

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Ceantar Bardasach Bhaile Locha Riach *Municipal District of LOUGHREA*

Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Municipal District of Loughrea held in the Council Chamber, Arás an Chontae on 9th December 2024

I LATHAIR:

Cathaoirleach

Cllr. M. Kinane

Baill:

Cllr's. M. Maher, PJ Murphy, G. Finnerty, G. Donohue, J. McClearn, S. Curley, D. Kelly, P. Killilea, I. Canning

Oifigigh:

Ms. E. Ruane, Director of Services
Mr. U. Finn, Director of Services
Mr. L. Hanrahan, Director of Services
Ms. R. Lowe, Senior Engineer
Mr. G. O'Malley, Chief Fire Officer
Mr. P. Duffy, Senior Assistant Chief Fire Officer
Ms. V. Loughnane, Senior Planner
Mr. G. Haugh, Senior Executive Engineer
Mr. N. Kennedy, Executive Engineer
Mr. D. O'Loughlin, Executive Engineer
Ms. T. Quinn, Executive Planner
Ms. M. Flynn, Administrative Officer
Ms. S. Cleary, Staff Officer
Ms. C. Kennedy, Clerical Officer

Apologies:

Mr. E. Gallagher, Senior Executive Engineer

Confirmation of Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Municipal District of Loughrea held in the Loughrea Chamber on 11th November, 2024 LMD2395

The Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of the Municipal District (MD) of Loughrea held on 11th November 2024 were **PROPOSED** by Cllr. Maher, **SECONDED** by Cllr. Curley and agreed and signed by the Cathaoirleach.

Cllr. Finnerty referred to previous discussions regarding hedge and tree maintenance and stated many trees fell during Storm Darragh, he stated that the onus is on the landowner to ensure dangerous trees are felled. He referred to a comment made in a previous meeting by Cllr. McClearn whereby Council engaged a professional to identify trees in the Portumna area to be felled and he suggested this approach be considered again. He stated utility companies should be contacted to review poles in their charge. He enquired if a member of the Law

Agent's Office would provide clarification on where responsibilities lie regarding trees and poles that are damaged/fall, and regarding debris on public roads. Cllr. Maher agreed, stating a lot of landowners do not understand their obligation regarding trees and hedges. Cllr. Donohue acknowledged the work of outdoor staff during Storm Darragh. She raised concerns regarding trees with Ash dieback and stated that the 1993 Roads Act is outdated and **PROPOSED** the Members to write to their party colleagues to have the legislation amended as this issue is a threat to life. The members **AGREED**. She stated there will be a new programme for Government and she intends writing to the Minister for Transport to propose a new scheme to assist Local Authorities and Landowners in the removal of dangerous trees as part of the new programme for Government. She added she is concerned for outdoor staff and fire services personnel dealing with hazardous trees. She suggested correspondence should issue from the Municipal District advising landowners of their obligations. Cllr. Donohue stated it is helpful to have pole identification numbers for reporting purposes and enquired if someone could attend the meeting from ESB/Eircom to clarify their position on these matters. The Cathaoirleach stated she will request an update for the January meeting.

Cllr. McClearn expressed his thanks to the outdoor staff for their work following recent storm incidents, he stated staff go above and beyond their duty to deal with various issues. He stated, in 1991, following a horrific accident in Portumna, Galway County Council arranged an inspection of Ash trees. He agreed with Cllr. Donohue stating that something needs to be done very soon regarding dangerous trees before there is a disaster.

Cllr. Murphy stated the condition of Ash trees on the side of public roads shouldn't be a matter for discussion as it was very clear that responsibility rested with the landowner and if a landowner has diseased trees on the side of the road they should be removed as they are hazardous to the public. He stated discussions on the potential of a grant scheme or other financial reward is not doing anyone any favours and stressed that this might in fact encourage landowners to delay removing trees that were hazardous.

Cllr. Donohue put forward a **Motion** that the Loughrea Municipal District write to the Government and ask that a properly funded scheme be put in place to deal with Ash dieback on the roadside and be included in the new Programme for Government as the 1993 Roads Act does not address the enormous hazard that is over 30 years of growth of roadside affected trees. The **Motion** was seconded by Cllr. Kelly and agreed by the Members.

Mr. Haugh stated a guidance document "*A Guide for Landowners to Managing Roadside Trees*" is circulated to all Councillors on a regular basis. This document clearly states that trees on your land are your property and each landowner is responsible for their care. Land ownership normally extends to the centre of the road; therefore, it is the landowner – not the local authority – who is responsible for the trees and hedges beside the road.

Cllr. Donohue stated, it is not only farmers who have a responsibility for trees on their land, as there are people in nursing homes or living abroad who are not aware of their responsibility.

Cllr. Curley advised that he wants his additional portion of funding from LPT to go towards site identification for a swimming pool stating that people in Loughrea must make a 60-kilometre round-trip to use swimming pool facilities.

Cllr. McClearn stated a meeting is needed to provide clarity to Councillors on how additional funding will be spent and requested clarification of the procedure at the January MD meeting, the Cathaoirleach agreed.

The Cathaoirleach informed Cllr. Curley that a few items could not be included in the MD Meeting of 9th December 2024 due to the time constraint, but these matters may be included in the Agenda for January 2025. Cllr. Curley thanked the outdoor staff for their efficient work following Storm Darragh.

Cllr. Curley enquired if a ramped junction similar to those in Westport could be located at the Westbridge, Loughrea to slow cars down adding a real solution is required for the Westbridge junction. Cllr. Maher stated the lights at the Westbridge need to be looked at again and enquired if a contractor had been out adding that only 5/6 cars get through at a time. Ms. Lowe responded, additional analysis of the LTP in Loughrea at the Westbridge is being carried out, adding she is meeting with the consultant, Systra, this afternoon. She stated the cause of the previous backlogs appeared to coincide with works being carried out by Uisce Eireann (UE). Mr. Haugh added, the recent additional Galway County Council works and repairs at the Westbridge had been successful and had significantly reduced delays and waiting times. A recent outage at the junction had occurred but the junction was operating normally again. One instance of delay did not point to a system issue and could have been the result of an external event. The operation of the lights would remain under review.

Cllr. Maher welcomed Mr. David O'Loughlin to the Loughrea MD team. He thanked Mr. Haugh and Mr. Kennedy for their work during 2024. He stated there had been 7 accidents on the lake road recently and ramps need to be installed to reduce speed on this road. He enquired if funding is available for footpaths as there are 4 wheelchair users using the footpath on the lake road which is lethal. Mr. Haugh responded, funding is not available for footpaths, but Mr. Kennedy will look at issues raised. Ms. Lowe stated, grant schemes could be considered, and she will advocate for funding under a Low-Cost Safety Programme.

Cllr. Maher clarified to Cllr. Curley that he attended training with the National Transport Agency (NTA) where it was confirmed to him that funding was not allocated for bus shelters in Loughrea. He requested an update regarding the current position and added there are students travelling to college who require an adequate transport service. Ms. Lowe responded the Council has no role in the provision of bus services. Ms. Ruane stated contact will be made with the NTA requesting an update.

Part 8 Loughrea Fire Station

LMD2396

The Cathaoirleach read aloud a **motion** submitted by Cllr. Curley. To defer the Part 8 discussion/vote which is scheduled on the agenda for the Loughrea MD Meeting 9th December 2024, **PROPOSED** by Cllr. Curley was **SECONDED** by Cllr. Finnerty.

Cllr. Curley stated he put forward the motion to defer the Part 8 to provide two community groups an opportunity to raise concerns before the vote took place. He stated he wants a deputation heard before the vote, following which a democratic decision can be made. Cllr. Maher responded the project is in progression for 10 years and every opportunity was available over the previous six months. He stated the Loughrea Fire Station is 75 years old and Councillors have an opportunity to ensure a new Fire Station is progressed.

The Cathaoirleach referred to a lack of recreational amenities at Oranhill stating this should not reoccur in Loughrea. She asked for evidence that if the Part 8 is not agreed now, funding would be lost. Cllr. Donohue stated, she was aware from the Plenary meeting and Management Report this discussion was coming before the Municipal District. She added, her late uncle, Pat Hynes (RIP), had an article in the newspaper 22 years previously looking for an upgrade to the Fire Station. Cllr. Kelly stated there is not much resistance from St. Laurence's Fields and he does not want to see the loss of this opportunity. He acknowledged the difficult situations the emergency services face in carrying out their valued services. Cllr. McClearn stated most people don't know what fire services personnel face in their duties adding, they are unsung heroes. He stated, he does not see any reason the Part 8 should not be supported. Cllr. Curley stated, a feasibility study was not done on other sites, and does not want to stop the new Fire Station progressing but wants people's views heard, he raised concerns regarding anti-social behaviour if recreation areas are removed.

The Cathaoirleach put the Motion to a vote to defer the Part 8.

Cllr. Curley raised concerns in relation to the link between antisocial behaviour and recreational facilities.

Votes in favour of deferring the Part 8; (3) Cllrs Curley, Finnerty and Kinane.

Votes not in favour of deferring the Part 8: (7) Cllrs Maher, McClearn, Killilea, Murphy, Donohue, Kelly, and Canning.

The Motion to defer the Part 8 was not carried.

Ms. Loughnane briefly outlined the Part 8 to the Members. She added, the members received a report on the 4th of December outlining the proposal, design, and relevant legislation. She stated that in accordance with legislation, the document was to be made available within 6 weeks. Ms. Loughnane stated that 71 submissions were received, reviewed, and considered which included considerations on the land that was acquired and concerns regarding the lack of recreation facilities. She stated that screenings formed part of the Environmental Impact Assessment. She stated that the report recommends proceeding with the proposed development but with the modification to move the boundary to provide additional space for future potential recreational area as there were a number of submissions in this regard.

Mr. Finn stated, there was a 6-week period for members of the public to make submissions, adding, the Part 8 was advertised in newspapers and a site notice was erected following which submissions were considered by the Executive. He stated, Section 1 deals with the provision of a recreation area. He clarified the site is 1.3 acres, and it is proposed to relocate the fence

line to provide an additional 4 metres thus increasing the recreation area to approximately one third of an acre, he stated the recreation area could be similar in size to the play area in Loughrea beside the lake, which is divided into two sections, and the area available is similar to the play area nearer to the court house that includes the junior play area. Mr. Finn stated that the services of a professional playground company were engaged to assess how best the area could be used. This would be subject to a separate consultation for the best use of the area.

Mr. Finn added, the Chief Fire Officer assessed the site and was one hundred percent supportive of the site location. He added, all issues raised have been responded to in the report.

Ms. Loughnane acknowledged the work of the Executive, Planning Team, and particularly Ms. Tara Quinn, Executive Planner.

Cllr. Maher welcomed the report and acknowledged the work done by the Planning Team and Director. He stated the works will cost approximately €1.9 million; he welcomed the additional land made available for the green area which could possibly be used by the pre-school. He stated the land is Council owned therefore it was not necessary to purchase land.

Cllr. Kelly stated it is important that there is land ringfenced for recreation use by the pre-school, or dog walkers. He said in 1950, it cost €5,000 to build the Fire Station which equates to €200,000 nowadays, adding we are getting 10 times more. He stated, it is fantastic for the safety of all living in the surrounding areas.

Cllr. Curley read aloud a letter from Mr. Paddy Egan penned in the early 1990s written with 2 men who are now deceased. The letter set out that the people requested the land to be preserved as green space and understood the Council assured the land would be preserved.

Cllr. Curley thanked Ms. Quinn and the Planning team for their work. He requested it be included in the Minutes that an area is ringfenced, and sufficient, for a green space/dog park. He stated he will put pressure on national politicians if required. He stated that he spoke to Ms. Ruane 3 years previously to pause the works, and stated he is asking for this again today. He added he sought reports on other site investigations but acknowledges that democracy will rule regarding the vote, and he respects that. Cllr. Curley's proposed that funding will be ringfenced for the greenspace and this was seconded by Cllr. Kelly and agreed by the Members.

Cllr. Donohue thanked the team and stated she is happy with the compromise regarding the green space. She stated she would support members to pool funding to be ringfenced for the recreation area. She sought clarification on what would happen with the current fire station, stating the area is used for dropping children off for school and a local market is located there. She added, the late Cllr. Hynes (RIP) would be supportive of the new fire station. Mr. Hanrahan stated that an assessment of the existing fire station site does not form part of the existing Planners Report as it takes account only of the lands to be used for the new Fire Station. Mr. Finn stated, there is no definite plan for the existing Fire Station building at present, he added it is a valuable site and it will be considered for future use.

Mr. Finn added, the existing Fire Station is well past its use by date, it is 75 years old he added, an upgrade is needed, and he is keen to move forward towards construction. He added, years will be lost if this doesn't go ahead and Loughrea will go to the back of the queue.

Cllr. Curley stated that his portion of additional of funding from Local Property Tax has been dedicated to the Loughrea Swimming Pool as per his discussion with Ms. Katie O'Connor, Head of Finance.

Cllr. Maher **PROPOSED** the Part 8 which was **SECONDED** by Cllr. Kelly.

Cllr. Kelly **PROPOSED** a Motion that the plaque erected in the Loughrea Fire Station in the late 1960s to Fireman Thomas Slattery, be erected in the New Fire Station. Cllr. Maher **SECONDED** the proposal and agreed by the Members.

Votes in favour of the Part 8; (7) Cllrs. Canning, Donohue, Kelly, Killilea, Maher, McClearn, Murphy.

Votes opposing the Part 8: (1) Cllr. Curley.

Abstained from voting: (2) Cllr. Finnerty, Cathaoirleach Kinane.

The Cathaoirleach confirmed that the Part 8 has been passed and thanked the Fire Service Personnel for their continued work. She acknowledged the sacrifices made by their families.

Mr. Finn thanked the Cathaoirleach and Members, he thanked Ms. Loughane and Ms. Quinn for their dedication and work. Cllr. Donohue enquired regarding the expected duration of the works and when the new facility will be available. Mr. Duffy responded, it is planned to go to tender in the coming weeks and anticipates the new Fire Station, subject to no other issues, should be completed in March 2026.

Flooding Update

LMD2397

Ms. Flynn advised the members that Mr. Gallagher was unavailable to attend the meeting and sent his apologies. Mr. Gallagher prepared an update to be circulated to the Members.

Cathaoirleach's Business

LMD2398

The Cathaoirleach informed the Members that Ms. Loughnane will give a brief update regarding the Gort Local Area Plan (LAP) and advised that Ms. Flynn will circulate a presentation to the Members.

Ms. Loughnane stated that the Gort LAP is the only one not completed yet adding that the outcome of the National Planning Framework (NPF) is awaited. She stated, it is anticipated that the Gort LAP will commence in Quarter 1 of 2025. She stated an advertisement will appear in the newspapers in Quarter 1 following which there will be a period for public consultation. She stated a webinar will take place on 12th February 2025 from 6pm to 7pm and the draft LAP, she expects, will be on public display from 9th January 2025 in Galway County Council, the Gort Local Area Office, and on Galway County Council's Consult website for six weeks. Ms. Loughnane stated she is available for the next few weeks should the Members wish to contact her for discussion.

In response to a query raised by Cllr. Murphy, Ms. Loughnane stated members of the public will have a 6-week period to make submissions. She added, a public consultation is scheduled to take place on 5th February 2024 in the Lady Gregory Hotel in Gort from 2pm to 7pm. She added. The Cathaoirleach and Members thanked Ms. Loughnane for the update.

Cllr. Canning stated the pedestrian lights at Finn's Filling station are not working again, Mr. Haugh responded that there has been a significant amount of work done but it appears that the lights are nearing the end of life and will need to be replaced for which funding is required.

In response to Cllr. Canning's request for an update on traffic calming on the road to the swimming area, Mr. Haugh stated that earlier this year he believed funding would be available, but this was not the case and needs to be looked at again. Cllr. Canning stated there are serious issues in Woodpark due to vehicles travelling at high speed, Mr. Haugh stated he will arrange for a vehicle speed survey to be undertaken.

Cllr. Donohue stated there is a boil water notice in Gort adding that a lot of people in Gort are also without electricity following the Storm. She asked if the scheme in Gort is fit for purpose, Cllr. Finnerty stated this is the third year at Christmas time this has happened in Gort and enquired why the facility is not able to deal with issues such as large volumes of rainfall, he requested correspondence be issued to Uisce Eireann for a response and update.

Cllr. Finnerty stated the bus shelter is still not installed at Labane adding that elderly members of the community must wait there for buses without any shelter, Ms. Lowe advised that Donna Gibbons, Executive Engineer can provide an update on bus shelters adding that work has commenced with a bus shelter being installed in Moycullen.

Cllr. Finnerty stated some roads on the last 3-year roads programme are still not completed and enquired if they will be completed. Ms. Lowe stated that any roads in the 3-year roads programme that have not been completed can be considered and there is a new 3-year roads programme being finalised. She stated that increased costs influence the completion of the programme. Mr. Haugh stated that all roads listed on the 3-year roads programme in the Gort/Kinvara area, with the exception of a road at Kinincha which has been postponed coinciding with construction works at a Civic Amenity facility, have been completed.

Cllrs. Curley and Cllr. Maher requested an update on the town hall, Ms. Finn stated she will request an update for the January meeting. In response to Cllr. Curley's query, Mr. Haugh responded that meetings have been held regularly between Mr. Kennedy and the Loughrea Tidy Towns group over the last year. Cllr. Curley stated that bus shelters are needed for Loughrea town, Ms. Lowe referred to the NTA's Bus Shelter Enhancement Programme adding funding is to be secured. She stated the programme can provide hard-standings and benches at stops.

Cllr. Maher requested an extension to the duration for which lifeguard services are provided at Loughrea Lake and other swimming locations. He stated, toilet facilities should remain open daily.

Cllr. Murphy stated that works have not commenced on the footway between Ardrahan and Labane and he was given a commitment by the Director of Housing that if he supported the Part 8 construction of 12 houses in Ardrahan a footway/cycleway would be provided. He said he reluctantly supported the Part 8 on that basis. Cllr. Murphy reminded those present that there is no shop or pub in Ardrahan and emphasised that he wants the footpath/cycle path in place when the houses are complete. He stated he advised the people of Adrahan that he received a commitment to this effect from the Executive and Engineers in Galway Local Authority and that commitment must be honoured.

The Cathaoirleach welcomed Mr. O'Loughlin to the MD team. She extended good wishes to the Members and staff for a happy Christmas.

CHRIOGHNAIGH AN CRUINNIU ANSIN

Martina Kinane

CLLR MARTINA KINANE

13th January, 2025

DATE