

Climate Change, Biodiversity & Environment Strategic Policy Committee
Minutes of Meeting – Friday 4th July 2025 in County Hall, Wexford

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Barbara Anne Murphy

Present: Cllr. Jackser Owens, Cllr. Tom Forde, Cllr. Lisa McDonald, Cllr. Aoife Rose O'Brien.

Jer O'Mahony (Construction), Joe Ryan (Wexford Council of Trade Unions), Natasha Ariff (PPN).

Eamonn Hore Director of Services, Rory O'Mahony Senior Executive Engineer, Abraham Dunne Senior Engineer, Frank Burke Climate Action Co-Ordinator, Brendan Cooney Senior Executive Scientist, Claire Goodwin Biodiversity Officer, Aidan Bates Marine Officer, Melissa Goff Senior Staff Officer, Nichola Gahan Clerical Officer.

Students: Mateusz Polinski, Fiona O'Mahony, Craig Moore, Maria Mazzucchi.

Online: Cllr. Catherine Biddy Walsh, Hugh Maguire Administrative Officer.

Apologies: Cllr. Pat Kehoe, Cllr. Aidan Browne.

1. Confirmation of Minutes of SPC Meeting held 4th April 2025.

The Minutes of the Meeting held 4th April 2025 were proposed by Cllr Catherine Biddy Walsh and were seconded by Joe Ryan. There were no matters arising from the minutes.

2. Climate Action Update.

Frank Burke gave the Committee an overview of current activities and events with the Climate Action Team and referred to the following items.

- Biodiversity & Climate Action Fortnight.
- Presentation of the Enniscorthy Climate Champions competition held at the Astro, Enniscorthy.
- The lack of attendance at Climate Action events.
- Installation of slow charging stations in Old Dunnes Stores car park Enniscorthy.
- EnergyCloud Energy Poverty Pilot Scheme.
- Enniscorthy Energy Upgrade Meitheal 2025.

He finished up his presentation by discussing the various elements involved in the Community Climate Action Programme. A discussion ensued regarding the Climate Action Programme and the production of solar energy at home and members questions were answered in respect of same.

Frank Burke had to leave the meeting at this stage.

3. Biodiversity Matters Update.

Claire Goodwin provided the Committee with an update on Biodiversity matters and spoke about the following items;

- The 4th National Biodiversity Plan and the legal requirements for Wexford County Council under same.
- The pre-draft public consultation papers in respect of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2030.

Members raised the issue of the cutting of roadside hedgerows, the responsibility for same and reporting the illegal cutting of same to NPWS. It was noted that the cutting of hedgerows is generally the responsibility of land owners but that Wexford County Council might cut hedgerows at junctions and on road safety grounds. This was followed by a discussion regarding the possibility of the introduction of a biodiversity element into grant applications

4. Coastal Matters Update

Abraham Dunne gave a presentation to the SPC Committee members on Coastal Matters in the absence of Enda Brennan and discussed the following items;

- Ongoing projects, in particular Seaview Coastal Protection Scheme and Grange Beach Cliff stabilisation works.

The Committee Members brought up issues regarding Seaview and discussed the importance of holding a second consultation with residents by the first week in September. Concerns were raised in respect of people lighting BBQ's in the sand dunes in the hot weather whereby it was suggested that signs should be in different languages due to many new nationalities in Ireland.

5. Our Lady's Island Lake

Brendan Cooney went through the recent EPA report on Our Lady's Island Lake and the following areas were discussed.

- The collapsing ecosystem at the Lake and some of the issues that were causing this.
- Compliance of farmers in the area and whether they were following the nitrates directive.
- The possibility of framers taking tracts of land out of production completely.

Mr. Cooney responded to a range of queries from Committee members regarding the following:

- Whether one sector of the farming community contributed more to the issue than others and whether they were compliant?
- Whether the holding tanks on farms were insufficient?
- Whether the same factors were at play at Tacumshin Lake?
- Whether slurry was being spread in excess and how they could tell that slurry was not being spread at the wrong time?
- What steps were going to be taken in the future?

Mr. Cooney responded to Members queries as follows:;

- No specific sectors of the farming community contributed more to the issues than any other sector.
- The DHHLGH fund the national inspection scheme for septic tanks and grants to upgrade defective treatment systems and the Village sewage treatment plant could do with being upgraded but was not currently a priority with Irish Water.
- Tacumshin was a lot more complex than Our Lady's Island and there was no committee.
- The amounts of slurry being spread were strictly controlled and followed the Nitrates Directive. Members of the public called Wexford County Council's emergency line if somebody was spreading outside the season.
- Legislation was not going to change the issue and people's mindsets had to be changed. Additional Staff were needed on the ground to work with farmers and local residents.

Cllr. McDonald complimented Eamonn Hore & Eoin Kinsella for their performance at the Joint Oireachtas Committee Meeting concerning the Lady's Island Lake Report. Cllr. McDonald followed this by stating that farmers should not be expected to give up their land without compensation whereby Brendan Cooney agreed and stated that there needed to be a just transition with long term supports in place.

6. Motion – “We ask that Wexford County Council and the Environment Section engage with Community groups, Tidy Town groups and all political parties and current independents to establish designated areas for election posters in each District across Co. Wexford”. Cllr. Aoife Rose O’Brien and Cllr. Tom Forde

Hugh Maguire opened the discussion by advising the Committee that the Electoral Commission had carried out a public consultation exercise with regards to election posters. Melissa Goff then went through the legislation regarding election and referendum posters.

Cllr. B.A. Murphy stated given that the Electoral Commission was looking into the matter the SPC had no choice but to wait for the outcome of this process.

Cllr. Tom Forde thanked the Committee for inviting him to the meeting and spoke about the following.

- The waste produced by election posters and the fact that most ended up in landfill.
- The hope that Wexford County Council would encourage future candidates to use specific areas in towns and villages for election posters.
- Co-operation between candidates and Tidy Town committees which may result in candidates not putting up so many posters thereby creating a more level playing field for people like independent candidates.

Cllr. Aoife Rose O'Brien also thanked the Committee for inviting her to the meeting and she informed the Committee of the following:

- 52% of her posters from the last election campaign had been stolen and dumped up the mountain.
- Tidy Town's groups had strong feelings about election posters.
- Suggested that it may be more beneficial environmentally to have one designated area for posters in each Village.

Cllr. McDonald stated that she supported the motion and felt that the Electoral Commission could take time to report on the matter.

Joe Ryan suggested that a cap be put on the number of posters erected and/or the amount of money spent on them.

Mr. H. Maguire joined the meeting online and discussed the National Electoral Commission public consultation. He made mention of the following:

- The National Electoral Commission were going to publish their findings in early January 2026.
- Voluntary codes of practice with regards to election posters could be undermined and legal penalties could not be enforced.
- Rules needed to simple, clear and straightforward.
- Difficulties with the enforcement of fines.

Cllr. Murphy followed this up with the following matters:

- It was up to the SPC as to whether they wanted to send the motion forward to Wexford County Council or wanted to come up with other wording.
- The Environment Section did not have the resources to police the issue and deal with various groups.
- Whether there was a way that the SPC could come up with wording that could be forwarded to Wexford County Council pending the Electoral Commission results and whether committee members would be happy if the SPC came up with wording that would meet their needs.

Cllr. Forde and Cllr. Owens stated that they would be happy.

Mr. E. Hore queried whether the SPC were jumping the gun if the Electoral Commission results were going to come out in January.

Cllr. O'Brien asked if a Bye Law could be created in respect of same whereby Eamonn Hore replied that the SPC could not create a Bye Law that was in opposition to the law of the land.

Cllr. Murphy requested that they come back with a suggestion in September.

Cllr. Owens, Cllr. Forde & Cllr. O'Brien left the meeting at 11.25am.

7. Walking Trails, Wexford Mountain Areas and related issues.

Mr. R. O'Mahony gave an overview of the following.

- The 15 existing ORIS projects that were at various stages of planning and construction. This included details on the ORIS grants that were currently with the Department, these being six Measure 1 Oris Grants, three Measure 2, one Measure 3 and two Measure 4 Oris Grants.
- The completion of two accessibility projects which had been completed.
- The tendering of the Blackstairs project measuring 13km.
- The grant application for €500,000 in respect of Our Lady's Island to Carne.

8. Noise Management Issues

Rory O'Mahony and Brendan Cooney discussed noise management issues with the Committee including details of the RMCEI inspection plan that had been submitted to the EPA in February. It was noted that three wind turbines near Bunclody were ordered to close down due to high noise levels.

Rory O'Mahoney advised that as part of Wexford County Council's brief they had to submit an annual report to the EPA which would be going on the website so the public could view it. He continued by explaining that a Noise Action Plan Working Group had been set up inviting Staff from Roads, Planning and Environment to join. The aim was to meet bi-annually or quarterly to implement and deliver the Noise Action Plan. He then went on to tell the Committee that they were looking into the rollout of quieter macadam surfaces, he followed this by discussing the Active Travel project and the Safer Route projects for Adamstown, St. Aidan's & Rosslare National Schools.

Rory O' Mahony finished the presentation by briefly mentioning the 9 Priority Important Areas (PIA's) in the plan and told the Committee that they were looking at measures to alleviate the noise levels in these locations.

Hugh Maguire commented that the SPC Work Programme should be high on the agenda for the next SPC, whereby Cllr. Murphy stated that it should be the first item on the agenda.

9. Any Other Business

There were no matters discussed.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.

Signed: B. Blaney
Cathaoirleach

Date: September 26th 2025

