

**Climate Action, Biodiversity, Environment, Energy, Marine,
Recreation and Amenity Strategic Policy Committee**

Friday, 5th June, 10.30 am – Council Chamber

PRESENT: Cllr. Erika Doyle (Cathaoirleach)
Cllr. Danny Alvey
Cllr. Lourda Scott
Justin Ivory (PPN Representative, East Wicklow, Env Seat)
Austin Baines (Community/Voluntary Representative)

IN ATTENDANCE: Theresa O'Brien (Director of Services, CERA)
Sarah McCullough (Senior Executive Officer, CERA)
Mary Cahill (Senior Engineer, CERA)
Eoin Kelly (Administrative Officer, CERA)
Margaret Birchall (County Librarian, CERA)
Jenny Sherwin (Arts Officer, CERA)
Nicole Keogh (Assistant Staff Officer, CERA)

APOLOGIES: Cllr. Jason Mulhall
Cllr. Peir Leonard
Anthony Ardee (Business/Commercial Representative)
Emma Smith (PPN Representative, West Wicklow, Env Seat)
Michael Storan (Development/Construction Representative)
Tom Byrne (Agricultural Representative)

A quorum was reached.

Cllr. Doyle stressed how important it is to reply to the meeting invites that are circulated. If members experience difficulties attending the meetings, then this issue can be raised with the Cathaoirleach of the SPC or a senior member of the CERA staff. An email will be circulated to all members reminding them of the importance of attending future Strategic Policy Committee Meetings.

Director of Services, Theresa O'Brien is retiring today and therefore will not be able to attend the whole meeting. She wished to thank everyone in the SPC for all their support over the years. She reiterated the importance of attending the SPC meetings, given the wide remit that it covers and expressed her disappointment at the low attendance.

Item 1: To note the minutes of the following meetings

- 14th November 2025
- 6th March 2026
- 7th May 2026 (Multi Annual Work Plan Meeting)

The minutes of the meetings were proposed by Cllr. Alvey and seconded by Austin Baines.

Item 2: To receive a presentation on the development of the Arts Plan 2026-2030

Jenny Sherwin (JS), Wicklow County Arts Officer, delivered an informative presentation. She highlighted that this new plan would review existing arts provision, evaluate the 2020-2025 plan and aim to identify any gaps that need to be bridged.

It is hoped that the draft plan will be brought to the SPC in September 2026 for the members opinion and input. The public consultation period is open until the end of July 2026. It is hoped that all going well, the plan will go before the full Council in October 2026.

JS explained that the Arts have never been stronger than they are today. All the data from the 2020-2025 plan, including case studies, have been assessed and it showed increased investment in recent years, with the aim for continued growth in this area. Based on population, Co Wicklow has 43% more artists than the average. These artists have great knowledge and ability, and it will be necessary to enable them to continue to improve and offer supports.

Need to identify both hard infrastructure (buildings, structures, places, spaces) as well as soft infrastructure (funding mechanisms, specialist staff etc). It is important that the fit for purpose hard infrastructure aspect should be built on and investment via capital schemes and grants will need to be examined. It will be necessary to support a spatial balance across the county, with the functionality of the spread being important. The next plan will have continued geographic targeted goals.

A public art advisor has been appointed to help local government. €2.5 million euro will come from central government to Arts in County Wicklow. This funding has increased dramatically in recent years, similar to the Arts Council and Local Authority funding. This new plan will identify targeted increased funding and partnerships.

JS shared that two public consultation meetings on the new plan are yet to take place, one in Arklow and the other in Blessington. An online wrap consultation meeting will also be planned. Internally, numerous meetings have been held, with a Sports Partnership meeting yet to take place. JS and the Arts Office will remain as open as possible to all views and asked that those in attendance today, share the details of the public consultation with members of the public.

Questions/Comments

Austin Baines

1. Austin Baines (AB) thanked JS for the informative presentation. He questioned that although it sounds as though there will be ample budget available, if it is to be split across the different municipal district areas, how would the money be proposed to be spent in each of them.

JS responded that this proposed plan of expenditure will be outlined in the body of the new plan. A public art working group will be set up, which will include municipal district members, senior management and arts experts. There may also be local and public consultation on such matters. The new plan will be very clear about how the available funding will be spatially spread and in what manner it is to be used.

Cllr. Lourda Scott

1. Cllr. Scott thanked JS and hoped there was some representation from the Greystones MD at the infrastructure meeting yesterday, as Greystones is the biggest growing area in Wicklow and people are crying out for dedicated arts spaces. Cllr. Scott highlighted that the Whale Theatre is a small community venue that may be hard to keep open, the Greystones library is tiny with only limited rooms available. Cllr. Scott has raised the matter at full council meetings where she shared her disappointment that there is no capital budget for hard infrastructure for the Arts. Cllr. Scott wanted it to be noted in the minutes that there is a need for an arts and cultural centre in Greystones Municipal District.

She would be happy to share details of the public consultation and would like to be involved in any future discussions and to sit with JS and brainstorm what opportunities/obstacles there are for the Arts in Greystones.

JS replied that she did indeed meet with Greystones MD and is aware of Cllr. Scott's concerns. Examining how funding for development levies and capital levies can be achieved, repurposing old buildings, and identifying any incentive schemes that can be provided are all necessary for this new plan. It will also identify the areas that need work

and assess how to progress projects given what resources they have available. JS further noted that arts staff are usually under resourced.

Cllr. Danny Alvey

1. As a representative for the Wicklow Municipal District, Cllr. Alvey stressed that shared and cultural structures are needed in Wicklow MD as there are many derelict buildings that could be repurposed.

Justin Ivory

1. Justin Ivory (JI) noted that he has received lots of queries where there is an overlap between Climate, Environment and the Arts and suggested that sitting down to brainstorm these may be beneficial.

Regarding hard infrastructure, the possibility of using temporary tarps, which could then be used cross sectionally, could potentially open spaces for use across the county.

JS thanked JI for his comments and noted that many biodiversity and climate projects have been funded over the last number of years but would still be interested in sitting down to speak of cross collaboration with JI.

2. Can WCC apply directly for EU funding schemes.

Funding schemes are usually for outward artists, but JS will pay attention to this going forward for any funding opportunities that may arise.

Cllr. Erika Doyle

1. What role does the Arts Office have for buildings that fall outside WCC ownership and when speaking about hard infrastructure, would partnerships extend to privately owned premises?

JS replied that the Arts Office can support private theatres such as The Whale for example but would not have a governance relationship with them. The Arts Office could not support the revenue side of the things for these private enterprises, but can advise of potential funding opportunities, i.e. Creative Ireland.

2. Has the Arts landscape changed at all since the introduction of basic income for artists?

The landscape has changed for those that have benefited from it, which amounts to only 2,000 nationwide. There are too many people who did not benefit from it for it to make a massive change but saying that it was welcomed.

Out of 2,000 Basic Income for the Artist Recipients 89 of those were from Wicklow. Wicklow has the fourth highest amount of BIA supported artists in the country

outside of Dublin City, Galway City etc. Please see on the link the full data. Again, this confirms the volume and quality of professional artists living and working in Wicklow.

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-culture-communications-and-sport/press-releases/groundbreaking-basic-income-for-the-arts-pilot-scheme-grants-awarded/>

3. What spaces are the most sought after, is it gallery or studio space for example?

The biggest need is for studio space. There are 3 spaces in Arklow, with Greystones advocating for both gallery and workshop space. Derelict buildings in Blessington are being looked at, and the new plan will identify spaces that could be developed over the lifetime of the plan. Business models need to be devised that would work going forward.

4. Are members of the public supporting the Mermaid Theatre in Bray?

JS explained that at the Councils request, she is on the board of The Mermaid. They cannot maximise their income anymore. Their multi-purpose room and green rooms are not big enough. They take public donations for extra support and will never make a large profit and will always continue to rely on extra support.

Item 3: To receive a presentation on the Draft Library Development Plan 2026-2030

Margaret Birchall (MB) delivered a presentation on the Draft Library Development Plan but first wanted to apologise for putting the cart before horse, in not coming to the SPC sooner, but made it clear that she is happy to receive input and is open to all suggestions.

There is an obligation every 4 years to produce a library development plan. The library service currently has 67 staff and around a €5.5 million budget. Some highlights from the last plan were shared (2021-2025), including the new library management system called Spydus, the opening of new libraries in Wicklow and Rathdrum, CBA guides for Junior cert, among others. It was also highlighted that Wicklow County Library Service were the first library to be awarded Library of Sanctuary Award in 2025.

The process around the development of the new Library Development Plan has proceeded as follows

Consultation No. 1 – Staff Feedback

In 2025, all libraries closed for the day and all staff come together, (as they do annually) to gather input on what they want to see included in the plan. Some weaknesses were identified, for example, the issue that space is one of the biggest demands from the public. The need for study spaces in the libraries is massive and the fact that management are constantly firefighting to ensure enough staff are always in place.

Consultation 2 – Public Feedback

A survey was held in the Autumn of 2025, a few issues were identified through this, such as out of hours book return, the need for study, meeting and baby changing spaces – although the latter are available in all branches.

MB would like to make a plea that libraries need space for students and library members for public events and exhibitions and this would be deemed a high priority.

MB highlighted plans for a new library to be built in Aughrim by 2028. Repairs and refurbishment will take place Ballywaltrim, Dunlavin and Blessington libraries.

The new plan will look at how we can improve services and broaden connections.

Comments /Questions

Justin Ivory

1.JI commented how it has been great to see the libraries revitalised in the last number of years, it has been something to behold, and it is brilliant to see the service being utilised more.

Regarding the over subscription to study spaces, in the month leading up to state exams would it be possible to come to some kind of partnership with coffee shops in the locality who could extend opening hours for students or to utilise community centres like the one in Charlesland, Greystones.

MB agreed that there is a need to look seriously at expanding the spaces available. If you take Blessington for example, yesterday students were using it for study during the Junior and Leaving Cert. Regarding the idea around the coffee shops, MB was unsure how this could be achieved.

Austin Baines

1. AB thanked Margaret and all the library team and suggested that when community groups are looking for meeting venues, it may be an idea to explore sports clubs or schools with available rooms in the evening time, which would be more for one off events rather than arts events.

MB agreed it might be handy for library staff to have list of local areas that would have meeting rooms available, if there is no room in libraries. Meeting rooms are also required by other local authorities and state bodies.

2. Noted that the Spydus Library Management System only started being used in 2023, so why is there a change being planned.

MB replied that whatever procurement WCC are tied into, it is necessary to look at alternatives every few years, but in fact it looks as if the Spydus system will be sticking around for the next number of years.

Cllr. Lourda Scott

1.Cllr. Scott thanked Margaret and stated that she loves the library in Greystones and its incredible staff. Wanted to note again how there is massive population growth in Greystones MD, which is projected to continue, with only a small library in place. Cllr. Scott has seen the students queuing outside the library during exam times and although it refers to the conversation earlier regarding the Arts plan, there is a massive need for more than the existing very limited spaces in Greystones.

Cllr. Scott wanted to stress that 3 students she worked with in a recent workshop, highlighted the need for study spaces as a priority for students.

Furthermore, it was noted that there is no specific mention of Greystones in the existing Library Development Plan and would really hope it will be mentioned specifically, with an action or objective in the next plan.

MB concurred that the library in Greystones is a beacon library but unfortunately the demand on it is huge and there is no room for expansion. Although it is a lovely building, it does not mean it needs to be a library for ever. Cllr. Scott then mentioned that there is an Enterprise building by Shoreline that seems to be underutilised.

Cllr. Danny Alvey

1.Cllr. Alvey would like the wording in the Library Development Plan to change from ‘to explore the option to develop a library in Newtown’ to ‘develop a library in Newtown’.

MB would like to follow through on this library as it is much needed.

2.The existing plan mentions ‘explore the opportunity to open libraries in Kilcoole and Ashford’. However, the County Development Plan notes that areas over a certain population should have library. Therefore, both Kilcoole and Ashford should be included as we need to be consistent with what we have in Development Plan.

MB replied that Kilcoole and Ashford can be put on the list. They are currently served by the Mobile Library. MB will look at the data and assess.

Cllr. Erika Doyle

1. Cllr. Doyle agreed with Cllr. Alvey, that there is a need to include the above libraries in the plan. The fact about the County Development Plan that Cllr. Alvey shared should be enough to get Kilcoole and Ashford at least included as an objective.

MB stated that she will speak with her colleagues and see if it can be included but would not expect them to be built soon, but the process starts by putting it down on paper. Cllr. Doyle noted that people here today are realistic and understand that by putting in an objective it doesn't mean it will be delivered immediately.

Cllr. Scott noted that what she said about the growth of Greystones, includes the population of Kilcoole, so based on that projection a library would indeed be needed in Kilcoole.

MB agreed that it will be named in Library Development Plan.

Mary Cahill explained that as the Library Development Plan is a statutory document, it should be put through proper advertised public consultation. MB agreed.

2. Cllr. Doyle asked how the libraries monitor physical visits. MB explained that there is a counter on the doors of all libraries.

3. As funding has been secured for the works on Ballywaltrim Library, what has the delay been in getting works underway.

A query about design fees caused the work to be held up but it has now been resolved, with the delivery date now scheduled for the end of 2028. The library will close for the duration of the refurbishment. The old courthouse on Boghall Road may be used as a replacement for Ballywaltrim while it is closed.

To conclude, MB offered her availability on email if there were any further questions.

Item 4: Multi Annual Work Plan

Cllr. Doyle noted that this was passed at the last meeting as it needed to go to the Corporate Policy Group (CPG).

Cllr. Danny Alvey

1. Cllr. Alvey looked at Multi Annual Work Plans (MAWP) from other Local Authorities and came up with 3 items that he hoped could be included

1. Energy, Poverty and Retrofit Plan
2. Beaches and Coastal Management and adaptation strategy
3. Parks and Open Spaces Plan

Cllr. Doyle highlighted that we already have an energy policy included, is this relevant to the above? Cllr. Alvey noted that Energy is quite a wide remit but understands that the retrofit and poverty aspects may be covered under the Housing MAWP.

MC confirmed that retrofitting does come under housing. Although Energy is included in this SPC, it is not included in this directorate. It can sit in our MAWP but would not include social housing or poverty aspect. She further noted that the other 2 items would be included in our work plan.

Justin Ivory

1. Apologised for not being able to attend the MAWP meeting. Requested that he would like the specific meeting for Tree Management Plan to take place, as agreed previously. MC suggested it may take place in the same format as the Biodiversity Working Group meeting in the Glenview hotel last year. Some people noted their preference for an online meeting.

Cllr. Doyle will work on organising the meeting to discuss the Tree Management Plan and hoped that more people will be in attendance.

2. In relation to Coastal Management Plan inclusion, water-based activities are experiencing some anti-social behaviour. Do we need more designated areas for these activities, does this sit with SPC to deal with?

MC replied that it would only sit with the Water Safety Officer and within the designated bathing areas. An awareness campaign will be worked on for over the winter months, but there are no resources to enforce the above issue.

Austin Baines

Apologised for not attending the MAWP meeting.

1) Regarding the Sports Plan and the Play Policy in the MAWP, it says they are to be confirmed. When will these items be discussed?

Sarah McCullough (SMcC) noted that resources are needed for these to be progressed. A parks department is needed for the Play Policy.

2) Can anyone confirm if the bring banks in Kilcoole have been removed. Is there a policy to provide bring banks when there is a certain population in an area. Is there any way a list of bring banks can be put on the website.

Eoin Kelly (EK), Administrative Officer, Waste Management stated that the bring banks are still there in Kilcoole, but they could be moved temporarily for building works. On bring banks in general, it is very difficult of find spaces to locate them but will explore the idea of creating a list.

No policy for Bring Banks currently exists and it would be an item to be included under the Waste Management Plan. It could be teased out in policy that collaboration with planning may be undertaken to assess if bring banks needed in certain areas.

Regarding the activity in Kilcoole, it was noted that the works are going straight up to water body and debris/sediment can wash straight back in, there is no boundary left at all to that river.

JI mentioned that in Offaly, they have underground bring banks, which are not obtrusive, wildlife friendly and very clean.

MC explained that bring banks are not to be located within 50m of a house due to the noise that the emptying process makes.

Cllr. Alvey stated that in Newtown, some bring banks have been removed and it is hard to find alternative locations. It would be good to have a policy on the Bring Banks. EK wanted to highlight that the more bring banks are installed, the more it costs to empty and service them. It is quite a significant cost, and this should be kept in mind.

Cllr. Doyle commended this positive discussion and confirmed that a bring banks policy can be included in our MAWP.

Item 5: Any Other Business

Austin Baines

1. In relation to future meetings, do we opt for having them as hybrid going forward.

Cllr. Doyle's opinion is that there are 4 meetings a year that must take place for each SPC and although she understands that is a commitment, still believes that in person meetings are far more productive. Having said that, Cllr. Doyle is aware people are not attending and does not know why. This will be discussed with the CERA team, and a response will be circulated in due course.

Justin Ivory

1. Is there any opportunity for evening meetings and is it possible that polls could be created to help decide meeting times.

Cllr. Doyle explained that these are statutory meetings and dates need to be locked into place early, so polls would not work. Regarding evening meetings, if they are outside of people's regular working hours, then it is not practicable.

Cllr. Doyle

Next meeting is Friday 4th September and the date for the Tree Management Policy meeting will follow.

This concluded the business of the meeting.