

Minutes of the Climate Action, Biodiversity, Environment, Energy, Marine, Recreation and Amenity Strategic Policy Committee Meeting held on Friday 7th March, 2025 at 10.30 am - online meeting

-Review the Draft Wicklow County Council SuDS Policy-

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

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

APOLOGIES: Cllr. Peir Leonard
Cllr. Lourda Scott
Tom Byrne, Agricultural Representative
Michael Storan (Development/Construction Representative)

Cathaoirleach welcomed everyone and thanked all for attending the meeting. The only item on the Agenda and the sole purpose of the meeting was to review and accept the Draft Wicklow County Council SuDS Policy. The meeting format included delivery of a presentation by Mark Costello, Climate Action Coordinator, followed by a discussion session and vote. It was declared that a Quorum was reached.

1. Review of the Draft Wicklow County Council SuDS Policy

Mark delivered a comprehensive presentation on the SuDS policy, which is an action included in the Climate Action Plan (CAP). The policy includes sections on surface water management in new developments, source control systems, site control systems, regional control systems such as ponds or wetlands and rainwater management plans.

Once the presentation was completed, MC advised that the Climate Action Team is formulating a report on the first year of the CAP and it will be circulated to the SPC members for their information. Approval of the document is not required.

The Cathaoirleach thanked MC and welcomed the annual report on the CAP.

Discussion and Q&A

Question 1

Justin Ivory noted he was very eager to get this policy adopted. He pointed out he is a member of the SPC as a PPN representative but there is an overlap as he also works for LAWPRO. On review of the Draft Policy, his colleagues in LAWPRO noted that they would not be in favour of attenuation tanks and therefore they would like to see the impossibility of using nature based SuDS set at a very high level, especially in regard to developers.

MC responded that in the environment section, assessing planning applications falls under the staff's remit. At the pre planning stage, pushing and promoting the implementation of Nature Based Solutions (NBS) would be their main priority but in some specific cases it may not be a suitable option and although MC personally does not like attenuation tanks, in some cases there may be no choice.

Question 2

Austin Baines queried that if this document were to be adopted and developers apply for permission, will there be a system of checks to ensure works will align with this policy.

MC stated that if the plan gets adopted at this SPC and at full council, this will strengthen the policy and its requirement to be implemented at all stages of development.

Question 3

AB queried if there will be a possibility of house prices rising and other price implications, if developers have to incorporate the SuDs policy into their developments?

MC advised that as the policy relates to new developments, it is something that will be considered from the start of all new developments until a projects completion, and so once this process is adhered to there should be no extra cost for people.

Question 4

Anthony Ardee sought clarity on the role of the policy for existing buildings or queried whether this policy is focused only on new developments.

MC confirmed that this policy only relates to new developments. However, there are guidelines available for existing buildings in residential areas.

JI commented that in other Local Authorities retrofitting has been undertaken, e.g. retrofitting of an attenuation system in to a new area for biodiversity. MC added that examples of retrofitting for NBS can be seen in Wicklow too, i.e. in Greystones Municipal District. JI advised that in the future urban nature based SuDs will always need to be the better option - with similar costs, improved performance, increased longevity and less maintenance.

Question 5

Emma Smith believed that smaller developers and architects in the county might benefit from the creation of a user friendly promotional leaflet on the SuDS policy.

MC replied that there is an appendix included in the draft policy for one off houses however it is only 3 – 4 pages long. ES stated that although this is helpful, it may not be of benefit to the smaller developers and would not be a sufficient promotional tool. MC agreed that leaflets and a separate document can be created.

JI advised that LAWPRO now uses the term ‘urban nature based solutions’. He shared that LAWPRO have been national champions of raising awareness on this subject from the onset and LAWPRO could team up with WCC to organise workshops and possibly hold a separate meeting around training for Local Authority staff, i.e. Planners etc.

Question 6

ES asked that where there is very visible groundwork in relation to SuDS, would it be useful to have public information panels to spread the message and engage the public.

MC agreed and stated that once policy is adopted then there will be both internal and external workshops. The policy is very open and during its formulation engagement with consultants and the public was undertaken.

Question 7

Cllr O Brien regarded the concept of SuDS as fascinating. He asked how would the council implement the SuDS policy across the domains that it is needed in, while also keeping regard of the County Development Plan and The Climate Action Plan and ensure that everyone understands their role in its successful delivery.

Question 8

Cllr O Brien queried where the policy comes into action when someone applies for planning - is it at pre planning stage, and who has responsibility on the development side, is it a management company or the developer themselves?

MC advised that potentially down the line, the management company might end up with responsibility; however there is also an audit process that would make sure that all is compliant before the management company take over responsibility.

Question 9

The Cathaoirleach was impressed with how much climate was intrinsic to the policy yet queried if developers had to self-declare they are carrying out SuDS as part of a development.

The Cathaoirleach was advised that SuDS will be highlighted to the developer as early as the pre-planning stage; however the shortage of engineers in all Local Authorities proves a barrier to this information sharing in some instances. In terms of its connection with Climate, MC believed that SuDS have a huge role to play in the adaptation aspect of achieving our climate goals.

The Cathaoirleach asked the members of the SPC to vote on adopting the Draft Wicklow County Council SuDS Policy.

It was proposed by Cllr. Dermot O'Brien and seconded by Justin Ivory. All members were in agreement on adopting the aforementioned SuDs policy.

TO'B thanked Mark Costello, Mary Cahill and their team, as a lot of work went into the creation of this policy. She made clear her understanding of the importance of education and awareness.

The Cathaoirleach echoed this and thanked MC and the members for joining this meeting.

The next meeting will be on the 9th May.

This concluded the business of the meeting.