

MUNICIPAL DISTRICT OF BALLINASLOE

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING OF MUNICIPAL DISTRICT OF BALLINASLOE HELD IN COUNCIL OFFICES, BALLINASLOE ON MONDAY 29TH AUGUST 2022 AT 11.00 A.M.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr. Dr. E. Parsons

I LATHAIR FREISIN:

Baill: Cllr. T. Broderick, D. Connolly, M. Connolly, D. Geraghty, P. Keaveney

Oifigigh: Mr. J. Cullen Chief Executive, Mr. G. Scully A/Director of Services, Mr. F. Fahey Senior Executive Engineer, Mr. N. Raftery Executive Technician and Mr. O. Monahan Technician I, Mr. E. Moloney Meetings Administrator.

The Cathaoirleach welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the members and Executive for attending at short notice. At the opening of the meeting the Cathaoirleach made the following statement.

‘Bailigh o Dhia go léir ar maidin agus go raibh míle maith agaigh as ucht a theacht anseo go cruinniu speisialta agus práinneach ar maidin.

Good morning, everyone, fellow councilors, Chief Executive and staff of Galway County Council, members of the press.

I have called a single item agenda special meeting of the Ballinasloe Municipal District Council regarding Arrabawn management Co-op limited and the devastating announcement which gives rise to direct and indirect job losses for the workers and closure of the plant in Kilconnell. We only have this one seismic issue on all our minds and in our hearts this morning, so I don't need to remind you we are not dealing with any other business. I know you all feel strongly, and I will give you all a chance to speak in a few minutes.

First, I want to thank Director of Services Liam Hanrahan and our Meetings Administrator Enda Moloney for facilitating this meeting at very short notice, I called for it when news was breaking on Thursday about the sudden and imminent job losses and closures which came as a sudden bolt from the blue for many of us. Since then, regrettable decisions have been taken by Arrabawn which impact the people and area we represent. I want to thank my fellow councilors from the Ballinasloe Municipal District who are all in attendance here this morning and the Chief Executive of Galway County Council Jim Cullen.

As Cathaoirleach of the Ballinasloe MD I called this meeting, and I would like to discuss and seek agreement on the following

That we issue a statement first and foremost that :

1. BMDC/GCC show solidarity and support with the Arrabawn workers, those directly and indirectly employed, who are facing job loss, on a human level and also as the local authority in this area. BMDC/GCC recognise the enormous impacts of this commercial decision by Arrabawn Coop Ltd. specifically the devastation for the workers and their families who are now facing job loss, their huge worry of economic uncertainty on the backdrop of rising costs of living and their limited options for re-employment in this area. BMDC/GCC acknowledge the knock on blow this closure will have on the village of Kilconnell and on the many rural villages of East Galway Ballinasloe where the current workforce area drawn from and the urgent need for investment in job creation/employment opportunities and a meaningful rural regeneration focus on East Galway/BMD by our Government.

2. I propose a motion to

BMDC/GCC calls on the Government, the Tánaiste, Department of Trade and Enterprise, and Minister for Agriculture McConalogue, to ensure that a viable sustainable replacement industry/commercial operation is immediately sought and enabled to keep the Arrabawn Plant in Kilconnell operational to full capacity in a seamless transition which will retain jobs and provide local employment while the light are still on at the plant. We call for an interagency governmental task force to be set up to focus on East Galway investment and job creation. I propose a letter to issue from BMDC/GCC to the Minister of Agriculture to this effect.

3. I propose that BMDC/GCC write to Arrabawn Co-Op Ltd. Senior Management calling on them to issue clear communication clarifying their intentions in relation to their future plans for the plant building and site. Although Galway County Council and the BMD do not have a direct role in the industry or decision making that is ongoing, we are the main authority for the area, with specific remits to ensure the sustainability of our towns and villages. The closure of any business is a cause of concern, but more specifically the closure of a large Plant in a village is of concern. The plant more than doubles the population of the village during the working day and supports employment directly and indirectly in the local area. As a council we are also concerned that the plant could be shut down next year which would leave a large empty industrial unit on the edge of the village, increasing vacancy and potential dereliction in the beautiful and historic village of Kilconnell.

The information sharing was sudden, unforeseen, with no consultation and the impact of this news not giving time to be investigated or influence the decision through consultation. There is a responsibility on the business to the workforce who have served the company for many years and a need for a meeting and clear communication.

The Cathaoirleach then invited the members to make their contributions.

Cllr. Broderick stated that the creamery in the current format and previously as the Midwest Farmers Co-operative had been a central part of Kilconnell and the surrounding community for many years. It had been a major employer and contributor to the local economy. The decision communicated over the weekend was regrettable and he said it was important that the members of the Municipal District were united in solidarity with the workers affected by the scaling down of operation at Arrabawn. He said it was important that the various agencies work together with Arrabawn to make sure replacement industry can be found and it was of the utmost importance that the site would not become unused and derelict in the future.

Cllr. D. Connolly thanked the Cathaoirleach for arranging the meeting and the Chief Executive for attending. He said it reflected the seriousness and urgency of the situation. He noted the decision by Arrabawn is a serious blow to the area and in particular the staff who are employed there. He explained that in addition to the staff directly employed there were many others indirectly impacted by the impending closure. He said that information was needed in relation to how the decision was arrived at and that he had motions he wished to bring forward later in the meeting.

Cllr. M. Connolly agreed that it was important that the Municipal District showed its strong support for the employees and all others affected by the Arrabawn decision. It was his understanding that the operation had been making a loss for a few years and so their situation may have been in the making for some time. He queried how such a situation could have been allowed to arise. He said that the council had invested in village improvement in Kilconnell and while there was little enough the council could do about the planned closure, it was nonetheless of grave concern to the council.

Cllr. D. Geraghty explained it was a great loss that such a significant employer was scaling back and that the impact on the local community would be significant. He said that if the company was making a loss, then the question was how that was happening. He felt that this was another example of the impact of market conditions and how the big supermarket chains are bringing price pressure to bear on the producers and processors making it very difficult to be profitable. This will result in fewer processors being able to compete profitably. He said that if we want small towns and villages to survive then we really need everybody to buy local and support local and he was asking the media to carry that message loud and clear.

Cllr. Keaveney thanked the Cathaoirleach for arranging the meeting and that it was indeed a very serious matter for the people in Kilconnell and the wider community but especially for any workers that would lose their employment. He feared that the decision that had been made was probably final and unlikely to be reversed given that the operation at Kilconnell was reported to be loss making for the last number of years. He said that the focus needed to be on minimising the impact on the community and working with the relevant state agencies and the company to either retain some part of the operation or attract replacement enterprises to Kilconnell. It was important, too to ensure the buildings were not allowed to become vacant and derelict.

The Chief Executive stated that it was appropriate the Municipal District as civic leaders in the community were meeting on this important issue. It was important that the Municipal District was seen to be standing in solidarity with those most severely impacted by the decision concerning the future of Arrabawn. He said the council had been focusing on the revitalisation of rural towns and villages throughout the county and Kilconnell had benefitted from that focus. However, the Arrabawn decision was a reversal of all that effort, but the council would continue to support the local community in any way possible. He acknowledged there would be a loss of rates income also. He expressed his concern that the decision taken was likely to be final especially if the operation was loss making. He felt that clear communication was needed from the company about the employment roadmap for staff and for the future of the plant.

When all councilors had contributed the Cathaoirleach took the following motions.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. D. Connolly and **SECONDED** by Cllr. Dr. E. Parsons it was unanimously **AGREED**, that the Ballinasloe Municipal District calls on Minister Heather Humphreys, Department of Social Protection to maintain oversight of the Interaction of Arrabawn's engagement with its Kilconnell employees and agency staff including the redundancy process that may occur on behalf of the employees and their families best interest and to ensure that they are getting their full entitlements at all stages of the process.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. D. Connolly and **SECONDED** by Cllr. Dr. E. Parsons, it was unanimously **AGREED**, that the Ballinasloe Municipal District calls on Minister for Agriculture Charlie McConalogue T.D. and Minister for Trade and Enterprise Leo Varadkar T.D. to make themselves fully aware of recent developments at Arrabawn Kilconnell, and in light of EU Food Security Policy, Farm to Fork initiatives and considering that Kilconnell provided farm families vital income in a low carbon, low miles provision of quality liquid milk for the surrounding counties. Considering how important the Kilconnell plant is to the rural economy in the West of Ireland seek answers why Kilconnell was not sold as going concern for liquid milk.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Dr. E. Parsons and **SECONDED** by Cllr. D. Connolly, it was unanimously **AGREED**, that BMDC/GCC calls on the Government, the Tánaiste, Department of Trade and Enterprise, and Minister for Agriculture McConalogue, to ensure that a viable sustainable replacement industry/commercial operation is immediately sought and enabled to keep the Arrabawn Plant in Kilconnell operational to full capacity in a seamless transition which will retain jobs and provide local employment while the light are still on at the plant. We call for an interagency governmental task force to be set up to focus on East Galway investment and job creation. I propose a letter to issue from BMDC/GCC to the Minister of Agriculture to this effect.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Dr. E. Parsons and **SECONDED** by Cllr T Broderick it was unanimously **AGREED**, that BMDC/GCC write to Arrabawn Co-Op Ltd. Senior Management calling on them to issue clear communication clarifying their intentions in relation to their future plans for the

plant building and site. Although Galway County Council and the BMD do not have a direct role in the industry or decision making that is ongoing, we are the main authority for the area, with specific remits to ensure the sustainability of our towns and villages. The closure of any business is a cause of concern, but more specifically the closure of a large Plant in a village is of concern. The plant more than doubles the population of the village during the working day and supports employment directly and indirectly in the local area. As a council we are also concerned that the plant could be shut down next year which would leave a large empty industrial unit on the edge of the village, increasing vacancy and potential dereliction in the beautiful and historic village of Kilconnell.

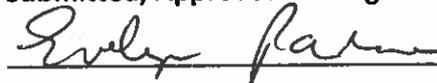
On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. M. Connolly, **SECONDED** by Cllr. P. Keaveney and it was unanimously **AGREED**, that the Ballinasloe Municipal District are requesting an urgent meeting with Arrabawn management. The purpose of this meeting is to try and establish a use for the plant going forward. This is important for Kilconnell and all the hinterlands going forward, to ensure the plant is put to some sustainable use.

The Cathaoirleach thanked the members and the Executive for attending the meeting to discuss the issue at such short notice.

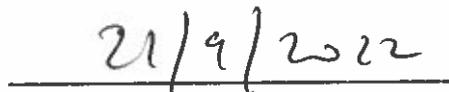
The meeting concluded.

CHRIOCHNAIGH AN CRUINNIU ANSIN

Submitted, Approved and Signed



(Cathaoirleach to sign here)



(Date)