

Minutes of Meeting of Climate Change & Biodiversity

Strategic Policy Committee held on 29th May 2020

I Láthair:

Baill: Cllr. Alastair Mc Kinstry, Cathaoirleach
Cllr. Gabriel Cronnelly
Cllr. Noel Thomas
Cllr. Ivan Canning
Cllr. Joe Sheridan
Cllr Aisling Dolan
Mr. Pat O Hora
Mr. John Hynes
Ms. Mairsíl Claffey
Mr. Henry Walsh

Oifigigh: Ms. Eileen Ruane, Director of Services;
Mr. Mike Melody, A/Senior Executive Engineer;
Mr. Ronan Conway, Executive Engineer;
Ms. Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer
Ms. Angela Quinn, A/Administrative Officer.
Ms. Sabina O Connell, A/Assistant Staff Officer

Minutes

1) Introduction by the Chairman – Alastair Mc Kinstry

The Cathaoirleach welcomed all members and representatives of the various sectoral interests to the first meeting of the Climate Change & Biodiversity SPC Meeting of 2020. Cllr. Mc Kinstry delivered a powerpoint presentation. He explained the objective of this SPC group.

- To collaborate with the relevant agencies and sectors working towards getting Galway to be carbon neutral by 2040 (7% reduction per year for the Paris Agreement)
- To work towards preventing the loss of biodiversity
- To monitor the implementation of Galway County Council Climate Change Adaptation Strategy

April 2020 was the driest April in 200 years, with February being the wettest on record. There is a decline in the water quality of our lakes. It is predicted that we will have wetter winters, drier summers with an increase in intensity of storms & more coastal flooding being predicted.

Ireland currently produces between 67 – 70 million tonnes of CO₂ annually. Ireland needs to get this to zero by 2040. Some of the means of achieving this will be through change to the use of electric vehicles, change to means of heating homes / businesses & changes to our agricultural practices.

Ireland is losing biodiversity. This is impacted largely by negative agricultural practices (fertilizer use / drainage). 28% of lowland hay meadows have been lost since 2013 due to intensification. One third of Ireland's 99 wild bee species are threatened with extinction.

2) Introduction by the Director of Services – Eileen Ruane

Ms. Ruane introduced herself and welcomed all to the first meeting of Climate Change & Biodiversity SPC. She briefed the meeting on the actions that have taken place to improve Climate Change, over a number of years by Galway County Council.

Various ISO standard awards have been achieved in different sections of the Council. Solar panels having been installed in County Buildings. Galway County Council was the first local authority to run the Climate Action Support Scheme. The scheme invited applications in the following areas – Community Facility-Energy Audit Scheme; Solar Primary Schools; Climate Action Workshops; Community Water Bottle Filling Scheme; Tidy Towns Water Butt Scheme.

Four Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs) as Centre's of Excellence have been established around the country, based on distinct geographic/topographic characteristics which enables them to advise local authorities in their region on climate action strategies ensuring a coordinated response and assisting with the roll-out of national/regional policies at local level. Galway County Council is in the North Atlantic Sea Board group with Donegal, Sligo, Mayo & Galway City. Mayo is the lead authority for the group.

The CARO's will establish and facilitate regional teams to lead the adaptation planning process and develop overarching regional adaptation strategies. Each CARO will share and exploit regional commonalities in relation to data, know-how and will create synergies between LAs and other state agencies, leading to informed and more cost-effective decision making.

Galway County Council adopted the Climate Adaptation Strategy in 2019.

Ms. Ruane introduced all Council staff present, including Mr. Conway who worked in the area of climate change up to the end of 2019, and Ms. Mannion, our Heritage Officer. Mr. Conway's replacement will be in place within the coming weeks.

Ronan Conway – Executive Engineer

Mr. Conway delivered a presentation on the development of the Climate Change Adaptation Strategy. Galway County Council have over the past decade been in house dealing with energy efficiency projects and working with local community groups. Through changes implemented in Council Hall, energy consumption has been reduced by 50%.

The Action Plan developed as part of the Adaptation Strategy will focus both on internal operation of Galway County Council and external education and awareness raising.

Planning permissions – low carbon, retrofitting, LED public lighting, Electric vehicles / charging points, working with local communities – these are all areas that Galway County Council will be working towards.

The focus through the lead authority in Mayo and nationally on funding needs is vital for projects going forward.

Mr. Conway suggested that members of this committee could identify topics that they would like the group to consider and Galway County Council would try to facilitate same.

Marie Mannion – Heritage Officer

Ms. Mannion gave a briefing on biodiversity & heritage with Galway County Council since 2000. There were initially separate biodiversity and heritage plans, because of the funding streams available at the time. In 2017 it was decided by Galway County Heritage and Biodiversity Forum to have one plan. The current plan runs from 2017 to 2022 and projects are delivered each year, depending on available resources both from a monetary and personnel perspective.

Most of the funding has come from the Heritage Council and Galway County Council's own resources but in the past 2 years funding has been received from the Department of Culture Heritage and the Gaeltacht through the National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP). Awareness of biodiversity is fundamental. The approach taken is one of a meitheal, where the Council works in partnership with local people, communities and schools to assist in achieving their biodiversity projects and initiatives. Training is provided to staff to assist them working with biodiversity in a positive way as part of their work.

An Invasive Species working group has been established in the Council and is cross departmental with queries being initially dealt with by the Roads Department and site visits undertaken by the Community Wardens.

The Council has a number of websites and social media sites that are used to promote heritage and biodiversity and include the following:

1. <https://heritage.galwaycommunityheritage.org/> - This is the Heritage Office website it operate this as part of Galway Community Heritage <https://galwaycommunityheritage.org/> with the National Museum and local communities). It is part of ICAN (Irish Community Archives
2. Galway Virtual Tidy Towns Facebook – operated by the Heritage Office in partnership with Tidy Towns Section of GCC https://www.facebook.com/County-of-Galway-Virtual-Tidy-Towns-105666351085711/?ref=hf&hc_ref=ARS9ErhA2AVB-zshHMjPDWWcBGegCPZ88sdVRChdNndSwX9xkqjLv5LdrdfXzkYBmTE

3. Galway Beo Facebook and YouTube Channel Council
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Community-Service/Galway-Beo-102500174744778/> and https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_bWW4CrzofP-4HIMwiTMfg
4. Galway County Heritage Office YouTube Channel
<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC5Wo1cOyDReFh1fzqymLqtQ>
5. Heritage Office Galway CoCo Vimeo <https://vimeo.com/user46874720>
6. Biodiversity Project website (part of Galway Community Heritage)
<https://biodiversity.galwaycommunityheritage.org/>
7. People and Nature <https://www.facebook.com/peopleandnature/>
8. Galway Community Archaeology (part of Galway Community Heritage) Galway Decade of Commemoration <https://www.galwaydecadeofcommemoration.org/> (initiative with community groups and National Museum of Ireland and GMIT)
9. Council's Website
<http://www.galway.ie/en/services/more/heritage/aboutuswhatisheritage/>

Two recent online projects Galway Beo and The Galway Buzz (Biodiversity Week Project) have been successful in connecting with people.

3) Roundtable Introduction

The Cathaoirleach invited the members of the committee to introduce themselves

1. Gabriel Cronnelly Cllr for Athenry / Oranmore area – Previously was a member of the Environment / Water SPC.
2. Mairsil Claffey (Plastic Free Kinvarra) – In 2018 Kinvarra ran a week's plastic free programme. Educating children through visiting schools also part of the groups awareness programme.
3. Pat O'Hora (Galway Old People's Council) (Tuam District Mental Health Association) (Bird Watch Ireland) - Founding member of Tuam Men's Shed.
4. Noel Thomas Cllr. Connemara – landscape gardener.
5. John Hynes. Project Director of The Ecology Team at MKO, they give advice to local authorities on wildlife / hedgerows in planning related issues.
6. Joe Sheridan Cllr Tuam. Background is in aquatics – Inland waterways & ecology.

7. Ivan Canning Cllr Portumna – is from a farming background. Education and funding are the key. Some of the Tidy Town funding should be ringfenced for biodiversity projects. GRD have a lot of knowledge and believes they should be used more.
8. Henry Walsh. IFA representative for Galway & nationally. Agriculture is struggling to survive. Organic produce is very difficult to export. Agriculture is judged on where it is produced. Believes that education needs to be top priority.
9. Aisling Dolan Cllr Ballinasloe – is from a farming background. Education and awareness are very important. She would like the public to enjoy the open areas and funding is required to improve such areas. Public transport should be encouraged.

4) Work programme for the year

- Monitor & Implement Galway County Council's Climate Adaptation Plan.
- Biodiversity Plan to be updated in 2021
- Workshops

1. Workshops with stakeholders

- Co-ordination with public bodies, businesses: their plans for climate action
- E.g. Eirgrid and electrification of transport, planning.
- Use academic support from NUI Galway Geography
- Facilitate joint applications for EU and National Funding applications

2. Public workshops - What climate change means for <town>

- Impacts with the local public, community groups
- E.g. Retrofitting and jobs, move to electric vehicles, public transport

In response to Cllr. Sheridan, it was agreed that any application for funding would include biodiversity aspect. The Cathaoirleach confirmed for Cllr. Dolan that the stakeholder workshops will commence in 2020 and a list will be available to all members of the SPC. Responding to Cllr Cronnelly, Cllr McKinstry confirmed that Bord Na Móna & Coillte will be included in stakeholder's workshops.

Cllr Thomas indicated the requirement for common ground to be found in the workshops for various groups. Cllr Canning stated that the biodiversity awareness seminars in schools for educating children should run jointly with anti-dumping awareness initiatives.

5. Schedule of Meetings

Four meetings will take place throughout the year with work plans being flexible. There will be a rotation of future meetings between open meeting like today's & zoom meetings

Next meeting will be online and scheduled for week commencing 20th July 2020.

