



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe
Galway County Council

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Minutes of the Climate Action, Biodiversity and Heritage Strategic Policy Committee Meeting held on Thursday 12th June 2025 am in Room G01 at 10 am.

I LÁTHAIR:

Baill:

Cllr. Ivan Canning, Chairperson

Cllr. Tomás Grealish

Cllr. Paul Killilea

Cllr. Ollie Turner

Cllr. Laurie Harney

Ms. Hazel Morrison

Ms. Justine Delaney - Online

Cllr. Martina Kinane - Online

Oifigigh:

Ms. Valerie Loughnane-Moran, Senior Planner

Ms. Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer, Planning

Ms. Tina Ryan, Climate Change Co-Ordinator, Climate Change

Ms. Helen Hallinan, Assistant Staff Officer, Environment

Ms. Anne Power, Senior Staff Officer, Planning

Ms. Gina O'Shaughnessy, Assistant Staff Officer, Planning

Apologies:

Mr. Peter Butler

Mr. Stephen Canavan

Mr Uisinn Finn, Director of Services, Physical Dev, Fire Emergency, Climate Change

Mr. Liam Hanrahan, Director of Services, Planning

Item No. 1 – Confirmation of Minutes and Matters arising from Climate Change, Biodiversity and Heritage Strategic Policy Committee Meeting held on the 9th April 2025.

The Minutes of the meeting of the 9th April 2025:

Proposed: Cllr. Ollie Turner

Seconded: Cllr. Martina Kinane

Matters Arising:

Cllr. Martina Kinane outlined that the motion agreed at the previous meeting in relation to *Increased Funding Allocation to the Community Climate Action Fund* would be put forward at the June Plenary meeting.

Ms. Morrison was invited to make a comment in relation to a concern she had raised regarding the draft minutes. She noted that she had requested via email that a number of issues be raised at the previous meeting. She noted that these issues were not included in the minutes. She noted that Ms. Ryan and Ms. Power had addressed most of the issues in the meantime, and she requested that an item related to Lough Corrib be included on the agenda for the September meeting.

Cllr. Ivan Canning acknowledged Ms. Morrison's request and suggested that the matter could be addressed under Any Other Business (AOB).

Item No. 2. – Climate Action Plan Annual Report for 2024

Ms. Ryan updated the members on the Climate Action Plan Progress Report 2024.

She noted that The Climate Action Plan was adopted in February 2024 and that the Progress Report would be submitted to the Senior Management Team on the 23rd June 2025.

Once approved by the Senior Management Team the Progress Report would then be presented to the Full Council.

Ms. Ryan outlined some of the highlights from 2024. Ms. Ryan noted there are 97 actions in the Climate Action Plan and 61 are classed as reoccurring actions.

- **Our Energy Use:** €3.5 million spend - 17 million kWh = 4,200 tonnes CO₂
- **On track** for our efficiency targets but **not** our Fossil CO₂ targets
- **Public Lighting** - Approx 12,600 Lights. Currently 77% LED.
- **Flood Risk Assessment and Management Programme**
- **Housing Retrofit Programme** – 12% of units (364) retrofitted to B2 since 2021 including 80 in 2024.
- **Green Public Procurement** - Galway Partner Forest Project
- **Active Travel** – Safe Routes to School National Pilot, Age Friendly Transport Award
- **Environmental Education** – Climate Action Course for Over 60's
- **Green for Business Supports** – 32 companies supported in 2024
- **Waste Reduction** – An Mheitheal Rothar and School Uniform Reuse Scheme

Ms. Ryan informed the members the Kilcolgan Clarinbridge Community Energy Master Plan had launched. She noted that the Climate Action Group support communities if they wish to develop an Energy Master Plan and provide bridging loans for same.

Ms. Ryan spoke on the GAA Green Clubs Information Evening which is to be held on the 17th June 2025, at Ballinderreen GAA Club which will offer advice to sports clubs on practical steps they can take to reduce energy consumption, enhance biodiversity, and implement other sustainability initiatives.

Ms. Ryan spoke on the Community Climate Action Fund which entails 100% project funding. An amount of €726,000 was awarded to build low carbon communities. In the year 2024, 55 applications were granted to the total value of €2.7 million.

She noted a few projects completed:

- Ballinderreen Community Centre – Water refill station, window up grades & planter boxes

- Lackagh Museum & Community Development Association – Solar PV Installation
- Forbairt Chonamara Láir Teo – LED Lighting Upgrade
- Rainwater Harvesting and Anaerobic Digester, Brigid's Garden
- Solar Panels and LED Lighting, Roundstone Community Development Association
- Cargo Bike, Oranmore Tidy Towns
- Annaghdown GAA Clubhouse
- East Galway & Midlands Cancer Support Ltd

Ms. Ryan spoke on Oileáin Árann Decarbonisation Zone. She outlined a fund was opened up specifically for the three Aran Islands in the amount of €60,000. A number of applications were received under this initiative and decisions on those applications would be made in the coming weeks.

Ms. Ryan noted that the National Adaptation Committee meeting was held out there and the members of that committee are looking at what needs to be achieved as a State in response to climate change and how to adapt appropriately.

Ms. Ryan noted that a number of sites were identified that are at risk and named a number of projects that Galway County Council want to seek funding for to help deal with Coastal Change and Climate Adaptation:

- **Invasive Species Eradication Programme**

Phase 1: Awareness and mapping.

Phase 2: Management Plans and Treatment.

Phase 3: Ongoing treatment and monitoring.

- **Sand Dune Protection Programme**

E.g. Ceann Gainimh beach located next to the airstrip on Inis Meáin

- **Roadway and Roadside Protection Programme**

- **Protection of Graveyards**

Eg. Reilig Cill Éinde Conservation Management Plan to protect natural, built and cultural heritage.

- **Community Gardens.**

Ms. Ryan addressed the internal energy usage in 2024, noting that Galway County Council face ambitious targets for 2030 which require GCC to reduce energy use and emissions by 50%.

Ms. Ryan outlined that last year, Galway County Council spent €3.3 million on energy, representing approximately 2% of the Council's overall budget. She noted in terms of emissions, transport accounts for 38%, which is particularly challenging to reduce. Thermal energy use, primarily from GCC buildings, makes up 19% of emissions and noted there are a number of projects to address this issue.

Ms. Ryan noted that Galway County Councils fleet which consists of approximately 350 vehicles, 3 electric, is a significant energy user. She noted that Galway County Council are exploring options such as becoming more electric and the use of HVO which is a lower-emission fuel alternative.

Ms. Ryan noted that the SEAI had carried out a critical success factor assessment and a number of key actions were identified.

Fleet:

- Develop Fleet Strategy
- Include all vehicles on Fleet Management System – identify opportunities for idling, reduction, electrification
- Appoint Fleet Manager

Green Public Procurement:

- Develop GPP plan for contract integration
- Develop Building Stock Plan
- **Obtain ISO 50001 Certification**
- **Develop Regional Energy Bureau**

Ms. Ryan informed the members an Internal Audit was carried out in May 2025 with 5 non-conformances identified which GCC need to address before certification can be achieved.

Ms. Ryan outlined some of the energy projects that are underway. She noted that four buildings were put forward for Pathfinder 2 where Galway County Council get 50% funding from SEAI for upgrades to those buildings. The four buildings are Westside and Ballinasloe Libraries and Ballinasloe & Tuam Area Offices. Aras an Chontae is part of a bigger office appraisal project and she noted there is plans to retrofitting the building also.

Ms. Ryan noted with regards to Fleet, Galway County Council are looking to put in place a Fleet Manager. Ms. Ryan noted with regards to Public Lighting, Galway County Council are currently at about 85% LED and hope to meet 100%, subject to finance, by 2026.

Cllr. Laurie Harney queried how Tuam and Ballinasloe had fully funded leisure centres and queried if community centers come under that heading?

Ms. Ryan replied that Galway County Council have approximately 65 buildings. The top ten significant energy users will be focused on initially and advised that Community Centers wouldn't fall under that category.

Cllr. Canning queried the retrofitting of Galway County Council buildings and how many of them have solar panels? He queried if it was in the pipeline to put solar panels on all Galway County Council buildings. He noted that in doing so it would offset so much of Galway County Councils carbon footprint. He noted the solar panels would create a return straight away.

Ms. Ryan stated Galway County Council has solar panels on several buildings and it is a project they hope to expand. She agreed that there would be a very quick payback on introducing solar panels. She advised that they are in the process of installing solar panels on the leisure centers at present. She noted that Galway Council Council is required to reduce emissions by 50% so it will be necessary to carry out other projects to remove fossil fuels from the buildings, such as the conversion of the heating system from oil to electric heat pumps.

Cllr. Turner queried if it is our policy to replace vehicles with electric ones when they reach the end of their natural life cycle?

Ms. Ryan explained that several issues need to be addressed first, which is why a fleet strategy is essential, to assess all factors and determine the best option for Galway County Council.

Cllr. Harney queried if solar panels still work during extended outages like those in Storm Éowyn?

Ms. Ryan replied that she had spoken to the Chair of that Adaptation Committee about this specific issue and he had advised that if you have a battery in your home with a switch you can switch from connecting from the grid to producing your own power. Ms. Ryan noted homeowners would need to seek advice from the ESB on that. Another potential is that some electric vehicles facilitate charging of household equipment.

Cllr. Harney raised a concern about retrofitted houses in the event of extended power outages. He noted that the removal of open fireplaces as part of retrofits had caused an issue in some locations and he enquired about the future of retrofitted housing estates such as those in Ardahan and Athenry, asking what provisions are in place for such cases.

Ms. Ryan replied that even if they had an oil boiler, it still wouldn't work without electricity, so this is also an issue for new homes without fireplaces. A benefit of retrofitting is that the house stays warmer for longer. She did acknowledge that the removal of a fireplace can raise some issues in the event of a long-term power outage

Cllr. Canning gave an example of a retrofitted housing estate in Eyrecourt, where residents were left without electricity for up to three weeks following Storm Éowyn. As part of the retrofitting process, all stoves and fireplaces had been removed. He expressed the view that these features should have been retained in the homes, though he acknowledged that this was not a matter for discussion at today's meeting. Ms. Ryan agreed that it may be beneficial to have a discussion in terms of housing retrofits and about the possibility of installing a small stove that would be available in an emergency.

Item No. 3 – Heritage Office Update

Ms. Marie Mannion began by explaining that one of her primary responsibilities each year is to apply for funding.

She highlighted several projects that received funding from the Heritage Council, including the Galway Community Archaeology Project. This project has been ongoing since 2004, and until 2011, the Community Archaeologist position was an in-house role. Ms. Mannion mentioned that the position now needs to be contracted out, and funding must be applied for annually.

Currently, Bernie Doherty, a community archaeologist, is managing the project, which secured €20,000 in funding this year. Ms. Mannion pointed out that this amount is quite low considering the invaluable work being done.

She emphasized the importance of having someone on the ground to protect the archaeology and to engage with community groups, farmers, individuals, and schools. She stated that they are aiming to secure an in-house community archaeologist post.

Ms. Mannion also outlined several other projects funded by the Heritage Council, including:

- County Galway Audit of Oral Heritage Recordings (Phase III) – Audit Consolidation and Master Plan.
- Digital Mapping of Graveyards 2025.
- Audit of Holy Wells of County Galway 2025 (Phase 6).
- Athenry Town Walls Capital Works Project 2025 (Irish Walled Town Network Funding).
- Athenry Walled Town Day (Irish Walled Town Network Funding).
- Loughrea Signage Interpretation Plan (Irish Walled Town Network Funding).

Irish Community Archive Network Project

Ms. Mannion provided details on the Irish Community Archive Network (iCAN), a leading organisation supporting digital community archives in Ireland. Its main goal is to encourage and assist communities in collecting and sharing their local history and heritage online. This project is a collaboration between the National Museum of Ireland, several local authorities including Galway County Council, several community groups within each participating county and the Heritage Council.

She explained how Galway County Council partnered with the National Museum of Ireland (in Castlebar) in 2014 to develop the country's first multi-site. All heritage groups that are iCAN members receive training on web access and writing and are encouraged to undertake various projects together.

Presentation at Stone Conference, Jeju Island, Republic of South Korea

Ms. Mannion shared that she was invited by the Jeju Special Self-Governing Province Stone Culture Park (The Jeju Provincial Government) to Jeju Island, Korea, to present a paper titled "The UNESCO Inscription of Ireland's Drystone Walling: A Celebration of Heritage and Craftsmanship" on April 26th. She noted that Jeju Island is keen to apply for UNESCO recognition of their own drystone construction practices. By sharing Ireland's and Galway County Council's (Féile na gCloch, Inis Oírr) experiences and insights, the goal is to foster a reciprocal exchange of knowledge and interest between the two islands.

Galway County Council Community Support Grants 2025

Ms. Mannion discussed the Galway County Council Community Support Heritage Grants Scheme. For 2025, the funding amounted to €60,000, sourced from Galway County Council's own resources. A total of 75 Heritage Groups, Schools, and Tidy Towns Groups received funding, with amounts ranging from €400 to €1,000.

She informed the members that this funding serves as seed money to undertake basic reports and works, which can then be used to apply for larger funding from other organisations.

Community Monument Fund 2025

Ms. Mannion spoke about the Community Monument Fund, which provides financial support for the conservation, maintenance, protection, and promotion of archaeological monuments in

Ireland. This national initiative, run by the Department, is crucial because, before its inception five years ago, there was no support for private owners of archaeological sites and monuments.

She informed the members that this year, twelve projects were submitted to the Department, and nine were awarded funding totalling €416,984. She highlighted the assistance provided to community groups in submitting their applications and noted that the Local Authority can only submit a limited number of its own applications. She emphasized the significant amount of work involved in preparing these applications, with the Heritage Office staff and Community Archaeologist, doing a substantial amount of unseen work.

Heritage Council Community Grants - Galway County Projects Receive €329,968

Ms. Mannion noted that out of a national fund of €1.6 million, Galway County received €329,968. She explained that for Built Heritage Projects and Cultural Heritage Projects, she and the Community Archaeologist work with community groups to ensure they submit the best possible applications. Biodiversity Projects are assisted by Rosina Joyce, Galway County Council's Biodiversity Officer. Ms. Mannion sees this as a way to secure funding for the benefit of heritage and the groups and organisations working in this sector.

Galway County Heritage & Biodiversity Plan 2024 – 2030

Ms. Mannion noted that the Galway County Heritage & Biodiversity Plan was launched on June 3, 2025. The plan includes:

- 186 actions categorized into themes.
- Participation from 447 individuals and organizations in public engagement, including 117 people in pre-draft public consultation workshops.
- Attendance of 141 people at in-person pre-draft consultations.
- 177 submissions through online questionnaires.
- 12 written submissions.

Cllr. Canning thanked Ms. Mannion for her presentation and commended her and her team for their extensive work.

Ms. Morrison noted that it is impressive what Galway County Council achieves with limited funding.

Cllr. Turner asked if the funding process primarily involves engaging with communities at the end of the year and making announcements at the start of the calendar year.

Ms. Mannion replied that she is constantly working in the background. When a community group approaches her, she assesses their goals and determines the best approach for their project. It involves sitting down with the groups and working with them to figure out the best way to secure project funding and to ensure that the project is undertaken to best heritage practice.

She reiterated that this work is ongoing throughout the year. The most significant part is providing advice and working closely with people. It involves a lot of unseen work, figuring out

where to source money for projects and how to undertake them according to best heritage practices.

Ms. Morrison highlighted the importance of the Community Archaeologist's work and noted the low funding for the project. She asked what could be done to make the position in-house.

Ms. Mannion stated that a workforce plan review had taken place within the Planning Department, and she had put forward a business case for the position at that time.

Ms. Loughnane noted that a Strategic Workforce Plan review took place in November 2023, with each section collaborating with appointed consultants to make business cases. She mentioned that it ultimately comes down to funding and seeking support from the Department for positions. The Workplace Plan would be with the HR Section, and they should consider it.

Cllr. Canning asked if there is a full-time person for the Capital Works in Athenry.

Ms. Mannion replied that Galway County Council must pay a Licenced archaeologist for their input as part of the works.

She stated that the Community Archaeologist role is different, focusing on working with communities. She referred to the benefits seen on the ground and the funds coming in from the Community Monument Fund and other funding streams. She noted that it would be extremely beneficial to have a full-time Community Archaeologist for a county the size of Galway, given the volume of work and interest in the county and the benefits that communities receive from this position.

Cllr. Canning asked if a request from the Councillors present at the meeting would help secure an in-house Community Archaeologist.

She noted that she must seek funding every year, and there is no security. She emphasized the invaluable work provided by the Community Archaeologist.

Cllr. Harney stated that considering the total fund of €1.6 million and Galway receiving €330,000 from the Heritage Council Community Grant funding, it surely qualifies for a full-time role.

Cllr. Canning agreed to bring this issue back to their parties and put it forward in the next budget.

Item No. 4 – Biodiversity Office Update

Ms. Loughnane noted that Ms. Rosina Joyce was out of office, but an update will be given at the next meeting.

Item No. 5- Any Other Business and Next Meeting

Representation from Municipal Districts

Ms. Morrison acknowledged that most of her queries had been addressed, but she wanted to highlight the lack of representation from certain Municipal Districts on the SPC. She suggested that consideration be given to including representatives from the two Municipal Districts that are

currently unrepresented. She pointed out that there are four representatives from Loughrea and suggested that future SPC compositions ensure all areas are represented. She also noted the absence of representation from the western part of the county on both the Environment SPC and the Climate Action, Biodiversity, and Heritage SPC.

Cllr. Canning explained that the process involves each councillor expressing their interest in a particular SPC when they are elected, and sometimes it is just a matter of the expression of interest coming from a number of members who were from the same Municipal District(s).

Ms. Morrison referred to the SPC manual, which states that the Council should have one representative from each Municipal District and suggested that this be considered in future SPC compositions.

Annual Galway Heritage publication

Cllr. Turner suggested the idea of creating an annual Galway Heritage publication to document the events and activities that occur throughout the year in the county. He believed this would enhance connectivity and awareness of the various initiatives happening beyond individual parishes. He noted that there is a significant amount of work being done that deserves to be showcased. Similar to the GAA, where different clubs contribute and there is a memorial section, this publication could serve as a localised format for the public to stay informed about county-wide heritage activities.

Ms. Mannion responded that it was an excellent idea. She mentioned that volunteers would be needed to assist with the project but assured that she would definitely consider it, as there is no shortage of material to include.

Lough Corrib

Ms. Morrison mentioned that she had one more item to discuss: Lough Corrib. She noted that Ms. Ryan had informed her that Lough Corrib would be the focus of the Regional Operations Committee, and they would receive feedback on this matter. She also noted that Ms Ryan had informed her that LAWPRO are hoping to assist in the establishment of a forum specific to Lough Corrib and Ms. Morrison agreed that this would be beneficial as it is becoming a significant issue.

Ms. Ryan added that Luke Drake, the Senior Community Water Officer responsible for that catchment, has offered to come and provide an update on the current situation regarding Lough Corrib if the SPC is interested.

Cllr. Canning asked for it to be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

Next meeting

Ms. Loughnane noted the next meeting would be held on the 17th of September 2025.

Meeting Concluded.

