

Minutes of the November Monthly Meeting of Clare County Council held in the Council Chamber, Áras Contae an Chláir, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare and via MS Teams on Monday, 13th November, 2023 at 3:00 p.m.

Present:

Councillors C. Colleran Molloy, P. Murphy, P. Daly, T. O’Callaghan, S. Talty, J. Garrihy, J. Killeen, L. Grant, J. Cooney, P. Hayes, P. Burke, T. O’Brien, P.J. Kelly, G. Keating, C. Murphy, I. Lynch, G. Flynn.

- Mr. Pat Dowling, Chief Executive.
- Ms. Ann Reynolds, Meetings Administrator.
- Ms. Aoife Coote, Assistant Staff Officer, Corporate Services.
- Ms. Deirdre O’Shea, Head of Tourism Development.
- Dr. Carmel Kirby, Director of Economic Development.
- Ms. Anne Haugh, Director of Social Development
- Mr. Jason Murphy, A/Director of Rural Development and Ukrainian Services.
- Ms. Siobhán McNulty, A/Director of Physical Development.

Present via MS Teams:

- Cllrs. M. Howard, J. Flynn, A. Norton, P O’Gorman, A. O’Callaghan, J. Crowe, M. Begley, P.J. Ryan, D. McGettigan

Absent: Cllrs. B. Chambers, P. McMahon

The Cathaoirleach, Cllr. J. Cooney presided.

The Cathaoirleach, Cllr. J. Cooney acknowledged the Clare achievements at the IPB Pride of place awards in Armagh the previous weekend with Tourism East Clare named overall winner of the Community Tourism Initiative category. The Common Knowledge project “Rekindle Festival of Lost Skills” received a Special Award on the night and Ennis Men’s Shed was named Runner Up of the Community Wellbeing Category. The Cathaoirleach, Cllr. J. Cooney noted what a fantastic achievement it was for these groups and for the County.

Votes of sympathy.

Votes of sympathy were extended to the following:

- The McNamara Family, on the death of Thomas McNamara, RIP.
- The Barrett Family, on the death of Nora Barrett (nee Bugler), RIP.
- The O’Neill Family, on the death of Gerard (Gerry) O’Neill, RIP.

- The St Ledger Family, Feakle on the death of Andrew St Ledger RIP
- The Conway Family, Kilfenora on the death of JJ Conway RIP
- The Neylon Family, Ennis on the death of Des Neylon RIP
- The Keane Family, Killkee on the death of Gerry Keane RIP
- The Collins Family, Kilnaboy on the death of Joe and Claire Collins RIP

The Cathaoirleach, Cllr. J. Cooney proposed a one-minute silence for those who passed away tragically in County Clare during the week.

Item 1: Minutes of Council Meetings.

- a. Ar moladh Cllr. I. Lynch
Cuidithe ag Cllr. J. Garrihy agus glacadh leis

“That the Minutes of the October Meeting of Clare County Council held on 9th October 2023 be adopted and signed.”

Item 2: Matters Arising.

There were no matters arising.

Item 3. Comhfhreagras/Correspondence.

The following correspondence was circulated with the agenda:

1. Correspondence dated 24th October, 2023 from Mary Butler, T.D. in relation to funding for a suicide awareness campaign.
2. Correspondence dated 19th October, 2023 from Cathal Crowe, T.D. in relation to access to housing for individuals and families on lower incomes.
3. Correspondence dated 20th October 2023 from Met Éireann in relation to the new radar system in Shannon airport.
4. Correspondence dated 6th November, 2023 from Violet-Anne Wynne, T.D. in relation to the Croí Cónaithe scheme and length of time the property must be vacant for.
5. Correspondence dated 18th October, 2023 from Office of the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage in relation to housing adaption grants.
6. Correspondence dated 10th October, 2023 from the Office of the Minister for State for Transport in relation to the National Car Testing Service.

7. Correspondence dated 20th October, 2023 from the Office of the Minister for Education in relation to school transport.
8. Correspondence dated 26th October, 2023 from the Office of the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage in relation to Vacant Property Refurbishment Grant.
9. Correspondence dated 1st November, 2023 from the Office of the Minister for Justice in relation to Garda resources in County Clare.
10. Correspondence dated 17th October, 2023 from the Office of the Minister for Finance in relation to price of fuel.
11. Correspondence dated 5th October, 2023 from the Office of the Minister for Finance in relation to the VAT rate.
12. Details of AILG Elected Member Training Programme Module 6 November 2023 entitled “Road Safety: New Speed Limit Policy and Safeguarding Road Users” taking place in Tower Hotel, Waterford on the 16th November, 2023
13. Details of AILG Elected Member Training Programme Module 6 November 2023 entitled “Road Safety: New Speed Limit Policy and Safeguarding Road Users” taking place in Clayton Hotel, Galway on the 18th November, 2023

Item 4: Minutes of Municipal District Meetings.

- a. Ar moladh Cllr. P. Daly
Cuidithe ag Cllr. C. Colleran Molloy agus glacadh leis

“That the Minutes of the Ennis Municipal District Meeting held on the 5th September, 2023 be noted.”

- b. Ar moladh Cllr. M. Howard
Cuidithe ag Cllr. P. Murphy agus glacadh leis

“That the Minutes of the Ennis Municipal District Meeting held on the 10th October 2023 be noted.”

Item 5: Minutes of Corporate Policy Group meeting

The members noted the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd October 2023 as presented.

Item 6: Monthly Management Report.

The monthly management report attached to the agenda included key activities in the principal service areas and was noted by the members.

Cllr. P. Hayes requested an update from TII on the Tulla and Barefield junctions.

Cllr. J. Garrihy highlighted the great work being undertaken by the Biodiversity Officer with the “Return to Nature” Clare Biodiversity initiative and the opportunity it was providing to communities throughout Clare.

Cllr. Garrihy referred to the update on derelict sites and the great work being done and noted how well it is dovetailing with the vacant property refurbishment grant. He queried in relation to the update on bus shelters if the term “bus stop” upgrades refer to bus shelters?

Cllr. J Flynn noted in relation to the Ennis Municipal District update, under the Ennis 2040 Economic & Spatial Strategy, a number of projects listed were Ennis MD projects and therefore it would be more appropriate that they be recorded under Ennis MD and not aligned with Ennis 2040 Economic and Spatial Strategy.

Siobhan McNulty, A/Director of Service, Physical Development Directorate replied to Cllr. Hayes query confirming that TII have reverted with a response and that they have moved onto the next stage.

Ms. McNulty also confirmed that “bus stop” did not mean bus shelter but rather replacing signs and new road markings.

Dr. Carmel Kirby, Director of Planning and Economic Development Directorate advised that the Ennis projects are recorded under the implementation of the Ennis 2040 Economic & Spatial Strategy.

Item 7: Disposal of land at Oak Park, Ennis, Co. Clare pursuant to Section 183 of the Local Government Act, 2001 and Section 211 of the Planning & Development Act, 2000.

Report dated 11th October, 2023 from Carmel Greene, Senior Executive Officer, Economic Development was circulated with the agenda together with map. The report states that it is proposed to dispose of an area of land measuring 0.0029 hectares subject to the conditions as set out in the notice served on the members dated 11th October, 2023.

Ar moladh Cllr. P. Murphy
Cuidithe ag Cllr. P. Daly agus glacadh leis

“Notice having been served pursuant to Section 183 of the Local Government Act, 2001, Clare County Council approves pursuant to the powers vested on it at Section 211 of the Planning & Development Act, 2000 as amended, of disposal of site subject to the conditions as set out in the notice served on the members dated 11th October, 2023.”

Item 8: Recommendation for award of a Civic Reception to Clare Junior Camogie Team and Clare Minor Hurling Team

Report dated 6th November, 2023 from Ann Reynolds, Senior Executive Officer, Corporate Services was circulated with the agenda. The report states that at the November meeting of the Corporate Policy Group (CPG) the members considered a nomination for a Civic Reception to honour Clare Junior Camogie and Clare Minor Hurling Teams 2023, submitted by Cllrs. Joe Cooney, Pat Daly, Gabriel Keating and Gerry Flynn. The nomination was made to the CPG in accordance with Standing Order Number 72. Details of the teams’ achievements were outlined in the report.

The elected members approved the nomination for a Civic Reception to honour Clare Junior Camogie and Clare Minor Hurling Teams 2023 having been proposed by Cllr. G. Flynn and seconded by Cllr. P. Hayes and agreed by the members present.

Item 9: Briefing by Saoirse Wave Project, at 1.30 p.m.

Leas Cathaoirleach, Cllr. G. Keating introduced and welcomed The Saoirse Wave Project team to the Chamber:

Sue Barr, Director Marine Energy and Project Director Saoirse Wave Energy
Marie Gleeson, External Affairs and Stakeholder Liaison, Saoirse Wave Energy.
Sean Moroney and Shane McLoughney, ESB Moneypoint.

And also attending online were:

Patricia Comiskey, Brian Hegarty and Ruairi Hand.

Ms. Barr then proceeded to discuss the Wave Energy project which is a joint venture with ESB and Simply Blue Group. She outlined why wave energy is an attractive proposition due to it providing a reliable and abundant alternative that can complement wind energy production by balancing grid demand.

This proposed Wave Energy Converter (WEC) development will focus on the installation of a c. 5 MW capacity demonstration array. The proposed site to be located 4km off the west coast of County Clare and will consist of 14 interconnected devices, each generating energy with the rise and fall of the ocean. It has the potential to power 3,500 homes.

The Saoirse Wave Project is planned to be developed using a surface point absorber-type wave energy converter array developed by CorPower Ocean. This technology, inspired by the pumping of the human heart, consists of floating surface buoys, anchored to the seabed by a pre-tensioned system, that rise and fall with wave motion. The buoys are 9m in diameter. CorPower's C4 unit is currently undergoing a further full-scale test deployment in Atlantic waters off Portugal.

Ms. Barr advised that there is considerable opportunity for job creation within the local community and along the Atlantic coast. The Saoirse project will support local job creation at all stages, including by working with the fishing industry to explore opportunities for future employment and by actively encouraging local content in their supply chain.

The project has been pre-selected for funding by the European Commission's Innovation Fund programme in its third call for projects. The joint venture will now move to negotiations around the preparation of a Grant Agreement for this project, which will conclude in the coming months.

P. Dowling, Chief Executive thanked and welcomed Ms. Barr and her colleagues. He noted that it is a very interesting project proposal and that it would be important to review the model in Portugal and the learnings from that project. Mr. Dowling committed to working with and supporting the project team.

The elected members were collective in their support for the new innovation being brought to the West Coast of Ireland. They raised queries in relation to job creation, the commercial viability of the project, prospect of working with fisheries, capacity in our grid system and supply chain opportunities. S. Barr and the team answered the queries raised by the members.

Leas Cathaoirleach G. Keating and P. Dowling thanked the Saoirse Wave Project team.

Item 10: Rental accommodation

Ar moladh Cllr. L. Grant
Cuidithe ag Cllr. J. Garrihy agus glacadh leis

“Call on Clare County Council to include cost rental units in any future social housing developments. There is a serious lack of rental accommodation available in Clare and we need to be doing more as a council to address this. Clare County Council are yet to build any cost rental accommodation. I think it would be a benefit to society to have mixed housing developments like this.” (M)

Pádraig MacCormaic, A/Senior Executive Officer, Social Development Directorate replied as follows:

“Clare County Council appreciate the importance of mixed tenure developments and will consider all viable options when preparing any future social housing developments, including options for affordable housing and cost rental properties. However, under the current scheme the rent for cost rental homes must be at least 25% below regular market rents in an area and having regard for long-term maintenance costs and the monthly market rent in the area this is difficult to

achieve in Clare. The scheme is proving more viable for larger scale apartment developments in larger cities. The new Secure Tenancy Affordable Rental (STAR) Scheme announced recently may provide increased opportunities and a number of developers are exploring viability of same in County Clare and we look forward to receiving proposals in relation to same.”

The elected members expressed concern that there is a lack of rental opportunities for people especially in their mid-20's to mid-30's. The members noted that there is a demand, desire and need for housing options in addition to social housing. The members agreed that rents are unattainable and people on lower incomes need to be considered and housing needs to be made more accessible for all.

Padraig MacCormaic, A/Senior Executive Officer, Social Development addressed the meeting and noted that approval has been received for Clare to access the Afford Housing Funds and advised they are currently reviewing a number of developer-led proposals. In relation to affordable housing, approval has been received from the department on the funding scheme but are awaiting proposals from developers. Each scheme proposed will require its own business case and needs analysis to be submitted for Department approval. Mr. MacCormaic advised that they are hopeful of progressing schemes in 2024.

Mr. MacCormaic noted that while rents in Clare are high, they are not reaching levels experienced in larger cities and so the current cost rental model is not proving viable at the moment. Mr. MacCormaic also confirmed that the Council have no control over rental prices in the private market but noted that Ennis EA is now a designated rent pressure zone [RPZ] with Shannon EA very likely to be designated an RPZ in the near future.

Item 11: Housing grant

Ar moladh Cllr. P.J. Kelly
Cuidithe ag Cllr. G. Keating agus glacadh leis

“That the Government provide a grant of €70,000 for persons building their own houses” (M)

The elected members collectively agreed that the cost of building your own home is excessive and unachievable for most people. The members referred to previous schemes that were used to encourage people to build, these schemes provided grants to those building and restricted the size of the houses being built. The members expressed concern that young people are under severe pressure and agreed that no stone should be left unturned to help those wishing to remain at home do so and anything they can do to keep housing front and center must be done. The members further agreed that any such grant should apply to first time homeowners only and other restrictions with regard to size should apply.

Item 12: Safe water supply

Ar moladh Cllr. T. O'Callaghan
Cuidithe ag Cllr. G. Flynn agus glacadh leis

“To ask Clare County Council following a presentation by Uisce Éireann how safe is our water supply today serving both Urban and Rural Communities and what protection is in place ensuring all potential carpark developments don't contaminate natural springs to our Towns and Villages.” (M)

Cyril Feeney, Senior Engineer, Physical Development Directorate replied as follows:

“A potential development of any description including car parks would come under the provisions of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) with its associated Regulations. Any application would be assessed in line with the objectives and policies of the County Development Plan (CDP), 2023-2029, and national policy including Departmental Guidelines, and would be open to public consultation etc. In addition, the Local Authority must have regard to all environmental regulations including the Surface Water Regulations (2009) and associated amendments, in carrying out its functions.

The Clare County Council CDP has specific development plan objectives for storm water management which require the following:

- the separation of foul and surface water drainage systems
- the implementation of SuDS (sustainable urban drainage systems) to ensure all storm water generated on site is disposed of on site or is attenuated and treated prior to discharge to an approved storm water system, and
- that attenuation systems take account of the potential future impact of climate change.

Also, the Development Management Guidelines section of the Development Plan, provides further guidance for surface water disposal, recommending the use of SuDS and to include the removal of pollutants from urban run-off at source. The Planning Authority will also require new developments to minimise soil sealing i.e., the covering of ground by impermeable material which is another effective SuDS measure to remove any pollutant run-off.

So, through the effective use of the planning and environmental regulatory framework Clare County Council will ensure that future car park developments do not contaminate natural springs in our towns and villages.”

The elected members raised concern as to the effects that unregulated car parking facilities have on the water system particularly in the Burren area where contamination from cars are seeping into the springs. The members acknowledged that Uisce Éireann now manage water operations but that they, the members, still have a role in planning and must do what they can to protect the environment.

Item 13: Land transfer application

Ar moladh Cllr. C. Murphy
Cuidithe ag Cllr. C. Colleran Molloy agus glacadh leis

“To ask the Minister at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to

consider, in the context of a land transfer application registered by an individual with the Property Registration Authority of Ireland, the introduction of a requirement by PRAI to notify the landowner involved by registered post, and/or the notification of a solicitor acting for that landowner, rather than the current system of a standard postal notification.” (M)

Cllr. C. Murphy advised the meeting that he wished to amend his motion, and this was seconded by Cllr. C. Colleran Molloy:

“To ask the Minister at the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to consider, in the interests of preventing possible fraudulent transfers, the removal of the ability for an individual to make a land transfer application without the involvement of a solicitor on behalf of the property owner.” (M)

The members acknowledged that there is a clear gap in the provision of the law and agreed that this is an area that needs to be addressed sooner rather than later. It was noted that the consequences are significant if this sensitive information is not delivered directly to the landowner, which could happen under existing arrangements, as the notifications from the PRAI are issued via standard post.

Item 14: Town and Village Regeneration

Ar moladh Cllr. J. Garrihy
Cuidithe ag Cllr. T. O’Callaghan agus glacadh leis

“I call on Clare County Council to refocus and increase the priority and allocation of resources towards Town and Village regeneration, renewal and sustainability throughout all of our strategies and implementation actions and to collaborate closely with CLDC, Failte Ireland and all other key stakeholders and agencies working in this area.” (M)

Jason Murphy, A/Director of Rural Development replied as follows:

“Clare County Council is committed to ensuring that our communities, in all their diversity, are supported to remain viable, resilient, and safe within attractive places to live, work and visit. The challenges surrounding climate change, accommodation, infrastructure investment and access to services remain a priority.

During 2023 the County Development Plan was adopted, and we are currently progressing both the Climate Action Plan and, in conjunction with our partners on the LCDC, we are progressing with the development of a new Local Economic and Community Plan which has been informed by extensive public consultation,

the 2022 Census, 2023 Clare Survey and the DRCD Pilot Engagement Survey seeking input and insights from marginalised communities.

Through the LCDC and numerous other projects and plans, Clare County Council works with a range of partner organisations including the Education Training Board, PPN, CLDC, An Garda Síochána and HSE but to name a few: By way of example, there are over 30 organisations and groups represented on the county's Community Response Forum, meeting regularly and working together to meet the needs of those arriving to our county.

The Rural Development Directorate, through the four Rural & Community Development Officers (RCDO), continues to support Community Groups across the County. The team works to the core values and principles of Community Development providing a wide range of existing supports in the areas of governance, engagement, and capacity building, Identifying and developing funding applications and delivering projects of scale and comparative advantage by fostering co-operation and partnerships.

Where projects are 'community-led', the RCDOs ensure that the community has the capacity to act as competent 'project promoters. Alternatively, where projects are led by the Local Authority or other Agencies, the RCDOs ensure that communities have the capacity to contribute as 'project partners. Since 2018, €40 million in projects and community supports have been delivered across Clare Communities.

The Clare Local Area Grants Scheme continues to provide funding supports to Community Groups across Clare. The 2023 Scheme provided grant support across 9 grant categories including Public Realm Initiatives and Amenity Projects, Maintenance of Open Spaces in Private Housing Developments, Burial Ground Maintenance, Irish Language, Best Kept Local Authority Estate, Tourism Marketing and Promotion, Sustainable Tourism, Community Playground and Arts.

As part of the Budgetary process the Rural Development Directorate has sought funding towards once-off start-up costs for Community Groups to enable new & existing groups to grow capacity together with funding towards project development measures to support community groups in advancing a project from initial concept stage to being 'shovel-ready' for national funding applications.

Working with our Councillors, we continue to review our activities to ensure that our resources are adjusted to meet the ever-changing needs of our communities. As opportunities arise to work with agencies or new groups on emerging initiatives, we will endeavour, through partnerships, to get the best return for our communities."

The elected members welcomed the reply from the Rural Directorate and discussed the importance of towns and villages and what is required to make towns and villages sustainable into the future. It was noted that towns and villages are an essential part of rural life and Clare are seen as leaders in the rural space resulting from the creation of the Rural Development Directorate. The members acknowledged that the Council is doing what it can with funding from Central Government but that communities need to create committees to empower themselves to create a pathway where projects can be delivered, it was however noted that the local authority will need to support and guide these groups in setting up structures.

Item 15: Healthcare deficits

Ar moladh Cllr. C. Murphy

Cuidithe ag Cllr. I. Lynch, T. O'Brien, D. McGettigna agus J. Garrihy agus glacadh leis

“To invite the CEO of the HSE, Bernard Gloster to an “in camera” workshop type meeting with the councillors of Clare Co. Co. with a view to having a full and frank discussion on

- a) the significant healthcare deficits facing the people of Clare
- b) potential solutions to those issues. **(M)**

The elected members remarked on the news that Bernard Gloster had spent a day in Clare shadowing paramedics, they believe that Mr. Gloster has demonstrated that he wants change. The members noted that what they were proposing would present a unique opportunity for a frank and open discussion on the issues facing our County and in turn may yield positive outcomes for the constituents in County Clare.

Cllr. G. Flynn remarked that he was not in agreement with an “in camera” meeting as he believes nothing much will be achieved from having a private meeting.

Cllr. C. Murphy noted that as elected members they meet people in private all the time and this would be no different.

Item 16: Private rental inspections

Ar moladh Cllr. G. Flynn

Cuidithe ag Cllr. D. McGettigan agus glacadh leis

“In view of the very high failure rate concerning private rental inspections, I am calling on Clare County Council to examine the process involved and to elaborate on the methodology involved in the whole process and provide comprehensive information on how compliance is addressed to make sure that private rental accommodation is up to an acceptable standard to satisfy the accommodation needs and safety of tenants.” **(M)**

Adrian Headd, A/Senior Engineer, Social Development Directorate replied as follows:

“All Local Authorities are responsible for carrying out inspections on the private rental accommodation within their area of responsibility and enforcing the minimum standards as set out in the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2019. An annual target of 25% of all registered tenancies, as set by the Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage, ensures that circa one thousand private rented dwellings are inspected in Clare on an annual basis.

Inspections in Clare County Council administrative area are carried out by our own technical staff in line with the “Guidelines for Housing Authorities in Implementation of Minimum Standards in Rented Accommodation” last issued in

November 2021. Where a property is found not to be compliant with the minimum standards, an Improvement letter will issue to the landlord of the property, setting out the measures required to achieve compliance, along with an appropriate timeframe within which the improvements should be made. In cases where Improvement Letters are not effective and do not result in the necessary improvements being made to the property, an escalation in enforcement proceedings may be required whereby an Improvement Notice will issue to the landlord. To date in 2023, Clare County Council have issued Improvement Notices in respect of six properties. An Improvement Notice requires a CE Order and must be sent by registered post. Ultimately, where neither an Improvement Letter or an Improvement Notice prove successful a Prohibition Notice may be issued by the local authority which directs the landlord not to re-let the property until such time as the issues as outlined in the Improvement Notice have been rectified satisfactorily. It is the experience of this council that properties achieve compliance with the standards following the issue of the initial Improvement Letter.

Clare County Council constantly seek to improve and make efficiencies to our private rental inspection programme. All relevant staff have attended an IPA training course which ensures a common understanding among Inspectorate Staff, and thereby a standardisation in interpretation and implementation of the Regulations and Guidelines. We recently invested in an electronic inspection system which will bring further efficiencies to our programme. All of these measures combined will ensure a greater level of compliant rental properties across the county resulting in safer and more comfortable accommodation for tenants”.

The elected members agreed that it is vitally important that rental properties are inspected regularly, and action taken given the high failure rate. The members noted that tenants may be afraid to complain in case the landlord increases their rent, it was also noted that it is not always the landlord who is responsible for non-compliance. The members were in agreement that housing is front and foremost and everyone is entitled to a home that is fit for purpose and safe to live in. It was also suggested that an inspection section be set up in the Housing Department.

Item 17: Attracting new industry to County Clare

Ar moladh Cllr. I. Lynch

Cuidithe ag Cllr. C. Colleran Molloy agus glacadh leis

“With the potential of offshore electricity generation far surpassing the capability of the current national grid, hydrogen production and electricity exportation are two welcome uses of excess electricity, however, before rushing to export excess electricity the IDA must exhaust all potential use by current and new industry within Ireland prior to exportation.

I request that the IDA are invited into the chamber to present on their strategic approach to attracting new industry to County Clare, specifically to the state-owned lands at Moneypoint to provide much need jobs and economic boost but equally to provide a more suitable alternative to exporting excess electricity.” (M)

The elected members noted that this was a timely motion in the context of the presentation earlier that day on wave energy. The members remarked on the

natural resources our county has to offer and that we must take advantage of this to attract business and multinationals. The members expressed concern that we are losing a lot of business to neighboring counties like Limerick and Kerry and that we need to drive interest to this side of the Estuary.

Dr. Carmel Kirby, Director of Planning and Economic Development stated that the recently published Shannon Estuary Economic Task Force report is the primary document which will inform and guide future economic policies in respect of Offshore wind and in turn will be a reference point as to how the various Government enterprise agencies support the development of future economic benefits arising out of developing enhanced power generation from this source. This will not be the exclusive remit of the IDA, but will incorporate the various enterprise agencies, IDA, Enterprise Ireland, Local Enterprise Office and other state support services adopting a co-ordinated approach to developing the potential economic benefits. Clare County Council were an active participant in the development of the Shannon Estuary Economic Task Force report and continue to engage with central Government to put in place a task force focused on implementing the report recommendations. It was agreed to refer the request to SPC for their consideration in terms of timing and attendees of the proposed presentation.

Item 18: Protection of the biodiversity and flood role of town and village watercourses

Cllr. J. Flynn requested that this item be deferred to the next Council meeting.

“In light of recent devastating flooding in Middleton, Newry and a sustained pattern of increased rainfall due to climate change, that Clare County Council will protect both the biodiversity and flood role of town and village watercourses by ensuring adherence to Inland Fisheries Ireland (IFI)* guidance on developments adjacent to urban watercourses which includes provision of a minimum nature-based buffer of 33m before hardcore development.

Clare County Council acknowledges the important role of such town and village rivers, streams, and their riverside (riparian) corridor in slowing down the flow of rainfall, helping to regulate flooding and preventing flash flooding. (*referred to in Vol 10 a & b Clare County Development plan 2023-2029).” (M)

Item 19: Development levies

Ar moladh Cllr. J. Cooney
Cuidithe ag Cllr. S. Talty agus glacadh leis

“I call on the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage to extend the period for which the waiver of development levies will apply. The extension should be applied to both the commencement and completion dates and

implemented to both Development Contributions and Uisce Éireann water and wastewater connect charges.” (M)

The elected members acknowledged that this is a hugely beneficial scheme and that the one-year timeframe is too short given that the planning process can be slow and the current shortage of builders. The members noted that development levies and water charges are very expensive and they, as elected members, and the local authority need to do more to get people on the housing ladder.

Item 20: Deterioration of facilities

Ar moladh Cllr. C. Colleran Molloy
Cuidithe ag Cllr. P. Murphy agus glacadh leis

“That Clare County Council indicate what efforts are underway to address the unacceptable condition and deterioration of the facilities on the ground at this key public amenity in our County. With Ennis now being the largest town in Munster possessing many ambitious plans for its future, it is of great concern to witness the deterioration evident at the athletic facilities at John O’Sullivan Lees Road Park, such that Munster or National Championships can no longer be held at the facility. The concern is exacerbated when contrasted with facilities available in Co. Tipperary, which has three athletic facilities, two outdoor, in Templemore and Clonmel, and one indoor, in Nenagh.

The deterioration is evident with underlay coming through the running track; rotten steeple chase timber; missing track rails; missing hurdle labels; verges not being cut back; missing net covers over the sand for the Long Jump; missing mats at the Pole Vault rendering it unusable; Short Put not useable due to rotten wood; and finally the Hammer & Dicus Cage not fit for purpose requiring a female athlete from Scariff (asserted to be of world master champion standards) to go to Templemore to train.

In the response to this motion, identifying the Council efforts that are underway, please indicate if there are intentions to manage access differently, especially as it is open all day with little or no limitations on times for access; and to manage permitted use of the track (e.g., bicycles being used on the track), which access it seems is unlike similar facilities in other Counties which have stricter and more controlled access.” (M)

Jason Murphy, A/Director, Rural Development Directorate replied as follows:

“Active Ennis consists of the Lees Road facility, Ennis Leisure Centre, Tim Smythe Park, Coote Park, Cloughleigh and Gleninagh. These are owned and managed facilities which provide an invaluable amenity to the community across a range of activities from teams sports to individual pursuits such as skateboarding, track & field and swimming. Woodland walks also provide outdoor amenity for a wide group of users. Clare County Council is also responsible for the management and development of the Active Kilrush facilities which include an astro-turf, 3

pitches and playground. All these facilities require on-going attention and upgrades which our team continues to plan for. At the present time, with the support of the West Clare MD, works are being carried on the facility in Kilrush.

The facility in Lees Road is extensive in its offering and it is recognised that the upkeep of the infrastructure requires significant ongoing investment. To that end, the team, working with the Department of Tourism & Sport and our own Finance Department, have applied for Sports Capital Equipment funding during 2023 in order to completely refurbish the track surface, surrounds, discus cage and shot putt area. We hope to complete this €250,000 project in 2024 and we continue to engage with the local clubs to keep them aware of our plans and to get their inputs and feedback.

Clare County Council has also been included in a pilot programme with three other Local Authorities, working with 'Sports Ireland' to implement a 'Local Sports Plan' for the County. This plan will provide a strategic framework for the ongoing development of facilities Countywide and promote increased participation of users into the future. Our inclusion in this project is an acknowledgement of our present offering and commitment to service for all users, communities and visitors.

During 2021, Clare County Council introduced an on-line booking system for all our facilities. The system, 'SportsKey', allows all users (individuals and clubs) fair access to book our facilities which are increasingly in demand, particularly in a post COVID environment. Any user can access this online system at <https://www.activeennis.ie/facilities/active-ennis-sports-and-amenity-park-lees-road>".

The elected members thanked the Director for his response but noted that Ennis is the County town and the largest town in Munster and it is embarrassing that our athletes cannot train at the facility and that Ennis cannot host events due to the condition of the track. The members noted that Lees Road is a jewel in the crown of the County and the benefit is immeasurable and the more facilities we have in Clare the better for our people. The members remarked that it is important that all sports venues in the County are maintained and kept up to standard.

Jason Murphy, A/Director of Rural Development responded to the members advising that the facility is 15 years old and is overdue an upgrade. It is an amenity of significant note with 82,000 footfall, 2,165 bookings, 4,000 vehicles, 400 per week.

Mr. Murphy informed the members that the facility is 15 years old and is overdue an upgrade. It is an amenity of significant note and as per the 2018-2027 National Sports Policy Clare are eager to increase participation through partnership with other local agencies, clubs and groups. Clare has been included in the national pilot with Laois, Cavan and Carlow.

Approximately 82,000 people have used the facility at Lees Road to November with 2,165 bookings. Approximately 4,000 vehicles and 400 pedestrians access the facility per week.

Mr. Murphy advised that the cost of capital investment is significant, and that funding of €250,000 has been applied for, to upgrade the track surface, surrounds, discus cage and shot putt area. Part of the upgrade will include the installation of a turnstile to regulate access to the upgraded track while having consideration of

accessibility. It was also noted that in order to ensure fair access to the facility a new online system, 'Sportskey' has been implemented.

Mr. Murphy acknowledged that it is important to increase participation from the widest catchment of people across the county and any new sports plan will consider the opportunity for the installation of 'pump-tracks'.

P. Dowling, Chief Executive addressed the meeting and noted that sports and cultural venues are important for the future work of the County. Mr. Dowling stated that while successfully securing capital grants for facilities the Council must also ensure that adequate maintenance budgets are put in place each year.

Item 21: Primary Medical Certificates

Ar moladh Cllr. A. Norton
Cuidithe ag Cllr. D. McGettigan agus glacadh leis

"Today I want to encourage all of you to urge the Minister for Finance to take immediate action in introducing Primary Medical Certificates (PMCs) to all individuals with physical disabilities.

I also call upon the members of the Seanad to initiate a commencement debate emphasizing the critical necessity for the Minister for Finance to issue PMCs to all those with physical disabilities.

In recent weeks, I have received numerous heartfelt communications from individuals across our county. These messages have come from parents and family members who share a common belief with me - that the widespread issuance of PMCs to individuals with physical disabilities could significantly enhance the quality of life for these individuals and their families.

I understand this is not the first time this issue has been brought to the attention of the Minister, or the Ministers before him, and undoubtedly it will continue to be raised with the ministers who follow.

People born with physical disabilities often endure a multitude of health challenges, including heart problems, early onset arthritis, chronic pain, conditions such as Lupus, MS, Syringomyelia, visual and hearing impairments, bronchial issues, and a compromised immune system, to name just a few.

The introduction of PMCs for all those affected would go a long way in aiding families by providing improved access to transportation for hospital and doctor visits, granting individuals a modicum of independence necessary to maintain their spirits.

The current criteria for obtaining a Primary Medical Certificate is archaic and no longer applicable to the myriad of complex disabilities diagnosed on a daily and

weekly basis. A Primary Medical Certificate should be a top priority, not an arduous and exasperating process.

We must recognise that individuals with disabilities deserve our unwavering support and assistance. They should not be treated as second-class citizens but should receive the necessary support to help them navigate each day with reduced pain and improved quality of life. A Primary Medical Certificate is a vital document that confirms severe and permanent disability.

The existing criteria, defined in the Finance Act 2020, no longer suffice. We must advocate for a radical overhaul of the Finance Act in 2024 to adapt to the evolving needs of individuals with disabilities.

Our government must actively champion the rights of people with disabilities and provide more than mere table scraps in terms of support and recognition. It is crucial that we facilitate the application process for a Primary Medical Certificate through Local Health Offices.

In conclusion, let us unite in our resolve to make a difference in the lives of individuals with physical disabilities by pushing for the introduction of Primary Medical Certificates. Let us demonstrate our commitment to equality, compassion, and progress for all members of our society.” **(M)**

The elected members expressed disappointment that this was occurring, and they were not aware of the issue before it being raised in the Chamber. The members noted that people are suffering unnecessarily, and something should be done to rectify the situation as soon as possible. It was agreed that the motion would be sent to the Minister for Health, Minister for Finance, An Taoiseach, and circulated to the Oireachtas Members and other Local Authorities.

Conferences.

Reports on Seminars/Conferences attended.

With regard to seminars/conferences attended, reports completed in accordance with Section 142 of the Local Government Act 2001 were made available at the meeting.

LAMA Spring Seminar entitled “Apprenticeship & Future Building Initiatives Recruitment & Training” taking place in Bantry, Co. Cork on 2nd – 4th March, 2023.

The Meetings Administrator informed the Members that the estimated average cost per Councillor attending this Conference was €647.98 including conference fee of €160.

It was agreed that Cllr. P. O’Gorman attend this Conference.

AILG Elected Members Module 2 Training entitled “Local Authority Climate Action Plans – Building Sustainable Communities” being held in Fairways Hotel, Dundalk, Co. Louth on 25th March, 2023.

The Meetings Administrator informed the Members that the estimated average cost per Councillor attending this Conference was €515.72 including conference fee of €80.

It was agreed that Cllr. P. O’Gorman attend this Conference.

AILG Annual Training Conference 2023 being held in Hotel Kilkenny, on 19th – 20th April, 2023.

The Meetings Administrator informed the Members that the estimated average cost per Councillor attending this Conference was €641.71 including conference fee of €165.

It was agreed that Cllr. P. O’Gorman attend this Conference.

AILG Elected Members Module 3 Training entitled “Overview of existing Planning Legislation and Policy Guidance” being held in Avalon House Hotel, Castlecomer, Co. Kilkenny on 17th June, 2023.

The Meetings Administrator informed the Members that the estimated average cost per Councillor attending this Conference was €396.53 including conference fee of €80.

It was agreed that Cllrs. A. O’Callaghan, P. O’Gorman attend this Conference.

AILG Autumn Training Seminar 2023 being held in Sligo Park Hotel, Sligo on 13th – 14th September, 2023.

The Meetings Administrator informed the Members that the estimated average cost per Councillor attending this Conference was €786.21 including conference fee of €165.

It was agreed that Cllr. A. O’Callaghan, P. O’Gorman attend this Conference.

Celtic Conferences “A Practical Guide to Budget 2024” being held in The Four Seasons Hotel, Carlingford, Co. Louth on 13th – 15th October, 2023.

The Meetings Administrator informed the Members that the estimated average cost per Councillor attending this Conference was €698.51 including conference fee of €100.

It was agreed that Cllrs. PJ. Kelly, M. Howard, P. Daly, P. McMahon, J. Cooney, PJ. Ryan attend this Conference.

AILG Elected Members Module 5 Training entitled “Elected Member Personal Security” being held in The Rose Hotel, Tralee, Co. Kerry on 21st October, 2023.

The Meetings Administrator informed the Members that the estimated average cost per Councillor attending this Conference was €482.66 including conference fee of €80.

It was agreed that Cllrs. P. Burke, Mary Howard, J. Cooney, A. O’Callaghan, P. O’Gorman attend this Conference.

AILG Elected Members Module 5 Training entitled “Elected Member Personal Security” being held in Hotel Kilmore, Cavan on 19th October, 2023.

The Meetings Administrator informed the Members that the estimated average cost per Councillor attending this Conference was €602.93 including conference fee of €80.

It was agreed that Cllrs. P. Murphy, Ann Norton attend this Conference.

LAMA Autumn Seminar entitled “Climate Action, Sustainable Businesses and Balanced Regional Development” taking place in Ard Ri House Hotel, Tuam, Co. Galway on 25th - 26th October, 2023.

The Meetings Administrator informed the Members that the estimated average cost per Councillor attending this Conference was €592.70 including conference fee of €160.

It was agreed that Cllr. A. O’Callaghan, P. Murphy, PJ. Kelly, M. Howard, T. O’Callaghan, G. Keating, C. Murphy, A. Norton, T. O’Brien attend this Conference.

AILG Elected Members Module 6 Training entitled “Road Safety: New Speed Limit Policy and Safeguarding Road Users” taking place in Tower Hotel, Waterford on the 16th November 2023

The Meetings Administrator informed the Members that the estimated average cost per Councillor attending this Conference was €529.78 including conference fee of €80.

It was agreed that Cllrs. C. Colleran Molloy, PJ. Kelly, T. O’Callaghan, G. Keating, C. Murphy, P. Burke, P. Murphy, J. Crowe, T. O’Brien attend this Conference.

The meeting then concluded.

Signed: _____
Riarthóir Cruinnithe

Signed: _____
Cathaoirleach

Date: _____