

**Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Municipal District of Baltinglass on Zoom on 22nd
February 2021, 10.30am**

Present: Cathaoirleach Patsy Glennon
Councillor Vincent Blake
Councillor John Mullen
Councillor Avril Cronin
Councillor Edward Timmins
Councillor Gerry O'Neill

In Attendance: Ms. Theresa O'Brien, Planning, Development & Environment
Mr. Pat Byrne, Senior Executive Engineer
Mr. Dermot Graham, Executive Engineer
Mr. Garvan Hickey, District Administrator
Ms. Andrea Connolly, Assistant Staff Officer
Ms. Caroline Fox, Community, Cultural & Social Development

Apologies: Ms. Breege Kilkenny, District Manager

The Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Glennon, opened the ordinary meeting of the Municipal District of Baltinglass.

1. To confirm and sign minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Municipal District of Baltinglass dated 22nd January 2021.

Cllr. Blake proposed the confirmation of the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Municipal District of Baltinglass dated 22nd January 2021 and this was seconded by Cllr. O'Neill.

Cllr. O'Neill proposed a suspension of the Standing Orders in order for Ms. Anne Halpin, County Wicklow PPN, to speak about the recent occurrence of sheep rustling in the West Wicklow area. The members were in unanimous agreement on this proposal and Cllr. Mullen seconded this motion.

2. Matters Arising.

There were no matters arising.

3. Correspondence

Mr. Garvan Hickey, District Administrator, advised members that a substantial amount of correspondence had been received for the meeting and noted that correspondence received had been circulated to members. The first piece of correspondence related to the Pride of Place Competition and confirmation of the categories for 2021 with a new category being added this year community resilience. Mr. Hickey noted that it would be great to have an entry or two from Baltinglass MD and he added that further information can be sought from the Community, Cultural and Social Development section in Wicklow County Council. Mr. Hickey also advised of correspondence received from Mr. Thomas Lennon of Baltinglass District Forum seeking support for the purchase of a street sweeper for Baltinglass town which could be used in the different estates around the town.

A number of emails had been received regarding the issue of dog fouling in the Blessington area which Mr. Hickey read out one of the e mails as an example of the e mails received. The e mails had been distributed to all members. Cllr. O'Neill advised that he had spoken to the Environment section of Wicklow County Council and had suggested that the law in place regarding dog fouling be enforced and the dog wardens be more active in carrying out summons to the irresponsible dog owners not picking up after their dogs. Cllr. Cronin added it is not just Blessington affected by this issue as it is happening across the District and proposed a campaign, involving the schools, be launched to make people more aware of this issue and noted that awareness raising may help alleviate the problem. Mr. Hickey advised he had been in touch with Baltinglass Tidy Towns, Dunlavin Tidy Towns and Blessington Tidy Towns, prior to receipt of emails, regarding launching an awareness campaign through the tidy towns in the three areas. Each of the Tidy Towns groups had highlighted the issue of dog fouling. He added that an extra number of signs had been put in place encouraging people to clean up after their dog had been increased but to no effect and noted that it was a small minority of dog owners that were responsible. Cllr. Mullen asked if the campaign would be rolled out district wide on social media and if there had been any court appearances

recently for this offence. Cllr. Blake noted that this item had been discussed at length over the years and a number of bins had been erected in affected places but this had not been as successful as we wanted. He continued that it's very hard to implement the law and suggested more deterrent signs be erected as this had been more successful in the past. Cllr. Timmins agreed with Cllr. Blake noting that funding had been allocated for extra signage a number of years ago and queried if there was any additional funding made available for signage this year. Cllr. Timmins also suggested the awareness campaign be rolled out through the environment section of schools as not everyone was on social media. Ms. O'Brien from the Planning, Development and Environment Section of Wicklow County Council advised that dog fouling is a countywide issue and is now more prevalent during level 5 lockdown. Ms. O'Brien added that prosecutions are few as the dog warden has to witness the act and with only four dog wardens for the whole county this can prove difficult. She advised that Jim Callery from the Environment Section was hoping to roll out a poster campaign with the transition year students in local schools and added that the more starker the poster the more effect it has. Ms. O'Brien advised targeting one or two areas in the town and erecting extra signage and bins, could be undertaken and compliance was very much down to dog owners. She added that a certain amount of funding was available for signage. Mr. Graham, Executive Engineer, queried if an audible system in use a number of years ago was effective and was there scope for video recording of the acts. Ms. O'Brien replied that the audible system was another form of awareness but there are huge issues with General Data Protection regulations and CCTV. Cllr. Timmins noted that the installation of extra signage in areas did make a difference but that it was only temporary; all the effects of dog fouling need to be highlighted.

Mr. Hickey advised members that correspondence had been received from a number of people objecting to item 8 on the agenda – notice of motion in the name of Cllr. O'Neill – “That Baltinglass Municipal District examine an appropriate way to commemorate all the victims from West Wicklow of the Great Famine including the rededication of the Downshire Monument to the victims of the Famine period or the development of an appropriate new monument in Blessington Town Centre”. Mr. Hickey listed out the details of correspondence and who it was from. Copies of the correspondence had been distributed to all members for their perusal prior to the meeting. .

4. To receive a presentation on the Blessington Greenway

Ms. Caroline Fox, Community, Cultural & Social Development Section, presented the members with a detailed presentation on progression of the Blessington eGreenway. Ms. Fox outlined the works completed so far and these included an entire walk over of the route which identified significant works to scheme including route change, a new bridge, lake shore protection works, a bridge underpass, tree removal, increase in path width and a new surface type of macamdram. These works have increased the cost of project to €15 million. Additional funding was granted in November 2020 to nine greenway schemes nationwide and Blessington eGreenway was allocated €6.4 million euro. Murphy Surveys had carried out a drone survey of the route. Site meetings had been held with landowners. All environmental reports have been updated. Ms. Fox advised that a route alignment has been agreed with the ESB but further environmental reports are required together with a full Natura Impact Statement and a tree assessment survey. All reports to be submitted to An Bord Pleanála by March 2021 followed by a public consultation. Ms Fox added that it is hoped a planning decision will be made by October and works can commence on site by November 2021. Construction once started will take approximately eighteen months.

Cllr. Blake thanked Ms. Fox for her detailed update and noted it was great to see progress on this project but expressed concerns over the increase in costs. Cllr. Blake added the escalating costs of projects are not taken seriously in this county and hoped that the project will come in under budget. Cllr. Mullen noted that there was a potential for an oral hearing to be held. Cllr. Mullen also queried how potential public consultation would take place during restrictions and Ms. Fox advised that this would take place online with level 5 restrictions in place until at least May. Ms. Fox added that Wicklow County Council staff would be available to explain the plans and to engage with any queries from members of the public. She also advised that an oral hearing may not take place and this would be up to An Bord Pleanála to decide. Cllr. Cronin commented that it was great to see progress being made and the additional funding allocated would be a great help. Cllr. Cronin added that communication is a key factor in keeping the community up to date with this project and noted how lucky we are to have this amenity available on our doorstep.

Cllr. O'Neill thanked Ms Fox for her report and advised that he shared the views of his colleagues on consulting with the local community and keeping them informed of progress. Cllr. O'Neill noted that it is very difficult to get the correct information out to communities at the moment and incorrect information can be spread on social media. Cllr. O'Neill queried if locals could get involved in the process and develop projects alongside the greenway such as glamping. He stressed the importance of encouraging and facilitating these requests and added that some people were not happy with preplanning consultations. Cllr. O'Neill also queried the location of toilet and carparking facilities along the route.

Ms. Fox agreed that engagement with the local community and groups was vital through social media platforms presently and further engagement was necessary. Ms. Fox advised that website development had gone out to tender and workshops with local groups and communities would be held. At present these workshops would be online. Ms. Fox advised that the route alignment had been agreed with ESB and maps and drawings will be available on the website once the application has been submitted to An Bord Pleanála. Ms. Fox continued that the main car park will be located at Knockieran with an additional ten around the route. On the query of toilet facilities, she advised that following environmental reports the preference is not to provide toilet facilities and encourage the public to use commercial facilities instead. Ms. Fox added that the old HSE building will have toilets and changing place facilities for public use. Ms. Fox also noted that they cannot get involved with planning applications for other developments alongside the greenway and these are dealt with separately. Ms. Fox advised that the development of a commercial strategy for the Greenway is being considered to facilitate the development of services along the Greenway.

Cllr. Timmins commended Ms. Fox on progress on this project and noted that the key to this project's success is consultation with local residents and landowners. Cllr. Timmins noted that this is a community project and it was important that the community is consulted. Cllr. Glennon commented that this is a most welcome project and to keep all informed to maintain goodwill. Cllr. Glennon also raised concerns over the dog fouling issue on the existing greenway and Ms. Fox advised that phase 1 of the greenway was under the remit of the Blessington District Forum and under licence from the ESB but this will be taken over by Wicklow County Council in a few weeks. Going forward the full route, when up and running, would have two general operatives and a vehicle on site to maintain the facility. Cllr.

Glennon stressed the importance of liaising with people. Cllr. Glennon noted the excellent work been done by the CE workers on the existing Greenway.

5. To consider Roads Reports (national and non-national roads).

Mr. Byrne briefed members on the N81 Progress Report. He advised that TII has carried out skid resistance testing on the entire N81 and these results will form the basis of resurfacing schemes in 2021. These locations would be known in the next few months. He also advised that resurfacing works on a section of the N81 from south of Blessington to Russborough bends will hopefully proceed during the summer months. Mr. Byrne added that TII are currently carrying out a study on a section of the N81 from Baltinglass to the Toll House at Annalecky and this will lead to future projects along this section of the N81. Mr. Byrne also advised that he was applying for funding under the fencing retrofit scheme. Cllr. Timmins welcomed this study and questioned if there had been any update on funding being allocated to works at Hangman's Bend as it is a very dangerous section along this route. He also raised the issue of mud and dirt on the N81, north of Blessington, and questioned if funding could be allocated to sweep this section every two to three weeks. Mr. Byrne replied that currently a road sweeper is being provided on this section of road once a month and being funded by Blessington area budgets which reduces the amount of road sweeping around Blessington area. He advised that he has sought funding from TII for this but with the sheer volume of HGV's on this route road sweeping from Tallaght to Blessington is not a feasible option. Mr. Byrne also advised he had spoken to Gardai about enforcement. On the TII feasibility study, he advised that this is the start of a process and that a number of reports on these locations still need to be completed. Mr. Byrne noted that Hangman's bend is a high priority area. Cllr. O'Neill welcomed these studies and the works to be carried out and stated that 14,000 vehicles commute from Blessington to Tallaght on a daily basis and stated that the number of HGV's will increase due to a planning application from a nearby quarry. Cllr. O'Neill proposed writing to the Minister for the Environment, Climate and Communications requesting an urgent meeting with members to discuss improvements of the N81 and stressed the importance of pushing this case and getting something done for once and for all. Cllr. Timmins seconded this motion. Cllr. Cronin advised members that she had attended an Eastern Midlands Regional Assembly meeting last week and raised the issues of the N81 and urged them to reconsider the upgrade and improvement of this route. There was unanimous support from the Wicklow representatives for redevelopment of N81. Cllr. Blake noted that a

lot of money has been spent on the N81 and queried if there was any update on the junction in Baltinglass or if any studies had been completed. Mr. Byrne replied that there were four main schemes funded by TII for works on the N81 – Minor Project works up to €50,000, Pavement Capital Works at Russborough of approximately €1 million, HD 28 Resurfacing Schemes, amount allocated depends on works identified and category B resurfacing works of €200,000. He added that the R747 was not included in TII's assessment of this route. Mr. Graham, Executive Engineer, advised that two to three years ago a lot of work had been carried out on a revised junction layout in Baltinglass but there had been no movement since. He added that TII, National Transport Authority and Baltinglass Municipal District were all facilitating but there were a number of conflicts at the time. Cllr. Blake questioned if there was any update on improving the footpath on the bridge and Mr. Graham advised that a pre-assessment had been completed in November and the scope of the consultants assessment had included a footbridge across the river Slaney within the Rural Development Funding project for Baltinglass town. Cllr. Timmins stated that he had spoken to the Department after funding had been announced and was advised that if there was no loss to other projects a footbridge could be included over the Slaney River at the Supervalu side. Cllr. Mullen noted that works at the junction in Baltinglass would be a major improvement. Cllr. Glennon commented that he has a personal interest in getting improvements made on the N81 and added that currently it is not fit for purpose. He advised he has made a submission on the National agenda of the National Development Plan and has spoken to the Chief Executive of Wicklow County Council on this matter.

Mr. Graham updated members on the Non National Roads Report. He advised that the final allocations for restoration improvement works and restoration maintenance works in the Baltinglass Municipal District has not been finalised yet but once received will be divided equally between Blessington and Tinahely areas. Mr. Graham added that there are two improvement schemes due to be completed in the Tinahely area once level 5 restrictions are lifted. Mr. Graham also outlined the proposed footpath, LIS and CIS projects. Cllr. Mullen thanked both engineers for their reports and questioned if the two outstanding projects from 2020 will be completed. He also raised the issue of large potholes appearing on the surface of Mangans Lane which had just been resurfaced at the end of 2020. Cllr. Blake noted that all were aware of level 5 restrictions in place but raised concerns over the number of calls received about potholes and the damage to country roads due to recent bad weather. Cllr. Blake queried what can be done to ensure these works are done and if there is any progress

on getting the roads crews back out. Mr. Graham replied that staff are adhering to level 5 restrictions and road crews could only respond to emergency repairs. This would be reviewed at the next District Engineers meeting and they were pushing for a reopening of services. Mr. Graham advised that the velocity patching unit was out repairing roads but only in urgent areas. On the issues at Mangans Lane he added that this is a drainage issue and not a resurfacing issue and once restrictions are lifted they will look at remedial works on the 350 metre area that is causing these issues. He continued that with restrictions in place last year there was extra pressure to complete the roads programmes and some road maintenance works had a minimal amount of preparation times. Cllr. Timmins welcomed the allocation of €73,000 to safety improvement works on the Wicklow Gap to Hollywood road and queried when these works will be completed and if new signage is included. Cllr. O'Neill raised the issue of the deterioration of the road surface at Knockieran Bridge and asked if there is any movement on this issue. Mr. Graham informed members that there has been no further progress on this issue and advised that Knockieran Bridge is the property of the ESB and it is their responsibility to maintain it. He added that the safety works on the Wicklow Gap road are scheduled for the summer months and advised that he will speak to the engineer in the Wicklow District about replacing the sign at the top of the Wicklow Gap and will look at erecting warning signs for sheep and deer crossing. Mr. Graham also outlined the bridges due to have work completed this year. Cllr. Cronin noted she had been inundated lately with calls about potholes on local roads and stated it was a massive issue. The Cathaoirleach thanked both engineers for their reports.

6. To discuss Estate Development Grant Scheme 2021.

Mr. Hickey informed members that application forms for the Estate Development Grant scheme are now available for distribution. Closing date is 5th March at 4 p.m. 2021 and this scheme has also been advertised in last week's edition of The Wicklow People. He advised that applicants are invited from estates with social housing and can be received by post or email once completed. It is hoped to have a list of applicants at next meeting for members to consider allocations.

7. To consider funding application received from West Wicklow Festival.

Mr. Hickey advised members that West Wicklow Festival have submitted a request for funding for 2021 which Baltinglass Municipal District has supported for the last number of years. West Wicklow Festival is hoping to run online in May 2021 and to hold a concert later in November, restrictions withholding. It was agreed to allocate €2,000, the same level of funding as 2020. This was proposed by Cllr. Glennon and seconded by Cllr. Blake.

8. Notice of Motions

a. Notice of Motion in the name of Cllr. Gerry O'Neill (15.02.2021)

“That Baltinglass Municipal District examine an appropriate way to commemorate all the victims from West Wicklow of the Great Famine including the rededication of the Downshire Monument to the victims of the Famine period or the development of an appropriate new monument in Blessington Town Centre”.

Cllr. O'Neill advised members that he is proposing this motion. Cllr. Blake questioned if any member had seconded this motion and pointed out that the date of the motion is 15th February 2021 and members should receive notification of motions fourteen days in advance. Cllr. Blake asked Cllr. O'Neill to withdraw this motion. The Cathaoirleach noted that the motion was in breach of Baltinglass Municipal District Standing Orders and advised members that he was going to give Cllr. O'Neill an opportunity to present a brief summary of his proposal. Cllr. O'Neill advised members that the Downshire monument in Blessington town centre was allegedly built by the people of Blessington in memory of the kind and generous landlords of the area. Cllr. O'Neill stated that during famine times hundreds of Blessington locals were being accommodated in cramped conditions in the number two district workhouse in Naas by British and Irish landlords. Cllr. O'Neill continued that his proposal is to add a plaque to the current monument to commemorate the people who suffered at the hands of the establishment and landlords. Cllr. O'Neill noted that a lot of people from the District had died in Naas No.2 district workhouse and he wished to draw attention to the cruel time in our history in which a lot of people suffered. Cllr. O'Neill advised that the wording should be drawn up by local historians who would have an expertise in the area. Cllr. O'Neill described the monument that had been erected at the old workhouse in Naas and noted that there was no monument to the Famine victims in the Blessington area.

Cllr. Mullen concurred with Cllr. Blake that this motion had not been seconded and should be withdrawn. Cllr. Mullen added that rededicating or changing a monument is very difficult and the Downshire monument is a part of Blessington town and its history. Cllr. Mullen stated that he appreciates Cllr. O'Neill's point of view but requested he withdraw the motion as it is not appropriate and is divisive. Both Cllr. Cronin and Cllr. Timmins agreed that as this motion had not been seconded no more time should be spent discussing. Cllr. Glennon asked Cllr. O'Neill to withdraw his motion or to propose an amended motion at a future meeting. Cllr. O'Neill stated he would withdraw the first part of the motion and apologised if he offended anyone, as the motion was not supposed to be divisive but he noted a number of people had concerns. Cllr. O'Neill asked that the second part of his motion be considered "the development of an appropriate new monument in Blessington Town Centre" and asked if any member would second this proposal. The Cathaoirleach advised that as there was no seconder the motion was dropped.

9. To receive a presentation from Ms. Ann Halpin regarding Sheep Rustling.

The Cathaoirleach suspended the Standing Orders to receive a report from Ms. Anne Halpin on the issue of sheep rustling in the West Wicklow area. Ms. Anne Halpin firstly thanked Baltinglass Municipal District, Mr. Pat Byrne and Cllr. Glennon for the recent works on footpaths in Hollywood. She outlined recent incidents of sheep theft in the Carnew, Hollywood and Vallemount areas and the loss of €138,000 worth of livestock to two farmers and the stress it has caused. Ms. Halpin stated that Wicklow County Council is not responsible for these incidents but that the lack of dog warden activity in the area is a contributor. These incidents have been reported to An Gardaí but in her view they have not been very responsive as it is difficult to get evidence. Ms. Halpin added that there is very little CCTV footage available and they are solely dependent on the reliance of witnesses which is difficult as most rustling occurs late at night and in rural areas. She requested that action be taken to make dog wardens more visible and CCTV is required in more rural areas. Ms. Halpin outlined both the financial and mental stress the rustling placed on local farmers. She thanked all members for their support and noted that she had been talking to Superintendent Farrell regarding the issue and would raise it at the Policing Plan Committee meeting. Cllr. Cronin thanked Ms. Halpin for her report and advised that Superintendent Farrell was investigating this matter. She informed members that she had received correspondence from distressed farmers and was fully supportive of their requests.

10. To pass a resolution for the holding of the March Ordinary Meeting of Baltinglass Municipal District on an online platform at the discretion of the Cathaoirleach at 10.30am on Monday 22nd March 2021 as set out in the Municipal District of Baltinglass, Standing Orders, regulating the business and proceedings of the Municipal District and the Supplementary Standing Orders to regulate the proceedings of remote meeting, Baltinglass Municipal District.

This resolution was passed and proposed by Cllr. Mullen and seconded by Cllr. Cronin.

11. Any other business.

Cllr. Cronin queried if there was any update on the location of a site for Blessington Allotment campaign. Cllr. Glennon proposed raising this with Ms. Kilkeny, District Manager, as she had been dealing with. Cllr. O'Neill asked Mr. Hickey for an update on the town development plan for Blessington at the next meeting.

There being no other business the Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Glennon, concluded the meeting.

Signed: _____

CATHAOIRLEACH

Signed: _____

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR