

**Climate Change, Biodiversity & Environment Strategic Policy Committee****Minutes of Meeting****held on Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> October 2021 at 14.30 (MS Teams)**

**Cathaoirleach:** Cllr. Mary Farrell

**Present:** Cllr. Donal Kenny, Cllr. Jim Moore, Cllr. Oliver Walsh, Cllr. Tom Forde, Cllr. Maura Bell, Mr. Danny Forde (PPN Member), Mr. Joe Ryan (Trade Union), Mr. Billy Murphy, Carolyne Godkin, A/Director of Services Gerry Forde Senior Engineer, Rory O'Mahony Senior Executive Engineer, George Colfer Executive Engineer, Michael Mahon New Ross Harbour Master, Capt. Phil Murphy Senior Marine Officer, Clare Kelly Climate Change Officer, Hugh Maguire Administrative Officer, Cliona Connolly Senior Staff Officer, Melissa Goff Senior Staff Officer, Dermot Leahy Agricultural Scientist, Lillie O'Brien Assistant Staff Officer.

**Apologies:** Cllr. Leonard Kelly, Ms. Mary Walsh (Business & Commercial), Mr. John Somers (Construction Industry Federation), Ms. Karen Finigan (PPN Member), Mr. James Brennan (Agriculture),

Cllr. Mary Farrell welcomed everyone to the meeting. Gerry Forde then introduced new members of staff to the Committee: Michael Mahon, New Ross Harbour Master and Melissa Goff, Senior Staff Officer.

**1. Matters arising from Minutes and Confirmation of Minutes of SPC Meetings dated 27<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

The minutes were proposed by Cllr. Maura Bell and seconded by Cllr. Jim Moore. Congratulations were extended to all involved in the Seagrass Awareness Event that took place at St. Patrick's Bridge, Neamstown, Kilmore Quay. Cllr. Jim Moore stated that he was invited By Capt. Phil Murphy to attend a meeting held by KIMO in the absence of another staff member, it was a very interesting meeting. Usually, the KIMO AGM meeting rotates around European Countries but it was online due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

**2. Climate Change Adaptation Strategy by Clare Kelly**

Clare Kelly gave Powerpoint presentation updating the Members of progress on the actions in the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy under the following headings.

- Local Adaptation Governance & Business Operation
- Infrastructure & Built Environment
- Land Use and Development
- Drainage and Flood Management
- Natural Resources and Cultural Infrastructure
- Community Health & Wellbeing

The following queries and points were raised after the presentation.

- G. Forde mentioned that training had been arranged for all members of staff and elected members concerning climate change coming up in November.
- Wexford County Council took the lead in Public Lighting LED replacement and has replaced nearly all public lights to energy saving LEDs. He also stated that there was no National Strategy about how EV's are going to be delivered. It was suggested that the SPC should send a motion through the Full Council to the Government

- It was agreed to consider a motion to the full Council regarding a National Strategy for EV infrastructure as nobody has guidance and G. Forde to examine this proposal.
- It was pointed out that Wexford have led the way in delivery of the first social housing NZEB scheme in the country.
- With regard to CFRAM and training for members it was queried if it was available for anyone on the Committee? C. Kelly responded that she was of the understanding it was for staff but would check if Members can attend as it is online.
- CFRAM reports do they come through this committee? Response was that coastal areas would come before this committee, but some are handled by the Special Projects Section, but we can bring any major schemes to this committee too.
- C. Kelly agreed to email a copy of the presentation to D. Forde.

### **3. Update on Coastal Matters area of concerns – Gerry Forde**

G. Forde gave a presentation to the Committee on the coastal areas of concerns such as Kilpatrick, Rosslare, St. Helen's and Ballyhealy. He stated that Seaview is the biggest coastal erosion issue at present and explained that a study was carried out and Consultants were appointed. The Council applied for emergency funding to protect the first part of the access road and have contractors ready to start and are awaiting final approval from OPW in the coming days and will advise Members when funding is confirmed.

With regard to Hook Head, 3 areas of concern were noted; Grange, Carnivan and Hook Head were looked at under Climate Adaptation Programme (Roads Department) and consultants were appointed to design and mitigate against climate change. €200,000 was received to carry out the work and will go to tender over next few weeks. At Carnivan it is not feasible to put in cliff stabilisation so monitoring will continue. Hook Head requires existing protection and rock armour to be strengthened and around €100,000 is required. G. Forde suggested that an SPC tour should be organised to visit some of the problem areas when lockdown is over. Cllr. M. Farrell agreed and suggested next March to arrange for such a tour to happen.

The following matters were discussed and responded to;

- The position regarding Ballyhealy erosion – Consultants will be appointed in November to carry out a pre-liminary assessment study. This will take a few months.
- The situation is getting very pressing at Seaview, apart from the emergency works a longer-term protection scheme is required for the area. Funding approval for the emergency coastal protection works from the OPW is imminent and a contractor is ready to commence work. The longer-term scheme is high priority but it will take longer than the emergency works to progress.
- The Council was to request information from the Coastal Management unit of the OPW about an overall coastal management strategy for Wexford, is there an update? The response was that there was no update yet but the Section in the OPW would be contacted urgently about the issue.
- There was a question on the prospects of a retreat strategy with regard to coastal erosion. It was noted that this was a sensitive issue that would need to be referenced to national policy, case circumstances and for discussion and development into the future.

#### **4. Environmental Education & Awareness – Cliona Connolly**

Cliona Connolly presented an update to the Committee on the most recent projects and initiatives under Environment Education and Awareness including;

- Virtual Green Flag Awards.
- The Trees for Wexford Scheme for Community & Voluntary Groups

WXCC recently launched a series of workshops for National Reuse Month in partnership with Waterford City and County Council sharing the workload and cost e.g.

- Greener Picnic Campaign (Summer season),
- Refill Ireland (refillable water containers),
- Leave No Trace
- Conscious Cup.
- WXCC will also have an online Sustainable Living Workshop,
- Planting Grants
- Local Waste Prevention Grant.
- Community Clean ups were very challenging during covid they are still ongoing.
- National Spring Clean,
- An Taisce Clean up
- Big Beach Clean-up week
- Developed a Dog fouling Campaign through social media “Bag it and Bin it”.

The Council also applied for funding for biodiversity leader training which will give community groups the knowledge and understanding to develop their local area further.

H. Maguire also informed the meeting that during Reuse month the Council launched an initiative School Bikes Africa involving Rotary Ireland and Prison Service where mountain type bikes are taken in at Holmestown and brought to prisons in Wicklow & Cavan to be mended and sent to Gambia Africa for school kids to use. Over 100 bikes have been collected and hope to reach 400 by December and mended and shipped in new year. Mattress Amnesty another huge success over 2,800 collected between the 4 recycling centres.

A query was raised regarding how many would have applied for green schools prior to the Pandemic compared to the 14 this year? The response was that there are 102 primary and 26 secondary schools in total and 86% are green schools and are renewed every 2 years. Normally there is between 35 to 50 green school renewals every year.

#### **5. New Ross Port Pilotage Byelaws– Capt. Phil Murphy**

Capt. P Murphy gave a brief presentation stating that since Wexford Co. Council took over the Port over 2 years ago the Pilotage Byelaws need updating. It is a commercial shipping port with up to 100 ships a year bring ships to and from the main port in a safe manner. The existing Byelaws were adopted in 2002 covering from the South Barrow Bridge to New Ross Town Bridge. The main proposed changes in the Draft New Ross Port Bye-Laws include;

- Regulate types and size of vessel that are compulsory to have a pilot on board.
- Qualifications and training requirements the Pilot must have. They are then officially given a Pilot Warrant and duties
- Change New Ross Company to Wexford County Council.
- Shipping vessel getting bigger increase from 25m to 40m
- Including a map

- Age limit of 50 removed for Pilots.
- Qualifications updated.
- Training trips to Pass pilot increase from 24 to 32
- Pilot Warrant update – putting WCC title and logo

Capt. Phil Murphy recommended the SPC to move forward to public consultation with the Draft Bye-Laws. A discussion ensued and the following queries raised and responded to.

- Southern end of jurisdictional area as you exit the Barrow must they also get Waterford Pilot to go up the port and are their charges in place and does that make harder to sell it. Response was there is a change-over point just south of the Barrow Bridge where the pilot must changeover.
- Can it be shared with Waterford to facilitate business there? The statutory authority is set out by the government and would be very difficult to change. Slight disadvantage in changeover.

G. Forde suggested giving a brief presentation at our next meeting about the operations of New Ross Port and especially in relation to the voyage and what's involved in looking after port. Cllr. Jim Moore formally proposed the Draft Byelaws for public consultation, and this was seconded by Cllr. Joe Ryan.

## 6. Notice of Motion – Cllr. Tom Forde

Cllr. T. Forde advised that the original motion was submitted to WCC about 2 years ago about residents' concerns over the use of roundup weedkiller by the Council in Wexford Town. The motion to be considered was as follows;

*"I call on Wexford County Council to cease its use of and to prohibit the use of roundup, glyphosate-based weed killers and toxic herbicides in all public places including footpaths, road verges, play areas, council estates and parkland/amenity areas".*

H. Maguire received a response from Sinead Casey, Senior Engineer Roads and read it to the Committee;

*"Further to your query and the responses I received back from the District Engineers is that glycoposphate is used to some degree for general weedkilling. About 10 years ago there was agreement to cease using and we did move away from glycoposphates. It seems as a result of the prevalence of Knotweed throughout the County and the best available treatment advice to eradicate it, the use of glycoposphates crept back in general.*

*Spraying in the Districts is contracted out for efficiency so we will issue instruction to the spraying contractors so cease in the use of glycoposphate weed killers for routine spraying. We may persist with the use of glycoposphates in the isolated treatment of Knotweed. I do need to add a caveat that it may not be possible to achieve weed free pristine pavements at all times using less effective products in the interests of a better environment but please be assured of the commitment of the Roads & Transportation Section to take minimise the use of toxic products".*

Following a discussion on the Motion the following points were made and queries raised.

- Cllr. J. Moore supported the Motion noting the Council should be encouraging the use of whatever chemicals that are environmentally safe.

- Cllr. D. Kenny asked what is the alternative? Response was reducing our hard landscaping and put in more soft landscaping but it is a challenge as Japanese Knotweed and can take up to 2 years to get rid. Roads are committed to reducing the use of those products in public spaces.
- In general, maintenance and tolerance for weeds is part of Climate Change, it is a trade- off between protecting the environment and what is visually acceptable in public spaces.
- B. Murphy supported the motion, said a strategy around rewilding is needed and training is required for outdoor staff, community groups and tidy towns to change and that this would need broad consultation.
- Cllr. M. Farrell supported this in theory but would be concerned as she is not sure the Council can cover all areas with the ban on use. Some verges and footpaths are not near houses. The Council doesn't have manpower to manually carry out the required level of maintenance and would be concerned with a blanket ban.
- D. Forde support motion but stated it doesn't mention farmland or Knotweed. Very focussed on parks and housing estates which are a concern where kids play. The Motion does mention roundup and glyphosate. Cllr. Forde could remove roundup and just use glyphosate. This Motion doesn't appear to affect motorway verges or farmland in any way.
- Cllr. M. Farrell stated can we be clear in what we are stating, and have the wording tightened up?
- G. Forde agreed with basic principle – tie in with an overall motion on rewilding and Japanese Knotweed bring a wider motion to encompass the various views.
- D. Forde stated if widening the motion there will be other issues and the essence of the motion could be lost. It is easy to comprehend why glyphosate is known to negatively to affect human health and said roundup is only a trade name.
- H. Maguire – Glyphosate is a compound in a lot of weed killers and roundup is the most popular brand name that uses glyphosate and it is possible to get roundup now without glyphosate and other substitutes. A Scientific/Technical view is needed to consider what is safe to use and to come back with a revised motion.
- Cllr. T. Forde – acknowledged the response from Sinead Casey, Roads was very measured and acknowledged that there are issues with Knotweed. He stated that this motion came from an FOI request made by residents in an area where kids were playing. It does have a negative impact on bees so will have to have some consideration on this SPC but would welcome getting more scientific advice. He didn't want to water down motion too much.
- G. Forde commented that the Council was involved in a joint venture scheme with a community group and did the landscaping as part of a monument that was being put in and had put lovely wildflowers in and they were mowed down as they thought it was weeds. Education is needed regarding rewilding.
- Cllr. T. Forde requested that Roads emailed response be sent to the Committee.
- Cllr. M. Farrell requested it to be put on agenda for next meeting to decide on the Motion.

## **7. Any Other Business**

Hugh Maguire stated that Karen Finigan has resigned from SPC and he had passed on thanks and appreciation for all her work on the SPC Committee. The SPC will have to formally request a replacement from the PPN. Cllr. Joe Ryan proposed and Cllr. Donal Kenny seconded it.

Cllr. T. Forde queried if there was any update on permanent toilet facilities on Quays in Wexford? G. Forde responded that it is being looked at and that temporary facilities were put on the Quay front during the summer, and we are trying to get a temporary location but it would be few more years before anything.

Cllr. M. Farrell thanked everyone for attending the meeting and the next meeting in provisionally set for early December.

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

Signed: *Mary Farrell*  
Cathaoirleach

Date: *4/1/2022*