

## **Minutes of Meeting through teams of Climate Change and Biodiversity**

### **Strategic Policy Committee held on 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021**

#### **I Láthair:**

**Baill:** Cllr. Alastair Mc Kinstry, Cathaoirleach  
Cllr. Evelyn Francis Parsons  
Cllr. Martina Kinane  
Mr. Pat O Hora  
Cllr. Joe Sheridan  
Cllr. Noel Thomas  
Cllr. Gabriel Cronnolly  
Mr. Henry Walsh

**Oifigigh:** Ms. Eileen Ruane, Director of Services  
Mr. David O'Loughlin, Assistant Engineer  
Ms. Maria Finn, Administrative Officer  
Ms. Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer  
Ms. Sabina O'Connell, C.O.  
Ms. Donna Byrne. A.S.O.

**Apologies:** Mr. John Hynes

**Absent:** Ms. Mairsíl Claffey

**Note:** Audio issues experience by Cllr. Kinane during the meeting.

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The Cathaoirleach opened the meeting by welcoming everybody and requested confirmation that a copy of the agenda and minutes from 26<sup>th</sup> May 2021 had been received by all. He also thanked Ms. Finn and her team for the hard work and for being so active in working on the documentation.

#### **1. Confirmation of the Minutes of Climate Change & Biodiversity SPC meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2021**

The Cathaoirleach asked if anyone had any comments or amendments to the minutes from the last meeting of the SPC. Cllr. Evelyn Parsons added that she wished to discuss a few items on pages 2, 6, 7 and page 9.

Cllr. Sheridan expressed his thanks to Ms. Ruane for the work in relation to the Energy Master Plan and as a point of clarity highlighted the importance of this work in meeting the 2030 targets. There are now six Energy Master Plans with more plans coming enroute soon.

In relation to solar arrays, Cllr. Sheridan voiced that it was a huge opportunity for Galway, and this will be the first tangible and visible community project, using solar power within the next 6 months in County Galway.

## **2. Biodiversity and Pollinators update**

The Cathaoirleach requested an update from Ms. Mannion in relation to the Biodiversity Pollinator Plan.

Ms. Mannion informed the meeting that there are 6 local biodiversity community plans in place. All the plans are written by each community group. The plans are community driven and are bespoke to individual groups based on community needs, resources, people, and expertise. Each plan is written on the strength of the community. She discussed the importance of the local biodiversity plans being led by the community and not consultancy written.

The consultant reports are based on their expertise in the area Ms. Mannion stated, they are not always achievable for the local community. She pointed out that for example Kinvara and Oranmore had experience in the biodiversity area and that Ardrahan and Woodford was new to this area and still learning. Ms. Mannion has spoken to the Galway Rural Development Group as she is a member of the steering group.

Ms Mannion also stated that funding for the biodiversity action plans has been received by the 6 community groups and training is to commence. It must be noted that there are limited resources for training.

Ms. Mannion stated that the Burren Beo Trust was involved in the compilation of plans for 6 groups. The Burren Beo Trust are in contact with Ms. Mannion and the communities. In relation to design of the plans she highlighted that it is important for the plans to be printed and not just available online. It gives a sense of pride to the community. Publication is key as was demonstrated with a project in Creggs in the past. On this occasion over 200 people attended and GCC handed out publications which were successful in creating awareness. The 6 prepared plans are available to view on GCC website.

The Galway County Biodiversity website also provides good models for the communities. In terms of Municipal District and Biodiversity Pollinator Plans, Ms. Mannion has been working with Mr. John Lusby on the Tuam biodiversity plan which is been used as a pilot. Ms. Mannion is also liaising with John Coyle and Paul Connolly, Area Engineers, Tuam. It is hoped that the Tuam plan once finalised will act as a template for the other MD regions who will amend according for its specific goals / funding opportunities.

Cllr. Parsons thanked Ms. Mannion for her work and acknowledged the limited resources that are available to her. She observed the willingness from the communities to engage with GCC but acknowledged that communities differ. There was an element of difference of opinion in the community in terms of cutting the grass and leaving pollinator areas. Some people in communities perceive the uncut grass in the pollinator areas to look neglected. Cllr. Parsons highlighted the importance of educating communities about the pollinator areas. Regarding the community biodiversity plans, Cllr. Parsons queried the timing of these plans i.e., Ballinasloe after Tuam, in relation to the Local Area Plans and linking these plans.

Ms. Mannion replied that once the Tuam biodiversity plan is finished, the available information can be reviewed. She does not have a timeline on this yet as it is a new process, and the original template plan will take longer to finalise. She would hope to have Tuam and Ballinasloe completed towards the end of this year. She stated that a policy objective on Pollination and Biodiversity will be included in the County Development Plan, Local Area Plan and Heritage Biodiversity Plan. These plans are all interlinked, and the plans need to be robust for funding opportunities.

Cllr. Parsons agreed with Ms. Mannion and thanked her for her reply. She again expressed the difficulties that are being experienced in the communities in relation to the no mow lawn areas. Ms. Mannion advised that there is a 'Pots for Pollination' project that is also available and a good opportunity for creating awareness in communities.

In relation to the Biodiversity Plan and the County Development Plan, Cllr. Thomas had a query in relation to planning permission, did one plan supersede the other, e.g., if a person applied for planning permission, would the decision be based on the policy objective of the Biodiversity Plan or the County Development Plan.

Ms. Mannion explained that the planning permission is governed by the County Development Plan which is the planning framework and will include a policy objective relating to biodiversity. In relation to the biodiversity plan, she explained that the biodiversity plans are the forum for delivering actions.

Cllr. Thomas discussed the pollinator plan and biodiversity role and highlighted how willing members of the public were to participate. He told the meeting that there is a 5-year plan in Moycullen, which is now in its second year. This plan was written by a consultant, and we had great community involvement. As a result of this plan a big pollinator bed is in Moycullen village near the creche and Old Forge and the local bee community has also erected signs explaining about the different bees. This area is extremely popular with the local people and young children. Before the plan came into existence, small groups interested in various aspects of the environment were struggling but the plan has brought the various groups together and the number of people involved / showing an interest has increased greatly.

Ms. Mannion agreed with Mr. O'Hora in relation to awareness and suggested GCC could deliver awareness through publication of leaflets and guides that could be circulated through schools. She outlined that GCC would work with the National Biodiversity Centre, but GCC would not have the time or resources to support the proposed project. Ms. Mannion concluded by saying that she did not see any benefit in creating another app / database when there was a well-funded system already in existence, but that GCC would do whatever it could to educate the public regarding its existence / use. Ms. Mannion stated that the National Biodiversity Centre are the depository centre and that she will invite them to do a presentation at the next meeting.

Cllr. Thomas expressed that the database and app were an excellent idea but that the main problem was the resources and staff needed by GCC. He also stated that admin control is needed in relation to the interactive maps for logging the flora and fauna.

Mr. O'Hora acknowledged the limited resources and that he was not suggesting that GCC set up a dedicated unit but instead get the national agencies to link and co-ordinate and collate, such as the Environmental Protection Agency and Birdwatch Ireland. Cllr. Thomas agreed on this approach.

The Cathaoirleach agreed that there have been problems in the past in relation to logging target species and he suggested that a meeting is set up with Biodiversity Ireland in relation to this project. He also suggested that they could be invited to a future SPC meeting and give the members a presentation.

Mr. O'Hora told the meeting that that local involvement is key in achieving results. He also informed Cllr. Thomas that the Tuam Men's Shed could provide barn owl boxes at a cost saving price to the committee in Moycullen or any local Men's shed.

The Cathaoirleach invited Cllr. Parsons to speak. Cllr. Parsons informed the meeting that she agreed with the idea. She suggested looking at local set ups and supervised programmes to avoid any issues. Cllr. Parsons suggested in relation to resources could GCC employ graduate programme staff which would be cost neutral.

Ms. Mannion advised Cllr. Parsons that she had a student placement from GMIT earlier in the year from the Mountbellew campus who has worked on ecology. The work carried out by the student has fed into the data sets for the municipal districts. Ms. Mannion told the meeting that she has built a good working relationship with the applied ecology unit in NUIG and can speak to Mike Gormally. In relation to data, the questions are how the data is collected and where the data goes. She feels the National Biodiversity Centre is home for this information. She put forward that why create a new app when there is already a particularly good existing app.

Cllr. Sheridan discussed EV charging points and the importance of them in central hubs and the social enterprise centres. It is important that they blend into the community and are more accountable for members of the public.

The Cathaoirleach agreed with this.

## **8. Barn Owl Survey and Awareness:**

Ms. Mannion informed the meeting that a Barn Owl survey is being rolled out by Birdwatch Ireland which is classed as a citizen science project. There is huge interest in the barn owl and a lot of queries have been received from the public recently. The project includes the design of a nice poster which will include Irish text.

Cllr. Thomas informed the meeting that he had a particular interest in relation to the barn owl and enquired about the barn owl in relation to the biodiversity plan. He told the meeting that he was involved in a barn owl project in Moycullen where they have sourced 20 barn owl boxes @ €100.00 each, which are stainless steel and weatherproof as part of the project. He added that there was also a 5year plan in place in Moycullen which was prepared by consultants and was extraordinarily successful. The consultants met with the community on the ground and listened to their concerns and ideas. He stated that an exceptionally good document was produced from this.

Cllr. Thomas pointed out that more awareness is needed to educate people about the barn owl. Cllr. Thomas discussed the nesting habitats and international studies that have taken place in Israel in relation to the increase in crops/barn owl. There is major concern about the use of rat poison and the harmful effects it has on the barn owl. Cllr. Thomas advised that there a natural rodent poison that can be made which is as successful as the chemical rodent poison and that he himself makes it. He suggested that GCC and the SPC's run a campaign to make people aware of the use of the natural rodent poison which can be used in a clean safe manner.

Ms. Mannion advised Cllr. Thomas to liaise with John Lusby and that there are similar barn owl groups in Connemara and East Galway. She also advised Cllr. Thomas that the community could apply for funding of the barn owl boxes through the Community Funds scheme.

## **9. Solar Power:**

Cllr. Sheridan introduced the topic of Solar Power exemptions. He stated that exemptions are sought for dwellings and clarity is sought. He also questioned whether this subject was on the schedule for the Oireachtas. He referred to RESS Program

## 11. RESS Program applicants and successful projects

Cllr. Sheridan introduced the subject of the RESS Programme and proposed that a letter of endorsement be issued to Minister Ryan for support on community dissemination and public relation platforming. He stated that the application has already been sent to the Department. He highlighted the importance of engaging the public at community level. There are 7 RESS1 Projects in the first tranche of community energy.

The Cathaoirleach seconded this proposal and Ms. Ruane requested that Cllr. Sheridan email details of the application submitted, and Galway County Council will issue a letter of endorsement to the Minister.

### Date of next meeting:

The agreed date for the next meeting was set for Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> September 2021. At the next meeting, the Cathaoirleach has requested an update in relation to the Climate Action Plan and Decarbonisation Zones at the next meeting.

Meeting Concluded

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CATHAOIRLEACH ALASTAIR MC KINSTRY