

**Climate Change, Biodiversity & Environment SPC**  
**Minutes of Meeting held on Tuesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2020 at 15.30**

The meeting was held remotely by Ms Teams software connection.

**Cathaoirleach:** Cllr. Mary Farrell

**Present:** Cllr. Tom Forde, Cllr. Leonard Kelly, Cllr Donal Kenny, Cllr. Maura Bell, Ms. Mary Walsh (Business & Commercial), Mr. Billy Murphy (PPN Member) Mr. Joe Ryan (Trade Union), Mr. Danny Forde (PPN Member), Carolyn Godkin, A/Director of Services, Gerry Forde Senior Engineer, Brendan Cooney Senior Executive Scientist, George Colfer Executive Engineer, Rory O'Mahony Senior Executive Engineer, Hugh Maguire Administrative Officer, Philip Knight Senior Staff Officer, Lillie O'Brien Assistant Staff Officer

**Apologies:** Cllr. Oliver Walsh, Cllr. Jim Moore (connection problems), Ms. Karen Finigan (PPN Member), Mr. Ned Lyng (Agriculture rep.), Mr. John Somers (Construction Industry Federation) and Cliona Connolly Senior Staff Officer.

**1. Minutes and matters arising.**

The Minutes of the SPC Meeting dated 13<sup>th</sup> February 2020 were noted on the proposal of Cllr. Tom Forde and seconded by Cllr. Leonard Kelly.

Cllr. Mary Farrell welcomed everyone to the first remote Microsoft Teams SPC meeting.

**2. Environment Team update by Gerry Forde**

Piers and Harbours – The Committee was advised that the channel at Kilmore Quay is currently being dredged. Wexford County Council has taken over New Ross Port directly and at present essential safety and other works are being carried out. Operations will recommence when the works are completed in the next few weeks.

Coastline – It was noted that Beaches are now fully opened and Wexford Co. Council was awarded 7 Blue Flags for 2020. The Blue Flag was withdrawn from Courtown Beach as there is no beach left due to erosion but the situation will be monitored until such time as the beach recovers and the Blue Flag might be regained. A Green Coast Award was awarded to Baginbun Beach for the first time this year.

Waste Activity – It was reported that the Household Recycling Centres remained open throughout the Pandemic and that the environmental clean-up crews continued to work right through from March. Reported illegal dumping was down during the crisis. Public amenities have all fully reopened over the past few weeks.

Cllr. Tom Forde commended the Environment Section for the traffic management at Curracloe over the June Bank Holiday weekend it had worked well.

**3. Walking Trails update by Rory O'Mahony**

Rory O'Mahony gave an update on Walking Trails and stated that both Coillte and Wexford Co. Council trails remained opened apart from the carparks being closed during lockdown but these reopened the 8<sup>th</sup> June. For the 2019 projects the Council applied to the Department of Rural and Community Development for ORIS Funding and 5 trails will be awarded grants in the near future for 2020 projects under measure 1 projects (€81,089) and tender will be sought to carry out the required works.

Wexford County Council must make a contribution of 10% from the Planning Levies Fund towards the Project.

Approval was also granted for a Measure 2 project funding (€62,328 grant) for a coastal trail running between Duncannon and Arhurstown. For 2021 projects, interested groups have until the end of August to submit an application to WCC. These will be vetted for the best projects which will be then be submitted to the Department of Rural and Community Development before the end of September. The main changes is that ORIS grant is that 90% funded is provided by the Department but are only allowed 7 rather than 10 projects through in Measure 1.

The following queries were raised by the Committee Members

- The car park at the Three Rocks Trail was opened at the end of May but now appears to be closed and if that is due to ongoing work or has the carpark reopened? Rory O' Mahony stated that there were 2 projects ongoing at Forth Mountain – the Three Rocks Trails project was completed and the car park reopened until Coillte closed them during lockdown but they have since reopened again.
- The walking trail at Cahore has become very popular and the need for toilet facilities was highlighted. The matter was noted and is being examined and a further response is expected for the next SPC meeting. The main difficulty is wastewater disposal and a satisfactory treatment system.

#### **4. Coastal Update by George Colfer**

George Colfer informed the Committee regarding a number of issues;

- New Beach Bye-Laws are currently being drafted over the next few weeks with three main areas for changes;
  - o Adding in some new beaches that are not covered in the existing Bye-Laws.
  - o More regulations on events and licensing of activities on beaches.
  - o Dealing with illegal camping and fires on beaches.
- A Survey is ongoing and this will enable a coastal strategy to be finalised over next couple of months to be put before the SPC.

Hugh Maguire advised that the Bye Laws will come to the SPC for consideration before they go for public consultation and they will be at public consultation for minimum of 6 weeks to 2 months. It takes about 3-4 months to complete the Bye-Law process. The draft Bye-Laws may be available at SPC in September. The Draft Bye-Laws are referred to the full Council and then for public consultation and back to the full Council for consideration and adoption or amendment.

A discussion ensued and the following queries were raised and points made.

- The possibility of having exclusion areas in the Bye-Laws for some species of nesting birds as there is some ground nesting birds moving around on beaches and perhaps the Bye-Laws might be used to protect them. This is not catered for under the existing Bye-Laws but if there are sensitive areas, most Bye-Laws don't cover all coastlines only the popular beaches and only 500 metres from the main beach entrance. Could the Council put up appropriate signage but it would need to be part of the public consultation? It was suggested that a submission be made when the draft byelaws are out for public consultation.

- Illegal camping and major fires will have to be addressed. The Council used security up until 10 pm on a few occasions during summer 2019 at some beaches. Enforcement can be difficult but it is a very important aspect of any proposed Bye-Laws.
- There was concern about a lack of camping sites in Wexford which is an issue that the private sector could help address.

## 5. Funding Approval Scheme Updates by Philip Knight and Brendan Cooney

Philip Knight advised the Committee about changes to the Domestic Waste Water Treatment System Grant Scheme. A New scheme is replacing the old one involving a new system of inspections for DWWT grants with the following main changes

- The maximum grant has increased from €4,000 to €5,000 or 85% of cost of works whichever is lesser.
- Means testing has been removed, payment is made once completed works have been inspected and invoices/receipts have been submitted to the Council.
- Grant only payable if registered before 1<sup>st</sup> February 2013, it has to be a primary residence and it cannot be for a connection to main sewer or routine maintenance.

There are 3 ways applications for the grant to be considered;

- National Inspection Plan administered by Wexford County Council Inspectors.
- High Status Objective Catchment Areas (HSOCA) identified in Kilanerin and a small area in the Blackstairs. They can request someone to have look at tank and submit proposed works for our inspectors to check it out
- Local Authority Water Programme (LAWPRO) which will look after river basins and can identify water treatment systems that they think need upgrading

Applicants must submit all receipts with the application after completion of the works.

If a person is in an area of high risk they can request an inspection. We have list of authorised private contractors that can engaged for necessary works. A map of the risk areas will be circulated.

**Brendan Cooney** updated the meeting in relation to the Enniscorthy smoky fuel ban –

- DCCAE propose to classify Enniscorthy as a low smoke zone. The DCCAE doesn't classify areas as smokeless zones anymore as all areas have some level of smoke. They have submitted a list of townlands and it has been agreed smaller zones encompassing all the urban area are more suitable as low smoke zones.
- Environment Section is installing more air quality monitoring equipment in Wexford town and hoping to do more in Enniscorthy,
- Duncannon project the Council is running an EIP (European Innovation Project) worth about €600,000 running over 2 years about 1.5 years still to go on it is improving water quality in the area. The Department of Agriculture is very interested in the findings of the Project. Water quality is improving and the project is liaising with Council Inspection Staff with regard to National Septic Tank Inspection Program.
- Irish Water has revised projected dates for a proposed Municipal Waste Water Treatment Plants in Duncannon, Ballyhack, & Arhurstown and the Council is trying to get Ramsgrange included too but funding is a problem.

A discussion ensued and the following queries were raised by the Committee;

- Any plans to include other 4 towns in low smoke zone?
- The response was that Wexford is already a low smoke zone since the 1990s and since then it has had 2 further expansions of area. The regulations prevent people from selling or marketing smoky fuel but the public can go outside the zone to buy smoky fuels.
- There is a population threshold and Enniscorthy falls into that category. New Ross and Gorey are not large enough to be included yet.
- Why are the towns not being made low smoke zones and have air monitoring stations? Brendan Cooney explained that the equipment is being developed in Ireland – WCC is working with a company called Honeywell and testing is taking place in Wexford Town at the moment. A new business being set up on foot of this in manufacturing sensors. They are feeding data in working with our GIS staff and they will be putting that on the map. As Enniscorthy is becoming a low smoke zone we are looking at getting them set up there in the next couple of months and start getting data from that and hopefully then it will steer the Department into looking at smaller towns that have poor air quality.

## 6. Any other business

C. Godkin stated that Wexford, Kilkenny and Waterford are members of the 3 Counties Energy Agency and do much work in reducing our energy consumption as a local authority such as improving public lighting with LED technology and innovative technology in our houses such as NZEB standard where energy use is much lower. The 3 Counties Energy Agency has requested each of the local authorities to consider membership of the Climate Alliance. It is an EU Membership organisation which has about 1840 memberships across 27 EU states. It is in operation since 1990. Part of the membership is that there is a commitment to reducing carbon emissions by 10% every 5 yrs. We are already committed to significantly reducing our energy efficiency in the next 10 years and other reductions in CO2 emissions in other programmes. Joining the Climate Alliance would be a positive step for the Council and C. Godkin's recommendation was to join. Only responsibility of the membership is committing to the reduction of the CO2. This was proposed by Councillor Maura Bell and seconded by Billy Murphy.

It was queried if WCC could consider taking part in two initiatives of European Car Free day and Earth hour and it was stated that it would be raised with our Energy Team to check if we can become involved.

The chair thanked members for engaging with first SPC meeting since lockdown for their attendance and for the Environment staff, clean-up crew and frontline crew working on keeping the environment clean and particularly the good work carried out in relation to the beaches. The next meeting is scheduled for September.

**THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.**

Signed: Mary Farrell  
Cathaoirleach

Date: 24/9/2020