

That Cork County Council would become a partner to the All Ireland Pollinator Plan.

Full Council: 8th April 2019

Without pollinators, Ireland would be a very different country. In climates like ours, about 78% of flowering plants require pollination. Without pollination, we could not grow fruits or vegetables. Growers would have lower crop yields and lower crop quality. Consumers would have reduced food choices, fewer indigenous food choices and higher prices. In fact, the annual value of pollinators for human food crops in Ireland is €53m; that's about €2,400 per hectare. And the number of pollinator-dependent crops is growing year on year.

Most pollination of crops and wild plants is carried out by bees. In Ireland, we have 99 different bee species: 1 honey bee, 20 bumble bee and 77 solitary bee species. Since 1980, the populations of more than half our bee species have suffered huge declines. Two species have become extinct. A further one third is threatened with extinction. Bees, our greatest pollinators, are massively threatened.

The biggest difficulty for bees is that they cannot find enough food. Around this time of year when a queen bumble bee has emerged from hibernation, she needs to visit 6,000 wildflowers each day to get enough nectar to sustain her new nest. But the large grassy fields, manicured lawns and clipped hedges which we have come to regard as tidy are like a barren desert for bees. If she can't find those flowers, her nest dies. In the autumn, she herself needs to weigh at least 0.6g if she is to survive through hibernation. If she can't find enough food, she too will die.

Bees are also suffering from other changes we have inadvertently made: habitat loss means they have fewer places to make a safe home; pesticide use can poison them and new pest species and diseases can make them sick.

The All Ireland Pollinator Plan was launched in 2015 by the National Biodiversity Data Centre. This Plan is all about collaboration and forming partnerships to reverse the decline in bees and to make Ireland a place where pollinators can survive and thrive. It outlines a wide range of actions cross public and private land that every level of society and undertake to create a network of pollinator-friendly places across our landscape.

Because they liaise closely with communities, Tidy Towns groups and because they plan for and manage many of our shared green spaces, Councils have a very special role in helping to make the All Ireland Pollinator Plan a success. In recognition of this, every local authority has the opportunity to sign up as an official partner of the All Ireland Pollinator Plan. I am asking that we in Cork County Council would join with some 7 other local authorities who have already done this.

There is nothing onerous about signing up to the All Ireland Pollinator Plan. It doesn't expect instant change. What it does expect is that in the first 12 months we would choose to implement just one of 30 evidence-based pollinator-friendly actions specially designed for Councils. In the following 5 years, we would implement three more. And where possible, we would consider pollinators in our policies, plans and management decisions. It would be about making very small, incremental steps that don't overexert our existing resources or require funding, creating awareness and building partnerships.

Although Cork County Council is already supporting actions to help pollinators, there would be huge advantages to our signing up as an official pollinator-friendly partner of the NBDC. It would give us

access to a range of helpful resources. It would identify Cork County Council as being progressive and aware. And it would respond to the massive interest across our communities in the welfare of bees and pollinators generally.