

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 Galway Council Chamber on 12th September 2022@ 9.00 am

I LATHAIR:

Cathaoirleach

Cllr. P.J. Murphy

Baill:

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

Oifigigh:

Ms. E. Ruane, Director of Services
Ms. R. Lowe, Senior Engineer
Mr. G. Haugh, Senior Executive Engineer
Mr. J. Coyle, Executive Engineer
Mr. N. Kennedy, Executive Engineer
Mr. D. Pender, Director of Service
Mr. E. Gallagher, Senior Executive Engineer
Mr. M. Kelly, Project Engineer, Greenway
Ms. A. Quinn, Senior Staff Officer
Ms. P. McHugo, Assistant Staff Officer

Apologies from Cllr. Byrne and Cllr. Kelly who were unable to attend.

Confirmation of Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Municipal District of Loughrea held in the Loughrea Chamber on 11th July 2022 **LMD 2242**

The Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of the Municipal District of Loughrea held on 11th July 2022 were proposed by Cllr. Kinane, seconded by Cllr. Donohue, and agreed and signed by the Cathaoirleach.

Condolences were extended to Cllr Murphy on the death of his Grandfather.

Congratulations were also extended to Ms Maria Finn, Meeting Administrator on her upcoming nuptials.

**Confirmation of Minutes of Annual Meeting of Municipal District of Loughrea held
On Monday 13th June 2022**

LMD 2243

The Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Municipal District of Loughrea held on 13th June 2022 were proposed by Cllr Finnerty, seconded by Cllr McClearn and agreed and signed by the Cathaoirleach.

Flooding Update

LMD 2244

Mr. Gallagher updated the meeting as follows:-

South Galway Gort Lowlands FRS – The Engineering consultant is advancing design and works proposals at several sites within the study area and examining options for the disposal of 200,000m³ of surplus material that would be generated by the project.

The Environmental Consultants have completed the vast majority of their botanical surveys and are progressing sections of the EIAR. Both sets of consultants are receiving feedback from the project agronomist following discussions with landowners and continue to examine issues being raised. The agronomist has completed approximately 80% of his site visits.

An engineering design freeze will be imposed on the project in October at which time works will be concentrated on the EIAR up to March 2022.

It was confirmed to Cllr Finnerty that Termon remains part of the scheme proposals. It was highlighted that this area of the scheme is unique in that no houses flood in the area.

Ballyboy – Mr Gallagher confirmed that culvert and wall building works commenced on site in July and will be finished this week. The contractor has spent a significant length of time over the last month rectifying issues that were raised with the wall. Additional funds are still being sought to undertake the road raising aspect of the works. If funding is secured, the works will ideally be undertaken during the school mid-term at the start of November.

Mr Gallagher confirmed that the issue of the finish to the restraining concrete blocks and rail at Ballyboy will be reviewed when road raising works have been completed. He also confirmed that the 700mm wall specification relates to the height of wall on show on the roadside of the wall. The roadside wall on show height is consistent with previous adjacent works. The walls are substantially higher on the field side.

CFRAM Progress Report – Mr Gallagher gave the meeting an update on progress for both the Ballinasloe and Clifden flood relief schemes. Ballinasloe is programmed to go the Exhibition in mid-2023 and Clifden is scheduled to commence its planning process in the later part of 2023.

In response to a query from Cllrs Canning and McClearn regarding progress on the Portumna scheme, Mr Gallagher indicated that the current pace of progress on schemes in County Galway should be taken as a good indicator of progress on flood relief schemes nationally.

The vast majority of schemes in progress were launched under tranche one of CFRAMs. Nationally, the first tranche of schemes will have to be progressed at least beyond the planning stage before there is sufficient capacity within consultancy firms to launch tranche two projects, which includes the Portumna scheme. Mr Gallagher undertook to seek an update, with timeframes from the OPW.

Cllr Maher's request to clean the rivers from Loughrea lake to accommodate fish spawning was referred to the area office for further investigation.

Greenway Update

LMD 2245

Mr Pender updated the members with the following presentation on the Greenway:

The proposed Galway to Athlone Castle National Cycleway project will see the creation of a segregated walking and cycling route linking Ballyloughane Beach in Galway City to Athlone Castle, where it will connect to the existing Athlone to Dublin Cycleway.

The Cycleway will be Ireland's first dedicated inter-city route for cyclists and walkers. Stretching across the country from Galway City to Dublin City, the Cycleway will be a world class amenity for families, communities and tourists to enjoy.

To identify the emerging preferred route, a series of project objectives were set, including the '5S' criteria set out in the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways, published by the Government of Ireland in 2018. The '5S' criteria outline that greenway's should be Scenic, Sustainable, Strategic, Segregated, and with lots to See and do.

Landowner Engagement

A Code of Best Practice for National and Regional Greenways has been agreed with the main farming organisations and published by the Government. This is to ensure that landowners are treated respectfully and fairly at all stages including construction and operation. The Code of Best Practice also includes a compensation package that was negotiated over a number of years by the farming organisations, local authority representatives and Transport Infrastructure Ireland.

Consultation has been an integral element of the project since its commencement. Despite the restrictions imposed by the Coronavirus Covid-19 outbreak, consultations on the project, identifying options and selecting an emerging preferred route have been undertaken both virtually and in-person.

The project team includes dedicated project liaison officers who have been engaging directly with landowners since 2021. They have undertaken well over 1500 consultations (either face-to-face meetings or telephone calls) with landowners over the past 15 months (May 2021 to August 2022).

This engagement with landowners has informed the identification of an emerging preferred route corridor that is over 205km in length. The emerging preferred route corridor starts near Ballyloughane Beach to the East of Galway City and then proceeds close to or through the following settlement areas: Oranmore, Rinville, Clarinbridge, Kilcolgan, Kinvara, Gort, Woodford, Portumna, Meelick, Clonfert, Ballinasloe, Shannonbridge, and Athlone Castle. It links places of interest, established tourism centres, public parks, and outdoor amenities. Approximately 350 potentially impacted private landowner have been identified along the

emerging preferred route and extensive engagement is on-going. Where landowners have engaged with this process, they have been listened to and their thoughts and potential issues identified. Where feasible, the route has been amended to address identified issues whilst ensuring the continuity of the route, end to end.

The project team continues to engage with landowners along the emerging preferred route. Meeting directly with landowners on a one-to-one basis is most beneficial for all parties as specific and personal issues can be discussed in confidence and possible solutions identified.

Public Engagement & Public Consultation

Since this project was launched in 2020, the project team has engaged actively with communities, individuals, businesses and landowners throughout the project study area.

- Three focused public consultations have been held since 2020.
- During the second public consultation 11,631 submissions were received on Route Corridor Options between January and March 2021, of which 95% were positive; 3% neutral; 2% negative.

Corridor Option 5 (which includes Kinvara / Ballinderreen / Kilcolgan) attracted the highest number of submissions totalling 1,896, the majority of which were positive.

In April 2021, the project team distributed leaflets to 8,500 landowners throughout the project study area setting out our approach to project development and landowner engagement.

During the relaxation of the Covid-19 restrictions between May and December 2021, the project liaison officers visited and spoke to landowners and farmers across the project study area which includes approximately 550 telephone calls and 650 face-to-face meetings. Furthermore, between February and August 2022 the project team have had over 375 meetings or telephone discussions with landowners whose property is within the preferred corridor.

This demonstrates that the project team have and will continue to actively engage with landowners. If any members here today request the project team to meet with any landowner or homeowner looking to meet the team, I can assure you that meeting will take place in a timely manner.

The project team understand that some landowners would prefer to meet them with one or two direct neighbours. The project team are willing to facilitate these meetings in small groups to address specific concerns of those impacted landowners.

Kinvara / Ballinderreen / Kilcolgan

The Kinvara / Ballinderreen / Kilcolgan segment of the Galway to Athlone Castle cycleway is approximately 15km or 7% of the over 205km route.

Earlier this summer, the project team made a commitment to contact all potentially impacted landowners within the preferred corridor by today's meeting and this has been achieved.

- The project team has visited all 53 landowners on whose land the emerging preferred route is proposed; and provided maps to the 47 landowners who were willing to accept the maps for their consideration.
- The project team has made telephone calls to all 43 landowners whose land is within the preferred corridor - the emerging preferred route is not located on their land.
- Whilst the commitment was to contact all the landowners, the project team, as a result of the above engagement, has identified that some homeowners, not directly impacted by the

greenway have concerns about its proposed location. So, in addition to contacting all the landowners as promised the team will also now be contacting all homeowners. We will write to homeowners in the consultation area over the next 2 weeks to update them on the scheme. Also, if deemed beneficial, we can make arrangements to hold an information evening in the area to provide attendees with the latest information on the project.

- It should be noted that the project team is very aware of the vulnerability of some landowners, particularly the elderly. In two instances it was decided not to directly contact landowners deemed to be vulnerable. Alternative methods of communication are currently being investigated.
- Following previous engagement with landowners in this area we have modified the proposal over a short section (200/300m) where the route is now proposed to run adjacent to the N67 in the form of a Hybrid model.

The project team acknowledge and accept that in providing maps to landowners, it does not imply their acceptance or agreement of the emerging preferred route on their lands. Providing maps to landowners is part of the process of ongoing engagement and facilitates informed discussions with landowners willing to engage with the consultation process. Since the initial engagements earlier this year on the emerging preferred route with directly impacted landowners in Kinvara / Ballinderreen / Kilcolgan, the route has been amended to prevent the severance of landholdings and, where possible, follow established farm boundaries. Updated maps have been provided to landowners.

Engagement comes in many forms. Text, call, email, one on one meetings. We will engage and consult with people in whichever format they are most comfortable. However, in my near 25 years dealing with landowners over many many schemes there is nothing that can better the one on one interaction where people are free to express their true feelings and thoughts. Whilst the above process is ongoing and engagement will continue, the issue of ill-informed and misleading comment and opinions must be addressed. For instance, in relation to CPO the team are endeavouring to acquire the necessary lands by voluntary acquisition and to hear comment that the team are using as a threat the CPO process is unfounded and indeed unfair. Certain parties have raised concerns, that both I and the project team find concerning. I have met and discussed with the project team concerns raised by Councillors and others regarding the behaviour and information provided by the project team.

I am satisfied that the project team has at all times acted in good faith and behaved appropriately. On behalf of the project team, I would encourage all landowners to engage fully with the consultation process so that their individual concerns can be taken into account in determining the route of the cycleway.

Closing Remarks

The question I am often asked is, "has a route been chosen for the cycleway" and "when will it be built?". From the work of the project team, there is positivity and support for the project over approximately 90% of the emerging preferred route. Both the project team and Galway County Council remain committed to progressing with the selection of a route between Galway City and Athlone Castle, which will be followed by the design and environmental evaluation in advance of a planning application. In order to finalise the route, I would again reiterate the importance of landowners engaging with the project team, when contacted by the project team so that any concerns may be addressed. The Galway to Athlone Castle

National Cycleway scheme will enhance the national and international attractiveness of the county for activity-based tourism. It will also provide local cycling and walking infrastructure, and connectivity for communities living close to the proposed route, promoting sustainable travel and healthy lifestyles. The Galway to Athlone Castle National Cycleway scheme has the ability to transform local villages and local economies all along the route here in County Galway, providing a worldclass amenity that is Scenic, Sustainable, Strategic, Segregated, and with lots to see and do.

Cllr Kinane thanked Mr Pender for his presentation and stated that he had answered a lot of her queries but on receipt of a Petition from a hundred landowners who stated that they had a fundamental distrust for the project, she questioned how the trust could be rebuilt going forward. Cllr Kinane also questioned if the project has adhered to the Code of Best Practice and the issue of engagement with the landowners was also a concern of hers.

Cllr McClearn questioned how the Team could re-engage in a positive way with the Landowners as it appeared on the ground that trust is lost.

Cllr Maher stated that there was a lot of scaremongering from people that do not want the Greenway and better communication is required. The Greenway will bring potential tourism with everyone on board.

Cllr Donohue submitted a Petition with 100 names to the meeting and stated that lessons were not learned from the past as the Petition stated that there was fundamental distrust in the process and engagement with the affected landowners. She enquired if it would be appropriate that Mr Cullen, CE would attend the next Municipal Meeting.

Cllr Canning stated that it was very frustrating for all involved and the Landowners were the most important people involved in the project as they were giving up their land for the good of everybody.

Cllr Finnerty stated that farmers need more time to meet locally in order to resolve the issues that concerned them including security of their property.

Cllr Murphy agreed that the landowners would be better served to meet in small groups or in one to one meetings and this would improve the issues relating to better engagement and communication between all involved.

Mr Pender confirmed that they are prepared to hold public consultations in every area to meet and talk to people either in small groups or one to one meetings. He does not accept that the Project Team have inappropriate practices and are not in the business of threatening anyone with CPO. He assured the Members that the code of best practice has at all times been adhered to. He further confirmed that the hybrid model does not comply everywhere as it is not safe along national routes but would not be ruled out over short sections.

Cathaoirleach's Business

LMD 2246

Cllr Maher requested road markings at the new estate at Coscorrigh due to the high number of pedestrians in the area. He also thanked the Taking in Charge Team for all their work.

Mr Pender confirmed that he will revert directly to Cllr McClearn regarding Kilmeen Cross. Cllr McClearn also requested an update regarding the Town Hall, the CCTV at Kiltormer Recycling Bins and collapse of the roadway verge at High Road, Tynagh. Mr Haugh confirmed that matter of the roadside collapse at Tynagh was with the appointed consultants and that the delay was disappointing but not uncommon at the current time.

Mr Haugh confirmed for Cllr Curley that he will review the issue of footpaths close to Gael Scoil Riabhach and the bilingual signage in Loughrea Town where required.

Mr Haugh confirmed for Cllr Canning that he will investigate the subsidence at Kilcorban Bridge and Durrow, Kiltormer where urgent works are required. Cllr Canning also requested an update on the slipway at the Swimming area in Portumna and the drainage channels on Main Street, Portumna. Mr Haugh confirmed that remedial works were planned for the slipways in Portumna and would be scheduled in due course when resources allow. He also undertook to review the drainage channels in Portumna.

Ms Lowe confirmed for Cllr Kinane that due to price increases, the amount of hedge cutting that could be done was being impacted. She clarified that the Council had no, or very limited obligation and landowners were responsible for the maintenance of the roadside hedges and trees.

Any Other Business

LMD 2247

Cllr Donohue requested that a Delegation from landowners in Stoneyisland and Kilcolgan areas be received at the next monthly meeting of the Loughrea MD.

In response to Cllr Curley's request for a delegation from Gaeilge Locha Riach in relation to the local development plan, Ms Ruane stated that there was a very clear statutory process for all members of the public to make submissions to the plans.

CHRIOGHNAIGH AN CRUINNIU ANSIN



CLLR P.J. MURPHY
CATHAOIRLEACH, LOUGHREA MD

