

**Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Municipal District of Baltinglass on Zoom on 25th
January 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. Breege Kilkenny, District Manager
Mr. Pat Byrne, Senior Executive Engineer
Mr. Dermot Graham, Executive Engineer
Mr. Garvan Hickey, District Administrator
Ms. Andrea Connolly, Assistant Staff Officer
Mr. Brian Dunne, Wicklow Uplands Council

Cathaoirleach Cllr. Glennon welcomed everyone and opened the Baltinglass Municipal District January Ordinary meeting. Cllr. Timmins proposed a vote of sympathy to the people who have passed away recently in the Baltinglass Municipal District due to Covid 19. All members expressed their wish to be associated with this vote of sympathy and extended their sympathies to all families affected. Cllr. Mullen seconded this motion.

Cllr. Timmins requested a suspension of the Standing Orders to discuss the issue of a proposed wind farm in the Kilranelagh area and asked for this issue to be addressed at around 10.45am as members of the West Wicklow Action Group would be joining the meeting at this time. All members were in support of this request and the Cathaoirleach suggested the matter could be discussed under item three – matters arising. The suspension of Standing Orders was seconded by Cllr. Mullen.

1. To confirm and sign minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Municipal District of Baltinglass dated 21st December 2020.

Cllr. Blake proposed the confirmation of the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Municipal District of Baltinglass dated 21st December 2020 and this was seconded by Cllr. Cronin.

2. To confirm and sign minutes of the Special Meeting of the Municipal District of Baltinglass dated 21st January 2021.

Cllr. Mullen proposed the confirmation of the minutes of the Special Meeting of the Municipal District of Baltinglass dated 21st January 2021 and Cllr. Cronin seconded these.

3. Matters Arising.

Cllr. O'Neill raised the issue of Crooksling Nursing home and stated that there was some confusion as to whether the Minister for Health has intervened in the matter. He proposed that a letter be drafted from Baltinglass Municipal District to the Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly, asking for clarification on the proposal for lands at Crooksling. Cllr. Mullen seconded this proposal and the Cathaoirleach also gave his support to the proposal. Cllr. O'Neill outlined the huge importance of Crooksling to the West Wicklow area over the years.

The Cathaoirleach suspended the Standing Orders and Cllr. Timmins thanked members for facilitating. Cllr. Timmins outlined how there was a proposal for a planning application to Wicklow County Council for a wind farm in the Kilranelagh area of Baltinglass and noted that it is of great concern to locals. Cllr. Timmins added that three to four years ago there was a lot of emphasis on the hill forts in the area, nine in the Baltinglass area, and discretionary funding had been provided for archaeological digs to be carried out. Cllr. Timmins also advised that this unique landscape is of huge national and international importance and as part of our heritage which needs to be protected and developed. Cllr. Timmins noted that the area should possibly be considered a national monument area or an area of special conservation. Cllr. Timmins proposed that we should consider making a joint

submission to the Planning section if a planning application is submitted and encouraged others make submissions also. Cllr. Mullen seconded this motion and advised members that he has experience in dealing with onshore wind farms in the past as does Cllr. Blake. Cllr. Mullen noted that the upland landscape within our county is not suitable for wind farms but that ABO Wind Ireland Ltd. will pursue this strategy. Cllr. Mullen also raised concerns that public consultations should place prior to a planning application being submitted to Wicklow County Council and deemed this move as highly disrespectful to local residents and members if an application was submitted without this consultation. Cllr, Mullen noted that brave decisions regarding the development of wind farms in the county will have to be taken in the County Development Plan and these decisions will probably go against national government. Cllr. Mullen advised that we needed smart renewable energy not polluting the landscape.

Cllr. Cronin echoed the concerns of her colleagues on the timing of the submission of the proposed planning application in the middle of a pandemic and noted there was huge frustration in the area. Cllr. Cronin continued that West Wicklow has a unique landscape that needs to be protected and fully supports the community in their efforts. Cllr. Cronin noted that the area is of area of natural beauty as well as an area of national historical importance. Both Cllr. Blake and Cllr. O'Neill concurred with Cllr. Timmins on this issue and Cllr. O'Neill urged his colleagues to use their parties influence to put a stop to this. Cllr. Blake queried if there was anything in the archaeological reports compiled on the digs by UCC that would have a bearing on the development of wind farms in the area.

The Cathaoirleach introduced Mr. David Case to speak on behalf of the community group against Kilranelagh wind farms. Mr. Case thanked the members and advised that Baltinglass hill forts are one of the largest in Ireland and has huge potential as a tourist area. Mr. Case described the disgust felt that ABO Wind Ireland Ltd. are proposing a planning application during a period of lockdown at level 5 which means the community cannot meet up as a group in order to discuss. Mr. Case noted that a previous planning application has been deemed incomplete and has been returned to ABO but raised concerns over the cost of making submissions and asked if individual councillors could also make submissions along with a group submission from the Baltinglass Municipal District. Mr. Case also raised the issue of the Kilranelagh area not zoned as a red area on Wicklow County Development Plan for 2022. He asked if this could be considered in order to protect this area for the future. The

Cathaoirleach asked the members if all were in favour of the motion proposed by Cllr. Timmins and all agreed unanimously. Cllr. Mullen seconded this proposal.

4. Correspondence.

Mr. Garvan Hickey, District Administrator, advised members that correspondence had been received from Tinahely GAA asking for support to renovate the monument at Luke O'Toole's grave in Killavaney. He advised that Mr. Luke O'Toole was the first Ard Runai of the GAA and was involved in the purchase of Croke Park. The club have estimated the restoration of the monument at a cost of €650. Cllr. Mullen advised members that the grave of Luke O'Toole consists of a large Celtic cross and headstone and has aged a lot since being erected by the GAA. Ms. Breege Kilkenny, District Manager, advised that as a heritage project, funding could be sourced from the Heritage Section and to contact Deirdre Burns with regard to an application. If this was unsuccessful funding could be sought from other sources.

Ms. Kilkenny also confirmed that submissions had been received regarding the Baltinglass hill forts and are being considered for the County Development Plan 2022. The Cathaoirleach queried if it was worth passing a motion on the application for funding from Tinahely GAA and Ms. Kilkenny advised Cllr. Mullen and Cllr. Blake to follow up with Ms Deirdre Burns, Heritage Officer. Cllr. O'Neill noted that applications for heritage grants had been unsuccessful in west Wicklow last year and advised that members discretionary funding would be their only option. Cllr. O'Neill added that an application for a heritage grant to erect a monument in Tournant graveyard in Dunlavin had been rejected and he had put forward funding from his discretionary budget instead. Ms. Kilkenny advised that heritage grants are determined by the national Heritage Council and each application is judged on its merits.

Mr. Hickey advised members that correspondence had been received from Mr. Paul Tyrell dated the 30th December 2020 in relation to a discussion at the Baltinglass Municipal District meeting in December regarding the Boyle monument, located in Blessington market square, being rededicated to the victims of the famine. He added that Blessington History Society do not support this motion and have been in contact with the Heritage Section of Wicklow County Council to voice their concerns. Cllr. O'Neill reiterated that there is huge support in Blessington town to rededicate this monument and added that historical groups should be

made aware that this monument was erected by the poor of Blessington to a landlord as hundreds of people died in workhouses in Naas. Cllr. O'Neill added that he will address this again at the February meeting of Baltinglass Municipal District. Mr. Paul Tyrell, who was in attendance via Zoom, interjected by clarifying that it is called the Downshire monument and not the Boyle monument and is protected as part of the Blessington Architectural Conservation Area. He added that what it is dedicated to is not relevant. Cllr. Mullen stated that historical monuments share our past whether good or bad and to amend them is incorrect. He added that regardless of who erected these monuments they need to be protected. Cllr. Timmins advised members that he had no issue with a monument for victims of the famine but did not agree with changing the current monument. Cllr. Blake questioned if anyone had seconded this motion and if not why was this issue still being discussed. Cllr. O'Neill responded that he had not proposed this motion at the previous Baltinglass Municipal District but stated he is proud of remembering the past and the number of people who died in the workhouses during that time. Cllr. O'Neill added that this issue should be debated more openly and wasn't aware this item was on the agenda. Mr. Hickey advised that this issue came under correspondence and was not a separate item on the agenda.

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

Mr. Pat Byrne, Executive Engineer, briefed members on the N81 progress report and advised that Transport Infrastructure Ireland have allocated funding to resurface a section of the N81 from south of Blessington to Russborough bends. It is hoped this project will commence during early summer 2021. He added that works on safety barriers at Knockroe Bends have now been rectified and landscaping works completed. The location for safety works as part of the Safety Fencing Retrofit Programme will be half a kilometre south of the Lamb junction on the N81 and it is hoped that funding can be secured from TII.

Mr. Graham, Executive Engineer, briefed the members on the Non National Roads Report, a copy of which had been distributed to members. He noted that we are now into the last year of the three year road programme and the roadwork's budget allocations for 2021 have not been finalised yet. He advised that all Road Improvement works had been completed last year with the exception of two in the Tinahely area which will be completed once level 5 restrictions are lifted. Cllr. Timmins thanked both engineers for their reports and questioned if there was a timescale in place for the line marking on the Wicklow Gap Road. Mr. Graham

advised that an application for funding had been submitted from Wicklow Municipal District and Baltinglass Municipal District to cover line marking and once received this scheme can commence. Mr. Graham added that the summer months were a more suitable time for line marking. The works would be completed under a safety scheme and Mr. Graham was hopeful of securing funding as it covered two Municipal Districts.

Cllr. Blake commended the great work that has been done on the N81 recently but stressed that the upgrade of the Blessington bypass needs to be pursued. Cllr. Blake also noted that some works had been completed on the R747 route to the M9 and asked if funding could be prioritised for this section of road as it is a significant route through the south of the county. Cllr. Blake queried if there was any update on funding for improvement works on Upper Ballard, Shillelagh and Mr. Graham replied there is a specific improvement grant scheme available for these works which he is researching currently. On the R747 route, Mr. Graham agreed with Cllr. Blake that this route is the second or third route of choice for most and is vital for linkage through the south of the county. Mr. Graham advised that a large part of this road had been resurfaced back in 2016 and a one and half kilometre section at the Ballytore side of Baltinglass is due to be completed this year depending on funding made available.

Cllr. O'Neill thanked both engineers for their roads reports and acknowledged the works completed in the county recently. Cllr. O'Neill added that during the winter months it was essential that emergency crews in towns and villages were able to get out and proposed putting more yellow gritting boxes out so that locals could spread salt in areas where needed. Cllr. O'Neill also raised concerns over the condition of the road surface at Knockieran bridge and advised that there had been a number of minor incidents at this location recently and movement was urgently needed to resolve this issue for once and for all.

Cllr. Mullen raised a number of queries including when the two outstanding improvement projects, Knockananna and Ballingate, would be completed and if the Three Years Road Programme will be completed this year. Cllr. Mullen also raised the issue of the road surface at Kelly's Hill, Tinahely where a number of accidents occurred recently and suggested that if more signage was erected on this road it may help. Cllr. Mullen continued that a number of issues were raised at a community discussion recently regarding road safety works at Knockananna. Mr. Graham advised the two outstanding projects were due to commence in January 2021 but unfortunately due to bad weather and Level 5 lockdown, these works have

been postponed until restrictions are lifted. Mr. Graham noted that he is confident the three years road programme will be completed this year but it depends on the funding made available and once funding has been confirmed the design and procurement process can be prepared. Mr. Graham advised members that significant works have been completed at Knockananna junction and these have improved road safety, there are still some projects to be completed in Knockanna. Mr. Graham added that footpath works at Kelly's Hill will commence once restrictions lift and although road surfacing was completed on this section of road in 2017 there have been a number of accidents in this area due to speed. Mr. Graham advised members that this may need investigating to check if remedial works are required. Both Cllr. Cronin and Cllr. Glennon thanked both engineers for their reports and the road crews for their efforts over the last number of weeks.

6. To discuss the winter maintenance programme.

Cllr. Glennon noted that the installation of extra yellow boxes at the start of steep inclines would help in some rural areas during the winter months as there are some areas where people can become isolated during adverse weather. Mr. Byrne briefed members on the service plan in place for the winter maintenance programme. Mr. Byrne advised that there are two main gritting routes and these are prioritised over unmarked roads which are only gritted in emergencies but that piles of grit have been left out in certain areas that are prone to ice. Gritting boxes are not being used but he will contact Mr. Colm Lavery, Director of Services, with regard to this. Mr. Byrne noted that there are limiting factors with winter maintenance budgets and the number of drivers available but added that the winter gritting team are one of the hardest working crews for Wicklow County Council. Mr. Byrne advised members that more routes cannot be added unless other routes are dropped.

Mr. Graham added that historically piles of grit had been left in areas badly affected by snow or extremely hilly areas and informed members that gritting trucks only have a capacity to carry a certain amount of grit and they are limited to what resources they have available. Cllr. Glennon asked if there was any progress on leaving gritting boxes at steep inclines and Mr. Graham replied that it is being looked at in order to eliminate the grit disappearing from these piles but he is awaiting confirmation from Mr. Lavery. Cllr. O'Neill noted that these stockpiles of grit get washed away during the year and that although Baltinglass Municipal District covers forty per cent of the roads in Wicklow it does not receive forty per cent of the

budgets. He suggested an emergency crew be assembled, like in Nebraska. These crews are available when required to clear their own areas and although, wouldn't be employed full time by Wicklow County Council, they could be considered as support for the municipal district. Cllr. O'Neill noted that he has raised the proposal with the Director of Services Colm Lavery. Cllr. Blake queried what emergency arrangements were in place to deal with potholes during the lockdown. Mr. Byrne replied that all staff had been stood down during the level 5 lockdown and were only called in, in case of emergencies. Mr. Byrne He added that the velocity patcher was being used during this time as it only required a one man crew and would be in the Blessington area tomorrow and the Baltinglass area the following day. He advised that specific instructions were being followed and they would not be responding to every call about a pothole.

Cllr. O'Neill pointed out that Wicklow should look at winter emergency schemes run in areas such as Nebraska where people assist on a voluntary basis in adverse weather to support the local authority.

7. To receive a report on Active Travel and Climate Adaption projects.

A report on Active Travel Measures and Climate Adaption Action Works had been circulated to members prior to the meeting and Mr. Byrne advised that all projects have been completed with the exception of the installation of electric vehicle charge points in Blessington. The proposed charge points are located at Blessington Main Street and the Municipal District offices and it is hoped these works can commence once restrictions have been lifted. Mr. Graham briefed members on the active travel measures in Baltinglass, Shillelagh and Carnew. Mr. Graham advised that works on these pedestrian crossings have been completed and they are awaiting electrical connections which will be completed once restrictions are lifted. Mr. Graham added that the climate adaption funded project at Barnamelia Gap has had some works completed but materials have been procured and works will recommence in February or March. Cllr. Cronin asked when the electric charging points would be installed in Blessington and Mr. Byrne replied that once level 5 restrictions are lifted it is hoped the ESB can start.

8. To receive a presentation from Wicklow Uplands Council.

The Cathaoirleach welcomed Mr. Brian Dunne, Co-ordinator Wicklow Uplands Council to the meeting. Mr. Dunne presented the members with a detailed report on the works of Wicklow Uplands Council. He explained how membership of Wicklow Uplands Council is divided into four panel groups: Farmers & Landowners, Environmental and Recreational Interests, Economic & Tourism Interests and Community. These panels represent the shared and diverse interests found in the Wicklow and Dublin Uplands. Wicklow Uplands Council is an independent voluntary organisation representing diverse member groups and individuals in the Wicklow Uplands. Mr. Dunne highlighted the works the Wicklow Uplands Council including Village Interpretive panels installed recently in Ashford, Lacken and Shillelagh. Mr. Dunne also spoke about the development of trails including St. Kevin's Way which is the only pilgrim path in Wicklow. He added that funding is always a challenge. Their main source of funding of €100,000 comes from the Heritage Council and €30,000 from sponsorship which is now nearing an end but is hopeful that Wicklow County Council Chief Executive, Mr. Frank Curran, might increase funding this year. Mr. Dunne also outlined the following projects SUAS project, PURE, Deer Management, sustainable trails management and Wicklow Trails. Wicklow Uplands Council works in partnership with Wicklow County Council on a number of projects.

The Cathaoirleach thanked Mr. Dunne for his presentation and excused himself from the meeting. He handed over to the Leas Cathaoirleach, Cllr. Cronin, to conclude the meeting. All members thanked Mr. Dunne for his presentation and a number of questions were raised. Cllr. Mullen queried if Wicklow Uplands Council would oppose the proposed wind farm at Kilranelagh and Mr. Dunne replied that the wind farm at Kilranelagh had not yet been discussed by the Uplands Council board. Cllr. O'Neill congratulated Mr. Dunne on the works completed across the uplands in partnership with local communities and noted the work done on the old mass path in Lacken by the local community. Cllr. Blake noted that securing additional funding for works in the District can be difficult for community groups and asked if Wicklow Uplands Council sufficient funding for the range of projects they are involved in. Mr. Dunne replied that funding is sourced through partnerships of different groups all working towards the same goal, however core funding is a limiting issue. Mr.

Hickey, District Administrator, added that in the interest of transparency, he is a Board member of the Wicklow Uplands Council. Cllr. Timmins complimented the work of Wicklow Uplands Council and noted the potential for the development of walking routes in West Wicklow.

9. To discuss the potential ways to leverage additional funding supports for projects in Baltinglass Municipal District.

Mr. Hickey advised that this item was added to the agenda due to the number of schemes that require projects to be “shovel ready” before the submission of applications for funding such as Rural Regeneration and Development Fund and Town and Village Renewal Schemes. Mr. Hickey outlined that he would like to work with members to develop applications for schemes such as the Heritage Council’s Historic Town Initiative Fund for towns such as Baltinglass and Carnew. Projects needed to be identified well in advance and applications prepared with the assistance of cross sectional team including the Heritage Officer and architects. Mr. Hickey commended the hard work of community groups in levering funding into the area. Cllr. Mullen thanked the District Administrator for keeping members informed of funding streams that are available but raised concerns over the looming deadlines for these applications which are made more difficult when groups cannot meet due to restrictions. Cllr. Mullen queried if Government were cognizant of this issue and if any allowances were being made. Mr. Hickey replied that there is some recognition of these times at national level and some deadlines had been extended. Mr. Hickey members to consider if there were any projects in their respective areas that the Municipal District could work with communities on for funding applications including the new transitional LEADER programme

Cllr. O’Neill raised concerns over the possibility of losing funding made available for the refurbishment of Baltinglass Town Square, as work had not commenced on the ground and asked when this project would commence. Mr. Hickey replied that he did not have a timeline to hand but Ms. Hartnett had been working on the project and a design has been submitted. Mr. Graham added that there had been some fine tuning to design plans and he is meeting the consultant on site next week. Mr. Graham added that there had been restraints last year due to the pandemic but that a timescale is needed and will have more information for the next meeting.

10. To pass a resolution for the holding of the February Ordinary Meeting of Baltinglass Municipal District on an online platform at the discretion of the Cathaoirleach at 10.30am on Monday 22nd February 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. O'Neill.

11. Any other business.

There was no any other business.

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

Signed: _____
CATHAOIRLEACH

Signed: _____
DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR

Dated: _____