

BLESSINGTON TOWN TEAM

Minutes of Meeting

**Held At the Office of Wicklow County Council at Blessington, Co. Wicklow
on Tuesday 10th December 2019 at 5.00 p.m.**

Present:

John Horan	Blessington Greenway (Chairman)
Breege Kilkenny	District Manager
Jason Mulhall	Blessington Tidy Towns
Liam Fay	Blessington & District Forum
Andra Johnston	Blessington & District Forum
Susan Rossiter	Blessington & District Forum
Garvan Hickey	District Administrator
Shaun Durkan	Gardaí
Kieran Burke	Principal Blessington Community College
Janet Hawkins	Business Network
Dan Kenny	Business Network
Simon Murphy	Business Network
Patsy Glennon	Councillor Baltinglass MD
Gerry O'Neill	Councillor Baltinglass MD

Apologies:

Michael Doyle	Blessington & District Forum
Andra Johnston	Blessington & District Forum
Susan Rossiter	Blessington & District Forum
Killian McGreal	Business Network
Peter Eustace	Business Network
Susan Nichols	Enterprise and Corporate Services
Patrick Byrne	Municipal District Engineer
John Mullen	Councillor Baltinglass MD
Avril Cronin	Councillor Baltinglass MD
Edward Timmins	Councillor Baltinglass MD

Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 12th November 2019 having been previously circulated were approved by the members and signed by the Chairman with an amendment to the attendance. It was noted that Simon Murphy had made his apologies for the November meeting.

Matter arising

A vote of sympathy was passed to Andra Johnston on the recent passing of her mother. The chairperson welcomed Breege Kilkenny to the meeting and wished her well in her new roles as District Manager for Baltinglass Municipal District. The Chairperson noted that he would talk to Michael Sargent regarding getting copies of the previous signed minutes. The

minutes can then be scanned and put on www.wicklow.ie. Garvan Hickey informed members that the minutes once scanned in will be put on the Blessington Town Team page under Baltinglass Municipal District page.

Tidy Towns and Public Realm

Jason Mulhall updated the members on the activities of the Tidy Towns and noted that this was a relatively quiet time of year for Tidy Towns. Jason noted that it was a time for planning ahead and he asked if Baltinglass MD had any projects planned which would help Blessington to achieve higher marks and a medal next year.

Planning & Infrastructure Group

Liam Fay queried if it was planned to have one submission from the Town Team to the review of the County Development Plan or if groups could put in an independent comment on the County Development Plan. The Chairperson John Horan noted that each group was free to send in their own submissions but there was also merit in the sub group of the representatives of the Forum and the Councillors meeting and discussing planning and infrastructure projects. Cllr. O'Neill informed members that the offer was still open meet with the Forum.

Chairperson John Horan outlined that the Blessington Town Health report would form Blessington Town Teams submission to the development of the County Development Plan 2021 – 2027. This would be a comprehensive submission. John also noted that it was important that as many groups as possible put in their submissions as it was important that all voices were heard and everyone had an opportunity to be involved.

Cllr. O'Neill informed members of a meeting that he is organising with representative from the KARE group, representative from the Peter McVerry Trust and Carmel Cashin from the Blessington and District Forum to discuss the development of bungalows for people with a disability and older people in Blessington. Cllr. O'Neill outlined that this accommodation was needed for people with a disability to live independently; he is also hoping to engage with Kildare County Council in light of the proposed development on the Kildare side of Blessington.

Dan Kenny noted that given the current increase in population and the projected increase given all the proposed developments policing and schools are two issues that need to be highlighted. Dan Kenny pointed out that resourcing of Gardai and schools in the town had not kept pace with the changes in the area.

Kieran Burke informed the meeting that the plans for 650 pupil Blessington Community College were at design stage. Kieran also informed members that he was meeting with representatives from the Department of Education the coming Tuesday to discuss the plans for the expansion of the school. Kieran pointed out that it is Department policy that the number of students are in place before the building is put in place. John Horan asked if it would be useful if representatives from the Town Team sought a meeting with the Minister for Education to highlight the need for the building to be put in place and the need to future proof. It was agreed to put this proposal on hold until after the meeting between the school and the representatives from the Department. John also noted that Cllr. Glennon was chair of the Board of Management for the school.

Kieran Burke noted that there were eleven feeder schools to Blessington Community College and the number of first year places was capped at one hundred and twenty and the number of applications in 2019/2020 was one hundred and thirty. Kieran outlined that he expects the number of applications to remain the same in 2020/2021 and possibly for the following year.

Simon Murphy pointed out that the Irish Water expansion in the capacity of the Blessington treatment plant will be met as soon as it is built and that it should be future proofed. Simon also outlined that it was important that the Town Team should have a submission to the County Development Plan based on consensus as the N81 and the associated traffic problems were one of the major issues which needed to be addressed. Simon pointed out that due to the N81 and the traffic no major employer was going to come near Blessington and pointed out that the business park in Naas is now bigger than City West. He also informed members that there was no point in having a tick box for ideological reasons in the County Development Plan that Blessington would self sufficient in terms of employment when we knew this was not going to be the case. Simon Murphy noted that the situation facing the school in terms of places for students highlighted the need for the Town Team to look at the macro level. Simon pointed out that the town centre was losing shopping as it was not commercially viable, businesses will only remain open if they are viable. Simon noted that the industrial zonings in the town area should be looked at and made sure they are suitable for businesses.

Dan Kenny noted that services in the town should be developed to keep pace with the expansion in population that will come from the new housing and queried how many social houses are being built. Breege Kilkenny outlined that there are approximately one hundred social houses to be provided in the Blessington area.

The Chairperson John Horan noted that the Health Check report being prepared by Future Analytics would be Blessington Town Teams submission to the County Development Plan and that the report included local input from the various consultation sessions which took place.

Jason Mulhall noted that the trees on main street were recently trimmed back again by the ESB and that underground cables are more suitable for the street. Jason proposed that underground cabling along Main Street and the relief road were two projects which the council should advance. John Horan pointed out that not downplaying the need for the upgrade of the N81 which is a long term project the completion of Blessington relief road is a major issue for the town and one which the Council should seek to complete. Breege Kilkenny informed members that she would discuss the relief road with the Director of Services for Roads and the engineering staff to see how the relief road could be advanced. Breege also noted that she took on board the concerns of the Town Team that the completion of the relief road was a major priority for the Town Team, as part of the road is in County Kildare it would require consultation with them.

Dan Kenny queried if planning went with the land or with the developer and highlighted the need for joined up thinking. He noted that the completion of the road should be tied in with planning permissions, danger planning will be granted and road will not be completed.

Cllr. O'Neill noted that to date it has been a winner for Kildare County Council as they have got the development levies, been able to take people off their social housing list and house

them in Blessington while Wicklow has to provide the services. Cllr. O'Neill also advised members that the reason for the resurfacing works on the N81 was as a result of areas of road failing skid tests. Cllr. O'Neill has been looking to meet Minister Ross to discuss the need to upgrade the N81 and complete the relief road but has been unsuccessful. Cllr. O'Neill also outlined that three hundred and sixty houses are to be built on Kilmalum road, four hundred and seventy four new houses are in the pipeline for development over the next two years. The extra capacity from Irish Water will be gone before it is built. Cllr. O'Neill outlined that the completion of the relief road was top of the agenda for the Municipal District.

Simon Murphy noted that communications with Kildare was crucial and an invite to the next meeting should be extended. Jason Mulhall noted that Eoghan Ryan who completed Phase 1 of the Blessington Town Health Check is now Director of Services in Kildare County Council and might be a friendlier ear as he knows the area very well and what is required.

John Horan proposed inviting Eoghan to the January or February meeting of the Town Team and this was agreed by members. Simon Murphy welcomed the proposal and noted that there was a need for Kildare and Wicklow to cooperate to deal with problems.

There was a brief discussion on the 65 bus route and the need to improve public transport in Blessington.

Liam Fahy noted that many of the projects which the Town Team want to advance are interdependent and the relief road needs to be in place before the underground cabling project is advanced.

There was a discussion on broadband availability in the town and members noted the importance of broadband to economic development. Cllr. O'Neill informed members that the head of IT Mr. Liam Fitzpatrick is to give a presentation on broadband and its development in the area to a meeting of Municipal District in the next few months.

Business

Dan Kenny noted that the N81 remained the main issue of concern to the business sector and the completion of the relief road would be a welcome development.

Tourism

John Horan updated members on the progress of the Greenway. AECOM are the consultants appointed to move the project on and are currently working on the detailed design. Liam Fahy noted that it was important given the tightness in funding that the community aspects of the Greenway outlined by the Blessington and District Forum should remain central to the project. John Horan outlined that the County Council had committed to completing the entire Greenway and were seeking additional funding for the project.

Culture & Heritage

Michael Doyle had sent his apologies for the meeting and there was no update.

Healthy Blessington.

The Chairperson advised members that the Healthy Blessington projects were ongoing on and thanks to Killian the nutritionist is working along with the Community College. Garvan Hickey informed members that there a meeting was to take place on the 11th December in the Coimin Centre to discuss the Health Blessington Projects and the Operation Transformation walk for 2020.

Town Health Check – Phase 2.

The Chairperson John Horan updated members of on the progress of the Blessington Health Check Phase 2 and outlined all the consultations that had taken place. An initial draft of the Health Check has been prepared by Future Analytics and John invited members to submit their initial observations by Friday week 20th December at the latest. It is hoped to have the project in the main completed before Christmas. Garvan to circulate a copy of the draft report to members by e mail following the meeting. John Horan thanked Kieran Burke and the transition year students for their assistance in completing the surveys.

Any Other Business

Simon Murphy updated members on the Joint Policing Committee public meeting which took place in Baltinglass and outlined the importance to plan ahead to deal with anti social behaviour issues. Shaun Durkan informed the meeting that the anti social behaviour issues in the town centre highlighted by the town team and at the meeting in Baltinglass were being dealt with.

There was a detailed discussion on Kaleidoscope 2020 which is to take place on the 26th to 28th June. John Horan proposed inviting Brian McDermott to a meeting of the Town Team to give a presentation to the Town Team similar to the last year and this was agreed by members.

Shaun Durkan informed members that Kaleidoscope is a family focused festival and is subject to licence. Initial discussions had taken place regarding the festival but no formal agreement had yet been agreed between the organisers and the Gardai.

There was a discussion on the benefits of the festival to Blessington and Janet Hawkins noted that while there may not have been a spin off to business in the town it was great to see people coming to the area and seeing all Blessington has to offer. Shaun Durkan noted that as a festival it has potential for growth and that Eric and the Trustees of Russborough would not allow anything that would damage the reputation of Russborough. Shaun also noted that old tunnel on the greenway could facilitate extra parking and the growth in the

festival. As a family festival it has the potential to be of huge potential in bringing people to the area.

Simon Murphy noted that the Kaleidoscope festival possibly assists with the financial viability of Russborough and outlined the importance of Russborough to the area. John Horan echoed Simon's sentiments and noted that Russborough played a vital part in the economic and tourist life of Blessington.

Garvan Hickey informed members that they were awaiting a date from the Garda Commissioners office on when the application on the Blessington Community CCTV project would be assessed. The project has been delayed due to national discussion on data protection.

This concluded the business of the meeting and the next meeting is scheduled for 28th January 2020 at 5.00 p.m.

Signed: _____
Chairman