

Minutes of the Climate Action, Biodiversity, Environment, Energy, Marine, Recreation and Amenity Strategic Policy Committee Meeting held on Friday 14th February, 2025 at 10.30 am , Council Chamber, County Buildings

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Theresa O'Brien (T/Director of Services, CERA)
Mary Cahill (T/ Senior Engineer)
Mark Costello (Climate Action Coordinator)
James Callery (Climate Action Officer)
Sarah Rubalcava (Environmental Awareness Officer)
Graham Cullen, (A/Senior Executive Engineer)
Carol Coad (Outdoor Recreation)
Aisling Hubbard (Coordinator, Wicklow Sports Partnership)
Nicole Keogh (Assistant Staff Officer)

APOLOGIES: Hannah O'Kelly, Biodiversity Officer
Meadhbh Quinn, T/SEO
Michael Storan (Development/Construction Representative)

1. To note the Minutes of the Meeting of 8th November 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the 8th November last were proposed by Cllr Dermot O'Brien and seconded by Cllr. Danny Alvey. Quorum reached.

Cathaoirleach, Cllr Erika Doyle, welcomed all in attendance. She advised that Item Number 4 on the Agenda, Update on the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), will need to be deferred to a future date as Biodiversity Officer is unavailable on medical grounds. The idea was put forward to hold a separate, workshop style meeting to discuss the BAP. Members were in agreement with this and date will be decided in future.

Cathaoirleach noted she is hoping to make contact with Comhairle na nÓg and have representative in place on this committee for next meeting.

2. Update on the Wicklow County Outdoor Recreation Plan (CORP)

AH delivered a comprehensive overview of Wicklow Sports and Recreation Partnership, including their current staff resources and future staff requirements. AH explained their role in training and education, Healthy Ireland Projects, outdoor recreation projects among others and the Wicklow Trails walking app which is to be launched soon.

The members were advised that the County Wicklow Outdoor Recreation Plan is on schedule to be adopted in April 2025. 2 public consultations and a number of one to one consultations have taken place. The public consultation is being delivered by Outscape, who are also rolling out National Plan. Approximately 150 people were in attendance at the public consultations. The online consultation window remains open until 26th February. AH will circulate the online consultation link to attendees after meeting so that they may share.

CC delivered a presentation on Outdoor Recreation in Wicklow, where a team of 3 currently work full time. This team are based in County Wicklow Partnership. This current structure allows the section to maximise use of funding from ORIS, LEADER and Dormant Funds.

CC offered brief overview of two specific projects, 1) Mullinaveigue – Roundwood Recreation Area Project. 2) Sugarloaf Repair Project.

Outdoor Recreation is currently identifying funding streams and organising projects to be undertaken in 2026. They are also working to a 5 year plan. In 2030, Outdoor recreation would like to see a full time maintenance crew, full time outdoor recreation manager within WCC and growing income from commercial activity.

Cathaoirleach thanked AH and CC for their presentation.

Questions & Comment

- 1) Cllr Scott thanked AH & CC for their presentation. She queried the accessibility and disability access portion of the presentation and how it is envisioned to include the voices of those with disabilities in the 5 year plan.

Response: One of the ORIS feasibility studies relates to communications with those with disabilities. The results of this feasibility study will be used as the basis for future project development.

- 2) Cllr Scott asked whether the merchandise that will be sold by Outdoor Recreation would be made from sustainable materials.

Response: CC agreed with this point and clarified that the items for sale are not single use.

- 3) Justin Ivory (JI) thanked AH & CC for their presentation. JI specifically enjoyed the piece regarding environmental protection but believed it is important to include an aspect on sustainability. The increased numbers of people undertaking outdoor recreation can also have a negative impact on the landscape, for example, in terms of wildlife protection. It may be necessary to designate some areas as 'not' for recreation.

Response: CC thanked JI for this interesting point and advised that the outdoor recreation team are undertaking actions in this regard. To measure numbers of visitors, approximately 25 people counters have been placed at various trails and these can be used to help assess the impact these numbers would have on the various landscapes. These figures are also assessed against a Baseline study.

In 2025, a project is to be undertaken to put rainfall recorders in various places around the county, which will lead to a way of advising people when to avoid trails.

All these items will help understand the carrying capacity. JI responded that it is not just about carrying capacity but also about experience and secondly, the groups that are visiting are also getting larger. CC responded that working on group management is an idea that needs to be examined in the future.

- 4) Cllr Mulhall thanked AH & CC for their presentation and asked if Outdoor Recreation and Sports Partnership has any involvement in the formulation and discussions around the development of the local area plans.

Response: They are involved in LAP consultation.

- 5) As Blessington Greenway was declined permission, how does this refusal impact the Outdoor Recreation section and also is there a broader conversation about cross county collaboration in terms of recreation.

Response: CC responded that it was disappointing that the application was declined. 2 more projects are in the pipeline for West Wicklow but not much can be revealed at this stage.

Regarding cross county collaboration, CC advised she has been speaking to other local authorities to explain their processes and projects. This collaboration was facilitated by Coillte.

- 6) Austin Baines (AB) thanked AH & CC for the presentation. He stated that through his own work, a re-occurring theme is the lack of space available for teenagers. He asked whether this consultation process on the Outdoor Recreation Plan will engage young people. AB is concerned that the voice of the young people is missing.

Response: One on one discussion with SIPSI and obtaining feedback from the youth services have been undertaken. It is a matter that is raised repeatedly and will be taken on board in the consultation process. Answers that are received from Planet Youth survey will also be fed into the County Sports Plan. CC also shared that applications for informal play areas are allowed to be submitted for development now.

- 7) Tom Byrne (TB) stated that the IFA were disappointed not to be invited to the public consultation process and would like to be involved in the future.

Response: The IFA were invited to the public consultation process via discussions with Ms Mooney. However, they do recognise that one on one consultation with the IFA was overlooked and should have been organised.

- 8) TB noted that a major problem, which is seen throughout county, is lack of car parking to service these outdoor recreation areas.

Response: It is agreed that this is a huge problem but one that needs a centralised system to help rectify it.

- 9) TB stated that sporting competitions and outdoor events are causing inconvenience to the local areas they are held in, i.e. cycling events. TB was happy to hear that permits are required for the organisation of these events.

- 10) TB highlighted that there is a real problem with dogs in upland areas and this matter needs to be highlighted constantly. The blame is not been placed on walkers only but the matter still needs to be addressed.

Response: Acknowledged that this matter is getting worse, not better. CC asked TB if the IFA would be happy with the following response that the Outdoor Recreation team give to members of the public in this regard – of saying that no dogs are allowed on private land and on public land they must be kept under effective control. TB believed that this response is good but may not be realistic.

- 11) Although nothing official has been released, TB is of the understanding that the Arklow Greenway may be declined also. Many farmers are not happy that this may not proceed.

Response: CC unaware of this but will look into it.

- 12) TB noted that the presentation mentioned work on paths in the various projects. TB stated that if this work was in conjunction with Wicklow Uplands Commission it might be useful to acknowledge their help.

- 13) Regarding the Disability access issue, TB stated that a number of events are held for people with disabilities but that the location of these events is not suitable. One example would include an event held in Annacurragh.

Response: For a fee, permits can be issued by Coillte for such events and so these people can be directed to Coillte.

- 14) Cllr Peir Leonard suggested it may be a good idea for AH & CC to have a conversation with the Economic Development SPC, of which she is a member, as there will be cross over, especially regarding EU partners.

Response: CC thanked Cllr Leonard and would be very interested in discussing their attendance at the Economic Development SPC

- 15) Cllr O'Brien appreciated there is a breadth and depth to what Outdoor Recreation are undertaking and acknowledged how valuable that is. He asked whether there would be any extra costs that have to be factored in, with regard to the app that is being created.

Response: There is commitment to costs for 5 years and nothing after that at the moment.

- 16) Cllr O'Brien also commented how the Planet Youth survey is very important to take on board as it will be a valuable link with teenagers and will be interesting to see how we maximise the levies that are been used.

Response: Agreed that the survey is excellent and areas around working with teenagers are being explored.

- 17) Emma Smith (ES) noted how she welcomes the inclusion of Eco toilets. The need for facilities for outdoor recreation needs to be looked at and happy that eco models are been examined for this in Wicklow.

Response: CC shared the make of the proposed eco toilets if anyone wanted to research them.

In the interest of time management, the Cathaoirleach asked that members keep discussions to agenda items or otherwise discuss matters privately with the relevant person.

3. Update on the Litter Management Plan

JC apologized for the delayed delivery of the Litter Management Plan and then gave a presentation on its development and contents.

It is a requirement of Litter Pollution Act 1997, that a Litter Management Plan is created and reviewed every 3 years. It will need to be adopted by members. It will include any updated legislation, with the the Circular Economy and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2022 being the main inclusion in this iteration.

The comprehensive presentation outlined that the Local Authority, business and the Public all have responsibilities under the Plan. Litter Composition, Priority issues that need to be addressed, Policies and Objectives of the Plan were discussed.

Questions & Comment

- 1) ES thanked JC for the presentation but believed that one classification of litter item was overlooked, namely, the debris that comes off quarry trucks, which poses a driving hazard leading to dangerous roads in winter and increased dust in summer. Cllr Leonard also agreed with this point, but in the context of urban areas.

Response: JC was unsure what current level of enforcement exists regarding quarry trucks but it is a good idea to reference in the plan and he will speak with waste management on the subject.

- 2) Cllr Leonard highlighted the need for some form of campaign around dumping in laneways.

Response: Cllr Leonard was advised that unlike the last time a Litter Management Plan was created, this time under GDPR, CCTV cameras can be used to help enforce anti-dumping initiatives in areas such as this.

- 3) Cllr Leonard shared a statistic that 1 in 4 people don't use waster providers and asked should there be a permit that people hold to show that they are using these services.

Response: It is a key priority in waste management this year to examine the segregation of waste both in business and households, which in itself will enable easier identification of those who do not partake in waste collection. However, JC did note that this is a sensitive matter as it involved dealing with personal data.

- 4) Cllr Leonard suggested the casual trading /farmers markets and incentives around same be promoted to make it easier to access local produce but to also reduce the reliance and the usage of plastics.

Response: It is hoped to explore and develop a good demonstration project on reducing or eliminating plastic, an example of one such project is Going Greener in Grange Con.

- 5) Cllr Scott noted that the breakdown of litter composition survey would match what she finds in her monthly litter pick. She would welcome a campaign around cigarette litter and how damaging it is on the environment.

Response: This point will be taken on board and the possibility of a campaign will be examined, especially concerning the pollution of waterbodies from cigarette litter.

- 6) Regarding the issue of dog fouling Cllr Scott is of the opinion that the issue will never be addressed until there is national plan. Perhaps reaching out and collaborating with Vets would be beneficial.

Response: DNA testing of Dog fouling is one option that could be explored, however it is challenging and the costs are prohibitive. No Local Authority has been able to do this in cost effective manner.

- 7) Cllr Scott was concerned with the dumping of clothes at Clothes Banks, particularly the one on Mill Road, Greystones. The operation of the banks is not ideal and there are issues with dumping and overfilling of the banks. She queried whether any fines are being issued in this regard.

Response: It was agreed that this is becoming an issue across the County. Markets for textiles are collapsing around the world and as result companies are not getting value from clothes banks and therefore are not managing them effectively. We need to learn lesson from this and think about how we deal with textile management in Ireland. Prevention of buying cheap purchases, tackling this culture, reducing production of textiles, and learning to restore, reuse and repair what we have all needs to be taken into consideration. The Awareness office is involved in the Re-Love fashion initiative and it is initiatives such as this that we need to be more involved in.

Cllr Scott stated that she has brought up this issue repeatedly and needs to know what measures are been taken to address dumping at Clothes Banks. JC responded that if the clothes bank is on WCC property, then the first thing would be to speak to contractor to remedy the problem and ask them to remove the bank if no action was taken. JC advised he will speak to waste management team and and ask them to follow up with contractor. Cllr Scott requested to be informed of the progress on this matter.

MC stated that in relation to this specific case on the Mill Road in Greystones, a solution will be sought and CCTV or removal of the bank may be required. She noted that there have been cases where staff have gone to investigate this location after complaints were received and the clothes banks were empty.

SR suggested that as she has a number of audio devices placed around the County delivering anti-dumping/anti littering/anti dog fouling messages that she can contact the operator to create a strong message to play at this location. SR advised she was going to target dog fouling in Greystones but will now target this matter here instead.

Cllr Scott confirmed to the Cathaoirleach that she was content with this response from JC and SR.

- 8) On the matter of dumping of garden refuse, JI stated that this needs to be examined further, but acknowledges work has been done
- 9) In regard to the DNA testing for dog fouling JI felt that although the idea seems to have been dismissed due to cost, he believed that Leitrim County Council are undertaking work in this regard and this should be followed up on.

The Cathaoirleach agreed that this item cannot be taken off table and asked whether the wording in the plan be changed to reflect that DNA Testing for Dog Fouling would be 'investigated'. JI was content with this suggestion and JC acknowledged that the text can be changed in this manner.

- 10) JI highlighted that many positives of the Councils engagement with clean coats groups have come to light. He agreed with Cllr Scott that a campaign around cigarette butts would be beneficial.
- 11) JI would like to see dog fouling given its own section in the litter classification system, rather than been included under deleterious waste and felt strong enforcement would be required to back it.

Response: JC advised that the waste is classified using a national classification system so a change can be requested but may not be achievable.

- 12) JI noted that there has been a decrease in Litter fines issued in 2024 compared to 2021 and sought the reasoning for this.

Response: JI agreed that there is reduction in fines issued but it was important to note that the fines are being followed through in terms of court proceedings etc. JI replied that the report highlighted that this also decreased.

JC is not aware how many litter fines traffic wardens have issued as it not under his remit. He acknowledged that Waste Enforcement have been speaking to providers around contract matters.

- 13) Cllr Mulhall questioned how many Litter Wardens and Dog Wardens are in the employ of the Council.

Response: JC stated that the Council have 4 enforcement staff, each with a big mandate, especially regarding illegal dumping, fly tipping and ensuring waste regulation are adhered to. Their role is not just as simple as issuing litter fines. He was unsure of the number of Dog Wardens.

- 14) Cllr Mulhall commented that it seems not many dog warden fines are being issued and that more locations are required for recycling banks.

- 15) Cllr Mulhall sought clarity on who deals with waste enforcement issues when it is 100m either side of a commercial premises, is it Planning or Waste Management.

Response: Waste enforcement should be able to take action on waste issues on sites such as these.

- 16) Cllr O'Brien thanked JC for his very comprehensive presentation. He asked for an explanation as to why there are higher spec bins available but when more bins are sought, cost then become an issue.

Response: It is not just cost of bin but also servicing of them that may be an issue. The high tech solar bins only really required where there is a high volume of waste and where you would get sporadic high volumes of waste, i.e. areas where recreation would be high at certain time of year.

- 17) Cllr O'Brien wanted to mention the newly developing technological dimension to litter management and CCTV. He stated that there is A.I. in litter management now and wanted to see where this comes in to the Litter Management Plan.

Response: Cllr O'Brien was advised that technology is something that will be used a lot over lifetime of this plan

- 18) The Cathaoirleach, like JJ, also commented on the reduction in Litter Fines and the reason why parking attendants are issuing litter fines.

- 19) The Cathaoirleach wanted to note the importance of Green Schools and urged that the relationship with schools and education continues.

Response: The importance of the Green Schools was agreed and although a lot of work is involved, it is a type of work that delves deeper and allows connections with communities in a way you can't manage through other methods. Dealing with students and teachers fosters relationships that have longer lasting impacts.

20) Cllr Alvey noted that only 1 fine for dog fouling was issued in both 2023 and 2024 and queried what the plan is to improve on this.

Response: JC agreed that this was disappointing but it is hard to enforce. Enforcement officers were asked to speak with offenders first before issuing fine. It is very difficult process to obtain peoples information and issue fine but it is something that needs to be worked on.

21) Cllr Alvey asked if the planned CCTV campaign to be used in Wicklow Town, could also be used for Dog Fouling.

Response: Using the CCTV for this project would be precluded in this case. The case has to be made to install CCTV for a specific purpose.

22) Cllr Alvey mentioned that he and Cllr Scott are on a disability inclusion committee who are going to run campaign on dog fouling if JC and his colleagues would like to partake.

Response: The team would be happy to collaborate on this and the different challenges that would come into play.

23) Tom Byrne highlighted that 2 years ago the Minister committed to providing extra dog wardens but this has not come to pass.

24) Tom Byrne also requested hard copies of the presentations to be circulated. The Cathaoirleach responded that this could be arranged.

The Cathaoirleach put the adoption of the Litter Management Plan to the members.

Cllr. Dermot O'Brien proposed the motion and Cllr. Danny Alvey seconded. All members were in agreement to adopt the Litter Management Plan.

The Cathaoirleach congratulated the members on officially adopting their first item as an SPC.

Due to time constraints, the Cathaoirleach asked the members if they wanted to defer the remaining agenda items, namely Item 4. Update on the Biodiversity Action Plan, Item 5. To consider the Draft SuDs Plan for adoption, Item 6. To consider the Climate Action Delivery Report and Item 7. Any Other Business. Some suggested that priority items get discussed today and others suggested that the remaining items be incorporated with the Biodiversity Action Plan workshop at a future date.

After much deliberation, the Cathaoirleach made the decision to defer the remaining Agenda items. It was stated that going forward there is a possibility that extra meetings will be required in order to give fair attention and time to all the matters under this SPC.

The Cathaoirleach and TO'B will discuss a plan of action and circulate to the members once decided upon. This may take the form of extra online meetings, earlier meeting start time and full day workshop type meeting to discuss the Biodiversity Action Plan.

Best wishes were extended to Hannah O Kelly, Biodiversity Officer, for her speedy recovery.

Meeting was adjourned shortly after 1 pm.

This concluded the business of the meeting.