

MEETING OF WICKLOW COUNTY COUNCIL
HELD AT COUNTY BUILDINGS, WHITEGATES, WICKLOW TOWN
AND VIA TEAMS

ON MONDAY, 7 APRIL 2025 AT 2:00PM

STENOGRAPHER: Niamh Kelly-Leahy, RMR, MBIVR

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PROCEEDINGS COMMENCED MONDAY, 7TH APRIL 2025 AT 2:00 PM AS
FOLLOWS:

CATHAOIRLEACH: Good afternoon, members. Sorry, members, good afternoon. I want to welcome everyone here today, including our guests in the public area as well. Helen, can you do the roll call first and the protocol and then we'll go into the meeting proper.

MS PURCELL: Roll call. Councillor Danny Alvey?

COUNCILLOR ALVEY: Present.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Mark Barry? Councillor Joe Behan?

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Present.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Sylvester Bourke?

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Present.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Melanie Corrigan?

COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Avril Cronin?

COUNCILLOR CRONIN: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Erika Doyle?

COUNCILLOR DOYLE: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Malacháí Duddy?

COUNCILLOR DUDDY: Anseo.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Gail Dunne?

COUNCILLOR DUNNE: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin?

COUNCILLOR FENELON GASKIN: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Orla Finn?

COUNCILLOR FINN: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Pat Fitzgerald?

COUNCILLOR FITZGERALD: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Tom Fortune?

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Present.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Patsy Glennon?

COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Pat Kennedy?

COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Shane Langrell?

COUNCILLOR LANGRELL: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Peir Leonard?

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Pat Mahon?

COUNCILLOR MAHON: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Jason Mulhall?

COUNCILLOR MULHALL: Present.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Miriam Murphy sends her apologies. Councillor Ian Neary?

COUNCILLOR NEARY: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Dermot O'Brien?

COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN: Anseo.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Paul O'Brien?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Gerry O'Neill?

COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: Anseo.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Warren O'Toole?

COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: Anseo.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Graham Richmond?

COUNCILLOR RICHMOND: Present.

MS PURCELL: Councillor Lourda Scott?

COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Here.

MS PURCELL: Councillor John Snell? Councillor Peter Stapleton?

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Stephen Stokes?

COUNCILLOR STOKES: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present. Councillor Caroline Winstanley?

COUNCILLOR WINSTANLEY: Present.

MS PURCELL: Present.

I am just going to go through the etiquette, yeah. It is great to see so many people have joined us online and in the chamber. I would just like to remind the people who are

remote that the camera must be off and they must remain on silent at all times during the meeting. And I would remind the people who are in the chamber to stay seated please and maintain silence. They must observe the directions of the Cathaoirleach and any employee in attendance. There can be no cameras of any kind or recording of the meeting at any time or any posters in the chamber. I would ask the Elected Members to speak very clearly into the microphones so those who are remote can hear you very clearly. It makes a huge difference to the sound. And if there are any issues with any of the Elected Members who are remote if they could contact me. So those who are online could you turn your cameras off, please? Many thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Helen. I will go on to condolences now. Councillor Pat Kennedy.

COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Cathaoirleach I would like to send -- as Cathaoirleach of the Arklow Municipal District I would kind our thoughts and prayers to Councillor Miriam Murphy on the death of her husband, Paul. When news came through yesterday morning I think all the members in the Arklow Municipal District were very shocked. We all knew Paul. Miriam, as we all know, is a very valuable member of this chamber and of the Arklow chamber, and that we are thinking of Miriam and her family at this very sad time. So I just want to send our condolences to Councillor Miriam Murphy on the death of her husband Paul. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. I am sure I speak on behalf of all the members here in sharing our thoughts and prayers with Councillor Murphy at this very sad time. Councillor Shane Langrell

COUNCILLOR LANGRELL: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Just a vote of sympathy, Cathaoirleach, to Marie Dunne, who is actually the sister-in-law of our fellow Councillor, Gail Dunne. I would like to send our sympathies on to her husband Peter, her three daughters, Melissa, Nicky and Aisling. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Sylvester Bourke.

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Cathaoirleach, I would like to be associated with the remarks by Councillor Kennedy there on behalf of the Fine Gael group; that we are very, very sad and sorry at Miriam's loss and we hope that she will have the strength to get through what will be a very difficult few days for her. So we'll all be there for her.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Joe Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I would like to be associated with the previous votes of sympathy and just to propose a vote of sympathy to the family of Seamus Reynolds. Seamus had a long and very positive impact on education in Bray and the surrounding area as CEO of Bray Town VEC for many years. A former teacher, he came from Roosky but he made his life in Bray and had a huge impact on the commercial, educational and social life of Bray, and I just want to convey my sympathy and I am sure the sympathy of all the councillors to his wife and his family. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Gerry O'Neill.

COUNCILLOR O'NEILL: I would like to express sympathy to the family of John Ward Senior. John was the director of Ward Construction in Kilbride and he was laid to rest in Kilbride this morning.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Leonard.

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: I'd just like to be associated especially with Councillor Miriam Murphy's husband's Paul's passing. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Is there any councillors online wishing to come? No. Okay. Just before I go on to our staff -- is there anyone, Helen?

MS PURCELL: Yeah. We extend our sympathies to the families of our former colleague Tom Patrick Bracken, brother-in-law of our colleague Dermot Bracken, and also our former colleague Declan Ward.

CATHAOIRLEACH: And just I have a couple here if you don't mind. Unfortunately Councillor Dunne was hit pretty hard, not just his sister-in-law but his uncle Teddy Dunne died as well. Teddy would have been a former town councillor here in the town, albeit independent, and I am sure he will be sadly missed because Edward, Thomas and Eric, his sons, and the wider footballing community around the town here because he was an avid manager for Wicklow Rovers here. And I also want to pay my tribute to another footballing legend more so in the north of the county, in Glencormac, in Kilmac, to Christie Devlin, who will be sadly missed not just by the footballing community but by his dearly beloved wife Bridie, his children Michelle, Jason, Denise, Shane, Paul and Ian, and I send my condolences to them all.

I wasn't sure, I was going to do it if you want. Okay. Sorry, Joe, I know you wanted to.

You don't have to be a GAA fan to admire Micko O'Dwyer. I know he was the manager here in the county for a long time and I am sure it came as a great shock and sadness to all GAA fans, not just in the county here but throughout the country. So on behalf of all of us I would like to extend my sincere condolences to his family.

Do you want to do the same, was it? Perfect. Okay.

So I might just ask everyone to rise for a few moments and have a moment's reflection in silence.

(Moment of silence.)

MS PURCELL: May their souls and the souls of all the faithfully departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, everybody. Just before I go on to the meeting proper I just have a proposal I'd like to make given the strength of feeling and those joining us online and those in the gallery. I am proposing that we bring up item number -- sorry, about this now -- item number 24 up to number 21 which is the TII presentation. Proposer? And a seconder? Councillor Stokes. So for those that don't know it basically means that I am bringing it up the agenda so we can get to it quicker, because it was at the end.

Councillor Winstanley, I believe you want to come in and say a few words there.

COUNCILLOR WINSTANLEY: I just wanted to extend my invitation to all the councillors to attend the Cór na nÓg National Showcase on the 15th April in Dublin Castle. This is an amazing event where all the youth councils across Ireland present the amazing work that they have been doing in their communities. And if you are free on that day you can just drop in, come and see the work that they have been doing. These are the people that will be taking our jobs in the future. They're amazing.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Not too soon I hope. Thank you for that, for sharing that. Okay, members, we will go on to the agenda proper now.

Item number 1: To confirm and sign minutes of ordinary meeting held on Monday, 3rd March 2025 (copy attached). Can I have a proposer? Councillor Avril Cronin. Seconded by Councillor Shane Langrell. Agreed? (Agreed.) Thank you.

Item number 2: To consider the disposal of 0.0128 hectares or thereabouts in the townland of Tiknock, being the property known as 8 St Patrick's Terrace, Arklow, County Wicklow to Ms Kathleen Dunne (as per notice previously circulated). Proposer? Councillor Pat Fitzgerald. And seconder? Councillor Warren O'Toole. Agreed? (Agreed.) Thank you,

Item number 3: To consider the disposal of 175 square metres or thereabouts in the townland of Kilcoole to Renaat Verbruggen (as per notice previously circulated). Proposed, Councillor Tom Fortune. Seconded, Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin. I apologise if I said that wrong. Agreed? (Agreed.)

Item number 4: To consider the disposal of 0.0266 hectares or thereabouts in the townland of Old Connaught being the property known as 1 James Everett Park, Bray, County Wicklow by transfer to Patrick and Barbara McLoughlin (as per notice previously circulated). Proposer? Councillor Dermot O'Brien. And seconder? Councillor Malachai Duddy. Thank you. Agreed? (Agreed.)

Item number 5: To consider the disposal of 0.0278 hectares or thereabouts in the townland of Knockanrahan Lower being the property known as 6 Knockanrahan, Arklow, County Wicklow by transfer to Pauline and Denis Earls (as per notice previously circulated). Proposer? Pat Fitz. Councillor Warren O'Toole. Thank you. Agreed? (Agreed.)

Item number 6: To consider the disposal of 0.0161 hectares or thereabouts in the townland of Knockanrahan Lower being the property known as 17 Liam Mellows Avenue, Arklow, County Wicklow by transfer to Marion Lawlor (as per notice previously circulated). Proposed, Pat Fitz. Councillor Pat Fitzgerald. Sorry, I better not be too informal. And Councillor Warren O'Toole. Agreed? (Agreed.) Thank you.

Item number 7: To consider the disposal of 322 square metres or thereabouts in the townland of Newrath, Rathnew, County Wicklow being the property originally acquired from Kathleen Bourne, Mary Kate Shannon, Rosemary Alexander, Elizabeth McCormack and Rosemary Magnier to Clermont Enterprise Hub CLG by way of a 99-year lease commencing 1st May 2025 (as per notice previously circulated).

Proposer? We're not stopping already, are we? Councillor Snell, being Rathnew?

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Yeah, I'll propose.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Snell, and I'll second it. Agreed? (Agreed.) Sorry, there's a conflict there because, John, you sit on it, I beg your pardon. That's what I'm being advised here.

Councillor Dunne: I propose it, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Gail Dunne. And I've second it. So thank you. Agreed? (Agreed.) Thank you.

Item number 8: To consider the disposal of 0.8092 hectares or thereabouts in the townland of Corballis Upper, Rathdrum, County Wicklow being the property known as Site 19 in Avondale Business Park, Corballis Upper, Rathdrum, County Wicklow (as per notice previously circulated). And I think, Councillor Kennedy, you want to come in on this.

COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I'd like to propose this, Cathaoirleach, but I would like to say a few words on it if I can. This is very important for Rathdrum. I'm delighted to see it coming before us today and I want to thank our own manager and the staff, some of them who are with here us today, for all the background work that they've done to bring employment to Rathdrum. It is a wonderful opportunity. And I just want to put on the record my gratitude to them, to the Chief Executive, the manager and the staff who all worked in the background on this. I am delighted to propose it. Thanks everybody.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Silvester Bourke.

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I'd like to second this. It's a long time since we had a disposal in this park, this industrial park that we're trying to develop there. It's been about 25 years since we did a previous disposal and I hope that it won't be as long until we do the next disposal up there because it's crying out for more employment in the area. Thank you very much.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you very much. Are we agreed? You seconded that, did you? Yeah. Agreed? (Agreed.) Thank you, members.

We now go on to item number 9 on the agenda: To consider the casual vacancy arising from the resignation of Councillor Aoife Flynn Kennedy in accordance with section 19 of the Local Government Act 2001 (as amended). Obviously we all heard the sad news that Councillor Aoife Flynn Kennedy has moved on to pastures new and I am sure we all wish her well, and I look forward to inviting her down here when we can say a few nice things about her, maybe at the next meeting if that's possible. But obviously it is going to be deferred. Councillor Bourke.

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: I propose that we defer this and all the other related items relating to the filling of vacancies until the May meeting and hopefully we will have a replacement for Councillor Aoife Flynn Kennedy by then.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Yeah. Perfect. So we're going to defer now from 9 to 17.

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I can second it. Agreed? (Agreed.) Thank you.

Okay. Item number 18: To consider taking roads in charge in accordance with the provisions of section 11 of the Roads Act 1993 (copy attached). And we should have all got the report. So I am going to read them out here. Do I need a proposer and seconder for each one? Okay. So I will do it for each one, so work with me and we'll get through it. Okay.

Number 1: Station Road in Bray. Councillor Dermot O'Brien. Seconded, Councillor Caroline Winstanley.

School Road in Greystones. Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin and seconded, Councillor Stephen Stokes. Agreed? (Agreed.) Thank you.

Item number 3: Kindlestown Upper North Road, Greystones. Proposer? Councillor Stephen Stokes. Seconded by Councillor Lourda Scott. Agreed? (Agreed.) Grand.

Number 4: Cherry Orchard Lane, Greystones. Councillor Stokes, Councillor Lourda Scott. Agreed? (Agreed.) Thank you.

Edengate Road, Delgany. Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin. Seconded by Councillor Orla Finn. Agreed? (Agreed.) Thank you.

Number 6: Ballycrone Road, Kilcoole. Councillor Tom Fortune. Councillor Aoife Flynn -- Sorry, Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin. Can't get her out of my mind! Agreed? (Agreed.)

Number 7: Holywell Avenue, Kilcoole. Councillor Tom Fortune. Councillor Stephen Stokes. Agreed? (Agreed.) Thank you.

Number 8: Moneycarroll Road, Newtownmountkennedy. Councillor Shane Langrell and Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin. Agreed? (Agreed.)

Number 9: Monalin Road, Newtownmountkennedy. Councillor Shane Langrell and Louise Fenelon Gaskin. Agreed? (Agreed.)

And number 10: Merrymeeting, Ballybeg, Rathnew. Councillor John Snell. I have no problem seconding that. Agreed? (Agreed.) Perfect.

Thank you, members. So that brings that to a conclusion. I will just get that there now.

Okay. Our next item on the agenda is number 19: To consider --

MS PURCELL: Sorry, I just want to interrupt. There's no photographs in chamber. And can those are actually online, can you turn your cameras off, please, those members of the public, because we can all see you here in the chamber. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Okay. Sorry about that. Number 19: To consider and adopt Wicklow County Council Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) Policy and Development (copy attached). So Mary. Oh, Mark.

Councillor Erika Doyle, if you're online I think you might want to say a few words on this and I know you want to propose it. So would you like to say a few words while we're waiting for Mark maybe? Councillor Erika Doyle.

COUNCILLOR DOYLE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Can you hear me okay?

CATHAOIRLEACH: We can indeed, yes.

COUNCILLOR DOYLE: Thank you. This came through the Climate and Diversity SPC which I chair, and thanks to Mark, Mary and all the gang for all the work which has been ongoing for a number of years now. So we in the SPC had a special standalone meeting to give it the time that it deserved and we passed it in the SPC. So it's probably not the most glamorous of subjects but it is actually highly interesting once you read it, the sustainable management of rainwater. And the really interesting thing is that it has biodiversity as one of the (inaudible). So it is actually a good read even though the subject matter mightn't seem too interesting. It is not just for new development; it can be retrofitted to existing development. So it's great we have our own Wicklow policy now and we in the SPC are happy to recommend it.

CATHAOIRLEACH: You are more than welcome, Councillor. I think we have Mark with us now. Straight in, Mark.

MR COSTELLO: Apologies for that. I wasn't expecting to be so quick on the agenda. No, so just I suppose the SuDS Policy, there's been a lot of work in this document with the SPC and by all members of the climate action team. So it's basically a sustainable urban drainage systems. This from an engineering point of view is the way things -- this is the future of drainage engineering and surface water engineering. There's been a lot of recent publications and documents in this area, as can be seen in the first slide, and I might move on to the next slide if that's okay. From a planning point of view, it is a national planning -- it's on the National Planning Framework as an objective for SuDS. Within our development plan there's various objectives from a SuDS point of view and they also refer to a SuDS Policy for the Council. So from a planning point of view it is a requirement of the Development Plan. We might move to the next slide, if that's okay. Then from a Climate Action Plan point of view there's at least four different climate actions that relate to the SuDS Policy. So it is also covered within our own Climate Action Plan. From a legislation point of view, it is the policy role of the elected council to approve new policies. So this is a new policy that's being brought before ye today under the Local Government Act. We might move to the next slide if that's okay. A recent document which was launched by LAWPRO which covers the implementation of urban nature-based solutions, this was published in November 2024. So this is probably -- the SuDS Policy probably would have been brought before the SPC and the full Council before this date only we waited for this document so we

could review it to make sure our development standards and policy was fully up to date, which it is. And I will move to the next slide if that's okay. Thank you. Just within our own document, it gives an introduction, Sustainable Systems Guidance for Developers; planning requirements, anything in the Development Plan that's required from a SuDS point of view; sustainable drainage measures; it gives design guidance; health and safety guidance. There's also an appendix document for single houses or extensions. So it's not just focused at large residential developments. It gives guidance for a one-off house which I think is important. And we might move to the next slide. Thank you. Just to explain kind of what sustainable urban drainage systems is. So, if you think of it like an initial greenfield, right, and you have a lot of ground infiltration into a groundwater system and there's a lot of, you'd have trees and you have transpiration into the atmosphere or rivers or wider watercourses, and then when we come to develop it with housing estates or apartment blocks we're kind of weakening where water can infiltrate into the ground and all the traditional measures are designed to get water away quick into our water system with pollution that it picks up from the road. That's the kind of traditional system. So our new SuDS Policy is mostly pushing developers towards nature-based solutions, so it is to kind of hold water up at various levels, slowing down the water flow and so on. It also covers riparian zone protection, and it points out where SuDS should be contained alongside a watercourse. If we move onto the next slide. Thank you. So within a SuDS management train there's kind of three different areas. There's source control, where you'll have green roofs, water butts, rainwater harvesting, bio retention areas, such as trees, rainwater gardens. And then you'd see a lot in the new housing estates, pervious paving or, you know, paved car park spaces in houses and all that, all that is designed to infiltrate the water into the ground at that stage. I'll move to the next slide if that's okay. Thank you. That's just a picture of a green roof under construction in Cherrywood. So again, this is the future of civil engineering. Then we have site control systems such as swales. This is kind of within a housing estate, you'd have swales, filter drains, detention basins. Attenuation storage tanks, we're getting guidance on that. It's not our preferred option but it is in the document in cases where they have to be installed. And we have infiltration basins as well. And then I'll move on to regional control systems, so this is the likes of ponds. I should point out nature-based solutions are very good for amenities and biodiversity. So you're seeing a lot of ponds being built from a regional basis now, which is kind of higher level than just a single housing estate. So I might move to the next slide if that's

okay. Thank you. This is an example of a pond in Fingal. We're part of the SuDS working group, the Climate Action Team, and we're kind of knowledge sharing with other local authorities. So this is a drainage system, and you can see the swans and benefits rather than everything below ground. And I'll move the next slide if that's okay. Thank you. That was the SuDS working group back in 2022, and it had about 20 members. Wicklow and the Dublin local authorities. And we might move on to the next slide. More recently South Dublin County Council hosted and had 53 people attend. So you had Meath County Council, Kildare County Council attend as well, LAWPRO, Waterways Ireland. So it is expanding as the interest amongst local authorities is growing, and the knowledge sharing is growing and we're seeing examples of poor practice and good practice. This is a sunken green area that would act as a detention basin, pictures that I took during the -- so this is, you still have green areas but instead of below ground, instead of below ground attenuation tanks we're having sunken green areas that if an area is going to flood it's your green area and it's not your houses. If I might move to the next. Yeah. This is another picture of a different detention basin, again which is a sunken green area. It included astro pitches, playgrounds, as well as a very large green area in this development. And then just, you know, it affects active travel, as well as even car parks. So nature-based SuDS can be taken into account in all future design going forward. Thank you very much for that.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Mark.

MR COSTELLO: Now, if there's any questions.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Lourda Scott.

COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Yeah. Thanks, Cathaoirleach and thanks, Mark. I'd be happy to second this policy. It is an excellent policy. I think it is going to be of a real benefit having this in the Council and particularly for new developments coming through it is great to hear us talk about nature-based SuDS solutions and green roofs and all of that. I suppose, Mark, if I had any suggestion for the SuDS working group you're on it would be if you could find a different name other than SuDS. I find when I'm talking to people about it, and it has taken me a while myself to wrap my head around what exactly it means, and there's so much to it and so much benefit to estates and stuff as well, it is a bit unfortunate that the name doesn't reflect -- I suppose to the likes of general public who aren't civil engineers the name doesn't reflect what it does. Otherwise, it is an excellent policy and I'm happy to second this.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Leonard.

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Yeah, I just want to thank Mark, because I know he has put in a tremendous amount of work and he has been very passionate about this. I don't think anyone realised the amount of time that has gone into this and it is something that is really needed I think in all our towns and villages and rural areas. We see more and more urban flooding all the time. So if we implement some of what's in this plan going forward over the next few years I think we will be starting to tackle that. But we need the money and funding to go with it. We need a Parks Department in County Wicklow because without the people there to look after these green spaces we're at nothing. So thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Stephen Stokes.

COUNCILLOR STOKES: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Mark, thank you very much for a very positive presentation. I will be supporting this. You know in particularly urban parts of the county, or more urban parts of the county like my own district of Greystones, we're seeing a lot of houses going down, a lot of tarmac, a lot of concrete, and there's just less and less places for the water to go. So I think that this is really positive. The only thing I would say in relation to the sunken basins, I do think we need to look at that on a case-by-case basis for a lot of cases. Like, they did that with the private dog park north of the Marina and it's been a complete disaster. I mean, it's so bad that Wicklow County Council, thanks to Michael Nicholson, ended up having to do their own dog park because it is just completely full of water for months at a time, particularly during the winter. We have to think about the facility. If a sunken basin is going to be actually actively used we have to bear that in mind rather than, you know, it is an overflow area. So that would be a large thing for me. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Mark, I normally do it in threes but you're not getting that many questions so I'm going to keep going if you don't mind. Councillor Tom Fortune.

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Thanks, Mark, for the presentation. Very professional as usual. Just a question. I'm aware of one or two developments that happened in recent years and the gardens of the neighbouring join-on properties are suffering serious flooding at even minuscule levels of rain. Will this policy be taken on board fully by planning and will it solve that particular kind of problem?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Dermot O'Brien.

COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And, Mark, thanks for the presentation. Just a couple of things. I pay tribute as well to the members on the

SPC from the community and other pillars, because I think it is a great example of how a collaborative process of developing a policy can produce something like this when the team on the inside is grafting away and really putting in the work, and then the people sitting on the SPC can also scrutinise from points of expertise that they bring to their membership. So all that benefits the development of policy and it especially benefits when that is drawn together. So a huge piece of work and a huge credit for that. And the other thing I'd say, Cathaoirleach, is it's fascinating that new policies that are coming into play that are transformative in how we do things and why we do them in a different way, and I would say there's a whole piece of learning that's required and that learning has to flow across all the departments of the local authority and flow out into the community. So I think there's huge synergy with the environment section, and I know that that's again part of it, but in order for us to benefit from SuDS and to appreciate their value and building a little bit on what Councillor Fortune said, that we have to understand them well enough to appreciate and value what they bring. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I've only one more speaker, unless there's anyone online. Councillor Orla Finn.

COUNCILLOR FINN: Hi, Mark. Thank you, that you was a great presentation. And I have seen first-hand in Greystones because we have a number of SuDS areas and you can see during the heavy rainfall how well they're working. I do have a question. There's a particular estate in Greystones Burnaby Heights, for example, has got the SuDS system but it has also got a basin, and the water basin is actually quite deep for obvious reasons but is also quite close to the footpath, and my concern is that at night-time somebody -- they are quite deep, and I'm wondering is there any thinking behind maybe putting a barrier around it or something that would make people aware that it is there, because it is not a particularly well-lit area either. It is just something in terms of health and safety to consider going forward, but it does work otherwise. It is brilliant. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Mark, I have no one online, so if you want to respond there and I'm going to look for agreement.

MR COSTELLO: Sure. Thank you very much for that. Just, Councillor Scott, the name SuDS, if we were to write it fresh we probably would have called it, you know, even something to do with climate action to be perfectly action, because from a climate action point of view it is a serious adaptation measure, and as well as that it's also a

biodiversity action as well. Our development policy which was in place before SuDS Policy referred to a SuDS Policy, so that's why we stuck with the name SuDS Policy, just to give it -- to link it to our Development Plan, so it could be enforced better by our planners basically. So that's why that was.

And then, Councillor Leonard, funding and parks departments, hopefully Central Government will start funding climate action better for all local authorities so we can all start doing more and more climate adaptation. So hopefully the funding will start coming to support all these climate action plans that's being rolled out by the Central Government legislation.

And then, Councillor Stokes, the dog park, I know what you're talking about. I would probably call that an example of poor design practice to be perfectly honest. I wouldn't think it's in line with any of the SuDS design guidance documents. You know, even having it as a dog park, I don't think it makes sense myself.

Councillor Tom Fortune, flooding, flooding of gardens and that. So this document, our SuDS Policy, kind of highlights all our flooding from a planning point of view as well to make sure that all future developments, you know, they're assessed not just from a drainage and SuDS point of view, but from a flooding point of view as well. And hopefully with workshops that we can hold within our local authority and within agents and that we can kind of let them know what Wicklow County Council require going forward, and hopefully that won't be a problem going forward.

Councillor O'Brien, learning across departments. Again that's our workshops and our internal workshops and getting the knowledge out there, but it is through policies with the help of the SPCs that we can do that. So yeah, thank you for that.

And then Councillor Orla Finn, Burnaby Heights. I cannot actually think of that particular example but I do know with detention basins they should be -- like, the design is good around them and you want to have adequate slopes. We don't want steep slopes. If you get a steep slope, yes, you're creating a health and safety hazard. Detention basins as well won't be ponds. The idea is you won't have water resting in them on a permanent basis. It is only through extreme weather events that there'd be a

need to have water in them. That's ideally the design thinking behind it, and it's where we are putting in ponds that we have to be careful. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: That's it, Mark, yeah. Thank you very much for that excellent presentation. I have a proposer. Councillor Erika Doyle. I have a seconder.

Councillor Lourda Scott. Are we agreed? (Agreed.) Thank you very much Mark.

I'll move on -- sorry, can I remind people online to make sure they're muted and their cameras are switched off? We can't keep saying it because we have a lot on the agenda.

So item number 20 on the agenda: To note Wicklow -- Sorry, I beg your pardon. So I am going to go to item number, what was 21 on the agenda: To consider and adopt the draft Wicklow Council Annual Service Delivery Plan 2025 in accordance with section 50 of the Local Government Reform Act 2014 (copy attached).

MS PURCELL: Just to say to the members that they have the Annual Service Delivery Plan in front of them. It sets out the objectives and the performance standards for the Council's service areas for 2025. It's linked to the high level goals contained in the Corporate Plan and also to the Budget Landscape as identified in the 2025 Budget which was adopted in November. It also takes account of the various service delivery areas that we have. And if there are any questions on it I am happy to take them.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Anyone want to come in there?

MS PURCELL: And if not, I just need a proposer and seconder, and agreement of all, please.

CATHAOIRLEACH: It looks like no one want to comes in. So can I have a proposer please? Councillor Leonard. And seconder? Councillor Fortune. Are we agreed?

(Agreed.)

COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: I want to come in now. Too late now.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Sorry, Dermot. No, come in. Go ahead.

COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Sorry, Cathaoirleach, I had notes here somewhere. I just want to reference in the Service Delivery Plan the fire service and whether we are -- in terms of a Service Delivery Plan whether the local authority is comfortable and confident that a fire service -- a retained fire service is adequate for responding to, and as we project forward into the year ahead that a retained fire service is our goal and is an adequate goal in terms of the future of fire provision in our county. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: No problem, Councillor. Chief Executive.

MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Councillor O'Brien. A very relevant question. The whole matter I suppose of fire services throughout the country, as you know they vary from county to county depending on the population, and Wicklow is a wholly retained fire service. This is an annual service delivery plan so it is dealing with our objectives for this year that sit back to the Corporate Plan. So it is an operational plan on how we deliver our services from day-to-day. With respect to the fire service there have been, I suppose, outline discussions with the NDFEMs, the National Delivery of Fire and Emergency Management in the Customs House around the whole question of fire services and what is the optimal solution, particularly after the WRC agreements of the retained services. So I am very open to those conversations with those at a national level. It is not solely a decision for the county, it has to be taken in a national context, and in relation to the capacity of neighbouring counties to assist where they can and where they do as well, and so it is on our agenda. It is something that I am very, very mindful of. The fact that we have a whole -- whole -- retained fire service in the county with ten stations, it's an awful lot. And would we be better served by a whole time service in parts of the county? I don't know but it is something I am happy to discuss with any member. And as I said, I have had conversations NDFEM around that whole matter. Thank you, members.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. We have a proposer and a seconder. Are we agreed? (Agreed.) Thank you very much.

I am going to bring it up now, up the agenda here, because the rest of the agenda is for noting, and I have to get through the adoption criteria first. So I am now going to bring up item number 21. It is: To receive a presentation, Briefing on the publication of the Options Selections Report (Phase 2 of TII Project Management Guidelines) that recommends the preferred option for the N11/M11 Bus Priority Interim Scheme. The preferred option will be developed further at Phase 3 (Design and Environmental Evaluation) prior to the required Statutory Approvals at Phase 4.

And I would like to welcome, correct me if I am wrong here, but Aoife O'Riordan, Óisín Kavanagh, Christopher Braddish, and obviously our own John. I have asked them to be as concise as possible but we do have a responsibility to give all the information out. I know this is a sensitive issue for a lot of people not just here in the

chamber but for online too, but I do require decorum here today and we will get through it. So, John, thank you very much.

MR BOWES: Okay. Thanks, Cathaoirleach. The three names you called out there, they're members of the project team who are joining us online. Just in person joining myself and Brendan Doyle today we have Marie Whelan, Stephen Cummins and Colm Osborne from the National Road Design Office, and Aiden Cleary and Martin Allen from Arup. And Martin will give you a more detailed presentation, albeit it is still an overview of the project.

So Wicklow County Council is progressing the development of the N11 Bus Priority Interim Scheme in partnership with Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, Transport Infrastructure Ireland and the National Transport Authority and the Department of Transport. Wicklow County Council is seeking to address the current operation and safety issues on the N11 corridor as a priority. The Bus Interim Scheme commenced in 2020 and aims to deliver bus priority measures on the N11 in advance of the more comprehensive Junction 4-14 Scheme. The scheme aims to increase people-carrying capacity and attractiveness of public transport along the route but it also includes proposals to enhance the operation and safety of the N11. Priority facilities can be used by buses and coaches to avoid congested traffic lanes during peak traffic periods whilst remaining as hard shoulders during non-operational time periods. The N11 Bus Priority Interim Scheme is a significant scheme which requires many interventions along the route to address not only congestion but substandard layouts and junction geometry. Following a detailed Phase 2 option selection process where public display events took place in November '22 and September '23 the bus priority scheme has evolved to now include major road improvement features such as a major upgrade of Junction 7 Bray south to a full graded separated junction, and a northbound service road linking Bray South to Fassaroe. The bus priority measures also include widening and realignment of hard shoulders to accommodate buses during peak periods. The closure of intermediate junctions and accesses facilitates this priority to be maximised for public transport. Additionally the closure of intermediary junctions reduces traffic weaving, intermittent traffic slowing and breaking, all of which disrupts traffic flows and contributes greatly to peak period traffic congestion. By rationalising access points to the N11 there would be significant benefits for overall traffic flow and

safety for all road users. Wicklow County Council is committed to ensuring that the closure of each direct access point is considered carefully and by implementing the major road improvement features the scheme will improve journey times for the people of East Wicklow.

So in particular Wicklow County Council will only accept the closure of Herbert Road basically only on this closure being coupled with and facilitated by the major upgrade of Junction 7 at Bray South. Bray South currently experiences severe congestion. It is acknowledged that currently Herbert Road provides an alternative route that bypasses this current congestion. The situation that transpired during the temporary closure of Herbert Road in 2023 is one that Wicklow County Council would not wish to see repeated. The situation has very much informed the preferred option that now includes the major upgrade of Junction 7, Hill's Garage roundabout to a fully grade separated junction including new slip roads and an underpass. These upgrades will relieve queuing and congestion on the N11, Killarney Road and on Southern Cross Road and will accommodate rerouted traffic from Herbert Road. Overall the preferred option will alleviate congestion on the N11 and greatly improve accessibility to the N11 at Bray South. This will benefit the journey times for all road users that rely on the N11 for daily commuting, whether that be by car or by bus, and this without unduly impacting upon locals in the Herbert Road area.

So the provision of bus infrastructure will also support the strategic bus park and ride facilities planned along the corridor and act as a catalyst to attract investment and expansion of bus services to our major towns along the N11 corridor.

The bus scheme is currently approaching the close out of Phase 2 with publication of the Options Selection Report and supporting documents planned on the 10th April on the project website, which is www.N11bpis.ie. The Phase 2 preferred option will then be used at Phase 3 as the basis on which the project design will be developed. The design will be subject to further and more detailed analysis, including more detailed traffic analysis. An environmental evaluation will also be completed. This design analysis will ensure that the project progressed through to the statutory approval submission is fully appraised and all of the implications are known and addressed. Wicklow County Council anticipates that following the publication of the Phase 2

Options Selection Report that the Phase 3 design and environmental valuation will be progressed during '25, the years 2025-2026 with the statutory approval phase following thereafter.

So I will just hand you over to Martin Allen there now. Thanks very much.

MR ALLEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Thanks everyone for giving us the opportunity to present the details of the preferred option here today.

So just on the agenda and the contents of the presentation there, we will just give a brief overview of the project, including the scheme extent and the project objectives; we will just briefly discuss the timeline that's taken us to this point of publication of Phase 2 preferred option; we will just give some background on the option selection process and the various stages that have led to the culmination of Phase 2 and the recommendation of a preferred option; and then we'll provide some details of the upcoming publication in terms of when and what information will be made available; and then we'll also just maybe go through the precise details of the preferred options so that's clear.

So just starting out, the project is a multi-authority project involving Transport Infrastructure Ireland, the National Transport Authority, Wicklow County Council, Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council. As mentioned, Kildare National Roads Office are project managing the delivery and are providing the technical consultancy services.

So since the outset the primary objective of this project has been to provide a priority facility for buses in both directions on the N11 corridor but as the project has evolved over a number of years the objectives have been subject to review and development and the project has evolved quite considerably. So there are multiple components now forming part of the preferred option.

So the extent of the project are from Loughlinstown roundabout in the north extending down along the M11 through Junctions 5, 6 and then along the N11 section of the dual carriageway all the way as far as Junction 9, Glenview.

Just moving on then. So the project objectives. I mentioned we set a number of project objectives and these are typically set for major infrastructure projects under six defined headings ranging from economy to environment, safety, integration and so on. So I won't go through all of these but it is important to note that the objectives have evolved as we have moved through Phase 2. So obvious objectives are around improving journey times for public transport, improving reliability of service, but also facilitating improved access to the Greater Dublin Area for all transport users, and as, John, mentioned increasing the people-carrying capacity of the N11 corridor. And we also have key safety objectives which seek to improve the overall safety and operational characteristics of the N11.

So just next slide, please. So I am conscious that this might not be visible but just to give you an idea of the timeframe through Phase 2 briefly. We started out with a feasibility study which examined the provision of bus priority on the hard shoulders of the N11 road. That very quickly identified that this would be a major undertaking. Those familiar with the route will obviously know that there are lots of challenges and complexities along the N11, including the presence of a lot of intermediate junctions and accesses but also substandard geometry and congestion along the route. So we commenced then the option selection process. Initially it was envisaged that we might progress the scheme through a Part 8 statutory process, but it became quite clear that this project was complex and of a scale that would require full environmental impact assessment. So this led us to re-evaluating options and we then considered provision of active travel infrastructure because we were aware that there could be conflicts between active traffic users, cyclists and pedestrians, and buses using the hard shoulder, and we also looked at options for closing the intermediate junctions and accesses which would prevent conflict points and many of which are substandard in their current layout.

So as John mentioned, we've had a number of public consultations. The first in September 2022, followed by a further consultation in -- sorry, in November '22, followed by a second one in September 2023. At that time we received over 1,100 submissions many of which were related to access closures, including Herbert Road, and that triggered is a revisit of options and a review of the emerging preferred option at the time. So as we will show in the presentation a number of key updates were made

to the project, including the Junction 7 upgrade, as John has mentioned, and a number of safety enhancements. And that has ultimately led now to the recommendation of a preferred option for the scheme and we will be looking to move forward with publication of that this week and then hopefully progress the project into Phase 3.

So just to give a brief overview, and this is very much a snapshot of the option process. We started out by looking at how we would provide a bus priority facility on the carriageway. And we looked at three options. We looked at what's called the nearside, so using the hard shoulder, to provide bus priority. We also looked at an option using a lane in the centre, close to the central median. And then we looked at a contra-flow lane which would operate inbound in the morning and reverse direction outbound in the evening. So for lots of reasons these were appraised but I suppose for a lot of engineering reasons it was decided that option one, which is the hard shoulder option, was preferred.

So then we moved on to stage two, which is a more detailed appraisal stage. And this essentially took the preferred cross-section arrangement and then examined over what extent we would provide bus priority over the overall length of the scheme. And we've acknowledged that, you know, given the presence of junctions and conflict points there was also likely to be some discontinuities in the extent of bus priority that could be provided. So for this purpose we split the scheme in three: Sub-schemes A, B and C. A is in the northern section, which is motorway standard and the most recently I suppose developed section of the route; B is between Junction 6 and Junction 8, which is quite a legacy section of the dual carriage network and lots of challenges that people will be familiar with, poor geometry, lots of intermediate junctions and accesses, and also the N11 along this section is non-motorway, so we do have cyclists and some pedestrians using the route that we need to think about also; and then sub-scheme C is from Junction 8 to Junction 9 which is somewhere in between I suppose in terms of its standard, so it is non-motorway but still has minor junctions and geometric issues.

So the option selection process then examined options aimed at maximising the extent of bus priority that we could safely achieve, addressing conflict points which include minor junctions, direct accesses, looking at how we would achieve bus priority through the primary junctions and then providing safer alternative facilities for active travel. So

these options are assessed under those six headings that I mentioned earlier and this ultimately led to an overall multi-criteria analysis.

So just moving on to the next slide. This then culminated in September 2023 in an emerging preferred option being recommended. And we had a public display at the time and we had quite an extensive consultation process. So this included bus priority, it also included active travel facilities along the all-purpose section of the road and it also included closure of some of the intermediate and direct accesses onto the N11, including the R117, the Enniskerry Road, Herbert Road and a lot of private, residential, commercial field accesses. I mentioned at the time we received a lot of submissions and following that -- there was never 1,100 submissions. Following that then we spent some time reviewing those submissions and analysing the critical issues for the public.

And just on the next slide please. So following that display we then initiated a number of further studies. So we undertook specialist biodiversity and habitat surveys, topographical surveys, we undertook more detailed traffic analysis and engineering and road safety assessments. And those assessments in combination with the review of the feedback received from the public consultation prompted a review. So rather than sort of moving forward with that emerging preferred option it was very clear that there were issues that needed to be considered. So that prompted further review of aspects of the preferred option and then we revisited elements of the Phase 2 design.

So the first area was at the R117, so this is the Enniskerry Road which we propose to close as part of the preferred option. And back in September 2023 we had proposed instead to link the R117 up to Junction 6, the Bray Fassaroe junction, via a new link through greenfield lands at Fassaroe. Now we undertook surveys in this area, biodiversity surveys, which identified the presence of Annex 1 habitats which are protected at European level. So that prompted us to review options for closing the R117 junction, and we looked at the option of a one-way parallel road northbound between Junction 7 and Junction 6 with the R117 connecting into that one-way service road, and we also looked at an option of connecting the R117 down to Junction 7. So taking that through an options appraisal process we concluded that the one-way parallel road northbound would be preferable given the additional studies and the constraints identified.

Then the second area, John has mentioned the Junction 7 Bray South. So it was very clear here in the initial scheme design, particularly in view of the concerns around the Herbert Road closure, the traffic obviously would have to reroute, and the primary rerouting of that traffic would be to Junction 7 Bray South, which anyone familiar with the route will know that this junction is a major cause of congestion and a bottleneck on the scheme. So initially we looked at an option of signalling the existing roundabout at Hill's Garage because we were focused on trying to find a solution that better managed the flow through this roundabout, where at the moment there are conflicting flows with traffic that is getting on the N11 blocking traffic that's getting off, and this results in queuing back onto the main line and extensive queuing into the urban areas of Bray.

So just moving on to the next slide. Obviously those of you will be familiar this is a typical image in the evening of queuing approaching the Bray South junction. We were concerned that buses using the hard shoulder would be obviously caught up in this queuing but obviously this has operational and safety issues for the general functioning of the N11. So we did look at options and apologies you probably won't see the full detail but as I mentioned we looked at an option of signalling the eastern roundabout at Hill's Garage. Now, that did achieve certain benefits in terms of preventing the queuing that comes back onto the N11 but it was also very clear from the analysis we undertook that it did not resolve queuing that extends into the urban area of Bray. So we project in the future design year for the scheme, which is 2042, that the queuing would extend kilometres up Killarney Road into Bray Southern Cross Road, and obviously any traffic rerouting from as a result of Herbert Road closure would be accessing Junction 7 most likely via Killarney road.

So just moving onto the next slide, we then looked at an incremental development of options at this junction which ultimately has culminated in this recommendation to significantly upgrade the junction layout. This includes new merges and diverges but crucially addresses that conflict point. So at the Southern Cross Road, the Killarney Road, that entry into that roundabout, with this layout traffic that is coming onto the N11 will no longer obstruct traffic coming off the N11. So this has very significant benefits not just for the operation of the N11 but also to alleviate the queuing that

currently occurs and that is projected to increase on the Killarney Road and Bray Southern Cross Road. So we feel that this intervention in conjunction with the Herbert Road closure offers much better accessibility to the N11 corridor to and from Bray.

Just the last area that we revisited was at Junction 8, Kilmacanogue northbound. So previously our preferred option didn't propose a dedicated bus priority through this area because we concluded given the spatial constraints and also given the existing issues with accesses that we couldn't safely achieve dedicated priority. However, we felt on review that we should look to address existing safety deficiencies through this section in the scheme. So again those familiar with it will know the Junction 8 diverge and merge in the northbound direction is quickly followed by a garage, a bus stop, a diverge into Glencormac and Avoca. So we have proposed to provide a one-way segregated service road which will be quite similar to that that was recently constructed in the southbound direction. Again this improves the general safety and operation of the N11 through the section of the scheme.

Moving onto the next slide. In summary, our scheme now comprises quite a few different elements to it. So it has aspects of bus priority which are northbound and southbound in that northern section, sub-scheme A, southbound in sub-scheme B and northbound in sub-scheme C. We are also proposing signalling of the Junction 5 southbound merge, and then we're also proposing active travel between Junction 6, the Bray Fassaroe junction, and Junction 7, and then again from Junction 7 down to -- sorry, from Junction 8 down to Junction 9 at Glenview. We're also then proposing the one-way service roads northbound through Kilmacanogue and also between Junction 7 and Junction 6 connecting the R117 junction. We're proposing minor junction and direct access closures which include the Silverbridge access, Dargle Lane, the R117, the Herbert Road junction and a number of other accesses into residential and commercial and field properties. And then also that significant upgrade of the Bray south at Junction 7.

So just moving on to the next slide. So, yeah, in terms of the upcoming publication of the preferred option we'll be publishing the what's called Option Selection Report. So this study will include all of the assessments and the rationale and justification behind our recommendation. So this was to be published via the project website this week on

the 10th April and that will include, as I mentioned, the Option Selection Report and also the current preferred option corridor and scheme layout. And following that publication and subject to approvals the scheme will progress into Phase 3 which will develop the design in more detail and undertake an environmental impact assessment.

So just to then give a final overview of what the scheme actually involves. This is the northern section and the red lines show the extent of bus priority. So that starts from Loughlinstown roundabout through Junction 4, 5 and down as far as Junction 6 at Bray Fassaroe. We just note also that the Junction 6 is the location for a future NTA park and ride facility as well. And then just moving on to the next slide. So this section of the scheme between Junction 6 and Junction 8 is more complicated. So we have a range of interventions proposed here which includes a mixture of bus priority where that could safely be achieved. That's in the southbound direction between Junction 6 and Junction 7. We have that very significant intervention at the Bray South junction with a full upgrade which improves the general operation of the N11 but also the feeder routes in and out from Bray. We're proposing the one-way segregated service road northbound, which the R117 Enniskerry junction will connect into. And we're proposing the closure of the intermediate junctions and accesses at Silverbridge, Dargle Lane and Herbert Road, and a number of private accesses, and the R117.

Then finally on the next slide, this is Junction 8 to Junction 9 section. So we're proposing bus priority in the northbound where there is clear benefit to providing it, and then we're also proposing the closure of minor junctions and accesses, and then also providing active travel facilities along the eastern side of the N11 connecting Kilmacanogue down to the Junction 9 Glenview.

So, yeah, that concludes and just provides an overview of the preferred option proposals, and we are happy to take any questions that anyone may have.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Mark. Just before I invite you in, I just want to clarify that we understand that the N11 affects a lot of our constituents south of Bray, in Greystones, Wicklow and Arklow, but I want to thank the Bray councillors who have reached out to me in the last number of days, and in the interests of fairness what I am going to do here today is I am going to invite the Bray councillors in first because obviously there's a lot of passion around this and I want to hear from them, and then I

might invite the chair of the Transport SPC and then I will open up. As I said, I understand there's a lot of passion out there, but as usual I will ask you to work with me here today. I will get as many speakers in as I can. I will go back to you if needs be. But please work with me as I do want to get through the agenda as well.

Councillor Erika Doyle, had your hand up there a few moments ago online. Can you hear me, Councillor Doyle?

COUNCILLOR DOYLE: I can thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you for the presentation. We had this presentation last week and I know we had a conversation there and several question and answers questions but I suppose for the benefit of everybody who wasn't there, there will be a bit of repetition. Just to apologise that I am not there in person. I was down there this morning. I had a childcare issue and had to come back to Bray.

And I do believe people protesting is one of the last tools available to them, ordinary people, to really make their feelings known, and it is an admirable thing to do; to feel that strongly to get up and go somewhere to make your feelings known.

I will try and be brief because I know a lot of people want to speak on this. I am a supporter of active travel and bus priority where it can take place. We are all supporters of doing anything we can do to try and address traffic congestion because we all know what it is like. And there's a lot of things in this plan that people probably will be supportive of and I think when it is published we will get a look at the overall plan. However, I think we all know that this conversation today is about the Herbert Road junction. I don't think I have ever seen such a strength of reaction to any proposal certainly in my time on the Council and even before, and across the board, no one particular section of people. Just an outright, not even people being displeased about it, people just saying no. What people are saying is you asked us for our opinion, we gave it to you, and you didn't hear.

Now, I know there's a conversation around the mitigation measures of Junction 7, and maybe that conversation broadens and will be demonstrated, but all people can see at the moment is something that will not work and does not work. And these are people with local knowledge, people that use it every day, several times a day. And I suppose

rather than just maybe giving out about it I am also interested in working towards solutions rather than rhetoric, so what I would ask as a question is: Is there a way to make this work and maintain this access? I acknowledge that there are a number of junctions and access point that are legacy issues and will probably need to close, and a couple of people may not be happy about it and a couple of people may be happy about it, but the strength of feeling against this particular one surely it means it has to be looked at. Is there an option to keep this open? One of the things we discussed at the Bray meeting was a potential for a reduced speed limit in this area. Is that an option? I understand you can't be doing that every two minutes along a busy road but for this particular one I am wondering is it possible to isolate this? Is it possible that this is a special case? Certainly the strength of feeling and the numbers behind this would lead me to believe that this is or should be a special case.

There is a lot more I want to talk about but the other members want to come in so I will leave it there. Thank you, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: You're more than welcome. Mark, I should have said I am going to do this in batches of three, okay? Councillor Joe Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks, John, and your colleagues for the presentation. And thanks to you particularly, Cathaoirleach, for being very proactive in facilitating an early discussion of this matter here today because of the huge public interest in it, but also you and other colleagues who went out to meet the many, many people who travelled down in the middle of the day, some of them had to give up time from work, childcare, et cetera, to be here to show their feelings about this absolutely ridiculously crazy proposal that is coming forward from this Council. But of course it is not just coming from the Council, it's coming from Transport Infrastructure Ireland, it's coming from the Kildare County Council Roads Office believe it or not, and it's coming from the Department of Transport. So it's a Government proposal.

And you can listen to the engineers speak all you like and you can be impressed or not impressed with it but the one thing that's missing in all of the talk that has happened so far from the official side here has been common sense. Common sense would tell you that this will be an absolute disaster for the people of Bray and surrounding areas. But it will also be a disaster, and you rightly mentioned, Cathaoirleach, people who are

travelling south who have nothing to do with Bray who are not going to be affected by closures, because in reality what this plan is doing is replicating what has been done in England which is this theory of a smart motorway. Smart in inverted commas, because it is basically a proposal to put vehicles on a hard shoulder leaving no refuge for cars travelling south or north who may end up in difficulty and have nowhere to pull over.

So the first point I would make is this has huge detrimental aspects for people further south of the county, and that's why I would welcome, certainly welcome the views of other members from other parts of the county with regard to that particular aspect.

We have a large number of people in the gallery, we had a lot of people outside the building and we have many more people online who are witnessing this debate. And I want to thank them all for the really civilised way they have organised themselves since word of this particular decision broke last week, last Tuesday night at our meeting in Bray, and I want to thank in particular Claire Finnegan who is sitting behind us here who is the main organiser of an impromptu meeting on the green in Herbert Park where almost a hundred people turned up, ready, willing and able to oppose this every step of the way.

I also want to acknowledge that as there's a representative in the public gallery here of Kilbride Church, which is the lovely, beautiful, protected structure which continues to function as a Church of Ireland church at the very end of the Herbert Road which will be dramatically affected by this closure if it were to go ahead.

What I would say, Cathaoirleach, is that this is being brought about because a previous Government, the previous Government, decided to divert money away from widening the N11. You might notice in the documentation this is an interim plan, and the main plan has actually been put to one side because the previous Government decided to cut the funding for roads. This particular Government appear to be -- although they're missing a significant element, they appear to be continuing with the policy of not widening the road but instead putting buses on the hard shoulder.

And effectively what I think we need to do here today, Cathaoirleach, is the entire process needs to be stopped. I am going to ask, and I am going to propose when we are

finished the discussion that the Chief Executive pauses any publication of any decision, of any proposal and that she writes as a matter of urgency to the Minister for Transport and the Tánaiste requesting an entire review of the entire proposal. And the reason I am making that suggestion is because if this goes past Thursday and money starts to get spent on consultants, Arup, or whoever it'll be, spending the next two years designing this massive scheme which has no public support it will be too late to stop it then. Five million euros has already been washed down the sink, poured down the sink, designing the bigger scheme which was paused by the last Government. We are about to embark on spending probably many more millions designing a scheme that has absolutely no public support. It has no support from the public representatives in Bray, I am hoping we will have the agreement of the public representatives from the rest of the county here today, and it has no public support from the people of Bray and North Wicklow.

There are many more things I could say, Cathaoirleach, I am sure people are sick listening to this, listening to me talk about it, but I really am asking and I am proposing that the Chief Executive pay attention to what I am saying here and listens to what the people are telling us, which is they're not going to put up with it, they're not going to accept it. And, Chief Executive, through the Chair you are the person who can decide today to pause any further work on this project. No one else here can decide to pause the work, only you. We have discussed it before. I know you're in favour of the wider scheme and more funding to produce a bigger and better scheme. And if we got the funding for the bigger scheme what we would be able to do is create a parallel road like we have done on the other side, and I welcome those improvements. We could have the very same solution coming out of the Herbert Road, a parallel road up the N11, your bus lane beside it. What we need to do is widen the N11 at that point. It's going to cost money but it is the solution that would work and with respect I ask you, Chief Executive, please do not proceed until we get a review. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. I am going to go through everybody before I ask anyone else to come back in. Councillor Dermot O'Brien.

COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thanks very much, Cathaoirleach. I am happy to second Councillor Behan's proposal. And again, I won't cover the same ground in terms of acknowledging how the public have come together and joined this campaign. And I think, Cathaoirleach, there's a couple of things I want to say and there's a lot of things jump out. When we hear the expression preferred option, so when there's a

preferred option then the next question is: Whose preferred option? So who prefers this option? And I think when I move on from that question I very quickly get into the world of what I would describe as democratic deficit because we have to decide, again to build on what Councillor Behan said, that if we are a partner in this project then what power do we carry as a partner? Are we a silent partner, are we a passive partner or are we playing an active role as a partner? And if we are a partner then our contribution to the preferred option should be shaped by those who are sitting around in this room who are elected and mandated to speak on behalf of the public and also the public themselves, because they are and should be woven into processes like this.

So I think it feels like, you know -- and again, Martin, fair play, the presentation is detailed and it has a lot of content in it and it wasn't just you know thrown together, there's a lot in there. But again, when we hear engineering reasons as a rationale for a decision-making and for me that flows directly to okay, engineering reasons are legitimate but there are also human reasons that have to be integrated in and balanced with engineering decisions. It feels like almost a formula of design, decide, announce, defend. That that's the risk that we're in. That if we -- the design was done, it was decided that this is preferred, it is announced to the world and then we just spend our time defending the decision and the announcement. And what that does is it short-changes the people who've already contributed and felt that their contributions mattered and that their contributions would have influence. And I think then what we risk doing is downgrading public participation, downgrading public engagements. And it almost feels like in one way their elective representatives are almost treated like roadblocks to good decision-making rather than signposts to good decision-making. We're signposts when we engage with the public, when we meet people where they're at, when we listen to them, when we create spaces to have conversations with them, and when they demand that we listen to them. And if we are listening to them and then advocating on their behalf and it's for nothing and it doesn't carry any power then again we're in democratic deficit.

I would ask as well, you know, in a formal question is: When we look at, for example, the fire service, were they consulted on a decision like this? Because fundamentally, however great Junction 7 looks and however much it's going to have a positive impact, for exits/entrances into Bray going to three is still one less and that has an impact. And

we again, I said it earlier on, we have a retained fire service which means that fire fighters need to go from their home to the station and now we're also proposing that if the retained model is what we will have going forward then they'll have to suffer the potential of having less opportunity to get to the station than they had before. And that's real.

Two more things, Cathaoirleach. I would just say as well that for the Elected Members in Bray and the officials in Bray and the stakeholders in Bray who are interested in transport and traffic and travel and mobility, that we made, I think, a very sensible and in some way courageous decision to set up a committee that we would highlight, shine a light on and give attention to the issue that's killing our town in terms of traffic and transport and mobility, and we thought let's take responsibility for this within our town, let's bring people together and try and find solutions and propose solutions and play our role, but it almost feels that that again, sure, it's hard to pitch that to people as something legitimate if it doesn't get to -- if us as elected reps don't get to contribute to something meaningfully.

The last thing I would say is that when major change is being proposed and it represents significant impact, I mean it feels like this is in many ways bus commuters before community, and if that's the way we're going then the challenge is can you bring people with you? Are we convinced, has the time and energy been given in the space between the consultation phase and now to say, right, this is going to be big because we're going to continue with the proposal to close the Herbert Road, we better go back to people, we better convince them, we really should get them on board for this, if we're pitching Junction 7 as the be all and end all, which it isn't and can't be, then let's put the effort into seeing who we can bring onside for that. And I feel like that wasn't done and I don't know what the why of that is. But we haven't been convinced, we haven't been brought on a journey and therefore we're not with this proposal. We're against this proposal and hopefully sense will prevail. Thanks, Cathaoirleach
CATHAOIRLEACH: You're more than welcome. Mark, there's three contributions there if you want to, I think there was a few questions in there as well.

Mr Allen: Thank you for the questions and for your comments. So, yeah, I suppose firstly the query was asked just around options and whether a reduced speed limit is a potential option. So we haven't -- or our intention is to maintain the speed limits on the

route. This is, you know, a high speed motorway, dual carriageway route, and you know the intention is that it will stay as that environment. So it is major interurban route and we're conscious not just of, you know, the route's overall function. So it is one of the radial routes in and out of Dublin. It is a comprehensive 10T route, which is the European designation. It's a key linkage in terms of connectivity to the Greater Dublin Area all the way down as far as Rosslare Port. And reducing speed limits, you know we have had a situation where there's been fluctuating speed limits on the route, and still are in some cases, and that creates its own issues in terms of, you know, congestion issues and safety issues along the route. So, you know, I suppose following on from that really what we're trying to achieve is an element of consistency in this route and trying to restore this route to what should be its proper function. So the N11 is somewhat unique in terms of the interurban motorway dual carriageway routes in terms of the legacy issues on it which have never been addressed, and I suppose this scheme is attempting to try and address some of those.

So yeah, it was mentioned, I mean, can Herbert Road be left open perhaps as a special case? As John mentioned, we gave a lot of consideration at every single access. So we looked at options for closing each individual access. We also looked at options around what if we close some accesses and not others? So we looked at all different sort of permutations. And I suppose in terms of the Herbert Road junction firstly it should be noted that this is a requirement of the design standards, that if we're looking to implement bus priority along a route like this the current standards require that these intermediate junction and accesses are closed, but nonetheless we still looked at options to see if they could be retained. We did look at the parallel road option in the southbound direction that was suggested, but those will know there are very significant spatial constraints along the corridor here, Kilbride Church obviously being one, on the opposite side there's Kilcrony Gate Lodge. There's also access into the R117. So it is a very confined corridor that we're dealing with and we're trying to optimise the function of it and optimise the space available.

The query was raised there on the smart motorway. We're not proposing a smart motorway here. Smart motorways in the UK operate quite differently with the hard shoulder being open to all traffic. So that's not what we're proposing to do here. We're proposing that the hard shoulder would be open at peak periods to bus traffic.

In terms of I suppose the general comments around the Herbert Road and the general concerns and the implications of the proposed closure. We do acknowledge and we understand that this has implications and this will affect people. What we're trying to do with the way the scheme has evolved, I mentioned this started out as a somewhat targeted scheme that we thought we might be able to bring through a planning, a Part 8 planning process, and I mentioned it's evolved quite significantly over the last number of years because it's been very apparent to us that elements of the N11, the existing N11, are too problematic and too dysfunctional to simply throw bus priority into the mix as well. So the scheme has now evolved to an extent where we've tried to resolve existing issues and tried to resolve some of the legacy issues and that actually is best not just for bus priority but best for the N11 and it's best for all road users. So this is not a scheme that is just simply proposing bus priority on a hard shoulder. We now have consider active travel components. We're providing active travel facilities around Bray and down as far as Junction 9 at Glenview. And the improvement at Junction 7 is a very significant change that was brought into the scheme in response to the further studies and the consultations that were carried out in September 2023.

So we feel we have a scheme that, yes, there is one less access point into Bray but we feel there is better access to Bray. So Junction 7 is highly dysfunctional at the moment. It neither serves the N11 corridor well nor does it serve Bray well because of the congestion coming off Killarney Road and Southern Cross Road. The intervention we're proposing there, we had looked at something in respect of alleviating issues on the N11 but given that it left those issues unresolved at Herbert Road and Killarney Road and given obviously that we were looking at proposing the Herbert Road junction closure, we've undertaken extensive rework throughout the previous year to bring about that junction upgrade. And as I mentioned, that in our view provides better access into Bray as opposed to keeping old accesses which aren't geometrically compliant which our standards require us to close. So we feel that the Junction 7 proposal mitigates that. But we do accept there are obviously concerns.

You mentioned just the engineering reasons. And, look, I appreciate today we can't give out all the information within the time available. So I would welcome if anyone wants further information, we will obviously be publishing the report later in the week

but we're happy to discuss, you know, in more detail. Our project office is contactable and we're always open. So I won't expand on the reasons here but we are happy to discuss the broader assessments with anyone.

And yeah, I mean we do have consultants. So just around the fire services and other consultees, so we have undertaken extensive consultations back in November 2022 and September 2023. We also write to all statutory bodies, prescribed bodies, but also to other interested parties in the study area who have engaged with us both on this project and on the previous project. So we do maintain contact with all stakeholders.

And it was mentioned just around the bus commuters before community. I suppose bus commuters are community, you know, so we are trying to provide an improved transportation corridor, but we recognise that, you know, as I mentioned earlier that we can't simply put bus priority on a route that is already dysfunctional, and that has obviously evolved the scheme into considering other elements that we feel are giving more to the community in the area. So I mentioned active travel components of the scheme obviously along the public transport and also what we feel is much improved accessibility in and out of Bray via the Junction 7 upgrade.

So I think that maybe covers, but I'm happy to take further questions.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Can I remind members that if the question has been asked, just because you don't like the answer, don't ask it again if you don't mind. It's just I want to get through it as best I can. Now we can disagree but I want to get as many speakers in as possible if you don't mind. Councillor Winstanley.

COUNCILLOR WINSTANLEY: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for the presentation. Normally once the point has been made by my colleagues I don't see the need to repeat it but in this case I feel it is very important to put my views on public record especially considering the volume of texts, emails and phone calls I received this week regarding the closure of the Herbert Road junction. It is also worth noting how frequently this issue came up on the doors during both the General and Local Elections campaigns.

Let me clear: I do believe we need a bus scheme, I do believe we need to make public

transport attractive and accessible, but I categorically disagree with the closing of the Herbert Road junction.

We have been shown how upgrading Junction 7 will improve traffic flow, and this really is welcomed, but we have seen no data on how traffic will flow with the closure of the Herbert Road junction. Given the strong objections to the closure its exclusion from the presentation isn't very reassuring to me. I struggle to believe that the closing of this juncture will result -- I am sure that there will be significant congestion, particularly on the Kilbride Lane through the Main Street, and I fear that we're simply shifting the problem and not actually solving it.

Finally, I believe this process has been a missed opportunity. We often talk about limited public engagement and public consultations but when we do finally receive overwhelmingly feedback a preferred scheme appears to completely ignore public opinion and I feel this is disenfranchising our community. This is not how in my mind a consultation should work. I would like to request a breakdown of all the objections and how these have been addressed specifically within the preferred scheme.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Melanie Corrigan.

COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you for the presentation. Seeing it again for the second time there's some good and bad. The scheme does have merits. I can see the value to closing off the smaller exits, the extra safety on that, the parallel road from the R117 and the Kilmacanogue Road. The upgrading of the Junction 7 I would say needs to happen regardless of the scheme. That's always been a bottleneck and that regardless should happen. But I have to say closing off of the Herbert Road I just cannot support that, and I fully support the proposal to pause the plans on this. Not only will the people of Bray suffer but anybody who is working in Bray, studying, visiting. Tourism will be adversely affected. We're a seaside town. Yesterday, the beginning of April, you only had to look and see the queues of traffic trying to get in as soon as the sun was shining all along the N11, the M50, all going to get to the seafront to access our beautiful seafront and tourism in Bray. We rely heavily on tourism. Killruddery, as I said the seafront, the Main Street, Ardmore Studios. We need to get people in to be able to work in the town and visit. By closing off the Herbert Road it's just going to have a huge effect.

I would also have serious concerns, I know you spoke about them then but I wouldn't be satisfied that if there were to be a major incident in Bray trying to get ambulances or fire engines in. The town has already been affected by, you know, the narrowing of the Main Street with the cycle lanes being put in and constricting the movement of traffic, trying to get emergency vehicles in, it could be a life-threatening -- and that's not something I say easily, but that could be a life-threatening thing by seriously constricting access into the town.

I have spoken with the Tánaiste about this, I had a meeting with him on Saturday morning and I know he is still fully opposed to this plan and his feelings remain unchanged, and I will continue to work with him and continue to speak with him and let him know the feeling, the high strength of the feeling of the people of Bray and working on that.

As Councillor Behan mentioned earlier, Kilbride Church. A beautiful church. Over 150 years old. A protected building. Consecrated ground, which we can't forget about that. It'll be potentially made inaccessible to its congregation, and I don't feel, and others feel they weren't adequately considered and they weren't adequately consulted on this plan, and that's not acceptable.

We're talking about active travel. Bray has already lost a direct bus route to Heuston Station, to the airport through the Air Coach and we're only pushing people back into car reliance. So it just doesn't make sense how you're putting a bus lane on one side and then our services are being cut on the other side. A service that is actually needed. And I would fully support the proposal that Wicklow County Council halt this publication and I fully support the people of Bray in their campaign, and it's crazy.

I do have one question though. Again going back to Junction 7, I think that the plan to upgrade that junction, I can see totally the merits of that, but what is being proposed to get the traffic from Bray up onto this junction? On the Southern Cross, there's always already a backlog it, the Herbert Road and Killarney Road, people have to get through those junctions there to get actually up onto Junction 7, so in this plan what is being looked at to see how is the traffic going to get up to that junction to access the N11?
Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Ian Neary.

COUNCILLOR NEARY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I think everything has been covered more or less from my colleagues, but the Herbert Road is huge, huge for Bray tourism. Every factor of Bray needs it. It's used 24/7, and I'd say the facts and statistics of how much use that road is -- hopefully you have the records -- that it is in the thousands of people using it daily. So we need that to continue; to attract tourism and for the locals to use it. Especially you're trying to kick people down the road by moving them down to Junction 7 which is already gridlocked. And we do welcome that being maintained and upgraded but sooner rather than later. But, yeah, basically we do need to keep the Herbert Road alive and not close it. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Mark, I have one more councillor for Bray to come in and then what I'll do is I will open it up to the rest of the floor. But I'd rather get all the councillors in from Bray. Councillor Duddy.

COUNCILLOR DUDDY: Cathaoirleach, go raibh maith agat, agus fáilte. Martin, isn't it?

MR ALLEN: Yes.

COUNCILLOR DUDDY: Thank you for your presentation today and your previous presentation before the Municipal Council in Bray.

I like so many other of my colleagues I am in full support of public transport, bus priority in general and encouraging more public transport, but I think this option seems to be over-engineered and not sufficiently people focused because you're focused purely on the bus users along the N11 route and you're not taking enough -- you're not paying enough attention to the people of Bray. I know in Bray you said that whether there'd be bus stops along that route wasn't part of your decision-making, but I know just looking at the timetable that there are no bus stops along that route until you get to Kilmac. So this priority bus corridor will only hinder the people of Bray. It is not adding anything to the people of Bray.

If I can just say that the closing of the Herbert Road junction is drastic and devastating. It's one of four exits into Bray, and it's probably one of the most beautiful entrances into the town, passing, as my friend has said, a very historic church. In Bray when you discuss this, you indicated that part of your reasoning for closing the road was the likely number of accidents with buses. Have you any statistics or any information on

the number of accidents at that junction at the moment not related to buses obviously but in general, whatever vehicles use that junction or travel along it? So I'd appreciate that information.

I note that it's likely that this will cost tens of millions to correct and it seems to me that that money is not being well spent and isn't being spent to the benefit of the people of Bray. And I suppose when you consider that Bray has been waiting for many years for the arrival of the Luas into the town would that money not be better spent promoting and facilitating that project of national infrastructure?

It seems that despite your admission that there were over 1,100 submissions that the local voice of people and the local knowledge of the town is just being ignored. And, you know, you mention that the closure of the road is required by current standards but it's only recently that, as recent as 2023 that a temporary closure of the road not only caused chaos into the town but also cost an awful lot of money. So is that money going down the drain only recently spent as a result of this project?

Now, attention has been drawn to the structure of St Brigid's Kilbride Church, which is a projected structure B27, and that the active congregation that pray there has been ignored which is hugely disappointing. But near that site there's also an early Christian cemetery that consisted of a small enclosure where there were hundreds of skeletons reported discovered just to the west of that site and when that site was excavated those remains were relocated into a common pit. So it seems very likely that any works along there will disturb a very early monastic or cemetery site, and I don't think that is acceptable. Included in that archaeological excavation were the discovery of a number of crosses that belonged to the South County Dublin group of slabs which are Hiberno-Norse in origin and some of which are now displayed in the National Museum. So that is a very important site to be considering working so close to.

I would also ask about what is the prospect of placing signalling, traffic lights, at that junction to the N11 that would activate I suppose red when buses were passing? By my estimation at the moment there's an express route that uses that route where there might be 14 or 15 buses a day along the route, and you've got the 133 again to Wicklow Town where there's an increase of seven buses which between 4 and 6.15. So it seems that

most of the day buses won't be using that route, and for the period where buses would use it to close off the whole road, the whole Herbert Road junction doesn't seem to make any sense to me. So have you considered the placing of a traffic light there to halt traffic from the Herbert Road when a bus is approaching that junction?

You also mention, you've shown us in fact your presentation at Bray that bus traffic, the priority bus corridor will continue to use the other junctions at Bray North, Bray Central and Bray South. Could the same type of filter not be used at the Herbert Road junction that you're proposing to use at those two other junctions? Because they're crossing live traffic and it seems to me that if it can be done at those junctions why can't the same use be applied at Herbert Road?

And finally, I suppose I really think that it's vital that Central Government is brought into the picture here, and I think the Tánaiste, Simon Harris, and the Minister for Transport will have to make an intervention. And I would hope that the councillors, particularly those from Bray, could work with the Chief Executive here in Wicklow to try and find a workable solution with the Tánaiste and the Minister for Transport that would keep the Herbert Road junction open.

So if you could answer those questions, Martin, I'd really appreciate it. Okay. Go raibh maith agat.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Mark, I will hand it over to you and then I'm going to open it up to the rest of the councillors around the county.

Mr Allen: Thanks very much for your comments everybody. I will just would start off with a comment around, you know, shifting the problem as opposed to solving it and public opinion. So I probably covered a little bit of this in terms of the proposals at Junction 7. So I'd reiterate I suppose the requirement here of standards to close the junction but also just thinking of the N11 route more broadly and the dysfunction of it. Between Junction 6 where the road becomes an all-purpose route and down as far as the end of the scheme we have 19 minor junctions and accesses in between the major junctions, which includes Herbert Road, the R117, right down into accesses into residential properties, into fields; this is simply not conducive to the safe and efficient operation of what is a major interurban route. And, you know, it is really the

cumulative impact of all of these not just on bus priority but on the general operation of the corridor where the scheme is seeking to address.

Just there's a few comments I suppose mentioned around Kilbride Church, and it is important to say it is a very significant constraint and something that we're obviously very well aware of in our team. We have archaeological and architectural heritage specialists appointed within the team. I would say that the information presented is quite indicative, so it does not represent the impacts or does not represent the width of the design. That will be clearer hopefully in the information that we're publishing, but even at Phase 2 it's important to note this is a preferred option recommendation, it is not the final scheme. It needs to go through a further design process in the next phase and will undergo a full environmental impact assessment. But just one thing on -- and you're correct obviously to point out the church, you know the impact on parishioners, the cemetery site, you know it's a very good example of how constrained this corridor is and the confines in which we're being forced to work. You know, so you mention even parallel with options along that side. Kilbride Church is a very good example of a constraint, you know, that we need to consider. And there are others on the western side of the N11 as well, you have Kilcrony House, the Gate Lodge, you also have an archaeological monument there that is afforded protection. So it is a very constraining corridor and, you know, there is limited opportunity to widen and to widen it further. So you have to address these legacy issues.

It was mentioned just around what's being proposed to get traffic to Junction 7. So I suppose the issue at the junction or one of the main issues mentioned is I mentioned that conflict particularly at the Hill's Garage roundabout but also at the western roundabout as well, that if those familiar with the junction, if you imagine the operation of it, so traffic coming out of Killarney Road and out of Southern Cross Road needs to turn right at the roundabout and come up over the bridge and then merge onto the N11 northbound. So that traffic has to cross the path of all the traffic coming off southbound and trying to get into Bray, and that simply blocks up the traffic on Killarney Road, on the Southern Cross Road and on the N11. So the proposed intervention at the junction would address that fully by removing that conflict entirely. So the traffic getting off the N11 is not in conflict with the traffic getting on the N11. And we have demonstrated that by doing that you vastly improve access from

Killarney Road and from Southern Cross Road to that junction. Because often the tailbacks that occur on links and on the N11 are as a result of bottlenecks further downstream, further upstream in the network.

Just mention around accidents and statistics around Herbert Road. I don't have statistics to hand today. But I suppose we have studied the accidents on the corridor. A lot of the issues arise, I mentioned earlier, as a result of inconsistencies and there's no real -- each junction on the N11 is different to the previous one. There are so many stop-start conditions caused by the multitude of access points on the network, changes in speed limits and so on. So the environment is constantly different. And it's quite different in character compared to the other interurban routes. So I mentioned it is about sort of restoring the function of this route not just as a strategic corridor but providing better accessibility into the towns there, including Bray obviously along the corridor.

Just around the recent closure of Herbert Road, and we were aware of the serious implications that happened in terms of the congestion that it caused, but, you know, I suppose that closure laid bare the issues that are present at the existing Junction 7. And it was also mentioned the statistics in terms of the actual volumes using Herbert Road, and we have done traffic counts and surveys to understand how many people use the Herbert Road junction. It is not in the thousands. So, you know, during peak hours the amount of traffic that uses the Herbert Road is much less than that. We also know that most of the traffic using the junction, 80% to 90% in the evening and in the morning peaks, originate from or are destined to an area within 1 kilometre of the junction primarily. So it is an important access for those who use it but we would see it as more advantageous to provide proper connectivity into Bray via one of the primary junctions. That is how a strategic motorway dual carriageway should function.

Just a couple of options were mentioned just around the prospect of signalling the Herbert Road junction, that would be triggered by the buses so that buses would get priority through the junction as I understand. So signalling a junction like that on a rural road in a high speed environment would not be considered to be a safe option. So signalling is more appropriate for urban lower speed contexts. You know, there would be a risk with signalling a junction like that, that a driver coming out of Herbert Road

interprets a green light to mean they have priority which they wouldn't, so you would need to have signals on the N11 as well. We don't feel that the option that is included in the standards for bringing the bus through the primary junctions could be applied and, as I mentioned, the standards require the minor junctions and accesses to be closed.

And just around, I suppose the comment was raised around what is Bray. So we're not addressing or not adding anything to the people of Bray as a result of this scheme, not paying enough attention to Bray. We do understand the concerns, you know, of the people of Bray and I've mentioned already that this scheme has evolved considerably. We feel we're providing active travel facilities around Bray Town; that's a deficiency that is there along the corridor at the moment. We've engaged with people who are forced to use the corridor to cycle on; it's highly unsafe to do so. So we're providing segregated, safe alternative facilities that will serve the communities along the corridor including the people of Bray. And similarly the Junction 7 upgrade, I've spoke about that so I won't dwell on it again but it is significantly enhancing the accessibility to and from the junction from Bray.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Just before I invite other councillors in I am conscious that we have other things on the agenda here as well and I am going to do my best to get through them so I am going to propose a time extension to 5.30. Can I have a proposer please? Councillor Behan. Secunder? Councillor Alvey. Councillor Stokes.

COUNCILLOR STOKES: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and for your leadership on this matter and facilitating the discussion today. I'd also like to pay tribute to Councillor Behan for his sustained commitment to this issue, and I would also like to briefly acknowledge the many people who have travelled down to Wicklow Town today. They're regular people with a genuine concern. I would like to thank Martin and John for the presentation. I learned quite a number of new things today and, yeah, there were a number of items towards the end that I would like to scrutinise a bit further as chair of the Transport Strategic Policy Committee so I'd look forward to reading the presentation.

Of course traffic in North Wicklow is a very challenging business. I mean as a Greystones district councillor, in my lifetime the population of Greystones has

probably doubled, if not tripled. I mean in the nineties many families had one car per family and now in many families it is one car per adult, including adult children living at home. So my point is that there's more traffic than ever.

Like most people, I welcome general investment, like what Councillor Behan stated, but we also need the rapid investment in public transport as a key priority, like what councillor Duddy stated. Could I just ask about the design process? We live in an era of AI, and I am wondering do we harness AI to look at simulation models based on the traffic data? I'm interested in this because I am just doubtful that closing the Herbert Road junction will help traffic in a simulation model. So I think we really need to be at the cutting edge of this.

And I want to pick up on Councillor Behan's point about smart motorways, which is valid. I have experience of this myself. I used to live in the UK. And I vividly remember going past, you know, a place like Birmingham which seemed to be endlessly tied up in road works and delays to build the smart motorways. So is the bus priority corridor the same as the smart motorways in the UK except that they're just for buses? That's the only difference between the two? Because what I am very interested in, what happens if a vehicle breaks down in this section? Because it's going to happen, there's so many vehicles on the road. I mean we all probably are aware that the smart motorways in England have come in for quite a bit of sustained criticism due to the high number of accidents and I believe just in the last week the UK government announced a further £390 million to add 150 stopping areas. So what I am wondering is, a specific question: Would there be any stopping areas for vehicles if this went ahead?

I have been concerned about a democratic deficit in Irish society for some time. I mean in 2024 this Council unanimously passed a motion calling for more power to be devolved to local government and here we are with the Herbert Road junction as an excellent example of that democratic deficit. I mean to me there is an overwhelming demand from residents and public representatives to keep the Herbert Road junction open.

And finally let me just ask this question: Of the 1,150 submissions how many people actually wrote in that they want the Herbert Road junction to close? I would expect that it's very few, if any. Go raibh maith agat, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Leonard.

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Thanks. Councillor Stokes has just brought up one of my concerns as well and it is just in the scenario of somebody pulling into the hard shoulder, what happens in a scenario like that with this plan?

I suppose I just want to bring in south of the county. I represent Arklow Municipal District, and we've have a lot of commuters. The town has grown over the years, but it's about to have a growth spurt again. There's a lot of people being pushed out of Dublin because of the housing crisis and I've noticed that a lot of people are relocating to Arklow and further south, down to County Wexford and Gorey actually. A lot of the buses are full every morning even when they reach Arklow and further up, there's spaces on the buses, no seats on the buses. So I suppose I just want to ask with this plan are there any plans to increase public transport and the buses servicing it as well?

But I would have the same concerns, and I would be in support of Councillor Behan's proposal to pause it. I think this conversation has been very healthy today and I think we need to continue it on a more regular basis and really engage and bring everybody's concern so that we can get the right plan. And I think, you know, the initial design of something, it's better to spend a lot of money and do the right thing rather than just small little bits and pieces that aren't going to cause a solution or give a solution to the problem that we all are facing, and we just need to get proper investment in public transport, the rail service and buses first before we do any of this. Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Glennon.

COUNCILLOR GLENNON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, Martin, for the presentation. Look, everyone here I am sure welcomes the planned improvement to Junction 7. Long overdue. Yet having listened carefully to you I fail to see the need to close the junction. I can't understand why if any danger arises from both uses, i.e. being left open and for entry and exit, and the bus corridor is to exist, it is a car almost passing the junction and cutting in front of a bus, I can't see why the two can't live together properly signposted, advance warning for people who might want to exit from the junction, that they would get in behind the bus who was on the lane or someone

coming out onto the junction that can drive out and behind when the bus passes. I fail to see why it's necessary to close both. I have some experience in traffic management in my previous life, I can't see having listened carefully to you the need for it to close the junction. I fail to see it. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Is it Mark or Martin?

Mr Allen: Martin.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Martin, I beg your pardon. I think I was calling you Mark.

COUNCILLOR GLENNON: I think I called him Martin anyway.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Not you, Patsy. Martin, over to you.

Mr Allen: Yeah. Thank you for the comments. Just the first question, Councillor Stokes, you mentioned around have we harnessed AI in terms of the traffic modelling and understanding the traffic patterns. So we do have a traffic model that we are using, it is not an AI model, but we have built what is called a micro simulation model for the project, and that's unusual at this early stage of the project but we felt it necessary in this case probably because of maybe some of the things that you might be alluding to. It is a very complicated corridor and it is very important that we understand the implications of, you know, changes and interventions that we're making but also that we understand, you know, right down at a finite level the intricacies, closing accesses, that kind of thing, how the operation of the route is affected by junction closures or junction alterations. The sort of strategic level models that might normally be used at this stage of the project weren't really the appropriate tool, weren't detailed enough for us to better understand that, so we invested quite a bit of time building a detailed micro simulation model, particularly to better understand how the scheme performs around the Bray area.

Just on the smart motorway, or what is the difference I suppose between what we are proposing and a smart motorway? So obviously you're familiar with the smart motorway schemes in the UK. I suppose for those who don't know, they operate where the hard shoulder is opened up to general traffic pretty much on a full-time basis, so there's no restriction of use, and there are stopping areas for emergency stops and that kind of thing every now and again. So on our scheme we're not proposing a smart motorway project. So we're proposing that the hard shoulder will remain a hard shoulder. So it will serve as a refuge for vehicles that do break down but the standard, the design standstill requires that additional emergency pull-in areas are provided at

specific intervals, so that will be included as necessary in the design, but it is not a full-time facility either. So, you know, it would operate during peak periods, it would be monitored, you know, by CCTV and so on so that incidents that do occur can be responded to promptly. But, yeah, it's quite different I suppose to a smart motorway scheme. And a good example of what we're proposing is actually on the M1 and M2 motorways already in Belfast where there are hard shoulder bus priority facilities on the outskirts approaching Belfast. They're not smart motorway scheme so they're very different to those in operation in the UK. We've engaged with the operators of those schemes. The feedback is very positive both in terms of the improvements for bus services but also in terms of how it's operated and the safety elements to it.

You mentioned just as well the submissions. So, yeah, we had received over 1,100 submissions. You are right, I mean most of the submissions, I think about 900 of the submissions were related to access closures, including the R117 and Herbert Road. We didn't receive many submissions, you know, proactively stating that they wanted or supported the junction closure. I think I mentioned all right, and I won't dwell on it again, around you know the requirement of the standards to close the junction, but one of the things that was very evident in the submissions was at the time we were proposing to put in signals at the Hill's road garage, and certainly there were doubts expressed in many of the submissions that that would be sufficient not just to cater for the traffic redirected from Herbert Road but also that it was perhaps an opportunity look to address to accessibility issues in and out of Bray. I suppose we did respond to that. You know, we have to adhere to the design standards in terms of the junction closures but we're obviously proposing that significant intervention now at Junction 7 which vastly improves the performance and, you know, our micro simulation modelling that I mentioned very clearly demonstrates that.

Just as well, further south of the study area from Arklow or Gorey and, you know, we are conscious that, I mentioned earlier, the N11 extends all the way to Rosslare. Buses, so will there be additional services? It's not within the remit of this scheme or ourselves to consider service provision but I suppose what we are trying to do is enable a corridor that facilitates improved services and services that will be more attractive. Obviously at the moment buses are subject to the same unreliability of journey times, they're caught up in the same issues, that general traffic is on the N11 corridor. So the

interventions that we're proposing significantly improve bus journey time and bus journey time reliability along the scheme, and then the National Transport Authority ultimately have responsibility for the provision of services and the services pattern and indeed the bus stop locations that was mentioned earlier.

I suppose finally just the question was asked, well, you know, and we've obviously discussed the need for the closure and why the two can't stay together and look, it's difficult to cover everything today, to get into all of the detail, but I suppose as I mentioned earlier, cumulatively the impact of all these accesses on a route like the N11, we all know the N11 is dysfunctional, highly dysfunctional at the moment, and it is very difficult to pin that to any one specific reason. It's an accumulation of all the problems on the corridor, all the minor junctions, all the accesses, the substandard geometry, the gradients, a lot of the primary junctions as well are dysfunctional, Junction 7 as we mentioned, the pedestrians and cyclists trying to battle through this, all of these elements combine and contribute to the dysfunction on the corridor at the moment, and this scheme is seeking to resolve those. You know, the presence of these minor junctions and accesses is not permitted by standards but not permitted on motorways and type 1 dual carriageways on the network in general.

So, you know, our modelling, we mentioned earlier we are cumulatively assessing the impact of all the interventions we're proposing on the operation of the corridor. You know, we are looking at the whole performance of the scheme. But I mentioned earlier we're happy to discuss the specific details, specific aspects of the project but, you know, as a whole the route is failing to perform because of a multitude of issues and this scheme has evolved into something that was, you know, initially targeting bus priority into something that that's actively trying to address those deficiencies up and down the corridor. So thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Lourda Scott.

COUNCILLOR SCOTT: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks for the presentation. I have been listening carefully to all the previous discussions and comments, particularly from the Bray councillors, and I suppose I do want to say this is my first time seeing the plans today. We didn't have the presentation in advance. So there's a huge amount of information that councillors from outside of Bray have been presented with here this afternoon, and just speaking for myself it's actually very difficult to get my head around

all the ins and outs of what you're talking about here.

I represent the Greystones district, so anything affecting Junction 7 and sort of traffic around Bray, particularly the Southern Cross, potentially has very much impact on my constituents coming from the north of Greystones. So I do think it was a slight missed opportunity that perhaps the Greystones district councillors also didn't have the opportunity to see more detail about these plans before this afternoon. Without an engineering degree it is very difficult to really make sense in reality as to what you mean by some of the things you are discussing. In particular, I am struggling with where is the traffic, and I appreciate you say it is not thousands of cars that use the Herbert Road junction and I think from what you are saying that most cars in your model suggest that people go within a 1 kilometre radius, it seems to be quite an important local access point, I am wondering where do they go? When the Junction 7 is upgraded, which I will add is extremely welcome and very much needed, but where do they go? Do they still have to go, all those cars, onto Killarney Road or onto the Boghall, or other access points? I just can't visualise that in my head.

I suppose one of my biggest concerns, I talk many times here about various consultation processes and various things that come out for public consultation, about consultation fatigue among the members of the public. So when I hear of 1,100 submissions coming from people around Bray onto this I sit up and I listen and I take heed because that is extremely unusual. And when they all seem to be unanimously saying the same thing again I take heed very much so. And I would say that again listening to you my interpretation is you're referring back to design standards, so it seems very much that regardless of what we're saying here today or what the public are saying, the design standards are there, so it's going to be closed anyway. Is that a correct interpretation to say, that's there's no overruling that? So, you know, where are we going from here? Are we all just going to come out having expressed our opinion? The people behind me have come down and spent their time from work, et cetera, letting their feelings be known outside, but does it just come back to the design standards are there, this needs to be closed, that's the path forward we're taking? Thank you for your time.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Tom Fortune.

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. And thanks, Martin, for your presentation, John. First of all, I would say that I totally support what Councillors Behan and O'Brien and Duddy said, all the councillors said, in particular the detail they have gone into, so I'm not going to repeat that. And I am familiar with the background to this because I did chair a meeting for Councillor Behan a good number of months ago where there was over 300 people attended, and the end result of all that was partly all the submissions you would have got and the concerns people had. So I just want to make a few observations having listened today to what's going on.

We talk about -- I think you mentioned that there was four entities involved in the whole process. I mean you obviously have been given a brief as a consultant to deliver what you're trying to deliver but I would be just curious to know, because it happens in this environment quite a lot, we hear "they have decided this," I would like to know who is the lead on this? Who is actually driving the final decision? I mean is it the NTA? I think we're also dealing with the fall out of a philosophy that was believed by the previous -- by the Minister in the last Government who's no longer here. So I think that's a big part of that. I think also my observation is having listened to your presentations and having been involved as I said before with Councillor Behan, that there's budgetary matters driving this as well. And it certainly having listened, and I've had contact from a lot of people in Bray it isn't in the interest of people in Bray. They don't want it. The six councillors have spoken very articulately about what the situation is. I mean they represent the guts of 40,000 people. And we talked about also, it was mentioned earlier in the presentation about the environmental impact. What about the human impact? Does the human impact not have a thread into the environmental impact? And I think that's been totally, totally ignored. And as Councillor Scott referred to earlier, we're being presented today with this report as 32 members of Wicklow County Council but it's going to be published this week. So I just think -- and then again, it does get the hair on the back of my neck up not in a friendly way when I hear that the Kildare NRO are the project management. They run our education and the guards all operate from Wexford. So why is Wicklow being hung out like this?

I think for us as members, and I say this to the members, this is a bit of a test case, because we're all democratically elected and we represent the public and there's

been -- I think the articulation from the Bray councillors, and I think Councillor Winstanley asked a very, very fair question about getting more detail about the submissions other than just what the numbers are. And I don't know how you're going to properly doing that if you're going to publish something this week and move ahead regardless. So it seems to me that we're being told all this, and it's like, well, we told ye but we're going ahead with it any way. We're not being listened to. And I think that is a major issue. And I think the proposal, that I would support a hundred percent that Councillor Behan proposed and I think there should be an immediate meeting with the Bray district councillors and the Chief Executive to put the stops on this. We know from one of the councillors that the Tánaiste is not happy with this at all and I think has written to people about it. So that should be dealt with and enacted properly. And I don't think it is good enough -- as far as I'm concerned it is not good enough for consultants and, you know, professional people to come in here and tell us something and then not listen to what they're being told and it appears to me haven't listened fully. You might have heard what was being said or read what was being said but you haven't listened, and just say we're going on regardless.

I just think as members, you know, I've touched on this stuff many times in the chamber, we have to stand up and say hang on a minute, we're democratically elected. The councillors in Bray have said very clearly what the situation is on behalf of the public and you've answered it as best you can. And I do appreciate your position, but you haven't answered every question you were asked. You gave an answer, but you didn't answer it. And I just think this is not the way we should be doing business. I think this is a ridiculous solution to a very serious problem. And I think it's been driven as I say by an outdated -- a philosophy of someone who had a whole idea of the way the world should be and a lot of the public don't agree with that, with the way that world should be. You know we have it on planning in our situation where roads are not allowed be done now and we want existing roads to be redirected and all this kind of carry on. It's ridiculous stuff. The members that are democratically elected and represent the people are not being listened to. I will finish up by saying I strongly support what Councillor Behan proposed.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. What I will do is I have Councillor Snell come in now. I have no other people, councillors from outside of Bray, so Councillor Snell and then I'll go to Councillor Behan to wrap up. So Councillor Snell.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I suppose first and foremost just to acknowledge the presentation here today. But I do have to say that, you know, the eight municipal districts councillors of Bray were informed last Tuesday night, so apologies seven because we've one who has stepped aside, but the seven municipal district councillors of Bray was given a presentation on Tuesday night. We have been brought in here today to listen to the consultants. And I want to thank Martin for the report, and you did say that the N11 is dysfunctional and you wouldn't have time to get into everything in regards to why you're proposing what you're proposing here today. So I suppose my question is: When are you going to get into everything? The Cathaoirleach is restricted in the time that he has on the agenda. I want to thank the Cathaoirleach for putting it on the agenda here today. It is hugely important for the citizens of Bray, the people who have took time out of their busy schedules to come down here and make their feelings known.

I was lucky enough to listen to East Coast last Friday on my way back from Dublin, I heard one of the residents speaking and I heard Councillor Behan speaking about this issue, and as I come back down the N11 I had a look at this and I just thought in layman's terms this is crazy, it doesn't make any sense. No sense whatsoever.

I understand that consultants are there to make reports and a reports only, and that's why I have a major concern that this goes out -- you mentioned that this will be going out on Thursday. And there is a proposal here and we'll take that proposal very, very seriously. It seems like every councillor is unified on this issue and it is very important.

You were also asked, Martin in regards to statistics and data that you had on the use of the Herbert Road, and you said you didn't have the statistics, but when you were asked a question in regards to the numbers of whether it'd be thousands of people that use that you said you know for a fact it is not thousands. So without the proper statistics that to me would have been the most fundamental thing that a consultancy firm would have, is the statistics of who is using what of these roads, and I just am sitting here and I am actually aghast with that.

You know, we're talking about a church of 165 years on the N11 there, Kilbride Church. And people talking about, it's nearly like the church shouldn't be there. It's like that, you know, it's a hindrance to the community. That's unforgivable. You know, probably a decade ago this sort of -- it wouldn't have been allowed to be discussed in this type of manner. This is not acceptable from a historical point of view, from the people that are using that church. They've a right to use their church and they've a right to be consulted. And I think there's an onus on every single one of us here to stand up and protect the rights of our citizens. And that's why the Bray Municipal District have been -- you have to be commended but unfortunately you look toothless because the very people that put you into the seats that you now occupy some of them are sitting behind you and they're thinking sure what's the point? The people who stood out here are wondering what's the point in having TDs and senators? Even our Tánaiste agrees that this is not acceptable and we hear that €5 million has been spent to say. Five million euros and nothing has changed. I don't hear any timescale in regards to Junction 7. Everybody here has spoke at length and said they accept and agree that Junction 7 needs an upgrade. Everybody is in favour of what you're trying to do in prioritising our bus routes but unfortunately not at the cost of the citizens who have spoken in 1,100 submissions, confirmed to the Cathaoirleach of the Transport SPC. And again, I feel sorry for our chair of the SPC, because it should have been one of the first places that it was discussed.

The members who sit on our Transport SPC should have had all the information that Martin is saying he cannot be fit into the agenda today and yet this is going out to the public on Thursday and we don't know what's in it because he can't explain it because he doesn't have the time. The Cathaoirleach cannot fit him in. To be fair, you have given a lot of time in it. And yet the eight councillors will go back to the members who elected them to try and explain what is happening. And the people at the back of the chambers haven't heard the full story either.

It's not wanted, it's not needed, and unfortunately what's happening here, as Councillor Fortune has alluded to, is the erosion of the powers of the democratically elected public representatives at grass roots level. Our voice is not being heard.

So there is a motion in front of the chamber here today. I will be supporting it wholeheartedly. I do want to see a stop to this. This should not go out onto public display until this is actually ironed out with the citizens of Bray, with the Elected Members, all 32, and our SPC Cathaoirleach and his membership, and also the Executive of Wicklow County Council. We're not getting all the answers here. Thanks, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Unless no other councillor from outside of Bray wants to speak I am going to invite Councillor Behan back in, and then Martin I will let you wrap up and then I will invite the Chief Executive in. Councillor Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach, and thanks to all my colleagues for the magnificent support that you have given to the motion I have proposed. Can I just say that the immediate feedback I have received from people who are listening both in the chamber and who are listening online is a huge disappointment at the fact that the impact on the local roads in Bray, all of the people who live on the Herbert Road and surrounding roads. There are 11 housing estates going onto Killarney Lane, there are a similar number onto Kilbride Road, they will have to go to onto the Killarney Road and pass through the Killarney Road, Boghall Road junction, which is very, very limited in scope. So that will be the impact on the people who were here today and who are listening at the moment in time. They feel they are being completely and utterly ignored by you the proposers of this proposal. I am sure they are very happy with the support they've heard coming from around this county, from West Wicklow to South Wicklow to North Wicklow to Bray itself, and that is very, very encouraging. But the last thing I would say on behalf of not the hundreds, not even the thousands, but the tens of thousands of people who are going to be affected by this is: They're not going to have it. They are not going to accept it. We hope the Chief Executive listens to what we are saying today but I can tell you from the strength of feeling this road is not going to close. End of story. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Martin, do you want...?

Mr Allen: Yeah, I will address some of the queries that were specifically raised there. So, yeah, it was mentioned just around the traffic modelling and the redistribution of traffic. So we have modelled, you know, the scenario obviously with Herbert Road being closed in the micro simulation model, so it does show the traffic obviously will have to redistribute. So the traffic bound for the N11 would be using one of the other

three junctions. It primarily diverts towards Junction 7, as I mentioned. But I suppose it is important to consider the current operation of Herbert Road. So Herbert Road is not an all-movement type junction. For example, in the morning most of the traffic is bound north towards Dublin. That has to go south, do a U-turn at Junction 7, negotiate all of that congestion at Junction 7 to do a U-turn and come back again and go north. That's undesirable for the people who have to do it but also from a safety perspective to have short trips hopping on and off the N11. So that traffic will distribute to Junction 7 but via an improved Junction 7 with those conflicts removed.

Just on the design standards and, you know, is there any circumventing or any way around those. So I mean design standards obviously we have to respond to those, and the design standards are set in order to achieve safe outcomes. So that is something we obviously have to consider. I did mention earlier that we have nonetheless assessed options for keeping junctions open or assessed multiple options for closing them and assessed options for keeping some open and some closed. So standards are obviously very important. We have to have very strong justification not to adhere to them but we feel there's merits -- you know, beyond obviously the safety implications and standards we feel there's strong merits to the proposal.

Just on, you know, some specific aspects of standards. The Herbert Road junction is a very substandard junction, and it is probably not something that we've discussed today. It is, you know obviously those familiar with it know it is a hair pin bend you know going into the junction followed by a steep gradient. It is unsuitable for heavy vehicles. There's also reduced visibility for traffic coming out of the Herbert Road junction looking north on the N11 and there's reduced visibility for people on the N11 driving towards the junction. There's also, the junction sits within, is closely spaced between Junction 6 and Junction 7 so it creates weaving issues for traffic looking to come on and subsequently get off again, or traffic that wants to get off at Junction 7 because of the congestion at Junction 7 has to jump into the hard shoulder early, sometimes conflicting with traffic coming out from Herbert Road. So the junction is, I mention it is a legacy junction which simply doesn't adhere to current standards.

Just around the decision-making, I suppose we are the engineering consultants, so we make a recommendation to the local authorities and the parties in the parties on the

project, which includes Transport Infrastructure Ireland, the NTA are a party to it as well so the decision-making is a collective one amongst the -- but the approving authority for the project is Transport Infrastructure Ireland.

You mentioned just the environmental impact and the human impact. And, you know, it is important to say we are very much responsive and aware of the human impact of what we're proposing. So, you know, we have broader team that has supported the project and will continue to do so as we go into the environmental impact assessment. That is not simply just an environmental and engineering team. So we do consider, you know, impacts to communities, impacts to heritage, resource, to archaeology we mentioned, broader impacts to material assets, to properties, to landowners and householders are very much part of the environmental impact assessment.

Just on the submissions and detail on the submissions from the previous consultation. So we did do a review, and you mentioned the number of submissions, but we published a report which is on the project website as a follow-up to the public consultation in September 2023. So that report was published on the website many months ago, it outlines in full detail a breakdown of all the submissions at that time, what the key themes were and provides detail on I suppose how that has informed the next stages of the project. So that report was published on the project website following that September 2023 public display.

Kilbride Church was mentioned and, you know, it being a hindrance to the community. Far from that, and it is important to say, we understand you know Kilbride Church is a very significant constraint. Make no mistake, it is not our intention to adversely impact Kilbride Church. You know, it's one of the reasons, as I mentioned earlier, along with other constraints while we're dealing within such a confined space here. You know, the human being impact, the cultural heritage impact, the archaeological impacts, the constraints on this corridor are very significant. Not just Kilbride Church, there are similar constraints on the other side.

The timescale was mentioned. John alluded to it, but the plan would be once we conclude Phase 2 that the project will move into Phase 3. That's about a two-year project, a two-year phase in general, so it would progress throughout 2025 and 2026,

with then a statutory planning application thereafter. And beyond that, you know, subject to approvals and funding the scheme would go to the implementation stages with a construction contract.

So, yeah, I think that probably covers most of the queries that were raised.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Bear with us one second. First of all, Martin, I want to thank you and your team for coming here today and for being open and honest as much as you can. From my point of view, representing the Wicklow Municipal District, I think we're all in agreement that the status quo is just not good enough at the moment for people travelling from Arklow, Wicklow up through the N11 and getting caught in the Glen of the Downs, especially when have a rail line practically empty most times of the day.

Can I commend every councillor here today who spoke. It is not very often we have such unanimity, and we are united in this I think it is fair to say from what I am hearing here today. I just hope, and I genuinely mean this, that the people of Bray are listening here today because again it is the people that put us here today and it would be remiss of us not to take their concerns on board and express them to yourselves with the Executive here. So I want to commend all the people from Bray that have not just travelled down here today but joined us online here today. I am nearly six years here, I am year nearly in the Chair here, and I have never seen so much passion. And we have had a lot of topics here discussed that can be as controversial as you can get them, but I have never seen all of us here in this chamber united. I have never seen as much passion from outside of this chamber and I hope that all the concerns are taken on board. So thank you very much and I'll invite the Chief Executive to come in and discuss Joe's...

MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you to Martin and the team and to John and all his team as well, and most importantly thank you members for the very passionate discussion I suppose about all things to do with the N11 today.

As you know, I am very much in favour of creating a safe -- safer road for people to use. We have spent, I suppose, the last couple of meetings agreeing Part 8s for park and ride facilities up and down the length of the N11 network. Those park and ride facilities will lie empty without a dedicated bus corridor for people to use, because

there is no benefit to any member of the public wanting to use public transport if they're sitting in the congestion that everybody is sitting in at the moment.

Where we are at now: It's an options report. It is not a public consultation document. It is a report of all the findings, of all the detail that the consultants have gone through. It is the gateway, I suppose, to opening up the discussion further. Environmental impact assessment has to be done, detailed design has to be done. There are so many constraints on that route as we know, but you simply cannot have bus corridors without straightforward access. And it is complicated.

I am more than happy to write to the Tánaiste and the Minister for Transport outlining what the members have articulated today and to look for the reinstatement of the full scheme again, but I do think that this report has to be published. You're talking, this work that has been done to date, regardless of whether the scheme goes ahead or the full scheme is to go ahead with new government, with inform and help and guide that process. I think far too much time and money has been spent to walk away from a process that we're in now. This will inform whatever the future may be. I do think we're in a stage where the current government are far more open to the broader scheme coming back to on the table.

This scheme is not funded. It has to go through the process of, as I said, the next stage is detailed design, environmental impact, archaeological impact, all of those constraints, and then it moves -- if it goes through those gateways it moves into the statutory planning process. And again, that's a unique opportunity I suppose for all to have their say. It'll be oral hearings, public, it will be all that if it gets to that stage. But I am more than happy, members, to write to the Tánaiste and Minister for Transport on this. I hear what you're saying, I understand the frustration, I have gone in and out of every exit and entry on the N11 myself to see and, you know, those pinch points at rush hour and at non-rush hour times, and the volume of traffic varies greatly depending on what time of the day, so I understand when people are saying you know they need access and want to use that piece of road.

I travel the N11 top to tale nearly every day and I see commuters coming home in the evening to Wicklow and in the morning time trying to get to Dublin or beyond, and it's

unsustainable. The road I suppose was built at a time when a simple cut through the mountains was good enough and that's simply not good enough for people of Wicklow and beyond today. It is the national primary route now to the largest port serving Europe, and that has had massive impact on the traffic volumes on the N11 as well. We need to be able to give commuters viable alternatives to the car.

As I said, I am more than happy to write to the Minister but I think the report needs to be published. It is the next point in this. It will give you all further information. It will give you detail. And I am more than happy to engage with the members, with our consultants and brief and talk through and have a far more open and frank conversation about this. TII are the body, the approving body on this. It is not a matter unfortunately for this chamber to decide on. It is not a matter for me to decide on. TII ultimately will decide whether any project goes ahead on the N11. Thank you members.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Chairman, that is absolutely not good enough. The Chief Executive has sat here for two hours listening to the express views of the councillor. I propose that she has the power -- and does have the power, and she knows well she has the power -- to pause this work. She has the power to do it. We have expressed our views. She like the previous speakers on behalf of the Council have ignored the people we represent and they've ignored us here today. Can I ask that my motion be read out, Cathaoirleach, and that it be voted on so that at least the express will of the elected representatives is recorded? But I have to say I am deeply, deeply disappointed with that response from the Chief Executive. It is not what I expected of her, but unfortunately this fight will continue and there'll be many, many more hours and unfortunately a lot more money wasted on this scheme until the powers that be realise it is not going to be allowed by the people. So, Cathaoirleach, rather than delaying any more can we have a vote on the motion please?

CATHAOIRLEACH: I have one more speaker and then I'll go to that. Councillor O'Brien.

COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I just want to say one thing, and I think it is critically important that we are talking about a whole scheme but let's not scapegoat the Herbert Road exit as the death-knell of the smooth flow of buses up and down this county. It is not the gatekeeper of a flow of -- it cannot be

scapegoated at all costs. And again, show a little bit of courtesy but also take this as an opportunity to revisit decision-making and include everything that's been said today and everything that will be said after, but we can't be scapegoating the Herbert Road. Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Helen, would you read out Councillor Behan's motion please?

MS PURCELL: The motion before us, proposed by Councillor Joe Behan, seconded by Councillor Dermot O'Brien, is that: "The Chief Executive pauses any further action on the Interim Bus Priority Scheme and writes to the Minister for Transport and Tánaiste Simon Harris asking Government to review the entire scheme to allow the Herbert Road access to the N11 to continue."

I will take a vote on it even though there doesn't seem to be any dissent. What I will say to the members who are online is I have muted everybody so just put yourself back on speaker when I call your name, please. So if you're in favour of the motion please vote 'for' and if you are against please vote 'against'.

Councillor Danny Alvey?

COUNCILLOR ALVEY: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Mark Barry?

COUNCILLOR BARRY: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Joe Behan?

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Sylvester Bourke?

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Melanie Corrigan?

COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Avril Cronin?

COUNCILLOR CRONIN: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Erika Doyle?

COUNCILLOR DOYLE: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Malacháí Duddy?

COUNCILLOR DUDDY: Tá.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Gail Dunne?

COUNCILLOR DUNNE: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Louise Fenelon Gaskin?

COUNCILLOR FENELON GASKIN: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Orla Finn?

COUNCILLOR FINN: For.

MS PURCELL: For Councillor Pat Fitzgerald is not present. Councillor Tom Fortune?

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Patsy Glennon?

COUNCILLOR GLENNON: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Pat Kennedy?

COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Shane Langrell?

COUNCILLOR LANGRELL: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Peir Leonard?

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Pat Mahon?

COUNCILLOR MAHON: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Jason Mulhall?

COUNCILLOR MULHALL: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Dermot O'Brien?

COUNCILLOR O'BRIEN: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Paul O'Brien?

CATHAOIRLEACH: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Gerry O'Neill is not present. Councillor Warren O'Toole?

COUNCILLOR O'TOOLE: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Graham Richmond is currently not present.

Councillor Lourda Scott? Not present. Councillor John Snell?

COUNCILLOR SNELL: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Peter Stapleton?

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Stephen Stokes?

COUNCILLOR STOKES: For.

MS PURCELL: For. Councillor Caroline Winstanley?

COUNCILLOR WINSTANLEY: For.

MS PURCELL: For. There are 26 in favour and 5 not present. The motion is passed. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, members, and thank you for that vote. I think it is very clear how every member of chamber feels. And I want to convey my sincere thanks again to those in the public gallery and at least leave here today knowing that you've the full support of every elected member in County Wicklow. So thank you very much again.

Okay, members. With that I have to go on to the next item on agenda. It's item number 22 now, and that's: To note Wicklow County Council 2025 Countywide Differential Rent scheme for social housing tenants (copy attached). Thank you Michael.

MR NICHOLSON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. As the members will be aware, we charge rents on our Council properties and the rent is based entirely on income. The idea being that everybody can afford to pay their rent. The rent assessed on what they're actually receiving every week, whether it be employment or social welfare. We are obliged to review the rent scheme and the rents being charged on a regular basis. We haven't actually done so since 2019 for various reasons. I suppose the main reason being we lost three years to Covid, and also because it is a fairly mammoth undertaking because we have in excess of 5,000 tenants and there's a lot of work, as you can imagine, in sending out forms, getting them in, assessing all the rents. There's a lot of work. It takes several months to do.

The other thing we have to do this year is something we should have done years ago, and that is we still have to two rent schemes in the county. In actual fact it's even more complicated than that. Bray has had its own rent scheme since the Bray Town Council days. It's broadly similar to the County Council's scheme but a little bit different. So the older tenants in Bray are still paying rent on that scheme. The newly appointed tenants from Bray are using the County Council scheme and the rest of the county are using the County Council scheme. And that situation is clearly untenable and has been for a long number of years. Everyone's rent should be the same if their income is the same irrespective of where the house is located in the county.

We're unique in that we're the only county in the country that has different rent schemes operating in the county. The auditor has pointed this out on several occasions. Up to now he has been suggesting that it is something we should tackle but in his last audit report he has instructed us to have one scheme for the county, so we have no choice. Apart from that, it is a very good idea and apart from that, it is something we are all keen to do in here. Even if the auditor didn't ask for it we should be doing it.

So we have had a look at the scheme. We haven't actually changed the scheme, we're just using the same scheme, because obviously when you change a scheme completely it is hard to anticipate what the effects will be on the tenants or on the income going to the Council. So we are sticking with the same scheme. We looked at a lot of schemes in the surrounding counties to compare and contrast. Our scheme matches up broadly similar to other schemes that are being used. We've made a couple of minor amendments to the scheme before you. We've excluded maintenance payments. We've excluded carers payments because we were asked to do that in particular. We have done away with the idea of a maximum rent simply because the maximum rent was always €200 per week. So you had a situation where somebody could be paying €190 per week based on their income and a person with four or five times the income paying €200. Again, clearly untenable. So the rent charged will be the rent depending on your income. Having said that, we have very, very few tenants paying anywhere near the maximum rent. The minimum rent is going to €30 per week which is very, very fair. Again a slight increase on before. We're rounding off the rents to 50 cents again just for collection purposes. And I think that's the most -- apart from that the scheme is the same.

Now, what we did with the rent ones, in order to assess the possible effect of moving the Bray rents to the County Council scheme we took a random sample of 150 tenants and ran their income through the rent scheme of the County Council just to make sure there wasn't huge variances. It turns out that most of the Bray tenants will be slightly better off because there's a couple of different nuances in the Bray scheme to the County Council scheme, but because we're doing an overall rent review it shouldn't affect the Council's finances too much.

So it is an Executive function of the Council. I am bringing it before you today to note simply because of the subtle changes in it and because we now have -- and I want the members to be aware of this -- we will now have one rent scheme for every single tenant in the county irrespective of whether they're in Bray or any other MD in the county. Any questions?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Michael.

COUNCILLOR WINSTANLEY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. I just wanted to say I was pleased to see the proposals from my rent disregards motion from last year being incorporated into the new rent scheme, and I welcome that Bray rents have been brought in line with the rest of the county and that the carers allowance and domiciliary carers allowance will no longer be counted as incomes along with maintenance payments. These changes will make a real difference to some of the disadvantaged families in our community. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Joe Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Cathaoirleach, sorry for having to speak again, but I can tell you it is not an Executive function. It is a reserved function. This idea of noting something that the Executive is trying to push through here today is unacceptable. This document here was given to all of the councillors elected in 2014 in Bray, the Local Government Reform Act, section 55: "The making and revocation of a rent scheme providing for the manner in which rents and other charges in respect of dwellings shall be determined." It's there in black and white. That document was given to me by the acting Chief Executive at the time. All the members got it.

What we're doing here is making a new scheme because we're combining the Bray scheme, the Bray scheme is effectively being changed, but so is the Wicklow one. And before anybody, you know, decides now to jump in and support it, it runs to three pages. In my view, and I have had a lot of experience of rent reviews, it's dynamite. Absolute dynamite. The impact this is going to have on people is going to be enormous. Not on everyone, but on some. And in fact probably on quite a big number. And before anything else happens we need to take a step back and say hold on a minute, three pages is not enough, I want to see exactly how this will work for a number of typical examples, both for people living in the Wicklow County Council administrative area and also the Bray Municipal District area. That's number one.

There could be a huge impact on older people for County Wicklow in this, because one of the changes that is being proposed by the Chief Executive is that subsidiary earners in the County Council house, at the moment the rent is limited to a percentage of their earnings, so the element of applying to them for their rent is lower than it is in Bray. In Bray the subsidiary earner is the main earner. This will have huge impacts on people's rents. And if we nod this through, which is again, just like the last discussion, if we nod this through and say ah, sure look it, all we could do was note it, be prepared for the avalanche you're going to receive when people receive their rent bills and they're being told that the rent system has changed and we sat there and we accepted it. It is unacceptable. And what's more, what is even more unacceptable is to my mind this is a way of punishing the people who do pay their rent to make up for the €3 million worth of rent arrears that the people at the top are responsible for because they haven't managed it properly. We are now going to penalise everyone else who actually does pay. That is figure is from the last Chief Executive's Report, by the way. It's probably gone up since then.

And one of the decisions that the top table made in their wisdom quite a few years ago was they abolished the idea of having rent collectors, which meant, in many ways people who would come around, knock on the doors and remind people their arrears situation was maybe getting out of hand, make a payment plan, make a contribution. In fact a lot of that is gone and people are resorting now to having to wait on the phone or send in an email, or do this, that and the other. Again the people who actually are not paying their rent are benefiting.

And what this is about is the auditor tells us. The auditor is worried because the bottom line looks bad because the figure on rent is not what it should be because it has been allowed go into arrears.

So, members, please don't just put this through on the nod. Examine it in more detail. I would certainly like to propose that this be deferred because apart from anything else, apart from the detail that other members want to get, I want to see the legal advice that tells us that we can't actually implement part of the powers that we were given in 2014. And by the way, which we always had. We always had the power as councillors to decide and adopt on a rent scheme. Rents are reviewed regularly because of income.

That's different. That's normal. But adopting -- and this is a new scheme. Be very careful councillors, colleagues. And, chairman, can we please defer it and get legal -- I want to see the Chief Executive's legal advice. And if I'm not happy with that we can implement another power we have, which is we can get a second opinion of our own through the office of the Chief Executive. Before anything else happens here today I think that's the very least we're entitled to. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Just before I bring in the next speaker, I did notice myself that it was noting rather than adoption and I did ask Helen to look for the legal advice. So I am going to ask Helen to read out the legal advice that the Chief Executive sent us.

MS PURCELL: Yes. Just to clarify it, Councillor Behan is correct. It is stated in the Local Government Reform Act 2014, at number 55 it restates the scheme as a reserved function under the Schedule but it also refers to the grounding legislation which is section 31 of the Housing (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act of 2009, and that section has not been commenced. So, therefore, the differential rent scheme remains an Executive function.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Can I respond to that Cathaoirleach?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Yes.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: First of all, that is completely unacceptable, that the meeting administrator reads a few sentences off a page. I want to see the senior counsel advice that the Executive are going by first and then we can see will we find another senior counsel who might have a different opinion. Because to me saying that something that we were given power to do in 2014 can't be enacted because something in 2009 wasn't enacted, that does not make sense to me. So, Cathaoirleach, with the greatest of respect to Helen I think we should be all circulated with that in time for a discussion next month.

MR NICHOLSON: Cathaoirleach, I can clarify even further. This is a direct response from the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: You can read all you like, Michael.

MR NICHOLSON: I intend to read it, Councillor, but thank you for your permission.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: You interrupted me. Can I have the written advice?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor, what I will do is I will let Michael clarify and then bring you back in.

MR NICHOLSON: Yeah, yeah. I think this should clarify it. "The right of local authorities to set and collect rents on their dwellings is laid down in section 58 of the

Housing Act 1966. The making or amending of such schemes under section 58 is an Executive function and is subject to broad principles set out by my department including rent levels, et cetera."

Now, the document that Councillor Behan is referring to, and he's quite right referring to it, a document was circulated, the document circulated purported to list all the reserved functions, however it did make reference to 2009 Act. And I clarify that sections 23-31 of the 2009 Act has not yet been commenced. It requires regulations and regulations were never implemented. And the reason for that -- and I am long enough here to remember exactly why because I was working in Housing at the time -- there was a proposal to have a national rent scheme, and the plan was that as soon as the national rent scheme was adopted and agreed that that section would come in. That work never took place. There was no national rent scheme. It is still an Executive. And it is an Executive function reserved through the Chief Executive of Wicklow County Council.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor John Snell.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. I was sort of praying that it was a misprint when I seen the agenda coming out that it was only down for noting, because again like the previous speaker I am aware that it is a reserved function. It is a reserved function under the Local Government Act, I thought 2015, but I'm not a legal expert, and that's why I was hoping that we would have access to the legal opinion that you have here. But I would also be urging the members of this chamber to seek our own legal opinion in regards to this. This is a big, big issue. Not something for noting. It is not something for noting here by 32 councillors. It is a reserved function that we have, one of the few reserved functions that we have, and to say that it is an Executive function it just isn't true, irrespective of what the Minister for Housing -- the Minister for Housing, they come and go. I want a proper legal opinion on what we're told we're entitled to do when you put yourself up for election. And this is our reserved function. And it's not for noting.

Again, why isn't this going through the SPC? Why isn't it going through the municipal districts? Giving people a heads up, discuss it within your own local authority, municipal district, before you can get it in here. And we're all on the one page, we all understand and we'll have made our opinions known, not to come in here to note

something in a few minutes that's going to have a huge effect on 5,000 households throughout the county. 5,000. Also at a time when the vast majority of our new allocations go to people who are dealing with Cooperative Housing Ireland, Clúid, TUA, just to name a few. There's 500 approved housing bodies out there within this State. A lot of the tenants who are on our local authority housing list will be housed through approved housing bodies. They will have no upper limit of a maximum rent with no option of ever purchasing their house because they cannot purchase a house that is within the gift or ownership of an approved housing body. And that hasn't been discussed. There's loads of other issues there that hasn't been discussed.

I am not here to note something and go out that door and then be asked a thousand questions that we haven't even discussed. So the question is, like the previous issue, in regards to the SPC, they're a huge function of the local authority and it's the first port of call in regards to thrashing out these issues, and whether you're on an SPC or you're not, we're entrusting our fellow colleagues at SPC level to have all these issues and bring in the expertise if they need to a strategic policy committee and debate it and then feed it into us as municipal district councillors. It has been highlighted, and Michael is quite correct in regards to the issue of Bray to other local authority municipal district areas, and they call it equalisation of rents or whatever you want to call it. But there is a huge effect on 5,000 families out there. Too huge to note here in two or three minutes.

So my proposal goes a little bit farther than Councillor Behan's because I am seeking independent legal advice in regards to: Is this a reserved function as is listed under the Local Government Act or are we now being told that a Minister has overwritten that and we don't have that power? Because when I put myself up for election I believed I had that power, and if somebody is saying now you don't, well, I want a legal explanation as to why I don't have that power. It's not an Executive function and it shouldn't have been down here for noting, and I'm only sorry that it's got to this stage. I really am.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Do you want to come in Chief Executive? Sorry, and then I'll invite Councillor Stapleton.

MS O'GORMAN: Thank you, members. Just for clarity purposes, this did go through the SPC, Councillor Snell. It went through the Housing SPC. It went through the

Housing SPC, so they did consider the rent scheme. The grounding legislation is section 58 of the 1966 Act where it is an Executive function. Yes, it is listed in Schedule 55 of the Local Government Act 2014, but it hasn't been enacted. I am quite happy to go get independent legal advice for you members.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Please do, yeah.

MS O'GORMAN: I am quite happy to do that. I would agree, it is a very important issue for you. I am more than happy to do that. It wasn't revoked. It wasn't enacted. That's the thing. It was always an Executive function going back to the '66 legislation and the provision from 2009 has not been enacted, but I am more than happy to get independent legal advice for the members on that and come back to you.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Chief Executive. Just before I bring in Councillor Stapleton, I think we're all in agreement, unless I hear otherwise, that we would like a second opinion.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Yes.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Behan, Councillor Snell. So rather than prolonging a debate that we mightn't have today, you're happy enough to defer it until we get that second opinion and we can bring it back here then? And I think give it the time it duly deserves, because housing as we all know is a big issue for all of us and rents is a big issue for all of us. So rather than carrying on this debate today, and of course you can come in anyone who has their light on, I am just conscious that it is going to be deferred because we have agreement here now that we're going to get a second opinion and we can bring it back here to the chamber then. Councillor Stapleton.

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Chair. And I think that's good to hear that it will be deferred. It certainly seemed to be the intention in the Act that it would be a reserved function. Just to say that I'm on the Housing SPC, and while it was noted it definitely wasn't debated or considered at length or in detail before coming back here to the main Council. And one thing I would just like to note or comment on is: Is there a possibility to have a maximum rate set the market rent? I know that that might seem administratively challenging, but if there's only a few where the maximum rent is going to apply it does seem crazy that someone could potentially be in a house potentially paying more than they would be paying on the general market.

And then just I do think, to Councillor Behan's point, that worked examples would be

helpful to see as well so that we know exactly what the impact is, in particular even in the way the rent is calculated. I'm not sure what part 55 multiplied by 3% means. So seeing a general working would be helpful as well. Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Dermot O'Brien.

COUNCILLOR DERMOT O'BRIEN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. Again really quickly. I welcome the opportunity. Apart from anything else I think there's added value when we can contribute to debates and conversations before we make decisions. And again a case study, I think it is really important that we do this stuff through a poverty lens, through a human rights lens and that we can have a rationale for all the different decisions that are sitting in the new scheme. So I'd welcome the opportunity to get involved in that conversation. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Leonard.

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Yeah, I agree, and I'd welcome the working examples on it to see the true impact on a variety different incomes. I would also like to propose that we actually make it a special meeting just about housing because I don't know, like I mean most of the other members have been experiencing really high levels -- like the lack of rental accommodation, there's a huge, a wider housing conversation to be had, and I think it's really important that we have it, and soon. And I think that this could be part of a special meeting on housing and the housing crisis in Wicklow. I think the staff are under pressure. I know the staff are doing a great job but I think we need to start looking at other options and some of the options we've had presentations on, but in the full Council not just the Housing SPC.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. I want to give the councillors a voice, I have done it since I have been in this chair, so what I am actually going to propose is that we have a standalone agenda item at the next Council meeting rather than a special meeting on housing. Do you want to come in there, Chief Executive?

MS O'GORMAN: Yeah. And what I would propose, if it is agreeable with the members, I will get Brian Wyles to give a presentation to the chamber on how it affects different family make-ups, so people have an idea, obviously after the advice has been received.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Can I say one more thing, councillor? I think I have proven a little bit that I won't guillotine a conversation or debate about it. We've got through a very important subject today. We still have a bit of time, and we've got through two

local area plans, we've got through it, so it's not that I am trying to minimise this. It affects all of us. So I will have it as a standalone agenda item. Councillor Fortune.

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Just a quick comment just following on what the Chief Executive said. If we're going to be looking at a meeting like that, at different options, there are kind of very real new scenarios out there now that wouldn't have been there in the past, not the far past. So, for example, I came into the building today and I was met with an individual who was in trying to talk to Housing because the relationship has broken down, three kids involved, the house is going to have to be sold, the money got from the house is not going to facilitate acquiring another house, what do they do? You know, we need to address all of that. Domestic violence, for example, and those issues. We need to address that. You know, I had a case not that long ago where I was trying to help somebody but we didn't have the capacity to facilitate. So there's loads of areas that I think we need to look at, and I think having a proper discussion on it and we need to -- it's an expression I don't particularly like but I'm going to use it. We need to think outside the box a little bit in the environment we live in today. God knows what's going to come down the tubes with all the madness going on in the globe. We need to be empathic a bit more, you know.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor, for that contribution. Do you want to come in Councillor Snell?

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Yeah, briefly.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Go ahead.

COUNCILLOR SNELL: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Just briefly, it would be brief for Brian or some of his colleagues within Housing, maybe the Chief Executive, to get out to the municipal districts before the next meeting if you're having it an item agenda with the clarity around the legal opinion, but I do think if it's debated at municipal district before it gets into Council it will speed up your agenda here on any given topic. Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: No problem. And I am sure if we can't get around, even if we got a copy of the presentation well in advance where we can discuss at an MD meeting and then obviously discuss it here next month. If everybody is happy enough with that we're going to defer it, get the second opinion and have it as a standalone item on the agenda for May. Are we agreed? Agreed? (Agreed.) Thank you very much.

So I will now go on to item number 23: To note the Wicklow County Council Capital Investment Programme 2025-2027. Brian.

MR GLEESON: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. You would have got the programme issued last week with all the figures. So there's a lot of detail in that so I will just give a brief overview of the programme. The Local Government Act 2001 requires a report to be presented to the Elected Members indicating the programme of capital projects to be undertaken over the forthcoming three-year period. The Wicklow County Council Capital Investment Programme 2025-2027 details ongoing and potential future projects with their associated estimated costs for each of the three years. In addition, it identifies the potential sourcing of funding for these projects. The capital programme details a maximum potential investment of 738 million funded by a combination of grant aid 607 million, development levies 41 million, loans 37 million and other income 54 million which may include funding from disposal of assets, revenue-budgeted provisions, capital account funds and private sector investment. The total amount of 738 represents an increase of 89 million on last year's plan and this is mainly attributable to a strong delivery pipeline of housing units projected for 2027.

The Capital Investment Programme is a three-year rolling programme and the status and viability of all potential projects is reviewed annually. It provides an indication of the investment Wicklow County Council would like to undertake over the three years, however it is not a guarantee of the commencement or completion of these projects.

The implementation of this investment programme depends on a number of factors including continued government approval of projects, timely delivery of proposed grant aid, availability of cash flow, ability to secure and finance borrowings, staff resources to manage and deliver projects, contractor availability to deliver projects and other external factors such as delays in planning consents or legal challenges. The plan presented to the members here today is broken down by expenditure programme as follows: Housing and building is the bulk, 472 million which is 64% of the overall plan; road transport and safety, 97.4 million; water services, half a million; economic development, 22.5 million; environmental services, 54.7 million; recreation and amenity, 43.1; agricultural, education, health and welfare, 45.6 million; and miscellaneous services, 2.7 million.

So that's a brief overview and just to note this is not for approval. I don't need a proposer and seconder. It is just for noting by the members. So I am happy to take any questions.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Just before I invite the members in very quickly. I am conscious that we have three speakers, I have another item agenda to get through here so what I am going to do is, with your agreement the Chief Executive's Report, we won't go into that today because I want to give it -- everyone will want a fair say on it, but I am going to say is, I will put it to the top of the agenda because I am conscious that it is two months in a row. So the Chief Executive's Report will be at the top of the agenda at the next meeting and I will get to hopefully to one of the motions here today.

Councillor Behan.

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: Just on that point. I mean I think Councillor Leonard, and I mean you're in agreement with the spirit of what Councillor Leonard said, but if we're going to have the Chief Executive's Report at the top of the agenda and we're going to have a very meaningful discussion on housing are we going to manage to do that with everything else at the one meeting? So I'd ask you maybe to keep under review the idea of maybe having to have a special meeting, as Councillor Leonard has suggested, for housing so that everybody's head can be focused on every aspect of housing.

Just in relation to this plan, I mean it is a set of figures, that's fine. Like, there is another capital plan, isn't there, where we get to look at all of the projects that are being proposed and so on in the different areas? But also we do have the ridiculous situation of €60-plus million sitting in the capital levies account which we don't seem to be capable of spending. We seem to be holding on to, to make it look like it is good in the balances or something. But we're due to review our capital levy scheme I think as well. This is something we talked about before. So, you know, I accept this is one area where we just note it, that's fair enough, today, but can I ask the Chief Executive:

When will we be discussing a review of the capital levies? Because I think that would be a very important discussion and meaningful discussion for us to have. Thank you

CATHAOIRLEACH: I will answer your first one, and I will keep liaising with Helen here in terms of the agenda, and I'll make sure that the Chief Executive and the Housing are up the top so we won't run out of time. Councillor Stapleton.

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Chair. And thank you very much, Brian, for the detailed report. I think it is very well set out and it is an ambitious capital

programme for the county. Unfortunately I just want to note that when I was going through the detail I couldn't find any mention of Tinahely, Carnew or any investments really south of Baltinglass in the southwest of Wicklow, which is hugely disappointing. And in particular I actually have a bit of concern about the way it's proposed to spend our development charges throughout the county, noting that there's very little to none being spent or proposed to be spent out west. When it comes to roads and safety and transport, 75% of 23 million of our development charges is being spent in Bray and Greystones; and when it comes to 14 million of our development charges being spent on recreation and amenity 50% of that 7 million is being spent in Bray alone. While they're all very worthy projects and it's great to see them on the list I do think we need a bit more balance, and if that is something you take into consideration going forward it would be much appreciated.

Just on a really quick question in addition, just when it comes to housing what does the line item on stock management and condition of survey relate to? I see there's 6 and a half million in that. And if that is to do with the upgrading of houses it would be really welcomed because I have visited some housing estates owned by the Council recently that are in really poor state of repair. I know it comes up the whole time.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you.

COUNCILLOR ALVEY: Thank you, Cathaoirleach, and thank you, Brian, for running us through that albeit briefly. My question very much follows on from Councillor Stapleton's. Especially for us newer councillors here in the chamber development levies is becoming more of a topic comes up on the doors: people are wondering what they're being spent on, and I suppose it is hard for us to answer that question. So my question is -- and I understand it is not a reserved function, it is an Executive function, but my question is: How is it decided upon in terms of these development levies being spent in the Capital Investment Programme? I am sure that is a complex question but just to give us some sort of idea. To echo what Councillor Stapleton said, you know, at a quick glance there doesn't seem to be anything close to a fair geographical spread. I note that 16 million of the 23 allocated to road transport and safety is going on just one project: the Chapel Road project in Greystones. Albeit projects might come and go at different times and need higher or lower amounts, I understand that, but just from the perspective of the public it would be interesting to know what process goes into deciding which of these projects get funded.

And then just one specific -- I think something that was very welcome at the municipal districts this past year was the footpath renewable scheme which our colleague Councillor Stapleton argued for, and 2 million was allocated for last year, I see that that's going down to 500,000 over the next two years so I just question why the reduction and if possible could we keep that at 1 million because it was very welcome? Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Brian, do you want to them three please?

MR GLEESON: Yeah, thanks. I suppose in general terms, in relation to development levies, it's a countywide scheme so we don't split it up by district. It is allocated to projects whereby we cannot identify a funding for those particular projects or it might be match funding for a particular project. I suppose the plan there might be skewed slightly. You said Greystones and Bray, Councillor Stapleton. There's one particular scheme, the Chapel Road in Greystones, which no funding has been provided so Wicklow County Council is funding that ourselves, and I think it comes to approximately 16 million. So that's just one project alone. If we had have got funding from the relevant authorities obviously that would be then in the grant column as opposed to the development levy column. So I suppose there are a number of different schemes, funding schemes out there, whether it is for roads, whether it is for housing, whether it is for community and recreation we always apply under those grants. If we're successful we might be in a position to use. Sometimes in roads they're usually a hundred percent and you can see in the list of roads projects there's a number of N81 projects that are listed. It doesn't really matter whether it is grant-aided or whether it is coming from development levies I think the issue is that the project is going ahead. So that's the key issue. Where the money is coming from is more of an accounting thing. That's my problem to try and identify, you know. So I would look at more the projects and I see the road improvement scheme section, the majority of the projects listed are N81 projects. So I think that's the kind of key issue to look at.

In relation to stock maintenance, I think stock management that was the question, councillor. Yeah, that's where we get funding for staff to go out to houses, look at our Council houses, identify what works need to be done. So there's a survey that's done and then obviously subsequent to that we actually have to go out and do the works. So you can see actually in the figures there the actual costs increase year-on-year because

we're only starting to do the surveys now so the knock-on effect after that will be the actual works that arise out of the actual conditional surveys that are carried out by staff.

I suppose, Danny, in relation to the development levy, it is the same sort of thing. It's not a case where we say we're going to allocate levies for this district or that district. The only situation where we actually split levies would be as you said the footpath scheme because we don't have any funding. I think we said this to Council over the years that we don't get any funding for government for footpath repairs or footpath enhancements and we have used the Development Levy Scheme. We've always -- the last time we had half a million, we've put in a million, obviously to represent this year. We will see how the repairs actually get done and the upgrades get done. If there's a requirement to increase the half million to a million for future years we can look at that, but it all depends on I suppose capacity of the municipal districts to actually carry out those works, but obviously this is reviewed on an annual basis, so it can be easily increased next year to a million. We'll see how this year goes. Because there's a big carry over of that million there'll be no need to allocate another million next year, the half a million will suffice. But look, as I said, this is a live document so we always adjust it according to the demands that we have. I think that was -- was that all the questions?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Yeah, I'll keep going. Leonora, do you want to come in?

MS EARLS: Yeah, just in relation to Councillor Behan's question on the Development Contribution Scheme. So there is a body of work that has to be done, in that we have to do costs. Every project in the scheme and any new projects have to be costed. We also have to have regard to the fact that the new Planning and Development Plan Act 2024, we have see is there any unintended consequences or provisions in that Act that might impact on the Development Contribution Scheme because that is provided for in the Act. At the moment there doesn't appear to be anything significant but we just need to be sure. But we do have an additional resource in planning, so likely it'll be the latter half of this year we'll bring a scheme to you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor Bourke.

COUNCILLOR BOURKE: Cathaoirleach, I would like to welcome some of the things you have in there, manager, but I'm concerned about some others and particularly I welcome the commitment you have there to the Arklow Southern Port Access Relief Road, but I am concerned that there's only a small amount of money being put in there.

Like, I think you've a total of 300,000 there over the next three years or maybe 600,000, but it seems like a very insufficient amount in the totality of the cost of what that's going to be. And I'm also surprised that in this year's scheme you've dropped the one, the mention of Kilbride. In last year's scheme we had mention of traffic management in Arklow including the Kilbride development, that seems to be dropped out of this time which would be concerning, considering that traffic is a huge issue, is a developing and growing issue on a daily, weekly and monthly basis getting in and out of Arklow, and with the amount of developments taking place over the next few years we will have a serious problem here. I think I'd prefer to see the Kilbride development included there. Maybe there's a reason for excluding it, but, you know, traffic management is a huge issue and it has come up at our district meetings in recent months. And I just don't think we're paying enough attention to it in this plan. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Leonard.

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Thank you. Yeah, I have said it before, that it is really important that the councillors have input into where the money is spent throughout the county and that there is a good geographical spread especially for recreational stuff and infrastructure, and I specifically referred to the Local Economic Community Plan on page 37, the Pobal HB Index of Affluence and Deprivation. And I suppose what I am asking is: Baltinglass and Arklow are the most disadvantaged towns on that register, so like the facts and the figures are, so the Capital Investment Plan, how is that measured against the Local Economic Community Plan and, you know, how do we see that money translate into what is needed according to that plan and those areas? Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Councillor Stokes.

COUNCILLOR STOKES: Go raibh maith agat, Cathaoirleach. Thank you, Brian, for the figures. It takes a lot of effort to put this together. Could I just ask about the recycling centres? I believe that there is 1.5 million proposed funding for that. You know where I'm going with this. I mean Greystones remains the only municipal district without a recycling centre and I really do believe that we need to invest in that for the Greystones districts and I think we need to start planning for that now. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. I have one more speaker, Brian, and I know he's going to be quick.

COUNCILLOR STAPLETON: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. No, Brian, to say I agree that overall I agree it is most important that these projects across the county get complete, but the development charges and where it is spent does seem to be for the project where we'll be told there is no money for that. So it is still important definitely from a perception point of view that that is equally distributed or at least more proportionally distributed around the different districts. Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Brian, do you want to come in there quickly?

MR GLEESON: Yeah, look, I suppose in relation to the recycling centres of our own funds we have about half a million to do the repairs on roofs, after that we'll have to look at generating our own income. So that can come in various ways. It can come in charges; it can come in LPT or it can come in increase in rates. So it's like anything, we have to generate income ourselves in order to implement major projects like that. So that's under other resources, as in, our own resources. So there's no government funding for recycling centres that I'm aware of, councillor, so we will have to generate that from our own resources and from -- as you know we've limited ways of doing that, so that's a decision for the future.

In relation to the Arklow Southern Road, the small amount of money, that was probably just in relation to design works, councillor. Obviously you'll see different projects, the small amounts are usually where it's at a design stage versus the construction stage. So once we start moving into millions you're probably looking at the construction stage. So, as I said, this is only a snapshot of a project. A project might go on for five years or six years. We're only showing the next three years. So that's that particular issue.

Councillor Leonard, in relation to I suppose taking account of other policies and other programmes, directors put forward business cases for projects and as part of those business cases an analysis would have been done for the requirement for a particular project in an area, and whether it's a roads project and having to discuss it with the NTA and TII, or a recreational community project whereby there would be input from the community in relation to that need, so I suppose that's where it comes from. I suppose I don't decide what the projects are. I suppose the relevant directors are responsible for putting forward projects. They get their, I suppose, ideas, whether it is

from Government, whether it is from municipal districts, whether it is through the SPCs, that's the route it takes before it actually gets to the capital plan here today.

CATHAOIRLEACH: I have three more speakers. I am conscious of time I am going to ask you to be as brief as possible. Councillor Fortune.

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: Yeah, I'll be quick. I am just picking up on what Brian said. So is it official now that we are an income-generating authority? In other words, has that been fed to us from somewhere? Because we traditionally are always fed by the Local Government Fund and it has been eroded and changed in different ways. So, like, is that what we're dealing with now? And if that's the case, should we be considering taking back refuse collection and turning it into a commercial activity so as it brings in some income?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Neary.

COUNCILLOR NEARY: Thanks very much, Brian. Just a quick one. The recreational amenity just says "Little Bray Fassaroe SHC Project". Have you any more information on that, just so I can find out myself. And then the Ballywaltrim Recreation Park, is that part of the sports development -- master plan, sorry?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Stokes is going to be quick I know.

COUNCILLOR STOKES: Yeah, I just wanted to come back in on the recycling centres. I'm sorry I didn't catch, what's the 1.5 million being spent on? And also I mean this is a very important issue for the Greystones district. Can we look at using development levies, for example, on a recycling centre? You know, like, I understand what Brian is saying is that there's no government funding for it but how did the other recycling get their funding to set up? Because it is not fair that one district is denied the equal services of the other districts.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Brian.

MR GLEESON: It's not in our current scheme. If you look at our current scheme it doesn't provide for funding for recycling centres. That something that can be reviewed as part of what Leonora said, the review of the existing scheme, but currently there's no funding, no levies can be used for recycling centres and as I say we are not aware of funding from Central Government for the development of the recycling centre. So it's our own resources that we have to look at.

Councillor Fortune, in relation to are we, was it, a revenue-generating organisation. We've always been a part-revenue-generated organisation. We get government grants.

We raise our income from goods and services, whether it is housing rents, parking charges, commercial rates, Local Property Tax. So we've always been a part-revenue-generating service. So there's no change there.

COUNCILLOR FORTUNE: I'm not so sure about that.

MR GLEESON: And sorry, Ian. That was, Sláintecare Healthy Communities is the SHC and the Ballywaltrim is the sports hub. That I know. That was one of the projects that was put forward for the Large Scale Sports Infrastructure Scheme and wasn't successful, so we are keeping all those projects that were submitted last year in the capital plan again with the hope that one or all of them does get funding in the future.

COUNCILLOR NEARY: Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Stokes, quickly.

COUNCILLOR STOKES: Yeah, sorry, Cathaoirleach. I am asking for the third time, where is the 1.5 million going for the recycling centres, the expected outlay 500,000 per year?

MR GLEESON: There's a lot of repairs that are required on our existing recycling centres, councillor. A huge amount of works are required in Bray and Wicklow in particular the roofs are in need of serious repair. So by the time we get through all of those works for all the recycling centres that we currently have that money will be allocated.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Okay. Item number 24: To note the draft Wicklow County Council Annual Report 2024.

MS PURCELL: Just to say that this is before the members purely to note because it is just the draft. The finalised annual report will come back on the agenda on the 2nd July. We're awaiting the financial information which will be included in the report and in particular that feeds into the NOAC indicators for 2024, which are to be submitted by the 17th April, and they will be an appendix in the report as well. So you will receive the final annual report in advance of the July meeting for adoption. Thanks.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Have we any correspondence?

MS PURCELL: No.

CATHAOIRLEACH: No. Okay. I am going to deal with one of the motions because I want to get the agenda as clear as possible for the next meeting and to give the Chief Executive and Housing the proper time. Do you want to read out one of the motions here from Councillor Behan and Councillor Leonard.

MS PURCELL: So the first notice of motion is proposed Councillor Joe Behan and seconded by Councillor Peir Leonard: "That this Council negotiates with the HSE to purchase the building known in Enniskerry as the Curran. This building has been vacant for the past 20 years and was used in the past as a sheltered accommodation centre. A local group in Enniskerry would like to put the building back into use as sheltered accommodation for elderly Enniskerry residents. They believe it could accommodate four residents and a carer. They also believe that funds might be accessed through the Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant."

And the response is: "Wicklow County Council has made contact with the HSE regarding the property Curran, Enniskerry, County Wicklow. Wicklow County Council have studied the HSE report and have the following comments. According to the structural survey there are a number of issues regarding the property. It has significant structural cracking at the front and rear of the house. This is likely to involve some level of underpinning and will require extensive opening up work in advance to ascertain the most appropriate solution. Sealed vertical joints will need to be provided externally. Timber decay generally throughout the house is likely to be a significant problem and would require further investigation in opening up. There will be significant costs associated with timber replacement and treatment and with temporary propping. At ground floor the replacement of timber flooring construction with an insulated damp-protected ground floor slab. Damp protection at ground floor will be required. This is particularly the case at the lower ground floor level at the rear of the house which would require an element of tanking. Significant work is required at roof level including works to the gutter, fixing of slates and probably at least partial reroofing of the building which is complex roof geometry. If Wicklow County Council were to acquire the property it would be expected that the costs of refurbishment to this property would be significant. The building in question is also a listed structure. The local authority, therefore, is not in a position to acquire this property. In addition, if the local authority acquired the property it would have to go through a process to select an appropriate approved housing body and an approved housing body acquiring the property would face the same issues and costs as outlined above."

CATHAOIRLEACH: Councillor Behan, would you like to come in there?

COUNCILLOR BEHAN: That's the longest version of 'No' I've heard in a long time. But I'm really acting on behalf of residents. I'm sure Councillor Corrigan will have a

view on this as well. This is a fine building in the centre of Enniskerry lying idle for the last 20 years plus, and there's an excellent both charitable group and local community group who are asking the two main public bodies in the county to put their heads together to try and produce a facility to care for some older people. Now, I had a similar motion at the HSE regional forum recently and the response I got was much more positive: The HSE are quite happy to sell it to Wicklow County Council. Now we know. Why I accept that. But I do think that I don't want to just drop it at that, Cathaoirleach, and I would like to have some further -- I'd like to get a copy of the report anyway to pass onto the residents, to the group who are active in this, but I may want to raise it again to try and see is there some way around this because it is a magnificent building, and it is lying idle, and we have a housing crisis. It doesn't have to be a housing body, by the way. We could be doing it ourselves. Maybe it could be something that could provide some kind of accommodation for people on our housing list or who want to step down from a council house. So there are other options and I would ask that we keep an open mind on it, Cathaoirleach.

CATHAOIRLEACH: We'll get you a copy of that. Councillor Corrigan.

COUNCILLOR CORRIGAN: Thank you, Cathaoirleach. And thank you, Councillor Behan, for putting this motion forward. I have been inside the building with that community group and there is extensive work to be done on it but that said it shouldn't be just left idle. But I think there should be an onus on, and we should be forwarding and pushing with the HSE that they should be actually giving this building to the Council so the Council can afford to do the work. It is going to cost a lot of money and I don't know where that money is going to come from, but it is a prime building in the middle of the village and it is a shame to see it falling apart year-by-year but I do think the HSE should be gifting it. A vacant building just standing there that is falling apart should be gifted to the Council. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you. Councillor Kennedy. Is it in relation to this?

COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: No.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Can I bring Councillor Leonard in first? I take it it's in relation to --

COUNCILLOR LEONARD: Yeah. Just to say I support Councillor Behan and, you know, like, we're talking about town centre regeneration and stuff like that, and I think any assistance we can give and explore opportunities to revitalise buildings and in particular this, you know, we do need more diverse range of accommodation in the

county. We've an ageing population and, you know, to be living in a little village or a town centre where you can just walk everywhere I think it would be invaluable. So instead of an outright no I think it should be explored further and to see what will come out of it then. Thank you.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you, Councillor. Thank you for your patience, Councillor Kennedy.

COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Can I come in now?

CATHAOIRLEACH: Yeah.

COUNCILLOR KENNEDY: Thanks, Cathaoirleach. Cathaoirleach, just on another note totally different. Two weeks ago we saw an event held here of a multi-agency EU response of experts that came to Wicklow to I suppose assess Ireland's preparedness and response to what could be a disaster in the uplands if we had a major fire was to take place. And as we all know the National Parks and Coillte they own about 25% of the land mass of County Wicklow, and if a major fire was to break out there how we would be ready to respond to that and tackle it and to make sure that it was brought under control very quickly. I just want to pay -- I suppose say thank you to the people who organised that. I think Director Marc Devereux and the Chief Fire Officer with the Senior Management Team of the Council, I think we showed ourselves in a huge -- the fact that we're open I suppose to being ready for this, to prepare for this, to bring in other agencies. And I think with climate change we need to be ready for this. A few years ago we had the Cheviot Sheep Owners Associations come in here, and Wicklow County Council took the lead in relation to taking out radio ads, ads in the print media, to ask people to keep their dogs on leads in the uplands. And this was a further action I feel where we were able to bring nine local agencies, the garda, the air corps, Coillte, defence, Civil Defence, fire service, I think there was eight different counties involved in the fire service on the day, and I think, you know, we should be doing this more often. And I think it was the first in Ireland, if I am correct. I am open for correction on that, but I think it was the first in Ireland and to do that in Wicklow I just want to say thanks to everybody involved in that. It was well done to everybody involved. Thanks, Cathaoirleach, for giving me the time to say that.

CATHAOIRLEACH: No problem. And thank you for raising it because I happened to be up there on the day with Councillor Glennon, and I have to say my thanks for not just the invitation but the courtesy that was extended to us. It was great to see it in action. And speaking to a lot of the volunteers not just from Ireland but other parts of

Europe, the scenery of course didn't half help either and the sunny day, but I have to say they were all very impressed with our services and I want to commend them all and thank you for raising it here today.

That brings the meeting to an end, members, and I'll see you all next month next month. I beg your pardon, Councillor Duddy, yeah.

COUNCILLOR DUDDY: Cathaoirleach, under any other business I'd like to -- I note from the minutes that there was a vote of sympathy here.

CATHAOIRLEACH: We don't do any other business, but go ahead.

COUNCILLOR DUDDY: Sorry, I beg your pardon. A vote of sympathy expressed in relation to my late father, and I would like to thank the Council for passing that motion. I'd like to thank the CEO and the Cathaoirleach of Bray Municipal District for attending the funeral together with other colleagues who attended the funeral or visited family.

CATHAOIRLEACH: Thank you for sharing that with us and our condolences again.

Members, we will see you all next month.

(Meeting concluded at 5.38 pm)

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