

## County Wicklow Public Participation Network

**Name of Committee: Climate and Biodiversity Action Strategic Planning Committee/CABA SPC**

**Name of PPN Representatives: Annette Vancanson-Kelly, Environment/Conservation Pillar East Wicklow and Sharon Jackson, Environment/Conservation Pillar West Wicklow.**

**Date of Meeting Attended via Zoom: May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

### **PRESENT:**

Elected Members: Cllr. Rory O'Connor, (Chair), Councillors Peir Leonard, Jodie Neary (replacing Jennifer Whitmore, TD), Dermot O'Brien, Lourda Scott

Representing Wicklow branch of Comhairle na nÓg: Rhona Lennox

Officials Present: Mary Cahill, Climate Action Officer, Theresa O'Brien, SEO/Senior Executive Officer, Breege Kilkenny, Director of Services at the Dept. of Planning, Development and Environment, Marc Devereux, Senior Engineer, Jim Callery, Environmental Awareness Officer and Deirdre Burns, Heritage Officer

Members introduced themselves and welcomed Annette Kelly, now the PPN Rep for East Wicklow and congratulated Mary Cahill, Senior Engineer on her recent appointment as the Climate Action Officer for Wicklow County Council.

### **On Climate Action, the meeting received an update as follows:**

**Speaker: Mary Cahill, Wicklow Climate Action Officer**, outlined the actions currently being undertaken by the Council as part of Wicklow's Climate Action Strategy:

1. CARO/ The Climate Action Regional Offices, which formerly divided the 31 local authorities among just 4 regional offices, have now subdivided into smaller subgroups. Wicklow is now part of the sub region called CARO Mid- East, which includes counties Wicklow, Kildare, Meath and Louth (The sub region of CARO Mid-East remains part of the larger group called the CARO Eastern and Midlands Region)
2. Climate Action Champions from the Climate Action Team in each local authority will receive training and undertake actions from among the 108 Actions outlined as priorities in the 2019-2024 Wicklow County Council Climate Action Adaptation Strategy plan available online from the Wicklow.ie website. Decisions on who delivers which actions and by when, the initial and intermediate targets are under discussion by the CARO and should be ready for sign off by the CCMA/City and County Managers Association by the end of June 2020. (The CCMA, of which the Senior Engineer, BK, is a member, is the City and County Managers Association . (Monaghan, Dublin City, Fingal, Clare and Wicklow local authorities sit on it, alongside Wicklow CEO, Frank Curran, Longford CEO, Paddy Mahon, Laois CEO, John Mulholland, Louth CEO & leader in CoCo energy efficiency, Joan Martin and Ciaran Haze, Sligo CEO. )
3. The CARO Local Authorities' Climate Action Training Plan has been agreed and will continue over three years to upskill 29,000 staff and 1,000 elected members to include frontline staff, PPN members and officials. The training will address behavioural change and community capacity building. This training has been somewhat delayed by the Covid lockdown, a pilot project was postponed after one successful session with Councillors.
4. As part of the Life 2020 Programme, a study to look at flood protection measures for the upper catchment area of the Avoca River has recently been submitted to the OPW/Office of Public Works. (LIFE began in 1992 and 2014-2020 is the 5<sup>th</sup> phase of funding. So far, LIFE has co-financed some 3954 projects across the EU, contributing approximately €3.1 billion to the protection of the environment)
5. Wicklow County Council/WCC is committed to rolling out additional e-v/electric-vehicle charging points across the county. Installing rapid charging points is a priority. WCC is in consultation with the ESB to

decide whether to contract the ESB's EV Section to install these. This week's meeting with the ESB's EV section is to find out what the ESB needs from the WCC. Traffic management legislation has changed to make it easier to install ev-chargers, the roll-out is intended to start in the Greystones Municipal District, that it might or might not be decided to plug some chargers into lampposts, that talks with the ESB on the difficult question as to where to position the ev-chargers are in progress.

6. ***WCC's new Tree Management Strategy* is about to be looked at by the Department of Planning, Development and Environment at WCC. Breege Kilkenny, Director of Services, invited any and all groups with an opinion on what they would like to see included in this Strategy to make submissions care of: Theresa O'Brien, Senior Executive Officer, Planning, Development & Environment, Wicklow County Council, County Buildings, Wicklow Email: [env@wicklowcoco.ie](mailto:env@wicklowcoco.ie). As this is not a statutory plan there is no deadline for the receipt of submissions but the sooner the better to send in submissions in order to guarantee consideration in the Plan preparation. The Tree Management Plan will be for Wicklow County Council and the provision of services within the Council.**
7. **Leader 2020 Grant Funding still has money available to groups wishing to apply for funding this year. There remains €100, 000 for renewable energy projects and €100, 000 available for Biodiversity projects.**
8. The LIFE Funding Programme is an alternative source of funding and the Climate Action Team of WCC intends to follow this up
9. **On the Sustainable Energy Association of Ireland website/SEAI.ie there are coming up 10 webinars, each one hour long and free to view. WCC will publish information on these on their website- [wicklow.ie](http://wicklow.ie)- also.**

### **Biodiversity: Deirdre Burns, Heritage Officer, updated the meeting as follows:**

WCC are moving to implement three Plans: The National Biodiversity Action Plan, the County Development Plan and the County Heritage Plan. There are four targets: to collate information, to raise awareness, to conserve and enhance and to foster partnership action.

The Biodiversity Action Plan/BAP Action 26 gives priority to preserving biodiversity in coastal and other areas most vulnerable to climate change. BAP Action 19 promotes the sustainable use of Wicklow's coast to incorporate the needs of tourism, wildlife and local populations. Wicklow's Climate Change Adaptation Plan enumerates WCC's Biodiversity targets under Theme 5.

Implementation of the Pollinator Plan: The cut and remove system is to be implemented, some areas of WCC grass will be mown every 6 weeks and the grass cuttings removed, other areas will be mown only once in the season, this to allow cover for pollinators to thrive in wildflower meadows. The website [pollinators.ie](http://pollinators.ie) tracks pollinator-friendly actions, a useful resource for knowing who is implementing which actions.

The Brittas Bay project: Brittas Bay is a site owned by WCC. An ecologist is on board and has mapped out areas where the invasive species, sea buckthorn, is growing. The signage to the area needs a facelift and making the signage more relevant for biodiversity is a task for the Volunteer Days planned for this Autumn. Volunteers will also be asked to help with invasive species.

Co Wicklow Swift Project: The first swifts were reported over Aughrim on Monday, May 4<sup>th</sup>. The Swift Project continues to record and monitor numbers and to install nesting boxes and, despite the Covid lockdown, has received word from the public of 17 places recording populations of swifts. Collars will be attached to track some and nesting boxes will be installed on WCC owned buildings including Wicklow library and Arklow municipal buildings.

**There are a number of Biodiversity awareness resources available free to post online from the WCC website at [www.wicklow.ie](http://www.wicklow.ie).** These include: a new child-friendly, illustrated booklet called Gardening for Biodiversity, produced by Deirdre Burns and published by LAHO. In production and due to be available soon: Reprints of the Wicklow Wildlife poster, a How to Guide to building nestboxes and a video on how to prepare and plant wildflower meadows, currently in production with the National Biodiversity Data Centre/NBDC. **June 13<sup>th</sup> is this year's Cruinniú na nÓg**, a national day for free creativity for children and young people. This year all the videos and guides are online already on the website Cruinniú na nÓg: no need to wait until June 13<sup>th</sup> to make a cool kite, read fabulous stories about Ireland's great lighthouses, etc...

Unfortunately, Covid has caused a number of events to be postponed or cancelled. The Art/Biodiversity workshops planned by the PPN and the West Wicklow Environmental Network for a Saturday during Biodiversity Week, May 16-23 around Baltinglass Community Garden have been postponed until the Autumn.

**The CEO Report on Submissions made to the CDP/County Development Plan is currently being prepared.**

Biodiversity is highlighted as a key concern/ issue in many of the public submissions. The CEO report is giving consideration as to how relevant issues can be addressed through the CDP. There is an opportunity to use the CDP as a mechanism to build resilience through the protection and enhancement of natural buffers and connecting locally important biodiversity sites and Natura sites. There are also opportunities regarding incorporating biodiversity issues into development management policies and generally into other areas as a cross cutting theme.

Issues raised: Protecting biodiversity, threatened through wider issues of biodiversity loss, resource depletion, use of pesticides, poor management practice, afforestation, agriculture practice, declining environmental quality and habitat loss are also closely linked to Climate Change and have been highlighted as key concerns in submissions to the CDP. Not all of these issues can be addressed within the scope of the CDP.

**Environmental Awareness: The meeting received an update as follows:**

**Speaker: Jim Callery, Environmental Awareness Officer:**

Let's Get Buzzing a series of workshops on CA/Climate Action and Biodiversity was well attended in Ashford on February 22<sup>nd</sup>. Wicklow County Council offered this event free of charge.

For National Tree Week, WCC asked the Tree Council of Ireland for 800 trees, 300 more than the 500 delivered last year and all were distributed. Requests are still coming in from the public and the advice is not to plant trees out now but to wait until October.

The Tidy Towns Awards are extending their reach to involve schools. A lot is happening in schools as they undertake climate actions, elect local champions and take on projects around the theme of water. 17 Schools are in line to receive or renew their Green Flag. The Green Schools Programme is ongoing. A survey around student attitudes to plastic bottles clarified that alternatives needed to be convenient. The EPA funded Water Refill fountains to 4 schools and 5 more Water Refill stations are to be paid for by WCC.

There has been a lot of positive feedback for the new Fashion & Textiles Wearable Clothing project, run in conjunction with the Rediscovery Centre. It encourages students to repair and upcycle clothing and will relaunch in May to allow pupils to work on their outfits over the summer holidays. Other County Councils are interested. A Cleaning Products Project got up and running. It looks at how to make simple alternatives to household cleaning products & how to make various personal cleansing products. The video on the careful disposal of wet wipes is up on social media.

WCC worked with the PPN to map the United Nation's 17 Sustainable Development Goals. Together, WCC and the PPN plan to create a data base to promote the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

**WCC is advancing plans to create a database to share the Environmental Projects that have taken place around the county.**

**Wicklow Naturally is working with WCC on WCC's Food Strategy around food poverty and sustainable food.**

**WCC's Energy efficiency and emissions, The meeting received an update as follows:**

**Presented by: Marc Devereux, Senior Engineer, Environmental Section**

The EPO Director of Services, Mr Joe Lane, heads up a multi-disciplinary team tasking each Director with making energy savings within their directorate. Working in conjunction with the Three Counties Energy Agency in the last three years, audits have been carried out to determine the energy efficiency of 25 buildings owned or managed by WCC, starting with the most energy-expensive buildings (swimming pools, etc..)

The Wicklow Climate Action Adaptation Plan commits WCC to achieve a reduction of 50% in energy usage in time for 2030, when 2030 usage is compared to the 2009 energy usage baseline. By 2030, GHG/Greenhouse gas emissions are to have reduced by 30% in absolute terms.

### **Energy-reducing projects undertaken by WCC:**

The BEC 974 Wicklow Better Energy Communities Project and the SEAI funding stream gave out €1.47 million in grants, replaced energy-inefficient lighting and retrofitted insulation to public buildings and to homes. Savings were to the order of 3.5GWh. All works and grant fund drawdown had to be completed by 11<sup>th</sup> October 2019.

This scheme was oversubscribed for 2020 with, for example, all grant money for 2020 assigned by February. Projects included leisure centres, Civic offices, recycling centres, libraries and Clermont College. Community Projects include Abbeyside Church, Staffords Bakery and Seafield Spa.

Seven more projects are currently being progressed: Clermont, Bray Civic Offices, Wicklow Town Hall, 2 Shoreline Centres, Bray Depot, Tinahely AO. At the feasibility stage are: several other projects on the SSRH/Support Scheme for Renewable Heat. A heat-exchange generator run off a sustainable energy system pays back the cost to buy and fit it within four and a half years, due to the savings in energy usage it achieves.

Public lighting: Wicklow County counts 15,000 public and street lights. About one third of the electricity bill paid by WCC is for public lighting. 1,000 have been replaced with LED lights to date. When all public lighting is replaced by LED the annual bill will reduce from €750, 000 to €350,000 per year and the emissions of CO2 will reduce from 3,000 tonnes to 1,500 tonnes per year.

Tenders are due in this May for the Solar Car park at Wicklow's Municipal District Offices. The 1,400 m of solar panels will stretch over some rows of car parking places.

Since 2017 WCC has been taking measures to reduce energy usage by 33% by 2020. With savings accelerating, due in part to the speed with which public lights can be replaced over 2 years with LEDs, energy usage by WCC is projected to be reduced by 30% by the end of 2021, one calendar year behind target. The target for 2030 remains a reduction of 50% against the 2009 baseline, with a 30% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

### **Q and A: There followed a series of questions:**

EV Chargers (Cllr. Lourda Scott): Another meeting with the ESB EV section is scheduled for May 7<sup>th</sup>.

Tree Management Strategy: under discussion within WCC. Will also come before the CABA SPC.

Submissions to this new Strategy are invited from all interested parties by Breege Kilkenny, Director of Services and member of the CCMA. **Groups, stakeholders and the public are invited to outline what they would wish to see included in the Strategy for Wicklow.** Submissions care of: Theresa O'Brien, Senior Executive Officer, Planning, Development & Environment, Wicklow County Council, County Buildings, Wicklow Email: [env@wicklowcoco.ie](mailto:env@wicklowcoco.ie). **As this is not a statutory plan there is no deadline for the receipt of submissions but the sooner the better to send in submissions in order to guarantee consideration during the preparation of the Plan.** The Tree Management Plan will be for Wicklow County Council and the provision of services within the Council.

Agricultural Burning/Upland Burning/ Grants (Cllr. Dermot O'Brien): Generally considered very bad for biodiversity. The OPW and Teagasc have got involved. The Suas Project Dept of Agriculture Scheme, funded by the EU, intends to bring farmers on board to manage the uplands. Grants to encourage only managed burns are on the cards. (Wicklow Uplands Council is an independent voluntary organisation representing 50 diverse member groups and individuals in the Wicklow Uplands. Wicklow Uplands Council launched the SUAS Pilot Project in 2018 to address some of the complex challenges associated with the land management of commonages and hill farms in the Wicklow/Dublin uplands, See online the SUAS Pilot Project Plan, 2018-2023)

Use of Pesticides: A request to have WCC's use of pesticides as an item on the Agenda for the next meeting was agreed by Breege Kilkenny.. Roundup is the only weedkiller to stamp out certain invasive species, but

its use to make subsequent mowing around trees easier is open to question. Proposal to survey Council workers to ask where and when they use it.

Educational Calendar: Suggestion that the Environmental Awareness section would publish an educational calendar showing what the public would look out for/grow/do at different times of the year outdoors was agreed as a good future project.

Remote working: (Cllr. Peir Leonard) WCC staff are soon to take a transport-usage survey and Mary Cahill agrees questions can be added to that survey to find out how the WCC staff did while remote working during the Covid lockdown.

Collaboration between the six SPCs/Strategic Planning Committees on the WCC and between the 4 Mid-East CARO Councils (Cllr. Dermot O'Brien): Rhona Lennox, Rep for Comhairle na nOg will be interested to meet any other Comhairle na nOg Reps.

Pollinator Plan (Cllr. Lourda Scott) Made the suggestion that the use of pesticides be added to the Pollinator Plan itself.

Joining The Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy: (Cllr. Lourda Scott): Can it be recommended to Council this year? Some other Local Authorities had looked at it and found the targets difficult, Climate Action Officer, Mary Cahill intends to meet the targets within the Climate Charter WCC has already signed up to first, but Mary Cahill will study the targets set within the GCoM/Covenant of Mayors and outline them at the next meeting. (The **GCoM** is a global coalition of city leaders addressing [climate change](#) by pledging to cut [greenhouse gas](#) emissions and prepare for the future impacts of climate change)<sup>11</sup>

Funding Streams: It is intended to streamline all the strings of grants, as Dublin CARO has done. Central Government grants may and Community grants do include Biodiversity and Sustainability as categories.

Greening your business: (Cllr. Peir Leonard) asked for one-stop hubs where businesses would access in one place all advice as to how to green their business.

Trainers for Wicklow, we hope will come from Wicklow (Cllr. Dermot O'Brien)

LCDC Cllr. Peir Leonard and Cllr. Rory O'Connor are both on the Wicklow LCDC/Local Community Development Committee.

Cllr. Jodie Neary thanked the speakers for the impressive work they detailed and offered to get involved in any way she could. She will be in contact with ideas and suggestions soon.

Request to have a speaker, like Professor John Sweeney of NUI Maynooth, come to some CABA SPC meetings to help train up Committee members. Reply that there will not be time for a speaker at every meeting but to please send the name of any speakers to SEO, T.O'B. Birdswatch Ireland did very interesting talks on birdlife and the studies from third-level colleges are very interesting.

## Post Covid Lockdown:

Breege Kilkenny, Director of Services, outlined the priority order of actions. Actions are what it is all about.

### Priority 1-6:

1. Roll out of E-V/electric vehicle public chargers
2. Implementation Plan for the Climate Action Adaptation Strategy
3. Tree Management Strategy
4. Chase Leader funding, collect as much funding as possible from all sources
5. Pollinator Plan delayed by Covid hopes to get up and running after May 18<sup>th</sup> easing of lockdown –provided Health and Safety Officer agrees...
6. To work on the [www.wicklow.ie](http://www.wicklow.ie) website and its accessibility

Mary Cahill, Climate Action Officer, predicts it will take about 18 months (June 2020 to Christmas 2021) for the Wicklow Climate Team to get the Wicklow Climate Action Mitigation Plan ready to add to the Wicklow Climate Change Adaptation Plan.

**Next meeting: One of two dates in July 2020 to be decided nearer the date**

-----There concluded the meeting-----