

REPORT

The Climate & Biodiversity Action Strategic Policy Committee

Meeting on April 28th, 2022

PRESENT:

Cllr. Lourda Scott, Cathaoirleach
Cllr. Peir Leonard
Cllr. Dermot O'Brien
Cllr. Rory O'Connor
Cllr. Jodie Neary
Ms. Franny Raven, Comhairle na nOg
Mr Gary McKenzie, Glen Fuels
Ms. Sharon Jackson, PPN
Mr. Justin Ivory, PPN

IN ATTENDANCE:

Ms. Breege Kilkenny, Director of Services
Ms. Jackie Carroll, Senior Executive Officer
Ms. Mary Cahill, Senior Executive Engineer ,
Climate Action officer
Mr. Jim Callery, Environmental Awareness
Officer
Ms. Deirdre Burns, Biodiversity/Heritage Officer
Mr. Marc Devereux, Senior Engineer

Minutes agreed and seconded.

Local Economic and Community Programme, 2022-2028:

Presentation by D. Whitfield, Community, Cultural and Social Development Section, WCC

The second LECP for the years 2022-2028, *Building Better Communities* will be developed by each local authority over the next 12 months with the deadline for completion pushed out to Easter 2023. The County Development Plan focuses on issues around land use, the LECP on much else. It will have a statutory basis. The Guidelines were published in December 2021. Climate Action, Mitigation and Adaptation - limited to Goal 9 in the first LECP - will have a much stronger profile in the up-coming LECP, in line with the *Climate Action Plan 2021: Securing our Future*. Implementation will be in 2-yearly segments, so action can be taken in response to changing circumstances. The LCDC/Local Community Development Committee will assist in developing the community elements and the SPC EDES/Strategic Policy Committee on Economic Development the economic elements. Starting this May 10th, Wicklow PPN will run a workshop in each municipal district, one online and one with environmental groups to identify key stakeholders and train them to consult with and collate data representing the views of their communities. The LECP Advisory Group will meet every three months to 2028 to measure implementation. Community engagement and participation will be sought at all times. Schemes like the 'Smart Villages' and the 'Town Centre First' schemes will receive funding. The measures to be taken around Climate Change have yet to be decided. Justin Ivory pointed out that Wicklow's LECP would need to increase its focus on biodiversity, seek not just economic growth but sustainable economic growth, make sure that targets were measurable and avoid strategic housing and other developments undermining the public realm plans.

***It was then agreed that three environmental representatives would be needed to assist in drawing up the Climate Action/Mitigation/Adaptation commitments of Wicklow's LECP. Letters will be sent out looking to secure three representatives, one for Climate Change, one from the PPN and one from Planning.

Alternatives to Glyphosate use:

The revised Weed Control Policy for Wicklow County Council

- The five Wicklow Municipal Districts have again held off cutting and mowing until May to ensure a supply of early season pollen to feed pollinators and other insects
- The **Foamstream** machine has been in Bray and Wicklow and goes next to Blessington and then Arklow
- Wicklow County Council's IT section have already prepared a draft App around the Wicklow policy on weed/vegetation control

- The Climate Action team are negotiating with Teagasc asking that Teagasc set up a training course for the staff and contractors engaged in the maintenance of green spaces
- *Slasher* organic weedkiller and *Surefire* are two safer products and hardware stores, garden centres and individuals could be encouraged to ask to buy them and to stock them
- Manual weed control is labour intensive and more expensive but there is oftentimes no real alternative when biodiversity is the priority.
- Increasingly, the judges and inspectors of the Tidy Towns competition award marks for sensitive weed control.
- The new revised Wicklow County Council Policy on non-chemical alternatives to glyphosate will be presented for discussion at the next Council plenary on June 13th
- The new Policy includes a case study where weedkiller use was reduced by 80% thanks to the other techniques trialled and evaluated in the case study at Clermont.
- The new Policy concludes with a Do's and Don'ts Section that lists clearly what it is helpful to do and not do when clearing weeds or using weedkillers.
- If your community is managing an open space for pollinators, you can record your good work on www.pollinator.ie.
- The Council also can provide 'Managed for Wildlife' signs suitable for outdoor use. Drop an e-mail with your postal address to wicklowheritage@wicklowcoco.ie to place your request

Press Release

28th April 2022

WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL TRIALS ALTERNATIVES TO WEEDKILLER USE

Wicklow County Council is aiming to green the Garden County by trialling alternatives to chemical weed control, and whenever possible, managing vegetation for pollinators.

This work is in response to public concerns about the overuse of Glyphosate products in the environment and the need to support biodiversity in all of our communities as part of the Council's commitments as a partner to the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.

All over the county each Municipal District has identified sites in Council ownership that are suitable for reduced mowing, ie: 'Cut- and-lift' on either a six week or a once-a-year regime.

Holding off on the first cut until after mid-April allows dandelions and daisies to flower as vitally important early food sources for pollinators including bees, bumble bees and hover flies. A reduced mowing regime throughout the year allows other flowers such as clover, buttercups, speedwells and vetches to thrive, providing a seasonally constant supply of pollen and nectar and a welcome splash of colour to our roadside verges and open spaces.

Tidy Towns and residents' associations are also managing many sites for pollinators. Managed for pollinators signs are often used to highlight the work being done. Householders can play their part by reducing mowing or leaving part of the garden uncut.

Wicklow County Council is also piloting new weed control techniques which avoid chemical use, mainly on hard surfaces where the growth of wildflowers would be undesirable.

A new product called Foamstream has been purchased that delivers a spray of hot water and natural oils which can be used to kill off vegetation where it is not wanted. It relies on heat rather than chemicals to kill weeds. The natural oils help to bind the heat into the plant for longer increasing the impact of the hot water.

The technique will be used across all five Municipal districts. A second technique that has been used in several towns is metal brushes which scrape roads clean removing any growing vegetation above ground. Weed eaters and trimmers are being used for clearing vegetation in smaller sites and more difficult to access areas.

Cllr Lourda Scott, Chairperson of the Climate and Biodiversity Special Policy Committee, welcomed the trials stating: *“Providing space and opportunity for pollinating insects is vital for building resilience of our biodiversity to Climate Change. I welcome the investment in new nonchemical techniques for weed control and the focus on reduced mowing early in the season.”*

It is hoped that the trialling of these alternative techniques will demonstrate that weed control is possible without the use of hazardous chemicals being released into our environment and this will help to protect our communities, the staff of Wicklow County Council and our wonderful biodiversity.

Wicklow County Council is committed to promoting a landscape where biodiversity can thrive and encourages householders and communities alike to make space for nature in our gardens, towns and villages. If your community is manging an open space for pollinators, you can record your good work on www.pollinator.ie. The Council also can provide ‘Managed for Wildlife’ signs suitable for outdoor use. Drop an e mail with your postal address to wicklowheritage@wicklowcoco.ie to place your request.

Ends

The Implementation of the revised Tree Management Policy:

- Wicklow County Council’s IT Dept are developing several Apps, one to cover The Management Plan for trees on lands under the control of the County Council.
- Revenue, Parks and Maintenance will employ an arborist to survey trees and recommend corrective works, starting with trees in town centres.
- The Blue Skies drone survey of Wicklow’s trees completed in 2021 shows trees within hedgerows and has been shared with UCD, TCD and other researchers.
- The new Tree Management Policy has been workshopped with relevant Staff.
- *****Wicklow County Council has assigned two new staff to the Planning Dept., one to advise on the trees and hedgerows involved in planning proposals and permissions.**

Revising the WCC Public Lighting Policy

Engineers within the Road Department welcomed the new lighting standards recommendations. The Chairs of the CABA and the Transport SPC are organising that Professor Brian Espey of TCD and Dark Skies present again, this time to all stakeholders so as to answer their submissions and questions about low-carbon, low-impact, biodiversity-safe public lighting.

Update on new and ongoing Biodiversity Action Projects:

- The Barn Owl Project is new this year and has a Facebook page where the public can register their sightings of barn owls to help with the nationwide survey. Nesting boxes are available. See [www.wicklow.ie/Wicklow Heritage Plan](http://www.wicklow.ie/Wicklow_Heritage_Plan) for more details. Contact dburns@wicklowcoco.ie
- The Swift Project continues, with Eoin O’Sullivan giving advice and swift nesting boxes available.
- The Brittas Bay project continues
- *****National Biodiversity Week is May 13th to 22nd this year. To view the multitude of events planned, consult the IEN.ie newsletter on this link: <https://mailchi.mp/0f672dba615d/may-newsletter-events-galore-to-celebrate-nature>**
- The National Biodiversity Conference is June 8th & 9th in Dublin Castle and online. Tickets now on sale.

- The joint project, Inland Fisheries of Ireland and Wicklow County Council, to replace barriers to fish migration on various Wicklow rivers will be on the agenda for the June 23rd meeting of CABA SPC. Tinahely, Ballinglen and Ballyduff are involved here.
- Congratulations to the Environmental Awareness Officer, Jim Callery, whose collaboration with the PPN and IT Department developed the interactive map on Wicklow.ie which records projects around Co. Wicklow that put the 17 *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2030* into action. This map won the gold award at the recent local authority management awards and will now be rolled out to local authorities nationally. To fill in the short form and record your project online, or to learn about the projects already recorded on this map go to Wicklow.ie/Living/Climate Action and Biodiversity/Sustainable Development Goals.

<https://www.wicklow.ie/Living/Your-Council/Climate-Action-and-Biodiversity/Sustainable-Development-Goals>

Any other Business

- The Climate Adaptation Plan identifies hedgerows as important natural corridors allowing many species of plant, insect, bird and creature to fan out through the countryside, to feed, nest and shelter from the elements and from predators. See Action 5.1.
- Wicklow has a Major Emergency Plan, with a person designated to take charge in the event of a major weather event or temporary evacuation due to flooding.
- The annual **Tidy Towns** competition awards a Biodiversity Prize and a Pollinator Prize.
 - ❖ The judges look for sustainability and, increasingly, for biodiversity awareness.
 - ❖ Retention is often found to be best, because quick fixes and sudden changes are often at the expense of biodiversity.
 - ❖ Saving local, native seeds is also advised, since packets of imported seeds have, in the past, contained species that proved invasive or detrimental in a local habitat. County Wicklow's public libraries again this year will distribute packets of native seeds free of charge to anyone who asks for them at the counter. Sarah Rubalcava of Rubalcava Heritage Services will train more communities in seed-saving this summer.

News from Wicklow County Council:

- A new Executive Engineer has been appointed to look at flooding and coastal erosion. Non-hard engineering solutions are to be preferred where possible.
- *The Acting CEO Brian Gleeson, announced that they will commence the **Advanced Planning Stage of the Development of the Climate Action Plan**. This will include a review of the Climate Adaptation Strategy (2019) and a Countywide Baseline Emissions Inventory...[The Bray People](#)*
- Submissions or observations regarding the Proposed Material Amendments to the **Draft Wicklow County Development Plan 2022-2028** and the associated Addenda are invited from the public and interested bodies between **Wednesday 27th April 2022 to 5pm Wednesday 25th May 2022** inclusive.
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.....The next meeting will be **Wed., June 22nd 10.30am** in the Council chamber....

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