

**Minutes of Environment, Biodiversity & Climate Action SPC Meeting**  
**held on Tuesday, 19<sup>th</sup> October, 2021 - Online meeting**

**Present:** **SPC Members:** Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald, (*Chair*), Cllr. Joe Kelly, Cllr. Jim Griffin, Cllr. Ger Barron, Cllr. John Hearne, Cllr. Joanne Bailey, Ms. Brid O’Hehir, Mr. Tom Hogan and Ms. Ithel McKenna.

**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. Siobhán McCarthy, S.O.  
Ms. Deirdre Moore, A.S.O.

**Apologies:** Cllr. Damien Geoghegan and Obianuju Ekedozie.

Cllr. Fitzgerald welcomed the members and proceeded with the business of the meeting.

**1. Minutes of Meeting held on 2021**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> July, 2021 were proposed by Cllr. J. Kelly, seconded by Cllr. J. Bailey and agreed.

**2. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising.

**3. Draft River Basin Management Plan 2022 – 2027**

F. Galvin, Director of Services stated the Draft River Basin Management Plan 2022-2027 was published for public consultation and submissions and comments were invited. The Draft Plan set out the role and targets for the various bodies eg. LAWPRO, EPA, Inland Fisheries Ireland, National Parks and Wild Service etc and the measures required to protect, restore and improve our water quality. Having chaired the WFD committee meetings, F. Galvin said a considerable amount of work had been done in the setting of targets and actions. Submissions/comments could be made directly by any person or group directly to the Department or as an SPC a submission could be formulated by the SPC at the next meeting.

F. Galvin stated the plan contained quite a significant number of responsibilities for local authorities including a new range of actions being implemented in respect of farm inspections, trace back, contamination of rivers with steps for prevention and remediation actions. He advised water quality has dis-improved with urgent steps needed to halt its deterioration.

Cllr. Fitzgerald thanked F. Galvin for the presentation and opened the matter for questions. Cllr. Barron queried if plan was complete or in progress. F. Galvin advised the report had been published a few weeks ago and a link, with appendices for actions attached, was available for people to comment.

Cllr. Kelly stated while the reports were interesting, it’s been report after report, plan after plan, with issues of shellfish kill off, agricultural runoff being continuously raised. He queried how specific areas can be addressed, like other councillors have raised: management of estuary etc which are not yet resolved. F. Galvin, DoS pointed out it can be raised at national level but it will not resolve the immediate kill off issue in the estuary. F. Galvin was asked if there was any fast way to deal with these issues, and stated the various bodies involved in Plan have been given specific actions and one solution to deal with this issue would be to reduce nitrates going into water. Cllr. Griffin said this would not resolve the issue as the river was being destroyed at a rate of knots and the government were not prioritising this type of issue. The lack of resources will ensure a worsening situation. F. Galvin hoped this was not the case; it was a complex issue and the government were keen to resolve it. He said this plan involved communities in the ‘protect function’ action. I. McKenna asked what this involved, with F. Galvin advising it was where the community picked a particular lake/stream, ensured the quality did not deteriorate, not to allow any discharges and ensure it was monitored.

Cllr. Fitzgerald thanked the members for their comments and advised it was possible for us all to make a submission. He asked if the public were aware of the public consultation and whose responsibility it was to advertise. F. Galvin stated it was publicised but encouraged members to feed back into any groups they were involved in and to the PPN. Cllr. Fitzgerald asked if an email could be sent to the PPN with F. Galvin agreeing to do so. F. Galvin complemented the PPN work being carried with community groups particularly in river clean ups, raising awareness of environmental matters and working with the local authority. B.O'Hehir requested, if not already done, the link be put on the local authorities Facebook page, with F. Galvin advising he would speak with the Communications Officer.

#### **4. Progress Report on Implementation of Climate Adaptation Strategy 2019 – 2024.**

Cllr. Fitzgerald noted there was a considerable amount of information in the Progress Report on the Implementation of Climate Adaptation Strategy 2019 – 2024. R. Moloney presented the progress report and reminded the members of local authorities' responsibility adopt a report by 2019. He stated this was an annual progress report which would be returned to CARO, to collate and create a national report from the information received from all the authorities. The report attached contained 78 actions, with 4 completed and 37 actions ongoing and in progress.

T. Hogan queried the timeline for No. 4 Extreme Weather with R. Moloney advising the Council owned buildings would be assessed over next 5 years. While it had yet to commence, he was confident it would be carried out once an allocation of resources was received from Government which he hoped would be part of the next budget. T. Hogan enquired about the Built Environment and increasing awareness of local authority tenants. Cllr. Fitzgerald advised Council Tenants handbook had been prepared with T. Hogan asking if this could be adapted for all residents. R. Moloney said a new section on Climate for Council Tenant Handbook was being prepared by CARO Cork for inclusion in the WCCC's handbook. The SEAI has information on energy efficiency measures for residents generally, and they were not in favour of the council tenant handbook being issued to all householders.

Cllr. Kelly noted 50% of actions started, with 50% yet to commence and asked if there was a pecking order? Was it the easy tasks commenced or is on urgency, or based on impact/or resources? R. Moloney said while not prioritised some were naturally required eg. Coastal erosion and funding dependent as the Council cannot afford to do the work. TII and Department funding had introduced Climate Adaptation funding with roads applying for OPW funding for coastal erosion at Ardmore and Kilfarrissey. He said the priority in terms of assets was funding and we would need to look at adaptation measures. Mitigation measures in place would reduce green house gases. I. McKenna said she did not see support for communities and energy. R. Moloney advised we were currently dealing with adaptation measures and her query referred to mitigation, which would be the next part of our Climate Action Plan. The Plan, when started, would include an Advisory Committee regarding awareness and information on severe weather events and provide for Climate Action Officers.

T. Hogan asked if advising groups of extreme weathers had commenced – where and what locations were most likely to be affected eg. in the event of heat wave the need for cooling areas, provisions for vulnerable people etc. F. Galvin, DoS stated a Severe Weather Plan is in place and is reviewed every 6 months and details how the various government bodies will respond in the event of extreme weather. R. Moloney advised under Community Health and Well-being, it raises awareness of extreme weather issues and will provide for these in the strategy when it is started.

Cllr. Fitzgerald raised vulnerable coastal areas in particularly the estuary from Creaden Head to Passage East and stressed the urgency to look after the softer coast lines, as fields at these areas were slowly disappearing at the Woodstown/Crook area. He said there were 8 harbour areas from Youghal to Waterford which he felt were undervalued and yet extremely valuable to local communities as amenity areas and the search and rescue fleet. Damage was being done to these and it would be expensive to replace them. R. Moloney advised that funding had been received for upgrade works at Helvick Head and Cheekpoint – Creaden Head and Passage East were not included in funding. Cllr. Griffin raised the pier/harbour works at Cheekpoint and felt it was fruitless unless 4-5 piles were in put in place to assist the pilot/lifeboat. He queried if this work had been included in the tender as a boat would end up on the pier in bad weather.

F. Galvin, DoS advised a survey would be carried out on the Copper Coast Regional Road – Bunmahon to Boatstrand to Killmurrin with a view to moving the road more inland due to significant erosion in this area and would try and establish what coastal protection work can be done. He was also acutely conscious of the Woodstown road and said coastal erosion was becoming a huge issue for other coastal counties with rising sea

levels. This is a national debate on how best to deal with this issue as it was important to protect the villages in these areas.

Cllr. Fitzgerald thanked R. Moloney for the presentation.

## **5. Update on Environmental Matters.**

Cllr. Fitzgerald invited N. Kane to present the update on Environmental Matters.

### **• Single use Plastics**

N. Kane advised Single Use Plastics Regulations (SUP) came into effect on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2021 implementing an EU Directive. By eliminating the use of SUP's it would reduce litter and in particular in the marine environment and ensure sustainable patterns. He stated there was a ban on certain SUPs from July 3<sup>rd</sup> eg. cotton buds, plates, straws, etc. as more sustainable alternatives are available. The new regulations for manufacturers of other SUPs contained some of the following requirements:

- ✓ Labelling requirements – certain products will require a standardised label.
- ✓ Extended Producer Responsibility - contribution towards clean ups from 2024.

### **• Recycling of Soft Plastics**

He stated while previously only certain plastics could be put in the recycle bin, all plastics now can be placed in the recycle bin. He listed what soft plastics were eg. Bread wrappers, cheese pack wrappers etc. He advised change was required in order to meet the current EU recycling target of 50% of plastics which was increasing to 55% by 2030 - we are currently recycling about a third.

### **• Domestic Fuel Standards**

N. Kane stated each year 1,300 people die from air pollution from solid fuel. In Waterford there is a bituminous smoky coal ban in Waterford City, Tramore and Clonmel environs only. He advised the Minister had announced that from September 2022 the smoke emissions from solid fuel and briquettes would be reduced. There would be turf regulations, wood storage advice and a public awareness campaign, namely the ABC for cleaner air:

**A** – Ask yourself do I need a fire?

**B** – Burn cleaner more efficient fuel

**C** – Clean and keep your chimney and heating appliances clean.

### **• Circular Economy**

N. Kane advised that the circular economy was about making more sustainable products and ensuring less waste. It included recycling of products, encouraging the right of repair introduced in March 2021 for products like washing machines, fridges, and television rather than purchasing new items, use of bike repair scheme – the better use of resources.

B. O'Hehir requested a copy of the presentation to be circulated to the members and N. Kane agreed to do so. She said the introduction of recycling of soft plastic would encourage people to buy in plastics and it would be better if less plastics were used. She asked N. Kane if they pay for it or is it free and N. Kane confirmed they pay for it.

Cllr. Kelly said the emphasis was on ownership where previously televisions and radios were rented which was a great idea but hard to deliver. He felt this was a very positive presentation with great initiatives and it was important now to move forward and implement.

Cllr. Bailey complimented the presentation and queried the bins in the city centre where all the refuse when in to one bin and asked if sectioned bins could be installed. She also mentioned an initiative her mother did during Covid where she set up a book drop library box where people could come along and borrow a book or bring books no longer required for people to read – more initiatives like this would be a positive step. N. Kane said he had seen this initiative in other counties and worked quite well.

Cllr. Griffin agreed it was not long ago when we rented televisions and while he enjoyed the presentation, it was important as an SPC we didn't leave the older and vulnerable people behind. He disagreed with a fire being a comfort as it kept the elderly and vulnerable warm as they cannot afford oil. He felt the onus is on us when preparing strategies not to leave people behind or to exclude them. N. Kane said it was not the intention to exclude but encourage the use of low smoke fuel and to discourage fires in public houses etc where they are used to create an atmosphere – fires should be used when you need it.

T. Hogan agreed with Cllr. Griffin and the council had a responsibility to ensure a just transition and to address this as soon as possible. He said this was needed in private homes as some are being assisted by the Vincent de

Paul and who cannot afford to retrofit. He complimented the presentation and queried why some of the soft plastic materials were being sent to cement factories for waste to energy and if there were emissions.

N. Kane advised they were licensed by the EPA and burnt at high temperatures with plants being monitored to control the emissions. T. Hogan felt it was a retrograde step giving VW as an example, as it was later found the emissions data to be false. N. Kane stated the use at cement factories was far more preferable than landfill.

Cllr. Fitzgerald thanked N. Kane for the presentation.

## **6. Waste Prevention Campaign Updates**

Ella Ryan presented the Waste Prevention Campaign Updates and advised the majority of the campaign was online due to Covid restrictions. It had been a very busy year with numerous online Workshops for the community, schools and Tidy Towns Groups with good attendance at all. The workshops covered some of the following:

- **Green Your Picnic**
- **Leave no Trace Workshop** encouraged people to take their litter home and the pitfalls of leaving litter behind.
- **International Refill Day** – promoted use of refill stations to encourage reusable bottles and discourage use of one of plastic bottles.
- **National Reuse Month – October 2021**– This workshop was run with a number of groups –sports groups, tidy towns and schools and encouraged the use of water bottles, buying second hand items and extending the life of our everyday items. There would be a competition for schools to encourage use of reusable bottles.
- **Conscious Cup Campaign** – advised the members over 22,000 single cups are disposed of every hour and this campaign encourages reusable cups.
- **Tidy Towns Workshop** – covered how to write the best application and submission based on no site adjudication visits in 2021.

There were numerous other workshops covering Fast Fashion, Furniture Upcycling, Sustainable living and sustainable gardening which will be run again. She stated Sports Clubs had taken an online pledge to reduce plastics and to encourage their members to bring reusable bottles to events.

Cllr. Fitzgerald thanked Ella for a very detailed presentation and opened to group for questions. He stated his friend in Southampton was using glass milk bottles which were recyclable. If there was a charge on plastic bottles would it detract from their use and have an impact? E. Ryan said glass bottles were making a comeback around the country but were taken out due to Covid and was hopeful they would return. N. Kane said there will be a tax on bottles where we will have to pay a deposit and refunded when bottles returned. Cllr. Fitzgerald thanked for Ella for the presentation..

## **7. Items from SPC Members**

### **1. Items from SPC Members - Councillor Pat Fitzgerald**

*Discussion on No Swim Notices issued by WC & CC and ongoing pollution issues, wild shellfish die-off and marine growth blooms in Waterford Estuary.*

Cllr. Fitzgerald stated this item had been discussed earlier in the meeting. He enquired about the no swim notices issued this year in Woodstown, as it was the first time he remembered this happening. Cllr. Fitzgerald felt it was important to note shellfish are getting scarce and important to protect and keep a focus on this issue.

### **7. Date of Next Meeting**

R. Moloney, SEO said 4 meetings had been held to date and suggested another meeting on December 7<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> to discuss SECAP under the Covenant of Mayors. It was agreed to hold the next meeting on December 14<sup>th</sup> at 2.30 p.m. online.

### **8. Correspondence**

No correspondence received.

### **9. Any Other Business**

- I. McKenna asked if a Climate Action Community Officer had been appointed. R. Moloney advised a business case had been prepared for funding and it was hopeful an allocation would be made.
- T. Hogan enquired about Waterford being a Decarbonised Zone and if there was any response in relation to funding for it? F. Galvin said there was progress as a meeting had been held with the Minister Ryan, Chief Executive and Director of Service in September. Support was being promised and progress also had been made with members of the local authority and advised he would follow up and update at next meeting.

- Cllr. Barron said at a special meeting of the Council it was discussed that Waterford would become a carbon neutral city. F. Galvin agreed and said there were a number of titles on this but Chief Executive would be going back to the Councillors to discuss again.
- R. Moloney advised that Laura Forbes O'Brien, IFA had resigned from the SPC and he was liaising with Corporate Services seeking a new representative from the IFA.

Cllr. Fitzgerald concluded the meeting by thanking the PPN members, councillors and council staff for attending and their participation in the meeting.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

**Signed:**

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

**Date:**

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