

**MINUTE OF THE MEETING OF THE CLIMATE & BIODIVERSITY ACTION STRATEGIC POLICY
COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 8TH APRIL, 2021 AT 2.30 P.M.**

PRESENT: Cllr. Rory O'Connor, Chairman
Cllr. Jodie Neary
Cllr. Dermot O'Brien
Cllr. Peir Leonard
Cllr. Lourda Scott
Ms. Sharon Jackson
Mr. Gary McKenzie

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms. Theresa O'Brien, Senior Executive Officer
Ms. Mary Cahill, Senior Executive Engineer
Mr. Jim Callery, A/Environmental Awareness Officer
Ms. Deirdre Burns, Heritage Officer

Item 1: To note the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 11th February 2021.

Item 2: Matters Arising from the Minutes

Cllr. L. Scott raised an issue with Item 6 of the Minutes:

Cllr. P. Leonard queried the status of the Biodiversity Action Plan which was 2010- 2015 and queried if it was out of date. Ms. Burns confirmed that the Plan is 2010 – 2015. However the Plan was incorporated into the Heritage Plan which is 2017 – 2022 which includes biodiversity actions. Going forward she would like to see the County Wicklow Heritage and Biodiversity Plan introduced."

Item 3: Presetnation by Donal O'Keeffe

The Chairman and Ms. Cahill welcomed Mr. Donal O'Keeffe, Community Officer, Lawpro to the meeting.

Mr. O'Keeffe stated that within Lawpro were 30 Catchment Scientists, 13 Community Water Officers and 3 Regional Co-ordinators. He is currently working with the Midlands and East Office.

Some of Lawpro's work involves

- Raising awareness
- Caring for Water Courses
- Stories from the Waterside. A competition that was held in 2020
- 124 meetings in relation to the River Basin and Management Plan 2021. Further meetings will be held shortly in 2021.
- Water Shortage Day in consultation with Ms. D. Burns.

- Illustrations / Short animation videos produced explaining the work of Lawpro.
- Citizen Science Initiative
- Community information evenings and farmer information evenings are held to ascertain the issues in the Catchment area. Water quality samples are taken
- Work with Local Authorities on data collected. A report is prepared on the data collected and sent to certain bodies.
- Training of groups
- Support funding of water related projects.
- Support Leader Projects.

Mr. O’Keeffe referred to the Community Development Funding which aims to improve / enhance water quality and improve amenities.

Lawpro works closely with the PPN, the Environmental Awareness Officer, the Heritage Officer together with local groups such as the Tidy Towns.

One project which Lawpro is working on at the moment is the Fish Barrier Mitigation Project which is a collaborative project between Wicklow County Council, East Wicklow Rivers Trust, Inland Fisheries Ireland and Lawpro. The priority site for 2021 is Ballinglen Bridge. Funding is currently being sought from the Atlantic Salmon Trust.

Mr. O’Keeffe posed the following questions

- Can we work on a policy to protect aquatic biodiversity?
- What policy can we develop in our uplands to protect water resources?
- How can the Climate and Biodiversity Action SPC help to protect against climate change and flooding?

The Chairman thanked Mr. O’Keeffe for his presentation. He stated that one of the struggles for the Climate and Biodiversity Action SPC was communication with the farmers locally and queried Lawpro’s approach to communicating with the farming groups. Mr. O’Keeffe stated that from his experience of working with Wicklow County Council in pollution control the ‘stick approach’ was used, where you were contacting the farmer under the Pollution Act. However Lawpro’s approach was different. They contacted the farmers separately from the Community Groups to get their opinions and suggestions. They usually go through the local IFA branch. Farmers like to talk specifically about their point of view. Teagasc is also on board with Lawpro.

Ms. Cahill referred to a conference she had attended recently on Re-Imaging Rivers where a farmer from Waterford spoke who made an excellent presentation on biodiversity regeneration. The Green Party had also recently made an announcement that farmers could get grant funding to carry out works along the rivers on their land.

Cllr. J. Neary queried if the SPC Members should be setting up a separate policy on aquatic biodiversity or if it should be part of our Climate Action Plan? Wicklow will have to produce a new Climate Action Plan incorporating mitigation and adaptation into the Plan. Mr.

O’Keeffe felt that it should be a very significant section within the overall plan as well protecting the wetlands and biodiversity.

Cllr. P. Leonard referred to the East Wicklow Rivers Trust who are looking at trying to get information / educational items together. Funding was needed to roll these out.

Cllr. D. O’Brien stated that the visibility of Lawpro was testament to the work that they are doing. He queried if there was a timeframe for the work of Lawpro going forward. He also referred to biodiversity and queried the commitment of communities that are living away from the rivers and importance of raising awareness of the importance of rivers to all aspects of our lives.

Mr. O’Keeffe stated that the third cycle of the Programme was from 2022 to 2027 which is a six year programme. Lawpro is mentioned in the Programme for Government. Verbally they have been informed that Lawpro will be around for the next cycle. A lot of people travel to the water. All tourism in Ireland is beside coasts. Awareness needs to be raised. Pollution issues are not understood.

The Chairman thanked Mr. O’Keeffe for his presentation.

Item 4: To review the shortlist of zones proposed for Decarbonisation and make recommendation

Mr. J. Callery stated that an exercise had been carried out on different towns in the County. One town from each of the Municipal Districts was selected and each were scored based on

- Energy
- Travel / Transport
- Citizen Engagement
- Environment
- Food
- Circular Economy

The towns were examined with regard to existing facilities in the towns and the opportunities available. A 7% reduction in emissions has to be achieved in order to meet our target by 2030.

The towns that were looked at were Arklow, Wicklow, Bray, Blessington, Greystones, Laragh / Glenmalure (this area already had an SEC who had completed their Energy Master Plan). Newtown 2050 had made a proposal to the County Council and as a result four villages of Newtownmountkennedy, Kilcoole, Newcastle and Kilpedder were also looked at.

In relation to the housing stock, regard was had to the age profile and the BER of the houses in the area.

Mr. Callery went through the top 3 areas which had scored the most:

1. Arklow
2. 4 villages of Newtownmountkennedy / Kilcoole / Newcastle and Kilpedder

3. Bray

Arklow

Arklow had a lot of older houses with good opportunities for retrofitting. There is a good amount of Local Authority housing stock together with private estates. Arklow has the advantage of SSE Airtricity and off shore wind. Data centres are proposed for the area who are high energy users and therefore offers potential to propose working with them on the waste heat. There are good public transport proposals together with active travel.

4 Villages – Newtownmountkennedy / Kilcoole / Newcastle and Kilpedder

The proposal received from Newtown 2050 was to look at 9 villages including Roundwood, Annamoe and Laragh, however it was felt that the proposal should be curtailed as the four villages proposed could be linked through active travel. There is off road cycleways linking to Greystones where the DART is available. Newtown and Kilcoole are large towns with over 4,000 inhabitants in each. There are a number of estates suitable for retrofitting. Newtown has one private house estate which would provide opportunities for retrofitting. It was felt that this area wouldn't have the same opportunities in relation to industry / housing as the larger towns.

Wicklow

Wicklow has a strong Town Team, Tidy Towns and SEC. There is good housing stock in the area, especially if you include Rathnew where there is a large amount of Local Authority housing stock suitable for retrofitting. There is also a large County Council presence in the area together with good public transport and remote working strengths. Wicklow Port also has potential for works.

The Chairman stated that energy was very important and referred to the data centres. Wicklow could have more data centres coming up that could affect the scores into the future. Dublin had a policy in place that an energy company would be set up to deal with the waste arising from such centres.

Mr. J. Callery stated that data centres wanted to locate near renewables. Wicklow is going to be a very attractive location for data centres. Proposals for working with the Companies in relation to the waste heat should be developed.

Cllr. J. Neary queried what supports would be available to the towns who were chosen and queried if the area that is chosen is seen as a test pilot.

Mr. J. Callery confirmed that the Team had not been made aware of any funding opportunities / resources that will be made available and it was a test bed. One area is chosen, the problems ascertained and then it is proposed to roll it out, as quickly as possible to other areas in the County.

Cllr. Neary suggested that clarification should be sought from the Department to ascertain what resources would be available to decarbonise.

Cllr. Neary confirmed she had met with Newtown 2050. She felt that the hinterland / rural areas should be included as these have other issues such as post Covid access, broadband, remote working. If it worked for the hinterland area then it would work for the larger towns and stated that if clarification was received in relation to the funding and resources that are available to areas for decarbonisation, she would propose option number 2.

Mr. J. Callery stated that the four villages scored strong in a number of areas but a lot of their proposals were only at preplanning stage. One of the concerns was that the greenway proposal was not included in a Plan. Progression should be made with the Newtown 2050 Committee in order to get the area ready for the next stage of implementation.

Cllr. P. Leonard queried the measurements used in each town. Mr. J. Callery confirmed that the housing stock (type, number / age and BER) was taken into account together with travel projects in the pipeline, different industries in each of the areas and the potential to work with them. He confirmed the aim of the exercise was to choose the first area in the County to decarbonise and ensure that the 7% target is reached.

Cllr. L. Scott queried the timeframe for the process and also what the baseline year was. Mr. Callery confirmed that the Circular from the Department stated that an area had to be chosen before the 30th April 2021 but it didn't set out timeframes for completion. Over the course of the next few weeks work would commence on the proposal and what will be carried out in the town. Ms. Cahill confirmed that an implementation plan had to be completed before the end of the year.

Cllr. L. Scott stated that Arklow was ready to start the project, however she stated that if this was going to be a true pilot a rural community should be involved and queried if a harder test area should be considered and see what the potential downfalls were.

Ms. M. Cahill stated that very little guidance on selecting areas had been received. She had discussed the issue with CARO. The fact that the greenway route was not in a Plan was a distinct disadvantage for the four villages. The Management Team had discussed the proposals and were reluctant to go with the four villages in the absence of the greenway being in a Plan.

Ms. Jackson queried when the areas not selected initially would be brought on board. Mr. Callery confirmed that the roll out to other areas would begin as quickly as possible as resources allow. He referred to Blessington where most of the housing stock was built between 2000 and 2010 and where there isn't a lot of older housing stock which could give rise to retrofitting opportunities. The population of the chosen town has to be over 5,000. Blessington doesn't have the scale of projects like other towns on the east of the County. He acknowledged that there were plans for transport and active travel. He stated that discussions needed to take place to advance projects.

Cllr. O'Brien stated that a lot of extra work was being created and queried what extra resources were available. Ms. Cahill confirmed that she was not aware as to whether or not the project would be outsourced to consultants. She advised the Members that a Climate Action Plan would need to be drawn up once direction was received from Government.

Cllr. J. Nearly queried if clarity could be sought about additional resources, staffing and funding. A phenomenal amount of work was coming down the track. She requested that this item be placed on the Agenda for a future meeting.

Ms. T. O'Brien stated that very rarely funding is allocated for staff for such projects. Additional staff would be sought but there has been no indication that additional staff would be allocated.

Cllr. Neary referred to the NTA and the additional 12 staff which will be working for Wicklow County Council and queried if some of them could work with the Climate Action Team.

Ms. O'Brien stated that they were all Active Travel staff and many of them are engineering staff that will work out on the road projects. She confirmed that no correspondence had been received to confirm that any of the staff would work on Climate Action. She confirmed that Ms. Cahill worked with the District Engineers on projects that are being rolled out and has asked that Climate Action is taken into account. The Active Travel Staff will have strict deadlines and will be extremely busy in order to meet their own deadlines.

Cllr. Scott also referred to the tree policy which is going to require additional resources. She stated that a case needs to be made for a full time landscape architect / biodiversity officer to link in with all projects. She also referred to the phenomenal amount of work coming on track including the Climate Action Plan, the Decarbonisation Zone, etc and felt that a case should be made for additional resources. If additional staff is not forthcoming, targets will not be met and felt that now is the time that something should be done.

Ms. O'Brien stated that the Team was very aware of their needs. She stated the problem was that every Directorate within the Council had the same issue. More expertise is needed. She referred to the additional resources that was allocated for the short term letting project and that perhaps additional resources would be made available but the Team was not aware of any at the moment.

Cllr. P. Leonard stated that there was a gap in accessing funding to roll out biodiversity projects. A full time biodiversity officer / landscape architect is required who would be able to design the project and give visuals in order to access and roll out the funding. There is no point in accessing funding if the technical expertise is not available to roll the projects out.

Ms. Cahill stated that a recommendation of the chosen town needed to be made to the Chief Executive who wished to bring it to the full Council meeting next week.

Ms. O'Brien confirmed that if correspondence is received in relation to the provision of additional staff, she would inform the Members.

Ms. Jackson felt that a request should be made for additional resources and at least the request would be on record.

Ms. O'Brien confirmed that the Climate Action Team were constantly looking at grants and funding streams available. The issue with funding opportunities is, first of all, there is a complex application form to be completed and then if approved, 100% grant aid is not forthcoming, there is always a shortfall of between 30 and 35% which needs to be financed from the Council. Ms. O'Brien confirmed that additional funding would be sought from next year's Budget allocation.

It was agreed that the Climate and Biodiversity Action SPC Members endorsed Arklow as the recommended town for a Decarbonisation Zone.

Item 5. To discuss the following policies:

(i) Lighting Policy

Ms. Cahill referred to the PLEEP which the Roads Department are managing. Guidelines for public lighting already exist and Transportation Water and Emergency Services comply with these guidelines. Ms. Cahill agreed to circulate Guidelines for Public Lighting 2017 to the Members. It makes reference to the British Standards. Ms. Cahill recommended that instead of this SPC drawing up a new policy that a letter should be issued to the Director of the Roads Department asking him to review the policy and that this SPC would have an input into it. The review should consider Dark Sky Ireland Best Practice for Public Lighting.

Ms. Jackson stated that she would circulate some information that she had recently received in relation to concerns on public lighting to the Members and the Team. She requested that the information be included on the Agenda for the next meeting. The Chairman confirmed that he wouldn't endorse it before he read it.

Ms. Cahill stated that the issues that Ms. Jackson raised would be forward to TWES for inclusion in the review if possible.

It was agreed Ms. O'Brien and Ms. O'Reilly would write to the Director of Roads to ask for the policy to be updated and that this SPC would be able to link into that update and make a submission.

Cllr. L. Scott stated that making a submission on the policy didn't mean that the Roads Department would have to take it into account. She requested that the importance of the submission from the Climate and Biodiversity Action SPC would be made clear to the Roads Department to ensure that it is taken on board. She requested that the item be left on the Agenda until it is concluded.

Ms. O'Brien confirmed that Climate Action is not just a function for the Environment Section or the Climate and Biodiversity Action SPC. All of Wicklow Local Authorities is very much aware of climate action. A lot of the staff in the Roads Department are very biodiversity and climate action friendly. If this Committee made a submission to the Roads Department it will be taken very seriously and will be included in any update of the policy. Climate action is throughout all the Departmental Plans and the Corporate Plan.

The Chairman agreed that the lighting policy would be kept on the Agenda.

Cllr. P. Leonard stated that she had some documentation in relation to protecting roadside verges from being destroyed and would send same to Ms. P. O'Reilly for circulation to the Members and to the Team.

(ii) Tree Policy

The Chairman sought clarity on the definition of a significant tree. Ms. Burns confirmed that professional tree survey would be carried out to identify the age etc of the tree.

Cllr. L. Scott stated that it was difficult to understand the document which had been circulated to the Members without having the full context of the report. Ms. Burns confirmed that only chapters 8 and 9 had been circulated to the Members as it was felt that these contained the actions. The rest of the document was very much in draft form which the Team still needed to go through and case studies needed to be added. She confirmed that the whole document would be circulated to the Members for their consideration.

Cllr. Scott referred to the critical need to know what trees are in the County and emphasised the need for a Tree Officer. A strategy should be to look at private trees and to work in consultation with other stakeholders.

Ms. Cahill confirmed that the Team had received a demonstration from Blue Sky Mapping who had flown Wicklow late 2019 / early 2020 and had very good clear images. Four data sets were available at a total cost of €30,000 which, if purchased, would give the Council a complete data terrain of the County. The Climate Action Team would purchase the data set on trees at a cost of €10,000 and she was, at the moment, seeking funding from other Departments within the Council in order to purchase the other three data sets. The service with Blue Sky Mapping would need to be reviewed every three years.

Cllr. J. Neary also referred to the issue of staffing and the employment of a tree officer.

Cllr Leonard stated that as less trees should be removed so therefore money and resources allocated to the felling of trees should be transferred to other projects in each Municipal District area.

In response to a query from Ms. S. Jackson, Mr. J. Callery confirmed that there will be a section on the website on the Tree Strategy.

Cllr. L. Scott referred to tree felling and reports recently that trees had been felled in Avondale. She stated that it should be included in the Strategy that there needs to be additional staff and a new Parks Department.

Ms. Burns explained that in relation to tree felling, national legislation is very weak. In relation to the felling of trees, Ms. Burns stated that this is a matter for the Forest Service to ascertain if a tree felling licence was in place and not Wicklow County Council.

Cllr. P. Leonard queried who granted licences for tree felling? Ms. Burns confirmed that Wicklow County Council did not grant licences for tree felling, that this was a matter for the Forest Service. She stated that Coillte would apply to the Forest Service who would consult with Wicklow County Council. The correspondence would be forwarded to the Municipal District Engineer for his comments. Wicklow County Council would report back to the Forest Service and indicate if there were any TPOS, if the trees were in a protected structure area or view. Wicklow County Council only acts as a consultee.

Ms. M. Cahill referred to a Notice of Motion which had been received from Cllr. Mary Kavanagh

Notice of motion number 8

Proposed by Cllr. Mary Kavanagh and supported by Councillors Peir Leonard, Joe Behan and Tom Fortune (22nd February, 2021)

“The benefits of trees for air filtration, habitats for birds and insects, a food source for pollinators and mental health benefits are well documented. We wish propose the following: That no healthy tree within a townscape, streetscape or public realm area be removed without at least two weeks prior notice to Councillors stating the reason for removal. Damaged or diseased trees or those that pose an immediate safety risk to be exempt from said notice period. That a register of trees be kept by each Municipal District with trees for inclusion to be agreed by Municipal District Cllrs and staff. That the motion, if passed, be forwarded to the Climate Change & Biodiversity SPC for inclusion in the upcoming Tree Strategy.

Response: *Standing orders provides that any Notice of Motion of which notice has been duly given relates to a matter normally dealt with by a Committee(s) or municipal district or comes within the terms of reference of any Committee(s) or municipal district, it shall be referred to such Committee(s) or municipal district as the meetings administrator may determine. Any dispute on such reference shall be determined by the Council. The elected member was advised that this motion was being referred to the Environment SPC for consideration however insisted that it be placed on the agenda.*

The motion should be forwarded to the Environment SPC and each MD for consideration prior to being considered by the plenary Council. From discussion with the Bray MD the motion fails to mention reasons for other tree removals that are justified and may not warrant prior notice such as:-

- *where a tree/s are causing, or have the potential to cause, structural damage*
- *where a tree/s, by virtue of species, size and future growth, is likely to impinge on property in its immediate vicinity,*
- *where recommended by an Arborist*

2 weeks notice should be reduced to 1 week notice and it must be noted/accepted that the MD in notifying the elected members are not seeking consent but rather advising and giving the reasons why the tree should be removed. In relation to the keeping of a register of trees the Bray MD have been carrying out tree surveys & assessments on a 3 to 4 year basis for a number of years for example and while there is not a comprehensive map of these, those assessed would be tagged.

The Chairman stated that the response of the Climate and Biodiversity Action SPC to the Notice of Motion should be that most of the items raised in the Notice is already contained within the Tree Strategy.

Cllr. P. Leonard stated that the Notice of Motion was an interim measure until the Tree Strategy was in place.

Ms. Cahill confirmed that comments made by the Members in relation to chapters 8 and 9 will be sent to Ms. Sophia Meeres who was compiling the Strategy and that if the Members had any further comments they should email Ms. P. O'Reilly who would arrange to forward same onto Ms. Meeres.

Ms. Burns stated that it was hoped a draft should be available in the next 6 to 8 weeks.

Cllr. L. Scott stated that at a previous meeting it was agreed that the draft Strategy would be circulated to the PPN for public consultation.

(iii) Alternative to Glyphosate Policy

Ms. Cahill confirmed that there was national policy contained on the Department of Agriculture's website in relation to this. She would circulate same to the Members. She suggested that perhaps our policy would be one page referring to the guidelines on the Department of Agriculture's website. A record sheet on the usage of glyphosate is also available on the Department's website which the Team will be implementing.

The Chairman referred to the fact that only one foamstream machine had been purchased by the Team. He acknowledged the price of the machine but felt that there should be a policy whereby an additional machine should be purchased - one machine for the east of the County and one for the West of the County.

Ms. Cahill stated that Bray Municipal District would lease a trailer for the machine from the Climate Action Budget. There are delays in the delivery of the trailer due to Covid.

Ms. Cahill referred to a Study being carried out by Kildare County Council and to which Wicklow County Council would be contributing €6,000 per annum for the next few years. Kildare County Council will be employing a Masters Student to carry out a research project looking at different sites under 13 different categories and looking at alternatives to the usage of weedkillers.

Kevin Scanlon, Wicklow Municipal District, had also used a tractor and wire brush which he had been using on the Port Road in Wicklow as an alternative but which he had to stop using due to HR issues.

Cllr. P. Leonard referred to the wire brush machine and cautioned about the running costs of the alternatives to glyphosate. She stated that the wire brushes needed to be replaced quite regularly at a high cost.

Cllr. J. Nearly stated that there was a list of mistruths circulating on Social Media and focus needed to be put on putting out communication from the SPC / County Council.

Ms. Cahill stated that she had hoped to launch the Foamstream machine formally with photos etc but couldn't due to Covid. Training had not taken place for the lads who were going to use the machine.

It was agreed that a press release would be issued in relation to the Foamstream Machine and one on the Decarbonisation Zone once a town had been selected.

The Chairman referred to the new format of the Agenda and asked the Members to forward him any comments that they may have on it.

Due to the lateness of the day, the meeting then concluded.

Signed _____
Chairman

Date: _____