

**Minutes of the Rural Development Strategic Policy Committee (SPC) held on
Tuesday 21st September 2021 at 10.30 a.m. via Zoom**

In attendance:

Cllr. Pat Hayes
Cllr. Shane Talty
Cllr. Cillian Murphy
Cllr. Mary Howard
Cllr. Pat Burke
Cllr. Joe Killeen
Ms. Jean Tierney O’Keeffe
Ms. Anny Wise
Mr. Denis Tuohy
Mr. Eugene Crimmins
Mr. Leonard Cleary
Ms. Bernadette Haugh
Ms. Helen Moloney

Organisation:

Chair
Elected Member
Elected Member
Elected Member
Elected Member
Elected Member
Social Inclusion
Environment/Conservation
Agriculture/Farming
Community/Voluntary
Director of Service, Rural Development
A/Senior Executive Officer
Assistant Staff Officer

Apologies

Ms. Niamh O’Callaghan

No. 1 Minutes of Meeting held on 18th May 2021:

The minutes of the meeting held on 18th May 2021 were proposed by Cllr. P. Burke, seconded by Cllr. C. Murphy and agreed.

No. 2 Matters Arising:

Cllr. C. Murphy referred to the County Development Plan and proposed that a special SPC meeting be held in October to get a brief from Forward Planning in relation to the National Planning Framework and the Regional Spatial Strategy. This was agreed by the members.

A discussion took place on the Rural SPC making a submission on the County Development Plan. L. Cleary advised that the purpose of the SPC is to comment on policy, therefore it would be in order for the Rural SPC to make such submission and admin support can be provided. He invited members to email key bullet points and these can be collated into a short submission. A draft can then be circulated to the members for approval. He advised the members to collate a preliminary submission first ahead of the special meeting.

The members agreed that a special meeting take place in order to be briefed by Forward Planning staff, to bring them up to speed and familiarise themselves with concerns raised previously.

Cllr. P. Hayes advised that the Department has requested submissions and that this closing date is coming up but this has nothing to do with the local plans. He advised that the draft national policy documents are not available in the public domain yet. He stated that a special meeting is critical as the County Development Plan would have implications for rural communities.

No. 3 Presentation on Burial Ground Review Process by Ollie O'Loughlin.

L. Cleary addressed the members and advised that a Burial Ground Review has taken place. What the Local Authority is trying to achieve is a shared understanding of policy issues and their role in relation to Burial Grounds and the future operation of the Burial Ground Service. Leonard advised that Ollie O'Loughlin has delved into the operating model. He stated that the SPC needs to have an understanding of the Local Authority's role going into the Budget process and there is a need to sustain and strengthen the service in the future.

Ollie O'Loughlin addressed the meeting and reported on the following:-

- Background to Burial Ground Service
- Current Organisational Structure
- Operational and Maintenance Arrangements (Key Business Areas)
- Issues identified which affect Service Delivery
- Proposals

He concluded as follows:-

- The service operated by the Burial Grounds Unit under the Rural Development Directorate is delivered in a professional manner.
- The Unit has a well thought out business model for the service delivery with the service being delivered around eight key business areas to manage the operations and maintenance of the burial grounds function.
- Currently, the Unit is endeavouring to deliver the service through this structured model however due to capacity issues the Unit operates mainly in a reactive mode.
- The issues identified in the review that affect the service delivery fundamentally relate back to the capacity of the Unit to respond effectively to the current demands placed on the service and the requirement to develop the service going forward.
- If the capacity issue is addressed in a reasonable timeframe then all the other issues can be resolved with the current business model and an accompanying business plan.
- In addition, in resolving the capacity issue, the extra resources will support the rollout and ongoing maintenance of the community playground service and other development works within the Rural Development Directorate. This will also contribute to overall efficiencies within the Directorate.

Cllr. P. Hayes thanked Ollie for his in-depth review of the operation of the Burial Ground function in the County. He noted that the review outlined challenges and that provision of resources is key to moving forward. He advised that processes are changing and that the review addressed the key issues. He stated it will also be necessary to look at financial assistance available to the community groups who assist in maintaining burial grounds. He took the opportunity to thank the staff in the Burial Ground Unit. Cllr. Hayes invited members' comments/questions.

A. Wise referred to non-Christian burials and referred to the Bye Laws that do not take account of the diverse number of people coming to Clare with other religions. She advised that she would like to see the Bye Laws take account of people from other religious backgrounds and allow them to be buried in the Burial Grounds in their own style and custom. In response to A. Wise, L. Cleary advised that there is a dedicated Muslim faith burial plot in Drumcliffe and

this has received very good feedback. Drumcliffe has also facilitated Baha'i burials. Leonard stated that burial grounds are for all faiths as there is a need to be inclusive of all families and religious beliefs.

Cllr. M. Howard thanked Ollie for his report and noted that there was a lot of work put into it. She referred to previous reports of anti-social behaviour in Drumcliffe BG which has since quietened down and enquired if there was any further update on same. Cllr. Howard also welcomed the Columbarium wall area in Drumcliffe. B Haugh advised that that Council continues to liaise with Gardai in relation to Drumcliffe and other areas. AGS have increased patrols in Drumcliffe which is also monitored by Burial Ground staff. AGS have advised that any further concerns would be reported to them for follow-up. She also confirmed that the trees in the vicinity of Section E had been cut back to increase visibility and monitoring of the BG.

Mr. D. Tuohy thanked Ollie for a very comprehensive review which reflects the challenges ahead. He stated that it is a huge body of work on the desk for 2 people and advised that the document should be used to make a resource demand. He stated that the next step is to further review the Bye Laws and enquired what the time line is for the review. The operation of burial grounds needs to be practical with a common sense approach and there is a need to acknowledge the reality of traditions and emotions given the sensitivities involved when families interact with the Burial Ground Unit.

L. Cleary thanked Ollie for the excellent review of the operational service and stated that it was a very comprehensive study. Leonard advised that a major part of the study was a listening process whereby engagement with the various stakeholders took place. He acknowledged the groups who took the time to share their experiences. Leonard stated that a review of the Bye Laws is now recommended and that this would be a statutory process and will be looked at over a number of months. The adoption of new Bye Laws will then need to go before the full Council. Leonard requested that the Rural SPC recommends a review of the Bye Laws.

Cllr. P. Burke thanked Ollie for his presentation and stressed the importance of good communication between Local Authorities and the communities. He advised that there is no anti-social behaviour in a lot of rural burial grounds. He noted that staff of the Burial Grounds unit had visited a cemetery in Clonrush and he was impressed by the knowledge that they had, which was great to witness. Following on from that meeting Clonrush was the subject of a successful application for funding under the Community Monument Fund. Cllr. Burke took the opportunity to acknowledge the work of the staff on this application.

L. Cleary advised that the next step of the review would be to share the review with the Directors of the four Municipal Districts as there is a need to share it with support staff. The review will feed into the Budget process in terms of resources and income/expenditures as there will need to be a balance. The commencement of the statutory process to review the Bye Laws should progress now. Leonard took the opportunity to acknowledge the various partners e.g. Gardai, HSE, Coroner, National Monuments Service, OPW who work very closely with the Council on a day to day basis. He acknowledged the huge partnership with the community groups and volunteers and all the staff involved.

The SPC agreed to recommend to the full Council the commencement of the process for development of new Burial Ground Bye Laws. This was proposed by Cllr. M. Howard, seconded by Cllr. P. Burke and agreed by the SPC Members. Cllr. P. Hayes, on behalf of the SPC thanked Ollie for the comprehensive review and stated that he may be needed to review what can be implemented. He stated that it was imperative to get policies brought up to a modern standard.

No. 4 Climate Change Adaptation Strategy and Biodiversity.

Cllr. P. Hayes thanked Anny for her email presentation on Heating the Home. He stated that it made for very interesting reading. Anny addressed the members and presented a power point which was originally given as a lecture for An Taisce members as a public awareness project. The presentation included details on carbon, particulates and sustainability. (Copy of presentation attached).

Cllr. P. Hayes thanked Anny for her comprehensive presentation and advised that as part of their commitment this item is on the agenda for each SPC meeting. It poses a lot of challenges and debate especially in terms of poverty.

L. Cleary thanked Anny for the presentation. He stated that it was very beneficial data and clearly presented. There is a need to develop knowledge in this area and Leonard requested that it be kept as an item on the Agenda. As the Council begins to develop their knowledge the Council's Climate Adaptation Strategy can be looked at. Cllr. P. Hayes recommended that the SPC's views be circulated to the Climate Action Group in the Council.

Mr. D. Tuohy suggested that other industries could give an alternative view and that maybe they would be interested in speaking on the topic.

Cllr. M. Howard referred to the food and fuel poverty and the awareness of the ban on smoky coals. Most homes were built in the last century with no underground heating or insulation and they are difficult to heat. Provision of grant aid is required for people to change their homes and a subvention for older people. Affordable alternatives need to be looked at, as a lot of constituents will be affected if there is a ban. Cllr. Howard stated that peat is coming in from Eastern Europe and there is a need for a balanced conversation about this.

Cllr. P. Hayes advised that there is a lot of challenges and the tradition of farmers cutting turf and open fires are part of history. He recommended that this be discussed again and possibly set up a meeting with other agencies for a balanced debate.

Any other Business

Camper Vans:

Cllr. P. Hayes requested that the Tourism Department provide a report on the number of camper vans in use over the Summer and the lack of facilities. He stated that it will be necessary to look at policies in relation to this. Cllr. P. Burke agreed that this would need to be discussed before next Summer's tourism season begins.

Next meeting:

Cllr. P. Hayes thanked everyone for attending the meeting and advised that the next meeting will be a Special Meeting with the Planning Department on the County Development Plan for Rural Clare. Leonard agreed to liaise with the Planning Department in relation to dates and he agreed to circulate a proposed date.

With no other business the meeting concluded.

Signed: _____
Cllr. P. Hayes
Cathaoirleach

Leonard Cleary
Director of Rural Development and
West Clare Municipal District