

Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of Municipal District of Baltinglass held on Zoom on 24th January 2022, at 10.30am

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

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
Ms. Caroline Fox, Community & Enterprise
Ms. Susan Nichols, Enterprise & Corporate Services
Ms. Helena Fallon, Housing & Corporate Services

Apologies: Councillor Patsy Glennon

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

1. To confirm and sign minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Municipal District of Baltinglass dated 20th December 2021.

Cllr. Blake proposed the minutes of the December meeting and Cllr. Mullen seconded them.

2. Matters Arising

Cllr. Blake queried if there was an update on the lighting issue at Beechwood Drive, Tinahely. Mr. Graham replied that he would follow up this issue with the lighting section in Wicklow and would be in contact with ESB also.

3. 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 Transport Infrastructure Ireland have allocated €200,000 to progress possible design works on the Baltinglass to Annalecky junction on the N81. They are currently carrying out testing and design analysis from Sruhaun, Baltinglass to Castleruddery and results will indicate if resurfacing works are required on this section of the N81. He continued that the Safety audit carried out late last year will be signed off on shortly and upgrades of lighting on the N81 were completed in December. Cllr. Timmins noted it was good to see works on that stretch of the N81 and asked if funding allocated by TII could be spent on widening the road at the Tuckmill junction as this section of road is very dangerous. Mr. Byrne stated there are schemes available and approval from TII would be needed for any improvements. Cllr. Blake queried if there was any update on the Blessington Inner Relief Road and Mr. Byrne replied that they are still working on the design stage and will have an update for the next meeting. Cllr. Cronin enquired if contact can be made with TII with regard to the dirt on the N81 as she had received a number of calls. Mr. Byrne advised that he had been in contact with Senior Engineer, John Bowes, and it was agreed to prepare a letter and forward to all quarries reminding them of their responsibilities and make contact with Kildare County Council and An Garda Síochána on this issue.

Mr. Dermot Graham, Executive Engineer, briefed the meeting on the non national roads report. He advised members that allocations from the department for RI works and RM works will be received in the coming months and will be divided equally between the Blessington area and Tinahely area. He complimented the Tinahely outdoor staff on their work on Christmas Day when significant flooding occurred in the Carnew, Shillelagh areas. Cllr. Mullen echoed Mr. Graham's sentiments and considered the yellow weather warnings issued from Met Éireann as insufficient and noted that Wicklow County Council's emergency team should get prior warnings from Met Éireann in such cases. He highlighted the water breakages and flooding that occurred at Lugduff, Tinahely, Main Street, Carnew and at Quarry Street, Shillelagh. He raised concerns over speeding on the R748 at Coolboy and queried if electronic feedback signs could be erected or if traffic calming measures could be introduced as there are a lot of children along this road. Mr. Graham addressed the issues raised by Cllr. Mullen and advised that Lugduff is in need of some work and has ongoing issues with storm drains. On the issue of flooding on Main Street, Carnew he advised that drainage is falling away and a long term solution is required to deal with this. Ms. Kilkenny acknowledged and thanked the district staff for their work on Christmas day. Cllr. Timmins raised the issue of flooding in Slaney Mall in Baltinglass over the Christmas period and queried if there was compensation available for businesses affected for clean ups and damaged equipment etc. He also queried if the flood defences at Parkmore could be checked by engineers. Cllr. O'Neill queried if there was any update on the road surface of Knockieran Bridge as it was now in a deplorable state. Cllr. Blake noted a number of

projects has not been completed from last year and queried if the white lining on the R747 could be completed as this is a main thoroughfare. He added his appreciation also for the works carried out by Wicklow County Council staff and the fire brigade on Christmas Day. He added that a number of years ago Wicklow County Council carried out some works to relieve flooding on the Derry river in collaboration with both Wexford and Carlow County Council and this may need to be done again. Mr. Graham addressed the issues raised by the members and noted that works on the Derry river had been carried out over thirty years ago and that works on rivers are more restrictive now but he will follow up with both Wexford and Carlow County Council. The Cathaoirleach expressed her thanks to all staff and emergency services for their work on Christmas Day and added their work does not go unnoticed.

4. To receive an update on Blessington eGreenway

Ms. Caroline Fox updated the meeting on the Blessington eGreenway and advised that the application has now been submitted to An Bord Pleanála and is now a live planning application. All associated documents are available on the Wicklow County Council website and are also on display in the Council offices in Wicklow, Blessington and Blessington Library and submissions can be made up until the 4th March 2022. Following the update Cllr. O'Neill raised concerns that there has been little consultation with the local community and the members on the greenway plans and there are a number of issues which will need to be looked at further including the proposal to install traffic lights on the three bridges. He noted that a traffic survey had been completed but not at the busiest time so the results do not reflect the true traffic numbers on these routes. He stated that this will cause major delays and traffic will be backed up on bad bends and cause a major inconvenience to locals. He also raised concerns at the lack of toilets and car parks along the route and queried why these issues have not yet been addressed. Cllr. O'Neill suggested a special meeting be held before the 4th March so the members can discuss these issues. Ms. Fox replied that she could not make any significant comments as this is now a live planning application and the formal process has to be carried out by An Bord Pleanála. Cllr. Cronin noted that as the planning process is ongoing the members could meet up to discuss and make a submission. She thanked Ms. Fox for her work on this project and considered it a huge advantage to the area. Cllr. Mullen stated that such a large project will always have issues but is a most welcome development to the area. He did query the ownership of the land and asked if there was a lease agreement or purchase agreement in place. Ms. Fox informed the meeting that 95% of the land is owned by the ESB and there is a long term lease agreement in place with the other four land owners.

5. To note Blessington's recent funding allocation under RRDF and Town Centre Masterplan initiative

Ms. Susan Nicholas, Enterprise & Corporate Services, presented the members with a brief update on funding allocated under the Rural Regeneration Development Fund to projects in West Wicklow. She informed the members that the Blueprint for Blessington project has been approved funding of €1 million recently by the Department. This project will develop plans for public realm works, the redevelopment of derelict property to create an eHub and a visitor centre for the forthcoming greenway. The plan aims to maximise the opportunities created by the expected increased visitor numbers to the Blessington Lakes eGreenway whilst reinvigorating the centre of Blessington town. The project will cost approximately €1.2 million and the shortfall will be match funded by Wicklow County Council. She also advised that funding of €100,000 was announced in December to support the development of a masterplan for the town. This project will develop a blueprint for a masterplan which can be used for other areas also. Cllr. O'Neill was critical of €100,000 being spent on a masterplan and stated it was a waste of money as health checks and feasibility studies have already been completed for the town. He queried if the members had any input into how the €1.2 million will be spent and recommended that some funding be used for toilet facilities in the town centre. Ms. Nichols replied that there are various plans in place already and they will all be taken into account. She stressed that RRDF funding can only be spent on what has been applied for with guidance by the Department. On the issue of toilet facilities, she advised that these will be included in the visitor centre. Cllr. Blake complimented staff on getting funding for this project but raised concerns over the amount Wicklow County Council have to match. Ms. Nichols advised that RRDF have funded 80% of the overall cost of project and Wicklow County Council will provide the shortfall of €200,000. Ms. Kilkenny, District Manager, advised that funding from Wicklow County Council will be provided from the whole county and not just the Baltinglass district. The Cathaoirleach welcomed funding to the district and thanked Ms. Nichols for her update.

6. Correspondence

Mr. Cullen, District Administrator, advised the members that correspondence had been received from a twinning group in Carnew wishing to update the members on their ongoing work developing links with Smiths Falls, Ontario, Canada. The group requested to give a brief presentation at the next meeting in February. There were no objections to this proposal and Cllr. Blake proposed this motion and Cllr. O'Neill seconded it. He also advised that the civil works for the CCTV scheme have started in the town.

7. Any other business

The Cathaoirleach advised the meeting that there was a late inclusion on the agenda and Ms. Helena Fallon would give a brief presentation on the pre part 8 planning application for Mountain View/Carriglen, Blessington. Ms. Fallon, Housing & Corporate Services, advised the members that six age friendly units are planned in collaboration with KARE. Following the presentation Cllr. O'Neill expressed his delight that Blessington is included in this scheme to promote independent living for the elderly and people with disabilities and asked for copies of the plans to be distributed to the members. Cllr. Cronin queried the timeline on this project and Ms. Fallon replied that it will be at least two to three months before any further progress will be made. Ms. Kilkenny thanked Ms. Fallon and Cllr. O'Neill both for their work on this project which will be funded by the Department. Cllr. Blake offered his support to this worthwhile and progressive project.

Cllr. Mullen raised concerns over the distribution of funding throughout the district following the announcement of NTA funding in recent days. Cllr. Mullen noted that an RRDF application for the south of the county had been unsuccessful and was awaiting feedback from the department. He stressed that the imbalance of funding within the county now needs to be addressed urgently. Ms. Kilkenny reassured Cllr. Mullen that feedback has been sought from the Department and this information will contribute to a more successful application the next time around.

Cllr. Timmins noted that a development plan workshop was to be held in the afternoon but stated that he was deeply concerned that all amendments to the County Development Plan submitted by the members of Baltinglass MD had not been considered and had been rejected by the Planning Regulator. Ms. Kilkenny advised members that the planning team have to follow statutory requirements and the Office of the Planning Regulator. Amendments submitted by the members and the public were put through but were not recommended. Cllr. Mullen agreed with Cllr. Timmins that this version of the town development plan is not suitable and is deeply flawed. He added that these issues need to be addressed and stated he will not vote through any of these recommendations. Ms. Kilkenny stressed that the executive has to comply with national policy and cannot disagree. Cllr. O'Neill concurred with both Cllr. Timmins and Cllr. Mullen and stated he was disappointed that every modest proposal submitted by the members had been rejected by the Office of the Planning Regulator. He stated that it was frustrating and disheartening for councillors. Cllr. Blake stated that these were not national policies and that the Office of the Planning Regulator does not know these areas as well as local councillors.

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

Signed: _____

CATHAOIRLEACH

Signed: _____

DISTRICT ADMINISTRATOR

Dated: _____

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