

## To the Mayor and Each Member of Limerick City and County Council

### Chairperson's Report of the Meeting of the Climate Action, Biodiversity and Environment Strategic Policy Committee of Tuesday 14th February, 2023.

#### **Item 1: Adopt minutes of the Climate Action, Biodiversity and Environment Strategic Policy Committee Meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> December, 2022 .**

The minutes of the meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2022 were proposed by Cllr. Teskey and seconded by Cllr. Collins (B)

#### **Item 2 : Directors Report**

##### **Biodiversity Officer**

Ms Gallagher informed the meeting that Limerick City and County Council has received confirmation from the Heritage Council/Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage of sanction for the recruitment of a Biodiversity Officer.

The primary responsibility of the Biodiversity Officer, as per the job description, is to prepare, manage and implement a Biodiversity Plan for Limerick city and county. Recruitment for the position will commence shortly.

##### **Creation of Woodlands on Public Lands Scheme**

Mr Brodie advised that two sites were identified as pilot sites under this scheme, and applications were made to DAFM for grant support. One site is in Kilmallock and the second in Newcastle West.

Approval has been granted for the Kilmallock site and it is likely that planting of native species trees will commence in Autumn 2023. DAFM is still considering the application for the Newcastle West site.

##### **Tree Planting Workshop**

Mr Brodie advised that on 4<sup>th</sup> February, LCCC with an Choill Bheag (an initiative of LEAF Ireland) supported 50+ local volunteers to plant approx. 350 native Irish trees along the Castletroy greenway.

#### **Item 3 : Presentation on Strategic Noise Mapping & Noise Planning (Simon Jennings, Exec. Scientist)**

Mr. Jennings gave a presentation on progress with Strategic Noise Mapping & Noise Planning for the Fourth Round of Noise Action Planning. The subject area of the presentation was the Limerick Agglomeration, but Mr. Jennings advised members that TII is currently preparing similar noise

mapping for the county area, and that when this is made available to the Council he would update the members.

Members queried the following: noise and planning; inclusion of towns on primary routes in noise mapping; reduction in noise levels on M20 following LCCC noise audits.

In response Mr. Jennings noted that there are now planning requirements for good acoustic design of houses to protect public health. With regards to recent road surface changes in part of Limerick, Transport Infrastructure Ireland (TII) have carried out some statistical analysis and LCCC is looking to obtain these results/reports from TII. He confirmed that the N21 is included in the TII mapping study.

**Item 4 : Blue Green Infrastructure Strategy : To note final draft of Blue Green Infrastructure Strategy**

Ms. Stephanie Crewe of LUC Consultants gave a presentation on the final draft of the BGI Strategy. The Strategy is a framework for sustainable development, and ensuring alignment with the Council's Climate Action Plan was critical. Included in the key actions of the strategy was a proposal for a blue-green ring which, if developed, would be Ireland's first urban strategic planning and environmental corridor.

Members asked whether the strategy has been costed and whether budget has been allocated to it. Mr. Jennings advised that funding has been awarded to develop a feasibility study for the Blue Green Ring and the strategy will offer opportunities to draw down funding from other sources.

Ms. Gallagher commented that the strategy is a blueprint for how we propose to implement BGI in the urban area, but it is equally the blueprint for all areas which will ultimately influence other Council policy.

**Item 5 : Notice of Motion submitted by Climate Action, Biodiversity and Environment Linkage Group of Limerick PPN (Ailis Ní Chofaigh/Caillum Hedderman):**

*I will move at the next Climate Action, Biodiversity and Environmental SPC that Limerick City and County Council adapt the World Health Organisation's standards for air quality, as recommended by the EPA in Air Quality in Ireland 2021. The aforementioned report identified readings above WHO guidelines from Air Quality Monitors (AQMs) in Askeaton, The People's Park and Henry Street for pollutants Nitrogen Dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>), Sulfur Dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>), Ground-level Ozone (O<sub>3</sub>), Nitrogen Oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>), PM<sub>10</sub> and PM<sub>2.5</sub> (Particulate Matter).*

*Air pollution is linked to premature deaths, dementia, stroke, respiratory illness, stunted lung development in children, and other respiratory ill-effects, crosses the placenta to impact foetal development in utero, is carcinogenic, and is associated with 3,000 deaths per year in Ireland.*

*Adaptation of these health-based guidelines allows Limerick to lead the way, nationally, in working towards a healthier environment for its residents, and work to improve localised air quality issues.*

In proposing the Motion Mr. Hedderman argued that Limerick City and County Council should adopt the World Health Organisation air quality guidelines to minimise the risk to public health from poor air quality. Members welcomed the Motion, and it was seconded by Cllr. Hartigan.

In response, Ms Gallagher advised that the World Health Organisation's Air Quality Guideline values for 2021 are more stringent than the current EU CAFE Directive air quality limits, which are transposed into Irish legislation (the Air Quality Standards Regulations 2011).

The most significant air pollutants in Ireland are particulate matter (PM) and nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>). The main sources of these pollutants in Limerick City are expected to be from the domestic burning of solid fuel (e.g. coal and wood to heat homes) and transportation (e.g. emissions from petrol and diesel engines). Measures have been recently implemented at a national and regional level that potentially will have a positive impact on air quality in Limerick (e.g. the Air Pollution Act 1987 (Solid Fuel) Regulations 2022 and the Limerick Shannon Metropolitan Area Transport Strategy).

The air quality in Limerick is generally good and meets EU norms. The EPA is currently reviewing the EU CAFE Directive with a view to amending the existing air quality limits. She noted that the Council is not a competent authority to set air quality limits and as such it is not appropriate for the Council to adopt the WHO guideline values. The Council will however continue to support the EPA's Ambient Air Monitoring Programme and will implement new air quality standards if and when they are adopted nationally.

Mr. Hedderman thanked the Director for her response but argued that as the Council owns 50% of the air quality monitors in Limerick, it should be able to adopt the WHO Guidelines. Mr. Brodie advised that the Council is not the competent authority to set air quality parameters. Parameters are set nationally.

Mr. Brodie advised that with regard to the air quality monitors, these are placed in the areas where it is anticipated that we might see exceedances eg city centre, industrial zones, high trafficked areas. He advised that there are no areas in Limerick City/County where there is poor air quality. All areas are within the limits.

With regards to the motion, Cllr Sheahan (K) suggested the Council write to the Minister of Environment calling on him to adopt the WHO guideline limits on air quality. Cllr Hartigan proposed that a Motion be forwarded to the full Council meeting that we ask the Minister for the Environment to adopt the WHO air quality guideline limits nationally, and ask whether it is possible for the WHO limits to be adopted unilaterally by Limerick.

It was agreed by all members that this motion should be forwarded to the next full Council meeting for discussion.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Next meeting of the CABE SPC - **Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> April 2.30pm at Council Chamber, MQ.**

Is mise le meas,

**Liam Galvin**

**Chairperson of the Climate Action Biodiversity and Environment Strategic Policy Committee**

**7 March, 2023**

**RECOMMENDATION: Motion proposed by Cllr Hartigan and seconded by Mr. Hedderman**

**“That this Council ask the Minister for the Environment to adopt the WHO air quality guideline limits nationally, and ask whether it is possible for the WHO limits to be adopted unilaterally by Limerick.”**