

Minutes of Strategic Policy Committee (Economic Development & Enterprise Support) meeting

held Thursday 29th July 2021 at 4pm on MS Teams

In attendance:

County Councillors

Sean Gilliland (Chair), Sean Conlon, David Maxwell, Noel Keelan, Brian McKenna, PJ O'Hanlon, Richard Truell, Pat Treanor, Cathy Bennett

Community Reps

Alan Johnston, Patrick McCormick, Peadar Black, Karen Jeffares, Bernard Treanor, Patrick McCabe, Liam Murtagh, Brian Duffy

Co County Staff

Paul Clifford, Adrian Hughes, Toirleach Gourley, Angela Gallagher, Robyn Flanagan, Gavin McEntee, Donna McEvoy, Kieran Duffy, Peadar McGuinness, Brendan Smyth

Bernie Guinan, Consultant Fehily Timoney

Apologies

John Tobin, Pat Tierney

Cllr Sean Gilliland welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised everyone there was only 1 item on the agenda.

Cllr. Sean Conlon stated that he would not be able to stay for the entire meeting but proposed the following motion:- *'That this Council make available by formal invitation the entire content of this presentation to relevant stakeholders within, and not exclusive to, the poultry industry including growers, processors and relevant representative organisations for the purpose of sectoral debate.'*

1. REGULATORY CHANGES TO PLANNING AND LICENSING OF POULTRY SECTOR

Mr. Paul Clifford stated that Monaghan County Council had employed the services of a consultant in January 2021 to look at the Poultry Sector in County Monaghan and welcomed Ms. Bernie Guinan, Director of Fehily Timoney Consultants who delivered a presentation.

Cllr Sean Gilliland thanked Ms. Bernie Guinan and stated that the information provided along with the new guidance recommended by the EPA will have a huge impact on Monaghan's Poultry industry and hopes that there is a technical or mechanical solution or a combination of both which could be found. He stated that the report which was produced for Monaghan County Council should be published and to involve all stakeholders to create an industry taskforce. Cllr Sean Gilliland also stated that the executive and Planning Section should meet with the EPA to discuss the report and tease it out to assist planning applicants and to help the Planning Assessors. Cllr Sean Gilliland asked that it be brought to the full Council in September. That the Council and SPC need to be proactive.

Cllr Brian McKenna stated that this report and the new guidance from the EPA is devastating news for the poultry industry in County Monaghan and is effectively closing down the industry to any future development. Cllr Brian McKenna stated that the EPA is not coming up with any solutions to assist the farmers and that the EPA has no respect for the poultry sector.

Mr. Liam Murtagh stated that the investigation by the EPA was initiated due to non-compliance with EU obligations in relation to Ireland's emissions and stated that ammonia emissions have an adverse effect on human life. Mr. Liam Murtagh asked what technical solutions can be adopted with existing poultry houses and is he allowed to share the report?

Mr. Brian Duffy stated that someone has to look after the environment and protect the environment. He stated that the planet needs to be saved and that we all have a responsibility to do this. He stated that it's not about cutting back on existing poultry houses, it's about cleaner air, purer water and non-contaminated food and that as a group we need to take this on board.

Mr. Bernard Treanor stated that this is very challenging and as a poultry grower himself that the industry would be prepared to work with others to find solutions. Mr. Bernard Treanor asked what mechanisms were used to monitor the ammonia in these areas? Was it continuous or how often was it checked and does the ammonia increase at different times of the year? Mr. Bernard Treanor also asked are there more emissions released from older sites than the newer sites? Mr. Bernard Treanor also stated that land spreading of poultry waste is not allowed therefore there must be no emissions from litter as it is taken away from sites. Mr. Bernard Treanor stated that the dryer the floor the less ammonia is being omitted and that the feet of the poultry is being sold to China and that a poultry aerobic digester can help with the poultry litter and that the population needs to be fed.

Cllr Sean Gilliland stated that it's about striking a balance and that the SPC will support the industry and recommended setting up a task force.

Ms. Bernie Guinan stated that the criteria proposed by the EPA relates to Planning Applications going forward and only within the 10km buffer zone. Ms. Bernie Guinan also stated that the EPA was responsible for gathering the data on monitoring and they have acknowledged that more needs to be done in relation to this. According to the EPA there are less emissions from the larger facilities than there are from the smaller poultry houses, however there are still omissions from them all. To reduce this there needs to be a combined effort by all the poultry sector and that measures can be taken to reduce omissions.

Cllr PJ O'Hanlon stated that it is important that the Council/SPC do everything in their power to help this industry and asked if there are the same issues in the South of the County as there are in the North?

Ms. Bernie Guinan stated that there is not great density of poultry houses as there are in the North of the County. The EPA are particularly concerned with the areas closest to the 3 Natura Sites. The main challenge to the Sector is within the 10km buffer zone and it will be less challenging out with the 10km zone.

Cllr Noel Keelan asked why were we not aware of these issues? Was there no red flag? Cllr Noel Keelan asked if planning applications in the north of the County will be treated differently to planning applications in the South? Cllr Noel Keelan stated that the industry needs to be maintained and allowed to expand.

Cllr Sean Gilliland stated that a development will be allowed in the North of the County as long as they will have no increase in emissions within the 10km buffer zone.

Mr. Patrick McCormick stated that the poultry industry is something County Monaghan should be proud of. The report sets out the facts as they are, biodiversity is important, however the population needs to eat and the demand for poultry is there. Mr. Patrick McCormick also stated that Monaghan

County Council should be commended for commissioning this report when they did, and a balance needs to be struck. Mr. Patrick McCormick stated that biodigesters are an option and that there are other solutions being looked at by the poultry sector. Mr. Patrick McCormick stated that Monaghan IFA would like to be part of the task force and part of the solution. Mr. Patrick McCormick also stated that there are poultry units in the North of Ireland which is also releasing ammonia which can make its way over to the South.

Cllr David Maxwell asked if it is the poultry houses which are the biggest contributor to ammonia?

Ms. Bernie Guinan stated that the poultry houses are a contributor, but the whole lifecycle including litter management needs to be looked at. Ms. Bernie Guinan stated that the greatest source is from the houses and that the older houses are contributing more than the newer ones.

Ms. Bernie Guinan stated that the north of the county is already saturated, however there is capacity in the South of the County for the installation of new poultry houses, however applicants in both areas need to provide the same information such as an Appropriate Assessment.

Ms. Bernie Guinan confirmed that there are transboundary emissions.

Mr. Bernard Treanor asked if the document will have any implications on dairy farmer or other types of agricultural farming.

Ms. Bernie Guinan stated that Ireland is exceeding its limits in relation to ammonia and this is largely due to agricultural use and that changes need to be made across all sectors of agriculture use to help reduce emissions.

Mr. Paul Clifford thanked everyone for attending and thanked Bernie for her presentation. Mr. Paul Clifford confirmed that the Council only became aware of the issue on 18th June 2021, when the EPA issued an instruction to applicants for IAD licences. The Council received no written communication from the EPA until Monday 26th July 2021. The Council had discussed the issue with the EPA regarding its communication to applicants.

Mr. Paul Clifford stated that the report needs to be made public and that we need to engage with the industry stakeholders and the solution lies within the industry and Monaghan County Council will work with them to come up with solutions.

Mr. Paul Clifford stated that he will circulate the document to all elected members and asked other members to circulate it too.

Cllr Sean Gilliland proposed that the document be made public by all means available to the Council including Facebook. This proposal was seconded by Cllr Noel Keelan.

Cllr Sean Gilliland asked if the EPA would meet with the Executive as he assumes that they would not meet with the Councillors.

Cllr David Maxwell asked that the SPC follow the correct procedures and that this be added to the CPG for the September Meeting.

Mr. Paul Clifford stated that he would put those arrangements in place.

The next meeting of the SPC will take place late September/October