

**MINUTES OF MONTHLY MEETING OF ROSCOMMON COUNTY COUNCIL
IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, ÁRAS AN CHONTAE, ROSCOMMON
ON MONDAY, 21ST DECEMBER, 2020 AT 2.15 PM.**

PRESENT: Councillor Laurence Fallon, Cathaoirleach **PRESIDED**

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

OFFICIALS: Eugene Cummins, Chief Executive
Majella Hunt, Director of Services
Martin Lydon, Director of Services
Shane Tiernan, Director of Services
Liam Bergin, Director of Services
Patricia Bohan, Meetings Administrator
Michelle Carney, Staff Officer
Patricia Bohan, Meetings Administrator

Apologies:

136.20 SYMPATHY TO FAMILY OF ROISIN COSTELLO

The Cathaoirleach expressed his sympathy on behalf of the members of Roscommon County Council to staff member Tina Costello and her husband John and family on the recent sad passing of their daughter Roisin. One minute of silence was observed as a mark of respect.

137.20 ADOPTION OF MINUTES

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Crosby

SECONDED by Cllr. Ward

It was **AGREED** to adopt the minutes of the Budget Meeting of 16.11.2020

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. McDermott

SECONDED by Cllr. Fitzmaurice

It was **AGREED** to adopt the minutes of the Plenary Meeting of 26.11.2020

138.20 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

139.20 PRESENTATION ON MID SHANNON BIOSPHERE UNESCO APPLICATION

Ms. Catherine Hannon from the NPWS delivered a presentation to the members remotely by MS Teams on

the proposed Mid Shannon Biosphere UNESCO application.

- There are 669 Biosphere Reserves in 120 countries worldwide. They are internationally recognised, nominated by national governments and remain under sovereign jurisdiction of the country where they are located. They are also a network for Research, Environmental Education & Training.
- Through consultation process the State submits a Nomination form to the International Co-ordinating Council of the MAB Program.
Biosphere Reserves have no legal standing - UNESCO assumes countries take measures to protect sites by 'existing' protection means (Local & Area Development Plans/Existing Planning Regulations/ Natura 2000 Network/Statutory Nature Reserves etc.)
- UNESCO proposed *Mid Shannon Biosphere & Environs* is about active management of all the things we're proud of.
- There are two Biospheres in Ireland – Dublin Bay Biosphere Reserve and Kerry Biosphere Reserve.
- BR's are traditionally organised into three interrelated zones:
 - Core Zone – this zone prioritises conservation and biological diversity. In parallel to conservation, economic activities can also be developed such as environmental education, research, environmental conservation and rehabilitation activities, recreational and Eco-tourism activities. The Core Zone could be the existing Natura 2000 Network sites.
 - Buffer Zone – identified as areas connected to the Core Zone and can host activities that are compatible with the Core Zone. Can be essential for maintaining biological & cultural diversity.
 - Transition Zone – where sustainable resource management practices are promoted and developed.
- 3 Functions of Biosphere Reserves:
 - Conservation - The importance of the site for conservation of biological and cultural diversity at Regional and/or Global scales.
 - Development – foster economic and human development which is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable
 - Logistic support –support for demonstration projects, environmental education and training, research and monitoring related to local, nation and global issues
- Different from other Bio Reserves in Ireland, Mid Shannon & Environs BR based on Wetlands and their importance for Wildlife/role in Climate Change & Solutions/provision of eco-tourism/Carbon sequestration,/Education and Awareness/Research.
- The proposed Preliminary Working Boundary of Mid Shannon & Environs BR is based on the logic which aligns with sub-catchments developed by EPA under the Water Framework Directive. This is a flexible preliminary boundary and is a good starting point.
- Lough Ree, at the centre of the proposed BR, is surrounded by three sub-catchments of the Upper Shannon Catchment natural watershed demarcation.
- The natural demarcation of the proposed boundary captures the northerly direction flow of water towards Lough Ree to its out flow point at Athlone.
- Mid Shannon Biosphere & Environs: Total area is 2,081.87 Sq. Km and the Combined Natura 2000 sites Core Zone is 169.62 Sq. Km
 - Roscommon: 908.82 Sq. Km (Core Zone Area of Natura 2000 Sites 69.03 Sq. Km)
 - Longford: 652.43 Sq. Km (Core Zone Area of Natura 2000 Sites 59.89 Sq. Km)
 - Leitrim: 375.10 Sq. Km (Core Zone Area of Natura 2000 Sites 0 Sq. Km)

- Westmeath: 145.52 Sq. Km (Core Zone Area of Natura 2000 Sites 40.74 Sq. Km)
- The Mid Shannon Biosphere and Environs, compared to other biosphere regions, has an outstanding combination of wetland landscapes, nature, wildlife, culture and heritage and together with communities and resilient rural workforce who want to thrive and have a good quality of living.
- The Reserve fits in with Management of ecosystems, aligning local authorities and community groups and socio-economic benefits with Climate Change, Bio-diversity and Eco-Tourism remit on Regional and National scale
- Goal is to submit Nomination Form Application to UNESCO September 2021).
 - Cost €5,000 per local authority the outstanding amount paid by DHLGH-NPWS (approx €15,000).
 - Prepare tender document for e-Tender Jan to mid-Feb 2021.
 - Engage consultants to complete Nomination Form & Consultation Process in Mar-May 2021. Steering Group to liaise with Consultants throughout process.
 - Update Public Representatives in June-July 2021
- The Challenges include:
 - Difficulty in maintaining stakeholder engagement levels.
 - Keeping people and organisations engaged during the running of the establishment of the Reserve
 - UNESCO BRs do not provide funding. Core funding is dependent on local authorities and Government Department.
 - Lack of awareness & Misunderstanding around the concept (enabling a voice for a biodiversity agenda in enhancing economic potential).
 - Maintaining cohesion & successful governance due to wide range of geographical spread & stakeholder representation.
 - Multi-sectoral representation in governance structures can influence decision making and giving way to 'no-one in charge'.
- The benefits of a UNESCO Biosphere reserve include:
 - International recognition and providing a boost to local & regional economy with branding. This has the power to strengthen our economy by amplifying our international reputation, creating business and employment opportunities. It also fosters pride in our unique way of life and, of course, will ultimately help to maintain and improve our exceptional landscapes and environment
 - Good Model for Governance: Cohesion of governance structures relating to Socio-Economic functions/Climate change Solutions/Sustainable Tourism/Recreational Plans & Projects/Tourism Potential. Governance Structure such as a 'Biosphere Partnership' or 'Steering Group' to consult and represent those living and working within the Biosphere. Collaborative decision making.
 - Constraints of funding is considerably reduced as each local authority and Department share costs. Biosphere Team with paid staff include Biosphere Officer & admin office.
 - Attracting funding & resources. - Biosphere Partnership and cohesion with representatives from a range of stakeholders.

- Complimentary to proposed and existing major Projects for the Region. UNESCO Biosphere Reserve concept can be used as a framework to guide and reinforce projects. Support eco-tourism, climate change actions & solutions, demonstration projects, environmental education and training, research and monitoring related to local, nation and global issue

The Cathaoirleach and members thanked Ms. Hannon for her presentation and discussed as follows:

- Support the proposed application that is fitting and timely and an opportunity to protect what is valuable in this area.
- This is a positive development for the four counties involved and will enhance tourism product in the region.
- Welcome assurances that there will be no further restrictions or implications for private lands.
- The tie into Athlone IT will enhance the research.
- This is a great opportunity for the region – a win win situation
- Concern with regard to the removal of railway tracks and locomotives used by Bord na Mona in the local boglands. They must be preserved at all costs.
- Of main concern is that jobs lost in the region must be replaced.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr Leyden

SECONDED by Cllr Crosby

It was **AGREED** that Roscommon County Council support the Mid Shannon Bio Reserve application.

140.20 MANAGEMENT REPORT

- Management Report for November 2020 noted.

The Cathaoirleach informed the members that signing of the contract took place last week for work to commence on the old Royal Hotel in Boyle and thanked Chief Executive and Director of Services for Regeneration Unit for their work in relation to the projects.

The Chief Executive advised the members that after a considerable amount of time, Roscommon County Council now owns what the “Parkway Lands” a 21 acre site on the Old Tuam Road in Monksland. He noted this is a strategic piece of land, compliments other investments in the area and endorses Roscommon County Councils commitments there. It is particularly important, given Athlone’s designation as a strategic growth centre.

The Chief Executive also advised the members that a derelict site has been purchased in Elphin in the middle of Main St. It is a mid Terrace commercial property and will allow for the development of Elphin.

The Members welcomed the announcements:

- The site in Athlone is of great strategic importance and will be significant for those wanting to

invest.

- Facilities for young people in this area need to be developed in addition to houses.
- It is unfortunate that the Council have to buy derelict buildings and we need to be stricter in this regard.
- Welcome the purchase of the building in Elphin.

141.20 RESCIND DISPOSAL OF LAND

This matter is deferred to the next meeting

142.20 DISPOSAL OF LANDS - HOUSING

This matter is deferred to the next meeting.

143.20 DISPOSAL OF LAND - ASSETS

On the **PROPOSAL** of Councillor Cummins

SECONDED by Councillor Callaghan

It was **AGREED** that the Council consent to the disposal of property pursuant to the provisions of Article 206 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001, Section 211 of the Planning and Development Act, 2000 (as amended) and Section 183 of the Local Government Act, 2001 of particulars of property which it is proposed to dispose of at the location in County Roscommon and to the persons set out in the schedule hereunder. Particulars of the property which the County Council proposes to dispose:

The Property: Site comprising 0.028 hA (0.059 acres) at Mockmoyne Td., Boyle, Co. Roscommon

The person(s) from whom the land was acquired: Not Available

The person(s) to whom the land is to be disposed of: Shane Clarke, Boyle, Co. Roscommon

The consideration proposed in respect of the disposal: €5,000

144.20 SECTION 106 OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT, 2001 - PUBLIC LIGHTING

Director of Services, Mr. Liam Bergin informed the members of the work to be completed under the Public Lighting Energy Efficiency Project. This is the final phase of the conversion of public lights to LED energy with approx. 4,000 to be completed at a cost of €500 per light. The Council has achieved 30% energy savings to date and our target is 33%. He recommended that the members sanction a loan for the project as our matched funding contribution and the savings in maintenance and energy costs will pay back the loan over time.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. McDermott

SECONDED by Cllr. Crosby

It was **AGREED** in accordance with Section 106 of the Local Government Act 2001 to approve a loan in sum of €2,070,000 for Public Lighting Energy Efficiency Project.

The members discussed the project as follows:

- Old type lamps (globes) in Tarmonbarry were removed by the ESB and these should be retained where possible in all villages where they exist as the add to the atmosphere of the villages.
- There should be an improved response to the repair of lights that are reported as out due to electrical faults. It is taking too long to repair some faults, sometimes lights are out for years.
- This is a good investment and can the Director detail the projected savings when all of the LED lights have been installed.

The Director replied that we are learning as we progress and in relation to Urban Regeneration of our towns and villages that is happening now, the retention of old lamps is something that we are cognisant of but sometimes there can be a light pollution issue. We will follow up in relation to light repairs with the contractor. In relation to cost savings the current generation of lights are expected to last 15 years but may last 20 with 50 percent cost saving over 20 years and payback period of 10 years is the current estimate.

145.20 2019 AUDITED ANNUAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT AND AUDIT REPORT AND AUDIT COMMITTEE REPORT

Mr. Martin Lydon, Director of Services presented the 2019 Audited Annual Financial Statement (AFS) and Audit Report and the Audit Committee Report on the AFS 2019 and the Local Government Auditors Report to the members for noting.

He highlighted the following from the Audit report:

- The 2019 revenue account show a €10k surplus and accumulated surplus of €202k.
- There is an overdraft facility of €6m that was not used in 2019
- There was large amount of capital investment in 2019 in particular, the extension to the arts centre, the purchase of velocity patches and the acquisition of 28 housing units. There was also to disposal of 15 housing units during that time due to the tenant purchase scheme and the sale of rural houses
- The income collection for rates was 89%, a 3 percent improvement on the previous year and exceeded the target set by the CCMA of 87%.
- The cash collected increased by €95,000 and debtors decreased by €0.5m
- A provision of €500k for non-collection of rates was included in light of revaluation process and this has proved prudent due to Covid-19
- Our rate collection rate was 91%, one of the highest in the country and we collected an extra €500k in cash due to the removal of the maximum rent ceiling
- Loan collection increased from 55 % to 76% people repaid their loans
- The bad and doubtful Debt provision for the council for 2019 is deemed adequate by the auditor
- The capital account recorded a net credit balance of €22m and include time indifferences and will be spent on various housing projects and mainly road projects as well as in the Community and Enterprise area of regeneration.
- Development contributions debtors decreased to €5.5m and is an ongoing process
- 12 Rebuilding housing loans issues and all performing well
- Number of unfinished housing estates reduced for 149 to 117 in 2019 (equivalent 700 houses). Bonds of €4.2m drawn down in respect of 43 estates and €1.8m to be spent. Cash bonds in place for 23 estates to value of €800k.
- 95 % of all invoices were paid within 30 days
- Roscommon Leisure centre had cumulative losses of €214k and Moylurg Rockingham showed a

surplus of €66k.

- Audit committee to meet quarterly

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Cummins

SECONDED by Cllr. Keogh

It was **AGREED** to approve the Audit Report on the Annual Financial Statement 2019

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Shanagher

SECONDED by Cllr. Ward

It was **AGREED** to approve the Audit Committee Work Programme

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Cummins

SECONDED by Cllr. Byrne

It was **AGREED** to approve the Internal Audit Plan 2021

146.20 DRAFT ANNUAL SERVICE DELIVERY PLAN 2021

The Draft Annual Service Delivery Plan 2021 was noted.

147.20 PRESENTATION ON JUST TRANSITION PROJECTS

Ms. Majella Hunt, Director of Services updated the members on the Just Transition Fund and its origins and development to the current status as follows:

From a strategic and programmes point of view the ethos of Just Transition initiative is based on the European Union Communication on New European Green Deal 2019; Europe Climate Neutral Continent 2050; National Development Plan – Project Ireland 2040; Climate Action Plan 2019; Regional Enterprise Plan 2020 (8 Regions); Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES); Regional Growth Centres and Growth Framework; Just Transition Plans Strategic Framework and Brown to Green Strategy (Bord na Móna)

Indicators of poor Economic Performance in Northern & Western Region:

- Commercial vacancy rates within the Northern & Western region are quite high relative to State average – High Vacancy Rate in 7 Counties.
- Disposable income per head of population remains quite low within the region, and is falling behind relative to the State average – €35,098 V €42,524
- Northern & Western region is not capturing as much high skilled employment relative to the EU28 and State averages.
- In recent years, Productivity within the region has fallen back, relative to the State average.

Multiple factors are likely to have caused the region's GDP to fall relative to the EU average, however poor performances in these indicators are likely to have contributed.

The Future Focus is on:

- Infrastructure - Energy, Transport, Water, Digital, Smart Rural Areas, Housing, and Broadband and Urban & Rural Regeneration
- Economy & Employment - Recovery through Job Creation, New Skills, Regional Growth & Government, Investment and Regional Balance-remote working

- Environment – Protection of Environment, Climate Action-Carbon Reduction, Circular Economy and Biodiversity
- Quality of Life – Health Care, Justice, Arts & Culture, Education, Wellness, and Sport

Just Transition Fund 2020:

Applications were open to Business, Community & Local Authorities.

In Strand 1 a total of €1.2 million made to 16 successful applicants for Projects costing less than € 100,000.

In Strand 2 an allocation of €108m was secured by Bord Na Móna for the Peatland Restoration Project in the Midlands which will create 310 Jobs and a further 47 Projects to the value of €27.8M for projects costing more than €100,000.

The successful projects in County Roscommon in Strand 1 were

- Lough Ree Bay Boardwalk - Roscommon County Council
- Moore Hub – Community Project
- Ballyforan Trail – Community Project

In Strand 2 the successful projects are:

- Cloontuskert/Ballyglass Units - Roscommon County Council
- Feasibility Study for Greenway/Heritage Trail, Mount Dillon, Funding €212,000
- Midland Wilderness, Roscommon/Longford County Councils
- Park Greenway Funding €102,000 Feasibility Study for Landing Space, Start Up or Visitor Centre & Organic Farm Funding €212,000
- Ballyforan Greenway Loop – Community Project
- Lough Ree – Access for All, Tourist Product Funding €471,693
- Cross County Initiatives-18 Projects

The Cathaoirleach thanked the Director for the detailed presentation and stated that the success of the projects will be judged by the number of jobs created in the area and the jobs must be at least of the same standard as the jobs lost due to closure of the midlands power stations.

The members discussed the presentation as follows:

- Is the proposed visitors centre in Ballyleague
- It is imperative that the railways in the bogs are retained
- The former Bord na Mona workers will require upskilling for new jobs
- The Region in transition requires investment in high quality jobs
- There is a need to extend the area in question with regard to projects – the villages of Tarmonbarry and Cloondra would benefit from greenway extension from Royal Canal.
- The cost of demolishing the power station in Lanesboro would be an issue and Roscommon and Longford County Councils should meet and make a submission to the ESB regarding future use of the plant. In any case the station should be retained for future use.
- Concern at the pace of change
- The matched funding of 15% for the projects for community groups to raise is a concern
- There is also the issue of huge data centres being constructed and businesses moving from UK due to Brexit and knock on implications of providing sufficient electricity in Ireland in the short term until alternative sources are established.
- Welcome the proposed projects locally and all assistance possible be utilised to facilitate the matched funding for local areas.

- Has there be a reply to a previous request for ESB
- Well done to staff involved

The Director advised that in relation to matched funding for community groups, Local Authorities may be prohibited from assisting due to the De Minimus clause and no commitments have been made due to clarification required in the matter.

148.20 CHIEF EXECUTIVE BUSINESS

There was no Chief Executives Business.

149.20 APPOINTMENT TO NUIG GOVERNING BOARD

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Leyden

SECONDED by Cllr. Naughten

It was **AGREED** to appoint Cllr. John Keogh to the Board of the National University of Ireland, Galway.

150.20 CORRESPONDENCE

Replies to Resolutions from Roscommon County Council:

- **1st Dec, 2020** – Reply letter from The Minister for Social Protection Ms. Heather Humphreys TD ref Notice of Motion regarding removing the means test for Carer's Allowance and the payment of full rate Carer's Allowance to people in receipt of other social welfare payments.
- **3rd Dec, 2020** – Reply letter from Daragh McKevitt, Defence Forces Ireland ref Notice of Motion - 131.20(a) - Letter re Jadotville Medals.
- **10th Dec, 2020** – Reply letter from Simon Coveney T.D., Minister for Defence and Minister for Foreign Affairs ref Notice of Motion - Letter re Jadotville Medals.

Resolutions from other Local Authorities:

- **1st Dec, 2020 - Resolution from Galway County Council**

That Galway County Council write to the Taoiseach and Minister for Children, Disability, Integration regarding a number of matters concerning Mother and Baby Homes including a request to publish the Final Report of the Mother and Baby Homes Commission as soon as possible, that a full state response is provided, that new statutory information and tracing legislation be published without delay, that survivors are given access to their personal records & that their rights to personal data are protected, that a range of supports for survivors are put in place and that Government continue to engage with stakeholders to establish a national archive of records related to institutional trauma.

- **16th Dec, 2020 - Resolution from Waterford City and County Council**

That Waterford City and County Council:

- sends its solidarity and support to the former Debenhams workers.
- reaffirms the Council's support for workers' rights, collective bargaining and fairness and dignity at work.
- calls on the Government to implement the Duffy-Cahill report and to legislate to protect workers.
- calls for KPMG and Government to immediately engage with the workers.

151.20 NOTICES OF MOTION

There are two notices of Motion on the agenda.

151.20a 20.20 PLANET YOUTH INITIATIVE - LEISURE CARD

Notice of Motion from Cllr Leyden:

"That Roscommon County Council calls on the Government to support the Planet Youth initiative by financing a Leisure Card as a pilot project to enhance the health and well-being of young people in the Western region and to address the risk of drugs and alcohol abuse"

The Meetings Administrator read the following reply:

This motion requires a resolution of the Council.

Cllr Leyden requested support for her motion for an initiative that started in Iceland that allows everyone to have an equal opportunity to participate in different sports or leisure activities. This is an extension of the Planet Youth Project that started in the Western Region in 2018 with a large number of secondary schools involved and provides an outlet for extra curricular activities.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Leyden

SECONDED by Cllr. Shanagher

It was **AGREED** That Roscommon County Council calls on the Government to support the Planet Youth initiative by financing a Leisure Card as a pilot project to enhance the health and well-being of young people in the Western region and to address the risk of drugs and alcohol abuse

151.20b 21.20 REDEDICATION OF FR. FLANAGAN MEMORIAL BRIDGE

Notice of Motion from Cllr. Waldron:

"That Roscommon County Council organise a rededication ceremony of the "The Father Michael Flanagan Memorial Bridge" over the River Suck in Castlerea during Heritage Week 2021"

The Meetings Administrator read the following reply:

A suitable event to commemorate Fr. Michael Flanagan can be included in the events of Heritage Week 2021, subject of Covid restrictions.

Cllr. Waldron outlined the importance of Fr. Flanagan in the history of Roscommon and should be considered one of the most important Irishmen of his time. He was a radical Republican and was at

the forefront of community development working with locals and promoting local produce. His is a story that needs to be told as it is a story of ambition and progress. His legacy needs to be more widely promoted.

It was noted that Castlerea Festival commemorated Fr. Flanagan at its festival.

On the **PROPOSAL** of Cllr. Waldron

SECONDED by Cllr Dineen

It was **AGREED** that Roscommon County Council organise a rededication ceremony of the "The Father Michael Flanagan Memorial Bridge" over the River Suck in Castlerea during Heritage Week 2021.

152.20 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There are two matters to be raised under Any Other Business.

152.20a 100 YEAR COMMEMORATION

Cllr. Fitzmaurice requested that it be noted in the minutes that this time 100 years ago, many Roscommon men, including his grandfather, were taken from their homes and interred in Ballykinlar Camp, Co Down. He also requested that notwithstanding National Commemoration events to remember the signing of the truce on 21st July 1921, Roscommon County Council should also organise an appropriate event to mark the 100 year anniversary in July.

152.20b SURVEY PLANES IN SOUTH ROSCOMMON

Cllr. Ward referenced an ongoing matter of survey planes on behalf of an energy company carrying out work in the South Roscommon area since March 2020 and if the work is now essential and can the Council do anything about it. It was noted that this is not a matter for Roscommon County Council

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be on Monday, 22nd February, 2021.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

The foregoing Minutes are
Confirmed and Signed:



Meetings Administrator



Cathaoirleach

Petrizio Bohon
Countersigned