

Minutes of the Climate Action, Biodiversity, Environment, Energy, Marine, Recreation and Amenity Strategic Policy Committee Meeting held on Friday 9th May, 2025 at p.m., Council Chamber, County Buildings

PRESENT: Cllr. Erika Doyle (Cathaoirleach)
Cllr. Peir Leonard
Cllr. Lourda Scott
Emma Smith (PPN, West Wicklow Env. Seat)
Anthony Ardee (Business/Commercial Representative)

IN ATTENDANCE: Theresa O'Brien (T/Director of Services, CERA)
Meadhbh Quinn, (T/SEO)
Mary Cahill (T/ Senior Engineer)
Mark Costello (Climate Action Coordinator)
Hannah O'Kelly, Biodiversity Officer
Nicole Keogh (Assistant Staff Officer)

APOLOGIES: Cllr Dermot O'Brien
Cllr Jason Mulhall
Cllr Danny Alvey
Justin Ivory (PPN Representative, East Wicklow Env. Seat)
Tom Byrne (Agricultural Representative)
Austin Baines (PPN Community/Voluntary Representative)
Michael Storan (Development/Construction Representative)

Quorum of 5 SPC Members reached.

Cathaoirleach offered apologies for the change in time and location of this meeting. Assurances were given that documents will be shared in a timely manner going forward.

ES requested that what each non-elected member of the SPC represents should be noted in the minutes. Cathaoirleach agreed.

The SUDS Policy, delivered at the last SPC Meeting, was proposed by Anthony Ardee and seconded by Cllr. Erika Doyle.

1) Presentation from Hannah O'Kelly regarding the formation of our Biodiversity Action Plan and update on implementation

Cathaoirleach stated that there will be a less formal workshop held for the members of this SPC to discuss the actions of the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) in near future.

HO'K delivered a presentation entitled 'Biodiversity Action Plan Development and Implementation Update'. Topics covered included obligations in terms of Biodiversity, the BAP process i.e. development of the plan, creation of Biodiversity Working Group and development of draft actions, which will be circulated to members in the next 2 weeks. Actions included in the BAP fall under 3 areas, as follows; 1) Actions on Council managed land, 2) Landscape Scale Actions, 3) Actions with Communities. HO'K also highlighted constraints on delivering the actions, i.e. funding mechanisms to manage coastal sites.

Comments/Questions

Cllr Peir Leonard

1) The Beach Bye-Laws need to be reviewed, upgraded and enforced. Perhaps the establishment of a task force to meet regularly would help improve public knowledge and information on our coastal sites.

It was agreed to include Beach Bye-Laws on the agenda for review by this SPC.

2) Highlighted that the discussion of Green areas and biodiversity is missing off the agendas of Municipal District Meetings, where the emphasis is placed more on hard engineering.

3) Queried whether the Dune Ambassadors positions are funded.

HO'K confirmed that the positions are funded but will only be employed over the summer months.

4) Noted that the biggest threats to biodiversity are removal of forestry and zoning issues, i.e. as is the case in Glenart. Queried whether conversations are being held with Coillte in this regard.

HO'K confirmed that there is a Coillte representative on the Biodiversity Working Group. It was agreed that these threats are some of the biggest hindrances to protecting biodiversity but highlighted that elected members do play a role in zoning decisions.

Emma Smith (PPN, West Wicklow)

1) Commented that a lot of wonderful work has been undertaken but there are a lot of challenges to overcome also.

2) Would like to see a map reflecting where the BAP actions are undertaken to show their geographic spread across the County.

HO'K agreed and needs to develop a mechanism to deliver this. It is included in the BAP actions and is on the to do list. She commented that she is doing her utmost to do more for the West of the County and ensure an even spread.

3) Applauded the idea of the Dune Ambassadors.

HO'K thanked ES for her support.

4) ES recently attended a meeting with Tourism Ireland regarding their development plan where they referred to areas as 'products', which she found concerning. Queried whether WCC have had any connections/conversations with Tourism Ireland.

5) Queried when the Tree Management Policy will be reviewed.

HO'K replied that a review is due, however the policies implementation is entirely resource dependent and at the moment these resources are not available. It is important to note that the council do not hold jurisdiction over private land.

Cllr Lourda Scott

1) Appreciated that there are a lot of challenges in formulating a Biodiversity Plan and the reasons not to have a too ambitious policy, but she would advise against over caution. Wicklow County Council was the first to declare a Biodiversity emergency in 2019, so there is a need to be ambitious now in 2025.

HO'K responded that the BAP is ambitious, but it requires the help of the SPC to achieve the actions.

2) In relation to Cllr. Leonards point on planning, Cllr Scott asked how the gap between biodiversity and planning or pre planning will be bridged.

HO'K responded that she has been involved in forward planning meetings but has been advised by the Department not to get involved in planning as it will take over all other duties requiring her attention. She strongly suggested that a planning ecologist is needed.

3) Cllr Scott reiterated the need for the Tree Policy to be reviewed. It was supposed to be reviewed at the last SPC. Discussions and consultations were held and some of the actions should be completed at this stage. Cllr Scott requested that the Tree Policy be left on the Agenda. It was noted that any issues that Councillors can help with, to progress Tree Policy actions, will be addressed.

HO'K stated that some actions included in the Tree Policy are included in BAP, but noted that a lot of the actions fall to the Municipal Districts.

The Cathaoirleach stated that if any member would like any plans/policies reviewed or assessed on this SPC, then to let her know directly as she may not be aware of previous SPC work.

Anthony Ardee (Business/Commercial Representative)

1) Is the need for a planning ecologist listed as an action in the BAP?

HO'K responded that it is noted as an action in the BAP and will become more important as the plan progresses.

Cllr Erika Doyle, Cathaoirleach

1) Understood it is unfortunate that biodiversity is seen as an 'add-on' in some instances and clarified that it is the job of the Councillors to apply pressure where possible in the background to ensure that this is not the case.

Thanked HO'K for her very interesting presentation and will circulate details of workshop for SPC members early next week.

2) Presentation from Mark Costello: Climate Action Updates

MC delivered a comprehensive presentation on the Climate Action Plan.

MC outlined the various CAP policies (including the Tree Policy) that need to be delivered upon.

Since SuDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems) policy has been adopted, it has been circulated to Planning Department for their information

The Litter Management Plan public consultation period has closed and 4 submissions were received. A report for the Chief Executive is currently being drafted.

Glyphosate Policy - As part of an SLA agreement with Kildare County Council and other Local Authorities, documents have been circulated to each Municipal District and a demonstration day on May 15th.

Oyster Reef Restoration project work is ongoing, including the purchase of a sea bin.

Codling Wind Park Project - number of community groups will benefit from the Community Benefit Fund from this project. WCC looking in to the possibility of working alongside/with community groups.

Dark Sky Reserve Project is ongoing.

A successful Community Gardening Network event was held on 12th April in Clermont, Rathnew.

The launch of the 2nd phase of the Community Climate Action programme is expected at the end of May /start of June.

E Mobility Bike Schemes - currently active in Bray and is launching in Greystones next Friday. This will be followed by launches in Wicklow, Arklow and Blessington over the coming months.

EV Mower demonstration will take place in Bray Municipal District next week – 3 districts are currently using the mower.

Engagement with Youth – A third Youth Climate Conference is due to take place in November, location will be either in Wicklow or Greystones. A Youth Conference was held in Blessington in March.

The Sustainable Development Awards took place in March. Thanks were given to Sarah Rubalcava, Environmental Awareness Officer and Jim Callery, Climate Action Officer for a successful night.

Greystones Climate Action Forum - an invitation only event took place in March. Sports Clubs and businesses, among others attended. This was an information and knowledge sharing event where the attendees were informed of various funding opportunities that may be of interest.

Kilcoole Primary School – Sixth class students were named as Reading Goals Ambassadors as part of the Greystones Library UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Book Club.

Coastal Erosion update – In Brittas Bay, topographic and biometric surveyor appointed and a report is to be produced in next couple of months, including the wave over topping event which occurred in Arklow.

ECRIPP Project- A preliminary design is to be completed in April 2025.

EU Funding applications –The Climate Action team were successful in securing circa €96,000 funding as part of Sponge Works Project. Other applications submitted to EU Life and EUCF City Life Seventh Call.

Climate Action Implementation Report to be brought in front of ordinary members for adoption. This will include a status update at end of 2024.

Comments/Questions

Cllr Lourda Scott

1) Cllr Scott sought more information on the Demonstration Day on May 15th and asked if the Foamstreamer is still in use by the Municipal Districts.

MC responded that Dublin Grass Company will demonstrate a number of different products to Municipal District workers. It will be a knowledge sharing and gaining event, promoting alternative projects.

MC confirmed that the Foamstreamer is still in use but more possibly as a cleaning mechanism.

2) In terms of Communal Gardening and a motion that she brought to the Council 2 or 3 years ago, which was later adopted, Cllr Scott wondered when the strategy for communal gardening will be put in place.

MC responded that it is on the radar, however, unsure under whose remit it shall fall, i.e. Planning or Environment. LS asked for clarity on this tasks ownership for the next SPC.

Anthony Ardee (Business/Commercial Representative)

1) Sought the name of the Kildare County Council guidelines document and if it would it be possible to circulate same.

MC advised that he will share this with the Municipal District on the aforementioned Demonstration day. Wicklow County Council would need to create their own guidelines document in order to share it externally.

Emma Smith (PPN, West Wicklow)

1) ES attended the Biodiversity Conference in Blessington and found it both very motivational and inspiring and how it is vital to keep the youth included.

MC agreed it was great success.

2) ES would also like to see copy of Kildare Co Co document on alternative herbicides.

MC will look to develop an educational event on something like this in the future.

3) Although it is great to hear about all the ongoing work of the Climate Action Team, ES suggested that it may be beneficial to have a place on the www.wicklow.ie website which outlines the members of the Climate Action Team and their contact details. ES and other attendees found the website very difficult to navigate.

MC advised he would speak to communications about this.

Cllr Peir Leonard

1) Cllr Leonard asked if there would be a possibility in Arklow of having shared equipment, where funding allows, so that both Municipal District staff and those involved in Tidy Towns and Residents Associations could use them. This could both free up staff time but also aid in the completion of the overall workload.

MC is unsure whether this would be workable but advised the community groups to look into the next Phase of the Community Climate Action Programme when it launches.

2) In respect to Grass waste, Cllr. Leonard asked if there is an opportunity to take grass from the MD areas and turn it into energy.

MC acknowledged that he knows that a company in Arklow are looking at creating a biomethane plant. Kildare County Council also has a programme called 'grass to gas' and the knowledge from this is going to be shared with WCC soon.

HO'K agreed that this is a good idea however, even though WCC are encouraging wildflower methods, she is also aware that there is nowhere to take long grass off to in County Wicklow.

AA commented that every local farmer has equipment that could help with this and may be an avenue worth exploring.

3) Any Other Business

1) ES declared that the PPN were contacted by Rathdrum Tidy Towns who are very concerned about the large number of trees that have been removed recently, with a possibility of more to be removed on the Laragh Road soon. This is a further reason to review the Tree Policy sooner.

The Cathaoirleach responded that this SPC has committed today to updating this policy. The particular details of the query from Rathdrum Tidy Towns can be sent to her directly, where she will forward it on to the appropriate persons.

2) The proposed date for the informal Biodiversity workshop will be Friday 6th June in Clermont, Rathnew. It will be a whole morning event with full details to be sent out next week.

3) The next full SPC Meeting will be on 11th July at 10.30 am and will be an In-person meeting

4) ED requested any AOB requests be circulated in advance of then next SPC meeting, so that there is an opportunity to prepare.

5) Cllr. Scott raised an issue about bin collection companies leaving bins on footpaths and creating hazards. Queried whether this falls under this SPC's remit?

It was confirmed that this matter would fall under the remit of this SPC and an email should be sent to Theresa O'Brien with all the details.

6) Cllr. Scott asked if presentations could be circulated well in advance of the next meeting so that they can be examined and questions prepared.

The Cathaoirleach responded that this is the aim for future.

7) Cllr. Leonard noted that the Marine falls under this SPC. She was aware that there was a marine strategic review but not sure if any follow up occurred. Cllr. Leonard requested organisation of a focus group or forum on marine matters as there is nowhere at the moment for input on this subject.

It was agreed to place this on the agenda.

8) Noted that the Casual Trading Bye-Laws may need to be reviewed.

9) In terms of the Arts, Cllr. Leonard would like to see a geographical spread of funding throughout county.

Next Strategic Policy Committee Meeting will be held on July 11th, 2025.

Meeting concluded.