

Minutes of Meeting of Environment & Water Services
Strategic Policy Committee held on 19th December 2018

I Láthair:

Baill: Cllr. Shane Donnellan, Cathaoirleach
Cllr. Gabriel Cronnelly
Cllr. Tim Broderick
Cllr. Peter Keaveney
Cllr. Noel Thomas
Cllr. Niamh Byrne
Mr. David Courtney
Mr. Aodán Mac Donnacha
Mr. Henry Walsh
Mr Colm O Dowd
Cllr Tomás O Curráoin
Mr. Mark Greene

Oifigh: Ms. Eileen Ruane, Director of Services;
Mr. Ronan Conway, Assistant Engineer;
Mr. Paraic Carroll, Administrative Officer.

Apologies: Cllr. Ivan Canning

1) Minutes

The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 25th September 2018 and which had been circulated were proposed by Cllr. G Cronnelly, seconded by Mr. Aodán Mac Donnacha and agreed

2) Climate Action Plan - Update.

Mr. Conway gave a report on the Climate Action Plan, a copy of which had been circulated to members. The Citizens' Assembly had made a number of recommendations to the State on Climate Change and which included that an independent body to urgently address climate change be created, the state to take a leadership role through mitigation measures, to undertake a comprehensive assessment of the vulnerability of all critical infrastructure, increase number of bus and cycling lanes, increase number of park & ride facilities, support transition to electric vehicles, expansion of public transport, tax on greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture, support planting of forests and organic farming. Mr Conway's report highlighted 15 potential keys risks arising from climate change - productivity of agriculture & forests, security of food supply, water quality and availability, flooding, energy

supply, health & wellbeing, cultural heritage, infrastructure, soils quality, natural environment, marine environment, coastal changes, occurrence of pests & disease through new growth conditions, business resilience resulting from financial burdens, closures, insurance costs etc. The report asked what we can do as a society and what we are doing as a local authority. Galway County Council as with all other local authorities are developing a climate adaptation plan (and later mitigation) that will assess hazards, impacts, risk & vulnerability, prepare for chronic stresses or shocks, adapt to existing & unavoidable impacts and increase our resilience during and after impacts. He referred to the establishment of the Climate Action Fund by the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment of a fund of at least €500m up to 2027 and which will support initiatives contributing to the achievement of the country's climate and energy targets in a cost-effective manner. Smaller initiatives in the county for 2019 include energy audits of community buildings (for upgrade measures such as wall/roof insulation, replacement windows or doors, upgrades to heating systems, LED lighting upgrade or solar panels), home energy saving kits (available in libraries), feasibility studies assessing potential for an upcycling centre in the county, public drinking water points, water butts etc. He advised that workshops in the preparation of the Plan are underway (with the assistance of the Climate Action Regional Office in Mayo), the plan is being developed through a Climate Adaptation Team representing the different sections within the Council and will be presented to the elected members for approval in September 2019

The Cathaoirleach thanked Mr. Conway for his presentation.

3) Burial Grounds

Mr Carroll circulated a report on the status of the burial ground development programme. He stated that Galway County Council maintain approximately 230 burial grounds throughout the county with the assistance of over 150 burial ground maintenance committees who receive an annual grant towards the upkeep of burial grounds. The Council area offices provide maintenance services but within the limited budgets allocated to maintenance of burial grounds. There are 180 burial ground caretakers who are responsible for the allocation of plots, collection of fees and keeping an up to date register of burials. The appendix to the report showed that between 2008-2018, 12 extensions were completed at a cost of €500,815. The average cost where the required land was obtained free or at agricultural prices was €41,734, rising to €52,476 where the cost of land acquisition exceeded agricultural value. He stated that with an annual provision of only €50,000 for burial ground extension, it was proving very difficult to provide an effective burial ground development programme and that at a minimum €100,000 was required annually. He stated that the cost of land was a major problem and that without local communities support in land acquisition and development of the ground on a partnership basis, the Council will only be in a position to provide a very limited number of extensions in the coming years. He concluded by saying that the income generated from fees for plots fell well short of the overall annual cost of maintenance of burial which include payment of caretakers and the annual maintenance grant to committees. Mr Mac Donnacha stated that cremation was an increasing option. Cllr. Broderick said that an increase in plot fees should be looked at while there should be discussion between the Department responsible for heritage and the local authority regarding archaeological based restrictions on development of burial ground sites. Cllr. Thomas asked what was required for

a new burial ground and the Council policy on removal of trees from burial grounds. Cllr. O Curráoin stated that the cost of land was a determining factor on providing extensions. Cllr. Byrne stated that there should be special areas designated in the County Development Plan for provision of burial grounds and that she was not in favour of regional burial grounds. Mr. Green asked if there could be a joint approach countrywide for burial ground provision. Mr Carroll stated in reply to the comments made that the Council were examining a proposal to provide a facility or area at a number of burial grounds for remains following cremation. An increase in plot fees was an option to examine but even with a substantial increase there would continue to be a sizeable gap between expenditure and income. The main requirement for a burial ground site is its suitability (which is assessed by HSE) and the cost of land acquisition. The removal of trees and repairs to walls was an ever-increasing problem and is limited by financial resources available. Regarding a countrywide approach to the acquiring and development of land for burials this could be difficult given the differing terrain conditions that arise countrywide but any approach that limited costs of land acquisition would be welcomed.

4) Any Other Business

Cllr Thomas requested that the EPA be written to expressing dissatisfaction with the proposed primary system waste water treatment plant being proposed for Carraroe.

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on 20th March 2019 at 3.00.

The meeting then concluded.