

Minutes of September Monthly Meeting of Athlone Town Council which was held in the Civic Centre, Church Street, Athlone at 6.00 p.m. on Monday 14th September, 2009

Attendance:

Mayor: Cllr. S. Buckley Byrne

Members: Cllrs. J. Henson, P. Hogan, G. McFadden, K. Molloy, K. Moran, A.O'Rourke, A. Shaw.

Officers: Mr. T. McCague, A/Director of Services
Mr. J. Walsh, Town Clerk
Mr. B. Lennon, A/ Town Engineer
Mr. A. Bass, Administrative Officer
Ms. M. McGovern, Staff Officer

Apology:

An apology was received from Cllr. M. Cooney who was unable to attend the meeting. The Deputy Mayor Cllr. S. Buckley Byrne chaired the meeting in his absence.

Minutes:

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,

“That we hereby confirm and adopt the Minutes of the July Monthly Meeting which was held on July 6th, 2009 and the Special Meeting which was held on July 21st 2009.

Matters Arising:

Cllr. Molloy queried when work would be undertaken on the Westside regeneration programme to which the Town Clerk replied that work would commence shortly.

Cllr. Moran raised a question regarding an enforcement notice which had been issued to a local restaurant. There is an ongoing issue regarding bins at this location and he sought to have the letter withdrawn. Cllr. Buckley Byrne said this issue could be taken up a later stage.

Report and Presentation on Unfinished Housing Estates:

The Town Clerk reported to the meeting that Pat Keating was not available to present this report until the next Monthly Meeting in October.

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. McFadden and resolved

“That we hereby adjourn Item No. 2 on the Agenda to the October Monthly Meeting”.

Enhancement Plan for College Park Estate:

The Town Clerk reported that the Enhancement Plan had been circulated and it included works such as paving, seating, bollards and public lighting. The total works would cost in the region of €400,000. It is intended to seek funding and to discuss it with the residents.

It was proposed by Cllr. Moran,

Seconded by Cllr. Henson and resolved,

“That we hereby request the Minister to receive a deputation from the Council regarding this Plan with a view to obtaining funding”.

The Town Clerk confirmed that the plan would be circulated to the Residents Association.

Disposal of Land:

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. Moran and resolved,

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

SCHEDULE

<u>Description of Property</u>	<u>Name of Purchaser</u>	<u>Purchase Price</u>
45 Iona Park, Athlone	Jimmy O’Connor	€45.40

Board of A.C.T.:

It is proposed by Cllr. McFadden,

Seconded by Cllr. Henson and resolved,

“That we hereby elect Cllr. Shaw as the Councils nominee to the Board of ACT”.

Athlone Tidy Towns Committee:

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. Henson and resolved,

“That we hereby elect Cllr. Hogan to be a member of the Athlone Tidy Towns Committee”.

Rapid Team:

It was proposed by Cllr. Molloy,

Seconded by Cllr. Moran and resolved,

“That we hereby elect Cllr. Hogan to be a Member of the Rapid Team”.

Managers Orders:

The Members noted the summary of Managers Orders as circulated.

AFS 2008:

Mr. Bass reported to the Members that Revenue Expenditure was €12.3m while Revenue Income was €12.3m resulting in a closing surplus of €63,467. He said the surplus was generated due to €95,000 being saved on term loan, €45,000 being saved on overdraft interest and excess income being gained through Housing Rents, Bank Interest, Rates, Pel and Road Opening Licences. Surplus income generated was transferred to the Athlone Castle and the Athlone Arts Centre funds.

On the Capital side Mr. Bass reported Capital Expenditure being €6.4m.

Over expenditure had taken place at sub service level and Mr. Bass outlined explanations, for the Members consideration and approval.

It is proposed by Cllr. Moran,

Seconded by Cllr. Hogan and resolved,

“Pursuant to the provisions of the Local Government Act 1925-2001, we hereby accept and approve the Annual Financial Statement presented and of the excess expenditure as follows:

Housing Maintenance	€11,839
Debt Management & Rent Assessment	€29,737
Service Support Costs	€5,169
Homeless Service	€9,465
Debt Management Housing Loans	€57
Local Roads General Maintenance Works	€70,994
Service Support Costs	€17,528
Traffic Management	€822
Other Engineering Improvements	€908
Operation of Street Parking	€34,680
Administration of Roads Capital Programme	€2,348
Statutory Plans and Policy	€11,660
Service Support Costs	€210
Planning Control	€7,489
Service Support Costs	€1,929
Enforcement Costs	€218
Unfinished Housing Estates	€41,084
Urban And Village Renewal	€12
Service Support Costs	€105
Agency and Recoupable Service	€4,650
Litter Warden Service	€4,142
Service Support Costs	€478
Service Support Costs	€731
Dangerous Buildings	€1,178,

Fire Services Training	€7,276
Fire Safety Control Cert Costs	€3,789
Agency and Recoupable Service	€477
Leisure Facilities Operations	€5,474
Service Support Costs	€63
Library Service Operations	€3,503
Playgrounds	€40,531
Community Grants	€17,809
Administration of the Arts Programme -Gallery	€480,000
Heritage/Interpretive Facilities Operations - Castle	€11,148
Agency & Recoupable Service	€15,861
Administration of Rates Office	€5,640
Debt Management Service Rates	€6,367
Refunds and Irrecoverable Rates	€220,626
Contribution to Members Associations	€350
Service Support Costs	€215
Maintenance of Networks and PCs	€1,209

The Town Clerk told the Members that despite the over expenditure, the Councils revenue balance had improved by €63,467.

Cllr. Buckley Byrne asked about the expenditure on Local Area Plans and whether this has been funded on the income side. Mr. Bass explained some of the over expenditure on LAP's was funded by development levies but that all of the over expenditure has either been funded by decrease in expenditure or an increase in income.

The Town Clerk told the Members that new properties were rated with unexpected income of €115,000 being generated.

Cllr. Shaw asked for an explanation on expenditure in refunds/irrecoverable rates. The Town Clerk explained that these were vacant properties where rates cannot be recovered, that there were more write offs in 2008 than in previous years, due mainly to old properties in the town centre and Connaught St. being derated.

The Town Clerk told the Meeting that once the final accounts were audited, they would be circulated to the Members.

Adjudicators Report on Athlone in respect of the 2009 Tidy Towns Competition:

The Town Clerk outlined the Adjudicators Report and told the Members that the town was awarded 238 marks overall, an increase of 7 on the 2008 total. Litter control had increased by 2 points which is a reflection of the great work being done by the Tidy Towns Committee. The high marks given are in stark contrast to the IBAL report. The adjudicator recommended a 5 year development plan, setting out the actions that needed to be taken under each of the headings. In particular he welcomed the work done on the built environment but thought the Civic Square required attention. With regard to Wildlife and

Natural Amenities, he proposed an Ecology Study which would be a starting point with a view to maximising the available points in this area. Overall the Town Clerk said this was a good report, with the Town Engineer and Staff, Tidy Towns Committee deserving praise for the great efforts they had made.

A general discussion ensued with all Members giving praise to the Town Engineer and staff and in particular to the Tidy Towns Committee under the stewardship of John Butler. All agreed that there was huge scope for improvement, with Cllr. Shaw suggesting that Tom Kavanagh from IBAL being asked to attend a Council Meeting in the future. Cllr. Moran suggested the Council write to the Tidy Towns Committee congratulating them on their great work. Cllr. Henson asked about the staff employed by the Tidy Towns Committee and said it would be regrettable if they are laid off after 6 months. The Town Clerk responded saying that funding was only available for this period.

In conclusion, Mr. T. McCague complimented all those involved and said that the points received were impressive. He was in favour of the 5 year plan suggested and said that there were a number of other plans approved that should feed into this plan. One plan mentioned was the Waterfront Strategy which the Manager hopes to complete. Overall, he believed an enhanced performance is achievable.

Questions:

Question 1

Cllr. P. Hogan:

“Can this Council contact the relevant authority with regards the trimming of hedges, the repair and replacement of signs and the cleaning up of rubbish on the Athlone Town by-pass?”

Answer:

A specialist Motorway Maintenance team has been created by Westmeath County Council. An 8 week programme to carry out all repairs/maintenance works on the Bypass/Motorway has been finalised and will commence in October 2009.

Question 2

Cllr. P. Hogan:

“Will this Council allocate monies to resurface road and provide gullies in specific locations to alleviate flooding at Alverno Drive?”

Answer:

This proposal can be considered in the context of the 2010 Roads Programme.

Question 3

Cllr. J. Henson:

“Is there an update available on the survey for traffic control measures in the St. Annes/St. Pauls Terrace area?”

Answer:

This survey will be completed shortly as the county needed to reflect school traffic.

Question 4. Cllr. J. Henson:
“Are the footpaths connecting Cornamaddy National School to the Department of Education going to be completed before work begins on foot of the Cornamagh Plan?”

Answer: Westmeath County Council currently has no funding available for these works. Athlone Town Council will write to WCC on this issue.

Question 5. Cllr. K. Molloy:
“Is O’Connell Street development likely to go ahead? If so can we estimate timeframe?”

Answer: This project is currently on hold due to the economic climate and the financial restrictions imposed by the Department.

Question 6. Cllr. A. Shaw:
“What is the timeframe of completion for the road resurfacing at Cornamagh, particularly between Fernhill and Cornamagh Cemetery?”

Answer: Resurfacing works are presently in progress.

Question 7. Cllr. A. Shaw:
“Can the Council clarify the response given to my question at the July meeting regarding the right turn lane to the Orchard Estate, when the Council indicated that land acquisition would be necessary before the right turn could be put in place?”

Answer: The initial response from the July meeting is as follows ‘A design for this facility is being prepared and will require the approval of the NRA and land may also have to be acquired to provide a footpath’. As an interim measure road markings identifying the right hand turn have been put in place and are currently being monitored to assess their effectiveness.

Question 8. Cllr. A. O’Rourke:
“Money was set aside for a bus turning zone at John Paul Park (€10,000) but this money had to be withdrawn following the revised budget for 2009. However, a less comprehensive and far less expensive bus turning zone would suffice and would cost a lot less than €10,000. Can the Council reassess the area with a view to providing a less comprehensive yet suitable solution?”

Answer: The proposal developed conformed with all engineering and health and safety requirements and standards which cannot be relaxed.

Question 9. Cllr. A. O'Rourke:

"Has the Council a plan to deal with the growing incidents of graffiti around the town?"

Answer: Incidents of graffiti in public areas where the Council have a responsibility are dealt with on an ongoing basis.

Question 10: Cllr. S. Buckley-Byrne:

"Can the Council give an update on the progress of the Military Memorial to be put in place as a tribute to the deceased members of the Western Command of the local Army Barracks?"

Answer: Tenders were opened last week and are being assessed. A contract should be executed within the next 5 weeks.

Midlands Regional Authority:

It was agreed that the Midlands Regional Authority would make a presentation on the Regional Planning Guidelines at the November Monthly Meeting.

Speed:

The Members noted a letter from the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform indicating that 8no. new Garda mobile speed detection vehicles had been launched and a procurement process was underway regarding the provision of safety cameras.

Town Councils:

The Members unanimously supported a motion from Tuam Town Council for the rejection of the McCarthy recommendation to abolish Town Councils.

Headlights:

Supt. Glacken in a response indicated that the use of headlights in poor visibility was being monitored and motorists would be cautioned or fined where lights were not being used in these conditions.

Bus Service:

Mr. Damien Coen of Bus Eireann was unable to meet with the Members regarding the local bus service as changes were under discussion with staff and unions.

Garda Facilities:

The Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform advised the Members that additional accommodation is being provided adjacent to the Garda Station and plans were being developed for accommodation for the Water Support Unit.

Athlone Show:

The Agricultural Show thanked the Members for their support for the 2009 show.

Members Expenses:

The Members unanimously approved of a revised Annual expenses as follows:

July 1 st 2007	-	€3,343.00 P.A.
July 1 st 2008	-	€3,393.00 P.A.
June 12 th 2009	-	€3,054.00 P.A.

Conferences:

The Members noted the cost and date of the La Touche Legacy Seminar in Greystones from October 2nd to 4th 2009.

Old Folks Information Day:

The Town Clerk confirmed to the Members that a once off contribution of €500 would be given by the Council towards this day. This contribution was welcomed by Cllr. Hogan.

Pitch at Sarsfield Square:

In response to Cllr. Hogan's and Cllr. Henson's motions the Town Clerk said that the provision of fencing at Sarsfield Square was primarily a matter for the Residents Association who use the facility, but that the Council would be prepared to consider making a financial contribution in the Budget for 2010. Cllr. Hogan welcomed this proposed funding in the next Budget and was supported in his motion by Cllrs. Henson and Buckley Byrne.

Allocation of Monies to Battery Heights and Willow Park:

In reply to Cllr. Hogan's motion the Town Clerk said that there were no funds allocated by the Department for expenditure in 2009 for Willow Park. The scheme approved for Battery Heights with a cost of €205,000 would have to be taken from the Councils capital allocation. A general discussion took place on this motion where many of the Members felt that the €205,000 promised for Battery Heights was a new allocation. It was unanimously agreed that the Council should write to the Minister seeking clarification of the monies promised in respect of both Battery Heights and Willow Park. The Town Clerk agreed to do this.

Community Worker for Willow Park:

In reply to Cllr. Hensons motion about retaining the Community Worker for Willow Park, the Town Clerk said that the continuity of this employment is unlikely in view of the current financial constraints and staff embargo. All Members praised the work of the Community Worker and Cllr. O'Rourke said to discontinue this post would be a backwards step.

Safety Measures at the Slip-Road going into B & O:

In reply to Cllr. Moran's motion, the Town Clerk said the slip road will be examined to identify any safety implications and any mitigation measures required will be prepared for the consideration of the N.R.A. Cllr. Moran in response said that he had already put this motion down in April 2008, that an accident was waiting to happen at this junction and it should have been dealt with prior to this. Mr. T. McCague said he would talk to the Roads personnel on this motion.

Directional sign at Coosan Tavern, Arcadia:

The Town Clerk stated in response to Cllr. Moran's motion that the Council would examine the need for signage in this general area and report later to the Council. He also stated that the whole town would be looked at with regard to signage and Cllr. Moran said he looked forward to this report.

Damaged Trees and Footpaths at Retreat Heights:

In response to Cllr. Shaw's motion the Town Clerk stated that the Council will examine the trees and determine whether or not they constitute a danger and who has responsibility to render the roadway safe. Then works will be carried out by the owners, be it the Council or private landowners under hedge cutting notices. He added that footpath repairs will be considered having regard to other priorities. Cllr. Shaw welcomed this response.

Yellow Box at John Broderick Street:

The Town Clerk in response to Cllr. Shaws motion said that the need for additional road marking in this area would be assessed. This motion was supported by Cllrs Moran and Buckley Byrne.

HSE Community Games:

In reply to this motion, the Town Clerk said he and the Town Engineer are part of AIT committee and that any involvement that the Members may wish for themselves can be conveyed to the Director of Institute. Cllr. Shaw said that there were few events catering for young adults and it is important to support the Games and send a positive message to Ciaran O Cathain and the AIT. Cllrs. Moran and Buckley Byrne both supported the motion and Cllr. Buckley Byrne further proposed that the Council write to A.IT. congratulating them on their success and offer to liaise with them in the future development of the Games.

Highfield Court and Arcadia Crescent:

As Cllr. Cooney was absent from Meeting, it was agreed that this motion would be adjourned to the next Meeting.

Rural Transport Initiative:

In response to Cllr. Cooneys motion, the Town Clerk said the Council would write to the Ministers should the Members so wish, it was unanimously agreed to do so.

Waste Management:

In reply to Cllr. O'Rourke's motion, the Town Clerk said that Westmeath County Council are currently undertaking a review of waste management and that a report would come before the Members in due course. Cllr. O'Rourke told the Meeting that the expected cost of waste disposal for this year would be €13,000 with income of €500,000 being generated thus leaving a serious loss for the Council. All Members were unanimous in their belief that the waiver scheme should remain in place, but Cllr. O'Rourke said that his motion had nothing to do with removing the waiver scheme, but that the Council should be examining other options with a view to turning the refuse collection into a profit making operation.

Swine Flu Virus:

In response to Cllr. O'Rourke's motion, the Town Clerk said that the Council were in the process of providing sanitising facilities where the staff interact with the public. Cllr. O'Rourke welcomed this response.

Safety Bollards at the junction of Gleeson Street and Sean Costello St:

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. O'Rourke that the need for safety bollards in this area will be assessed.

St. Mels Terrace:

In response to Cllr. Buckley Byrnes motion, the Town Clerk stated that arrangements are continuing to rehouse 4 no. families and to finalise the legalities of the acquisition of further houses. He further stated that all blocks will be demolished when vacant and in Council ownership and it is expected that 2 no. blocks will be knocked in 2009. Cllr. Buckley Byrne welcomed this response and said that it was critical that progress would be made on the demolition of such houses as it was a heavily used area and was adding to the litter in the area.

Pedestrian Crossing at Assumption Road:

The Town Clerk informed Cllr. Buckley Byrne that a survey of the pedestrian movements would be undertaken in the near future and should a crossing be warranted, it could be considered in conjunction with the roads programme in 2010. However, he added that previous counts undertaken at this location, had not warranted a crossing. Cllr. Buckley

Byrne replied saying that the 2 lines currently there does not constitute a crossing and that it is presently very misleading for pedestrians. Both Cllrs. McFadden and Hogan fully supported this motion. The Town Clerk said there is already a traffic island there but that the Engineering Dept would look at it again.

Replace paths on Old Willow Road:

In response to this motion, the Town Clerk said that these paths will be examined and prioritised in the context of the 2010 budget/block grant.

This was welcomed by Cllr. Buckley Byrne and she acknowledged that small repair works had already been done.

This concluded the business of the meeting.