

Minutes of Meeting through teams of Climate Change & Biodiversity

Strategic Policy Committee held on 16th December 2020

I Láthair:

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

Oifigigh: Ms. Eileen Ruane, Director of Services;
Mr. David O'Loughlin, Assistant Engineer;
Ms. Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer
Mr Aidan Cunningham, A/Senior Staff Officer.
Ms. Sabina O Connell, A/Assistant Staff Officer

Apologies:

1. Confirmation of the Minutes of Climate Change & Biodiversity SPC meeting held on 22nd October 2020

The Cathaoirleach asked if everyone had received the minutes from the last meeting held on the 22nd October and if there were any issues arising from them to be raised.

Coastal Erosion

Cllr. Kinane raised the issue of coastal erosion and asked that a motion be progressed to the Plenary Council that a member of staff from the Infrastructure and Operations Directorate to be appointed to liaise with the OPW on coastal erosion issues and assist with drawing down funding etc. She pointed to a commitment from the minister to carry out a feasibility study on Tawin Island but the matter was currently at a standstill until the Council makes the relevant application to OPW.

Cllr McKinistry seconded Cllr Kinane's request and requested that coastal erosion be on put on the agenda for the next meeting of the SPC. He asked that a list of climate risks be drawn up around coastal erosion.

Cllr. Parsons supported Cllr Kinane in regard to the importance of highlighting the issue of coastal erosion but felt that flooding in areas of conservation were of equal importance to raise. She added there should be a focus should on highlighting the danger of waste facilities being placed in sensitive areas and the risks associated with doing so. She asked that a delegation from the Council meet with the minister to highlight these matters.

Cllr Kinane agreed that she too would like to part of a delegation to meet with the Minister.

Cllr. Mc Kinstry stated that GCC has to do a lot of work to progress these issues and there would be a need for staffing resource which in turn requires funding.

Ms. Ruane informed that group that the budget for 2021 has been passed with no funding allocation set aside for a dedicated of coastal erosion officer and that such a resource would have to come from an alternative funding source.

Cllr. Cronnelly sought clarification on the previous minutes regarding flag grants. He outlined that Rinville Pier has to be cleaned twice annually due to erosion and over 300 tonnes of debris cleared from the slipway had washed into Rinville Bay. He noted concern that the €20,000 allocation for this work was not acting as a preventative measure but merely moving the debris to a different area in the bay. He outlined that Rinville pier was one of the few working piers in the county and expressed the need for rock armour at the location. He also noted that no swimming signage had been installed at the location.

Cllr. Cronnelly also spoke of the re-wetting of Attymon bog. As a result of this work, excess water going into the Claren River had brought more water downstream risking flooding in the surrounding areas. There was now a pressing need for the cleaning of the river.

Ms. Ruane in response said she would seek clarification from the Infrastructure and Operations directorate in relation to the Flag Grants re Rinville Pier.

Hedgegrows

Cllr Mc Kinstry requested an update on the hedgegrow guidelines from last meeting.

Ms. Mannion informed the group that a meeting with the area engineers had taken place. Work is ongoing on the project from Ms Fuller and a need to ensure that the guidelines drafted align with that of Teagasc. Cllr McKinstry asked for an update on the project for the next meeting.

Minutes closed.

2. Climate Adaption Strategy

Ms. Ruane informed the meeting that the climate adaptation strategy had been adopted by the members and a Climate Adaptation Steering group established. The steering group have met on a number of occasions and there had been a positive cross pollination of ideas. She added that CARO is working with all local authorities to develop a consistent methodology to develop and implement climate change action plans across the region. To date 33% of the Action Implementation Plans have been completed.

Ms. Ruane outlined that the CCMA had submitted a business case to the department last September looking for 4 additional climate specific officers to enable the Council to fulfil their commitments under the Plan. She added that there is a pressing need for this proposal to be approved.

Ms. Ruane updated the meeting on the following:

- As per National Energy Efficiency Action Plan, GCC are on target to meet the 33% energy efficiency improvement requirement by end of 2020. The Council had achieved 31% savings by end of 2019. She added that the Council continuing to input and record data on the SEAI database.
- The Infrastructures & Operation Directorate are looking at an EV fleet, but consideration had to be given in regard to the size of county and the range that the vehicles have to travel.
- CARO Leadership & capacity on-line climate action training courses are to commence in January 2021.
- Retrofit of Public lighting is ongoing.

Cllr Mc Kinstry asked for a written update on the progress thus far as outlined by Ms. Ruane.

Cllr, Sheridan enquired as if there had been any update re the easing of restrictions on planning regulations for PV panelling installation - 12 metres on private / 50 metres on commercial premises

Ms. Ruane isn't aware of any change but she will look into it and revert to Cllr. Sheridan on the matter.

Cllr. Parsons asked that she also be informed regarding PV panelling and planning regulations. She also enquired as to what the SPC group could do to assist in progressing the Council's business case for the 4 additional climate specific staff. She referred to the size of Galway County and its large coastline and the importance for the County to fulfil its obligations in relation to climate change.

Ms. Ruane stated any assistance to help progress the matter from the members would be welcome and that a letter from the Climate Change SPC could be issued to the Department.

3. ESB EV Charging Infrastructure

Cllr. Mc Kinstry spoke of the presentation given at October meeting and proposed that the Council look at potential locations for the slower charging points to be installed. He suggested the likes of tourist areas, health centres, and hospitals be primary considerations and that a list should be drawn up and public consultation sought on same.

Cllr. Sheridan believed that the list should be broader in scope and not be confined to particular areas.

Ms. Ruane informed the meeting that the ESB have provided a list of their planned sites following the last meeting of the SPC. She also advised that there is work ongoing within the Infrastructure and Operations directorate in reviewing charge points and that she would need to discuss further with Mr. Jim Cullen DOS Infrastructure & Operations. She added that the unit are being guided in this work by the LUTS Committee, a subgroup of the CCMA.

4. Light Pollution

Ms Mannion advised the group that Galway County Council are in the process of developing the County Development Plan for the period 2022 – 2028 and that work is ongoing in developing an objective within the plan for developing an environmentally friendly dark sky policy. She outlined that research is required in the drafting of such policy objectives and ensuring that they would be workable within the context of the plan.

Cllr. Mc Kinstry informed the meeting that dark sky principles falls in with heritage / biodiversity and added that there is a need for a general policy for the type of lighting applied on our greenways in respect of biodiversity/ bats etc.

He felt that it would be a challenge to draft regulations, but it would be an educational piece of work. He suggested a working group be established to go through the detail.

Mr. Hynes stated that through his own work experience from an ecological perspective that he would offer his assistance to any of the research needed to be carried out.

Cllr. Parsons added that the greenway from Athlone to Galway would also be an area where lighting needs would need to be assessed as the route was along an SAC. She felt that a working group would be worthwhile to analyse issues raised prior to development of the plan and expressed an interest in being on this group.

Ms. Ruane thanked Mr. Hynes for his offer of his assistance on this matter and that the council will liase with him as this is part of the work ongoing in preparation for the County Development Plan.

5. Active Travel Plan

Cllr. Mc Kinstry informed the meeting about funding available to Galway under the active travel plan.

He outlined that the scheme is an initiative to provide for improved and more accessible walking and cycling infrastructure such as cycle paths/footpaths/bike parking etc. Cllr McKinistry proposed that the SPC form a working group and link in with work of the Infrastructure and Transportation SPC for their plans for the scheme before February 2021.

Cllr. Kinane seconded this motion. She added that she felt it had always been a challenge in getting a response from TII as the department responsible for carrying out works on national routes where schools may be located. She felt that a designated communications person within TII would be required so that all communication from the Council could go through them. This would assist in facilitating a closer working relationship between the Council and TII.

Cllr. Cronnelly asked that assurances be sought regarding the funding in place so that the designated projects outlined in any submission to the Department could proceed.

Cllr Mc Kinistry, Cllr. Kinane & Cllr. Sheridan all expressed interest of being part of the working group.

6. Galway's Living Bog

Ms. Mannion presented a booklet on Carrounagappul, Galway's living bog in Mountbellew. It is one of Ireland's largest raised bogs, a SAC and is home to a huge variety of wildlife. The booklet was emailed to all members prior to the meeting and included a link showing an educational video on same.

GCC's heritage office started this project progressing the awareness aspect and by working in partnership with Mountbellew Teleworks & NPWS. Ms Mannion added that school groups visit the bog and can use the book as a workbook. She acknowledged the work of John Lusby from Birdwatch Ireland on the project and that a poster and digital map identifying habitat sites on the bog will be coming on stream shortly.

Cllr. Mc Kinstry thanked Ms. Mannion for her work on this project.

7. Date & Time of Next Meeting

Next Meeting set for Wednesday 24th March 2021.

8. A.O.B

Cllr Cronnelly thanked Ms. Mannion for her presentation and complemented the work she has done with Mountbellew Living Bog. He had found the invasive species swatch cards very informative.

Cllr. Kinane had not yet received invasive species cards and requested Ms. Mannion to forward to her. She enquired about the possibility of something similar being produced in respect of wild mushroom for schools in particular.

In response, Ms. Mannion informed the meeting that she had run foraging courses last year through the Medieval festivals and would look at the possibility of producing a poster for schools subject to resources available. She added she may consider doing a pilot project with the school in Clarinbridge.

Cllr. Parsons thanked Ms. Mannion for the work she has done. She has found the booklet & cards very informative and user friendly.

Cllr Parsons referred to the Peatland Climate Action Scheme and that Bord na Mona intended to carry out bog rehabilitation improvements at Castlegar and Kellysgrove bogs. Submissions in relation to these improvement works were to be submitted to Bord na Mona by 29th December.

She enquired if Galway County Council as an interested party would be making a submission to Bord na Mona.

Ms, Ruane in response said she was not aware of any submission being made by GCC but that she will check if the local authority is putting in a submission.

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Cllr. Parsons proposed that a delegation be sent from SPC group to meet with the minister in regard to coastal erosion/flooding matters.

Cllr Mc Kinstry seconded this proposal.

Cllr Sheridan thanked Ms. Mannion for all her work. He enquired if there were any of the invasive species cards available so that they could be given to local Angling and kayak clubs. He suggested that if possible that the cards could be made available to councillors to distribute to the community. He also enquired as to the possibility of having the information available on-line.

Ms. Mannion stated councillors who wished to get some of the cards directly could link in with her on it in the new year subject to resources available as she noted there are costs associated with their production. She will speak to Joe Caffrey who produced the card units about the possibility of having an app developed for download to a smart phone.

Ms Mannion also outlined that she hoped to run training online for communities in the new year.

Cllr. Parsons informed the meeting of a pollution incident in the Deerpark River which resulted in a large fish kill and which is in the court system at present.

Ms. Ruane thanked the SPC group for their input to this new SPC this year which was challenging for everyone. She thanked the background team in Environment also.

Cllr Mc Kinstry thanked everyone & wished all a Happy Christmas & a Happy New Year.

Meeting Concluded.

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CATHAOIRLEACH ALASTAIR MC KINSTRY