

**MINUTES OF THE PORTLAOISE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY
17TH OF JUNE 2020 IN ÁRAS AN CHONTAE, PORTLAOISE**

PRESENT Mr. John Joe Fennelly, Cathaoirleach (In the Chair)
Ms. Mary Sweeney, M.C.C.
Ms. Catherine Fitzgerald, M.C.C.
Ms. Caroline Dwane Stanley, M.C.C.
Ms. Thomasina Connell, M.C.C.
Mr. Willie Aird, M.C.C.
Mr. Noel Tuohy, M.C.C.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services
Mr. Wes Wilkinson, Senior Executive Engineer
Ms. Michelle McCormack, Staff Officer

1. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE MAY MEETING OF PORTLAOISE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT HELD ON THE 20TH OF MAY 2020

On the proposal of Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy the minutes of the May meeting held on the 20th of May 2020 were confirmed as circulated.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM MEETING HELD ON THE 20TH OF MAY 2020

There were no matters arising from the meeting held on the 20th of May 2020.

3. RE-OPENING OF SOCIETY & BUSINESS – BUSINESS RECOVERY GROUP – PUBLIC REALM MANAGEMENT & MAIN STREET, PORTLAOISE

This issue was taken in conjunction with NoM 60/2020 in which Councillor Mary Sweeney proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That Laois County Council work with the hospitality and service industry in the Portlaoise area to facilitate access to public spaces and footpaths for their use subject to social distancing and health and safety guidelines"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. The Members were advised that Laois County Council, in partnership with Laois Chamber of Commerce and the Local Enterprise Office, has established a Business Recovery Group to support and stimulate recovery in business, retail, tourism and the general services sectors. One of the principal aims of the Group is to support the rearrangement of the public realm such that it provides compensatory retail floor space, outdoor queuing space, adherence to public health guidelines and enhanced consumer confidence. At the time of writing, specific to the issue of accessing public spaces, consultations are ongoing with 12 individual businesses who have contacted Laois County Council (via the Chamber of Commerce). Laois County Council will facilitate such rearrangement of the public realm where it is reasonably feasible. As previously agreed by Elected Members all fees associated with such use of the public realm are waived for 2020.

The Members were also circulated with a copy of a report on the Main Street, Portlaoise – ‘A Covid Compliant Street’. Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services advised the members that Laois County Council will temporarily pedestrianise Lower Main Street from its junction with Railway Street to the junction with Church Avenue from the 2nd of July 2020 until the 30th of August 2020 during the hours of 11.00 a.m. and 5.30 p.m. seven days per week. The Notice has been published on the 16th of June with a closing date of the 26th of June 2020 for submissions.

It was confirmed that this is a temporary measure.

A lengthy discussion took place before and after the presentation and Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services responded to the various queries raised, referred to the statutory notification, which issued on the 16th of June 2020 and had a closing date for receipt of submissions of Friday 26th June. Over and above the pedestrianisation proposed, Elected Members indicated a desire for additional pedestrianisation measures to be introduced and Mr. Walton agreed to revert to the Members in a week or so as to advise on the implications of the proposals put forward.

4. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Notice of Motion No: 59/2020

Councillor Mary Sweeney proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That Laois County Council liaise with Irish Water to provide a solution to the concerns regarding lack of water capacity in Ballyroan"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. The Members were advised that Water Services continue to liaise with IW in relation to the water capacity in Ballyroan. Laois County Council staff are actively working in this area, looking for, finding and fixing leaks. Irish Water have recently approved our proposal for the installation of two booster pumps – one in Meelick and other one on the Bog Rd. These will be installed in the coming weeks and will augment the Ballyroan supply. However during peak demand and droughts, both the Portlaoise and Ballyroan supplies will have little continue to be affected. LCC are working with IW on longer term strategies to provide additional bore well sources for Ballyroan.

Notice of Motion No: 60/2020

Councillor Mary Sweeney proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That Laois County Council work with the hospitality and service industry in the Portlaoise area to facilitate access to public spaces and footpaths for their use subject to social distancing and health and safety guidelines"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. The Members were advised that Laois County Council, in partnership with Laois Chamber of Commerce and the Local Enterprise Office, has established a Business Recovery Group to support and stimulate recovery in business, retail, tourism and the general services sectors. One of the principal aims of the Group is to support the rearrangement of the public realm such that it provides compensatory retail floor space, outdoor queuing space, adherence to public

health guidelines and enhanced consumer confidence. At the time of writing, specific to the issue of accessing public spaces, consultations are ongoing with 12 individual businesses who have contacted Laois County Council (via the Chamber of Commerce). Laois County Council will facilitate such rearrangement of the public realm where it is reasonably feasible.

Notice of Motion No: 61/2020

Councillor Mary Sweeney proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That Laois County Council provide drainage on the Rock Road, Ballyroan and include road repairs at this location"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. The Members were advised that the drainage works at this location will be completed this week. This road will be resurfaced later this summer as part of the 2020 Roads Programme.

Notice of Motion No: 62/2020

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That this meeting calls on Laois County Council to install traffic calming measures in Broomville, Portlaoise"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that all housing developments have been implemented with a slow zone area, with a max. speed limit of 30km/hr in place, signage has been installed indicating same. If further traffic calming measures are required this can be discussed with Area Engineer.

Notice of Motion No: 63/2020

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That Portlaoise Municipal district be given a report regarding the derelict house on the Borris Road, Portlaoise opposite the new St Francis School and also regarding the unoccupied house owned by Laois County Council on the Ballyfin Road"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that a site inspection was carried out by Catherine Murphy, Senior Executive Technician, Planning on Friday 12th June 2020. It was noted that this property is derelict site that has been neglected and has become overgrown. It detracts from the streetscape. A Derelict Site file has been opened. However, having checked the Land Registry records it appears that this property is not registered. Further investigation into the ownership of same will have to be carried out to progress the matter.

In relation to the property on the Ballyfin Road works were delayed due to the COVID19 restrictions. As these restrictions are now lifted and works can recommence we estimate that the property will be ready for tenanting by the end of June.

Notice of Motion No: 64/2020

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That the Portlaoise Municipal District call on Laois County Council to put pedestrian crossings in place on the Mountrath road at Rockdale and Rockview Estate"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that currently an uncontrolled pedestrian crossing is in place within close proximity to the roundabout at Rockdale. It is proposed to improve junction at Rockview and Controlled pedestrian crossing is proposed as part of the upgrades works, subject to funding being available.

Notice of Motion No: 65/2020

Councillor John Joe Fennelly proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That this Council and Respond Housing Agency meet up to discuss who is responsible for the maintenance of the pumping station at Sli na Nor, Abbeyleix"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that on Wednesday 3rd of June The Development Manager of Respond Housing Agency confirmed that Respond would be applying to LCC for the taking in charge of all roads, lighting etc and to Irish Water for the taking in charge of pump station, sewers, water mains etc at Sli Na Nor Abbeyleix. Currently none of this is in the charge of LCC or Irish Water and therefore until then Respond are responsible of the maintenance of this infrastructure.

Notice of Motion No: 66/2020

Councillor John Joe Fennelly proposed the following Notice of Motion:

"That this Council erect two new signs for wheelchair users at the Bog Road, Ballyroan in conjunction with the traffic claiming measures to be installed on this road"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E. will make himself available to meet with Councillor Fennelly and residents to examine this location.

Notice of Motion No: 67/2020

Councillor John Joe Fennelly proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That this Council examine the possibility of providing a safe walking area at Blackhill, Abbeyleix as this is part of the Abbeyleix Walking Route"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Mary Sweeney. The Members were advised that Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E will make himself available to meet with the residents and Councillor Fennelly to examine the location and potential measures to enhance safety along this section of road.

Notice of Motion No: 68/2020

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That this Council have a serious look at the original plan to open a new road linking the Stradbally Road with the Dublin Road"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Mary Sweeney. The Members were advised that there is provision to connect the Dublin Road and the N80 Stradbally Road in Portlaoise Local Area Plan 2018 – 2024. This link road will be completed in conjunction with the development of land at this location by the relevant developer. A CPO in is effect to give effect to the establishment of a "fourth arm" on the Stradbally Road Roundabout.

Notice of Motion No: 69/2020

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald proposed the following Notice of Motion:

"That this Council enforce regulations to prevent large articulated lorries using the N80 Mountmellick Road"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that there are currently signs in place on the N80 Mountmellick Road approach to Portlaoise advising of a height restriction (railway bridge) and redirecting traffic via the Western Orbital Route. The signs will be updated and enhanced. Motorists in control of vehicles in breach of the height limit are legally bound to use the alternative route. Additional measures such as the imposition of vehicle weight restrictions (except for local access) are possible but would have to be undertaken in consultation with TII and in accordance with a broader HCV Management Plan. It was agreed that the development of the broader HCV Management Plan would be referred to the Transportation SPC for consideration.

Notice of Motion No: 70/2020

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald proposed the following Notice of Motion:

"That this Council repair the road at Burnwood, Clonad"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. The Members were advised that Road repairs will be carried out at this location.

Notice of Motion No: 71/2020

Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council give an update on progress of the roll out of the proposed public bus routes and stops for Portlaoise town”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that Preliminary designs are in place for the Portlaoise Town Bus Service to provide for two bus routes (Collier's Lane to Ballyfin Road and Kilminchy to Bellingham), each serviced by two buses and based on a half hourly service. Between the two routes there are approximately 40 stops including 5 stops in the Town centre where the two routes cojoin. It is the case that Portlaoise Town Bus Service is not at as advanced a stage of delivery as other, similar, regional towns. In keeping with Portlaoise's designation as a Low Carbon Town, a recent meeting was held with the National Transport Authority (funding agency) with a view to the NTA expediting the delivery of the Portlaoise Town Bus Service.

Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley requested that the bus service for Portlaoise be expedited and also that bus shelters be provided as part of the service.

Notice of Motion No: 72/2020

Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council remove the signage in the Top Square stating parking prohibited on Fridays and return it to a normal parking area”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that this signage related to previous Casual Trading Bye Laws, which provided for the location of the Portlaoise Farmers' Market at Market Square. Under the Portlaoise Casual Trading Bye Laws 2019, the primary site for the Portlaoise Farmer's Market is now Pepper's Lane. Accordingly, arrangements will be made to remove this signage from Market Square. It should be noted that Market Square is included in the current bye laws as an alternative site for the market should it become necessary to move it from its primary location.

Notice of Motion No: 73/2020

Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council and Irish water examine the possibility of providing a sewage connection to the houses on the Portlaoise Road, Abbeyleix”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. The Members were advised that this matter has been referred to Irish Water. Mr. Walton agreed to provide an update for the next meeting of the Municipal District.

Notice of Motion No: 74/2020

Councillor Noel Tuohy proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council repair the dangerous pot hole outside Conroys house in Meelick as there has been a number of minor accidents there with the potential for more serious accidents and damage to passing traffic”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley. The Members were advised that road repairs will be carried out at this location.

Notice of Motion No: 75/2020

Councillor Noel Tuohy proposed the following Notice of Motion:

“That this council repair the wall at the bottom of Lakeglen, as it is dangerous to children”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley. The Members were advised that Laois County Council's Housing Department will seek quotes for the repair of this wall. The Housing Department will proceed with this repair.

Notice of Motion No: 76/2020

Councillor Noel Touhy proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That Laois County Council give an update on the progress on the provisions of disability facilities in Portlaoise Playground”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Thomasina Connell. The Members were advised that Laois County Council has formalised a plan for the improvement works to increase accessibility on Portlaoise Leisure Centre Playground – these works will be carried out in the Autumn of 2020 – equipment has been ordered, however, due to Covid-19 the Company manufacturing the equipment have only just re-opened which accounts for the delay in support.

Notice of Motion No: 77/2020

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council give its full support to the recent application made by the Department of Housing, Planning & Local Government for funding from the Urban Regeneration & Development Fund for the Lyster Square Project”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund is a state sponsored fund to support the compact and sustainable development of our five major cities and the larger towns. Under Round 1 of the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund, Laois County Council was allocated €8 million (75% funding to be matched with 25% funding from LCC). Round

1 funds relate to various projects to form the Cultural Quarter and, separately, various projects in pursuit of a Low Carbon Town. Recently Laois County Council has made a Round 2 application under URDF, largely related to public realm enhancements in the town centre, connecting the ‘old’ and ‘new’ towns, promoting more sustainable forms of transport and supporting town centre living.

Notice of Motion No: 78/2020

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council take whatever steps necessary to install an additional Bottle Bank/Bring Bank in Portlaoise”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that the Environment Section will inspect the Council’s Property Register to try and identify suitable sites for a new Bottle Bank location. If a suitable site, on lands owned by the Council, cannot be identified then privately owned lands will be investigated.

Littering at Bottle Banks is currently a problem in the County so the viability of any sites identified will be dependent on what anti-litter measures can be put in place. The provision of any Bottle Bank will require necessary site works and signage etc.

The Environment Section will commence its search for a suitable Bottle Bank location in the town starting with the Fairgreen Area of town as recommended by the Elected Member. The Environment Section will keep you updated on its progress with the selection of a suitable site.

Notice of Motion No: 79/2020

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council undertake repairs to the tactile paving at Laurel Drive, Esker Hills, Portlaoise”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that the repairs to the tactile paving at Laurel Drive will be completed this week.

4. Any Other Business

Bord na Mona

The Members expressed serious concern in relation to the issue of Bord na Mona not being able to commence the peat harvest and domestic turf cutters not being able to start cutting their turf on the bog. It was agreed to seek an urgent update from Bord na Mona in relation to same.

Portlaoise Leisure Centre Update

The Members raised the matter of the closing of Portlaoise Leisure Centre. It was noted that the Portlaoise Leisure Centre Company wound up their operations on the 15th of June 2020. Councillor Connell in her capacity as Board Member indicated that it was regrettable that the Board had to make the decision to put the company into liquidation and indeed very sad to witness the impact it has on employment for those working in the Centre. The Centre would have needed at least €300,000 to stay open until Christmas. It would have been reckless to continue trading in the current circumstances.

Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services confirmed that Laois County Council will ensure that the public investment in the Leisure Centre will continue and that the facilities will be available for the benefit of the public. Laois County Council will commence refurbishment works to ensure that it is ready for use as soon as it is safe and appropriate to do so. Clearly it was the case that, following the appointment of the liquidator, new governance arrangements were required for the Leisure Centre going forward and this is a priority for Laois County Council as the owners of the assets. It was noted that the pitches, skate park and playground would remain open in the short term.

4. Correspondence

There was no correspondence

8. Fix Time, Date & Venue for the next meeting

On the proposition of Councillor William seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly, the Members unanimously agreed for the suspension of standing orders in order to hold a July meeting of the MD on 15th of July 2020 at 11.00 a.m. in the Council Chamber with social distancing guidelines being adhered to.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed:

John Joe Fennelly, Cathaoirleach

