

Minutes of the June Monthly Meeting of Athlone Town Council, which was held in the Civic Centre, Church Street, Athlone at 6.00p.m. on Tuesday 7th June, 2011.

Attendance:

Mayor: Cllr. S. Buckley Byrne

Members: Cllrs. M. Cooney, J. Henson, P. Hogan, G. McFadden, K. Molloy, K. Moran, A. O'Rourke & A. Shaw.

Officers: Mr. Barry Kehoe, Director of Services
Mr. John Walsh, Town Clerk
Mr. Alan Kelly, Town Engineer
Mr. Aidan Bass, Administrative Officer
Ms. Edel Martin, Administrative Officer
Ms. Anne McNamara, Assistant Staff Officer

Minutes:

It was proposed by Cllr. Cooney,

Seconded by Cllr. Henson and resolved,

“That we hereby adopt and confirm the Minutes of the May Monthly Meeting which was held on May 3rd 2011”.

Matters Arising:

Cllr. O'Rourke asked that the Council request a meeting with the Minister for Health regarding a proper health plan for Athlone. He feared St. Vincent's Hospital would end up being closed like Loughloe House, as beds are being removed when patients pass on; respite services have been outsourced and the Midoc nurse who retired, has not been replaced. Some Members agreed while others felt they should meet first with Joe Ruane, HSE Manager. Following a lengthy discussion it was agreed that Cllrs. Buckley Byrne, Hogan, McFadden and O'Rourke would request a meeting with Mr. Ruane to clarify the facts concerning the issues mentioned by Cllr. O'Rourke. If considered necessary then, a Special Meeting of all Members could be held.

Ms. E. Martin informed Cllr. Molloy that she intended to organise a meeting of the Battery Heights Regeneration Forum during the month of June.

The Director advised Cllr. Rooney that the Director of the Regional Authority is working with the manufacturers of the midlands logo signs to replace them.

In response to Cllr. Cooney's query, the Town Clerk informed him that all tenders for the Castle should be back within the next 4 weeks and assessed quickly, to have work commencing late July or early August.

Cllr. Molloy said the Council should write to Athlone Chamber to inform them that the OPW shed, which has been a bone of contention for at least the last 20 years in the Council Chamber, is now going to be relocated to the Council's new yard in Wansboro Field.

The Town Engineer informed Cllr. Shaw that the replacement furniture for the Strand has been ordered.

The Town Clerk advised Cllr. Shaw that Dublin City Council tender every year for advertisers on the back of their parking tickets, but there never is any interest. He said they sometimes use the space to advertise one of their own products.

Regarding the Contract for Public Lighting, the Director advised Cllr. Hogan that today is the closing date for tenders.

The Town Clerk undertook to send a reminder to Adshell regarding the provision of a bus shelter at Arcadia, as requested by Cllr. Hogan.

The Town Engineer advised Cllr. Hogan that the treatment of the trees at Annesfield Woods is included in a contract of last year, but the contractor just did not get to them. He will deal with them in September.

Launch of Summer Fest:

The Town Clerk stated that following the successful Euro-Festival last year, the Members requested a Festival be held in 2011 and the Euro Festival Committee agreed to be the conduit to organise it. €27,000 was provided in the Budget for the Festival. It will take place from July 1st to July 3rd 2011, with activity mostly centered at the Civic Square, the Town Park and Castle/Main Street carpark. There will be music, street theatre, inter pub "tug of war", a crafts and food market, a pike angling competition and a Family Fun Day in Burgess Park, including bouncing castles, slides, crazy golf, rodeo bull and a selection of carnival stalls. All entertainment is free with something to suit everyone and people are encouraged to attend and participate. It is coupled with the Triathlon and therefore will be one of the major events of the year. He called on the Mayor to launch the Festival and she declared it officially launched.

Cllr. Moran who is also on the Committee thanked everyone on it for their hard work and in particular he thanked Mr. Walsh, the Town Clerk. Cllr. Shaw added his congratulations to all and looked forward to the Festival.

Annual Financial Statement 2010:

Mr. Bass informed the Members that at the end of 2010, the Revenue account had a credit balance of €827,476. He briefly outlined the major sources of revenue income and the major categories of revenue expenditure. He listed the main sources for the surplus in

income and the reason for the excess in expenditure and he asked the Members for their approval of the over expenditure as listed in the schedule.

It was approved by Cllr. O'Rourke,

Seconded by Cllr. Shaw and resolved,

“Pursuant to the provisions of the Local Government Act 1925-2001, we hereby accept and approve the Annual Financial Statement in respect of the year ended December 31st 2010 presented and of the excess expenditure as follows:

		Budget	Expenditure	Variance	Explanation of Variance
A0101	Maintenance of LA Housing Units	474,698	476,911	-2,213	Housing Repairs
A0402	Tenancy Management	61,871	158,136	-96,265	Legal Fees for High Court – Quinn
A0502	Homeless Service	244,075	300,816	-56,741	90% funded by DOEHLG
A0802	Debt Management Housing Loans	11,000	23,503	-12,503	Legal Fees Circuit Court – Coffey
A1101	Agency & Recoupable Service	130,412	142,862	-12,450	Fire Damage funded by IPBMI
B0405	Local Roads General Maintenance Works	353,907	384,004	-30,097	Extraordinary expenditure relating to freezing conditions
B0406	Local Roads General Improvement Works	659,000	701,657	-42,657	Extra Block Grant Allocation funded by DOEHLG
B0603	Traffic Improvement Measures	0	50,000	-50,000	Revenue Transfer One Way System
B0902	Operation of Street Parking	36,102	38,123	-2,021	Minor Overexpenditure
CD	County Charge	1,300,130	1,300,280	-150	Minor Overexpenditure
D0403	Management of & Contribs to Other Commercial Facs	80,000	83,000	-3,000	Athlone eCom funded by Bord Failte
D0501	Tourism Promotion	104,000	200,000	-96,000	Revenue Transfer Festival of Europe
D0701	Unfinished Housing Estates	281,948	281,987	-39	Minor Overexpenditure
E0406	Contribution to Waste Collection Services	0	5,372	-5,372	Refuse Tags Refund
E0407	Other Costs Waste Collection	0	5,657	-5,657	Bad debt provision Environ
E0501	Litter Warden Service	41,762	43,515	-1,753	Minor Overexpenditure
E0503	Environmental Awareness Services	4,000	4,301	-301	Minor Overexpenditure
E0602	Provision and Improvement of Litter Bins	16,000	22,240	-6,240	Savings in Emptying Litter Bins
E1101	Operation of Fire Brigade Service	868,768	880,777	-12,009	Savings in other firecodes E1103 & E1199
F0101	Leisure Facilities Operations	83,928	88,094	-4,156	Savings in Open Spaces
F0401	Community Grants	193,650	212,870	-19,220	Savings in Open Spaces
H0302	Debt Management Service Rates	103,717	395,058	-291,341	Increase in Bad Debt Provision Rates
H0303	Refunds and Irrecoverable Rates	800,000	881,311	-81,311	Underprovision Writeoffs Vacant Properties
H0402	Local Election Costs	0	1,000	-1,000	Hire of Regional Sports Centre
H1101	Agency & Recoupable Service	515,072	669,465	-154,393	Revenue Transfers Civic Centre & Pensions

Cllr. Shaw complimented the Finance Officer on the AFS. He queried many items but was particularly worried about the increasing arrears of rates and was joined by other Members expressing their concern too. The Director assured them that everything possible was being done to collect rates, up to and including court action. Cllr. McFadden asked if chasing rates was not a waste of money on legal fees, but the Director said it was necessary to be seen taking whatever action necessary. Mr. Bass added that €415,000 of the €1m arrears have been collected so far this year and every opportunity is given to businesses to pay in whatever way they can.

Cllr. Shaw asked if the procurement process had been carried out by the Council in respect of legal services and the Director stated that it is being done at County level. He said it is very difficult with legal services, but tenders are back and are currently being assessed.

Cllr. Moran congratulated the Council on its performance particularly in these difficult times.

Housing Allocation Scheme:

Ms. Edel Martin, Housing Officer advised the Members that the new Allocation Scheme replaces the old Scheme of Letting Priorities and it will apply to all house types. She briefly outlined its content and pointed out that the main difference lies in the handling of refusals of house offers. In the future, where a qualified household refuses 2 reasonable offers in any continuous period of one year commencing on the date of the first refusal, this household shall not be offered anything for a period of 1 year, starting on the date of the second refusal. Other aspects of the Scheme are similar to the old scheme.

It was proposed by Cllr. Hogan,

Seconded by Cllr. Henson and resolved,

“Pursuant to S.22 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2009, we hereby adopt the Housing Allocation Scheme for Athlone Town Council.

Car-park at O’Connell Street:

The Town Clerk advised the Members that the proposals for the car-park were advertised and on public display as required, but no submissions were received. He recommended proceeding with the development.

Cllrs. Cooney and Molloy said they were pleased to see this project proceeding at last and in answer to Cllr. Cooney’s question, the Town Clerk stated that it is hoped to commence work in the last quarter of this year, to be completed in early 2012.

It was proposed by Cllr. Cooney,

Seconded by Cllr. Molloy and resolved,

“Pursuant to the Planning & Development Acts 2000-2010 and Part 8 of the Planning & Development Regulations 2001-2006, we approve of the proposed plans for the development of a car-park at O’Connell Street, Athlone”.

Managers Orders:

The Members noted the summary of Managers Orders as circulated.

Questions:

Question 1. Cllr. K. Moran:
“Will this Council include Orwell Grove in the weekly schedule for the Sweeper?”

Answer: A review of the sweeping schedule would be required in order to include the sweeping of Orwell Grove.

Question 2. Cllr. K. Moran:
“When will work commence for the finishing of Pinewood Close to bring it up to standard for taking it in charge?”

Answer: The design for the sewage and surface water pipelines is being finalised in tandem with upgrade works to the Roscommon Road pumping station and works are expected to begin in the next 2 months.

Question 3. Cllr. P. Hogan:
“When will the next phase of demolition and relocation commence at Loughanaskin?”

Answer: Tenders for the 3no. houses to relocate the existing tenants are being assessed and construction should begin in early July. They should be completed in early 2012 when the blocks will be demolished.

Question 4. Cllr. P. Hogan:
“When will the bollard at back lane in Sarsfield Square be erected?”

Answer: A lockable bollard was installed at this location within the past year but it appears that the lock and bollard have been removed by others in the meantime.

Question 5. Cllr. J. Henson:
“When will traffic calming measures be put in place in St. Anne’s Terrace?”

Answer: The traffic calming measures at St. Annes Terrace are included in this years roadworks programme and they will be carried out by September.

Question 6. Cllr. A. O'Rourke:
"Has the proposal for a new bus parking zone between the Fr. Matthew Hall and the Boat Club been examined by our Engineering Department?"

Answer: **This proposal was examined and it is estimated to cost in the region of €120,000.00. In addition, the proposal would result in the loss of a number of the mature trees at this location and its construction may be hampered by archaeological investigations.**

Question 7. Cllr. A. O'Rourke:
"Can the Town Engineer arrange a meeting during this month with the Westside Traders to discuss Christmas Lights and available options for December 2011?"

Answer: **It will be a matter for the traders to put forward realistic proposals for financial support.**

Question 7 Supplementary Question
"Can the Town Engineer meet the Traders just to advise them?"

Answer: ***Yes, the Town Engineer will meet them.***

Question 8. Cllr. A. Shaw:
"When will the Council be undertaking footpath repairs in Retreat Park in the Retreat Stores end of the estate?"

Answer: **These works will be completed by September.**

Question 9. Cllr. A. Shaw:
"Please provide an update on the Council's assessment of footpaths in The Pines?"

Answer: **A short section of footpath at the entrance to the Pines will be repaired in the coming weeks and the remainder will be considered for inclusion in the 2012 Roads programme.**

Question 10. Cllr. S. Buckley Byrne:
"Is there another delay in the construction of the Art Gallery at Fr Matthew Hall?"

Answer: The remains of an 18th century masonry Riverside wall partially encroaches on the site and will require a minor redesign of the piling arrangements for the extension. Ministerial consent will be required and will take 3 weeks. Work on the existing building will continue but the northern extension will incur a short delay.

Question 11. Cllr. S. Buckley Byrne:
“When will the council put a good quality "pardon our appearance sign" up at the castle and remove the black plastic from the existing sign so that our visitors know we are renovating not neglecting our heritage?”

Answer: A sign outlining the proposed works to the Castle will be erected when works commence and in the meantime the existing signage will be removed.

Services at St. Vincent’s Hospital:

The Members noted an acknowledgment from the Office of the Minister for Health concerning the services at St. Vincent’s Hospital.

Summer Reading Challenge:

A letter from Ms. Mary Farrell, County Librarian, confirmed that the Library will be running a Summer Reading Challenge from June to the end of August, whereby young children are invited to borrow books throughout the summer and each time they return books, they will be eligible to enter a draw for various prizes. Professional storytellers will visit during the month of June and these are very popular. This is part of the library’s ongoing commitment to developing confident readers and to keeping children occupied during the holidays.

Conferences:

The Members noted the location and cost of the following conference:

Limerick – Renewing Local Democracy through Civic Engagement - 13-17th June 11

Pedestrian crossing at Kilmacoo Lane / Dublin Road:

The Town Clerk advised the Members that a survey will be carried out at this location in accordance with the wishes of the Members.

Double yellow lines at Cypress Gardens:

In response to Cllr. Moran’s motion, the Town Clerk stated that a scheme of double yellow lines will be prepared for consideration at the July Meeting.

The future of Cornamaddy N.S.:

All the Members supported Cllr. Moran's motion requesting the Council to write to the Minister for Education seeking a Deputation to meet with him regarding the future of Cornamaddy School. Cllr. Moran also requested that the Director write to the Parents Association regarding the pedestrian crossing, following the meeting with the N.R.A.

Dog Warden for Athlone:

In response to Cllr. Hogan's motion, the Town Clerk stated that the proposal should be examined in the light of limited resources and the need to move the allocation of existing resources to where the long term objective of responsible dog ownership can be achieved. A graph was circulated and the trends demonstrated that there has been a reduction in stray or unwanted dogs, but an increase in the number of complaints regarding irresponsible dog ownership. He said the issue must be tackled by both education and enforcement. Westmeath County Council has carried out school visits over the years, that have been well received and they will identify the possibility (within existing resources) of developing an educational and enforcement initiative for Athlone. The Members were dissatisfied with this and felt that the issue of stray dogs, dangerous dogs and dog fouling should be addressed more seriously and the Dog Warden should be divided more evenly between Athlone and Mullingar. The Director stated that the Community Wardens deal with these issues too. He agreed to have the Veterinary Officer for the County present at the July Monthly Meeting, to answer their queries.

A.T.M.'s for Connaught Street:

The Members supported Cllr. O'Rourke's call to write to the financial institutions requesting them to provide an A.T.M. in Connaught Street.

Re-surfacing of Mardyke Street:

The Town Clerk advised Cllr. Hogan that the damaged sections of road pavement on Mardyke Street are programmed for reconstruction in the coming weeks and he welcomed this.

Community Garden Project for Brawney:

In response to Cllr. Henson's motion, the Town Clerk stated that Westmeath County Council is in the process of developing Community Gardens in a number of L.A. housing developments as a pilot project. There are a number of issues associated with these projects such as, community participation and agreement, insurance, funding, long-term maintenance etc. If there is a positive outcome to the pilot projects he said the Council will examine the possibility of extending this concept to other housing developments where there is a demand for such a project. Cllr. Henson said the Residents Association are requesting this and the Members supported their request for a small piece of land. The Director agreed to discuss the matter with the County Manager and the Housing Director.

Sewerage fumes, Ardbrae Park:

The Town Clerk advised Cllr. Henson, that Westmeath County Council is not aware of any 'sewerage fumes' in Ardbrae Park. He said that the surface water and the sewage are dealt with on a separate basis within the estate and any surcharging of the pipe network in the area is due solely to surface water and is dealt with as and when these events happen. Cllr. Henson said it is an ongoing problem in the estate, with the end gardens being flooded. The Town Engineer undertook to have the matter examined by the Water Services Section.

Traffic calming/road widening in Beechville:

In response to Cllr. Henson's motion, the Town Clerk stated that the layout of the access roads within Beechville has been designed to deliberately slow down traffic and any redesign of these roads will remove this traffic calming effect and result in increased speeds. He advised that the residents in the area should liaise with each other to facilitate oil / fuel deliveries and to consider a communal area for the collection of refuse bins near the entrance to the estate. Cllr. Henson said that lorries are digging up the green area and have it destroyed. The Town Engineer said that the road layout is to reduce speed within the estate, but he would re-examine the sharp corner, where the lorries are going on the green. As regards the proposed parking area, he said he had sent the layout of the spaces to the residents of Nos. 1-10 and the closing date for submissions/observations, is this coming Friday, June 10th 2011. He hopes the work will be completed by the third quarter of the year.

Signage for Tourist Office & Castle:

The Town Clerk advised Cllr. O'Rourke that a scheme of Tourist Information directional signage was prepared in early May and these signs are expected to be delivered in the coming weeks, following which they will be installed. Cllr. McFadden had a similar motion about signage for the Castle and was informed that the Contractor will put up the necessary information sign, when work commences. As regards the Castle grounds being open, he informed her that a new attendant was being arranged and the grounds would be open in the next week.

Cllr. Moran asked about the artists impression for the Art Gallery and the Town Clerk suggested putting this up on the hoarding as opposed to the River Bank side which would be more difficult requiring scaffolding and it was agreed to do so.

Communication with Members:

In response to Cllr. O'Rourke's motion, the Town Clerk stated that these projects are managed by the Executive of the Council on a day to day basis and Members are advised when significant issues arise and this will continue to be the case.

Trees and footpaths at Auburn Villas:

In response to Cllr. Shaw's motion, the Town Clerk stated that the area will be examined and any urgent works will be carried out.

One Way traffic in Friary Lane:

The Town Clerk advised Cllr. Shaw that this proposal could be examined, but it appears that given the low level of traffic currently using this road and the limited options available to access and egress the Strand area, it may be prudent to leave the 2 way traffic flow regime in place. Cllr. Shaw felt there were safety issues involved as it is very busy at certain times and asked if the Council could consider a one-way system. Cllrs. Cooney and Moran said they felt it was better to leave the two-way system. The Town Engineer added that its narrow nature had inherent traffic calming values.

Renew road markings:

Cllr. Shaw asked that the road markings on O'Connell Street, Pearse Street and Church Street be removed as they are currently difficult to see and the Town Clerk stated that these locations will be reviewed and any necessary works will be undertaken, having regard to available budgets.

Suspension of Standing Orders:

It was proposed by Cllr. Hogan,
Seconded by Cllr. Cooney and resolved,
"That we hereby suspend Standing Orders to deal with the remainder of the items on the Agenda".

Fence at Willow Park:

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. McFadden's motion that work has been ongoing in recent weeks to prepare the site for the installation of this fence, while the fencing panels were being manufactured. It is expected that the installation will be underway within the coming two weeks.

Litter at Meadowbrook:

Cllr. McFadden requested that the empty houses in Meadowbrook be cleared out and boarded up by the Council, but the Town Clerk stated that litter in accordance with the Litter Management Acts is deemed to be the responsibility of all owners of properties. Therefore a notice under Section 9 of the Litter Management Act 1997 will issue to the owner(s) concerned, advising them of their responsibilities. Cllr. McFadden said the difficulty is trying to establish who owns these houses and would the Council not have a moral obligation from a Health and Safety point of view.

Flower baskets:

In response to Cllr. Buckley Byrne's motion, the Town Clerk stated that baskets will be provided in the same places as last year.

Turn off the Red Light Campaign:

Cllr. Buckley Byrne asked that the Council support the Turn Off the Red Light Campaign to help end prostitution and sex-trafficking in Ireland and criminalise the purchase of sex. All the Members supported the motion and it was agreed to write to the Minister for Justice requesting him to prioritise the introduction of the necessary legislation.

Votes of Sympathy:

All the Members wished to be associated with votes of sympathy to the Daly, Dillon and McAuley families, on their recent family bereavements.

This concluded the business of the meeting.