



Cloughjordan Ecovillage

 Cloughjordan, County Tipperary

In 1999, Sustainable Projects Ireland Ltd sought to establish Ireland's first ecovillage. The plan was to create a community of dedicated environmentalists; to buy a site together on which they could each build their lives.

After 2 years, the site beside Cloughjordan town was selected and meetings between the future residents occurred. Consensus decision-making was used to ensure each community member had their say in the development plan. By 2005, money had been raised and planning permission granted, enabling the Cloughjordan Ecovillage site to be purchased. In 2009, the first residents moved in, and the village began to develop rapidly. By 2012, Cloughjordan Ecovillage had fibre optic broadband installed, 500m² solar panel array, eco-hostel, eco-enterprise centre and 50 homes completed or under construction.



Interview Questions and Responses

How did you, as a community, agree the key objectives that you wanted the ecovillage to deliver?

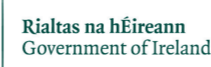
In 1999, the group was established as an educational charity, with the aim of developing a destination to learn from and a great place to live, work and play. The project displayed a new approach to rural community development centred upon pioneering ideas of sustainability. The group spent 2–3 years collectively identifying ideas and sites. The process of identifying the site at Cloughjordan involved assembling the assets required and working with ecological designers and an architect. In 2003, the group provided a deposit for the land for a one year lease, before buying the land in 2004 using a loan from AIB.

The group collectively focused upon gaining zoning and planning permission, and conducted independent studies on the land to enable the construction of the first 30 houses in 2009. In the last 3 years, the group has gathered momentum following the impact of the global financial crisis and 55 homes are now occupied. The sale of sites will allow for the repayment of loans and enable infrastructure completion.

The group has developed a number of individually and community-owned enterprises. The core example is the Cloughjordan Ecovillage educational charity, which provides education through training programmes which fund the running of the charity.

How do you typically develop new projects within the ecovillage?

As people moved into Cloughjordan Ecovillage they sought to find ways to make a living locally. Residents created smaller businesses based within the ecovillage or brought businesses with them. Some projects are therefore 2 or 3 people coming together to make their own livelihood, while other larger businesses are at a community scale. For example, the community is home to an independent bookshop, Cloughjordan Community Farm (with 2–3 active employees) and a community-based internet company which was established to install fibre optics within the community.



Funded through the Just Transition Fund and the Carbon Tax Fund

Describe the process by which you achieved consensus around objectives and projects?

The Cloughjordan Ecovillage educational charity has between 80 and 90 members, who meet once a month and utilise a consensus decision making process to ensure all voices are heard. The process of consensus building has helped to bind the community together, and enabled the sharing of voices and opinions.

Cloughjordan Community Farm utilises a different approach – consent decision making. This quick process involves identifying objections to ideas and is typically used within smaller working groups and organisations in the community.

How do you typically approach planning and project management around selected ideas?

Within Cloughjordan Ecovillage, working groups are established around specific primary activities such as land use, education and process and a coordination group supports these working groups to ensure collaboration and communication between primary activities. This helps consensus decision making to be maintained within project management. For other entities Cloughjordan Ecovillage educational charity licenses out land to organisations within the ecovillage, who then make autonomous decisions internally.

Has the original project vision stood the test of time?

The community embarked on its journey with a vision of developing the ecovillage. However the community did not know what the experience of living in a community would entail, or the nature of their future homes or land. It has since exceeded expectations and much of what the founders set out to achieve has become reality.

How did you identify a funding need? How have you managed the process of bidding for funding?

Funding for the Cloughjordan Ecovillage has been self-generated or project specific, meaning that the community has largely funded the €2m project. The group did not want to source a large grant to fund the entirety of the ecovillage as it would make the project hard to replicate for others.

Some examples of specific funding streams accessed by Cloughjordan Ecovillage include:

- In 2022 Cloughjordan Ecovillage educational charity and Cultivate were successful in obtaining funding from a community climate action programme offered by the Department for Environment.

- The Irish Environmental Network (IEN) provides annual funding through their education and advocacy project.
- The Department for Agriculture provided funding to establish and manage the local woodland.
- European Union funding was obtained for the development of the community-owned district heating system.
- Loans from community members.

Each of the 80–90 members of the Cloughjordan Ecovillage education charity are encouraged to provide around 100 voluntary hours each year, supported by 4 employees. Other organisations at Cloughjordan Ecovillage are entirely self-sufficient, such as Cloughjordan Community Farm, operating on a subscription basis.

Did you have a need for specialist expertise?

The majority of work has been completed by volunteer experts who have relevant professional expertise. For example, members have supported the development of the wetlands. The community is aiming to release new sites and develop affordable housing to attract new residents and bring new expertise to the community.

What have been the hardest difficulties to overcome?

The group has experienced and overcome a number of difficulties. A major difficulty for the group was the economic crisis in 2008, which caused a number of members to leave the project. In addition, funding and financial issues have proved to be a key issue for the group. Additional funding is required to overcome infrastructural challenges, including upgrading the wastewater treatment, establishing biodiversity friendly street lighting, completing footpaths and bridges and upgrading solar panels.

What have been the biggest learnings from the development of Cloughjordan Ecovillage?

Davie and Veronica suggested that other communities should identify what they can change and determine which elements of Cloughjordan Ecovillage they could bring into their own community. The district heating systems, sustainable urban draining systems, integrated constructed wetlands, co-housing models, community supported agriculture, or support of local food producers are all elements of Cloughjordan Ecovillage which could inspire other communities across the Midlands of Ireland.

What decisions, or elements of organisation have been the most important in the development of Cloughjordan Ecovillage?

The community aimed to mainstream and normalise sustainability by creating a new type of village. Therefore the community decided to build the ecovillage independently, rather than seeking large grants and procuring major consultants.

The second key decision was to make the Cloughjordan Ecovillage an educational project for other communities, which has enabled members of the community to remain passionate about the project.

What were the most important sources of advice and guidance for your group as you moved through the different phases of development?

As Cloughjordan Ecovillage was a pioneering community, many thought leaders from across the globe have visited the ecovillage. Each time a group visits the ecovillage they ask new questions which provoke thoughts and ideas and remind the group of the importance of the project.

Key contacts

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Links

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