

## **Climate Change, Biodiversity & Environment SPC**

**Minutes of Meeting held on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February 2021 at 14.30**

The meeting was held remotely by Ms Teams software connection.

**Cathaoirleach:** Cllr. Mary Farrell

**Present:** Cllr. Donal Kenny, Cllr. Jim Moore, Cllr. Maura Bell, Cllr. Oliver Walsh, Cllr. Tom Forde, Mr. Billy Murphy (PPN Member), Mr. Danny Forde (PPN Member), Mr. John Somers (Construction Industry Federation), Carolyne Godkin, A/Director of Services, Gerry Forde Senior Engineer, Rory O'Mahony Senior Executive Engineer, Brendan Cooney Senior Executive Scientist, George Colfer Executive Engineer, Dermot Leahy Agricultural Scientist, Eoin Kinsella Assistant Agricultural Scientist, Hugh Maguire Administrative Officer, Cliona Connolly Senior Staff Officer, Philip Knight Senior Staff Officer Lillie O'Brien Assistant Staff Officer.

**Apologies:** Cllr. Leonard Kelly, Ms. Karen Finigan (PPN Member), Ms. Mary Walsh (Business & Commercial), Mr. Joe Ryan (Trade Union).

### **1. Minutes and matters arising from previous SPC Meeting (19-11-2020).**

Carolyne Godkin informed the Committee that she had contacted 2 organisations; KIMO and the Nuclear Free Local Authorities regarding membership. No answer was received from NFLA and KIMO said that while they had no Irish Members, the Council is very welcome to join. C. Godkin is awaiting a return call and will make further contact if no response is received.

Cllr. Jim Moore raised concerns regarding the absence of Coastal Erosion from the Agenda. A discussion took place on the importance of the Coastal Erosion issue for the County and the SPC, some of the Committee Members contributed to the discussion including Cllr. O. Walsh and Danny Forde. It was agreed to hold a special SPC on Coastal Erosion in the coming weeks, with contributions to be sought from relevant bodies such as the OPW.

The Minutes of the SPC Meeting dated 25<sup>th</sup> February 2021 were noted on the proposal of Cllr. Maura Bell and seconded by Cllr. Donal Kenny.

### **2. Wexford County Council Marine Invasive Species Plan – Brendan Cooney**

Brendan Cooney gave a Powerpoint presentation on the Marine Invasive Species Plan and stated that in 2019 the Council applied for funding from the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government on biodiversity within our County concentrating on marine invasive species. He explained that as our coastal waters are getting warmer Invasive Species are thriving and because of more sea traffic they are being carried to Ireland. He gave a brief report on Invasive Species and their risks and the need for education on the threats posed by Invasive Species. Wexford County Council is the first County in the Country to catalogue the invasive species that are in its ports and harbours. Wexford Co. Council received grant funding for €30,000 for the project.

### **3. Duncannon Blue Flag, Farming & Communities Scheme EIP – Eoin Kinsella**

Brendan Cooney briefed the meeting stating that the project originated several years ago with Mairead Shore, Agricultural Scientist in the Environment Section. Duncannon had lost its Blue Flag status because of bathing water quality issues. The Council has looked at sources of pollution such as septic tanks and agricultural practices in the area. The Council was awarded funding of €550,000 by DAFM for this project.

Eoin Kinsella is Project Manager and is seeking to minimise pollution from agriculture and getting the local community involved. Eoin Kinsella gave an overview of progress with the Duncannon Project and the plan for the next 12 months. The Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM) through the EIP Project awarded funding for this project which comes under the current Rural Development Programme

The approach used Potential Pollution Zone (PPZ) surveys and the GAP regulations. Farmers could improve the condition and management of their farms and have a results-based reward scheme. Grants were provided for improvements such as fencing of water courses, minor jobs around farmyards to prevent water pollution.

A discussion ensued and the following queries were raised and addressed.

- What happens when this project ends and if there is an opportunity in other areas around the County where this can be applied to improve water quality? The response was that this EIP Project ends in 2021 and depending on funding the Council is looking at farmers taking control and taking environmental considerations on board. Wexford Co. Council is the only Local Authority in Ireland to be a partner in an EIP Project. There are lessons from the project for the Department of Agriculture and the Council. The Department will look at incorporating findings into their regulations and guidelines. They are looking at the new Repeal Scheme that's coming out and how to engage with farmers and communities. The Council will be examining other catchments and what has been learned as this project comes to an end.
- A query was raised asking who applied for the funding and the response was Wexford Co/ Council made the application after an invite came from the Department of Agriculture to apply under the European Innovation Project.
- The Dept. awarded grant aid for various projects in innovation seeking to modernise agriculture in various aspects. The applications were mostly from community and voluntary organisations but the Council applied separately.
- Were farmers encouraged to take part in the project and how? The response was that Teagasc and the DAFM Consultants approached all the farmers informing them of the project and most farmers were keen to engage but there were a few that were not on-board. Encouragement was given to keep farmers on board.
- It was highlighted that this was a completely new approach in aiming to improve the water quality where previously the Council would have gone down the enforcement route. Now the community and farmers are involved in the improvement of the water quality and Wexford can be a model for the rest of the country.

#### **4. Bathing Water Quality – George Colfer**

George Colfer gave a brief overview on the Bathing Water Quality monitoring, the organisations involved and the Council's role and responsibility. He outlined the classification of beaches and noted that Wexford CC has 30 local beaches covered by bye-laws. He also outlined how the water quality is rated and how the results are publicised.

The following queries were raised and responded to.

- What is the status of Ballymoney as there is a water quality issue? The response was that the EPA compile an annual rating based on a 4-year average and they have issued preliminary results for 2020 in which Ballymoney went down 1 level in the annual rating and this is expected to be confirmed over the coming months. If the rating has gone down Ballymoney will lose the Blue Flag. The Council can't do anything about it this year. Courtown Beach has no sand at present but is being monitored regularly.
- Testing appears to be done on monthly basis and do the Council initiate any more frequent monitoring during the holiday period? There are 18 beaches being monitored and can this be extended?

The response was that the beaches are monitored every week from early May to mid-September and the sample results are published on the website [www.beaches.ie](http://www.beaches.ie). Besides the 18 beaches the Council also monitor others such as the small beach at Kilmore Quay. The Council will consider any beaches nominated by the public but there is no plan to extend the number at present. Under legislation the Council is obliged to test water quality where crowds of people visit. Other considerations for Identified Beaches include facilities and safety. The minimum number of samples, per bathing season required is 4/5 and the Council generally takes 15 over the summer season for each beach.

#### **5. Any Other Business**

Cllr. Mary Farrell informed the meeting that at the last County Council meeting on 8<sup>th</sup> February, it was agreed to put a proposal to the SPC in relation to a sub-committee examining litter and waste related issues. It was agreed to seek 1 nomination from each Municipal District together with the SPC Cathaoirleach and relevant Environment Staff for the proposed committee and set a first meeting date as soon as practicable.

Cllr. Tom Forde stated that a Waterford Co. Council SPC had made a written request to include the former Rosslare-Wexford-Waterford railway line in a strategic rail review announced by the Transport Minister and he suggested that Wexford County Council make a similar submission from the SPC. A discussion took place on the merits of the item for the Environment SPC. It was agreed that elected members would pursue motions directly in this regard for the next Council meeting.


Billy Murphy informed the meeting that the Department of Environment Climate and Communications is launching a public consultation exercise on new smoky fuel regulations and maybe the Council should have some input into it either independently or as a group. He will send the link for distribution to the Committee Members. He also welcomed the Litter Initiative.

Gerry Forde and Carolyne Godkin responded to a Danny Forde query concerning coastal erosion and climate change and the need for baseline data.

H. Maguire informed the meeting that in relation to SPC membership, Mr. Ned Lyng, (IFA) has advised that he no longer wishes to be a member of SPC and there is a nominated replacement for him to be approved by the full Council.

The Cathaoirleach thanked the Members for their attendance and engagement with the agenda items and she advised that a date will be set for the next meeting specifically on Coastal Erosion.

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

Signed:   
Cathaoirleach

Date: 3<sup>rd</sup> Sept 2021.