



Comhairle Contae  
Ros Comáin  
Roscommon  
County Council



## MINUTES OF SPECIAL ATHLONE MUNICIPAL DISTRICT MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - ÁRAS AN CHONTAE, ON MONDAY, 28TH SEPTEMBER, 2020 AT 9.00 AM

**PRESENT:** Councillor Donal Kilduff      **PRESIDED**

**MEMBERS:** Cllr L. Fallon, Cllr T. Ward, Cllr I. Connaughton, Cllr J. Keogh and Cllr J. Naughten.

**OFFICIALS:** Liam Bergin, Director of Services  
Paul Browne, Executive Engineer  
Shelia Glennon, Assistant Staff Officer  
Shane Tiernan, Director of Services  
John Mockler, Roscommon Municipal District Co-Ordinator

### Apologies:

#### 48.20 MEMBERS UPDATE ON LOUGH FUINSHINAGH

The meeting was held in accordance with Government Guidelines in relation to social/physical distancing

Cathaoirleach Donal Kilduff welcomed everyone to the special meeting of Athlone MD to update members on Lough Funshinagh. He called on Annmarie Johnston, SEE, Roads Section, to give the presentation on the Malachy Walsh and Partners Flood Analysis report and Ecological Review of Flood Protection Options for Lough Funshinagh and Lough Cup. (Presentation slides attached)

Cllr. Donal Kilduff thanked Annmarie Johnston for giving the presentation. Cllr Kilduff said he is sixteen months elected as a public representative and is sixteen months coming in here to Áras an Chontae listening to and debating the issue of Lough Funshinagh and that he is completely fed up with it. There are six elected public representatives in the Athlone Municipal Area and we all agree that essential works are necessary at Lough Funshinagh to avoid mass displacement. This is not populism; he is certain based on current water levels that if we get a wet winter there will be at least five houses flooded this winter. Who is going to take responsibility for it?

Cllr Kilduff: 'We are being told here today nothing will be done because the cost benefit ratio is not where it needs to be to warrant action - but we all agreed when the cost benefit analysis was first published that it was flawed because the OPW cost template attributed absurdly low costs against agricultural land and private dwellings. When we collectively requested the OPW to attend our municipal meeting to engage constructively on the issue we were told that they do not have the resources to attend municipal meetings. Is this a representative democracy or a centrally controlled bureaucratic dictatorship? Why is a bureaucrat in Leinster and a body with such limited resources deciding the fate of a relatively simple infrastructure project in Roscommon when we have public officials in Roscommon County Council with top class multi-disciplinary competencies and an elected body capable of evaluating and deciding on such a project locally.

Ireland is a relatively young democracy; we are doing well in general on the big issues but all too often we drop the ball on the small stuff. We should look to international best practice in older more established democracies. Countries such as Denmark have much stronger local government and real autonomy at local level where locally elected representatives in consultation with local and regional public officials make

decisions on matters such as Lough Funshinagh. Our system of electing national politicians and then judging their success or failure as public representatives based on their ability to extract funding for their area from central government is not working for rural Ireland and Roscommon in particular. It has created severe regional inequality. If Lough Funshinagh was located closer to the Pale I would have no doubt that the outcome would be different'.

Cllr Kilduff finished by saying that a properly funded model of local government is needed, where resources are distributed at local government level in accordance with a national policy of balanced regional development. If such a system of government was in place the issue at Lough Funshinagh would be resolved several years ago.

Cllr Fallon agreed with Cllr Kilduff and said the statement captured his sentiments also. He thanked Annmarie Johnston, Shane Tiernan and Liam Bergin for all their help and input and emphasized that he put no blame on Roscommon County Council for the outcome of the report. Cllr. Fallon continued, the report stated the proposed construction of an overflow could potentially have a significant ecological effect on the turlough habitat and may undermine the sites conservation objectives, but this is already destroyed because of the flooding. If the EU Commission were aware of this, they would fine the State. He welcomed the possibility that the houses that flooded previously could be relocated. The water levels are 4ft higher than this day last year when they were recorded to be 3ft. A solution is required which lowers the level of the water in the lake not compensation for the relocation of flooded houses. He noted that they have agreed to relocate houses that have already applied for relocation before this report, but what about a house that may get flooded in the future as the flooding at Lough Funshinagh will most certainly worsen over time.

Cllr Keogh supported Cllr Kilduff's opening statement and also supported Cllr Fallon and Cllr Ward's continued work on behalf of the local community. He said properties adjacent to Lough Funshinagh should be protected against the risk of flooding and potential risk of flooding in the future. He can't accept that the overflow pipe is not a solution. Failure of OPW in their report to deal with the issue is unacceptable.

Cllr Ward supported the Cathaoirleach and other members. He said that 5 years is a long time with for 45 families affected by this flooding. The habitat of the lake is completely destroyed which the OPW would have seen if they had visited the area. There was nothing in the report referencing the farming community and their loss of earnings. He felt the report was flawed and the people of the area don't count. Cllr Ward called for a complete rejection of report.

Cllr Naughten thanked Annmarie Johnston for giving the presentation, he agreed and supported the other members on this issue. Families continue to be affected by the flooding and as time goes the situation will worsen as more properties are threatened by the rising water level. He agreed the overflow pipe is most logical and cost effective solution. He called on the other member to continue to highlight the problem until a positive solution is found and put in place.

Cllr Connaughton agreed with all of his fellow members. He mentioned that he asked at the MD meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> September if there was any correspondence from the OPW in relation to Lough Funshinagh. He questioned if a letter was received from OPW in August, and questioned why it was not on the agenda for the meeting held on the 15<sup>th</sup> September instead of a special meeting called the morning before a Plenary meeting. He asked what was spent to date on Lough Funshinagh. He continued that there is nothing in the report as to what should be done. He said that he is embarrassed to be a politician as a result of the OPW's stance. He acknowledged the Council officials can only follow what is in the report.

Cllr Fallon explained why the meeting was called, he said that he became aware of the report midweek. He considered the report would not get significant time for discussion if put on the agenda of the Plenary meeting as result of the limited time due to the Covid 19 restrictions. He felt the best option was to have a separate meeting this morning. Cllr Fallon also requested a fund to raise roads and provide pumps to prevent properties from flooding by Roscommon County Council.

**On the Proposal of:** Cllr Fallon.  
**Seconded by:** Cllr Naughten

It was **AGREED** to write to the Minister of Environment inviting him to visit Lough Funshinagh and meet the local community and the Elected Members of South Roscommon to discuss the impact of the flooding.

It is noted that Cllr. Fallon also proposed sending correspondence to Europe however this was not supported by the other members.

Shane Tiernan, Director of Services said that he had been on annual leave when the correspondence from the OPW was received and on speaking with the CEO it was planned for inclusion at the next Plenary Meeting. However, as a result of the increased restrictions with Covid19 he felt a separate meeting was required with the members of the Athlone MD. He said a lot of work went into the reports, the cost involved with the proposed overflow pipe is excessive and could potentially have significant ecological effect on the turlough habitat and may undermine the sites conservation objective at the outflow. The risk of a negative outcome for a planning application for the project is high.

Cllr Ward said that funding should be made available to carry out the work that needs to be done and queried the cost of reports. It was also asked had any OPW officials visited Lough Funshinagh before the report was written? There was nothing in the report about the farmer's loss of income or depopulation of the area. He called on the members to reject the report.

Annamarie Johnston showed the slide detailing costs and benefits. The cost of the AA and NIS screening and EIAR is €106,800 and the cost of the Topographical survey and ground investigation is €40,000. The benefits for alleviating flood risk to a house is €11,000 and alleviating flooding of agricultural land is €1,045 per hectare.

The Councillors called into question the costs attributed to the value of agricultural lands in the county in the calculation of the cost benefit analysis in the report and therefore they were rejecting the content of the report

Cllr Fallon said that he was at a meeting with the OPW facilitated by former Minister Kevin Boxer Moran. During the discussion on the first report from Malachy Walsh and Partners he questioned the OPW official on how the cost benefit value for newly flooded land of €1045 per hectare was arrived at. He said that he was informed it was a standard value used in places like the Shannon Callows. He pointed out to the OPW that the Shannon Callows was a short term flood, with a maximum period of a few months, with rapid land recovery to the original productivity. In contrast, at Lough Funshinagh the flood was present now for 4 years with severe and permanent damage which was not comparable with the situation at the Callows. Cllr Fallon said that the OPW agreed that he had a valid point, but that the Shannon Callows calculation was the only criteria they had and they agreed to review the calculation method for long term floods in areas such as Lough Funshinagh. He said that he suggested to the OPW that permanent flooding should be valued at prevailing market value. It was his understanding that the OPW would review this element of the cost benefit analysis in the same way they revalued the flooded house values.

Cllr Naughten referred to the Cost Benefit Analysis as a serious issue. The cost of another 5 houses would be €250,000 along with road repair, diversions, pumps, agriculture land, these along with other areas left out of report. He reiterated 'Whatever has to be done must be done now'.

Cllr Connaughton stated prevention is better than cure. He said that the report does not make sense. Nothing about contamination of water from flooding effecting sewerage tanks and slatted shed in area.

They have an obligation to get value for money. OPW is not fit for purpose. He supports the other members to reject the report.

Cllr Fallon asked if funding would be made available for the raising of roads and pumps if required for the coming winter season.

John Mockler, Senior Engineer replied that as with previous years Roscommon County Council provide funding to alleviate the flooding of public roads.

**On the Proposal of: Cllr Keogh**

**Seconded by: Cllr Ward.**

It was **AGREED** to write to the head of the OPW requesting a review of the cost benefit value for newly flooded land at €1045 per hectare.

**On the Proposal of; Cllr Kilduff**

**Seconded by; Cllr Keogh**

It was **AGREED** to write to the Committee of Public Accounts calling on them to investigate the OPW, as the OPW is using an acknowledged inaccurate calculation criterion for cost benefit analysis. The correspondence should include the cost to date in relation to reports, pumps, and flood alleviation measures.

Shane Tiernan, Director of Services, stated that they have exhausted what they can do for a major scheme at Lough Funshinagh, the excessive cost and risk of a negative outcome for a planning application for the project is high. He said the OPW have provided funding to Roscommon County Council for minor flood mitigation works down the years.

The Cathaoirleach Cllr Donal Kilduff concluded the meeting.

***NEXT MEETING***

**The next meeting will be on Wednesday, 21st October, 2020.**

This concluded the business of the meeting.

The foregoing Minutes are  
Confirmed and Signed:

*Paul Blowne*

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Meetings Administrator

*Donal Kilduff*

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Cathaoirleach

*Paul Blowne*

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Countersigned