

Minutes of the July Monthly Meeting of Athlone Town Council, which was held in the Civic Centre, Church Street, Athlone at 6.00p.m. on Monday 6th July, 2009.

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
Ms. Anne McNamara, Assistant Staff Officer

Votes of Sympathy:

All the Members wished to be associated with Cllr. Hogan's expression of sympathy to the Bartley family in Sarsfield Square on the death of Mrs. Bartley (mother of Mary Gavin) and with Cllr. Moran's expression of sympathy to the Gately Family on the untimely death of John.

Minutes:

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,

"That we hereby confirm and adopt the Minutes of the June Monthly Meeting which was held on June 2nd 2009 and the Annual Meeting which was held on June 15th 2009".

Matters arising from the Minutes:

Cllr. Moran was informed that the Council did intend to erect a banner at the Fr. Matthew Hall with an artist's impression of the new Art Gallery on it.

Cllr. McFadden requested that the letter from the Minister for Health and Children concerning legislation governing the sale of 'legal drugs' be circulated to all the Members and it was agreed to do so.

Disposal of Land:

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,

Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,

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

Schedule:

| <u>Description of property:</u> | <u>Name of Purchaser:</u> | <u>Purchase Price:</u> |
|--|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 12 St. Anne’s Tce. | Gillian Curtin | €39.30 |
| 2 St. Bridget’s Tce. | Patrick & Irene Kenna | €19.01 |

Cornamagh & Irishtown Local Area Plan:

It was proposed by Cllr. Cooney,

Seconded by Cllr. Molloy and resolved,

“That we defer consideration of the 2no. Local Area Plans until such time as the new Members have been given a presentation on them”.

It was agreed that the new Members be given a presentation on the Plans, following their Induction Course on the 21st July, 2009 and that would then be followed by a public meeting to adopt the Plans or otherwise.

The Induction Course to take place at 4.30p.m., the Local Area Plans Presentation at 5.30p.m. and the Public Meeting at 6p.m. on July 21st 2009.

Nomination to W.C.C. Strategic Policy Committee:

It was proposed by Cllr. McFadden,

Seconded by Cllr. Henson and resolved,

“That we hereby elect Cllr. Shaw as the second Town Council member of a Westmeath County Council Strategic Policy Committee”.

I.B.A.L. Report:

The Director of Services circulated the Report and expressed disappointment at its content. He said he did not consider it representative of the Town, especially the core of the town which is doing very well, due to the constant and hard work of the Town Engineer and his staff and the Tidy Towns committee. He commented that 5 of the sites were on the outskirts of town, outside the jurisdiction of the Town Council. However he added that we must take the Report seriously and learn from it. He assured the Members that there had been no cut-back on the Councils expenditure on street cleaning and litter management. It remains at €52,000.

All the Members expressed disappointment with the Report but agreed we must act on it. They suggested working more closely with Roscommon and Westmeath County Councils to try and improve the approach roads to the town, enforcing the Litter legislation better, reviewing the Litter Management Plan and inviting Dr. Tom Cavanagh to meet with them at a Monthly Meeting.

The Director acknowledged their comments and suggestions and agreed to do whatever is practical and to invite Dr. Cavanagh to a meeting and to have the item on the September Agenda.

Road Closures for Triathlon 2009:

The Town Clerk outline the proposed closures agreed to after consultation and said the difference between last year and this year, is that the Baylough Road will be open from 12.30p.m. to 3p.m., from 4.30p.m. and 5.15p.m. and opening permanently at 7p.m. He added that also as race traffic permits, vehicles will be able to go to the west side via Hallsbridge, but the east side will remain closed, as there is plenty of alternative routes.

Cllr. Shaw acknowledged the work done by the Council, Liam Heavin and his organisers, but said they must acknowledge the sacrifices being made by the traders and business people of the area. Cllr. O'Rourke said the consultation process was much better this year and traders felt more involved. Cllr. McFadden welcomed the chance to showcase the town but felt the message should go out that a lot of the town is still open for business over the weekend. Cllr. Hogan said that the erection of the marquee in the Civic Square this year was more promising than previous years, but it does cause a major inconvenience and we should do everything we can to help the business concern including the provision of a temporary taxi rank, if possible. All the Members agreed with these views and the Town Clerk undertook to contact the Taxi Regulator, to get permission to create a temporary rank in Church Street/Mardyke Street for the weekend. The Mayor asked if people could be informed of the open times and the intermittent access and the Town Clerk said he would write to pertinent people who could then inform others.

Connolly Street:

Cllr. Molloy asked about the situation regarding the bollards for the street, as it is currently blocked with parked cars. He asked that residents be informed of the key holders for the bollards and he added that there is concern over access for the emergency services.

The Director said that the Council will hold a key as will the emergency services and it was agreed to write to the residents to inform them of this.

Managers Orders:

The Members noted the summary of Managers Orders as circulated.

Questions:

Question 1 Cllr. K. Molloy:
“What is the reason for delay in starting Westside regeneration programme?”

Answer: Final construction drawings are expected from the scheme designers by the end of this week and the Council is engaging with the Traders organisations with regard to traffic management during the construction of the scheme with a view to commencing construction within the coming weeks.

Question 2 Cllr. K. Molloy:
“Has report been completed on safety measures required at St. Paul’s/St. Annes Terrace?”

Answer: A survey for this area is planned for the coming month and a report on the matter will be presented to the Council at the September meeting.

Question 3 Cllr. G. McFadden:
“What is the current position of the Council taking in charge of Priory Park?”

Answer: The pumping station has been upgraded and additional public lighting will be installed and charged to the bond. However legal action is being prepared in regard to this estate and it will not be taken over until this process has been completed.

Question 4. Cllr. G. McFadden:
“Could this Council erect a “Children at Play” sign at entrances to Tormey Villas?”

Answer: Yes.

Question 5. Cllr. A. Shaw:
“When is it envisaged that work will commence on the re-alignment of Garrycastle bridge?”

Answer: Detailed design of this scheme is scheduled for the current year and subject to funding being made available it would be hoped to proceed to tender and construction in 2010.

Question 6. Cllr. A. Shaw:
“When is it intended to put in place the right hand turn lane to the Orchard Estate, Cornamaddy to improve road safety?”

Answer: **A design for this road facility is being prepared and will require the approval of the N.R.A. and land may also have to be acquired to provide a footpath.**

Question 7. Cllr. P. Hogan:
“Will Athlone Town Council allocate monies for the provision of traffic calming measures at St. Pauls/St. Annes Terrace from the next Block Grant?”

Answer: **A survey for this area is planned for the coming month and a report on the matter will be presented to the Council at the September meeting.**

Question 8. Cllr. P. Hogan:
“Can this Council restore popular walkway along the River Shannon and the Meadows to its former glory prior to the recent development at the Docks?”

Answer: **This area will be examined and dealt with in the context of the Waterfront Study which is currently being prepared.**

Question 9. Cllr. S. Buckley Byrne:
“Will the Council be putting CCTV into the Willowpark Area with the €8,000 allocated in 2009?”

Answer: **The Council is not aware of any funding allocation for 2009 for this purpose. Funding for a community worker was received in 2007 in Willow Park.**

Question 10. Cllr. S. Buckley Byrne:
“When will the Council be proceeding with the construction of Pedestrian Crossing at Connaught Street?”

Answer: **This crossing will put forward for consideration for funding from the 2010 Block Grant allocation.**

It was unanimously agreed to prioritise the items cut from this year's programme of works due to the reduction in the Block Grant allocation.

Shed at the Docks:

The Members noted a letter from the OPW, the Minister of States Office, which stated that the shed is used by the Hydrometric Section to both store materials and house equipment which records/monitors water levels on the Shannon and also by Waterways Ireland. He said therefore the OPW cannot agree to the removal of this shed.

The Members were totally dissatisfied with this response.

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,

“That we request the Minister to receive a deputation from the Council on this matter”.

Conferences:

The Members noted the following conferences and the costs thereof:

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|------------|---|--------------------------|---|
| Skibereen | - | Training Seminar | 10 th – 12 th July '09 |
| Ballina | - | Humbert Summer School | 20 th – 23 rd Aug. '09 |
| Killarney | - | AMAI Annual Conference | 10 th – 12 th Sept. '09 |
| Ennistymon | - | Clare Tourism Conference | 26 th – 28 th Nov. '09 |

Windows/doors replacement programme:

The Town Clerk in response to Cllr. Molloy's motion, stated that the window/door replacement programme was funded from Internal Capital Housing Receipts, but the requirement placed on the Council by the Department of Finance to maintain its bank balance at the end of the year, means that expenditure is restricted to the additional internal receipts expected in 2009 and this is estimated at €20,000 which reduces the programme some what.

The Speed Camera Programme:

Cllr. O'Rourke requested the Council write to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform to obtain the up to date situation regarding the roll out of the Safety Camera Network (Speed Cameras) as announced by him in 2008. He said he thought this system was the best way to deal with the problem of speed as the technology allows the offenders to be caught and fined and is better than speed ramps. He added that it is a passive but comprehensive way to tackle the problem of speed in built-up areas. The Members supported the motion and it was agreed to write to the Minister.

Contribution levies for car-parking:

In response to Cllr. O'Rourke's motion, the Town Clerk stated that the standards in regard to the provision of car parking for developments in the town centre was reduced by 50% when the Town Development Plan was adopted in 2008 e.g. 3no. spaces are now required for 100m² for retail area as against 6no. prior to 2008. Allowances are also given for previous established uses. He said the cost of providing a car parking space is now approx. €30,000 and where developers cannot provide such spaces, the Council imposes a contribution of €4,980 which is considered very reasonable in the context of the full cost.

Cllr. O'Rourke saw 2 difficulties in that if the spaces were already there, the developer is still charged and people pay for them on a daily basis anyway. Some Members agreed that the levies were difficult to justify at times but others felt the levies were working well and the Council does accept payment by instalment. The Director said that infrastructure is expensive to provide and a 16% levy on developers is seen as very reasonable. He added that levy reduction would impact upon the Councils capacity to generate infrastructural income and our ability to provide necessary infrastructure.

Blocked road signage:

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. McFadden that all road signs in the Athlone Town Area were cleaned earlier this year and they will be examined again and any obstructions to visibility removed.

Pedestrian timings at traffic lights:

Cllr. McFadden requested that the time given to pedestrians at the Crescent and Custume Place be extended to improve access for those with disabilities, parents with young children and the elderly. The Town Clerk responded saying that the timings at these locations meet the standard for pedestrian crossings and any alteration would impact adversely on other traffic. The Town Engineer explained the timings and said they were industrial standards, but he would re-examine them and meet with Mr. Michael Duffy if required. Cllr. McFadden welcomed this.

Traffic calming at St. Anne's/St. Paul's Terrace:

In response to motions from Cllrs. McFadden and Buckley-Byrne, the Town Clerk informed them that a survey for this area is planned for the coming month and a report on the matter will be presented to the Members at the September Meeting. All the Members were in favour of some form of traffic calming measures at this location.

Traffic Management for Triathlon:

Cllr. Shaw's motion requested the Council to ensure that the traffic management measures for the Triathlon take account of the concerns of Traders and Businesses with a view to minimising disruption and the Town Clerk stated that meetings with the Trading Associations had taken place and the arrangements minimise the impact. He added that the organisers and the Gardai also attended.

Free car-parking on Saturdays:

In response to Cllr. Shaw's motion the Town Clerk stated that free car-parking would impact negatively on the Council's finances which is measurable, however the benefits if any, would come in macro-economic terms which are not measurable in the context of 1 day per week and the level of free parking available in the town. He said a cost benefit analysis would therefore not serve any useful purpose at this time and any policy decision to provide free parking by the Council would have to be done in the context of the annual budget. Cllr. Shaw still felt it would incentivise shoppers and tourists into the town and felt it would be considered in the budgets for 2010. Cllr. Moran felt Saturday would be a bad day to this as most people came to the town on Saturdays and Sundays, so maybe a quieter day should be tried out. Cllr. O'Rourke thought weekly was too frequent that maybe free car parking should be given on certain weekends like it is at Christmas. The Mayor in summing up said that it is not feasible to be reducing the Council's revenue resources at the moment. It was agreed it was an issue for budget meetings.

Nominations to the Tidy Towns Committee:

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. Shaw that if the Members so wished, they could nominate a Member to sit on the Tidy Towns Committee. It was agreed to nominate 2 Members.

Provision of Allotments:

In response to Cllr. Hogan's motion, the Town Clerk stated that the Council is not aware of a demand for allotments but in any event the Council does not have any suitable land in its possession and is unlikely to be able to provide land at a cost which would be recoupable from the users as is required by statute, due to land values in the town. Cllr. Hogan said he had been approached by many and Cllr. Shaw agreed that there would be a demand for allotments. Cllr. Buckley-Byrne said other L.A.'s had bad experiences with allotments due to vandalism and said she felt private land owners should be encouraged to provide land for allotments. The Mayor felt there might be more of a role for the County Council in providing allotments.

Cuts to Athlone bus service:

Cllr. Hogan and Buckley-Byrne said huge concerns have been expressed within the town about cutting these services, as many people depend on them, including many elderly and hundreds of students. All the Members agreed that an adequate and frequent bus service is needed in the town and that they should meet with Bus Éireann Management or the Minister for Transport. The Town Clerk agreed to arrange a meeting with local Bus Éireann management first.

Additional parking in Beechville:

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. Hogan's motion that the proposal to provide additional car parking spaces will be examined and costed, but such a proposal is likely to result in the removal of part of the open space green area within the estate. However Cllr. Hogan supported by Cllr. Moran felt that there is an urgent need for parking spaces and if the residents were consulted and informed of the need to take some open space, they would wish to do so. It was agreed to consult the residents.

Unfinished site opposite St. Mary's Church:

In response to Cllr. Cooney's motion, the Town Clerk stated that the Council had been in correspondence with the owners of this site in the recent past regarding its condition and have requested that the site be cleaned up. However he added, there is a planning application to complete the development before the Council which will be decided next month and when permission is granted, the Council will pursue the matter further with the owners.

Astro-Turf Football Pitch in Woodlands:

Cllr. Moran's motion related to safety issues at the Astro-turf pitch, but the Town Clerk stated that the Council has not had any complaints, but will take up the issue with the local residents. Cllr. Moran said he had lots of complaints about children running across the road, balls hitting off windows etc. He felt the pitch should be made safer immediately. Other Members agreed with this.

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,

Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,

"That the Council erect a high mesh fence around the astro-turf pitch at Woodlands, in the interest of public safety".

New light at Ashley Crescent:

In response to Cllr. Moran's motion, the Town Clerk stated that the 'public lighting' section of the ESB will be requested to examine this area and proposals for additional public lighting can be considered in the context of the 2010 budget. Cllr. Moran welcomed this response.

Entrance to Athlone Town Centre Carpark:

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. Moran's motion that it is felt the advance signage for both entrances to the Town Centre car-park is adequate, but a sign will be erected to differentiate between the Town Centre and the Civic Centre car parks at Park Grove.

Relocation of the Tourist Office:

Cllr. Buckley Byrne requested that the Council meet with Fáilte Ireland to discuss the future presence of a Tourist Office at a more accessible location to the public in Athlone, than the Castle. All the Members fully supported this and they agreed a tourist office should be open all year round in Athlone, a tourist town. The Town Clerk informed the Members that Fáilte Ireland own the premises they are currently in since 1991 and have expressed no interest in

moving or in staying open all year round. However he added, if the Members wish, the Council will seek a meeting.

It was proposed by Cllr. Hogan,
Seconded by Cllr. McFadden and resolved,
“That the Council seek a deputation with Fáilte Ireland, made up of Cllrs. Buckley-Byrne, O’Rourke the Mayor and the Town Clerk”.

It was agreed to request the same group meet with Bus Éireann, if the local response was inadequate.

This concluded the business of the meeting.
