

Minutes of the May Monthly Meeting of Athlone Town Council, which was held in the Civic Centre, Church Street, Athlone at 6.00p.m. on Tuesday 3rd May, 2011.

Attendance:

Mayor: Cllr. S. Buckley Byrne

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

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

Apology:

An apology was received from Cllr. K. Moran who was unable to attend the meeting.

Minutes:

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,

“That we hereby adopt and confirm the Minutes of the April Monthly Meeting which was held on April 4th 2011”.

Matters Arising:

The Director informed Cllr. Cooney that he would contact the Manager again about increasing the size of the Midlands logo on the road signs approaching the town, but he thought the signs are in the process of being increased.

As regards welcoming people to the Midlands there was no mention of Athlone and he would enquire if that is the policy.

In response to Cllr. Cooney, the Town Clerk advised that the assessment of tenders should be completed in 6/7 weeks and works should then commence by early July. He stated that the Castle courtyard will be opened until the works commence.

In response to Cllr. Shaw, the Town Engineer stated that work had begun removing the grit and it is hoped to finish within 2-3 weeks.

The Director informed Cllr. Hogan that the public lighting contract is gone out to tender

and submissions will be assessed and the contract granted, as soon as possible. Cllr. Hogan asked that the concrete barriers being used on the bypass to divide lanes, be made more visible at night and the Town Engineer said he would discuss this with the Contractor, who had undertaken to do so.

The Town Clerk advised Cllr. Buckley Byrne that fees were being sought from the Designers of the McCormack Exhibition Centre and when received, the Council will apply to Fáilte Ireland for funding.

The Mayor also enquired about the relocation of the OPW shed at the Docks and the Director informed her that it will be incorporated into the new Council Yard at Wansboro Field.

Marist Memorial Presentation:

The Mayor welcomed Mr. Noel Heavey, Mr. Louis Walsh and Mr. Ciaran Temple from the Marist Past Pupils Union and Mr. Mark Rode, Artist to the Meeting.

Mr. Heavey thanked the Members for the opportunity to speak to them. He outlined the hugely significant role that the Marist Brothers had played in Athlone for the past 125 years and said it had been agreed to acknowledge this, by placing a sculpture outside the Marist House in St. Mary's Square. He said the sculpture would be of a Brother with a boy on either side of him, one with books, signifying their role in education and one with a football, signifying their role in sport. He said it would be in bronze on a granite plinth and the Council's contribution would enable it to be of a very high quality. He thanked the Town Clerk and the Members for their support.

Mr. Mark Rode briefly outlined his works and advised that this sculpture will consist of a 7ft. figure with a 5ft. and 4ft. figure on either side, cast in bronze. The plinth will be concrete, clad in granite. There will be a stainless steel frame inside the figures, set into the plinth, to add security to the sculpture. There will also be a railing around it and it will be floodlit, Mr. Heavey added.

The Members congratulated the Past Pupils Union on their Memorial, agreeing it was impressive, in a prominent location, adding to St. Mary's Square and were pleased to contribute. They looked forward to seeing the finished product.

Capital Housing Programme 2011:

A report was circulated by Ms. Edel Martin, Housing Officer, which outlined the proposed expenditure programme based on the following allocations:

Construction / Acquisition	- €200,000	Two houses at Loughanaskin
Energy Efficiency	- €115,000	6/7 properties
Battery Heights Regeneration	- €190,000	Works to be decided

From Internal Capital Receipts, it is proposed to spend €30,000 on Extensions to L.A. Housing / Disabled Persons Grants, dealing with the applications on a priority basis and €40,000 on Window and Door Replacement. The RAS for Westmeath County Council will continue to be handled by the Town Council, adding a further 15 contracts in 2011 and a minimum of 20 properties from the leasing scheme.

In response to Members queries, Ms. Martin advised that 3no. houses are being built in Loughanaskin, but the third will be funded from a different source. Members expressed dissatisfaction with long term leasing and she said that the Council has an option to buy at the end of long-term leasing, but not with RAS. She undertook to recall the Regeneration Committee in Battery Heights and arrange a meeting to discuss/consider works to be carried out with the allocation of €190,000.

While Members expressed disappointment with the downward trend in allocations, they welcomed all the proposed works, including those to improve existing housing stock.

Assessment & Eligibility for Social Housing:

Ms. Edel Martin, Housing Officer circulated a report outlining the criteria for assessing eligibility and housing need, following the Social Housing Assessment Regulations 2011, which came into effect on April 1st 2011. The reform is aimed at bringing a level of standardisation to all housing authorities and application can now only be made to one housing authority. The Application Form is now as prescribed. The Report outlined the determining factors for inclusion on the Housing List; right of residency, income, rent arrears and availability of alternative accommodation. It also outlined the criteria in assessing housing need as follows:

- 1) Institution/Emergency Accommodation/Hostel
- 2) Overcrowded
- 3) Unfit
- 4) Meets specific accommodation requirements of a household member with physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment
- 5) Involuntary Sharing
- 6) Otherwise unsuitable, having regard to the particular household circumstances or an exceptional medical or compassionate grounds

Applicants must meet one of those categories.

In answer to queries Ms. Martin advised there are 1,500 on current waiting list and they will not have to reapply on foot of the Regulations. If they are nearing being housed, they will be reassessed and if over the income limit, they will be disqualified. She advised that tenancy of a RAS house is equivalent to tenancy of social housing.

Cllr. Henson in a motion regarding single / divorced fathers, said they were seen as single men, whose need to accommodate their children was not considered and therefore they are

being discriminated against. Ms. Martin advised him that both separated mothers and fathers were treated the same way, assessed under the same criteria, with the children considered in both cases and therefore there was no discrimination. Each parent needs written back-up regarding the custody of the children, to substantiate their application.

Cllr. Hogan enquired about the proposed scheme for housing for single men in O'Connell Street and the Town Clerk informed him that the funding is not available now to proceed with it and that is where the surface car-park is being provided in the meantime. It is hoped it will be able to proceed at some time in the future.

Civic Reception:

It was proposed by Cllr. Henson,

Seconded by Cllr. O'Rourke and resolved,

“That we hereby agree to host a Civic Reception for the Midland Vintage & Classic Car Club on Friday August 26th 2011 to welcome their annual rally”

Expansion of the Gym:

The Town Clerk advised the Members that the statutory requirements had been conformed with. The public consultation period ended on January 20th 2011 and no submissions were received. The Manager recommended proceeding with the proposed development as placed on public display.

It was proposed by Cllr. Cooney,

Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,

“Pursuant to the provisions of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010 and Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2006, we approve of the proposed development and extension of the Gym facilities at the Athlone Regional Sports Centre, as placed on public display”.

Managers Orders:

The Members noted the summary of Managers Orders as circulated.

Questions:

Question 1. Cllr. J. Henson:

“What date will the road-surfacing promised for Newtown Terrace be carried out?”

Answer:

It is expected that these works will commence within the coming month.

Question 2. Cllr. A. O'Rourke:
"Has the new anti-litter CCTV arrangement been put into use yet, if so; where, what were the results and how many fines resulted?"

Answer: **The Council is in consultation with a CCTV provider in relation to this matter – terms and conditions have yet to be finalized. The results of initial test will be advised to the Members. It is anticipated that test runs will begin in the summer months.**

Question 3. Cllr. A. O'Rourke:
"Has the casual trader who cooks and sells meat from a mobile catering trailer in St. Peter's Square applied for and obtained a casual trading permit?"

Answer: **Yes.**

Question 4. Cllr. G. McFadden:
"Will this Council put a railing at the pathway on the railway bridge approaching the Marist College?"

Answer: **There is insufficient road width to provide a railing at this location.**

Question 5. Cllr. A. Shaw:
"Will the Council carry out essential maintenance on public seating at The Strand?"

Answer: **These seats will be painted or replaced as necessary.**

Question 6. Cllr. A. Shaw:
"What are the Council's findings in relation to the proposal for the introduction of advertising on the reverse side of parking tickets?"

Answer: **A survey of 34no. Local authorities was undertaken and only six responded and 5no of these did not use advertising on their tickets and this includes Cork City Council.**

One large town found there was little interest and we are awaiting information from Dublin City Council, where advertising is in place.

Should we consider the proposal to be viable, expressions of interest can be sought.

Question 7. Cllr. P. Hogan:

“What amount was allocated for housing grants assisting elderly people and people with disabilities in Athlone?”

Answer: The allocation for the Athlone Area in 2011 is €277,950

Question 8. Cllr. P. Hogan:

“When will the bus shelter be provided at Arcadia?”

Answer: The provider who indicated that they would make the shelter available has not been in touch recently and the Council will again make contact to ascertain the current position.

Acknowledgement:

The Members noted a letter from the American Embassy acknowledging the Council’s invitation to the President to visit Athlone on his Irish tour.

Thanks:

The Members noted a letter from Mrs. Mary O’Rourke thanking them for their kind sentiments following the outcome of the General Election.

Traffic Management by the Gardai:

Supt. Aidan Glacken wrote informing the Members of the ongoing discussions and monitoring that takes place constantly regarding the works on the Relief Road and the resulting traffic problems.

The use of lariam:

A letter from the Department of Defence was circulated and noted. It had attached the answers to Parliamentary Questions which outlined the Departments position with regard to the use of lariam.

Conferences:

The Members noted the location and costs of the following conferences:

Athlone - BMW Regional Assembly 6th May, 2011

Universal Social Charge:

Cllr. Hogan asked that the Council write to the Government requesting them to abolish the Universal Social Charge, as it is merely a stealth tax of 7% on all incomes over €16,000. Cllr. Shaw said the Government are going to review the Charge, so we should wait. Cllr. Hogan proposed we write now but there was no seconder for his proposal.

Services at St. Vincent's Hospital:

Cllr. Hogan requested that the Council write to the Minister for Health requesting a commitment to protect all services currently provided at St. Vincent's Hospital. Cllr. Cooney agreed we should remind Dr. Reilly about his commitment to the Hospital and ask him about the Primary Care Unit.

It was proposed by Cllr. Hogan,

Seconded by Cllr. Cooney and agreed,

“We hereby agree to write to the Minister for Health Dr. James Reilly, requesting a commitment from him to protect all services currently provided at St. Vincent's Hospital and to get the up to date position with the Primary Care Unit”.

Provision of Cycle Lanes:

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. Hogan's motion that the provision of cycle lanes in the town is being pursued through the development of the Green Route Strategy for the town and this will be presented to the Council at the July Monthly Meeting. The Members welcomed this response and Cllr. Hogan asked if the wide footpaths at the A.I.T. might be examined, with a view to providing cycle lanes there.

Rent reviews:

The Town Clerk advised Cllr. Henson that the Council proposes to undertake a full review of rents in 2012, but he assured him that tenants are free to seek an individual review of their rent based on a change in circumstances.

Role of Town Clerk:

Cllr. O'Rourke said that speculation in the media that the office of Town Clerk would be diminished, had raised concerns among the public. He felt it was necessary to have that figure head in the town. Others Members agreed. The Town Clerk confirmed that the role of the Town Clerk in Athlone will be retained under the Town Council.

Doors & Windows in Millbank:

In response to Cllr. O'Rourke's motion, the Town Clerk stated that repairs have been carried out to some windows in this estate as a response to complaints received. However some minor issues have again arisen in relation to draughts in the front doors and the windows and these matters are being attended to. Cllr. O'Rourke welcomed the response.

Traffic calming at Our Lady's Bower:

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. McFadden's motion, that a Traffic Calming Scheme for the Lower Road is being examined by the Road Design Section of Westmeath County Council and the provision of a pedestrian crossing can be considered.

Disrest in Estates:

In response to Cllr. McFadden's motion, the Town Clerk stated that complaints have been made in respect of activity in two Council estates and these are being investigated by the Gardaí. Minor complaints have also been made to the Council and these are being dealt with by the H.L.O.

Dangerous Structures Mardyke Street:

The Town Clerk advised Cllr. McFadden that Notices have been served on both property owners in accordance with the Local Government (Sanitary Services) Act 1964 with regard to Dangerous Structures, requiring that they be demolished forthwith. Cllr. McFadden said she sympathised with the owners, but 6 months have passed since the fire and derelict buildings in the centre of the town give out a bad message. They should be taking action by now. The Town Engineer advised that a structural Engineer has been engaged by the owners and he is liaising with him. He thinks works will begin in the next few weeks.

Youth Summer Scheme for Library:

Cllr. Shaw asked that the Town Council request Westmeath County Council to introduce a "Youth Summer Scheme" in the Town Library to encourage reading and use of our library facilities by young people. An amnesty could be given to young people who may owe money, giving them a fresh start in the library. Cllr. O'Rourke supported the motion, adding that we have a superb facility here but it is underutilised by our youth. It was agreed to write to the County Librarian.

Court Devenish House:

In response to Cllr. Shaws motion, the Town Clerk stated that the Council has no current strategic use for this property or the funds to acquire and maintain it. Cllr. Shaw felt the house would enhance the tourist offerings in the town and asked the Executive to reconsider, but the Director confirmed that the Council cannot consider the purchase from a capital source and there is no money at central government level either. He added that it's best chance of being preserved would be as a viable business. Cllr. Cooney said this discussion would at least heighten public awareness. Cllr. Buckley Byrne said she would raise it at the Heritage Forum.

Parking at St. Mel's Terrace:

The Town Engineer circulated a drawing outlining the proposed layout for 9no. car parking spaces at St. Mel's Terrace to meet the needs of the area. The cost including the provision of traffic calming measures will be in the region of €30,000 and can be funded from car parking development levies. Cllr. Cooney welcomed the proposal and asked if there would be a time limit on parking. The Town Engineer said there would be a half hour limit on it.

It was proposed by Cllr. Henson,

Seconded by Cllr. Buckley Byrne and resolved,

“We hereby agree to provide 9no. car parking spaces and the necessary traffic calming measures at St. Mel's Terrace, in accordance with the drawing circulated”.

Town Parks:

Cllr. Henson complimented the Town Engineer and his staff on keeping all the town parks in such good condition and so clean.

This concluded the business of the meeting.