

MINUTES OF THE CLIMATE & BIODIVERSITY ACTION STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE HELD ON 7TH JUNE 2023 AT 10.00AM

PRESENT: Cllr. Lourda Scott (Cathaoirleach)
Cllr. Peir Leonard
Cllr. Rory O'Connor
Cllr. Dermot O'Brien
Sharon Jackson

IN ATTENDANCE: Breege Kilkenny, Director of Services,
Jackie Carroll, Senior Executive Officer
Jim Callery, Climate Action Officer
Marc Devereux, Senior Engineer
Declan Keogh, Regional Energy Manager
William Halligan, Energy Officer
Deirdre Burns, Heritage Officer
Mick Fleming, Environmental Awareness Officer
Hannah O'Kelly, Assistant Environmental Awareness Officer
Paul Brophy, Executive Technician
Fergal Keogh, Senior Engineer
Nicole Keogh, Assistant Staff Officer

APOLOGIES: Laura Kehoe, Biodiversity Officer
Mary Cahill, Senior Executive Engineer
Cllr Mark Barry
Justin Ivory

Item 1: To note the Minutes of the Meeting Of 19th April, 2023

Proposed Amendments to minutes of CABA SPC of 19th April proposed by Sharon Jackson – suggests an addition of paragraph. No objections to proposed amendment. Motion proposed by Cllr Leonard and seconded by Cllr Scott. Amended minutes to be circulated.

Item 2: Matters Arising from the Minutes

(a) Staff Update

- Climate Action Coordinator Role is still open as first candidate withdrew their interest. JC carrying out dual role at moment.
- Kim Townsend Smith commenced role as Community Climate Action Officer.

- Declan Keogh commenced role as Regional Energy Manager.
- William Halligan has been appointed as Energy Officer.
- Laura Kehoe has been appointed as Biodiversity Officer
- Mick Fleming has been appointed as Environmental Awareness Officer and Hannah O’Kelly as Assistant Environmental Awareness Officer.

JCarroll will circulate list of staff members.

(b) Query as to whether members can lodge comments on the LECP. JCarroll noted that the public consultation period has closed and no further opportunity to make comment. Cllr Leonard would like confirmation of this. It was proposed that internal talks on the LECP or presentation given by DB may be what Cllr Leonard is referring to.

Cllr Scott surprised that there was no pre-draft consultation but happy that internal talks did take place.

(c) Declan Keogh gave brief update on public lighting.

(d) Marc Devereux gave brief update on Avoca Mines project.

Item 3: Receive presentation from Professor Diarmuid Torney on Children and Young People’s Assembly on Biodiversity Loss.

Present - Professor Diarmuid Torney, DCU, Ben Mallon, DCU, Rowan Edmund, DCU

Olwyn, Lucas, Siofra - Reps of Children and Young People’s Assembly on diversity Loss

DT shared a presentation on Children and Young People's Assembly on Biodiversity Loss, which outlined the origins of the project and the 58 Calls to Action that each of the young members work toward. 3 members of the Assembly - Olywn, Lucas and Siofra were available to take question/comment after presentation.

Cllr Leonard commended the members of the Assembly and noted the importance of working at local level while also working toward national policy targets. Cllr Leonard asked the members what it was like to be on the Assembly. Olywn replied that it was an amazing experience to help people and work with like-minded people.

Cllr O'Brien also commended the Assembly and asked the representatives what is next for them? Olywn replied that she would share their experience with as many as possible in the hope that they can learn from the Assembly.

Cllr Scott enjoyed the breadth of the Calls to Action and asked the assembly members which one was most important to them. DT commented that all the calls are important but the call to action that all policy must incorporate biodiversity and protection of nature stands out. Olywn found the call to action about planting trees important.

FK praised the members on their passion and for realising the importance of biodiversity.

Cllr Scott confirmed that as per Michael Noonan, the Calls to Action will be integrated into policy. Cllr Scott thanked DT and Assembly members for their involvement today. BK agreed and thanked the participants. JCarroll advised that that will investigate the possibility of putting the link to Children and Young People's Assembly on the Wicklow County Council Website.

Item 4: Planning Permission Compliance

The members received a comprehensive presentation on Planning Compliance from Fergal Kehoe, Senior Engineer, who noted that there are currently 70 large scale developments ongoing in Wicklow (potential of c. 4,000 housing units)

He advised of the 2 types of Unauthorised Development, namely (1) non-compliance with permission and (2) when no permission exists.

The members noted the statutory enforcement process and were advised that the focus is on hands-on and active on-site management and the Compliance team build relationships with the developers which minimises the risk of problems arising.

Further conversations ensued regarding statutory enforcement of unauthorised development and the issuing of Warning Letters, which is a legal document.

Cllr Scott thanked FK for presentation and queried whether the upcoming Planning Act will contain any changes to the response time and enforcement pieces. FK was not aware of such changes but stated that enforcement may not always be the correct avenue to deal with complaints.

It was noted that all complaints received are answered by the Planning Authority, even if it is just a matter of redirecting them to relevant body to answer their query. Hands-on and active on-site management and dealing with people aims to minimise problems along with relationship building with developers.

BK noted that although Wicklow is defined as a rural local authority, its status as Garden of Ireland and its location beside Dublin lends complexity to the situation. Staff resources need to be increased similar to those in an urban Local Authority.

HOK advised that work is ongoing work ongoing on raising awareness of tree policy for members of public and will now include information regarding the planning process in this context also.

JCarroll outlined that OPR planning leaflets are currently available on the website Furthermore, the current complaint system is run from the Customer Service Innovation Hub and the backoffice system is being progressed.

KS raised queries around tree felling, (a) whether condition can be included in permissions that no tree is to be felled without a report from an arborist (b) is it possible to enforce that developers do not side step and remove trees without a felling order and (c) if arboculturist provides report then can an internal arboculturist, not a planner assess the reports?

FK advised that the Local Authority seeks reports from external suitably qualified people with professional indemnity insurance. KS outlined that tree felling licences are required for hedgerows and individual trees and suggested that developers are made aware of what could happen at early stages of development rather than possible court appearance.

5. Update on Climate Action Plan

JC gave a brief presentation on ongoing external and internal stakeholder engagement process for Climate Action Plan.

External discussions held with;

-Social Partnership under the PPN, where housing stock and social housing were the main concerns.

-Agricultural Sector, where emissions and portrayal of agricultural sector to public were the issues highlighted.

-Environmental Pillar of the PPN - multiple discussions held in last few years, therefore review of these talks coupled with consultation piece for LECP took place. Actions on electric vehicles and corresponding fairly distributed charging stations spread around county rated high as issue along with highlighting importance of needing consistency in approach to all actions across climate.

- Youth and Business pillar – not huge response received and therefore will take different approach with surveys and one to one consultations.

Internally, the Planning & Environment Directorate, Transportation and Roads Section and Corporate have all held their engagement meetings.

An online survey on the consultation hub will be available on www.wicklow.ie until the 12th of June.

Other news includes 2 staff e bikes available for local commuting. Wicklow County Council is funding the promotional campaign for an Energy Awareness Day on 24th June ran by Wicklow and Greystones SEC's. East Coast FM will be doing an outside broadcast, display of electric vehicles and energy experts will be speaking.

The Community Climate Action officer is working on preparation for the launch of the Climate Action Fund and is consulting with local stakeholder groups in this regard.

Questions were raised as to how council will distribute Electric Vehicle charging points. JC outlined that strategy for fair and even distribution is being looked at currently.

BK outlined Easy Go and Eir Service Level Contract that the Chief Executive recently signed, where pilot will be run with WCC to provide infrastructure for EV charging and charging the national rate. The Municipal Districts have been included on discussions and conditioned in the agreement that there will be fair distribution of chargers all across county, not just urban areas. DK further noted that the council have installed their own chargers in various locations across county.

Next stage after stakeholder engagement consultation is for draft CAP to be prepared by August so that it can go out for public consultation by September/October with second draft to be completed by late November, aiming for Councillors to adopt in February 2024.

JC responded to question on participation in stakeholder engagement – stating that numbers varied per group, usually between 8-16 on the external groups. Furthermore, the types of information the external stakeholders were looking for related to how council processes and general information on climate action are being delivered to the public.

6. Update from Mid-East Energy Unit

The SPC members welcomed William Halligan, Energy Officer, to the Climate Action Team

DK updated the members on the work of the Mid East Energy Unit as follows:

1. the process to obtain ISO50001 which is currently underway. Next training to be held in June in NSAI Headquarters.
 2. Meetings with CODEMA on how we decarbonise buildings and fleet.
 3. Hosted visits from other Local Authorities to Solar Car Park and Biomass system in Clermont.
 4. Wicklow County Council has been entered for various SEAI awards.
 5. EV car for staff use has been used for 16 of past 23 days and the lease time has been extended with SEAI.
- Public Lighting - over 15,000 public lights in Wicklow, 10,000 have been retrofitted to date. Analysis of carbon savings due to these works to be carried out.
 - LED Retrofit is underway.

DK to discuss with Biodiversity Officer about colour temperature of LED lights to suit areas where Bats roost, as per query from Cllr Scott.

7. Review of Heritage & Biodiversity Plans

DB and LK updated the members on the review of the Heritage & Biodiversity Plans. Initial consultation will be carried out in tandem and then split separately for heritage and biodiversity.

It is anticipated that both Heritage and Biodiversity Plans will go before the SPC and then full Council during 1st quarter of 2024.

8. Draft National Waste Management Plan for a Circular Economy – Launch of Statutory Consultation (for mention)

Item will be on full agenda for upcoming Council Meeting and was circulated to all members a month ago.

Mywaste.ie has the plan on display, including the executive summary. Regulations to be introduced regarding deposit and return scheme with reverse vending machines to take back empty models.

9. Review of Tree Management Policy

The members were advised that there are insufficient resources available to carry out the review of the Tree Management Policy as the team's priority focus is the Climate Action Plan. Cllr Scott expressed concern that date needs to be fixed to review as this SPC due to come to an end next year. Cllr O'Connor asks that when resources available that hedgerow survey can be completed also and it was noted that the Hedgerow survey should be completed by September/October.

Cllr Scott requests that this item be kept on Agenda for next meeting.

10. Any Other Business

Dates of remaining SPC Meetings to be circulated.

