

MINUTES OF THE PORTLAOISE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY
10th of MARCH 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.

APOLOGIES: Ms. Mary Sweeney, 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 FEBRUARY MEETING OF PORTLAOISE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT HELD ON THE 17TH OF FEBRUARY 2021

On the proposal of Councillor Willie Aird seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly, the minutes of the February meeting held on the 17th of February 2021 were confirmed as circulated.

2. MATTERS ARISING FROM MEETING HELD ON THE 17TH OF FEBRUARY 2021

Councillor John Joe Fennelly raised the matter of wild deer crossing between Abbeyleix and Durrow on the N77. Councillor Fennelly indicated that the Wild Deer Association of Ireland have carried out a survey at this location and have contacted him in relation to same. In the past fortnight two deer have been killed on this stretch of road and there has been a number of other incidents also. Councillor Fennelly enquired if Laois County Council could request the TII to provide fencing on both sides of the road at this location.

Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services indicated that there has been engagement between Laois County Council and the TII and that Laois County Council was, at this point in time, awaiting confirmation from TII as to the appropriate interventions to protect public safety together with any provisions for animal welfare issues that arise from such interventions.

URDF announcement of funding of €9 million

Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services, briefed the meeting on Round 2 Urban Regeneration and Development Fund announced in the sum of €9 million. The fund, to be matched with local funding of €3 million, provides for the refurbishment of Portlaoise Town Centre, building on URDF Round 1 Projects already underway. The funds were sought by Laois County Council guided by the principles of Placemaking for a Low Carbon Town Centre in Portlaoise.

The recent announcement focuses on the public realm and proposes to refurbish the entirety of Main Street into Bull Lane, Peppers Lane, Lyster Lane, Lyster Square Car Park and JFL Avenue, re-connecting old town and new town, all in keeping with the objectives 2040 And Beyond – a Vision for Portlaoise.

The County Town of Portlaoise is critical to the overall sustainability of the County and the allocation is a good news story, complimenting other developments around the town.

Mr. Walton acknowledged the work and input from all the Members, the Town Team, Downtown Portlaoise, Laois Chamber of Commerce & Laois Tourism.

The Members complimented Laois County Council and all involved on the funding secured.

There is ongoing engagement with the NTA in relation to bus services for Portlaoise and significant advancement has been made in the design of two new routes – this will be included in the presentation which will be done at the April meeting. This is one of the initiatives of the Low Carbon Town Centre.

It was noted that developments under Round 1 are currently underway.

3. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Apologies were noted from Councillor Mary Sweeney for her inability to attend the meeting.

The Cathaoilreach of the Portlaoise Municipal District, Councillor Thomasina Connell agreed to propose the following three Notice of Motions which were submitted by Councillor Mary Sweeney:-

Notice of Motion No: 2021/41

“That Laois County Council repair and re-mark the car parking area at Ballyroan Community Hall”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that the parking area adjacent to Ballyroan Community Hall will be included on the list of works for repairs and line marking, the works will be carried out in the coming weeks.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/42

“That Laois County Council repair lighting at the village green in Ballyroan”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that this light has been reported to the maintenance contractor for repair and will be repaired shortly.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/43

“That Laois County Council repair the footpath at Newtown, Ballyroan”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that Mr. Wes Wilkinson, Senior Executive Engineer will examine the footpath adjacent to the R425 at Newtown Ballyroan and make arrangements to carry out repairs as required.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/44

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

“That this Council put in place a plan of action to improve the maintenance of the current Council housing stock”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that in 2020, Laois County Council's Housing Department completed 3,269 maintenance work order to social housing units. Laois County Council is also preparing a plan for the retrofit of Council houses and a workshop will be held with Councillors next week in this regard.

Councillor Dwane Stanley expressed concern in relation to some Council tenants, in particular elderly tenants who have been renting their homes from Laois County Council for the past 30 – 40 years and are awaiting repairs to be carried out to their homes. Councillor Stanley has had queries in relation to rising damp, heating systems

Councillor Stanley indicated that she has had a number of queries in relation to rising damp, heating systems, mould, replacement of kitchens etc and that these repairs are vital. Rents have increased following the recent rent review. When a house is re-let a contractor is appointed and brings the house up to specification, however there can be a situation where there may be no funding for repairs to the house next door. Councillor Dwane Stanley requested that a plan be put in place to address this with a review being carried out looking at the oldest stock.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/45

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

“That this Council give a progress report on the provision of 3 roundabouts on the Mountmellick Road”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that Laois County council engaged consultants to assess road safety and traffic capacity at 3 junctions on the Mountmellick Road (Harpurs Lane, Greenmill Lane and Ballyfin Road) at the beginning of 2020. The findings of this assessment were presented to the elected members at the May 2020 Portlaoise MD meeting. The recommendation solution is roundabouts (with Zebra crossings on all arms) on all 3 junctions. Subsequently, the report has been submitted to TII for their consideration. The Harpurs Lane roundabout junction is currently undergoing preliminary design as required under condition 13 of planning reference 20/52. This design will be to Part 8 standard and a Part 8 can be advertised subject to approval by TII.

It was also noted that Laois County Council are in ongoing consultations with the TII on the matter. Traffic priorities are currently assigned to the mainline route and the one of the objectives of the scheme put forward to TII was to reallocate priority to the side routes/local traffic and, in so doing, displace by-pass traffic to the Western Orbital.

Members requested if a cycle lane could be considered for the Ballyfin Road. It was noted that the development of the Blueway will be beneficial to the Western Orbital Route also – connectivity over to that residential area of development is currently under consideration.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/46

Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley proposed the following Notice of Motion:

“That this Council give an update on when the windows in the Council owned houses in St Brigid’s Place, where there is no fire exit route will be changed”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Noel Tuohy. The Members were advised that the Council is in discussions with the appointed contractor with a view to recommencing the repairs to windows in St. Brigid's Place as soon as possible

Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley express concern regarding the very small windows in these houses in the event of a fire taking place.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/47

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

“That this Council install drainage works in front of House at Spink”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that this location on the R430 at Garrintaggart, Spink will be examined for consideration as part of the 2021 Drainage Works Programme.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/48

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

“That this Council carry out road repairs on the L-27781-0 Cloncollane/Upper Cribbin, Ballyroan”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that the L-27781-0 Cloncollane/Upper Cribbin Ballyroan will be included on the list of works for road repairs in the coming weeks.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/49

Councillor John Joe Fennelly proposed the following Notice of Motion:

“That this Council carry out repairs on the road from Ballinakill to Heywood Demense especially at the entrance to Gills pond as a lot of people walk this area”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley. The Members were advised that the L-77974-0 from Ballinakill to Heywood Demense will be included on the list of works for road repairs in the coming weeks.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/50

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council resolve the serious sewage problem in The Hermitage Estate especially in the vicinity of Number 180”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. The Members were advised that The Hermitage Estate area is being examined as part of the DAP (Drainage Area Plan). The focus of the work under the DAP programme is to (1) Identify where, how often and the scale of problems impacting the public (such as flooding) and the environment and (2) Identify solutions to remedy the above based on whole life cost assessment. The solutions we consider would generally fall under the following headings, either as standalone measures or in combination: Operational measures, Capital maintenance and Capital upgrades. Stormwater removal is a key consideration and this is reflected in the hierarchy of potential solutions with Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDs) and storm water separation being considered ahead of upsizing or providing additional storage. The specifics at each problem location dictate which solutions are the most practical and effective. The DAP Model is used to generate concept design solution to address the problems while also taking account of future risks such as Urban Creep, Climate Change & Growth. There are various stages to a DAP: Stage 1: Information/Data Gathering, consulting with Asset Operations to scope out Asset Surveys / Monitoring programmes. Stage 2: Undertake surveys / monitoring and build the models. Stage 3: Test the existing network against current design flows and future predicted flows out to a 25 year design horizon. We see where the network is deficient, we identify the needs in terms of compliance, flooding and growth. Stage 4: Develop design solutions to meet these needs. Examples of these solutions could be in the form of: Storm Water Separation and its feasibility, Implement Sustainable urban Drainage Systems (SuDS), resizing the network or storage capacity. In relation to the Hermitage Estate, we are at Stage 4 optioneering. When this work is completed we will have better understanding of possible solutions. IW and LCC will need to work together to assess the feasibility and remove surface water from the foul system as an immediate task to try divert the need of major capital upgrades.

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald expressed concern regarding the serious issue at this location and indicated that Irish Water be requested to provide an immediate solution to address the problem. Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services indicated that this also coincided with heavy rainfall and Irish Water are working to divert the surface water from getting into the system. Mr. Walton confirmed that he would raise the matter with Irish Water, that there are ongoing investigations regarding the matter but that it would take a couple of months to identify any solution.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/51

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council be given an update on the CBS and Convent Sites”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor John Joe Fennelly. The Members were advised that in relation to the Convent - The Part Planning submission for this project was approved by Laois County Council in 2020 and the Stage 2 Capital Assistance Scheme funding application has now been approved by Department of Housing. Site investigations and surveying are reaching a completion onsite and the project is currently at detailed design stage. An enabling works contract is expected to commence onsite in the Summer and approval to proceed to tender for the main construction contract will be sought following its completion. CBS - The Part 8 Planning submission for this scheme was approved in 2020. It is currently at detailed design stage with surveying and other investigative work ongoing. It is expected that CLUID Housing Association will be in a position to seek funding approval

under the Capital Acquisition and Leasing Facility Scheme later this year in order for the main scheme to commence onsite.

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald raised the matter of the development of the car park prior to the housing development. Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services confirmed that both the car park and the housing development will be delivered consecutively – they will be undertaken and completed at the same time given the logistics at the site and the overall layout proposed.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/52

Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council repair the road at Clonreher and include it in next years road programme”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that this location will be examined and repairs will be carried out in the coming weeks - the location will be noted for consideration in the 2022 Roads Programme

Notice of Motion No: 2021/53

Councillor Noel Tuohy proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council support efforts that may be made by Laois County Council to develop a Museum/Heritage Centre in Portlaoise to recognise the tremendous history of our town and County”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Caroline Dwane Stanley. The Members were advised that it is currently an objective of the Laois County Development Plan 2017 - and the Laois Heritage Plan 2014-2020 to work with stakeholders including the Heritage Council, OPW, Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Failte Ireland, local communities and businesses to support the development of heritage and cultural tourism in County Laois. The continued development of the Cultural Quarter within the Town Centre of Portlaoise as envisaged in the Portlaoise 2040 - A Strategy for a Better Town Centre document places the celebration of its heritage at its core and the Council will make every effort to further enhance this through supporting events and seeking opportunities to work with stakeholders to develop a new museum and/or expand existing facilities to provide heritage related interpretation. The provision of a new Museum and/or the expansion of existing Facilities will be considered further in the context of the draft Development Plan and the forthcoming Heritage Plan.

The Members agreed that the Courthouse would be an ideal premises for a museum.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/54

Councillor Noel Tuohy proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That this Council put road markings and signage in place each side of the GAA in Rathleague warning of the approach to the grounds , in an effort to reduce the speed

of traffic as it approaches so as to safeguard the large number of children who will be using these facilities on this extremely busy road, many of them on foot or on bicycles”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that funding has been sought to improve the safety of pedestrians walking from the town centre towards the GAA grounds at Rathleague. Works to improve road markings and signage are included as part of this scheme.

The Members expressed concern regarding safety at this location and also noted that the footpath is level with the grass margin. Councillor Willie Aird requested that prior to works commencing on the Stradbally Road, that a continuous white line be included for the safety of the residents living on the right hand side of this road.

Mr. Simon Walton, Director of Services confirmed that preparations are underway which will include signage, road markings footpaths and pedestrian crossings where appropriate – it is acknowledged that there is significant cycling activities in this area – over and above the interim measures there are long term solutions and it is envisage to implement the first phase of that long term solution with funding from the 2021 Roadworks Scheme.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/55

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That Portlaoise Municipal District call on Laois County Council to carry our works to the cul de sac at Brittas L2133-D and at Ironmills on the L1738”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that road repairs will be carried on the L-21333-0 Brittas and on the L-1738-0 Ironmills at this location in the coming weeks.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/56

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That Portlaoise Municipal District call on Laois County Council to as a matter of urgency repair the section of the road at Lyster Square from Laois Pharmacy across to Allbooks”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Thomasina Connell. The Members were advised that Works are being arranged to carry out road repairs in Lyster Square outside of business operating hours later this week, subject to suitable weather conditions

The Members expressed some concerns in relation to the visually impaired and to ensure that they are catered for on the walkways and pedestrian crossings to make it safe for them. Also in relation to disabled parking that the signage be moved from the middle of the car parking bay as there is difficulties for wheelchair users to get their wheelchairs out. It was agreed that these works would be done including some filling of potholes at the location.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/57

Councillor Willie Aird proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“That Portlaoise Municipal District call on Laois County Council to allocate funding to repair the road at the entrance to Togher Wood”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Thomasina Connell. The Members were advised that the road at this location is not in the charge of Laois County Council. However, following discussions with the Director of Services and as this is a highly used public amenity for the County Town of Portlaoise, The Portlaoise MD Roads Office will engage with the local landowner at this location to resolve the drainage issue.

Councillor Aird indicated that due to Covid-19 this area is used now more than ever and requires additional parking and pothole filling. It was agreed that works be undertaken.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/58

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion:

“That Laois County Council review the car park at Togher Woods, Portlaoise with a view to the installation of additional car parking at that location”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that Laois County Council will engage with Coillte to explore options to increase the car parking capacity at Togher Woods, Portlaoise. Subject to the outcome of these discussions a funding application could be made in relation to car parking and amenity furniture during 2021 under the Outdoor Recreation Infrastructure Scheme (ORIS)

Notice of Motion No: 2021/59

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion:

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

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Catherine Fitzgerald. The Members were advised that the Property Management Section will endeavour to compile a list of all lands in the ownership of Laois County Council within the Portlaoise Urban Area in excess of 0.5 acres.

It was noted that the lands that are being referred to are vacant, undeveloped lands in excess of half an acre with a view to its development for a sports campus.

Notice of Motion No: 2021/60

Councillor Thomasina Connell proposed the following Notice of Motion:-

“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”

This Notice of Motion was seconded by Councillor Willie Aird. The Members were advised that The Cube forms part of an affiliated Company of Laois County Council. At the June 2020 monthly meeting of Laois County Council, a full report was provided to the Elected members in respect of Associated Companies of Laois County Council - a similar report will be provided at the forthcoming April/May meeting. In the meantime, it is noted that Laois County Council is in contract discussions regarding the refurbishment of the building. Once those discussions are concluded and public health guidance will allow refurbishment works will commence later in 2021.

A further report relating to the Cube will be given at the April or May Council meeting. Mr, Walton is making arrangements to have the recent damage to the building attended to.

4. FIX DATE & TIME FOR NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on 21st of April 2021 at 11.00 a.m via Microsoft Teams

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed:

Thomasina Connell, Cathaoirleach