**Minutes of Meeting of Longford County Council**

**held via Microsoft Teams on**

**Wednesday, 9th June 2021 at 3.00 p.m.**

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**PRESIDING**: Councillor Paul Ross, Cathaoirleach.

**MEMBERS PRESENT**: Councillors – Paraic Brady, John Browne, Seamus Butler, Mick Cahill, Mark Casey, Colin Dalton,

Gerard Hagan, Martin Monaghan,

Garry Murtagh, Turlough McGovern, Peggy Nolan,

Pat O’Toole, P.J. Reilly, Uruemu Adejinmi, Colm Murray and Gerry Warnock.

**APOLOGIES:** Councillor Gerard Farrell.

**IN ATTENDANCE:**  Mr. Paddy Mahon, Chief Executive.

Mr. John McKeon, Head of Finance/Director of Services.

Mr. John Brannigan, Director of Services.

Ms. Barbara Heslin, Director of Services.

Ms. Nora O’Farrell, Senior Executive Officer.

Ms. Lorraine O’Connor, Regeneration Staff.

**MEETINGS**

**ADMINISTRATOR**: Ann Marie Mc Keon

**SPECIAL PUBLIC MEETING**

Meetings Administrator Ann Marie Mc Keon referred to standing orders “special meetings” and informed the members that she received a request from the Cathaoirleach to hold a special public meeting on 21st June at 3pm and that item number six (b) would be deferred to this meeting. On the proposal of Councillor Peggy Nolan, seconded by Councillor Paraic Brady it was unanimously agreed to hold a special meeting on the 21st June at 3pm and that item six (b) be referred to this meeting. Ann Marie noted standing orders “submission of notice of motions” and requested a proposer and seconder for the amendment to the submission of notice of motions for this meeting and on the proposal of Councillor Gerry Hagan, seconded by Councillor Pat O’Toole it was unanimously agreed to accept the amendment.

**PRESENTATION FROM EIRGRID**

Rodney Doyle gave a very comprehensive report on shaping our electricity future and responded to questions raised by the members. Some of the issues highlighted by Rodney:

* Generation companies create electricity and compete to supply it at the best price
* EirGrid ensures there is enough electricity, then safely delivers this directly to large energy users and all around the grid
* ESB Networks take electricity from the grid and send to everyone who needs it
* Consumers choose an electricity supplier, confident that they’ll have a reliable and secure supply – now and in future
* Burning fossil fuels creates carbon emissions
* Carbon emissions create climate change
* Electricity can be generated from clean and renewable sources with no carbon emissions
* Government policies would determine the best location of new renewable generation.
* Preferred locations will consider the strength of the existing grid and the local demand.
* Likely to lead to more offshore wind generation close to major cities, with less need for new onshore renewable generation.
* Requires around 38 Projects / €0.7bn  
  4.5 GW offshore wind (east coast)  
  1 GW solar energy and inland wind farms
* Continue to connect new sources of renewable electricity in any location that developers request.
* This will create a need for a very large number of grid development projects – that cannot be delivered for many years after 2030.
* This approach would also see more power being generated than can be used.
* Requires over 77 Projects / €1.9bn  
  4 GW from inland wind farms  
  2 GW each from solar and offshore wind
* Many technical issues to run the grid when most power comes from renewable sources.
* Principal challenge: electricity generated from renewable sources has a different frequency to electricity generated from burning fossil fuels.
* Overriding goal is to ensure your supply of electricity remains secure and stable.
* New technical solutions, policies and tools needed.
* Consulting with electricity sector to find the best response.

The members raised the following questions which Rodney responded to:

* Crisis in supply/challenges on supply system
* Data Centre
* Renewable wind turbines
* Storage of electricity
* Power to UK
* Climate change
* Battery projects

**ADOPTION OF MINUTES**

On the proposal of Councillor Mick Cahill, seconded by Councillor Gerry Hagan, the Minutes of Monthly Meeting of Longford County Council held on the 12th May 2021, as circulated, were confirmed and adopted.

On the proposal of Councillor Peggy Nolan seconded by Councillor Pat O’Toole, the Committee Minutes of Longford County Council held on the 12th May 2021, as circulated, were confirmed and adopted.

**MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES.**

None.

**DECLARATION OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS.**

None.

**CHIEF EXECUTIVE REPORT**

The Chief Executive Report, as circulated, was noted.

**MINUTES OF CORPORATE POLICY GROUP MEETING HELD ON THE**

**13TH APRIL 2021 - CIRCULATED**

The adopted Minutes of Corporate Policy Group Meetings held on the 13th April 2021, as circulated, were noted.

**STRATEGIC INFRASTRUCTURE AND CLIMATE CHANGE.**

**Planning Applications**

The list of Planning Applications received since last meeting of the Council were noted.

**‘Draft Longford County Development Plan 2021 – 2027 and associated Chief Executive**

**Report’**

Deferred to Special Public meeting on Monday 21st June 2021.

**COMMUNITY, CORPORATE AND ENTERPRISE.**

**Draft Annual Report 2020 - circulated**

On the proposal of Councillor Mick Cahill seconded by Councillor Seamus Butler, it was unanimously agreed to adopt the Draft Annual Report 2020 prepared in accordance with Section 221 of the Local Government Act 2001 as amended.

**Notices of Motions, submitted by Councillors, as listed hereunder –**

**Business Enterprise Park**

The following Notice of Motion was proposed by Councillor Garry Murtagh and seconded by Councillor Paraic Brady -

Calling on Longford County Council to actively stimulate growth and business for the County of Longford by acquiring land for a Business Enterprise Park.  Suitable & attainable ground needs to be identified and secured in collaboration with the County Development Plan. A 20-year business plan needs to be prioritised to simulate industry/growth/jobs and promote Longford as the county to conduct business in, in the midlands.

**Reply**

Longford County Council welcomed the notice of motion from Councillor Gary Murtagh that recognised that future commercial and industrial development is vital in ensuring that economic growth and prosperity is sustained in County Longford. The Draft County Development Plan incorporates the County Policy Objectives to

Ensure that sufficient land is zoned for economic activity through the County Development Plan and any relevant Local Areas Plan. Such land will normally be protected from inappropriate development that would prejudice its long-term development for employment and economic activity.

Collaborate with key agencies in the identification, scope, development and promoting of sites as potential enterprise landing spaces throughout the County.

The availability of appropriately zoned land is a key factor in our ability to attract and facilitate proposed investment and Longford County Council works with many stakeholders including the development agencies in identifying property solutions that might work for client companies.

The Council’s ability to deliver property solutions in all cases is curtailed by the following;

1. Longford County Council has a very limited supply of industrially zoned land in its ownership. In particular it does not have ownership of a sizable landbank that might help secure a medium to large sized employer looking for a ready-made solution. The IDA does have plans to construct an advanced facility in the environs of Longford town in the next 24 months and an advance building solution of that type can be a key attractor in winning new investment.
2. The absence of land controlled by Longford County Council often necessities the need to work with third party landowners and introduces another layer of complexity in sourcing sites to arrive at a satisfactory solution. This issue is made more complex when site owners do not want to sell sites and we have many examples where agreement could not be reached between parties meaning that proposed investment was delayed or deferred.
3. The restrictions laid down in the planning process in terms of the quantum of land we can zone for new investment is a limiting factor. The County Development Plan has quite rightly focussed on development of exiting zoned land or brownfield sites but will result in the vagaries identified in point 2 above. A small point worth noting is that some of the existing land zoned industrial is impacted by flooding, accessibility issues, road capacity, etc
4. The ability to bring employers and employment to some of our satellite towns is restricted due to the absence of serviced business parks or serviced sites in those towns. This absence makes it harder to sell these centres to small and medium sized employers. It makes it difficult for micro enterprise to scale up to larger premises and it increases the pressure on many rural enterprises to erect units around domestic dwellings which is never the preferred solution.

Longford County Council will prioritise the development of a medium term plan to help address the issues identified and to future proof our ability to provide land and property solutions when required. This plan will seek to maximise the resources available to us. However, it would be even more robust if there were

* 1. Government supports available to develop serviced landbanks to support balanced regional development as laid out in National Plans, and
  2. more flexibility in the zoning of land to meet anticipated needs in the future.

The Members agreed that these were two areas worthy of further consideration.

Councillor Murtagh indicated that he had been approached by a number of companies and businesses regarding possible investment and site requirements to locate. Barbara confirmed that she and Michael Nevin would be happy to meet with them to assess their requirements and consider what support and assistance the Council and LEO could provide them. The information could support the business case for future possible investment in a business park once the level of demand and specific requirements are determined.

Councillor Nolan suggested the development of a Business Park for each Municipal District.

On the proposal of Councillor Paraic Brady, seconded by Councillor Peggy Nolan it was unanimously agreed to invite the IDA to a meeting of Longford County Council.

**Standing Item Municipal District**

The following Notice of Motion was proposed by Councillor Garry Murtagh and seconded by Councillor Peggy Nolan -

We propose that a standing item be added to the agenda of each Municipal District Meeting which would facilitate an update for the Members on grant applications/projects that are being developed/worked on between the Local Authority and Community Groups in each Municipal District. The purpose of such an agenda item will be to ensure the Local Elected Members are fully informed of both Local Authority and Community Plans in their area and it will facilitate Members in supporting and nurturing Community Development throughout County Longford.

Councillor Murtagh clarified that the emphasis be placed on providing information on proposed projects and expressions of interest.

**Reply**

Longford County Council will include a standing item on the agenda for each Municipal District, as requested. In addition, an update on projects will continue to be provided as part of the Management Report which is circulated to Elected Members in advance of the Municipal District meetings.

**Royal Canal Greenway**

The following Notice of Motion was proposed by Councillor Pat O’Toole and seconded by Councillor Mick Cahill -

I call on Longford County Council to open discussions with Westmeath County Council with a view to carrying out a feasibility study on the provision of a Greenway between Athlone and Ballymahon which would add to the tourist experience of Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands and open access to the Longford section of the Royal Canal Greenway to a very significant cohort of walkers, runners and cyclists from Athlone, Glasson, Tubberclare, and Tang etc.

**Reply**

The Draft County Development Plan incorporates the County Policy Objective to

Support the development of a Shannon Way, subject to the requirements of the Birds and Habitats Directives, to link the Royal Canal at Clondra to the Grand Canal in Offaly via Athlone in collaboration with local communities, Offaly County Council and Westmeath County Council. This trail shall be located close to the river and linked to scenic areas where possible.

Longford County Council will engage with Westmeath County Council regarding collaboration on a plan to deliver a greenway between Ballymahon and Athlone.

**Local Community Safety Partnership**

The following Notice of Motion was proposed by Councillor Seamus Butler and seconded by Councillor PJ Reilly -

‘That Longford County Council welcomes the progress on the pilot Local Community Safety Partnership (LCSP) and the move towards recruiting a Community Safety Co-Ordinator. It’s work will inform the new Policing and Community Safety Bill which, when passed, will then be put on a statutory footing. However, the existing Joint Policing Committee remains a statutory committee under the Garda Siochana Act 2005 as amended in August 2014 and remains in place until the LCSP is put on a statutory basis.’

**Reply**

Longford County Council will formally contact the Department of Justice requesting their views and position on the proposal, as outlined by Councillor Butler, that the JPC remains in place until the Local Community Safety Partnership is put on a statutory basis.

**FINANCE & REGENERATION.**

**Longford Athletics Club Funding – as circulated**.

On the proposal of Councillor Gerry Hagan seconded by Councillor Paraic Brady, it was unanimously agreed to provide funding to Longford Athletics Club subject to the terms and conditions as circulated.

**Disposal of Property at 3 Canal Close, Co. Longford.**

On the proposal of Councillor Paraic Brady seconded by Councillor Garry Murtagh, it was unanimously agreed to dispose of property at 3 Canal Close, Longford, Co. Longford in accordance with the terms of Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001 issued on the 14th May 2021, as circulated.

**Disposal of Property at 68 Teffia Park, Longford, County Longford.**

On the proposal of Councillor John Browne seconded by Councillor Peggy Nolan, it was unanimously agreed to dispose of property at 68 Teffia Park, Longford, Co. Longford in accordance with the terms of Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001 issued on the 14th May 2021, as circulated.

**Disposal of Property at Carrowbeg, Newtowncashel, County Longford.**

On the proposal of Councillor Pat O’Toole seconded by Councillor Mick Cahill, it was unanimously agreed to dispose of property at Carrowbeg, Newtowncashel, Co. Longford in accordance with the terms of Section 183 of the Local Government Act 2001 issued on the 14th May 2021, as circulated.

**Notices of Motions, submitted by Councillors, as listed hereunder –**

**Vacant Properties**

The following Notice of Motion was proposed by Councillor Garry Murtagh and seconded by Councillor Gerry Hagan –

I propose that property hoarders, landlords/vulture funds that are sitting on vacant properties in towns and villages pay Vacant Levies and initiate the Derelict Sites Act to motivate and encourage landlords to stimulate business back into vacant commercial properties, this should also include vacant flats overhead commercial premises.

**Reply**

As is common across a large number of rural Local Authorities the current vacancy relief applied by Longford County Council is 100%.

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Section 9 of the Local Government Rates and other Matters Act 2019 deals with, amongst other things: -  **Minimum rates on vacant properties**  The current system of vacancy relief permits full (100%) abatement of rates in some areas and 50% abatement in certain areas. Section 9 of the Act permits local authorities to introduce a scheme for the abatement of rates in their own area within certain guidelines as set by the Department.  Provision for abatement of rates in respect of vacant properties: |
|  |  | * In accordance with such regulations as may be made under this section, a local authority may make a scheme providing for the abatement by the authority of rates due to it by liable persons or classes of liable persons in respect of vacant properties of a class or classes for such period or periods of time as may be specified in the scheme. |
|  |  | * A scheme under this section shall be approved at the local authority budget meeting held under section 103 of the Act of 2001 concerning the local financial year to which the scheme shall apply and the scheme shall apply for the whole of that local financial year. * A public consultation process that must be followed by a local authority before a scheme under this section is approved. * The making of a scheme under this section shall be a reserved function within the meaning of the Act of 2001. |

Also, the Programme for Government makes a commitment to a ‘Town Centre First’ approach.

The Town Centre Living Initiative (TCLI) is a pilot scheme managed by the Department of Rural and Community Development (DRCD) where funding has been made available to participating towns to develop innovative proposals that encourage the reuse of vacant and underused buildings in town centres for living.

**GENERAL**

**Notices of Motions, submitted by Councillors, as listed hereunder –**

**Beef regulator/Ombudsman**

The following Notice of Motion was proposed by Councillor Paul Ross and seconded by Councillor Paraic Brady

That Longford County Council calls on the Minister for Agriculture to set up a Beef regulator/Ombudsman to deal with the ongoing issues in the beef industry as soon as possible

**Reply**

Longford County Council will write to the Minister for Agriculture.

**Correspondence – as circulated**

Correspondence dated 5th May 2021 received from the Office of the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage – Reply to Notice of Motion submitted by Councillor Gerry Warnock was noted.

**Votes of Sympathy**

To be forwarded to the Meetings Administrator

Notice of Motion

Councillor Garry Murtagh looked for an update on a notice of motion which was submitted to the Minister for Education, Ms. Norma Foley TD, in relation to secondary schools providing at least one Autism/Discovery Unit for children with spectrum disorders. Ann Marie informed Garry that she had followed up in relation to this notice of motion and that she would send a further email.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

**Ann Marie Mc Keon**

**Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Ann Marie Mc Keon,**

**Meetings Administrator.**

**Confirmed and adopted at Meeting of Longford County Council held on the**

**14th July 2021.**

**Peggy Nolan**

**Signed: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Cathaoirleach.**