

Minutes of Meeting through teams of Climate Change & Biodiversity

Strategic Policy Committee held on 24th March 2021

I Láthair:

Baill: Cllr. Alastair Mc Kinstry, Cathaoirleach
Cllr. Gabriel Cronnelly
Cllr. Evelyn Francis Parsons
Cllr. Martina Kinane
Mr. John Hynes
Mr. Henry Walsh
Mr. Pat O Hora

Oifigigh: Ms. Eileen Ruane, Director of Services
Mr. David O'Loughlin, Assistant Engineer
Ms. Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer
Ms. Maria Finn, Administrative Officer.
Ms. Ann Dolan, Executive Scientist
Ms. Sabina O Connell, A/Assistant Staff Officer

1. Confirmation of the Minutes of Climate Change & Biodiversity SPC meeting held on 16th December 2020

The Cathaoirleach asked if everyone had received the minutes from the last meeting held on the 16th December and if anyone had any questions arising from minutes.

Ms. Ruane confirmed that she is to prepare a written report for the members on Climate Adaptation Strategy with update on progress so far, plans for future projects

Cllr McKinstry raised the following point:

- ESB – any update on map re EV charging point

Ms Ruane confirmed that she has not received any further information regarding this from the ESB. However, she informed the meeting that at the National Meeting on energy in February The LUTS Committee has formed a working group. A Guidance Document is being produced for local authorities on best model and will give advice on planning etc. This is expected to be ready in May and Galway County Council will develop its strategy based on that Guidance Document. If the guidance document is available, it will be circulated at the next meeting.

- Hedgerow guidelines – Ms. Mannion informed meeting that the guidelines have been approved and they need to be translated. Training will be required but work is continuing in this respect.
- PV panelling planning regulations – Cllr McKinstry informed meeting that there has been a response from the Minister re solar panel regulation change and he understands that schools will now fall into category.

Ms. Ruane stated that she has not received any communication regarding this, but upon receipt of same she will issue it to the members.

- TII working group – Ms Ruane confirmed that we are not a part of the working group.

Ms. Ruane informed the meeting that following a discussion with the DOS for Infrastructure and Operations she has been informed that an application for funding opportunities had to be submitted by 7/1/2021. A robust application under each category has been lodged by GCC. It is expected that an answer will be received to that application in the 1st week of April and pending funding allocation the key for GCC will be having the appropriate staffing resources to progress these opportunities that have been identified.

Cllr. McKinstry informed meeting that the Climate Action Bill is going through the Dáil and Local authorities have been made aware that staffing numbers have to increase to meet the work involved in the individual plans. Government departments and SEAI have already increased staffing numbers and he foresees L/A staffing numbers likewise being increased.

Cllr. Cronnelly sought update/clarification with regards to bog re-wetting of 30,000 acres of boglands by Bord Na Móna and the resulting impact on the drainage of rivers. He requested to have a meeting with Ms. Ruane separate to this meeting to discuss the Claran Drainage Scheme and he sought clarity around the maintenance once its completed. Perhaps the OPW would assume control or it needs to be included in the County Development Plan.

Ms. Ruane stated that the OPW at the meeting with GCC on 4/3/2021 did not foresee any issues deriving from the re-wetting of boglands.

Cllr. Cronnelly also wishes to know if there was any update on Flag Grants. Ms. Ruane advised him that Galway and Clare are together in this process. There are two projects annually and it falls under the remit of Community and Enterprise and Kieran Coyne from that department would make contact with Mr. Cronnelly..

Ms. Kinane stated that projects already identified need to be given urgent attention under any funding received under active travel plan application. She stated that during COVID there had been an increase in people of all ages out walking, and it is highly important that sites be identified for pedestrian crossings and are brought to completion with the support of any funding secured by GCC. She referred to two areas in her MD area, one on the Old Limerick Road and the second at Oranhill which she would be seeking completion on. Once funding is secured GCC will need to manage projects previously identified and unfinished.

Ms. Ruane stated that there is a great desire by GCC to progress any existing unfinished projects. The Minister for Transport has indicated that there will be increased staffing to support projects, the DOS for Infrastructure and Operations was not happy with level proposed and has made a strong application in reply for increased staffing levels.

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Cllr McKinstry told meeting that the expectation was €30 - €40 per capita with expectation that this will rise. There will be multiannual grants.

Cllr McKinstry told the meeting that International experience is that at 30-40 euro per capita per year expenditure, individual behaviour and attitudes change positively towards active travel, and that it is multiannual grants are expected to rise to this level.

Ms. Finn proposed that the minutes from 16/12/2020 be approved, it was proposed by Cllr. McKinstry and Cllr. Parsons seconded the proposal.

Update on meeting with Minister Patrick O Donovan re coastal erosion

Cllr. McKinstry asked if there were any questions from the minutes with the Minister on 4/3/2021. Cllr. McKinstry stated that a good discussion had taken place.

Cllr. Parsons was delighted to have the opportunity to attend the meeting with the Minister. She thanked GCC for organising the meeting which was very productive. She was delighted to be able to ask question from OPW and to have been able to put her case to them and although she did not feel that there was any indication of adequate resources to progress projects it is reassuring to know that coastal erosion will become a national debate. The Minister had stated that this was the first SPC meeting that he had been invited to / participated in since his appointment as OPW minister and this was very significant for Galway.

Cllr. Parsons stated that she wished for the members of this group receive an update from the Roads SPC meeting. Ms. Ruane confirmed that following on from OPW meeting with GCC on 4/3/21, the Roads Section have held the SPC and she will request an update on status of Ballinasloe Scheme from Roads DOS.

Cllr. Kinane informed the meeting that following on from the meeting with the Minister she had spoken with her own political party and it is being discussed at Government level that extra staffing to meet climate change plans are necessary so it is hopeful that the message is reaching the highest levels with regards to additional staffing resources needed.

Despite coastal erosion being a nationwide conversation GCC still have issues Cllr. Kinane stated. The OPW are on board and supportive to assist in whatever means they can with information / knowledge / expertise. Cllr. Kinane spoke to Jim Cullen following the meeting of 4/3/2021 regarding the three areas of concern in her MD area and she feels very strongly that we need to keep staffing for climate change on the agenda. Cllr. Kinane proposed that flooding and coastal erosion be put back on agenda in 6 months' time to get progress and refer to the Minister office for an update. Cllr Parsons seconded this proposal.

Ms. Ruane thanked Cllr. Kinane. She found the meeting with the OPW Minister very positive. She acknowledged that GCC have been proactive in their dealing with OPW with many projects having received funding from the OPW office in the past. Ms. Ruane confirmed that the CARO regional office has set up a technical working group for coastal erosion and Jim Cullen (DOS) has assigned a Senior Executive Engineer from GCC to sit on that working group.

Cllr. McKinstry – Timeline for County Development Plan – gap of 6 months. Ms Ruane confirmed that the draft plan due next week. Climate change is at top of the plan and has a very broad platform. It will be open for further discussions and workshops are due to take place before the plenary meeting.

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Cllr. Parsons enquired if the CARO office have any role in the peatland rewetting project by Bord Na Móna. Mr. O'Loughlin confirmed that he had raised the issue with David Mellet, CARO Regional Co-Ordinator and that although Mr. Mellet had stated that he would keep abreast of developments with regards to rewetting of boglands, he didn't feel that the CARO office would have any role to play.

Cllr. Parsons believed that the CARO office should have a role to partake in the project and requested that CARO be contacted to see if they have any update. Ms. Ruane confirmed that this will be done. She confirmed that with regards to the County Development Plan there has been robust discussion and flood maps are included.

Minutes of 4th March 2021 proposed by Cllr. Kinane and seconded by Cllr. Parsons.

2. Climate Adaption Strategy

Ms. Ruane informed meeting that she will follow up with a report following this meeting.

Galway have completed 49% of its commitments in the Action Implementation Plan to date. Some projects are moving quicker than other. Resources to meet targets are an issue with DOS. Ms. Ruane to meet with individual DOSs to discuss their individual areas of action.

Ms. Ruane confirmed that she has received approval for the recruitment of a Climate Action Officer for GCC. This post is due to be advertised and will be funded initially in the short term by GCC pending approval of the position by the Department. Climate change has a very significant focus in the County Development Plan.

Ms. Ruane spoke about the Severe Weather Management System being implemented by GCC. This is primarily to cover storms and fires. General Operatives will have their tablets and updates / close outs of cases will be coming through live from local area. The Chief Fire Officer is willing to give members a demonstration and Ms. Ruane will be happy to arrange same. Maria

Updated tenancy handbook produced with an element of Climate Change contain therein.

Ms. Ruane updated meeting on the Climate Action Opportunity Fund. This provides opportunities for Communities and Not for Profit Groups within the GCC jurisdiction to have a significant impact on our overall ability to meet climate targets. Definitive and impactful action at community level will extend and complement the action being undertaken at regional, national, and international levels.

The scheme will be advertised on 2nd April 2021. GCC will provide support funding for high impact projects aligned with the County's Climate Adaptation Goals and Objectives. The fund is in region of €70,000 and categories of finding are energy efficiency / biodiversity / Renewable energy / Cycling and walking / Resource efficiency.

Ms. Ruane updated meeting on a Local Authority EV Working Group that that been established to advise local authorities on their role in the provision of EV charging infrastructures including price guide, sites, and siting for such infrastructure. GCC have completed a survey to support the working group and a report from the working group is due in May / June 2021. Two service providers have been in touch enquiring about GCC's plans to deliver within the sector. Following receipt of the report from the working group in May / June there will be an expectation that GCC will progress in line with recommendations included in the guidance document issued by the working group.

Ms Ruane updated meeting on SEAI communities funding (SEC). A memorandum of understanding has been agreed with SEAI. We met with SEAI a few weeks ago and we are

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happy with outcome of that meeting. It is hoped MOU will be signed in the coming week. Two applications have been received – 1 in Athenry and 1 in the Ballinasloe area. SEAI will only assess SEC applications once the signed MOU is received by them.

Home Energy saving Kits are being rolled out through the Libraries in Galway City, Clifden, Tuam, Loughrea and Ballinasloe. Ms. Ruane stated. CODEMA (Dublin's Energy Agency) delivered training to GCC library service staff in January.

Monitoring and reporting on energy levels Ms. Ruane stated in continuing and GCC is progressing in line with related timelines for data input.

Ms. Ruane reported on significant training / webinars which are scheduled to take place. This is to be rolled out to every local authority worker and is scheduled for GCC Management and GCC Councillors from May. It is recommended that this training is availed of and other modules to follow which will include training for Planners.

Community conversations took place in March through PPN and a significant body of work is ongoing with a lot more to follow Ms. Ruane stated.

Cllr. Cronnelly enquired if any more companies had come on stream for the SEAI retrofitting grants. He believes it is a closed shop, that many contractors are unable to meet the criteria. Cllr Cronnelly also enquired if the Hen Harrier Project had been extended to other areas

Ms. Ruane stated that she will investigate both issues raised by Cllr. Cronnelly.

Cllr. Kinane stated that it was very positive news that GCC was supporting the appointment of Climate Action Co-ordinator and enquired as to what would be the role of the co-ordinator.

Ms. Ruane stated that in the first instance the role of the Co-ordinator would be dedicated internally to oversee / adapt actions in GCC targets in Climate Action Plan. He / She would also liaise with external stakeholders and collaboration.

Cllr. Parsons was about to ask the same question and confirmed that it had now been answered for her.

Cllr. Kinane asked whether the Co-ordinator will be working with local areas too and Ms. Ruane confirmed that they will be at a later stage. Cllr Kinane stated that the amount of work being carried out (Severe weather / GIS / GCC own plan / CARO office) is very impressive.

Cllr. Parsons stated that she was impressed with the new severe weather management system and is interested in seeing how it works. She welcomed the Climate Action Fund.

Cllr. McKinstry thanked Ms. Ruane for her update to the meeting stating that it was very helpful. He added that GCC had made great progress with the mapping of storms. He referred to European Space Agency and EP projects and the work they do on tracking / mapping of fires. He requested a presentation on the new severe weather management system at the next meeting.

Cllr. McKinstry informed meeting that Lettermullen are in progress of making a submission under SEAI Sustainable Energy Communities for retrofitting / recycling.

3. Decarbonisation Zones

Ms. Ruane outlined that a Circular from DHLGH in February specifically requires each local authority under Action 165 of the Climate Action Plan to identify one location or area in each local authority area that would be subject to a plan in order to be declared a decarbonisation zone whereby carbon emissions would be measured annually in order to reduce carbon emissions for that specific area to annual meet targets in place.

Each local authority is requested by 30th April 2021 to identify a potential area suitable to be designated as a decarbonisation zone. Urban areas and agglomerations identified by a local authority must have a population of not less than 5000 persons or rural areas with an area of not less than 4km².

Ms. Ruane stated that GCC will be looking to work closely with local communities who presently have a positive approach to climate change to identify an area. Galway would like to identify two such areas. GCC will be meeting with stakeholders and is confident that GCC can meet target.

Cllr. McKinstry enquired if this project involves existing communities or new communities. Ms. Ruane replied that initially GCC would plan to work with current communities and in the future new communities will hopefully come on board. Cllr. McKinstry replied that he believed the Aran Islands would be one of the most mature communities for this project and Ms. Ruane confirmed that the Aran Islands are on GCC's short list.

Ms. Ruane stated that some local authorities are advertising for communities to come forward, but this is not the preferred option for GCC. Ms. Ruane confirmed that she will send a copy of the Circular on DZs to all members.

4. Biodiversity and Pollinators Update

Ms. Mannion updated meeting on the 'Pots for Pollinators' Initiative that the Heritage Office and Tidy Towns Section of Galway County Council have developed with the National Biodiversity Data Centre and will be rolling it out with the Tidy Towns Groups in the County. A draft Press Release has been prepared and is awaiting sign off.

As part of this initiative GCC are also running a sustainable gardening course with Aoife Munn for Tidy Towns Groups starting in April. 30 people will be taken on this online course. Ms. Mannion stated that she is hoping to run a second course and a funding application will be submitted through the National Biodiversity Funding. The first week of the course will be dealing with Pesticides and Waste Reduction. Ms. Mannion stated that she needs to work individually with the various MDs as biodiversity plans vary depending on the plants in the different areas.

Ms. Mannion also gave an update on Mechanical hedgerow-cutting guidance for County Galway which was collated by Janice Fuller and produced in line with Teagasc guidelines. GCC are currently trying to source suitable photos and it will be designed by a graphic designer. It is specifically for Council staff and contractors and it will also be translated.

Advancing the Mechanical hedgerow-cutting guidance to this stage involved liaising with engineers in the different MDs. Ms. Mannion bestowed praise on the engineers for their help, advice and guidance in producing the final document. Training will now have to be organised for the various engineers and methods of recording will require additional work.

Ms. Mannion stated that Clare Co. Council have produced a training video. Four counties are piloting this scheme them including Offaly, Kilkenny, Clare and Galway. Trinity College Botany

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Department have also produced a video which is designed for public awareness, whereas Clare Co. Council's is designed for staff training.

Ms. Mannion also stated the Heritage Office will be running the 'Galway Buzz' for National Biodiversity Week this year and they will have a different theme for each day.

Cllr. Parsons thanked Ms. Mannion for her work and leaflets produced. She stated that they are very enticing and engaging for all age groups. She stated that the libraries are circulating free seeds currently. Cllr. Parsons requested that the leaflets shared today be sent out to the members. She stated that she was a member of the on-line course "Bringing Nature to you in East Galway" and found it very informative and interesting. Cllr. Parsons requested that the original books / leaflets from the earlier SPC meetings be sent to her, as she was not on this SPC Committee originally.

Cllr. Cronnelly asked if road-side hedgerows have been taken into carbon credits. He understood that they qualified at 10% to 15% and if they are not included presently then clarification on this needs to be given urgently.

Cllr. McKinstry stated that he did not believe that they had been included and this is due to technical issues. There is a problem in identifying how much is stone and how they are measured each year. Cllr. McKinstry confirmed that there is a strong desire to include hedgerows in carbon credits. He stated that the EPA are looking at methods and one option is from the air.

Cllr. McKinstry welcomed the hedgerow leaflet. He referred to cutting every 2/3 years and explanation re biennial berries / leave vegetation. He enquired if there are plans to track which areas are cut and when.

Ms. Mannion confirmed that this will be an ongoing project in partnership with the Engineers for the various MDs and HR for training. A balance on road safety and biodiversity will be striven for. Ms. Mannion stated that old surveys need to be updated and that ongoing conversations with Engineers and training through HR will continue.

Cllr. McKinstry enquired if photos of before / after cuts will be on website. He confirmed that he will discuss with Ms. Mannion after the meeting.

5. Pesticide Exceedance in Water

Ms. Ruane stated that this is a two-pronged approach which involves water sampling and education the public.

Ms. Dolan explained to the members that since January 2014, Irish Water (IWA) has been responsible for the provision of water in all public water supplies in Ireland. Regulation 4 of the Drinking Water Regulations requires Irish Water to ensure that the water it supplies is wholesome and clean.

Regular testing of drinking water sources Ms. Dolan stated is carried out by the HSE to ensure that drinking water complies with legislation. Non-compliances are reported to EPA and referred to the local authority in which area the breaches occur. Where non-compliances occur GCC work with IWA to educate people regarding pollution of water supplies.

The European (Drinking Water) Regulations 2014 sets out the parametric limits for pesticides in drinking water. This limit is very low. In Ireland pesticide use is widespread, occurring across many sectors. The agriculture and forestry sectors account for most of the pesticide use nationally. Pesticides may be used by landowners themselves

Over the past number of years Ms. Dolan explained exceedances for pesticides continue to be detected in drinking water supplies around Ireland. While the pesticide levels we are detecting do not pose a health risk, they are nevertheless undesirable and ideally should be

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as close to zero as possible. Breaches of pesticides parameters in water are being picked up in drinking water because the water courses from which we abstract have been contaminated. Three water supplies identified in Galway having breached Regulations are Ballinasloe, Tullykyne and Tullycross.

IWA working in partnership with a range of organisations have set up an awareness campaign Ms. Dolan stated, and GCC have assisted them in drafting a letter which will be sent to the farming community in the affected areas. Initially, in Galway this letter will be sent to the farming community in Tullykyne and Tullycross. IWA will also engage with the Water Officer from LAWPRO for Galway to give cultured advice regarding what pesticides people can or cannot be used etc.

Ms. Dolan stated that breaches of drinking water regulations has huge implications for treatment systems. Following on from non-compliances with the legislation the EPA issue remediation plans to be undertaken. Ms. Dolan explained that the key to eliminate water pollution is to educate people. Pesticide use is most common amongst the farming community, Tidy Town groups may use it on verges or walk areas close to water supplies and individuals may use it on their own gardens. It is vital that we educate the general public on the dangers of pesticides use and disposal and the effect it has on our water supplies.

Cllr. Parsons raised concern that the Ballinasloe farming community are not currently on list to receive the proposed letters. Ms. Dolan stated that IWA possibly will send the letter to them at a later stage, she stated that this breach of drinking water regulations is not confined to County Galway, it is a national issue.

Cllr. Parsons enquired if there will be repercussions for people who are found to cause these breaches or how will it be enforced. Ms. Dolan confirmed that this query will be raised with the IWA. Ms. Dolan added that she did not feel the Ballinasloe supply was a major worry at this time, the treatment plant is licenced by EPA. Ms. Dolan told the members that she will be available to answer queries if anyone wishes to contact her on the matter.

Cllr. McKinstry thanked Ms. Dolan for the update and stated that as far as he could see the role of GCC would be to assist in educating the public on pesticide use. He enquired if there would be any training given on safe disposal of pesticides. Ms. Dolan stated that safe disposal of pesticides should be a national debate item.

Ms. Mannion added that an awareness of safe use of pesticides is part of the programme, when working with Tidy Town Groups. With regards to safe disposal of pesticides she believes we need politicians to come on board and raise the issue at national level for discussion.

Ms. Kinane stated that proper use of pesticides was extremely important, and she was delighted that it is an element of Tidy Town Group training. She enquired if there was any proposal to have any training in schools on this issue.

Ms. Mannion stated that perhaps in time use of pesticides could become part of a school training programme, perhaps at transition year level. She stated that Williamstown Tidy Towns group work with schools on programmes. The way forward she believed was to educate on lower level use of pesticides. Williamstown are the first tidy town group out of 40 groups to work with schools. At a later stage perhaps, they will work with the Water Officer Conor Ruane and Environment Awareness Officer Mark Molloy.

Ms. Parsons queried as to whether Tidy Town Groups can be compelled to work with biodiversity officer and if they failed to do so is there means to penalise them, e.g. reducing funding they receive.

Ms. Mannion stated that Tidy Town Committees are great to work with. It is their ethos to have a partnership approach. They are open to new ideas and Ms. Mannion stated that if one

Minutes of Meeting through letters of Change Charge 4 (Wednesday 5th April to 24th March 2021)
proposal isn't acceptable, they find solutions. She stated that a positive approach with groups
is more beneficial than a negative approach and she is not a fan of punitive measures.

6. Date and Time of Next Meeting

The agreed date for next meeting was set for Wednesday May 26th, 2021 through Teams

Meeting Concluded

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