



Minutes of Environment, Biodiversity & Climate Action SPC Meeting
held on 12th September 2023 - Maritana Room, Menapia Building, Waterford.

Present

SPC Members: Cllr. John Hearne (*Chair*), Cllr. Jim Griffin, Cllr. Ger Barron, Cllr. Damien Geoghegan, Cllr. Joanne Bailey, Cllr. Joe Kelly, Mr. Tom Hogan, Ms. Ithel McKenna, Ms. Mary Greene.

Officials: Ms. Dawn Wallace, S.E.O., Mr. Niall Kane, S.E.E., Ms. Grainne Kennedy, Climate Action Co-Ordinator, Mr. Anthony Russell, A.O., Ms. Siobhán McCarthy, S.O.

Apologies: Cllr. Pat Fitzgerald, Ms. Laura Forbes O'Brien, Mr. Fergus Galvin, Director of Services, Ms. Ella Ryan, Environmental Awareness

Cllr. Hearne welcomed the members, noted the apologies received and requested a proposer and seconder for the 9th May Minutes.

1. Minutes of Meeting held on 9th May 2023

The Minutes of meeting held on 9th May 2023 were proposed by Mary Greene and seconded by Cllr. Barron and approved.

2. Matters Arising

T. Hogan asked about the proposed Presentations from the Active Travel Team and the update briefing on sustainable transport. D Wallace advised these items were deferred to allow time for the Climate Action Plan Update.

T. Hogan enquired as to the status of the re-wording of his motion regarding the re-municipalisation of waste services due to legislative changes required. The Chair noted that Cllr. Fitzgerald had undertaken to look at this and the Chair will follow up with Cllr. Fitzgerald.

3. Climate Action Plan Update

G. Kennedy updated the Meeting. All the information has been gathered and Draft Actions completed. Design and translation of the draft plan is due to take place by 18 October. It is anticipated that the Draft Climate Action Plan will be open for public consultation by the end of October 2023.

Cllr. Griffin questioned whether, despite the Grants available from S.E.A.I. the high cost of retrofitting, solar heating, heating controls, etc. people on lower incomes, especially those in LA Housing Estates may be left behind as, people from more affluent areas are more likely to be able to borrow for retrofitting and avail of Grants. He asked if it would be possible for Ivan Grimes, Director of Services with responsibility for Housing to attend this SPC. The Council is promoting the lowering of emissions, yet it is taking weeks, and sometimes months, for Council tenants to get doors/windows replaced and heat pumps installed. He highlighted that at the recent Dungarvan and Clonmel Agricultural Shows some people took issue at the Council 'Go Green' message. They suggested that this could be interpreted as the Council giving 'the edge' to one particular Political Party (the Green Party) and that the individuals raising this were not in favour of some of the Green Party Policies.

Cllr. Kelly requested information on how emissions are measured and how these could be explained to the public. He echoed the comments made by Cllr Griffin as he had heard the same sentiments expressed. He questioned how the Council get away from this e.g. a group called the 'Ballybeg Greens', people had thought it was the Green Party. Can the Council's 'Go Green' be used in a way that is distinct from a political party? An example of good progress and change was at the Harvest Festival where no diesel was used, the sign stating that there was no use of diesel at the festival gave out a positive message.

Cllr. Geoghegan concurred with Cllr. Griffin's comments on the affordability of retrofitting.

Cllr. Bailey requested information on the number of houses that have been retrofitted and commented on the difficulties getting buy in from people in fuel poverty and stressed the importance of engaging with families on this issue.

T. Hogan asked how the Council's approx. 4% emissions compared with similar private industry or with public bodies.

G. Kennedy replied that figures are not available for this. T. Hogan believes that private industry should be proceeding at the same pace as the Council as globally the big picture is poor.

Cllr Baron asked about how we are building houses for the future and cited the recent development in Kilmacthomas as a good example of future proofing.

Cllr. Geoghegan suggested that the rate reduction scheme brought in last year encouraging businesses to engage with the Council on climate change did not have a good take up.

G. Kennedy said that about 20% of those who were eligible got a reduction. The Scheme was promoted by:

- Radio advertising – 'smarter, greener Waterford'
- Encouraging those in lower socio-economic groups e.g. challenge neighbourhood v neighbourhood

G. Kennedy explained some of the measures used to measure emissions. One way is to calculate the reduction in litres of diesel used and another was to measure the reduction in kilowatts of electricity used. There is a 'baseline' document which outlines the calculations for how much carbon dioxide is used (the emission factor). This document will be circulated to all following the meeting. There needs to be more engagement with LA Tenants on retrofitting through outlining the benefits e.g. the air improvement in air quality when not burning coal. Approx. 200 Council houses went up to a BER B2 last year. However, this is funding dependent which influences turnaround time.

Cllr. Kelly asked what is annual cost of heating a B2 house? **G. Kennedy will circulate a table to the SPC Members.**

T. Hogan raised the issue of people who own their own homes being able to afford upgrades.

The Chair mentioned the good work being carried out by a 'Green' Group in Central Avenue. And concurred with concerns around fuel poverty.

4. Noise Byelaws

N. Kane gave a presentation on the proposed introduction of Noise Byelaws. This has become necessary in part due to the level of entertainment now being provided in some outside smoking areas which has led to an increase in noise complaints. The Council is looking to strike a balance between businesses needs and local resident's needs. If Byelaws are to be in place for Summer 2024 the Pre-Consultation process must commence by end September 2023.

Cllr. Geoghegan said he can see both sides – the residents who live close to noise generating activities and the obvious success of outdoor dining. The SPC must be careful on how this is approached as enforcement is the key to the effectiveness of new bylaws.

Cllr. Kelly agreed that the idea is good and needed, but using O'Connell Street as an example, there must be a balance between economic development and housing. Niall's suggestion of asking the residents is a good approach. It puts more weight behind the citizens rather than visitors. He fully supports a public consultation on this matter.

Cllr. Griffin supported a public consultation and acknowledged the conflicts between housing priorities and environmental policy making. He asked if it would be possible to have someone from Housing attend the SPC when any housing/housing related issues are down for discussion?

Cllr. Geoghegan believes that the Vintners Association will be split on this; between those who have and those who don't have outdoor facilities.

Cllr. Barron asked whether noise levels are currently monitored and supported the idea of a public consultation but questioned whether there needed to be other forms of sanction instead of new bylaws.

Cllr. Bailey said that the Gardai monitor outdoor activities. Deciding 'what is reasonable' would be a major balancing act. Businesses would need to employ extra staff to monitor noise. Can Byelaws be overruled and who enforces Byelaws? The Council could look at not housing tenants in these areas.

As advised to the Chair, Cllr. Barron left the meeting at this time.

Cllr. Hearne asked if hand-held noise meters were available to An Garda Siochana.

T. Hogan asked what is the level of noise complaints and where these were coming from.

N. Kane responded to the questions:

- The Local Government Act gives the power to a L.A. to enact Byelaws.
- Enforcement can go all the way to Prosecution in Court.
- Some other European Cities have noise restrictions e.g. there is a cut-off time for outdoor terrace dining in London and the same for beer gardens in Berlin.
- Where applicable, Planning Permissions will contain a Condition on noise limits.

Cllr. Kelly asked if Noise Byelaws have been passed by any other Council. N. Kane confirmed that Waterford was the first.

Ms. Greene asked if there were complaints regarding buskers. N. Kane confirmed that busking is covered by the Parks & Open Spaces Byelaws and length of time, noise levels (amplification), etc. is covered.

It was agreed by the meeting to go ahead with the Draft Byelaws for public consultation.

5. National Food Waste Recycling Week Presentation

D. Wallace gave a presentation on behalf of E. Ryan.

The overall aim of the campaign is to generate awareness of the role of food waste recycling in diverting this valuable resource from landfill and allowing it to be transformed into renewable energy and fertilisers for horticulture and agriculture use in Ireland. This will have a lasting impact as it will create green jobs here now and into the future. The campaign is being managed by Ireland's three regional waste management planning offices* and funded by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications. Local events were run by Local Authorities to support this campaign on the ground.

Ms. Greene asked what percentage of households now have brown bins.

Cllr. Bailey also asked about number of households with brown bins and whether there are any deals which could be offered to new householders to ensure they got a brown bin. Have the hotel owners been approached?

Ms. McKenna asked if she could get one of the small brown caddies.

N.Kane advised that Ormonde Organics take brown bin contents. The natural gas (methane) generated is used as fuel.

Cllr. Geoghegan said people believed that brown bin waste is emptied into the same truck as general waste so some do not see the point in segregating waste. N.Kane explained that some collection lorries have segregated collection which may give the impression that the waste is being collected into one space when it is in fact segregated.

N. Kane advised that companies must offer 3 bin system to householders. Currently only towns with a population over 500 must offer a brown bin. This population criteria will not apply from 1st January 2024 – all householders must be offered a brown bin.

Cllr. Kelly mentioned the increase in charges following the introduction of 'pay by weight' – as food waste is heavy placing it in the black bin will only increase the cost for the householder. This is another incentive for people to use their brown bin. The downside of the increased charges is an increase in illegal dumping:

- Increased charges lead to dumping
- There is an extra cost to the Council with clean-up operations
- It's a vicious circle.
- Some Local Authority Housing would have households with not as much money as others and would be under pressure to pay for bin services

Cllr. Hearne mentioned the GIY centre on the Dunmore Road approach to food waste recycling and shows what can be achieved.

N. Kane explained that hotels and restaurants must segregate their waste. They are subject to on-going inspections and enforcement. The brown bin has to be cheaper than black bin.

Cllr. Kelly said that when the Council ran the bin collection service it was in a position to bail people out.

N. Kane – Cost is not the real issue – of more concern is the potential harm caused by the dumping and the items dumped e.g. glass, electrical items, etc.

T. Hogan asked if there is any data available on what is being burned? And is there 'missing' waste?

N. Kane responded that there is no data available on missing waste. It is known that burning is dangerous because of the dioxins released. People can be unknowingly breathing in cancer causing dioxins from back garden burning.

6. Any Other Business

- Cllr. Griffin mentioned approx. 60 trees on the side of the road in Woodstown which the owner wants to cut down for firewood. 8 of the trees have died back and the owner has obtained a tree felling licence. As there are bats nesting in these trees could the Heritage Officer be asked to go out immediately to inspect. Can this SPC put something in place to halt the works until the Heritage Officer has carried out her inspection?
Cllr. Griffin also asked if there was an update on filling the Horticulturist vacancy.
- Cllr. Bailey asked whether there were any chestnut trees affected by disease in Waterford.
- T. Hogan asked if the SPC could make a submission on the South Coast Offshore Renewable Energy Designated Maritime Area Plan Proposal before the closing date for public consultation on 26th September. He had prepared a detailed suggested submission for the SPC to consider.
Cllr. Hearne said this is the biggest Maritime Area Plan in the history of the State.
T. Hogan said the Plan mentions new wind farms off the south coast which will be erected by the private sector. He believes this work should be carried out by the public sector, as the opportunities for Irish people will be lost if this is in the hands of private companies.
He questioned what the environmental implications are if sand banks are removed from Special Areas of Conservation.

D. Wallace advised that the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications is holding an online public information session tonight from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. with a facility for Questions and Answers.

G Kennedy referred to the wind turbines in Soloway, Scotland which are appx 14km from land and can be seen in the distance. Another example could be found in Denmark where there was initial disturbance to fisheries when building wind turbines but now fish live around the bases of the turbines. It appears that there is no long term impact from wind farms.

Cllr. Hearne – under the EU Habitation Directive 30% of all sea areas are cordoned off to encourage development of marine parks. It is upsetting to those who have always fished when fishing is not allowed.

T. Hogan raised concerns about the target for protected areas in order to protect areas from overfishing. Must have S.A.C.s The State is determining where the turbines will be located and then auctioning off the sites. In some European countries (Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands) the minimum distance from the shoreline is 22km. The deepest fixed bottom offshore wind farm in the U.K. sits in 59m of water and is 27km off the coast.

Cllr. Geoghegan said that we're still discussing a 22km limit – the same is happening with wind turbines that happened with masts .

Cllr. Kelly – following a recent information session in the Coastguard Station he has learned that the spawning grounds as close to the coastline. The Council has no role in determining what happens off the coastline.

T. Hogan asked whether the SPC should use this consultation as an opportunity to express its views and put in a submission before 26th September?

Cllr. Kelly asked if it would be permissible for the SPC to make a submission and, if so, who would be writing it on their behalf.

Cllr. Hearne asked who, of the Members, would have the knowledge to do this?

T. Hogan stated that all members of the SPC would hold a view.

Cllr. Griffin proposed that T. Hogan's suggested submission be approved and should it be permitted, Cllr. Hearne said he would ask for it to go on the agenda for the next Plenary meeting.

Date of Next Meeting

D. Wallace advised the SPC that the next meeting is scheduled for **Tuesday, 28th November 2023** and will take place on-line.

Actions:

Establish whether it is permissible for the SPC to make a submission regarding the South Coast Offshore Renewable Energy Designated Maritime Area Plan Proposal:	D Wallace
Re-wording of T Hogan's motion regarding the re-municipalisation of waste services due to legislative changes	Chair will follow up with Cllr. Fitzgerald.
Circulate a table of average cost of heating B2 rated homes.	G Kennedy
Draft Noise Byelaws to be put out for public consultation.	N.Kane

Cllr. Hearne thanked the Councillors, Community Representatives and Executive for attending and concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: John Hearne

Chair,
Environment, Climate Action & Biodiversity SPC

Date: 27th November 2023

