

Minutes of Meeting through teams of Climate Change and Biodiversity

Strategic Policy Committee held on 26th May 2021

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
Mr. Pat O Hora

Oifigh: Ms. Eileen Ruane, Director of Services;
Mr. David O'Loughlin, Assistant Engineer;
Ms. Maria Finn, Administrative Officer.
Ms. Ann Dolan, Executive Scientist
Ms. Sabina O Connell, A/Assistant Staff Officer
Mr. Paul G Duffy, Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Mr. Michael Sweeney, Assistant Chief Fire Officer

The Cathaoirleach opened meeting by expressing his sympathy to the Mannion family on the death of Hubie Mannion father of GCC employees Marie and Patricia. Sympathy was also expressed by Cllr. Parsons.

A moments silence was observed by the members before meeting commenced.

1. Confirmation of the Minutes of Climate Change & Biodiversity SPC meeting held on 24th March 2021

The Cathaoirleach asked if anyone had any comments or amendments to the minutes from last meeting of the SPC. Cllr McKinstry added that he wished for two changes to be made to them on pages 3 and 5. Cllr. Cronnelly proposed that the minutes be passed, and this was seconded by Cllr Kinane.

Cllr. Cronnelly enquired as to whether there was any update on flag grant which he had raised at previous meetings. Ms. Ruane confirmed that she had no update currently but that she would follow up with Kieran Coyne in the Community and Enterprise department. Cllr. Kinane requested that a copy of flag grant response be sent to her also.

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Cllr. Parsons requested update on SEAI MOU, decarbonisation zone and pesticides in water.

Ms. Ruane confirmed that she will discuss the SEAI MOU and decarbonisation zoning later as they are items agenda.

Ms. Dolan updated the members on the MCPA pesticide / herbicide. At the last SPC meeting IWA had sent letters to the farming communities in Tully / Tullycross areas in Galway. IWA have since then set up a WhatsApp group in the areas to provide updates.

With regards to Ballinasloe, in 2019 IWA in conjunction with Teagasc carried out a series of information meetings in the area. There are no additional plans for any further action taking place specifically for the Ballinasloe region. IWA will continue to conduct national awareness campaigns as this is not specifically a Galway issue, it is a national issue.

Ms. Dolan confirmed that water testing will continue as per normal in the Ballinasloe area. This is carried out over 12 months with one sample being taken monthly. The results from such testing goes to both GCC and IWA.

Cllr Parsons asked if GCC uses the MCPA herbicide. Ms. Dolan stated that she does not know if it is used by GCC staff in carrying out their duties. However, if it is used, council staff will have received proper trained in its use. Ms. Dolan continued by saying that the herbicide in question can be used in gardens, the problem arises if it is not used correctly and it seeps into waterways.

Cllr. Parsons enquired if the SPC meeting could be provided with result of water sampling for Ballinasloe. It was agreed that an update on any breaches in the area can be provided to the members at future meetings with respect to MCPA.

2. Severe Weather Management System Presentation

Ms. Ruane introduced Mr. Paul G Duffy, Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officer and Mr. Michael Sweeney, Assistant Chief Fire Officer who have carried out a huge amount of mapping work and utilising the GIS system.

Mr. Duffy thanked the members for giving him the opportunity to give his presentation. He shared his presentation with the members. Galway County Council's scheme GUROP is to be rolled out to fire services nationwide.

The objective is targeting / record keeping / importing information from other agencies / real time performance management & improved transparency / ArcGIS Online

All social housing Mr. Duffy explained is mapped and from maps it is easy to identify according to the colour coding time element involved in reaching any particular housing development.

- Home fire packs have been issued to households outside of 20-minute travel time.
- Complaints Geoform devised
- Risk inspection smartphone app

- On-line checklists
- Performance viewers

Major emergency management

- Electronic information management system – electronic boards to record and share data easier
- Severe weather event management system (eIMS / SWEMS / GEMMS)
- Galway emergency mortality management system – smartphone app and tracking systems with burial grounds and undertakers in the county

Severe weather event management system SWEMS gives improved management of severe weather events. Provides improved public information and records historical information for planning for the future.

- Geoform uploaded to GIS cloud and events managed as they occur
- Smart based app
- Real time availability
- Municipal Districts – road closures & scheduled road closures recorded
- Viewer for senior personnel
- Updates to Twitter & council website immediately
- Less time spent managing system and more time managing events as they occur.
- HSE and Civil defence links
- Weather impacts register where nursing home locations / childcare facilities / venerable people residing are recorded
- Platform used for flooding and water related incidents updated back to 2020
- Flood response rescues – information allowed for swift mobilisation e.g. Clifden 2020 flooding event. These records improve forward planning.

Wildfires – significant effect on the environment plus safety issues for travelling / fire crew

- Use the data to log all forest / gorse / bog fires
- Update forestry areas / SACs 7 protected areas of heritage
- In 2020 wildfire initiatives included at targeting areas for farms VIA eircodes and will be distributing safety packs.
- In the past the service waited for events to occur whereas going forward it will be taking a proactive approach by patrolling areas, acting swiftly if anything seen, using drone technology as a deterrent and fire fighter safety
- Work closely with the Gardai – Garda helicopter in areas report back
- Information provided to EPA flares project
- AFIS – satellite overpasses recording
- Online home fire safety checklist – information submitted is logged
- European Forest Fire Information system (EFFIS) has some useful information
- County email database for ads and videos
- National email database

Future – community resilience message – a toolbox of checklists

- Fire safety
- Road safety
- Winter ready
- Rural crime
- Climate awareness
- Mental health & wellbeing

Mr. Duffy finished his presentation by informing meeting that there is a lot of good work going on behind the scenes. He advised the meeting that he would not be here giving today's presentation without the massive input put in by Barry Doyle the GIS officer and Michael Sweeney ACFO who has done a tremendous amount of work on this project.

Cllr. Parsons thanked Mr. Duffy for the presentation and stated that the volume of information was huge and that one would need to review it again in order to gain a small part of the information it contained. Regarding the opt in form for domestic dwelling she queried as to whether it complied with GDPR.

Mr. Duffy confirmed that it is compliant. They wish for the public to come on board in completing form, it requests very low-key data and this data will not be used for any other purpose.

Cllr. Parsons enquired if the public representatives could assist in any way. Mr. Duffy confirmed that briefing of all Councillors will be part of the roll out. There will be advertisements on Galway Bay FM.

Cllr Cronnolly thanked Mr. Duffy on a great presentation which has shown the large volume of work carried out and planned upgrades for the future. He stated that the Fire Service has a great pro-active approach and enquired if it would be possible to have the presentation shown at MD meetings and also use the PPN infrastructure to circulate information. Mr. Duffy confirmed that a fire safety article for the PPN newsletter has been drafted and the plan will be to show the presentation at both plenary council meeting and at MD meetings.

Cllr. Kinane thanked Mr. Duffy for a very informative presentation. She finds the MD meetings allows more opportunity for discussion and she stated that other members of the SPC group may have other ideas on sharing of it. Cllr. Kinane asked that she could receive a copy of the presentation. Mr. Duffy confirmed that a PDF copy would be given to all members.

Cllr Sheridan asked Mr. Duffy how he would foresee the public thinking safely. Mr. Duffy stated that ideally, the Fire Service would require additional resources. The elimination of wildfires and improved awareness and education is the goal.

There is a requirement to work with the farming community. Mr. Duffy stated that currently there is mixed messages out there from different agencies (clear land to get subsidies / don't burn). Climate action and biodiversity have made a huge difference in a very short time and working with farming community needs to be prioritised.

Cllr. McKinstry thanked Mr. Duffy. He enquired if WIRE included flooding. Mr. Duffy confirmed that it records all events, snow has been added, trees down and the system is constantly adjusting.

Ms. Ruane thanked Paul for presentation and also thanked Michael and Barry who have done tremendous work. She confirmed the Department national review of the fire service in 2020 indicated that they were very impressed with the work carried out by the Fire Services. Presentation to be rolled out at Plenary and MD meetings.

3. Biodiversity and Pollinators Update

In the absence of Ms. Mannion Ms. Ruane gave a rundown of updates which had been prepared by Ms. Mannion

Training 2021 (end of May):

- **40** Galway County Council staff have received 3 training sessions re biodiversity and pollinators (this was co-ordinated by the HR Dept Training Unit)
- **80** Tidy Towns and Community Groups have participated in a 5-week training course on biodiversity and pollinators (this was run jointly by Tidy Towns Section and Heritage Section of GCC and funded by the PPN)

- Galway County Council partnered with Galway Rural Development and Bird Watch in running biodiversity training in East Galway. This was online and was very well received.
- Training will be put in place for SPC and Elected Members on Biodiversity and Pollinators in the coming months. This will be online. Further training will be put in place for other Council Staff and also additional training will also be put in place including hedgerow training.

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National Biodiversity Week 16th – 23rd May – The Galway Buzz!

Celebrating National Biodiversity Week in the County of Galway took place from 16th to 23rd May 2021. National Biodiversity Week is all about connecting people with nature and inspiring them to learn more, see more and do more for biodiversity.

It's also about communicating the importance of biodiversity and encouraging people to play their part in protecting it as well as enjoying it.

Our natural heritage connects us with our roots and our community. Galway County Council and its partners are celebrating National Biodiversity Week virtually this year, through the Galway Buzz.

Online events which took place over the week to create a better awareness, knowledge and pride in the biodiversity of the county were

- Bird song on the bog (Dawn Chorus)
 - Great yellow bumblebee art (for Children)
 - Creating a sensory garden
 - Painting a wildflower meadow
 - The wonder of woodland
 - Planting for biodiversity and climate change
 - A Wild Galway Garden - Garden biodiversity from the soil to the sky
 - Pollinator planting
 - Sustainable living
 - Making your garden a haven for hedgehogs
 - Mammals of the Wild Atlantic Way - the lesser horseshoe bat
 - River biological diversity
 - Barn owls, Buildings and biodiversity
- Preliminary statistics (from Facebook only): Total views as of 25 May - 3628
 - Eventbrite workshops: 40 people x 4 = 160 people

Funding

6 New Local Biodiversity Action Plans:

Galway Rural Development have funded biodiversity training in East Galway and 6 communities have produced local biodiversity action plans. Galway County Council is actively working with GRD, Burren Beo and the communities involved.

Funding granted under the **National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) Grant 2020-2021**. The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage has agreed to grant funding to Galway County Council for the following projects:

- Wetlands Project to the amount of **€ 12,750**
- Barn Owl Survey to the amount of **€7,453**
- Yellowhammer Survey to the amount of **€ 2,550**
- Biodiversity and Pollinator Awareness project to the amount of **€ 9,220**
- Management Plan for Gunnera and Giant knotweed to the amount of **€16,209**

These projects will be progressed during the year.

Cllr Parsons stated that had partaken in the Bird song on the bog (Dawn Chorus) and the Pollinator training event – both were excellent.

Cllr. Parsons stated that she would like to know more about the local biodiversity plans. In estates how do we get contractors to abide by the plans. Cllr. Parsons enquired about mowing / landscaping contracts with contractors and possibility of inclusion of “no mow” areas / cutting in strips when awarding contracts to contractors. Cllr. Parsons stated that she has had received enquiries from some residents’ associations about allocating areas for pollinators – also legacy estates financial gain and that she would like to know more about the plans.

Ms. Ruane stated that the housing estates / maintenance would come under come under Infrastructure and Operations section and that when Ms. Mannion returns to work she can follow up on the action plans.

Cllr. McKinstry seconded having areas cut in strips along hedgerows / parks and football pitches. He said he has seen it in Westside training pitches

4. Foras na Páiste

This item was deferred at today's meeting due to the absence of Ms. Mannion. She has been engaging with GCC engineers on the matter.

Cllr. McKinstry requested that a holding letter be submitted to the Department stating that we are doing this work.

5. Active Travel Update

Ms. Ruane confirmed that the Infrastructure and Operations department of GCC had made a robust application for funding for projects. €6.2million of funding was awarded to GCC for projects all around the county. Four additional executive engineers will be employed under plan. A copy of the list of projects and breakdown of the sums awarded will be distributed to the members of this SPC group

Cllr. McKinstry stated that the aim of the Active Travel Plan was to move traffic off the roads and enquired as to whether there was access to see the plans. Ms. Ruane confirmed that Damien Mitchell in Infrastructure and Operations will be the point of contact.

Cllr. Cronnolly enquired if there was any allocation in funding for "disability friendly" projects, for service users and caine users. Ms. Ruane confirmed that she will follow up with Mr. Mitchell on this. Cllr. McKinstry stated that funding for footpaths should in their design allow for wheelchair use.

Cllr. Parsons stated that bus stops need to be accessible to people with disabilities, there is different need and GCC need to engage with the Disability Access Forum. Cllr, Parsons sought clarification as to whether the current engineer vacancy in Ballinasloe was included in the 4 posts. Ms. Ruane confirmed that the vacant post was separate to these additional posts.

Cllr. Kinane added that news of the funding allocation was fantastic news for the county. Funding for bike parking needs to be split according to the MD area. With regards to Renville Park Cllr Kinane stated that she is trying to get Galway City and Galway Council support for bike parking, but no reply was issued. Cllr. Kinane also stated that disability parking is needed at Renville Park. Ms. Ruane stated that she will be willing to discuss this issue with Michael Owens in Corporate.

Ms. Ruane stated that some works have commenced under the Active Travel Plan.

Cllr. McKinstry proposed that this SPC recommends that there be a reduction of 20% in road traffic numbers in 10 years under the active travel plan. Cllr. McKinstry proposed public consultations on cycle facilities / footpath design in each area. Ms. Ruane will forward on recommendation to Damien Mitchell.

6. Energy Agency Update

Ms. Ruane updated the members on status / progress on / ongoing events regarding:

Climate Action Opportunity Fund:

Ms Ruane told meeting that applications for Climate Action Opportunity Fund for 2021 closed on 14/5/2021 with 40 applications having been received. All applications have been acknowledged. Ms. Ruane outlined the next steps and projected timelines involved in assessing the applications lodged.

- Applications to be reviewed by Environments Section (**31 May 21**).
- Assessment Board to be established
 - Comprising Subject Matter Experts:
 - Energy Efficiency
 - Biodiversity
 - Renewable Energy
 - Cycling and Walking
 - Resource Efficiency
- Applications will be assessed having regard for the following considerations (non-exhaustive list):
 - Overall budget available for Climate Action Opportunity Fund 2021.
 - Maximising the impact of Climate Action taken throughout the County.
 - Distribution of support funding throughout the County.
 - The projected impact and sustainability of each project.
 - Projected timeline for project delivery.
- Following the Assessment Phase, award recommendations will be forwarded to DOS for consideration:

Decarbonising Zones

Ms. Ruane spoke of the short window to April 30th given to local authorities to identify a potential area suitable to be designated as a decarbonisation zone. Ms. Ruane informed the SPC members that as indicated at last meeting of the SPC, GCC have now identified The Aran Islands as the County's Decarbonising Zone. Ms. Ruane advised of GCC's Internal Assessment Process Overview

- Galway County Council undertook an internal process to assess its Administrative Area and identify a spatially defined zone for which appropriate decarbonising plans can be developed and implemented.
- This process prioritised areas where existing projects and partnerships provided an opportunity to coordinate a renewed collaborative effort to manage climate risks and vulnerabilities and strive towards achievable decarbonising targets.

- Resources available to Galway County Council, coupled with limited national guidance relating to Action 165 of the Climate Action Plan 2019 have shaped our approach to requirements to date. Further challenges advancing Decarbonising Programs are projected in the absence of dedicated resources and appropriate guidance on a proposed framework.
- Other Opportunities considered during GCC's Internal Assessment Process Ms. Ruane stated included Re-purposing old landfills (Poolboy, Kilconnell).

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage were notified by GCC of area identified on 10 May 2021.

The Department's DZ advisory group will meet this month (May 2021) to begin assessing the responses received from LAs. Feedback expected thereafter.

European City Facility (EUCF)

GCC are making an Application on behalf of Comharchumann Fuinnimh Oileáin Árann Teoranta (CFOAT) the closing date of which is Friday 28th May

The objectives of EUCF is to build a substantial pipeline of sustainable energy investment projects in Europe.

€60,000 grant to support activities necessary for the development of investment concepts.

- Feasibility studies,
- Engineering analyses,
- Legal analyses,
- Social studies,
- Market studies,
- Financial analyses, and further supporting tasks.

Overview of CFOAT's Proposal:

- 2 X 900kW turbines to be erected on the old turbine site on Inis Meain
- Turbines would be 100% community owned (or as close as possible).
- Rooftop Solar Project
- Building Retrofit Project
- EV Charge Infrastructure Project

CFOAT are very enthusiastic about this application and GCC have sought by in from Tipperary Energy Agency to assist in making the application.

Sustainable Energy Communities (SECs) MOU with SEAI

MOU with SEAI was signed on 29 Mar 2021 Ms. Ruane advised the meeting of the following:

- 4 x SECs have applications have been submitted with GCC support and accepted by SEAI for Headford SEC / Athenry SEC / Ballinasloe SEC / Milltown SEC
- One further application for Dunmore SEC is compiled and this will be confirmed at a later date

To date, SEAI have approved the award of a grant (€15K) for Ballinasloe SEC & Athenry SEC with awards for Headford and Milltown expected in the coming weeks

Home Energy Saving Kits

GCC Library Services have ordered 5 additional Home Energy Saving Kits from Codema.

Production of same was temporarily halted due to Covid .

EV Charging Infrastructure:

The LAs are still awaiting report from the CCMA Working Group advised Ms. Ruane

Monitoring & Reporting (Energy)

Target improvement results Ms. Ruane advised members are 33%. GCC provisional result is 38% which is very promising, but a lot of work still required to be done.

The CARO office is currently closing out on MOU and once this is completed the recruitment process can begin for the Regional Energy Officer and the 4 other officers

Training / Webinars

- **Green Infrastructure and Nature-Based Solutions Training Program**
 - Workshop 1; Completed in April
 - Embracing Nature-based Solutions for climate Adaptation
 - Introduction
 - Policy, etc.,
 - Workshop 2; Completed at start of May
 - Embracing Nature-based Solutions for Climate Adaptation
 - Content focused on specific opportunities within GCC Adaptation Strategy

Climate Action Awareness Training Program – Climate Ireland

- Climate Action Team Training is Six (6) half days, designed to support Local Authority Climate Action Teams in understanding and confronting the challenges of climate change

Raising Awareness LA Climate Action Training

- Online self- paced course designed to increase awareness amongst all Local Authority Indoor Staff to be completed by the start of July 2021

Carbon Basics

- Carried out in April

Climate Action for Planners

- Planning Section advised about this training opportunity in May

Woodland Working Group

- Marie Mannion to participate on behalf of GCC on this training event

CARO Working Group to Develop Training Course (Flooding)

- Enda Gallagher to participate for GCC on this WG
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Decarbonising Zones - Developing an Implementation Plan

- Training delivered by RPS | Consulting UK & Ireland

WIRE APP (Weather Impacts Register App)

- Mobile data collection App for Local Authority staff to record the impacts of weather events. App runs on mobile devices, primarily mobile phones and is cross platform.
- Online Map Viewer and Data Dashboard with spatial analysis and reporting functionality to assist climate adaptation planning
- Phased rollout to LAs starting Q2 2021

Cllr. Cronnolly thanked Ms. Ruane for the extensive update on all the work being carried out. He queried as to whether there is a timeframe on the 30% SEAI funded project.

Cllr Cronnolly also raised concerns for disabled drivers changing their car. They are now losing out on VRT and there does not seem to be a concession for disabled drivers to change to electric vehicle. He proposed that a submission be made for of a grant for installation of a charging point at home to be made.

Cllr McKinstry seconded this proposal and recommended that this SPC group make such a submission as outlined by Cllr. Cronnolly. Cllr. Parsons agreed that this was a valid recommendation and that she would assist in any way she could in making the submission.

Cllr. McKinstry enquired as to what is the next step that needs to be carried out in relation to the decarbonisation zones. Ms. Ruane informed meeting that GCC will receive guidelines from the Department on how it should proceed and that GCC would hope to progress some of the other opportunities identified once the energy officer has been appointed.

7. AOB

Cllr. Parsons requested that her condolences to the Mannion family be recorded.

Mr. O'Hara apologised for not always being in attendance at meetings for health reasons. He proposed that an item be put on agenda for next SFC meeting. Mr O'Hara would explore the idea of a digital database where the public can record sighting of feral fauna in their own area. In the farming community payments should be linked to good biodiversity agricultural practices.

Cllr. McKinstry seconded this proposal, saying that only 3% of landowners knew why SACs are designated and this would open opportunities for local protection schemes.

Cllr. Hanson agreed that this was a worthwhile initiative. She had watched a program on urban bee keeping and that perhaps maybe in rural communities something along the lines of community gardens could be explored.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The agreed date for next meeting was set for Wednesday June 30th, 2021 through Teams when update on deferred item from today's meeting will take place.

Meeting Concluded

CHRIOGHNAIGH AN CHRUINNÍU ANSIN


CATHAIRLEACH ALASTAIR MC KINSTRY