

County Wicklow Public Participation Network

Climate and Biodiversity Action Strategic Planning Committee/CABA SPC

PPN Representatives: Annette Vaucanson-Kelly, Environment/Conservation Pillar, East Wicklow and Sharon Jackson, Environment/Conservation Pillar, West Wicklow

Date of Meeting Attended via Microsoft Teams: October 16th, 2020

PRESENT:

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

Representing External Sectors: 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.

The Climate Action Officer welcomed Pamela O'Reilly to the 'team'. She will help with Biodiversity Support, compiling a list of funding streams available, compiling and circulating Minutes. The other members of the WCC Climate Action team are: Mary Cahill, Climate Action Officer, Jim Callery, Environmental Awareness Officer and Deirdre Burns, Heritage Officer.

The Meeting received Climate Action Updates as follows:

a) **On the Implementation of the Climate Action Adaptation Strategy:** WCC, Mary Cahill and others are looking at the 108 actions listed with the aim of establishing who is responsible for implementing each of them. The CARO/Climate Action Regional Offices are working to establish a standardised reporting process that will be used nationally to report on and evaluate all climate actions.

b) **The Climate Action and Low Carbon (Amendment) Bill, 2020**

(This draft bill was published on October 7th and is to be reviewed by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action and then presented for debate in the Dáil and Seanad. The Bill is the framework setting the rules which will govern the new amended national Climate Action Plan to be drawn up after this Bill is passed into law around Christmas. The Bill suggests that Ireland aim to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2050, that 5-year national "carbon targets" be proposed by the CCAC/Climate Change Advisory Council and set by the Oireachtas and that the national CCAC review the CA Plan each year and prepare a National Long-Term Climate Action Strategy at least every decade. Local Authorities will be instructed thereafter by the relevant Minister to prepare individual Climate Action Plans that include both mitigation and adaptation measures.)

WCC already has a Climate Action Plan and awaits guidance from CARO, expecting to be given the tight timeline of 12 months after the National Climate Plan is in place to update it, present it for public consultation and have it adopted by the WCC. Local Authorities will be the main drivers tasked with implementing the various climate actions, and WCC will formally apply for funding from the local property tax and central government in due course.

- c) **Electric vehicle public chargers:** Four are due to be installed at the Shoreline leisure centre in Greystones within 6 weeks. GlenEV have the contract. WCC is in discussions about where to install a number of public E-V chargers in the town of Blessington.
- d) **WCC Tree Management Strategy:** A PhD student from UCD has been tasked with preparing the Tree Management Strategy for trees on Wicklow Council/publicly-owned lands. This policy document will not include hedgerows. The brief allows 8 weeks for data gathering, a presentation (which may be ready by mid December) and for the draft strategy to go on public display. Cllr. LS asked that the brief sent to UCD be circulated; Cllr PL suggested a moratorium temporarily banning some urban tree felling or creating a paper trail so a WCC engineer would issue a notification and sign off whenever an urban tree or trees were to be felled.
- e) **Funding Options and Grants available:** Mary Cahill is working to collate and gather in one document/folder all the funding options for environmental and biodiversity projects available from the EU and at national and local level.

BK: Grants sometimes cover as little as 35% of the total cost of a project and any matching funding from WCC might be in short supply this year.

PL: Other funding streams are available to replace local authority matching funding for climate action or biodiversity projects, MC and P.O'R will look into these also.

- f) **Alternatives to glyphosate:** A non-toxic alternative to the weedkiller, glyphosate/Round-Up has been agreed. Pilot schemes in a number of local authorities (Dublin City, Kerry, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown) agreed that FoamStream was an effective alternative. A generator-type machine sprays hot water mixed with four oils onto the leaves of the plant, the oils holds the hot water on the leaves long enough to kill the plant. The FoamStream machine can also be used to disinfect and clean public spaces such as park benches, playgrounds, etc. WCC intends to purchase one machine from the quotes already in (cost €22,000) and some staff will be trained to use it. The more vigorous invasive species plants might still require the occasional use of a more toxic weedkiller to eradicate them. LS: Delighted and would like to see data next year showing how much less Round-Up was required compared with this year's baseline.

The Meeting received an Update on Biodiversity Actions from Heritage Officer, Deirdre Burns as follows:

- a) **Brittas Bay Project** (designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). The Heritage Office has been mowing a plot on the North Beach to keep the bracken down and allow native plants to replace it. A few cattle will now graze the area. An ecologist is monitoring the site and will do a yearly quadrat survey.
- b) It is hoped that the **Invasive Species Clean-Up Day** will go ahead in November.
- c) The rare plant workshop in early October, in collaboration with the National Biodiversity Data Centre, looked at cudweed, asparagus, meadow saxifrage and marsh helleborine. The workshop will repeat next year.
- d) **Swift Project:** The swifts have migrated now; take up on their nesting boxes and caller systems worked great this year and there will be more nesting boxes available next year if other towns and venues wish to apply for them.

- e) **WCC**, the East Wicklow Rivers Trust/**EWRT, Inland Fisheries** and the Local Authority Water Programme/**LAWPRO** have formed a working group to look into removing or re-configuring various obstacles/barriers to fish migration identified in a 2014 study. Atlantic salmon and sea trout numbers have dwindled. Corrective work at Ballinglen Bridge near Tinahely will go out to tender, the Salmon Conservation Fund may help fund this; The Three Trouts Barrier in Delgany is also being looked at. Greystones MD/Municipal District will look at funding to reconfigure a fish barrier near the Glebe in Wicklow. These projects are in the very early stages. When and if funding is secured, public information nights will then take place.
- f) The County Wicklow Partnership/CWP has been assured funding into 2021 under the Leader Rural Development Programme. (The CWP operates from the Bridgewater Centre in Arklow , info@wicklowpartnership.ie, 0402 20955). In early spring 2021, Leader and the CWP will advertise, seeking expressions of interest from 10 towns or villages interested in working with an ecologist to draw up a **tailored Biodiversity Plan for their town or village**.
- g) A **Biodiversity Audit** of local authority lands has shown various historic graveyards and circa 50 sites to be areas of high biodiversity value or potential.
- h) **There are a number of Biodiversity awareness resources available for free from the WCC website at www.wicklow.ie**. These include: a new child-friendly, illustrated booklet called *Gardening for Biodiversity*, produced by Deirdre Burns and published by LAHO and a video on how to prepare, plant and tend a wildflower meadow, produced in cooperation with the National Biodiversity Data Centre/NBDC and Kildare CoCo and Kilkenny CoCo. In production and due to be available soon: Reprints of the *Wicklow Wildlife* poster and a *How to Guide to building nestboxes*.

The Meeting received an Update from Environmental Awareness Officer, Jim Callery, as follows:

- a) Applications for Tree Grants were up fourfold this year, all proposed sites for the new trees will be checked for suitability and advice available.
- b) The Fashion & Textiles Wearable Clothing project, run in conjunction with the Rediscovery Centre in Ballymun, Dublin 11, relaunched in May. It encourages secondary school students to repair and upcycle clothing. 25 teams registered this year, up from the 7 teams who competed in 2019. The entrants have been given an extension to the end of November to get their entries ready. The final will be a virtual event in January 2021 and will be filmed from the Rediscovery Centre.
- c) The judging of Tidy Towns for this year is complete. The announcement of the winners will be a virtual event. Discussions are ongoing as to how best to recognise the winners.
- d) The Stop Food Waste challenge over 4 weeks in July/August with Chef Catherine Fulvio sharing recipes and tips, garnered a lot of views. 160,000 tuned in and 50, 000 watched a video through to the end.
- e) The National Pollinator Plan requires that grass be mowed, lifted and composted because mulching the grass cuttings back into the ground encourages grass and discourages the wildflowers that bees feed from. A grant application has been made to buy mowers equipped to lift the grass.
- f) **A new SDG Mapping Tool will enable all Volunteer and Community Actions to be recorded and pinpointed on a map of Wicklow and all actions will be linked to the United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals/SDGs. The SDG mapping tool is to**

go up on www.wicklow.ie, probably on the Living Page, perhaps also on the new revised Environment landing page.

It has been created in house by WCC's P. O'Flaherty. The aim is for people to get more familiar with the SDGs and for everyone to see what is being done by community and voluntary groups to implement the SDGs in Wicklow. The original concept comes from the Public Participation Network and the 450 voluntary groups registered with it in Co Wicklow. **The application form online requires just one contact email, a brief description of the project and perhaps one photo.**

This initiative was very well received by everyone present. It recognises the contribution made by voluntary groups. The SDGs are to be integrated into this year's revision of the County Development Plan and will be considered during the evaluation of future applications for funding. Applications for funding through the Rural or Urban Regeneration Funds already ask how the proposed project links with the SDGs. To invite young people to get on board, it was asked that schools around Wicklow be notified of the mapping tool and asked to record their great work (Green Schools, school gardens, etc.).

- g) Extensions have been granted by SEAI to five Sustainable Energy Communities/SECs whose Energy Master Plans were delayed by Covid restrictions. Some SECs are close to complete (Glenmalure); others, like Blessington, Greystones and Wicklow Town are about to start on their Energy Master Plans.
- h) Wicklow Food Hub: WCC has put a call out to the food and beverage producers of Wicklow as part of the Wicklow Naturally project to assess the level of interest in developing a Food Hub for the county. It is asking producers to complete the survey on its Facebook page. The link to the survey is: surveymonkeys.com/r/58NTDSW.

The Meeting received an Energy Efficiency and Emissions Reduction Update as follows:

- a) Marc Devereux is to meet again with Joe, the Energy Performance Officer and Mary Cahill
- b) Some projects will go in seeking funding for next year, it is WCC will make funding available at the upcoming annual Budget meetings
- c) The VEC Better Energy Communities are due funding
- d) When as little as 35% funding is available on some schemes, match funding is a concern
- e) It is expected that the lowest tender for the solar panels to the Wicklow Municipal District car park will be awarded soon

The County Development Plan/CDP and how Climate Action/CA is incorporated into it:

The County Development Plan is at draft stage, but should be ready for circulation to members by the end of this year. **If adopted by the Councillors in spring 2021, it will go out for public consultation for a second time, for 10 weeks in March/April 2021, for the public to review it and make submissions.** (There were 155 submissions to the Climate Change section of the CDP on the first public consultation. The aim is to encourage the people of Wicklow to take ownership of the Plan). The current draft has taken the 10 appendices of the 2015-2020 Plan and incorporated nine of them fully into the Plan from the outset. One of the appendices is on climate change; it will be brought front and centre in the new CDP.

There are 3 pillars to the CDP: economic opportunity, climate change and happy place making. All policy objectives sit under those 3 pillars.

Land use is discussed in the chapter on Climate Change. More attention is to be given to Green Infrastructure, Biodiversity and Natural Heritage. Cllr LS asked that the County Development Plan pay commensurate attention to Biodiversity, since Biodiversity health or loss goes hand-in-hand with Climate Change adaptation/mitigation.

(From a previous meeting of CABA SPC, on July 16th, 2020: The management of council lands comes under the remit of the Directorate of Corporate Estate. Changing the management of WCC-owned green sites to maximise biodiversity could be brought to that Directorate or to the Council as a policy recommended by CABA SPC and advocated by the councillors on CABA SPC. The CDP provides a land use framework, which the public and Councillors can develop.)

A.O.B

1. Coastal Erosion Plan and Flood mitigation for the Avoca River: Cllr PL asked if there was an update, CAO MC said there was not, that the 10-chapter Plan was complete and had been submitted to the Department/OPW. Chair R.O'C asked that the CABA SPC using its name write to the Minister/OPW asking for an update. PL asked that the Coastal Erosion study done in partnership with Irish Rail be released. CAO MC agreed a summary of it would be released and made available to the SPC and the Councillors and to the Marine Development Group.

2. Climate Action Officer, Mary Cahill and others proposed that the CABA SPC meet more frequently than at present, alternating between formal, fully-minuted meetings and a second, more informal style of meeting to get ideas flowing, hear back what is happening on the ground, be more action focused, be more 'steering group' than committee. Such informal meetings would feed energy, inform policy and acknowledge the urgency of the issues around climate change and biodiversity loss.

These informal meetings would not require either a quorum or the taking of full minutes. So as not to lose ideas generated in the chat, Cllr LS asked that some notes be taken and that the deliberations at informal CABA SPC meetings be put on the Agenda to be outlined during the next plenary 'formal' meeting. It was also asked if each MD could report on climate actions in its area, if presentations heard at the CABA SPC could be made available online for the public to view, if (LS) an email could please be circulated to members outlining how the informal meetings would be run. It was also asked that Minutes of the CABA SPC meetings be posted online within 10 days of each meeting. Chair RO'C asked whether the online meetings might be recorded to help P O'R with drafting the Minutes.

3. CAO MC is working on a new and improved landing page for the environment section of www.wicklow.ie. There will be a Buzz section under the Living in Wicklow section and the new SDG Mapping Tool will be there. DO'B: the National Youth Council is helping with a virtual workshop lasting 90 minutes to go online the week after Hallowe'en. MC asked Rhona and Comhairle na nOg to please help with ideas for the design and launch of the new Climate Action segment; the launch could link with a collage of photos from any number of recent projects (as mentioned at this meeting and all around the county)

Chair R.O'C looks forward to the workshop, thanked all, sees some changes ahead for this SPC, feels it is moving in the right direction, welcomed PO'R again to the team.

.....The next meeting date is to be decided.....