

**MINUTES OF THE PORTLAOISE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY
20th OF MAY 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. VOTE OF SYMPATHY

On the proposal of Councillor John Joe Fennelly, the Members unanimously proposed a vote of sympathy to Ms. Mary Sweeney, M.C.C. and the McDonald family on the death of Mr. Jim McDonald, Newtown, Ballyroan, Co. Laois. The Members also expressed sympathies to all families who lost loved ones during this pandemic. In doing so the Members commended the frontline staff for their tremendous work.

2. AMENDMENT TO STANDING ORDERS

On the proposition of Councillor John Joe Fennelly seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy, the Members unanimously agreed to the amendment to the Portlaoise Municipal District Standing Orders in light of the global pandemic in relation to the COVID-19 Outbreak declared by the World Health Organisation on the 12th of March 2020. The Members in particular were advised of the amendment at 72(a-f) of the Standing Orders for the duration of the COVID-19 as follows:

- (i) Council meetings may be held by means of conference/video call among the members of the Municipal District for the purposes of dealing with statutory, urgent or priority agenda items
- (ii) Following consultation with the Cathaoirleach the Meetings Administrator shall inform members that the meeting is to be held by conference/video call
- (iii) The conference/video call shall be organised and facilitated by the Meetings Administrator.

3. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY MEETING OF PORTLAOISE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT HELD ON THE 19TH OF FEBRUARY 2020

On the proposal of Councillor Willie Aird seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy, the minutes of the February meeting held on the 19th of February 2020 were confirmed as circulated.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM MEETING HELD ON THE 19TH OF FEBRUARY 2020

There were no matters arising from the meeting held on the 19th of February 2020.

5. SCHEDULE OF MUNICIPAL DISTRICT WORKS 2020

On the proposition of Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley seconded by Councillor Willie Aird, the Members unanimously agreed the Schedule of Municipal District Works 2020 as circulated.

Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley raised the matter of funding allocated under the Community Involvement Scheme for additional parking bays in St. Brigids Place, Portlaoise. Mr. Wes Wilkinson, Senior Executive Engineer will arrange a meeting on site.

6. REPORT ON N80 MOUNTMELICK ROAD JUNCTIONS

Elected Members welcomed the Roadplan Report on the N80 Mountmellick Road Junctions. Mr. Simon Walton indicated that this report was carried out as a result of concerns expressed by the Members in late 2019. An assessment was carried out by Roadplan regarding road safety and traffic capacity at the three junctions, i.e. Harpur's Lane, Greenmill Lane & the Ballyfin Road.

The Report identifies operational performance and provides recommendations on short term and long term measures to improve junction safety and performance. It was noted that traffic flows on the N80 were heavier than flows on the side roads and that the existing T junctions favour the mainline which gives rise to delays on the 'locally trafficked' side roads, in particular at peak times. There are also difficulties for pedestrians and cyclists negotiating junctions with uncontrolled crossings.

It is proposed to introduce a number of short term measures at the junctions.

The longer term roundabout options at the three junctions together with improved pedestrian access and zebra crossings will result in a reassignment of priority to the side roads ultimately reducing through/by-passing traffic on the Mountmellick Road and enhancing road safety generally.

Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services responded to the various queries raised by the Members and indicated that the proposals would now be forwarded to the TII with a view to securing funds for detailed design.

Mr. Walton also indicated that cycle lanes would be installed during the summer period under the URDF.

Members also suggested making contact with Dunnes Stores as the roundabout at Greenmill Lane would benefit their store also on the Mountmellick Road, Portlaoise.

Councillor Willie Aird proposed that a deputation be made to the T.I.I. in relation to the long term measures for the N80.

7. ROADMAP FOR RE-OPENING SOCIETY & BUSINESS

Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services referred Members to the update on operations of Laois County Council during the Covid-19 pandemic which issued from the Chief Executive on the 15th of May 2020.

Laois County Council are engaging with Laois Chamber of Commerce and the Local Enterprise Office to support business recovery in Laois. A Business Recovery Group has been established in that regard. In relation to the retail and hospitality sector in Mr. Walton indicated that enhanced use of public spaces will be supported by the Council such as the allocation of additional space outside business premises in order to adhere to the various restrictions presented by Covid-19 and to compensate for the effective loss of internal space. Mr. Walton indicated that the current licence application fee of €125 per table would be waived for 2020. He noted, however, that the application process will still apply so as to ensure the needs of vulnerable road users are addressed.

It was also noted that over 60% of Main Street is allocated to the car 100% of the time and that, in its current configuration, Main Street, as the principal street in the principal town, required particular consideration such that a successful return to trading can be facilitated in an atmosphere of consumer confidence and adequate provision for public health guidelines. Mr. Walton outlined that consideration was being given to the reallocation of public spaces on Main Street and that details would emerge in that regard in the coming weeks following consultations with various stakeholders.

The Members expressed concern in relation to businesses getting up and running again and noted that any measures that support the Reopening of Society and Business are to be welcomed.

In addition to alternative uses of public spaces the Members were advised that the Local Enterprise Office are offering a number of supports to businesses, financial and mentoring, in relation to re-opening. Business owners were encouraged to contact the LEO.

The Members raised concern in relation to the restrictions on peat harvesting in Laois due to a High Court ruling made last September preventing Bord na Mona from harvesting peat. Councillor Willie Aird requested that contact be made immediately with our local Oireachtas Members for their support in enabling turf cutting to commence again especially in light of the good weather.

8. STRATEGIC HOUSING DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Mr. Joe Delaney, Director of Services briefed the meeting on the new arrangements for fastracking planning applications for strategic housing developments of 100 or more housing units or student accommodation of 200 or more bed spaces or shared accommodation developments of 200 or more bed spaces. Applications are to be made directly to An Bord Pleanála for determination in these cases. The primary objective of the SHD process is to accelerate housing delivery by introducing changes to reduce processing time. Mr. Delaney circulated an information note to the Members on the process and responded to the various queries raised. Following a query from the Members, Mr. Delaney advised that if applications are received under the scheme Members will be informed by way of presentation.

9. UPDATE NOTICE OF MOTIONS (MARCH 2020 NOTICE OF MOTIONS)

Notice of Motion No: 41/2020

Councillor Mary Sweeney proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That Laois County Council replace the damaged paving adjacent to the AIB ATM Machines in Lyster Square"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that the footpath at this location will be examined and arrangements will be made to have repairs carried out as required.

Notice of Motion No: 42/2020

Councillor Mary Sweeney proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That Laois County Council repair the main Abbeyleix to Portlaoise N77 Road adjacent to Bondra Lane"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. The Members were advised that Capital Maintenance funding has been approved by TII for this section of the road and will be resurfaced in the coming months. Repair of potholes has been carried out at this location.

Notice of Motion No: 43/2020

Councillor Mary Sweeney proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That Laois County Council repair as soon as possible the potholes in Lyster Square adjacent to the library"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that road repairs have been carried out in Lyster Square adjacent to the library.

Notice of Motion No: 44/2020

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

"That this Council replace the locking systems on all the public lights on Main Street, Abbeyleix"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Mary Sweeney. The Members were advised that the maintenance contractor has been instructed to replace locking system on these lights.

Notice of Motion No: 45/2020 & Notice of Motion No: 51/2020 were taken together as follows

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

"That this Council support the Principal, staff, Board of Management, Parents and Students of Scoil Mhuire Abbeyleix in their application for a new School"

51/2020 – Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley

"That this Council calls on the Department of Education to immediately approve adequate funding for works on the roof, sewage system, plumbing and electrical system in Scoil Mhuire Abbeyleix"

These Notice of Motions were seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that this Council supports the Principal, staff, Board of Management, Parents and Students of Scoil Mhuire Abbeyleix in their application for a new School.

Notice of Motion No: 46/2020

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

"That this Council erect new signage for St. Fintan's Well, Cromogue"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E. would meet with Councillor Fennelly on site at St. Fintan's Well, Cromogue to examine the location and type of signage required.

Notice of Motion No: 47/2020

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That this Council regulate parking at Portlaoise Day Care Centre"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E. would meet with Councillor Fitzgerald on site at Portlaoise Day Care Centre to examine the specific issues at this location.

Notice of Motion No: 48/2020

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald proposed the following Notice of Motion:

"That this Council upgrade lighting on the Mountmellick Road"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that new street lights have been installed on Mountmellick Road between Green Mill Lane and Harpurs Lane. ESB have completed new connection and these lights will be operational on 20/05/20. Lights between Railway bridge and Harpurs lane has been upgraded to LED.

Notice of Motion No: 49/2020

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

"That this Council give an update as to when work will begin on the construction of houses at Hepburn Court and Knockmay Field and to give a timeline for the project"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that designs have been received from CLUID Housing Association in respect of this development showing 60 units in total. Cluid HA has completed stage 1 of procuring a contractor. Prior to lodging Part VIII a meeting will take place with the Members to present the plans for this development. It is envisaged that Part VIII will be lodged in quarter 3 2020. Following this Cluid will be in a better position to advise when construction will commence and to provide a timeline for the project.

Notice of Motion No: 50/2020

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

"That this Council clean out the drains and cut back the trees at Carmody Way Fairgreen Estate and clean the culvert across from the Bog Road Pub, Mountmellick Road"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that arrangements will be made to clean the gullies in the Carmody Way Fairgreen Estate area. The outlet from the surface water culvert opposite the Bog Road will be examined and cleaned as required. Mr. Wes Wilkinson, Senior Executive Engineer will meet with Councillor Dwane Stanley on site to examine the specific trees that require attention in Carmody Way.

Notice of Motion No: 52/2020

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion:

"That this Council put in place signage to reduce speed on the road from Shaen to Mountmellick"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E. would meet with Councillor Connell on site to examine the specific issues at the location on the road from Shaen to Mountmellick.

Notice of Motion No: 53/2020

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion:

"That this Council put in place signage to reduce speed on road at Kyletelisha"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E. would meet with Councillor Connell on site in Kyletelisha to examine the issues at this location and discuss possible measures that can be carried out.

Notice of Motion No: 54/2020

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That this Council investigate the flooding that took place in the following areas after the recent periods of heavy rainfall - Pallas, Keyes Cross, opposite Clonrooske Abbey and under the Railway Bridge on the Mountmellick Road"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that the Portlaoise MD Roads office is currently examining options to address the drainage issues on the L-2113-0 Pallas and the L-6139-0 near Keyes Cross. Minor works will be carried out on the N80 Mountmellick Road under the railway bridge to assist in addressing the surface water issue. The inlet screen to the surface water culvert opposite Clonrooske Abbey is checked and cleaned regularly, and also in advance of severe weather events.

Notice of Motion No: 55/2020

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That this Council be informed as to when signage will be erected on the new part of the Southern Circular Route"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. The Members were advised that Road Design is working on the design of signage strategy for Portlaoise Circular Road. It is estimated that signage will be installed by end of July.

Notice of Motion No: 56/2020

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That this Council install/replace the two existing pipes with a new culvert where the river crosses the road above Knock Hall"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. The Members were advised that Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E. would meet with Councillor Aird on site near Knock Hall to examine the drainage issues at this location.

Notice of Motion No: 57/2020

Councillor Noel Tuohy proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That this Council erect signage to warn drivers of heavy vehicles of the tight corner at the junction between Ridge Road and Green Mill Lane"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley. The Members were advised that the signage will be reviewed at this location and improvements will be carried out where possible.

Notice of Motion No: 58/2020

Councillor Noel Tuohy proposed the following Notice of Motion:

"That this Council take measures to provide for vision for traffic coming down Main Street looking to the left at the corner of Old Shaw's where the new Library is being constructed"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that the road markings at this location will be renewed to highlight the need for traffic on Main Street to stop at the junction with Church Avenue. A request will also be sent to the building contractor to review the hoarding at this location to improve the view for traffic approaching the junction. It was further noted that this request has been made to the Contractor.

4. Correspondence

Correspondence received from Iarnród Eireann dated the 11th of March 2020 in relation to approval of funding for bicycle racks at Portlaoise Station was noted by the Members

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

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on 17th of June 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