

MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING OF ROSCOMMON COUNTY COUNCIL HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, ON MONDAY, 18TH NOVEMBER, 2019 AT 2.30PM.

PRESENT: Councillor Tony Ward **PRESIDED**

MEMBERS: Cllr V. Byrne, Cllr L. Callaghan, Cllr I. Connaughton, Cllr T. Crosby, Cllr J. Cummins, Cllr N. Dineen, Cllr L. Fallon, Cllr P. Fitzmaurice, Cllr J. Keogh, Cllr D. Kilduff, Cllr O. Leyden, Cllr M. McDermott, Cllr J. Murphy, Cllr J. Naughten, Cllr K. Shanagher and Cllr A. Waldron.

OFFICIALS: Liam Bergin, Director of Services
Patricia Bohan, Meetings Administrator
Eugene Cummins, Chief Executive

Apologies: Cllr M. Mulligan.

175.19 PROPOSED CLOSURE OF LOUGH REE AND SHANNONBRIDGE POWERSTATIONS IN 2020

The Cathaoirleach welcomed the Members to the special meeting that was requested last week to discuss the proposed closure of the peat burning ESB power stations in Lanesboro (Lough Ree) and Shannonbridge in 2020.

The members expressed their disappointment at what was a very sudden announcement that was not expected for at least five years and no contingency plans have been put in place:

They raised the following matters:

- This is an opportunity to establish a National Park in the bog lands that will be closed
- 100's of jobs now gone, both fulltime and seasonal, in an area that has seen many factories with good employment over the past forty years,
- If staff do not accept redundancies, they should be allowed to work out the last five years and contract workers not be brought in.
- The Collaboration Group set up during the year met this week and there had been no indication of this announcement when the group was set up.
- No plans have been put in place by Bord na Mona or the ESB. Staff can use the resources of the GRETB to upskill.
- ESB need to explain their decision and why the Oireachtas members were not made aware of the decision at any stage.
- There is a need for strategic replacing of the jobs lost
- The Government is in the process of setting up a Just Transition Commissioner and Fund to deal with such issues but unfortunately action is required much earlier than anticipated due to the unexpected closure of these two power plants.
- Any proposal should include Offaly and Westmeath County Council and together with Roscommon and Longford, they should work together to secure any funding that is available.
- There is huge potential for the plants and it is imperative that they are not dismantles until every avenue for their subsequent usage is explored.
- A scheme must be put in place by the Department responsible for Climate Action in conjunction with the Department of Finance to secure alternative employment for those affected by the

closure.

- Climate Action and Environmental plans are hitting Rural Ireland the most and those without voices are not heard
- Bord na Mona need to accelerate their programme of rehabilitation works for the bogs to be initiated as soon as possible and the current employees be employed there.
- The dismantling of the stations is premature
- The power stations could become the museums of the future
- A proper plan needs to be put in place regarding the repatriation of the bogs in respect of flora and fauna and the current workers employed as such a facility
- The ESB previously indicated they would work with farmers to grow willow as an alternative and all of these job losses have undermined this option.
- Westmeath and Galway should be included with Longford, Roscommon and Offaly in any committee set up.
- As it has been known for many years that the stations would eventually close, it is disappointing that at least one of these plants could have been used for the production of biomass energy and it would have been good for the local farmers to have had an opportunity to get involved in the business area.
- Call on the Government to implement a proper “Just Transition” policy
- The existing plant in Lanesboro could be used as a cold storage facility.
- Elected members be appointed to a Task Force.
- Identify areas in county Roscommon that could grow products suitable for biomass to be used as a fuel

The Chief Executive spoke on the matter and he stated this was a devastating blow to the communities. He stated that it was important to remember that stakeholders, including Government, have responsibilities in this matter and they will ultimately have to provide a solution. He confirmed that he has been in contact with the C.E. of Longford County Council and agreed that a steering committee/task force be set up to look at options and responsibilities and identify stakeholders, possible new solutions including funding requirements and actions required. It is likely that Longford will take the lead on this and they will be meeting on this to establish Terms of Reference in the coming week including the possibility of including other counties affected. He hopes to be in a position to report back to the Members at the December Plenary meeting.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Dineen

SECONDED BY Cllr. Leyden

It was **AGREED** to write to the relevant Government Department to seek additional funds for the area to create jobs and to develop an action plan.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Leyden

SECONDED BY Cllr. Murphy

It was **AGREED** that Roscommon County Council support the Lanesboro Ballyleague Strategic Development Plan 2020.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Fallon

SECONDED by Cllr. Ward

It was **AGREED** that a letter be sent to the Minister to give a commitment that the existing power plants in Lanesboro and Shannonbridge should be kept intact until alternative options for the usage are in place.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Byrne

SECONDED by Cllr. Ward

It was **AGREED** to write to the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment that the money earmarked by the Government should be spent on those working at the power plants at present and should be employed on any proposed project.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Waldron

SECONDED by Cllr Kilduff

It was **AGREED** to write to the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment and Bord na Mona not to demolish any plant until every avenue for its usage as explored.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Fitzmaurice

SECONDED by Cllr. Naughten

It was **AGREED** to write to the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment to request that the Chief Executive or nominee be appointed to the “Just Transition Team” together with elected members from Roscommon County Council, one from each Municipal District.

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On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Crosby

SECONDED by Cllr. Callaghan

It was **AGREED** that a proper plan be put in place and submitted to the Department Communications, Climate Action and Environment and the Department of Agriculture with regard to jobs value in producing biomass and using it in the power stations. This proposal would include an option for farmers to bring the biomass directly to power stations.

It was agreed by the members that the Meetings Administrator would consolidate a single letter to the Department include all of the motions passed by the members.

This concluded the business of the Special Meeting.

The foregoing Minutes are Confirmed and Signed:


Meetings Administrator

Cathaoirleach

Countersigned