

**MINUTES OF THE PORTLAOISE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY
20th OF JANUARY 2021 BY MICROSOFT TEAMS**

PRESENT Ms. Thomasina Connell, Cathaoirleach (In the Chair)
Ms. Mary Sweeney, M.C.C.
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. Simon Walton, Director of Services
Mr. Wes Wilkinson, Senior Executive Engineer
Ms. Michelle McCormack, Staff Officer

1. CONFIRMATION OF THE MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER MEETING OF PORTLAOISE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT HELD ON THE 9TH OF DECEMBER 2020

On the proposal of Councillor Willie Aird seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly, the minutes of the December meeting held on the 9th of December 2020 were confirmed as circulated.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM MEETING HELD ON THE 18TH OF NOVEMBER 2020

There were no matters arising

3. SUMMARY OF Q1/Q2 2021 WORKS PROPOSED FOR PORTLAOISE TOWN CENTRE

The Members were circulated with a presentation on the works which are proposed for Portlaoise Town Centre. The proposed works at Bull Lane/Main Street will include the following and will be carried out over a number of phases while maintaining pedestrian access:-

- Re-surfacing of the new vehicular carriage way on Bull lane using imprinted asphalt
- Laying of new kerbs and re-surfacing of footpaths
- Re-placement of bollards and decluttering of existing street furniture
- Installation of a raised table at the junction of Bull Lane, Main Street & Hynds Square with courtesy crossing point for pedestrians
- Installation of road drainage
- Installation of ducting to facilitate a forthcoming upgrade to public lighting
- Cleaning of existing brick pavement in Hynds Square
- Signage and road markings

It was noted that the works are due to commence on the 8th of February with road closures required on an interim basis over the ten to twelve weeks required to complete the works. Works subject to the easing of the current Covid-19 restrictions insofar as those restrictions apply to construction works.

The Members were circulated with a presentation on the Phase 2 works proposed for the Portlaoise Cultural Quarter/Fort Protector. The proposed works will include the following:-

- Conservation works to the Old Fort wall improving its visual setting, presentation and prominence
- Addition of landscaping elements to green the urban environment and improve the public realm
- Reconstruction of footpaths to provide additional space for pedestrians
- Road crossing points to be provided for pedestrians
- Undergrounding of overhead ESB cables
- Upgrade of Public Lighting
- Materials and finishes to harmonise with the materials in used at Fitzmaurice Place

It was noted that these works are due to commence in mid-March and will be subject to the easing of the current Covid-19 restrictions.

The Members welcomed both projects, urged that minimum local inconvenience be caused and agreed that commencement/completion of works in advance of a broader reopening of society was preferable.

4. PUBLICATION OF PART VIII PROPOSAL FOR A PEDESTRIAN/CYCLE LINK FROM PORTLAOISE SOUTHERN CIRCULAR TO PEOPLES PARK

The Members were circulated with a presentation on a Part VIII proposal for an off-road pedestrian/cyclist route from Portlaoise Southern Circular road to the Portlaoise People's Park. The proposed works will include the following:-

- 3 m wide combined footpath/cyclepath
- Public lighting along route at scheduled times
- Biodiversity – pollinator friendly planting
- Bat and Bird boxes installed
- Timber post and rail fence in some areas
- Connectivity to proposed Triogue Blueway

The benefits of the proposed infrastructure were noted as follows:

- Meets Low Carbon Town Initiatives of reducing the dominance of the car and achieving a modal shift
- Supports the masterplan for development of wider lands in the area
- Providing a sustainable method of transport in Portlaoise Town
- Supports the Portlaoise Walking and Cycling Strategy
- Connects and expands the existing pedestrian/cycle network
- An alternative safe means of access

Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services advised that it is proposed to place an advertisement in the local paper's during the first week of February seeking submissions. Following the consultation a full report will be presented to Elected Members for their consideration. The Members welcomed the development.

5. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Notice of Motion No: 2021/01 & 2021/16 were taken together as follows

Councillor Mary Sweeney proposed the following Notice of Motion:

“That Laois County Council provide extra road safety measures at Raheen National School”

Councillor John Joe Fennelly proposed the following Notice of Motion:

“That this Council install additional safety measures at Ballinakill National School and Raheen National School as parents and staff are concerned about the present restrictions”

Both Notice of Motions were seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that Mr. Wes Wilkinson, Senior Executive Engineer would meet the Councillors on site when restrictions allow safely to do so to examine the specific issues at Raheen National School.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/002

Councillor Mary Sweeney proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That Laois County Council include provision for a footpath from Ballyroan National School to Ballyroan GAA pitch in the 2021 roadworks scheme and any national infrastructural funding schemes”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E. would meet with Councillor Sweeney on site when restrictions allow safely to do so to examine the specific issues at Ballyroan National School. In relation to the provision for a new footpath from Ballyroan National School to Ballyroan GAA Pitch, there is currently no provision for the construction of new footpaths as part of the Annual Roads Programme.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/003

Councillor Mary Sweeney proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That Laois County Council carry out road improvement works on the R425 between Ballyroan and Abbeyleix”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly.

The Members were advised that the road at this location will be examined for consideration for resurfacing works as part of the 2021 Roads Programme

Notice of Motion No: 2021/004

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That Portlaoise Municipal District calls on Laois County Council to remove overgrown verge from the footpath opposite the junction at Meelick Cross up to the Rugby Club”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that the verge adjacent to the footpath opposite the junction at Meelick Cross up to the Rugby Club will be examined and arrangements will be made to cut back vegetation that is causing an issue.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/005

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion

“That Portlaoise Municipal District calls on the Enforcement Section of Laois County Council to take immediate action to stop anti-social behaviour on the old Centrepoint Site”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that in general to the extent that anti-social behaviour involves littering or noise it is open to the environmental section to investigate on foot of specific notified complaints. To the extent that anti-social behaviour involves threats, intimidation, aggressiveness or similar actions, such actions would fall outside of the remit of the environment section or other enforcement sections of the Council and most likely would involve An Garda Siochana or other authorities”

The Members requested that the site be made secure.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/06

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That Portlaoise Municipal District calls on Laois County Council to erect a sign for Broomville Gardens on the main thoroughfare in Fielbrook”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Thomasina Connell. The Members were advised that a sign will be ordered and erected at this location.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/007

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald proposed the following Notice of Motion:

“That this Council make safe the pedestrian crossing at Ballyroan Primary School”

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 Councillor Fitzgerald on site when restrictions allow safely to do so to examine the specific issues at Ballyroan Primary School and then liaise with the Road Design to review this location and apply for funding.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/008

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald proposed the following Notice of Motion:

“That this Council install road markings on the Orbital Southern Route especially at the roundabout at Park View, Abbeyleix Road”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. The Members were advised that the current roadmarkings on the approach to the roundabout at the junction of the Abbeyleix Road and the Portlaoise Southern Circular Route are consistent with the types of road markings for roundabouts outlined in Chapter 7 of the Traffic Signs Manual 2019.

Requests for additional roadmarkings will be referred to the Road Design section for consideration.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/009

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald proposed the following Notice of Motion:

“That this Council install a pedestrian crossing across Main Street from Bull Lane to Hynds Square”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. The Members were advised that works are due to commence shortly at and adjacent to the interscetion of Bull Lane, Main Street and Hynds Square. The works will involve renewal of footpaths, road resurfacing and installation of a raised table including an uncontrolled pedestrian crossing at the junction of Bull Lane, Main Street and Hynds Square.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/110

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

“That this Council contact Irish Water and Water Services in County Hall and ask that a full report be given to the Municipal District on the sewage system that services the houses at the front of Lakeglen where there was a recent problem and also from Newpark down to Lakeglen on the Mountmellick Road”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that recent sewer line issues at Lakeglen/Newpark arose due to blockages caused by solidified tar macadam in the sewer i.e. hot tarmacadam was caused to enter the sewer, solidified and gave rise to sewer blockages. Following the issue being reported to Laois County Council, the Council, acting on behalf of Irish Water, arranged a sewer jetting contractor who has ensured all of the offending material has been cleared from the sewer.

Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley expressed concern that the contract for sewer jetting in Portlaoise had been awarded by Irish Water to a company based in County Kerry. In this way it was necessary for Laois County Council to contact the office in County Kerry which, as outlined by Cllr. Dwane Stanley, resulted in the problem taking a number of days to resolve. Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services confirmed that Laois County Council does not play any part in the appointment of Contractors for Irish Water. Irish Water are responsible for the appointment of their own contractors and are subject to the normal procurement rules that apply across the state. Following discussion it was agreed that Mr. Walton would raise the concerns with Irish Water and recommend that Irish Water consider a regional approach in tendering for services such as sewer jetting.

Separately Councillor Dwane Stanley indicated that she would raise the matter at an Irish Water meeting the following week.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/011

Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley proposed the following Notice of Motion:

“That this Council ask the Roads Department to carry out a Roads Safety Audit at Boughlone pedestrian crossing, Mountrath Road and improve the safety wit lights and signage as soon as possible”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that a road safety audit will be undertaken at this location to determine the appropriate actions required.

Councillor Dwane Stanley expressed concern about the safety at this pedestrian crossing where additional signage and lights are required and requested that temporary measures be carried out in the interim.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/012

Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley proposed the following Notice of Motion;

“That this Municipal District work towards providing an indoor sports centre on Tyrells Land”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Thomasina Connell. The Members were advised that there has been a call for submissions in relation to the Masterplan lands. The responses are being correlated and reviewed by the Consultants preparing the Masterplan. These responses will be used to inform the development of the Masterplan. This Masterplan will in turn be brought before the Members for consideration at various stages in the Masterplan development process.

Councillor Dwane Stanley requested that the site could accommodate various sporting organisations including the Portlaoise Panthers Club which have been actively seeking a site in Portlaoise for quite some time now.

A meeting with the Chief Executive, Mr. John Mulholland was also requested.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/013

Councillor Noel Tuohy proposed the following Notice of Motion:

“That this Council assure the former members of Portlaoise Leisure Centre who had unused time remaining on their memberships are prioritised when the centre reopens and are contacted to allow them to continue with their membership”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that provision has been made in 2021 Estimates to ensure that any outstanding memberships, swimming lessons will be honoured by the new management structure of Portlaoise Leisure Centre when it re-opens.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/014

Councillor Noel Tuohy proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council give an update on the installation of equipment on the playground for those with special needs”.

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Thomasina Connell. The Members were advised that unforeseen delays were experienced with the delivery of specialist equipment due to closure of factories due to COVID 19 in EU and logistical issues. Some items are still awaited but delivery due at end of Jan 2021. Works will commence once the current restrictions are lifted.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/015

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

“That this Council remove vegetation close to the roundabout at Clonkeen as visibility is very poor when you are coming off the motorway onto the roundabout”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that the request will be referred to MidLink for examination.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/017

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

“That this Council dedicate dropping off areas for salt/grit in all our towns and villages in the Portlaoise Municipal District Area”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that during prolonged and severe weather events, the council may drop salt at designated locations so that members of the community may spread this locally. A pilot scheme consisting of 2 no. salt bins will be introduced in the Portlaoise MD to assess the benefits and functionality of same. The 2 no. locations will be agreed with the MD Engineer.

Councillor Fennelly expressed concern in relation to some laneways which can be completely impassable during periods of bad weather when the temperatures drop. It was agreed that the matter would be referred to the Transportation Strategic Policy Committee.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/018

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council undertake a parking review of Portlaoise Town Centre with a view to making alterations to the current layout and appropriate charges to the current by-laws if required”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that it is an objective in the Roads Business Plan 2021 to examine Portlaoise Town from a parking perspective and to assess the needs of the town, which continues to develop both economically and socially. It is proposed in 2021 to engage a consultant to carry out a study on current parking options, requirements in this area and to give recommendations on how parking in Portlaoise can be optimised to benefit all. Procurement of a consultant will take place in Q1 2021 and this MD Committee will be updated on progress.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/019

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council provide an update on the Public Realm works adjacent to Fitzmaurice Place, Portlaoise”

The Members were advised that detail designs are complete for the Fort Protector Phase 2 Public Realm upgrade with works scheduled to commence in Q1 2021. The Members were briefed in detail on same during the presentation on No. 3 on the agenda.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/20

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council review the roadway and footpath between the entrance to Dun Masc and the roundabout at the Colliers Lane/Dublin Road with a view to making this safe for pedestrians to traverse”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that Mr. Wes Wilkinson, S.E.E. will make himself available to meet with Councillor Connell on site when restrictions allow safely to do so to examine the roadway and footpath between the entrance to Dun Masc and the roundabout at the Colliers Lane/Dublin Road.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Cathaoirleach of the Municipal District, Councillor Thomasina Connell expressed her concern in relation to the news of Bus Eireann’s decision to cancel Route X12 from the end of January which is the expressway Dublin Airport to Limerick due to the challenges posed by Covid-19. It was requested that Bus Eireann be advised of the Members.

Mr. Walton referred to the approval received from Waterford Institute of Technology for the appointment of a Cycling Officer (Masters Student) to focus on the challenges and opportunities for the development of a broader cycling culture Portlaoise. The Student is to be appointed in early 2021 and a suitable candidate is currently being sought – it was agreed that the advertisement details for the post would be forwarded to the Members and Media.

6. FIX DATE & TIME FOR NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on the 17th of February 2021 at 11.00 a.m via Microsoft Teams

7. SCHEUDLE OF MEETINGS

The schedule of meetings for 2021 was agreed as circulated.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed:

Thomasina Connell, Cathaoirleach

