

Massive undertaking will collect data on water standards

New project to assess quality of natural waterways

by Eoin English

A MASSIVE project to assess the quality of and then safeguard Ireland's natural waterways will be unveiled tonight.

People were invited to attend the first of a series of information meetings across the south west at which details of the nationwide project — which aims is to kick-start the implementation of the EU's Water Framework Directive — will be outlined.

The South Western River Basin District project, which is being run in this region by Cork County Council, in association with lead consultants, Pettit Engineering, will cover all six local authorities in the area.

Project coordinator, Seán Ó Breasail, said it was an enormous piece of work.

"It involves the collection of a colossal amount of existing information on water quality from all agencies," he said.

Data will be collected on all the rivers, lakes, estuaries, groundwater sources and coastal waters out to one nautical mile from Kerry, Cork city and county, parts of Waterford, Limerick, and South Tipperary.

It is hoped the project will also fill certain information gaps and lead eventually to

the drawing up of a draft management plan for the region's waterways.

This will then be handed over to the local authorities for implementation.

Mr O Breasail said research has been underway for about a year.

"A lot of our waters are of reasonable to mediocre standards," he said.

But efforts must be made to prevent the deterioration of Ireland's water quality, he said.

Some estuaries are being enriched by excessive nitrogen, he said.

The Lakes of Killarney are also under significant pressure from nutrients, he said.

"Previous studies show that measures need to be implemented to tackle this situation but none have been implemented. But there is legislative backup there now."

The project does not, however, deal with the water being supplied to consumers.

Mr O Breasail said there are many demands on our waters from housing development, industry, agriculture, forestry and industry.

"We draw from our waters for drinking and washing, we fish and swim in them, our industries need reliable and clean supplies, and waters are the habitat



Cork County Council environmental officers Billy Sexton and Séamus O'Brien carry out a water quality test by identifying insect life in the Shournagh River, as part of a Small Stream Rapid Screening Programme in the South West River Basin District, and, right, some of the insect life they discovered.

Picture Neil Danton/News Digital

Public meetings

Tonight: Youghal Town Hall at 8pm

Tomorrow: Quality Hotel, Clonakilty at 8pm

May 2: Cork City Council's Lifetime Lab, Lee Road, Cork at 8pm

May 9 Hibernian Hotel, Mallow at 8pm

for many plants, birds and animals," he said.

"Protection and management of our water resources are not just necessary but are required by European and national legislation.

"In particular we must achieve at least good quality standard for all waters by 2015 and maintain high quality waters where they exist."



Owner of historic house 'failing to preserve it'

by Sean O'Riordan

CORK County Council will take legal action if the owner of a well-known historic building doesn't take steps to preserve it.

Council officials have so far been unable to enter into talks with the owner of Vernamont house in Frankfield, Douglas, but they are hoping to do so within the next three weeks.

If that fails, however, they will take enforcement proceedings.

This could lead to the council moving in, doing the work and then billing the owner or, alternatively, acquiring the property through a Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO).

The issue was highlighted yesterday by Cllr Peter Kelly (FG) who said the historic house, built in the 1780s by Sir Henry Brown Hayes, was in a very bad state of repair.

Sir Henry kidnapped a Cork woman called Mary

Pike and was transported to Botany Bay for the crime. He later received a pardon and returned to the house, where he died in 1832.

His home in Australia has been renovated and turned into a museum, but the one in Cork is falling down.

"The building is unique in terms of its architecture. Over the course of the winter, a large section of the roof collapsed and almost all the windows are broken," said Mr Kelly, who added that he would be meeting with the Irish Georgian Society to discuss the case.

He claimed the owner, who is believed to be living in the US, was a multi-millionaire, well capable of paying for the upkeep of the house.

Cllr Deirdre Forde (FG) said the building could be lost forever if the council delayed.

"I would like to see it being developed as a pivotal community building. I'd like to see the council exploring some kind of PPP (Public



Council officials have so far been unable to enter into talks with the owner of Vernamont, above, house but are hoping to do so within the next three weeks.

Picture: Michael MacSweeney/Provision

Private Partnership) and rescue it," she said.

The council's conservation officer has recommended that notice be served on the owner.

However, county manager Maurice Moloney felt it would be better if talks could be initiated first and that that did not work then he would begin proceedings.

The council's director of planning John O'Neill said an application was made in 1997 to turn the house into a hotel/apartment complex, but this had been refused.

Mr Moloney said that if positive talks didn't take place with the owner and if the person was found to be well off, then the council would initiate proceedings.

Mobile phone mast recommendation being ignored

by Eoin English

MOBILE phone masts are still being erected close to schools, hospitals and crèches almost a year after an Oireachtas committee recommended a change in planning guidelines.

A lobby group fighting for safer telecommunications systems in Ireland will raise this and other concerns about mobile phone masts at a public meeting in Limerick tonight.

The Better Environment and Safer Telecommunications (BEST) group said concerns are mounting about the increasing number of planning applications for phone masts in the heart of communities nationwide.

BEST chairman John Cummins encouraged other groups campaigning against mobile phone masts to join BEST in raising their concerns on the national stage.

"The purpose of tonight's meeting is to formulate a plan to highlight the Government's failure to implement the recommendations in the Joint Oireachtas report and particularly the recommendation which advises that phone masts are not located near schools, health centres, hospitals and crèches," he said.

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Communications, Marine and Natural Resources issued the report in June last year on non-ionising radiation from mobile



phone handsets and masts.

Committee chairman Noel O'Flynn said he accepted that some people living near masts do suffer from ill-health.

"But our job is to make recommendations, not to make policy," he said.

"There is still no scientific evidence that there is a danger so we recommended a precautionary approach."

One of the recommendations stated "that planning guidelines and planning

exemptions be examined with a view to ensuring that no 'electromagnetic emissions' or 'radio frequency emissions' emitting equipment be permitted to be sited near health centres, schools or other sensitive sites such as playgrounds or pitches etc".

Bur Mr Cummins said this recommendation is being ignored by local authorities.

"Glin NS in Limerick and two schools in Cahir are fighting against masts near

their premises," he said. The Government has set up a cross-party implementation group to look at the issue of non-ionisation radiation. It is expected to report later this year.

Mr Cummins said emissions from mobile phone masts in Ireland are much higher than those in other European countries like Italy, Austria, Switzerland and Hungary.

"We are calling on all groups and individuals who have concerns about the adverse health effects associated with radiation emissions from phone masts to attend this meeting," he said.

The meeting takes place at the South Court Hotel, Limerick, at 8pm tonight.

Councillors oppose plans for park and ride facility

by Eoin English

POLITICIANS have united to fight controversial plans to build Cork's second park and ride facility on a greenfield site on the city's northside.

Five city councillors have followed previous calls by two northside TDs — Bernard Allen (FG) and Noel O'Flynn (FF) — to scrap council plans to build the facility on the Tinkers Cross site in Mayfield.

The country's first park and ride facility was developed at Black Ash off the Kinsale Road roundabout just over three years ago.

The profit-making service won a public service award a month ago.

However, in a joint motion put forward at last night's city council meeting,

the five north-east ward councillors — Mairín Quill (PD), Tim Brosnan (FF), John Kelleher (Labour), Annette Spillane (SF) and Dara Murphy (FG) — called on city manager Joe Gavin to acknowledge that the Tinkers Cross site is "both unsuitable and unacceptable" for the city's second park and ride.

Ms Quill said there is an agreed need for a park and ride on the city's northside.

However, she said councillors want Mr Gavin to identify a "suitable and acceptable alternative site" to service.

They also called on him to agree to develop the green space at Tinkers Cross for recreational purposes.

Mr O'Flynn said he welcomed the move by the local councillors.

Building a bus-based park and ride at Tinkers Cross flies in the face of the Cork Area Strategic Plan (CASP), he said.

"The CASP strategy calls for bus-based park and rides at the existing Black Ash site, in Carrigaline and in Bishopstown," he said.

"CASP calls for rail-based park and rides at Dunkettle, Blarney and Kilbarry.

"The Tinkers Cross facility is premature until these are in place. The proposed location is next to second and third class roads and in a residential area."

Council officials are still waiting for a final report from consultants on the suitability of the site before proceeding.

Gardaí eager to trace murdered man's footsteps

by Neans McSweeney
South-East
Correspondent

GARDAÍ probing the murder of a 60-year-old stone mason at his flat in Waterford city centre are particularly anxious to speak to anyone who might have seen the man between March 7 and 13.

Superintendent Dave Sheahan, who is leading the investigation, said the team probing the violent death are particularly anxious to trace anyone who might have come into contact with the deceased in the week or two before St Patrick's weekend.

"We have not had any new information to date on Mr Purcell's last movements," he said.

"The last reported sighting of him was on Tuesday, March 7, when he collected a library book from The County Library at Lady Lane in the city.

"We believe the dates from then up to March 13 could be critical and we would appeal to anyone who saw him on those dates to come forward."

The 60-year-old was found dead with wounds to the neck in a flat in a converted house at 14 Henrietta Street in Waterford city late on Friday evening.

The grim find was made by a friend who had not seen him in three weeks, Superintendent Sheahan said.

The deceased was about 5ft 9" in height, of slight build, had a moustache and was balding.

No funeral arrangements have yet been confirmed.

Mr Purcell, who was single, was originally from Cuffsprange, a village on the Clonmel approach to Kilkenny.

Anybody with information is asked to contact Waterford Gardaí at 051-305335