

# **Minutes of the April Monthly Meeting of Athlone Town Council which was held in the Fire Station, Coosan Road, Athlone at 6.00 p.m. on Monday, 7<sup>th</sup> April, 2003.**

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## **Attendance:**

Mayor: Cllr. K. Molloy

Members: Cllrs. A. Berry, J. Butler, M. Cooney, F. Keena, E. Moran, K. Moran, N. McFadden and B. Rowan

Officers: Mr. George Lambden, Director of Services  
Mr. John Walsh, Town Clerk  
Dr. Paul McCool, Town Engineer  
Mr. Billy Coughlan, Administrative Officer  
Mr. Aidan Bass, Administrative Officer  
Ms. Anne McNamara, Asst. Staff Officer

## **Athlone West Bank Regeneration Plan:**

The Members considered the Plan for the regeneration of the west side of Athlone, presented by Mr. Rory Milligan & Mr. Eamon Larkin Architects from Milligan, Reside, Larkin Architects and Mr. Stuart Hood from Park Hood Partnership, Chartered Landscape Architects.

Mr. Milligan informed the Members that the area concerned in the study was largely located between the Town Bridge and the Canal at Battery Bridge. He said the area possesses many interesting individual elements like the Shannon itself, the Castle, the Church, the riverside Library and the riverside frontage and the Plan knits these together increasing their potential. The main areas dealt with are as follows:

St. Peter's Square, Castle Street/Main Street, the "Quay", Fry Place/Bastion Street, Connolly Street, Dean Crowe Theatre, O'Connell Street/Connaught Street, Pearse Street/Barrack Street and Battery Bridge and the Canal.

It is proposed to create a "gateway" entrance to the west bank at the roundabout, create a civic square at St. Peter's, opening up the front of the Church onto the Square, in all, giving a sense of arrival.

The plan provides for the upgrading of the whole area by the provision of natural stone paving, extensive planting schemes to soften hard surfaces, installation of feature lighting and public seating, items of sculpture, re-routing of many overhead wires, providing stainless steel bollards, creating and enhancing pedestrianised areas and relocating some car-parking. The Plan provides for improved and brighter access to the Library, a glazed extension for a possible art gallery, providing a viewing platform and a cantilevered decked terrace, with stair access to the Bridge.

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It proposed to provide an external performance space at the Dean Crowe Theatre by relocating car-parking and extensive landscaping. Many properties in the area will have to be upgraded and re-developed.

The area ends at the canal and it proposes to redesign this in-fill site to create a linear urban park with play areas, while also creating a through route for pedestrians and a ramped access to the Battery Bridge.

The Members welcomed the Plan which they thought was very imaginative and if possible to implement, it would greatly enhance and improve the Westside of the town, which badly needed upgrading.

They accepted that there was a problem with derelict buildings in the general area and that the Council would have to continue to trace owners and undertake the necessary action. They also stressed that a lot of consultation would be needed with concerned interests. Cllr. Butler asked that the Plan be extended to include the improvement of the area where the O.P.W. currently have a building on the River front in the event that this building was removed, while Cllr. E. Moran requested that the consultants examine the provision of opes in the Town Bridge, to allow people to see the Shannon, while crossing. It was agreed to write to the Minister concerning the future of the O.P.W. building.

The Members congratulated all involved in the production of the Plan and unanimously approved of it.

The Members also approved of the Plan going on public display for the purposes of obtaining the observations of the public.

### **Congratulations:**

The Mayor was jointed by all the Members in his congratulations to the Athlone Community College Basketball Team on their recent All-Ireland victory and in his congratulations to Alan Sheehan and Patrick Mulvihill on their performances with the Irish under-age Soccer Team. The Members also congratulated Athlone Town Soccer Club on the recent launching of their new Stadium plans.

Cllr. K. Moran congratulated the pupils of Coosan N.S. who made history by being the first school from the Athlone area to reach the All-Ireland Finals of the Credit Union quiz.

### **Minutes:**

It was proposed by Cllr. J. Butler,  
Seconded by Cllr. K. Moran and resolved,  
“That we hereby adopt the Minutes of the March Monthly Meeting and the Special Meeting held on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2003”.

### **Matters Arising from the Minutes:**

#### Boundary Extension:

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. Butler that he had not received a response to his correspondence with the Department concerning the Boundary Extension. Cllr. Butler proposed that a deputation go to the Minister to discuss the situation and all the Members agreed.

#### Speed Limits:

The Director of Services confirmed for Cllr. Keena that the report being prepared would be brought before the Members.

#### C.C.T.V. Cameras:

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. Butler that he had not yet received a response from the Minister for Justice or the Garda Superintendent.

#### Premises for Athlone Arts Group:

Cllr. Rowan wanted it noted that he had the support of all the Members to his request that the Council help locate a premises for the Arts Group.

### **Loughandonning Area Action Plan:**

It was agreed to defer this item for consideration at the May Monthly Meeting.

### **Civic Reception:**

The Members unanimously agreed to host a Civic Reception for the Midland Vintage & Classic Car Club on Friday, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2003.

### **Disposal of Land:**

It was proposed by Cllr. Cooney, seconded by Cllr. Molloy and resolved, "Pursuant to the provisions of the Local Government Act 2001, the Housing Act 1966, Section 90 of the Housing Act 1966 and the Landlord & Tenant (Ground Rents)(No. 2) Act 1978, we hereby approve of the disposal of the fee simple interest in land as set out in the schedule hereunder:

#### **SCHEDULE**

<u>Description of Property</u>	<u>Name of Purchaser</u>	<u>Purchase Price</u>
135 Sarsfield Square, Athlone	Martin & Sandra Dempsey	€45.46

### **Planning:**

The Town Clerk informed the Members that a planning application had been received from Taurus Construction to build 6 No. two-storey office blocks with car-parking and ancillary works at Bogganfin, Roscommon Road, Athlone, which works, would contravene the Town Development Plan as the area was zoned residential. The Director of Services indicated that the Council was amenable to deciding to grant permission for the proposed development and recommended that the statutory process be initiated and the proposed material contravention be advertised.

It was proposed by Cllr. E. Moran, seconded by Cllr. Rowan and resolved, "Pursuant to the provisions of the Planning & Development Act, 2000 and in particular to Section 34 of the Planning & Development Act 2000, we hereby approve of the implementation of the statutory process for a material contravention of the Town Development Plan in respect of the application of Taurus Construction for 6 No. office blocks, car-parking and ancillary works at Bogganfin, Athlone Ref. P.D. 4089/02".

### **Annual Financial Statement:**

The Annual Financial Statement for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December, 2001 was presented to the Members.

The Director of Services indicated that revenue expenditure for the year was €5.8M and capital expenditure was €8M. Revenue income for the year was €5.7M, while capital income was €6.8M. He indicated that the debit balance had disimproved by €140,429 and now stood at €425,053. He stated that the collection figures for rates were 88% and 85% for rents and annuities.

The Director then outlined the areas where over expenditure had occurred for the consideration of the Members.

It was proposed by Cllr. Rowan,  
seconded by Cllr. K. Moran and resolved,  
“Pursuant to the City & County Management (Amendment) Act 1955 and the Local Government Acts 1925 – 2001, in particular the Local Government (Financial Provisions) Act 1978, we hereby accept and approve of the Annual Financial Statement for 2001 and approve of excess expenditure as follows:

Group 2	Roads	Increased Road Grants	€309,816}
		Urban Roads	€ 25,586} €335,402

It was proposed by Cllr. K. Moran,  
seconded by Cllr. Molloy and resolved,  
“Pursuant to the provisions of the Local Government Acts 1925 – 2001, we hereby accept and approve of the Annual Financial Statement for the year ended December 31<sup>st</sup>, 2001 as presented”.

### **Manager’s Orders:**

The Members noted the summary of orders circulated.

### **Questions:**

Question 1. Cllr. A. Berry:

Has there been any further communication between Bus Eireann and Athlone Town Council regarding the requested Bus Shelter at Portiuncula Hospital, Ballinasloe?

**Answer: Bus Eireann met with all the Members last week and indicated that sub-contractors for shelters had just been appointed and would be now examining new sites.**

Question 2. Cllr. A. Berry:

What progress, if any, has been made regarding work to commence at widening the road at the Whitegates Level Crossing?

**Answer: A draft Agreement was drawn up between Westmeath County Council and Iarnrod Eireann in relation to works at this crossing. This Agreement was signed by Westmeath County Council but was not completed by Iarnrod Eireann.**

**Over the past months the Roads Section of Westmeath County Council have had a number of meetings with Iarnrod Eireann staff at a local level. A further meeting has been arranged for April 14<sup>th</sup> next. A detailed construction layout and revised written Agreement has been drafted. These documents are to be forwarded by Iarnrod**

**Eireann to their solicitors who will prepare the revised legal documents. The revised legal Agreement must then be signed by both parties.**

**It is estimated that these works could be commenced in the latter part of 2003 subject to:-**

- (a) the legal Agreement being completed**

**(b) the necessary finance being available.**

When Cllr. Berry queried why the agreement was not signed by Iarnrod Eireann he was informed by the Director of Services that there was a dispute over compensation for expenses if the gates were automated in the future, but this dispute has been resolved.

Question 3. Cllr. K. Moran:  
What is the up to date position of this Council taking over Orwell Grove?

**Answer: Additional works are required before it will be to the standard required for a public road.**

Question 4. Cllr. N. McFadden:  
Will the pedestrian access be restored along the St. Patrick's Tce. Football Pitch opposite Diskins when building works are complete?

**Answer: Yes.**

**Uninsured Cars:**

The Members noted a letter from the Garda Superintendent in which he stated that the Gardai always have and will continue to vigorously enforce the legislation in respect of uninsured vehicles on the road.

**Primary Care Unit:**

The Members noted a letter from the Midland Health Board informing them that a Project Team was currently preparing a Development Brief & Option Appraisal for the overall health service infrastructure in Athlone and it was committed to increasing the existing G.P. out of hours service and to developing Primary Care Teams in the region.

Cllr. Butler requested the Council write again to get an up-to-date on the negotiations with G.P.'s.

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**Electoral Acts:**

The Members noted an acknowledgement from the Minister for the Environment & Local Government concerning our letter on the Electoral Acts.

**Uninsured Cars:**

The Members noted an acknowledgement from the Minister for Justice for the Council's letter concerning uninsured cars.

**The Needs of the Disabled:**

The Members supported the resolution from Tullamore Town Council to request the Government and in particular the Minister for Health to meet the needs of disabled people over the age of 18 years.

**Trading Hours of Licensed Premises:**

The Members noted a resolution from Ballinasloe Town Council calling for the rejection of the proposed legislation, which would confer on Local Authorities the power to determine the trading hours of licensed premises.

### **Taxi Federation:**

A request was received from the Taxi Federation for a meeting with the sub-committee from the Council, to discuss the fare structure for Athlone.

It was agreed to hold the meeting on Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> May, 2003 at 4.30 p.m. in the Fire Station, Coosan Road, Athlone

### **Conferences:**

The following conferences were noted by the Members:

Carrigaline, Co. Cork - Tackling Pollution of Inland & Coastal Waters - 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 2003

Various locations (circulated) - I.P.A. Seminar on the Environment - (various dates)

### **Review of Paid Parking:**

It was proposed by Cllr. K. Moran,

seconded by Cllr. McFadden and resolved,

“That we hold a meeting “in committee” to review the paid parking scheme, the meeting to be held on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> May, 2003 at 5.00 p.m. in Athlone Fire Station, Coosan Road, Athlone”.

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### **Urban Renewal:**

The Director of Services informed the Members that Athlone had an allocation of €90,000.00 from the Urban Renewal Fund and he recommended that the grant be expended on the projects as outlined hereunder:-

- |    |   |         |
|----|---|---------|
| 1. | Completion of railings at the Strand                                      | €30,000 |
| 2. | Refurbishment of Shannon viewing point at the Strand                      | € 2,500 |
| 3. | Wansboro Park, kerbing, surfacing paths, planting, topsoiling and seeding | €18,500 |
| 4. | Abbey Graveyard surfacing path  | € 5,000 |
| 5. | Replacement of street lighting at the Strand                              | €34,000 |

The Mayor expressed his complete dissatisfaction with the proposed spending, as none of the projects were on the west side of town as did Cllr. Rowan who requested that the fence at Battery Bridge along Clonown Road be included. He felt it was dangerous in it's current state.

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

seconded by Cllr. Rowan and resolved,

“Pursuant to the Local Government Acts 1925 – 2001, we hereby approve of the expenditure of the grant of €90,000.00 received from the Urban Renewal Scheme Fund and the 6 No. projects listed hereunder

1.	Completion of railings at the Strand	€30,000
2.	Refurbishment of Shannon viewing point at the Strand	€ 2,500
3.	Wansboro Park, kerbing, surfacing paths, planting, topsoiling and seeding	€18,500
4.	Abbey Graveyard surfacing path	€ 5,000
5.	Replacement of street lighting at the Strand	€34,000
6.	The repair and replacement in places of the fence at Battery Bridge along Clonown Road.	

The grant shall be distributed to the projects so as to ensure that all are completed”.

### **St. Mel's Tce/Loughandonning:**

The Director of Services informed the Members that a grant of €50,000.00 had been allocated by the Department of the Environment to undertake a feasibility study on a possible P.P.P. Project for the development of this area.

In response to queries he confirmed that the funding was for the study only and not for any physical work. All aspects of a likely P.P.P. would be examined and reported on.

### **Athlone Tidy Town's Plan 2003:**

The Members were circulated with a copy of the Plan for 2003 and they congratulated and complimented the Town Engineer and his staff on it's preparation. They hoped it would result in an increase in Athlone's marks as it did last year.

### **St. Vincent's Hospital:**

The Members agreed with Cllr. Berry's request to write to the Midland Health Board and ask them to outline the exact status of St. Vincent's whether it is a hospital or a care centre. Cllr. McFadden requested that they also be questioned on their proposals for the attendance of a radiologist in the x-ray unit.

### **Minimum Wage:**

Cllr. Berry requested that the Council write to the appropriate Minister asking for an increase in the minimum wage to €12.70 per hour. This was supported by Cllr. McFadden and Keena. The other Members felt this rate would be totally impracticable.

### **Standing Orders:**

As the finishing time of 8.30 p.m. for meetings had arrived, the members unanimously suspended Standing Orders so that the meeting could continue to complete the business on the Agenda.

### **St. Francis Tce.:**

The Town Clerk informed the Members that this road will be inspected, however this year's funding has been allocated and any works required must await the road allocations for 2004.

### **St. Columbas Tce.:**

The Town Clerk in response to Cllr. Molloy's motion stated that the footpaths here would be inspected, but again this year's funding has been allocated and any works required must await allocations for 2004.

### **Flooding at Iona Park:**

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. Molloy that gullies have already been installed at the rear of these houses and the rear road has been resurfaced. Any additional works required will be examined and completed as part of the construction contract for the adjacent houses. All Members were anxious that this problem be resolved.

### **Derelict Sites:**

In response to Cllr. Molloy's and Cllr. Moran's motion, the Town Clerk stated that the derelict and vacant buildings in Connaught Street were already being dealt with as part of the Council's ongoing programme to eliminate dereliction. Lists of properties were circulated to the Members for their assistance in determining ownerships.

### **Chair:**

At this stage of the meeting Cllr. McFadden took the chair as Mayor Molloy had to depart.

### **Recycling Facilities:**

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. Rowan of the location of 9 Bring Centres in the town and also that a new major Bring Centre is being provided by the County Council at Golden Island at a cost of almost €1 million. It is also intended to increase the size of bins provided. Cllr. Rowan welcomed the news and hoped the press would highlight the information.

### **Regional Sports Centre:**

All the Members wished to be associated with Cllr. Rowan's motion to congratulate the staff of the Regional Sports Centre for the splendid job they are doing.

### **Manhole Covers at Auburn Heights:**

Cllr. Rowan requested that Westmeath County Council lower the manhole covers which they raised at the playing pitch at Auburn Heights and where Celtic F.C. had put a lot of money into providing the pitch. He felt the Council should lower them, as it was them that raised them above pitch level. The Director of Services explained that the covers were raised to provide for ongoing maintenance of the surface water system at Auburn Heights, to prevent a recurrence of the flooding problems they had in the estate last year. The Council staff had great difficulty in locating the source of the problems then, because the manhole covers had been covered by a contractor working on behalf of the football club. He said that if the residents and football club come into the Council with a proposal to solve the problem, then it would be examined. Cllr. Rowan agreed to meet with the Area Engineer with Celtic F.C. to find a solution.

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### **Friary Lane:**

The Members supported Cllr. Keena's motion to request Westmeath County Council to make the steps at the top of Friary Lane, wheelchair friendly, but the Town Clerk informed them that a cellar at the top of the Lane prevents improvement works at present. However, when the proposed one-way system is introduced in Church Street this will allow footpath widening and render the area suitable for ramps.

### **Hedging at Retreat Heights:**

The Town Clerk confirmed for Cllr. Keena that the Council would contact the owner of the large hedging at the entrance to Retreat Heights off the Retreat Road, with a view to having the hedge trimmed. If the owner does not respond, then legal action can be taken.

### **Garrycastle Bridge Project:**

The Town Clerk confirmed that this Council will write to Westmeath County Council to request an update of the present status of the new Garrycastle Bridge project.

### **By-Pass Bridge at Roscommon Road:**

In response to Cllr. Butler's motion the Town Clerk confirmed that the Council will request Roscommon County Council to clean up the area under and around the by-pass bridge on the Roscommon Road.

### **Housing Estates:**

Cllr. Butler requested that this Council and Westmeath County Council provide a list of housing estates where development has been completed but have not yet been taken in charge by the Councils. The Town Clerk stated a list will be prepared and circulated to all the Members.

### **Smoking Policy in Public Houses:**

Cllr. K. Moran requested the Council to support the campaign of Deputy Noel Davern in relation to a smoking policy in public houses that recognises the needs of smokers and the adverse effect that a total ban would have on business. Following a discussion and vote, the majority supported the motion and it was agreed to write to the Minister.

### **N6 from Kinnegad to Athlone**

The Members unanimously supported Cllr. Cooney's motion to write to the N.R.A. and the Minister for Transport to get confirmation of the time scale for the construction of the N6 from Kinnegad to Athlone. The Members felt the road was essential to attract new industry to the town.

The Town Clerk informed the Members that the submission made to the Tanaiste by the recent Deputation, would be circulated to all Members for their information.

### **Repeal of Legislation:**

Cllr. Cooney requested the Council to write to the Minister for the Environment and Local Government to repeal the legislation providing for the removal of sanitary services from municipal authorities or at least from authorities which have been granted gateway status. Cllr. Cooney is concerned because of the size of the town and the loss of finances which the change will mean.

All the Members supported the motion and it was agreed to write to the Minister.

### **Playground – Town Park:**

In response to Cllr. McFadden's motion, the Town Clerk stated that the playground is currently under construction and it is hoped to have it completed before the end of April 2003.

### **Litter along the Railway Line:**

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. McFadden that the railway including the embankments, is the property of Irish Rail and they are responsible for maintenance and cleanliness. The Council have, he said, already served notices on Irish Rail to remove all litter from these areas.

Cllr. E. Moran said there was a great improvement in the amount of litter throughout the town and he congratulated Billy Coughlan, the Town Engineer and the Litter Warden.

**This concluded the business of the Meeting.**

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