

## **Minutes of Meeting through teams of Climate Change and Biodiversity**

### **Strategic Policy Committee held on 17<sup>th</sup> August 2022**

**I Láthair:**

**Baill:** Cllr. Alastair Mc Kinstry, Cathaoirleach  
Cllr. Evelyn Francis Parsons  
Cllr. Joe Sheridan  
Cllr. Noel Thomas  
Cllr. Gabriel Cronnelly  
Mr. Henry Walsh  
Mr. Peter Butler  
Ms. Margaret Sheehan

**Oifigigh:** Ms. Eileen Ruane D.O.S  
Mr. David O'Loughlin, Assistant Engineer  
Ms. Maria Finn, Administrative Officer  
Ms. Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer  
Ms. Ann Dolan A/Senior Executive Scientist  
Ms. Christina Ryan, Climate Change Co-Ordinator  
Ms. Sabina O'Connell, Clerical Officer

**Guests:** Ms. Doreen King. Mr. Conor Feighery – Bord na Mona

**Apologies:** Ms. Paula Higgins

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The Cathaoirleach opened the meeting by thanking everyone for attending. He thanked the Administration Team for the comprehensive minutes from last meeting and enquired if anyone had any comments / amendments.

The Cathaoirleach stated that if that if any member wanted to raise any issues not included in the minutes, they had an opportunity to do it now.

Cllr. Parsons commenced by informing the members that work on Ballinasloe MD's pollinator plan is in progress, however, works on new footpaths has been undertaken recently in areas around the town and that this may have been a missed opportunity for some flower beds to be built in. It would be great if advice on planting was included in the MD pollinator plans and have various ongoing projects running in alignment with each other. Mr. Butler added that educational science is required.

The Cathaoirleach stated that the National Biodiversity Conference occurred in June. The Climate Action Plan sets out actions across every sector of society which will ensure Ireland meets its 2030 climate commitments. One of the actions in agriculture involves leaving scrub land untouched to increase biodiversity.

At previous meeting of this SPC an update on Active Travel and the Council's EV plans was to be provided to this SPC group. Ms. Ruane stated that an update on EVs will be provided later in the meeting. Ms. Finn added that in relation to active travel Ms. Higgins unfortunately was ill and couldn't be online for today's meeting but that she will provide an update at the next meeting of this SPC and if necessary, upon her return from sick leave, she can provide a written update for the members of this SPC team.

Cllr. Cronnelly raised two issues, he would like some additional information with regards to removal of hedgerows along roadsides and the plan to increase the distance between them. He also requested an update on ragwort.

#### **1. Confirmation of the Minutes of Climate Change & Biodiversity SPC meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

The minutes from 16/3/2022 were proposed by Cllr. Parsons and seconded by Cllr. Cronnelly

#### **2. Presentation by Doreen King, Bord na Móna – Rewetting of the Bogs**

The Peatlands Climate Action Scheme (PCAS) also referred to as EDRRS was announced in November 2020 and involves enhanced rehabilitation of 33,000 hectares of Bord na Móna owned bog across several counties. Many of the bogs identified under the scheme are in Co. Offaly, with some in Galway, Longford, Kildare, Roscommon, Westmeath/Meath. The scheme is managed by the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications and is regulated by the NPWS. The scheme is supported by EU funding under the national recovery & Resilience Plan with Bord na Móna putting up €18m of its own monies.

The objective of the scheme is to optimise suitable hydrology for climate action benefits with the aim to maximise the wet residual peat footprint to accelerate the development of natural peatland vegetation while halting carbon emissions from oxidation, setting areas on a trajectory towards naturally functioning wetland and peatland habitats. All surface water will discharge through silt ponds and boundary drains will be retained. Old drains some dating back to the 1800 are to be found in some bogs. The rehab measures may vary from bog to bog depending on site characteristics, deep peat bog/ lower peat bog. The result however will be the same with water moving from cell to cell within the bog but never getting too deep.

The benefits from the of rewetting of bogs provides

- Climate action benefits with increased carbon storage, reduced carbon emissions and acceleration towards carbon sequestration.
- Employment opportunities
- Ecosystem service benefits with increased biodiversity, improved water quality, water flow attenuation, improved environmentally stable landscape which will indirectly support other potential amenity projects (e.g. Longford Co. Council upgrading the railway bed for cycling / walking track). Overall, the environment for the local community will improve.

Under the scheme 8,000 hectares have been rehabilitated in year 1 with 18 bogs having been enhanced. The planned total at the end of year 2 is 14,500 hectares with 2578

hectares in the county area of Galway. Bogs in Galway falling into the present scheme are Castlegar, Kellysgrove, Kilmacshane, Garryduff and Derryfadda.

Ms. King discussed PCAS Stakeholder engagement & what it involves

- The information on the scheme will be available on the PCAS website,
- Draft rehab plans uploaded onto the website for consultation purposes,
- Brochures and letter delivered to all residences within a KM of each bog – due to COVID it was not possible to do door to door calls
- Emails for each bog issued to Local authorities, NGOs, Gov. Bodies, elected reps, Farming organisations, Community Groups etc
- Community Liaison Officer Conor Feighery available to take calls, emails and facilitate on-site visits. Site visits can be arranged with interested groups - IFA, ICMSA, OCC, Community Groups etc.
- All submissions and queries addressed in Final Rehabilitation Plans
- Where NIS is required, newspaper advertisement and public consultation process will take place
- Final rehabilitation plans, AA Screening Reports/ NIS and Determinations uploaded to website following consultation period
- Communication via teams / Zoom meetings (> 60 virtual meetings and presentations held to date)

Deadline dates for submissions for Draft Rehabilitation Plans but stakeholder engagement is ongoing for the lifetime of the scheme

Some bogs in Ireland cannot be rewetted due to hydrology of the bog. Following rehabilitation carbon monitoring is carried out. A range of habitats are likely to develop depending on the peat depth, hydrology, and soil-water chemistry. Each habitat is likely to have specific Greenhouse Gas emission profiles. Emission factors to be developed for emergent habitat.

Over 1000 piezometers have been installed through rehabilitated bogs to measure height of water within areas of the bog. Ecologists are satisfied with the level of wetting sitting on bogs. Kellysgrove has been measured as a deep peat bog and its restoration is progressing as anticipated.

An increase in biodiversity has been observed through habitat surveys, vegetation quadrants, breeding bird surveys, winter bird surveys and pollinator surveys. Sphagnum moss is only found in the deep peat bogs with Oxeye Daisy in both. The Bee Orchid which is relatively rare in Ireland has been observed growing in rewetted bogs. Over 200 Whopper swans were counted on the Kilmacshane Bog last winter, with a Juvenile white-tailed eagle which is rare to Ireland having been spotted in the Kellysgrove Bog. Adult Crane birds with 12 chicks fledged have also been observed on a rewetted bog.

Cllr. Parsons thanked Ms. King for an excellent presentation and sought clarification on the reference to old drains. She believed that there may be old underground pathway running from Kellysgrove to Clontuskert. She asked was there any evidence of contaminated water due to historic landfill site close to Kellysgrove. How recently has the eagle been spotted.

Ms. King confirmed that Bord na Mona carry out an archaeology assessment before commencing any works and if anything of historical nature is discovered then they do not commence works in that area. Butter was located buried in one bog during works.

With regards to the monitoring of surface water runoff, Kellysgrove is a high bog and Ms. King was not aware of anything abnormal having been identified in the water. Ms. King further confirmed that the rare eagle had been spotted within the last 12 months.

Ms. Parsons stated that confirmation of the recent presence of the eagle was exciting news but suggested on keeping its sighting low key to prevent too much attention being drawn to the area. She enquired as to whether there is any linkage between the PCAS scheme in Galway and other projects which are ongoing / planned, for example the cycleway, swim and water recreational facilities or the flood relief scheme which will be ongoing until 2028. Cllr. Parsons advised the meeting that Kellysgrove has been included in the County Development Plan as a peatlands park, and she had met with Tom Donnellan CEO who had indicated that he may be open to suggestion to lease the area. Funding however would have to be found to achieve this.

Ms. King replied that there is no funding included in the restoration work project budget for amenities and that funding would have to come from other sources. Kilmacshane bog has the railway line left in situ, similar to Longford and if funding is secured elsewhere then the bed could perhaps be upgraded for amenity use. The larger bog area as a whole would not be suitable for amenity use on health and safety grounds as ground soft with deep pools of water in places and encouraging the public to walk, run etc in it would not be advisable. It is best not to raise high expectations of the public Ms. King advised.

Cllr. Cronnolly requested information on current monitoring / future proposed works for Cloonkeen Bog which is not on the list of bogs identified under this current scheme. Some works have previously been carried out which included birch water harvesting and marina drainage system were funded from a different scheme. As Cloonkeen and Kellysgrove are quite close to each other with the Claran river close by, Cllr. Cronnolly wondered if there were plans for more works. Cloonkeen is a massive tract of land with approx. 1000 acres owned by Bord na Móna and Cllr. Cronnolly would like to see it used to its maximum potential.

Ms. King stated that Cloonkeen has not been included in the current project but may be considered in the future. She understood that some investigation works had been completed on the bog, but she did not know the reason why it was not included in this schedule of works. Cllr. Cronnolly pressed for information as to how the previous rehabilitation work was being monitored and what was the plan. Ms. King confirmed that it was been monitored by an ecologist.

Mr. Feighery added that rehab work had been carried out prior to the current scheme on some bogs. 82 bogs have been selected for the current PCAS scheme to run over a 4-year period. Some Bord na Móna owned bogs will not receive any rehab under this current scheme. He confirmed that he can try and find out if perhaps there is any plan for Cloonkeen and provide an update on same.

Mr. Butler enquired as to approximate length of time it takes moss / vegetation to return once bog has been rehabilitated and do Bord na Móna plant moss. Ms. King replied that moss grows from spores and yes in some cases they replant, but that it is not possible to replant 33,000 hectares. The length of time may vary from area to area. Spaghnum is visible in in some drains in Castlegar bog and this bog has only recently had rehab work carried out in it. Mr. Butler enquired that if a bog was clear of vegetation after a long period would Bord na Móna take action to return it to its natural coverage. Ms. King confirmed that full coverage of all peatlands occurs over a

relatively short period of time, maximum 2 years and that the company do not have concerns about any bog not achieving this naturally.

The Cathoirleach thanked Ms. King for the informative presentation and enquired if there are any plans to extend the scheme to privately owned or commonage bogs. Ms. King confirmed that Bord na Móna have carried out work for the OPW on SACs. She agreed that there is a lot of privately owned peat production areas around the country but that it would not be a decision for Bord na Móna to extend rehab works to these bogs. The Cathoirleach added that some expertise may be sought for farmers from Bord na Móna, it was his understanding that DAFM have been inspecting some privately owned boglands.

Ms. King and Mr. Feighery left the meeting at this point.

### **3. Biodiversity Update – Ms. Mannion**

Ms. Mannion advised the group of the importance of Biodiversity and Pollinator Municipal District Plan. Every person and group form part of the jigsaw which aids to develop improve and implement these plans. SACs and designated areas are listed within the plans. Consultations with the local community takes place to discover what activity is happening at ground level by voluntary groups. The aim is to collate all the individual actions into the formation of one masterplan. When completed the plan will be a living document and will available on-line and reviewed and updated on an agreed timetable.

New information will be added, and it proposed to review the plan quarterly. Ms. Mannion stated there is great interest from new community groups. More resources will be required when it's time to update the plans.

The primary aim of Biodiversity and Pollinator Action Plans is to provide a framework for protecting, managing and/or enhancing natural heritage in each municipal district through actions led by the local authority (Area Office) and the local community. Ms. Mannion used the Ballinasloe MD Draft Plan as a sample to show what is contained in the plan.

#### **Community Consultation**

Public Consultations were organised online and in person to establish the range of biodiversity and pollinator projects taking place in the county, and Ballinasloe Municipal District. Future projects were also taken into consideration. The public consultation which took place included:

- Flyer circulated to all community groups, Tidy Towns, heritage groups, organisations, and schools to inform Galway County Heritage Officer and Beo Ecology of any ongoing biodiversity or pollinator actions or activities which they may be undertaking, with feedback to be submitted via email.
- Public Consultations were held at two locations in the county: Williamstown on the 19th of May 2022 and An Spidéal on the 23rd of May 2022

#### **Where are we at with the Plans**

Draft Plans have been sent to Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO), Galway Rural Development and Forum Connemara for review and comment. The next step is to circulate internally within Galway County Council. Plans will need to be translated and layout designed. Galway County Council will need to promote and distribute the Plans. As these are 'living plans' they will need to be updated on a regular basis i.e. as new groups emerge, new projects are underway or new funding schemes announced etc

## **Digital Story Telling with Maps**

Galway County Council's Geographical Information System (GIS) Section and Heritage Office is working in partnership with various community heritage groups, BirdWatch Ireland, Galway Rural Development, Geological Survey Ireland, The Heritage Council, Athenry Arts and Heritage Centre have created several unique StoryMaps to help tell remarkable stories about the rich heritage and biodiversity of the County.

It is built on leading edge geospatial technology, and it is hoped that these custom storymaps will inform and inspire people to explore the wealth of heritage that is available right on their doorstep. These StoryMaps bring together the latest mapping technology with text, images, and multimedia content to tell powerful location base, stories accessible from any internet enabled device with a Web Browser including Tablets and Phones. They are therefore an ideal tool to communicate the story of our rich heritage and biodiversity in the county. Further Storymaps will be developed and added to the current listing.

A few community groups who have seen the existing Storymaps have contacted the heritage office seeking advice on how their area can form part of a storymap.

## **Development of a new Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2023 - 2030**

The review of Galway County Heritage and Biodiversity Plan 2017- 2022 and commencement of the development of Galway County Heritage and Biodiversity Plan 2023 - 2030 is in the planning stages. Galway County Heritage and Biodiversity Forum has agreed to the review of the current heritage and biodiversity plan and the development of a new heritage and biodiversity plan from 2023 to 2030. The new plan which will be 7 years duration will bring it in line with the National Heritage Plan.

## **Council Staff Biodiversity Training**

It is proposed to deliver *Habitat Management: Hedgerows; Trees & Treelines; Grasslands; Riparian Margins and Watercourses* • *Invasive Alien Species* • *Legislative Overview* training to relevant Galway County Council staff. The training will be carried out in conjunction with HR, and it will be included on staff training records for employees who undertake it. It is hoped to commence this mid-September when most staff have availed of their annual leave. There will be further online training with Dr. Amanda Browne available to staff.

This training will assist in the delivery of the biodiversity and pollinator plans at Municipal District Level. It is required there are a lot of new staff members who require training on biodiversity matters.

## **Sustainable management of spaces training**

Just under 40% of Galway surface waters are no longer meeting the required environmental standards set by the Water Framework Directive (EPA,2019). Due to the nature of pesticides in water and the environment, the overuse of these products can lead to the contamination of our drinking water sources and poisoning of our wildlife. These are serious challenges we all face but working with nature and using sustainable practices we can all be part of a solution to turn these figures around.

The aim of this project is to develop a practical training course and accompanying resources to upskill attendees in sustainable practices when looking after their green and blue spaces. The courses will be run in Letterfrack and Ballinasloe for local community

groups, NGOs and Council staff and other organisations working in this area. It is proposed to deliver most of this training at the end of September. Insurance is currently being obtained to run the event at a NPWS site in Letterfrack.

Due to an issue with wild goats eating plants in the Letterfrack area a Pollinator Planting Day took place with residents of Radhairc Bhinn Ghuaire estate, Letterfrack as part of this training. This training was delivered by Kay Synnott Galway Living Gardens.

### **Sustainable Gardening Courses for Clifden and Tuam**

The sustainable Gardening Course for Clifden was held in July with 28 people attending. The course was advertised on all local Facebook pages. The course was run in the Transition year garden. It was an excellent site for the course as there were lovely wildflowers, raised beds, space for planting and enough room for all participants.

The Tuam course was held in the Palace grounds near Coral Leisure Centre in July with 38 people attending this course. Topics covered included:

- Information on the best drought resistant pollinator friendly plants
- Creating habitats for biodiversity
- Ways to deal with pests organically in the garden
- Reducing weeds
- Growing vegetables
- How to build a mini pond
- Rewilding
- Plant Propagation, Pruning and much more.

Additional people had registered to attend the training events, but due to Covid there was a decrease in attendance from initial numbers registered. Ms. Mannion thanked Mary McGann and the PPN who provided supported the funding to run these two courses

### **Invasive Alien Species management**

In 2020, Galway County Council commissioned a survey to determine the detailed distribution and extent of *Gunnera tinctoria* (Gunnera) in the Clifden area of Co Galway. The survey was also used to record the presence of Japanese knotweed and any other invasive alien plant species that are present. The survey data was used to generate distribution maps for Gunnera infestations identified within the survey area and to produce a Management Plan and a list of control/management options applicable to Gunnera.

Based on the findings from the survey conducted in 2020, areas in and adjacent to the town of Clifden that support infestations of Gunnera, Japanese knotweed, Himalayan knotweed and Himalayan balsam were treated in June 2022 and will be treated again in September, as recommended in the report. GCC is also working with a PhD Candidate at NUIG with regards to Japanese Knotweed research in North Connemara. Rosina Joyce Community Warden has visited some of the sites in Connemara with her.

Invasive Species Swathes have been distributed to GCC staff and community groups and they cost GCC €13.00 each to purchase.



## Other Galway County Council Biodiversity Projects for 2022

- Bird Survey in Connemara Blanket Bog - Working with BirdWatch - GCC are undertaking a survey of breeding birds on blanket bogs in the Connemara Bog Complex SPA to understand the species present, the importance of these sites and to inform their future management.
- North- East Galway Wetland Project –survey 15 sites in 2022. It is proposed to survey 5 bog sites, 5 fen sites and 5 turloughs sites of high conservation importance.
- Barn Owl project – engagement with communities - Working with BirdWatch – GCC hope to implement the second phase of the project, to continue to foster links with local community groups and landowners to implement practical conservation initiatives, to take advantage of the recent increases and to help secure the future of Barn Owl populations in the county. We will build and install nest boxes in suitable locations in east Galway, in addition to monitoring known nest sites in the county to assess their occupancy, breeding success and to address any conservation requirements at individual sites to ensure these sites remain suitable and protected.
- Quagga mussel project - The project focusses on the Quagga mussel (*Dreissena rostriformis bugensis*), a high impact aquatic invasive alien species discovered in the Shannon in 2021 and aims to address several key knowledge gaps.
- Biodiversity Week and Heritage Week Initiatives includes:
  - FREE Children's Soap making workshop on Wednesday 17th of August in Williamstown Parish Hall.
  - Workshops in How to create a Pollinator Plan

Ms. Mannion concluded by stating that the work of the heritage office includes continually working with colleagues in other departments e.g., Road, Housing, Environment, Community and Enterprise etc. Galway is a very large area, and the funding available for projects is very small. It is vital when drawing up the biodiversity plans for the individual MD area to get the foundation right, and even though this slows progress down initially in the long run once the foundation is strong everything else will develop.

A comprehensive funding application has been made to secure resources for a Biodiversity Officer. Ms. Mannion informed the meeting six positions are available. The resources within the current team are very limited. Galway County Council works closely with Galway City Council on biodiversity issues.

The Cathoirleach thanked Ms. Mannion for the huge amount of work being carried out on biodiversity and acknowledged that additional funding is necessary to provide the level of service required in a county the size of Galway. He enquired if there was any update on citizen science.

Ms. Mannion stated that she did not have the time to read it as she was organising Heritage Week. It is proposed to include it in the new Heritage and Biodiversity Plan. She informed the meeting that GCC are working on a Peat Care Project with NUIG's Dr. Terry Morley and that more information on this will be available at the next meeting.

Signage on pollinators has been distributed to all the Area Offices.

In relation to Cllr. Cronnollys queries on hedgerow removal and replanting Ms. Mannion stated that she would need to enquire into it further. Ragwort she confirmed is not an invasive species and is a matter for the relevant area office to deal with in conjunction with DAFM.



The Cathoirleach enquired if the mapping / GIS carried out by GCC is available to other agencies. Funding on projects is available from the Space Agency. Ms. Mannion confirmed that once information collected is checked and proofed, it will be available publicly.

Cllr. Parsons thanked Ms. Mannion for an excellent presentation and for the phenomenal work that has gone into organising Heritage Week projects which are taking place all around the county. She enquired if any advice could be obtained for the planting of daffodils from the council. Daffodils were planted in Ballinasloe in 2021 and they didn't bloom. She also enquired as to how new groups e.g., Inland Waterways have their details included in the living MD plans which are being prepared.

Ms. Mannion advised that it is intended to ask Aoife Munn, the lady that worked on the 2 gardening projects in Clifden and Tuam to run further workshops in the other 3 MD areas. She said that she would discuss the issue separately with Cllr. Parsons outside of this meeting. Each MD has different needs and GCC will try to accommodate same in the workshop. New groups who wish to be included in plan should email Ms. Mannion. A separate email address may need to be set up in the future for incoming information related to the new plans. A decision must be made in relation to the frequency of update of plans, perhaps quarterly / biannually. A copy of Ms. Mannion's presentation will be emailed to the members of this SPC group.

Cllr Thomas congratulated Ms. Mannion on the brilliant work being carried by herself and her team. He stated that with reference to daffodils, he would not like to see GCC distributing bulbs as whilst beautiful to look at they have zero biodiversity value. Bluebell flowers are fantastic to look at and are excellent pollinators he advised.

In relation to ragwort Cllr. Thomas advised the meeting that it has very high pollinating value as a plant. Whilst growing it is not a danger, but he acknowledged that if it grows in land for meadows for the making of hay and silage it has a profound affect.

In relation to the soap making workshops, Cllr. Thomas stated that he makes all his own soap and was interested in what ingredients were being used, as he believes that if you would not put something in your mouth, you shouldn't use it on your skin. Ms. Mannion stated that she didn't know the ingredients for the soap but that the lady Aoife Munn who runs the workshop and gardening classes is very focused on sustainability in the environment.

Cllr. Parsons thanked Cllr. Thomas for the information on pollinator value of daffodils and bluebells. The background behind planting daffodils in Ballinasloe was for youth group engagement and it was hoped to sell them to raise funds for cancer.

Mr. Butler agreed that daffodils have zero pollinator value. With regards to ragwort the problem he stated is that it can overgrow an area very quicky and too much of it is a problem.

#### **4. Climate Action Team – Christina Ryan**

Ms. Ryan opened her presentation by stating that since the last meeting of this SPC significant effects of climate change can be seen in Europe and throughout the world and it is important that we remind ourselves of the urgency surrounding implementation of climate change measures. Ms Ryan guided the meeting through a series of slides and photographs. Climate change she stated is exacerbating the current food crisis, with 800 million people regularly going hungry and 40 million at risk of starvation.

Current policies in place around the world are projected to result in an estimated 2.7°C of warming. Implementing current pledges and targets under discussion would bring us just below 2.0°C. What do these differences mean?

At 1.5 degrees 14% of the population would be exposed to at least one severe heat wave every five years. That jumps to 37% if the planet reaches 2 degrees of warming. Similar differences are seen in relation to flooding and storms. 2.7°C would make areas of the world uninhabitable and see a significant increase in the number of climate refugees. The recent Ukrainian crisis gives us an indication of the type of response that will be required to assist climate refugees. The Ukrainian crisis has also shown us the risks associated with being reliant on fossil fuel from countries such as Russia.

Climate change is already costing the world billions. Natural disasters are estimated to have cost €280 billion in 2021, with the floods in Germany alone costing \$40 billion

Whilst Ireland needs to keep these risks in mind, it also needs to look at the opportunities that our response to climate change will bring. Ireland currently spends €7 billion per year on fossil fuels, most of which leaves the country. But here in the west of Ireland we have a vast potential for renewable energy development, which would allow much of this money to be retained in the country funding local jobs and businesses.

The Taoiseach recently launched a “hydrogen valley” in Galway to encourage research, production and use of renewable hydrogen gas for the region. It is envisaged that 30 gigawatts of floating offshore farms will be developed with a potential for Ireland to increase this and become a net exporter of energy to the EU. This and other actions to tackle climate change will create tens of thousands of jobs and opportunities for new SME enterprises. 13,000 extra employees are needed for residential retrofits alone by 2030. We need to ensure that GCC does what we can to support and facilitate these innovations in a sustainable way.

Developing in a way that protects against climate change also brings other advantages. For example, ensuring that we implement the 10-minute town concept would create healthier and more vibrant communities while protecting the local environment and reducing emissions. Plans have been announced by Dublin Local Authorities for The City Edge project which will see an area with a population greater than Galway city become virtually car free. Funding will be available to make the necessary changes, including the €1 trillion European Green Deal Investment Plan, and we need to ensure that we are able to draw down funding for both internal and community projects.

*What will Galway County Council's role be in relation to all these changes?*

Ms. Ryan explained to the team that GCC are going to prepare a Climate Action Plan to clearly set out the actions it proposes to take. GCC will need to identify how it will reduce its own greenhouse gas emissions by 51% by 2030. We will need to protect the most vulnerable members of our society by implementing an extensive retrofit programme for social housing she stated. We will need to identify and protect infrastructure and buildings. And then we will need to look to our communities, supporting them as they make the transition to a low-energy society.

A regional workshop has been held to identify how best to develop the Climate Action Plan and what structure Local Authorities would require. Following this workshop, GCC presented our proposals to the Management Team. They have been very supportive and signed off on the proposal. We propose to re-establish the Climate Action Steering Group and to set up a Climate Action Team and Energy Team.

There is now a regional Energy Bureau in place with Mel Gavin having been appointed as regional manager. An Energy Bureau Officer is to be appointed. GCC are providing funding towards the Energy Bureau. It is our understanding that GCC will receive approx. €700,000 under the Communities Fund and that 12.5% can be used to fund a Climate Community Officer post. GCC will need to be the lead applicant for the large funding applications.

GCC are to hold a meeting of the Energy Team with the regional manager of the Energy Bureau Mel Gavin next week and expect to have the 1st meeting of the new Climate Action Steering Group in late August or early September. It is GCC's intention to have quarterly meetings of the Climate Action Steering Group and bimonthly meetings of the Energy Team and Climate Action Team.

The next significant step will be to start the development of the Climate Action Plan which GCC have been working behind the scenes with CARO on. GCC will need to carry out meaningful engagement with all relevant stakeholders and we would greatly appreciate the input from the SPC on how best to do this: Elected Representatives, Staff Public Bodies – IFI, NPWS, LAWPRO Communities, Businesses Third Level Institutions Groups affected by Climate Change Actions – e.g., Peat cutters, Low-income families, rural communities IFA and other farming organisations Environmental Groups, Youth Groups.

Ms. Ryan stated that her aims for the Climate Action Plan are that it will be SMART – that the actions will be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound. GCC do not want it to conflict with any other plans and to that end we will work closely with the relevant staff on the Heritage Plan, Tourism Strategy and LECP. Climate action should be embedded into all plans from the start with no requirement for separate plan thereafter.

Ms. Ryan displayed several slides showing how GCC have already achieved its 2020 targets with an improvement in efficiency of 38%. This slides also gave an indication of the work that need to be done to achieve our 2030 targets which is progressing very well as it currently stands. Ms. Ryan thanked Mr. Fergal Fahy for the information supplied on public lighting installation.

The modelled 2030 figures Ms. Ryan explained shows that the electricity portion of our greenhouse gas emissions will reduce significantly as the percentage of renewables feeding the grid increases so that the gap to the target is quite achievable. Additional improvements will need to be targeted in our fleet and upgrades to our buildings to make the remaining changes.

In relation to Housing, under the Retrofit Programme 56 properties were upgraded in 2021 which included works such as external insulation, and the installation of heat pumps and PV panels. The houses were brought from as low as G to A3 to A1. The savings from the work completed in 2021 is estimated as 350 MWhr and 94 tons of carbon per year. Advice on best use of heat pumps is expected to take place soon. It is proposed to retrofit a further 144 houses by the end of 2022. Ms. Ryan added that she would have more information on the housing projects at the next meeting of this SPC group.

Ms. Ryan explained that The Energy Bureau has indicated that GCC will need to develop an asset register: buildings, facilities, and fleet, identify staff and training needs and identify priority projects for 2022. Our existing data is relatively poor and significant work is required to gather information and improve the accuracy of our data. This will require staff time from the Buildings and Facilities. We will need to build expertise among relevant staff. Once the projects are identified we will need an internal staff resource to manage these projects.

Ms. Ryan expressed her thanks to Jack Houilhan in the Roads and Transport Section an excellent assessment of the costs of EV vehicles has been prepared. In summary, the costs of an EV Commercial Car, Small Van, are now comparable over their lifetime considering initial cost, fuel cost, depreciation etc depending on mileage. For example, you need to be doing 18,000 km a year over 8 years to break even for a commercial car based on current electricity and fuel costs.

In most cases, MWB, LWB Van don't have sufficient range at present due to increased payload but there may be a small number of drivers where it will be suitable. 23 surveyed at present, another approximately 27 to be surveyed. Home and office charging needs to be assessed.

GCC's next steps will be to identify which category of drivers are suitable. It is then proposed to have discussions with the lease hire companies, this will possibly be carried out on a regional basis. A tendering process would then follow. GCC will look at its own charging infrastructure and charging at home. There are some issues including reduction in battery capacity over their lifetime and installation of chargers, but GCC are now able to consider leasing electric vehicles as current vehicles require replacement. Leasing locally would be the preferred option – tendering taking a significant amount of time Ms. Ryan added.

There will be a requirement to have a vehicle's register and there will be a requirement to meet certain targets on the purchase of electric vehicles. GCC have recently met with a representative from the Galway Hydrogen Hub, and they have agreed to include GCC on their working group of potential users of the hydrogen they will produce.

GCC's Mr. O'Loughlin is carrying out a review of the EV strategy and the CCMA strategy. A transport modelling assessment is being completed by the Roads Department and meetings with the consultants and Department are in progress. Mr. O'Loughlin is also in talks with EasyGo regarding installation of EV chargers and he is due to meet personnel from Carlow County Council regarding this. It is proposed that chargers be installed at County Hall for staff and fleet charging of vehicles

Ms. Ryan stated that she has been in contact with Go Car regarding the lease of a vehicle which would be available for staff use if they needed to travel out on site. A booking system would need to be devised whereby staff would use public transport to travel to work and then have the use of the vehicle for work related journeys during the working day.

Approximately 45 solar bins have been installed around the county by the GCC area offices. These can reduce street litter collections by up to 90% thus reducing collections traffic and associated emissions – SMS alerts issue when bins are full. The initial purchase price of bins is expensive, but this is counteracted by reducing overall cost of litter collection service and it removes litter bins as source of food for vermin and reduces unsightly overflowing bins

Ms Ryan informed the meeting that GCC have started to develop an internal and external communications programme. The council's climate action day in June was the start of the programme and generated lot of interest from staff. Both Marie Mannion and Mark Molloy Environmental Awareness Officer had stands set up on the day exhibiting their areas of work. The E-car was popular and the lunch and learn generated interest and so did the retrofitting scheme.

Internally, the aim will be to support and encourage the participation of colleagues in climate actions and develop climate leaders throughout the organisation. Staff have already expressed interest in what the council are doing. Staff participation will include

surveys, blogs, best practice examples, links to further information, pledges, competitions etc. A lot of work is required on our website.

Ms Ryan explained the various other actions that are underway:

- Presentation was made to Minister Eamonn Ryan in May outlining what we are doing and how we need additional funding to continue and expand on this work.
- On the Adaptation side we have been involved in developing a Sand Dunes Awareness Campaign and this is being run across social media over the summer. We would like to expand this to on the ground projects with communities next year.
- Our IT and Emergency Services Section have developed a cutting-edge system for the management of severe weather events. The National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management is very supportive of the system, and we are rolling it out on a pilot basis to a few other counties with a view to using it as a national system. We highlighted this as part of Your Council Day in June including through an RTE News Site Piece.
- Also, as part of Your Council Day we did an interview on the Pat Kenny show about the work being done on Climate Change and resources required.
- Education Activities Tuam and Oranmore Libraries – August 2022 - Oisín McGann presented them based on his book 'A Short, Hopeful Guide to Climate Change', aimed at an older audience (fifth and sixth classes). It is a light-hearted talk on the basics of Climate Change.

Ms. Ryan stated that GCC will also work very closely with communities in several other areas. GCC was the first local authority to develop a funding program for sustainable communities. This has been in place since 2019 and we supported approximately 20 projects with an annual budget of €60,000. This is a great way to encourage climate change actions and dialogue in local communities.

We have also supported the development of five energy master plans, and we plan to give additional supports to the communities allowing them to use the master plans as a basis for applying for funding.

- Ms. Ryan met with Inisboffin Development Company in relation to the Inisboffin Energy Master Plan in April. She visited Inis Mor to meet with representatives from SEC Inis Mor and Inis Oirr in May 2022.
- We will have a stand at PPN Plenary in September.

Ms. Ryan concluded by advising that GCC will review planning applications to assess whether they are in line with climate objectives.

The Cathairleach thanked Ms. Ryan for her presentation. He stated that he had anticipated an update on the council's EV strategy for this meeting. Prioritising tourist venues for EV charging is of utmost importance and that no tourist destination be left un-serviced. The council needs to be proactive in this area.

He continued further by saying that perhaps there was an under estimation by the Local Authority on how quickly national plans were moving and that a lot of the work in progress and planned was in relation to the council's own activities. He stated it is the council's responsibility to raise awareness and support the public regarding Climate change. He said 800,000 cars need to be removed from our roads in the next 3 years. GCCs active travel plans need to be robust to achieve this. He recognised that it is a huge challenge for the council but a necessity.

Mr. Butler agreed with the Cathoirleach's comments in relation to GCC taking a leadership role and plan for the County.

Ms. Ruane agreed with the comments of the previous two speakers. She informed the meeting that GCC is fully committed, engaged and aware of the huge challenges it faces and the urgency of them. However, it is necessary she stated to have our own house in order first. GCC will then be able to focus on stakeholders and raise awareness on climate change with the public.

Ms. Ruane stated that when the climate action plan is devised, we want the actions to be achievable and sharper in focus than previous plan where targets were in some cases unrealistic. Feedback is invaluable she added. The Cathoirleach requested that a presentation on GCC EV strategy plan be available for the next meeting of this SPC group.

Cllr. Cronnolly wished to have it noted that in his experience with the roll out of EV's the emergency services are slow to avail of it. These services cannot estimate the length of time that calls will take, and it is a necessity for public charging points to be available in villages around the county.

Cllr. Parsons thanked Ms. Ryan for her excellent presentation and noted that there is a real sense of urgency in pushing forward to actions. She queried the solar bins as to whether these are all being used for their intended purpose. She believed that some may currently be used as normal bins and queried if during an audit of these if it possible to check that they bins are being used for purpose they intended for. Ms. Ryan stated that she would follow up on this query with the engineer in the Loughrea office.

Ms. Ryan added that the Climate Action Plan when devised would have clearly defined targeted actions, appropriate staffing, funding, and stakeholder involvement would be key in implementing the EV strategy. She advised that GCC have looked at the Dublin Plan in some detail. The consultants engaged have previous experience of working in the UK on Climate Action Plans. GCC will have more information to share at the next meeting of this group. The Cathoirleach added that finding shortfalls is key for successful implementation purposes.

The Cathoirleach recommended that an energy subcommittee be established. He also recommended that a representative from the Galway Hydrogen Hub should be invited to make a presentation to the SPC in relation to discussed proposals. He also requested that an update on the active travel plan be shared with the members on Ms. Higgins return to the office with a presentation being given to the team at the next meeting in October.

The Cathoirleach further requested that a review of GCCs pesticides strategy be put on the agenda for next meeting. Mr. Butler asked if we could include hospitals as it would be interesting to know if the HSE agree with the County Council strategy. Ms. Ruane stated that we could pose the question to the HSE about their use of pesticides.

Cllr. Parsons stated that in relation to pesticides it had been agreed at a previous meeting that updates on drinking water monitoring would be provided, she would like an update on this. Also, when the council are considering distributing free seeds in the future to community groups perhaps, they can consider the option of bluebells.

Cllr. Parsons stated that a representative from the SAUTI Youth Group was to attend this meeting but due to holidays was unavailable. They will attend the next SPC meeting in October.

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The next meeting is Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> October 2022. This shall be in person if Council Chambers are available. If not, Teams invitation will issue.

The meeting concluded.

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CATHAOIRLEACH ALASTAIR MC KINSTRY



