

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

Present: **SPC Members:** Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald, (*Chair*), Cllr. Joe Kelly, Cllr. Susan Gallagher, Cllr. Jim Griffin, Cllr. Ger Barron, Cllr. John Hearne, Cllr. Joeanne 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.

Apologies: Cllr. Damien Geoghegan

Cllr. Fitzgerald welcomed everyone to the meeting.

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

R. Moloney corrected the Minutes as follows: (a) The date should read 20th April 2021 and not 16th April 2021 and (b) Cllr. John Hearne was in attendance. The Minutes of the meeting held on April 20th, 2021 with the noted corrections were then proposed by Cllr. Hearne, seconded by Ms. McKenna and agreed.

2. **Matters Arising**

There are no Matters Arising.

3. **Climate Action Update**

a. **Climate Action Bill**

R. Moloney updated the Meeting. The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021 has been passed by the Oireachtas and due to be signed into law. A Commencement Order will follow and then Regulations should be made in the next few weeks. After Commencement the Council will be required to prepare a Climate Action Plan.

b. **Decarbonising Zone**

R. Moloney updated the Meeting. The Decarbonising Zone application was submitted on 30th April and is with the Department for consideration. There has been no formal response received only an acknowledgement. Confirmation would be expected before the next SPC Meeting. If successful the detailed plan will be ready before the end of this year.

c. **Delivering Effective Climate Action**

R. Moloney gave a presentation as had been given by Paddy Mahon, Chair of the CCMA Climate Action, Transport and Networks Committee at the launch of 'Delivering Effective Climate Action' on 14th April 2021. A further presentation prepared by David Mellett, Regional Coordinator with North Atlantic Seaboard CARO was also given. The Chair opened the meeting to questions.

Ms. McKenna asked how a small local Community could interface with the very high aspirations outlined in the Presentation. R. Moloney referred to the Resources page of the Presentation – (a) a Climate Action Community Officer, (b) through the SEAI & Better Energy Communities projects. The early stages will be all about education with the Local Authorities leading by example. Ms. McKenna said that some Communities feel there isn't anyone in the LA to help them. The people involved already have the education and the plans, will there be somebody now. R. Moloney replied yes – the Climate Action Community Officer role will be to empower Communities. The Council doesn't have the resources at the moment but it is expected that the resources as set out in DECA will be made available.

Cllr. Barron said the question has now been answered as to how Communities can interact with the Council. As recently as five years ago it would have been an uphill battle to get Communities to engage on Climate Action but people are now very much aware of threats from climate to their own environment.

Cllr. Kelly agreed with Cllr. Barron and the sooner the appointment of Climate Action Community Officer is made the better. It is vital for the community. He is delighted to hear that the Council is moving in the direction of empowering and working with communities.

Cllr. Hearne mentioned that with the return of the Area Support Officers people have been encouraged and committees have formed. When projects are small and community specific people will answer the call.

Cllr. Gallagher considered the question raised by Ms. Kenna very relevant. Is there any plan for sharing knowledge where Communities can get ideas from one another?

Mr. Hogan asked if the Local Action Steering Group will have L.A. Representatives and will it include Community Representatives so they can put forward ideas on what they consider good for their Community/area rather than being told what's good.

The Chair asked if the Council was setting up the Steering Group, who will be involved and how membership divided between all groups.

R. Moloney responded to both questions. The Plan/Strategy allows for the delivery of pilot projects that can be replicated across communities. The Steering Group will be made up of Management Team within the Council. It is a decision for the Chief Executive. F. Galvin added that the Decarbonising Zone will include all sectors. There is no agreed structure in place as yet. Ideas are still being tossed around.

4. 2020 Energy Reduction Target

R. Moloney gave a short presentation which had been prepared by L. Fleming who was unable to make today's meeting. Some of the points outlined were:

- The Council has energy reduction targets and it's energy usage has been reported to SEAI each year since 2009
- The Council had a target of 33% energy efficiency by 2020 and achieved 31.2%
- Energy performance is calculated by 'head of population'
- 2020 was an unusual year due to Covid and under normal circumstances the shortfall would have been higher.
- The revised targets will be set 2030 based on no new developments/improvements but the Council will have to factor in for upto 5,000 new public lights.

The Chair opened the meeting for questions. Cllr. Hearne asked if a copy of the presentation could be circulated. He asked if the National Bodies involved be asked to review and change the figures with regard to dimming lights. He cannot see it being a problem or safety issue if lights are switched off at 3 a.m.

Cllr. Gallagher considers the LEDs a great improvement. However, the more 'bluish' light is proving detrimental for wildlife. Cllr. Griffin noted that the trend for electricity produced from coal is going down which is good for the Environment, however many people are dependent on coal for heating and asked if the Council would carry out energy upgrades in private houses as well as LA stock? The Chair stated that LED lights have been fitted in his locality. 95%/99% of people are thrilled with them. Some of the people living in the immediate vicinity find the light very penetrating; it even gets through curtains. The previous lights were 'softer'. Is there anything the Council can do about this?

F. Galvin addressed the lighting issues.

- The existing lights on the Outer Ring Road have a dimming profile. They are not LED.
- The Council has an obligation to retain public lighting for health and safety
- LED lights can be very harsh but they can be dimmed.
- Dimming is dependent on location e.g. junctions on main roads
- The Council is seeking to maximise the reduction of CO₂
- The bulbs in the existing lights have a life span of 4/5 years and cost approx. €300k every year for maintenance
- LED bulbs have a 20 year life span

F. Galvin stated that the SEAI operates the Better Energy Housing Scheme Grants which are available to private owners with increased grants available for fuel poor households

5. Motion referred from Plenary Council – Cllr. Frank Quinlan

“In light of the Covid-19 pandemic and the importance of outdoor recreation spaces; Waterford City & County Council will carry out a full design of a multipurpose walking, running and cycling track in the People’s Park to cater for all ages and abilities in a safe and controlled environment. Furthermore, WCCC will seek alternative funding streams for the project should the costs be prohibitive from internal resources.”

R. Moloney advised the Motion was from the Metropolitan Meeting and not the Plenary Meeting. The Environment Department had looked at this as per the discussion document circulated with the agenda. Cllr. Kelly said the old view of the People’s Park has gone now. It has a number of activities with the partial track and skate park area. He doesn’t see a clash between the Motion and the normal use of the park. The Motion should be investigated. A track could be accommodated and the fitness units upgraded. The Park could still be used for recreation which he considers reasonable.

Cllr. Bailey asked if this Motion had not already been passed at the Council Meeting. The existing track is overgrown. If the People’s Park is to be used it needs to have a full Programme of works; the first being the development of plans and the Fountain. Is the Council developing the Eco Park or the People’s Park?

Cllr. Griffin said that COVID had brought another ‘ask’ to the People’s Park. Funding is the issue. If the track were to be railed off how would it be ‘policed’ with people bringing in bags, equipment, etc.

Cllr. Hearne said people were ‘starving’ for places to go. The People’s Park is too small for Club use. Loops and trail runs could be put into places like Mount Congreve. The cost of making a trail run would be less than putting a track into the Park and the trail run would be self-maintained afterwards. The Council could consider looking at its land bank and finding suitable areas for loops.

Cllr. Gallagher agrees with the assessment made in the discussion document. Further, (a) at the Metropolitan Meeting Cllr. Quinlan mentioned about Schools having access to the People’s Park. Can the Schools use the track (b) Could markers be put on the grass to make it square with the outer ring and people could go round. (c) At the same meeting F. Galvin mentioned that, at Spring Tide, the ground level in the People’s Park is below the water level. Flooding is a likely scenario in the future and the Council may be looking for places for water to gather.

Cllr. Kelly asked what was the purpose of referring the motion to this SPC. How does it all work if the Motion has been passed at the Metropolitan Council Meeting and then referred to the SPC for discussion?

Mr. Hogan asked the same question. The People’s Park as outlined in the discussion document has served its purpose. The Park shouldn’t lose its essential features; the aesthetic of the Park should be kept. How can the Park be changed whilst keeping its old features. Can every aspect of the Park be looked at?

Mr. Galvin said the Motion had been referred to this SPC for consideration. Management’s view is that the Park needs to be looked at again as the last works carried out were approx. 20 years ago. Council needs to look at the functionality of the Park and go for wider consultation. The new proposed track would offer technical challenges and the ground water levels are quite high.

The Chair proposed that the Motion be referred back to the Metropolitan Meeting with the suggestion that a Committee be set up to look at all the Parks and their functions. Can’t have toddlers running around with people cycling nearby. The Department of Education has land at Newtown and both Newtown and the De La Salle Colleges could develop their own running tracks. Each track could be different to the other and each track could be shared with the other. The People’s Park is not a sports field for schools. This can be discussed further at the next Metropolitan Meeting.

Cllr. Hearne reiterated his earlier point on the Council looking at all lands in its ownership and putting in loops e.g. the St. John’s River area. The Chair could see an involvement with the wider Community and the matter may have to go out for public consultation. F. Galvin suggested the matter be referred back to the Metropolitan Meeting with the Chairman’s opinion on the setting up of a Committee to look at Parks and their functions. Cllr. Hearne asked about a bridge access to the Eco Park from across the road linking it with the boardwalks. F. Galvin responded that the Wetlands area where the boardwalks are located is the subject of a SAC. and this limits the works that can be carried out.

The Chair mentioned the many nice small parks in towns and cities around the country and how it is important for them to remain as they were as they provide relaxation area. There is a new park planned for the northern suburbs out beyond Hillview. There is a shortage of Park space in the Dunmore Road/Williamstown area.

6. Items from SPC Members

- **Councillor Jim Griffin**

- *Update on Newtown Pier water quality and Bunmahon*
- *Treatment plant at Newtown or lack of one perhaps*

Cllr. Griffin was approached by a member of the RNLi regarding water quality at the Pier in Tramore. He was in Tramore at the weekend with Deputy D. Cullinane. The RNLi took water samples at different times in three separate areas. Same results at the Pier as in Tramore and the Guillamene. Can the Council ask Irish Water for capital funding to provide infrastructure to fix these issues. Also can the water at the Caravan Park in Bunmahon be tested?

- **Councillor Pat Fitzgerald**

- *Water quality at Woodstown Beach*

The Chair mentioned that Woodstown had a recent 24/48 hour 'No Bathing' Notice.

F. Galvin replied to the questions.

Tramore: All the bathing places in Tramore are tested by the Council and samples are taken regularly during the year. Very rarely are the results less than excellent. All waste and storm water in the Newtown area goes to the pumping station at the Pier. The biggest difficulty in the last eighteen months has been the significant rainfall into the gullies. Storm water overflow then comes into action. Red Lights start flashing 'water not safe' as the combined sewers are also feeding into this pumping station. The cost of separating the waste water and storm water would prove onerous for Irish Water. It would require decoupling pipes of costing several million euros. The pumps cannot cope with severe weather events.

Newtown Cove: There is a small stream at the northern end which has cross connections into it from houses whose septic tanks give bacteriological contamination.

Bonmahon: There were historical issues here. There is a history of poor bathing water quality. The area is not serviced by waste water treatment plant but septic tanks from the village. There are no secondary or tertiary treatment facilities.

Woodstown Beach: Samples were taken two weeks ago after the heavy rain. Further samples have been taken and all is now okay. Woodstown beach has a number of streams which could contain farmyard runoff. The Council is looking at these.

Cllr. Barron referred to the Motion in general. There is sewage and septic tank contents flowing into the River at Bonmahon. He had a meeting with Paul Carroll and the residents of Bonmahon. A modern treatment plant is required. There is a document from last night's meeting with the residents containing GPS co-ordinates which he plans to pass to Paul Carroll. He welcomes Cllr. Griffin raising the matter.

The Chair asked if the water quality is poor in Woodstown would this not be the same for the adjoining beaches if these beaches have the same stream feeds.

Cllr. Griffin said same would apply to the Guillamenes.

F. Galvin said contaminant of the water in the sample taken from the outfall at Pier was much reduced in sample taken further out in the Estuary. Same for the samples taken where the stream flows into Woodstown and further out where the water dispersed. Any beach with streams and agricultural catchment are always subject to pollution when the rainfall is high. The monitoring of the Suir Estuary is a priority for action under the National Water Framework. Work is on-going at the moment for the Suir & Blackwater Catchment area. There is engagement with landowners where there are sources of pollution. Education and awareness are crucial. the topic will be returned to at SPC Meetings over the next 12 months.

Cllr. Kelly agreed that everything F. Galvin said was correct. The issues in Tramore will have to be fixed. The town is not getting any smaller. New houses being built. Next step is to source funding and Irish Water to get on with fixing the problems. This SPC should be putting pressure on Irish Water as Tramore has been designated as high priority.

- **Councillor Susan Gallagher**

- *"A 10,000 rain gardens project for Waterford"*

Cllr. Gallagher advised that a 'rain garden' is an area of planting designed to capture rainwater from hard surfaces before rain gets into the sewer system e.g. planters attached to down pipes of buildings reduces the amount of water going into a sewer. Similar projects are in place in other countries. Dublin City Council had a

trial with six rain box planters in an urban residential area at €2,000 per box to establish if it would reduce hard surface water and would it be acceptable to residents. Could the Council consider a trial in Waterford.

R. Moloney said it was something that could be looked at as a mitigation measure in the Climate Action Plan.

Cllr. Hearne mentioned that Plans are being prepared to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Larchville/Lisduggan Parish and they would love to be involved in this.

7. Date of Next Meeting

R. Moloney referred to the 19th October as the date for the next meeting as set out in the Schedule at the beginning of the year. In order to align the meeting with Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan required under the Covenant of Mayors he requested that the date of the next meeting be changed to Tuesday, 21st September. This will allow time for any amendments to the SECAP to be brought to the Plenary Meeting on 14th October.

Ms. McKenna asked if the document could be made available to the Members before the meeting and R. Moloney said yes.

8. Correspondence

R. Moloney confirmed that the only correspondence was the letter referred to already i.e. an acknowledgment from the Minister's Department in respect of the Council's Decarbonising Zone Application.

9. Any Other Business

- Cllr. J. Griffin has been contacted by a Group who would like to give a Presentation to the SPC on 'returning plastic bottles'. He can provide more information to F. Galvin and R. Moloney. The Group would like, if at all possible, to make the Presentation before the end of this year. The Chair agreed and would like to aim for the meeting after 21st September. F. Galvin said the Department would expect to have the Deposit Return Scheme up and running by next year. If the Group has an initiative it would be welcomed. Cllr. J. Griffin said he was just looking for approval for the Group to give its Presentation.

- Mr. T. Hogan asked where he could see a hard copy of the Draft Development Plan. F. Galvin will check where the Draft Plan is on display and reply to Mr. Hogan after the meeting. It is on public display in the Libraries and the two Customer Services Offices.

Cllr. Fitzgerald thanked everyone for attending.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed:

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

Date:
