

**MINUTES OF THE PORTLAOISE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY
21ST OF APRIL 2021 BY MICROSOFT TEAMS**

PRESENT Ms. Thomasina Connell, 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.
Ms. Mary Sweeney, M.C.C.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services
Mr. Wes Wilkinson, Senior Executive Engineer
Mr. Adrian Barrett, Senior Engineer, Roads
Ms. Georgina Ireland, Administrative Officer, Roads
Ms. Michelle McCormack, Staff Officer

1. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON THE 10TH OF MARCH 2021

On the proposition of Councillor Willie Aird seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald, the minutes of the meeting held on the 10th of March 2021 were confirmed as circulated.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM MEETING HELD ON THE 10TH OF MARCH 2021

✚ Councillor John Joe Fennelly raised the issue of wild deer crossing between Abbeyleix and Durrow on the N77. Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services indicated that correspondence had been received from Transport Infrastructure Ireland indicating that arrangements are currently being made for a full assessments of the appropriate interventions to be introduced at this location to address public safety issues and any animal welfare issues arising. It was noted that this assessment will be used as a pilot for similar schemes throughout the Country.

✚ In response to a query in relation to the refurbishment of the Abbeyleix Road, Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services advised that Laois County Council have requested that the design brief be extended to include design of an appropriate footpath/cycle track linking the scheme to the J17 National Enterprise Park.

✚ Councillor Thomasina Connell raised the following Notice of Motion that had been agreed at the March meeting of the Municipal District

“That Laois County Council prepare a schedule of all lands that are in the ownership within the Portlaoise Urban Area in excess of 0.5 acres”

Councillor Connell was advised that the Property Management Section are currently compiling a list of all vacant, undeveloped lands in excess of half an acre with potential for development as a sports campus. It was noted that a report would be available for the May meeting of the Municipal District

✚ Councillor Connell also raised the following Notice of Motion which had been raised at the March Meeting as follows:

“That Laois County Council provide an update in relation to the Cube, Tower Hill, Portlaoise – what activities are proposed to be undertaken there and the stage that they are at in relation to same and set out the funding that has been applied to this project to date”.

Mr. Walton indicated that a report would be made available for the May Meeting of the Municipal District.

- ✚ Councillor Dwane Stanley raised the issue of the roundabout at Fieldbrook. Mr. Wes Wilkinson, Senior Executive Engineer indicated that a design has been completed for an interim upgrade of the roundabout including increase in advanced warning signage, additional road markings and the provision of bollards to delineate and separate the cycleway from the vehicle carriageway. It is proposed that the changes will be made to the centre island of the mini roundabout turning it into a domed centre island. Members were advised that there was an allocation in the sum of €30,000 from the NTA Active Travel funding for this project. The timeline for completion would be early summer/mid-June.
- ✚ Following a query in relation to the footpaths from Meelick out to Togher where there is a lot of overgrowth, Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E. indicated that the matter would be addressed in the next three to four weeks.
- ✚ Following a request from Councillor Aird, Mr. Simon Walton indicated that the bottlebank on the Abbeyleix Road would be examined with a view to having additional clear glass capacity provided at the Bring Bank.

3. UPDATE ON PORTLAOISE TOWN CENTRE WORKS

The Members were provided with a presentation on the Portlaoise Town Centre Works. Mr. Wes Wilkinson, Senior Executive Engineer provided the update on the current works at Bull Lane which are due to be substantially complete by the May Bank Holiday Weekend. It was noted that the works on Main Street/Hynds Square are due to commence on the 4th of May 2021. In response to a query in relation to the surfacing/paving of the roadway/footpaths on the Bull Lane project, Mr. Wes Wilkinson, Senior Executive Engineer confirmed that the footpath paving is block paving whereas the ‘paving effect’ on the road is by way of an imprinted asphalt surface.

In relation to the works on the N80 Stradbally Road Surface Rehabilitation Scheme, the Members were advised that works commenced this week on the section from St. Peter & Paul’s Church to the Summerhill Roundabout and further works will be carried out in phases with a completion date of mid-July 2021.

Details were also outlined to Members on the proposed works at Tower Hill under the URDF Funding which will commence after the Main Street/Hynds Square works.

4. HOSPITALITY SECTOR GRANT SCHEMES

Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services delivered a presentation on the above item. The Members expressed their support for the measures proposed by the Council to support outdoor dining.

The Members were advised that funding for hospitality sector businesses is available towards the cost of outdoor dining furniture and equipment. The grant is to a maximum of €4,000 under a new scheme of Outdoor Seating & Accessories for Tourism & Hospitality Businesses.

Ms. Georgina Ireland, A.O. & Ms. Louise Gillen, A/S.O., Roads Department are available to assist businesses in the application process and it was noted that all relevant details are on Laois County Council's website with a dedicated email address for queries, i.e., outdoordining@laoiscoco.ie. For eligibility to apply, all commercial rates must be paid up until the end of 2019. Where it is proposed to locate furniture on the public realm a Section 254 licence will be required noting that associated fees, for 2021, are waived. Ms. Georgina Ireland, A.O. responded to various queries from the Members on the scheme. Members were advised that businesses could either make individual applications or joint applications for a shared project.

The Members complimented all involved and welcomed the supports coming on stream for businesses.

Members discussed pedestrianisation at various parts of the Main Street. The Members requested information on what correspondence/communication has issued to the traders in the Town Centre.

Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services confirmed that there are no Main Street pedestrianisation proposals at this time. Rather, the current focus is on supporting the re-opening of businesses in the midst of ongoing public health requirements. In terms of outdoor dining proposals in and around Market Square/Top Square there will be consultation with the businesses to ascertain preferences with a view to identifying options that best fit the local needs.

Following a query, Mr. Walton indicated that the grant scheme does not apply to Casual Traders and only to the hospitality businesses who are serving food in a fixed place in an existing location.

5. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Notice of Motions

Notice of Motion No: 61/2021

Councillor Mary Sweeney proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That Laois County Council repair the footpath outside the Old Boys School in Ballyroan"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. The Members were advised that Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E. would make himself available to meet with Councillor Sweeney on site to examine the footpath at the Old Boys School in Ballyroan.

Notice of Motion No: 62/2021

Councillor Mary Sweeney proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That Laois County Council waive the Section 254 licence fee for outdoor table and chairs in public spaces outside any hotel, restaurant, café and public house in the Portlaoise Electoral Area"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Thomasina Connell. The Members were advised that in support of the re-opening of the local economy in 2021, Laois County Council will waive the fee in respect of Section 254 licence applications this year.

Notice of Motion No: 63/2021

Councillor Mary Sweeney proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That Laois County Council provide an update on the projects funded under the Rural Active Travel Investment Programme in the Portlaoise Electoral Area including the proposed new footpath from Ballyroan School to Ballyroan GAA Pitch"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. The Members were advised that an indicative programme for Active Travel Measures 2021 will be set out to Elected Members in the 2021 Roadworks Scheme Report, to be presented to and considered by Elected Members at the April Meeting of Laois County Council. In the specific case of the Ballyroan Footpath it is envisaged that works associated with same will advance as part of the 2021 Roadworks Programme, subject to local agreement with adjoining landowners. Other Active Travel schemes, prior to construction, will require advisory and/or consents but that does not apply in the case of the Ballyroan Footpath.

Councillor Sweeney commended Laois County Council on this and in doing so acknowledged support of Management Team for this proposal which will allow children and adults to navigate a safe route between the GAA Pitch and the School.

Notice of Motion No: 64/2021

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That the Portlaoise MD request a meeting with Mr. Donal Brennan, Director of Services & Ms. Carmel McNicholl, S.E.O., in St. Peter & Paul's Graveyard, Portlaoise to discuss parking issues and the movement of cars beside the graveyard with a view to ensuring that graves are not damaged with moving vehicles"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley. The Members were advised that as the Councillor knows, Mr. Donal Brennan, Director of Services is free at any time to arrange a call to discuss the graveyard or other business of the Council and would be more than happy, as required by the circumstances, to arrange a phone call or meeting with the Councillor to discuss the reported situation on car movements within the cemetery. This cemetery is somewhat unusual in relation to the extent to which people chose to drive within the cemetery. Consideration is being given to the erection of demountable bollards to prevent vehicles driving over unsuitable areas within the cemetery.

Councillor Aird advised that families are unable to erect headstones and memorabilia on graves that have been recently occupied and this is causing some distress. It was noted that over 60% of the lawn cemetery is now occupied.

Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley indicated that this area is not fit for vehicles to be driving on and requested the provision of bollards. It was noted also that a number of items had been stolen from graves in recent weeks.

The Members requested a meeting with Mr. Donal Brennan, Director of Services and the 7 Portlaoise MD Members as a matter of urgency and it was agreed that this would be arranged.

Notice of Motion No: 65/2021

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That this Council repair the bridge at Lalor's Mills/Ballycarnan"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that funding will be sought to carry out works to the bridge on the L-6714-0 at Lalor's Mills/Ballycarnan for inclusion in the 2022 Bridge Works Programme.

It was noted that the bridge is giving way and Mr. Wes Wilkinson, Senior Executive Engineer indicated that he would re-examine from a Roads perspective.

Notice of Motion No: 66/2021

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That this Council repair the potholes at the road in Clondarrig and include on the list for re-surfacing"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that road repairs will be carried out on the L-6114-0 & L-61141-0 Clondarrig, and the locations will be included on the list for consideration for resurfacing as part of the 2022 Roads Programme.

Notice of Motion No: 67/2021

Councillor Noel Tuohy proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That this Council support and assist in whatever way possible the opening and the future running of a SOSAD Centre in Portlaoise"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Thomasina Connell. The Members were advised that the Council is conscious of the importance of good mental health in our communities and in conjunction with our partner agencies, channels, appropriate supports in pursuance of this objective via the Healthy Laois Plan.

Councillor Tuohy indicated that a Centre like this would be of huge benefit to the town and requested the possibility of Laois County Council securing a premises and funding for a proposal of this nature. All members fully supported the Notice of Motion.

Councillor Tuohy recommended that a representative from SOSAD would do a presentation to Laois County Council detailing how a facility like this could get up and running in County Laois. All members fully supported the Notice of Motion. Councillor Tuohy indicated that he would arrange to invite the group to address the Council on the matter.

Notice of Motion No: 68/2021

Councillor Noel Tuohy proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That this Council look at the drains, paths and areas of damaged tarmac in Lakeglen"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley. The Members were advised that Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E. will make himself available to meet with Councillor Noel Tuohy on site to examine the drainage, footpaths and roadway in Lakeglen Portlaoise.

It was further noted that a meeting was held this morning in relation to this. Councillor Tuohy requested that some funding be made available for works at the estate. Mr. Wes Wilkinson, Senior Executive Engineer indicated that he would liaise with the Housing Department and the Roads Department in relation to same.

Notice of Motion No: 69/2021

Councillor Noel Tuohy proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That this Council repair or replace the cappings on the four pillars at the entrance to the Cemetery"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Mary Sweeney. The Members were advised that Laois County Council will inspect this location and carry out the repairs if deemed necessary.

The following two Notice of Motions were taken together:-

Notice of Motion No: 70/2021 – Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley

"That this Council give a progress report on the site at Centrepoint including who the owner of the site is and have they been contacted, have the Planning Department served a vacant site notice and levy on it, has there been a dangerous site notice served and what action is being taken under the Act and is the owner of the site paying the cost to secure it and what are the future plans for the site"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that the owners of the property have been confirmed as Pimcar Ltd, Unit 1 Keltic Business Park, Clieveragh, Listowel, Co. Kerry. The Planning Authority has made contact with the owners, who are engaging in carrying out works to the site. The Planning Authority served notices on the owners of the Centrepoint Property of the intention to enter the site on to the Derelict sites Register which commences that process. The owners have been given a

14 day period from the 1st April 2021 within which to respond. The necessary appropriate action will commence thereafter once this time period has expired and will depend on the response or not received. An update to the Vacant sites register will now also be made to reflect the actual confirmed owners of the property and that process will continue following this change. Concurrently the Water Services Section has served notice of works to be carried out under Dangerous structures legislation and subsequently works commenced on-site Tuesday morning 7th April, involving the erection of fence posts, fencing, rehangings of gates etc. There has been no waste removed from site, nor works undertaken on the structures. In this way works associated with the Notice are ongoing and not complete.

Councillor Caroline Dwane requested that the owner of the site submit a report to Laois County Council prior to the next meeting as to their intentions for the site.

Councillor Dwane Stanley also enquired if the 8% vacant site levy could be issued to the owners also.

Notice of Motion No: 73/2021 – Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald

"That this Council give an update on the vacant derelict site adjacent to Beechfield and on the derelict Centrepoint site"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley. The Members were advised that an inspection was carried out by Ms Catherine Murphy, Senior Executive Technician, Planning Section. Whilst the property is secured to the public by a high wall, locked gate and hedgerow to the rear, the site is considered derelict and there are elements of improvements to the boundary that could be carried out. Correspondence has been sent to the owners in relation to this.

Councillor Fitzgerald raised concerns in relation to anti-social behaviour at this location which has resulted in the fire brigade being called out on several occasions.

Notice of Motion No: 71/2021

Councillor Dwane Stanley proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That this Council improve the public lighting in Esker Hills and Fairgreen immediately"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Thomasina Connell. The Members were advised that Fairgreen has experienced an issue with the height and location of existing poles and they did not light the area as required. To improve the lighting levels in Fairgreen, new fittings have been installed on one section of road. We are in process of verifying lighting levels at this location, it is planned to replace all other lights in Fairgreen after verification of improved lighting levels with new fittings has taken place. Esker Hills LED lighting achieves the required lighting levels which is in compliance with P4 in line with BS5489_2020. We have met with the elected members and residents in Esker Hills and identified 2 locations where additional poles were agreed and the Council's public lighting contractor are in the process of installing 2 infill lighting columns at these locations. It was also agreed that trees will be trimmed where they are obstructing Street lights. There are areas where there were no poles and were never lit, these locations do not form part of the LED upgrade works but they can be examined separately

Councillor Dwane Stanley requested that alternative funding is sought to improve the public lighting in Portlaoise.

Notice of Motion No: 72/2021

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

"That this Council contact the owner of the Old Boys School in Ballyroan and request them to secure the site and improve the condition of the building and give an update regards the future plans for it"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Mary Sweeney. The Members were advised that following an inspection on the 13th April 2021 , it was determined that the above property is a derelict site. A file has been opened on this site. An initial letter has issued on the 15th April 2021 to the owners notifying them the property is classed as a derelict site under the derelict site Act. The owners have indicated they are also seeking to address the issues of dereliction and keen to do something about it. A meeting will be organised with the owners to agree works to address this dereliction.

Notice of Motion No: 74/2021

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That this Council apply for funding for a canopy / roof for Main Street and also ensure that Market Square is included in the Public Realm"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that Laois County Council notes the policy shift towards outdoor dining and outdoor performance and events spaces. The Council is currently and will continue to engage with any funding streams that support weather proofed outdoor dining spaces and/or weather proofed outdoor spaces suitable for performances and events. Subject to agreement on detail Main Street, Market Square and/or other suitable locations can be considered for any such grant schemes

Notice of Motion No: 75/2021

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald proposed the following Notice of Motion

"That this Council address the safety issues at the pedestrian crossing near The Macra Hall"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that Road Design will arrange site meeting with elected member to identify issues at this Pedestrian crossing.

Notice of Motion No: 76/2021

Councillor John Joe Fennelly proposed the following Notice of Motion

"That this Council upgrade the road markings and the school signage at Knock National School"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that a proposal has been submitted to Road Design section to seek funding under the CLAR 2021 Programme to upgrade signage at Knock National School. The upgrade of road markings will be carried out in the coming weeks.

The Members requested that Laois County Council re-examine the new flashing lights that were recently erected and are not operational at the moment.

Notice of Motion No: 77/2021

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

"That this Council upgrade the junction at Burnwood, Clonad and install drainage works at this location"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that Mr. Wes Wilkinson, Senior Executive Engineer would meet Councillor Fennelly on site to examine the drainage issues and junction at Burnwood, Clonad. Councillor Willie Aird indicated that he would attend this meeting also.

Notice of Motion No: 78/2021

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

"That this Council include the low part of the cemetery at the Church of the Most Holy Rosary, Abbeyleix as a Council cemetery as this was always in Council charge up to five years ago"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that the community section will meet the Councillor on site to review the implications of this proposal.

Councillor Fennelly indicated that the bottom part of this cemetery is Council owned and there is an issue with overgrowth of trees on the footpaths and enquired as to the possibility of Laois County Council taking over the responsibility for this graveyard into the future and address the problem with the overhanging trees.

Notice of Motion No: 79/2021

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

"That this Council arrange for the removal of the graffiti covering the wall at the green playing field adjacent to Portlaoise Leisure Centre, Ridge Road, Portlaoise"

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that this matter will be reviewed upon easing of Covid-19 restrictions – in consultation with the Environment Section. Laois County Council have a policy of removing any offensive graffiti from our properties once reported.

Councillor Connell indicated that the graffiti is very offensive and requested Laois County Council to cover with paint. There is also an issue with anti-social behaviour at this location where runners are being put on electrical cables on the Ridge Road. Councillor Connell requested that Laois County Council contact ESB Networks to have these removed.

Notice of Motion No: 80/2021

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council make a presentation in relation to the full schedule of works that are to be undertaken with regard to existing cycle ways in Portlaoise over the next 12-18 months and also in relation to new cycle ways to be installed during the same period to remedy the situation whereby the network of cycleways throughout the town continually start and stop suddenly”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley. The Members were advised that a presentation will be made at the May Municipal District meeting relating to cycling and active travel measures for the short and medium term for Portlaoise.

Councillor Connell requested the possibility of the installation of off-road cycle lanes in the interest of safety of the cyclist. Councillor Dwane Stanley welcomed that we would have a presentation and requested that consideration be given to the inclusion of cycle ways on the Ballyfin Road

Notice of Motion No: 81/2021

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“This this Council now put an Outdoor Seating Plan in place to prepare for the re-opening of our restaurant, cafe and hospitality businesses. Notwithstanding, Covid-19 measures, this should be in place in time for the June Bank Holiday Weekend. A weekly update to Councillors on the roll out of this plan would be required”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that Laois County Council has recently purchased a number of planter boxes, outdoor dining tables and outdoor seating. The rollout of this furniture on the public realm will be commensurate with Government announcements regarding the broader re-opening of society. With recently confirmed grants for local authorities, additional procurement processes are underway with a view to additional furniture. Members have been previously advised in relation to a plan for 4 locations in Portlaoise Town Centre in terms of ‘shared outdoor dining spaces’, all subject to agreement locally, one at Market Square, one in Hynd’s Square, one an upgrade to the existing area at the bottom of Lower Main Street and finally a potential area outside Bank of Ireland in Lyster Square. There are multiple hospitality businesses within 50m of each of these 4 locations. A scheme recently announced by Fáilte Ireland in respect of grant aid for outdoor dining equipment for local hospitality businesses is also being rolled out by Laois County Council, details of which can be found on our website.

The rollout of this scheme may also provide for outdoor seating on the public realm through businesses seeking a licence to use parking and other areas in the town centre. This is also being considered in the context of outdoor furniture provision in the town. Members will be updated regularly in relation to the above rollout and reimagination of the above four locations.

6. CORRESPONDENCE

It was noted that no correspondence had been received since the last meeting.

7. FIX DATE & TIME FOR NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on **19th of May 2021 at 11.00 a.m via Microsoft Teams**

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed:

Thomasina Connell, Cathaoirleach