

# How green is your village?

Concern over climate change has brought the Co. Dublin villagers of Glashule and Sandycove together in a bid to build a sustainable future, writes Katy McGuinness



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Village people: Local Glashule business owners who have taken part in the green initiative. Photo: Kyle Tunney

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'In the city centre, people put cigarette butts in our recycling bin,' says James Norton, owner of The Punnet health stores, 'but it's a different world out here; people really care.'

James is one of the shopkeepers participating in the Glashule & Sandycove Going Green initiative in County Dublin, and he reckons the fact that the seaside village has made such good progress over the year and a half since the programme was launched is testament to the 'amount of noise' that campaigners, Dr Ruth Doyle, a local resident, and Roxanna Allen of Rococo boutique have generated.

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It also doesn't hurt that Ireland's answer to Greta Thunberg, Flossie Donnelly (12), hails from the area and has already made an impact with her Flossie and The Beach-cleaners campaign, which is working to rid the local beaches of plastic.

"I've been working in the environmental field for the last 13 years," says Ruth Doyle, who has a PhD in Human Geography and is an expert in behaviour change and sustainable lifestyle, "so this is very much an intertwining of my personal and professional lives.



"When I was on maternity leave with my second child [she is expecting her third in a few weeks], I became very concerned with the amount of waste that we were generating as a family and started trying to do something about it [see Ruth's Instagram @missionzerowaste]. I read up on the 'zero waste' movement and saw that villages in the UK and US had signed up to a 'no plastic' initiative [Aberporth in Wales is one example, and Ireland has its own eco-village at Cloughjordan, Co Tipperary] and I wondered if we could do the same in Glasthule and Sandycove. We are all constrained by what's around us, and it's about making it easy for people. I also thought that it would make a great brand for the village."

Ruth set about enlisting the support of key businesses. Mella Tarrant of coffee shop Hatch, James Norton of The Punnet, Gerard Maguire of 64 Wine, Roxanna Allen of Rococo and Mark Caviston of the famous Caviston's food shop were among those who came on board at the outset.

"We realised very quickly that going plastic-free was very aspirational and would be hard to achieve in the short to medium term," says Ruth, "so we went instead for 'going green'. We felt that each business in the village would be able to take some actions and that everyone could get involved."

"Initially we have focussed on reducing the use of plastics and introduced more planting and benches. We have ambitions to cut our waste, energy and water consumption. It's a partnership between the community and the businesses in the village, with the idea that everyone works together to create a road map for us to be more sustainable in the future."

As a first step, each business committed to phase out three single-use plastics in favour of compostable ones - "we felt it was important to have a measurable goal," says Ruth - and to display signage designed to highlight particular products that fit in with the aims of the campaign. Each shop has a personalised poster calling on consumers to support the initiative by, for instance, bringing their own cups when they go for coffee.

But although there are common threads running through the actions that each of the village businesses has taken, there are particular challenges.



Roxanna Allen of Rococo clothes shop asks her suppliers to certify that the clothes that she buys from them are made in accordance with ethical rules for the garment industry and produced sustainably.

"I have suppliers in India who are now shipping to us in boxes lined with plastic rather than shipping each individual garment in plastic, and another with a new dyeing system which means that every drop of dye is re-used, and nothing goes to waste. One of the latest fabrics is made out of orange peel, and the Danish brands are using sea-wool made out of recycled fishing nets and oyster shells - they really are ahead of the posse.

"The True Cost on Netflix is a film that everyone should watch, to gain an understanding about the impact of individual clothing choices. I won't buy garments in polyester even if I love them, because of the microfibres that end up in the sea. Acrylic is a problem too. Cotton is one of the worst fabrics from an environmental perspective - even though it's natural - as it uses lots of resources; bamboo is much better. The whole area is a minefield, but we are doing the best we can - trying to encourage our existing suppliers to work with us while balancing that with clothing that reflects our brand. Increasingly our customers are asking if the clothes are sustainable which I see as a positive."

Directly across the road from Rococo is 64 Wine, Gerard Maguire's popular wine and food shop, which also operates a café/wine bar.

"It has been relatively easy for us, with packaging the biggest issue," says Gerard. "All our own food packaging is biodegradable, and we use compostable coffee cups - although we had to get through thousands of cups before we could make the switch! We also have a herb garden up on the roof - it was a disaster last year because of the watering ban but it's going well this year and the chefs actually use it. I find that it's helped in terms of getting the staff engaged. We have looked at every aspect of our business to see how we can improve. We already have one of the biggest ranges of natural and biodynamic wines in the country which we're expanding all the time, and we are in the process of changing our cheeses so that we stock more local and Irish options."

A couple of doors along the road from 64 Wine is Caviston's, where Mark Caviston has made the switch away from single-use plastics and invested in compostable containers for takeout coffees and deli products but admits that there is still lots more to be done.



"Our bakery is directly across the road so there are no food miles there, and we sell our bread loose in paper bags. We're also happy to take back any plastic packaging from customers. We have sold muesli and rice loose for a while now to people who bring their own containers and hope to sell more bulk products in the future, and our dried goods will be in compostable bags before the end of the year."

But Mark says that it is not all plain sailing. He admits to being torn when it comes to questions such as whether recyclable is better than compostable.

"And then there are the realities of health and safety and food waste versus plastic," he says. "Food simply lasts longer wrapped in plastic. It's complicated ... as a customer you have to remember to carry your Tupperware container, and as shopkeepers we want to give the customer the best experience possible. It's definitely a work in progress."

As if on cue, a regular customer walks in with her own container for the purchases that she selects at the fish counter at the back.

"Compostable containers and biodegradable plastics are still not great," says Ruth, "because of the lack of segregated recycling and disposal. We really have to be conscious to bring our own cups and containers. Personally, I would like to be able to buy more loose dry goods in a dedicated zero waste shop."

Gail Cantwell and her sister Sandra Mamane run Mirella, a beautiful-smelling Aladdin's cave of cards and gifts, its shelves laden with all manner of 'green' goods such as natural rubber toys for babies, string bags, bamboo cups, cutlery sets and toothbrushes, BPA-free water bottles and children's lunchboxes.

"We bought the stuff and they came enthusiastically," says Gail. "Children are particularly keen, it took off very quickly."

"At trade fairs we see amazing stuff," says Sandra, showing off a new range of glass water bottles in protective cases that has just arrived. "The range of what's available is growing very fast."

Gail and Sandra say that suppliers are improving when it comes to excess packaging, but that non-recyclable polystyrene "remains the real killer".

At Hatch, Mella and her sisters serve up 3Fe coffee to a steady stream of regular customers. Even though Hatch has got rid of single-use plastics, all its packaging is paper, and the coffee shop has installed a filtered water tap (and encourages customers to refill their water bottles without charge), Mella sounds frustrated.

"Not many use their keep cups - even though we give a discount to anyone using them - either because they forget to bring them, or the cups are dirty, although we tell them we are happy to wash them on the spot. We are now stocking premium keep cups and water bottles from MiiR and Frank Green that are sustainable, spill-proof and keep liquids hot. We'd much rather people use them - if the compostable cups end up in the rubbish bin, it's a wasted effort. We're currently waiting for 3Fe to supply the coffee in compostable packaging - we get through 60kg each week so that's not insignificant."

Audrey McDonald of the Cookbook Café says that she's proud of the improvements that she's made over the past few years.

"The City Bin guys say we should get an award! We generate a very small amount of general waste now, but a large amount of compost and recycling. All our food waste from people's plates, except for bones, goes into the compost, and we have very little food waste aside from that - our ordering and menu planning is much tighter than it used to be. We even pre-zest the lemons and limes we use in drinks so as not to waste the zest! It's an ongoing battle, though, to bring the staff along. I'm always on at the staff to turn off lights and

conserve energy, and I've written to all our main vegetable suppliers complaining about the amount of plastic that they use - I would love if they were more in tune with what we are trying to do. My children have it drummed into them in school, and they drum it on to me. Tom [Dunne, her husband] does all the recycling at home and he goes mad if things are in the wrong bin. We're not perfect, but we do our best. In the village, we are all on the same page, trying to get it together."

Alan Kealy from the Spar shop has also got rid of single-use plastics in the shop, replacing them with compostable deli containers, cutlery, coffee cups and plastic bags.

"The biggest challenge is plastic packaging from suppliers, although we move as much as possible through recycling. At store level we do as much as we can, and as chair of the Spar Council of Retailers, going green is very much part of the agenda. It's a significant cost and we need to challenge suppliers to bring down that cost."

At Cabello Hair Design, owner Rory Finnerty uses Natulique organic hair colour produced in a windmill-powered factory - "we can make you blonde or dark and do ombre or balayage" and has switched to reusable wraps for highlights.

"We are still waiting for the bigger suppliers to step up though," he says, "but we are down to one black bin every three or four weeks, which is a big change."

Beauty salon and spa owner, Nuala Woulfe, has also gone organic, introducing the Eminence 100pc organic 'seed to jar' range of skin care products.

"They are very popular with people who have gone through cancer treatment as they are made with food-grade ingredients; I am getting very good results. I am always looking for ways to be chemical-free and my clients are definitely looking for products with fewer chemical additives."

Nuala says that her biggest challenge is finding paper bags and cups that aren't coated and yet of a high enough quality that they can be re-used.

At Fitzgerald's pub, Tom Fitzgerald has switched to paper straws, while Robert Mitchell of Mitchell & Co wine merchants says that there is not much that comes into his shop that can't be recycled.

Emma Martin of Miss E boutique and Nicky van der Lee of The Core Pilates studio are two others doing their bit; the latter maintains a notice board of suggestions that includes using compostable coffee cups as seed planters which can be put directly into the ground when the seedling is ready to be planted out. And Quinn's funeral directors report an increase in demand for sustainable coffins.

A year and a half on from the launch of the initiative, it's time to take stock.

There's praise from all the shopkeepers for Ruth and Roxanna for creating the logos and signage for the campaign, and Gerard Maguire sums it up when he says, "Ruth had nothing to gain from this, but she has embarrassed us all".

"This village is a good place," says Roxanna. "The locals are receptive, educated and widely travelled and the Harold School [which has its own green agenda] is a very positive influence on everyone. Sometimes it can be frustratingly slow, but we have had good support from local politicians including Oisín Smith, Cormac Devlin and Mary Mitchell O'Connor, and Jenny MacNeill even though it's not her area. Other villages have been in touch to see if they can emulate what we are doing, so hopefully the word is spreading."

James Norton reckons that the key to making further progress is education.

Roz Purcell is doing a great job making younger people aware of the issues," he says. "It's important that people understand the difference between compostable and recyclable; I find that everyone under 45 is conscious but older people not so much. The pressure is definitely on - we are using 10pc of the plastic bags that we were a couple of years ago - but I do have an issue with the cost of compostable bags. They're expensive - €101 per box compared to €42 for plastic - and they're ending up in the bin."

Gerard Maguire thinks that the local authority should incentivise businesses making the effort to go green, perhaps by reducing rates, while Ruth says that businesses need hand-holding through implementation.

"There is a lot of confusion," she says, "nobody knows how to make decisions. I am pleased with where we are but there is more to do, and we need the council on board. We need dedicated compostable and recycling bins on the street - without those you don't see the benefit of the compostable packaging, especially coffee cups. They end up in the same bin as rubbish and give off methane greenhouse gases; segregated waste is the big thing.

"It's hard to keep up momentum and there is volunteer burnout, we need direction yet there is no template out there. We need to look at energy but that means getting involved with the SEAI, and with water it's the EPA.

"If there was one central number to call I would really welcome that. The EPA used to offer a free audit under its green business programme, but now there's just an online tool. Large businesses are quite well catered for, but smaller businesses desperately need a holistic approach and help to navigate all the issues."

Photos: Kyle Tunney

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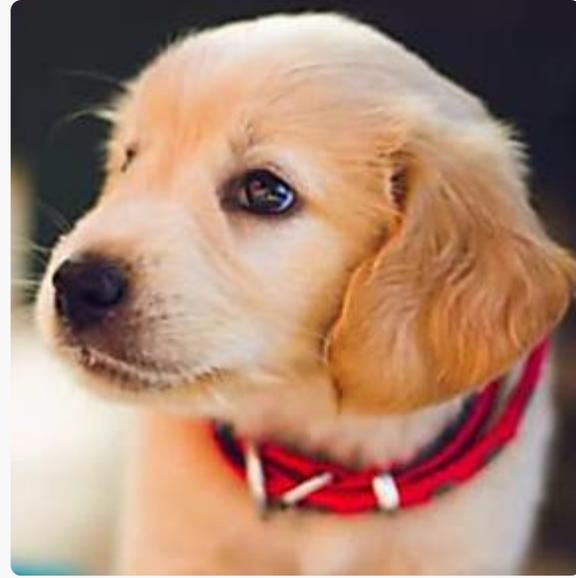
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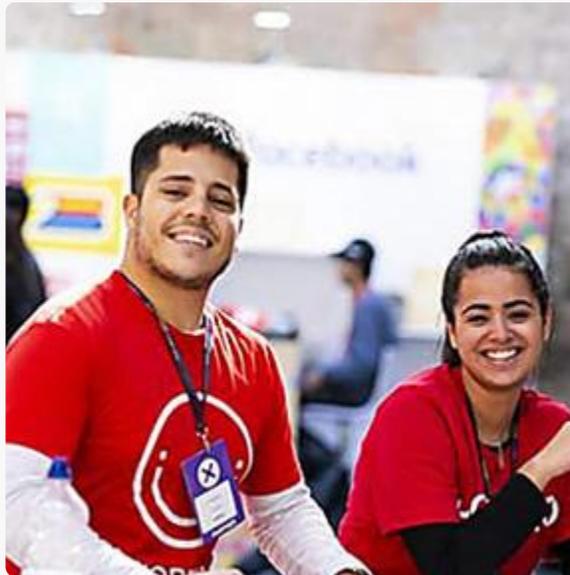


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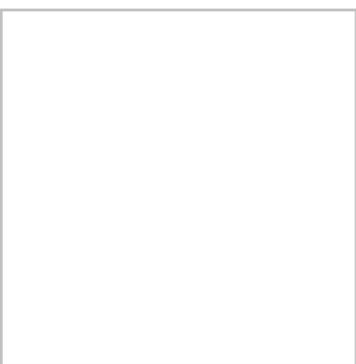


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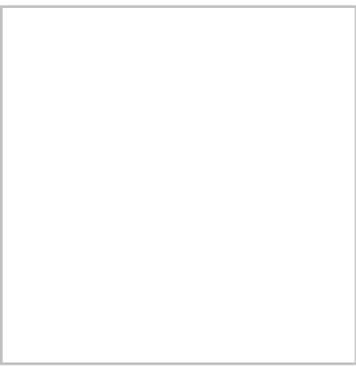
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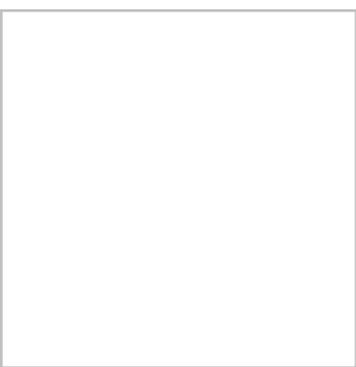
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