

Minutes of Monthly Meeting of Offaly County Council
Held on 17th April 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. Tony McCormack, Leas Cathaoirleach

Cllr. John Carroll	Cllr. Declan Harvey
Cllr. Clare Claffey	Cllr. John Leahy
Cllr. John Clendennen	Cllr. R. McDermott
Cllr. Noel Cribbin	Cllr. F Moran via zoom
Cllr. Eamon Dooley	Cllr. Sean O'Brien
Cllr. Neil Feighery	Cllr. Peter Ormond
Cllr. Eddie Fitzpatrick	Cllr. Danny Owens
Cllr. John Foley	Cllr. Liam Quinn
Cllr. Mark Hackett	Cllr. Ken Smollen

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. M. Connolly, H.O.F.; Mr. P. Mathews, Head of Operations, Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, Mr. A. Murray, S.P., Mr. J. Condrón, E.P., Mr. M. McRedmond, E.P., Mr. E. Fennell, S.E.O.; Mr. G. Bruton, Meetings Administrator and Ms. L. Carbery, C.O.

Suspension of Standing Orders

On the proposal of Cllr. P. Ormond, seconded by Cllr. J. Leahy, the members resolved to Suspend Standing Orders to extend their condolences to Cllr. T. McCormack, on the death of his father Anthony. The Chief Executive, on her own behalf and on behalf of the staff of Offaly County Council, joined with the members in expressing her condolences.

On the proposal of Cllr. E. Dooley, seconded by Cllr. N. Feighery, the members resolved to suspend Standing Orders to discuss the sudden closure of the briquette factory by Bord na Mona at Derrinlough. The members expressed their concerns on the announcement to bring forward the date of closure from 2024 to 1 June 2023 and the subsequent loss of jobs and its effect on the local economy. They highlighted the prohibitive costs for householders to heat their homes and to retrofit their houses. They called for a plan from Bord na Mona outlining their intentions for their land bank and buildings. Cllr. E. Dooley, seconded by J. Leahy sought a meeting with Bord na Mona and the Department to discuss their plans and employment opportunities.

1. Confirmation of Minutes

On the proposal of Cllr. D. Harvey, seconded by Cllr. R. McDermott, the members resolved to adopt the Minutes of the Ordinary meeting of Offaly County Council held on Monday 27 March 2023.

2. Minutes for Noting

The members noted the following minutes:

- Minutes of the Corporate Policy Group meeting held on 17 February 2023

3. Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001

On the proposal of Cllr. N. Feighery, seconded by Cllr. D. Harvey, the members resolved to adopt Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001, to lease land at Clonminch, Tullamore to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).

Cllr. K. Smollen queried if there is there a guarantee that the Ukrainian refugees will be vetted and he raised concerns for Irish Citizens that are being evicted. In response Ms. S. Kennedy advised that the responsibility for vetting lies with the Department, the housing programme will not be affected by this development and the Department are running a drop-in information session in Tullamore next week to update any concerned members of the community.

4. Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 as amended.

On the proposal of Cllr. F. Moran, seconded by Cllr. N. Feighery, the members resolved to adopt the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended, Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 as amended, for development at Sycamore Drive, Ballycumber, Co. Offaly.

5. Finance Draft Annual Financial Statement 2022 / Over expenditure

On the proposal of Cllr. E. Dooley, seconded by Cllr. L. Quinn, the members resolved to adopt the Draft Annual Financial Statement 2022.

Cllr. L. Quinn sought confirmation on the amount paid towards the deficit in 2022, Mr. M. Connolly confirmed that the revenue account balance had been reduced by €425k.

On the proposal of Cllr. L. Quinn, seconded by Cllr. J. Carroll, the members resolved to approve the Excess Expenditure for 2022.

6. Chief Executive's Report on the Edenderry Local Area Plan

Ms. A. Dillon, D.O.S. informed the members that the current Edenderry Local Area Plan expires in October 2023 and the draft LAP has been on display up to February. Following this public consultation, 31 submissions were received and the Chief Executive report has been reviewed by Edenderry Municipal District members and will now be presented to the council.

Mr. J. Condon provided the members with a brief overview of the process and the strategies that are considered. He updated the members on the core strategy table for Edenderry and proceeded to outline the zoning submissions.

On the proposal of Cllr. R. McDermott, seconded by Cllr. L. Quinn, the members resolved to adopt the Chief Executives recommendation to amend Justification column for Site no. 20 in Table 10.2 of the Planning and Infrastructural Assessment from the draft LAP

On the proposal of Cllr. L. Quinn, seconded by Cllr. J. Foley, the members resolved to adopt the Chief Executive recommendation at section 3.2.6 of the CE Report for miscellaneous change, to replace the Strategic Residential Reserve zoning on the GAA lands to Open Space, Amenity and Recreation zoning based on its use as recreational space by the GAA. In addition regularise the zoning to the front of two houses to the south from SRR and open space zoning to existing residential, in conjunction with the insertion of the constructed road that serves two houses to the south of the subject GAA lands.

On the proposal of Cllr. M. Hackett, seconded by Cllr. N. Cribbin, the members resolved to adopt the Chief Executive recommendation for miscellaneous change that all maps in the LAP should be updated to include the newly built roads: Blundell Avenue and a segment of the northern relief road.

On the proposal of Cllr. R. McDermott, seconded by Cllr. L. Quinn, the members resolved to adopt the Chief Executive recommendation for miscellaneous change that all maps in the LAP should be updated to include the updated LAP development boundary based on decisions taken on submissions in this CE Report.

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Foley, seconded by Cllr. N. Cribbin, the members resolved to adopt the Chief Executive's recommendation for miscellaneous change to amend the zoning at St. Francis Street from 'Enterprise and Employment' to 'Existing Residential' to reflect the existing uses on site.

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Foley, seconded by Cllr. L. Quinn, the members resolved to adopt the Chief Executive's recommendation for miscellaneous change to changes to Section 1.4 of the draft LAP based on updates to listed documents.

On the proposed motion of Cllr. L. Quinn, seconded by Cllr. N. Cribbin the members resolved to adopt the following zoning changes based on a map submitted by Cllr. L. Quinn on behalf of the Edenderry Municipal District members, 17 April 2023:

- Zone lands outlined in red at Carrick Road 'New Residential'
- Zone lands outlined in red at Clonmullen 'Strategic Residential Reserve'
- Zone lands outlined in red at Clonmullen 'New Residential'
- Zone lands outlined in red at Tyrells Lane 'New Residential'
- Zone lands outlined in red at Monasteroris 'New Residential'

- Zone lands outlined in red at Downshire ‘New Residential’
- (a) Change zoning of site outlined in red to ‘Enterprise and Employment’ from ‘Community Services
- (b) Include a proposed walkway and cycleway in the route shown;
- (c) Include an objective in Chapter 9 Critical Infrastructure stating;
 “CIO XX: To provide a footbridge over the Grand Canal along with a walkway and cycleway along the route shown on the Local Area Plan Zoning Map. Any development of lands to the north and south of the proposed walkway and cycleway shall take account of this route and in designing the layout, egress and exit of the site, provide for the safe use of the route by pedestrians and cyclists to the satisfaction of the Planning Authority.”

On the proposal of Cllr. M. Hackett, seconded by Cllr. N. Cribbin, the members resolved to adopt the changes as set out in Section 3.2.6 of the CE Report in relation to transportation changes.

On the proposal of Cllr. M. Hackett, seconded by Cllr. R. McDermott the members resolved to adopt recommendations in Section 3.2.4 of the CE Report in relation to Biodiversity and Climate and the CE Report Addendum in relation to the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications submission.

On the proposal of Cllr. N. Cribbin, seconded by Cllr. R. McDermott, the members resolved to adopt the proposed recommendations as set out in Section 3.2.5 of the CE Report in relation to Utilities and Section 3.2.2 in relation to extension of the core retail area boundary.

On the proposed motion of Cllr. L. Quinn, seconded by Cllr. R. McDermott, the members resolved to remove the word ‘coarse’ from BGIP-05.

On the proposal of Cllr. L. Quinn, seconded by Cllr. J. Foley, the members resolved that having considered the Draft Edenderry Local Area Plan 2023-2029 and the Chief Executive’s Report circulated to the members on 16th March 2023, in accordance with the provisions of Section 20(3)(d)(ii) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended), the members agree, by resolution, to amend the Draft Edenderry Local Area Plan 2023-2029, as recommended by the Chief Executive and as further amended by way of motions and resolutions at the Council Meetings on 17th April 2023 and to proceed in accordance with Section 20(3)(d)(ii) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended).

In response to a query, Ms. A Dillon noted that she has not been advised of any change to the growth core strategy and she thanked the planning, Edenderry Municipal District staff and the members for their work and support on drafting the plan.

7. Draft Annual Report 2022

Mr. M. Connolly advised the members that this is the draft report and the final will be available by June.

On the proposal of Cllr. E. Dooley and seconded Cllr. L. Quinn, the members resolved to adopt the Draft Annual Report 2022.

8. Just Transition

Ms. A. Dillon introduced Mr. Paddy Mathews, Head of Operations Irelands Hidden Heartlands, Fáilte Ireland and invited him to give a presentation on the elements of their Just Transition funding.

Mr. P. Matthews advised the members that plans have not been finalised subject to further public consultation which will consist of clinics to be held in May, and it is hoped to have plans in place by July for the Just Transition funding scheme. He provided the members with a brief chronology of events. He noted that the process began with Hidden Heartlands and consultation with Bord na Mona two years ago to investigate opportunities to use their land to further develop the Midlands trail strategy. He advised that this work has been fed into the study and it is envisaged that this will be a long-term plan with further funding required beyond Just Transition.

He informed the members that Fáilte Ireland, through their Regenerative Tourism Scheme 2023-2027, were successful in their application to oversee €38m for economic diversification and €30m to develop the Midland trail network. He updated the members on the Strands consisting of Strand 1 for trail development on old railways through rehabilitated wetlands, with a target of approximately 80km of trails. Strand 2 is to support Small & Medium Enterprises (SME), communities and amenity development. Strand 3 has €3m allocated for low carbon alternative accommodations such as glamping and Strand 4 consists of €10m for smart solutions and digitisation programme for the tourism sector. He advised that there is some fluidity for the funding between Strands 2-4.

He highlighted examples of successful regenerative tourism trail networks such as Limburg, Belgium. He provided the members with an outline of the proposed trail network that would provide connectivity between towns & villages and enhance existing attractions. He noted there is an ongoing process with Bord na Mona, so the trails locations have not been finalised but he acknowledged that Offaly is a very strategic location.

He outlined the potential elements of Strand 2 with a range of grants schemes for tourism SMEs/private/public/ community aimed at business growth and job creation. He noted there are opportunities all across parts of the JTF territory, priorities for funding are being worked out, but state aid rules will apply. July 2023 is the target for the launch of Strand 2.

He informed the members that Strand 3 is aimed at small scale accommodation developments that could be associated with the trail network, providing carbon neutral/ low carbon developments and state aid rules will apply.

He advised that Strand 4 concentrates on supporting entrepreneurship, capacity building, which may include placing tourism activators within counties. Other elements include aiming to ensure commercial success of the JT investment, digital transformation, innovation, including the important aspect of online booking.

The members joined with Cllr. T. McCormack in thanking him for his comprehensive presentation and they stressed the need for Offaly to get its fair share of Just Transition funding, as County Offaly is the most impacted county due to de-carbonisation. The members sought clarity on the location of the trail

network, future maintenance and the importance of utilising the rail network currently on peatlands in Offaly. They called for access to Bord na Mona plans for their land bank and buildings. They queried if access to private land would be required and how this would be dealt with. They voiced their concerns that the current and future large energy projects under development in Offaly would have an adverse effect on locating the Midland trail network in the county.

Cllr. E. Dooley highlighted the potential for a trail from Clonmacnoise to Lough Boora, utilising the attractions along this location and Cllr. L. Quinn cited the potential for the trail from Edenderry Canal to Croghan Hill. Cllr. J. Clendennen highlighted the potential to develop the Shannonbridge power station as an adventure centre which would provide alternative activities for tourism in all weathers. He queried if glamping is reaching saturation point in the tourism sector. The members sought clarity on possibility of large-scale development in a single location, such as hotels, citing the lack of accommodation in the county and they raised concerns on the tight timeline for completion of projects.

In response to the member's queries, Mr. P. Mathews, advised that the trails will be high-grade surfaces requiring less maintenance and possibly managed by TII. He noted that due to construction costs, it is difficult to finalise the distance of trails that will be developed and he agreed to work closely with Bord na Mona and Local Authorities to get the best value for money possible. He noted the current rail networks are being examined and they would provide a good foundation for the trails. He agreed the large-scale projects by Bord na Mona may slow down the process. He acknowledged the huge work by Offaly County Council on the greenways and wilderness corridors, feeding into the study. He noted the need for the right mix of projects, limited by state aid rules and that there are currently no grants schemes to deliver big developments. In his opinion, glamping accommodation options are not exhausted. With regard to utilising private land this would only be required if a link to the peatlands is necessary. Also, the timeline to complete projects by 2026 might impede accessing private land.

He noted that facilities will be required on the trails and the importance of connecting the trail network to towns and villages to provide support to the local businesses. He reiterated the option of fluidity in strands 2-4, to re-divert funding if necessary. He agreed that there are many opportunities in Offaly for trail development. Planning permission may be required and Fáilte Ireland will work with Offaly tourism in relation to same. He confirmed the adverts for the applications will be published in May and an online portal is also provided on their website.

Ms. A Delaney wished Fáilte Ireland well with their Regenerative Tourism and Place Making Scheme for Irelands Midlands. She acknowledged the work and engagement by planning /tourism staff, and their interactions with communities and SMEs.

9. Monthly Management Report

Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive, brought the members attention to the March monthly management report. She advised of the Part 8 proposal for the construction of a new trailhead at Ballycommon on public display until 24th April and submissions will be accepted up to 9th May. She welcomed the site visit by the Secretariat for Technical Assistance for Regions in Transition (START) and the series of engagements with project partners exploring the role of each in supporting the county through Just Transition. She noted the 100+ attendance the open day for Ferbane Regeneration Project, which allowed the community to tour the buildings and grounds and to give their views and comments on the refurbishment of St. Joseph's Convent for use as a multipurpose community/enterprise/learning space in Ferbane, Co. Offaly.

She advised the members that Roads programme they adopted will be rolled out over the coming months and the Housing update is outlined in the report. She informed the members that information on the Leader Programme, Arts, Library and LEO services are all set out in the report and she welcomed the Climate Action Economic Opportunities Conference due to take place in Tullamore on 26 April 2023.

10. Corporate Policy Group Report

Clr. T. McCormack advised the members a sub-committee representing each MD was set up to discuss Chains of Office for the MDs. Cllr. F. Moran congratulated the Esker Arts on the success of the soft opening of the centre and he looked forward to the official opening in early June. He also congratulated Clara Swimming Pool on their 50th Anniversary. He advised the members the May meeting of the council will take place in Clara and further details on the venue will be circulated to them in due course. He invited the members to a Civic Reception for the Offaly boxers Grainne Walsh, Nicole Buckley and Paul Loonam to celebrate their success at the National Elite Championships to be held on 28th April next.

11. Comhdhálacha /Conferences

No Conferences/Training

12. Comhfhreagras / Correspondence

Correspondence that issued with the agenda was noted.

13. Any Other Business

The members raised concerns with the amount of Public Lighting that is not working and with the delay in carrying out repairs.

Mr. T. Shanahan advised that the issue with the contractor is resolved and significant resources have been assigned to repair public lighting. This includes crews trained to deal with the ESB network and a further meeting with contractor is scheduled for next week. Cllr. N. Cribbin confirmed work on public lights have resumed in Edenderry.

The members joined with Cllr. J. Clendennen in congratulating Noel Tynan as Offaly Person of the Year and with Cllr. T. McCormack in congratulating Shane Loughlin as the Unsung Hero of Offaly 2022. Cllr. E. Dooley sought communication with Minister Eamon Ryan to clarify his support for over runs on Just Transition projects, including the Ferbane Food Campus. The members welcomed the soft opening for Esker Arts, organised by the local Lions Club to fund raise for the Centre.

Ms. A. Delaney thanked the Tullamore Lions Club, Esker Arts and Offaly County Council staff and the members for their work and support for Esker Arts.

MINUTES CONFIRMED:

CATHAOIRLEACH

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15 May 2023