

**Minutes of the October Monthly Meeting of Athlone Town Council, which was held in the Civic Centre, Church Street, Athlone at 6.00p.m. on Monday 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2009.**

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**Attendance:**

Mayor: Cllr. M. Cooney

Members: Cllrs. S. Buckley Byrne, 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  
Ms. Anne McNamara, Assistant Staff Officer

**Apologies:**

An apology was received from Cllr. J. Henson who was unable to attend the Meeting.

**Minutes:**

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,

Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,

“That we hereby confirm and adopt the Minutes of the September Monthly Meeting which was held on September 7<sup>th</sup> 2009 and the adjourned September Monthly Meeting held on September 14<sup>th</sup> 2009”.

**Vote of Congratulations:**

All the Members wished to be associated with Cllr. Hogan's congratulations to the Garrycastle Men's Senior Team on winning the County Championship and to the ladies Senior Team who also won their County Championship and have now reached the semi-final of the Leinster Championship.

**Unfinished Housing Estates:**

The Mayor welcomed to the Meeting, Mr. Pat Keating and Mr. James Joyce from the Legal and Enforcement Section of Westmeath County Council and Mr. Keating proceeded to inform the Members of the current position of housing estates in Athlone. He stated that 26 estates are still not in charge and Planning Permission has expired on 20 of these. He is in the process of carrying out compliance checks on all of these and where action is required, he is following up with the Developers in each case. He circulated a Report which gave the current status of the 26 estates.

The Members discussed various estates and the action being taken and in general they were pleased with the progress being made now and they complimented Mr. Keating and his team. They asked if legal costs were recovered from Developers when legal action had to be taken against them and Mr. Keating said that legal costs were always sought.

Members were concerned about Priory Park and the Director informed them that the Council had reached the end of the line with Planning Enforcement, but that a civil agreement existed and this was now going to be enforced in Court. He added that the Council have a substantial bond in this case too. Cllr. Moran asked if the Bord could be used to rectify the problems which cause severed flooding in the estate in winter and the Director said emergency works could possibly be carried out. The Town Engineer would examine.

The Mayor thanked M/s Keating and Joyce for their report and requested that the Council be given an update in six months time.

### **Receptions:**

It was agreed unanimously to host receptions for the Ravens Marching Band who won the All-Ireland Cadet Class Championships (date to be agreed later) and for the Media Pike Angling Challenge to be held as a launch of an International Pike Angling Competition and Festival being held in April 2010. This is on foot of the Callows being designated a Pike Angling Centre of Excellence in the National Development Plan and this reception is to take place on Tuesday 20<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

### **RAPID Funding:**

The Town Clerk informed the Members that the Sarsfield Square Community Centre had been closed for the past 4 years and that there is a substantial need for this facility to be re-opened for the community. The refurbishment, new equipment, security and professional fees will cost a total of €151,000. To date the HSE has contributed €80,000 and Dormant Accounts €64,000, leaving a shortfall of €7,000. He recommended that RAPID allocate the shortfall of €7,000 to the Project as it is within a RAPID area and the Members agreed with this.

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,  
seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,  
“That we hereby approve of the allocation of €7,000 from the RAPID Programme to the Sarsfield Square Community Centre Refurbishment Project”.

### **Taking-in-Charge, Hazelwood/Rindoon:**

The Members all welcomed the fact that these estates were going to be taken-in-charge and wanted the process to commence immediately.

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,

Seconded by Cllr. Shaw and resolved,

“Pursuant to the provisions of the Roads Act 1993 and the Planning & Development Acts 2000-2006 we hereby approve of the commencement of the process to take the roads and services in the Hazelwood/Rindoon Estate in charge”

### **The Art Gallery:**

The Director distributed a Press Release announcing that grant aid funding of up to €1.45m towards the Art Gallery had been secured through the B.M.W. Gateways and Hubs European Regional Development Fund Scheme. This will be added to the existing grant of €650,000 already secured through the Department of Arts, Sports and Tourism Access Scheme, making the total grant now available of €2.15m. The Members welcomed the funding and the plans to proceed with the Art Gallery and Artists studios at Abbey Road, with the exception of Cllr. McFadden. She said she was not in favour of proceeding with an Art Gallery costing €3.2m approx. in these difficult economic times, nor is she in favour of changing the front of the Fr. Matthew Hall or knocking any of the trees. She said she would prefer if the Hall was used for something more inclusive of the entire community. The rest of the Members felt the Gallery was what the people wanted according to the submissions made under the Part 8 process. They felt the town currently lacked cultural infrastructure and the gallery will help promote access and enjoyment of the arts in the town and midlands. They also pointed out that the money is only for an Art Gallery and cannot be transferred and spent on anything else. Cllr. McFadden asked about the title of the Fr. Matthew Hall and why a copy of the Lease had not been given to the Architectural Heritage Group under F.O.I. The Town Clerk responded saying that the Council’s title is a Lease made in 1957 after the original Lease expired. He said it was not covered by F.O.I. as the record was created prior to October 21<sup>st</sup> 1998. He added that he had outlined the contents of the Lease to the Group and that should be sufficient. In response to Cllr. Buckley Byrne’s question about the running of the gallery, the Town Clerk said that a curator would run it on a day to day basis and the Arts Officer would also have a supervising role. He confirmed it would be accessible to the disabled.

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,

Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,

“That we hereby agree to proceed with the provision of the Art Gallery and Artists Studios at the Fr. Matthew Hall and Abbey Road, respectively”.

### **Waste Collection & Disposal:**

The Members felt it would be essential to hear from the Director in charge of Waste Collection before making any decision on its future and so it was agreed to defer this item to a Special Meeting.

### **Traffic Calming at St. Anne's/St. Paul's Terraces:**

The Town Engineer stated that surveys had shown that the speed in this area was below the speed-limit but following Members requests, speed tables will now be provided. He circulated a map showing the proposed locations of 3no. speed tables and said money could be provided in the Budget for 2010. The Members welcomed the proposals.

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,  
seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,  
“Pursuant to the Road Traffic Acts 1961-2006, we hereby approve of the provision of 3no. speed tables in St. Anne's and St. Paul's Terraces at the locations agreed”.

### **Car parking in Kilmacoo Lane:**

The Town Engineer in response to the difficulties being endured by residents in Kilmacoo Lane, circulated proposals for car parking regulation on the road. He proposed putting down double yellow lines on both sides of the roadway, with defined car parking spaces intermittently on one side. The Members welcomed the proposals but were concerned that the residents would be happy with them.

It was proposed by Cllr. Cooney,  
Seconded by Cllr. Moran and resolved,  
“Pursuant to the Road Traffic Acts 1961-2006, we hereby approve of the provision of double yellow lines and defined car-parking spaces in Kilmacoo Lane as outlined on the drawings circulated”.

### **Questions:**

Question 1      Cllr. S. Buckley Byrne:  
“Is the Council able to do anything about the amount of trucks and in particular Learner driver trucks permanently parked on the Old Dublin Road at Kilmartin N6 Roundabout?”

**Answer:**      **This matter will be referred to Westmeath County Council for response.**

Question 2      Cllr. S. Buckley Byrne:  
“Could the Council repair the water valve cover at Norwood Court?”

**Answer:**      **This matter will be referred to Westmeath County Council for response.**

Question 3      Cllr. A. O'Rourke:  
“The work to erect the new epitaph at the side of the Castle has stopped why? and when will work recommence?”

**Answer:** Preparatory work was undertaken by the Town Engineer and a contract to complete the Memorial has been offered to the successful tender.

Question 4. Cllr. A. O'Rourke:  
"Why has the enormous piece of graffiti on the wall at the back of Battery Heights not yet been removed?"

**Answer:** A comprehensive scheme for the removal of graffiti in Battery Heights was undertaken in 2008 under special funding from Pobal. The removal of such graffiti is costly and must be prioritised in the context of overall expenditure. A costing for the removal of this graffiti will be prepared and the carrying out of the work will be examined in the light of remaining budgets for 2009.

Question 5. Cllr. P. Hogan:  
"Will this Council be providing funding for the repair/provision of footpaths in Garrycastle and Altown in the 2010 Budget?"

**Answer:** This area will be examined and considered in the light of priorities and available expenditure for 2010.

Question 6. Cllr. P. Hogan:  
"Can work be completed where bollards were erected some time ago at Bonnavalley and Mardyke Street, as they are unsightly?"

**Answer:** The location of the bollards on the Old Dublin Road at the bottom of Killyon Hill is being considered in the context of the provision of a footpath and the availability of funding by the Area Engineer at this time.

The temporary bollards at O'Neill's on Mardyke St. were put in place following the removal of the trial one-way system in 2008 and the permanent works at this location includes the one-way system which the Council has postponed for the time being.

Question 7. Cllr. G. McFadden:  
"Would this Council put street lighting in Pinewood Close?"

**Answer:** Works at Pinewood Close are planned to commence within the coming month and the provision of public lighting is included in these works.

Question 8. Cllr. G. McFadden:  
“Would this Council put a speed ramp in McCormack Park?”

**Answer:** The matter has been examined and it is considered that there is no justification for the provision of a speed ramp at McCormack Park.

Question 9. Cllr. A. Shaw:  
“What is the projected cost of completing the footpath from Cornamaddy School to the Department of Education on the Ballymahon Road and can this matter be referred to Westmeath County Council to include the completion of same in the 2010 budget?”

**Answer:** The cost of this footpath is of the order of €80,000.00 and the matter will be referred to Westmeath Co. Co. if the members so wish.

Question 10: Cllr. A. Shaw:  
“The exit onto the Dublin Road for Residents of Loughandonning has been a hazard for many years and in particular during tailbacks on the Dublin Road which can block traffic wishing to turn right. Is there a road safety plan to deal with this difficulty and can a temporary measure be put in place to facilitate Residents?”

**Answer:** There is no accident history known to the Council at Reddington Carpets and it is therefore understood the junction operates satisfactorily in relative terms. Any improvement of this junction would require the acquisition of private property which would prove costly and would not be justified.

Question 11: Cllr. K. Moran:  
“Any update on the bus shelter at B&Q?”

**Answer:** The Council has consented in principle to a shelter at this location and advised the proposers. A planning application has not yet been submitted.

**Supplementary Question:**  
“Could the Council write to the people in question?”

**Answer:** Yes, the Town Clerk will write to Clear Channel.

Question 12: Cllr. K. Moran:  
“When will work commence on the Art Gallery?”

**Answer:** The notice to procure contractors will be published at the end of this month and a contractor should be appointed in February 2010.

### **Managers Orders:**

The Members noted the summary of Managers Orders as circulated.

### **Acknowledgement:**

An acknowledgement was noted from the Minister for Housing and Local Services, Mr. Michael Finneran T.D., concerning the issue of funding for Willow Park and Battery Heights and he stated that the matter is being examined.

### **Relocation of Tourist Office:**

A letter was received from Mr. Kevin Kidney, General Manager Fáilte Ireland agreeing to meet with a deputation from the Council and suggesting 3p.m. on Monday October 19<sup>th</sup> 2009 for the meeting. The Members agreed to meet with him at this time.

### **Letter of Thanks:**

The Members noted a letter of thanks from the President of the Community Games for the contribution made by the Council in assisting with the Games during the National Finals in August.

### **Conferences:**

The Members noted the following conferences and the cost thereof:

Limerick	LAMA Winter Seminar	6 <sup>th</sup> & 7 <sup>th</sup> Nov. 09
Athlone	Time Management, Media & IT skills for Councillors	6 <sup>th</sup> to 8 <sup>th</sup> Nov. 09

### **Casual Trading Bye-Laws:**

In response to Cllr. Buckley Byrne’s motion, the Town Clerk stated that new Bye-Laws have been drafted in respect of casual trading at St. Peter’s and St. Mary’s Squares together with

the Civic Square and these will be presented to the November meeting. Cllr. Buckley Byrne welcomed this saying that regulation was badly needed. She and other Members referred to the “chip-van” in St. Peter’s Square, that remains there constantly, which is unfair to the businesses of the area who are paying rates. She also complained that the casual traders take up a lot of space in St. Peter’s Square, but the Town Clerk pointed out that the square is primarily a trading area with the traders having preferences over parking and he added that the Council will take appropriate action against the chip-van owner, when the new Bye-Laws are in place.

### **Derelict Site, Dublin Road:**

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. Buckley Byrne that the site of the old garage will be examined and appropriate notices served under the Derelict Sites Act. The Members welcomed this as one of the petrol pumps could be dangerous and needs attention.

### **Traffic Calming at Magazine Road:**

In response to Cllr. O’Rourke’s motion, the Town Clerk stated that traffic in the area will be examined and a report will be available for the November Meeting.

### **Provision of Cycle Routes:**

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. O’Rourke that Westmeath County Council is currently finalising a Green Routes Strategy for Mullingar, which includes a plan for the provision of a network of cycle and pedestrian routes throughout the town and it is proposed that Athlone Town Council prepare a similar plan for Athlone in 2010. Cllr. O’Rourke welcomed the proposal, as there has been a 20% increase in bicycle purchase he said. Cllr. Moran added that spaces should also be provided for the safe parking of bicycles.

### **Illegal signage:**

In response to Cllr. O’Rourke’s motion, the Town Clerk stated that signage for major local events is permitted for limited periods and specific locations with the consent of the Council under the policies of the Town Development Plan. Unauthorised signage he said is removed on an ongoing basis when it comes to the attention of the Council and in July, letters did issue to business owners with unauthorised signage and many are now in discussions about licencing of their signs. Cllr. O’Rourke said he had no objection to event signs that are time-specific, but others should be removed and appropriate action taken. Cllr. Moran agreed signs should be removed if causing an obstruction, but because of the current difficult economic climate, some leeway should be given with business signs.

### **Regeneration Plan for Willow Park:**

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. Hogan’s motion, that the vast majority of the houses in the Willow Park area are privately owned and the area is therefore not amenable to

the traditional regeneration approach. However he said, the Council is engaged in a multi-agency grouping that is seeking to address local issues and it is proposed that the Council would continue this work. Cllr. Hogan said other areas that had L.A.P.'s had private housing too and some type of plan was needed to bring all the stakeholders in Willow Park together, the resident owners, landlords and students. Cllr. Buckley Byrne said they were getting together already and a big clean-up had been done, with great support from the Council. The Community Worker is also a good support, but she felt a plan for regeneration must come from the people of the area themselves. The Mayor asked if the Community Worker could be kept on, but the Director said this would not be possible, as there was no funding. He added that Willow Park receives a lot of attention from the Council and will continue to do so and he will look into the formation of a basic plan for the area.

### **Traffic Calming in Parnell Square:**

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. Hogan that it was not considered that any additional traffic calming measures were necessary at Parnell Square, but Cllr. Hogan requested that the Town Engineer examine the southern end of the estate again.

### **The future of R.A.P.I.D.:**

Cllr. Hogan requested that the Council write to the Minister for Finance requesting him not to proceed with the proposed recommendation contained in the McCarthy Report to axe the RAPID structures. He said the Council should tell him the great benefits this town has received through RAPID and all the Members supported this motion.

### **Drinking Water Quality in Cloghanboy:**

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. McFadden that the quality of the water will be examined by Westmeath County Council who are the responsible authority, but no complaints have been received by Athlone Area in this regard. Cllr. McFadden welcomed this as she said she had received many complaints from residents of the estate.

### **Drug addiction in Athlone:**

Cllr. McFadden requested that the Council meet with the Regional Drugs Task Force to find ways to stamp out heroin from the town and the Town Clerk said the Task Force will be requested to accept a deputation from the Council. Cllr. McFadden welcomed this as she was concerned over the increasing anti-social behaviour in our estates. Cllr. Buckley Byrne complimented the HSE on the work they do in the town. The Members agreed that the Mayor and Cllrs. McFadden and O'Rourke would make up the Deputation.

### **Special Budget Meeting:**

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. Shaw that the holding of a Special Meeting is a matter for the Members, but the Council will as usual be holding a preliminary budget meeting in advance of the Statutory Meeting. Cllr. Shaw felt that as the times are exceptional, the Council should try and plan as much in advance as possible, but the other Members felt that the pre-budget meeting that they hold every year, is sufficient. The Mayor suggested that this Meeting be held as early as possible this year.

### **Overhead cables:**

In response to Cllr. Shaw's motion the Town Clerk stated that any unnecessary cables should be identified to the Council who will then contact the owners to remove them. Cllr. Shaw said he was seeking this in the context of Tidy Towns, following the Adjudicators Report. The Town Clerk said that putting necessary cables underground is very costly and forms part of the regeneration plan.

### **Footpaths in Parnell Square:**

The Town Clerk in response to Cllr. Moran's motion stated that funds were provided and expended for the repair of footpaths at this location in 2008. Cllr. Moran requested that more money be provided in the Budget for 2010.

### **Traffic Lights at Cloghanboy:**

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. Moran's motion, that the availability of funding to Westmeath County Council for this project is inhibited by the expenditure restrictions imposed on all Local Authorities by the Minister for Finance. Cllr. Moran rejected this response outright and was supported by the Mayor. Cllr. Moran said the NRA were blamed for delays before and now it was money. It has been going on too long and it is increasingly dangerous at this junction. The Director said he was anxious to move on with it but he did not have the €350,000 necessary to do the work. Cllr. Moran said he would not agree to the Budget in W.C.C. until the money was found to do this work.

### **Pinewood Close:**

In response to Cllr. Moran's motion, the Town Clerk stated that the sum of €70,000 was provided in the current budget and work will commence in November. Any shortfall in funding he said, will be sourced through future revenue budgets to be approved by the Members. Cllr. Moran welcomed this response.

### **Deferred Motion:**

#### **Highfield Court & Arcadia Crescent:**

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. Cooney's motion that noise mitigation on the National Primary Network is predominantly provided by landscaping, earthworks and the road surface. The need for additional noise mitigation measures he added, will be referred to Westmeath County Council for discussion with the N.R.A. Cllr. Cooney welcomed the response and he said the trees do help, but the ESB has to cut them back from time to time because of the power lines and he wondered if the lines could be moved.

*This concluded the business of the meeting.*

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