

**Minutes of the April Monthly Meeting of Athlone Town Council, which was held in the Civic Centre, Church Street, Athlone at 6.00p.m. on Monday 6<sup>th</sup> April, 2009.**

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**Attendance:**

Mayor: Cllr. E. Moran

Members: Cllrs. A. Berry, J. Butler, M. Cooney, P. Hogan, R. Lennon, K. Molloy, and M. O'Connell

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

**Apology:**

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

**Cllr. A. Berry:**

The Mayor and Members expressed sadness at the decision of Cllr. Berry not to run in the forthcoming Local Elections. They thanked him for his contribution over the past ten years and wished him well with his retirement. The Town Clerk expressed the same sentiments on his own behalf and that of the staff.

Cllr. Berry thanked everyone for their kind remarks and expressions of goodwill. He said it was a great ten years as there was money available and that he would miss his involvement with the Council. He added that it was his age that was making him finish, as he is in his 79<sup>th</sup> year and he was afraid that over the next five years, he might not be able to give 100% and therefore he decided to finish now. Again he thanked his colleagues, the executive and staff and in particular, the Town Clerk.

**Minutes:**

It was proposed by Cllr. Butler,

Seconded by Cllr. Molloy and resolved,

“That we hereby confirm and adopt the Minutes of the March Monthly Meeting which was held on March 2<sup>nd</sup> 2009”.

### **Matters arising from the Minutes:**

The Director, in response to queries from the Members, stated that the designs for the right turn at Mayfield Grove and the turn into the Orchard have been finalised and should be installed soon. He said that he did not think the road could accommodate an island at Mayfield Grove. There would be a cost element to this too, as it would require power to light it.

In response to Cllr. Hogan, the Town Engineer stated that quotations have been received for the work on the OPD's at John Paul Park and work will commence soon.

The Director informed the Members that the Council now has approval for the pedestrian crossing at Cornamaddy National School.

### **Mayor's Reception:**

The Members agreed to hold a Reception for the Drama Festival Launch on Thursday 23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2009 at 5p.m. in the Civic Centre.

### **A.M.A.I. Conference Motions:**

The Town Clerk informed the Members that motions have to be submitted by May 31<sup>st</sup> 2009 and this year they must relate to "Financing Local Authorities into the Future" and "L.A. Housing Options".

It was agreed to defer this item until the May Meeting.

### **Regeneration of Battery Heights:**

The Director informed the Members of the current situation with the proposed Vision Plan for the Battery Heights Area and circulated his report as follows:

#### **BACKGROUND:**

The Council embarked on an extensive planning exercise for the regeneration of Battery Heights in 2004, which resulted in the creation of a Vision Plan for the area and detailed proposals for Phase I of the scheme in the Lower Batteries. The exercise involved considerable local consultation and the formation of an Action Group to help deliver the agreed vision for the area.

In response to Department of the Environment comments on the Vision Plan and the plans for Phase I, the proposals for the area have been revised somewhat as outlined in this report and accompanying drawing. The Forward Planning Section of the Council has examined the site and the proposals and advised the following Planning Objectives for the area:

- To develop distinctive character areas based upon the provision of community facilities, including the provision of a neighbourhood centre at the heart of the scheme.
- Maximise connectivity to adjoining areas
- Create a good residential environment for existing residents and future occupants
- Provide for safety and security
- Maximise the use of existing zoned land
- Provide for additional housing with a mix of house sizes and tenures
- Provide ‘houses for life’ which will allow later adaptation and conversion for special needs or elderly accommodation.
- Enhance existing open space provision
- Provide Linear Canalside Park
- Provide for expansion of existing Primary School
- Provide for enterprise and employment uses
- Maximise the use of existing community facilities
- Resolve archaeological significance of the site

**Suggested amendments to the Vision Plan for the achievement of a sustainable community, based upon the fundamental principles of good urban design and place-making**

The vision for this area is to provide a sustainable community, the basis of which centres upon the creation of a number of zones within the study area. The zones of activity (numbered 2 – 9 in the accompanying Vision Plan) or area characterisation, which include the provision of enterprise and employment areas have been devised to complement existing and future provision of community services and facilities, which represent the cornerstone of the scheme. Measures have also been proposed to improve connectivity, including greater linkages within the estate and between the estate and surrounding area for both pedestrian and cyclist movement (Linkages A-G in the Vision Plan). These proposals provide for the enhancement of the amenities of the canal and preservation of adjacent lands as a linear park.

The Character Areas are as follows:

***Zone 2 & 3 – Enterprise/Employment Zone:***

Two distinctive enterprise/employment zones are proposed to the north and west of Battery Heights (Area 2 & 3 in the Vision Plan), which are highly accessible in terms of both

vehicular and pedestrian movement. It is anticipated that these workshops/incubator units will act as a catalyst for development in the area and facilitate local employment. Zone 3 is isolated and very exposed particularly when viewed from Old Batteries Road. The site is characterised by steeply sloping ground. There is potential to develop this site for low profile small workshops and enterprise uses, with a pedestrian link through the site from Old Batteries Road.

***Zone 4 – Neighbourhood Centre:***

The existing Primary School acts a focal point within the estate. Having regard to its central position, close proximity to recreational facilities and the merits of the existing built form, it is considered that the Primary school should be retained at its current location. In addition, there is potential for expansion of the existing school to the east and south. The provision of a health centre, community services and a local shop at this location would complement the existing use. It is anticipated that Zone 4 would act as a neighbourhood centre which would serve the local catchment. The acquisition of the adjoining derelict dwelling to the east of the school would facilitate both the expansion of the school and neighbourhood/community services.

***Zone 5 – Community & Recreation Zone:***

Zone 5 consists of two distinctive areas, namely a children’s playground and hard surfaced court and the existing complex. The children’s playground located immediately opposite the Primary School is intensively used and overlooked. The adjoining hard-surfaced court is under-utilised. Consideration should be given to enhancing this facility for use by older children. The existing complex provides essential community services. There is considerable scope to maximise community/recreational uses at this facility and there is a need to extend it to the west. Consideration should also be given to addressing the varying ground levels at this location and the visual impact of same. The Vision Plan provides for improved pedestrian permeability to each recreational node, which is to be enhanced by soft landscaping and street furniture (as depicted by Amenity Link in the plan).

***Zone 8 – Canalside Linear Park:***

The Canal forms the eastern corridor of the study area and provides a valuable amenity to the residents of Battery Heights. The Council has carried out a number of environmental improvements along the canal including provision of street lighting, tree planting and litter control. Notwithstanding, there is potential to promote increased usage of the canal by both pedestrians and cyclists.

***Zone 9 – Scheme of Affordable Housing:***

Zone 9 offers an ideal location at one of the entrances to Battery Heights for the provision of Affordable Housing. The provision of Affordable Housing at this setting would complement existing residential units, provide an attractive approach into the neighbourhood, optimise the use of the existing unsightly vacant plot and a better tenure mix.

The Vision Plan for Battery Heights secures higher residential densities by means of introducing additional residential units, which create new streets and close off unsightly back garden areas exposed to public view. This in turn will lead to an overall enhancement of security within the scheme by means of improved opportunities for overlooking of streets and public spaces, greater levels of activity and pedestrian movement and an overall visual enhancement through planting of public spaces, the canal linear park and site boundaries. Dwellings looking onto gables would be removed or reversed so that all residential units would have proper views.

### **Current Position**

The response of the Department of the Environment to these proposals is generally positive. In particular, the Department may be in a position to fund environmental improvements in the short term, with more expensive proposals on hold pending the upturn in the public finances. In this regard, the Planning Section is preparing proposals for immediate implementation. These include landscaping to the rear roads and the construction of a new access road to the Community Centre.

Cllr. Molloy thanked the Director for his Report and requested that a meeting be arranged now with the Residents of Battery Heights, together with himself and Cllrs. Hogan and Lennon. Cllrs. Lennon and O'Connell expressed disappointment with the new Plan especially where the school was concerned, as they felt it was a small site and the school needed to be bigger. Cllr. Cooney asked if this Plan replaced the old one or just some aspects of it, while Cllr. Butler welcomed the new plan because there would be no more houses being built and the residents would be happier with this. He also said he was glad to see the environmental improvements in the area and he hoped something could be done to protect the area along the canal from littering.

The Director said that there is some scope to extend the school and that the Plan has been amended both to reflect the current economic times and to gain the approval of the Department. In response to queries about the funding, the Director said he would be looking for €300,000 to €500,000.

### **Managers Orders:**

The Members noted the summary of Managers Orders as circulated.

### **Questions:**

Question 1      Cllr. K. Molloy:  
“Can this Council write to Garda Superintendent and ask him to take action against footpath cyclists?”

**Answer:**      Yes

Question 2 Cllr. K. Molloy:  
“What is position regarding completion enforcement re car park at Texas Shopping Centre?”

**Answer:** **Planning application for scheme to complete is expected to be submitted shortly.**

Question 3 Cllr. J. Butler:  
“Can this Council ensure that the gullies are cleaned at Ganly Place?”

**Answer:** **This matter will be examined by the Town Engineer.**

Question 4. Cllr. J. Butler:  
“When will work start at the back of the Castle and how long will it take?”

**Answer:** **Works on the main part of the project are intended to recommence in the coming weeks on receipt of the construction drawings from the consultant and a detailed programme and sequencing of works will be agreed with the traders organisations in the area and advised to the Council in due course.**

Question 5. Cllr. R. Lennon:  
“Is the developer keeping in line with the timeframe it has given to Athlone Town Council to finalise the works to be carried out at the Woodville estate?”

**Answer:** **A deadline has been set by the District Court and the issue is now a matter for the Court.**

Question 6. Cllr. R. Lennon:  
“When will the company hired by Athlone Town Council carry out a niches and marketing study for the West side of town?”

**Answer:** **A preliminary assessment has been received from the Consultant and is being considered in the context of a requirement for a more focused approach.**

- Question 7. Cllr. A. Berry:  
“What progress has Athlone Town Council made to put in place at the Athlone Castle the Military Monument?”
- Answer:** **Tenders for the work are being sought and the consent of the Minister to undertake the work has just been received.**
- Question 8. Cllr. P. Hogan:  
“Has this Council or Westmeath County Council carried out a feasibility study for the provision of a roundabout at Baylough?”
- Answer:** **This matter is being considered as part of the traffic calming scheme for Baylough and the forthcoming temporary closure of the Monksland slip road off the Athlone Relief Road.**
- Question 9. Cllr. P. Hogan:  
“Can this Council contact Westmeath County Council in an effort to have Coosan Point Road marked between Old Bog Road and Coosan National School?”
- Answer:** **Resurfacing works over this section of road are planned in the current year and the matter will be considered at that stage. Roads markings are not provided on roads less than 6 metres in width.**
- Question 10. Cllr. M. O’Connell:  
“Why are the lights not yet connected/available for use at the Multi Use Games Areas in Woodlands Grove and Brawney?”
- Answer:** **The appropriate metering/charging system for the operation of these lights was under consideration and has now been decided upon and the installation of this system will be carried out over the coming weeks.**
- Question 11. Cllr. M. O’Connell:  
“What is the status of the Athlone Housing Forum and the Work plan that was created in 2005/2006?”
- Answer:** **The Athlone Housing Forum has de facto been superseded by the Athlone Implementation Team for Rapid Areas, the Joint Policing Committee and focused committees for particular areas as required for example Battery Heights and Willow Park estate.**

**In addition the Housing Officer and Housing Liaison Officer support the establishment of Residents Associations and occasionally attend Residents meetings when requested.**

**These arrangements provide sufficient contact between the Council and its housing estate and there is an open door policy and in regard to meetings with associations and individual tenants.**

Question 12. Cllr. M. Cooney:

“When is it planned for the footpath improvement works at Arcadia to be carried out?”

**Answer: These works will be carried out over the next 2 months.**

### **Carers Allowance and One Parent Family Payment:**

The Town Clerk circulated letters from the Department of Social & Family Affairs which outlined the schemes in detail and stated that there are no plans to make cuts to either of these schemes.

### **Old Shed at Docks:**

The Members supported Cllr. Molloy’s motion that the Council write again to the O.P.W. to request them to remove the old shed at the Docks. Cllr. Butler suggested that a Derelict Site Notice be served on them but the Town Clerk said that he would write to them again first.

### **Press units at Millbank:**

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. Molloy’s request to replace the presses in Millbank that are melting and burning beside the ranges, that the Town Engineer will have them examined and rectify the problems.

### **Traffic control on Magazine Road:**

In response to Cllr. Molloy’s motion, the Town Clerk stated that the matter will be examined by the Town Engineer.

### **Sewage smells Garden Vale/Crescent:**

The Town Clerk stated the Westmeath County Council have recently examined the public sewers in this area and they are fully operational, but there might be an issue with the private sewers. Cllr. Butler requested that the Council write to the E.H.O. to investigate the problem.

### **Out of use signs:**

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. Butler that the Council will write to any business identified by the Members as having signs no longer in use.

### **Old Shopping Centre Car-Park:**

In response to Cllr. Butler's motion, the Town Clerk said that a planning application for the completion of these works was recently returned as invalid, but a new application is expected shortly and it is hoped work can then be completed.

### **Sewage problems in Griffith Street:**

The Town Clerk stated that the Council is not aware of the alleged sewage effluent problems being a regular occurrence. He said there was one incident recently at this location where the public sewer overflowed and this was as a result of the unauthorised deposition of fats, oils and greases into the sewers, particularly by some businesses involved in the preparation of food in the area. He added that Westmeath County Council intends to pursue this matter with its powers under the Water Services Act and to issue proceedings where necessary.

### **Refuse Collection Prices:**

In response to Cllr. Lennon's motion the Town Clerk stated that the domestic refuse collection charge is determined by resolution of the Members at the Annual Budget Meeting and the Council's finances for the year are predicated on this amongst other factors in determining the Budget for the year. He said the level of the charge set is also influenced by other factors such as the procured collection contract, waste disposal charges, administrative and printing costs. The charge applied is already subsidised by the Council and the Council also operates a waiver scheme which does not apply in the private sector and would be equivalent to about a 25% discount on private offers.

Cllr. Cooney said he hoped the public continued to support our collection as we need to maintain the waiver system, as we have a responsibility to the less well off.

### **Maintenance of the Fr. Matthew Hall:**

In response to Cllr. Lennon's request, the Town Clerk stated that the Fr. Matthew Hall is regularly monitored by the staff of the Council, as has been stated in the recent past and any necessary repairs will be carried out.

### **Register of Landlords:**

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. Berry that there is a statutory requirement on landlords to register private residential rented property with the Private Residential Tenancies Board and the Register of names is provided to the Council annually.

The Members in general agreed with Cllr. Berry when he said it is almost impossible for some tenants to trace the landlords and there should be available documentation with this information on it.

### **Sale of 'legal drugs':**

It was agreed to write to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform requesting him to put in place statutory reform prohibiting the sale of legal drugs (specifying these) in shops. Cllr. Hogan said that 'party pills' are now illegal but are still on sale in 2 outlets in Athlone and he said these should be closed down.

### **Traffic signs in Retreat Park:**

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. Hogan that yield signs are not considered appropriate at junctions within residential areas, but the Town Engineer will examine the area to ascertain if any signage improvements are warranted or necessary. Cllr. Hogan said something should be done in the interest of safety.

### **Horses in the Derries:**

In response to Cllr. Hogan's motion the Town Clerk stated that any incident notified will be forwarded to the Gardai and Westmeath County Council for enforcement in the context of the control of Horses Act 1996. Cllr. Hogan welcomed this response and was supported by Cllrs. Butler and Cooney who said the disruption to people in that area is unacceptable. However Cllr. E. Moran said the horses are not running wild but are well fenced in. They do have to be moved on occasion but people built there knowing that the existing family there dealt in horses and there could be disruptions at times.

### **Extension of the Bus Service:**

The Members supported Cllr. Hogan's motion and it was agreed to write to the bus operators requesting them to extend their service to Creggan, Clonbonny and Carrickobrien.

### **Traffic Safety measures in Baylough:**

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. O'Connell that such matters are being considered as part of the proposed traffic calming scheme for this area. Cllr. O'Connell said it is very dangerous at the Grove as cars reverse out onto the main road and there are lots of children crossing to the shop from Annesfield Woods. Cllr. Butler asked when the pedestrian crossing that was in Baylough at Abbeygarth, is going to be put back.

### **Cleaning of the Canal:**

In response to Cllr. O'Connell's motion the Town Clerk stated that the litter is periodically removed and all litter along the canal will be cleared in the coming weeks. However he said,

this area is consistently the subject of heavy indiscriminate littering and community involvement in reporting such offences is necessary to deal with the matter fully.

Cllr. O'Connell asked about the canal itself and if there are proposals to clean it and was informed that there is no budget for this work this year. Cllr. Molloy thanked the Town Engineer for all the work that has been done.

### **Litter bins for Annesfield Woods:**

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. O'Connell that this estate is not in the charge of Athlone Town Council and the installation and servicing of such litter bins is a matter for the developer or the residents association.

### **Investment in Primary Education:**

Cllr. Cooney requested the Council call on the Government to maintain investment in our primary education system, not to increase class size at primary level and to ensure that the educational opportunities of our children are protected. This was generally supported and it was agreed to write to the Minister for Education.

### **Financial Restrictions:**

In response to Cllr. Cooney's motion the Town Clerk stated that the Department of the Environment issued a circular in February, of this year requiring the following controls in regard to finance:

- 1) Revenue accounts must be balanced at the end of the year with no deficit for the year.
- 2) Capital accounts must be balanced at years end.
- 3) Net increase in borrowing is limited to levels sanctioned.
- 4) Net bank position limited to the previous years level.

As well as these requirements, there is also a total ban on staff recruitment, replacement and upgrading.

Cllr. Cooney asked what impact this will have on the Council at a practical level and the Town Clerk informed him that we cannot spend more than we take in and we must maintain our bank balance, but we can spend capital allocations. The Director added that we must get Department approval before buying any house and we cannot enter into any roads contract without approval from the Department of Transport.

Cllr. Cooney asked if there was any point in writing to the Minister and the Town Clerk advised it better to wait until after the Budget announcements.

*This concluded the business of the meeting.*

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