

Minutes of Monthly Meeting of Offaly County Council
Held on 18 September 2023 at 2pm, in Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road,
Tullamore and via Zoom

The Meetings Administrator carried out a roll call to confirm attendance.

Present

Cllr. Eddie Fitzpatrick, Cathaoirleach

Cllr. John Carroll	Cllr. John Leahy
Cllr. Clare Claffey	Cllr. T. McCormack
Cllr. John Clendennen	Cllr. R. McDermott
Cllr. Noel Cribbin	Cllr. F. Moran
Cllr. Eamon Dooley	Cllr. Sean O'Brien
Cllr. Neil Feighery	Cllr. Peter Ormond
Cllr. Mark Hackett	Cllr. Danny Owens
Cllr. Declan Harvey	

Apologies

Cllrs. J. Foley and L. Quinn

Officials in Attendance

Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive; Mr. T. Shanahan, D.O.S.; Ms. S. Kennedy, D.O.S.; Ms. A. Dillon, D.O.S.; Mr. T. Mawe, A/H.O.F.; Ms. A. Pedlow, H.O.; Ms. R. McKenna, C. A.; Mr. R. Whelan, B.O.; Mr. E. Fennell, S.E.O.; Mr. G. Bruton, Meetings Administrator and Ms. L. Carbery, C.O.

Votes of Sympathy

On the proposal of Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick, Cathaoirleach, seconded by Cllr. N. Feighery the members expressed their condolences on the passing of Cllr. Damian O'Reilly, Meath County Council and Fianna Fáil party member. The members offered their deepest sympathy to Damien's partner, Lisa and daughter Carly, stepson Kyle, his mother Phil, his extended family and community.

Votes of sympathy were unanimously extended to the following:

Mr. Brian Pey and the Pey family, on the death of his brother Dennis;

Mr. Hugh McConnell and the McConnell family, on the death of his mother Helen;

Mr. David McCabe and the McCabe family, on the death of his mother Sadie;

Mr. Paul Daly and the Daly family, on the death of his father Mickey Daly;

The Chief Executive, on her own behalf and on behalf of the staff of Offaly County Council, joined with the members in these votes of sympathy.

1. Confirmation of Minutes

On the proposal of Cllr. F. Moran, seconded by Cllr. N. Cribbin, the members resolved to adopt the Minutes of the Ordinary meeting of Offaly County Council held on Monday 17 July 2023.

2. Minutes for Noting

The members noted the Minutes:

- Minutes of the Land Use, Planning and Economic Development Strategic Policy Committee meeting held on 6 June 2023
- Minutes of the Corporate Policy Group meeting held on 16 June 2023

3. Transfer of Tullamore Swimming Pool loan from Ulster Bank to AIB

Mr. T. Mawe, A/H.O.F. advised the members that due to the exit of Ulster Bank from the Irish market approval is sought to transfer the loan taken out in 2007 for Tullamore Swimming pool to the AIB. He advised that the terms and conditions remain the same.

On the proposal of Cllr. D. Owens, seconded by Cllr. S. O'Brien, the members resolved to approve the terms and conditions applicable to the term loan facility in the amount of €1,691,000 available from Allied Irish Banks, p.l.c. (the "**Bank**") to the Council under the Offer Letter dated 28th July 2023.

On the proposal of Cllr. D. Harvey, seconded by Cllr. C. Claffey, the members resolved that each of Anna Marie Delaney, being the Chief Executive of the Council, and Thomas Mawe, being the Acting Head of Finance of the Council, are hereby authorised to sign the Offer Letter jointly on behalf of the council and such other authorities, documents and instructions that the Bank may require to be signed by the Council in connection with the Facilities.

4. Filling of Casual Vacancy

Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick welcomed the Smollen family to the meeting and he advised that a casual vacancy has arisen in the membership of Offaly County Council due to the retirement of Cllr. Ken Smollen. He outlined the procedure for the filling of the casual vacancy as prescribed in the Local Government Act 2001, as amended and in the Council's Standing Orders. He informed the meeting that Ms. Sandra Feehan Smollen had been nominated to fill the vacancy and acknowledged that Ms. Feehan Smollen had provided her written consent to the nomination.

On proposing Ms. Sandra Feehan Smollen, Cllr. C. Claffey listed the numerous community groups and organisations in the Clara area with which Ms. Feehan Smollen was involved, from sports to school

parents associations and many more. She also paid tribute to former councillor Ken Smollen and said they shared similar views, praising his food appeal work.

Cllr. S. O'Brien seconded the nomination and praised Ms. Feehan Smollen for her extensive work in the community.

As there were no further nominations, the members welcomed Cllr. S. Feehan Smollen and wished her well in the position. Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick invited Cllr. S. Feehan Smollen to take her seat in the chamber.

Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive joined with the members in welcoming Cllr. S. Feehan Smollen to the council.

5. Election / Appointment / Nomination

Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick informed the meeting that following the resignation of former member Mr. Ken Smollen that an appointment to the following committees was now required:

- 1) Community, Cultural and Emergency Service Strategic Policy Committee
- 2) Housing Strategic Policy Committee
- 3) Local Traveller Accommodation Consultative Committee
- 4) Joint Policing Committee
- 5) Clara Swimming Pool - MD
- 6) Tullamore Leisure Ltd - MD

The members agreed to include all nominations under one proposal. On the proposal of Cllr. S. O'Brien, seconded by Cllr. C. Claffey the members resolved to elect Cllr. S. Feehan Smollen to the above listed committees.

Cllr. C. Claffey sought clarity on the representation for gender balance on the Laois Offaly Education Training Board.

Ms. A. Delaney advised that this matter will be checked and she will revert to the council.

6. Architecture, Heritage and Biodiversity

Ms. A. Dillon brought the members attention to the presentation from the Architecture, Heritage and Biodiversity team and she acknowledged their fantastic work in these areas.

Ms. R. McKenna, County Architect, updated the members on the grant schemes provided, including the **Built Heritage Investment fund**, with a provisional list of 16 applicants and €126,400 approved for 2023, and additional **Thatching Fund** for 4 applicants with €15,540 approved. The **Historic Structures Fund** was approved for 4 applicants in the amount of €285,000. The **Heritage (Council) Stewardship Fund** approved €19,926 for the Tubberdaly Conservation Management Plan and **Creative Ireland Follies and Vernacular Fund** €15,000. This amount of total funding for 2023 is €461,866.

She outlined the geographical spread of projects across the county and listed some of the projects including Woodfield House in Clara, Moorock Lodge, St Ryanaghs Church in Banagher and Compton Row, Birr. She noted that under the Historic Structures fund, funding was provided for projects such

as repair of windows at Kinnitty Castle and structural repairs in St Marys Church in Ballyboy. She highlighted the new opening in Birr Castle wall, based on an original opening and she welcomed the improved access this will provide to the public.

She advised the members on the role of architectural conservation for planning services including assisting the Record of Protected Structures, Conservation Reports for relevant planning applications, Planning Reports relating to large proposals and Housing applications, Section 57 Declarations, Masterplan Steering Groups and her role in the National Vernacular Strategy Group. She welcomed the visit of Nationwide to Gloster House in January and July with episodes airing in 2023 and the ministerial visits, podcasts and tracks and trails programmes that all provide great public relations for the county. She highlighted the success of the many publications and of Heritage week.

Ms. A. Pedlow, Heritage Officer welcomed the appointment of Mr. Ricky Whelan as Biodiversity Officer and Karen Gray working on the Creative Ireland programme. She outlined the funding programmes including the **Community Monuments** providing 100% funding and dovetailing with **Just Transition** funding to support 6 projects. She highlighted the success of Heritage week held over 9 days in August. A fabulous celebration led by communities and included events such as Shinrone Clock restoration and St. Brochans well visits.

She advised that consultation for the last heritage plan played a huge role in the books that have been published, including the Camcor River by John Feehan and Kilcomin Graveyard by Stephen Callaghan. She welcomed the upcoming publications, in particular Paul Moore's exploration of public art in the county.

She noted that over her twenty years as Heritage Officer with Offaly County Council she has enjoyed working with the Leamanaghan community to assist in developing the Leamanaghan Interpretation Plan. The development of the plan has included interviews with Crannog Media, working with Irish Heritage School on a schools' programme, reconstruction drawings of Lemanaghan Castle and an overall plan for the site. The school's programme has been embraced by two national schools based on the children designing a tour that they would enjoy. She advised the old schoolhouse will be the hub of the tour and that work is ongoing with an artist to reconstruct the drawing of the castle.

She highlighted the Community Monuments Fund ongoing work on the Monasteroris Church and conservation of Kilmurryely at Shinrone. Further works are taking place to preserve Rahan Church which dates back to the 13th century and the community are very involved in this. A successful pilgrimage was arranged from Rahn to Clonmacnoise recently.

She noted the Creative Ireland programme is a collaborative team effort working on the Decade of Centenaries – a publication of Offaly towns and villages in a time of change from 1912-23 based on Offaly History's collection of postcards county wide. She updated the members on her role in the working group for the Clonmacnoise Master Plan managed by OPW and the hosting of Heritage Council training in Birr.

Mr. Ricky Whelan, Biodiversity Officers advised the members he commenced his post in mid-March and in this time, he has assisted the Offaly Naturalists Field Club who have returned with full programme of events post covid. He highlighted the Biodiversity Week 2023 held in May with many events including bat night in Clara, Syngefield walk and Swift Walk in Tullamore.

He outlined the surveys and monitoring carried out through the **Local Biodiversity Action Fund**, including swifts and county tree surveys. He highlighted projects such as the Geashill Swale Project and the Tullamore Wetland habitat creation. He advised that the biodiversity plans in Kilcormac and Clara will assist the Tidy Towns committees in those areas. He outlined the training provided including nature based solution training for engineers, awareness training for protection of swifts and seed saving courses.

He informed the members of the ongoing management programme for invasive species and that an alpine newt has been identified in the Shinrone area and this threat will be reviewed nationally. He highlighted the popularity of biodiversity events in Heritage week including the moth event at Fancroft Mill, bat night in Edenderry and Swallow ringing in Pallas Lake. He welcomed the wildflower management in the cemeteries creating further biodiversity. He brought the members attention to the Offaly Naturalist Field Club event guide and his In Your Nature podcast co-hosted with Niall Hatch of BirdWatch Ireland.

He gave a brief outline of future actions including the formation of Biodiversity Working Group with the PPN, tidy towns and community to assist in upskilling for biodiversity. He invited the members to the upcoming Community Biodiversity Knowledge Share Day in Geashill on 23 September. He noted further training events including a Planning Worksop (Biodiversity) – Planning for swifts in September and the National Biodiversity/Heritage Officer Visit to Offaly on 26/27 September. He advised the drafting of the County Biodiversity Action Plan including public consultation will provide a roadmap for our aims and objectives for the future. A further podcast will be available titled Winter in Your Nature Podcast Season (late-Oct – Nov) and **Local Biodiversity Action Fund** returns & grant drawdowns will be conducted in mid-November.

The members thanked the team for their comprehensive presentation and they acknowledged their work and contribution to the community. They welcomed the many publications over the years, in particular those by Rachel McKenna and John Feehan and the wonderful promotion that they provide for the county. They welcomed the collaboration with the Leamanaghan community group, the re-skilling services provided to the community and the success of both Biodiversity and Heritage Weeks. They acknowledged the importance of conservation and monastic heritage works for tourism. They sought more information on the thatching grants/projects, the rewilding/maintenance of cemeteries, employment creation and timelines for Birr Destination Town. They raised concerns about Lough Boora and the maintenance of the sculptures in the park and the rewilding/maintenance of roundabouts.

In response Ms. R. McKenna advised the members that employment statistics will be available by the end of the year and the members will be provided with an update. She acknowledged the contractors skills and the importance of traditional skills for heritage and conservation works. She advised the National Vernacular Group are looking at further developing skills in these areas. There is a delay in completion of the thatching grants due to a scarcity of thatchers and materials, however they are working with thatchers to assist independent owners with their projects. She acknowledged that the number of thatched properties has reduced in the last number of years. She highlighted that other funding streams are assisting with conservation, such as the regeneration, town and village renewal schemes and vacant homes grants.

Ms. A. Pedlow acknowledged the contribution of John Feehan over the years. She advised that Seir Kieran, Clareen, had received funding under the community monuments fund and she hoped to see the conclusion of the graveyard walls work next year under the care of the Church of Ireland. She

informed the members that the Department policy is to conserve any remains of heritage structures and with this in mind there is a proposal to commission an etched glass replica of the castle at Leamanaghan that will sit in the landscape and will protect the remains of the castle. In regard to Lough Boora both Ms. S. Kennedy and Ms. S. O’Leary are on the steering group to investigate maintenance of sculptures in the park. Additionally, Ms. S. O’Leary is involved in separate project Art in the Landscape, a partnership project with Mayo County Council, Offaly County Council, and Visual Artists Ireland.

Mr. R. Whelan acknowledged the members concerns with regard to rewilding in the cemeteries/roundabouts and he advised that this year has been an exception as he has just taken up the role of Biodiversity Officer and the weather over the summer had affected maintenance. He advised that individual proposals for sites and appropriate management will be agreed in communication with relevant parties.

Ms. A. Dillon advised the members that in regard to Just Transition funding Fáilte Ireland are actively engaging with Local Authorities and other partners and are coming close to identifying the routes for the trails, and the majority of trails earmarked in Offaly are on Bord Na Mona lands. In partnership with communities and landowners, they are working through the detail and the members will be briefed at the next meeting in October.

Ms. S. Kennedy informed the members that there is a Memorandum of Understanding between Offaly County Council and Bord Na Mona to put funding in place to appoint a consultant to advise on the maintenance of the sculptures in Lough Boora. She advised this is the first step and they will apply for other funding streams and will keep the members updated.

7. Monthly Management Report

Ms. A. Delaney brought the members attention to the July and August monthly management report. She advised the Edenderry Local Area plan 2023 – 2029 was adopted in July and came into effect on 28 August 2023. She informed the meeting that the Start programme is on-going with more workshops scheduled in September. The second call for the **EU JTF Bioeconomy Demonstration Initiative Scheme** and the **Fáilte Ireland Investment Grant Aid Fund** were both launched in August. A full Just Transition update will be provided to the members at the October meeting.

She highlighted the various regeneration projects outlined in the report, including the Croi Conaithe and the Outdoor Recreation Scheme. The Local Enterprise Office took the opportunity to update Minister Coveney on the new economic development strategy including the land use strategy. She acknowledged the success of the Tullamore Show and the work of staff that were involved.

She welcomed the visit of Minister O’Brien to two new Oakley housing developments at Kearney's Drive and Ashfield and she advised an update on Housing Services will be provided to the members in October. She acknowledged the positive feedback for the Pride of Place entrants and the work of Mr. B. Pey and the community team in assisting the groups. She noted the tender process for St. Mary’s Cemetery, Edenderry, extension is on-going and various transportation capital projects are outlined in the report. She welcomed the announcement by Minister O’Brien of an increase in the LA baseline in the amount of €3.525m that will form part of the budget 2024.

8. Corporate Policy Group Report

Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick informed the members that at the CPG meeting on the previous Monday the agenda for the council meeting was discussed. He encouraged the members to attend the Civic Reception for the Offaly Association New York on Tuesday 26 September.

9. Notices of Motion

On the proposal of Cllr. P. Ormond, seconded by Cllr. E. Dooley, the members resolved that Offaly County Council supports the retention of the 9% Vat rate for food, tourism and hospitality related businesses and we are calling on the Minister for Finance to reverse its recent decision to increase VAT on that sector to 13.5%.

On the proposal of Cllr. M. Hackett, seconded Cllr. C. Claffey, the members resolved, that Offaly County Council writes to Minister Hackett and the Department of Agriculture welcoming the National Strategy for Horticulture 2023 - 2027. In particular that the Council welcomes the commitment to 'work with local authorities to implement and support community gardens and allotments to encourage enthusiasm for gardening / growing and promote fresh produce consumption and healthy eating'. In addition, the Council confirms their similar commitment to support community gardens and allotments and proposes a meeting or appropriate follow up on possible next steps.

Cllr. L. Quinn Motion was deferred to October meeting - That this council clarifies the process for adjudicating planning applications for rural houses where high voltage electricity cables (connecting renewable energy projects to ESB substations) are installed under the public roadway in tandem with a public water supply or GWS. Will applicants be conditioned to join the public water network/GWS where this connection would mean crossing these cables.

Cllr. L. Quinn deferred was deferred to October meeting - That this council write to the Minister for the Environment to seek clarification on the Departments plans to deal with roadside trees affected by Ash Dieback Disease. Will a fund be made available to local Authorities and landowners to carry out the necessary felling where it is required?

10. Comhdhálacha /Conferences

On the proposal of Cllr. D. Owens, seconded by Cllr. D. Harvey, the members approved the training and conferences as listed.

La Touche Legacy in association with Greystones Archaeological and Historical Society 8th Festival of History – 33rd La Touche Legacy Weekend “Social Discourse of the 20th Century in Ireland” Friday 15th – Saturday 16th September 2023 Greystones Golf Club, Whitshed Road, Greystones. Fee is €130 and includes dinner.

Celtic Conference 13th – 15th October 2023 – “A Practical Guide to Budget 2024” in the Four Seasons Hotel, Carlingford, Co. Louth. The conference fee is €100 and no meals are provided.

Retrospective Approval:

- Cllrs. D. Owens and S. O'Brien, LAMA Spring Seminar Cork, 2-4 March 2023
- Cllrs. E. Dooley, E. Fitzpatrick, S. O'Brien and D. Owens, AILG, Module 2, Dundalk, 25 March 2023
- Cllrs. N. Cribbin, E. Dooley, E. Fitzpatrick, R. McDermott, S. O'Brien, P. Ormond and D. Owens, AILG Annual, Kilkenny, 19-20 April 2023
- Cllr. P. Ormond, Caro Climate Change, Tullamore, 26 April 2023
- Cllrs. N. Cribbin, N. Feighery and E. Fitzpatrick, AILG, Module 3 Mullingar, 15 June 2023
- Cllrs. N. Cribbin and S. O'Brien, AILG, Module 4, Cork, 20 July 2023
- Cllrs. E. Dooley, N. Feighery, E. Fitzpatrick, D. Harvey, F. Moran and D. Owens, AILG, Module 4, Sligo, 22 July 2023

11. Comhfhreagras / Correspondence

Correspondence that issued with the agenda was noted.

12. Any Other Business

Cllr. J. Carroll sought support to engage an Irish Officer to encourage and facilitate the use of the Irish Language by staff and customers and to liaise with An Coimisiún Teanga. He acknowledged that the Officer could have other responsibilities as required.

In response Ms. A. Delaney pointed out that some funding has been provided to support Irish language promotion, such as Seachtain na Gaeilge, improvements have been on going and a proposal for further funding will be considered in the budget 2024.

Cllr. S. O'Brien raised concerns with a proposal by Waterways Ireland to review their byelaws and he advised that Leitrim County Council have similar concerns with the proposal. He is concerned the byelaws could have detrimental effect on canal use. Some of the changes proposed include requirement for permission to host events on the canal, CE rating for boats and a limit on mooring. On the proposal of Cllr. S. O'Brien, seconded by Cllr. T. McCormack the members agreed to write to Minister.

In response Ms. A. Delaney advised the members that public consultation is open to Monday 2 October and a submission can be made on behalf of Offaly County Council.

Cllr. F. Moran raised concerns in regard to the possibility of a direct provision centre in Clara. Ms. S. Kennedy advised that the International Protection Accommodation Services are responsible for Direct Provision Services and she agreed to write to them for information and clarification.

MINUTES CONFIRMED

CATHAOIRLEACH

RUNAÍ



16 October 2023