



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 17th September 2025 am in Room G01 at 10 am.**

I LÁTHAIR:

Baill:

Cllr. Ivan Canning, Chairperson

Cllr. Tomás Grealish

Cllr. Paul Killilea

Cllr. Laurie Harney

Ms. Hazel Morrison Pagett

Peter Butler

Janet Laffey, LAWPRO

Luke Drea, LAWPRO

Ms. Justine Delaney - Online

Cllr. Martina Kinane - Online

Cllr. Ollie Turner - Online

Oifigigh:

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

Mr. Liam Hanrahan, Director of Services, Planning

Ms. Rosina Joyce, Biodiversity Officer

Ms. Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer, Planning

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

Ms. Denise Feeney, Community Climate Action Officer

Ms. Helen Hallinan, Assistant Staff Officer, Environment

Apologies:

Ms. Anne Power

Ms. Gina Shaughnessy

**Item No. 1 – Confirmation of Minutes and Matters arising from Climate Change, Biodiversity and Heritage Strategic Policy Committee Meeting held on the 12<sup>th</sup> June 2025.**

**The Minutes of the meeting of the 12<sup>th</sup> June 2025:**

**Proposed:** Cllr. Laurie Harney

**Seconded:** Cllr. Tomás Grealish

## **Matters Arising:**

None

### **Item No. 2 Lough Corrib Catchment Management Update**

Mr. Luke Drea, Senior Community Water Officer, presented an update on the Local Authority Waters Programme (LAWPRO). He explained that LAWPRO is a shared service supporting all 31 local authorities in protecting and restoring good water quality in rivers, lakes, estuaries, groundwater, and coastal waters through catchment science and local community engagement. LAWPRO is jointly managed by Kilkenny and Tipperary County Councils. Luke also introduced Janet Laffey as another member of the LAWPRO team.

Mr. Drea emphasized that public participation is a core principle of the Water Framework Directive (Article 14) and is essential for effective Integrated Catchment Management.

He noted that the 3rd Cycle of the River Basin Management Plan aims to enhance public participation by establishing Catchment Community Fora (CCFs), along with other initiatives such as funding and community teams.

- Community engagement is crucial for delivering the Water Framework Directive, the work of LAWPRO, and the efforts of partner organisations.
- Communities nationwide already play a significant role in protecting and restoring water quality.

Mr. Drea explained that one catchment was selected in each of LAWPRO's five regions as a pilot location for CCFs.

- In the Western region, Catchment 29: Galway Bay Southeast was chosen. This catchment includes all streams entering tidal waters in Galway Bay between Black Head and Renmore Point, covering an area of 1,270 km<sup>2</sup>.
- In 2024, a scoping exercise was conducted in each of the five pilot catchments to gather stakeholder feedback and inform the development and design of the CCFs.

Mr. Drea outlined the key recommendations for the Catchment Community Fora (CCFs):

- Establish five pilot CCFs in the original selected catchments
- Recruit members from workshop participants and other interested community groups and individuals within the catchments
- Develop a clear Terms of Reference for members
- Define learning objectives
- Ensure support from a host organisation (e.g. LAWPRO)
- Establish an Implementation Advisory Group to oversee the pilot
- Conduct ongoing evaluation to inform a potential national rollout
- Identify long-term funding and administrative requirements

Next Steps for CCFs:

- LAWPRO will continue to develop and support CCFs throughout the 3rd Cycle of the River Basin Management Plan (RBMP)
- This includes exploring various engagement models and approaches to public participation
- Pilot catchment members will assist in trialling consultation processes between communities and catchment management work plans
- They will also contribute to shaping a framework for integrating public participation into Water Framework Directive (WFD) governance structures
- Findings from the pilot will inform the development of CCFs nationally beyond the end of the 3rd Cycle in 2027

Cllr. Tomás Grealish asked how LAWPRO collaborates with the Office of Public Works (OPW) regarding flooding in South Galway. Mr. Drea explained that Uisce Éireann, OPW, LAWPRO, the Department of Agriculture, IFA, and other stakeholders coordinate regularly, submit work plans, and work together on shared objectives.

Cllr. Laurie requested a report from the EPA (2024) on underground river tunnels in Catchment 29. He also raised a complaint about sewage pollution in Rahasane Turlough, noting that Rahasane is the largest turlough in Europe.

Ms. Paggett expressed concern about the deterioration of Lough Corrib due to pollution and noted the absence of a current plan for the lake. She mentioned that the timeline for the 3rd Cycle has been delayed. Mr. Drea responded that the 3rd Cycle concludes in 2027, and it is expected that Lough Corrib will be included as a CCF in the next cycle.

### **Item No. 3 Climate Action SPC Update**

Ms. Ryan provided an update to members on the national 2024 LA Climate Action KPI Report and the 2024 GCC Climate Action Plan Progress Report.

She noted that the National Report was released last week. Ms. Ryan highlighted that over 2k social houses were retrofitted to B rating for tenants and 181 km of new cycling/pedestrian infrastructure was delivered in 2024. 683 community climate action projects were supported and businesses were supported through the Green for Business initiative.

She noted that the 2024 GCC Climate Action Plan Progress Report has been reviewed by the SMT and is ready for publication. It will be published on the new GCC website when it is launched along with a comprehensive section on Climate Action.

Ms. Ryan outlined some of the main achievements / challenges in 2024 and to date in 2025:

- **Energy Use:** Galway County Council is required to improve its energy efficiency by 50% by 2030, with over €3 million spent last year. Four buildings are participating in the Pathfinder Programme: Ballinasloe and Tuam Area Offices, and Ballinasloe and Westside Libraries.
- **Public Lighting:** Retrofitting is ongoing and we are currently at 85% LED.
- **Fleet Management Strategy:** Decarbonising the council's fleet remains a significant challenge.
- **Housing Retrofit Programme:** Since 2021, 12% of units (364) have been retrofitted to a B2 rating, including 80 units in 2024.
- **Green Clubs Event:** There was significant interest in the recent sustainability event.
- **Sustainable Fashion Summer Camp:** Held in August 2025 with Tuam Youth Ireland, this camp promoted buying and styling second-hand clothing.
- **PPN Plenary:** Ms. Ryan spoke at the PPN meeting on Tuesday evening, 16th September 2025, where concerns were raised regarding renewable energy.
- **Community Climate Action Fund:** 32 projects to the value of €762,000 were awarded funding and are currently being implemented.

Ms. Ryan also noted that the Community Climate Action Fund is expected to reopen in October 2025, with similar funding anticipated for next year. Ms. Ryan explained that the Community Climate Action Funds will be available under several themes for not-for-profit organisations:

**Theme 1: Community/Energy** - e.g. Retrofitting and solar on community buildings, LED lighting upgrades. Ms. Ryan noted that having an energy audit completed can strengthen funding applications.

**Theme 2: Travel** e.g. Bicycle shelters and racks, Bicycle repair stations

**Theme 3: Food & Waste** e.g. Community gardens, Community fridges, Anaerobic digesters

**Theme 4: Shopping and Recycling** e.g. water refill stations, segregated bins, swap shops

**Theme 5: Local Climate & Environmental Action** e.g. Mini forests and dispersed orchards

Ms. Ryan recommended that strong applications should include three adequate quotes. She advised groups to begin preparing their applications now, to collaborate with other communities, and to seek assistance from the Climate Action Unit if needed.

Ms. Ryan also highlighted the Decarbonisation Zone Fund, specific to the Aran Islands, which is funded by the local authority. She concluded her presentation by noting opportunities for funding collaboration. Ms. Ryan also reminded everyone that Climate Action Week will take place from 13th to 19th October 2025.

Cllr. Laurie Harney asked if, in the event of another storm, there would be alternatives for heating sources for social housing upgraded to an A rating. Liam Hanrahan responded that due to the level of insulation, these houses would remain warmer than homes of a lower rating. Uinsinn Finn added that efforts should be made to ensure a more robust electricity supply to prevent prolonged outages. It was agreed to invite the Housing Section to provide an update on the Housing Retrofit Programme.

Cllr. Martina Kinnane suggested exploring the “Eden Project” in Southern England/Cornwall as a potential model for Galway County Council and possibly for Ireland as a whole. Ms. Ryan agreed to research this further.

Uinsinn Finn mentioned ongoing office facilities consolidation, including retrofitting county buildings and regional offices to meet carbon reduction targets. He stated that a full update and presentation would be provided at the Office Appraisal meeting. Cllr. Ivan Canning commended Ms. Ryan and her team for their excellent work with the Community Climate Action Fund.

#### **4. Heritage Office Update**

Ms. Mannion presented an update from the Heritage Office. She noted that Heritage Week 2025, held from 16th to 24th August, was a tremendous success. In addition to the officially registered events, approximately 20 additional events took place that were not listed on the Heritage Week portal. One notable example was D’Arcy 300: Patrick D’Arcy 1725–1775, held in Kiltulla/Killimordaly, where small communities came together showing great passion and enthusiasm.

Ms. Mannion encouraged attendees to watch two short films: Holy Wells and 9 Irons, when they have the opportunity. She also mentioned that the Genealogy event reached full capacity, reflecting strong public interest. The Athenry Walled Town Day and Loughrea Medieval Festival were major highlights. The Athenry Walled Town Day attracted over 10,000 visitors in a single day. She expressed gratitude to media outlets such as Galway Bay FM for their excellent coverage.

Ms. Mannion shared exciting news that the Joyce Country & Western Lakes Geopark has received a green flag, marking the final step toward achieving UNESCO status. She also referenced a meeting earlier in the year focused on delivering the "Taking the Past Forward" Heritage Course, and noted a visit from representatives of Jeju Island, South Korea—a self-governing region and where seven delegates travelled to Ireland to engage with local heritage initiatives.

The Féile na gCloch Inis Oírr festival took place from 11th to 14th September 2025. Ms. Mannion expressed heartfelt thanks to Galway County Council staff, including Martina Creaven, Mary Condon, Anne Power, Gina Shaughnessy, and Ita Gordon, for their significant contributions. She spoke about the festival's success, emphasizing the importance of the "feel of a place." This year, the event welcomed 120 attendees, with numbers steadily increasing annually, leading to repeat visits and growing interest.

## **5. Biodiversity Office Update**

Ms. Joyce provided a brief update on Biodiversity initiatives. She highlighted the integration of biodiversity into creative arts projects across Galway County, noting the value of developing biodiversity-themed arts events within the community. One such event is Wild Trad Tunes, taking place on 21st September in Athenry.

Ms. Joyce described several engaging awareness campaigns designed to encourage wider participation, including:

- Seed Saving for Biodiversity
- Gardening for Biodiversity
- Help Stop Invasive Species in Your Tracks
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Ms. Joyce also referenced National Heritage Week (16th–24th August 2025), mentioning that the event Exploring the Geology, Hydrology, and Biodiversity of Glenamaddy Turlough was a particular highlight.

## **6. AOB**

As there was very limited time available for the Heritage and Biodiversity updates it was noted that more time would be provided for detailed updates at the next SPC meeting.