



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 Wednesday 17th June 2026 at 10am at Room GO1

I LÁTHAIR:

Baill:

Cllr. Ivan Canning, Chairperson
Cllr. Tomás Grealish
Cllr. Ollie Turner
Cllr. Laurie Harney
Cllr. Martina Kinane (online)
Ms. Hazel Morrison-Pagett
Ms. Justine Delaney (online)
Mr. Peter Butler

Oifigigh:

Mr. Liam Hanrahan, Director of Services, Economic Development & Planning
Ms. Eileen Keaveney, Administrative Officer, Economic Development & Planning
Ms. Rosina Joyce, Biodiversity Officer, Economic Development & Planning
Mr. Sam Keady, Assistant Staff Officer, Economic Development & Planning
Ms. Rebecca Mooney, Climate Action Officer, Climate Unit

Apologies:

Cllr. Paul Killilea
Mr. Michael Haverty
Mr. Uinsinn Finn, Director of Services, Physical Dev, Fire Emergency, Climate
Ms. Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer, Economic Development & Planning
Ms. Tina Ryan, Climate Action Coordinator, Climate Unit
Ms. Denise Feeney, Administrative Officer, Climate Unit
Ms. Anne Power, Senior Staff Officer, Economic Development & Planning

Item No. 1 – Confirmation of Minutes and Matters arising from Climate Action, Biodiversity and Heritage Strategic Policy Committee Meeting held on the 25th March 2026.

The minutes of the meeting of the 25th March 2026

Proposed: Cllr. Laurie Harney

Seconded: Cllr. Ollie Turner

Item No. 2. - Biodiversity Office Update

Ms. Joyce presented an update regarding the Biodiversity Office. She began by reading aloud the comment of Minister Christopher O’Sullivan which advised that *“We must also redouble our commitment to nature: continuing investment, strengthening collaboration and improving delivery as we strive to stop the loss of biodiversity and move towards a future where it is protected and restored”*.

She then advised that this morning’s EPA Water Quality Report further underlined the responsibility of Local Authorities to improve their efforts where possible in assisting with biodiversity initiatives. She then outlined that her presentation today would touch on Funding and Project Updates regarding the following:

- Local Biodiversity Action Fund 2026
- Local Biodiversity Action Plans 2026
- Creative Ireland

She further advised that the Sustainable Plant Management Policy Review would be examined during her presentation this morning.

Key Funding Streams

She noted that the 2026 funding sources were split between the Dept. of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage, the Heritage Council, as well as Galway County Council via match funding. She advised that the total Project Value was €146,432.

She explained that the funding split is attributable as the following –

- €96,700 from the Dept. of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage plus 15% Match-Funding supplied by GCC.
- €20,000 from the Heritage Council plus 25% Match-Funding supplied by GCC.

She then outlined the grant requirements for each source of funding:

- **From the Dept. of Housing, Local Government, and Heritage (with 15% Match-Funding from GCC):**
 - Strengthen the evidence base for biodiversity in Local Authorities.
 - Carry out practical conservation and restoration work.
 - Strategic projects across multiple LAs.
 - Build ecological capacity within and between LAs.
 - Build ecological capacity for practitioners.
 - Strategic education and outreach.
 - Conservation measures in Natura 2000 sites.
- **From the Heritage Council (with 25% Match Funding from GCC)**
 - Support the creation and approval of Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPs).

- Support the growth and effectiveness of the Biodiversity Officer Network.
- Support biodiversity research, conservation, and management.
- Support community and citizen engagement in biodiversity.

Initiatives

Ms. Joyce then moved to the Local Biodiversity Action Fund (LBAF) 2026 and outlined the various initiatives being undertaken regarding same.

The first was the monitoring and removal of the invasive Alpine Newt species in Co. Galway, which she noted was being undertaken successfully and smoothly thus far. Mr. Butler enquired as to what the mechanism for their removal was, to which Ms. Joyce advised that they were being physically captured as the means of management of the problem.

She then moved to the *Galway Raised Bogs Bird Baseline*. She advised that the undertaking of baseline bird surveys on raised bogs would assist with the building of evidence for peatland restoration as well as supporting the conservation of nationally and internationally important bird species.

The next initiative discussed was the *County Galway Wetlands Survey 2026-2028*. She noted that the comprehensive surveying of the County's wetlands informed conservation, protection, restoration, and management priorities as well as supporting critical planning and decision-making efforts. She further advised that Galway has the most wetlands in the country, alongside Cork.

Ms. Joyce moved discussion to the '*Wings – Galway County Biodiversity Conference 2026*'. She advised that the Conference was sold-out of tickets after only three and a half days, showcasing the level of enthusiasm and participation from all levels of the community. She noted that the conference was very important in terms of building out the local knowledge base regarding biodiversity.

Community Engagement & Events

Ms. Joyce then continued to the events of National Biodiversity Week 2026 which included events all around the county. This year saw the annual Biodiversity Week County bioblitz held in Loughrea. She outlined that the *Loughrea Festival & Bioblitz 2026* was a huge success. She noted that the event, was a collaboration with MKO, Coillte, University of Galway, Galway City Council, NPWS, ATU Galway, Galway Rural Development, Detection Dogs Ireland, Loughrea Tidy Towns, The Barn Owl Project, Hedgerows Ireland, Galway Bay Southeast Catchment Community Forum, Mad Yolk Farm, LAWPRO. CELT, Loughrea Anglers Association and local schools. There was a full programme of community engagement events over the 24-hour period in the town, and ecologists and citizen scientists documented the species observed in the area during that time.

Other events hosted by the Biodiversity Office during Biodiversity Week included a farm walk in Derrydonnell, a seagrass workshop in Kinvara and a butterfly workshop in Rosscahill.

Ms. Joyce continued by adding that the media coverage of all of the events of the week was hugely successful, with a significant story published by the Connacht Tribune, and another story featured in the Irish Independent by Henry Walsh, a former member of this SPC.

Heritage Council Funding - Local Biodiversity Action Plan Fund 2026.

Ms. Joyce then discussed the implementation of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan through Heritage Council funding, noting that the work programmes for same included capacity building, lighting retrofit projects, swift conservation actions, as well as the Nanny River ecological study. She further added that these projects all directly contributed to the ongoing delivery of the Galway County Heritage and Biodiversity Plan 2024-2030.

Creative Ireland Funding

Ms. Joyce then spoke of the *Feamainn agus Sliogáin Inis Meáin* project, which is concerned with the documenting and sharing of local knowledge of seaweeds and seashell on Inis Meáin to embed ecological understanding with the Irish-Language traditions and folklore of those living on the island. A bi-lingual booklet researched and written by Aedín Ní Thiarnaigh will be launched during National Heritage Week. This project is being delivered with support of the Arts Office and Creative Ireland Funding.

Policy Development

Ms. Joyce advised that a review of the Council's pesticide and herbicide usage policy was underway, in line with Action BD 4.6 of the Galway County Heritage and Biodiversity Plan 2024–2030. The review will focus on reducing and improving the use of these chemicals, strengthening alignment with Council policy, and introducing measurable actions and monitoring systems.

She noted the importance of engaging directly with Municipal District outdoor staff to understand current practice and acknowledged the reductions already achieved. She also recognised the significant efforts of community groups, including Tidy Towns, in reducing chemical use, while noting the added difficulty this can create for plant management. Ms. Joyce stressed that herbicides and pesticides carry ecological costs and should only be used correctly, appropriately and where necessary. She clarified that she was not advocating for their full cessation, particularly where they are needed for the management of invasive alien species.

Ms. Joyce further clarified that the policy review applies only to GCC staff and contractors working on behalf of GCC, including contractors managing estates taken in charge by the Council.

She highlighted an opportunity to improve monitoring through digital record-keeping, noting that better data would support accountability, annual funding returns and future analysis. While acknowledging possible hesitancy around electronic recording, she emphasised the value of the information that could be gathered and the importance of bringing staff on board.

Ms. Joyce invited SPC members to consider the proposed electronic recording system, the setting of measurable targets based on the data collected, whether specific provision should be made for invasive alien species, and whether use should be curtailed in sensitive locations such as hospitals and playgrounds. She concluded that a careful balance was required in the use of these chemicals and asked members to reflect on these issues.

Strategic and Upcoming Actions

Ms. Joyce then spoke of the *EU Nature Restoration Plan*, noting that the Public Consultation for same was due to close to submissions on 30th June 2026

Ms. Joyce then thanked the committee members and asked if there were any questions for her that anyone would like to ask.

Discussion

Mr. Hanrahan thanked Ms. Joyce for her very detailed presentation. He advised that the Wings conference in Loughrea last month was a great success, noting the enthusiasm of the speakers and attendees. He then added that it was great to see the level of work by staff with the hedgerows, due to prominence of this issue at Council meetings.

Regarding the use of herbicide and pesticides, he advised that there were multiple stages of consultation that the issue would need to be brought up at, before the issue could proceed for examination before the entire Council. In particular, he noted the importance of ensuring that the new plan continues to allow for the management of invasive alien plant species using herbicides, where appropriate, as this remains the most effective method of control for many species, including Japanese knotweed, giant rhubarb and rhododendron. He then stated that his belief that community groups in receipt of GCC funding should have to sign-up for compliance of GCC herbicide and pesticide policy in order to avoid situations arising whereby Tidy Town committees used them on one side of the road, where the other side of the road was managed by GCC staff and these substances were not used, creating visible disparities in plant management, as well as undermining GCC policy.

Cllr. Canning thanked Ms. Joyce for her infectious enthusiasm and detailed presentation. He stated that it was important that these chemicals' usage was tracked but noted that he was aware of some Tidy Towns groups who used them, as there were not enough GCC staff to do such work. He then stated that it was important that the quantities of these chemicals being used and bought is disclosed when such groups are allocated funding.

Cllr. Turner noted that a Cost-Analysis scheme regarding herbicide and pesticide use would be very beneficial, as he noted that there would surely be significant savings from the reduction in their use. He added that the documentation of which pesticides and herbicides being used, as well as whether there were any safer alternatives available, needed to be explored. As such he stated that he supported the proposed digital recording of their usage, as well as an assessment into potential cost-savings which may be gained from same.

Ms. Joyce answered Cllr. Turner on the point of cost-analysis, noting that the Journal.ie had published a Freedom-of-Information-Act-borne analysis of same. She noted that Galway did not place badly or well in this analysis but noted that there was a significant lack of quality data with respect to same. As such she noted that improved data collection through electronic recording would allow for more accurate cost-based analysis in future.

Cllr. Turner enquired as to where GCC's stock of these chemicals was stored, and what the protocol for their procurement was. Ms. Joyce advised that she did not have the full answer to this response, but noted that due to LVP cards, that any worker with the appropriate approval could purchase them theoretically.

Cllr. Harney enquired as to whether they were a regulated product and noted surprise that anyone could purchase them. Ms. Joyce answered that they are a highly regulated product, but only in terms of large-quantity procurement and their usage in public spaces.

Mr. Butler stated that Council leadership, such as on EV Battery-run work vans, was noticed by and sent a real message to Community Groups. He added that Tidy Town groups take definite notice of Council-led initiatives such as that and so noted his strong support for GCC to lead the way in terms of this policy-review of herbicide and pesticide use. As such he noted that Council leadership on this area would allow for tidy town groups to follow suit, and that the reduction in GCC usage of such products would be very important.

Cllr. Grealish noted that many property management companies use significant quantities of those products as well. Mr. Hanrahan clarified that the current discussion concerned GCC internal policy only but noted that it would be applicable to GCC-employed contractors or property management personnel working on estates which GCC has taken in charge.

Cllr. Canning stated his belief that the Council were relatively small purchasers of the chemicals in comparison to Tidy Towns Groups and Community Groups due to the lack of GCC to spray them.

Ms. Joyce advised that GCC must examine what usage is within its control and should use its influence regarding funding of community groups to ensure that funding is not spent on herbicides except for the management of invasive alien species. She then advised that only professionally licensed users may spray such products in public spaces, with Council permission to do so.

Ms. Morrison-Pagett enquired as to whether GCC should have annual KPI's to assess its herbicide and pesticide usage, but Mr. Hanrahan advised that only NOAC may set KPI's for GCC. Ms. Morrison-Pagett then stated that it was important to get additional information regarding these chemicals into the public realm for awareness.

Ms. Joyce stated that an accurate baseline of data regarding the chemicals would be required firstly, before their use could be measurable. She then advised that it was

imperative that herbicide policy did not affect the treatment of invasive alien species, due to the significance of invasives treatment as a biodiversity issue. Ms. Morrison-Pagett enquired as to whether the treatment of invasive alien species should be separate from this discussion, lest it become affected. Cllr. Canning then stated his belief that GCC purchasing the product in bulk and then centrally distributing it as required would provide data regarding its usage. Mr. Hanrahan advised that Municipal District procurement processes were all statutorily standardised.

Cllr. Kinane wished to acknowledge the significant work undertaken by the Tidy Towns groups. She then enquired whether there were any schemes or programs that GCC could be a signatory to reduce the usage of these chemicals, which could then be promoted on signposts etc. She then wished to echo the comments of Mr. Butler in affirming GCC's standing as leading the way for affecting change at a community level through rolling out such initiatives. She then suggested that such a scheme or program could then be rolled out even further afield if it was successful. She then enquired whether pesticide and herbicide usage were criteria for Tidy Towns scoring.

Mr. Hanrahan advised that such a proposal was not included within GCC Plant Management policy, and that if the Tidy Towns groups wished to raise the issue, they could do so, but that GCC could not, due to the absence of same from the Plant Management plan.

Cllr. Kinane then enquired whether this SPC could stipulate that an additional 5% funding was allocated towards community groups who affirmed a commitment to reducing pesticide and herbicide usage. Mr. Hanrahan advised that such a proposal could be discussed with the appropriate parties, but that it was unlikely to be adopted.

Cllr. Kinane then enquired whether internal initiatives could be proposed by this SPC, for this end. Mr. Hanrahan then advised that it would need to be examined thoroughly. He then clarified that GCC were not advocating for zero-use of the products, as zero-use was impractical and would face significant backlash from engineers and maintenance staff, but for the correct, reduced usage of the products instead.

Ms. Morrison-Pagett then enquired whether GCC could produce a hierarchy of use for the chemicals. Mr. Hanrahan then advised that Tidy Town groups in Connemara dovetailed closely with one another and with other voluntary groups in their treatment of invasive alien species. He then stated that this was only the starting point of this discussion regarding their use.

Ms. Joyce affirmed this and noted that public awareness campaigns and supports for community groups regarding their usage would be looked at for 2027.

Cllr. Harney enquired whether pesticide and herbicide usage would affect the biodiversity scoring for Tidy Towns. Ms. Morrison-Pagett advised that weed suppression methods varied significantly. Ms. Joyce echoed this remark and noted that there could be an action as well as a plan for same, which could then allow for easier deliverability in reducing their usage.

Cllr. Harney then enquired as to the level of GCC's success in treatment of rhododendron in Connemara. Ms. Joyce advised that it was a difficult question, as the issue is very

widespread. She noted that a multi-agency approach was required to effectively manage the issue effectively.

Ms. Morrison-Pagett enquired as to whether the county's rhododendron presence could be mapped. Ms. Joyce advised that some mapping work had been undertaken to that end in Connemara, but that it was a difficult and costly endeavour. She added that Connemara is home to many invasive alien species, many of which are unknown to her and others until they are formally identified as same.

Item No. 3 – A.O.B

Cllr. Canning enquired whether there was any other business to discuss, per agenda item 3. Cllr. Turner stated that he had liaised with multiple Directors of Service to date regarding Tidy Towns issues and that he had enquired about the holding of a meeting with the GCC Director of Finance regarding potential use of LPT funding for these ends. He then noted that while he is aware that LPT revenue is to be used for capital projects only, he noted that funds had been reallocated for community group use from training budgets in the past and that he would continue to seek additional funding avenues for these community groups. He then advised that he would keep the committee updated on his efforts.

Cllr. Canning then advised the members that the meeting was finished.

END