

**SPECIAL MEETING OF WICKLOW COUNTY
COUNCIL HELD ONLINE VIA ZOOM**

ON

MONDAY 22nd MARCH 2021 AT 2:00 P.M.

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J Sinnamon

**TRANSCRIPT OF SPECIAL MEETING HELD ON MONDAY,
MARCH 22ND 2021:**

CATHAOIRLEACH: Good afternoon, everybody. You are all very welcome. I think we have, certainly we have most people here anyway. Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome and thanks for being here with us. I am going to go out to Lorraine first, Lorraine, if you are there to do a roll call, please.

ADMINISTRATOR: Certainly, Cathaoirleach. Cllr Tommy Annesley?

CLLR ANNESLEY: Here.

ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr Joe Behan.

CLLR BEHAN: Present.

ADMINISTRATOR: Vincent Blake.

CLLR BLAKE: Here.

ADMINISTRATOR: Sylvester Bourke.

CLLR BOURKE: Here.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr M Kavanagh.

CLLR KAVANAGH: Present.

ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr Mags Crean.

CLLR CREAN: Present.

ADMINISTRATOR: Avril Cronin.

CLLR CRONIN: Present.

ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr Erica Doyle. Cllr Gail Dunne.

CLLR DUNNE: Present.

ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr Ferris?

CLLR FERRIS: Present.

ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr Aoife Flynn Kennedy.

CLLR FLYNN KENNEDY: Present.

ADMINISTRATOR: Patsy Glennon.

CLLR GLENNON: Present.

ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr Cronin.

CLLR CRONIN: Here.

ADMINISTRATOR: Pat Kennedy.

CLLR KENNEDY: Here.

ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr Peir Leonard.

CLLR LEONARD: Present.

ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr Grace McManus.

CLLR McMANUS: Present.

ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr Derek Mitchell, I know you are there, Cllr Mitchell.

CLLR MITCHELL: Present.

ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr John Mullen.

CLLR MULLEN: Present.

ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr Miriam Murphy.

CLLR MURPHY: Present.

ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr Jodie Neary.

CLLR NEARY: Present.

ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr Dermot O'Brien.

CLLR D O'BRIEN: Here.

ADMINISTRATOR: Paul O'Brien.

CLLR P O'BRIEN: Present.
ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr R O'Connor.
CLLR O'CONNOR: Here.
ADMINISTRATOR: Gerry O'Neill.
CLLR O'NEILL: Here.
ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr Lourda Scott.
CLLR SCOTT: Here.
ADMINISTRATOR: John Snell.
CLLR SNELL: Present.
ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr Edward Timmins, I know you are there, Cllr Timmins.
CATHAOIRLEACH: He is there, I can see him.
ADMINISTRATOR: Are you on mute? We see him there. Gerry Walsh?
CLLR WALSH: Present.
ADMINISTRATOR: Irene Winters.
CLLR WINTERS: I think Cllr Ferris came in.
ADMINISTRATOR: I will go back. Cllr Cronin?
CLLR CRONIN: Present.
ADMINISTRATOR: Shay Cullen? Erika Doyle? Cllr Ferris?
CLLR FERRIS: Present.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Timmins.
CLLR TIMMINS: I lost the connection during the roll call.
CATHAOIRLEACH: We have you there now.
ADMINISTRATOR: Just the etiquette for the online Zoom meetings. Can the elected members and anyone present, mobile phones should be switched to silent. Please do not leave the online meeting without informing the Cathaoirleach to ensure that the quorum remains. You may use the chat function if you wish to speak or raise your hand. Can you keep cameras and microphones on, when you are not speaking please keep your microphone on mute. You can inform the meeting administrator by telephone if you lose connection in accordance with the regulations for the regulation of remote meetings. Members of the public press you are welcome, please keep your microphones on mute and observe any directions the Cathaoirleach may give. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.
CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Lorraine and thank you members and you are very welcome and management, you are very welcome to this special meeting. I had a request for a Special Meeting from Cllr Joe Behan and it is signed by 15 members. I was very happy to facilitate this meeting, so thank you, members for that. Just before I get into reading that I would also like to read a letter I received from the Chief Executive. It says "*dear Cathaoirleach, as you are aware, a Special Meeting of Wicklow County Council will be held on Monday 22nd of March 2021. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss the following:*

'That the Members of Wicklow County Council call on the Government to reinstate, in the Land Development Agency Bill, the legal requirement that Councillors must consent to the sale of all public land in the ownership of the Council by way of a Disposal Motion (Section 183) voted for by a majority of Councillors in public session.'

I am currently Chairman of the County and City Management Associations Committee on Housing, Building and Land Use and consequently a member of the board Of the Housing Agency and an interim board member of the Land Development Agency. In order to avoid any conflict of interest or perceived bias I will not be attending the above meeting. Mr. Joe Lane, director of housing will be available to take any questions. I trust this in in in order, Frank Curran Chief Executive of Wicklow County Council. I also want to welcome, Joe Lane who will be directing our questions to. The purpose of the meeting today is that, That the Members of Wicklow County Council call on the Government to reinstate, in the Land Development Agency Bill, the legal requirement that Councillors must consent to the sale of all public land in the ownership of the Council by way of a Disposal Motion (Section 183) voted for by a majority of Councillors in public session..

That was signed by 15 members. So members, I am delighted that those members signed that. Cllr Behan, you contacted me first about this and I am going to bring you in first and I also want to just put on the record that there was a Notice of Motion from Cllr Paul O'Brien and Cllr Ferris on this motion and I asked them to withdraw this because I was going to have it as an agenda item at next month's meeting, but we are going to deal with it at this Special Meeting. Cllr Behan, if you are there, can I bring you in.

CLLR BEHAN: Thank you very much. Can I acknowledge the support of the following councillors: Cllr Joe Behan, Cllr Mags Crean, Cllr Jodie Neary, Cllr Anne Ferris, Cllr Paul O'Brien, Cllr Lourda Scott, Cllr Grace McManus, Cllr Dermot O'Brien, Cllr Mary Kavanagh, Cllr Miriam Murphy, Cllr Gerry O'Neill, Cllr John Snell, Cllr Rory O'Connor, Cllr Tom Fortune, Cllr Peir Leonard.

Chairman, I don't propose to keep this meeting very long from my point of view. We have already had representations from a number of sister local authorities throughout the country. We have had very strong statements made by both NAMA, the local authorities members associations and the Association of Local Government.. they are all really saying the same thing, this provision in Section 56 of the Land Development Agency Bill is a bridge too far.

What is proposed in this Bill is the removal of the responsibility for the disposal of public land from, for sale of land to this Land Development Agency Bill. In other words the consent of the elected representatives of the county will not be required if land is transferred from Wicklow County Council to the Land Development Agency. I took the time to read the entire Bill. There is an awful lot in it and a lot we could talk about today. Effectively what we are talking about today is the creation of a superagency which is effectively going to acquire land compulsorily from many public bodies across the State. The lack of accountability, public

accountability to public representatives is astonishing, how far this Bill can reach. However, to confine our remarks to the day, we have every, practically every meeting we have notices of disposal on our agenda because we, as guardians of the public interest, must agree to any public land being sold to any organisation or any person. With regard to this Land Development Agency Bill, the Land Development Agency can require, from Wicklow County Council land that they will then decide what will happen with it. Whether it's sold on to a developer, a private developer, whether it's used for developing affordable housing or council housing, or local authority housing, or whatever the case might be. Effectively the council has no choice, the council executive have to hand it over and the councillors are completely bypassed. In the Dail debate on this on the 17th of February, Mr. O'Brien refers to the fact that bypassing Section 183 will only be used in limited circumstances where agreement on lands is not possible. What that really effectively means is if the local council don't agree this land should be disposed of to the Land Development Agency it doesn't matter, they are going to take it anyway and we, the guardians of public interest will be completely bypassed. I think people of all parties and none, right across the political spectrum, particularly in local government are quite unhappy and angry and appalled at this development. That is why I am putting forward this, we are putting forward this motion. We are asking the councillors to accept it and that we communicate the decision today, if it is agreed to the powers that be, which is obviously the Minister for the Environment. So I want a proposal.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Behan. Cllr Behan, Gerry Walsh.

CLLR WALSH: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Can you hear me?

CATHAOIRLEACH: We can.

CLLR WALSH: Just following on from Cllr Behan's opening there, I like to add to that. The Bill in question, which was published on the 3rd of February, 2021, it has passed a second stage of the Dail, it was at the committee stage now. Effectively three stages to go with that. So looking at the Bill and in particular one would have to have concerns in relation to Section 56. So which, really with the stroke of a pen removes the councillors' democratic power to having a final vote with regard to the sale and transfer of local authority lands to any third party.

Really, Cathaoirleach, this needs further scrutiny. Looking at it, any public lands identified by the Land Development Agency are exempted from Section 183 with councillors being bypassed by any transaction, effectively giving the LDA first refusal on said lands. I would have serious concerns in relation to this fact and really, as directly elected public representatives, we have a democratic mandate to ensure the local authority will get the best value and that the sale and transfer of such lands is in the best interests of citizens our country. So really furthermore, if you look at the programme for Government and also it's in contravention of that, the Programme for Government, under the heading Local Government it talks about devolving more powers to local authorities through the legislative process and strengthening and

enhancing local democracy. Again this is in contradiction of that straight away.

Really, also, Cllr Behan referred to other areas around the Act and one such requirement that I looked at is that a portion of the lands only rather, can be used to deliver affordable housing by the LDA or any party acquiring such land. This is already proving problematic. It opens the door effectively for some land to be transferred to private developers thus impacting on the overall ambitions of providing affordable houses, which we all support. So I would propose really that we write to the minister, where as we welcome the idea around affordability, noting the introduction of the LDA Bill 2020, that we would call for the minister to re-examine the inclusion of Section 56 and all that is included in that and the Bill, which, also, as I said, excludes the application of Section 183 of the Local Government Act in relation to the local authority lands. Other council, I believe have already taken this step, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you.

ADMINISTRATOR: Could I just come in there for a second. I see all the hands for members to speak. If there are proposals coming from the floor they need to be handed to the Cathaoirleach. As we are not in a physical space, if there are proposals coming from the floor they need to be emailed to the meeting's administrator. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Lorraine. Cllr Paul O'Brien.

CLLR P O'BRIEN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, for facilitating this meeting. I just want to second what Cllr Behan has made and commend him for having the foresight to convene such a meeting. We have this motion submitted for next month. We welcome this meeting today.

In the past I have been criticised for saying a topic is above politics but I would like to echo that fact. I am conscious we have seven Fianna Fail councillors and I hope this debate doesn't turn into a partisan attack on them because it happens to be a Fianna Fail minister. We oppose the removal of the role of elected member have in Land Development Agency. For far too long, successive governments have been trying to kill off local democracy in what I can describe as death by a thousand cuts. In this programme of Government they promise to enhance local Government, but the records speak anything but. Again it's time for councillors to unite under one and oppose this attack on what I can say is local democracy.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Tom Fortune.

CLLR FORTUNE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Again, I think this is a really vital topic and I want to thank Cllr Behan for bringing it forward and I fully endorse what he has said. My comments are quite brief, Cathaoirleach. I am totally in agreement with what Cllr Behan has already said. I would second every word that he mentioned. I think the comments around Section 56 is very important. Obviously the attack, or all the issues around Section 183.

Can I make just a general point, Cathaoirleach, if I may. I think aside from the serious issue that is going on here, this is a wake-up call in my view for councillors. This is, there has been a continuous chipping away

and chipping away of the powers that councillors have had and should have in running the business on behalf of the people who elect them. It's been taken away from us in every section, if you wanted to do a helicopter view of the Council. I think this particular move is a real wake-up call for councillors. I think the day has arrived and it's way overdue. There is 32 councillors in Wicklow County Council and for at least a period of I would say 12 months we need to act as one unit, or if not they are going to wipe us out. That is what they are about here.

If you look at the way the trends are, with all kinds of things going on from the point of view of taking powers away from us. The silence of our TDs on this issue is deafening. That is a serious issue and I don't believe they support us at all. We need to call that out for what it is. It is a wake-up call in my opinion for us as councillors.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Shay Cullen.

CLLR S CULLEN: Thank you, Chairman, thank you for facilitating the meeting. I did raise this at our last meeting for our next meeting, but look we are here today and that is fine. I suppose I am just part of the AILG as is Cllr Behan and I attended a meeting last week about this topic and it was very clear that all Councils across the country that were in attendance were very much against the Land Development Agency progressing.

I suppose a couple of points I want to get answers to from Director Lane is they are suggesting that this Land Development Agency Bill is only applies in a population over 10,000 and the lands will only be offered to the Land Development Agency in the event of the Council wanting to dispose of the land. I find that difficult to understand, because I think with a budget of 1.2 billion that is being put together for the Land Development Agency, I think they are going to be given very clear powers to purchase land anywhere they can get hold of it. So I certainly very much against that. I think, as has been said earlier, I think this will take away the reserve functions of members across the country. I think it's another stick to beat us with, in terms of the likes of the housing crisis. It's very quick for the likes of the Department of Housing to blame councillors and Councils, but at the end of the day, if housing is taken away from us, it's just another power, it's another one of our powers that has been taken away. I just can't accept that. I suppose a couple of points I want to make, the community gain out of the Council's building local authority houses, that is going to be up for question, will there be community gain if the Land Development Agency takes over and builds houses. Will that happen? It was pointed out in the LAIG that one size doesn't fit all population size, the larger population areas should be looked at differently to the more rural counties. I think that is important. Another suggestion is where does this fit into the county development plan going forward. I have looked at this every which way and I cannot see any positive out of supporting a Land Development Agency Bill. I think we are going to be undermined as has been said earlier. There is nothing that I have heard in any commentary to date that would suggest to me that this is a worthwhile supporting the Land Development Agency

Bill. So for those reasons I am totally opposed to the Land Development Agency going ahead.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Grace McManus.

CLLR McMANUS: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just my appreciation to Cllr Behan for getting us organised and to be, Cathaoirleach. I have really enjoyed listening to what the councillors have said to far. From my perspective, it makes me suspicious. Now I am newer to the local politics things, but it makes me suspicious why they wouldn't want us to be involved. We are the people on the ground and we are hearing the day-to-day why we couldn't be a positive asset for the development of social and affordable housing? I think looking at the Bill it's because we might not agree with some of the definitions. So, in the Bill, affordable is deemed anything that is below the average market price. Just for councillors' information, in January 2021 for purchase under Bray that is anything under 389,000. In Greystones it's anything below 400,000 and in Wicklow 383,000. Or in rent 1.330, in Greystones 1576 and for people my age, I am 29 years old, for people in their 20s that is not affordable. I am suspicious, when we say affordable housing will be provided, if you can't get councillors to buy into your definition of affordable, you take away their vote and their say. For that reason I think we should be fighting to have a say and I want to commend Cllr Behan for pushing for this and that is why I think this is happening and that is why I support the motion.

CATHAOIRLEACH: John Snell.

CLLR SNELL: Look, I feel this is another attack on local democracy. We have had it a number of years ago when the town councils, the abolition of town councils in 2014. We would have remembered the old Section 140s as part of the Planning Act. That was taken away from us and restricted. Now it's another attack. I think it's getting to the stage where all 32 councillors, let there be no divide between us. We are all publicly elected members. But our power has been diminished day by day. The reality is a public representative, a County Councillor now, if this goes through, I think it's the final nail in the coffin. You would be better off being part of a Town Team because you don't get the head aches and nuisances that are mentioned day in and day out in regards to everything that goes on in the county, but we are expected to put up with all of this.

I won't drive no wedge between no councillor because I don't care what party you are, or if you are an independent, the reality is we have to be united on this. Limerick, Kerry, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, they have all passed this. They have all wrote to the minister. It's about actual that we wrote to the minister as well in unison. We wrote to the Minister and let him know we are not happy in Wicklow. Anyone that has any clout with our national TDs get them to speak up. This is not right. As everyone knows, we hear about TDs getting pay rises when it comes to councillors getting pay rises you never heard a word. Nothing is being done, the Report is still sitting there, nothing is happening, there genuinely is no incentive for anyone to get involved in local politics at grassroots level. I have every disposal motion that comes before me in the last is it years. I have them all. I take the role very seriously in regard to disposing of public lands.

This, in my opinion, is a step too far. I believe that as 32 councillors we should all consider our future in politics if this goes through. That is how seriously I treat it. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: We will get to everyone, there is a lot of hands up, I promise I will get to everyone. Cllr Irene Winters.

CLLR WINTERS: I am glad we are discussing this. If I had been asked to sign for the special meeting I would have signed for it. I agree with everything that has been said so far. I know it was asked to be put on the agenda for the next meeting, it was probably to have it as a single item so that people realise the significance and the seriousness of it. It would appear from what there is in the press and anecdotally that the reason that this is being done and the Land Development Agency has been set up is because in certain local authorities, the permanent Government are unhappy with the decisions that are being taken by elected members. That is really serious. So whether I agree with the decisions of elected members or not, if they are in a majority and they are elected then what they say should go. And anything that is done by the public service to thwart it has to be opposed. I think this Land Development Agency Bill should not go ahead, I think it's there to thwart the will of the elected members and that is wrong on every single occasion. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Edward Timmins.

CLLR TIMMINS: Thank you, Chairman. Thank you, Cllr Behan for bringing this matter to the meeting today. I have the same opinion as the other speakers, I will just add a few other points to it.

This clearly further erodes our powers as local representatives. It's almost as if we are not to be trusted with decisions in our area, areas that we know better than anyone else. Where we are close to the ground, we are not allowed to make decisions which is completely wrong and isn't logical either. Like, just looking across the areas of local government, the development plan, one of our main powers, that has been undermined by National Planning Frameworks and that is undermining completely our ability to shape a Development Plan.

We have, also lost the Section 140 power, about ten years ago at this stage. That is planning attacks. Roads a long time ago before I joined the Council. The national roads were taken over by GII, no say there. So you are creating these extra layers, where officials centrally are completely unaccountable to the local authorities and to the local public representatives. We can't ask questions, we can't ask questions like we can here every month to the officials because the officials are not making the decisions and they refer to the TII.

On water and sewage, we all know that, seven or eight years ago Irish Water took over, so it's one cut after another. We are becoming less relevant.

So there is no doubt we have to completely oppose this, it undermines this, it's like turkeys voting for Christmas. We can't accept this and we

should be looking at bringing more powers to local government, not increase them.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Lourda Scott.

CLLR SCOTT: Thank you, Chair. I just want to echo a lot of what has been said, it's great to hear unified voice on this, it's really important. It's not only about the concern of removing powers from elected reps, but by extension we are removing power from the community. As councillors we are supposed to be the voice of the community in the council chamber, the custodians of the public land, the community's land. We are definitely best-placed to communicate local knowledge and to assist the executive in local planning, so more autonomy has to be given, not removed, so I absolutely support Cllr Behan in bringing this motion and I don't support the LDA at all for these reasons.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Gerry O'Neill.

CLLR O'NEILL: I didn't have my hand up at that time, you caught me on the hop. First of all, I want to thank you, Cathaoirleach for having this meeting, allowing this meeting today and for Cllr Behan. I also want to offer my sympathies to Joe on the death of his mother-in-law only the other day.

So, again I would be very brief there, I fully support the motion, I fully support all of my colleagues on the Council on everything I have heard so far. It definitely is, it would be the nail in the coffin for local authorities. We had our own Municipal meeting this morning and I spoke on the same issues on the erosion of our powers.

So I want to, concur especially with Cllr John Snell and Cllr Edward Timmins on what they have said. Really there is times here I have to actually ask voluntary groups what is the situation on the issues? They know more about actually what is happening in the area than I, as an elected member. It's very important. This is a huge issue, on the land issue. Right across the board, it's very important that the people who were elected, whether we like the councils or not, were elected by the people. We should be listened to. We are only there making representations on what comes to our door. So any further erosion of local authorities is wrong, totally wrong, so I just want to fully support and say well done to Cllr Behan for bringing this motion forward.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr R O'Connor.

CLLR O'CONNOR: I just wanted to talk about the long-term damage our democracy with this as a young person. You kind of ask yourself, why would you get involved in local government, if you are look running out of powers and people are emailing you and all of that. I also want to talk about when it comes to election time, if you came to the door and all you hear about in the news is taking away power, like why would you bother even take your time out of your day to vote for one if they have no powers. I think it's a deadly road we are going down. I wanted to voice my opinion on that.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr John Mullen.

CLLR MULLEN: I would like to echo what everyone else has said and thank you Cllr Behan and yourself for facilitating the meeting. I suppose

the nutshell of this is that this is an attack on democratic accountability. Since the financial crash the Irish reaction in the political sphere has been to centralise everything. It's a fact that we have the most highly centralised form of government, not only in western Europe, but in the world. When you take away powers, whether it be planning roads, Irish Water, away from elected representatives and put them in the hands of technocrats. Yes, they are skilled, but you end up forming a technocracy. The last time that happened was in the Soviet Union. That didn't finish up too great.

We have to have accountability. That means public representatives must centre a role in deciding public policy. If we centralise everything, make everything unaccountable and we are living in times at the moment where you would wonder, with lockdowns and everything, how much is public policy shaped by experts and how much is it publicly accountable to the people? That is a very dangerous road to keep going down and not expect consequences. As public representatives I am glad we are united today. We are not doing party political bickering. We are just saying, big red light flashing enough is enough.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr M Kavanagh. You are on mute, Mary.

CLLR M KAVANAGH: Can you hear me?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes, can hear you now.

CLLR M KAVANAGH: Sorry, my computer is acting up. I just want to add my voice to all of the other voices. I am delighted to see that everyone so far is on board. I just want to ask really is there a Plan B? Cllr Walsh referred to the fact that it's already in contravention of part of the Act. So if it's in contravention of that, how do we deal with that? There has to be some kind of legal remedy. I mean you can't just come in and railroad over democratically elected representatives who are here to represent the public. We are here through a proper legal process. How can all of our powers be suddenly eroded away if we all object to it. So what is the Plan B. How do we deal with this? Yes, if every county in the country wrote in and objected and they still railroaded through it, what do we do? Is there any solution out there? Are they breaking the law? Can we go a legal route? Is there something, we can all sit and complain forever about it, but what can we actually do about it? That is all I want to ask.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Kavanagh. Has anyone else got their hand up that I can't see on the screen? I think I have everyone.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Pat Fitzgerald has his hand up and Cllr Derek Mitchell.

CATHAOIRLEACH: We will go to Pat Fitzgerald now.

CLLR FITZGERALD: Look it, as a councillor, and I represent one of the Government parties, I am very disappointed by what is entered in the land Development Act as they call it. I and some other members of the party have made my views known to people who are making the decisions. I read through that the last few nights and I think it has been mentioned, it's an attack on democracy. Certainly councillors are not in the equation and over the last 22 years, I am a councillor for 22 years, we made a decision for many year, they seem to be, being asked to

support the decisions that people who maybe mightn't care too much about councillors, but different times when they are seeking election.

So I fully support the motion and I want to thank Cllr Behan for bringing the motion forward. I have no hesitation. I will support the motion.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Fitzgerald. Derek Mitchell.

CLLR MITCHELL: I want to say I support the motion for the reasons stated by most of the other people.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Mitchell. I don't want to leave anyone out. I don't see anyone else. Cllr Gail Dunne?

CLLR DUNNE: I just want to thank, Cllr Behan for bringing this to the meeting. Very worthwhile subject to have a Special Meeting on. I have to say, I totally agree with all the sentiments and I won't take too much of the meeting, but I will say when we are looking for direction from the Government with things like the Local Property Tax and asking questions they are nowhere to be seen, yet they want to take our powers away. This attack on local democracy, that is all this is and it shouldn't be allowed to go through.

ADMINISTRATOR: Thank you, Cllr Dunne.

CLLR FORTUNE: Can I make one additional point if there is no one else coming in in. Just for information and maybe a lot of members might have seen this. There was an article around this in the papers, the weekend before this one. I will just read it very quickly, a quick quote from it, which is very important. It says one senior Government source said that there are real anxieties that the minister could be creating an NAMA or even worse an HSE for planning. You look what happened when we took the Health Boards. They warned a dangerous experiment is happening and not without political risk either. Councillors may be at the bottom of the political food chain, but you don't need to alienate the totality of them. I think that captures a good bit what of what was said by other members.

I repeat what I said earlier, I think this is a real wake up call for us. If we talk about this today and send off a complaint in Wright through Lorraine for the department, and hope something happens. I think we need to do more on this, we need to stand up and be counted on this. This is a joke now, from our perspective, I am expressing a personal view, obviously. But this is really serious and we do need to take action, because if you listen to what Cllr Timmins and others have said about the various things that are now gone, the Executive now makes decisions that we should be making in lots of cases. Even in their case, some of the decisions have gone back to the Department. This is a real attack on democracy and, as 32 people, we are elected by the people to act on their behalf, we shouldn't allow this to happen at all and we should protest in whatever way we need to do it to highlight it. I think, writing an email or a letter or a comment to the Department is not going to be sufficient. We need to call out our TDs on it and say "okay, are you with us on this? What is your position on this? " We do need to know that.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Fortune. I don't see any other hands at the moment.

ADMINISTRATOR: Cllr Peir Leonard has her hand up..

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr Leonard.

CLLR LEONARD: I just want to echo what everyone has said. I think it's quite scary listening to the more experienced councillors listening to what is happening here. We, as 32 councillors need to come together and form a strategy of how we are going to counteract what is happening. I think what Cllr Mullen has said is extremely scary. That we need to do more, but we also need to create a strategy going forward and claim back and protect the democracy for future generations.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cllr Leonard. Cllr Walsh, did you want to come in back in?

CLLR WALSH: Yes, a number of people have expressed their concerns when I enquired at Oireachtas level, it's at committee stage at the moment for amendment. There are a group of TDs and Senators I am told working currently with the minister to address a number of issues around this. So I suppose it's important we add our voice to the other local authority that's have already expressed their concerns. And also to the TDs as I think it was Cllr Fortune referred to earlier.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I don't see any more hands at the moment. I am going to bring in Director Joe Lane Now. There wasn't a huge amount in that there, was more contributions than questions.

DIRECTOR LANE: I didn't hear any housing questions. They were all democracy or Section 56 type questions I think, rather than housing questions, unless I stand corrected?

CATHAOIRLEACH: I think so. We have a proposal from Cllr Behan. It is seconded by Cllr Paul O'Brien. If everyone is agreement with that I am going to go over to Lorraine.

ADMINISTRATOR: Exactly we have a proposal by Cllr Behan and seconded by Cllr Paul O'Brien. If, unless there is any dissent, from what I am hearing it's unanimously agreed across all the elected members present.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Agreed.

CLLR SNELL: It can be forwarded to other local authorities.

ADMINISTRATOR: We can indeed, Cllr Snell.

CATHAOIRLEACH: One at a time, Cllr Edward Timmins.

CLLR TIMMINS: Could I say.

CATHAOIRLEACH: We can't hear you, Cllr Edward Timmins.

CLLR TIMMINS: Unanimous in the submissions to the minister. Could this decision from Wicklow County Council was a unanimous decision, could that be stated?

ADMINISTRATOR: Absolutely.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Cllr Behan.

CLLR BEHAN: Cathaoirleach, I just wanted to say a word when the decision has been made, if you don't mind.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes.

CLLR BEHAN: If it's okay, I am certainly very heartened with all of the contributions that have been made here today, because what comes out of everything that has been said by every single member and I know by the ones who haven't spoken but by their not speaking they have consented to what has been said. It's a clear and strong support for local

democracy. Ensuring that the decisions that we make, that we are accountable for them rather than being hived off to some other body.

I want to pay tribute to every single member, particularly those members who represent Government parties because it's not easy to let's say publicly articulate a view that might not necessarily agree with the national party line. I think it indicates everyone's support for local democracy. I think the people of the county should be certainly encouraged, listening to what is being said by every one of the members here today, that we take our responsibilities, extremely seriously. When it comes to disposal of public property, that is one of our most serious jobs and our most serious responsibilities. It's heartening to hear every councillor saying the same thing with regard to that and I think it's an important message to give back to the people we represent. I want to thank everyone for the support today on this matter.

On a point of order, if you like, or point of information, I would certainly welcome a copy of the Chief Executive's letter that you read out at the start of the meeting, please.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Cllr Behan, thank you, members. Just to say myself I was delighted to be able to facilitate this meeting, I fully support what the member just agreed and thank you for those that did sign it, I think as a previous speaker did say, we all would have signed that for this very serious topic. So Cllr Behan, thank you for bringing forward the motion and thank you to the members who signed it. I think you wouldn't have any difficulty in any of us signing this for this Special Meeting. I also want to thank everyone for facilitating the meeting, the management for being online with us today. So members, thank you very much and we will be in touch, during the next few weeks and we have our next meeting in a couple of weeks' time. Thank you very much, members.

ADMINISTRATOR: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, thank you members. Take care.