

Minutes of April Monthly Meeting

Held on 16th May 2022, in Áras an Chontae, Charleville Road,
Tullamore and via Zoom

Present

Cllr. Declan Harvey Cathaoirleach

Cllr. John Carroll	Cllr. John Leahy
Cllr. Clare Claffey	Cllr. Tony McCormack
Cllr. John Clendennen	Cllr. Robert McDermott
Cllr. Noel Cribbin	Cllr. Sean O'Brien
Cllr. Eamon Dooley	Cllr. Peter Ormond
Cllr. Neil Feighery	Cllr. Danny Owens
Cllr. Eddie Fitzpatrick	Cllr. Liam Quinn
Cllr. John Foley	Cllr. Ken Smollen
Cllr. Mark Hackett	

The Meetings Administrator carried out a roll call to confirm attendance.

Apologies

Cllr. Frank Moran

Officials in Attendance

Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive; Mr. T. Shanahan, D.O.S.; Ms. S. Kennedy, D.O.S.; Mr. M. Connolly, H.O.F.; Mr. S. Duclot, D.O.S.; Ms. O. Farrelly, T.O., Mr. E. Fennell, S.E.O. (R), Mr. G. Bruton, Meetings Administrator, Mr. C. Kelly, S.O.; and Ms. L. Carbery, C.O. (R)

Votes of Sympathy

Votes of sympathy was unanimously extended to the following:

Mr. Declan Nelson, Clover Hill, Monaghan Town, on the death of his wife Mary Nelson;
Mr. John Stone, Offaly County Council, on the death of his father Jim Stone;
Ms. Olive Weatherhead, Offaly County Council, on the death of her mother Colette Weatherhead;
Mr. Joe and Marie Moran, Offaly County Council, on the death of their father Joe (Kieran) Moran;
Ms Mary McIntyre, Offaly County Council, on the death of her mother Kathleen Dunne.

The Chief Executive, on her own behalf and on behalf of the staff of Offaly County Council, joined with the members in these votes of sympathy.

1. Confirmation of Minutes

On the proposal of Cllr. J. Leahy, seconded by Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick, the members resolved to adopt the minutes of the Ordinary meeting of Offaly County Council held on 25th April 2022.

2. Minutes for Noting

The members noted the following minutes:

- Minutes of the Corporate Policy Group Meeting held on 25th March 2022

3. Planning and Development Act, 2000 as Amended, Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 as Amended

On the proposal of Cllr. D. Harvey, seconded by Cllr. T. McCormack, the members resolved to adopt the Planning and Development Act, 2000 as Amended, Part 8 of the Planning and Development Regulations, 2001 as Amended for the Proposed Development at Chancery Lane, Tullamore, Co. Offaly.

4. Tourism Presentation

Ms. O. Farrelly, Tourism Officer, provided the members with a presentation on Offaly Tourism. She began her review of Offaly Tourism 2021 by playing 2 suites of videos for the members, that were produced for Target Markets and to promote Outdoor Recreation facilities. She updated the members on the Summer Marketing Campaign that ran for 3 months from May 2021 and included radio advertisements and social media. She advised the members that social media is a great way to help build the Tourism brand and followers have increased to 15k, which represents an increase of 2% on previous year's figures. She welcomed the publicity that influencers have provided for Offaly Tourism. She outlined the TV campaigns that Offaly featured in, including a US cable TV magazine show and the TG4 Heartlands. She advised the members that Offaly Tourism continues to provide print advertising with brochures and supplements. She highlighted the Fáilte Ireland's Keep Discovering Campaign that advertised various attractions and the success of the brochure 'Offaly Outdoors'. She informed the members that a number of tailored training programmes were facilitated in 2021.

Ms. O. Farrelly advised the members that Offaly Tourism are now working with a public relations company since March 2022 and have a plan set out for the year. The plan includes competitions running at the end of this month, adverts on radio, brochure distribution in all airports and in over 200 locations across the country. She highlighted the importance of the greenways and that a new website is being developed. She updated the members on the marketing membership figures, the virtual tourism seminar and funding through Leader applications. She advised the members that a 5 year Strategy 2023-2027 is being developed which will guide and steer the recovery, growth and development of the Tourism Sector in Offaly.

The members thanked Ms. O. Farrelly for her comprehensive presentation and they agreed on the importance of the greenways, Mountain Bike trails in Kinnitty, Derryounce Lakes and the many attractions available for tourism in Offaly. Cllr. J. Clendennen pointed out that there is an opportunity to develop a national outdoor event centre, the need for a master plan across the various tourism

facilities and to utilise tiktok as a social media platform. Cllr. E. Dooley called for an operational programme to access Just Transition funding, citing the need for quality projects and for various groups to work together.

The members raised queries on the availability of statistics for employment in the sector, removal of old signage, provision of tourism packages and future investment in Lough Boora.

In response Ms. O. Farrelly advised the members that the employment figures from Fáilte Ireland are inconclusive, but the Offaly tourism marketing group will help to facilitate feedback from the trade. She advised the provision of packages on the website is complex, but itineraries are available on the website. She acknowledged that there is outdated signage in the Birr area and that the Tourism Team is working with Birr MD to remove these and the new heartlands signage will be installed this year. She informed the members that there are approximately 350 businesses working in tourism in Offaly. She advised the members that the Clonmacnoise master plan should start this year. Lough Boora is currently going through transition, a new manager has been appointed and Offaly Tourism will support them.

Cllr. D. Harvey informed the members that following on from the meeting with Tourism Ireland in New York, they were advised that short snappy clips and videos, similar to the videos that Ms. Farrelly had played are a great asset in advertising the county. Cllr. D. Owens pointed out the importance of genealogy to tourism.

Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive, noted that the previous strategy was a building block leading to our brand development and through consultation further strengths will be identified. She acknowledged the value of the marketing campaign and the collaboration with Geraldine Egan, Tourism Ireland, in providing high resolution photography. She advised the members that there is a specific action at number 11 in the Draft Just Transition Territorial plan to develop tourism potential and access funding streams. She noted that previous feasibility study highlighted that links in walks and trails shows how connectivity can be achieved, resulting in the development of our Greenways.

5. Just Transition

Mr. S. Duclot, D.O.S., briefed the members on the National Just Transition Plan with 55 projects now entered into contract, 16 from Strand 1 and a further 37 larger projects from Strand 2 underway since June 21.

He advised that a Territorial Plan has been drafted following public consultation and a summary report will be published online. He stressed the importance of quality projects of scale to access the funding.

The members thanked him for his update and they noted the importance of liaising with the Oireachtas and MEP members to ensure that Offaly is acknowledged as the most affected county due to decarbonisation. They sought match funding from Central Government and they highlighted the necessity to ring fence the funding from Just Transition. They voiced their concerns that projects of scale would be difficult for smaller groups and the timeline of 2023 for completion of projects will be challenging. They sought clarity on the submissions and job creation from the Just Transition projects.

In response Mr. S. Duclot advised that the Offaly County Council submission highlights that Offaly is the most affected territory and therefore should benefit the most of EU Just Transition fund. He agreed to revert to the members on the criteria for projects of scale and he thanked them for their support. He agreed that a meeting with the Oireachtas and MEP members can be organised in next few weeks.

6. Monthly Management Report

Ms. A. Delaney, Chief Executive, brought the members attention to the monthly management report. She highlighted dates of interest for the members including the Lough Boora Art in Landscape seminar on 25th May and the Offaly jobs fair in the Tullamore Court Hotel in July. She welcomed the recent visit of Minister Heather Humphreys to various sites in Offaly, including the Derryounce Lakes and Trails, Blundell Master Plan in Edenderry and the Slieve Bloom Mountain Bike Trails in Kinnitty.

She advised the members that details of Architectural and Heritage projects are outlined in the report with a lot of funding accessed through these projects. She noted the roads programme 2022 is underway and the housing report is available for their information. She informed the members that there is an update on the Ukrainian Refugee Response in the Community and Culture section and emergency accommodation is currently being provided in Portarlington, Tullamore and Birr. She congratulated Glenisk on their win as the Local Enterprise Business of the year awards.

The members thanked her for the comprehensive report. Cllr. K. Smollen voiced his concerns on the housing list and HAP and he queried if Riverside in Portarlington is in Offaly County Council ownership. Cllr. E. Fitzpatrick queried if the provision of solar compaction bins will be introduced to the wider county. Cllr. N. Feighery welcomed the provision of 8 new houses in Mucklagh and he commended the high standard of A rated housing being provided for social housing tenants. Cllr. D. Harvey welcomed the building of houses by Offaly County Council, noting it is very positive for the County.

Ms. A. Delaney welcomed the member's comments and the approval of another part 8 for Tullamore. She cautioned that there will always be a waiting list and that construction costs continue to increase, but the provision of social housing is progressing. She confirmed that Riverside, Portarlington, is not in Offaly County Council ownership. Mr. T. Shanahan advised the members that the provision of solar bins is a pilot project that may be expanded and that they are costly to provide.

7. Corporate Policy Group Report

Cllr. D. Harvey, Cathaoirleach advised the members that the Corporate Policy Group was a very positive meeting, where they discussed the Offaly County Council meeting agenda, Just Transition and questions for the upcoming Bord Na Mona meeting.

8. Notices of Motion

On the proposal of Cllr. K. Smollen seconded by Cllr. O'Brien the members resolved 'that Offaly County Council calls on the Government to abandon plans to stop the commercial sale of turf until an affordable alternative is available. The Government must take into consideration that many thousands of families depend on the use of commercially purchased turf for heating and cooking in their homes.'

Cllr. K. Smollen voiced his concerns that people in Offaly are facing fuel poverty and an affordable alternative to turf is not yet available. He agreed that everyone wants a cleaner form of energy. Cllr. S. O'Brien expressed his concerns that Just Transition is a difficult process that is happening too soon, and without proper planning. He stressed that importation of fuel from other countries is an unacceptable alternative, as it goes against reducing the carbon footprint.

Cllr. M. Hackett pointed out that this issue has been debated by Government at National level and that the ban on sale of turf is about human health and clean air. He proposed to request the government

to assign Offaly with additional income to support householders. He suggested that the public can still share or gift turf. Cllr. N. Cribbin voiced his support for Cllr. M. Hackett and he called on the provision of grants for pellet stoves.

The members voiced their support for Cllr. K. Smollens motion and pointed out that the use of turf would eventually phase out naturally.

On the proposal of Cllr. K. Smollen, seconded by Cllr. S. O'Brien, the members resolved that 'Offaly County Council creates designated areas throughout the county for the erection of posters for all future Local and National elections, that only one poster per candidate be permitted at each location and that the erection of election posters be prohibited in all other areas of the county.'

On the proposal of Cllr. M. Hackett, seconded by Cllr. C. Claffey,' the members agreed that in light of the biodiversity crisis, Offaly County Council will, for a trial period, stop using glyphosate and other chemical based / non organic herbicides in all circumstances except for the control of invasive species'.

Cllr. T. McCormack raised concerns that this would allow the regrowth of weeds quicker and Cllr. J. Clendennen advised that it must be done at a respectable pace that will work for staff.

Mr. T. Shanahan agreed that there is no lack of motivation to use alternatives, and advised that chemical based herbicides are used in a limited way on footpaths and paved areas by trained personnel and amounts are recorded. There are various alternatives such as mechanical scuffing which is very aggressive and not very effective. More recent public realm surfaces have sealed surfaces which greatly reduce weed growth and make for easier cleaning. He informed the members that a study by CARO on alternatives is on-going and a briefing will be provided at next SPC. Ms. A. Delaney agreed they will need time to put measures in place.

9. Comhdhálacha / Conferences

Cllr. D. Harvey reminded the members that pre approval for attendance at conferences and training is required.

10. Any Other Business

Ms. S. Kennedy invited the members to attend the Volunteer Awards on Thursday 19th May in the Bridge House Hotel to acknowledge the input and contribution of volunteers over the past few years during the Covid-19 pandemic and requested the member to rsvp to the community section.

MINUTES CONFIRMED:

CATHAOIRLEACH

RUNAÍ

20th June 2022

