

**MINUTES OF THE CLIMATE & BIODIVERSITY ACTION STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE HELD ON THE 6<sup>th</sup> OF OCTOBER 2022 AT 10.00AM**

**PRESENT:** Cllr. Lourda Scott (Cathaoirleach)  
Cllr. Peir Leonard  
Cllr. Rory O'Connor  
Sharon Jackson  
Ken Sweeney  
Gary McKenzie

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Breege Kilkenny, Director of Services  
Mary Cahill, Senior Executive Engineer  
Deirdre Burns, Heritage Officer  
Jim Callery, Environmental Awareness Officer  
Ciara Ruane, Assistant Staff Officer  
Merlin Ovington, Administrative Officer, P.D & E Section  
Carmel Canterbury, Senior Staff Officer, P.D. & E. Section

**APOLOGIES:** Cllr Dermot O'Brien  
Cllr. Jodie Neary  
Justin Ivory  
Michael Storan,  
Jackie Carroll  
Marc Devereux  
Paul Brophy

Councillor Lourda Scott welcomed Ken Sweeney, Coillte as the Forestry representative for the SPC.

**Item 1: Minutes of the Meeting held on 22<sup>ND</sup> of June 2022**

The minutes of the Climate and Biodiversity Action Strategic Policy Committee held on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June 2022 were proposed by Cllr. Rory O'Connor and seconded by Cllr. Lourda Scott.

**Item 2: Matters arising from the Minutes**

No matters arising.

**Item 3: Receive Presentation from the Wicklow Uplands Council**

The members received a presentation from Brian Dunne of the Wicklow Uplands Council. This independent, voluntary organisation was set up in 1977 in response to concerns that local communities had about developments occurring in the uplands area. It is made up of 25 board members. It operates on the basis of consensus of various stakeholders, i.e. farmers, recreational users, tourism groups, community groups etc.

The full presentation has been circulated to the SPC members.

In response to a question about core funding, Brian Dunne advised that funding is received from Wicklow County Council in addition to €50k p.a. from the Heritage Council. Budget is just under €100k p.a. with 1 full time member of staff, 1 part-time admin staff member and a communications

person. An additional €30k p.a. is needed. Project funding is easier to access but core funding is needed to enable staff to operate and leverage additional funds. The Cathaoirleach requested that a letter in relation to funding is sent to the Department of Rural and Community Development.

In response to other questions Mr. Dunne advised that:

- 1) The majority of deer in the area are sika but all breeds are taken into consideration when management plans are being developed.
- 2) There has not been an increase in TB in the cattle grazing in the area.
- 3) In relation to fires, burning is a big issue. Putting in fire breaks and identifying areas that need to be managed and could help fight the problem. Building engagement with the farming community is most important.

#### Item 4: Wicklow County Council Climate Action Plan

The background to this was outlined by Mary Cahill to new members who also confirmed that the Climate Action Regional Office have set up a framework of consultants. Mini competitions for the Climate Action Plan Lot 1 and Lot 2 have been set up with a closing date of Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> October.

##### 1) Mid-East Energy Unit:

Wicklow, Kildare and Meath will form the Mid-East Energy Unit with WCC being the lead authority in the unit. A Memorandum of Understanding with the SEAI and a Service Level Agreement with Kildare and Meath are being finalised.

##### 2) National Public Sector Energy Targets:

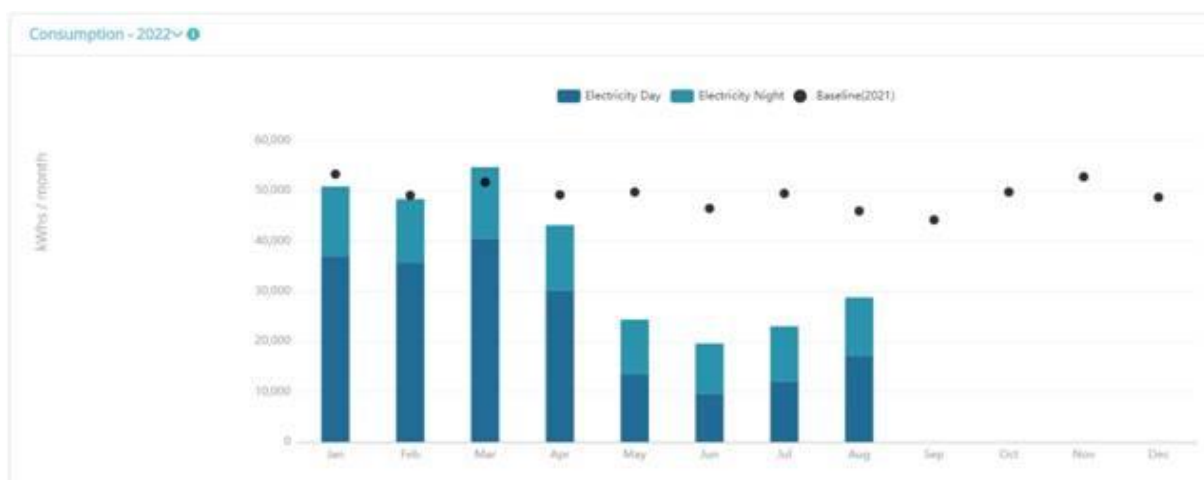
The targets of reducing greenhouse emissions by 51% by 2030 and increasing efficiency in the L.A. will form the Actions in the Climate Action Plan.

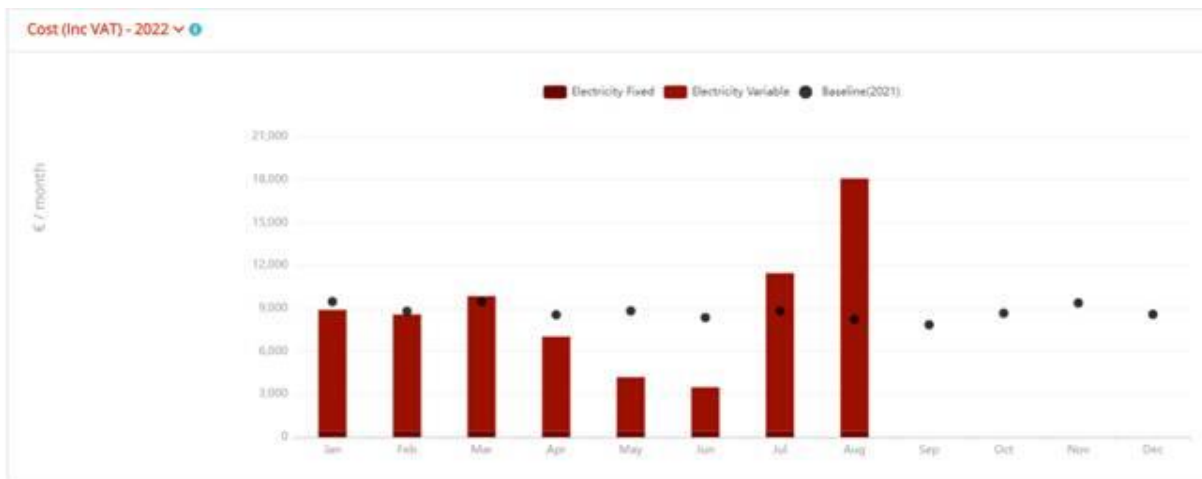
Projects such as the solar car park are meeting the reduction in GHG emissions target for County Buildings but do not meet the energy efficiency target.

##### 3) Energy Elephant:

The group received a presentation from Mary Cahill on Energy Elephant which provides real time data every 15 minutes on energy usage in County Buildings. It also provides monthly usage for all other buildings. This will assist with decision making and issues in terms of investment and where money needs to be spent. It will be very beneficial to the Energy Unit in trying to achieve gap to target. Other features include the provision of a 5yr estimate which will assist with budgeting and the tool will speed up M & R returns every April.

It was confirmed that despite a reduction in energy consumption (blue graph below) since the installation of the solar panel car park, the cost of same (red graph) has vastly increased since July.





Public lighting survey will commence Q1 and Q2 of 2023 with installation commencing in Q3 2023. This will provide a major saving in the countywide energy consumption.

For County Buildings, an energy audit has been completed and the building needs attention with insulation being prioritised as a quick win. Some window replacement will be rolled out on a phased basis using local enterprise where possible.

The Cathaoirleach requested that the reduction in emissions etc. is included in the Chief Executive's report and on the climate section of the website. This was agreed.

A press release was suggested outlining all the good work being carried out and this will be discussed by the Climate Action Team.

#### **Item 6: Conservation Management Plans:**

Alan Lauder has commenced work on the Bray Head Conservation Management Plan with a first draft expected shortly. This will be followed by the plan for Wicklow Head. Similarly, the plan for Clermont Campus is also in motion. In response to a question Deirdre Burns confirmed that once we have a draft report in place for Bray Head onsite consultation will take place.

#### **Item 7: Climate Action Staffing Update:**

Approval has been received for the following posts:

- Energy Officer (at Executive Engineer Level) and Regional Energy Officer (At Senior Executive Engineer Level) are required to staff the Energy Unit. Sanction is being sought from the DHLGH. They will be funded between WCC and 2 other LAs in the Mid East Energy Unit.
- Biodiversity Officer which will be funded by the Heritage Council – 100% year 1, 75% year 2, 50% year 4 and 25% thereafter. The appointment will be advertised once sanction is in place and must be appointed by the end of the year.
- Community Climate Action Officer which is a 3yr project and will look at submissions for the Climate Action Fund of approx. 700k. Post is at grade 6 level and is fully funded by the DECC.
- The Cathaoirleach requested that Breege Kilkenny email the SPC members when sanction was received from the Department regarding the Biodiversity Officer post and to circulate the job brief to the SPC once received.

## **Any Other Business:**

**Recycling Centre Charges:** The meeting received a presentation from Joanne O'Dowd, Senior Executive Engineer on infrastructure investment in the recycling centres. The background is a review of the Recycling services offered by Wicklow County Council. The review outlines a proposed investment plan to maintain and improve current facilities. A small customer charge is proposed to fund this investment programme. Breege Kilkenny stressed that all monies taken in recycling charges will be ring-fenced for future investment needed. Cllr. Leonard advised that she will submit her questions by email.

**Public Lighting:** In response to a question, Mary Cahill confirmed that there has been a reduction in the strength of the lumen and will provide a further update by next week.

**Tree Protection:** Cllr. Leonard enquired if there was a way of identifying trees of high value and what classifies a high value tree in terms of biodiversity. We could then look to the public for assistance to identify trees, possibly by way of a checklist, and draw up a list of same. It was agreed that it would be valuable to do the piece but just nominating a tree does not guarantee that a TPO will be put on it and messaging around this will be very important.

**Avoca Mines:** Cllr. Leonard would like to get areas fenced off and work with the Rivers Trust to introduce a pilot scheme for nature based solutions. Mary Cahill will discuss this with Marc Devereux who is project managing the remediation of the Avoca Mines.

Jim Callery gave an update of current projects including the staff travel survey for staff across the organisation. Out of those who completed the survey 91% commute by car, 2% cycle and walk and 24% of our staff live within 5kms. 50% of staff needs their car for work but all are open to improving active travel. There is potential to grown this piece. Results also indicated that 73% of staff would like to avail of blended working and there was great interest in working in hubs closer to home. 46% would consider switching to E.V.s.

A Climate Workshop for 140 TY students will take place at the Brockagh Centre with Raoul Empey as guest speaker.

A site visit has been arranged to Dunleer with members of 7 of the SECs who have completed their energy master plans, attending. Dunleer have had their SEC for many years and this is an opportunity for the network of SECs to meet up in person and move forward with their projects.

It was advised that despite securing funding for the hedgerow survey we were unable to proceed as we got no response to tender. Sanction has been received to carry the funding forward to next year.

Cllr. Scott informed the meeting that there is a citizens assembly for young people in Glenree from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> of October. When they reach their conclusions she would like to invite a rep to present their findings to the SPC.

Next meeting: December 7<sup>th</sup> at 10.30am in the Council Chamber

## **Actions:**

A letter is to issue to the Department of Rural and Community Development regarding additional funding and resources for the Wicklow Uplands Council.