

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 4th May, 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. Barry Kehoe, Director of Services
Mr. John Walsh, Town Clerk
Mr. Alan Kelly, Town Engineer

Minutes:

It was proposed by Cllr. Hogan,

Seconded by Cllr. Henson and resolved,

“That we hereby adopt and confirm the Minutes of the April Monthly Meeting which was held on April 6th 2010”.

Matters Arising:

At the request of Cllr. McFadden the Members congratulated Athlone G.A.A., on their Feile success and requested that their passage to the finals be financially assisted by the Council.

Cllr. Moran requested the Director to meet the residents of Cloghanboy and the Director stated that equipment was being ordered.

Cllr. Shaw extended the thanks of the RTE Amateur All Ireland Drama Festival Committee to the Council for its support for the Festival.

The Members unanimously supported the proposal of Cllr. Shaw and extended the sympathy of the Council and people of Athlone to the Polish Ambassador on the death of the Polish President and other senior figures in a plane crash.

It was agreed to write again to Bus Éireann and request a meeting regarding bus services.

In response to Cllr. Buckley Byrne, the Director advised that he would report to the Flood Sub-Committee in regard to the Park and Canal Walk.

Cllr. Cooney sought a progress report regarding planning enforcement for the Athlone Shopping Centre while the Director indicated that it would be October before the design for the Goldenisland road junction would be completed.

Disposal of Land:

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,

Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,

“Pursuant to the provisions 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 properties as set out in the schedule hereunder;

Schedule:

<u>Description of Property</u>	<u>Name of Purchaser</u>	<u>Purchase Price</u>
49sq. m of land at O’Connell St., Athlone 53 Beechpark West	Angela McIntyre O’Connell St., Athlone Darrell Kelly & Linda McMonagle	Surrender of rights on Council property €39.30

Willow Park/Meadowbrook Plan:

The Members noted the Report of the Director which summarised and responded to all the submissions received in respect of the Willow Park/Meadowbrook Plan. He added that the relocation of the playground to Norwood Court was an acceptable revision as it was a suitable location and near the Community House.

In response to queries he said that CCTV did not come within the remit of the Council and costings were not available as the town system had been provided by the Department of Justice.

The Members accepted that all aspects of the Plan would not be acceptable to all the interests but the CCTV system was a major issue which many believed would secure the Plan investment. Some Members believed that it needed further investigation as other Local Authorities had used it while others believed that its operation by the Gardai was the most effective system.

It was requested that the environmental security assessment be examined, that planting be on a phased basis and that the footpath at Willow Park View be excluded. The Members believed that the investment was a major issue which empowered the people and the submissions welcomed the derelict sites levy.

It was agreed to leave the provision of CCTV as an aspiration in the Plan and to write to the Minister for Justice to provide the system.

The Director indicated that a meeting with the residents regarding the CCTV would not be fruitful and while residents may not favour the footpath, the Community Group did and it should be retained as people walked in that area. He added that all works would be phased to assess the impact and works within the Plan would have to be prioritized. The Council will liaise with the Representative Group and the CCTV aspiration was accepted.

It was proposed by Cllr. O'Rourke,
Seconded by Cllr. Moran and resolved,
"That we hereby approve of and adopt the Willow Park/Meadowbrook Plan as circulated with the inclusion of an aspiration in regard to the provision of CCTV in the area".

Triathlon:

The Town Clerk advised the Members that the Triathlon would take place from July 1st – 4th 2010 and he outlined the Road closures requested in respect of the Church Street area and particularly on the Westside where the Main Baylough Road and the Market Square, Castle Street, Connaught Street, Magazine Road, Grace Road/Accommodation Road, Pearse Street and Town Bridge would be closed at various times but particularly on July 3rd and 4th 2010 (Saturday and Sunday) with mid morning open periods. Some of these streets would be closed from 5.00p.m. to 9.00p.m. on Thursday July 1st with Accommodation Road closing from Wednesday to Sunday and Church Street from Thursday to Sunday.

The Members were aware of the positive impact of the event but also about the reduction that some business may experience. They requested that the Traders be contacted and advised of the closures and that Triathlon distribute fliers to the residents. Alternative taxi ranks were also required.

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,
Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,
"That we hereby approve of a Civic Reception for Triathlon on Friday July 2nd 2010".

Main Drainage Scheme:

The Town Clerk advised the Members that Church Street would be closed from 7.00p.m. to 6.00a.m. on the 14th to 16th June, 2010, and Northgate Street from 7.00p.m. to 6.00a.m. on the 8th to 9th June, 2010 and Friary Lane from 7.00p.m. to 6.00a.m. on the 21st to 22nd June, 2010 to facilitate site investigation works for the Main Drainage Scheme.

Euro-Festival:

The Town Clerk advised the Members that an Event Plan to manage and control the Festival in safety was being prepared and would be advertised for submissions after which a Report would be presented to the Members.

Sarsfield Square:

The Director stated that he was amenable to providing the bollards requested at Sarsfield Square subject to the implementation of the statutory process. However the Members agreed that the approval of the Residents Association be sought before the process begins.

Managers Orders

The Members noted the summary of Managers Orders as circulated.

Questions

Question 1. Cllr. P. Hogan:
“When will the windows and doors scheme be commenced?”

Answer: It is intended to commence these works in the coming month.

Question 2. Cllr. P. Hogan:
“Will this Local Authority be providing floral hanging baskets at designated poles at Tormey Villas and Assumption Road?”

Answer: These poles were installed by the Town Council in recent years at the request of the local communities on the strict understanding that the communities in these areas would plant and service the baskets each year. The Council considers that such work would engender a spirit of stronger civic pride in these residential areas and in any case the Council does not currently have the capacity to service such baskets.

When Cllr. Hogan requested that the matter be reconsidered the Town Engineer stated that the area was remote and the watering system would have to be moved and this would require a second group.

Question 3. Cllr. M. Cooney:
“When will the Council be presented with the Loughandonning Area Action Plan and what is the reason for the delay in finalising same?”

Answer: The Council is awaiting a response from the environmental authorities regarding the Strategic Environmental Assessment and Appropriate Assessment under the Habitats Directive of this Plan.

The Draft Plan will be brought before the Members whenever possible.

Question 4. Cllr. M. Cooney:
“Assuming the gates to Burgess Park were removed by this Council, can it be confirmed that they have been retained by the Council and will be re-erected in due course?”

Answer: The Councils records and stores will be examined to ascertain the location of these gates.

Question 5. Cllr. A. O'Rourke:
"The Council was to return to complete footpath improvements in Hillcourt in recent months, when will this work be completed?"

Answer: **Outstanding footpath works in this area outside no's 31/32 and 1 – 5 were completed in February of this year. A short section remains outside house no. 6 and this will be attended to in the coming weeks.**

Question 6. Cllr. A. O'Rourke:
"Have consultants been engaged to complete an Open Space Strategy for Athlone as allowed for in our 2010 budget?"

Answer: **This will be prepared by the Forward Planning Section of Westmeath County Council. In response to a query the Director indicated that it would not be ready until at least September.**

Question 7. Cllr. A. Shaw:
"What is the current status of the Coill Ur Estate in Cornamaddy, particularly concerning the taking in charge by the Council of the completed 9 / 10 units and the undeveloped state of the adjoining land?"

Answer: **This estate has not been put forward for taking in charge by the developer.**

Question 8. Cllr. A. Shaw:
"Considering the increasing numbers walking between Cornamaddy and the Department of Education on the Ballymahon Road, can the Council make a commitment to build the necessary link footpath and facilitate users on safety grounds?"

Answer: **This footpath link has been costed at €80,000.00 and it is a matter for consideration by Westmeath County Council.**

Question 9. Cllr. G. McFadden:
"Would the Council include Irishtown when it is putting up hanging baskets?"

Answer: **The provision of hanging baskets in Irishtown will be examined.**

Question 10. Cllr. G. McFadden:
“Would the Council put a bin on accommodation road near the information board?”

Answer: Yes.

Question 11. Cllr. S. Buckley Byrne:
“Could the Council erect “children at play” signage in the estates of Willow Park and Meadowbrook?”

Answer: Signage will be examined in the context of the Plan.

Derelict Sites:

In response to the motions from Cllrs. Hogan and Henson, the Town Clerk stated that remedial works to house numbers 11, 13 and 15 O’Connell Street and 52 Connaught Street, will be put out to tender in the coming week and that works will begin on site at the beginning of June 2010. He added that properties at 53 and 59 Connaught Street are listed for inclusion in the 2010 Social Housing programme and remedial works on the both properties will be carried out in advance of the Festival season. The Town Engineer added that a 2m wall be built at Fawls. The Town Clerk stated that house nos.13 and 15 and 52 would be demolished and a 2m wall would front No.52.

Garrycastle interchange:

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. Hogan that design proposals for all the junctions on the Relief Road are intended to be progressed in the current year and that it is hoped to carry out the works in 2011. Cllr. Hogan asked if traffic lights would be provided and the Director responded saying that design solutions were not identified but the report recommended a roundabout. However there are no funding guarantees, but he added that the interchanges are a priority.

Sewage problems at Norwood Court:

Cllr. Hogan requested that the Area Engineer investigate the ongoing sewage problems at Norwood Court and it was agreed that the matter will be examined. Cllr. Hogan requested that the pipes be examined with CCTV and the Town Engineer said they would be surveyed.

H.S.E. Services:

Cllr. Cooney requested that the Council write to the H.S.E. asking them to confirm that there will be no diminution in the services currently provided at St. Vincent’s Hospital and Loughloe House and also to confirm that there are no plans to change any of the services provided until such time as the primary care centre is constructed at Clonbrusk. Cllr.

Molloy felt that the Midoc Service should also be raised. Cllr. Shaw said that the towns Dail representative should influence the Minister in a positive way. All the Members supported this motion and it was agreed to write to the HSE and invite Mr. Joe Ruane of the HSE to the June meeting at 5.00p.m.

Opening of the Castle:

In response to motions from Cllrs. Cooney and McFadden regarding the opening of the Castle Courtyard prior to the regeneration works, the Town clerk stated that the Castle is a hazardous environment with dangers for visitors in the absence of supervision and such supervision is also necessary to protect the buildings and their contents. He added that it will become a building site from July and as no income or expenditure was provided in the budget for operational purposes in 2010, there is no scope to provide supervision for the next two months. Cllrs. Moran and Buckley Byrne agreed that the Castle should remain closed in the interests of safety. The Mayor requested that the matter be reconsidered with a view to opening.

Information sign at the Castle:

Cllr. O'Rourke requested that the Council erect a large format sign outside Athlone Castle for the duration of the refurbishment works, to include artists impressions of the completed works and a narrative to explain the work being undertaken and the timeframes involved. It should also mention the celebration of the 800 years of the Castle and should be used as a marketing tool. The Town Clerk advised that a sign will be erected in the vicinity of the Castle and also in response to Cllr. Moran's request, he said a sign will be erected at the Art Gallery, as previously agreed.

Damaged wall, Grace Road:

In response to Cllr. O'Rourke's motion to have the low wall at the Railway Bridge on Grace Road repaired, the Town Clerk confirmed that it will be repaired in the coming weeks.

Responses to motions:

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. O'Rourke's motion, that an I.C.T. initiative which includes an early response to motions and questions is being piloted within an area of Westmeath County Council and its application on a countywide basis, will include the Town Council. It is not proposed to change the system until then. Cllr. O'Rourke asked also that reports be given to Members in advance of meetings, but the Town Clerk stated that this already happens with reports usually being received by Members 3 days in advance of meetings as required by Standing Orders.

Rates on childcare facilities:

Cllr. Shaw requested that the Council write to the Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government requesting the abolition of commercial rates for Childcare Facilities in recognition of their educational status and the unique regulatory environment in which they operate. There was also a need for equality of treatment between voluntary and commercial facilities. The Members supported the motion and it was agreed to write to the Minister.

Green routes strategy:

In response to Cllr. Shaw's motion, the Town Clerk stated that a green routes strategy for Athlone will be prepared in the current year for the consideration of the Members. However he added, the motion deals with a wider area that can best be accommodated/progressed by the County Development Board, where all the agencies are represented. Cllr. Shaw welcomed the green routes and said the walks benefit tourism and are cost effective, with added health benefits and with Clonmacnoise being a proposed World Heritage site, it would attract interest in Athlone. Cllr. O'Rourke added that Gateway Chamber have already examined 25k cycle routes and we should write to them.

Waste Management:

The Town Clerk advised Cllr. Shaw that the regulatory functions under the Waste Management Acts are vested in County Councils and not in Town Councils. Cllr. Shaw said that a representative from the County Council should outline their functions and proposals relating to waste management and it was agreed to request Mr. Ray Kenny, Director of Services to attend a Meeting, to speak to the Members.

Signage for Tourist Office:

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. McFadden that the signage has been agreed with Fáilte Ireland and will be erected.

Planning legislation:

Cllr. Moran requested that the Council write to the Minister requesting that the Planning & Development Act 2000 (Section 42) be amended to enable Local Authorities to extend the life of planning permissions in cases other than those where substantial works have been carried out and as already bestowed on NAMA under its legislation. It was agreed to write to the Minister. Cllr. Shaw said the provision may be in the new Planning Bill but the Director said there were many amendments and it was not clear what was now included.

Advance signage for Athlone:

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. Moran's motion, that directional signage will be considered in the context of the Relief Road remedial works and all signage is subject to

the approval of the N.R.A. Cllr. Moran said the current signage is directing people to Athlone via Kilmartins Roundabout and placing pressure on this route. He felt that the alternative accesses should be shown in advance, so motorists are made aware of other more direct accesses. Cllr. Cooney requested that any proposals for new signage be presented to the Members before being sent to the N.R.A.

The Director agreed that current signage is poor but new signs cannot be erected until the status of the Relief Road has been decided on. He also agreed that the signage needs to show in advance that there are 5no. junctions.

It was agreed to write to the Minister concerning the designation of the N6.

Footpath repair, Mardyke Street:

In response to Cllr. Moran's motion the Town Clerk stated that the matter will be referred to the Area Engineer for consideration as the footpath in question is maintained by Westmeath County Council.

D.P.G. Allocation:

In response to Cllr. Buckley Byrne's motion, the Town Clerk stated that the allocation for Housing Grants in 2010 is €1,854,000 and €580,000 of this has been allocated to Athlone. The remaining budget of €100,000 is being retained for the present by Housing HQ to cover any emergencies that may arise during the year. He added that the allocation will allow the Council to deal with all Priority 1 cases and the majority of Priority 2 cases. Cllr. Buckley Byrne said the figure given earlier in the year was €300,000 and she welcomed the €580,000, but she still felt that Athlone did not get a fair share of the allocation. The Director said that the allocation is based on need and the population of Mullingar and its area is greater than that of Athlone. He also said that Athlone may get some of the €100,000 retained for emergencies, if there are not many emergencies. He could not say whether or not refusals could be re-considered, but they should be brought to the attention of the staff.

Flooding at Cornamagh:

Cllr. Henson requested that flood defences be provided at Cornamaddy and he was advised that historically this was caused by ruptures in the watermain which will be replaced and the procurement arrangements were in process.

Cllr. Henson stated that flooding occurred in this estate every year and it is due to the low level of the footpaths. He requested that the Council rectify the problem in the immediate future.

‘Cash for Gold’ advertising:

Cllr. Henson requested that the Council write to the Advertising Standards Authority regarding the advertisements for ‘cash for gold jewellery’ as no proof of ownership is required and this is encouraging house break-ins and burglaries. It was agreed to write.

Representation:

Cllr. O’Rourke raised the matter of Dáil representation referred to by Cllr. Shaw in the discussion on health services and advised that any ideas he may have should be brought to the local Dáil Deputy who hold regular clinics in the area.

This concluded the business of the meeting.