

Minutes of Environment, Biodiversity & Climate Action SPC Meeting
held on Tuesday, 20th April, 2021 - Online meeting

Present: **SPC Members:** Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald, (*Chair*), Cllr. Joe Kelly, Cllr. Susan Gallagher, Cllr. Jim Griffin, Cllr. Ger Barron, Cllr. Damien Geoghegan, Cllr. Breda Brennan, 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. Muriel Cullen, C.O.
Ms. Siobhán McCarthy, S.O.

Apologies: Cllr. John Hearne Cllr. Ger Barron Ms. Laura O’Brien-Forbes, Ms. Obianuju Ekedozi

Cllr. Fitzgerald welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. **Minutes of Meeting held on 20th April 2021**

The Minutes of the meeting held on February 16th, 2021 were proposed by Cllr. D. Geoghegan, seconded by Cllr. B. Brennan and agreed.

2. **Matters Arising**

(a) Notice of Notice of Motion from Tom Hogan – correction to February Minutes.

Mr. T. Hogan asked for one correction in relation to the funding for a suggested feasibility study. Mr. Hogan had not indicated that the Council would be required to fund such a study.

(b) Discussion on Notice of Motion from Tom Hogan

R. Moloney confirmed that, as requested at April’s meeting, a letter had issued to and an acknowledgement received from Minister Ryan. An All Ireland (North and South) Strategic Rail Review was announced by the Minister in April. Cllr. Kelly asked if every line in the country (including the Waterford/Limerick Line) was part of this review. Mr. Hogan said an Official at the Department of Transport said the review would be wide-ranging and would include bringing back defunct lines. The Chair asked Mr. Hogan if there was a completion date for the review. Mr. Hogan said the date wasn’t known as yet but that public consultation would be significant. The Chair asked Mr. Hogan to keep abreast of the situation and advise the Members when the public consultation commenced and the SPC can make a submission.

3. **Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021**

R. Moloney gave a brief presentation on the FAQ document sent with the Agenda. He advised that the public consultation in relation to the next Climate Action Plan had commenced and the public were encouraged to complete a survey and make submissions via the “climate conversations” website and the Council would promote the Public Consultation on its social media outlets. The PPNs can also be encouraged to promote Public Consultation with their various groups in the Community. The Chair said this Plan will involve change for the Council. Cllr. J. Kelly asked how the changes are measured and the impacts of these changes. Also, are the targets legally enforceable and are they enforced by the Council. R. Moloney replied that a lot of the measurement is already being done e.g. since 2009 the reduction in energy usage and carbon emissions. All electricity, vehicle and heating fuel consumption is already measured and reported annually to Government. It’s not certain as yet if some level of grant funding would be made available to any Local Authority who might be falling behind in achieving targets. R. Moloney confirmed to Ms. McKenna that the Council’s Carbon Neutral Plan is for all of the citizens of the Council’s administrative Area. The SEAI offers encouragement e.g. through insulation grants. Ms. B. O’Hehir asked for a copy of R. Moloney’s Presentation to be circulated.

The Chair commented that there is a long way to go to meet ‘Carbon Neutrality’ but that the Council is probably a long way on. General discussion and questions followed. Mr. T. Hogan asked how the 2030 targets can be

met on the basis that the 2020 targets were not met. He asked if there was a target for the Council and does it encompass all i.e. industrial, agricultural, etc. R. Moloney stated that this level of detail is not yet known but probably no; targets are more likely to be on a sectoral basis. The target for 2020 was 33% and the Council achieved 24/25%. The Chair asked about people in cities having a lesser carbon footprint based on their use of natural gas and public transport e.g. Luas. Cllr. J. Kelly asked if the difference between the target and actual in the 2020 Plan will be added to the 2030 plan or will there be a new target in the 2030 plan. R. Moloney said that new targets will be set for the 2030 plan and may be in place by the end of this year. Cllr. Kelly asked if the targets will take account of the 'missed' 7% in the 2020 plan. R. Moloney said the baseline is 2009 and the targets for 2030 may be re-set based on the 2020 figures. Cllr. B. Brennan asked if there are plans for recycling facilities for electric vehicle batteries which have a short life span. F. Galvin said that EV batteries generally have an 8 to 10 year life span and that end-of-life batteries can be recycled into new batteries or re-used as storage banks for energy. Cllr. J. Griffin mentioned the Pollinator Plans from last year and the criticism Councillors received from people who considered the non-mown areas as 'unsightly'. Is there a 'carbon' answer to give to people? Is it possible to say how much was saved in emissions by not using lawn mowers/tractors to strengthen the argument and show what difference the Council is making. R. Moloney advised that the adaptation and mitigation measures will be part of the Council's new Climate Action Plan. There are no significant figures. However, the benefits are in biodiversity and pollinators not reduction in fuel consumption.

4. Deposit Return Scheme

N. Kane gave a presentation to the Members giving the background to the Consultation Document circulated with the Agenda. Ms. B. O'Hehir asked if a copy could be circulated to all. This is the second Document prepared by the Department of the Environment, Climate & Communications. The first was issued late last year and was on 'whether there should be a Deposit Return Scheme'. A 'Circular Economy' document also issued from Department which, again, is a public consultation document. Cllr. B. Brennan expressed her delight at seeing this initiative and how it would take plastic bottles off amenity sites. She has seen its success in various European countries. F. Galvin said that the LA Sector had been lobbying Government on this for the last couple of years. The timeline for set-up is end of this year/early 2022. Cllr. S. Gallagher also expressed her delight at the Scheme and asked about 'drinking fountains'. She had raised the matter at yesterday's Metropolitan Council Meeting but had not gotten an answer. N. Kane referred to E. Ryan who advised that a lot of work has been done particularly in Tramore where the Refill.ie campaign has been very successful. N. Kane mentioned the 2019 Spraoi where hydrants were used as refill stations. This is something the Council could look at for all big events. Cllr. J. Kelly asked would there be a charge by Irish Water for drinking fountains. F. Galvin confirmed that Local Authorities are charged full rate for connections. Cllr. J. Kelly said the Council should continue the initiative mentioned by Niall and Ella for people to get refills. Mr. T. Hogan commented that whilst this was a welcome development it didn't seem to eliminate the use of plastic, the production of which has high levels of emissions.

5. Decarbonising Zone

F. Galvin outlined the background advising that was one of the actions in the Climate Action Plan. The Department had asked for LAs to designate a decarbonising zone within their area. The LA would work to implement all measures with Government financial support. The zone would be used as a test bed to try out new technologies and, as proven, roll out into the wider community. The Chief Executive informed the full Council at a recent workshop that all of Waterford City has been nominated as a decarbonising zone for the application. There will be a cross sectoral approach, partnering with the wider community including industry, business the Chamber of Commerce, WIT and residential sector. The most significant carbon emissions in the City had been identified as transport, residential energy use, industry and services sector and the decarbonising zone plan would be focused on substantially reducing emissions across these areas and also looking at providing local zero carbon electricity locally such as large solar and/or wind farms.

While the detail of the plan has yet to be developed there are a number of other initiatives in planning that will complement and seek to attain the plan objectives including the proposed Active Travel schemes for Waterford which will facilitate the modal shifts to walking, cycling, public transport and support the transition to electric vehicles. There is also a new scheme commencing in the current year to undertake deep energy upgrade retrofits to the Council's housing stock which it is intended will be substantially expanded in future years and the Council will also have to adopt a new Climate Action Plan later this year with a focus on substantially reducing its own energy usage and carbon emissions.

The Decarbonising Zone application will be lodged in the next 10 days. If successful the detailed plan will be ready before the end of this year.

A discussion and questions on the subject followed - Ms. B. O’Hehir asked if there was a chance of the application being refused on the grounds of the size of the project. F. Galvin said that the Council has been building relationships and a lot of work has gone on behind the scenes. He is confident the application won’t be refused. Mr. T. Hogan said this was exciting to hear as the City has no alternative and asked, following successful application, if financial grant would be available for preliminary work e.g. putting teams together. F. Galvin stated that it was expected that funding would be available both nationally and via a number of EU programmes. The Chair expressed his support for a decarbonised zone and thought it ideal for the City. He asked when would a decision be made on the Application. F. Galvin said a decision is expected a couple of weeks after the closing submission date of end April. Cllr. B. Brennan asked about timeframe from acceptance of application to when Waterford City would be declared a ‘decarbonised zone’. F. Galvin replied that targets are (1) emission reduction by 2030 of 51% and (2) carbon neutrality by 2050 not just a reduction of carbon emissions. It is expected that the City would grow in this same time period. The Chair opined that an increased population might be helped with new houses. F. Galvin said the Council is looking to retro-fitting all its stock at an average cost of €15k/€16k per house. The average cost for the City is €10k per house.

6. Motion referred from Plenary Council – Cllr. Susan Gallagher

“That Waterford City and County Council declare a climate and biodiversity emergency and commit to taking measures to address the climate and biodiversity crisis within Waterford City and County.”

Cllr. S. Gallagher introduced the Motion for the meeting. Cllr. J. Kelly expressed his support for the Motion which he sees as only adding to the general trust, not a conflict but an additional measure. The Chair asked if there were any staff concerns i.e. would it tie the hands of the Council, is there a downside. F. Galvin confirmed there was no issue from the Management side. It would be complementary to what the meeting has been discussing and it fits in with both National and Local Policy. The Chair asked if the next step was to refer back to the Plenary Meeting and F. Galvin said it has only been referred to this SPC for noting.

7. Items from SPC Members

- **Councillor Susan Gallagher**

- Investigating the possibility of planting Miyawaki forests in Waterford

Cllr. S. Gallagher said that this method of growing trees was named after a Japanese Botanist and is suggesting pop-up forests on a trial basis using seeds local to the area of planting. Soil fertility is important and can achieve in 20 years what would usually take 200 years. Aughrim, Co. Wicklow is an example where planting took place only 2 years ago and is now a dense woodland. This may not be suitable as an amenity. The Chair asked if there was a commercial value from timber when it ages. Cllr. S. Gallagher replied that the proposal was not being looked at as a crop. Soil fertility was the primary factor and there may be a need to help the soil along. It would be labour intensive for the first years. The Chair asked what acreage would be needed to help neutralise carbon produced e.g. are figures available to say what tonnage of carbon could be neutralised by 10 acres of trees and what native tree is best for neutralising carbon. F. Galvin noted that the Council was intending to undertake an overall tree management policy and that a tender would be issuing shortly for an Arborist Consultant to advise the Council on this and the viability/suitability for small afforestation and small scale woodlands/forests in urban settings. Cllr. B. Brennan had a concern with a concentrated dense woodland and the effect it would have on the ground i.e. lack of sunlight, more insects. Cllr. B. Brennan accepts that it would depend on the area of land used and might not have any effect. Ms. B. O’Hehir asked if this proposal was for public land only, or to encourage private persons on their own plots or both. Cllr. S. Gallagher replied that it was for public land. F. Galvin agreed to consider the matter further once a consultant Arborist had been appointed and a tree management policy adopted.

8. Any Other Business

- Cllr. J. Griffin asked if anyone had information on a matter raised at yesterday’s Metropolitan Meeting, concerning the Deise Community Boat Club slipway and storage area at Bilberry. Cllr. J. Kelly advised that the proposal is on land which is designated a SAC (Special Area of Conservation) and development will not be allowed here and there is also an individual who is claiming he has rights to this area. His information is that the area was cleared some years ago and the Council gave the go-ahead to the Boat Club. However work stopped when the individual claiming rights to this area contacted the Council to advise he was on the way to the High Court. F. Galvin replied that he was not aware of anything further to what he had read in the local paper and he was not aware of any approaches to the Council in respect of the Lower Suir SAC. Cllr. J. Kelly asked if there

was any further development or proposals made to Council could they be put into the public forum. F. Galvin advised that this would be a matter for the Planning Dept and any planning application would be advertised publically.

- Cllr. J. Kelly asked if there was any access to the Eco Park from the Lacken Road. F. Galvin replied that the Council was considering couple of proposals and were developing a number of ideas which would be brought back to the Metropolitan Meeting.

- Cllr. J. Kelly asked if congratulations to Cllr. B. Brennan could be noted in the Minutes as Cllr. Brennan is stepping down from the Council next week. The Chair endorsed Cllr. Kelly's congratulations and wished Cllr. Brennan the best of luck. Mr. T. Hogan added his good wishes to Cllr. Brennan.

- Mr. T. Hogan asked the expected date for sight of the Draft Development Plan. The Chair replied that the Draft has gone to the Elected Members. Mr. Galvin advised that the second round of public consultation would be in place over the next months and public input will be sought. Mr. T. Hogan asked if the Draft Plan is available to SPC Members and the Chair replied not as yet.

- Cllr. P. Fitzgerald, Chair asked if more waste bins could be provided in Dunmore East as the residents of the area believe City dog owners are walking their dogs more than ever in Dunmore East. L. O'Brien replied that the Council is currently carrying out a survey throughout the whole County regarding the location of existing dog bag dispensers and bins. When the data is fully collected the Council will be able to see what's required and talk to local people regarding location of bins.

- Cllr. P. Fitzgerald, Chair asked about the LED lights recently fitted in Dunmore East. They are very bright and the intense glare is affecting the residential properties in close proximity. F. Galvin replied that these lights were installed to required standards for public lighting installations and were required for road and pedestrian safety reasons. He had received complaints from a small number of residents in the area and was looking to see if any measures could be put in place to reduce the glare.

- Cllr. B. Brennan bid a fond farewell to everyone. This was the SPC she had most enjoyed being a member of. Cllr. Brennan extended her thanks to the Chair, to Cllr. D. Geoghegan, Mayor for his recent kind words, to Fergus, Raymond, Luke, Ella, and Niall for all their help in the past. The Chair extended thanks to Cllr. Brennan for her input and cooperation.

- R. Moloney advised of correspondence received from Jon Hawkes, Programmes Coordinator – Waterford PPN, seeking an update on a proposed development of the car park at Mahon Falls and the Council's application to An Bord Pleanal.. All of these documents are available on the Consultation Page of the Council's Website.

Cllr. Fitzgerald thanked everyone for attending.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed:

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

Date:
