

Minutes of the Meeting of Limerick City & County Council Climate Action, Biodiversity and Environment Strategic Policy Committee held on Tuesday 11th March 2025 at 2.30pm.

Members Present:

Cllr. J Leddin (Chairperson), Cllr. B Collins, Cllr. N Stokes, Cllr. T Hartigan, Cllr. S Hickey O'Mara, Mr. S Lavery, Mr. B Murphy

Members in attendance:

Cllr. P.J Carey, Cllr. J Pond, Cllr. S Hartigan, Cllr. E Secas, Cllr. S Kiely, Cllr L Galvin, Cllr. E Ryan, Cllr. F Daly, Mr. C Joy, Ms. M Gallagher, Mr. B Harper

Apologies:

Cllr. K. O'Hanlon, Cllr. F Foley, Cllr. J Sheahan, Mr. C Hedderman

Officials Present:

Mr. K Lehané (Director of Service), Mr. A. Finn (Senior Engineer), Ms. S. Hourigan (Administrative Officer), Mr. C. Brodie (Senior Executive Scientist), Ms. A. Mellett (Senior Executive Engineer), Ms. C. Lynch (Senior Executive Engineer), Mr. K. Reeves (Climate Action Coordinator), Ms. C. Linehan (Senior Executive Scientist) Ms. S. McDonnell (Biodiversity Officer), Mr. S. McNamara (Administrative Officer), Ms. H. Kenneally (Environmental Awareness Officer), Ms. Y. Rowland (Staff Officer), Mr. O. Enright (Assistant Staff Officer)

Officials in attendance:

Mr. Conor McDonagh (Senior Executive Engineer)

- Cllr. Leddin commenced the meeting by introducing himself as Chairperson and welcomed all members. He requested all members to familiarise themselves with the Standing Orders for Strategic Policy Committees, he reminded members that the role of the SPC was in Policy, not operational issues. Any queries or clarifications on the Standing Orders can be directed to Sinead Hourigan (Meeting Administrator)

Item 1 – Limerick City and County Council Biodiversity Action Plan 2025-2030 – presentation - Ms. Sinéad McDonnell, Biodiversity Officer.

Ms. McDonnell gave a detailed presentation on the draft of the new Limerick City and County Council Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP) and requested that the Committee recommend the plan for adoption at the Full Council on March 31st.

The Biodiversity Plan is based on Ireland's 4th National Biodiversity Action Plan 2023-2030 (NBAP). The draft plan has adapted the five objectives from the NBAP for Limerick. It consists of 66 Actions and requires a 'whole of Limerick City and County Council' approach to Biodiversity. Seventeen policies feed into the plan as well as seven different pieces of legislation. The engagement process in creating the LBAP began in Quarter 2 of 2024 included public consultation on an LBAP discussion paper from April to June 2024 and a public consultation on the draft LBAP between November 2024 and January 2025. The Limerick Biodiversity Forum supported, informed and advised on the Discussion Paper and draft LBAP and in February 2025, the draft was proposed and seconded during a meeting of the Forum.

Cllr. Leddin thanked Ms McDonnell for the presentation and acknowledged the hard work of members on the Biodiversity Forum.

A discussion took place with regard to the engagement process and the value of the plan to biodiversity and conservation programmes in Limerick. Members thanked Ms McDonnell for the presentation.

Cllr Collins proposed that the Plan be recommended to the Full Council for adoption. Cllr. Hickey O'Mara seconded the proposal.

Item 2 – Introduction to the Environment and Climate Action Department, including Mayoral Programme and Budgetary Overview – presentation – Mr. Aidan Finn, Senior Engineer

Mr. Finn gave an overview presentation on the Environment and Climate Action Department including main functions and services, structure, senior staff, roles/responsibilities, budgets and challenges. The areas covered were –

- Environmental Enforcement (e.g. Control of waste Management Licences, Enforcement in areas of Waste, Water, Air, Noise, Management of Recycling Centres, and Management of Dangerous Structures).
- Parks, Playgrounds & Green Spaces (e.g. Management and Development of Parks, green Spaces including playgrounds and sports facilities, Sponsorship of Roundabouts, Management of 300 hectares of grass cutting, Tree planting and maintenance).
- Cemeteries Capital (e.g. Development of new cemeteries, existing cemeteries including Columbarium walls and management of Ancient Structures in cemeteries).

- Environmental Strategy (e.g. Agricultural Inspections and Water Framework Directive Implementation, Production of Strategy in Biodiversity, Water and air quality etc., Environmental Awareness, Biodiversity, European Projects and Going for Gold).
- Laboratory and Rural Water (e.g. Group Water scheme Grants, Capital Investment Programme, Well grants, Testing of private supplies, bathing waters and surface waters).
- Midwest Region Energy Unit (e.g. Delivery of SEAI Pathfinders Projects, Feasibility study for district heating in Limerick)
- Climate Action (e.g. Preparation of Climate Action Plan, Management of Community Climate Program, Operation of Citizen Innovation Lab, Participation in knowledge programs to support Climate Action).
- Litter Enforcement, Veterinary Services, ECA Corporate (e.g. Take practical measures for the prevention, control and correct disposal of litter, Anti-Dumping Initiative, CCTV for waste/litter enforcement, Dog Control, Horse Control, SPC Meeting Administrator, Coordinate support for Corporate Services (Councillor Questions, Notices of Motion, Freedom of Information requests etc.)).
- Cemeteries Operations and Maintenance (e.g. Cemeteries Administration, Plot Allocations/Burials/Exhumations, Cemeteries Bye Laws, Graveyard Maintenance, Management of relationships with key stakeholders – Public, Funeral Directors, Sculptors).

Mr. Finn outlined the Environment & Climate Action projects in the Mayoral Programme, in particular the creation of high-level expert group to develop a masterplan for heritage and public nature parks across the county. He highlighted some key objectives such as; investing in the public realm of key towns in the County, developing community projects, promoting green therapy initiatives, leveraging the natural assets across the county and city and other objectives such as reducing our carbon footprint, tree planting and the provision of seed packs to promote gardening.

A discussion took place among members with regard to the breadth of function within the department and members requested the presentation be circulated to the members for future reference.

A range of topics were further explored by members including;

Cemeteries - Cllr. Secas asked for an update on the columbarium wall due to be installed in Kilmurry Cemetery. Ms. C Lynch advised funding was in place since last year but due to high consultancy costs the issue is still ongoing. In addition alternative funding for the project has been sourced and it go out to tender shortly. Mr. Finn advised there is minimal funding nationally for developing new/repairing existing cemeteries and that other sources of funding including a loan were being explored to support this activity.

Members queried the regulation of unauthorised structures in cemeteries. Mr. S McNamara responded that a number of strategies were being pursued as the current regulatory system is not working. A permit application system exists but is challenging to enforce. The Council have ongoing engagement with communities, monument artists and suppliers in cases of unauthorised structures but the process can be drawn out and largely ineffective. A national register is being considered with a view to sanctioning sculptors nationally. A Graveyard Strategy for Limerick City and County Council is being drafted and will be published this year.

Tree planting – Members discussed tree planting in general and the LCCC Tree Planting Policy. Cllr. Collins then asked where we are getting the seeds for the tree planting initiative, are they native. Mr. Finn advised that they are native seeds, there is a publication and media going out this week, which is Tree Week. The Council will provide free seeds at three locations in the city/county.

Roundabout planting – Cllr Leddin raised the Shannon Bridge roundabout and the need for regular maintenance. Ms. Lynch advised that we were actively looking for sponsorship for the Shannon Bridge roundabout and that any suggestions would be welcome. She outlined the lack of funding available for existing playgrounds, currently only €20,000 annually.

Bring Banks – Members raised problem illegal dumping at bring banks and the Mungret Recycling facility. Ms. Hourigan responded by advising that six bring banks have been approved for the installation of CCTV by the oversight committee and that cameras would be installed over the next couple of weeks.

Playgrounds – Members discussed playground maintenance and raised concerns around the lack of national funding available for playgrounds. Cllr Leddin suggested writing to the relevant Minister to lobby regarding the topic. Cllr Collins outlined her concerns which extend to funded pressure on the upkeep of greenways and supported the suggestion of writing to the Minister to request funding for the for upkeep and maintenance.

Item 3 – Irish Business against Litter, Update and Progress Report – Ms. Sinéad Hourigan, Administrative Officer

Ms. Hourigan gave a detailed presentation on the results of the Irish Business Against Litter (IBAL) report for 2024. Limerick City and Galvone were both given a position of 37th out of 40 towns/cities surveyed which was quite disappointing. Main areas of Limerick City received ‘A’ ratings including O’Connell Street, People’s Park and Colbert Station whereas poor grades were reserved for some laneways, vacant sites and basements in the city. Ms Hourigan then presented details of the work being completed by Council staff to rectify litter blackspots. She described the work carried out in 2024 and expressed frustration that improvements in certain areas were not acknowledged in the most recent report – the vacant building between 30 Cecil Street and Engine Buildings being cited as an example.

Members welcomed the work being done on litter management around the City and County and highlighted several challenges including management of the laneways in the city, bring banks and persistent illegal dumping in certain locations. Members also highlighted and praised the work of community and voluntary groups around the city and county and underlined the importance of the work they undertake in cleaning their communities.

Item 4 – Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor E. O’Donovan

Cllr. Hickey O’Mara (deputising on behalf of Cllr O’Donovan) proposed the Notice of Motion. Cllr Leddin advised that non-members are entitled to bring Notices of Motion before the SPC and to attend.

I will move at the next meeting of the Metropolitan District of Limerick that a cost price municipal refuse collection scheme be piloted in illegal dumping hot-spots in the city including St. Mary’s Park, Ballinacurra Weston, Lenihan Avenue, Coonagh/Clondrinagh, Johnsgate and Kilmallock Road.

Response:

In October 2024, under the Anti-Dumping Initiative a free Bulky Waste collection was offered to all residents in St Mary's Park, Ballinacurra Weston and the Hyde road area. It is intended to repeat this initiative in 2025.

In November 2024, the Minister for Environment, Climate Action and Communications asked the Department to commission a comprehensive study to explore the feasibility and benefits of transitioning Ireland's municipal waste collection market from its current model of side-by-side market competition to a franchise tendering system for local authority areas or regions.

Study will include –

- Comparative analysis with other jurisdictions
- Legislative & policy changes required
- Cost implications for both consumers and industry
- Potential environmental impacts

Consultants are to be appointed in coming weeks and I recommend awaiting an outcome of this report in advance of taking actions at local level that may be superseded by the recommendations of the feasibility study.

This response is to be circulated to all members.

This concluded the business of this meeting.

Cllr Joe Leddin

Chairperson of the Climate Action Biodiversity and Environment Strategic Policy Committee