

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Municipal District of Baltinglass held in Blessington Civic Offices on 27th January 2025 at 10.30am

Present: Cathaoirleach Patsy Glennon
Councillor Jason Mulhall
Councillor Avril Cronin
Councillor Gerry O'Neill
Councillor Peter Stapleton
Councillor Pat Mahon

In Attendance: Ms. Theresa O' Brien, District Manager
Mr. Pat Byrne, Senior Executive Engineer
Mr. Liam Cullen, District Administrator
Ms. Christina Brophy, Clerical Officer

Mr. John Bowes, Senior Engineer, Roads Section, Wicklow County Council
Mr. Brendan Doyle, Executive Engineer
Mr. John Aherne, Roughan & O' Donovan Civil Engineering
Mr. Stephen Cummins, Engineer, Kildare County Council
Mr. Kevin Tynon, Engineer, Kildare County Council

Apologies: Mr. Dermot Graham, Executive Engineer

Cathaoirleach Patsy Glennon opened the January meeting of Baltinglass Municipal District and welcomed all present.

Votes of Sympathy

Cllr. Cronin expressed a vote of sympathy to the family of Oscar Traynor, Rathvilly, Co. Carlow, formerly of Raheny, Dublin who died suddenly of 17th December 2024.

Mr. Cullen expressed a vote of sympathy to the family of Mrs, Ann Halloran (nee Walsh) who passed away on the on 14th January 2025 in the loving care of all at Baltinglass Hospital. Mrs O' Halloran was the mother of Seamie O' Halloran, G.S.S., Baltinglass Municipal District and grandmother of Ray Halloran, Plumber, Baltinglass Municipal District.

May they rest in peace.

A minutes silence was observed.

1. To welcome newly co-opted Councillor Pat Mahon to Baltinglass Municipal District.

Cathaoirleach Patsy Glennon welcomed newly co-opted Cllr. Pat Mahon on to the Baltinglass Municipal District, stating he will be a great addition to the Council. This was unanimously agreed supported by all of the members.

2. To confirm and sign the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Municipal District of Baltinglass dated 16th December 2024.

It was proposed by Cllr. Mulhall, seconded by Cllr. Cronin and unanimously agreed to confirm and sign the minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Municipal District of Baltinglass dated 16th December 2024.

3. Matters Arising.

Cllr. O' Neill raised concerns surrounding the Blessington Town plan, particularly if there is to be a loss of parking spaces resulting from the pedestrianisation of the Town Square. He stated that the market square has been used for trading by generations of people from Blessington and he would not like funding to be wasted on a plan that includes removing existing parking spaces. Cllr. O' Neill said that in his opinion none of the business people are in favour of such a plan.

Cllr. Mulhall said he would like to first see what is proposed and then review and make a decision on the plan. In its current state he feels the square is unsafe for pedestrians and motorists. His opinion is that people have mixed views on the future development of the area.

4. To receive a presentation: Briefing in advance of a non-statutory public consultation on the Emerging Preferred Option for the N81 Whitestown Lower Project and the N81 Hangman's Bend and the Tuckmill Project.

Mr. Bowes and Mr. Doyle presented the members with the proposed upgrade plans for parts of the N81. Mr. Doyle informed the members that the first Statutory Display took place on 27th March 2024, this is still available online, the website is www.N81whitestownandtuckmill.ie, the second Statutory meeting will take place on Thursday 30th January 2025 in Germaine's in Baltinglass.

Mr. Aherne informed the members that the two projects will run parallel to one another and some of the scheme objectives will address matters such as;

- Road Safety
- Reduce Road Collisions
- River Slaney – special area of conservation
- Cultural Heritage sites

Mr. Aherne also advised that the progress to date has included a completed constraint study; a feasibility study was done in October 2022 in conjunction with Kildare County Council. There will be a holistic appraisal of all preferred options.

Members Comments and Observations

Cllr. Cronin thanked all for sharing the presentation with the councillors and she said that any upgrade to the N81 is welcomed, stating she has requested this on many occasions. She raised

concerns about the impact the proposed project could have on homeowners and landowners in the area where the proposed work is to be carried out.

Cllr. Cronin asked if landowners will be provided with an opportunity to speak with the Engineers at the upcoming meetings and also enquired if the proposed works are dependent on funding. Mr. Bowes replied that there will be staff at the meeting to talk to people privately or they can also request to meet at a later date. He also informed the members that TII have committed to funding up to stage 4 at present.

Cllr. Stapleton queried if there were any reviews since the first public consultation was done. Mr. Bowes replied that some plans were tweaked to try to avoid the impact on landowners, pointing out this is why the public consultations are done early to get feedback and tweak so that the process is as accommodating and transparent as possible.

Cllr. O' Neill thanked all for the presentation and said N81 improvements are badly needed but that he is concerned that land could be frozen and nothing might happen for years. Mr. Aherne replied that approx. 15 landowners will be affected.

Cllr. Mulhall asked that maps of the project plans be displayed in the MD office and Baltinglass Library. Mr. Bowes agreed to this request.

Cllr. Glennon said any improvements to the N81 are welcome but asked that the landowners be dealt with respectfully and compassionately.

Cllr. Glennon asked Mr. Bowes for an update on the traffic safety plan Blessington South. Mr. Bowes said this project has gone to tender for the appointment a design consultant and he is hopeful this an appointment will be made soon, this has to then go to TII for approval before going to tender for a contractor to be appointed for works to commence. He advised it is a lengthy process as all TII procedures and processes must be adhered to and followed.

Regarding the Hollywood project, Mr. Bowes said this has been a long process and a lot of time has been spent going back and forth to TII in order to progress the project. He is hopeful that the tender for works will go out towards the end of March and envisions a start date in June or July. Cllr. O' Neill said this issue has been going on 10 years, he stated that all the people of Hollywood wanted was a pole in the ground highlighting it as an area for the bus to stop. Mr. Bowes replied that it is not just a matter of erecting a bus stop sign, footpaths and traffic calming measures are a requirement so that the area is safe for when using the service.

Mr. Byrne informed the members that TII are currently carrying out a safety audit on existing bus stop locations on the N81. It thought that some of the existing bus stops may be deemed unsafe.

5. Update on Baltinglass RRDF

Mr. Cullen sated that there has been no further progress on the Baltinglass Public realm project, negotiations are still ongoing with the consultants.

Mr Byrne said the Park is progressing well with new paths to be installed in the coming days. Mr Cullen advised that a grant has been secured for a new basketball court and for tree planting to the value of the €10,000.

Courthouse - Mr. Cullen advised that District Manager Ms. O' Brien and himself have applied for heritage grant funding with a view to carrying out works on the roof of the Courthouse

Members Comments and Observations

Cllr. Mahon queried why Wicklow County Council are still persisting working with ARUP since they failed on the initial survey, he queried can a new consultant not be appointed to carry out the works. Mr. Byrne replied that there is a contract in place with Arup and to start the process over again would be costly and probably even more time consuming, he pointed out to Cllr Mahon that big projects like this one are managed centrally from HQ in Wicklow. Cllr. Cronin said it is frustrating that this has gone on for so long and to the people it looks like the council are not keeping on top of this project, since 2019 this project has been moved from one department to another and there is no consistency, this is a major problem. Cllr. Mulhall agreed with these views stating the timelines not being met is no longer acceptable. He also suggested he would like to see Blessington RRDF added to the agenda.

Blessington RRDF

Cllr. O' Neill said he does not wish to see the Main Square pedestrianised, losing much needed car parking spaces. Mr. Byrne informed the members that and Town Centre First plan was carried out and out of that plan came the proposal to make the square more pedestrian friendly, he said that if the Main Square cannot be pedestrianised we don't have a project to proceed with, pointing out it would be a complete waste of funding to formulate a plan without the support of the elected members.

Cllr. O' Neill said he understands Mr. Byrnes views but he felt that the Businesses in the town don't want this plan. He pointed out that as representatives for the people the elected members views must be taken into account. Cllr. Mahon said the councillors have to represent all the people including the ones who do want change. Cllr. Glennon pointed out regardless of any proposed plans, the elected members will have the final say on a project going ahead and that the process will be democratic.

Cllr. Mulhall said parking is a major issue in Blessington, his view is that people are parking in the centre of the town then getting the bus to Dublin or working in the town all day thus taking up prime parking spots, he also pointed out that at the weekends people come into the town ,then carpool to go hillwalking which results in very little turnover of car parking spaces. He also queried why the multi storey carpark at Dunnes Stores is permanently closed.

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

Mr. Byrne presented the members with the January Roads reports, he said the new 3 year programme runs from 2025 – 2027 inclusively and that they are still awaiting confirmation on the amount of funding allocated.

Members Comments and Observations

Cllr. Mulhall said that the new ramps installed at Baltinglass GAA have no markings and are not very visible. Cllr. Cronin agrees with this stating they are very dangerous.

Cllr. Cronin commented that the streetlights in Dunlavin are now repaired and thanked everyone that progressed and helped sort this issue.

Cllr. Mulhall asked that the CE be reminded to publish notices in the newspapers in relation to the public lighting issue. Cllr. O' Neill asked that Cats eyes replacement be continued on N81 particularly around Kilbride. Mr. Byrne said he will follow up on this matter.

Ms. O' Brien said she wanted to acknowledge the great work has been done by the Engineers and the outdoor crews in dealing with the many severe storms over the past few months. Cllr. Glennon echoed these comments.

7. To discuss the recent proposed plan by the Department of Children, Disability, Integration and Youth to relocate Ukrainian families from their homes in Blessington, a plan which was subsequently withdrawn by the Department.

Cllr. Glennon suggested a proposal for an extension of time for the meeting. This was proposed by Cllr. Mulhall and seconded by Cllr. Cronin

Cllr. O' Neill thanked the Cathaoirleach for including this item on the agenda, he advised that there has been a temporary reprieve regarding this plan to relocate the Ukrainians out of the Avon. He proposed a motion that the members write to the Department to withdraw all agreements with Avon and Quanta Capital. He stated that the behaviour that has taken place in the Avon Ri is despicable, he said brought this issue to the full council meeting previously stating that not just Ukrainian families but Irish and other Non-national families are literally being thrown out of their homes in order to facilitate the housing of refugees for larger amounts of money . He called on the other members to boycott these organisations.

Cllr Mulhall said that the situation need to be looked at from a humanitarian point of view stating that these people have lived in the community for years and are employed locally and that their children attend schools in the area.

Cllr. Stapleton stated this is a really difficult situation and we need to move on from temporary refuge housing situations. Cllr. Mahon commended the work done by elected members and Deputy Edward Timmins in order to overturn the planned relocation. Cllr. Cronin said this is a really sad situation and that the people living there have been treated horrendously.

Cllr. Glennon said he is glad that the Department showed compassion and commended Cllr. O' Neill, Cllr. Mulhall and Deputy Timmins for the work done to date.

Cllr. Mulhall said the wording of the motion would need to be clarified before he would make a decision to vote on this. Cllr. Mahon agreed saying that we need to be careful what's written so as not to affect current tenants. Cllr. Cronin said she agrees with some of what Cllr. O' Neill is proposing but is concerned how that would impact the current residents. Cllr. Glennon suggested to Cllr. O' Neill to write what he is asking for and circulate to the members for their perusal. Ms. O' Brien urged the members to be very careful, she said while she understands Cllr. O' Neill's point of view but she would hate for the current residents however temporary, to be evicted with immediate effect. Cllr. Mahon agreed saying the wording needs to be correct.

Concerns were also raised by Cllr O'Neill regarding business's operating in the Avon Ri without appropriate planning permission. Cllr Glennon said that any planning issues should be dealt with by the planning department.

8. Correspondence

Mr. Cullen informed the members that the Lakeshore Striders would like to make a presentation at the next meeting. The Members agreed to this request

Mr. Cullen also informed the meeting that Catherine Keogh , chairperson of the Blessington Forum sent a letter thanking the members for the donations towards the Christmas Lights.

The Local Enhancement Plan (LEP) is now open for community groups, the closing date is 07th March.

9. Any other business

10. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Monday 24th February at 10:30am.

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

Signed: 

CATHAOIRLEACH

Signed:  

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR

Dated: 24th February 2024