

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Ceantar Bardasach Bhaile Locha Riach *Municipal District of LOUGHREA*

**Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Municipal District of Loughrea
held in the Loughrea Area Office, Council Chamber on 11th December 2023 at
11.00 am.**

I LATHAIR:

Cathaoirleach

Cllr. J. McClearn

Baill:

Cllr's. G. Donohue, I. Canning, S. Curley, PJ Murphy,
G Finnerty, M. Maher, J. Byrne, M. Kinane

Oifigigh:

Mr. G. Haugh, Senior Executive Engineer
Mr. N. Kennedy, Executive Engineer
Mr. L. Flynn, Executive Engineer
Mr. E. Gallagher, Senior Executive Engineer
Ms. M. Flynn, Administrative Officer
Ms. S. Cleary, Staff Officer
Ms. C. Kennedy, Assistant Staff Officer

As Láthair:

Cllr. D. Kelly
Ms. E. Ruane, Director of Services

**Presentation to Students from St. Brigid's College, Loughrea (winners in the
Anti-Litter Competition) by An Cathaoirleach Jimmy McClearn**

LMD2330

As part of Galway County Council's 2023 Anti-litter programme, students throughout the county were invited to participate in the Ant-Litter Poster competition based on the theme of 'Keep County Galway Litter Free.'

The Cathaoirleach congratulated students from St. Brigid's College Loughrea who participated in the competition and designed posters to promote anti-litter in the County, he added the students 'could be future artists and authors.' He stated that the competition presented young people with a great opportunity to show their talent.

He thanked Mr. Mark Molloy and the Environment team for their work in promoting the project.

The Cathaoirleach made presentations to the students, Ms. Charlotte Lewis, Ms. Ava Murphy, and Ms. Estra Silva. He thanked their teacher Ms. Siobhán Treacy and St. Brigid's School for taking part in the project.

Confirmation of Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Municipal District of Loughrea held in the Loughrea Chamber on 13th November 2023 **LMD2331**

The Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of the Municipal District of Loughrea held on 13th November 2023 were proposed by Cllr. Finnerty, seconded by Cllr. Maher and agreed and signed by the Cathaoirleach.

In response to Cllr. Finnerty's request for an update from Ms. Maria Flynn, regarding access to the rear of the properties on Crowe Street, Gort, Ms. Flynn advised she will follow up and advise the Members.

Confirmation of Minutes of Budget Meeting of the Municipal District of Loughrea held in the Loughrea Chamber on 13th November 2023 **LMD2332**

The Minutes of the Budget Meeting of the Municipal District of Loughrea held on 13th November 2023 were proposed by Cllr. Maher, seconded by Cllr. Byrne and agreed and signed by the Cathaoirleach.

Cllr. Byrne advised that he previously highlighted that figures presented at the Municipal District (MD) budget meeting are not a true reflection of what subsequently happened at the Plenary meeting. He stated that the Head of Finance should amend the figures to reflect the adopted position.

Cllr. Byrne stated there is an ambitious Capital Budget in place for the MD and proposed a presentation should be made to the Members in January updating them on all items of capital expenditure such as a planned development of 350 houses and the Gort Civic Amenity Site.

Mr. Haugh suggested that a presentation in January would be difficult given the timing of the next MD meeting and the various sections involved and suggested that a briefing update on all Capital Works within the MD be issued to Councillors in February as an alternative. The proposal was put forward by Cllr. Byrne and seconded by Cllr. Canning.

Cllr. Kinane requested clarification of the date on which a Caretaker will be appointed to Renville Park stating that this appointment is vital, she added it is important to have in place proper opening times for public conveniences there.

Flooding Update

LMD2333

Mr. Enda Gallagher updated the meeting as follows: -

The project team are nearing completion of the EIAR and NIS. The biodiversity chapter is the only outstanding chapter of the EIAR, with all other chapters currently under internal review with the environmental consultants. The scheme is being progressed through the OPWs Arterial Drainage Act and they must review documents before submission. There will be a

meeting in the next week to confirm with the OPW when they will have their review panel in place.

Ryan Hanley's are currently working on the carbon assessment, interference notices, Options Report, CBA, and outline designs. Works on all these topics are now well advanced.

Mr. Gallagher informed the meeting that he will attend a meeting with the SGFRC next Friday to update the committee on works completed in the last six months and to outline the next steps in the process.

Cllr. Kinane acknowledged the wonderful work done by Galway County Council in Loughrea and Gort/Kinvara area following the disruption caused by Storm Debi and stated that hundreds of sandbags were distributed to the public. Cllr. Kinane stated that a specific persons should be appointed to deal with flooding issues in Gort, Kinvara and Maree and that Mr. Gallagher should be supported by other people. She called on Members of the CPG to reiterate a call to assign a member of staff for this purpose.

Cllr. Byrne agreed with Cllr. Kinane's request to bring to the CPG the appointment of a specific member of staff to deal with flooding issues in Gort, Kinvara and Maree. Cllr. Byrne thanked the outdoor staff for work done over the weekend following Storm Debi stating that the Council was very proactive in its approach. He added that a lot of damage was caused to businesses because of the storm and asked if a financial package would be made available to assist those affected.

Cllr. Murphy stated that several kilometres of walls were knocked in Townisland which will cost thousands of euros to fix. He advised that one landowner face a cost of €50,000 to rebuild stone walls. He asked if there is any funding available under Climate Change to assist people or if there are any measures the Local Authority could implement to assist people financially. He added it will take up to five years to replace knocked walls adding that these are historic stone walls in the MD.

Cllr. Finnerty stated that a tree had fallen in Shanaglish at 4pm on Sunday last (Storm Debi) and he thanked the Council for having dealt with it, he stated he is aware that a significant number of walls have been knocked by the storm and added without financial support, landowners will not be able to replace them. He stated that, sourcing people with the craft and skill to rebuild these walls will be a task.

Cllr. Kinane stated she is aware that two protected structures have been damaged in storm Debi. She enquired if the Conservation Officer position will be filled following Mairin Doddy's retirement. Cllr. Kinane acknowledged the great work done by Ms. Doddy during her employment with the Council, this was echoed by the Members. The Cathaoirleach extended good wishes to Ms. Doddy on her retirement on behalf of the Members.

Cllr. Kinane enquired if the Heritage Grant could be used to repair damage to protected structures on private property.

The Cathaoirleach requested the Corporate Policy Group (CPG) to review the procedures for notifying Elected Members of retirements and resignations from the Council so that Members are aware of who they need to contact regarding various matters.

Gort Town Centre First – Presentation by Hazel Fox

LMD2334

Ms. Hazel Fox made a presentation to the Members on Gort Inse Guaire Town Centre First Plan. She explained that the project has a central focus on improving the attractiveness of the town, tackling vacancy and dereliction, embracing arts and culture, and providing more opportunities to enjoy the town centre and surrounding landscape for residents and visitors. She added, the project aims to provide a strategic framework to support the community in their aspirations to revitalise Gort and with the aim of making the town an attractive place to live, work and visit.

Ms. Fox explained that Gort was one of the first 26 pilot towns across the country to receive funding for a Town Centre First Plan. She explained that a Town Regeneration Officer was appointed by Galway County Council to support and enable the Town Team as well as the delivery of the Plan. She stated that, establishing the Town Team brought together local business owners, community representatives and stake holders who assisted in the delivery of this Town Centre First Plan.

Ms. Fox stated that phase 1 commenced in December 2021 with Galway County Council announcing that Gort had been selected for the project, and in June 2022 Galway County Council invited responses to the tender for the Plan, following which in November 2022 BDP and Venture International were appointed by the Council to develop the Plan.

She advised that numerous meetings and interviews were held to gather as much information as possible to inform the types of projects required by the town and explained that the Plan presented to the Members today is the finished plan.

Ms. Fox added, the results of the public engagement set out the framework for how the projects are delivered. She advised that she was appointed to her role as Town Regeneration Officer in June 2023 and there was a quick turnaround time with the plan being ready for the Team in November 2023. She explained that the Town Team met once/twice per month during the production of the Plan. Ms Fox explained the 4 key components as outlined in the TCF Policy including collaboration and communication – community engagement, understanding of place (analysis and appraisal), defining the place, and enabling the place. Ms. Fox explained that the understanding of a place includes a SCOT analysis based on the results of the community engagement which sets the framework for developing the themes and the proposals for the town. She stated, the analysis and appraisal of primary data sources (including socio-economic data) give a clear understanding of the place including a spatial analysis being the Government’s vision for connectivity on how the town moves having regard to cyclists and pedestrians, together with how the lands can be opened. Ms. Fox explained that there are 12 key themes and 26 proposals identified and the job going forward is to focus on funding and on delivery of the projects. She stated that one of the aspirations of the town is to put the old convent building into use for the local community and to develop it as a multi-

functional community and social space. Ms. Fox stated that consideration is being given to purchasing the convent building and primary school as a package. Ms. Fox added that, the first stage is now to apply for funding to acquire and develop a detailed design the site before progressing to stage two and then to 'shovel stage.'

The Cathaoirleach and Members thanked Ms. Fox for her informative presentation.

In response to Cllr. Donohue's enquiry on how the project will affect Ukrainian people living in the convent Ms. Fox advised that this is a five- or six-year plan and there is no immediate concern for residents at the convent. Cllr. Donohue sought clarification on the cost and details of what was factored into the budget. Ms. Fox responded that the money to acquire the building would be sought from government funding and there is a 3-month period to have the application prepared and a further 3 months to issue the award. After this she stated, there is a 12-month period to get the design completed, then she stated an application for capital works can be progressed. She stated that she is aware there are significant costs associated with maintaining a historical building which would otherwise fall into wreck and ruin.

Cllr. Finnerty stated that something is needed urgently in Gort town to revitalise the social element of the town, he added that it can be difficult to secure a venue in the town for family and private social occasions. Cllr. Finnerty stated that a piece of ground beside the river should be acquired by the Local Authority as 80% of the land referred to is a flood plain. Ms. Fox responded that the piece of land is being considered for purchase by the Council together with some land from Canon Quinn Park for development under the project. This has been raised by the local community with a view to extending the River Walk.

Cllr. Finnerty enquired how much contact has been had with people in the town. He enquired, should the convent end up in the ownership of Galway County Council what will the cost be to the Council to purchase and maintain the property. Ms. Fox responded that the cost would be provided by way of grant from Central Government and a plan would be put in place regarding price and costs. She stated that the Team have applied for Category II RRDF grant funding for development of the Convent alongside the public realm previously but in that instance, funding was not approved for the purchase and design of the Convent.

Cllr. Finnerty stated that the town lacks an adequate primary care centre at present and stated there is no parking or access to the current facility. He stated, there is great potential for other Government Departments to purchase the building such as the Department of Social Welfare. He said the convent is a huge building which can facilitate a huge range of services and enquired if it would be possible to explore the Council office moving into the property.

Cllr. Maher complemented the team on the works completed. He stated that the purchase of the Town Hall in Loughrea has left a legacy as it was purchased over 15 years ago but requires a significant amount of work before it is ready for use. He stated that the convent building in Gort is a significant building and will take a huge amount of funding and works to get it going.

Cllr. Curley enquired regarding Theme 3, Social Inclusion, Community Spirit & well-being, including the development of a multi-sports facility and welcomed its inclusion. He asked regarding the timeline for the project and how long will it take to bring the project to Category 1.

Cllr. Murphy stated that the plan is a very positive plan, and the level of positivity is needed in Gort. He expressed his agreement with points raised by Cllr. Finnerty. He stated he requested Galway County Council to purchase the lands along the river a long time ago as Gort needs a park. He said the area is not suitable for development except for a small area of land located beside Centra, adding that this should be considered for a primary care unit. He stated he loves the plan for putting the convent into use and stated there is a similar situation in Kilrush. He added, using part of the convent for housing is an expensive means of providing accommodation however he stated it is best to deal with it now rather than let it deteriorate any further.

Cllr. Byrne stated it was great news last month that the biogas plant was turned down and he is very positive regarding plans for Gort town. He stated there was a discussion three years ago to locate a primary care unit in the convent and added it is an exciting time for Gort. In response to a query from Cllr. Byrne, Ms. Fox clarified that the Plan was considered regarding the current Gort Local Area Plan and clarified that consultations took place with the Forward Planning Department regarding the draft new LAP expected in the new year. Ms. Fox said that the Gort Town First Plan is a funding plan, but the Local Area Plan is a plan about the strategic use of land. She stated that the Gort Town First Plan is an 'addition' to the LAP which will comply with the LAP.

Cllr. Canning requested to share his observation that it might be helpful to include opinions from people of all ages in plans going forward. Ms. Fox stated that observations from all people have been submitted and taken into consideration at various meetings and she acknowledged the contribution by all who gave their time to the plan. She was happy to advise that conversations were also had with schools and youth groups.

The Cathaoirleach stated that there are a lot of positive comments on the plan and thanked Ms. Fox for her presentation.

Cathaoirleach's Business

LMD2335

Cllr. Curley sought an update on the installation of traffic calming measures on the Old Galway Road, Loughrea which he stated is a serious issue. Mr. Haugh replied that a survey will be carried out on this road to address the issue.

Cllr. Curley referred to heavy traffic on Moore Street earlier this week and stated traffic management by Uisce Eireann could be more strategic with respect to closure of roads at Christmas time.

Cllr. Curley thanked the outdoor staff who worked through the night during sub-zero temperatures to ensure roads were safely gritted for motorists. He thanked Mr. Haugh and his team for the provision of salt bins around the Municipal District and added that the salt

bin at Station Road Car Park has been extremely helpful to the public in making icy footpaths safe.

He stated that it is imperative to look at the 2022 census data before making decisions on the Local Area Plan (LAP).

Cllr. Curley stated it would be beneficial to the young people of the MD if head prefects from schools could attend an MD meeting each quarter for fifteen minutes to understand how the Council does its business. He added this would be a structured way of hearing what issues are important to young people. The Cathaoirleach stated that the electorate have elected the Members to the Council on the understanding that the views of all will be taken into consideration.

Cllr. Maher requested an update on the progress of works in the Loughrea Town Hall. He also sought an update on the progress to correct the sequence of lights at the Westbridge, he stated that people are complaining about the length of time it takes to get through the lights at the location. Mr. Haugh responded that the lights at the Westbridge appear to be working well and the commitment given at the previous MD meeting still stands.

Cllr. Maher stated that closing the Courthouse Road in Loughrea is not an option as large artic lorries use this road when travelling from Gort through Loughrea town and, they will not be able to make the turn from the Gort Road as the junction is too tight.

Cllr. Maher enquired when Uisce Eireann will properly replace all the roads on the side streets in Loughrea, he stated the condition they have left the roads in is a disgrace.

Mr. Haugh responded that the competing interests of providing safe drinking water in a timely fashion and minimising the impact on the commercial interests in Loughrea had been considered prior to the granting of both the Road Opening Licences (ROL) and Road Closure Licence under which the current works were taking place. This ROL will condition the required permanent reinstatement standard that must be achieved. Works are not yet complete, and the current reinstatement is temporary only.

Cllr. Donohue requested an update on the Gort public water supply and asked if they are winter ready adding that several people in Gort were out of water last week, she requested a written reply to issue to Councillors next week to confirm if the water is back at full strength. Ms. Flynn stated that she will follow up with Uisce Eireann and revert.

Cllr. Donohue sought clarification on planned works at Hennelly's junction and asked if barriers will be put in place. She stated sightlines are very tricky when driving into the town and clarity is needed. Mr. Haugh clarified that there is no funding available, or project planned for this location at the current time. Any future works will require design, a road safety audit and funding approval. He clarified that it was not proposed to install a pedestrian barrier as these can pose a risk to other vulnerable road users. He stated that this location is presently being examined under the Safe Routes to Schools Scheme attached to the local School.

- Cllrs. Murphy and Byrne welcomed an allocation of €10.4 million for the provision of a Water Works Treatment plant at Craughwell. Cllr. Byrne stated that more definitive answers are required from Uisce Eireann regarding the WWTP for Craughwell and Clarinbridge and enquired if the network will be able to accommodate additional sites and 'R1' plans.

Cllr. Canning expressed his concerns regarding the speed at which vehicles are travelling on the N65 into Portumna and sought an update on the pedestrian lights, which are out of order. He requested the installation of a traffic counter and stated traffic calming measures are urgently needed. The Cathaoirleach requested a speed counter be installed stating that the results of this will be 'shocking.' He stated, even with the pedestrian lights working this crossing is not safe. Mr. Haugh responded that a Traffic Volume and Vehicle Speed survey will be carried out on this stretch of the N65 at Portumna and the information would be provided to the Councillors and An Gardaí Síochána if necessary.

Cllr. Finnerty enquired where Loughrea MD Active Travel projects stand at present, he stated that two projects were discussed last week but neither were from the Loughrea MD.

Cllr. Finnerty stated last Monday/Tuesday businesses had to close due to the absence of water provision, he said he raised this issue with Uisce Eireann and was given three contradictory answers. He stated that, when temperatures went below freezing and water tankers were located around town, confusion was caused, he continued, as a Local Authority we have a responsibility to the public to provide services. He asked for an update from Uisce Eireann regarding services in the Gort area.

Cllr. Byrne referred to planning objections lodged by Mr. Peter Sweetman. He stated that Mr. Sweetman lives in Cork but appears to be lodging planning objections to various planning applications in County Galway. Cllr. Byrne stated that he is going to write to Galway County Council to establish why Mr. Sweetman was objecting to planning applications in Galway. The Cathaoirleach stated that he recently seen where Mr. Sweetman objected to a planning application for a milking parlour in Galway.

The Cathaoirleach stated that, the real scandal lies with An Bord Pleanála who should deal with efforts to exploit the planning process. He added that the Government needs to ensure that the Board are carrying out their function effectively and acknowledged that everyone has the right to submit objections to planning applications.

Cllr. Byrne requested the Council to repair a significant number of potholes around the Municipal District.

Cllr. Curley stated as Councillors it is important to provide correct information to the public. He stated, with respect to the boil water notice, *'it is not the water coming from Mid or North Galway that caused the iron in people's water pipes, this was caused by a burst water main'*.

Cllr. Curley requested clarification on the cause of iron in water supplies. Cllr. Maher proposed requesting a member of Uisce Eireann attend an MD Meeting, this was seconded by Cllr. Curley.

Cllr. Murphy enquired if there was a change in Active Travel rules and if Active Travel only applies where there is an active town plan. Mr. Haugh responded that it had been previously clarified that the NTA has requested that all proposed Active Travel projects are strategic, and plan led.

In response to Cllr. Murphy's request for improvements to kerbs and traffic calming measures in Labane, Mr. Haugh responded that GCC are finding it difficult to source a contractor to carry out these works, but he will arrange for works to be carried out in-house if necessary. Responding to Cllr. Murphy's request to repaint street bumps in Loughrea, Mr. Haugh stated he will review this request.

Cllr. Canning enquired who is responsible for providing access to graveyards. He said he is aware of a lady who travelled from Meath recently to visit a family grave, but she could not egress from her car due to the condition of the ground. Mr. Haugh advised that he can discuss this matter with Ms. Flynn as it may be possible to consider works as an access to a public amenity under the Local Improvement Scheme. In response to the Cathaoirleach's request for an update on the Kilmeen Cross, Mr. Haugh stated he will follow up once again on this matter.

The Cathaoirleach referred to the provision of public transport for Loughrea which he stated was raised previously by Cllr. Curley. He proposed inviting a member of the NTA to attend a meeting of the Loughrea MD. He stated that two bus stop signs were requested from the NTA for Kilrickle over two years previously, but these have not materialised. This proposal was seconded by Cllr. Curley.

Ms. Flynn expressed Ms. Ruane's apologies for her absence at the MD Meeting and stated that Ms. Ruane extended good wishes to the Members and Staff for a Happy Christmas and New Year.

Mr. Haugh thanked all the MD staff for their contributions throughout the year, highlighting the response to Storm Debi as an example of the great service that is provided by the outdoor staff.

The Cathaoirleach thanked the Elected Members and Council Staff for their work during 2023 and acknowledged that a phenomenal amount of work was done during the year, however he stated, it is never enough as there is always more work to be done. He stated that the Galway County Council's 2024 budget is the largest he has seen for Galway County however, he added, that the demands on the Council are great. He extended his good wishes for a Happy Christmas and New Year.

CHRIOGHNAIGH AN CRUINNÍU ANSIN



CLLR JIMMY MCCLEARN
CATHAOIRLEACH, LOUGHREA MD

