

MINUTES OF APRIL MONTHLY MEETING OF MUNICIPAL DISTRICT OF BIRR HELD REMOTELY ON THURSDAY 23RD APRIL, 2020 IN BIRR CIVIC OFFICES, WILMER ROAD, BIRR AT 2.30 P.M.

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MEMBERS PRESENT: Cllrs E Dooley, P Ormond, J Carroll
J Clendennen, C Claffey and J Leahy

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms Ann Dillon A/Director of Services, Mr John Mitchell SEE, Arlene Guilfoyle, Olwen Cummins, Planning OCC, Olive Farrelly, Tourism Officer and Ms D Molloy, Meetings Administrator.

Adoption of Minutes of Meeting held in Committee on 9th March, 2020.

On the proposal of Cllr Carroll and seconded by Cllr Clendennen the Minutes of the Meeting in Committee of Birr MD held on 9th March, 2020 were adopted.

Adoption of Minutes of Monthly Meeting held on 9th March, 2020.

On the proposal of Cllr Leahy and seconded by Cllr Ormond the Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of Birr MD held on 9th March, 2020 were adopted.

Birr Destination Town Funding

Ms Arlene Guilfoyle, Planning OCC, delivered a report to the Members in relation to a Letter of Offer of funding from Failte Ireland in the amount of €412,500 to develop Birr's potential as a Tourism Destination Town. She advised that in Sept 2019 a meeting of the tourism stakeholders in the area was held and on foot of that meeting Sherwood Associates and Co were engaged as Consultants and they identified gaps in the current tourism offerings in Birr. Project proposals were prepared by the Consultants and an application was completed by Offaly County Council and submitted to Failte Ireland. The Members thanked Arlene for her report, welcomed the funding and raised the following:

- Enquired about the uniformity of brand within the county or will Birr be building a unique branding of its own, and if so will it be for the entire town amongst all the stakeholders, instead of stakeholders doing separate marketing?
- Will the proposed works on Green St and Castle St due to be carried out under the Public Realm programme be done in conjunction with this proposal, it was advised that all proposed works should tie in together, the Members asked that they would like to see plans for Green St/Castle St soon? Mr Mitchell advised that consultation with the residents and businesses in the area to iron out any concerns are ongoing and that plans are progressing well. The Members hoped that works could commence in this area once restrictions are lifted a little so as not to have any disruption to the businesses in the area when they are allowed to reopen.
- The Members expressed concerns that currently a lot of visitors that are coming to Birr Castle that their presence is not benefitting the rest of the town and businesses are not seeing the footfall that this should generate, are there any proposals to address this issue and try to change it? It was

advised that it is hoped that when works are carried out to enhance Castle St that this will reinforce connectivity between the town and the castle.

- Members enquired if there was any money to be made available to businesses to paint shopfronts and it would be a nice idea to get a paint company involved e.g. Dulux to create a plan for the town for uniformity, they were advised that there was a Shopfront Enhancement Grant Scheme being presented to the OCC meeting in May for consideration.
- The Members enquired as to what is the timeframe for completion of the works and were advised that works have to be completed two years from the date of the Letter of Offer and that 25% match funding has to be provided from OCC.

Covid 19 Update

Ms Ann Dillon A/DOS addressed the meeting and advised the Members that circumstances had changed greatly since the March meeting of the MD and that currently the Birr MD are closed to the public and only essential services are being carried out in the district. She advised that all meetings at present are being held remotely and that a number of staff are working remotely from home. She advised that the Community Response helpline is being operated from the Aras in Tullamore and the Community Response Forum are responding in helping vulnerable households at this time and it is working very well. The Members thanked the DOS for her update and raised the following:

- Acknowledge the services still being carried out by staff in these difficult times and praised them for their efforts.
- Outlined that dumping is a major problem at the moment and what could be done to try and curtail it.
- The Meeting was advised that OLDC in conjunction with the KDA in Kilcormac were now expanding their Meals on Wheels service to other areas in South Offaly and wished to make the public aware of the expansion of same.
- The Members commended some local businesses who are donating PPE equipment to healthcare workers.
- Enquired as to how many calls were being received by the Community helpline, they were advised that initially there would have been approx. 20 calls per day but that this had reduced now and the helpline was being used to make social contact with people that are cocooning or alone.

District Engineers Report.

Mr John Mitchell, SEE advised the meeting that with effect from the 27th March only essential services were being carried out. In the last couple of weeks following risk assessments by Health and Safety Officer the patching units are back out in the area and some grass cutting has recommenced. He stated that he is making plans for the surface dressing programme to commence before the end of May if restrictions are eased. He further advised that funding of €50,000 had been received from the TII for maintenance and repair of the N62 and €60,000 had been received to convert the existing lighting in Emmet Square to LED. He advised that dumping and overflowing bottle banks were becoming a major problem in the area and that Birr MD are working in conjunction with the Environment Section in OCC and the Litter Wardens to try and resolve same.

Mr Mitchell also advised that the Town and Village Renewal Schemes works have been suspended at present due to the current crisis, but he was hoping that they could resume soon and enquired if the Members would consider allocating the €100,000 that was available to them through the Harmonisation of Rates Fund to support the projects. On the proposal of Cllr Ormond and seconded by Cllr Clendennen this was agreed.

The Members thanked Mr Mitchell for his report and raised the following:

- Concerns were expressed in relation to the bogs and as there are no workers on them that dumping and fires could become a big problem, asked that OCC write to Bord Na Mona in relation to same. The Members also expressed concerns in relation to the level of dumping in the area and feel that legislation needs to be stronger and cameras need to be used to catch the offenders. Mr Mitchell advised that in conjunction with the Environment Section they are continuing to monitor the problem and try to find ways to combat same.
- The Members raised the issue of ongoing dumping in Clonoghil graveyard and also wanted to know what the plan was for maintenance of graveyards now that the grass has started to grow. Mr Mitchell advised that grass cutting had commenced in the graveyard in the past couple of days and that cameras were being explored as a measure to try and combat the dumping problem.
- Congratulated the SEE on the great and efficient work that was carried out on the TVR in Crinkle. Enquired if was possible to progress the TVR in Shinrone?
- Enquired if an application or proposal had been submitted looking for additional funding to repair damage caused by the flooding in the area, the SEE advised that he met with the OPW in relation to some of the issues.
- Enquired that if restrictions are lifted are we in a position to commence surface dressing, Mr Mitchell advised that we are in a position to commence and hopes we can do so before the end of May.
- An issue was raised in relation to advertising for new LIS applications when the current list of approved applications have not been completed and won't be for some time. It was suggested that the 2018 list of LIS approved schemes will be completed before any new applications are done. The Members asked that the matter be brought back to the SPC for consideration. On the proposal of Cllr Ormond and seconded by Cllr Clendennen it was agreed not to proceed further with the process for any new applications.

Community Grants

The Cathaoirleach advised the meeting that given the current circumstances with Covid 19 the criteria for allocation of Community Grants for 2020 was being revised and proposed that the matter be discussed in Committee after the monthly meeting concluded. The Members were in agreement.

The Meeting then concluded.

SIGNED: _____

CATHAOIRLEACH

MEETINGS ADMINSTRATOR

DATE: