

Community Conversations

WORKSHOP 04 OUTPUT REPORT
ASKEATON, CO. LIMERICK



Community Conversations

WORKSHOP 04 OUTPUT REPORT | ASKEATON, CO. LIMERICK



Date	Sunday 5 th October 2025
Workshop Event Venue	Askeaton Community Centre, Churchview, An Clar, Co.Limerick
Nature Event	Woodlands of Inchirourke
Facilitators	Philip Corrigan*, Ray Ó Foghlú**, Lucy Taylor**
*ACT, **Hometree	
Relevant Ecosystem	Farmland
Total Events & Outreach Participants	28

FACILITATORS' NOTE

Facilitators answered the following 3 questions post the Community Conversation:

- How did you feel the Community Conversation event went?
- What was the general make-up of the room and the overall mood?
- Were there any key stories that stood out?

Facilitator 1 – Philip Corrigan (ACT)

The nature walk at the beginning went really well. Around twenty people took part. It was a mix of participants, mostly older, with two families also attending. Back in the workshop, there were about twenty-eight people. It was a very engaged group, perhaps the most knowledgeable so far. Many were actively involved in restoration through farming, forestry or local nature projects, alongside others with a general interest in nature.

The mood was one of frustration. People spoke about sadness and loss, but frustration stood out most, mainly with poor policies over the years. The River Deel was a major topic. It has suffered from intensive agriculture and industrial impacts which has drastically affected water quality. Locals said they can no longer drink or swim in the river.

One standout story came from a man who spoke about his past in research, now as a landowner, and his frustration with government policies that never follow through. He feared this (the Nature Restoration Plan) process might end up the same way. It was not the most uplifting note to end on, but it was honest.

Another powerful moment came from a woman who works as a public health nurse and is active in local music and culture. She described how her connection to nature appears through songs and art. She compared the loss of nature to the tragedy of the mother and baby homes scandal, calling it a national disgrace. This was the most striking story of the session.

Facilitator 2 – Lucy Taylor (Hometree)

The day went really well. It was intense and full of energy. People were very engaged and eager to contribute. Once they arrived, they stayed involved right to the end. We had to wrap up after 4 p.m. but the conversations could have gone on for hours longer. The morning walk helped everyone focus and set the tone for the afternoon workshop. Many topics raised during the walk were explored further later on.

The group was mostly older but not entirely. Several people came for specific reasons and were very active in the discussions. A strong sense of urgency came through; people wanted action and change.

Farmers talked about challenges in passing on their land and what to do for the next generation. Education came up often - how to build stronger connections to nature in

schools, agricultural science courses and even at degree level. There was discussion on how to help farmers see their role in protecting nature.

The River Deel was a major concern. The idea of bringing water from the Shannon to Dublin was also raised. People discussed the decline of mass and of the local marts, the loss of communal spaces for sharing ideas, and how to rebuild those conversations.

Frustration with government was strong. Many said they spend hours travelling to meetings, giving input and sitting on committees, but feel unheard. Several participants said they have valuable insights for developing local solutions yet struggle to be listened to. A recurring message was clear: pay farmers to take meaningful action.

Facilitator 3 – Ray Ó Foghlú (Hometree)

The group was quite diverse but mostly older. The average age was around fifty to fifty-five, with very few younger people. The youngest participants were in their thirties. There were many farmers and rural residents, and overall the mix worked well, though a few more younger voices would have helped.

Loss was the main theme, loss of mixed farming, mixed habitats and biodiversity. The river featured strongly with sadness over how it has changed. People spoke about once catching fish or swimming there, which is now impossible.

There were also hopeful mentions of wildlife returning, like buzzards and woodpeckers but the dominant tone was frustration. Smaller farmers and local communities felt they were losing out to big polluters, large agri-operators, Irish Water and housing developers. Untreated sewage was mentioned as an ongoing issue. The shared feeling was that ordinary people bear the cost while larger interests avoid accountability.

A standout story came from a man who had travelled from near Macroom in Cork. He had wanted to attend the Kerry and Lahinch events but could not, so he made the long drive to Askeaton. A farmer and agricultural advisor, he spoke passionately about what has been lost and what could still be recovered. His commitment to attending and contributing was deeply impressive.

REPORT METHODOLOGY

This Summary Output Report has been compiled from the contributions of 28 participants who took part in the Workshop Event. During the workshop, participants were asked to reflect on the same three core questions, ensuring consistency in the responses gathered.

Participant contributions were recorded using written post-its across three rounds of questions. To support discussion and reflection, facilitators introduced prompt cards based on the seven Articles of the Nature Restoration Law and satellite maps of the local area. For Question 2a, a show-of-hands response method was used to capture collective sentiment.

To support the work of the Independent Advisory Committee, this report aims to collate and summarise the general responses while also reflecting the weighting participants placed on the sentiments and stories shared during the workshop. Participant responses are presented in bullet-point format to support ease of reading. As participants occasionally addressed topics beyond the specific questions, our team has reallocated their responses to the most appropriate question (1, 2, or 3). Where this was not suitable, the response has been placed in the 'Additional Comments' section.

All responses have been grouped under the seven Articles of the Nature Restoration Law. While overlaps inevitably occur across themes, every effort has been made to present them as distinctly as possible to provide a clear and structured representation of community perspectives.

In addition to the three core questions, participants were invited to share personal or local stories about nature. Our team has transcribed these stories as verbatim as possible, with only light edits for clarity and legibility while preserving the original meaning. These stories are included in full in the Appendix and are also quoted and location-referenced where relevant throughout the report.

Finally, as a disclaimer, ACT and Hometree are acting solely as facilitators for the Community Conversations. The contents of this report, including any statements that may be inaccurate or non-evidence-based reflect participants' views, and should not be interpreted as endorsed positions of either organisation.



Community Conversations Workshop Event (Image credit: ACT)



Community Conversations Workshop Event (Image credit: ACT)



Community Conversations Nature Event (Image credit: ACT)

Q1. What nature in your community matters most to you and why?

By 'nature' we mean places, spaces, plants and animals.

Terrestrial, Coastal and Freshwater Ecosystems:

- The River Deel and the wildlife it supports. Its importance to the town with tourism, recreation, swimming and fishing. Everyone at this table agrees that the river is the most important issue.
- The River Deel. The otters and the seals that still live there despite pollution.
- Access to the River Shannon.
- Water quality in Loch Derg for swimming.

Marine Ecosystems:

- Water quality in our seas.

Urban Ecosystems:

- Public parks in urban areas.

Natural Connectivity of Rivers and Floodplains:

- Old, native, ancient woodlands along the flooded valley.
- The Lee Valley in Cork.
- The River Deel is the heart of the town. Connections to the river and the Shannon Estuary.
- The traditions surrounding the River Deel. There is a loss of tradition. All this is threatened by pollution.
- The River Deel has cultural and architectural importance. Wildlife loss because of pollution in the River Deel.

Pollinator Populations:

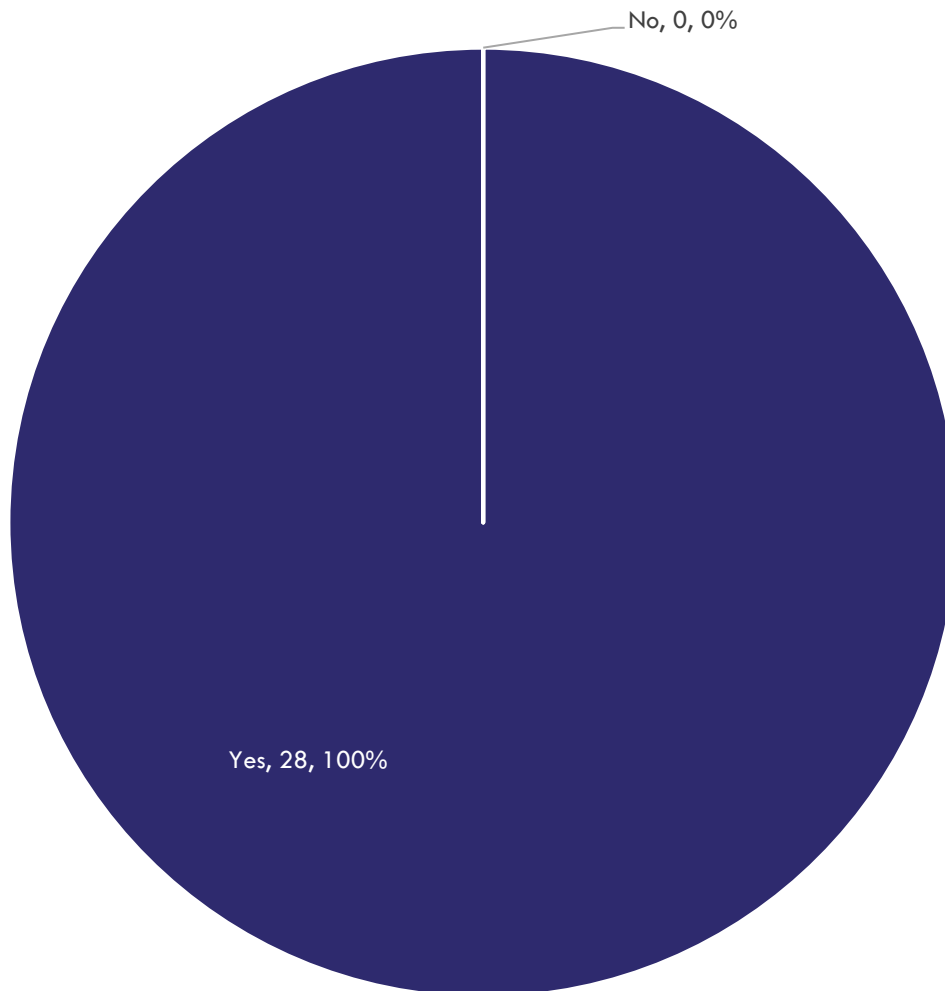
- Birds, butterflies and the dragonfly.
- Listening to the birds and the bees when out walking in nature. Walking in the woods and parklands and seeing birds and swallows, etc. Knowing that there is wildlife around.
- Changing seasons and the return of migratory birds, for example swallows and the cuckoo in spring.
- Birds of a feather in the winter.
- The birds, bees, pollination, curlew, corncrakes and hares.

Forest Ecosystems:

- Our woodlands and the benefits to society including carbon sequestration and oxygen production.
- Fungi including Shiitake mushrooms, Oyster mushrooms, Blushing Wood, and their health benefits. These fungi grow in our woodlands in association with different tree species.
- Birds' nests in the hedgerows which double up as a shelter for livestock.
- Access to our woodland areas.

Q2a. Have you noticed any changes in your local nature over your lifetime? (Yes or No)

By 'changes' we mean positive and or negative changes in your area.



Q2b. If yes, can you tell us about these changes and how they made you feel?

This could be in relation to a particular story or place in your community. What made this particular change come to mind?

Terrestrial, Coastal and Freshwater Ecosystems:

- Poor rewilding projects and their negative effects.
- Habitat, polluted rivers, new species, buzzards, drier spells for longer.
- A decline in flora and fauna. I feel anguish. Along the Shannon estuary I've witnessed more hares and kingfishers.
- There has been a big drop in salmon numbers.
- There is more flooding, less plants, less frogs and less birds.
- There are fewer pairs of mating swans for example in Gougane Barra in Cork.
- The water quality is abysmal. Septic tanks are not working and wastewater treatment plants are inadequate.
- There has been a mass extinction of animals and random things in the water
- The loss of the peregrine falcons makes me sad. There are less owls and bats.
- A loss of habitats, polluted rivers, new species and drier spells for longer. These losses and changes makes me feel very sad.
- I am seeing birds that I haven't seen before, like the white egret.
- The otters are returning.
- The woodcock seems to have disappeared.
- Wildflowers, the last orchid is in the parish.
- The geese that came in the 2000s are now completely gone. Geese have not come to Askeaton in 30 years. They used to come in their thousands.
- The swans are gone.
- The unusual groundwater which has been ruined by industry.

Marine Ecosystems:

- There are less fish in the sea
- We gave away our fisheries.

Urban Ecosystems:

- House building which involved clearing of sites beside turloughs and sensitive areas. These areas should be maintained in their natural form.

- There is more rubbish on the roads.
- There is a lot more light pollution.
- The nature around the town is disappearing.
- In Askeaton, a new multi-million wastewater treatment plant is being built. This will allow further development.

Natural Connectivity of Rivers and Floodplains

- The use of the biotic index to measure the River Deel and its freshwater mussels and crayfish.
- There is change in our river with less fish species including less flatfish and eels.
- The river's appearance has changed from something beautiful to something ugly.
- There are less salmon and trout.
- There are less turloughs.
- The red mud pond as a result of Aughinish Alumina just outside Askeaton is now a mountain. It is the cause of major pollution. It has a huge negative impact on our oysters. There was a big investigation led by the EPA but the findings were never enforced.

Pollinator Populations

- The fields are just green with almost no flowers and no wildflowers.
- The butterflies have disappeared.
- Forty years ago there were insects on your windscreen and at your yard light at night.
- Massive reduction in insects.

Agricultural Ecosystems:

- Changes in farmland with less fields and less mushrooms.
- The badgers are returning to previously dug out setts. [Please see the 'Returning Badgers' story in the appendix.](#)
- Hedgerows should be left intact. Hedges now at the edge of woodlands. They are being cut too low.
- There is too much obsession with the tidiness of our hedgerows. They are cut too tight. There has been a big decrease in hedgerows.
- No hares, less rabbits, no hedgerows and fewer badgers.
- There has been a big increase in monoculture in grassland. There has been a big decrease in hedgerows.

- There has been a decrease in biodiversity. There has been an increase in the use of chemicals, causing pollution.
- There are less corncrakes.
- In our lifetime soil condition has drastically deteriorated. The earthworms are gone.
- There has been an increase in invasive species and mink.
- There has been a decrease in mixed farming methods leading to monoculture and a subsequent reduction of birds and wildlife.
- We need more traditional meadows with modern farming.
- There is no diversity within farming, no self-sufficiency. Mixed farming has gone.
- I studied a correlation between dairy farming and poor water quality in Caherconlish in Limerick. The biggest impact was the pollution from the wastewater treatment plant and not farming.
- Huge increase in the use of herbicides and pesticides since the 50s and 60s which has had a negative impact on our soil.
- Back in the day, everybody had a vegetable garden. They grew their own food. They were self-sufficient. Nowadays, we need nicely shaped carrots and bananas. In the past they were all different shapes and sizes.

Forest Ecosystems:

- There is less forestry.
- There is more awareness of forest diversity and planting native species.
- Ash dieback and the loss of trees.
- The bark beetle threatened Scot's Pine.
- The plastic bag levy took some of plastic rubbish from the trees.

Additional Comments

- Increase community awareness and strive for change.
- I feel for little children that they won't have no opportunity to see nature as we have in the past. The future won't have the opportunity to see nature as we have had in the past.
- The arrival of the woodpecker, buzzards and an improvement in air quality.
- What's driving the change? Is it greed? Is it farming? Is it policies? What about incentives for intensification?
- There has been a lack of knowledge. The next generation know less and are out of touch with nature.

Q3a. What opportunities to experience local nature would you like your community to have in the future? How can we make this possible?

Think about how your community could enjoy and connect with its local nature in the future.

Terrestrial, Coastal & Freshwater Ecosystems:

- Protect our riverbanks, do not allow grazing on them. We need coherent regulations on this. [Please see the 'Common Sense Regulations' story in the appendix.](#)
- Protect our bogs for flooding mitigation. Public access to these environments similar to how it is done in the UK.
- Where I live there is a danger of flooding. We need nature-based solutions. Protection of fish in the sea. Stop dumping waste in rivers from towns and factories and farms. Clean rivers increase wildlife.
- Restore bog lands and wetlands.

Marine Ecosystems:

- Protection of fish in the sea

Urban Ecosystems:

- Healthcare needs to advocate for access to and engagement with nature. Identify values as a country and locally.
- To have more green spaces for people to enjoy and engage with nature.

Natural Connectivity of Rivers & Floodplains:

- Start utilising our waterways for living, for working and for reforming relationships with our water.
- Encourage river walks led by local volunteers with local knowledge to allow for intergenerational learning. We need supported people at a community level with local expertise.
- Stop dumping waste in rivers from towns and factories and farms.
- We need a major long-term solution to our river pollution. What does it look like? Stronger penalties.

Agricultural Ecosystems:

- Proper long-term funding for farmers to support for administration, for insurance, for maintaining the existing stone walls and for amenity values. [Please see the 'Stone Walls' story in the appendix.](#)

- A full revamp of all farming funding. Community-based, more like the Rundale system, not prioritising multinationals.
- Provide a basic income for restoration. Small farmers, it should not be so hard for people to access funding for nature. Simplify application forms and provide long-term schemes which pay farmers and communities to become nature stewards.
- Lease back government land to young farmers with nature restoration measures as conditions in the lease.
- Better funding for agri-environmental schemes including supporting organic farming. [Please see the 'Organic Farming' story in the appendix.](#)
- Why would someone change the way they manage land now if they may change how they farm in the future?
- Supporting sustainably managed farmland that is in proximity to the Shannon Estuary.
- Encourage traditional meadows.
- Put a bounty on mink.
- To properly manage badgers in relation to TB. [Please see the 'Badgers and Foxes' story in the appendix.](#)

Forest Ecosystems:

- Coillte to remove rhododendron and other aliens from their forests.
- Woodlands are beneficial to our livestock.
- Certification on a national basis for woodlands.
- Support nature education in woodland setting.
- There should be mixed planting. Native species should be planted and avoid anymore 'block forests'.
- Support local forest access.
- Our woodlands benefit society with carbon sequestration and oxygen production. Farmers should be paid for both.

Additional Comments

- The GAA can have a massive influence and exposure to the population and audience. We need to use their influence to teach our children about respect for nature. Give the GAA and sporting organisation a grant to promote the nature of their pitch boundaries as children spend a lot of time on the pitch.
- An ethical and cultural overhaul is required to value nature.

- With the new carbon plan, will they be able to get carbon credits?
- Schools can also happen out in nature. Children can learn to grow their own food.
- Change the school curriculum with more movement, more free play outdoors including 'bushcraft' and more nature connection. Repair the disconnection.
- Make more of our mosaic of landscape on our doorstep.
- Providing access, making access easier so people can experience nature more.
- Enforce existing legislation. Local authorities need to be made accountable. Fines need to be assessed at sale.
- Locally adapted solutions. Local solutions for local problems with more adaptive policy making. Improve communication to make proposed changes inclusive.
- Implement a progressive carbon tax.
- More community conversations on nature. Politicians are afraid to show leadership.
- How can volunteerism become subsidised where communities have pots of money to distribute that pay for volunteerism. What are the new civic spaces? Marts or creameries or pubs to share stories, challenges and tips. Incentives for custodianship.
- Discuss more our identity in relationship with land.

Appendix

The following stories are excerpts taken and transcribed from participants during both the Askeaton Community Conversation event and Nature Walk. Our team have lightly edited them for legibility and referenced the relevant stories in the Question section.

Returning Badgers

As long as I can remember, they've been around here. A few years ago the area got dug out. Somebody came and dug it out about twenty years ago, and after that there was nothing. They were gone for five or six years.

How do you know whether they're back? (facilitator)

You can see them out the back. You'd spot the kind of bedding, that mossy stuff there. That's what they use. They're supposedly very tidy animals and clean out their beds regularly, maybe not every night, but often enough.

You can tell when the bedding is fresh, and you can see their tracks here too. They even come out and dig in the fields, which can be a bit annoying if it's a good silage field or something, because they do make a bit of a mess.

Badgers and Foxes today

We wouldn't do much about the foxes. Occasionally, when one steals a couple of my hens, I let him. We keep saying we should do more. There's a hunts and hounds group that comes to hunt them, but they rarely kill a fox. They gallop around but they don't usually get one.

The badger is a different story. TB is a big issue for a lot of people. We've been lucky and only get TB about every ten years, just an odd case, but in some places it's endemic. It's clearly in the badgers, as well as being spread by other causes. Deer are apparently a big driver of it in West Wicklow. It's a huge problem.

It can be a bit of a sledgehammer to crack a nut approach, passing it all onto the badgers. It's a chicken-and-egg situation. Badgers got TB from cattle, and now badgers pass it back on. But if you have a clean population and wipe it out, which is what the Department of Agriculture is doing, it only makes things worse. New badgers will move in from up to fifteen miles away overnight and colonise the area, and they can be infected too.

There's a strong argument for removing only infected badgers that are known to carry TB. Vaccination has been tried as well. The problem is that if it's left to certain individuals, often from the hunting population, they don't really care whether they kill them or vaccinate them.

'Common Sense' Regulations

When I was farming in my woods, I had woods like this (participant currently in a farm woodland as part of the Askeaton nature walk). I used to be very careful to clean up and take all the brush away so that everything looked tidy. I had no idea at the time about the symbiotic relationships or how nutrients are moved by fungi and other organisms.

That understanding needs to be passed on to farmers. I've found it difficult because I'm now classified as a scientist, not a farmer, but I am a farmer. It's about education and helping people understand. If you promote ridiculous rules, you lose people. One such rule is clearing trees away from rivers. We now know trees give cover to fish and help keep water temperatures down, which is essential, yet the regulation still requires removal.

The other day, a contractor I know was planting for Coillte. There were three plots. In the first plot, the ecologist measured a 120-metre setback from the river. The next plot beside it required 70 metres, and the next 30 metres. Three different assessors from the environmental section, three different results, and no consistency. When farmers see that, it undermines confidence in the whole process.

It's the same issue with native species planting. We've already learned from ash dieback that monoculture doesn't work, yet we're still seeing blocks of single species being planted.

We need proper conversations with the people making the regulations, to bring in some common sense and listen to those on the ground.

Organic Farming

How does organic farming make life harder? (facilitator)

The first couple of years were the hardest. Getting grass established in spring was difficult. Wintering is also tough because cows must have a proper bed to lie on, and it has to be organic. That makes it really expensive.

Those would be the two biggest challenges.

Ireland's Stone Walls

There's something about stone walls that really connects people across the island. You see them all over Ireland.

If there was some sort of grant to help people restore them, it would make a big difference. In other countries, like in Menorca, you see stone walls everywhere and they're all well maintained.

Here, a lot of the old walls are falling apart. Someone once said something that really stuck with me "there's great value in those walls, both in heritage and in the land itself" but we don't give them the care or support they deserve.