

MINUTES OF THE CLIMATE & BIODIVERSITY ACTION STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE HELD ON 06TH SEPTEMBER 2023 AT 10.00AM

PRESENT: Cllr. Lourda Scott (Cathaoirleach)
Cllr. Mark Barry
Cllr. Peir Leonard
Cllr. Dermot O'Brien
Cllr. Rory O'Connor
Ken Sweeney, Coillte
Kate Dolan, An Comhairle na n'Og
Sharon Jackson, PPN Representative (Environment)
Gary Mackenzie, Business/Chambers Representative

IN ATTENDANCE: Breege Kilkenny, Director of Services
Jackie Carroll, Senior Executive Officer
Mark Costello, Climate Action Co- Coordinator
Jim Callery, Climate Action Officer
Deirdre Burns, Heritage Officer
Declan Keogh, Regional Energy Manager
William Halligan, Energy Officer
Julie Samiller, Community Climate Action Officer
Nicole Keogh, Assistant Staff Officer

APOLOGIES: Michael Storan, Construction Industry Federation Representative
Justin Ivory, PPN
Tom Shortt, Agricultural Representative
Paul Brophy, Executive Technician
Sinead Boddy, Assistant Staff Officer

Item 1: To note the Minutes of the Meeting of 7TH June 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the 7th June were proposed by Cllr. O'Connor and seconded by Cllr. Scott.

Item 2: Matters arising from the Minutes

Cllr. Scott queried whether any further action had been taken on Tree Policy. JCarroll advised that due to the necessary focus of the team in preparing the draft Climate Action Plan, no further action had been taken but the matter would be given priority in 2024.

Item 3: Climate Action Plan

The members received a comprehensive presentation detailing the themes and actions of the draft Climate Action Plan. JC outlined the role of the Local Authority; to be fully accountable, to be a positive influence, to coordinate and facilitate and to advocate for positive and sustainable change. It was noted that an extensive stakeholder engagement process had been undertaken. Each meeting was attended by 10-12 people on average and the quality of the information and the feedback received was of high quality. The need to increase effective communication and how the actions will impact our communities were the two main issues raised. BK stressed that no stone was left unturned when it came to both internal and external engagement.

The draft plan will be presented to the members for final adoption before the deadline of the 24th February, 2024. The Climate Action plan will be valid from 2024-2029 and the actions contained therein will be monitored by way of annual summary reports. The public consultation will begin on the 3rd October and will run for 6 weeks until 15th November 2023.

The members welcomed the draft and the team answered various queries, including a query regarding an increase to transport links in the County. The members were advised one of the matters that came through engagement is that people were concerned with frequency of services and bridging the gaps in rural areas and elsewhere. A project such as current e bike scheme in Bray is one example of possible project that could be rolled out elsewhere. Travel safety was not an issue that arose in stakeholder engagement; however this is being dealt with by the Active Travel Section, i.e. Safe routes to school programme.

An extensive communication campaign had been undertaken to ensure that the maximum number of people could make submissions. The members were also advised that there were two surveys – one for stakeholder groups and the other was on the online consultation portal for any member of the public to view and submit. It was also advertised through local press, social media, via the PPN and as part of the stakeholder meetings.

Cllr. Leonard outlined that she is working closely with the Climate Ambassador from An Taisce in the Arklow area. She would like to discuss the possibility of WCC supporting a task force in the south of the county to tackle various climate related issues. The matter has been discussed with the Heritage Officer and the JPC members and she would like to have it added to the list of actions.

Item 3: Climate Action Plan

- **Review of proposed actions of draft Climate Action Plan**

Review of Theme 1: Governance and Leadership

This theme contains 16 actions, many of which involve putting climate action at the forefront of the council's agenda, including energy and working towards ISO50001 status.

Cllr. O'Brien highlighted how this is a very comprehensive document and that this information needs to be shared with new staff and new councillors. JC confirmed that induction of staff is included under Action 4 and that Councillors will be inducted when elected.

Cllr. O' Connor noted that perhaps as some of the actions seem to be very broad, it might be more powerful to narrow these issues. MC advised that this way it ensures that climate action can be promoted across all sections.

Cllr. O'Connor welcomed the clear sky initiative, and would like to see an increase of solar PV in each MD and a trial in green rates for customers who incorporate green measures in their business.

Cllr. Scott queried whether using the number of meetings held as a tracking measure for actions would be the most suitable way to track. MC will look into this. JC commented that how we report on issues will be important, to avoid getting bogged down in the monitoring and reporting.

Review of Theme 2: Built Environment & Transport

This theme includes 26 actions, it looks in a large part at reducing reliance on fossil fuels, i.e. through Housing retrofit, low carbon building methods, PLEEP Project, EV Charging strategy and the Active travel team, Fleet management, road resurfacing and flood adaptation measures etc.?

Cllr. Leonard queried whether we could incorporate a move towards more local buses within local areas. Car Hire and the use of smaller vehicles in town centres may also be possibilities. Installing hundreds of plastic bollards is not a long term solution.

In response, it was noted that as Arklow is the designated Decarbonisation Zone for the county and has its own 24 actions these issues will also be reviewed. JC commented further that a shared car scheme may be rolled out in Bray in the future and that any shared schemes in Arklow could involve bikes, cars or scooters.

Cllr. O'Connor mentioned that within the Bray Town Plan, there is a project where the Luas is to expand to Bray – and asked that perhaps the investigation of the possibility of the project could be therefore added as an action.

GMcK noted that many bus companies are finding it hard to source bus drivers and that in terms of Electric Vehicles, the problem is that there is no supply chain and it is not an affordable option for

many households. It was noted that this is a national issue that needs to be dealt with at government level. Cllr Scott referred to Action 15 and that it may be the most relevant in this regard.

Cllr. Scott asked that the plan be proofed to ensure that is written in 'plain english' and to improve the terminology used so that everyone can understand.

Cllr Scott would also like to see the e-bike scheme extended to Greystones, JC confirmed that this is being examined at the moment.

Theme 3 – Natural Environment and Green Infrastructure

31 Actions included within this theme. Some of these actions cover the areas of coastal erosion, flood relief schemes, SUDS and Nature Based SUDS policies, assisting community stakeholders with peatland restoration, upland management and development of dark sky reserve.

Cllr Scott commended the fact that many of the issues included within this theme have been raised at SPC meetings over the years. However, she believed that some of the Actions may be misleading and need to be rephrased, i.e. Action 11 re buffer of riparian zones, is already covered in the County Development Plan , as well as Action 16 pertaining to the Glyphosate Policy, which implies that this action is not currently in place and being carried out. Action 23, 28 and 30 are also queried. JC responded that the wording of the above will be reviewed.

Cllr O Connor would like the action regarding the pilot housing scheme to be clarified and KS queried WCC's role in the action relating to forest fires.

Regarding the pilot housing scheme it was noted that although Housing is very interested in running the scheme, there may be a delay in receiving funding for same from the Department.

NPWS brought up the issue of Forest Fires in engagement process and how communication about fire prevention, not just tackling the fires, needs to be examined.

BK emphasised the importance of capturing all existing policies, to highlight the work Wicklow County Council is already carrying out.

Theme 4 - Communities Resilience & Transition

24 Actions included in this theme. Topics include Community Climate Action Fund, Green events policy, annual climate action week, green schools, active travel, work with SEAI.

Cllr O'Brien applauded this theme and believes it to be very strong. He would like to suggest aligning Climate Action Week with other national or international events. JC responded that the date for Climate Action week has not been confirmed yet but will probably fall in line with Dublin Climate Action Week, which is also National Mobility Week.

Cllr Scott would like community gardens and allotments to be incorporated into an action under this theme even though it is already represented under Food Waste Action.

Cllr Scott would also like more external body involvement outside of the PPN, for example, traveller and migrant groups. JC confirmed that he will investigate further scope for involvement of more external bodies and will mention them in an action.

SJ commended the wide span of the actions and hopes that funding, staffing and promotion of events will be successful.

Theme 5: Sustainability and Resource Management

20 actions included under this theme. Topics include review of civic amenity sites, promoting uptake of energy performance, develop renewables hub in Clermont, liaise with Signpost and Acres schemes, promote green public procurement and investigate potential of former landfill sites.

Cllr O'Connor raised the possibility of including green rates for businesses under this theme and that Bray Car Free Day may be an event that could be included under an action. Cllr O'Connor is advised that meetings would have to take place with Finance regarding the Green Rates and that a travel plan for all Council staff will be developed and promoted throughout the county.

JC believed that mobility week might be a better way to promote alternatives to using the car than running a 'car free day' as negative publicity has surrounded this event in the past. Cllr O'Connor agreed and asked that communication is open with business and schools.

Theme 6: Arklow Decarbonisation Zone

This theme includes 24 actions, split within the 5 themes specifically for Arklow. Some topics include shared travel scheme, local transport plan, retrofit of civic amenity sites, tree survey, solar pv promotion, circular economy promotion and pilot with oyster reef project.

Cllr Leonard stated there was a possibility to include an action with Coillte for Glenart Forest as they would be open to commencing a project. The NORRI project and possibility of county wide Farmers Markets promoting locally sourced produce are examples of other ideas that could be actioned.

Feedback was requested from the members on the draft Plan.

BK commended the Climate Action Team for all the hard work and commitment in delivering the draft Climate Action Plan and confirmed that the draft Plan had the full support of the Senior Management Team.

Item 4: Any Other Business

- A business case was brought to the Chief Executive regarding coastal erosion in Brittas Bay. The works will be based around Nature Based Solutions and permission is there to commence works as soon as possible given the urgency of the situation. Funding will be sought from the OPW. Prior to launch it will be important to communicate the plans with the public, especially regarding limited access to the beach.

Cllr Leonard agreed with the urgency around this project and that works such as these are needed on other beaches also, i.e. Clogga. The meeting was informed of a pilot project in Kilmichael reserve, in conjunction with Teagasc which may act as an extra source of information.

- Awaiting confirmation from the Department for when the Climate Action Fund will go live. The Community Climate Action programme is very important and has the ability to empower local communities to get energy master plans and Sustainable Energy Communities underway.
- Cllr Leonard would like to create a south beach taskforce in Arklow, involving numerous stakeholders. BK advised that she understood how time sensitive the matter is and has tasked Arklow MD with the flood relief scheme and coastal erosion, which will incorporate all beaches.
- Arklow Energy Awareness Day takes place on Monday.
- Cllr O'Brien advised that Comhairle na nÓG will be holding their youth summit on the 10th November in The Parkview Hotel, Newtown and suggested that this would be a good opportunity to incorporate the work of Climate Action Team. It was agreed that a member of the Climate Action Team would attend.

Date of Next Meeting – Wednesday 6th December, 2023 at 10.30am
Location: Council Chamber, Wicklow County Buildings