

Smart Energy Action events were held in Carrick-on-Shannon, Drumshanbo, Ballinamore and Carrigallen (Leitrim); and Ballyshannon (Donegal), as part of the NECS project organized by Good Energies Alliance Ireland (GEAI) and I.T. Sligo. The events included discussions about barriers to wind energy, solar energy and electric cars, priorities in making the best quality of life in the next ten years in the discussed towns and how would the chosen towns benefit if 10 million euros was invested into each of them. The results of these discussions are as follows.

The question asked and discussed was about priorities in making the best quality of life in the next ten years in the discussed towns.

### **Priorities**

*Q: What are the priorities for improving the quality of life in your town?*

In **Ballinamore**, the priorities are more jobs and employment. But also fire and ambulance emergency service, health care, and a easy access to child care development. Having universal citizen wage, and keeping the town crime free. Also, good quality communication, electricity, bowling and a digital center. Eating locally grown vegetables and a farmers' market. Using natural facilities: lakes, walks, sports, canal, cycling (Greenway). Another priority would be better and cleaner public, and using car pooling. Having a solar panel for hot water group, a change from coal to local timber and a cut in energy costs. They would like more recycling bins, also dog proof bins, and a plastic bottle recycling. Also, they would like to keep their environment clean.

In **Ballyshannon**, the priorities are reduction of commercial rates to try and encourage people to open shops, increase employment, reduce town routes to encourage businesses to open or re-open, and give more support for new businesses. Also, fishing could be encouraged to bring in tourists and angling could be developed (there are over 100 lakes in 20 miles radius). Watersports opportunities (tourism) could be improved, and tourism which would keep the historic image (historical buildings). And a tourism office could be open for more hours a day. Also, tours of the hydro-electric station could be organized. And walking paths and/cycling routes / Greenway / Walk ways and Water ways. Also, outdoors activities could be encouraged. And skating ground constructed for young people. Education schemes to use buildings as the VEC (old VEC building) could have new courses. There is a need to educate people about sustainable energy, public transport and community development association to develop.

In **Carrick-on-Shannon**, the priorities are more jobs and employment, but also sustainable trade/local producers, and to promote sustainable tourism. Also, higher insulation in the houses. But also, greenways linked with blueways, improving the public transport (implementing new routes), car pooling, more charging points for electric cars in public places (hospital, colleges, council office, etc.). Constructing a bypass to avoid traffic jam (especially the bridge), increase number of car parking, introduce electric boats, pedal pubs, solar batteries (cruises), rainwater harvesting and flood prevention measures. There is potential for geothermal energy, and implementing renewable energies courses to raise awareness about renewable energies would be very useful.

In **Carrigallen**, local employment is needed, and community resources, purpose build hall and a theatre. Internet /mobile phone coverage could be improved. There is no bank and only one ATM/cash machine. The residential sector could be improved by making it more modern. There is a rural link bus service missing, and link to cancer treatment center. It was emphasized that local waters have to be protected, and rejuvenated for fishing. Also, waste management could be improved.

In **Drumshanbo** more jobs are needed. There is also improvement needed to increase outdoor activities (like cycling and walking) and improvement in living conditions. The vacant houses need to be filled up by trying to encourage more families to come and live in the village. Tourism could be improved if there is an electric bus implemented. And a link created between nearby towns. They need more public transport options and variety. An opportunity for car pooling, better broadband, water storage and rainwater collection. Deep retrofitting is needed (insulation, raise from C to B BER) and joined up thinking.

## Barriers

*Q: What are the barriers to Renewable Energies?*

About the barriers to wind energy, solar energy and electric cars. The **barriers to wind energy** discussed were the local opposition to big wind farms, the opinion that big companies take money out of the communities and the perceived noise and visual intrusion that wind farms cause. There also seems to be lack of knowledge about wind farms, and lack of clarification on the government level. They are also perceived as high costing to set up, interfering with signals and needing a lot of space. It was noted that they can't handle strong wind, and it could break them. They are seen as not suitable for individuals, only for big companies. There is a opinion that they have a large carbon footprint.

The **barriers to solar energy** are lack of knowledge about them, and they are seen as not efficient or cost effective. There is a problem as to the energy not used can't be sold back to the grid, and there is a lack of connection to the grid. Also, there is an existing opinion that solar energy can't be produced without direct sunlight. And the thermostats have to be maintained. And there seems to be a lack of government help on the issue.

The **barriers to wind and solar** are expensive turbines and solar technology, and storage batteries

the ESB monopoly on distribution. There is a need for community co-operatives who would get value from local projects (community beliefs).

The **barriers to electric cars** are a lack of charging points and the travel distance between any existing charging points. There is also uncertainty over charging costs. And an opinion that electric cars can't be compared by efficiency to regular cars. Also, electric cars are seen as more suitable for cities. They are perceived as more dangerous because they're silent, and their batteries are expensive. It was noticed that there are no incentives for local population to actually get a electric car. With new technology, there is a need for trustworthy suppliers and products. But also a second hand market of electric cars is needed.

The **barriers to both wind and solar energy and electric cars** are a fear of change, and lack of knowledge about sustainable energy.

### Opportunities

*Q: If 10 million euros were invested in your towns, what would you spend the money on?*

If 10 million euros were invested in the towns discussed the effects would be the following, based on the discussion in each town.

**Ballinamore** would invest in the hydro scheme's canal, community solar PV farm, community solar thermal project, community wind farm, community Biogas AD plant, community wood fuel supply chain and community mixed forestry. They would also make fast public charge points for electric cars, and a local business for electric taxis. Housing retrofits as well, and housing focused on the elderly. And upgraded the public lighting, broadband , community eco launderette. To fund local projects for support grants and GAA Grounds NZEB .

**Ballyshannon** would invest in PV solar community scheme, and group schemes for insulation, thermal solar heating scheme, wood pellet factory, tidal generation of electricity, center for energy research, biodigester. And day rental electric cars, also increase employment, community education and showcase older streets.

**Carrick-on-Shannon** would invest in solar farms on flood plains, set up energy co-operatives, central geothermal district heating, local Indigenous employment, register of regular travels, go car for small industrial estates + 4 setup points, more and faster charging stations, eco-tourism as industry helps sustainability. Implement an electric bus from Carrick to Lough Allen, electric bikes, school-run electric cars, go cars hire per hour, more and faster charging stations.

**Carrigallen** would upgrade all buildings in town, insulation (windows), town broadband, implement charging points, community CHP plant, education about energy in local schools, solar panels. Also invest in Syn Gas, Bio Gas plant, Algae Bio Mass. But fishing tours, wood community, community CHP plant and solar farm and community public transport scheme.

**Drumshanbo** would invest in floating solar panels, micro hydro (eco-tourism project), develop a zero waste town for the whole supply chain, a district energy system, car sharing, car pooling, deep retrofitting, dissemination of (independent) information, vacant housing retrofit to BER A and food Hub to be a NZEB (Nearly Zero Energy Building).