

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

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**Attendance:**

Mayor: Cllr. E. Moran

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

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

**Minutes:**

It was proposed by Cllr. Cooney,

Seconded by Cllr. K. Moran and resolved,

“That we hereby confirm and adopt the Minutes of the April Monthly Meeting which was held on April 6<sup>th</sup> 2009”.

**Votes of Congratulations:**

The Members wished to be associated with Cllr. Hogan's congratulations to St. Peters Football on winning the Paddy Cotter Cup and on reaching the finals of the FAI Umbro Junior Cup and Cllr. Butler's congratulations to Mona Joyce on winning the Cathaoirleach Award for Community Involvement for her ongoing work with St. Kieran's Community Centre.

**Votes of Sympathy:**

All the Members wished to be associated with Cllr. Lennon's votes of sympathy to the families of the recently deceased Larry Fagan and John Burke.

**Civic Reception:**

The Members agreed to host a Civic Reception for District 1160 of Rotary International who are holding their National Conference in Athlone from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> October 2009.

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

The Members unanimously approved of the following motions for consideration at the 12009 Annual A.M.A.I. Conference.

1. “That the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government notify all Councils of their financial allocations in advance of the Annual Budget Meetings”.
2. “That we call on the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government to revise the House Leasing Scheme to provide for the acquisition of these houses by Local Authorities at the end of the term of the lease, with credit being given for the leasing payment made”.

## **Fr. Matthew Hall – Art Gallery – Part 8 Report:**

The Town Clerk outlined the background to this project stating that in 2005 the Council decided to provide an Art Gallery in the Fr. Matthew Hall and after a public consultation process, decided to add a single storey extension in December 2007. The Town Development Plan has an objective to provide an Art Gallery.

He went on to say that the site on the west bank of the river is 0.33 acres and is held on lease from the O.P.W. for 99 years from 1957.

He said the Art Gallery has been designed by Keith Williams Architects and the proposal was placed on public display on January 17<sup>th</sup> 2009 and circulated to the prescribed bodies under Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001. The building has 2no. galleries, reception area, meeting room, lift, storage and plant areas, circulation and delivery area and a boardwalk. The gross floor area is 569m<sup>2</sup>.

The Town Clerk then listed the submissions received as follows:

Old Athlone Society, Waterways Ireland, Athlone Musical Society, Mr. Paul Roy, Ms. Jean Coyle, Ms. Jeanine Lowry, Fr. Renzo Sala, Mr. Pdraig Nally, Dr. Kieran O’Connor, Ms. Carmel Feeney, Athlone Architectural Heritage Group, Ms. Maureen Downey, Ms. Emma O’Connell, Mr. Alan Shaw, Ms. Geraldine O’Reilly, Athlone Chamber of Commerce, Ms. Mary O’Rourke, T.D., Ms. Sheila Buckley Byrne, Ms. Phyl Staunton, Cllr. Mick O’Connell, Mr. Shane Brennan, Ms. Pamela Myers, Athlone Institute of Technology, Chris Flicker and a petition with 600 signatures, Athlone Arts Group, Cllr. Ray Lennon, Mr. Michael Meade, Circular Letter submitted by 122 persons, which were circulated to the Members. Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

He said the issues raised in each submission is summarised in the Report of the County Manager and the response of the Manager to each is given.

He added that the Manager had considered the submissions, the Town Development Plan and the provisions of the Planning & Development Acts 2000-2007 and he is satisfied that the

development is in accordance with the proper planning and development of the town and he recommends proceeding with the development as advertised with a modification to provide a buffer at the boardwalk. He said the Members can now by resolution, vary or modify the proposal or decide not to proceed with the development, but this must be done within 6 weeks, otherwise the recommendation of the Manager stands.

The Report of the County Manager had been circulated to the Members and read as follows:

30<sup>th</sup> April, 2009

**Re: Report on proposed Art Gallery at the Fr. Matthew Hall/Shannon Bank,  
Grace Road, Athlone**

**To: Mayor & Each Member**

A Chara,

The plans and particulars to provide an Art Gallery at the Fr. Matthew Hall/Shannon Bank were advertised on January 17<sup>th</sup> 2009 and placed on public display pursuant to the Planning & Development Acts 2000-2007 and Part 8 of the Planning & Development Regulations 2001-2006. The closing date for submissions/observations dealing with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area in which the proposed development is situated was March 3<sup>rd</sup> 2009.

I have conformed with the statutory requirements and I now place this report before you and any resolution to vary or modify it or to decide not to proceed with the development must be passed by you not later than 6 weeks from the receipt of this report.

**A. Nature, Extent and Principal Features of the Site and Development:**

The site has an area of 0.33 acres approx. and is located north of the Town Bridge on the West Bank of the Shannon River at Grace Road, Athlone. The Fr. Matthew Hall, a two storey building with minor extensions is presently located on the site and has in the past been used as a Town Hall and Public Library. The Town Council has a leasehold interest in the Hall and the site.

The development proposed consists of the following:

- (a) The renovation and alteration of the Fr. Matthew Hall including the demolition of the existing extensions to the north and south of the building, alterations to the windows and opes, the provision of a new roof with roof lights, new windows, render the external walls and provide a new circular enclosure for the adjoining sub-station. A

stairway will be constructed between the eastern façade of the building and the adjoining public road.

(b) The removal of 3no. trees.

(c) Construct a single upper floor extension to the north of the Fr. Matthew Hall with external finishes consisting of glazing and limestone with roof lights. The retaining wall underneath of the eastern elevation will be finished in limestone and a deck will be constructed along the river front. A paved open space provided to the north of the extension will facilitate deliveries and will include a railing and access to the public road.

(d) The completed building will contain 569m<sup>2</sup> of floor space and will be used as an Art Gallery consisting of 2no. galleries, reception area, meeting room, storage, plant rooms and circulation areas.

## **B. Planning:**

The site is zoned institutional, educational/community and open space in the Town Development Plan 2008-2014 and lies within the zone of Archaeological potential in Athlone. The Fr. Matthew Hall is not presently a protected structure but it is included in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage issued by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage & Local Government and is recommended by the Minister for inclusion in the Councils Record of Protected Structures in the Town Development Plan.

It is the general policy of the Council to promote and develop the arts, culture and entertainment sector and to contribute to the intellectual, artistic and social quality of life for the people of the town.

The Town Development Plan contains the following specific policies in relation to the arts and culture,

P-IC35 It is the policy of the Council to encourage the provision of new or improved arts, cultural and entertainment facilities, particularly in the parts of the town where there is a deficiency in such provision.

O – IC41 To continue to encourage and develop locally based arts activities and facilities through the County Arts Plan which are accessible to the community and encourage new interest in the arts.

O – IC44 To promote the provision of an Art Gallery for the town.

It is considered that the development accords with the policies and objectives of Athlone Town Council and the Town Development Plan and is in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

### **C. Submissions:**

Details of the persons/organisations who made submissions/observations and the issues raised are summarised hereunder together with a response thereto.

#### **1. The Old Athlone Society:**

##### **Issues:**

- a) The Society welcomes the interest the Council is taking in the Fr. Matthew Hall, the removal of the flat roof extension and favoured the retention of as much as possible of the original façade.
- b) The Gallery should be managed by a professionally qualified Curator and exhibits should be of a high standard.
- c) The site should be archaeologically assessed and research facilitated.
- d) The minimum number of trees should be removed.
- e) Subject to the foregoing the work should proceed.

##### **Response:**

The Gallery will be managed by an appropriate Curator and the site will be archaeologically assessed by an Archaeologist who will conform with the requirements of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage & Local Government.

The minimum number of trees will be removed and the alterations to the facades of the Fr. Matthew Hall do not materially alter the structure and protect its character.

#### **2. Waterways Ireland:**

##### **Issues:**

They request that the boardwalk overhang be buffered to prevent vessels being impaled and to avoid injury to the waterway users.

##### **Response:**

The boardwalk overhang will be buffered as requested.

#### **3. Mr. Paul Roy, Artist, Tyrrellspass:**

- (a) There are too few display locations for professional artists in the Midlands.
- (b) There should be constant exhibitions from the full spectrum of the arts which would demonstrate the depth and strength of the arts in the midlands.

**Response:**

The Gallery will be professionally managed by a Curator for the benefit of all artists, age groups and art forms and usage will be maximised.

**4. Athlone Musical Society:**

**Issues:**

- (i) Supports the contemporary Visual Arts Gallery and Artists Studio.
- (ii) Is the oldest Society in Ireland and was founded in the Fr. Matthew Hall in 1902 and has performed there and been associated with it over the years.
- (iii) They require a home for meetings, rehearsals and the display of awards and memorabilia they have received for their performances.

**Response:**

Space in the new Art Gallery is limited and it is hoped that there will be a constant turnover of exhibitions from a broad range of art forms.

In this context the gallery will not be a home for any one group but if meetings and rehearsals can be accommodated by the Curator this will be done. The display of the awards and memorabilia could form an exhibition from time to time but not on a permanent basis.

**5. Ms. Jean Coyle, Beechpark West:**

**Issues:**

- (i) Critical of the design of the extension proposed and other recent town developments such as the Civic Centre. Considers it to be out of character and a monstrosity. An alternative design should be considered.
- (ii) The extension blocks the view of the Church from the bridge and that of the bridge from the Accommodation Road.
- (iii) A museum about John Count McCormack should be established in the Fr. Matthew Hall and the Tourist Office should also be relocated there.

**Response:**

The extension is a modest contemporary element sensitive to the existing building and its historical context. The massing reiterates this and it is offset 700mm back from the line of the existing building and the 2no. buildings are separated by a glazed link articulated to form the entrance and this emphasises the primacy of the Fr. Matthew Hall. However the overlap of the glazed riverside elevation into the Fr. Matthew Hall integrates the two structures to reflect their unity. The extension is

finished in rough Irish limestone to complement the finishes on the nearby Church. The glazed elevation to the river strengthens the link between the Gallery and the river. The alterations to the façades of the hall modernise the window openings but retain the original architectural character and context of the building.

The views of the Church and the Bridge are already limited by the existing trees and in that context the amount of the view lost will not be significant.

John Count McCormack will be commemorated appropriately within the Castle and the relocation and control of the Tourist Office is a matter for Fáilte Ireland. However if required it can be accommodated within the Civic Centre.

**6. Ms. Jeanine Lowry, Dublin Road (Dancer)**

**Issues:**

- (i) Welcomes the facility and requests space for dancers.

**Response:**

The needs of dancers can be accommodated within the letting programme for the galleries.

**7. Fr. Renzo Sala Milan**

**Issues:**

- (i) Disagrees with the extension and the modern windows proposed for the Fr. Matthew Hall.

**Response:**

The extension design is considered appropriate – see response to Submission No.5 above.

**8. Mr. Padraig Nally – Pinewood Close:**

**Issues:**

- (i) The proposed development has contrasting architectural styles and does not provide a good aesthetic appearance to an historic building. It is uncomplimentary to St. Peters and Paul's Church and the Castle.
- (ii) Door and window alterations will interfere with the structural integrity of the building and the new roof with glazing will spoil the appearance of the elevations. The existing roof is relatively new and the original vents and ridge tiles should be re-introduced.
- (iii) The extension would impede views of the bridge and river.

- (iv) The use of glass is inappropriate for viewing visual art.
- (v) The ground should not be disturbed because of its archaeological importance.
- (vi) Trees should not be removed, there is no room for expansion on the site and the best location for a gallery is Court Devenish House.

**Response:**

The extension design is considered appropriate – see response at Submission No.5 above.

The structural integrity will not be compromised and the work will be designed and supervised by Messrs. Arup Consulting Engineers who are competent structural engineers.

Various light levels are required within Art Galleries and the inclusion of glass in both the roof panels and the elevations together with the blinds that will also be provided, give maximum flexibility in regard to the light levels that can be achieved within the building.

The minimum number of trees possible will be removed (3no.) and the site will be assessed by an Archaeologist before and during the works and he/she will also report to the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government.

Court Devenish House is privately owned and not in the ownership of the Council and in any event its purchase and adaptation would considerably increase the costs.

**9. Dr. Kieran O'Connor N.U.I. Galway:**

**Issues:**

A 17<sup>th</sup> century map seems to suggest that the Castle had an outer ward to the north in the vicinity of the Fr. Matthew Hall and suggests that the area beside the Fr. Matthew Hall is extremely sensitive from an archaeological perspective. The development is therefore considered inappropriate

**Response:**

There is no certainty about the location of this “Connaught Tower” but the site will be fully assessed by an Archaeologist before and during construction work. Archaeological discoveries if any will be appropriately dealt with on the basis of professional advice including that of the Department to whom the Archaeologist must report. It should be noted that this site would have previously been disturbed with the building of the Fr. Matthew Hall.

**10. Ms. Carmel Feeney, Beechpark West:**

**Issues:**

- (i) The ultra modern design is out of keeping with the Fr. Matthew Hall, would ruin the building and intrude on the character of the area.
- (ii) The window and façade alterations would leave the Hall unrecognisable and the new surfaces would attract graffiti. The use of stainless steel, aluminium, zinc and metal materials would destroy the building.
- (iii) The development would require the removal of old trees.
- (iv) The Fr. Matthew Hall should be restored and used as a Tourist Facility, Information Centre, Museum, Meeting Rooms and community purposes.

**Response:**

The design has been dealt with at Submission No.5 above and the minimum number of trees (3no.) will be removed. The materials were specifically chosen to complement other finishes in the area.

Tourism facilities are a matter for Failte Ireland and there is an existing Museum in the Castle which will be upgraded. There are already information centres in town and many community facilities throughout the area where the needs of local groups can be accommodated.

**11. Athlone Architectural Heritage Group:**

**Issues:**

- (i) The Fr. Matthew Hall should be included in the Record of Protected Structures as requested by the Minister for the Environment, Heritage & Local Government in the N.I.A.H.
- (ii) The Art Gallery should be located in Court Devenish House which is available to purchase.
- (iii) The Tourist Office should be located in the Fr. Matthew Hall.
- (iv) The alterations proposed to the Fr. Matthew Hall cause a conflict in architectural styles and the full height window opens will interfere with the structural integrity of the building.
- (v) The glass roof lights would not be in keeping with good architectural design and interfere with the elevations.

- (vi) The extension is not in harmony with the surrounding area, the glazing is not suitable for visual arts and it would impede the views of the Castle and the bridge.
- (vii) Ground disturbance would be inappropriate in a sensitive archaeological location. (See submission of Dr. O'Connor) and the removal of trees is unacceptable.
- (viii) There is no room for future expansion and the boardwalk would attract anti-social behaviour.

**Response:**

When the development of the Fr. Matthew Hall is completed the Council will consider its inclusion in the Record of Protected Structures.

The acquisition of Court Devenish House and its redevelopment is likely to cost in excess of the current proposal and would not be feasible from the Councils perspective.

The design of the buildings and the location of the Tourist Office and the views has been dealt with at Submission No.5 above and the structural integrity of the building is dealt with at No.8 above. The glazing issue has been dealt with at Submission No.8 above and archaeology at Submission No.9. The minimum number of trees will be removed (3no.) and the scale of the Gallery is considered sufficient for our arts needs in this area.

There is no reason to believe that the boardwalk will be a location for anti-social behaviour as Athlone unlike Dublin has a lengthy open river front without boundary walls and is not noted for anti-social behaviour.

The windows in the Art Gallery will however provide visual supervision, which is a major factor in combating anti-social behaviour.

**12. Ms. Maureen Downey, Cornamaddy:**

**Issues:**

Disappointed with plans to put a building with glass, metal and stone materials at the Fr. Matthew Hall and the removal of trees.

**Response:**

See response at Submission No.5 above.

**13. Ms. Emma O'Connell, Ashdale:**

**Issues:**

- (i) Welcomes the Art Gallery for Athlone.
- (ii) Concerned regarding the loss of trees and the impairment of the river views.
- (iii) The Fr. Matthew Hall should not be altered but should be used as a Tourist Office, John Count McCormack Museum and a small Art Gallery.

**Response:**

See previous response regarding the trees and the uses at Submission No.11 and Submission No.5 above.

**14. Mr. Alan Shaw, Cornamaddy:**

**Issues:**

- (i) Has an interest in the arts and believes that the Council should have communicated the proposal through public meetings.
- (ii) The spending of €3.5m on an Art Gallery in the current climate is something we cannot morally or financially afford.
- (iii) Consult the public and achieve census on a renovation and preservation proposal and create a multi functional building to include a scaled back Art Gallery.
- (iv) The Council should contract local builders and advisers.

**Response:**

The Planning & Development Acts 2000-2007 sets out the legal procedures to be followed in dealing with Council developments and these processes were conformed with in this case.

Grant aid from the Department of Art, Sport and Tourism is available for this project but the Council must at all times ensure that there is a balance between the competing demands in respect of all its expenditure and that its finances are allocated fairly over any given period.

It could be argued that the arts have been neglected by the Council over many years and that neglect is now being redressed through this and other projects in the town. Other sectors are not being disadvantaged by this project which can benefit all of the people.

Demands for space for other facilities in the Fr. Matthew Hall are being addressed in other buildings and an Art Gallery will require all the space available in the Hall to function effectively.

National Policies and EU Directives require open procurement and local arrangements are not permissible for work of this scale.

**15. Ms. Geraldine O'Reilly – Member of Aosdana:**

**Issues:**

- (i) Welcome purpose built Art Gallery for Athlone on a magnificent site, which can form part of a “cultural quarter” for the town.
- (ii) Concerned regarding the width of the external glazed corridor for viewing purposes and the need for separate storage for art works.
- (iii) Outlines importance of good natural and artificial lighting and a good hanging system.
- (iv) Suitably qualified staff should manage the gallery.
- (v) A restaurant is not required but a tea/coffee area would be welcome.
- (vi) Open door at end of gallery would prevent the creation of a white cube space.
- (vii) No access to lower ground floor and there are no workshops.

**Response:**

The internal wall facing the glazed external wall will be used for the display of small works of art suitable for viewing from the corridor. The other walls will all be internal to the main galleries and will have the full width of the galleries for viewing purposes.

An appropriate Curator will manage the gallery and the glazed roof and elevations, with blinds, will permit maximum flexibility in regard to light management.

The storage area will be physically divided between general storage space and art storage space on the ground floor and a tea/coffee dispensing machine will also be installed in the Reception area.

The end of the south gallery will have a sliding door to the stairs which will permit the white cube space required.

Workshops for artists will be provided at the Old Fire Station and not in the Art Gallery and access to the Gallery is available at Ground floor level.

**16. Athlone Chamber of Commerce:**

**Issues:**

- (i) The Chamber welcomes the renovation and alterations to the Fr. Matthew Hall the removal of trees and the provision of the new modern extension.
- (ii) The provision of the Art Gallery is also welcomed which will create a cultural quarter and be an economic force for Athlone contributing to our success.
- (iii) Access from the ground floor level is recommended and that the workshops and ancillary rooms be multi-purpose and used for both workshops and classes. Equipment such as sinks shall also be provided.
- (iv) The Council should provide a band stand along the waterfront which would be a visitor attraction near Costume Barracks. The river walkway should not be obstructed and the provision of a piece of sculpture would add to the Galleries identity. The boardwalk should be extended across the bridge and link the area to Northgate Street.
- (v) The Castle and the Gallery should be integrated and signage and physical linkage would be part of the process. Outdoor exhibitions along the Riverfront would be welcomed.

**Response:**

There will be access from the ground floor and the uses of the meeting rooms will be maximised as will the workshops which will be properly equipped. There will be strong linkages between the Gallery and the Castle where the Curator will have a management role for both. Programmes for the use of the Gallery will include and encourage external exhibitions.

The other issue raised such as the bandstand, extension of the boardwalk along the bridge, piece of sculptor etc. are ideas which will be considered in the context of the Waterfront Study which is currently being prepared for public consultation.

**17. Ms. Mary O'Rourke T.D.**

**Issues:**

- (i) The provision of a small Tourist Office should be included in the Art Gallery.

**Response:**

Failte Ireland is responsible for the provision and location of Tourist Offices and it is not within the remit of the Council to do so.

**18. Ms. Sheila Buckley Byrne, Clonbonny:**

**Issues:**

- (i) The development of the Fr. Matthew Hall is welcome and will ensure that it is not left in a derelict condition.
- (ii) The buildings proposed do not sit well with the existing buildings but similar concerns over the Niland Model Arts in Sligo proved to be unfounded and that gallery is very successful.
- (iii) The limestone façade looks good but the glazed elevation to the Shannon does not work and will age quickly. These design details should be reconsidered.

**Response:**

The design of the building has been dealt with at Submission No.5 above.

**19. Mrs. Phyl Staunton, The Two Mile:**

**Issues:**

The development of this cultural centre is of great interest to her as a professional artist and to her colleagues in the Midlands and she looks forward to playing a role in encouraging and nurturing community participation and the achievement of the ideals and objectives of the gallery. This investment in the arts in Athlone is a necessity.

**Response:**

This response is noted.

**20. Cllr. Mick O'Connell, River Village:**

**Issues:**

- (i) The proposal to regenerate the Fr. Matthew Hall as an Art Gallery is welcomed.
- (ii) A plaque should be erected on site detailing the history of the building.
- (iii) A coffee shop/small restaurant should be included as it will add vibrancy to the facility.

- (iv) A community room should be included to rent to groups and the space could be achieved by introducing a ground floor element to the extension or by reducing office/storage space and locating it elsewhere.
- (v) Bus parking should be provided by reducing the width of the footpath from the Fr. Matthew Hall to the Rowing Club.
- (vi) The promenade as a whole should be upgraded with new paving, lighting etc.
- (vii) The toilets should be public toilets with an alternative access outside the ticket desk.
- (viii) Wheelchair accessible toilets and access via the lift to toilets should be included.
- (ix) The proposed colour of the Fr. Matthew Hall should be darkened and the extension should be kept in line with the Hall and it should be redesigned to reduce the amount of glass.
- (x) Failte Ireland should install a Tourism Kiosk and leaflet section.
- (xi) Details of the funding, procurement and operational arrangements as well as employment levels and cost saving measures should be provided.
- (xii) The Design Team should be procured by open competition and local talent should be used.

**Response:**

The design of the building has been dealt with at Submission No.5 above.

The Members have decided that the extension should be a single storey structure and as all the space available, particularly the office and storage areas, are essential for the operation of the facility, there is no space for community rooms. The meeting room could be used by small groups when available and not in use for arts purposes.

Space is not available for a tea/coffee shop/small restaurant and the general area is well served with such facilities by the private sector. The Council will provide a tea/coffee dispenser.

The upgrading of the promenade and bus parking are not appropriate to this process and can be addressed through the Waterfront Study.

Access to the toilets via the lift is included and the toilets will be wheelchair usable. The location of the access will not restrict the use of the toilets.

Failte Ireland can be requested to include an Information Point and the plaque as requested can be erected.

The funding of the project is not a Part 8 planning issue and is a matter for alternative consideration notwithstanding that these issues have previously been dealt with by the Council.

Procurement of service providers and contractors is governed by Government Procurement Procedures and Policies as well as EU Directives which give European access to these contracts and these measures have been applied in the case of the Gallery where the competition was open.

**21. Shane Brennan, Midlands Arts Education Officer:**

**Issues:**

- (i) The design is good and blends quite well with the town and the Shannon.
- (ii) Wall space in the Fr. Matthew Hall should be improved by design solutions that eliminate the windows from the internal gallery wall.
- (iii) The space for community arts activities is not sufficient i.e. courses and workshops for local community and school groups who can engage and work with artists and art teachers.

**Response:**

The proposal does eliminate the windows from the internal gallery walls and community arts will be a feature of the Gallery and will be accommodated within the meeting room when required and the artists workshops on Northgate Street.

**22. Ms. Pamela Myers – Athlone Artist:**

**Issues:**

- (i) The Visual Arts are almost unrepresented in Athlone and the Art Gallery is welcomed and the Westside lends itself to artistic development.
- (ii) The gallery should be credible, professional and contemporary and showcase the best national and international names. The galleries look as good as the top galleries and should be treated as such. The Civic Centre should be used for outside installations.
- (iii) The galleries will develop in Athlone an interest in contemporary/conceptual art and guided tours by visiting artists would captivate audiences. Education programmes and workshops for children would benefit their personal development. It will be a resource for students and future artists.
- (iv) She would be interested in participating and exhibiting in the gallery.

**Response:**

The gallery will be managed by a professional Curator who will maximise the usage of the gallery, maintain high standards and develop educational and community programmes.

**23. Athlone Institute of Technology:**

**Issues:**

- (i) The Art Gallery and studios are welcomed as there is a dearth of cultural facilities in Athlone which is a serious deficit.
- (ii) The Gallery has the potential to collaborate with a range of institutions at national and regional level to provide an interesting visual arts menu in the town. It will be possible to draw on local collections and put together the work of artists who have given expression to the landscape and look of the Midlands.
- (iii) An educational dimension to the gallery is welcomed and it is hoped that the Institute will be able to offer support in this area.

**Response:**

The submission of the A.I.T. is noted.

**24. Chirs Flicker, Baylough:**

**Issues:**

- (i) Welcomes and supports the Art Gallery which is badly needed and believes that the architecture is a good mix of old and new buildings and the prime river location makes it the perfect site for national and international artists to show their work in the Midlands.
- (ii) He stated that there is a lot of support for the Gallery and a petition with over 600 names supporting it were also submitted by Mr. Flicker.

**Response:**

The submission is noted.

**25. Athlone Arts Group:**

**Issues:**

Welcomes the new Art Gallery which will enhance the reputation of Athlone as a cultural centre. They also welcomed the proposed studios.

**Response:**

This submission is noted.

**26. Cllr. Ray Lennon, Connaught Street:**

**Issues:**

- (i) The design of the new windows in the Fr. Matthew Hall conflict with the old and are not acceptable.
- (ii) The extension is not complementary to the existing building and is out of context with the area. It blocks the view of the River and the Castle from the river.
- (iii) The viability of the gallery is questionable.
- (iv) The Fr. Matthew Hall should be used as a Tourist Office, café/coffee shop, John Count McCormack Museum and community meeting rooms.

**Response:**

The design has been dealt with at Submission No.5 above as have the uses. The viability of the gallery is not an issue relative to the Part 8 planning process and Submission No.10 deals with community rooms.

**27. Mr. Michael Meade, Assumption Road:**

**Issues:**

- (i) The Fr. Matthew Hall should be used for the Tourist Office, an area to commemorate famous Athlone citizens, a café, public toilets, a communal meeting hall.
- (ii) Enough thought has not been given to the location of the Art Gallery and alternative sites included St. Mary's Hall, Court Devenish House, the Midland Railway Station and adjoining the Library.

**Response:**

The alternative uses have been dealt with under Submission No.10. The acquisition of alternative buildings which would require significant adaptation would add to the costs and render the project non viable. The limited space at the Civic Centre must be retained for the future expansion of services there which will be required with the growth of the town in the years ahead.

A number of other development issues in the town were raised in the submission but were not relevant to the Part 8 planning process for the Art Gallery.

**28. Circular Letter – Submitted by 122no. persons:**

**Issues:**

- (i) The alterations to the Fr. Matthew Hall including window changes interfere with its character and architectural style and its structural integrity.
- (ii) It should be listed in the Record of Protected Structures.
- (iii) The proposed extension is not in harmony with the character and built form of the area and the materials used conflict with adjoining buildings.
- (iv) The extension would require the removal of trees and would also impeded views of the bridge and the river.
- (v) The building has not been used in the spirit it was intended and the people should have a say in its use. It should be used as a Tourist Office, Coffee Shop, John Count McCormack Museum and Meeting Rooms for citizens.
- (vi) The Art Gallery should be located in Court Devenish House.

**Response:**

The design, removal of trees, uses, location and inclusion in the Record of Protected Structures have been dealt with under Submission Nos. 5, 8, 10, 11, 20.

The Fr. Matthew Hall is held by the Council under lease from the OPW dated 1957 and does not contain any restriction in regard to the past or proposed Council uses. The Council decided by resolution in 2005 to develop the Fr. Matthew Hall as an Art Gallery.

**29. Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government:**

**Issues:**

- (i) The site is within the zone of Archaeological Potential and is subject to statutory protection.
- (ii) Archaeological monitoring of all ground works by an Archaeologist will be necessary and any material found should be recorded and dealt with appropriately on the advice of the Archaeologist and the Department in regard to mitigating action. The monitoring results should be submitted to the Department.
- (iii) The Department have no objection in principle to the proposal but recommend the refining of the glazed connection detail at the junction of the 2no. buildings to give regard to the integrity of the form of the old building.
- (iv) Natural slates and cast iron rain water pipes and black painted gutters are recommended for the Fr. Matthew Hall.

**Response:**

An Archaeologist will be engaged and the site will be assessed and monitored before and during construction to conform with the requirements of the Department to whom a report will be submitted and whose advice will be followed.

The Council considers that the separate entity and integrity of both the new and old building have been achieved in the design presented and the overlap of the glazed riverside elevation provides the integration necessary to articulate the unity of the overall structure.

Natural slates and iron rain water pipes will be used on the Fr. Matthew Hall.

**Recommendation:**

I welcome the interest in this project shown in the submissions received which I have considered and present this Report to you for your consideration. Pursuant to the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2007, the Planning & Development Regulations 2001-2006 and in particular Section 179 of the Planning & Development Act 2000 and the Town Development Plan 2008-2014, I am satisfied that the development is in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable and development of the area and I recommend that the proposed development of the Art Gallery as placed on public display be proceeded with, modified to provide a buffer at the boardwalk and I propose to do so.

\*\*\*\*\*

Cllr. Butler welcomed the proposed Art Gallery and all the support it had received in the submissions. He said it would be good to see the fourth corner of the Bridge being updated and developed. Cllr. Lennon felt the people of the town did not want an Art Gallery in the Fr. Matthew Hall, but would prefer the Tourist Office there and a museum dedicated to John Count McCormack and he said he was unhappy with the way his submission was dealt with in the Report. He also felt it was a bad time to spend €3.5m on an Art Gallery, which would then probably cost about €400,000 p.a. to run. Cllr. Molloy welcomed the development for the Westside of the town and felt it would compliment the other regeneration works. Cllr. O'Connell agreed and asked that a plaque be definitely erected on the building. He queried how the community and groups like dancers would be accommodated. He asked if the grant was still available? Cllr. Cooney said finance was not the issue at this stage. It is more to do with the design and he accepted that it is the best one for the purposes of an Art Gallery. Cllr. K. Moran stated that there is a huge level of interest in the arts in the town, but no place for them and he felt the Fr. Matthew Hall would be an ideal site and that the boardwalk is a great feature of the project. He felt the Art Gallery would be for the betterment of the whole town. Cllr. Hogan agreed a place was needed for art and exhibits especially for young people. He felt it would be a good investment. Cllr. Berry said as most of the submissions were in favour of it, he would support its progress.

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. Lennon that the Report required a summary of the issues raised and not a verbatim account and all the issues raised by him were reflected in summary form.

He said the plaque requested by Cllr. O'Connell was a good idea and would be included, while he believed the dancing could take place in one of the galleries but that would be a matter for the Curator to programme. He informed Cllr. Cooney that the date of the Report was Thursday April 30<sup>th</sup> 2009. He confirmed that the archaeology of the area will be dealt with by a qualified Archaeologist with the advise of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and the Heritage Officer.

Cllr. Lennon said he was not in agreement with the proposed Art Gallery at the Fr. Matthew Hall and that it be used for other facilities/amenities for the people of the town. There was no seconder to this proposal.

It was proposed by Cllr. Butler,

Seconded by Cllr. Cooney and resolved,

“That pursuant to the provisions of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2006, the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2006, in particular Section 179 of the Planning and Development Act 2000, and having regard to the provisions of the Athlone Town Development Plan 2008-2014, and the property planning and sustainable development of the area, we hereby approve of the carrying out of the development of the Art Gallery at the Fr. Matthew Hall, Grace Road, Shannon Bank, Athlone in accordance with the report of the County Manager dated April 30<sup>th</sup> 2009 modified to provide a buffer at the boardwalk”.

The County Manager stated that he was happy that all the issues have now been aired and he said he was confident that the art gallery was the right thing for the whole town and it would make art available at all levels, from children to established artists. The Department of Arts had also thought it a worthwhile project and made funding available, which he assumed is still in place. He assured the Members that as a Capital Project, its funding would not impact at all, on any of the Council's frontline services. He said that maintaining the Gallery would not cost anything like the €400,000 suggested by Cllr. Lennon and that social infrastructure was not meant to be profit making. He added that he felt it was a very good project and must proceed.

Cllr. Lennon asked that the timber panelling in the windows of the Fr. Matthew Hall be replaced with glass, so that it would look well for the tourist season. Cllr. K. Moran suggested that the artists impression of the new gallery be erected by means of a banner on the building and the Director agreed to investigate this possibility.

### **Taking in Charge Housing Estates:**

The Town Clerk informed the Members that the taking in charge of Ardnaglug, Clonbrock Court, Cartrontroty Heights and Orwell Grove had been advertised and no submissions had been received. The Council also has the agreement of the Developers involved and he recommended the Council taking them in charge.

The Members welcomed this progression and felt it sent out the right message to all developers. They felt that the proper mechanisms are now in place to monitor planning in the future with the Enforcement Section monitoring all development and keeping bonds up to date.

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. Cooney and resolved,

“Pursuant to the provisions of the Local Government Acts 1925-2001 and in particular Section 11 of the Local Government Act 2001, Section 180 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 and being satisfied that the roads are of general public utility, we hereby declare and order that the roads and services within the following estates be taken in charge by the Council,

- 1) Ardnaglug
- 2) Clonbrock Court
- 3) Cartrontroty Heights
- 4) Orwell Grove

### **Revision of Block Grant Expenditure for 2009:**

The Town Engineer informed the Members that the Block Grant has been reduced by the Minister from €81,000 to €59,000 and because of this, he has had to revise this spending proposals. He circulated the new proposals and while the Members expressed disappointment, they accepted in general, that cutbacks have to be made.

It was proposed by Cllr. Cooney,

Seconded by Cllr. Butler and resolved,

“Pursuant to the provisions of the Local Government Acts 1925-2001 and the Roads Acts 1993-1998, we hereby approve of the revised expenditures of the Road Block Grant 2009 as set out hereunder”.

## **SUMMARY**

### **Carriageway Restoration**

- |                               |          |             |
|-------------------------------|----------|-------------|
| 1. Cypress Gardens (71 to 81) | (Bitmac) | € 30,000.00 |
| 2. Altown                     | (Bitmac) | € 15,000.00 |

3. Coosan West Road – Curley’s corner to Clonbrusk West	(Bitmac)	€ 40,000.00
4. Bowerview	(Bitmac)	€ 15,000.00
5. Carrick O’Brien Road	(Surface Dressing)	€ 30,000.00
6. Coosan Point Road (2-Mile junction to Bog Rd)	(Surface Dressing)	€ 25,000.00

### **Footpath Improvements**

1. Footpath Replacement Glenavon Tce.		€ 20,000.00
2. Footpath replacement from 79 - 89 Retreat Park		€ 40,000.00
3. Footpath replacement 137 – 140, 18 – 19 Auburn Hts		€ 20,000.00
4. Footpath replacement 1 – 6, 12, 31 Hillcourt		€ 15,000.00
5. Footpaths in Cypress Gardens		€ 10,000.00
6. Footpath replacement 30 – 38 Altown & sections at Garrycastle		€ 25,000.00
7. Kerbing and footpaths (Coosan West Road)		€ 24,000.00
8. Footpath replacement at Arcadia		€ 15,000.00
9. Footpath replacement at Westlodge		€ 5,000.00
10. Footpath replacement and dished crossings Central Tce. to Hospital		€ 10,000.00
11. Footpath replacement at Mayfield Grove		€ 20,000.00

**Revised Total** € 359,000.00

### **Managers Orders:**

The Members noted the summary of Managers Orders as circulated.

## **Questions:**

Question 1 Cllr. R. Lennon:  
“When will the Council proceed with works at Pinewood Close?”

**Answer:** **It is proposed to carry out these works in the current year.**

Question 2 Cllr. R. Lennon:  
“When will pedestrian lights be turned on between Walsh’s shop Baylough and St. Comans Park?”

**Answer:** **Athlone Town Council will write to Roscommon County Council who have responsibility for this matter if the Members so wish.**

Question 3 Cllr. P. Hogan:  
“Can this Council endeavour to clean the canal at Millbank?”

**Answer:** **The bed of the canal at this location was cleaned in 2007 and the Council regularly attends to a surface cleaning of this area throughout the year when the water level is sufficiently low. The Council will continue this ongoing surface maintenance when the water levels are sufficiently low and the Council would request the assistance of the public in reporting and prosecuting the ongoing indiscriminate dumping at this location.**

Question 4. Cllr. P. Hogan:  
“Can this Council request Westmeath County Council to finish footpath started at Shancurragh, Coosan?”

**Answer:** **The Council will write to the County Council on the matter.**

Question 5. Cllr. M. O’Connell:  
“When will the place name signs for Riverside Place be erected?”

**Answer:** **These signs have now been received from the supplier and they will be installed in the coming weeks.**

Question 6. Cllr. M. O’Connell:  
“When will the bollards for the green area at the rear of Roslevin Lawns be installed?”

**Answer:** **These bollards will be installed in the coming months.**

### **Lighting at Westlodge:**

In response to Cllr. Molloy's motion the Town Clerk stated that the ESB public lighting department will be asked to examine this matter and any lighting proposals warranted, will be put forward for the consideration of the Members in the 2010 expenditure proposals.

### **Traffic Management at St. Paul's/St. Anne's Tce:**

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. Molloy that speed surveys were carried out previously at St. Paul's Terrace and it was found that traffic calming measures were not warranted. He added that a survey will be carried out at St. Anne's Terrace if the Members so wish. Cllr. Molloy said that the residents will block that road if something is not done very soon, even the erection of a 'Children at Play' sign might help. Cllrs. Butler and Lennon agreed with the urgency here and the Town Engineer agreed to examine the area again.

### **Name sign for Abbey Grove:**

In response to Cllr. Lennon's motion it was agreed to erect a name sign in Abbey Grove.

### **Illegal dumping:**

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. Lennon's Motion that Athlone Town Council responds to all reports in relation to illegal dumping and the waste is examined for evidence of ownership and offender(s) fined where such evidence is found. The Council also removes the waste and he added that any Member can notify the Environment Section of dumping they are aware of. Cllr. Lennon said he had done and the response was good. He suggested that more signs be erected.

### **Local Authority Rents:**

Cllr. Hogan suggested that the Council place an upper limit of €60 on their rents bearing in mind these economically challenging times. The Town Clerk stated that rents are calculated on a Differential basis related to the total household income and are therefore deemed fair and equitable and he added that all houses have a maximum rent which is determined by references to the value of the house. Cllr. Molloy felt Council rents are too high now in comparison to private rents. The Director said the Differential Rent Scheme could be examined and compared to other Scheme, to ensure its fairness.

### **Helplink South:**

All the Members fully supported Cllr. Hogan's motion to write to the Minister requesting him not to proceed with the cutbacks which have affected Helplink South, and the provision of security initiatives to deter intruders from the dwellings of the elderly and it was agreed to write.

### **Play area for St. Francis Terrace:**

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. Hogan's motion that passive open space will be provided between the new road and the rear of St. Francis Terrace and that a children's play area will be provided if an appropriate area of land can be identified. Cllr. Hogan said he understood that a play area had been agreed with the residents, but the Director said that only a very small piece of land is available and it is surrounded by roads, but he said he would meet with the Residents again.

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

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. O'Connell that a speed survey would be carried out if the Members so wish and Members did agree that some form of traffic control was needed in the vicinity of the playground.

### **Traffic Calming at Chapel Street:**

In response to Cllr. O'Connell's motion, the Town Clerk stated that the narrowness of the street and the parking arrangements restrict speed in this area and additional devices are not considered necessary.

### **Street Lighting on the 2 Mile Road:**

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. O'Connell that the installation of this public lighting is provided for under a condition attached to a planning permission for an adjacent development and the Developer will be contacted in this regard.

### **Old Town Walls:**

In response to Cllr. Berry's motion the Town Clerk stated that the Council has a Conservation Plan for the Town Walls and Defences and next year funding will be provided to commence the implementation of the Plan. However he added that the removal of vegetation cannot be undertaken in isolation and must form part of conservation works to insure the protection and stability of the wall.

### **Town's Road Network:**

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. Butler that the road network in the town is under continuous surveillance and monitoring by the Town/Area Engineer and any necessary works are carried out subject to budgetary consideration.

### **Illegal parking on Ballymahon Road:**

The Members supported Cllr. Butler's motion to take action against the people parking on the grass verges along the Ballymahon Road and it was agreed that the Council provide

double yellow lines on both sides of that road, from the Whitegates to the Moorings, to prevent parking.

**Policy on signage/advertisement:**

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. Butler’s motion that presently all advertising of events is strictly monitored and those signs erected without permission are removed and the offenders fined, where deemed appropriate. He added that no advertising signs are allowed within the town and all signs are required to be removed immediately after the events advertised are held. The policies of the Council in regard to advertising, he said, are set out in Section 35 of the Town Development Plan. Cllr. Butler felt there were far too many signs around the town and that monitoring and removal should be improved.

**Paid parking in Kilmacoo Lane:**

Cllr. Cooney requested that the Council introduce paid parking in Kilmacoo Lane so as to alleviate illegal parking and congestion in the area. Cllr. Butler said that the residents of the area should first be made aware of the effects paid parking would have on them and their families.

It was proposed by Cllr. Cooney,

Seconded by Cllr. E. Moran and resolved,

“Pursuant to the provisions of the Road Traffic Acts 1961-2006 we hereby apply the Athlone Town Council (Street Parking) Bye-Laws 2002 to Kilmacoo Lane Road No. L-40214-0 in the Town Council Road Schedule”.

**Traffic calming in Kilmacoo Lane:**

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. Cooney’s motion that if the paid parking is applied, it will be monitored for a period to determine its impact on traffic in the area and the need for further measures if any.

*This concluded the business of the meeting.*

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