

BLESSINGTON TOWN TEAM

Minutes of Meeting

Held At the Office of Wicklow County Council at Blessington, Co. Wicklow
on Tuesday 12th November 2019 at 5.00 p.m.

Present:

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

Apologies:

Sean Quirke	District Manager
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
Simon Murphy	Business Network

Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 8th October 2019 having been previously circulated were approved by the members and signed by the Chairman.

Matter arising

Liam Fay asked if the minutes of the previous Town Team meetings were available to groups to view on line. He noted that it was important that members of all groups should be able to see the issues that were discussed. The Chairperson John Horan noted that this was an important issue and that previously we had an offer of a page on the Council website. It was agreed by members that we should avail of this offer. Garvan Hickey to check with the IT section, Wicklow Council about getting page developed. John Horan to check with Michael Sargent to get signed past minutes to put on the website.

Tidy Towns and Public Realm

Jason Mulhall updated the members on the activities of the Tidy Towns. Jason pointed out that we are looking for something special that will give us an edge to achieve a bronze medal next year. He also noted that it is only by working together we can achieve this, Tidy Towns is about much more than keeping an area litter free or maintaining an area, we need to constantly move forward. It includes community involvement and planning, approach roads, built environment and public realm, sustainable waste and resource management, litter control, wildlife, habitats and natural amenities and biodiversity. Jason asked members for suggestions of work or projects that could be undertaken.

Planning & Infrastructure Group

The Chairperson John Horan noted that at the last meeting it was proposed to establish a group consisting of three Councillors and three others from the Town Team to work together and consider planning and infrastructure projects. He also noted that it was an opportune time for the group to come together with the consultations sessions for the County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 starting soon. Consultation session in Blessington Library on the 28th November from 4.30pm to 7.30pm.

Cllr. O'Neill noted that he had proposed the establishment of the group and was waiting on response from the Forum. It was agreed that Liam Fay would liaise with Cllr. O'Neill and would propose three members from the Forum. Cllr. O'Neill proposed that the three Councillors would be Cllr. O'Neill, Cllr. Glennon and Cllr. Timmins, however this needed to be checked with the councillors. The Chairperson asked if the group could meet before the consultation session on the 28th November and prepare a submission for the County Development Plan.

The meeting then moved on to a detailed discussion on the N81 and its impact on Blessington. Jason Mulhall noted that the Tidy Towns report had mentioned that Blessington was being choked by traffic. Cllr. O'Neill informed members that he had called a special meeting of Baltinglass Municipal District for Friday 15th November to discuss the N81. A 300 meters wide strip of land has been sterilised from development while the preferred route for the N81 remains to be decided. Cllr. O'Neill noted that this is limiting the development of the town.

Dan Kenny noted that the N81 is the elephant in the room and is creating apathy in the business sector as it is limiting business and stymieing development. The condition of the N81 is causing huge tailbacks and at all consultations with the business pillar the N81 is the main topic. Dan also noted that the N81 is impacting not only on Blessington but on all of West Wicklow and Carlow.

The meeting then moved on to a discussion of the need to create enterprise opportunities for people in West Wicklow to cut down on the need to commute and the need to balance housing development with community infrastructure.

Cllr. O'Neill informed the meeting that there is a lot of housing development planned for around Blessington such as 360 houses being built in Kilmalulm. Jason Mulhall noted that

we need to balance housing with facility development otherwise we will end up with a lot of houses and no facilities. Liam Fay informed members that the forum had compiled a list of infrastructure projects that are required, this will have to be revised and new developments taken into account. The Chairperson John Horan advised that this list should form part of the submission on the County Development plan.

Dan Kenny pointed out there was a proposal on phase three or four of the development of O'Leary lands for the development of an IT park. There is a need for the IT park and enterprise hubs in the town. Dan Kenny also noted that existing proposals for enterprise developments and zonings should not be forgotten about now even though the land is possibly now owned by a different developer.

Cllr. O'Neill informed members that he is hoping to have a meeting with Naas MD before Christmas, it is important that the two MDs work together. Cllr. O'Neill noted that the N81 possibly won't be looked at until 2027. Dan Kenny noted that we should get the relief road and the link road at Crosschapel resolved before then.

Michael Doyle proposed that there should be a two prong approach to creating jobs in Blessington, existing proposals should be supported and facilitated and for new housing developments and there should be a stipulation that the community facilities and enterprise units are also provided.

John Horan advised that the County Council has more control over the land at Burgage as it is in Council ownership and there may be an opportunity to develop enterprise and community facilities there to compliment the proposed housing. John Horan advised members that An Board Pleanala had granted approval to the rowing club for the development of a regional rowing facility at Baltyboys Bridge.

Michael Doyle noted that we need to have community input into the facilities that are developed otherwise we will end up with what happened in the 30's and 40's - being flooded with houses and no facilities for people. Community infrastructure needs to be developed alongside the houses.

Cllr. O'Neill advised members that he believed the thirty two acres at Burgage should be developed for recreation and a hotel with the land at Doran's Pit and Roadstone Land being developed for housing. Dan Kenny noted that in the submission to the County Development plan, the group that are coming together should insist that the roads and employment infrastructure are improved.

Cllr. Glennon informed members that the transport maps circulated last week in Dublin did not include the 65 bus route. Cllr. Glennon noted that if we are serious about sorting the traffic issues we need to put in place good public transport.

Business

Dan Kenny noted that from the business group the N81 remained the main issue and there was frustration that there was no improvement over a long number of years. Janet Hawkins pointed out that there is need to bring home a win for the business sector. Simon Murphy is working with Future Analytics on the business survey and it is hoped to have the Health Check completed by Christmas.

Tourism

John Horan updated members on the progress of the Greenway. The Project Board to oversee the development of Blessington E-Greenway held its first meeting on 1 November 2019. Michael Nicholson, Margaret Hartnett and Caroline Fox represented Wicklow County Council. Michael Quinlan from ESB. Eoin O'Mahony, Regional Director, Transportation with AECOM Ireland Ltd briefed the Board on how work on finalising the detailed design and construction of the new greenway will proceed from here on. AECOM are the consultants appointed to move the project on and do the detailed design. The plan is to do the full route of over forty kilometres, Council has been allocated €5 million by the Department and the Council will look for the balance from other sources.

Cllr. O'Neill pointed out that the €5 million should be used for the lake loop and the work on the greenway should possibly start at Knockieran bridge. Funding should not be used to facilitate private enterprises at Tulfarris and The Avon. There was a danger that routes to Tulfarris and The Avon will be done and the project will run out of money.

John Horan noted that it is a Wicklow County Council project and the elected members would have an input into overseeing the project. The Council has committed to doing all the route and that is the aim.

Liam Fay enquired if the development of the interpretative centre was going ahead as it was part of the Forum's original vision. The Chairperson John Horan noted that it was important that the original vision should be kept in my mind in the development of the project. He also noted that only fifty percent of the funding required was allocated to greenway projects throughout the country probably as a result of political considerations.

Dan Kenny noted that it was a laudable project which should create sustainable employment. There was a discussion about the difficulty in getting planning permission for businesses so close to the lake.

Culture & Heritage

Michael Doyle updated members on the range of cultural activities which have occurred in the area over the last few months. These included the Hollywood Fair, culture night in the Men's Shed, Ballymore singing festival. Michael also outlined some of the events which are coming up including Conor McKeon in the Tramway Theatre on the 7th December and Blessington Men's Shed music night.

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

Town Health Check – Phase 2.

The Chairperson John Horan reminded members that the Blessington Health Check public consultation session was taking place at 7.30 pm in The Avon. It is part of the consultations which Future Analytics are undertaking as an element of the health check.

Kieran Burked informed members that the transition year students had been assisting Future Analytics with the public survey and traffic count.

Any Other Business

Susan Rossiter raised the issue of anti social behaviour around the town especially in the Town Centre around Dunne's. Groups of young people congregating in the area are intimidating people going about their business. Sgt. Durkan informed members that the Gardai are proactively dealing with the issue and a number of people have been apprehended. Gardai are actively trying to deter the anti social behaviour and all incidents should be reported. Dan Kenny enquired if Gardai could be more visible in the town and do foot patrols. Jason Mulhall pointed out that anti social behaviour was becoming an everyday issue at the town centre and juvenile crime was an issue.

Michael Doyle noted that there were reports of cocaine use and young people armed with knives at the town centre and this was a serious issue. Cllr. O'Neill informed members of the establishment of Policing Plan Committees which are being established in each Municipal District and will bring the Gardai, PPN and MD's together to discuss policing issues. Cllr. O'Neill congratulated the Gardai on the thirty three percent increase in the level of detection of drugs.

This concluded the business of the meeting and the next meeting is scheduled for 10th December 2019 at 5.00 p.m.

Signed: _____
Chairman