

KILKENNY'S ENERGY COMPETITION SETS TEMPLATE FOR OTHER COMMUNITIES

A town in the south-east which clinched a winning landmark energy initiative could be the catalyst for other towns around the country to think and act green, bring communities together and create jobs. Report by Sarah Slater.

Having scooped €100,000 plus

additional supports in September, the small town of Callan in Co. Kilkenny is leading the way in a landmark sustainable and renewable energy competition. Now the organisers hope it could catch on not just in Ireland, and say it has the potential to be replicated globally.

Kilkenny LEADER Partnership teamed up with the 3 Counties Energy Agency (3CEA) at the start of the year in a bid to find Kilkenny's Energy Town.

The county initiative supported communities and business interests in a number of qualifying, mid-sized towns in the county to become more sustainable, energy efficient and guidance on how to reduce their carbon emissions.

Callan was crowned Kilkenny's Energy Town and for Nevin Cody, one of the spearheads of the newly-named 'Callan Community Energy', the initiative and competition "is something more than just a once off".

HISTORY OF ENERGY CREATION

According to Cody, this is a broader project that creates a whole new way of looking at sustainable energy that can be carried



Kilkenny LEADER Partnership Chairman Denis Drennan; Callan's Nevin Cody and 3CEA's Energy Engineer Jane Wickham.

forward into the future. "It brings a community of so many different people with skills and knowledge together and will create employment.

"We also discovered during our research that Callan did produce its own electricity locally back in the 1920s, so we've a history of energy creation. So many people in the community wanted to get involved and what we discovered was that the majority of them already were doing their own things when it came to creating renewable energy.

"What has to be realised that this is a community based initiative and by community we mean everyone from every

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All competing communities were commended by Declan Rice, CEO of Kilkenny LEADER Partnership.

walk of life, such as sports clubs, businesses, students, local representatives, basically everyone living in and around Callan. It is a great idea to get a community working together.

“Key to our application was a business plan for now and that would be sustainable for the future with a vision and mission. We have a 10 year mission that we aim to carry on much longer than that.”



Colette Byrne, Chief Executive of Kilkenny County Council, and 3CEA's Energy Engineer Jane Wickham.

THE WINNING SUBMISSION

As part of its winning submission, Callan plans to install locally-made limestone pillars with LED lights, a battery bank, powered by solar photovoltaic panels at the Abbey Meadow Walkway, in addition to rolling out electric vehicle charging points across the town.

The winning group also plans to oversee an energy efficient upgrade of the Old Bacon Factory to include renewable technologies.

The competing towns audited their current use of energy and carbon emissions and developed a plan to optimise their energy sustainability. It is hoped that the competition will spur other towns to take charge on the energy use and carbon emissions, and in the current the global environment encourage community groups and small enterprises to work together on a carbon reduction plan and more.

Cody revealed that, “We are realistic about there being successes and challenges with this initiative. The group hopes it is a spark for other initiatives by towns across the county and indeed nationally. It’s all about people power and communities coming together.”

ENERGY-SAVING IDEAS

Other towns in the county, including Thomastown, Castlecomer and Graignamanagh, engaged with 3CEA and KLP in the competition. Numerous energy saving ideas were mooted and discussions followed.

While there is only one winner, KLP's CEO Declan Rice commended all the competing communities on their drive and passion and genuine commitment to become more sustainable.

“All of the competing towns are winners. They are beating the pathways for others to follow suit. Voluntary and community groups, small and large businesses, community members with knowledge and interest in renewables and others with little or no technical expertise or knowledge but a genuine passion to go green all came together and pooled their ideas for this competition.

“While Callan is the overall winner, both KLP and 3 CEA hope to continue to work with the runners up to help make

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Kilkenny LEADER Partnership Chairman Denis Drennan (left) with representatives from Callan (l-r): Nevin Cody, Cllr Joe Lyons, Eoghan O'Brien, Seamus Kelly, Patrick Lydon and Anja Terpstra.

their plans a reality. With a little more expert help and support, we aspire to making Kilkenny a shining example for the rest of Ireland. This competition shows a genuine, heartfelt and deeply-rooted desire and need to go green and we really see this successful competition template being emulated elsewhere."

CHANGING THE MIND SET

Rice pointed out that initiatives of this type are no longer centred around working in isolation, but instead with an integrated and long-term approach. "It is possible to change working practices and mind sets. It's about thinking globally but acting locally at a community and personal level. If a town or indeed has an idea of this type then we help you.

"Callan is like a laboratory and pioneer for the national and international grid. An independent body looked at the quantitative and qualitative metrics of the business plan Callan produced. It set up a platform to be more ambitious today for tomorrow with a backing skill set from all sectors of the community.

"This initiative is not about becoming a cookie cutter, it's about the collective vision. It's not about duty to one another. It's about a community always being in a state of becoming. The have to own their initiatives and future.

"A competition like this has never run in Ireland," Rice continued. "It has worked. We're hoping now that it will be replicated regionally, nationally or transnationally. Competing communities in Kilkenny submitted detailed, aspirational yet



Martin Rafter, Assistant CEO of Kilkenny LEADER Project, with Mary and Martin O'Brien from Graiguenamanagh (runner-up), in Butler House, Kilkenny.

deliverable plans for optimal use of the available local sources of renewable energy as well as carbon reduction proposals. We want other counties to follow suit to help Ireland significantly cut its carbon footprint."