

Minutes of Meeting of Climate Change and Biodiversity Workshop Strategic Policy Committee

22nd September 2023

I Láthair:

Baill: Cllr. Alastair Mc Kinstry, Cathaoirleach
Cllr. Evelyn Francis Parsons
Cllr. Martina Kinane
Mr. Henry Walsh
Mr. Peter Butler
Ms. Mags Butler

Oifigigh:

Ms. Eileen Ruane D.O.S
Ms. Tina Ryan, Climate Change Co-Ordinator
Ms. Rebecca Mooney, Climate Action Officer
Ms. Denise Feeney, Community Climate Action Officer
Ms. Rosina Joyce, Biodiversity Officer
Mr. Dave O'Loughlin, Executive Engineer
Ms. Sabina O Connell, A/Staff Officer
Guest – Sheila Murphy BEO Galway

Apologies for non-attendance received from Cllrs Gabriel Cronnelly and Joe Sheridan

1. Confirmation of the Minutes of Climate Change & Biodiversity SPC meeting held on 12th April 2023 and workshop held on 26th May 2023

The Cathaoirleach thanked the members present for their attendance adding that it has been several years since the last in person SPC meeting of this group took place and acknowledged that now it was great to see that a full climate action team in place within the council.

Both sets of minutes from the last meeting on 12th April and the workshop through teams on 26th May were proposed by Mr. Butler and Seconded by the Cathaoirelach. The Cathaoirelach stated that any issues arising from those minutes would be addressed at the next full meeting of the group.

2. The Workshop on Climate Action and Biodiversity Potential Actions for the Plans

Ms. Ryan introduced Ms. Sheila Murray informing members that Ms. Murray has been working with Ms. Joyce the Biodiversity Officer on the Council's Biodiversity Plan. The Cathaoirleach suggested that each person in attendance introduce themselves. Following introductions, Ms. Ryan moved onto the recent survey carried out by Galway

County Council. The survey received a very good response from the public. This she stated will be feeding into the Council's Climate Action Plan (CAP). She informed the group that Ms. Mooney has developed the consultation portal and has put an excellent system in place.

Ms. Mooney delivered a presentation on the survey undertaken. Heritage and biodiversity had been included in the survey by Galway County Council. 177 submissions were received, no question in the survey was obligatory, there were open text boxes after the various sections where the public could include additional comments. It was observed that some of the same comments were raised on more than one occasion. Actions will be coming through from the workshops which had been held previously.

Ms. Ryan confirmed that the findings from the survey will be sent to all members of this SPC group. Mr. Walsh enquired if any dissenting voices were identified from the survey. Ms. Mooney confirmed "no, not really" that overall, it was a good response. One person made a comment about "not being led" and it was stated that there weren't any dissenting voices identified.

Ms. Ryan stated that Galway County Council will have to support valid concerns and transfer these concerns into actions. She added that we do not want to create a divide with the agricultural sector. Mr. Walsh stated that the language used is crucial and added that The Wild Atlantic Way are assisting farming communities and providing supports. Ms. Ryan passed over to Ms. Joyce to provide an update on Pesticides and Sustainable Plant Management.

Ms. Joyce commenced by saying that it was great to attend this meeting. She acknowledged the excellent work carried out by this group and on policy decisions. She advised that Galway County Council had engaged the expertise of Ms. Murphy of BEO to advise with the aim to reduce the use of herbicides being used thus making us more responsible. Methodology and baselines will be instrumental in achieving a reduction and this is an action which Galway County Council can include in the CAP.

Ms. Murphy gave members a presentation on use of herbicides advising that children and the elderly are the most likely to suffer from overuse of pesticides. Goals are in place in the EU and UN to reduce their continued use. Targets at EU level is to reduce by 50% the use of chemical pesticides by 2030. Member States will set their own national reduction targets within defined parameters to ensure that the EU wide targets are achieved. In the EU use of pesticides is recorded by sales. Going forward individual states will be required to keep records and this will practice will be applicable to the local administrative area.

Overuse of pesticides impacts on ecology and measures need to be implemented to stop biodiversity loss in Ireland. Without action, we will no longer be able to rely on nature for the very services we need to live. The Citizen's Assembly have brought various recommendations to The Joint Oireachtas Committee and these recommendations are a 'call to action'. They ask us all to re-evaluate our current practices across industry, agriculture, social enterprise, local government, national agencies, and Government Departments. Future generations are depending on us to act now. We are awaiting an outcome on the recommendations made.

Galway County Council's County Development Plan contains actions to reduce the use of pesticides in its administrative area. Various methods of weed control are available which Galway County Council will need to investigate into more. A trail area will need to

be selected and the preferred method used. Establishment of a baseline average for pesticide use will be a hugely important factor in reaching our targets.

Ms. Butler enquired if Rural Schemes and CE schemes included in Galway County Council's use. Ms. Joyce replied that if it is public lands then it would fall under GCC's jurisdiction and that these would need to be documented. A multifaceted approach would be required with education and awareness as top priorities.

Mr. Butler stated that accountability on this issue is very lax. He was of the opinion should any group or individual be in receipt of funding from Galway County Council, then a policy needs to be in place. Likewise, when Galway County Council award contracts to private contractors, checks and enforcement of its policy on pesticide use needs to be enforced.

Ms. Joyce advised that staff of GCC will be the first to be documented. Tidy Town groups who maintain public spaces will also be documented. Some community groups obtain funds through LEADER, CLÁR and through local fundraising efforts. The Cathaoirleach stated that GCC have a task ahead of it in educating, raising awareness and at end of day reducing the use of pesticides.

Cllr. Parsons referenced contractors and whether they buy their own pesticides – if so, how are they going to be monitored on its use to ensure they adhere to GCC's policy. Ms. Joyce added that contractors need to be registered and the LA will have to devise a method to establish quantity of pesticide used in the various MD areas. She added that this is GCC's plan – baseline data will be used, and the plan will be reviewed annually. She concluded by advising that great action in this area is already being observed and some equipment is being purchased as part of this plan.

How are we developing the CAP?

Ms. Ryan informed the meeting that GCC is building in all actions from Stakeholders Workshops, Youth Assembly Conference, SPC meetings, Previous Adaptation Plan, and the recent survey. She advised that a project management system called ClickUp will be used develop and manage the actions and assign them to the relevant sections.

Ms. Ruane asked the members if the Pesticide Plan is being adopted. Members agreed yes. Ms. Sheehan stated that the plan did not go far enough, and that 50% reduction was not ambitious enough. Cllr. Kinane sought clarification as to what the members were adopting, and it was confirmed to her that it was the pesticide plan. Cllr. Kinane further asked how this plan is going to be balanced by GCC with staff and equipment. Where is the money going to come from? Rinville Point was an example given by Cllr. Kinane. The Cathaoirleach advised that the budget would be adopted later in the year and that it is incumbent on this SPC to push for funding.

Mr. Butler stressed that it is for GCC to aspire to not use weed killers which are damaging to the environment. To achieve this, we need objectives and plans. Education and best practice will eventually change mindsets.

Mr. Walsh added that statical data in this area has shown improvement. Awareness and education are essential. The agricultural sector has already been through a lot and have many challenges ahead, communication is vital with agricultural / commercial sectors.

Cllr. Parsons referred to water quality and the difficulty in being able to obtain water quality monitoring reports from Irish water. Ms. Ryan advised that there is the same requirement for monitoring, and these are published on EPA website. Ms. Parsons stated that between 2019 – 2021 there were two areas in Galway with non-compliances for pesticides. Education and intervention took place in these areas. Cllr. Parsons advised that she does

not have time to locate water reports on the EPA website which do not comply with pesticides standards, and that she would like reports to be made available at SPC meetings of this group. Ms. Ryan said that she would arrange that and requested that this be recorded as an action.

The Cathaoirleach stated that he would like to be updated with a time estimate as to when the baseline would be set and as to when the plan will be reviewed.

Mr Butler referred to SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) objectives. He noted that this is the approach which the Department has recommended in their guidelines to Local Authorities for creating a Climate Action Plan. He recommended that individual actions and large projects should be assessed to determine their overall emissions. Examples he referenced included the provision of new bus routes or higher bus (or train) frequencies on existing routes, the construction and operation of new bypasses such as the Moycullen Bypass, and the proposed Athlone to Galway cyclepath/ greenway although that may be outside of the timeframe of the plan. He noted that estimates for just construction of the Moycullen Bypass would be misleading, as there will be significant reductions in emissions from its operation.

Where estimates are not available currently, he recommended that the plan include a timeframe within which those estimates would be known so that the relative priority and importance of actions could be determined.

Mr Butler recommended that a target should be included in the plan for the number of public EV charging points by different types of location and by year. Mr. Butler to write up and send to Ms. Ryan a piece with regards to recommendations for EV for the CAP. He noted that there needs to be specific measurable plans in place to achieve targets. If 4000 cars in Galway, where is the infrastructure for them? Planning needs to increase the number of points by 10% and this needs to be documented.

Ms. Ryan advised that there are two actions in the plan which will address this matter. Donegal County Council is the lead authority in region. Zero Emission Vehicles Ireland (Zevi) is and will continue to roll out programmes in this area. Mr. O'Loughlin is currently working on this, Ms. Ryan advised. Communities and local authorities are eligible to apply for funding. Applications are being submitted for Mountbellew Square, Leisure Centre Tuam, Glenamaddy Town Centre and Aughrim Interpretive Centre. These programmes will be measurable and specific Ms. Ryan confirmed.

Mr. Butler referred to public transport and the need to have specific plans for infrastructure included e.g., Timeframes, lengths of bus lanes, where these will commence / end. This is a major dialogue that needs to be had, the council needs to be much more specific with its numerical data and its objectives. Infrastructure required first before plan can be taken seriously.

Ms. Ryan again advised that this is an area being looked at. It is a concern raised in submissions from the public. If we work and include communities, they will be more supportive. Mr. Butler asked how the national targets can be achieved by 2030 if a specific measurable plan is not in place. Bus Eireann can measure so why can't the council.

Ms. Ryan advised the meeting that the data Mr. Butler referring to is not currently available to the local authority to allow for figures to currently be put in CAP and that overall, it would be very difficult at present to provide figures. The Cathaoirleach referenced that Carbon Budget stating that we currently don't have tracing at local level, however it needs to be built into CAP. There are large gaps to fill, and the Department of Transport should have

information to assist GCC. The members of this group need to know how KPIs are going to work he added.

Ms. Ryan confirmed that we will have draft plan by mid-October. We have a certain amount of National targets / GCC's own targets to include as KPI's. She further added that we don't currently have the data previously discussed but that we can build on that in the future.

Mr. Butler stated that woodland is needed for forestry areas. Carbon value is measurable from change of grass to trees, and this should be prioritised in the County Development Plan under capture of emissions. Ms. Ryan stated that this is a very important point. Under regular landscape plan there is an action for all LA land to define areas for re-wilding. Private funding for biodiversity net gain under review at present. Mr. Butler added that including hectare numbers makes it specific and measurable.

Ms. Joyce added that we do need a baseline. Galway rehabilitation of wetlands was very beneficial and KPIs are needed to ensure local authority is meeting its targets. Ms. Ryan stated that KPIs will be included where possible, otherwise a comment will be included.

The Cathaoirleach informed the meeting that there are different expectations on carbon emissions on a local and national basis. As a local authority, GCC needs to track emissions. Data gaps will need to be included from building homes to every other project.

Ms. Ryan informed meeting that carbon budget is bundled by sector nationally at present. She confirmed that GCC can put in targets – it has baseline assessment figures, and we can track and update regularly – gaps will still be seen but these will be brought back to this SPC. Cllr. Parsons enquired if water quality was going to be included and Ms. Ryan confirmed that that will be for the SPC meetings not for inclusion in CAP.

Cllr. Kinane queried as to whether coastal erosion was included in CAP. Ms. Ryan confirmed that it is included and that resources are being developed and targets set. This is the opportunity to focus on staffing she added.

The Cathaoirleach enquired whether flood assessments were for 5 years or 30 years. A long-term timescale for certain developments is necessary he advised. Ms. Ryan stated that she understood some especially on floodplains have longer timeframes, maybe 100 years risk. She suggested that a meeting with the Planning Department may be advisable in relation to coastal erosion.

The Cathaoirleach added that there will be technical challenges and that we won't have a carbon budget available to allow for rebuilding in 30 – 50 years' time. Ms. Ryan stated that it would need to come into the County Development Plan. For now, perhaps it would be best to build action around this she suggested.

Mr. Butler enquired if the Tuam / Athenry trainline could be included in CAP – also would emission reductions from the greenway be able to be included during lifetime of the CAP. Ms. Ryan suggested that the assessment of any major potential project would be the way to go. Ms. Mooney added that greenways had come up regularly in the recent survey.

Ms. Sheehan enquired if there were any plans for installation of electric bike charging points. Ms. Ryan confirmed that this concern has been raised and that it is being investigated. The Cathaoirleach confirmed that he wants EVs included on agenda for next meeting of this SPC Group.

Cllr. Kinane questioned cycleways adding that they are not just for tourism. There is a submission in for one in Kilcolgan. We need to strengthen designated cycleways and

parking she added. Some are included in the County Development Plan, but these tend to be funded out of Cllrs own small budget. Ms. Ryan advised that Ms. Feeney will be working on the Community Climate Action fund soon.

Ms. Ryan added that under Active Travel the public has submitted a list and we have included an action to review this list and assess potential. She requested members to contact her if anyone wanted to recommend specific locations. A number of suggestions have been received under Agriculture. Ms Ryan added that GCC would like to receive feedback from the farming communities and asked if Mr Walsh would be able to look at this, informing him that she would send it to him after the meeting.

Mr Walsh stated that the agriculture sector had experienced problems this year in relation to planting and harvesting and that there is a lot of concern in the farming community in relation to forestry programmes. Ms. Murphy stated that there is a good bit tied in with DAFM here. Some plans can be fast tracked she added. Mr Butler added that the council should fast-track applications by farmers.

Cllr. Kinane mentioned that at a recent meeting, there were concerns in relation to pesticide strategies.

Ms. Ryan reinforced the necessity for feedback and noted that education and support for the farming community will be included in our plan. Arming the public with the correct advice is necessary. Mr. Walsh suggested community and educational incentives.

Ms. Ryan concluded with list of potential actions and progress on same. Time is short she advised, and the plan needs to be translated.

Ms. Ruane confirmed that the plan is a dynamic plan and a live document.

Ms. Sheehan expressed her wish to have more in-person meetings as she has found today's meeting more interactional than meetings through teams.

Meeting Concluded.

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CATHÁOIRLEACH ALASTAIR MC KINSTRY