

Minutes of Environment, Biodiversity & Climate Action SPC Meeting
held on Tuesday, 16th February, 2021 - Online meeting

Present: **SPC Members:** Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald, (*Chair*), Cllr. Joe Kelly, Cllr. John Hearne, Cllr. Susan Gallagher, Cllr. Jim Griffin, Cllr. Ger Barron, Cllr. Damien Geoghegan, Cllr. Breda Brennan, Ms. Brid O’Hehir and Mr. Tom Hogan.

Officials: Mr. Fergus Galvin, Director of Services.
 Mr. Raymond Moloney, S.E.O.
 Mr. Luke O’Brien, A.O.
 Mr. Niall Kane, S.E.E.
 Ms. Ella Ryan, Environmental Awareness Officer.
 Ms. Muriel Cullen, C.O.
 Ms. Siobhán McCarthy, S.O.

Apologies: Ms. Laura O’Brien-Forbes, Ms. Obianuju Ekedozi

Cllr. Fitzgerald welcomed everyone to the first meeting of the year and extended a warm welcome to new sectoral representative Ms. Ithel McKenna who is representing the Irish Wildlife Trust under the Environment pillar.

1. **Minutes of Meeting held on 15th December 2020**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15th December 2020 were proposed by Cllr. B. Brennan, seconded by Cllr. S. Gallagher and agreed.

2. **Matters Arising**

(a) Update on Upland Burning.

Following on from last meeting in December, R. Moloney, SEO advised this matter had been referred back to the C.P.G. for consideration. Cllr. Fitzgerald advised that Cllr. Brazil is awaiting a reply from Sheep Breeders Association and Department of Agriculture.

(b) Discussion on Notice of Motion from Tom Hogan deferred from last meeting

Notice of Motion:

In light of the climate crisis and the necessity of meeting our emissions obligations the importance of Transport policy is paramount.

The Environment, Biodiversity and Climate Action, SPC, recommends that WCCC along with other stakeholders undertake an immediate feasibility study of upgrades on the entire Wexford-Waterford-Limerick Corridor.

- Seek a guarantee from the Government that any Greenway developments will keep Rosslare/Wexford-Waterford as a valid railway.

- Establishment of an Iarnrod Eireann Regional Office - to manage & improve non-radial inner-city lines.

A commitment to encourage modal transport shift across the region to rail for primary -commuting journeys.

Mr. Hogan outlined in detail the background to his motion, the history of the rail line, the economic benefit it brings to the region and the future potential and the severe impact that would ensue with its threatened closure. Mr. Hogan concluded by advising that the Line will be closed if/when the new Greenway comes into being. He also asked if the SPC would consider passing on this Motion to the next Plenary Council Meeting.

Cllr. Fitzgerald questioned the role of Iarnrod Eireann in relation to this matter. Mr. Hogan confirmed that Minister Eamon Ryan has called for a Rail Review. Cllr. Fitzgerald suggested a feasibility study was needed but enquired as to who would carry it out and would there be a cost to the Council. Mr. Hogan indicated that the Council would be required to fund such a study. Cllr. Fitzgerald asked F. Galvin if he thought the Executive would be interested in carrying out a feasibility study on the future of the railway line. F. Galvin indicated that he didn’t disagree with the sentiments expressed in relation to the railway line. However he stressed that the matter rests with the NTA. F. Galvin indicated that in making any such motion to the Department of Transport it would be best if it were a joint motion from the three Local Authorities (Waterford, Wexford and Kilkenny).

Historically CIE have abandoned lines and ceded them back to Local Authorities e.g. the Dungarvan Line and the Wexford plan to convert the line to Greenway. Ownership stays with Irish Rail for 100 years should there ever be a requirement to convert back to a working railway line. F. Galvin indicated that the Council was not in the business of running railway lines.

Cllr. Fitzgerald asked how best to move forward with the proposal. R. Moloney advised that as Minister Eamonn Ryan was preparing Terms of Reference for the countrywide review of the rail network then the Council could write to him requesting the inclusion of the between Waterford/Wexford railway line in that review. F. Galvin advised that the next appropriate step would be for the SPC Members to nominate one of the Elected Representatives to bring a Motion to the next Plenary Meeting. Cllr. Kelly said he would put the Motion forward in his name but it mightn't reach the Agenda due to number of current Motions already listed. Cllr. Kelly proposed that as time was critical in this matter a letter could issue to the Minister from the SPC. Cllr. Geoghegan agreed with Cllr. Kelly and asked that the letter be issued to the Minister to get the matter moving.

Cllr. Fitzgerald asked on behalf of SPC that letter be sent to Minister. This was agreed.

3. Draft Litter Management Plan 2021-2024 – Report on Public Consultation

R. Moloney indicated that despite widespread advertisement of the Draft Litter Management Plan 2021-2024 which also invited submissions from the public only one submission was received in relation to the Plan. He advised that some minor changes were made to the Draft Litter Management Plan to include data in respect of the year 2020 which was not available when the draft plan was prepared. SPC members were advised that the making of the Litter Management Plan in accordance with the Litter Pollution Act, 1997 was a Reserved Function of the Council and accordingly the Draft Litter Management Plan is required to be presented to the Plenary Council. Cllr. Geoghegan proposed to bring the plan to the Plenary Council and Cllr. Kelly seconded the proposal. Cllr. Fitzgerald stated that he would support the Plan at the Plenary Meeting. R. Moloney indicated that he will prepare a short briefing for the Chairperson note highlighting the key points to be emphasised. Cllr. Fitzgerald said it was disappointing that only one submission was received in light of number of complaints received by Environment Department.

4. Dog Fouling Campaign

E. Ryan gave a presentation which included details of actions taken during last year's campaigns. These actions were mostly done on-line. E. Ryan then moved onto the action plan for 2021.

Green Dog Walker Scheme – this is a community approach whereby dog walkers take a pledge to clean up after their dogs and to carry extra doggie bags and to give others a bag for their dog if they ask for one. By wearing the Green Dog-Walkers high-vis vest a dog walker is indicating that they are a responsible dog-owner participating in and supporting the scheme.

E. Ryan advised that a regional campaign scheduled to commence in March and will run for 12 months will encompass a number of messages, including basic message of picking up after a dog, allowing dog to foul on green areas, bagging dog fouling but not binning it, effects on other users of public areas e.g. wheelchair users, ball players, buggies, etc.

Cllr. Fitzgerald indicated that under the Litter Management Plan it was proposed to provide more bags and bins particularly on looped walks. Cllr. Griffin said there is a need to look at who is being most affected by dog fouling. He has had representations from the Brothers of Charity regarding Griffith Place where the Brothers of Charity have four Units. E. Ryan advised that the campaign puts responsibility on dog owners/walkers whilst mentioning the effects dog fouling has on wheelchair users, vulnerable groups, etc. More dog waste bins may not be the answer as there is one particular 'black spot' walk of approx. 1km which has dog waste bags and bins at both ends. The message is "dog fouling is not acceptable and should be reported". Cllr. Kelly agreed that it is the owners who are at fault but historically people find it hard to report on their neighbours. Educating the public that dog fouling in public areas is not acceptable is vital and this must be supported by more bins. Cllr. Gallagher asked if a sign could be put on dispenser bins reminding people not to take more than one bag. Cllr. Gallagher also requested that the Council source biodegradable bags for the bins and that these bins be emptied more frequently. Cllr. Hearne questioned the responsibilities of dog breeders. Cllr. Hearne requested that dog owners/walkers be checked to ensure that they are carrying bags for dog waste. Cllr. Geoghegan agreed with Cllr. Hearne regarding enforcement and stated that the issue of dog fouling is raised every month at District and

Plenary Council Meetings. Cllr. Geoghegan requested that the Environmental Awareness Officer prepare a one or two page document setting out what has/hasn't worked and what does/doesn't work currently. Cllr. Brennan agreed with Cllr. Geoghegan and indicated that "it will take a 'zero tolerance' approach to end dog fouling".

Cllr. Fitzgerald asked if the document requested by Cllr. Geoghegan could also be sent to the PPN. Ms. B. O'Hehir also asked if the document could be sent to PPN. E. Ryan advised launch date for new campaign is 18th March.

R. Moloney gave 2020 figures for enforcement i.e. 13 Dog Fouling Fines issued. Unpaid fines are prosecuted through the courts with one case recently being adjourned to the next sitting of Dungarvan Court. In 2020 €28k was spend on provision of 800k biodegradable bags. Cllr. Fitzgerald asked if a private operator could be used to supply the bags through vending machines similar to cigarette machines. R. Moloney will make enquiries regarding this proposal.

5. Issues from SPC Members

Cllr. S. Gallagher - Investigating the use of alternatives to glyphosate in public areas and introducing a reduced mowing regime and implementing more pollinator-friendly planting in public areas.

Cllr. Gallagher asked about an alternative to using glyphosate for treating weeds in public areas. She also mentioned that reduced mowing has been taking place and this gave rise, last year, to the discovery of a rare orchid. Is there a plan for reduced mowing to continue? For pollinator planting her preference would be for the natural flowers to be left alone.

F. Galvin advised that in relation to mowing the choice is between the cost of mowing less and paying more for the picking-up or more for mowing and paying less picking up and reduced mowing is considered where grass collection can be achieved economically. With regard to the wild flowers it is a matter of perception. Some members of the public thought it looks awful when the verges were left to grow and flowers started dying on the roundabout. R. Moloney advised that Eoin Dullea, Horticulturist had prepared a discussion document on the use of sustainable herbicides which were used on a trial basis in parks in urban areas in 2020 with some success. R. Moloney agreed to circulate the document to the SPC members for their information.

In reply to Cllr. Geoghegan, R. Moloney confirmed that 100,000 trees and shrubs were planted during the course of the construction of the Greenway. Cllr. Brennan asked if Councillors could be advised in advance which Estates would be having less mowing so they can answer questions from those who make complaints. R. Moloney confirmed that, currently, there are 7 or 8 areas in the City large enough to grow into meadows. The perimeters are cut regularly so people can see what's happening and meadows are mowed once a year by contractors (usually farmers).

Cllr. Hearne advised that the residents of Larchville are seeking an area to turn into meadow. Could the Council consider putting aside a budget each year for Resident's Associations, this would enable them to purchase large planters to do up their estates and show-off what it could look like.

6. Schedule of meetings 2021

F. Galvin confirmed this was the first meeting of 2021. The minimum number of meetings to be held by the SPC is four. Cllr. Fitzgerald agreed dates with members i.e. 20th April, 20th July and 19th October at 2.30p.m. Meetings will be held online pending lifting of Covid-19 restrictions.

7. CARO Climate Action Video – Local Actions

F. Galvin asked that, due to time constraints, a link to the video be circulated and the members can view in their won time.

8. Any Other Business

- Ms. B. O'Hehir referred to a letter from Coast Watch regarding nesting birds on the cliff walk at Dunmore East and asked how the nesting birds are being protected. F. Galvin advised that the same letter had come to Council and the Biodiversity Officer had sent a comprehensive reply. Cllr. Griffin asked if signage could be erected advising walkers of the nesting season – similar to what's in place at the Copper Coast. Cllr. Kelly asked if the letter and response could be circulated to the members of the SPC. R. Moloney gave an undertaking to circulate the letter. He confirmed that an independent ecological report had been commissioned before any works took place on the cliff walk.

- Cllr. Kelly asked if this SPC have any remit around planning applications for wind farms. Cllr. Fitzgerald also had this issue for question. They were referring to a recent wind farm application in west

Waterford. He asked how had this decision been passed by the Council and if the public had a say in the decision process. F. Galvin confirmed that, depending on the nature of the development, all planning applications which are deemed to be Strategic Infrastructure Development go directly to An Bord Pleanala. Cllr. Fitzgerald asked if the public can also make submissions and F. Galvin confirmed that they can make a submission within the statutory timeframe set out in legislation.

Cllr. Fitzgerald thanked everyone for attending.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed:

**Chair,
Environment, Biodiversity & Climate Action SPC**

Date:
