

Climate Change, Biodiversity & Environment SPC

Minutes of Meeting held on Thursday 24th September 2020 at 15.00

The meeting was held remotely by Ms Teams software connection.

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Mary Farrell

Present: Cllr. Tom Forde, Cllr. Leonard Kelly, Cllr. Jim Moore, Cllr. Maura Bell, Ms. Mary Walsh (Business & Commercial), Mr. Billy Murphy (PPN Member), Mr. Danny Forde (PPN Member), Carolyne Godkin, A/Director of Services, Gerry Forde Senior Engineer, Brendan Cooney Senior Executive Scientist, Rory O'Mahony Senior Executive Engineer, George Colfer Executive Engineer, Capt Phil Murphy Harbour Master, Hugh Maguire Administrative Officer, Cliona Connolly, Senior Staff Officer, Philip Knight, Senior Staff Officer, Lillie O'Brien Assistant Staff Officer.

Apologies: Cllr. Oliver Walsh, Cllr. Donal Kenny, Mr. Joe Ryan (Trade Union), Ms. Karen Finigan (PPN Member), Mr. Ned Lyng (Agriculture rep.), Mr. John Somers (Construction Industry Federation)

1. Minutes and matters arising.

The Minutes of the SPC Meeting dated 23rd June 2020 were noted on the proposal of Cllr. Tom Forde and seconded by Cllr. Maura Bell.

2. Draft Wexford County Council Harbour & Piers Bye-Laws 2020

George Colfer presented a report on public consultations regarding the draft Harbour & Pier Bye-Laws, 3 submissions were received. The Bye-Laws went on Public display on 7th July until 24th August and placed as a public notice in the Local Newspaper and on the Council website, Twitter through the PPN and various notifiable bodies together with local press coverage.

Submission 1 - was about the applicability of the Harbour & Pier Bye Laws to smaller piers and harbours e.g comparing Kilmore Quay with small harbours like Slade Harbour with few facilities. It was explained that this can be achieved with the Harbour Master and Staff using discretion in smaller harbours and at piers in the application of the Bye Laws. Capt Phil Murphy advised that when the Bye-Laws were adopted in 2014 the decision made to have one set in instead of 10-12 sets.

Submission 2 – concerns were raised about traffic, parking and work vehicles trying to negotiate their way through Kilmore Quay. Bad parking is causing obstructions and difficulties for harbour users, visitors and residents. The issue requires enforcement in relation to the proposed Bye-laws and traffic regulations in general for Kilmore Quay Harbour and Village.

Submission 3 – related to the need for more signage and controls on the piers for boat trailer parking and temporary summer parking. It was stated that it was improvements in facilities that were needed such as extra parking, control measures & bollards rather than amendments to the Draft Bye Laws.

A discussion ensued and the following queries were raised.

- Concerns were expressed about Cahore Pier that has similar traffic problems, enforcement of Bye-Laws and traffic regulations issues as with Kilmore Quay.
- It was suggested that there should be a communication strategy for the Bye-Laws to get the message out about the changes for Harbour users and visitors to the County. The response advised the Bye-laws will update an existing Bye Laws link on the Council's website with latest version and new signage will be prepared in this regard.
- A request was made to seek clarification regarding the powers open to the Harbour Master and Gardai in relation to directing traffic within the Harbour/Pier Areas and to delay the recommendation of the Bye-Laws pending this clarification. Furthermore it was proposed to examine the consistency of the Harbour & Pier Bye-Laws with the Wexford County Council (Prohibition of overnight camping on roads and public places in Courtown) Draft Bye-Laws 2020 prepared recently in the Gorey MD. The Committee agreed to this course of action.

3. Water Quality

Brendan Cooney gave a presentation on the EPA Water Quality Report 2013-2018. It was noted that 2/3 of the water bodies in Co. Wexford are classed as mediocre, poor or bad so water quality is declined over the report period. River sites have increasing nitrogen levels including the Slaney and Wexford Harbour. Wexford has some elevated nitrate levels and also showing increasing levels of phosphates. It was not just fresh water, it is also in transitional waters such as Our Lady's Island, Baliyteige Bay and Lower Slaney Estuary, they were all classed as bad. It was noted that 25 water bodies in the County had improved quality over the period. Three water bodies which have the highest dissolved inorganic nitrogen levels in the country are in Wexford - Corock Estuary, Slaney Estuary and New Ross Port. Pesticides are also a problem and in 2013 the highest level of pesticides was found in Banoge River with 18 micrograms.

Pressures affecting water bodies included agriculture such as the increase in dairy herds, urban waste water treatment plants, holiday home developments, caravan parks and domestic wastewater treatment systems for single rural dwellings.

A discussion ensued and the following queries were raised.

- Can agricultural practices be changed and stop putting our chemicals in water?
- Wexford CC was involved in regional river basin management plans previously, what structures are now in place and is there a plan where we can deal with this and develop a policy? Brendan Cooney replied that the River Basin Management Plan has continued under different agencies - Tier 1 DHLGH, Tier 2 EPA, Tier 2.5 is LAWCO and Tier 3 is Local Authorities. The Overall Organising Group is trying to get a consistent approach to water quality throughout the country. It is up to each Local Authority to draw up plans as they see fit in that area.
- In relation to beaches, it's very concerning that some beaches are closed during the summer where swimming is prohibited, what can be done? Brendan Cooney replied stating that a small number of our bathing waters are failing because of high levels of faecal bacteria due to heavy rainfalls being pushed out of our rivers to the beach water and its coming from faulty septic tanks/agriculture etc. There is E.coli present in every single river in our country due to septic tanks failing and other sources. The Council will have to make a decision whether to continue with developments as now or to prioritise clean water. Slurry spreading is a serious issue for water quality and the future of agriculture. It was further explained that huge efforts have been made over last few years to maintain water quality.

Septic tank inspections are ongoing and up to 90% fail so it is up each individual household to maintain their tanks. Some projects and actions are happening but not quickly enough, more education for householders, farmers and the public is required.

- The EPA Report indicated that one of the main problems is agricultural runoff but LAs tend to get a wrist slapping for inadequate treatment plants too like the heavy rainfalls and it was queried if this is reflected in the County Development Plan to provide measures to deal with this water crisis?. The response was that treatment plants were an issue for Irish Water. The problem is there are no public waste water treatment in some places e.g. Ballymoney, Duncannon. IW needs to invest in these locations. There are plans for treatment plants for some of the locations.
- Is there a requirement under the SPC to address this issue in a formal way? It was responded that through the Local Authority Water Programme, presentations have been made at regional level on the findings and it was agreed it would be raised through the SPC and through the full Council and to roll it out through local media. It will be noted for the present and it will be monitored through upcoming SPC Meetings.
- A presentation on bathing water quality was proposed for the next or future SPC Meeting.

4. Climate Change Adaptation Strategy 2019-2024

Gerry Forde gave a power point presentation update on the Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (CCAS), concentrating on the CCAS and the built environment looking at new design, the threat posed to such infrastructure as public roads and the monitoring of areas of coastal areas. The Public Lighting Network in the County will have been upgraded to LED standard by Q1 2021. The Council Energy Team is focussing on promoting Wexford as a low carbon County. The following queries were raised by the members.

- What are the timescales involved with the Strategy particularly concerning coastal erosion? Gerry Forde advised that some actions are one off measures and some are ongoing like energy conservation and he will come back with a timeline for members. Caroline Godkin stated that overall the period 2019-2024 is the 5 year plan it is trying to address the sources and reduce the amount of carbon in the atmosphere. Housing is a big challenge where WCC has to bring the housing stock up to a B2 energy rating by 2030 which will take a huge amount of resources and it will have a big impact on residents' energy costs.
- Could the SPC look at inviting National Scientists from UCD as speakers who are doing great work on coastal communities and climate change in Ireland. There needs to be greater engagement with coastal communities in relation to the threats posed by Climate Change and the plans to address it? G. Forde said that he would consider the suggestion. There were some technical problems with freezing screens and sound problems at this stage of the meeting.

5. Coastal Strategy

Gerry Forde gave a brief outline of the objectives and main sections of the Coastal Erosion Strategy for Co. Wexford. The coastline extends from Kilmichael Point to Duncannon, just over 250km in length. Most of the coastline is under the threat of erosion. The Rosslare Area has been successful in limiting erosion because of the Coastal Protection Works from the 1950s to the 1990s. Courtown has been protected but has no beach now but there is a plan for the area. The OPW have allocated €1.2 million funding for Rosslare. It is hoped to bring a presentation to the next meeting. Prioritisation will focus on public infrastructure and more densely populated areas.

A discussion ensued and the following queries and points were raised

- Will the report be presented to the OPW and what is the process regarding the follow up of the report? G. Forde responded that once the vulnerable areas were identified, further studies and reports will be required and these would be sent then to OPW e.g. Hook Peninsula. The Municipal Districts and the Full Council will be kept informed of progress.
- Is the Strategy part of a rolling plan? The Committee was advised that it is part of rolling programme for OPW and will be considered for funding for Coastal Protection works. The OPW is responsible for coastal protection projects but the Council takes the lead for such projects as shown with the Rosslare Scheme but OPW are the main funding agency.

6. Draft Beach Bye Laws

Hugh Maguire presented the draft Wexford County Council Beach Bye Laws 2020 to the Committee he advised that Beach Bye-laws were first adopted in 2000, they were revised in 2005 and now a proposed revision in 2020. The draft Bye-Laws extend to 4 more beaches Baginbun, Booley Bay, St. Helen's and Rostoonstown (34 in all). It will also include measures that were not in the previous Beach Bye Laws such as to prohibit the lighting of fires, introducing the removal of ring buoys as an offence, introducing penalties for removal of beach material, causing nuisance, camping, horses not permitted on beach at certain times, dogs not permitted on blue flag beaches at certain times, improve licences on certain beaches. The Council receives a good deal of complaints about dogs loose on beaches and related issues. A discussion ensued and the following queries were raised and responded to;

- If communities wanted to add a beach along with the 4 newly added how do they go about it? - During the public consultation phase, they can make a submission.
- The level of the fixed Penalty Notice? – This is specified in the regulations (max).
- If Beach Bye-Law Fines are issued – Yes for example a successful Beach Bye-Law prosecution was in Wexford District Court in September for caravans overstaying.
- Does any other WCC have dog friendly areas on beaches – not at present, there is a dog park in the new Min Ryan Park.
- What are the restrictions on dogs at Blue flag Beaches? – It is proposed no dogs be permitted on Blue Flag Beaches between 11am and 6pm during the summer season.

The Committee was advised that around the Wexford coastline there were 50-60 beach access points and over 30 beaches covered by Bye-Laws and 7 Blue Flag Beaches where restrictions on dogs might apply. The Committee was advised that horse restrictions were from 9.30am to 8pm this has changed to the slightly later time of 10am to 8pm in new Bye-Laws. Horses can cause damage to the dunes. It was agreed to wait until submissions are received before making any changes to the Draft Beach Bye Laws regarding the dogs.

The Chair thanked members for engaging with a rather challenging SPC meeting because of network problems it was agreed to cease the meeting and reconvene at a later date as it was hard to concentrate with the technical difficulties.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.

Signed: *Mary Farrell*
Cathaoirleach

Date: *5/3/21*