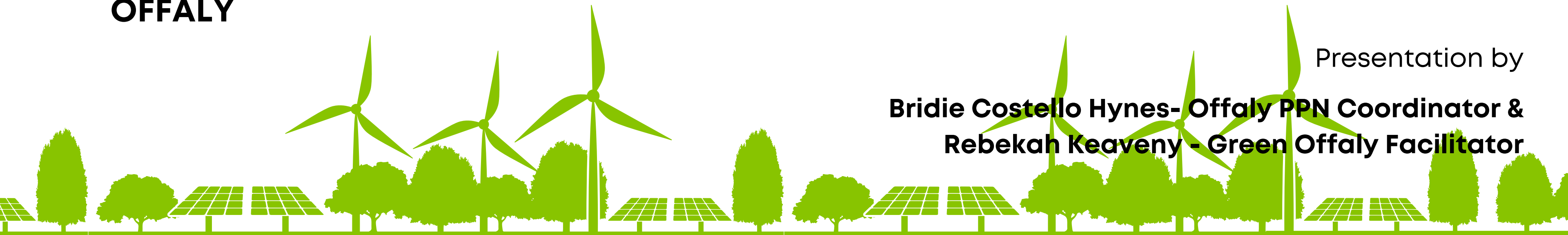


OFFALY PPN COMMUNITY ENERGY CHARTER

GIVING VOICE TO THE COMMUNITY POSITION ON ENERGY IN
OFFALY

Presentation by
**Bridie Costello Hynes- Offaly PPN Coordinator &
Rebekah Keaveny - Green Offaly Facilitator**





Líonra Rannpháirtíochta Pobail Uíbh Fhailí
Public Participation Network Offaly

PPN National Conference 2024



As wind and solar developments continue apace across Offaly's Peatlands, the PPN membership identified at the November Plenary in 2023, that a series of collectively agreed guidelines would enable them to meet energy developments from a position of strength and informed opinion. Awarded LEADER funding for the Energy Charter project, Offaly PPN and Green Offaly worked in partnership with the PPN membership to develop the Charter which outlines the Community Position across 5 main Pillars.

Here is the why, what and how of our Energy Charter Journey!

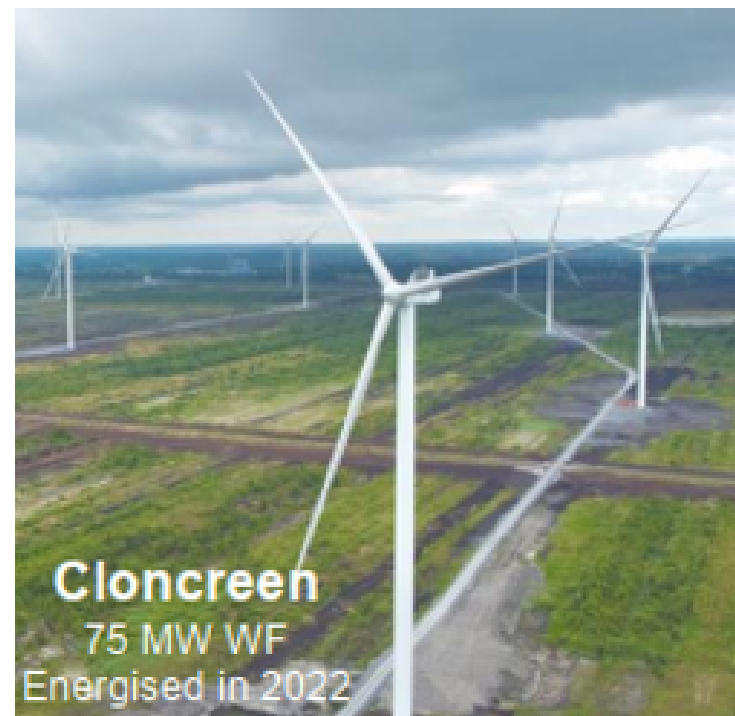
Background

Bridie and I set up Green Offaly back in 2019 when I became the PPN Environmental Rep (LCDC).

We founded GO from a deep belief that Communities should benefit from the coming transition to a sustainable future.

Our first community consultations (2019) reflected a deep concern about wind farms on the Peatlands and resulting job losses from cessation of peat harvesting.

The Offaly situation is unique!



At the November PPN Plenary, Brian Flynn presented on Bord na Mona and Communities.

Key Takeaways:

- BnM owns 80,000 hectares of peatlands in Ireland, 27,000 of which is in County Offaly. This is 34% of their total 'estate' and 1/8 of the land mass of the entire county.
- Power Generation from Peat took place in Rhode, Ferbane, Shannonbridge. 3,500 people employed, mostly by BNM during this era. These stations contributed **260 MW** to the National Grid (little over ¼ of 1 GW)
- BnM will not consider the transfer of any landbank suitable for renewable generation to community groups.
- BnM develop projects to sell on to third parties.

Energy Charter v Community Owned Energy Project?

GO has undertaken a steep learning curve in all aspects of community energy over the last 4 years.

Key takeaways are:

1. Community Owned Energy projects are incredibly difficult to undertake for volunteers, logistically, technically and financially.
2. Communities are increasingly competing with professional bodies for projects and funding.

3. Communities feel that their concerns around energy developments are not taken into consideration at the outset, nor is there any meaningful engagement between developers and communities prior to a development starting.

4. There is currently no national strategy for community energy in Ireland despite a 2014 FofE policy paper recommending just that. National Wind Energy Development guidelines are still pending review and at present the 2006 guidelines stand. There is much confusion around what is and what isn't allowed in terms of distance, engagement with the local community, and so on. This lack of clarity around policy leads to mistrust.

Objectives of the Charter

INFORMATION - The Community Energy Landscape

To gain a thorough understanding of the Community Energy Landscape from many different perspectives. This stage saw us gathering the information needed so that we could make informed decisions about our shared energy future. We needed to gain a thorough understanding of the Community Energy Landscape from many different perspectives, legal, european, experiential and practical.

PROFESSIONALISM - Cohesive Community Vision

In the light of increasing competition, Communities have to become more 'professionalised', in the sense that we are able to work as an organised body. As a 'community collective' we can better respond, from a position of strength, to the big challenges both presently and in the future. When faced with an unwanted or badly positioned energy development, ***Communities tend to respond from a position of opposition, not one of informed, pre planned strategic thinking. Do we know ourselves what we want and what is, or is not, acceptable to us?***

CONSENSUS - Agreed Community Energy Guidelines

When we have agreed, together, what is in the best interest for our communities as a whole, then we are joined in consensus. TOGETHER we can shape the future that we want.

Methodology

01 Involving the Membership

As the Energy transition accelerates, we wanted to ensure that our Communities had the opportunity and framework to influence Offaly's Energy Future. The Charter serves as a set of guidelines that aim to strengthen the Community position in all aspects of the Energy landscape. While the workshops were available to all registered groups we advised that nominated representatives of each group attend workshops 2 and 3 as the nature of the workshops required intense participation and ran for a full day.

02 Engaged throughout

In addition to the workshops, 2 surveys went out to all members; one at the beginning to assess general feelings around the topics to be covered and one for input into the emerging themes for the charter guidelines as identified in the workshops. Once consensus was achieved, the final draft was written and circulated for members approval.

A charter is a formal document describing the ***rights, aims, or principles*** of an organization or group of people.



The Process

Workshop 1

Understanding the Community Energy Landscape

Pillar 1 - Place, Peatlands, Power.

Pillar 2 - People, Policy, Position

Pillar 3 - Potential, Practicality & Problems

Survey 1 - goes out.

Workshop 2

Communities as Energy Partners

What is our role as partner in GOOD energy developments?

Partnership Role - who? what? how?

What we bring to the table - our value.
Professionalism - how do we operate as a force/equal partner in our own right?

Workshop 3

What goes into the charter?

Task 1 - Community Position

Task 2 - Land Use & Legacy - position on energy developments in the built & natural environment.

Task 3 - Communities & Energy Developments.

Task 4 - Community Architecture.

Survey 2 - goes out.

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Community Energy Charter

Understanding the Community Energy Landscape
WORKSHOP 1



Presentation researched and prepared by Rebekah Keaveny
GO Sustainable Development Trust February 2024

Community Energy Charter

Survey 1/Workshop 1
Summary 9/03/24

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Presentation prepared by Rebekah Keaveny
Green offaly

Workshop 3

Community Energy Charter

Refining the Content

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Examples of talking points & questions

Is the demand for clean energy taking place at the expense of ecological benefits? Is there a balance here?

What is our energy preference? Solar, Wind, Geothermal, Microgeneration?

How can we ensure that we are included in decision making of energy projects whether they are owned by us or not? Could forming as an EU Energy Community give us a voice at the decision table?

Could a % of Community Gains and other Funds be used to provide paid support for Communities?

The transition gives opportunity for new agendas that demand local benefits, social ownership and distributed power. What are these opportunities?

Should renewable energy be treated as a regional development project – not simply as a power project? How can we articulate this? Who are our partners?

Is there a way to commission independent reports on health and environmental impacts of turbines? How do we support our demands?

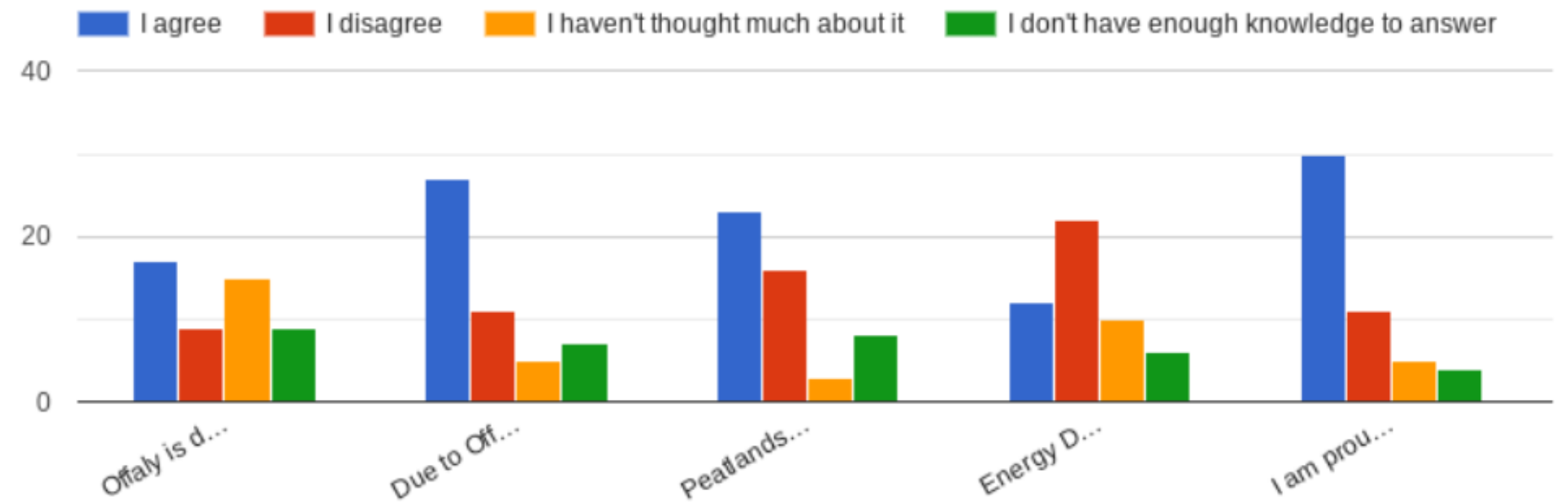
How can we make practical and real contributions to creating options for a just energy transition at the local level?



Offalys Role in the Energy Landscape

Offalys role in the Energy Landscape - please indicate your responses to the following 10 questions. Click on the question and scroll across to read fully. There are 4 options for your response.

[Copy](#)



1. Offaly is defined by power generation - 42% Agree. 20% Disagree 50% haven't thought about it or don't have enough knowledge.

2. Due to Offaly's Energy Legacy Infrastructure, it makes sense that we continue to be a large producer 54% agree. 22% Disagree.

3. Peatlands are the perfect location for Wind and Solar Farms 46% agree, 32% disagree.

4. Energy Development in the County is fairly distributed across the landscape 30% agree 46% disagree

5. I am proud that our County is a leader in the energy transition 72% agree 22% disagree

6. I have a good understanding of Offalys Wind Strategy 36% agree 22% Disagree

7. We should explore other avenues of energy generation. 84% agree 10% Disagree

8. Other uses for Peatlands should be explored 90% agree 6% disagree

9. Offalys energy landscape adds to our tourism offering 42% agree 34% disagree

10. Green Energy is what makes Offaly unique - 48% agree 32% Disagree

OUR VISION

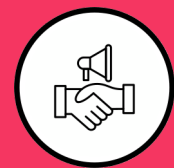
‘TO DEMONSTRATE THE VALUE IN TRANSFORMING THE COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDER/DEVELOPER ENERGY PARTNERSHIP FOR A POSITIVE LOCAL FUTURE.’

OUR GUIDING VALUES

We support ethical energy projects that are nature-positive, community approved, and transparent. We expect renewable energy developments to bring significant social, ecological and economic gains for our Communities as laid out in this Charter.



1. PARTNERSHIP



Recognition of the Community Role as Partners in the Energy Transition

It is widely agreed that citizen engagement is the key to accelerating the energy transition. Offaly data tells us that 70% of citizens asked are proud of the county role in the Energy Transition & 75% that communities have a big role to play in it. Yet only 12% feel that they have a voice at the energy table. Offaly PPN proposes a Community Energy Team (C.E.T) be established to promote the objectives of this Charter & realign the community/energy relationship.

PRINCIPLE 1 IN ACTION

- The Community Energy Team enables:**
- 1.1. Participation** - The C.E.T is the collective community voice in the Energy Transition
 - 1.2. Acceleration** - The C.E.T is a constructive forum, solution focused & in support of good energy projects that can demonstrate ethical, social, ecological & environmental benefits.
 - 1.3. Energy Democracy** - input into localised energy decisions to ensure an equal balance between business and community interests & counteract mistrust
 - 1.4. Just Transition** - securing a fair share of economic benefit from Energy Developments to generate local employment opportunities.
 - 1.5. Facilitation** - mediate, educate & inform within our communities
 - 1.6. Transparency** - serving as watchdog for oversight & accountability.
 - 1.7. Opportunity** - for early engagement between communities and energy developers at pre-planning stage.

2. PLACE



Energy in the Landscape, the Unique Position Of Peatland Communities

Our Peatlands bestow an economic, environmental & social legacy derived from energy generation. The C.E.T acknowledges a clear distinction between private developers and Bord na Móna. The Peatlands were originally transferred from the People to the State for the good of the nation. This transfer created a 'social contract' that resonates today and has impacted the community position regarding energy developments on semi-state lands.

PRINCIPLE 2 IN ACTION

- 2.1. Honouring of Social Contract** Peatlands were originally transferred from the People to the State for mutual benefit. The lands continue to generate huge revenue from Energy Projects and yet Communities see little benefit. See Principle 4.4
- 2.2. Clarity & Engagement** between Bord na Móna & communities/land owners in a spirit of mutual respect.
- 2.3. Participation** on the future use of the Peatlands, 90% of citizens asked would like to see other uses for the Peatlands explored.
- 2.4. Recognition** of the necessity to engage communities in the creative design, placement & economic gain of future developments, contributing to the environmental, socio- economic & cultural heritage of a place as per ESG/CSR practice
- 2.5. Balance** between nature & energy generation on the Peatlands & a shift towards more energy developments in the built environment.



3. PARITY



Transforming Community Standards - Our Value & Professionalism.

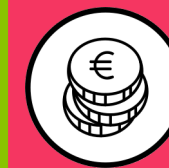
Parity: the state or fact of being exactly the same in status or quality. Communities of local populations are facing an ever increasing series of risks and challenges to their future social, environmental and economic resilience. Solutions are to be found in new thinking, systems and ways of working. Energy democracy calls for moving beyond public participation in the renewable energy transition into a new era of co-design of energy projects via strong community/developer partnerships.

PRINCIPLE 3 IN ACTION

- 3.1. Professionalism:** an identified and approved Community Energy Team of Stakeholders & Representatives that is the professional body for Community/Developer Partnerships.
- 3.2. Supporting the Transition:** The C.E.T provides the structure for genuine community involvement in energy developments by being a constructive forum that is solution focused and supportive of good energy projects.
- 3.3. Value:** The C.E.T can bring immense value to developers, serving to facilitate & accelerate the rollout of good projects.
- 3.4. Voice:** The C.E.T provides a forum that communicates opposition to irresponsible energy developments.
- 3.5. Community Design:** The C.E.T calls for Local Authorities to enable the authentic co-design of future Local Development Plans. We welcome involvement from Councillors to support & communicate the community position in shaping policy.
- 3.6. Capacity Building:** The C.E.T supports the creation of a visible, localised, Community Energy Platform to inform, engage and enable participation around energy projects within Offaly.



4. PROSPECTS



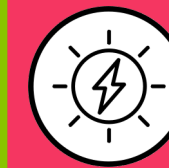
Moving beyond Community Gains to an Equitable Share

A vibrant community is multi generational, offers social, economic and environmental wellbeing. To activate the principles of this charter, we seek a percentage of gain/ownership to initiate self determined enterprise opportunities. We seek the means to be proactive in determining the sustainable future of our places, marked by an abundance of sustainable high-wage employment, existence of efficient energy infrastructure and encouraging a growing business sector that offers opportunity across all ages.

PRINCIPLE 4 IN ACTION

- 4.1. Equity** - a meaningful financial share or ownership percentage stake of all Energy Developments.
- 4.2. Fairness** - the Community Gain Funds do not adequately compensate communities in comparison to the revenues generated for Developers/Owners*
- 4.3. Central Fund** - Per Cent for Energy Scheme for Projects developed in partnership with the Community such as: a) agreed percentage of revenue into a central Offaly fund for Enterprise creation. b) agreed percentage of ownership stake in the development.
- 4.4. Dividend** - in compensation for 3,500 job losses, communities should have percentage ownership of assets and/or MW output to create enterprise opportunities.
- 4.5. Debate** - is it ethical that Bord na Móna can sell energy projects on Peatlands to third parties?

5. PROJECTS



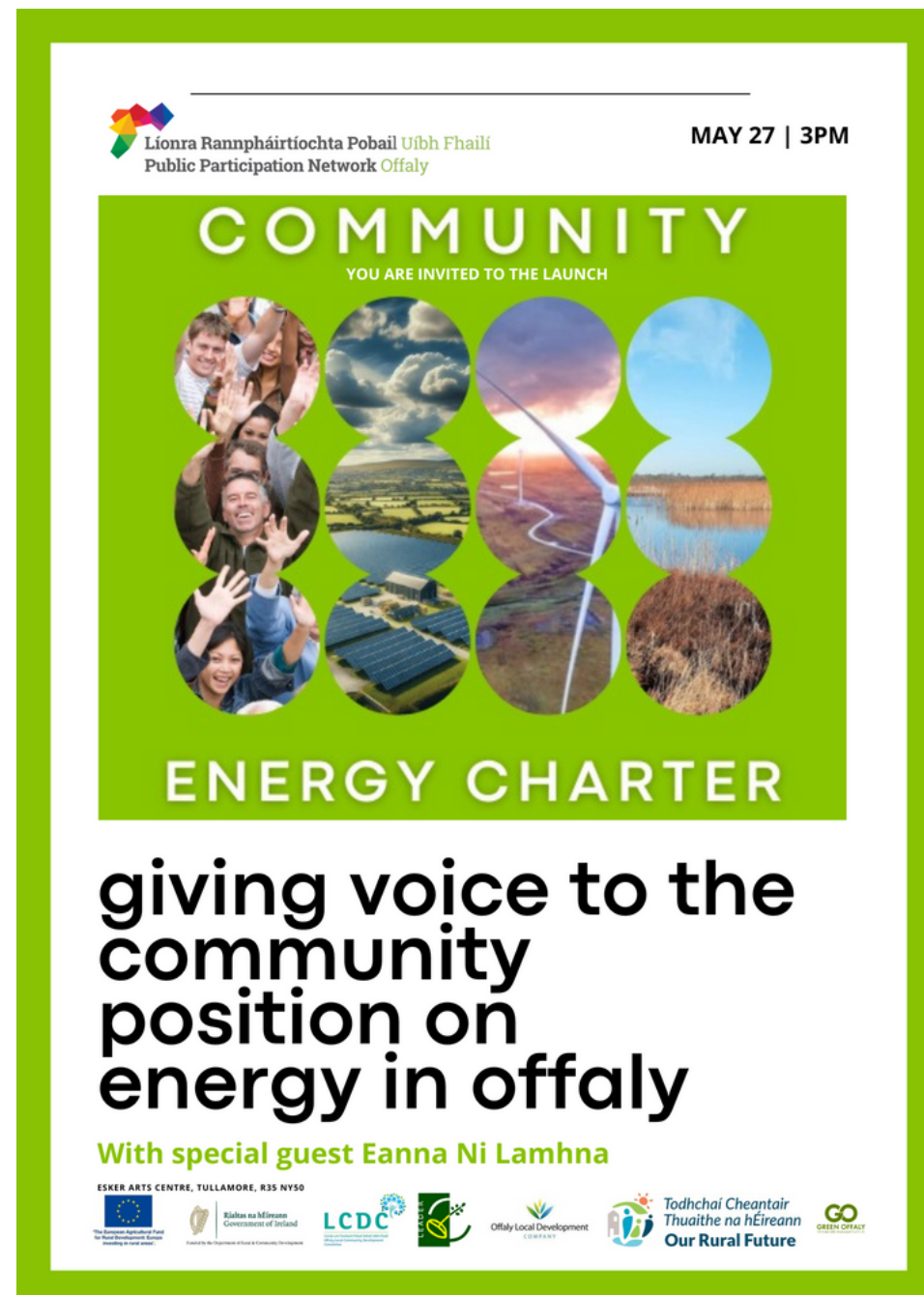
Supporting Good Energy Projects.

Offaly is on the renewable energy development frontline. We have approximately 10 operational & 12 proposed Solar Farms, 9 operational & 5 proposed Wind Farms, 10 proposed battery storage facilities, 3 biomass plants, 1 hydrogen plant plus proposed energy parks. Citizens of Offaly are mostly proud to be a leader in the Green Energy Transition, however we want to evolve the Community Role and see Good Energy Projects which welcome a Proactive Community Partnership and which can meet the standards outlined below.

PRINCIPLE 5 IN ACTION

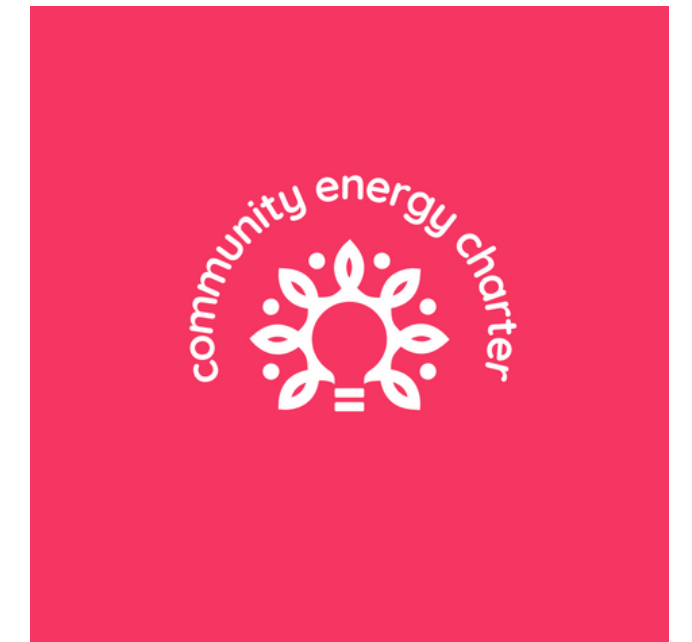
- 5. Agree to Engagement Framework**
 - 5.1. Align** to Community & County Development Plans.
 - 5.2. Provide** tangible and long term economic benefits for Communities
 - 5.3. Demonstrate** environmental stewardship with materials ethically sourced.
 - 5.4. Transparency** - provide a central resource of information at all stages of development.
 - 5.5. Acceptance** that projects will not go ahead if they cannot meet the Community Standards as laid out in this Charter.
 - 5.6. Continuity** - Community share must continue if the development is resold.
 - 5.7. Welcome** Community as a Design Partner with involvement at the outset.
 - 5.8.** The C.E.T engages with the Community to ensure true participation.
 - 5.9.** The C.E.T provides ethical oversight to ensure Developments will deliver social, ecological & economic benefits.
 - 5.10.** The C.E.T are a facilitating partner that can enable good projects to happen by assisting in achieving community consensus. Offaly PPN believe that 'Good' projects are those that are guided by the values set out in this Community Energy Charter.

Launch & Next Steps - Community Energy Team



In order to act on the principles in the Charter we are now moving onto the next step, the creation of a Community Energy Team!

The team members will be representative of a broad spectrum of community groups and organisations. We are also seeking members from other professional, public and voluntary bodies who have valuable experience and insight to bring to the team. For example; the Climate Action Office, Offaly Local Development Company, the Enterprise Office, Local Council, Sustainable Energy Authority, Community Wetlands Forum, Farming, Heritage and other related areas. **This is to ensure that we are all working together in the best interests of the County and that we are operating as a ‘professional’ community team that is willing to work in partnership.** Watch this space!





To find out more about this project or to enquire about the facilitation of a Charter for your own local issues, please
contact: