

Minutes

All Party Group on Climate Action

16 November 2022 | 1:00 pm – 2:00 pm

At: Virtual

Members in attendance: Kate Nicholl MLA (Chair), John Blair MLA, Steve Aiken MLA, Eoin Tennyson MLA, Kellie Armstrong MLA, Andrew Muir MLA, Cllr Ciarán McQuillan, Cllr Maeve O'Neill, Cllr Martin Gregg, Cllr Stephen Dunlop, Cllr Christopher Jackson.

In attendance: Nichola Hughes, Sharon Clements Nuala Flood, Mark Emmerson, Amy Bell, Andrew Cassells, Andy Frew, Anne Art, Anne Ford, Catherine Blease, Bob Hanna, Brian Rankin, Caitlin Sullivan, Catherine Hunter, Colin Jess, Cormac Matthews, David Rooney, David Rossiter, Declan Allison, Emma Adair, Elaine Smith, Hannah Irwin, Johnny Stewart, Karen Phillips, Kate Livingstone, Marcella Kinsella, Marie-Louise Gaile, Nuala Campbell, Paddy Robb, Reece England, Robert Jervis-Gibbons, Ryan White, Sophie Brown, Stephanie McEvoy, Tanya Hedley, Tom Lavery, Tom Woolley, Vanessa Postle.

Attendees: 49

Apologies: Peter McReynolds MLA, Nuala McAllister MLA, Cara Hunter MLA, Cllr Terry Andrews, Cllr Roisin Lynch.

1	Opening Remarks
1.1	Kate Nicholl (KN), Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting. She noted that Cllr Ciarán McQuillan is now representing Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Councils on the APG and welcomed Ciarán to the meeting.
1.2	Apologies Apologies were recorded.
2	Meeting Admin
2.1	Minutes of meeting on 21 September 2022 Minutes of the meeting on 21 September were approved: proposed by Steve Aiken (SA); seconded by Tom Woolley (TW).
2.2	Matters arising from meeting on 21 September 2022 KN confirmed she had written to ask why the Department for Economy (DfE) did not accommodate previous requests for a briefing on the Energy Strategy, noting that no response had been received. Ryan White (RW) from DfE was at the meeting and noted that he is new in post as Director of Heat, Energy Efficiency and Climate Change and confirmed that he will be engaging with the APG and that DfE would be able to provide a briefing at the next meeting. KN noted that due to a change in her support staff she had not yet written to Council APGWs setting out proposals on how they can tie in with the APG's work but would send these letters shortly and will circulate any responses received. KN confirmed wrote to the Minister of Finance to explore the feasibility of a 'Superbloom' at Stormont however as there is no Minister, she will send a letter to the Permanent

	<p>Secretary and will circulate any response received.</p> <p>The Group also wrote to the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) to provide information on the Department's mowing policy in the context of protecting and conserving nature. She noted that since the letter was issued, the Minister for Infrastructure has announced a new approach to verge management across the road network that includes a focus on protecting wildlife and promoting biodiversity which is encouraging.</p>
3	<p>The All-Island Climate and Biodiversity Research Network: Plans and Ambitions</p> <p>KN welcomed Professor Mark Emmerson from Queens University Belfast to the meeting to discuss the plans and ambitions of the All-Island Climate and Biodiversity Research Network (AICBRN).</p> <p>Presentation: https://www.sustainableni.org/sites/default/files/APG%20Nov%202022%20Presentations.pdf</p> <p>Useful links:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network website: www.aicbrn.net. • NESC Report: https://www.nesc.ie/publications/collaboration-on-climate-and-biodiversity-shared-island-as-a-catalyst-for-renewed-ambition-action/ <p>Contact: Mark Emmerson m.emmerson@qub.ac.uk</p> <p>KN thanked ME for his presentation, noting how encouraging it is to hear about the excellent work being carried out by the research sector. She invited questions from the group.</p> <p>JB asked the extend to which academic research is currently being used for policy design by DAERA?</p> <p>ME confirmed that the network had been invited by DAERA to attend, for example, workshops on the review of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and that it is hoped this model can be extended and used in the design stage of all new policy / legislation. The aim is to involve the research sector, NGOs, and industry in co-designing policy from the point of concept, not at the latter stages of development as is current practice.</p> <p>JB asked how effective co-design was in the development of climate legislation, for example?</p> <p>ME noted that he wasn't involved in development of the Climate Change Act but the hope is that the Network can be utilised for policy co-design in future. He noted that the Republic of Ireland (ROI) involves civil society in policy design, through citizen's assemblies for example, and that Northern Ireland should adopt a similar approach.</p> <p>Stephanie McEvoy (SMcE) asked if NI Departments and Stakeholders can meaningfully engage in all-island networks such as this one during periods of political instability i.e., if no Ministers are in place?</p> <p>ME noted that DAERA has committed a significant amount of funding to support two AICBRN centres in Northern Ireland and that there are strong lines of communication between Departments and researchers on both sides of the border. He admitted that £17 million funding committed to date will not go far when split across three organisations in a 6-year time frame. He noted that the thematic working groups are as inclusive as they can be and that they envisage data to be fed to working groups, therefore will be utilised by a diverse range of stakeholders.</p>

	KN thanked ME and requested that the APG is kept updated about its progress.
4	Campaign for the North West Rail Corridor
	<p>KN welcomed Steve Bradley (SB) from Into the West and invited him to deliver a presentation on the campaign for a North West Rail Corridor.</p> <p>Presentation: https://www.sustainableni.org/sites/default/files/APG%20Nov%202022%20Presentations.pdf</p> <p>Contact: Steve Bradley steve@stevebradley.info</p> <p>KN thanked SB for his contribution and asked what engagement the campaign has had with local councils to date and how Councillors can help?</p> <p>SB noted that all 4 councils in the proposed areas for rail expansion are involved and have received presentations from Into the West. Some have passed motions to support the campaign.</p> <p>SB cited his disappointment that the CEO of one local council had been directed by DfI not to ask for any new rail infrastructure when bringing forward its Local Development Plan. Government shouldn't direct local councils in this way, and it is symptomatic of DfI's historical focus on roads and road infrastructure, which curtails the development of sustainable travel infrastructure in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>SB noted that Northern Ireland is unlikely to make any progress in address the twin issues of climate change and regional imbalances if policy makers solely focus only on roads. He highlighted that English councils lobby more and play a more significant role in applying pressure on government for more rail investment.</p> <p>KN asked how long the campaign has been running and what it has achieved so far?</p> <p>SB explained that Into the West was set up in 2004 but that four years ago it began to focus on expansion of the North West Rail Corridor. Following significant stakeholder engagement over the past few years, the campaign went public in recent weeks.</p> <p>Steve Aiken (SA) asked how much of the old rail track bed is still intact and how difficult would it be to restore it?</p> <p>SB noted most of the old rail beds still exist because planning laws require sterilisation and preservation of any existing rail infrastructure where possible. However, he pointed out that in some cases, new routes into and out of towns/cities may be required. For example, the Great Northern Road into Omagh was once a railway route that was converted into a road, so it is now unusable for rail.</p> <p>SA asked what conversations have been happening around electrification of the railway network?</p> <p>SB said Into the West is fully supportive of electrification of the existing rail network. He said new routes should be fully electric, dual track lines. If the requested route goes ahead, it would be the first purpose built electric rail line on the island of Ireland.</p> <p>Maeve O'Neill (MON) highlighted the success of the Scottish Borders Rail Campaign which saw the rail link from Edinburgh to the Scottish Borders reopened. She noted that business cases for rail infrastructure often underestimate passenger numbers. She asked Steve to highlight the immediate issues with the existing Derry to Belfast route?</p> <p>SB noted that weekend services from Derry to Coleraine are significantly less frequent</p>

	<p>than services from Coleraine to Belfast and highlighted an east west disparity in the existing rail service between Derry and Belfast. The cost to address these existing disparities amount to just £200k.</p> <p>ME highlighted that a short-term, high-impact intervention would be to make public transport free for young people (e.g. 18 – 25 year olds) and ask if the group has engaged with Translink or DfI about the costs of doing that and the associated impacts on carbon emissions, air quality, etc?</p> <p>SB noted that Transport for London offer free and discounted travel for students and young people in London. He also highlighted the fact that Northern Ireland pays less than half of what Scotland spends on sustainable transport infrastructure, arguing that funding and incentives are critical to encourage a modal shift away from cars.</p> <p>Andy Frew (AF) asked if e-bikes and increased use of bikes in general have been included in the business case for rail investments, taking into account the opportunities around integrated transport solutions?</p> <p>SB noted that integrated bike/rail solutions can assist with the first mile and last mile access barriers to rail use. He said more work needs to be carried out on this by DfI and Translink. He noted the current barriers for commuters using bikes on trains, as Translink policies prevent use of bikes on trains before 9.30am. This policy should be reviewed considering recent developments in cycling technology.</p> <p>SME asked if there has been any feedback or support from local Chambers of Commerce?</p> <p>SB noted that local Chambers were broadly supportive however most are still calling for improvements to the road network, rather than advocating for rail network improvements.</p> <p>Christopher Jackson (CJ) asked what steps local councils should be taking to support the campaign?</p> <p>SB noted there had been a 61% increase in rail passengers through the Derry/Londonderry Rail Station since it was reopened. The decision to reopen it was not based on the business case, which had in fact significantly underestimated passenger numbers, but that it was due to political will and public pressure.</p> <p>He said councils can help by commissioning feasibility studies, e.g., Armagh Banbridge and Craigavon secured £50,000 of DfI funding for a feasibility study looking into a rail connection between Portadown and Armagh. He called on more councils to do this.</p> <p>SB also called on council planners not to allow development that might prevent or make the re-opening of existing tracks difficult in future. He also asked Councils to be champion and lead local rail campaigns and apply more pressure on DfI and Translink for rail infrastructure in their areas.</p>
5	AOB
	<p>KN outlined why the stakeholder consultation event on Thursday 27 October had been cancelled and that the aim is to reschedule the event in the New Year.</p> <p>No further items of business.</p>
6	Summary and close
	<p>KN thanked everyone for attending. The date of the next meeting is Wednesday 25 January (1pm - 2pm) via Zoom.</p> <p>Meeting closed at 14.10.</p>