

**Minutes of Monthly Meeting of Offaly County Council**  
Held on 15 January 2024 at 2.00pm, 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. Declan Harvey
Cllr. Clare Claffey	Cllr. John Leahy
Cllr. John Clendennen	Cllr. T. McCormack
Cllr. Noel Cribbin	Cllr. R. McDermott
Cllr. Eamon Dooley	Cllr. F. Moran
Cllr. S. Feehan Smollen	Cllr. S. O'Brien
Cllr. N. Feighery	Cllr. Peter Ormond
Cllr. J. Foley	Cllr. L. Quinn
Cllr. Mark Hackett	

**Apologies**

Cllr. D. Owens

**Officials in Attendance**

Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive; Ms. A. Dillon, D.O.S.; Mr. T. Mawe, A/H.O.F.; Ms. J. Ryan, A/D.O.S.; Mr. A. Murray, A/D.O.S.; Mr. B. Lennon, A/D.O.S.; Ms. O. Martin, H.LEO; Ms. O. Cummins, T.R.O. ; Ms. O. Farrelly, T.O.; Ms. M. Hensey, T.A.; Ms. L. Giles, A/S.E.O.; Mr. G. Bruton, Meetings Administrator, Ms. L. Carbery, C.O.; Ms. A. Curran, CHL Director; Mr. E. Rowe, Waterways Ireland, Operations Controller, Mr. P. Harkin, Waterways Ireland, Inspector of Navigation.

**Votes of Sympathy**

Votes of sympathy were unanimously extended to the following:

The Hughes family, The Green, Clara on the death of their brother Ronnie.

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. E. Dooley seconded by Cllr. J. Carroll, the members resolved to adopt the Minutes of the Ordinary meeting of Offaly County Council held on Monday 18 December 2023.

### **2. Minutes for Noting**

The members noted the minutes of the meetings listed below:

- Minutes of the Corporate Policy Group meeting held on 6 November 2023
- Minutes of the Corporate Policy Group meeting held on 13 November 2023

### **3. Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001**

On the proposal of Cllr. R. McDermott , seconded by Cllr. J. Foley, the members resolved to adopt Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001, to sell 0.158Ha (0.4Acres) of land in the townland of Ballyleakin to Ballyfore GAA Club for the sum of €1,500 plus legal costs

### **4. Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001**

On the proposal of Cllr. D. Harvey, seconded by Cllr. R. McDermott, the members resolved to adopt Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001, to sell a rural cottage at Eneghan, Walsh Island, R35 H990 to Mr. Leon Stafford, 35 Curragh Hill, Ballinagar, Walsh Island, Co. Offaly for a consideration of €148,000

### **5. Planning and Development Act 2000, (as amended) Planning and Development Regulations 2001, (as amended) Part 8, COMMUNITY LIBRARY & ARTS BASE, EDENDERRY Chief Executive's Report on Submissions**

On the proposal of Cllr. N. Cribbin, seconded by Cllr. J. Foley, the members resolved to adopt the Planning and Development Act 2000, (as amended) Planning and Development Regulations 2001, (as amended) Part 8, Community Library & Arts Base, Edenderry.

### **6. Annual Service Delivery Plan 2024**

On the proposal of Cllr. P. Ormond, seconded by Cllr. J. Clendennen, the members resolved to adopt the Annual Service Delivery Plan 2024.

### **7. Draft Meetings Schedule 2024**

On the proposal of Cllr. D. Harvey, seconded by Cllr. E. Dooley, the members resolved to adopt the meeting schedule 2024.

## 8. Tourism

Mr. A. Murray informed the members that in conjunction with CHL consultants and the Offaly County Council Tourism Team the Offaly Tourism Strategy 2023 – 2027 has been published.

Ms. O. Martin introduced Mary Hensey, newly appointed on a 3 year contract as Offaly Just Transition Tourism Activator. This post is funded by Fáilte Ireland and the role is to build awareness for tourism in Midlands.

Ms. Ali Curran, CHL Consultant provided the members with an overview of the Offaly Tourism Strategy 2023-2027. She outlined the objectives of the 5 year strategy:

- to guide the recovery, sustained growth and development of tourism.
- to contribute to economic growth and wellbeing in the County.
- to ensure sustainability as a fundamental principle.
- offer world-class experiences in culture/heritage, outdoor activities, and health and wellbeing.
- needs and motivations of key domestic and international markets, and maintain an integrated approach with the needs of local communities.

The strategic context encompasses the actions and principles as set out in the Offaly County Development Plan. This includes actions relating to tourism planning, accommodation, experience and sustainability. The strategy also provides context from Fáilte Irelands Hidden Heartlands Regional Tourism Development Strategy and the Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon. She outlined the county wide focus and stressed the need to increase accommodation across the county.

The Offaly Tourism Strategy has sustainability as a central tenet. The characteristics of the County demand special attention be paid to sustainable practices and offer an opportunity to go to market with an authentically environmentally responsible brand.

She outlined the four pillars to unlock Offaly's tourism potential:

- Sustainable infrastructure development and maximisation
- Gateway, cluster & attraction development
- Industry development & support
- Marketing and communications

Cllr. F. Moran queried if there is any flexibility for other projects, such as the Ballycumber action plan group. They were involved in a comprehensive study on the wetlands area and they have a proposal that should be considered for funding.

The members expressed concerns about the lack of accommodation across the county. They sought more information on the greenways and cycling routes. They stressed the need to upgrade playgrounds and other amenities and to develop the night time economy.

Cllr M. Hackett queried if there is any provision for Dark Skies amenities. Cllr. E. Dooley stressed the need for strategic development of the green and blue ways and for access to the Bord na Mona land plan to assist in this development. Cllr. N. Cribbin expressed concerns that north Offaly is very unbalanced in relation to tourism and in particular he highlighted the lack of a hotel in that area. Cllr. S Feehan Smollen queried why the Clara Bog Visitor Centre has been closed for 3 years and she

expressed concerns on the closure of a local café in Clara due to cost of overheads and she stressed the need to encourage small local businesses.

In response Mr. A. Murray advised that there is confidence in the development of the greenways as a lot of work has been put into the building of the network of trails from previous strategies and he highlighted the National Cycle Network Plan report published last week that provides a plan to connect destinations across Ireland.

He noted that the four pillars of the strategy include a large number of tangible actions. He agreed there is a lack of accommodation but highlighted the Just Transition funding of €3m for low carbon accommodation. He noted the strategic trails routes have not been formally published. He agreed there is an imbalance in county but the greenway in Edenderry has now been developed and there is a possibility of including Derrycastle as a major trail head. He agreed to revert back to members in relation to the Ballycumber Action Group project proposal.

Ms. O. Farrelly confirmed that the Clara Bog Centre have recruited a new lead guide in a year round role and the Centre is a member of Offaly Tourism and Marketing group. She noted that the development of the peatlands with Bord na Mona provides an opportunity for dark skies experiences.

Ms. A. Delaney thanked Ali Curran and CHL for their work on the strategy and she welcomed Ms. Mary Hensey to her new post.

## 9. Waterways Ireland

Ms. A. Delaney welcomed Mr. Éanna Rowe, Operations Controller and Mr. Paddy Harkin, Inspector of Navigation, to the meeting and she noted the contribution of Waterways Ireland to Offaly's tourism infrastructure.

Mr. É. Rowe expressed his congratulations on the tourism strategy and he agreed that Waterways Ireland will continue to support the four pillars contained in the strategy.

He outlined Waterways Ireland plans for the development and promotion of waterways in Offaly. The Shannon Tourism Masterplan in conjunction with Fáilte Ireland, set up a steering group of which Ms. A. Delaney is a member and is involved in ensuring that Offaly is well featured in the plan. He highlighted the success of the €3.2m development of the Meelick Weir incorporating a walkway that connects Offaly and Galway. He noted the Shannon Discovery points, a unique interpretative design, that will include 3 sites in Offaly.

He updated the members on the proposed development in Banagher and Shannonbridge. The Banagher Marina and Environs Masterplan will enhance the location, creating a walkable attractive active area, that will link to the town centre. The Shannonbridge Marina will increase mooring capacity by 50%, provide a canoe step and a berth for a boat tour operator.

He advised that the new Tullamore Depot will be developed on a green field site, that will provide space for all Waterways Ireland operations in the Eastern region. This in turn will free up the existing harbour site in Tullamore, to be developed in partnership with Offaly County Council, funded by URDF. A draft report will be published in early 2024 and will encompass commercial, residential and leisure objectives that will align with Waterways Ireland long term plan and the Offaly County Council County Development Plan.

He updated the members on the Grand Canal Greenway, partnership between Waterways Ireland, Offaly, Kildare and South Dublin. He confirmed that 80% of routes are in place and when fully complete it is expected to have an economic impact in the region of €17.2m. He advised that the animation and interpretation scheme, will bring life to the routes and will be implemented in 2025.

Mr. P. Harkin briefed the members on the revision of the Bye Laws. He outlined the background to the current legislation, the Bye Laws process, public consultation and the analysis of the 933 submissions received. The public consultation report was published 15/01/2024. He updated the members on the need to revise the Bye Laws, in order to modernise 30 year old rules and amalgamate 2 sets of old Bye Laws.

The key Bye Laws revisions include retaining the 5 day rule & winter mooring, abolish the lock passage fee, introduce fixed notice penalty, annual registration and compulsory insurance. The Shannon navigation annual fee of €200 will exclude angling boats and boats under 30hp. The canal Bye Laws will include boat standards and environmental and maritime legislation. He outlined the various canal houseboat permit pricing proposals and the various canal zones.

He welcomed the fixed penalty notice, including powers to remove vessels and prosecution in district court. Life jackets, age limits for operation of crafts and holding tanks will be compulsory. These improvements will be environmentally friendly and are aimed to improve water quality, emissions and biodiversity. Non boating bye laws will cover the 600km greenways and will focus on various aspects including managing of events, littering and dog control. Public consultation will close on 26/02/24.

The members thanked them for their comprehensive presentation and the public consultation that has been undertaken. They welcomed the development of the Tullamore Harbour, Banagher and Shannonbridge Marinas.

They sought clarity on the requirements for permission to hold events, the provision of amenities along the blueways/greenways, future maintenance of the routes and the provision of life buoys. They raised concerns about serious dumping and littering issues.

Cllr. R. McDermott queried if there are any plans to link the Royal and Grand canals and he suggested the development of the old Edenderry to Enfield railway.

Cllr. T. McCormack queried if the grass in Tullamore could be cut more frequently and he highlighted that the local triathlon club train in the canal from March to June and if a ladder could be provided and the weeds in canal cleared to allow them to train through the summer in the canal.

In response to the members queries Mr. É. Rowe confirmed that the amenities on greenways are planned once the infrastructure is complete and will be similar to Royal Canal amenities. Future maintenance will be provided for in the next phase of the plans. He noted life buoys are provided by Local Authorities, in line with Irish water safety guidance, but Waterways Ireland will assist if required. He confirmed there are no plans currently for Edenderry harbour, but it may be included in the longer term. He noted the Link from Royal to Grand Canal navigation would be a huge task.

He noted their concerns with littering and he advised that Waterways Ireland have a hands on approach and a significant clean up has been undertaken in the last few years. He welcomed the fixed penalty notice as a game changer as the onus will be on the boat owners to remove unused vessels

removing a huge cost for Waterways Ireland. He noted there is a robust grass cutting programme and designated wild areas and will revert in regard to the Triathlon training requirement. He agreed more bins may be provided under the animation scheme when it is implemented, along with benches/toilet and biking facilities. Mr. P. Harkin advised the members that information on events protocol is available on their website.

Ms. A. Delaney thanked them for their presentation and their ongoing collaboration.

## 10. Monthly Management Report

Ms. A. Delaney brought the members attention to the monthly management report and she welcomed the filling of the post of Tourism Activator, fully funded by Fáilte Ireland for a period of 3 years. Ms. Hensey will engage directly with private tourism operators within Offaly. She highlighted the County Enterprise Awards 2024 and the Meet the Buyers Event taking place in National Construction Training Centre, Mountlucas in February. She noted that Housing Services will provide a presentation to members at the February meeting.

She advised that the Local Development Strategy (LDS) submitted by Offaly Local Community Development Committee in respect of its interest in delivering the 2023-2027 LEADER programme in the Offaly sub-regional area was not selected by The Independent Selection Committee. The competition and evaluation process for the SICAP programme 2024-2028 was awarded to the Offaly Local Development Company.

She noted the Local Enhancement Programme 2024 will open for applications on 19/01/24 and closing date for applications is 28/02/2024. Offaly County Councils website has been updated to include an online environmental complaint form, making it easier for members of the public to register a complaint. Also the Environments Complaints Handling procedure has also been amended.

She advised the members that the tender documents for the construction of the extension to St. Mary's Cemetery are being prepared and it is planned to publish the tender by the end of January 2024. Proposed new parking facilities at Ballycommon will include 53 carparking spaces including EV charging and accessible parking, associated public lighting and traffic control measures on Ballycommon Bridge. Offaly County Council have deployed 5 new electric vehicles as part of the Roads and Infrastructure commitment to decarbonising the corporate fleet.

## 11. Corporate Policy Group Report

Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick informed the members that at the Corporate Policy Group meeting the Council meeting agenda was discussed and the CPG agreed that members should inform the Cathaoirleach of any other business issues they wish to raise at least 2 days prior to the council meeting.

## 12. Notices of Motion

Cllr. J. Carroll sought the members support not to remain passive in the face of the mass slaughter of defenceless women and children and as a Military Neutral Country use that independence in every forum for a unilateral ceasefire in Gaza.

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Carroll, seconded by Cllr. D. Harvey the members resolved to call on our Government to use all its diplomatic influence to mobilise International support for an immediate and unilateral ceasefire in Gaza as agreed below:

- a. That the appropriate Government representative visits all EU member States mobilising support for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.
- b. The Government write to the American Ambassador requesting their Government to stop supplying military arms and equipment to Israel which is been used to murder women and children, destroy homes, hospitals and schools in Gaza and use their influence to get immediate ceasefire.
- c. Write to the Israel Ambassador expressing our abhorrence at the slaughter of women and children in Gaza over past 100 days and request an immediate ceasefire.

Ms. A. Dillon agreed that the most impactful way to demonstrate support is to send correspondence to government and circulate to other councils.

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Clendennen, the members resolved, to write to the Ambassador of the State of Palestine to request that they use the influence of their office to persuade the Hamas Group to immediately release all the hostages that they hold and to ensure their safe return to their loved ones.

## 13. Comhdhálacha / Conferences

Conferences circulated and noted.

## 14. Comhfhreagras / Correspondence

The members noted the correspondence on the agenda.

## 15. Any Other Business

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Clendennen, seconded by Cllr. P. Ormond the members resolved to write to the HSE to express their concerns about the closure of the Birth, Death and Marriages Registration Office at Tullamore Health Centre. They further expressed concerns about the Birr Nursing Home Respite Services and the lack of communication when services are being reduced or discontinued.

Ms. A. Delaney agreed to write to the HSE to request that representatives of the HSE would attend the February or March Meeting of Offaly County Council to discuss these matters.

Cllr. S. Feehan Smollen brought the members attention to a previous motion, that prior to elections campaign posters be restricted to certain areas and she queried what plans are in place in relation to this.

Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick pointed out that the location restrictions are governed by the Electoral (Amendment) Act 200 and guidance is likely to issue prior to Local Elections and that some candidates revert to their local Tidy Towns Committees for guidance in their local areas.

**MINUTES CONFIRMED**

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**CATHAOIRLEACH**

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**RUNAÍ**

**19 February 2024**

