

Minutes of the July Monthly Meeting of Athlone Town Council, which was held in the Civic Centre, Church Street, Athlone at 6.00p.m. on Monday 5th July, 2010.

Attendance:

Mayor: Cllr. S. Buckley Byrne

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

Officers: Mr. Danny McLoughlin, County Manager
Mr. Michael Connolly, A/Director of Services
Mr. John Walsh, Town Clerk
Mr. Alan Kelly, Town Engineer
Ms. Anne McNamara, Assistant Staff Officer

Minutes:

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,

Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,

“That we hereby adopt and confirm the Minutes of the June Monthly Meeting which was held on June 8th 2010”.

Matters Arising:

Cllr. Cooney requested an amendment be made to the Minutes as it was the gates at Burgess Park he enquired about, not at Wansboro Park.

He also requested an update on enforcement action on the Athlone Shopping Centre and the presentation on the upgrade of the Relief Road. He complimented the Council on reopening the Castle as there were so many visitors in the town over the weekend. He enquired as to when work is expected to begin on the re-generation. The Town Clerk advised him that it should commence in August. He informed him that Pat Keating, Westmeath County Council is examining the Athlone Shopping Centre, but he has no response from him yet, while Barry Kehoe is organising the presentation on the Relief Road and he is still on leave.

The Town Engineer informed Cllr. Hogan that he was meeting with C.I.E. on Wednesday July 7th regarding the fence on the railway line and a programme of gully clearing will commence in the next week or two and this would relieve the flooding issues in Beechpark West and Auburn Drive.

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. O'Rourke that the OPW would be contacted about the curtain wall of the Castle and that he had written to Westmeath County Council about the silt deposits in Goldenisland and Barry Kehoe will follow this up. As regards weeds on

the inner banks of the canal, the Town Engineer informed Cllr. O'Rourke that he would speak with Inland Waterways to resolve any issues.

Vote of Sympathy:

All the Members joined in Cllr. Molloy's expression of sympathy to the family of Martin O'Gorman, who had died so tragically recently.

Town Bus Service:

The Members welcomed from Bus Éireann, Mr. Brian Connolly, Regional Manager West and Mr. Damien Coen, Athlone Services Manager. Mr. Connolly outlined the reasons for services being re-organised. He said it was due to the financial situation, resulting from a severe decline in patronage with fewer travelling to work and retail and fewer tourists. He said there was always a shortfall between the P.S.O. Subvention and the cost of services being provided, but the successful, profitable routes compensated for the loss making ones. The Athlone service was the heaviest loss maker (€600,000 approx. in 2009) in Ireland as it was over-resourced in the past. Now the reorganisation has taken services back to more reasonable levels, leaving some service on all routes. Willow Park is gone from every 10 minutes to every 20 minutes and there has been no change in Monksland. This has somewhat stabilised our finances, but should finances worsen, the situation will have to be reviewed.

Cllr. Hogan said there are only 2 buses to Garrycastle per day and this is totally unacceptable. A lot of elderly people live in the area and rely on Bus Éireann and they need a better service. As a state assisted company, he said they should look after the less profitable routes. Cllrs. Henson and O'Rourke agreed with this and felt the profitable routes should subsidise the others. Mr. Connolly responded reiterating that no route in Athlone is profitable and subvention was never enough. In response to Members saying that private operators seem to manage, Mr. Connolly said that Bus Éireann was assessed by Deloitte and found to be an efficiently run company and the only way to save the company was to cut services. He said they do work with private operators and welcome competition, but on a level playing field. Large multi-national companies, who are prepared to operate at a loss for a number of years in order to ruin other operators, are not properly regulated and have an unfair advantage.

Cllr. Cooney sympathised and said the law should be improved. He asked if the school bus service could be used for other services and Mr. Connolly said this is actually being examined at the moment. Cllr. Buckley Byrne said that we want to keep Bus Éireann in the town, as it is a good employer also and Mr. Connolly said they hoped to stay as an employer. He said that Bus Éireann will be making an announcement soon about a direct route from Athlone to Dublin Airport and the Members welcomed this. They also thanked Messrs. Connolly and Coen for their attendance at the meeting.

Control and Regulation of Waste Management:

The Members welcomed Mr. Hugh O'Reilly, S.E.O. to the Meeting to advise them on the control and regulation of Waste Management. He outlined the background on how the law and policies have changed at European and national levels. A new national waste policy is due in the coming year and he felt that the local policy set out in the Midland Regional Waste Management Plan may be extended following the upcoming review, until such time as the national policy is published. He advised that the role of the Local Authority has gradually evolved to being the controller and regulator of waste activities within its functional area, from producer, to collector, transport and ultimately it's treatment. The E.P.A. overviews L.A.'s waste activities. As policy now wishes to divert biodegradable waste from land fill, it is envisaged that a brown bin collection will commence in Athlone and Mullingar in the near future. Mr. O'Reilly circulated the Food Waste Management Regulations 2009 for the commercial premises and a leaflet on Brown Bin waste for domestic waste.

He informed the Members that the landfill at Ballydonagh is due to close in 3 weeks time, but the Civic Waste Facility will continue to operate, taking waste from the public.

He outlined the current recycling infrastructure and stating that the rate of recycling in the Midlands is 39% which is just above the national average of 37%.

As regards waste enforcement the Council monitors 41 Permitted Sites and other facilities, carries out inspections, investigates and resolves waste complaints and works with Gardai and EPA in doing so.

In summing up, Mr. O'Reilly advised that the role of the Council has evolved from provision of waste services to the role of Regulator, but it continues to provide some recycling services which are uneconomic for the private sector to provide.

In response to Members queries on the Brown Bin, Mr. O'Reilly advised them that the collectors would provide the bin at no cost to householders, sizes may vary and it will be collected every 2 weeks and every house should use one. Spot checks will be made by Community Wardens and there will be a Fixed Penalty Fine of €75 for non-use. Cllr. Moran asked if the free service that was available to local residents at Ballydonagh would continue, but Mr. O'Reilly said Oxigen will be operating the Facility and that the free service to locals will not apply. Cllr. Shaw asked if the €20,000 due to Athlone from the sale of the Bin Collection Service had been allocated yet but Mr. O'Reilly said nothing had been spent or decided upon. Cllr. Henson was informed that macerators will not be permitted as they divert waste into sewers. Cllr. Hogan said that since privatisation, consumers are not getting the best choice as providers pay varying rates of commission to retailers selling the tags, but Mr. O'Reilly said the Council never had any control over that side of things.

Cllr. Buckley Byrne suggested the Council should survey the public about the waste collection service now to see how it is working. She said we had a long history with land

fill and the closing of Ballydonagh is an historic event, putting an end to troubles with pollution and smells for people living in the area. She congratulated the County Council on this move and welcomed the role out of the brown bins. All the Members thanked Mr. O'Reilly for the presentation.

Overdraft:

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. Moran and resolved,

“Pursuant to the provisions of the Local Government Acts 1925-2001, we hereby approve of borrowing by means of temporary overdraft accommodation in the sum of €3m in respect of the half year ending December, 2010”

Bollards at Sarsfield Square:

The Town Clerk informed the Members that Mr. Michael Dowling from the Sarsfield Square Residents Association, has informed the Council that they are in favour of the provision of the bollards.

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,

Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,

“That we hereby agree to the provision of bollards at the entrance to the back lane in Sarsfield Square at No.42”.

Traffic Calming at The Beeches/Coosan Point Road:

The Town Engineer circulated his Report in respect of traffic calming measures at the Beeches/Coosan Point Road junction, which concluded that calming measures were not warranted at this location. Most of the Members expressed disappointment with this result as they felt residents in the area had serious fears at this junction. Cllr. Moran proposed that the Council spend money from the Block Grant in 2011 to provide traffic calming measures at this location and was supported by other Members.

The Town Engineer stated that the speeds were representative of traffic in the area, as the surveyor could not be seen by oncoming drivers. In response to Cllr. Buckley Byrne's request for costing of traffic calming measures at Magazine Road, Assumption Road and The Beeches, the Town Engineer agreed to revert to her at the September Meeting, with a date for the prepared costings.

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,

Seconded by Cllr. McFadden and resolved,

“That we hereby agree to provide traffic calming measures at the junction of the Beeches with Coosan Point Road, with funding from the Block Grant in 2011”.

Special Meeting:

The Members agreed unanimously to hold a Special Meeting on Monday, July 19th at 6p.m. to consider a planning application, the Event Plan for the Euro-Festival and the expansion of the Regional Sports Centres gym facilities.

Managers Orders:

The Members noted the summary of Managers Orders as circulated.

Acknowledgement:

The Members noted an acknowledgement from the Minister for Transport regarding the design of the Athlone Relief Road.

Gold for cash advertisements:

The Advertising Standards Authority responded to the Councils complaint about advertisements seeking gold for cash, but requested specific details in order to identify the particular advertisements being complained about. The Members were asked to identify them.

Conferences:

Greystones	2010 La Touche Legacy Seminar	1 st – 3 rd Oct. 10
Listowel	LAMA Autumn Seminar	8 th & 9 th Oct. 10

Congratulations:

All the Members concurred with Cllr. Moran's congratulations to Liam Heavin and his committee on the Triathlon which brought a large volume of visitors to the town and had the town televised for an hour on national TV. All agreed it was a tremendous undertaking and had been very successful and all involved, the Committee, the Council staff, the Gardai, Army, Sub-Aqua, Civil Defence and the volunteers deserved great credit.

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,

Seconded by Cllr. Molloy and resolved,

“We hereby agree to host a Civic Reception for Liam Heavin and the Triathlon Committee to acknowledge their work in organising the European Triathlon Championships”.

The Town Clerk added his congratulations to Mr. Heavin in bringing a world class sporting event to the town, which was supported by thousands of people. He said that it is intended to meet with the traders in the Autumn to discuss the future of the Triathlon in Athlone.

Assumption Road Celebrations:

Cllr. Cooney enquired if the Council will have any role in the celebrations due to take place soon in Assumption Road and the Town Clerk advised him that they would not, but the closing of the road would be advertised in the coming week.

This concluded the business of the meeting.