

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Municipal District of Baltinglass held on Zoom on 28th February 2022, at 10.30am

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

In Attendance: Ms. Breege Kilkenny, District Manager
Mr. Pat Byrne, Senior Executive Engineer
Mr. Dermot Graham, Executive Engineer
Mr. Liam Cullen, District Administrator
Ms. Andrea Connolly, Assistant Staff Officer
Mr. Kevin Lee & Ms. Eleanor Lee, Carnew/Smiths Falls Twinning
Ms. Deirdre McCormack, Chair of West Wicklow Pool Campaign
Mr. Ashley Hunt, Swim Ireland
Mr. Michael Nicholson, Director of Services, Community & Enterprise

Cathaoirleach Cronin welcomed all and opened the February meeting of the Baltinglass Municipal District.

Cllr.O’Neill proposed a suspension of the standing orders to discuss the Blessington eGreenway. Cllr. Glennon seconded this motion and it was unanimously agreed to support this proposal.

Votes of Sympathy

The Cathaoirleach offered a vote of sympathy to the Kinsella family on the death of Billy Kinsella who died tragically during the course of his work with Wexford County Council. Cllr.

Blake offered his deepest sympathy to Billy's wife Rita and family and to Peter Dunne, staff member of Wicklow County Council. Cllr. Glennon asked to include Larry Whelan, Stratford, who passed away recently in the votes of sympathy. All members wished to be associated with both votes of sympathy and a minutes silence was observed.

1. To confirm and sign minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Municipal District of Baltinglass dated 24th January 2022.

Cllr. Blake proposed the minutes of the January meeting and Cllr. Timmins seconded them.

2. To confirm and sign minutes of the Special Meeting of the Municipal District of Baltinglass dated 4th February 2022.

Cllr. Mullen proposed the minutes of the Special meeting and Cllr. Glennon seconded these.

Amendment

Cllr. Timmins asked for the minutes of the Special meeting to be amended to reflect that he was not in attendance as stated.

3. Matters Arising

Cllr. Blake noted that at a recent SPC meeting he proposed that when NTA allocations are being distributed they should be divided equally among urban and rural areas. He also queried if there was any update on the Blessington Inner Relief road and questioned if there was any follow up on the suggestion to make contact with Wexford and Carlow County Councils with regard to works on the Slaney river. Cllr. Mullen thanked his colleagues for their support at the full Wicklow County Council meeting when a discussion took place regarding the recent NTA allocations. He advised that the Chief Executive has been asked to source extra funding and stressed the need for these allocations to be divided fairly. Cllr. O'Neill noted that he had requested a Special meeting be held to discuss the Blessington eGreenway at the January district meeting but that no meeting had been scheduled. Mr. Cullen advised that a meeting was requested but that there had been no seconder to this proposal. The Cathaoirleach advised that she had sent an email on 31st January to all members asking if they were interested in making a submission to An Bord Pleanála with regard to the Greenway but there had been no further request for a special meeting.

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

Mr. Pat Byrne, Senior Executive Engineer, briefed the members on the N81 Progress Report. He advised that Wicklow County Council have sought funding from TII to carry out drainage works at Hempstown. TII are currently carrying out a study on the N81 from Tuckmill towards Saunders Grove House and have allocated funding towards feasibility of any future projects and it will be a number of years before these design works will be completed. Cllr. Timmins noted it was good to see extra funding allocated to the N81 and queried if there was any progress reports on Hangmans Bend and Whitestown junction. He added that when traffic was turning left towards the Glen of Imaal they exited at speed from the N81 and asked if the NRA could look at reducing speeds at this junction. Mr. Byrne advised the meeting that TII had completed a feasibility study on junctions on the N81 and had identified the Whitestown junction as having poor alignment. He added that there is a business located on the right of this junction and they had recently sought planning permission and one of the conditions was to tighten up the junction, which they need to seek permission from TII to do so, and hopefully these developments will progress. Cllr. Glennon noted it was great to see works ongoing on the N81 but with the upgrade of the N81 shelved it was suggested that a light rail system to Blessington would be looked at. He added that TII were unaware of this and asked that Wicklow County Council take on board the possibility of this suggestion. Cllr. Timmins advised that a submission was made to amend the draft county development plan to include this option but it had been rejected and suggested this proposal be resubmitted. Mr. Byrne advised he would seek an update from TII on this issue and was due to meet with Gardaí in Baltinglass later this week to discuss the issue of dirt on the N81. Cllr. Cronin welcomed this but queried if the issue of speeding at Hollywood cross can be addressed. Mr. Byrne advised that there is a speed limit review being carried out presently and there will be an update on this in the coming weeks. He added that TII will have the final say on the speed limit at this junction. He also advised that TII had come back looking for more information on the Hollywood bus stop and he will have more of an update on this for the next meeting.

Mr. Dermot Graham, Executive Engineer, updated the members on the non-national roads report. He advised the meeting that the annual Wicklow County Council allocation for the LIS schemes has not yet been received but funding of €403,000 has been allocated for the CIS schemes for the whole county, up €100,000 from last year. He added that there are a number of live applications and a decision will be made in the coming months in relation to which schemes will progress based on funding availability. Cllr. O'Neill queried what contribution the public make to the CIS schemes and if there is a cap on voluntary funding in place. Mr. Byrne replied that there has been no applications made for the CIS schemes in the Blessington area. Cllr. Glennon advised that residents in the Granabeg area are currently working on an application form for a CIS scheme and to expect soon. Cllr. Mullen raised the issue of NTA allocations and advised that it was proposed to leverage extra funding for shovel ready projects in the district which would be split equally between the Baltinglass

and Blessington areas. He queried if the issue of how NTA allocations were split within the county and asked if a report could be provided when this failure has been identified and when the extra funding that has been secured would be available. He thanked Mr. Graham for the works on the footpaths at Kelly's Hill and in the Carnew area. Cllr. Cronin asked when the roads programme will be finalised and raised concerns over the speed limit between the crèche and school in Donard. She noted that this is a very busy road with children being walked to school and asked if speed signs could be erected at this stretch of road. Mr. Graham advised the members that the imbalance of NTA allocations had been discussed and an extra €1 million has now been allocated for shovel ready projects in the district. He will seek an update from the Roads department in Wicklow on when this funding will be made available. He informed the meeting that with the rising costs of materials it has not yet been confirmed what works will go ahead on this years roads programme. On the issue of the speed limits at the crèche in Donard, he advised that the crèche is located beyond the 50km speed limit and added that a submission can be made to extend the speed limit in this area. Cllr. Blake queried if there had been any contact with Carlow and Wexford County Councils on the issue of flooding at the Derry river. He raised concerns over water ponding at the southern side of the R725 and asked if the Climate Change Adaption works would address these issues. Ms. Kilkenny, District Manager, addressed the issue of the light rail system being extended to Blessington and advised the members that Wicklow County Council were supportive of this initiative but the NTA did not recommend this be included in the draft county development plan due to a low demand for light rail travel in the area. Although they did recommend improving the bus service in the area. Cllr. Glennon noted that at a recent meeting with TII and the Department of Transport the lack of support from Wicklow County Council was the reason given for not recommending this initiative. Ms. Kilkenny clarified that this proposal would have gone to NTA and not TII but she would raise this again. She suggested a spokesperson from TWES section attend the next meeting to address Cllr. Mullen's concerns on the NTA allocations.

5. To receive a presentation on Carnew/Smiths Falls Twinning.

Ms. Eleanor Lee presented the members with a report on the twinning of Carnew with Smiths Falls, Canada. She informed the meeting that the towns were officially twinned in 2017 when an Irish delegation made up of representatives from Carnew Community Care, Carnew Musical Society and Colaiste Bhríd travelled to Smiths Falls. The Coolattin Canadian Connection was founded in 2016 and it is hoped that a group from Canada will visit in September this year. An application for Leader funding is currently being submitted and it is hoped this will be successful. Mr. Kevin Lee thanked local councillors and Wicklow County Council for their support of this project over the years.

Following the presentation Cllr. Mullen acknowledged the years of work and dedication that have gone in to this project and noted it was important that Wicklow County Council

continue to acknowledge and support this example of community work. He noted that these works are the most extent archive of family history that exists in Ireland with thousands of families and names included. These records are a massive tourism potential and will contribute to the social and economic future of West Wicklow. All members thanked both for their presentation and offered their full support to this project.

The Cathaoirleach advised the members that an extension was required to continue with the meeting. Cllr. O'Neill proposed an extension to the meeting and Cllr. Glennon seconded this motion.

6. To receive a presentation on the provision of a temporary portable pool in Blessington.

Ms. Deirdre McCormack, Chair of West Wicklow Pool Campaign, and Mr. Ashley Hunt, Swim Ireland, presented the meeting with a report on the provision of a temporary portable swimming pool in Blessington. Ms. McCormack outlined how the idea of developing a pool for West Wicklow began in 2016 and stressed the importance of teaching water safety in schools to young children. The aim of this project is to locate a pool in an area with no access to a swimming pool and to reduce commuting time to a pool. The pool would be set up in a marquee for twelve weeks, from September to December, at an initial cost of approximately €15,000 to €20,000. This would not include operational costs or staffing costs. Ms. McCormack informed members that a site has been identified and there has been an overwhelming interest from schools in the district.

Following the presentation the members wished Ms. McCormack every success with the project. Cllr. Mullen queried where the site for the pool is located and Ms. McCormack confirmed there will be an announcement on the site location in the next week or so. Cllr. O'Neill stated that he believes a swimming pool should be part of a sports complex for Blessington and reiterated the need for infrastructure for sports facilities for young people in the area. He queried how much has been raised so far and Ms. McCormack replied that fund raising began in 2019 with a total of €23,000 raised so far. Cllr. Cronin asked if there are any planning requirements for this project. Mr. Hunt replied that this project falls outside the sixteen week planning regulations so there is no need for planning permission.

7. Correspondence

Mr. Cullen, District Administrator, reminded the members that the closing date for Twinning applications is the 31st March and for Estate Development Grant 4th March 2022. He advised that Baltinglass District Forum had been in contact with regard to the provision of a sports campus in Baltinglass and any support would be welcome from Wicklow County Council.

8. Any other business

Cllr. Blake voiced his disappointment that only three projects for Wicklow had been approved for funding through the Town & Village Renewal Schemes 2021, a total of €310,000, which in his opinion was low compared to other counties. Cllr. Timmins concurred with Cllr. Blake's point on benchmarking with other counties. Both Cllr. Glennon and Cllr. Cronin noted with disappointment that Kiltegan Tidy Towns had not been successful with their application and asked if the marking schemes for these projects could be obtained.

Cllr. O'Neill raised a number of concerns with regard to the Blessington eGreenway application lodged with An Bord Pleanála. These concerns included:

- The installation of traffic lights on bridges
- The loss of carparking spaces on the main street
- The lack of consultation with the public, An Gardaí, elected representatives, health and emergency staff

Cllr. O'Neill urged the members to support his motion to withdraw this application for a period of six months and try and resolve the parking and bridge issues. Cllr. Timmins noted that there had been no consultation with the members on the issue of traffic lights on the bridges and on the loss of parking spaces on the Main Street and this lack of consultation had led to a feeling of mistrust. He added that following a meeting with Wicklow County Council officials no solution to resolve these issues was found but traffic must be allowed to flow on the bridges and a technical solution must be found. Cllr. Glennon stated that he was in favour of the Greenway however he has major reservations regarding the installation of traffic lights on the bridges and felt an alternative option to traffic lights must be found. He also felt it was imperative that the public make their submissions to An Bord Pleanála. Cllr. Mullen noted that this process has to be dealt with and there will possibly be an oral hearing when other solutions can be made. He suggested that an inclusive management committee be set up for the Greenway to deal with ongoing issues as they come up and technical solutions will have to be relayed to the communities that are affected by these issues. Cllr. Cronin stressed that communication is key when dealing with projects of this size. Although in favour of this project she stated that these issues cannot interrupt daily lives and solutions need to be found. Ms. Kilkenny advised the meeting that a Natura Impact Statement was required with this application due to its proximity to Blessington lakes and once an NIS is required the Local Authority is obliged to submit an application to An Bord Pleanála. Once submitted there is no provision in place to withdraw the application. Submissions can be made to An Bord Pleanála and if there is a lot of

opposition then an oral hearing could be held. She added that every submission will have to, by law, be considered by the Local Authority. Mr. Michael Nicholson, encouraged all to make a submission and advised that it was important to hear all concerns. He addressed the points made by the members and advised the meeting that this project has taken over ten years to get to this stage, with the assistance of roads engineers and consultants. He added that this development of thirty three kilometres is mainly off road but needs to cross the three existing bridges which are shared with motorists, cyclists and pedestrians. He noted that one option currently being looked at is the installation of sensors on the traffic lights but that it would be wrong of him to suggest there won't be traffic lights on the bridges. Cllr. O'Neill stated that he did not accept that the application cannot be withdrawn and formally proposed that this plan be withdrawn for a period of six months whilst these issues are resolved. Cllr. Glennon noted it was inevitable that there would be traffic lights on the bridges but suggested that pedestrians use the footpaths whilst cyclists cross with traffic. He asked if this option could be a possibility and looked at. Cllr. Cronin thanked all for attending the meeting and stated that constituents are frustrated with the process and a lot of issues have been raised and need clarification.

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

Signed: _____

CATHAOIRLEACH

Signed: _____

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR

Dated: _____