

Minutes of the May Monthly Meeting of Athlone Town Council, which was held in the Civic Centre, Church Street, Athlone at 6.00 p.m. on Tuesday 8th May, 2007.

Attendance:

Mayor: Cllr. J. Butler

Members: Cllrs. A. Berry, M. Cooney, P. Hogan, R. Lennon, N. McFadden, K. Molloy and E. Moran.

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

Apology:

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

Minutes:

It was proposed by Cllr. Berry,

Seconded by Cllr. Molloy and resolved,

“That we hereby adopt the Minutes of the April Monthly Meeting which was held on April 2nd 2007”.

Matters Arising from the Minutes:

Battery Heights Regeneration Scheme:

The Director informed Cllr. Molloy that no response had been received from the Department yet and that he intended to seek a meeting with them to further the submission.

Fallen Tree:

The Town Engineer confirmed for Cllr. Hogan that the tree would be attended to as soon as possible.

Alternative Accommodation for Mixed School:

The Director informed Cllr. McFadden that no agreement had been reached yet on alternative accommodation for the school, while the new school is being built, but he assured her that it would not be a prefab or inferior in any way.

Enhancement of the Civic Square:

It was agreed to defer this item to the next meeting.

Description to the water supply:

Mr. Greg Duggan, S.E. outlined the background to the disruption to the water supply in February and March. He said that the improvement works to the Athlone Water Treatment Plant meant the decommissioning of one of the four sedimentation tanks, tank no.3. Based on an analysis carried out by consultants, it was believed that a single tank could be decommissioned and flows through the plant maintained, subject to raw water quality remaining relatively stable. For the first two weeks, he said that average daily production was only down by approximately 2% but an unfortunate series of events changed that. The quality of the raw water dropped and there were burst water mains resulting in action that caused a reduction in new water intake and consequently a reduction in the production of finished water. When water levels drop in the reservoir, the pressure dropped and therefore there had to be shutdowns in supply to maintain pressures to high level areas.

He apologised for the interruptions in supply and the inconvenience caused to consumers. He added that a temporary water treatment plant has been obtained and it is expected to be producing water by May 14th. There should be no further supply interruptions.

The Members felt that the temporary treatment plant should have been acquired in the first place despite the cost. They stressed the inconvenience caused to all, especially the businesses and asked if there would be any form of compensation. They asked what checks and tests were carried out to ensure the quality of water in Westmeath.

The County Manager said that in hindsight things could have been done better, the risk assessment and the levels of communication, but lessons had been learned. Informing the Members immediately is something that will be built into the Emergency Plan which is currently under review. As regards compensation, he said that the Council strives to provide a good quality water supply at all times, but it is not something that is guaranteed and there would be no question of compensation of any kind. Maybe he said, consumers could think about their storage facilities particularly in business and it could possibly be addressed at planning level in the future. He informed the Members that there are obligatory monthly tests sent to the EPA and the HSE does regular tests on the water supply. The quality of water in Athlone gives no cause for concern.

He thanked the staff involved for their hard work in restoring the supply and was confident that the water supply has now been significantly enhanced. Again he apologised on behalf of Westmeath County Council for the inconvenience caused to the people of Athlone.

Mayor's Reception:

It was unanimously agreed to grant a Reception to ONET, the Organisation of National Ex Servicemen and Women, who are holding their Annual Convention in the Shamrock Lodge Hotel on the 22nd, 23rd and 24th June, 2007.

Taking in charge of Hazelwood/Rindoon:

The Director presented an interim report to the Members outlining the cost of necessary works to these estates, totalling €235,000. He said that a programme of works is being prepared and will commence with works on the drainage and water systems, as these must be rectified before any of the footpath and road works are carried out. He added that the Council will also pursue the developers to seek to recover costs of rectification. He assured the Members that the Council is committed to bringing these estates up to standard and taking them in charge.

All the Members were dissatisfied with the length of time that had elapsed without action on these estates and they wanted the necessary works to be undertaken regardless of where the finance came from. They felt the Council should borrow the funding if necessary.

The Director said he was seeking a contribution from Westmeath County Council but he might not get anything, no funds would be available from the Department and Development Levies cannot be used for such works. The Council might have to set aside revenue monies over the next 2/3 years.

The Town Engineer agreed to Cllr. McFadden's request to cut the grass once but the residents would have to continue it, as the Council does not cut grass on private estates. He also undertook to examine a loose manhole if Cllr. McFadden identified it.

Road proposals for Baylough:

The Town Engineer outlined the feasible options available for the principal roads in the area of Baylough Area Action Plan which hopes to accommodate 400 houses.

Michael Punch, Consultant, recommended that the principal road network in the area should have 2 access points to existing roads, one onto the Clonown Road, south of the Shamrock Lodge Hotel and the other onto the Battery Road, at the bend west of Westlodge, both to be tee-junctions. This road network should then provide for all future linkage to the west.

All the Members welcomed the proposed layout and felt it would be good for the Westside of town but Cllr. McFadden proposed to exclude the exit at the bend in Battery Road. There was no seconder for this proposal.

The Director informed the Members that it will be incorporated into the New Town Development Plan.

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. E. Moran and resolved,

“Pursuant to the Planning & Development Acts 2000-2006 and the Roads Act 1993 we hereby approve of the road layout for the Baylough area as presented and we further approve of the necessary processes to include it in the new Town Development Plan”.

Draft Development Contribution Scheme:

The Director stated that following the February Meeting, the Draft Scheme was advertised and one submission was received from the D.O.E.H.L.G.

The Minister recognised the importance of the infrastructure (Main Drainage Scheme) to be provided through the levies and supported the overall approach. He added that the Department proposes to introduce in the coming months revised guidance on the operation of Sections 48 and 49 of the Planning & Development Acts 2000.

In his report the County Manager noted the Ministers comments and said the Scheme is to be adopted up to 28th February 2015, but can be reviewed in the interim and a new scheme can be adopted if necessary.

The Director told the Members it is now up to them to adopt or refuse the scheme, but he recommended its adoption.

The Members recognised the need for the levies in order to provide the necessary infrastructure for the town. Cllr. Molloy expressed disappointment that the Scheme did not include the provision of finance for the Loughandonning Road.

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. Cooney and resolved,

“Pursuant to the provision of Section 49 of the Planning & Development Act 2000 we hereby adopt the Supplementary Development Contribution Scheme as circulated and placed on public display in respect of the Athlone Main Drainage Scheme. The contribution shall be €88,249.00 per hectare for greenfield sites, €6.62 per sq. metre for brownfield development and extensions of commercial/industrial developments, shall apply to all developments served by the Athlone Main Drainage Scheme, shall be index linked annually to the Wholesale Price Index for Building and Construction published by the Central Statistics office and shall remain in effect to February 28th 2015”.

Vehicles for sale on public roads:

The A/Town Clerk informed the Members that the Council has drawn up a policy to deal with vehicles left for sale on the public roadside in the interest of safety. He said such a vehicle will be affixed with a sticker instructing its removal within 24 hours, if not removed by the owner, then the Council will remove it and store it for a maximum of 6 weeks. Its implementation would be primarily the responsibility of the Community and Traffic Wardens. He added that the costs incurred by the Council in removing and storing, must be paid in full, before the vehicle will be released. He recommended the Member's approval of the Policy.

While the Members welcomed the Policy, they felt it should apply to abandoned cars too.

The Director said the policy could be re-examined with regard to abandoned cars and it will be brought before them again next month.

Part 8 Planning Process for Brawney:

Cllr. Cooney referred to the Special Meeting earlier and as a number of issues needed to be clarified, he felt that more discussions should take place with residents before the commencement of the Part 8 process.

Cllr. McFadden agreed meetings should take place as soon as possible with the residents and the child case committee.

It was proposed by Cllr. Cooney,

Seconded by Cllr. E. Moran and resolved,

“That we defer the commencement of the Part 8 process for Brawney for one month”.

Part 8 Planning Process for distribution road through Lissywollen:

The Town Engineer displayed a map showing the proposed road, opposite Ericssons and going into Lissywollen, with a roundabout on the R916.

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. Cooney and resolved,

“Pursuant to the Planning & Development Acts 2000-2006 we hereby approve of the commencement of the Part 8 planning process for the construction of a distributor road at Lissywollen and a roundabout at the R916”.

Auditors Report:

The Member's noted the report of the Local Government Auditor on the accounts of the Council, in respect of the year ended 31st December 2005 and were very pleased with the state of the Council's finances.

The location of fun fairs/circuses:

Following a discussion on the dangers of funfair and circuses and the options open to the Council to restrict them, it was agreed to write to the Minister requesting that Local Authorities be given greater powers in the siting of funfairs etc. in their towns.

Motions for AMAI Conference:

The A/Town Clerk informed the Members that motions have to be submitted by June 30th 2007 and motions this year must relate to alternative energy, regional planning guidelines on road safety.

It was agreed to defer this item until the June meeting.

Draft Litter Management Plan:

All the Members accepted the Draft Plan and congratulated the Mayor, the Tidy Towns Committee and Council staff on the progress made to date in the town.

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. Cooney and resolved,

“That we place the revised Litter Management Plan on public display and invite submissions pursuant to the Litter Pollution Acts 1997-2003”.

Questions:

Question 1. Cllr. K. Molloy:

“What is the present position regarding our O’Connell Street Development?”

Answer: Part 8 drawings being prepared by Finola Rogerson Architects as per instruction dated 2nd April, 2007.

Question 2. Cllr. K. Molloy:

“Has this Council sent a submission to the D.O.E. seeking finance for works at Marine View?”

Answer: The Remedial Works scheme submission has yet to be prepared and it is hoped that this will be done in the coming months.

Question 3. Cllr. N. McFadden:
“Can this Council reinstate the green area, repair the Roads, and clean up the rubbish in the Willow Park area?”

Answer: **The Council is liaising with ESB and Westmeath County Council to have final reinstatement works to the green areas within Willow Park carried out. €40,000 has been allocated to Willow Park in the current year for the rehabilitation of roads and these works will be completed within the coming months. The Council has been removing rubbish from Willow Park continually this year and there is a serious problem with indiscriminate dumping at this location which is being closely monitored with a view to taking legal proceedings.**

Question 4. Cllr. N. McFadden:
“Can this Council re-examine traffic calming at the top of Assumption Road (Beech Park end), especially to consider the pedestrian crossing, for the elderly residents and children, trying to cross at this junction?”

Answer: **This matter was reported on at the November 2006 Town Council meeting where a survey carried out on 27 October 2006 showed that a warrant did not exist for a pedestrian crossing.**

Question 5. Cllr. A. Berry:
“Has Athlone Town Council reached any positive decision regarding some form of lighting at the junction of Assumption Road/Beech Park?”

Answer: **The Council is awaiting a report from the ESB in this matter..**

Question 6. Cllr. A. Berry:
“Has there been any progress in plans to erect a military monument in Athlone as was discussed some months ago?”

Answer: **Keith Williams Architects are preparing a design for this monument which will be erected in a recess in the wall of the Castle at Castle Street. This design will be brought before the Members in due course.**

Question 7. Cllr. E. Moran:
“What plans have ATC to alleviate traffic congestion and parking in the town?”

Answer: **The Athlone Traffic Management Plan recently carried out by Michael Punch & Partners details the proposals for the management of traffic within the town which will include the provision of the Link Road between the Crescent junction and the Hospital and the**

implementation of the one-way system in the town centre with associated junction modifications. It is considered that there is adequate parking provision in the town and this will be further enhanced with the opening of the new town centre.

Question 8. Cllr. P. Hogan:
 “Can this Council write immediately to the Minister for Environment, Mr. Dick Roche T.D., requesting him to amend the existing legislation that allows funfairs and circus events to take place at unsuitable and unsafe locations?”

Answer: **This would only be considered if submitted as a motion.**

Question 9. Cllr. P. Hogan:
 “Can this Council remove broken glass from walkways at Burgess Park?”

Answer: **Yes.**

Question 10. Cllr. R. Lennon:
 “What is the Town Council position regarding the taking over of Woodville estate?”

Answer: **A report is currently being prepared with a view to taking planning enforcement proceedings in this matter. This report is expected to be completed within the next month.**

Question 11. Cllr. R. Lennon:
 “What is the latest development with the Council and the Brawny Residents Association regarding the location of the Community Centre?”

Answer: **A meeting between Council officials and the Brawny Residents Association was held at 3p.m. on the 8th May 2007 to discuss this issue.**

Suspension of Standing Orders:

It was proposed by Cllr. Cooney,
 Seconded by Cllr. Butler and resolved,
 “That we hereby suspend Standing Orders in order to deal with the remaining items on the
 Agenda.

Managers Orders:

The Members noted the summary of Managers Orders circulated.

C.I.E. Costs:

The Members noted an acknowledgement from the Minister for Transport who said he referred our letter on fares to Iarnród Éireann.

Iarnród Éireann in turn responded stating that fares on week days are discounted because they are less busy days and the fares applied at the weekend are the normal fares.

The Members were dissatisfied with the response. They felt fares should be less at the weekends when many people have to stand and the trains are crowded. Alternatively Iarnród Éireann should provide more carriages.

The Electoral Act 2007:

The Members noted a letter from the Minister for the Environment regarding the amendment to the Electoral Act 2007, which merely stated that the contents had been noted.

Taxi Regulator:

The Members noted a letter from the office of the Commission for Taxi Regulation stating that a public competition was being held to select a candidate for appointment as Commissioner for Taxi Regulation by the Minister for Transport. In the meantime a Deputy Commissioner has been appointed.

C.C.T.V. at the Sports Centre:

The Manager of the Sports Centre confirmed that he has applied for funding for CCTV under the community CCTV scheme and that he would raise their letter at the next Board meeting.

Electricity Prices:

The Members noted a lengthy letter from the Commission for Energy Regulation which outlined its functions and responsibilities to both consumers and companies. It stated that the primary cause for the price increase in 2007 was wholesale fuel prices. A copy of the letter was circulated to the Members.

Conferences:

The Members noted the following conferences and the cost thereof:

Youghal	Irish Walled Towns Network	17 th & 18 th May, 2007
New Ross	A.M.A.I. Annual Conference	13 th - 15 th September, 2007

Window Replacement Programme:

In response to Cllr. Molloy's motion, the Acting Town Clerk stated that a window replacement scheme would have to be funded from the Council's own internal capital receipts or from the Revenue Budget. Members felt that a survey should be done to determine need, but the Director said that a survey would raise expectations and we would not have the funds to replace all the necessary windows. It was agreed that it would be best to have a rolling programme, as bad windows are identified, they will be prioritised and replaced.

Cllr. Cooney requested that they be replaced with timber frames rather than PVC, but was not supported.

Footpath at Deerpark Road:

The A/Town Clerk informed Cllr. Molloy that the footpaths at Deerpark Road can be examined and considered for funding for repair in 2008.

Caravans on Roscommon slip-road:

The Members supported Cllr. Molloy's motion and it was agreed to write to Roscommon County Council requesting them to take necessary steps to prevent travellers from parking their caravans along the slip-road onto the Roscommon Road, opposite Ganleys.

Housing allocations/anti-social behaviour:

The A/Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. McFadden's motion that all housing offers/allocations are subject to Garda clearance and all get pre-tenancy training. He added that the Council relies on this check to make judgements regarding the suitability of prospective tenants.

Cllr. McFadden felt these checks were failing because of the amount of serious anti-social behaviour within our estates. She called on the executive to take positive action to curb this.

All the Members agreed with Cllr. McFadden and felt there should be more consultation with themselves before allocating houses, as they knew the history of the families and the Gardaí might also be included in consultations.

The Director stated that the Council does try to screen tenants and makes every effort to evict anti-social tenants. He added that the item should be re-visited and that the Housing Liaison Officer should attend to give a presentation on the work undertaken by him prior to the next meeting.

Hazelwood/Rindoon estates:

Cllr. McFadden welcomed the proposals as discussed earlier.

Priory Park taking in charge:

It was agreed to defer this to the next meeting.

Opening of the Museum and Castle:

The A/Town Clerk informed Cllrs. Berry and Hogan that the Castle is the responsibility of Athlone Town Council but the museum within it, is the responsibility of the Old Athlone Society, who have chosen not to reopen, until improvements to the Keep have been carried out.

Cllr. Hogan said it was bad management to stay closed during the tourist season and Cllr. Berry agreed, saying they should reopen and apologise to the public for staying closed.

Cllr. McFadden requested the Council write to the Old Athlone Society asking them to reconsider.

Cllr. Molloy said the Development Committee should be moving faster to improve the Museum area.

Cllr. Butler said the committee was moving as fast as it could and would report to the Members in due course.

Weeds on Town Bridge:

In response to Cllr. Berry's motion, the A/Town Clerk stated that the maintenance of the Town Bridge is a matter for Westmeath County Council and the Area Engineer will arrange to have these weeds sprayed as soon as possible.

Power blasting Town Bridge:

The A/Town Clerk informed Cllr. Berry that this too is the responsibility of Westmeath County Council and the Area Engineer said they hoped to finish the power-washing of the Bridge in June.

Abstraction of water from Lough Ree:

Cllr. Hogan said the Council have an obligation to protect our environment and the proposed abstraction by Dublin will effect the raw water quality and the lake shore which has special areas of conservation. He proposed that the Council oppose the abstraction.

The Members supported the motion and agreed to write to all the Local Authorities along the Shannon seeking their support against the move by Dublin City Council.

Cllr. McFadden suggested we write to Dublin City Council asking them not to proceed with their plans for the abstraction of water from Lough Ree.

Election Day on a Thursday:

Cllr. Hogan expressed his disappointment at the selection of Thursday as Polling Day as this disenfranchises a large sector of society – lots of young students and people working away from home. He requested the Council write to the Taoiseach to express this disappointment.

Cllrs. Lennon and McFadden supported this motion but it was not generally agreed to write to the Taoiseach.

Dereliction in Conanught Street:

The A/Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. Lennon's motion that notices under Section 8 of the Planning & Development Act 2000 have been served in respect of the derelict sites and a land search is currently being undertaken to establish the owners. He added that C.P.O. notices will issue when this search has been completed.

Some of the Members expressed dissatisfaction at the length of time this was taking and the Director ensured them that all will be served with C.P.O.'s this year.

Niche trade on Westside:

The A/Town Clerk informed Cllr. Lennon that a letter was sent to the Westside Trading Organisations in February asking them to contact the Town Clerk to discuss the identification of additional niche uses for the Westside, but to date, no response had been received. He said he would write again.

Cllr. Lennon said that Jackie Flannery had submitted a letter on behalf of the Westside Traders which must have gone astray.

He agreed to submit a copy of it immediately.

Road to Iona Park Football Pitch:

Cllr. Lennon requested that traffic safety measures be taken on this road but the Director said as it is a private road the Council could not spend any funds on it.

Double yellow lines at Roslevin Lawns:

It was proposed by Cllr. McFadden,

Seconded by Cllr. Butler and resolved,

“Pursuant to the Roads Acts 1925-1993 and the Road Traffic Acts 1961-1994, we approve of the provision of double yellow lines at the junctions in Roslevin Lawns and at the turning bay”.

Loading Bays:

The Town Engineer circulated a map showing the location of a new loading bay for St. Peter’s Square, in front of the Palace Bar and the relocation of the disabled parking bay in Barrack Street. He suggested the loading bay operate as such from 8a.m. until 11a.m. Monday to Friday and then revert back to parking spaces at other times.

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. Butler and resolved,

“Pursuant to the Roads Acts 1925-1993 and the Road Traffic Acts 1961-1994 we hereby approve of a loading bay at the front of the Palace Bar at St. Peter’s Square and the relocation of the disabled parking bays at Barrack Street. The loading bay to operate from 8.00a.m. to 11.00a.m. Monday to Friday”.

This concluded the business of the meeting.