

Minutes of the February Monthly Meeting of Athlone Town Council, which was held in the Civic Centre, Church Street, Athlone at 6.00p.m. on Monday 7th February, 2011.

Attendance:

Mayor: Cllr. S. Buckley Byrne

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

Apology:

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

Minutes:

It was proposed by Cllr. Cooney,

Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,

“That we hereby adopt and confirm the Minutes of the January Monthly Meeting which was held on January 4th 2011 and the Statutory Budget Meeting which was held on January 11th 2011.

Vote of Sympathy:

Cllr. Hogan expressed his sympathy to Mr. Tom Maloney a former employee of the Council, on the recent death of his daughter, Annacita. The Town Clerk joined in the expression of sympathy on behalf of the management and staff.

Matters Arising:

The Town Clerk advised Cllr. Hogan that he is awaiting a response from the Secretary General of the Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources regarding the postal service.

Cllr. Shaw asked that the Minutes of the Budget Meeting be amended on page 7 to read “*Cllr. Shaw asked if the Council attended the AGM of such management companies*” instead of Cllr. Hogan. The Director then confirmed that Council representatives do attend these meetings.

Cllr. O'Rourke also asked that the Minutes of the Budget Meeting be amended on page 7 regarding the budget for ranges, to read as follows: "*Cllr. O'Rourke withdrew his proposal for an extra allocation of €20,000 for the provision of ranges, on the understanding that the Town Engineer would undertake an Audit of the Councils existing heating systems and this was agreed*".

Signage Plan:

The Town Engineer circulated the final proposals for Major Junction Signage in the Town, the Report having been updated following the October Monthly Meeting. The Members welcomed the proposals.

It was proposed by Cllr. Cooney,
Seconded by Cllr. Buckley Byrne and resolved,
"We hereby approve of the proposals for signage throughout the town, in accordance with the Report of the Town Engineer, January 2011".

Taking in Charge:

The Town Clerk advised the Members that the proposal to take in charge the roads and services in Abbeygarth, The Glen and Retreat Mews, had been advertised, and no submissions had been received. He recommended approval of the taking in charge by the Council.

It was proposed by Cllr. Hogan,
Seconded by Cllr. Shaw and resolved,
"Pursuant to the provisions of the Roads Act 1993, the Local Government Acts 1925-2001 and the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010, we hereby approve of the taking in charge of the roads and services in the housing estates at Abbeygarth, The Glen and Retreat Mews".

Taking in Charge commencement:

The Town Clerk advised the Members that the Council propose to take in charge the inner section of the road to the Athlone Community College, which serves some private houses too.

It was proposed by Cllr. McFadden,
Seconded by Cllr. Henson and resolved,
"Pursuant to the provisions of the Roads Act 1993, the Local Government Acts 1925-2001 and the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010, we hereby approve of the commencement of the process to take the road to the Athlone Community College in charge".

IBAL Report:

The Town Clerk informed the Members that Athlone's ranking improved from 48th to 42nd and went from "littered" to "moderately littered". The Members welcomed the Report. Cllr. Cooney said it was good to see that all the main roads had done well this time and the two Grade D sites were private property. He suggested taking action against the owners of the car-park behind Paws Pet Shop as they are quick to clamp cars and against the owners of the Dublin Road site. Cllr. Hogan asked if there were any explanatory notes for the new grading system and if there had been any response from Dr. Cavanagh. The Town Clerk said no information was received regarding the new grading system and that Dr. Cavanagh advised the Council to meet with An Taisce, not him, as they carry out the inspections. It was agreed to write to them to seek a meeting and to the owners of the littered sites regarding a clean up.

Bollards in Connolly Street:

The Town Clerk stated that the bollards had been installed in Connolly Street in 2000 to pedestrianise the street at the request of the residents in accordance with Section 38 of the Road Traffic Act 1994. In recent times, disquiet had arisen between the residents and the Left Bank Traders, the latter requiring freer access to the backs of their properties. On foot of correspondence from the Council, both sides nominated an individual to hold a key, thus allowing access when required, while also maintaining the pedestrian nature of the street. Mr. Noel O'Connor (Traders) and Mr. Peter Bolger (Residents) would represent the respective sides and would receive instructions for the use of the keys.

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. O'Rourke and resolved,

"That we issue keys to Mr. O'Connor and Mr. Bolger with instructions regarding use and thereby allow the bollards to remain in Connolly Street".

Cllr. McFadden welcomed the outcome which satisfied both sides.

No.59 Connaught Street:

The Town Clerk advised the Members that this property had been acquired by C.P.O. It is a 3 storey house, vacant and derelict. The plans and particulars to redevelop it as a 2 storey, 4 bedroom house, were advertised in October 2010, placed on public display and one submission was received. This was from Mr. William Hannon who resides next door at 57 Connaught Street and his concerns were about the shared chimney, the height difference, sound proofing, measures to protect his property during construction, including his shed and the loss of sunlight. He did welcome the development of the derelict site. In response the Council will liaise with the Consulting Engineers employed by Mr. Hannon and address their concerns and identify solutions based on best practice. In regard to sunlight, it is considered the reduction in height and bulk of the buildings will not have a material impact on sunlight levels.

He added that the development is in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the Town Centre / Connaught Street area and accords with the objectives and policies of the Town Development Plan and he recommended the development be proceeded with.

Cllrs. Molloy and McFadden welcomed the development, but asked that Mr. Hannon be dealt with sympathetically. Mr. Molloy expressed his sympathy to Mr. Hannon and his family on the recent death of his wife Mary.

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. McFadden and resolved,

“Pursuant to the provisions of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010 and Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2006, we approve of the proposed development at 59 Connaught Street, as placed on public display”.

Athlone Art & Heritage Ltd:

The Town Clerk advised the Members that the Council has established a company known as “Athlone Art and Heritage Ltd.”. It is a private limited company, with the Council as the sole shareholder. It was established to manage and operate the Councils art and heritage/tourism facilities and to market, promote and encourage their use. These facilities are Athlone Castle, Athlone Art Gallery and the Artists Studios.

To enable the company to retain a Council presence and to benefit from external expertise, he recommended that the Board of 12no. Members be made up as follows:

- 1) Mayor (Ex Officio & Chairperson)
- 2) Director Services
- 3) Town Clerk
- 4) Arts Officer
- 5) Gearoid O’Brien – Town Librarian
- 6) Nominee – Athlone Chamber of Commerce

- 7) Nominee of professional Artists
- 8) Nominee of A.I.T.
- 9) Nominee of Dean Crowe Theatre
- 10) Nominee of Old Athlone Society
- 11) Nominee of local amateur artists
- 12) Local historian
- 13) Nominee of Westmeath County Council (Athlone area)
- 14) Nominee of Athlone Town Council

The Director added that the membership of the Board would be reviewed every two years, taking account of attendance and interest of the Members and any outside interests that might be expressed. Cllr. Cooney suggested that the Manager of the company be a member of Athlone eCom also. In response to Cllr. O'Rourke's query, it was agreed to place the nominations of the Town Council Member, on the March Agenda.

It was proposed by Cllr. Cooney,
Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,
"We hereby approve of the establishment of Athlone Art & Heritage Ltd. and the structure of the Board as set out above".

Cllr. Buckley Byrne thanked the Town Clerk for progressing the company to this stage.

Car-park at O'Connell Street:

The Town Engineer circulated a drawing detailing the layout of the proposed carpark, comprising of 56 spaces and 5 disabled parking spaces. Issues arose regarding the screening at the rear near the back gardens of Parnell Square. It is proposed to erect a solid timber fence on top of the existing embankment to provide adequate screening and to landscape some locations to cover walls. In answer to questions from the Members, the Town Engineer advised that this carpark will be a short term facility, the landscaping will be low level, the one entrance/exit will be on O'Connell Street and the method of payment has not been decided yet. The Director advised that the Part 8 process should take approximately two months and two months following that, he hoped the work would commence. Some Members were concerned about the timing in conjunction with Phase 2 of the Street Enhancement Scheme on the Westside. They felt the two jobs together would cause too much disruption to the businesses of the area and Cllr. McFadden asked the Director for his assurance that the carpark would be provided, before Phase 2 started. The Director said he could give no such assurance but he felt Phase 2 would not take many carparking spaces out of use and Cllr. Molloy said not to postpone Phase 2 for any reason. The Westside are waiting a long time for it and it should proceed. The Director advised that he would meet with the Traders again before any work commences.

It was proposed by Cllr. Cooney,
Seconded by Cllr. Molloy and resolved,
"Pursuant to the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010 and Part 8 of the Planning

and Development Regulations 2001-2010, we hereby approve of the commencement of the Part 8 planning process for the development of a carpark at O'Connell Street in accordance with the drawing circulated”.

Managers Orders:

The Members noted the summary of Managers Orders as circulated.

Questions:

Question 1. Cllr. P. Hogan:

“When will Killyon Hill be resurfaced and lights in general area repaired?”

Answer: Localised repair works have recently been carried out on Killyon Hill but there are no current proposals to resurface this road. However, it will be examined in the context of the expenditure proposals for the 2011 Roads Block Grant.

Question 2. Cllr. P. Hogan:

“Can this Council make concealed entrance at Moore View safer by replacing signage and providing rumble stripes”

Answer: The advance Concealed Entrance signage at this location has been removed by others on numerous occasions and is currently being replaced by the Council. The provision of rumble strips was considered previously but was deemed to be unacceptable from a noise viewpoint.

Question 3. Cllr. A. Shaw:

“Will the Council undertake badly needed footpath repair work at Retreat Heights on the main road where damage has been caused by protruding tree roots?”

Answer: The trees at this location need to be removed in order to prevent this damage recurring and the residents have been asked in the past to submit a collective petition to the Council agreeing to the removal of these trees and same is awaited.

Question 4. Cllr. A. Shaw:

“In relation to Athlone By-Pass work currently underway, will the Council provide regular monthly updates to Councillors over the term of the works, so that we are in a position to keep our constituents informed of ongoing work and progress of the project?”

Answer: The roadworks warning signs currently in place on the Athlone Relief Road meet with the requirements for such signs, as set down in the Traffic Signs Manual and they are in excess of these requirements. The Councils' websites www.Athlone.ie and www.Westmeathcoco.ie have a web page outlining details of the scheme and the extent and duration of the works. These web pages will be updated as the phasing of the works progresses to show details of traffic diversions for each stage underway at a particular time. In addition, the National Roads Design office is in contact with the local newspapers on a continual basis and an email system is being set up to advise the Elected Members and local media and interest groups of ongoing progress updates.

Question 5. Cllr. A. O'Rourke:
"A draft plan for control / management of traffic on Magazine Road was discussed some months ago, when will this plan be available for discussion?"

Answer: These proposals will be brought before the March meeting of Athlone Town Council.

Question 6. Cllr. G. McFadden:
"Can this Council be given an update on the water situation in St. Patrick's Terrace and Lower Irishtown?"

Answer: The watermain supplying this area ruptured during the Christmas period. This break occurred under an unauthorised rear house extension which was built over the watermain at some time in the past and was most likely due to the loading placed by the foundations of this building on the watermain. It was therefore not possible to repair the burst under the building but instead once the problem was located, a new watermain was extended along the rear access road and connections were provided for the affected householders. The old watermain will be terminated on 21st February and works to the new watermain extension were practically complete on 31st January 2011. Westmeath County Council as the Sanitary Authority has decided to pay the reasonable costs associated with the connection to the houses incurred by affected property owners based on tenders received by the owners and submitted to the Council. Property owners will be responsible for the work undertaken within their properties.

Closure of Loughloe House:

A letter from Joe Ruane, H.S.E. was note by the Members. It merely outlined the closure date and that the last residents were transferred to St. Vincent's Hospital. The Members felt there was little point to it.

Primary Care Site:

The Members noted a letter from the HSE dated February 1st 2011, stating that they had received two valid tenders for the primary care site at Clonbrusk and hoped to begin discussions with the preferred tenderer within two weeks. They could then announce the programme for the development of the Primary Care Centre for Athlone.

Management of the Shannon:

The Members noted a letter from the OPW which restated that the ESB and Waterways Ireland control the sluices on the Shannon and that twice weekly water level forecasts are now being issued to all local authorities along the Shannon catchment. The Town Engineer confirmed that he is receiving these forecasts.

Begging legislation:

The Members welcomed the letter from the Department of Justice stating that the Criminal Justice (Public Order) Act 2011 has been signed into law and it gives the Gardai new powers to deal with begging at certain locations, aggressive organised begging and living off the proceeds.

Restructuring V.E.C.'s:

The Members noted a letter from the Department of Education and Skills, seeking suggestions or observations regarding the title "Vocational Education", the Headquarter location and the future composition of each committee under the Government Reform proposals. Cllr. Cooney suggested that the current and past Members of the VEC come together to draft a submission. The Members were more concerned about the reduction in the V.E.C's from 33 to 16, than about the name or Headquarters location. It was agreed that the Mayor, Town Clerk, Cllrs. Henson, McFadden, Molloy and Hogan meet to discuss the submission at 9a.m. in the Civic Centre on Thursday 17th 2011.

Conferences:

The Members noted the location and cost of the following conferences:

Letterkenny	-	Colmcille Heritage Trust	-	25 th - 27 th February, 2011
Carlow	-	Tourism Conference	-	3 rd - 5 th March, 2011
Enniscorthy	-	1916 Conference	-	26 th March, 2011
Athlone	-	Regional Seminar on Planning & Development (Amendment) Act 2010	-	15 th April, 2011
Dundalk	-	LAMA Spring Conference	-	29 th – 30 th April, 2011

Littering at Golden Island Road:

In response to Cllr. Henson's motion, the Town Clerk stated that the Council is currently liaising with a CCTV service provider with a view to selecting areas where high volumes of littering have been encountered within the administrative area of Athlone Town Council. This project will be administered on a pilot basis initially and based on results, will be extended or withdrawn. The Goldenisland Road can be included for consideration as a possible location as part of this project.

Water shortages at St. Patrick's Terrace:

In response to a joint motion from Cllrs. Henson and Hogan, the Town Clerk stated that the watermain supplying this area ruptured during the Christmas period. This break occurred under an unauthorised rear house extension which was built over the watermain at some time in the past and was most likely due to the loading placed by the foundations of this building on the watermain. It was therefore not possible to repair the burst under the building but instead once the problem was located, a new watermain was extended along the rear access road and connections were provided for the affected householders. The old watermain will be terminated on 21st February and works to the new watermain extension were practically complete on 31st January 2011. Westmeath County Council as the Sanitary Authority has decided to pay the reasonable costs associated with the connection to the houses incurred by affected property owners based on tenders received by the owners and submitted to the Council. Property owners will be responsible for the work undertaken within their properties. To clarify matters, the Director confirmed that the Council are accepting quotes for connecting the properties to the mains and have agreed to pay all reasonable costs. The Members welcomed this and hoped it would be a speedy process.

The prescription of larium:

Cllr. Hogan asked that the Council write to the Minister for Defence requesting him to cease the practice of prescribing larium to army personnel serving in malarial countries, as the associated side effects of depression, insomnia, paranoia and suicidal tendencies are very severe. All the Members supported this and it was agreed to write to the Secretary General of the Department of Defence.

Cornamaddy National School:

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. Hogan's motion, that a planning decision is a quasi-judicial decision made by the County Manager and can only be determined in the context of a live planning application being submitted to the Council for consideration. Cllr. Hogan was concerned that the school might be refused planning permission, if they reapply to build on their existing site, because of the change in its zoning, but he was advised that it could be dealt with by means of a variation to the Town Development Plan (due for review in 2012) or by material contravention.

Public Lighting Maintenance:

The Town Clerk advised Cllr. Shaw that the contract with Airtricity for public lighting maintenance terminated on December 31st 2010 and that the work is presently being undertaken on an ad hoc basis by local Electrical Contractors pending the procurement of a new contractor on a county or regional basis. There is an engineer in Mullingar working full time on securing the best contract. In response to queries, the Director said that there is a saving of about €100,000 by doing this and it will give the Council more control over this infrastructure and they intend to improve the equipment they used. Members complained about many lights being off for some time and the safety issues involved. The Director said that the Council had only taken over since January and were still coming to grips with it. He asked Members to report lights out to the Town Engineer and added that patrols also will be going around at night to log the ones needing attention. The Members asked that they receive and Report on the situation at the March Meeting.

Multi-Annual budgets:

Cllr. Shaw requested that the Council write to the new Minister for the Environment when elected, asking him to reform the present system of financing Councils, from one of annual budgeting to a multi annual system, in order to reduce waste and provide greater certainty for financial planning by Councils as well as local rate payers. The Town Clerk informed Cllr. Shaw that there used to be a system of multi-annual budgets for Housing, but the system was changed to one annual budget. It was agreed however to write to the new Minister.

Building Control Regulations:

In response to Cllr. Shaw's motion the Town Clerk advised that Westmeath County Council and Athlone Town Council have a designated Building Control section, that undertakes the duties required under the current legislation, including a 15% inspection rate. However the area of Building Control is self regulating. Cllr. Shaw said this is what he wants to change, as the current system does not have adequate consumer protection. Cllr. Cooney agreed with the thrust of the Motion but felt it was not feasible without huge resources being made available to the Council. He suggested the onus be put on the builders supervising engineers.

It was agreed to write to the new Minister for the Environment requesting greater consumer protection for the future, through new Building Control Regulations.

Text messaging service:

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. O'Rourke's motion that a text messaging service would be demanding in terms of maintenance and the financial cost of texting. Furthermore it may be of limited value as it would be almost impossible for the Council to direct messages to relevant parties only. Cllr. O'Rourke however felt that texting would be worth investigating as it is people friendly and relatively inexpensive. Other Members supported this and the Director agreed to seek advice from the Head of I.T. in Mullingar.

Leasing advertising space:

In response to Cllr. O'Rourke's motion the Town Clerk advised that there are significant safety issues associated with the placement of advertisements on roundabouts. However the provision of discreet signs on the approach to roundabouts which would not distract drivers maybe a viable alternative. The Director added that an investigation will be carried out to assess suitable roundabouts and their expressions of interest can be sought. Cllr. O'Rourke welcomed this potential new revenue source.

Water charges deduction:

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. O'Rourke's motion that Westmeath County Council charge for commercial water supplied on a measured basis and customers only pay for what is supplied. In this circumstance, there is no overcharging or any reason to alter the charges made. Cllr. O'Rourke appreciated that but felt that the Council should pay towards the alternative water supply that businesses had to seek. This was not supported however and the Director advised that the Council do not guarantee the water supply and could not pay for out-sourced water.

Dublin Road Footpath:

The Town Clerk advised Cllr. Buckley Byrne that the footpaths in question are maintained by Westmeath County Council and the matter of funding their repair can be referred to the Athlone Area Committee for consideration. Cllr. Buckley Byrne asked if the Area Engineer would please examine this footpath and she said she would raise it at the Area Meeting.

Disruption on the N6:

In response to Cllr. Buckley Byrne's motion, the Town Clerk stated that the roadworks warning signs currently in place on the Athlone Relief Road meet with the requirements for such signs, as set down in the Traffic Signs Manual and they are in excess of these requirements. The Councils' websites www.athlone.ie and www.westmeathcoco.ie have a web page outlining details of the scheme and the extent and duration of the works. These web pages will be updated as the phasing of the works progresses to show details of traffic diversions for each stage underway at a particular time. In addition, the National Roads Design office is in contact with the local newspapers on a continual basis and an email system is being set up to advise the elected members and local media and interest groups of ongoing progress updates.

Cllr. Shaw asked when the email system would commence and the Director said he would check it out the next day. Cllr. Buckley Byrne felt the warning signs were not back far enough but the Director stated that the required countdown started 800m from the works and that there is a speed limit of 50k on the N6, but all the signage is being ignored by the travelling public.

Traffic build-ups at Creggan:

The Town Clerk advised Cllr. Buckley Byrne that the traffic build-up at the N6 roundabout at Creggan, will be examined in conjunction with the National Roads Design Office and a Report will be brought back to the Members. Cllr. Buckley Byrne welcomed this.

Parking difficulties Connaught Street:

In response to Cllr. McFadden's motion, the Town Clerk stated that this matter will be investigated by the Traffic Wardens and any infringements will be dealt with. He pointed out that Residents Permits do not allow daytime parking on the street. They have to use the carpark, therefore residents should not be causing the problem. Cllr. McFadden said the business people were complaining to her about the residents parking all day and she asked that the Council write to them to remind them that they must use the carpark in the day time. It was also agreed that the Traffic Wardens visit the area.

Heating in houses at Hallsbridge:

The Town Clerk advised Cllr. McFadden that the Council will investigate and cost the provision of solid fuel heating in these houses, but the Town Engineer added that the apartments will not be suitable for solid fuel heating.

General Election 2011:

Cllr. Cooney wished all the Members well who are seeking election in the upcoming General Election and the other Members joined in the good wishes.

This concluded the business of the meeting.