

Climate Change, Biodiversity & Environment Strategic Policy Committee
Minutes of Meeting - Thursday 29/09/2022 in County Hall, Wexford & Remotely

Cathaoirleach: Cllr. Mary Farrell

Present: Cllr. Maura Bell (remotely), Cllr. Tom Forde (remotely), Mr. Danny Forde (PPN Member remotely), Mr. Joe Ryan (Trade Union), Mr. James Brennan (Agriculture) Mr. Kevin Molloy (PPN Member), Mr. Allen Holman (PPN Member), Caroline Godkin Director of Services, George Colfer Executive Engineer, Hugh Maguire Administrative Officer, Clare Kelly Climate Change Officer, Catherine Mc Loughlin, Heritage Officer, Cliona Connolly, Environmental Awareness Officer, Melissa Goff Senior Staff Officer, Lillie O'Brien Assistant Staff Officer.

Apologies: Cllr. Jim Moore, Cllr. Donal Kenny, Cllr. Leonard Kelly, Cllr. Oliver Walsh, Mr. John Somers (Construction Industry Federation), Ms. Mary Walsh (Business & Commercial).

Cllr. Mary Farrell welcomed everyone to the meeting. Cllr. Farrell suggested that for future SPC meetings, Members should notify in advance of the meeting to Hugh Maguire any items to be discussed under the AOB agenda. A discussion ensued and it was agreed that if something does come up that is important and relevant and wasn't put forward for AOB it can still be raised and discussed.

1. Confirmation of Minutes of Meetings held on 16th June, 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 16th June, 2022 were proposed by Cllr. Maura Bell and seconded by Cllr. Mary Farrell.

2. Introduction of new PPN SPC Members –

Cllr. Farrell welcomed the two new PPN Members to the SPC meeting. Mr. Kevin Molloy and Mr. Allen Holman introduced themselves to the SPC Committee.

3. Biodiversity Matters update – Catherine McLoughlin

Catherine McLoughlin gave an update on activities undertaken in the last few months under National Heritage Week in August 2022. She also gave a brief report on the following:

- Ongoing Local Biodiversity Action Fund Projects.
- Urban Ecological Corridors initiatives e.g. Wexford Town.
- On-going community engagement e.g. historic graveyards .
- Other heritage work undertaken such as Community Monuments Fund and Irish Walled Towns Network Grant Scheme
- 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan open for public consultation – increase in budget funding for Local Biodiversity Action Fund.

After the report the following queries were raised and responded to:

- A number of invasive species are popping up around country. Are there any national resources or help that can be given to Local Authorities? The Response was there is help through NPWS and the National Biodiversity Data Centre there is a new invasive species website www.invasivespecies.ie where you can upload and track, there are so many vectors for these species to get into Ireland and underside of boats is a big one. It is really difficult due to softening of climate.
- Concern about animals and plants brought into country illegally. Response this is in the NPWS remit.

- Rhododendron – advice on Motion. C. Mc Loughlin advised that it was not as big of a problem in Wexford as other counties. It hasn't been a threat on any council owned land to date. It is most prevalent in west but in terms of a policy she didn't see it being hugely beneficial.
 - o The Motion came from full council meeting as there is no policy around at present. Unless we come back with more specific areas or state owned or public areas affected by Rhododendron but she is not aware of any overgrown areas of Rhododendron. One species out of 900 is the invasive variety "Rhododendron Ponticum".
 - o Hugh Maguire is to contact Cllr. Leonard Kelly to clarify if there was an area he was concerned about and that at present, it was noted that not all species of Rhododendron are invasive.
 - o Rhododendron has not been reported as an invasive species in Environment in recent years.
- Herbicide Policy – Catherine McLoughlin said that the policy was passed at SPC but had never made it to full Council and if can be put on next agenda. Response was that Co. Secretary is going to discuss this at CPG. It doesn't need adoption by full Council once it is adopted by SPC so it just needs to be included on the Minutes.
- Send email to check, once adopted by full council and it is a policy, Advice can be sent to appropriate staff that this is now Council Policy.

4. Climate Action Plan update – Clare Kelly

Clare Kelly gave a presentation update on the Climate Action Activities. She informed the meeting that the target for 2030 is to improve the Council's energy efficiency by 50% and reduce greenhouse gasses by 51%. The Council has 12 months to prepare a Climate Action Plan and the Minister must direct the Council by March 2023 which is 18 months after the Act was brought in in September and the Plan will run for 5 years. She outlined what the new Plan will include under mitigation as well as adaptation measures.

A lengthy discussion ensued, and the following queries were raised and responded to and points made.

- Legislation – how will the reduction of emissions be presented? Buildings will be kilowatt(Kw) hours done as a percentage for energy efficiency.
- The Council has been publishing energy reduction statistics for years which is being monitored and tracked. Clare Kelly can send a link on the public sector reporting framework.
- It was suggested that a presentation be made to the next SPC Meeting to show the work that has been done regarding energy usage and how specific Action Plan must be, where savings are being made such as retrofitting done and where savings can be made.
- Joe Ryan queried as the majority are Local Authority houses and do not have a BER Cert should we be talking to the Housing SPC regarding this. Also, there should be a baseline of reduction emissions in LA houses and the Department to foot the bill for attic insulation. He proposed writing to the Housing SPC to request what their targets to comply with the Departments request for the Action Plan. It was agreed to link in with the Housing SPC regarding the National Retrofit Programme.
- Clare Kelly will send out her presentation to the Members.
- Are there many local authority houses getting attic insulation? The Response was that the building regs at the time what would have been acceptable have changed over time and the quality of our building retrofit has had to change. Retrofitting has been done but there could be some properties that are still not retrofitted without attic insulation.
- We don't have an option in the scheme to just look at attic insulation. A deep retrofit must be carried out and achieve a B2 rating.

- There is only funding for energy efficient measures in the scheme so we have looked for additional funding to draw down the schemes.
- Lack of window and door replacements and funding went into the retrofitting. Is there any other money that can be put aside for window and door replacement?
- A few businesses that are struggling with energy costs and are using green diesel in generators instead of using electricity off grid. Can we formulate a letter to the relevant Minister to seek further measures to support small business?
 - o If it's a proposal from the SPC it needs to be backed with evidence. This should be a motion for the full Council meeting.
 - o In the budget there is funding support for businesses for increased energy costs.
 - o Cllr. Forde to put forward motion and the CPG will be notified that it was raised at the SPC.
 - o There are some energy audits available for businesses to identify where savings can be made.
 - o There isn't a programme there for windows and door replacement outside retrofitting but if the windows and doors have failed, they will be replaced.

5. Coastal Matters update – George Colfer

George Colfer gave an update on coastal matters and a presentation on St. Helens' Preliminary Erosion Risk Assessment.

Coastal matters included:

- Rosslare Coastal Erosion and Flood Scheme – €8m to protect the land.
- Seaview, Kilmore – the Council be submitting a planning application next month.
- 2 Preliminary Assessments are carried out in Ballyhealy and St. Helen's
- Bathing Waters – 1/6 to 15/9/22 the Council takes bathing water samples – the results for 2022 have been good to date.
- Dune restoration project – 2 schemes at Booley Bay and Hook Head
- Update on St. Helen's and the main issues

The following queries were raised and responded to:

- Is the Council obliged to look coastal protection works for private homes? The Council is not obliged but they get funding for Protection Scheme through the OPW to look at them. It is not a legal obligation but there is a scheme in existence and the scheme is open for the Local Authority to put forward proposals. A proactive strategy rather a reactive strategy which is what we have. Infrastructure and areas of population have higher priority due to cost/benefit analysis.
- Booley Bay protection has no houses, is the Council doing something to protect the small number of dunes? Schemes are assessed on an individual basis. Dune restoration works are being carried out on the small dunes due to people camping and walking over it.
- In St. Helen's would it be of value putting rocks below the water mark to take the power out of water as it comes in, in association with the existing rock armour as it would also benefit lobster and crabs there? They are being considered options in coastal protection works but would be very difficult to get approval for planning and a foreshore licence. The main problem in St. Helen's is the cliff rather than the erosion.
- Ballyhealy – didn't see any additional erosion so not sure what is referred to? Go to Ballyhealy beach towards Kilmore one off single house on coast.

6. Any Other Business

Update on toilets at Cahore Toilets:

- Enda Brennan is looking at the situation. The new walkway has generated more visitors so temporary portaloos were installed there during the summer season. There is lack of wastewater treatment options so alternative solutions are being examined. There is a dry toilet pilot scheme on Vinegar Hill so WCC are investigating a variation of that for Cahore.
- Toilets are needed all year around as the local business only allows toilets to be used by their customers.
- Areas must be prioritised as it is not feasible to put in pilot schemes everywhere and there wouldn't be resources on all trails with increasing demand.
- If we're promoting walking trails, we need to have facilities and good signage.

Oulart Hill – dog fouling

- The Council's Environmental Warden will be asked to investigate.

Morriscastle viewing platform.

- Dune restoration has commenced and WCC is seeking to extend it. The first phase was carried out with 2 more phases to go. Will look at feasibility once dunes has been restored. There need to be access for aged and disability and flag funding option as the deadline will be coming up soon.

Next meeting scheduled for Thursday, 17th November 2022.

THIS CONCLUDED THE BUSINESS OF THE MEETING.

Signed: Mary Farrell
Cathairleach

Date: 23/2/23.