

Minutes of the March Monthly Meeting of Athlone Town Council, which was held in the Civic Centre, Church Street, Athlone at 6.00p.m. on Monday 1st March , 2010.

Attendance:

Mayor: Cllr. M. Cooney

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

Officers: Mr. Daniel McLoughlin, County Manager
Mr. Barry Kehoe, Director of Services
Mr. John Walsh, Town Clerk
Mr. Alan Kelly, Town Engineer
Ms. Edel Martin, Administrative Officer, Housing

Minutes:

It was proposed by Cllr. P. Hogan,

Seconded by Cllr. A. Shaw and resolved,

“That we hereby confirm and adopt the Minutes of the February Monthly Meeting which was held on February 1st 2010”

Matters arising from the Minutes:

Congratulations:

On the proposal of Cllr. Hogan the Members unanimously congratulated Re-seisiún on their success in the All Ireland Talent Show.

Taxi Ranks:

The Town Engineer advised the Members that the signage for temporary taxi ranks was in place and that the signage for the permanent ranks would be in place in 3 weeks.

St. Francis Terrace:

The Town Engineer advised the Members that the pot hole at St. Francis Terrace would be repaired.

Bus Services:

The Town Clerk advised the Members that a meeting would be sought with the Area Manager to discuss the bus services.

Loughandonning Plan:

The Director advised the Members that the environmental assessment had to be completed before the Plan could be completed.

Westside:

The Town Engineer advised Cllr. McFadden that the Westside streetscape works would be completed within the 6 weeks.

Castle Regeneration:

The Town Clerk introduced Consultant Architects Mr. John Keogan and Conservation Architect Mr. Alistair Lindsay to present their proposals for the regeneration of the Castle as a Visitor Centre.

They indicated that the Castle was a national monument and protected structure and they outlined all the physical changes to the structures within the Castle principle of which included the paving of the entrance ramp and Courtyard with granite sets and resin bonded gravel, a covered bridge between the Keep and the Armaments Building, the demolition of the glazed link building and its replacement with a 2 storey glazed structure, a new entrance with a glazed viewing balcony at the Barrack Building, a lift, the removal of the ablutions block, the removal of the 2nd floor of the Keep and new opes where required for access. They added that interference with the fabric of the Castle would be kept to the minimum.

They outlined the proposed new circulation route and use of the space which all related to the military history of the town and the Castle as well as John Count McCormack. They added that the Visitor Centre would be a lively, engaging and interactive experience and the Keep would contain an immersive audio visual presentation on the Siege of Athlone. The Centre would also include a tea shop and the museum artefacts would be dispersed throughout the buildings:

The Members welcomed the proposals and in response to queries they were advised that there would be mobility impaired access, signage would be improved, the Castle would be floodlit, multiple languages were under consideration, intervention to buildings would be the least invasive and that new work had to be distinctly different from the old as this was established conservation practice.

The Manager thanked the Team for the presentation and said that the development would improve the platform to establish the Westside as the cultural centre of Athlone.

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. Moran and resolved,

“Pursuant to the provisions of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2007 we hereby approve of the commencement of the public consultation process in accordance with Section 179 of the Planning & Development Act 2000 and Part 8 of the Planning Regulations in respect of the development of Athlone Castle as a Visitor Centre”.

Draft Regional Planning Guidelines:

Mr. M. Daly Director and Ms. P Kenny Planner both of the Midlands Regional Authority outlined the detail of the Regional Planning Guidelines and indicated that submissions should be submitted by April 28th 2010.

Local Authority Development Plans had to be consistent with the R.P.G.'s.

The guidelines cover the period 2010-2022 and deal with economic development including a Strategic Development Zone east of Athlone, settlement strategies, identify

population targets and housing land requirements and the development of tourism. Transport, power and communications infrastructure, the environment and amenities are also dealt with as is flood risk.

The Members queried whether the future housing needs reflected existing vacant property, the funding for the Athlone/Mullingar railway and flood risk. They were advised that the vacancy rate had not been set out and flood risk would also be a matter for Local Authority Plans. The de-zoning of flood risk land was also raised.

The County Manager stated that flood risk was raw in people's minds arising from recent events and the Council could not second guess how insurance would be dealt with in the future. The population projections and lands zoned were tempered to reflect a level of ambition for the future and the Director added that the Guidelines were being examined as would the need for a separate meeting. The Guidelines are on public display and submissions are invited.

County Heritage Plan:

The Plan had been previously circulated and Ms. B. Solon Heritage Officer indicated that the Plan covered the period 2010-2015 and there was a 4 week display period to enable submissions to be made which would be considered by the County Council before adoption by them.

Ms. Solon stated that the Plan dealt with the identification of the natural and built environment, the conservation of all aspects of our heritage, the promotion of awareness and the integration of heritage into the development process.

Some Members expressed a preference for a County Museum in Athlone and the need to refer to the conservation of the town walls. The transfer of the Local History Diploma from Maynooth to Athlone I.T. was also desirable.

Ms. Solan stated that the Heritage Forum considered it best to support local museums and the National Museum while the County Manager added that it was difficult to sustain a County Museum. Ms. Solon said that the Town Walls were covered by a separate Plan and supported the idea of a pamphlet for Athlone Castle.

The Members welcomed the Heritage Plan and looked forward to its adoption and implementation.

Willow Park Plan:

Presenting the Plan Mr. B. Kehoe DOS, stated that the area consisted of 325no. houses and its proximity to the A.I.T. led to investment by Landlords who let the properties to students but large vacancies arose in recent years as students moved to new purpose built accommodation. Social problems then emerged compounded by absentee Landlords and transient communities which have impacted on community spirit and there is dereliction and illegal dumping. The area now has a mix of Local Authority tenants, private house owners, long term tenants, students and non-nationals.

He outlined the work undertaken by the Community Worker whose contract had expired, but he added that the Community House opened there would be managed by the Council. He stated that funding provided by the Council amounted to €85,651.25 but €27,258.00 of this was committed to a lighting upgrade.

He outlined the content of the Plan which included a playground (€60k), all-weather games area (€100k), fencing (€45k), scrub removal (€5k), footpaths (€5k), car parking (€10k), green area at Meadowbrook (€30k), tree planting (€10k).

The total cost of these works amounted to €260k, but a contribution would be required from the Landlords and it was hoped to lever money from other sources.

Other issues raised were the provision of an alternative vehicular access, action on dereliction including the imposition of a levy, parking controls but CCTV would not be provided by the Council as it was outside its remit.

The Members welcomed the Plan and in particular the playground, pitch and paths. Cllr. Hogan said that the residents deserved a community worker and he queried whether the Garda Supt., had been contacted re the CCTV and what proposals there were for the rear link road. He also requested the number of derelict site notices served. Cllr. Molloy expressed satisfaction with the notices served to get rid of dereliction and he said that grants were available to Resident Associations for CCTV where approved by the Gardai. Funding for Willow Park he added should be sought from the Minister for Housing.

Cllr. McFadden in welcoming the Plan expressed concern regarding the dereliction and she agreed with the parking restrictions but requested that the community worker be maintained. Cllr. Shaw said the inclusion of CCTV could be a deal breaker and requested the inclusion of the A.I.T. as a player in the area. He also welcomed the levy. Cllr. Henson also supported the Plan and urged the elimination of dereliction and the replacement of the community worker.

Cllr. Moran stated that absentee landlords were a problem and accommodation to let needed to match the standards of student accommodation. He added that lighting and a community worker were also required. Cllr. O'Rourke said the Plan was an incentive to all but he expressed concern in the event of all the necessary funding not being available. Cllr. Buckley Byrne acknowledged the level of resources applied by the Council and complemented the Gardai on their work. She believed that the acquisition of houses by the Council was a turning point and the relocation of anti social tenants should have been mentioned in the report. She expressed reservation about the playground as it did not have passive surveillance. She added that public safety and monitoring was significant and while she understood the separation of Garda and Council powers surveillance was important. She welcomed the parking works and fencing.

Cllrs. Molloy and Henson disagreed with Cllr. Buckley Byrne regarding Council acquisitions and Cllr. Molloy referred to poor private tenants and many students were bad neighbours. Cllr. Moran said the Plan was a new beginning and the Residents needed support.

The County Manager stated that it was not a time to look back and the report is based on the estate being a family estate. He added that CCTV could not be provided by the Council but the residents could apply but it would not be funded or supervised by the Council.

The Director said that there was no correspondence with the Gardai re CCTV and the short-term contract of the community worker could not be renewed but other agencies could become involved. There was no road plan for the east of Willow Park and work would be prioritised after the consultation process having regard to the funds available. He was confident that the facilities would not be vandalised and a multi-purpose games area would not be provided in Meadowbrook at this time. He said the Minister would be contacted as would the A.I.T. Works would be prioritised when the funding from all sources was known and the Plan would be implemented over time. He added that the acquisition of housing by the Council was not the cause of the problems in the area.

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,

Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,

“That the Plan be distributed to the community organisations for their observations and submissions”.

Capital Housing Programme:

The Members considered a Report on the capital housing programme for 2010 previously circulated and in her presentation Ms. E. Martin, Housing Officer advised the Members that an allocation of €1,245,000.00 had been notified and it was proposed to expand it as follows:

- | | |
|------------------------------------|-------|
| 1) 2no. houses at Loughanaskin | €340k |
| 2) 2no. houses at Connaught Street | €125k |
| 3) Acquisitions | €420k |

She added that in the past 2 years improvements/extensions had been completed on 14no. houses and a further 22no. applications required attention. Of these 7no. would be dealt with in 2010 at a cost of €70k of which €35k would come from the capital allocation with the balance from capital internal receipts. She added that subject to legal issues being resolved a house at Lucas Court would be improved at a cost of €30k.

Approval was awaited from the DOE to a grant and allocation of €135k for the purchase of a house at Sarsfield Square by the Athlone and District Housing Association. This was not part of the Councils allocation. €40k from internal capital resources would be expended on windows and doors.

The remainder of the capital allocation would be expended as follows:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|-------|
| 1) Battery Heights Regeneration | - | €190k |
| 2) Energy efficiency programme | - | €100k |
| 3) Compliance with rented standards | - | €35k |

The energy programme is for Council houses and will be delivered on a matching funds basis with a maximum grant of €15k per unit or 75% of the cost of the remedial works which would provide for the needs of 6/7 properties.

The Members then considered motion (h) from Cllr. McFadden and Motion (n) from Cllr. Hogan both requesting Minister Finneran to increase the capital allocation as it was not adequate. The Town clerk advised the Members that the Council had met with D.O.E. officials in February who had indicated that additional monies were unlikely and that there should be greater utilisation of the Rental Accommodation Scheme and the Leasing Initiatives.

The Members expressed concern over the level of the reduction which could be exceeded in 2011 and they also requested that the steel shutters used to secure houses be painted white as they were unsightly.

Ms. Martin in response stated that the 2011 expectations were not known and that RAS was the recommended option. In regard to leasing, only 1no. expression of interest had been received and there were not many vacant units available. In regard to a case of improvement works she said that a response to a legal issue was awaited from the client and she added that shuttering was required on vacant houses to maintain insurance. The Town Engineer stated that shutters were generally hired in but shutters acquired last year were painted green.

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,

Seconded by Cllr. Molloy and resolved,

“That we request the Minister for Housing Mr. Michael Finneran TD to meet the Council regarding the Capital Allocation”.

Casual Trading Byelaws

John Walsh Town Clerk gave an overview of the current situation and advised that the Bye-Laws could not be adopted or made until after 30 days from the last date to receive submissions. The matter would be on the agenda for the April Meeting.

Conference and Expenses Matters

John Walsh Town Clerk advised the members that in accordance with recent guidance issued from the Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government changes were being made to the current arrangement for attendance at conferences and expenses. The changes were noted by the members. Cllr. Paul Hogan enquired as to how the mechanics of the proposed amendments would be adhered to. John Walsh Town Clerk advised that the executive would in future issue any details to the members as they were received. The Ministers letter limited expenditure on conferences and the full correspondence was circulated to the Members.

Chateaubriant Invitation

John Walsh Town Clerk advised the members that an invitation had been received for attendance at the 15th anniversary of the twinning of the two towns. He advised that this invitation was outside of the conference arrangements and that he felt the Council should be represented. Cllr. Molloy proposed that the Council should send delegates and noted that he was not interested in attending himself. Cllr. Cooney agreed and it was decided to finalise arrangements at the next Council meeting. Members interested in attending to advise the Town Clerk in advance of the meeting.

All Ireland Drama Festival – Civic Reception

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,

Seconded by Cllr. Shaw,

“That we hereby agree to host a civic reception to honour the 2010 All Ireland Drama Festival on April 15th 2010 at 5p.m.

Disposal of Fee Simple:

It was proposed Cllr. Moran,

Seconded Cllr. Henson,

“Pursuant to the provision of the Local Government Act 2001, the Housing Act 1966, Section 90 of the Housing Act 1966 and the Landlord and Tenant (Ground Rents) No.2 Act 1978, we hereby approve of the disposal of the fee simple interest in the property as set out in the schedule hereunder:

Schedule:

<u>Description of property:</u>	<u>Name of Purchaser:</u>	<u>Purchase Price:</u>
1 Parnell Square	Teresa Fennell	€45.40

Managers Orders

The Members noted the summary of Managers Orders as circulated.

Questions:

Question 1. Cllr.. K. Moran:

“Will this Council consider erecting a convex mirror at the entrance/exit to Auburn Terrace”.

Answer:

Such a mirror does not meet any known standard in relation to road signage and as such the Council would not permit its installation.

Question 2. Cllr.. K. Moran:
“Can this Council give a date for the commencement of works in Pinewood Close”.

Answer: **These works are expected to be started within the next 2 weeks.**

Question 3. Cllr.. A. O'Rourke:
“The need for bollards was to be examined at the junction of Gleeson Street/Pump Lane and Irishtown, what is the status of this work?”

Answer: **There is no accident history at this location and the installation of bollards here would hinder rather than aid the movement of pedestrian traffic at this location.**

Question 4. Cllr.. A. O'Rourke:
“Improvement works to some footpaths in Arcadia and Retreat Park were undertaken during 2009, can the Council please confirm that these areas will be revisited in order to complete these areas in 2010?”

Answer: **These areas will be examined in tandem with an assessment of the condition of all footpaths and roads within town in the context of the preparation of proposals for the expenditure of the 2010 Block Grant.**

Question 5. Cllr.. K. Molloy:
“When will work start on Traffic calming measures at St. Anne's Terrace?”

Answer: **These works are to be considered in the context of the expenditure proposals for the 2010 Block Grant and these proposals will be brought before the Council at the April 2010 meeting.**

Question 6. Cllr. G. McFadden:
“Will this Council be putting pedestrian crossing at Connaught Street, from 2010 block grant, as per July monthly meeting?”

Answer: **These works are to be considered in the context of the expenditure proposals for the 2010 Block Grant and these proposals will be brought before the Council at the April 2010 meeting.**

Question 7. Cllr. G. McFadden:
“When will this Council provide speed ramps in St. Anne's and St. Paul's as promised in October 2009?”

Answer: These works are to be considered in the context of the expenditure proposals for the 2010 Block Grant and these proposals will be brought before the Council at the April 2010 meeting.

Question 8. Cllr. A. Shaw:
“Please provide an update regarding the realignment of Garrycastle Bridge, the construction phase of which is due to commence in August 2010?”

Answer: Westmeath County Council received an allocation of €400,000 for 2010 for this project. This will be used to fund the detailed design and land acquisition but is not sufficient to allow the Council to go to construction. However, Department of Transport approval to go to tender may be forthcoming in 2010 with a view to constructing the scheme in 2011.

Question 9. Cllr. A. Shaw:
“Can the Council take steps to improve the line of vision for residents of Drumaconn as their vision of oncoming traffic from the town side is impaired by promotional signage erected by the Builders, as they enter the Cornamaddy roundabout from the Estate?”

Answer: The sightlines for traffic exiting Drumaconn and for traffic entering the roundabout from the Ballymahon Road northbound (from Town) meet with the requirements set out the relevant road design standard and the removal of the hoarding in question would be likely to lead to a diminution in road safety.

Question 10. Cllr. P. Hogan:
“Will this Council, in conjunction with the relevant authorities, clean both Garrycastle slip roads off the Relief Road as a matter of urgency and give an update regarding the provision of roundabouts at this location?”

Answer: The Athlone Relief Road is currently undergoing and extensive clean-up operation which will include all slip roads and which will be complete within the next week. The provision of roundabouts at the interchanges will be considered in the context of the current funding from the NRA for 2010 for the upgrading of this road.

Question 11. Cllr. P. Hogan:
“What stage is the regeneration of Battery Heights at?”

Answer: The Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government has providing funding of €190,000 in the current year’s allocation towards the cost of completion of Environmental works which

commenced in 2009. This Council has sought a meeting with the Department to discuss the advancement of the plan for Battery Heights when these works are completed.

Question 12. Cllr.. M. Cooney:

Has there been any response from Westmeath County Council or the NRA regarding the reduction of traffic noise experienced at Highfield Court/Arcadia Crescent”?

Answer: This issue will be considered in the design of the remedial works to the relief road in the context of the 2010 allocation.

Question 13. Cllr.. S. Buckley Byrne:

What is the date for completion of the Westside streetscape first phase works”?

Answer: The paving contractor has started on site and it is expected that Phase 1 will be completed within 6 weeks.

Correspondence

Mr John Walsh Town Clerk advised that correspondence had been received from the Lord Mayor of Dublin City Council expressing sympathy for the hardships suffered during the recent inclement weather and commending all the good works done by the local agencies. Letter to be acknowledged and circulated to the members.

Correspondence also received from Sustainable Energy Ireland advising the members of a Sustainable Energy Day to be held in March 2010 and it was agreed that space would be provided in the Council offices for government/statutory bodies participating in this day.

Correspondence received from the Mayor of Wilmington and headquarters of PPD, congratulated Athlone on the opening of the new PPD facility in Athlone and it was agreed to acknowledge his generous letter.

AFS:

The Members noted receipt of the AFS circulated to each of them.

Traffic Calming Measures at The Beeches, Coosan.

In response to Cllr. Moran’s motion the Town Clerk advised that this matter will be examined and findings presented to the members at the April meeting. Cllr. Moran advised that he had raised this issue as a result of the speed of traffic at this location. Cllr.. Shaw who advised that he had received numerous calls from residents in the area concerning the matter supported the motion. Cllr. Buckley Byrne noted that a solution similar to that at

Coolevin should be considered. Cllr. McFadden added her support to this motion. It was agreed that the Town Engineer would examine the matter and report.

Taxi Regulator

The Town Clerk advised that correspondence would issue to the Taxi Regulator if the members agreed. Cllr. Moran added that at present the knowledge test for Athlone taxi drivers applying for licence is based on Mullingar town and that this should be amended. Cllrs. Hogan and Shaw supported the motion.

Bollards Outside O'Neill's Pub

In noting the reply received from the Town Clerk, Cllr. O'Rourke advised that he hoped that this work would be carried out in the near future given the number of festivals to be held in the town in 2010. He also noted the unsightly bollards at Bonnavalley. Cllr. McFadden supported this motion adding that the temporary bollards located at the Crescent should also be removed forthwith. Cllr. Shaw also supported this motion advising that it was in the town centre and close to hotels and amenities. Barry Kehoe DOS noted the members' comments and advised that the matter would be at discretion of the Area members but that the Town Councillors' comments were noted.

Reletting of Council Houses

In response to the Town Clerk's reply to his motion that all houses would be given a final inspection by a staff member before letting, Cllr. O'Rourke advised that he had raised the issue as a result of his being made aware of the condition of a particular dwelling on its allocation. He hoped that this would not occur in future. Cllr. Hogan supported this motion.

Relocation of Council Yard.

Cllr. O'Rourke acknowledged the response received that a site had been identified and Part 8 documents were being prepared and advised that the area concerned was unsightly and at present there appeared to be little action being taken. He urged that this matter would be resolved sooner than later.

Pedestrian Crossing at Irishtown

Cllr. McFadden noted response received that the matter would be referred to the County Council and advised that she hoped some action would take place in relation to this matter. Cllr. Hogan questioned whether a pedestrian crossing had been provided for in the Irishtown Development Plan. In response the Town Clerk advised that provision was made in the plan but that its implementation would not happen in the immediate future.

Traffic Lights at Dunnes Stores

In response to reply received that timing changes would create greater queues. Cllr. McFadden advised that the problems created are by reason of driver error. Alan Kelly

Town Engineer replied that some adjustments had taken place to lights sequence at this location and the situation should now be resolved.

Yellow Box at John Broderick Street

Cllr. Shaw acknowledged response received that a box would not give any advantage and advised that he appreciated the findings. Notwithstanding this he advised that traffic might be avoiding this area due to blockages and felt that it warranted re-investigation. Alan Kelly advised that the provision of a yellow box might have a negative effect on traffic progression in this area. Cllrs. Buckley Byrne and McFadden added their support for this motion. Barry Kehoe DOS advised that there was a risk of the location being utilised as a rat run if yellow box was provided. Cllr. Shaw noted that this was the 3rd time he had raised the issue and advised that it warranted further consideration.

Water Minimisation and Waste Management

In response to reply received that Westmeath County Council was promoting water minimisation. Cllr. Shaw advised that he placed the motion owing to the water shortages imposed on the general public during the recent inclement weather. He advised that there was a need for behavioural change and to raise water conservation awareness among the general public and not just at times of crisis. He advised that a website was available in this regard (www.taptips.ie) and he urged members to support this issue.

Block Grant 2010

Cllr. Hogan noted that the 2010 proposals would be presented to the April Meeting and that the Council was dependant on central funds to advance the roads programme. He felt that schemes that were removed from 2009 programme should receive priority in 2010. Cllr. Cooney added that the members in general would be supportive of this.

Town Boundary Extension Blyry and Garrycastle

Cllr. Hogan noted the response received that such an extension would have negative financial consequences and advised that he believed that such an extension of the boundary would have benefits for the town. In response John Walsh Town Clerk advised that in financial terms it might not work in favour of the Town Council. Cllr. Hogan noted this comment and added that an analysis on this proposal would be interesting. Cllr. Cooney supported Cllr. Hogan proposal advising the he felt it should be examined. Cllr. Shaw also supported this motion.

In reply Barry Kehoe advised that he would raise the issue at County level if the members wished.

Dereliction opposite St Mary's Church

Cllr. Cooney noted response received from the Town Clerk that planning enforcement would be pursued and advised that he was aware of planning permission received at this location however he added that the appropriate notice should issue to the developer. Cllr.

Henson supported the motion adding that he felt the issue of a Derelict Sites notice was a waste of time. In reply the Town Clerk advised that as the Council proposed levying owners of derelict sites it was considered worthwhile.

Cllrs. Hogan and Shaw both supported the motion while Cllr. Hogan added that the hoarding in place at this location was attracting anti social behaviour.

Former Town Dump Site

Cllr. Cooney noted that he had raised this issue previously approximately 12 months ago and that the response received today was similar in that an assessment had been undertaken and that further investigations were necessary. He advised that he was not happy and that a report in the matter should be arranged. He noted that he would take the matter up at county level.

LED Street Lighting

Cllr. Buckley Byrne noted response received that the cost benefits were questionable and added that she had raised the issue as a result of the large street lighting costs each year funded by the Town Council. She felt that there would be merit in examining this matter with long term cost benefits.

This concluded the business of the meeting.