

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE UÍBH FHAILÍ

**MINUTES OF MAY MONTHLY MEETING
OF OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL**

**HELD IN ÁRAS AN CHONTAE, CHARLEVILLE ROAD, TULLAMORE ON
MONDAY 17TH MAY 2021 AT 2.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:	Cllr. J. Carroll, Cathaoirleach (R), Cllrs. C. Claffey (R), J. Clendennen (R), N. Cribbin (R), E. Dooley (R), N. Feighery (R), E. Fitzpatrick (R), J. Foley (R), M. Hackett (R), D. Harvey (R), J. Leahy (R), T. McCormack (R), R. McDermott (R), F. Moran (R), S. O'Brien (R), P. Ormond (R), D. Owens (R), L. Quinn (R) and K. Smollen (R)
IN ATTENDANCE:	Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive (R); Mr. T. Shanahan, D.O.S. (R); Ms. S. Kennedy, D.O.S. (R); Mr. S. Duclot (R); Mr. M. Connolly, H.O.F. (R); Ms. A. Dillon S.E.O. (R); Ms. O. Martin, H. of LEO; Mr. E. Fennell, S.E.O.; Mr. G. Bruton, A/ Meetings Administrator (R); Mr. C. Kelly, S.O.(R) and Ms. L. Carbery, C.O. (R)
STATEMENT	<p>Cllr. J. Carroll advised members that he wished to read the following statement into the record before proceeding with the meeting:</p> <p>Before I go to the Agenda of today, I just wish to put on record the concern of our members at how Bord na Mona dealt with appointment of the Bike Hire Contract at Lough Boora Visitor Centre.</p> <p>I don't need to convince you or public of the anger, frustration and annoyance felt by the people of Offaly and wider afield at how it was handled.</p> <p>We have just come through one of the most difficult years in this County's history, dealing with the Economic and Social fallout not just of Covid-19, but closure of our Power Station in Shannonbridge and the sudden end to Peat Harvesting which leaves massive uncertainty regarding employment in the Region.</p> <p>We need Bord na Mona to act in a manner that supports Just Transition, which means ensuring that every support is given to creating and protecting employment in this region as they pursue their Brown to Green Agenda.</p> <p>I have engaged with Bord na Mona by phone and email since the story broke and put it on the Agenda for the MRTT meeting last Wednesday. As it happened the matter was raised by Union representative Mr Mooney who was responding to Kieran Mulvey's updates, and the issue was then addressed by myself and Deputy Barry Cowan.</p>

	<p>Without going into who said what, we did get assurance from Bord na Mona representative (Mr. Redmond) that they were actively seeking a resolution to the matter and that it possibly could have been handled better.</p>
VOTES OF SYMPATHY	<p>Votes of sympathy were unanimously extended to the following:</p> <p>Mr. Diarmuid Bracken, Clonaslee, Co. Laois, on the death of his mother Josephine Bracken;</p> <p>Mr. Raphael Fallon, Kilcoursey, Clara on the death of his mother Mary Fallon.</p> <p>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.</p>
CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES:	<p>On the proposal of Cllr. J. Leahy, seconded by Cllr. D. Owens, the members resolved to adopt the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Offaly County Council held in Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road, Tullamore, Co. Offaly on Monday 19th April 2021.</p>
MINUTES FOR NOTING	<p>The members noted the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minutes of the Corporate Policy Group Meeting held on Friday 12th March 2021
SECTION 183 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2001, OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL PROPOSES TO DISPOSE OF LAND AT WOODFIELD, BIRR TO EIDOLE INVESTMENT PROPERTIES LTD IN THE SUM OF €90,000,	<p>On the proposal of Cllr. E. Dooley, seconded by Cllr. J. Clendennen, the members resolved to adopt Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001, to dispose of land at Woodfield, Birr to Eidole Investment Properties Ltd in the sum of €90,000.</p>
SECTION 183 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 2001, OFFALY COUNTY COUNCIL PROPOSES TO RENEW LEASE OF OLD LIBRARY BUILDING, JOHN'S PLACE, BIRR TO JOHN LOUGHNANE. THE NEW LEASE WILL COMMENCE ON THE 1ST JUNE 2021 FOR A TERM OF 5 YEARS AND THE RENT FEE WILL BE €10,400 PER ANNUM	<p>On the proposal of Cllr. J. Leahy, seconded by Cllr. P. Ormond, the members resolved to adopt Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001, to renew lease of Old Library building, John's Place, Birr to John Loughnane. The new lease will commence on the 1st June 2021 for a term of 5 years and the rent fee will be €10,400 per annum.</p>
PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT ACT, 2000 AS AMENDED, PART 8 OF THE PLANNING AND	<p>Ms. S. Kennedy, D.OS. informed the members that the proposed housing development at Raheen Clara has been progressing with the Department for a considerable period of time. She advised the members that following public consultation a number of submissions had been received covering issues such as road</p>

<p>DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS, 2001 AS AMENDED, PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AT RAHEEN, CLARA, COUNTY OFFALY</p>	<p>safety, infrastructure and connection to the sewerage scheme for existing residents in Raheen. Mr. J. Cunningham, S.E.E., shared a brief presentation with the members outlining the plans and noting the spread of unit types, including much needed bungalows.</p> <p>Cllr. N. Feighery welcomed the development noting it will alleviate housing pressure in the area and he sought to keep the possibility of a group sewerage scheme for Raheen residents on the agenda. Cllr. S. O'Brien joined with the members in welcoming the development and he highlighted the need for a traffic management solution at the junction outside the scheme.</p> <p>Ms. S. Kennedy agreed with the members that it is a beautifully designed development and she thanked Mr. J. Cunningham, Ms. N. McGinley and the housing team for their efforts in progressing this scheme. She advised the members that the issues with regard to sewerage and traffic management are extraneous to this Part 8 and that the Director of Services Mr. T. Shanahan has agreed to look at the infrastructure requirements associated with this development.</p> <p>Cllr. J. Leahy welcomed the scheme noting it's a huge investment for Clara and he raised a general query in relation to the possibility of relocation of tenants to more appropriate accommodation as their needs change, over the period of their tenancy.</p> <p>Ms. S. Kennedy responded that tenants can apply for transfers but amending the tenancy agreements have yet to be devolved to Local Authorities. She agreed that it would create flexibility in the community to addressing housing needs.</p> <p>On the proposal of Cllr. N. Feighery, seconded by Cllr. S. O'Brien the members resolved to adopt under the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as Amended, Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 as Amended, for the proposed development at Raheen, Clara, County Offaly.</p> <p>Cllr. F. Moran joined with the members in welcoming the €12m investment to provide 38 units in Clara and he commended the Chief Executive on her detailed responses to the submissions received. He stated that he looks forward to on-going communications with the residents in Raheen and the Director of Services. He raised a query on the progression of plans for the Fire Station.</p> <p>Ms. S. Kennedy advised that the budget for the Fire Station has not yet been approved but it has been advertised on etenders for a design team to progress the plans and she agreed to keep the members updated.</p>
<p>LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE PRESENTATION</p>	<p>Cllr. J. Carroll joined with the members in congratulating students Damien Delaney and Alex Byrne from St. Brendan's Community School in Birr for their win in the Natasha Lynch Commemorative Award for Excellence in Social Media at the National Final of this year's Student Enterprise Programme.</p>

Ms. O. Martin, Head of LEO, further congratulated the students and began her presentation with a photograph of the students and of Doyle's shop in Birr that have recently availed of the Shopfront Enhancement Scheme.

She informed the members of the enterprise and development role for LEO in promoting Entrepreneurship & Business Start-Ups/Expansion and working with other LEOs and Enterprise Ireland colleagues regionally and nationally.

She highlighted the area of Economic Development for LEO to target activities for Economic Infrastructure, Wellbeing & Quality of Life, while working in collaboration with colleagues throughout Offaly County Council, the members and other relevant stakeholders.

She outlined the challenges of 2020/2021 including Covid-19, Brexit, Just Transition and remote working. She advised the members that some of their clients have experienced job losses but they hope to take back on staff as Covid-19 restrictions are eased.

She updated the members on LEO's initiatives and grant approvals for 2020 culminating in 853 approvals to the value of over €3.25m and she provided a detailed breakdown of the grants and initiatives, noting that in the early part of lockdown, business continuity was of utmost importance.

She outlined the programmes provided in 2020 including training, seminars, events, mentoring, student entrepreneurs and highlighted that client enquiries have increased 3 fold since the start of Covid-19. She updated the members on the scheme Lean for Micro which assists businesses on improving their efficiencies and reducing waste. She noted the positive feedback from their clients, stressing that it can be hard to keep on top of everything, but that various studies have scored the performance of Offaly LEO highly.

She brought the members attention to the success of two of their clients, firstly Deirdre Hynds the 2018 IBYE Best Business Idea Winner with her products now listed in 70 stores nationwide. Secondly, Euram Air Leases Ireland Ltd, an Aircraft Engine Disassembly Company based in Ferbane, currently employing 13 people and expanding.

Ms. O. Martin updated the members on Engenuity, which is a member led engineering cluster network consisting of 16 Offaly companies, the First Time Exporters Programme with 5 Offaly companies and Going Green involving 8 Offaly companies. She outlined the National LEO initiatives as below:

- Student Enterprise Programme
- National Enterprise Awards
- National Women's Enterprise Day
- Local Enterprise Week
- Look for Local Campaign

She outlined the progress in Economic Development, with 8 sites sold in Ferbane, a further 2 in progress, and the last 2 sites sold in Portarlinton. She advised the members that through the Just Transition fund there is a provisional offer for design & planning of an industrial unit in the IDA Srah Industrial Park. She called on the members to let companies and businesses know of the Free Quarterly Property Database available to assist them in exploring opportunities and to advertise free of charge.

Ms. O. Martin updated the members on the Shopfront Enhancement Scheme with 17 applications approved under the 2020 scheme and 22 applications under the Town & Village Renewal funded scheme (2021). She outlined the on-going progress with the Offaly County Council Co-Working Hubs including Stream BIRR, who are hosting an upcoming virtual training & events in data analytics with Ms. Catriona Montgomery. She advised the members of the recruitment of a new Business Development Manager funded by Enterprise Ireland. She informed the members of the other committees LEO are involved in, including the Midlands Regional Transition Team, Midlands Regional Enterprise Plans, Branding and Marketing Offaly, Climate Action Team, Age Friendly Committee and the SPC for Economic Development & Planning.

Ms. O. Martin outlined the areas of focus for 2021 as below:

- Enterprise: Supporting Reset & Recover
- Green Agenda: Enterprise, Rhode Green Energy Park Opportunities
- Assets & Infrastructure: Data Connectivity, Roadmaps for Investors, Grand Canal Dock Tullamore Masterplan
- Tourism: Collaborations with LEO/Economic
- Science & I-LOFAR

She advised the members of the key messages for businesses:

- Connect and Engage with LEO Office
- Avail of relevant supports, esp.:
 - Green For Micro, BREXIT Supports
 - Innovation, Financial Capability, LEAN, Management Development
- Engage with Look for Local/Promotions
- Avail of the Free Property Database

The members thanked Ms. O. Martin and the LEO staff on their excellent work and they congratulated students Damien Delaney and Alex Byrne for their win at the National Final of the Student Enterprise Awards. They acknowledged the funding and supports provided to businesses in particular at the start of lockdown, the importance of the mentoring programme and the challenges presented by Covid-19. They welcomed the Shopfront Enhancement and the Green for Micro Schemes. They raised queries on what is required to progress the Tullamore Harbour Project, if there will be any rates relief in 2021 for businesses effected by lockdown, the need for land/property for businesses and the necessity to develop remote working hubs.

	<p>Cllr. R. McDermott sought clarification on the trading online vouchers. Ms. O. Martin clarified that to qualify for these vouchers companies need to be trading for 6 months and can use the vouchers to develop their e-commerce websites.</p> <p>Cllr. E. Dooley welcomed the sale of sites in the Ferbane Business park and the jobs that this will create and queried if there are any plans to expand the Business Park.</p> <p>Cllr. F. Moran queried if the pending closure of the Bank of Ireland in Clara could provide an opportunity for a remote hub in the town.</p> <p>Ms. O. Martin thanked the members for their positive feedback. In response to the members queries she confirmed that a Masterplan for the Grand Canal Harbour is progressing through Urban Regeneration funding in the amount of €180k. She advised that there is no update currently on the review of rates for businesses in 2021, but that Offaly County Council and LEO continue to look at different elements to support businesses. She informed the members that they had received a lot of queries about the remote working hubs, but that due to Covid-19 they had to be mindful of keeping tenants safe and could not facilitate everyone due to social distancing. She agreed that in the future there would be more demand for remote working hubs as many employers may introduce some form of hybrid working and that this will present opportunities for community based hubs.</p> <p>Ms. O. Martin agreed that LEO will continue to work with all stakeholders. She informed the members that they are waiting on the final letter of offer from Just Transition funding to develop a unit in Srah Industrial Estate. She informed the members that to expand the Ferbane Business Park they need to uncover more sites and there is room for wider discussion on available lands in county. She confirmed that the sites that have been sold were to companies who are developing and expanding their businesses.</p> <p>Mr. S. Duclot acknowledged the difficulties presented in 2020/2021 and that it is positive to see the economy re-opening. He advised that Offaly County Council and LEO are available to help businesses and he thanked members for their support.</p> <p>Ms. A. Delaney thanked the members for their positive comments and acknowledged that the LEO team have a significant amount of work to get through, and they are a hardworking and dedicated team.</p>
JUST TRANSITION	<p>Ms. A. Delaney informed the members that the Midlands Regional Transition Team hosted by Roscommon County Council met last week and they received an update from the Just Transition Commissioner Mr. Kieran Mulvey, the working groups, the Department of Environment, Climate & Communications, and the ESB.</p> <p>She advised the members that Mr. K. Mulvey's third report is imminent, that he continues to engage with Department and the ESB and he has made a submission in regard to the EU</p>

Territorial Plan and on the possible utilisation of Bord na Mona/ESB properties/land.

She noted the Working Groups provided the MRTT with an outline of the progress they are making in areas of training, communication, skills and they are organising briefing sessions for the members/stakeholders with the Strand 1 Just Transition applicants.

She advised that the Implementation Plan for Just Transition will form part of the Climate Action plan and the ESB are investigating alternative uses for Shannonbridge/Lanesboro power plants. She informed the members that she will have more details on the Community gain fund in next few weeks.

She advised that the Commissioner had agreed to review the issues surrounding the continuity of the local authority Cathaoirlioh serving on the MRTT.

Cllr. E. Dooley expressed his disappointment in the low level of approved applicants for Just Transition funding in Offaly and he queried if there would be any input from Offaly County Council to the EU Territorial Plan.

Cllr. J. Leahy sought a closing date extension for community groups that have been successful in their applications for Just Transition funding, as work on their projects have been delayed by Covid-19. He called for political intervention to allow community gain funding to be ring fenced by Offaly County Council and not to be administered by state agencies.

Cllr. J. Clendennen queried if there is a commitment by the ESB not to demolish the Shannonbridge power station. He voiced his concerns that the match funding requirement is too high and he sought more details on the number of jobs being created by Just Transition funding.

Ms. A. Delaney agreed that Offaly has been more impacted by de-carbonisation than other counties but she stressed that the county is part of the Midlands Region. She advised that EnvEcon Consultants are contracted to support the Department in their submission for the EU Territorial Plan and they are engaging with the Midlands Regional Transition Team and the Just Transition Commissioner in this regard, with work due to be finalised on this in June or July. She advised that Offaly County Council have made their submission to the Department and she expects feedback on this in near future, but she stressed that the Department will have final say and Offaly County Council may not see final plan.

She advised the members that they are pushing the Department to extend the end date for the Just Transition applications and they have raised the issue of match funding. It has been suggested to the Just Transition Commissioner that a reduction in the match funding requirement for community projects would be greatly welcomed.

	<p>She informed the members that they are working through issues with the Department to make the application process easier for groups and she is hoping for feedback on this next week.</p> <p>Cllr. N. Cribbin requested that the members be provided with a full list of projects and the Chief Executive responded that only Offaly County Council lead projects could be provided. She noted that the Department will give further information on job creation and funding when all contracts are signed and she may get a list of Strand 1 projects as they have been signed- off on.</p>
<p>MONTHLY MANAGEMENT REPORT</p>	<p>Ms. A. Delaney, C.E., brought the members attention to the monthly management report and she stressed that there has been a lot of activity in difficult circumstances but that services are being delivered as scheduled.</p> <p>She welcomed the re-opening of the Libraries, the Regional Development Fund applications, the Outdoor Recreation Scheme and the return of construction and the Roads Programme. She noted that the draft County Development Plan meetings are progressing. She informed the members on the Grand Canal Programme and Environment and Water projects. She highlighted that the tender documents for the extension of Kilreaghan Cemetery in Ferbane are due to be issued in May 2021 and tender documents for the extension of the cemetery in Kilcoursey, Clara are to be issued in June. She advised the members that Tullamore has been nominated as the initial decarbonisation zone in County Offaly. She noted that Climate Action training is on-going and both the Active Travel Project and Tullamore Living River will be rolled out. She informed the members that the library are running a biodiversity project and IT are running a pilot project of moving users to a single device saving on the amount of desktop pc's in use and hugely reducing the power consumption for each user.</p> <p>Ms. A. Delaney welcomed the nomination by Tuath Housing Body of 27 families for the new development in Killane, Edenderry and the Part 8 for Raheen, Clara approved by the members. She noted the on-going vacant houses initiative. She welcomed the allocation from the Department for a significant increase in funding for Disabled Persons Grants for Local Authority housing units for 2021. She updated the members on the Retrofit Lots 1 & 2 for Birr, which is out to tender and that a contractor will be appointed in June 2021 to carry out the retrofit works on 35 houses.</p> <p>Ms. A. Delaney brought the members attention to the Community response forums request for nominations for the Community Recognition Awards 2021. She welcomed the Irish Times article's reference to the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trails and she wished businesses well on their re-opening in the next few weeks.</p> <p>The members thanked her for her comprehensive report and welcomed the increased funding for housing grants and queried how far the allocation would stretch to clear the backlog. Cllr.</p>

S. O'Brien raised concerns about the recent reports of vulture funds buying housing stock and the increase in the cost of rent. Cllr. F. Moran welcomed the progress on the Kilcoursey cemetery and of the Stage 1 housing development in Sycamore Drive, Ballycumber. He enquired about the criteria for development of derelict properties under the Town and Village Renewal Scheme.

Cllr. R. McDermott welcomed the Tuath housing development in Killane and noted that they are of exceptionally high standard. Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick queried if members that have made representations on behalf of housing applicants could get notification from the housing bodies when they are allocating houses. Cllr. J. Clendennen sought clarity on the timeline for businesses to repay the outdoor dining grant and called for greater engagement with stakeholders for the development of the greenways. He acknowledged the number of initiatives brought by Comhairle na nÓg.

Ms. A. Delaney thanked the members for their positive comments and noted the issues with investors buying up housing and the cost of renting. She advised that Offaly County Council's housing section are very pro-active on availing of the various schemes and now that construction is back open current schemes will progress. She noted that they are always looking to progress projects and to the availability of land.

She advised that the Regeneration team will look at derelict buildings and vacant houses that could be considered for refurbishment. She acknowledged the work of Ms. M. Cleary and the housing staff in liaising with the Department to secure extra funding for Disabled Persons Grants and noted that it should help to reduce the waiting list. She advised that funding would be spread out as much as possible, but that building standards have to be met.

She informed the members that a meeting has been arranged with fellow Greenway partners in an effort to link all initiatives for the Greenways access the County and the Region. She noted that 76km from Edenderry to Lough Boora parkland will be complete by 2023.

Ms. A. Delaney informed the members that the Outdoor Dining Grant is administered by the tourism team with the end of September as the closing date. Details for repayment will be clarified. She commended the Comhairle na nÓg One Word Campaign to support and engage young people.

Ms. S. Kennedy also welcomed the increased funding for DPGs, noting that it will make inroads into the housing waiting list but will not clear it. She advised that a number of challenges exist with construction just back, lack of contractor availability, ensuring value for money and that approved works are determined by the Occupational Therapist. She noted the commitment to increasing engagement with Comhairle na nÓg and is happy to see this area improving. She advised that where possible they will inform the members of any housing allocations

