

Minutes of Meeting through teams of Climate Change and Biodiversity

Strategic Policy Committee held on 19th January 2022

I Láthair:

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

Oifigigh: Ms. Eileen Ruane, Director of Services
Mr. Derek Pender, Director of Services
Mr. David O'Loughlin, Assistant Engineer
Ms. Maria Finn, Administrative Officer
Ms. Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer
Ms. Ann Dolan Senior, Executive Scientist
Ms. Christina Ryan, Assistant Scientist
Ms. Sabina O'Connell, C.O.

Note: Connection issues experience by Cllr. Joe Sheridan during meeting

The Cathaoirleach opened the meeting by informing the members that Mr. Pat O'Hora had resigned from this SPC group due to other commitments. He expressed thanks to everybody for their attendance at the meeting and asked for confirmation that a copy of the agenda and minutes from 7th October's meeting had been received by all. Ms. Finn and her team were thanked for their hard work and for providing concise and detailed minutes.

The Cathaoirleach referenced typing errors – P 11 "Over 2000 personnel" should read 20 personnel

1. Confirmation of the Minutes of Climate Change & Biodiversity SPC meeting held on 7th October 2021

Cllr. Cronnolly enquired if Kieran Coyne was part of this meeting to discuss Flag Grants – Ms. Ruane confirmed that the matter would be raised separately with him. –

The Cathaoirleach informed meeting that Ms. Mannion, Ms. Joyce, (GCC Community Warden) have begun discussions with Dr Karen Bacon, NUIG re Japanese Knotweed research and innovative ways to deal with individual sites.

Cllr. Sheridan referenced an issue regarding CARO, there is still steps to take. – An update on this he stated will be available for next meeting

The Cathaoirleach proposed the minutes from 7th October 2021, and they were seconded by Cllr. Kinane

2. Biodiversity update by Ms. Mannion

National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) Funding

Ms. Mannion confirmed that GCC need to finalised their planned work projects for 2022 and that a meeting with Rosina Joyce and Conor Ruane is needed to discuss proposals that GCC will be submitting for 2022 to Department for National Biodiversity Action Plan funding.

Mechanical Hedgerow Cutting

At previous meetings of this SPC there was a lot of debate around cutting of hedgerows and around the drafting of a standard guidance document to assist Area Office Engineers and contractors when cutting hedges in the different MD areas.

Ms. Mannion confirmed that a guidance document has now been produced by Janice Fuller prior to her departure to take up her new appointment. This document was produced in conjunction with input from engineers in GCC Area Offices and Roads section. Ms. Mannion had difficulty in sharing the document with the members at meeting and requested that it be emailed to the SPC members following the conclusion of the meeting. Done

She explained to the meeting what the document covered:

- Hedgerow management – invasive species (more training for Council Staff to take place on this)
- Value of hedgerows
- Timing of cutting
- Shape
- Level cut
- Retaining of trees growing in amongst the hedgerows
- Machinery used / maintenance of same
- Frequency of cutting
- Record keeping – The taking of “before cut” and “after cut” photos

The aim of the guidance document Ms. Mannion stated is to promote a positive message. The document was signed off on last week and it needs to be translated. When this is completed, it will be uploaded on the GCC website and printed versions will be available. The on-line document contains hyperlinks which opens to different sites linked to biodiversity.

The Cathaoirleach thanked Ms. Mannion and requested that the document once it has been translated be sent out to all Councillors as those not a part of this SPC group would not be aware of its existence. The importance of record keeping and the taking of before

and after photos is a welcome addition. He queried invasive species signage removal as a few queries have come to his attention. Ms. Mannion stated that a few such instances have come to her attention and that she has referred these to the Area Engineers to ensure signage if removed is replaced.

Ms. Mannion is due to have a meeting with the Roads Engineers next week and the invasive species document will be discussed and circulated to contractors before any hedgerow cutting commences in 2022. The hedgerow guidance document is not perfect Ms. Mannion stated but it is a good starting point for local Office Engineers when identifying areas to be cut and provides valuable information to contractors. This document can be improved upon in the future.

Cllr. Kinane thanked Ms. Mannion and welcomed the publication of the hedgerow guidance document. Cutting of hedges takes up a huge amount of local Councillors' budget and she has major concerns. She enquired if the content of the document been implemented by contractors when they secure contracts for hedge cutting. Cllr. Kinane raised issue of height of hedgerows and had concerns that when cutting has taken place it looks as if the machinery used has been blunt as it can be quite butchered and unsightly. She agreed that the local area offices need to work closely with contractors.

Cllr. Kinane agreed that the pockets docket (swatches) on invasive species should be given to contractors to make them aware of the invasive species that grow amongst our hedges. With an increase in the number of adults and young families out walking over the past 2 years Cllr. Kinane would like the issue of swatches for mushrooms re-visited. Ms Mannion confirmed that when the 2022 budget proposal is being allocated, she will examine the production of swatch cards for mushrooms, and maybe identify those local to Galway and produce cards on that basis.

Cllr. Cronnolly thanked Ms. Mannion and added that this is a very welcome document. He has much concern about contractors and referenced cutting that was carried out in Athenry area for purposes of broadband in the run up to Christmas. He stated that the roads were left in a very poor condition and could present as a hazard particularly in stormy weather. He was aware that a lot of complaints had been filed with GCC Area Office in Athenry in the lead up to Christmas. Contractors carrying out work for outside agencies need to be aware of this document he stated.

Mr. Pender acknowledged the concerns raised by both Cllr's Kinane and Cronnolly. He stated that prior to any cutting taking place toolbox talks take place with the contractor carrying out the works. This new guidance document will form part of those toolbox talks in future and the issue of branches on verge of road will be discussed under health and safety. Mr. Pender also stated that the roads department have monthly meetings with NBI and Broadband Ireland and that the issues raised together with the new guidance document will be discussed at future meetings. Mr. Pender concluded by saying that there are no height restrictions in any legislation.

Cllr. Thomas stated that the system "Flail system" used by GCC for cutting hedgerows does not give the appearance of a clean cut. Hedgerows gets cut and mulched on road verge. This he stated is the best system. The "finger bar cutting system" costs a lot more and leaves debris on the roadsides.

Referring to invasive species Cllr. Thomas stated that identifying these alongside a roadside requires a trained eye. As a horticulturist he can identify these plants but not everyone can. He added that a driver operating a tractor would not be able to identify invasive species. The local area offices need to point any known areas out to contractors prior to commencement of works

Cllr. Thomas queried of Ms. Mannion as to whether birds were intelligent enough as to not nest in roadside verges. Personally, he hasn't come across many. He has identified leylandii trees as a place where a lot of birds tend to build nests. Ms. Mannion was not aware of intelligence of birds and yes birds are known to nest along roadside in the grass verges and hedges.

Cllr. Parsons thanked Ms. Mannion on the development of such a great document. She stated that at a previous meeting of this group in 2021, she had informed the meeting that she had discovered that contracts for grass cutting had already been awarded for 2022 and that any proposals made by this group could not be considered for 2022. She queried as to when and how the awarding of contract for hedgerow cutting was granted. Mr. Pender confirmed that contracts for regional roads are arranged by each MD area and that if anyone had any suggestion or proposals, he would suggest that they contact their own MD early in summer. Contractors for cutting on regional roads are being engaged with during May and early June. Contractors for national roads are made centrally around September time annually. John Coyle is the Engineer in charge of the national road contract projects.

Cllr. Sheridan stated that we were in a realm of fiscal constraint last year to tree care and hedge cutting. Most of the calls received from the public were around site lines of road intersections and T junctions. He asked if these areas could be treated more carefully going forward when cutting of hedges taking place.

Ms. Mannion emphasised that the new guidance document is a code of practice that GCC will implement as best it can. It is a learning process and can be amended and improved as deemed necessary in the future. GCC can only give contractors knowledge that helps them when cutting hedgerows. Area offices should make it clear to the contractors the areas where invasive species are growing. Overall, it is hoped that a balance between road safety and biodiversity is achieved. The week following this SAPC meeting she will again be meeting with the Roads Engineers.

The Cathaoirleach added that he would like to see multiyear cutting of hedgerows taking place. This will involve Area Office tracking hedge cutting on regional roads and retaining before cut and after cut photos. There is more communication required between Engineers and Contractors and this will be essential going forward. Cllr. Thomas stated it is difficult for tractor drives to identify signage regarding invasive species and this matter needs to be raised with contractors in advance of cutting.

All Ireland Pollinator Plan Annual Review

Ms. Mannion requested that a copy of this report be emailed to the members of this SPC group. The results from Galway have been submitted to the All-Ireland Data Centre and the update gives a flavour of what is happening in each individual county.

For GCC the annual review includes Pots for Pollinators, Biodiversity training that has taken place, Galway Buzz, Website, Signage for Pollinators, Tuam MD's biodiversity and action plan. It is very important that Galway County Council showcase the work that we are doing and having it included in an annual update. Ms Mannion concluded by stating that Environment, Community and Enterprise, Roads, and Housing are all contributing to biodiversity.

The Cathaoirleach thanked Ms. Mannion on a very successful project.

Wetlands of Northeast Galway

A wetland is an area of land that is either permanently or seasonally saturated by water and where the water table is either at or near the surface. Rich biodiversity is to be found in wetlands. During a mapping inventory project 442 wetlands were mapped in Northeast Galway. A lot of these occur in and around Lough Corrib.

Galway County Council engaged the services of consultants Wetlands Surveys Ireland Ltd in 2021 to carry out an audit on wetlands in Northeast Galway. A story map was created which can be accessed at [Wetlands of North East Galway \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com). It is planned to launch this on February 2nd which is World Wetlands Day.

The story map is very detailed, and any age group can interact with it through the pictures and access the valuable information contained therein. Wetlands offer recreational and amenities opportunities. They have cultural value inspiring many paintings, books, and songs Ms. Mannion stated.

The wetlands story map gives valuable information on Lough Corrib, The Suck Valley Way, information on soil types most of which is limestone and some sandstone also. It also gives information on turloughs, raised bogs, SACs and living bogs. Over 300 turloughs have been recorded in Ireland with 63 of these being recorded in Northeast Galway. In some parts of Galway wetlands have been developed by local community e.g., Derrymore, Cappagh and Dumore. Three interconnected loop bog walks have been developed and are regularly used by walkers, runners, and cyclists. The entrance contains a hand painted information sign on the wildlife in the area. Cloondroon Lake outside Milltown has been developed to protect its valuable course fishing resource, the environment and wildlife. Facilities include a carpark and short walking trail with views of the lake and bog. The story map on wetlands also gives advice on how to protect wetlands into the future.

Ms. Mannion confirmed that she has spoken to the consultants from Wetlands Surveys Ireland Ltd, about the possibility of them giving a presentation at our next SPC meeting and they are amenable to do so.

The Cathaoirleach thanked Ms. Mannion for all the work that she has done in bringing the story map on wetlands to fruition. It would be a good idea he stated to have a wetland consultant at the next meeting. The work carried out on this project is very valuable he stated and turloughs are virtually unique to Ireland with many people underestimating how valuable they are. He also posed the question what can GCC doing to promote turloughs? Ms. Mannion will examine the funding options that GCC will have for 2022 and will ascertain how to spend monies to promote turloughs.

3. Active Travel

Mr. Pender gave an update on funding of €6.1million awarded to GCC in 2021 for active travel projects. From that funding €4million has been spent by GCC on approximately 40 projects which have been completed and additional 30 projects to be rolled out across the 5 Municipal District areas. The Municipal District can advise on the projects completed

and future projects if further information is required. €2 million of the funding received will roll over into 2022 and it is expected that a further allocation of €5million will be paid in 2022 which will be used for additional projects, phase 2 of completed projects and for additional bicycle stands.

To date Mr. Pender stated the MDs completed all the work themselves. Approval has now been granted for a dedicated Active Travel Team to be put in place. This will comprise of 1 Senior Executive Engineer, 2 Executive Engineers, and 1 technical staff member. The positions will be advertised as soon as possible. The Active Travel Team once in situ (expected to be Mid Quarter 2 of 2022) will work with the various MDs for project locations / type of projects. Individual MDs will be managing their own projects until that time.

The Cathoirleach requested that a list of all projects completed to date and the planned projects be made available to this SPC group.

He acknowledged that a huge amount of work has been completed but that there is outstanding works. Cllr. Cronnolly added that there will be an overlap in funding towards the end of February when local road improvement funding (LIS) is announced. Cllr. Parsons also requested to see a list of all projects. A list of all projects both completed, in progress and planned to be made available at next meeting of this SPC group.

4. EV Charging Points

Ms. Ruane stated that is no significant developments on EV Charging Points. The guidance document had been received in Autumn 2021. GCC must examine their own fleet, identify resources required for both environment and roads departments. Mapping of locations must be carried out and this will include along tourist routes. There is funding available from the SEAI of €600 whist installation of a single charging point is approximately €5000.00. GCC will need to include education and awareness as part of the planning. The CARO office has advised that the Department of Transport are expected to publish an EV infrastructure strategy in the coming months. To assess it properly it requires key pieces of strategy to include timescale for public charge points. When the Strategy is published it will be discussed at SPC committee meeting.

The Cathoirleach stated that the Wild Atlantic Way be included in national strategy as a key area. He stated that about 20% of housing estates do not have space to install charging facilities. He stated that he is pleased that national funding may be utilised. To have an update for next meeting of this group.

5. Climate Action Plan

Ms. Ruane updated the SPC members on activities/progress. Ms. Christina Ryan was introduced as the Climate Change Co-Ordinator for GCC. A date for her taking up the post has not yet been finalised as Ms. Ryan's position as Assistant Scientist in the environment section needs to be filled. Ms. Ruane will keep members informed.

While GCC are still awaiting related guidance/direction from the Department, CARO have confirmed that a draft Guidance document for the proposed Local Authority Climate Action Plans, as developed by the EPA/CARO/LAs, has been issued to the EPA and to the CCMA for review before being sent to the Minister for consideration. Under the Act the guidance needs to be issued by the Minister and the draft will be issued to the Department

for consideration. The CCMA met before the Christmas and endorsed the draft documents.

The Cathoirleach enquired if inventory will be ready to include in County Development Plan. Ms. Ruane replied that she it would not be done in time for the County Development Plan. To update at next meeting of this SPC group.

6. Decarbonising Zones

GCC still awaiting related guidance from the Department's DZ Advisory Group. There has not been any communication since submission made on guidelines. CARO are keeping the pressure on Ms. Ruane stated.

Cllr. Sheridan thanked Ms. Ruane for help that she has given him on an ongoing project. There is a group in Milltown dealing with local GWS but unfortunately, they do not have any Government support. They are hoping to put renewable energy in place. This group have a very proactive and positive approach. He has been in touch with Trinity College and DVO officers and hopes to have an update on the project for next SPC meeting.

7. AOB

Ms. Ruane to liaise with planning office with regards to inclusion of inventory under climate action plan in County Development Plan. Once update available Ms. Ruane to discuss with The Cathoirleach.

List of projects under Active Travel to be made available.

8. Date of next meeting:

Ms. Finn listed the proposed dates for the meeting of this SPC group for 2022

- 16/3/2022
- 13/7/2022
- 19/10/2022

Meeting Concluded

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