

**Climate Change, Biodiversity & Environment Strategic Policy Committee**

**Minutes of Meeting**

**held on Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> December 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, Cllr. Leonard Kelly, Mr. Danny Forde (PPN Member), Mr. James Brennan (Agriculture), Mr. Joe Ryan (Trade Union), Carolyne Godkin, A/Director of Services Gerry Forde Senior Engineer, Rory O'Mahony Senior Executive Engineer, Clare Kelly Climate Change Officer, Dermot Leahy Agricultural Scientist, Catherine McLoughlin Heritage Officer, Hugh Maguire Administrative Officer, Lillie O'Brien Assistant Staff Officer.

**Apologies:**, Mr. Billy Murphy, Ms. Mary Walsh (Business & Commercial), Mr. John Somers (Construction Industry Federation),

Cllr. Mary Farrell welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**1. Matters arising from Minutes and Confirmation of Minutes of SPC Meetings dated 14<sup>th</sup> October 2021**

The minutes were proposed by Cllr. Donal Kenny and seconded by Mr. Danny Forde. There were no matters arising from the minutes.

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

Clare Kelly provided the Committee with a Powerpoint presentation on the Government's new Climate Action Plan, the main headings in relation to the Plan were;

- Limiting the increase in global temperatures to 1.5 degrees centigrade by 2100 and cutting carbon emissions by half by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2050
- Benefits of lower carbon emissions e.g. cleaner air and water for citizens.
- Climate Change Advisory Council & Carbon Budgets.
- Circular Economy e.g. reducing food, packaging and plastic waste.
- Increase the use of renewable energies.
- Opportunities for green enterprises.
- Homes and Buildings- retrofitting older buildings.
- Transport Sector e.g. 500,000 daily sustainable journeys by 2030.
- Land Use e.g. afforestation and rewetting of wetlands.
- Citizen engagement and Community Leadership.

The following queries were raised and responded to after the presentation.

- If the Plan is for the County or the Country? It is a National Plan.
- If the Council is going to tackle each of those sectors and put action plans in place for each of those areas linked into the Town Development Plans (adopted or planned)? Under the new Carbon Act the Council will need to prepare a new Climate Action Plan for the County. Currently the Council has a Climate Adaptation Strategy, but the new plans will involve mitigation and adaptation. It will be rolled out in the next 1 ½ years. Last April Enniscorthy was proposed as the decarbonisation town in the County by 2030 and it will be into the next year approval from the Department is received.



It will involve specific proposals and targets. Once the Minister signs the Act instructing the **Local Authorities to produce their Climate Action Plans** there will be a statutory process taking up to 12 months. It will be very challenging to adopt the Plan and reduce emissions. It will involve much work and additional resources will be needed. This remains to be clarified by the Government.

- A question was raised about the Council having access to **predictive flooding maps** (Climate Central) relating to Climate Change where areas of the coast could be underwater by 2030. Some of the forecasts were alarming for County Wexford. The response advised that it is a real challenge because of rising sea levels and coastal erosion but that the Council is working actively with the OPW in identifying vulnerable areas and preparing plans in this regard.
- If maps are freely available as part of the National Study project for the next 10 years and would the maps be circulated to be discussed further? In response it was advised that they are based on various climate change scenarios and temperature rises. Some of those maps are very pessimistic if the emission reductions are not achieved. It is hoped to have the maps available for next meeting. Gerry Forde stated that he was part of the **Inter Departmental Coastal Change Management Strategy Group** and policies will be developed dealing with changes to the coastline. The Council initiated Very successful working Climate Change Teams the Council is trialling its first EV electric pickup next week and will inform the Committee of the outcome.
- A query was raised asking if there were any immediate proposals that could be pursued in the **Town Dev. Plans** e.g. providing for public transport hubs and within that can reduce carbon emissions? Could one area within each of the towns be targeted to achieve this? The response was that this is already built into the planning process. Current plans will have this embedded in them.
- A query was raised about the non-attendance of **OPW** representatives at a previous SPC meeting regarding coastal erosion. It was noted that the OPW had sent a letter of apology for being unable to send a representative to the Special Meeting of the SPC in April 2021 about coastal erosion as the Inter Departmental Group was still working on a report.
- Clare Kelly mentioned that there were two presentations organised by the Library as part of Science Week one by Conor Murphy, Climate Change Professor from Maynooth University and the other by Gerard Fleming former Meteorologist, RTE and are available on Library website if anyone wanted to view them.
- G. Forde said that protection works is ongoing at Seaview near Kilmore and he recommended that the Committee Members visit the location to view the construction.

### 3. Draft Beach Byelaws – Hugh Maguire

H. Maguire updated the Members on the Draft Beach Byelaws and the process involved in adopting the Beach Bye-Laws. He stated that around 153 submissions were received during public consultation, and some aspects need to be finalised. The presentation covered;

- Legislation – main acts relative to Beach Management
- Reasons for the Bye-Laws – mainly safety issues.
- Beach Bye Laws 2000
- Co. Wexford has 260km of coastline - 48km was covered by the last Bye-Laws in 2005 and will probably be close to 60km if the new Bye-Laws are adopted.
- 34 beaches proposed up from 30 under the 2005 Beach Bye-Laws.
- Main problem issues such as illegal camping/parking, jet skis, dog and horse loose and fouling, litter, illegal trading, illegal events on Beaches
- Expected schedule. Draft Byelaws for consideration before SPC in Feb 2022
- New Beach Bye Laws 2022.

The following matters were discussed and responded to;

- Is the list of beaches a complete list or can other beaches be included on the list? It was previously mentioned the money spent in Seaview to reinstate the slipway but that doesn't appear to be on the list?  
The response was the purpose of the Draft Bye-Laws isn't to have the entire coastline covered by Bye-Laws. Most of the beaches on the list are beaches with an entrance, carparking and accessibility for people to congregate and activities taking place such as illegal trading, camping etc. The Council Environment Staff concentrate on most popular beaches first as the entire 260km of coastline cannot be covered with regular patrols within current resources.
- **In relation to litter prosecutions**, is there any changes in the way the Council intend to operate that and do people complaining to the Council have to witness the littering themselves? The Response was that litter prosecutions slowed down in the early part of 2020 due to the courts being closed (Pandemic). This year there were 5 successful in October and 1 in November and a number of cases were adjourned until the New Year. In relation to prosecutions, the Council's Wardens issue fines and the clean-up crew can issue fines if warranted. The Council's Wardens and enforcement staff will attend Court as witnesses, some members of the public also appear as witnesses in litter and waste prosecutions.
- There was a query in relation to **horses on beaches** and running over dunes, is it a significant problem? The answer was that horses are permitted to use the beach during summer season before 9.30 and after 8pm and outside of the season between 16<sup>th</sup> September to 31<sup>st</sup> May. It was noted that most damage to sand dunes is caused by people visiting beaches. Environment and Beach Wardens carry out patrols.
- If horses damaging dunes and running through the sand dunes should it be in the Bye-laws? This is in the current Byelaws that horses operate within the intertidal area. It was stated that most horse owners use proper access points and respect the beach environment, Carolyne Godkin pointed out that the introduction of a Beach Warden at the Curracloe Beaches worked well and the increased carparking spaces.
- Gerry Forde pointed out that the restriction on dogs on Blue Flag Beaches will apply to less than 1% of the coastline and will apply for 16% of daylight hours in the year.

#### **4. Biodiversity Presentation– Catherine McLoughlin, Heritage Officer**

Catherine McLoughlin, Heritage Officer introduced herself and said she started in the role in June 2021. She gave background on Heritage and how the Heritage Sector is operated and gave a presentation to the Committee on Natural Heritage and Biodiversity. The main areas covered by the Presentation included;

- Natural Heritage including river/water bodies, plants and animals, habitats etc.
- Biodiversity – short for biological diversity which is unfortunately in decline.
- Habitats and protected sites such as SPAs, SACs and NHAs.
- Local & National plans and strategy to consider
- All Ireland Pollinator Plan – important framework for positive action to protect pollinators
- Actions for Natural Heritage undertaking such a Tree Policy and wetlands projects.
- Historic graveyards – over 100 in County Wexford.

The following queries were raised, and points made following the presentation.

- A concern was raised that about Crosstown when graves get old with nobody to keep them? What is the alternative to herbicides particularly in summer and is there another way of dealing with rag worth if it's a threat to farmers next to graveyards? The response was that weeds might be a problem for one person but not for another and person. **Hand weeding** would be appropriate in an actively used graveyard that may have management over it. Although ragworth is a problem it is not totally evil.
- There was a query on what the County Heritage forum going will look like? The County Heritage Forum will be established next year. The process includes a range of prescribed bodies, statutory consultees, Councillors, local community representation and from others a number of groups. The forum will be made up of 25 people across those areas and Catherine is currently devising the methods of communicating about the Heritage Forum and how the process will be set up next year. A further communication will be issued in this regard.
- **What can we do with about the threat to Ash Trees?** The response was the Council need to look at hedgerows and Ash is most common tree in Wexford. On a National level there is no guidance yet and looking at what's happening in Britain and Europe the situation is getting bad with the widespread felling of ash in some areas.
- Danny Forde congratulated Catherine on her appointment noting that it will be difficult to protect our archaeological heritage. Does the Council have a plan for protecting it? The response was the Archaeological and Built Heritage Climate Change Sectoral Adaptation Plans which was released last year would cover a lot on coastal erosion, but some land could be lost to the sea. It will be determined as part of the Heritage forum to see what sites are vulnerable or under threat and how this can be addressed.

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

Councillor Tom Forde put forward a motion on Wexford County Council's use of weed killer in public spaces at the last CCBDENV SPC Meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> October. Following discussion on the motion it was agreed to formulate a policy and to discuss at the next CCBDENV SPC Meeting. The motion 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".*

Catherine McLoughlin and Clare Kelly prepared a Draft WCC Herbicide Use Policy for the SPC Meeting, Hugh Maguire read out the Draft Policy for the Committee.

The following queries raised and points made in the subsequent discussion on the policy.

- Cllr. Forde said it was good to see trials beginning for alternatives and to highlight the main concern was that Roundup shouldn't be used in play and residential areas.
- Cllr. Kelly queried if there might be an increase roads of use scraping/sweeping? While they are beneficial it will leave dead weeds and we will use more man-hours.
- Cllr. Forde stressed it was very important that it stated specifically that the Council is not going to be using these harmful chemicals where children are playing. He would like for motion to go ahead

- G. Forde said that the policy was good and from it could form part of a risk assessment before any employee uses it they won't be spraying where it can pose a risk.
- H. Maguire pointed out that in the motion that it refers to banning the use of all herbicides. With some vegetation like Invasive species such as knotweed, spraying would be precluded by the motion and that this may pose a difficulty.
- Cllr. Kenny agreed that Roundup used incorrectly was an environmental problem but there doesn't appear to be an alternative apart from hand weeding. He was not sure the Council has the manpower to do this work.
- D. Forde queried if there is an offer to add to Cllr. Forde's proposal. Playgrounds and other public areas are the locations where weed killer shouldn't be used. Cllr. M. Farrell stated that the options can be addressed and the policy could include specific areas where weed killer shouldn't be used.
- Cllr. Forde stated he has no problem that weedkillers must be used in some circumstances. He didn't think it specifically stated in the policy that there would be no herbicides used in areas such as playgrounds should not and he would be pleased to have it included in the policy.
- Cllr. Mary Farrell asked if this can be added in the Policy that playgrounds where children are will be included in that. C. Mc Loughlin agreed to include and redraft an amendment for next meeting.

## 6. Any Other Business

Cllr. M. Farrell asked if the Council had contacted the PPN about replacing Karen Finnigan on the SPC. The Cathaoirleach was advised that the Environment Section had been in touch with the PPN and County Secretary and will be sending a formal request to the County Secretary in the coming days.

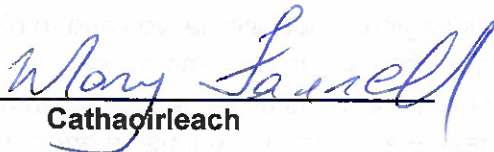
The Environmental Awards are on South-East Radio at 8pm on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2021.

Cllr. Kenny asked about Ballymoney Beach regarding Blue Flag status? G. Forde stated that based on water quality results it is hoped to get blue flag back on Ballymoney beach.

Cllr. Farrell congratulated Carolyne Godkin and Liz Hore on their new appointment as Directors of Services and wished everyone a Happy Christmas and New Year.

It is hoped the next meeting would be in February on a date to be confirmed closer to time.

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

Signed:   
Cathaoirleach

Date: 10-3-2022