

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

Friday, 14th November 2025 - Online Meeting 10.30am

PRESENT: Cllr. Erika Doyle (Cathaoirleach)
Cllr. Lourda Scott
Cllr. Peir Leonard
Cllr. Danny Alvey
Cllr. Dermot O’Brien
Cllr. Jason Mulhall
Austin Baines (Community/Voluntary Representative)
Justin Ivory (PPN Representative, East Wicklow, Env Seat)
Emma Smith (PPN Representative, West Wicklow, Env Seat)
Anthony Ardee (Business/Commercial Representative)

IN ATTENDANCE: Theresa O’Brien (Director of Services, CERA)
Mary Cahill (Senior Engineer, CERA)
Mark Costello (Climate Action Coordinator, CERA)
Dr. Hannah O’Kelly (Biodiversity Officer, CERA)
Aisling Hubbard (Sports Administrator, CERA)
Jonathan Sexton (Executive Scientist, CERA)
Grainne O’Neill (Administrative Officer, CERA)
Eoin Kelly (Administrative Officer, CERA)
Nicole Keogh (Assistant Staff Officer, CERA)

APOLOGIES: Tom Byrne (Agricultural Representative)
Michael Storan (Development/Construction Representative)

1. To note the Minutes of the Meeting of the 26th of September

Emma Smith (ES) suggested one amendment to the minutes of the 26th of September.

ES wished to clarify that she does not currently work with Margaret Birchall of the Council Library and would like the minutes amended to reflect this.

The minutes of the CABEEMRA SPC meeting of the 26th of September were then proposed by Cllr Scott and seconded by Cllr Alvey.

2. To receive a presentation on Fish Barriers

A comprehensive presentation was delivered by Mary Cahill (MC). Faith Wilson of the East Wicklow Rivers Trust (EWRT) was credited with most of the content of said presentation.

The presentation noted that over 70,000 fish barriers are in situ throughout the country and there is an onus now to remove them as they act as an obstacle to fish migrating and spawning upstream.

The presentation focused primarily on the works undertaken in the Ballinglen River. A fish barrier was erected in the river after Hurricane Charlie in the 1980's, as part of remedial works, to strengthen the bridge, which was left damaged after the storms. The current water quality in the river is noted as 'very high' by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) but in relation to the rivers' hydro morphology, its' status is listed 'not high' – which results in the rivers overall status classified as 'good'.

Led by the EWRT, the project was funded and facilitated to different levels by various stakeholders, particularly Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI), as well as the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO) and Wicklow County Council.

Rivus was the contractor that was appointed to design the 6 ramps, made from local stone, to bring the level of the water back up over the level of the apron.

The budget for this project, which would not be deemed as a large project, was €125,000. The resultant works have led to the reopening of 41km of ideal spawning habitat, which has not been accessible since the 1980's. The EPA have not upgraded the status of the river from 'Good', but it is hoped this will happen over time.

In September 2025, IFI carried out a survey of the river post works and found that some small numbers of smolt and Lamprey have migrated. Although small numbers at present, it is expected that in 2026 numbers will increase. A further barrier in Aughrim will be removed in the future which will also improve migration to this area of the Ballinglen river.

Questions/Comments

1) Cllr O'Brien queried whether members of the public and communities are aware of this project and what is being done to promote this newsworthy work. It was suggested that a comic /children's style book might be useful to promote the project to the younger generation.

MC and Justin Ivory (JI) agreed that LAWPRO will have a role in its promotion and liked Cllr O'Brien's idea of the story book for children.

JI also reported that the barrier project in Aughrim has commenced with capital works funding from IFI currently being sought. This project will be more expensive than Ballinglen but more funding may also be available from sources such as the Water Action Plan.

2) Cllr Leonard noted that she was involved in this project in its very early stages and holds the belief that money being spent in an area like this is very worthwhile and that Ecological Engineering should be incorporated and/or taken into consideration where possible, in all Council works going forward.

Cllr Leonard also suggested a huge gap exists between scientific knowledge and the community interest in projects such as this, and this is something that needs to be examined, alongside increased promotion in the media.

3) Dr Hannah O'Kelly (HO'K) agreed with Cllr O'Brien's point that there needs to be more communication, but it must be remembered that the EWRT are working on a shoestring budget.

HO'K further noted that the expenditure of €125,000 to complete this project is excellent value for money given the positive outcomes it will yield.

4) Cllr Doyle queried that if the apron was installed as flood mitigation work in the 1980's, what will happen now in the event of flooding. MC clarified that the works were not flood mitigation works, but remedial works to the bridge after damage from Hurricane Charlie.

It was highlighted that there would be at least a few hundred fish barriers around the county of Wicklow of varying sizes.

MC noted that there are other routes to completion of projects such as this one, but that the Council's hands are tied in terms of the tendering process on who can carry out the works.

Cllr Doyle suggested that from an elected representative perspective, now that they have a deeper knowledge of the project, a site visit to the Ballinglen river may be a good idea

3. To receive a presentation on the delivery of a 'Wicklow County Council – Sports Action Plan'

Aisling Hubbard (AH) delivered an in-depth presentation about the Wicklow County Council Sports Action Plan.

The tender process is currently underway to choose a consultant to develop a local sports plan for the county. Under the National Sports Policy

all counties in Ireland are required to create a Sports Action Plan. The main objective is to get 50% of adults taking part in sport at least once a week.

Wicklow presently have a reactive rather than proactive approach to sports development in the county.

There are multiple reasons why the creation of a Sports Action plan will be advantageous, for example, it's creation will enable evidence-based decision making, promote collaboration, provide measurable targets, strengthen funding applications and align capital investment within a strategic plan.

The plan will have both a capital and a participation element (inclusion, diversity). It will involve stakeholder engagement and alignment to existing county policies. This strategic alignment will also help ensure Value for Money. It will be a 5-year plan, which needs to be realistic so that it can be achieved.

The creation and implementation of the Sports Action Plan will improve and further develop existing facilities, will lead to stronger collaboration and reduce duplication and maximise efficiency. It will also act as a reference point for planning section to deal with developers and generally improve participation rates, support health, wellbeing and inclusion throughout the County.

It was explained that the Sports Action Plan is at a very early stage in its development, but the members of this SPC will be kept up to date.

Questions/Comments

1) ES was delighted that this plan is in development. She noted her interest in seeing the development of more facilities in the west of the County and hopes that a plan like this will help this cause.

She also queried what timescale is envisaged for this plans completion.

AH replied that including the west of the county is very important and mentioned the work of Blessington Basketball Club, which was noted by Cllr Mulhall and the refurbishment of Baltinglass Park which the council funded and was host to its first park run last weekend, which over 100 children attended.

It is envisaged that the plan will be completed around the end of the Summer 2026.

2) Cllr Alvey was delighted to hear this news, as it is long overdue. He would like to encourage sports partnership to liaise with sports bodies in Newtown and Wicklow areas. When submitting proposals to the Wicklow Town - Rathnew Local Area Plan earlier in the year, it would have been easier if a plan like this was in place.

3) Cllr O'Brien agreed that it is brilliant to have this plan in the works. It is attempting to shift the culture of how sports are undertaken in County Wicklow. It is not 'what are you doing' but 'how can we work together' – he believed that the cohesion piece is the biggest challenge but also the biggest advantage.

AH noted that this is a Wicklow Local Authority led plan. Both Sarah McCullough and the Planning Directorate will also help in its formulation.

4) Austin Baines (AB) thanked AH for a great presentation and this good news. AB queried whether unstructured play and unstructured sports – particularly in relation to teenagers, would be considered in this plan as not all teenagers want to be part of a team or a club. AB felt that this is

something that is normally overlooked and hopes that will be given consideration.

AH responded that unstructured play does fall under the council's remit and it will form a big part of the new plan. There is an existing WCC Play Policy, which needs to be renewed and could also possibly run alongside this new plan. AH referenced the 'Make Space for Girls 'project in the UK. Cllr Doyle commented that she was a big fan of this UK project and would love to be involved in any future stakeholder engagement in this area.

5) Anthony Ardee (AA) spoke about wider community stakeholders and noted that sports businesses of all types in the county need to be included and named in the plan, i.e. gyms, personal trainers, adventure tourism, surf schools, physios, yoga teachers etc. He believed that they have an important role to play in implementing this new plan.

AA also queried whether the economic impact of sport be included in this plan.

AH concurred and noted that consultation with sports businesses will be undertaken.

6) Cllr Leonard highlighted a need for the mapping of green /passive spaces that are outside the ownership of clubs and to formulate a plan around that.

Cllr Leonard also stated that it would be good to see a register of what land is leased to sports clubs and link it in with Planet Youths for example.

Grainne O'Neill (GO'N) responded that this register is being created now. AH stated that this is a great and worthwhile idea but also a huge undertaking.

Cllr Leonard emphasised a need to capitalise on our marine areas more - further encouragement and awareness of the potential of our marine areas is needed.

AH agreed with this point and stated that the existing area in Arklow near the Leisure Centre is probably one of the biggest areas for recreational potential in the County.

7) JI thanked AH for her brilliant presentation. He echoed AB's point around the importance of the inclusion of unstructured play and how the existing gap in this area needs to be filled.

In relation to water-based sports, JI commented that they need to be accessible from a financial point of view and it would be nice to have opportunities for people from all economic backgrounds.

AH agreed but stated that the Council's hands are somewhat tied with what businesses charge for their activities.

JI commended the idea of increased collaboration and used the recent example of the development of the Greystones Sports Charter as a prime example.

However, he was eager for everyone to understand that all these projects need to be developed with Biodiversity in mind.

8) Cllr Mulhall commended AH on her presentation and noted that it was a very topical issue with many people crying out for facilities in their communities. He stated that one problem seems to be lots of clubs, groups and schools that do not want to share their facilities.

AH commented that she is aware of this issue and will hope to create a standalone school's group, where access to and expanding the use of their facilities can be discussed.

Cllr Mulhall also commented that within the West Wicklow area, many groups have been undertaking work themselves, and it may be possible get those people engaged in the plan.

AH agreed and expressed her intention to include more clubs and groups and to create more multi use and multi-disciplinary facilities. She also noted that as Council resources are finite, there will be a need to be protective of what we do have and to use these in the most effective way to ensure the inclusion of a huge range of people, clubs and disciplines.

9) Cllr Alvey shared how the Working Group that was created to help in the formulation of the Biodiversity Plan was hugely beneficial to the plans development and this may be something that AH might be interested in using for the Sports Action Plan.

AH agreed that she will discuss this possibility further with HO'K.

4. To receive an update on the draft Wicklow Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) 2025-2030 (for approval)

Cllr Doyle explained that the Biodiversity Action Plan is being put forward for approval at the meeting today so that it can go in front of the full Council meeting for adoption in December.

HO'K delivered a brief verbal update.

The huge amount of work and support received from the working group was noted as invaluable to this plan's creation.

The Plan has been sent out for both AA and SEA screening, with the final screening reports to be received back soon.

The Final plan is currently being designed and translated, with the aim of bringing it to the to the full council meeting in December.

HOK felt that the biodiversity section of the plan was a little bare and so employed the services of Richard Nairn to work on it.

All attendees have received the Draft CE report and all updates available to this point.

Questions/Comments

1) Cllr O'Brien wanted to acknowledge this huge piece of work and noted his appreciation of the evolution of this document over time. Cllr O'Brien is of the opinion that the language of the collective is present in the document.

Cllr O'Brien hoped that this document, somewhere in the future, would be the reference point and anchor document for every group or individual who is involved in biodiversity work in the County. It needs to be made available to all.

2) ES offered a huge congratulations to HO'K on a very impressive plan and echoed the sentiments of Cllr O'Brien on its collective nature.

ES highlighted that on page 40 of the Plan and again in Appendix A, the term West Wicklow Environmental 'Group' is used, when it should state West Wicklow Environmental 'Network', unless it is referring to a different group that ES is not aware of.

3) Cllr Erika Doyle extended her thanks to HO'K on behalf of everyone for making the effort to include all different perspectives and opinions.

4) JI also thanked HO'K and suggested he would like to see an infographic version of the plan alongside a normal version made available at key locations to the public and online.

HO'K mentioned the possibility of circulating the adopted Plan to the schools via the Green Schools Programme and she will speak to the Environmental Awareness Officer in this regard.

Jl mentioned that in the CE report, a lot of submissions were received that stated the Plan is tied to national legislation which may act as a barrier to this plans progress. Jl queried that if this is to be the case, how will this be overcome.

HO'K commented that there is not much that she as an individual can do but possibly through the larger country wide Biodiversity Officer network, issues or problems can be raised at a higher level. This is an issue that all Biodiversity Officers in the country are cognisant of.

5)Cllr Leonard conveyed her concern about how this plan will be cross populated across all sections of the Council, for example, how the actions of other Council policies or plans, i.e. Local Area Plans, would not contradict actions within the Biodiversity Action Plan.

HO'K responded that in the development of this plan, a considerable amount of time was put into internal consultation, and it is hoped that in time, other sections will seek advice from HO'K. In fact, this has happened to a certain extent already.

HO'K reiterated her opinion that the Council is in desperate need of a Planning Ecologist and that although she has a positive working relationship with the Forward Planning section, she is restricted in deepening this collaboration in terms of time and resources.

6) Cllr Scott communicated she would like to see the document published in plain English.

Also, regarding Cllr Leonards point around aligning actions of the BAP with Local Area Plans and other council plans, Cllr Scott noted that Councillors ultimately do vote on such Plans, so the Councillors do have some power here.

HO'K thanked all present for their congratulations and noted it is great to think that it will have an impact on so many different people.

HO’K shared that it feels as if interest in biodiversity has dwindled a bit recently and reminds everyone that there still is a Biodiversity emergency but hopes the focus will return with the arrival of the Nature Restoration Plan next year. NPWS are under pressure with this plan and will more than likely need help from all Council’s.

MC and Theresa O’Brien (TO’B) thanked HO’K and the working group on bringing this plan together.

The Biodiversity Action Plan was proposed by Cllr Doyle and seconded by Emma Smith.

The Plan will now go in front of the full council at the December meeting.

Cllr Leonard requested that the Tree Policy be placed on the agenda for the next meeting in 2026.

Also, Cllr O’Brien requested that the Nature Restoration Plan be placed on the agenda for discussion next year, once it has been developed.

Cllr Doyle shared she will be meeting with TO’B, MC and SMcC soon to discuss meeting dates for next year and they will be circulated in due course.

This concluded the business of the meeting.