

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

**Friday, 6<sup>th</sup> March 2026 - Online Meeting 10 am**

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**PRESENT:** Cllr. Erika Doyle (Cathaoirleach)  
Cllr. Danny Alvey  
Justin Ivory (PPN Representative, East Wicklow, Env Seat)  
Emma Smith (PPN Representative, West Wicklow, Env Seat)  
Anthony Ardee (Business/Commercial Representative)  
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)  
Dr. Hannah O'Kelly (Biodiversity Officer, CERA)  
Declan Keogh (Regional Energy Manager, WCC/MEEU)  
Ben Mangan (Energy Officer, WCC)  
Eoin Kelly (Administrative Officer, CERA)  
Nicole Keogh (Assistant Staff Officer, CERA)

**APOLOGIES:** Cllr. Lourda Scott  
Cllr. Peir Leonard  
Cllr. Jason Mulhall  
Michael Storan (Development/Construction Representative)  
Tom Byrne (Agricultural Representative)  
Jim Callery, Climate Action Officer

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1. **To note the minutes of the Meeting of the 14th of November 2025**

Quorum not reached. Minutes will need to be approved at subsequent meeting.

2. **To receive an update on the Wicklow County Council Energy Policy**

Ben Mangan (BM), Energy Officer was welcomed to his first Strategic Policy Committee (SPC). He delivered a presentation on the Wicklow County Council (WCC) Energy Policy. He provided an update on WCC's energy performance thus far and the ISO50001 energy management system.

As of last year's reporting, WCC are on track to reach their 2030 targets, with a strong focus on emissions from heating and transport. Since 2018, there has been a 14 % reduction in greenhouse gas emissions but with big projects such as upgrading of the swimming pools in the pipeline, WCC are on track to reach the 51% target by 2030.

Public lighting, leisure centres, the county building and the transport fleet make up 87% of WCC's energy usage. This has improved in the last year due mainly to work in County Buildings, including the installation of a heat pump.

Declan Keogh (DK) explained that BM will proceed to present the energy policy that was signed in 2023 and that the Energy Team would welcome any feedback the SPC may have. This feedback would be reviewed and incorporated into the upcoming review of the Energy Policy with the Senior Management Team.

BM proceeded to deliver a brief and informative presentation on the energy policy, which sits at the top of the Energy Management strategy for WCC and is used as the basis for the Energy Management System.

DK continued to present to the attendees on updates from the Mid-East Energy Unity (MEEU). He detailed the progress being made in the Energy Performance Contracts (EPC's) and informed the attendees of the new regional Multi Party Framework. The two Wicklow Shoreline Projects are due to be progressed; this will include energy efficiency solutions such as installation of Heat Pumps. Fabric upgrades will not play a major role, at least at the outset, due to increased cost of materials.

5 district heating schemes have been approved for the MEEU. Regarding the Arklow area, the Energy Team are awaiting the final decarbonised zone district heating study report. Once received, a further presentation will be held for the SPC. Naas, Drogheda and Maynooth district heating projects have been fully funded. All these schemes are reliant on government funding and a large commitment from the local authorities is also required.

## **Questions/Comments/Feedback**

### **Cllr Erika Doyle**

- 1) What is being done on the fleet for WCC.

BM informed Cllr. Doyle that currently the focus is mainly on energy efficiency, specifically the monitoring of fuel consumption and how much staff are driving around. Tracking of council vehicles and the implementation of a fuel card system, which will pinpoint vehicles that are underperforming are the two main ways this is being achieved.

Work is also ongoing on the use of HVO fuel in council vehicles, but this is only in its initial stages. The HVO is being looked at as a transition fuel until technology for larger vehicles improves. Regarding smaller vehicles, the Council are looking at obtaining more Electric Vehicles. It was advised that under the Clean Vehicles Directive when the Council purchases new vehicles, 40% need to run on clean energy.

It is currently unconfirmed, but there may also be a plan to hire smaller vehicles in the fleet and upgrade to higher efficiency models of larger vehicles until technology improves.

- 2) Regarding the upgrading of the Shoreline Pools, will the entire building be upgraded or just the pool area?

DK advised that the upgrade would relate to the entire building, with an investment of €4 -€5 million per building planned. Works will include heat pump installation and other decarbonising and energy efficiency upgrading works. If fabric required, it might have to come later, due to current high costs.

### **Anthony Ardee**

- 1) From a district heating point of view, is there any data for the energy that private enterprises are producing? Is there any strategy that shows the most advantageous place to situate a district heating project.

BM reported that to date, detailed modelling and simulations have been carried out mainly around the Arklow Wastewater Treatment Plant and the proposed Arklow Data Centre.

- 2) Do businesses get paid or compensated for waste heat they produce?

This depends on the model of the project and would have to be looked at on a case-by-case basis. The best example would be Amazon in Tallaght, but DK was not aware of the commercial compensation measures which apply. Also, in Drogheda, a Data Centre is being built near a hospital, so the district heating may have benefits for the hospital.

### **Emma Smith**

- 1) It is very interesting to hear about the ongoing different projects. Is there any communication to the public about them?

DK replied that launches have taken place on past projects upon completion and that there would be communications around this, for example at Bray Fire Station. Similar launches will take place when the shoreline projects are completed also but the Energy Team are aware that communication needs to be improved.

ES suggested that as an interested member of public and member of an environmental network, it is very important to improve the communications. The council should have a communication plan, which would bring the public along as a project progresses. Cllr Doyle agreed and would be happy to spread the word of such projects in her capacity as a councillor.

### **Justin Ivory**

- 1) JI concurred with the point made by Emma Smith and clarified that this is a point he has made repeatedly in this SPC in the past. Communications are not only necessary when a project ends but also as it progresses.
- 2) Are Wicklow County Council implementing battery technology in their projects - not just from solar but also during nighttime cheaper rates that are available? There is an Irish company now that are using repurposed car batteries, which are providing a much bigger capacity than what was available previously.

DK reported that WCC have about 20 solar projects across the Council's total building stock, which includes 5/6 battery projects, with a tender going out today for another project at a community centre. It was agreed that it makes more sense to install battery technology now as costs have reduced and it is on the Energy Teams radar as something that could be included more in the energy policy, but resources are limited.

BM explained that the success of using battery technology depends on the use case and it currently seems more suited to domestic projects than commercial.

Jl reiterated that if WCC have access to those lower nighttime rates, then it would be beneficial to investigate it more.

Cllr. Doyle commented that it would be safe to say all sections would benefit from more resources.

### **3. To receive an update on the Wicklow County Council Tree Management Policy**

Mary Cahill (MC) had to step away to another meeting. Sarah McCullough (SMcC) and Dr. Hannah O Kelly (HO'K) will present on this item in her absence.

SMcC shared that it was requested at the last meeting to have the Tree Management Policy on the agenda today. She shared that resources, staffing and budgets are the obstacles to implementing this policy.

Kildare County Council have a full parks team in place and it is still not enough to meet every objective. The Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) does have some very strong objectives in place, but if you consider that Objective 1.1 speaks about mapping, we don't have the resources for this. Clare County Council, for example, have developed a very good inhouse system but once mapped, the works still need to be tendered, and the budgets are still needed to implement any works. The fundamental thing to realise is that Wicklow County Council needs a Parks Section to run this policy effectively.

HO'K commented further on how she wanted to draw a distinction between the Tree Policy and the BAP. It is obvious that here is an overlap between the two policies and there is a specific action within the BAP to implement the Tree Management Policy, but it must also be noted that there is another action stating that we need sufficient resources to implement policy in general. Current resources are not sufficient to do this.

## **Questions/Comments/Feedback**

### **Emma Smith**

1) It seems like no priority has been put on this policy at all – why is this happening within a climate and biodiversity crisis?

SMcC reiterated that we need the budget to get the people and we need the people to get the budget. We know this is a priority and to have a proper program and plan in place is fundamental in the county, however we cannot do anything on this until we have the resources.

TO'B advised that it is extremely frustrating for staff that this policy cannot be progressed. A Parks Department was highlighted as a priority for this department, and even if we are successful in getting a parks superintendent in 2026, it will a bonus. If any funding becomes available, then we will look to use it. She knows that this is not satisfactory, but it is the truth.

### **Justin Ivory**

1) JI noted his awareness of the history of this project - as a member of the SPC when the original iteration of this policy was rejected, the expenditure of €10,000 on a consultant, and up to and before this current version was approved. It was agreed at the time of its approval that this policy should be updated and reviewed regularly, and that it was to be placed on hold temporarily until the completion of the BAP. It is now as if this Tree Management Policy is being kicked to touch. It was suggested that a further meeting to discuss only this specific item needs to take place to find way of implementing the policy with the current available resources.

Cllr Scott sent several points for discussion to JI on this matter and believed that it would be preferable to let Cllr Scott bring them forward herself at a future meeting.

2) Do Kildare County Council have a parks department?

SMcC replied that they do have one and it is the newest established Parks Department in the country.

3) On the first iteration of the Tree Management Policy, there was talk of purchasing software to enable blue sky mapping. He believed this was purchased by the council at the time, can this be confirmed?

HO'K confirmed that it was purchased and is currently with the Council's GIS team, which has a staff of 2. The map exists and there are 6 million trees on it. It is too large a file to upload. Although we know where the trees are, it doesn't give an idea of a

maintenance schedule or where work is required. MC, returned to the meeting and agreed that this is not the most useful.

Jl noted that there have been cases that have been resolved in the absence of large resources, and that not everything requires huge expertise, perhaps training can be offered. There are basic actions that can be achieved without a huge demand.

Cllr. Doyle will speak with SMcC, MC & HO'K to organise a meeting specifically to discuss the Tree Management Policy.

Cllr Doyle noted that this is very challenging and it will be constructive to have the meeting. Jl advised that they are here to support the council in reaching their objectives.

### **Cllr. Danny Alvey**

1) It is clear that this policy is not being implemented as he is being constantly contacted by residents and issues with developers about removing trees and hedgerows.

HOK understood why people are distressed and coming to her for answers. The reality is that there is a planning process that must be followed. There is a point where public can make submissions, but once a planning application has been approved, there is not much that can be done. WCC cannot tell people what to do on private land. It is her understanding that before a commencement notice has been issued, private landowners can do anything on their land if it is in keeping with national legislation. It is not a pleasant reality, but it is the reality. It would be great that developers when putting in applications, would retain hedgerows, but we cannot compel them to do anything outside the current guidelines.

2) Is there any plan to look at Tree Preservation Orders (TPO's) and at hiring an arborist to carry out this work? He believed this would be very valuable to residents and communities.

HO'K agreed and noted that WCC has the most TPO's in Ireland by far and away and even though they have quite a shaky legal basis, people do have respect for them. It goes through the planning section for processing but HO'K is unsure how the TPO are enforced. There is nothing to stop anyone requesting a TPO, but she would be reluctant to use a TPO as solution to obtain more tree protection. It is important to note that TPO's are only enforceable within the bounds of national legislation.

SMcC reiterated that WCC has many TPO's, yet their enforcement is dependent on staffing and resources, i.e. tree officer to go out and visit sites. Staff are needed in forward planning, to assess compliances, to assess developers etc – it all come down to resources. Once these parts are in play then developers will know there may be

consequences for not abiding by the rules. SMcC suggested that perhaps the idea of bonds might help.

### **Justin Ivory**

Jl remarked that a lot of emphasis has been placed on resources and given that €10,000 was spent on a policy which was largely ignored then surely, we can do this again. MC replied that the €10,000 was taken from the Climate Action budget, so it was not money that WCC had to spare. Any money will need to be taken from other projects.

Danny Alvey agreed and stated it is not as easy as having €10,000 free to spend as you wish. Although budgets have increased, they are all allocated. Jl noted that another way needs to be found to skin this cat.

HO'K mentioned that having another meeting to discuss the Tree Management Policy will be beneficial and it would be great if we can get a Parks staff member. However, expectations need to be managed as there is only so much one person can do. What is really needed is a team of people.

Regarding TPO's, Jl believed there is some legislation and there is legal basis for them but if it is not totally secure then maybe we need to look at acts like the Wildlife Act to help enforcement.

Regarding planning conditions, if there are no conditions to protect trees contained in planning decisions at the outset, how can it stand a chance.

Cllr Doyle highlighted that a lot of points have been raised and are worthy of discussion. A meeting date will be arranged to discuss the Tree Management Policy.

## **4. Any Other Business**

1) MC recounted an item that was raised at the last Council meeting regarding the collection and safe disposal of Nitrous Oxide canisters.

Eoin Kelly (EK) reported a huge increase in the littering of Nitrous Oxide canisters, which are deemed as hazardous waste. He is in discussions with different suppliers who may be able to collect these canisters. So far, Veoila are offering the best prices. EK has also been in touch with the Municipal Districts to try and quantify the volume of canisters we are dealing with and to assess how to move them to a location before they can be moved on for recycling and the budget for this determined. The update is that the Waste Management section is currently in the Data Gathering phase.

Jl asked if there is an option to collaborate with other Local Authorities to see if there is any economy of scale to work together and get better value.

EK has been in touch with various other Local Authorities, who are all at the start of their investigative journey. Economies of scale are beneficial, but the main issue will be transport, as the canisters need to be packaged correctly before they go anywhere, so it is not feasible to combine the canisters of WCC to another councils.

There has been some talk of producer responsibility but that must come from government, and it will be brought up at Waste Enforcement Regional Local Authorities (WERLA) meeting. In the interim, there needs to be a way to deal with them. The SPC will be kept updated. EK requested that if members of this SPC know of community groups that have a stock of canisters collected, to let the waste management section know.

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Next meeting has been scheduled for the 5<sup>th</sup> of June and will take place, in person, in the Council Chamber.

The date for the Tree Management Policy meeting will be circulated in due course.

This concluded the business of the meeting.