

MINUTES OF THE CLIMATE & BIODIVERSITY ACTION STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 22nd FEBRUARY 2023 AT 10.00AM

PRESENT: Cllr. Lourda Scott (Cathaoirleach)
Cllr. Peir Leonard
Cllr. Rory O'Connor
Cllr. Dermot O'Brien
Cllr. Mark Barry
Sharon Jackson
Ken Sweeney
Gary McKenzie
Justin Ivory
Kate Dolan

IN ATTENDANCE: Breege Kilkenny, Director of Services
Jackie Carroll, Senior Executive Officer
Mary Cahill, Senior Executive Engineer
Deirdre Burns, Heritage Officer
Jim Callery, Environmental Awareness Officer
Hannah O'Kelly, Assistant Environmental Awareness Officer
Ciara Ruane, Assistant Staff Officer

APOLOGIES: Marc Devereux
Paul Brophy

Councillor Lourda Scott welcomed Kate Dolan, Comhairle na N'Og, representative for the SPC.

Item 1: Minutes of the Meeting held on 7th December 2022

The minutes of the Climate and Biodiversity Action Strategic Policy Committee held on the 7th of December 2022 were proposed by Cllr. Pier Leonard and seconded by Cllr. Mark Barry.

Item 2: Matters arising from the Minutes

No matters arising.

Item 3: Climate Action Plan Update:

It was advised that KPMG have now delivered the draft Climate Change Risk Assessment and Baseline Assessment and are awaiting comments. A framework for consultants to carry out appropriate assessment has been set up by CARO. Wicklow's next phase will be the stakeholder engagement which will present the evidence collected through the baseline emissions assessment and risk assessment and seek stakeholder input into the plan. We will seek a consultant to facilitate this work. CARO have a framework of consultants for work on the plan and will provide support in drawing up the provisions of the tender and the framework for consultants allows for mini tenders. A consultant may be used to compile the plan pulling the various strands together

The meeting was informed that commonality with a logo and formatting for the final document is being considered by the mid- eastern sub region (Louth, Kildare, Meath and Wicklow).

As a requirement of the new Irish Language Act which came into effect in January 2023, an Irish version of the final document is required. This will be very costly in addition to adding further time pressure as all L.A.'s will be looking for translation services at the same time. The mid-eastern sub region is considering using one supplier which may prove more effective.

Following a request, it was agreed that the group will receive a hybrid presentation from KPMG in March and feedback will be provided to KPMG following that.

Sharon Jackson, on behalf of West Wicklow Environment Network, commented on pages 27 and 31 of the Risk Assessment document that the vulnerability of the peatlands is not being sufficiently flagged. They feel that the carbon potential should be noted. The capture of carbon in these lands should feature heavily in the final report. It was further noted that the executive summary and recommendations were missing. The Climate Change Advisory Council's report and the sustainability progress index contained suggestions as to what can be done to implement measures which would bring Wicklow in line with ambitions that have not yet been realised in climate change. Mary Cahill will contact Sharon Jackson separately to discuss the matters raised and SJ will email same to the SPC group.

The scheduling of meetings around key action points of the Climate Action Plan had been discussed at the meeting of December 7th 2022 and a timeline will be circulated shortly.

It was confirmed that the position of Community Climate Action Officer has been offered. Applications for the roles of Climate Action Coordinator, Climate Action Officer, Regional Energy Services Manager and Energy Officer have all now closed. Interview panels are currently being convened.

Two new staff members, Hannah O'Kelly, Assistant Environmental Awareness Officer and Laura Kehoe, Biodiversity Officer were introduced and it was advised that Laura will be assisting Deirdre Burns with the preparation of the Biodiversity Plan.

Kate Dolan, the new rep for Comhairle na N'Og was then welcomed by the Cathaoirleach. It was confirmed that one of the roles of a third party facilitator for stakeholder engagement for the LA CAP will be to determine youth friendly language and they will meet with Comhairle na N'Og to see how they can assist.

Item 4: Heritage and Biodiversity - update

Heritage: Funding application made to The Heritage Council's County Heritage Plan (CHP) fund on 23/01/23 for the following:

- Glendalough Community Excavation and outreach;
- Continuation of Barn Owl Project;
- East Coast Nature Reserve seasonal nature events;
- Support for Heritage and Biodiversity Plan reviews
- Outreach and communications.
- Community Archaeologist Part Time post.

Architecture: Built Heritage Investment Scheme (BHIS) and the Historic Structure Fund (HSF) grant schemes 2023 opened for applications in Q4 2022. Closing date for applications was 27th Jan 2023. Co-ordinated by the Heritage Office on behalf of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage underway. 34 applications received to BHIS, 19 shortlisted for a total budget of €101,000. 5 projects submitted under HSF by deadline of 10/02/23.

Historic Towns Initiative (HTI): Heritage Office worked with Arklow MD to develop a project proposal and application to the Heritage Council's HTI scheme which was submitted on 02/02/23. Capital project seeking €150,000 to develop heritage led regeneration at three medieval sites in Arklow.

Archaeology: Community Monuments Fund- CMF 2023 announced by National Monuments Service, Department of Housing, Heritage and Local Government in Q4 2022. Local Authorities invited to submit project applications. The scheme is co-ordinated on behalf of Wicklow County Council by the Heritage Office with applications invited by deadline of 27th Jan 2023. Applications accepted from private landowners, community groups, public authorities and other custodians of archaeological heritage. X 12 projects being prepared for submission by 14/02/2023 deadline; mix of public and privately owned monuments.

Biodiversity Plan Fund: €100,000 available to each LA from NPWS, Department of Housing, Heritage and Local Government. Closing date for applications 24/02/23. Proposals currently in preparation to consolidate existing projects and develop new theme areas as follows:

- Continuation of Brittas Bay Biodiversity Management and Enhancement Project
- Behind the Beach programme – outreach, education, citizen science and volunteer events
- Brittas Bay Branding: new signage, interpretation and messaging (in assoc. with MD)
- Initiate pond restoration pilots at selected locations on Council owned lands
- County hedgerow survey
- Bat Conservation Ireland (BCI) collaboration on developing and piloting new survey methodology for woodland species, also includes selected sites in Kildare, Meath and Cavan;
- Biodiversity awareness outreach programme to include: host and facilitate nature cafes, reconnecting with nature workshops; consultations for Biodiversity Action Plan: Citizen Science events and equipment purchase; supporting local biodiversity action groups; providing resources (including digital) and training for themed local biodiversity enhancement initiatives.

It was confirmed that the new Biodiversity Officer will also be part of the Climate Action Team and is based in the Forward Planning Section. LK will be involved in setting up a biodiversity forum, producing the biodiversity plan and target priorities for action and the framework for annual funding. This will now be separate from the Heritage Plan.

Re Pond Restoration pilots, the locations of the ponds are at Clermont Campus and adjacent to Aldi in Greystones. These ponds harbour rich life i.e. declining species frogs and newts. In response to a query it was confirmed that the aim is to encourage biodiversity and native endangered species into these areas.

An Taisce are interested in having demo ponds on public lands for educational visits through The Ponds for Life project. Work has previously been undertaken on Kilmacanogue pond which provides us with three different learning resources. The possibility of a webcam at these locations to broadcast to schools was agreed as being an excellent idea and Deirdre Burns will try to progress same.

Bat Conservation Ireland previously had a woodland bat monitoring scheme on 2 sites in Wicklow, as a pilot project, for 3 years. It was confirmed that based on previous work done, bats in Ireland do not emit the same signal as bats in the UK and so the proposed work is about getting our own audio file.

It was advised that the land owner at Ennerreilly beach will erect signage forbidding cars from driving onto the beach.

Item 5: Local Government Ethical Framework:

The Department of Environment, Community and Local Government issued a new Circular LG 2/2015 in respect of the ethical framework in Local Government and its requirements in 2015. While the non-elected members are not required to fill out an ethics declaration form they are bound by the Act and our code of conduct for Councillors. If they or a connected person have a pecuniary or other beneficial interest to any matter proposed or otherwise, arises at a meeting of the committee or other body either as a result of any of its functions or as regards the performance of any of its functions, they must disclose the nature of their interest and withdraw fully from the meeting.

Item 6: Tree Policy & Glyphosate Policy:

A tender will be run for a survey in one town in each MD to establish a baseline on trees in the public domain. This must be carried out by an arborist.

The District Engineers will be reminded about the requirement to submit a business case for use of glyphosate and a record sheet must be kept also. It was confirmed that an awareness campaign focusing on the policy component – Hierarchy – Use of Herbicides will deliver the message of ‘leave vegetation; learn to love our weeds’. Alternative methods such as the use of mechanical weeding by the MD’s and support of groups such as Tidy Towns were outlined. The campaign will link our own policy with the All Ireland Pollinator Plan. A press release will follow.

It is hoped that when new resources are in place there will be a push to ensure that the actions of the Tree Policy are carried out in the coming year. It must be remembered that the Tree Policy is for trees under Council control. It was confirmed that the only instances in which a felling licence is not required are when a tree is within 30m of a dwelling or if the Council requests a landowner to do so. Licence records are held by the Fire Service. Ken Sweeney will circulate a link on the department website outlining this.

Mary Cahill will liaise with colleagues in the Roads section and report back to the SPC about the process involved in the cutting back of trees on the N11 by the NTA.

The 18 month review of the Tree Policy will be discussed at the next SPC meeting.

It was confirmed that the proposed tree app is more of a management tool but it could possibly be expanded into a questionnaire on the website.

There has been excellent feedback on the recently purchased Weedex machines and additional batteries will be purchased. A review on the success of last year’s use of Foamstream will take place. It was agreed to roll out a flyer with information such as when not to cut etc.

The Cathaoirleach will seek an update from the Oireachtas Committee about the purchase of glyphosate from hardware stores.

Item 7: Any Other Business:

Dates for the 2023 meetings will be circulated.

DZ Arklow – The implementation plan has been received and will form a chapter in our CAP.

Irish Deer Management Forum is back up and running with Teddy Cashman as Chair. WCC will be contacted for their opinion on the impact the deer population is having on the Uplands. Wicklow has the biggest problem with deer in the country and Ken Sweeney asked that the council strongly engage when contacted.

Concern was expressed about a disconnect in communication between planning applications and council managed building projects. BK advised this is a matter for the Housing Department and she will also raise the issue of the link between climate action, planning and housing at Senior Management Team.

The School of Civil Engineering, UCD in partnership with other European entities contacted BK about taking part in a project which aims to create a Co2 emission observatory and digital platform that allows the monitoring of Co2 emissions in coastal areas. Arklow Harbour was considered suitable and it is hoped that we will progress with this; another first for Wicklow.

The Energy Unit has been launched with the first steering group meeting taking place on 22.2.2023.

Register of Actions	
Climate Change Advisory Council Report	Mary Cahill to contact Sharon Jackson
Link to Tree Felling Licence criteria	Ken Sweeney to circulate
NTA Criteria around tree cutting on N11	Mary Cahill to update SPC
Update from Oireachtas Committee re availability of glyphosate in hardware stores	Cllr. Lourda Scott

Next Meeting: 19th April 2023 @ 10.00am