

REPORT FROM THE CLIMATE & BIODIVERSITY ACTION STRATEGIC POLICY COMMITTEE of 10TH JUNE 2021 BY MICROSOFT TEAMS

PRESENT:

Cllr. Rory O'Connor, Chairman
Cllr. Peir Leonard
Cllr. Dermot O'Brien
Cllr. Lourda Scott
Cllr. Jodie Neary
Ms. Sharon Jackson
Ms. Franny Raven
Mr. Justin Ivory

IN ATTENDANCE:

Ms. Breege Kilkenny, Director of Services
Ms. Jackie Carroll, Senior Executive Officer
Ms. Mary Cahill, Senior Executive Engineer
Mr. Jim Callery, Environmental Awareness
Officer
Ms. Deirdre Burns, Heritage Officer
Mr. Marc Devereux, Senior Engineer
Mr. Tom Griffin, Senior Chemist

Minutes Of the Meeting held on the 8th April 2021.

The Minutes of the Meeting held on the 8th April 2021, were proposed by Cllr. P. Leonard. Cllr. L. Scott seconded the Minutes on the proviso that the sentence under item 4 'greenways were a priority for the Green Party' be removed. The Minutes were agreed.

(i) Air Quality Policy

The Cathaoirleach requested that the matter of implementing an Air Quality Policy similar to that of Cork County Council be considered. The Cork City CoCo Draft Air Quality Plan showed Fireplaces and stoves are bigger polluters than traffic. Burning wood, kiln-dried wood or wood chip all releases Carbon into the atmosphere. The aim is to phase out the burning of all fuel, even of dry wood pellets.

Mr. Tom Griffin, Senior Chemist, Wicklow County Council advised the committee that the Department of the Environment is currently finalising the National Air Quality Strategy, following extensive public consultation. He noted that the Council works with the EPA on installation of air quality monitoring equipment in the larger urban areas and that monitors have been installed in Bray and Greystones.

The Committee discussed the matter and it was agreed that Wicklow County Council would investigate the possibility of installing an air quality monitor for the Decarbonisation Zone in Arklow and one also in Blessington. This would create a baseline which would be very useful.

It was noted that the SEC in Arklow have been doing research on fuel usage which indicated that 20% of people burn coal, 30% oil, 30% gas with some homes not having a heating system. There is a fuel poverty in Arklow.

As there are budgetary considerations, the cost of the provision of these monitors will be included in the Estimate of Expenses for 2022.

East Wicklow Rep, Justin Ivory, called for decisive action. He had previously campaigned for greater vigilance around air quality and had personal reasons for doing so.

(ii) Tree Policy

A presentation on the draft Tree Policy was given by Ms. Sophia Meeres, UCD. Ms. Sophia Meeres headed the team employed to draw up a Tree Management Strategy for trees and hedgerow on lands owned by Wicklow County Council. Ms Meeres is a Professor of Landscape Architecture at UCD with ten years experience running her own consultancy in Southern France.

Ms. Meeres acknowledged the input she had received in her consultations with the Climate Action Team, the District engineers, the Municipal Districts, notably with the Bray MD, the PPN, the Tree Council and other NGOs as she reviewed current practise and sought to develop and co-ordinate best practice. A survey had been conducted by the PPN which formed the basis of the draft policy.

Mary Cahill confirmed that funds had been found to carry out a comprehensive drone survey of the trees, hedgerows and woodlands of Co Wicklow. A company called Blue Skies would supply this initial survey which will be available for the public to consult.

The Tree Management draft Strategy identified a number of issues:

- Wicklow County Council has no control over trees on private land unless they are subject to TPOs.
- The care of trees falls to the district engineers or their staff as part of their extensive duties in other domains. They are trained on the job and with little access to the advice of trained arborists.
- Four of the 5 Wicklow municipal districts have no budget for tree management (Bray does have a budget).

These issues notwithstanding, Wicklow Co Council aspires to develop standards and county-wide protocols for the care and management of trees on council land.

WCC's Vision is to increase urban forest cover to 30% and to plan the replacement of its mature trees.

In order to implement the Strategy fully, it was recommended that:

- ❖ the expertise built up in the Bray MD could and should be shared
- ❖ the Care Protocol and the Maintenance Protocol supplied with the Strategy be applied
- ❖ that Annual Surveys and Inspections be carried out as outlined in the Care and Maintenance Protocols Example the Felling Protocol: *No tree, urban or rural will be felled unless advised by an arborist report, Annual Review and Annual Plan of Tree Works will be posted to the Council website 2 weeks before cutting season starts: (September 1st to February 28th is cutting season), then a sign will be posted at the site of the proposed felling 2 weeks before felling, Always prefer careful doctoring Always outline replacement choice of tree before felling...*
- ❖ that All works be carried out according to the British standard for tree work, BS 3998 (2010) the British Standard for Tree Work
- ❖ That the Council will develop a Technical Manual for the Planting & Maintenance of Trees in Streets and a Technical Manual for the Planting & Maintenance of Trees in Parks
- ❖ That the Strategy could be implemented by current staff if assisted by the advice of professionally qualified arborist(s)
- ❖ That the Council consider the appointment of a Tree Officer to oversee the county-wide vision for tree maintenance, renewal and planting into the future.

The Committee welcomed the presentation and a discussion ensued, during which such matters as planning development and tree management, merits of Tree Preservation Orders and resources required to fully implement the policy.

Regarding the proposal to have a public consultation on the policy, it was noted that the Members of the SPC were "either Elected Members or were representing a sectoral interest"

It was agreed that, following circulation of the draft policy to the SPC members, the Cathaoirleach would host a public webinar and any feedback would be brought back to the Climate Action Team.

It was proposed that a further meeting would be held in July to recommend the Policy to the full Council Meeting.

It was noted that while Bray had a budget for such works, the other Municipal Districts will need to be provided with a budget which the Councillors will have to agree when they are agreeing the budget. *The members requested that other sources of funding be investigated also.*

Sharon Jackson spoke of the local upset at the felling of 35-40 trees at the Burgage cemetery in Blessington town in May 2021 and asked what check list or protocol the new Strategy had put in place to prevent such sudden top-down decisions on felling? The sudden felling during biodiversity week of 35-40 previously topped leylandi trees screening the cemetery from the housing estate had freed up 73 extra grave plots, but was done without consulting or forewarning the local community. "The trees cannot be fixed, what's really important is that changes are made by Wicklow County Council to prevent anything similar being done in the future".

The draft Strategy does contain a Felling Protocol as follows: : No tree, urban or rural will be felled unless on the advice in a report by a professional arborist. Annual Review and Annual Plan of Tree Works will be posted to the Council website 2 weeks before cutting season starts: (September 1st to February 28th is cutting season), The Tree Policy is to always refer tree doctoring to felling and to always outline the choice of replacement tree that is to be planted immediately after any tree is removed. A site notice will be put up two weeks before the felling is to be done.

A comment from The Committee at WWEN that should have been added: Please to recognise in discussing the Tree Management Strategy that hedges are as valuable as trees. Hedgerows could sequester 50% more carbon than forestry. Almost all groups of animals may be found in a hedge, Species of native hedges are slower growing, but more species shelter in them than in faster growing imported species

(iii) Lighting Policy

Ms. Mary Cahill referred to the very informative presentation that was held the previous day by Professor Brian Epsey, Astrophysicist at Trinity College, Dublin and co-founder of dark Skies, Ireland. Twenty-four were present, including the Council engineers attached to three Strategic Planning Committees, including the Roads and Transport SPC.

Ms. Cahill stated that she was hoping to organise a further presentation for all the Members of Wicklow County Council and other Sections of the Council including the Municipal Districts and CCSD. Professor Epsey was holding a one hour webinar next Wednesday night from 7 to 8. Ms. Cahill agreed to send round the link for this talk.

Cllr. P. Leonard queried if some of the energy savings that were going to be made could be transferred to fund other projects.

Mr. Devereux stated that proposed energy projects were being funded from loans taken out and which were being paid back from energy savings such as the PLEEP Programme. It was confirmed to Cllr. Scott that warmer LED lights were being used as part of the PLEEP Project.

Ms. Cahill confirmed that she would discuss the setting up of the Working Group with the TWES Section who may set up the group but with the Climate and Biodiversity Action SPC having an input into it.

Outline recalled from the PowerPoint Presentation of Prof. Espey:

Prof. Brian Espey, Astrophysicist at Trinity College and co-founder of Dark Skies Ireland, gave a very interesting presentation to several Committees of Wicklow County Council this June, 2021. The subject was Best Practice Public Lighting. He has been researching the issue of light pollution since 2009 and been involved in EU Cost Action "Loss of Night Network". The Mayo, Kerry and Donegal County Councils, notably Newport town, have drawn up or are starting to draft Master Plans to adjust public lighting so as to best light public spaces while protecting wildlife and selecting the correct LEDs for different areas and environmental zones. His presentation makes the case for reasoned lighting tailored to the needs of different zones and is accompanied by research images, graphs, tables and data making the case for professionals.

Generally, electric light pays to produce so much extra light that it pollutes the night and leaves 84% of us in areas where the Milky Way is obscured and stars invisible. Insects, moths, bats and birds are confused by the artificial light that blots out the cycles of lunar light, with resulting decline in populations and strange phenomena where birds keep up their dawn chorus singing for an extra two hours a day, migrating birds get disorientated, bats avoid lit areas, we humans have weakened night vision, trees and plants bud out of season.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service has expressed support for a more tailored approach that would allow curfews in certain protected areas and trim and dim sensor lights in sensitive areas, directing light downwards to light only the path that needs to be lit and limiting the scattering of extra light upwards and around the light.

LEDs of 3000 Kelvin are now a new standard over the counter and 2700 Kelvin, warmer white, with even less harmful white light, are a further protection in sensitive areas. Dark Skies Ireland is working with the Road Management Office and Transport Infrastructure Ireland so the high cost of wasteful lighting can be brought down while using the safer warm-white spectrum, lower Kelvin LEDs. PC Amber (Phosphor-coated blue LED) or amber LEDs also have none of the harmful blue emission light human eyes perceive as bright white. Some manufacturers have designed lighting that alters depending on the time of the day, becoming warmer towards the evening to reduce environmental impact at twilight and beyond.

The lighting of the road network will need very careful re-consideration, since bright lights do not give the safest, most accurate colour perception and the floodlighting of buildings needs to be adjusted to tone down the glare and highlight the texture of the facade.

The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: Bringing nature back into our lives will form the basis of future legislation around light pollution. Pockets of Mayo, Kerry, Donegal and Wicklow's Glendalough are already aware of the visitor potential when walkers, hikers and festival-goers enjoy the night sky.

Altogether, a very useful and interesting hour and hopefully, as the word begins to spread, this research will inform the public lighting of all zones, protected, urban, rural, suburban and sensitive. The new greenways, blueways, trails, parks, walks and coastal paths would protect their wildlife

Item 5: Decarbonisation Zone

In relation to a previous query from Cllr. P. Leonard, Ms. Cahill confirmed that no funding was earmarked in this year's budget for the decarbonisation zone as the Circular had only recently been received from the

Department. There is money available in the budget to appoint a consultant to work on the baseline for energy.

It was confirmed that the Energy Master Plan prepared by the SEC would inform the baseline work that would be included in the Implementation Plan. The consultant will carry out a carbon footprint for the town.

Mr. Callery confirmed that the decarbonisation zone will look at all carbon emissions whereas the Energy Master Plan will look at heat and transport initiatives in the town. He confirmed that carbon sequestration would be measured as part of the process.

The Chairman stated that a letter should be sent to the Chief Executive about getting air quality monitors in Arklow.

Mr. J. Callery agreed to forward on a presentation that he made to the Town Team recently to the Members. He stated that the primary focus would be on establishing baselines for emissions within the town and emissions from travel, housing industry and community buildings. The business community and industrial sector would be contacted to explore potential projects which will help with carbon sequestration.

Item 6: To discuss Report received on Climate Action / Energy / Environmental Awareness and Biodiversity

Cllr. L. Scott expressed disappointment that the EV Chargers in Greystones were being delayed. She queried if there was a date for the videos on dog fouling and queried the up to date situation with regard to the website. She referred to a recent report by Faith Wilson and queried how the local biodiversity plans fed into the work of the SPC.

Ms. D. Burns stated that she had not seen a copy of the Faith Wilson report and would be interested in seeing it.

Mr. J. Callery stated that the website was being worked on at present and hoped that it would be completed in the near future. In relation to the dog fouling video, quotes had been received last week with a Dublin Company selected to provide the videos. Solar powered LED signs had also been ordered and were due to be delivered the following day. It was hoped to put one sign in each of the Municipal District areas.

Ms. Carroll confirmed that the website should be completed by August.

In relation to a query from Ms. S. Jackson regarding 84/85 community groups applying to do local biodiversity plans, when places for ten to receive the help from an ecologist/ biodiversity experts had been advertised by the Co. Wicklow Partnership, members were assured that Co Wicklow Partnership was going to start offering online training on the platform Slack for seven Mondays to representatives of as many groups who sent on volunteers to receive the training and spearhead the drafting of a local Biodiversity Plan. To the request that reinstating the aid of an ecologist to help local Biodiversity teams involve their wider community, it was replied that online training and short locally agreed Biodiversity Plans had proven very effective elsewhere. Ms Burns had been involved in scripting the biodiversity training.

Cllr. P. Leonard referred to the derelict phone boxes in Arklow and a company who was installing EV Chargers. She agreed to send on the details of the Company to the Elected Representatives on the SPC.

Mr. J. Ivory referred to a programme being run by Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council who had funding available for biodiversity projects. *It was suggested that Wicklow County Council should contact Dun Laoghaire County Council to ascertain where funding was being obtained for such projects.*

The next meeting of CABA SPC is on September 9th, 2021