

**MINUTES OF THE PORTLAOISE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT MEETING HELD ON  
WEDNESDAY 15<sup>th</sup> OF SEPTEMBER 2021 IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, ÁRAS AN  
CHONTAE, PORTLAOISE AND BY MICROSOFT TEAMS**

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

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Mr. Paul McLoughlin, A/Director of Services  
Mr. Wes Wilkinson, Senior Executive Engineer  
Ms. Michelle McCormack, Staff Officer

**APOLOGIES:** Ms. Mary Sweeney, M.C.C.

**1. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THE 16<sup>th</sup> OF JUNE 2021**

On the proposition of Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley seconded by Councillor Willie Aird, the minutes of the meeting held on the 16<sup>th</sup> of June 2021 were confirmed as circulated.

**2. MATTERS ARISING FROM MEETING HELD ON THE 16<sup>TH</sup> OF JUNE 2021**

Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley raised the following issues:-

- ✚ Taking in Charge of Broomville – it was agreed that an update be available for the Members at the next meeting
- ✚ Footpath at Fr. Browne Avenue/C.I.E. crossing on the Telford Side of the junction was welcomed by the Members. Mr. Wes Wilkinson advised the Members that the pedestrian gates on the crossing are fitted with automatic closures. This will facilitate a member of the public to use the footpath over the railway line and the gates can be pushed to open. Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E. to liaise with Irish Rail to have signage fitted to the gates to make the public aware that they can operate these gates themselves. Councillor Aird requested the Portlaoise Roads Office to progress the installation of a footpath on the CIE depot side of Fr. Browne Avenue. Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E. agreed and indicated that correspondence is currently ongoing between Laois County Council and Irish Rail.

**3. APPROVAL OF PROPOSAL TO TAKE IN CHARGE JIMMY MAHER PARK LANE, BALLINAKILL ROAD, ABBEYLEIX**

Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E. briefed the Members on the background to the proposal to take in charge of Jimmy Maher Park Lane.

The proposal follows a Notice of Motion agreed at the November 2020 meeting of the Portlaoise Municipal District. The proposed works will consist of the installation of a new surface water drainage system, installation of public lighting and road resurfacing works. On the proposition of Councillor John Joe Fennelly seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald, the Members unanimously agreed to proceed to take in charge of Jimmy Maher Park Lane.

#### **4. NOMINATION OF ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE TO THE EIRGRID LAOIS KILKENNY REINFORCEMENT PROJECT COMMUNITY FORUM**

The Members were advised that Eirgrid has committed to establishing a community forum in relation to the Laois Kilkenny Reinforcement Project and has appointed Irish Rural Link as the Community Forum's independent facilitator. The purpose of the forum is to ensure constructive communication between community stakeholders during project delivery and oversee the implementation of the community benefit scheme.

Laois County Council have been invited to nominate an elected representation from the Municipal District. On the proposition of Councillor Thomasina Connell seconded by Councillor Willie Aird, it was agreed that the matter be deferred to the October meeting of Laois County Council.

#### **5. NOTICE OF MOTIONS**

**It was agreed by Councillor Mary Sweeney that her Notice of Motions be considered in her absence.**

##### **Notice of Motion No: 124/2021**

Councillor Mary Sweeney proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

***"That Laois County Council carry out road repair works at the junction of the Well Road and the R425 near Sheffield Cross"***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that repair works have been carried in recent weeks and further works will be carried out shortly.

##### **Notice of Motion No: 125/2021**

Councillor Mary Sweeney proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

***"That Laois County Council Library & Tidy Towns collaborate to provide book exchange boxes throughout the towns and villages in the Portlaoise MD to encourage reading"***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that the County Library services are already providing free access to high quality reading books and materials (no fees or fines) in libraries throughout the county and they have been open fully to the public since the 8th of May and at another times during the pandemic offering cocooning book deliveries and a "Call and Collect" for all our readers and communities. We continue to offer class sets (books to schools), teacher's block loans to schools and early learning centres throughout the County. The summer reading challenge this year has seen over 1000 children during July and August come in and sign up for the reading challenge taking out books and other resources throughout the county library network. The Library Service is not in a position to provide book exchange boxes as we already provide a book lending service in our branch libraries.

**Notice of Motion No: 126/2021**

Councillor Mary Sweeney proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

***"That Laois County Council provide contactless water bottle filling stations near walking and cycling routes in the Portlaoise MD"***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that Laois County Council have applied for a grant to part fund the installation of an initial water station adjacent to the soon to be constructed Triogue Blueway connection to the Peoples Park. The success of the application and subsequent installation and operation of the water station will advise future policy in this regard.

**Notice of Motion No: 127/2021**

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

***"That Laois County Council give an update on the road safety audit that was to be carried out at the pedestrian crossing on the Mountrath Road at the Centra Garage/Bellingham Estate and install safety measures immediately"***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Thomasina Connell. The Members were advised that Road Design has identified issues with this crossing where no Poles with Flashing Bacons were installed. ESB connection has been applied and construction works to install new poles and flashing amber beacons with Street lights will start on 2nd week of October.

**Notice of Motion No: 128/2021**

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

***"That Laois County Council give an update on when the works will start on the drainage and environmental work in Woodgrove Estate and an update on the pumping station and vacant site in Woodgrove Lawns"***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that the environmental and drainage works consist of two phases of works - the first phase will entail a tree surgery contractor carrying out works on mature trees and hedging adjacent to the open drains - these works are expected to commence within the four to six weeks, the second phase of work relates to drainage and we are currently examining options and pricing. It is expected that these works will commence in Q. 4 2021. Pump Station – Woodgrove - The pumping station in this estate has water/wastewater infrastructure not yet been taken in charge by Irish Water. LCC Water Services staff carried out an investigation on this pumping station and established that significant remedial measure are required to bring this pumping station up to Irish Water's current standards. LCC Water Services staff are currently engaged with IW on this matter, however in the meantime Water Services staff will continue to operate and maintain this PS. An inspection was carried out on the vacant / derelict site in Woodgrove. A file has been opened - the registered owners have gone into liquidation since 2014. Permission was granted on this site for 1 detached dwelling on 16/09/2005 and expired on 02/11/2010, this permission was never taken up. This estate is taken in charge.

A discussion ensued during which Councillor Dwane Stanley enquired about the funding in the sum of €200k which was ringfenced for this project to bring it up to standard specification. Tenders were advertised and received some time ago.

In relation to the Pumping Station and the Vacant Site, clarification was sought on the ownership of same and also a timeframe to have the issues resolved. Councillor Dwane Stanley requested that the Planning Department engage with Water Services and Irish Water on this matter. Councillor Dwane Stanley also sought a further update on the vacant site – It was agreed that the matter be followed up on and a report be made available to the Members for the November meeting of the Portlaoise Municipal District.

#### **Notice of Motion No: 129/2021**

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

***"That Laois County Council ensure that as part of the development in Tower Hill that a boundary wall is included between the development and Millbrook Estate"***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that the development of the CBS lands will include a boundary treatment with the adjacent Millbrook estate. This boundary has two parts: (a) The boundary which runs along the rear of the proposed terrace houses, where there is existing fencing currently located will be treated with concrete post and panel fencing. It is likely that the existing fence will remain and that the concrete post and panel fencing would be on the inside of the site boundary.(b) The existing boundary wall in Millbrook which runs behind the rear of 3 existing bungalows will be retained.

Councillor Willie Aird indicated that he had made a submission during the current review of the County Development Plan proposing that a capped wall plastered on both sides be erected at this location before the commencement of the project and also that concrete post and panel fencing should not be permitted for boundary walls in any development going forward. It was agreed that an update be available on this for the October Meeting.

#### **Notice of Motion No: 130/2021**

Councillor Noel Tuohy proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

***‘That this Council congratulate both Abbeyleix and Ballinakill on their inclusion on the list of the top 20 places to live in Ireland as listed in the Irish Times’***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. The Members were advised that compliments will be noted. It was agreed that a letter issue to both Development Associations extending the good wishes of the Portlaoise Municipal District Members.

#### **Notice of Motion No: 131/2021**

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

***"That Portlaoise MD calls on Laois County Council to carry out safety measures at Keyes Cross, Ballycarnan"***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E. will arrange to meet Councillor Aird on site to examine both of these locations.

It was agreed also that Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E. would review the blind bend at this cross at the meeting with Councillor Aird during the site visit.

#### **Notice of Motion No: 132/2021**

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

***"That Portlaoise MD calls on Laois County Council to upgrade the footpath on the Mountrath Road from Rockdale to the junction at Boughlone"***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Thomasina Connell. The Members were advised that the upgrade of the footpath from Rockdale to Boughlone will be examined and considered for funding in 2022

Councillor Aird requested the possibility of emergency works being carried out in the interim. It was agreed that Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E. would agree to proceed on this basis.

**The following Three Notice of Motions were taken together:-**

**Notice of Motion No: 133/2021 – Councillor Willie Aird**

***"That Portlaoise MD calls on the Director of Services, Mr. Donal Brennan & the Sports Officer, Ms. Anne Marie Maher to meet with the Members of the Portlaoise Municipal District at the Portlaoise Leisure Centre as soon as possible"***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that Council staff regularly meet and engage with Councillors outside of the normal statutory meetings. Should the Municipal District Members as a body wish to meet and discuss a specific item of interest this can be arranged in the usual fashion and appropriate staff made available to attend such a meeting.

**Notice of Motion No: 138/2021 – Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald**

***"That this Council give an update on the re-opening of Portlaoise Leisure Centre"***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Thomasina Connell.

**Notice of Motion No: 140/2021 – Councillor Thomasina Connell**

***"That this Council provide an update in relation to the Re-Opening of Portlaoise Leisure Centre to include a schedule of works completed to date and those which have yet to be completed"***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that the responsibility for the opening of the Portlaoise Leisure Centre lies with the licensed operator. I am given to understand that since the beginning of this month that Operator has appointed a General Manager. That Manager is in the process of taking over the required works to reopen the indoor aspects of the Centre.

Based on recent reports from the Operator, a reopening date before November is not anticipated. This date is provisional and reopening is dependent on a number

of factors which are outside of the control of the Operator or Laois County Council. These factors include but are not limited to the following:

- Availability of specialist works contractors,
- availability of materials and labour etc and the limited availability of swimming pool service contractors

In the works undertaken by the Council to date, the procurement of these works and services has been adversely affected by Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic and many suppliers are advising of delays and/or limited availability of materials.

Updates have previously been given (including discussion at plenary council meeting) of works planned for the Leisure Centre.

Works undertaken have included:

- External Painting of the Leisure Centre Building
- Internal painting of the leisure centre including timber beams in the Pool Hall.
- Reopening of the Astro-Turf soccer pitches.
- Repairs and replacement of fencing panels at soccer pitches.
- Address rising damp issue.
- Lower level of footpaths around the building and install vertical DPC to the external envelope. Upgrading of Damp Proof Course (DPC) detail at the external walls of the building.
- Installation of roof access / fall arrest system.
- Repairs to leaks in the roof of the leisure centre.
- Assessment of major items of equipment
- Assessment of Calorifier unit for proposed leak repairs.
- Supply and installation of a new calorifier unit which supplies hot water to the showers and sinks at the leisure centre (at a cost of over €40,000) which was an unexpected additional item of expenditure
- Replacement of the floor surfacing to the entire ground floor, stairs and upper landing (These works were subject to supply delays and are now expected to be complete by the end of September 2021)
- Servicing of the moving floor and boom of the main swimming pool
- Reflooring of the gymnasium and upstairs meeting room.
- Sanding and varnishing of the studio floor
- Servicing, repair and upgrade works to the combined heat and power (CHP) system (which produces the energy for the leisure centre)
- Removal of surplus equipment in the gym.
- Reconfiguration of the gym to suit layout proposed by new management company.
- Purchase of some lighting equipment
- Assessment of existing Building Management System (BMS) undertaken to ascertain whether a system upgrade is feasible. Assessment indicated that a



new BMS was preferable. Given the timescale mentioned above it was decided to proceed with this as an additional improvement. Procure / Tender for BMS. Specialist contractor has been appointed and the new system will be installed shortly.

- Disassembly and removal of reception desk to accommodate reflooring works and the relocation of the desk to a revised location as selected by the new management company.
- Works to address leak in children's (features) pool (works ongoing).
- Removal of internal partitions which were no longer required.
- Repair of internal foldable walls between upstairs rooms.
- Provision of storage containers to facilitate the removal of internal fixings and furniture to enable the replacement of the existing floor covering.
- Removal of access/egress turnstile to the changing village area to suit the operational requirements of new Leisure Centre Management Company.

### **Schedule of works yet to be completed:**

It is expected that the new operator will have some items of detail that it wishes to adjust to suit its operating method. The new operator will also need to carry out pre-opening checks/maintenance with the various specialist contractors.

- Assessment and servicing of the swimming pool mechanical and electrical equipment (pumps, valves etc). (Unavailability of parts and specialist pool contractors is an issue here)
- Lifts - Servicing (ongoing service contract to be negotiated and signed by new management company)
- Poolside Hoist - (Service/inspection – ongoing service contract to be negotiated and signed by new management company)
- Electrical Works – Rewiring of electrical and IT systems at the main reception desk which has been relocated for operational reasons. Minor electrical works in the gymnasium
- Mechanical Works: Assessment and servicing of the Air Handling units/Heat Recovery Units.
- Relocation of gym equipment to Studio and subsequent reinstallation of equipment in gym, Servicing and of Gym equipment in advance of reopening.
- Removal of any surplus gym equipment.
- IT provisions to the requirements of the new management company, phone line upgrades, new computer systems to be specified by the management company.
- Assessment/servicing/replacement as required. of electrical equipment e.g. Hair Dryers, Body drying unit etc
- Assessment and flushing of plumbing system.

It is also intended that the operator would proceed with the following (non-critical) item:

- Replacement of a number of internal doors in the leisure centre – Tenders have been returned and are currently being assessed.

The Members expressed concern in relation to the re-opening of the Leisure Centre which is a much needed facility for the community including the schools. Clarification was sought in relation to the 'Operator' also. Mr. Paul McLoughlin, A/Director of Services indicated that he would seek clarification on the matters raised.

It was agreed that a meeting be scheduled with the Portlaoise Members & relevant officials as a matter of urgency.

#### **Notice of Motion No: 134/2021**

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

***"That Laois County Council carry out a survey on the trees on the boundary of Balladine Drive, Abbeyleix"***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that Laois County Council will engage an Arborist to carry out an inspection and Risk Assessment of the trees at this location in the coming weeks

#### **Notice of Motion No: 135/2021**

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

***"That this Council examine the possibility of putting a ghost island on the Portlaoise Road, Abbeyleix to assist residents in the island entering their roadway"***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that Road Design will arrange site meeting with elected member to identify exist location and identify issues at this location.

#### **Notice of Motion No: 136/2021**

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

***“That this Council include Knapton Road, Boley, Abbeyleix on the schedule of works for next year’s Roadworks Programme and examine the possibility of removing the dangerous bend at residence at this location”***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that this location will be examined and considered for the 2022 Roads Programme

**Notice of Motion No: 137/2021**

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

***“That this Council install dog foul bins underneath the Mutt Mitt bags or else remove altogether”***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. The Members were advised that Laois County Council is currently running a Dog Anti-Fouling Campaign across the county. The campaign aims to promote responsible dog ownership and to encourage dog owners to clean up after their dogs using their own scooping device or bag, or one of the Mutt Mitts bags, before disposing of it in the nearest litter bin or taking it home and placing it in their own general household waste bin. The Mutt Mitt Bag dispensers are provided at 68 locations throughout the county. These are provided in partnership with the various Tidy Towns Committees. The provision of dog-fouling bins at the dispenser locations is not being considered at the moment. These bins will necessitate the provision of collection and maintenance services etc. The Council does not propose to remove any of the dispensers provided. The Waste Enforcement Section will carry out inspections at the dispenser locations to identify the problem areas. The collection and disposal of dog waste is the responsibility of the dog owner.

The Members requested the Environment Section to initiate a pilot project to install dog fouling bins on the Borris Road and to also consider printing messages on the footpaths similar to Galway County Council. Councillor John Joe Fennelly recommended that the Environment Section liaise with Waterford County Council and Tramore Tidy Towns in relation to dog fowl bins installed in Tramore Town. It was agreed that the matter be referred back to Mr. Adrian Barrett, Senior Engineer.

### **Notice of Motion No: 139/2021**

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

***“That this Council look at parking in Jessop Square with a view to providing more car parking spaces”***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Thomasina Connell. The Members were advised that the parking at Jessop Square will be reviewed to determine if more car parking spaces can be made available.

Councillor Fitzgerald sought for a review of the Residents only Car Parking currently operated at Jessop Court with a view to making a small number of the existing spaces available to non-residents for use as town centre parking. Councillor Dwane Stanley stated that a petition had been signed by occupiers in Jessop Court whereby they are seeking to retain residents only car parking in this area and that Councillor Dwane Stanley requested the Laois County Council Roads Section to consult with owner/occupiers as part of the review. It was agreed that the matter be referred back to Mr. Adrian Barrett, Senior Engineer.

### **Notice of Motion No: 141/2021**

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

***“That this Council provide an update as to the installation of ramps at Bellingham Estate, Mountrath Road, Portlaoise”***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley. The Members were advised that traffic calming works to install speed ramps will be carried out at Bellingham within the next four to six weeks

### **Notice of Motion No: 142/2021**

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion: \_

***“That this Council set out the progress made in relation to the provision of the Domestic Violence Refuge in Portlaoise”***

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley. The Members were advised that Laois County Council is working closely with Laois Domestic Abuse Service on its plans to construct a refuge, including advice on funding the development through the Dept of Housing's Capital Assistance Scheme, for which the Council will lend its support and assistance. We are actively working with LDAS to identify a suitable site on which this building can be developed.

The Members indicated that the matter will be raised at next weeks JPC meeting. It was noted that a significant number of families are engaging the service with a large number also having to go outside of the County for support. It was requested that a site be secured as soon as possible and capital assistance funding secured. Mr. Paul McLoughlin, A/Director of Services confirmed that Laois County Council are currently actively trying to identify a suitable site and when the site is sourced an application will be developed around this.

It was agreed that a progress report be available for the next MD Meeting and that an update on the proposal for a new Courthouse also be given at the next meeting.

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald requested that a meeting be requested with the three Oireachtas Members to discuss the following matters as a matter of urgency:-

The Domestic Violence Refuge in Portlaoise

The Re-Location of Portlaoise Courthouse

Water Infrastructure/New Pumping Station for Portlaoise in particular Rathevan and Colliers Lane

The Members enquired as to details on the removal of the Bottle Bank at Raheen – it was agreed that an update be sought on this (Adrian)

The Members also requested that an in-committee meeting be arranged regarding the proposed Road Safety Audit for Raheen. It was agreed that this meeting be scheduled.

## **6. CORRESPONDENCE**

It was noted that correspondence had been received from the TII in relation to a request to meet a delegation. TII confirmed that they would meet a delegation from Laois County Council consisting of two members from each Municipal District – it was agreed that the matter be discussed later amongst the Members and they would revert with nominations.

**7. FIX DATE & TIME FOR NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on **20<sup>th</sup> of October 2021 at 11.00 a.m.**

This concluded the business of the meeting.

**Signed:**

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**John Joe Fennelly, Leas Chathaoirleach**