

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

**MINUTES OF LOUGHREA AREA COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT LOUGHREA REGIONAL OFFICES ON
TUESDAY, 3RD FEBRUARY 2009**

ILATHAIR

Bail:

Cllr. B. Willers, Chairperson
Cllr. W. Burke
Cllr. M. Regan
Cllr. P. Feeney
Cllr. M. Fahy
Cllr. P. Hynes
Cllr. M. Maher

Loughrea Town Council

Cllr. G. Burke, Mayor of Loughrea Town Council
Ms. Geraldine Bane

Oifigigh:

Mr. J. Cullen, D.O.S., Environment & Water Services Unit
Mr. S. Breathnach, S.E.E., Loughrea Electoral Area
Mr. A. Raftery, E.E., Loughrea Engineering Area
Mr. C. Mitchell, E.E., Portumna Engineering Area
Mr. J. Costello, E.E., Gort Engineering Area
Ms. A. Power, S.S.O., Loughrea Regional Offices

PRESENTATION BY AN BORD GAIS

Cllr. Willers introduced Fiona Lally, Project Manager, Fiachra Quigley, Regional Sales Manager and Barbara Heneghan, Administration, from An Bord Gais to the Meeting. A copy of the Presentation was circulated to each Member.

Ms. Lally gave a Project Over-view as follows:

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- The construction of the high-pressure 149km transmission Mayo Galway pipeline facilitates the availability of natural gas to the North Western Region of Ireland for the first time.
- Connection points to facilitate the supply of natural gas to new towns from the transmission network have been provided along the pipeline route.
- Distribution (low pressure) pipelines will be constructed from these connection points off the feeder main into the various towns.
- Study undertaken to review towns under revised Gas Connections Policy.
- The Mayo-Galway transmission pipeline facilitates the viability of towns along the pipeline route.
- Towns that do not meet the necessary criteria at present, will be kept under review. A significant increase in natural gas demand from a town, probably resulting from the addition of a new large industrial or commercial user, would be a key factor in determining a town's viability in a future review.
- Phase 1 & 2 of the New Towns study resulted in fourteen towns in Co. Mayo and Co. Galway qualified for connection to the natural gas network under the new policy, including Loughrea.

Ms. Lally outlined the Project details as follows:

- Capital Expenditure of €50m
- 3 year overall construction programme for the 14 towns
 - commenced in 2007
 - 7 towns completed and gas delivered
- Project Team based in Castlebar
 - 9 Bord Gais employees
- Pipeline data
 - Loughrea Feeder length – 13.5 km
 - Loughrea Distribution length – 8.5 km
 - Polyethylene Pipe
 - Easy handling & installation – low weight & flexible
 - Can be supplied in coils – reducing number of joints
 - Can be squeezed off for emergency repairs & extensions
 - Can follow the contour of the trench
 - Life span of more than 50 years

Ms. Lally then went through how the pipeline construction was carried out, i.e. signing, guarding and traffic management; open-cut trenching; pipe-laying; trenchless pipe installation; permanent reinstatement.

Mr. Quigley went through the benefits to changing to Natural Gas as follows:

- Environment
- Industry & Businesses
- Home Owners
- Local Heating Contractors

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- Attracts new industry to town

He outlined the financial benefits as follows:

- Natural gas offers considerable saving against alternative fuel options.
- Based on 2008 figures, natural gas is on average 20% more cost effective than oil
- For business customers, savings as great as 40% can be realised versus oil or LPG
- For large industries, natural gas offers a considerable drop in CO2 emissions compared to LPG, and particularly oil, which relates directly to savings for companies who trade emissions licenses.

He then went through the positive influence of Natural Gas on the Environment.

Other additional Benefits were outlined as follows:

- Natural gas provides a continuity of supply, with no need to re-order
- It is a clean, manageable and safe fuel
- It is a very versatile fuel and has many uses both domestically or industrially

The percentage of Gas Use in Ireland is as follows:

- Power Generation – 69%
- Industrial/Commercial – 17%
- Residential – 14%

He stated that the Sales campaign for the Gaswest Project started in Summer 2008. He stated that every business in Loughrea has received the Gaswest Brochures. Loughrea has been canvassed since December 2008 and was still ongoing.

Mr. Quigley then went through the connection fees for business customers; the new residential connection fee and mature housing connection fee. A map of Loughrea Town was included in the presentation indicating what streets gas would initially be available and it was explained that the gas network would continue to expand to meet demand.

Ms. Lally stated that they expected to appoint the Contractor by the end of February. Construction was expected to start in early March and would take about five months to complete. She stated that they hoped to have Gas in Loughrea by September 2009.

Cllr. W. Burke thanked An Bord Gais personnel for the excellent presentation. He asked if there were any plans to include Portumna into the national gas grid and queried what it would take to join in. Ms. Lally stated that Portumna town has been evaluated under Phase 3. She explained that at the moment it was not proving viable. Under the evaluation carried out, projected growth rates, interest and the amount of new houses that was forecasted were taken into account. She suggested that Cllr. Burke talk to the local Chamber of Commerce and that if they had new figures they could put a case forward and that they could be re-evaluated again. Cllr. W. Burke stated that he believed that a lot of

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people would not have been aware of an evaluation having been carried out. He said that he would take what was said back to the Chamber of Commerce and that he would certainly like Portumna to be reconsidered again. He said that Portumna was a progressive town and this is where they wanted to be going. Ms. Lally advised that they could check the web-site which outlined clearly how to prove their viability in getting gas into the town.

Cllr. Regan queried why some of the streets were only partially included in the supply of the gas network in Loughrea Town, i.e. Abbey Street, Station Road, Lake Road and Main Street. Ms. Lally explained that they look to provide the most economical footprint and look at where most potential customers are. She stated that the network grows and continues to grow as new businesses are generated. She explained that they had to put in an initial linear length but they would anticipate that the network would grow. Cllr. Regan asked what hours were they intending to carry out these works and was mindful of the disruption the town has been through for the past three years with works on both Barrack Street and Main Street. Ms. Lally stated that they were liaising with the Council on this issue. She stated that there were peak times that they wouldn't be allowed to work on. She stated that they would be looking to provide a traffic management system that would facilitate businesses. She stated that they would be working between the hours of 8.00 a.m. and 5.00 p.m. daily and that there would be some night works as well. She said there were certain restrictions when working on the feeder main and they would be discussing these with the businesses in the town and their suggestions will be taken on board and considered.

In response to Cllr. Maher's query, Ms. Lally stated that there was a duct laid on Main Street where a pipe can be inserted into the duct and there would be connection pipes off them. She stated that there would have to be a perpendicular connection off the mains into the business and each business was seen as an individual connection. Cllr. Regan asked if they were responsible for reinstatement of the road and footpath affected. Ms. Lally stated that they were responsible for reinstatement of any footpath and road that they have to cross. She stated that they pay the Council long-term damage costs and the road/footpath affected was maintained for two years afterwards. Cllr. Hynes asked if they proposed to put in a main on the N66 roadway in Loughrea. Ms. Lally advised that it was not doing so under this current project. She stated that what they had outlined to the Members was what they had received fund for. She stated that if they found through their canvassing that there was a substantial customer base there they would certainly extend that network. She said that they have found that customers have come on stream as they start laying the pipe-work.

Cllr. G. Burke queried if they had to lay ducting on Main Street or Barrack Street. Ms. Lally advised that they had to lay ducting every 100m on Main Street, but that there was no ducting laid on Barrack Street. Cllr. G. Burke stated that there was a lot of traffic disruption whilst the pipe-laying was going on in Craughwell and he hoped that there would not be a repeat of that in Loughrea. Ms. Lally said that in the case of Craughwell, there was no alternative diversion available, but in Loughrea the Bye-Pass was in place and there are other diversion routes available to them which they would be hoping to utilise. She advised that if the duct was there (as in on Main Street), there would be less

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disruption. She stated that they would be keeping the businesses informed. She stated that if there were any problems they would have staff on the ground to deal with whatever issues that may arise. She said that they will work with the businesses to the best of their ability and try to limit the disruption to the businesses as best they could.

Cllr. Fahy asked for the up-to-date in relation to supply of gas to Gort town. He advised that the Council may be laying a water main pipe in October and asked if the pipes would have to be separated. Ms. Lally advised that they have been liaising with the Water Services Department and stated that the works would run in tandem with the Council works. She advised that they could run the two pipes together, but that there had to be certain proximity. Cllr. Fahy queried if the houses up to three miles outside the town could tap into the pipeline. Ms. Lally advised that this would not be possible initially. She advised that it would be primarily be the houses that are on the route, but that would grow. She said that it would be mainly associated with new development. She advised that unless there was new development planned for the area it would not be viable to run the piping for that.

Cllr. Willers thanked Ms. Lally and Mr. Quigley for their presentation and asked if they were going to make a presentation to the Chamber of Commerce. Ms. Lally advised that they would be making a presentation to the Chamber and businesses in the town at the end of the month.

Bord Gais Representatives and the Town Council Members then left the Meeting and the Area Meeting resumed.

Cllr. Willers welcomed Mr. S. Breathnach, S.E.E. to his first meeting of the Electoral Area Committee and wished him well in his new role. She also welcomed back Mr. Mitchell, E.E. Portumna.

DEPUTATION FROM EARLSPARK RESIDENTS

Cllr. Willers advised that the Deputation were unable to make the Meeting but it would be rearranged for the next Area Meeting.

MINUTES OF LOUGHREA AREA COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 16TH DECEMBER 2008

On the proposal of Cllr. Fahy, seconded by Cllr. Maher, the Minutes of the Loughrea Area Committee Meeting held on 16th December 2008 were confirmed.

Matters Arising

Car-Park Portumna

Cllr. W. Burke queried when the Part 8 for the car-park in Portumna would be coming before the Members for approval. Mr. Breathnach advised that plans had been prepared for the Part 8 but no details had been discussed at the time about the boundary wall. He advised that they needed to discuss this matter with the local Parish Priest. Cllr. W. Burke said that it was important to get this project off the ground and he requested that a deadline be set so that this could be moved on as quickly as possible. Mr. Cullen stated that they would aim to have it on the Council Agenda for April.

Fitzzy's Corner

Cllr. Maher queried the up-to-date position regarding the property known as Fitzzy's Corner. Mr. Breathnach advised that the approved contractors hoped to carry out the demolition during the Mid-term break in February when the schools were off.

Shanbally Junction

Cllr. Maher queried when the works at Shanbally Junction would be completed. Mr. Costello advised that the macadam and DBM Lining Contractor should be on site in the next week or so to realign the Junction. Cllr. Fahy stated that he had allocated €21,000 of his Notice of Motion monies towards this project in November. Cllr. Feeney stated that he too had allocated a substantial amount towards this project and requested that a letter be sent from the Council to the Board of Management in Craughwell School informing them of the funding that was allocated by them. Cllr. Fahy felt that the Councillors were not getting any recognition for the contribution towards these works. It was agreed that a written notification of the allocations from Councillors Notice of Motion Expenses towards these particular works would be sent to the Board of Management of Craughwell N.S.

Loughrea Traffic Management Plan

Cllr. G. Burke queried when the Draft Traffic Management Plan for Loughrea Town would be going on public display. Mr. Breathnach stated that the proposed changes that had been discussed by the Members at a previous Area Meeting have been reviewed. He said that they were in the process of preparing a map to be forwarded on to the Road Design Section. He advised that he would go through with the Members the proposed changes they would be making to the Plan at the end of the Meeting. This map would then be forwarded to the Road Design Section who would prepare the Map and Schedule that will go on public display. He stated that they may make further comments and changes and it would then go on public display. Mr. Cullen stated that it was agreed by the Town Council Members that the Plan would go on public display and they would make their comments at that stage.

Traffic Lights for Westbridge

Cllr. G. Burke asked for an update on the proposed provision of traffic lights at Westbridge. Mr. Breathnach stated that an Engineer from the Road Design Section would be meeting the Traffic Lights Contractor in the coming week and he would have more details for the Members for the next Meeting.

Pedestrian Lights – Main Street

In reply to Cllr. Hynes' query regarding about a fault on the pedestrian lights on Main Street, Mr. Raftery stated that this had been repaired two weeks ago.

Junction Definition Bollards

Cllr. Feeney stated that he raised the issue of the lack of definition bollards on the N6 from Loughrea to Craughwell on a number of occasions and asked for the up-to-date position on same. Mr. Raftery stated that had recently received a delivery of junction definition bollards which were intended to put up on the N65 and the N66 and whatever was left over would be used on the N6 as requested. Cllr. Feeney requested that the replacement bollards on the N6 would be done immediately and as a matter of urgency. The Members agreed that precedence be given to replacing the missing definition bollards on the N6 ahead of the N66 or N65 roads. Mr. Raftery stated that drainage works were being carried out at the moment but when these were complete they would work on replacing the definition bollards.

Potholes

Cllr. Hynes stated that potholes were the main complaint from the public and some of the potholes were huge and were quite dangerous. He acknowledged that the bad weather had made the situation worse and that the cut-backs and non-replacement of staff wasn't helping the situation. Cllr. W. Burke stated that there are two large potholes on the stretch of roadway where works were carried out on the Bridge in Portumna in October. He stated that he was very disappointed that potholes would be showing on this stretch so quickly and he asked that it be investigated immediately. In relation to water tables, he stated that they should be opened up on a continual basis and should be part of ongoing maintenance. He stated that anywhere water tables were opened up there were no flooding problems. He said that there was little point in filling potholes when the water tables are closed. Mr. Breathnach advised that the works on the Bridge in Portumna was funded by Waterways Ireland and it should still be under retention and he would check it out prior to the next Meeting. Cllr. Feeney stated that the Annual Road Grants that were recently announced shows an increase of 6% on last year, and queried if this would make a difference in terms of improved maintenance. Cllr. Regan stated that the roads were deteriorating and that there were not enough monies coming from National Government. He stated that there was no point in resurfacing part of the road when further down the road is in a deplorable state. He stated that they needed to concentrate more on maintenance works, such as pothole repair and opening of water tables. Cllr. Maher suggested that the 6% extra granted should be used for maintenance repairs. He queried

who deemed when these were done, was there a priority given to Councillors requests and how they were dealt with. Cllr. G. Burke stated that the materials that are being used to fill in potholes were not good enough quality. He stated that putting that on top of water filled potholes was a waste of time. He said that there had to be something wrong with the materials if potholes were reopening again so quickly. Cllr. Fahy suggested that the Councillors for the Electoral Area issue a statement saying that they are dissatisfied with the pothole situation. He said that he had received representations from many people stating they had damaged their cars and something had got to be done to rectify the situation. He stated that they demand that some of this extra 6% allocation be used for road maintenance. He said that the pothole situation is the most serious issue facing the Councillors at the moment. Cllr. Willers referred to the reporting of potholes to the Council Offices and stated that there was an expectation by the public that somebody else was reporting it. She said that it was important that the public are told to report any potholes in their areas to their Local Area Office. She also agreed with Cllr. G. Burke's comments on the quality of material being used to fix the potholes. She referred to a number of areas where the potholes were particularly bad and need to be continuously repaired. She referred to cases where the repairs only last at most two weeks and stated that it was in incredible waste of resources and man-power. She stated that the N6 Haul Lorries were going down Shrah Road and taking short-cuts and asked what could be done as it was completely destroying the road. She stated that it was the image and the public perception of how the Council carries out its works that was being damaged.

Mr. Cullen stated that the Roadworks Programme would be coming before the Members in the coming weeks and advised that the suggestions that the 6% increase in Road Grants be used for improved road maintenance i.e. pothole repairs/verge trimming could not happen. He said that the reality was that the funding for these works comes out of the Local Roads Fund which was down by about €1.5m on last year. He stated that the additional 6% was on non-national road grants which were quite specific. He advised that this matter can be further discussed when the 2009 Roadworks Programme were presented to the Members. He also advised that there had been a shift in where Local Authority funding was being allocated and the priority now has been identified as water.

Cllr. W. Burke suggested that a review should be carried out in the area and a plan prepared with recommendations that a sum be made available for the worst affected roads. He suggested that the proposed recommendation should come from the relevant engineering personnel.

Mr. Breathnach agreed that the condition of some of the roads had deteriorated quite badly and the very wet winter had made the situation worse. He also advised that Loughrea was a very low-lying area and drainage was very bad. Regarding the opening of water tables, he said that this was being done on the N65 and N66 but he agreed that they had a major problem in keeping up with the amount of pothole maintenance that was required. In relation to the N6 haulage routes, he said that the roads would break-up as a result of heavy loads and that some redress would have to be looked at by more senior personnel from the N.R.A.. He advised that lack of maintenance funds would be a major issue and that they would try to prioritise maintenance as much as possible. Mr. Raftery said that he would suggest that a Hot Mix Unit should be purchased for the area. He said that they

were currently using cold mix and the quality of the repair was not as good as if they had hot-mix macadam. Cllr. Feeney stated that he would not be in favour of making modifications to the existing unit as that had not proved successful. He said that they needed something that will last permanently. Mr. Cullen stated that they needed to consider these issues when considering the 2009 Roadworks Programme and in deciding how these monies will be used.

FOOTPATHS – MAIN STREET PORTUMNA

Letter dated 15th December 2008 from the N.R.A. regarding the Portumna Main Street Footpaths were circulated to the Meeting. Cllr. W. Burke asked that an update be available on this issue for the next Meeting. This was agreed.

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Gort Chamber of Commerce

Cllr. Fahy thanked Mr. Cullen for sending out letter updating the Members on the issues raised regarding the town of Gort. He advised that the Chamber of Commerce had organised a public meeting which is to be held in Gort on the 9th February next. Cllr. Fahy stated it was claimed by the Chamber that the Regional Water Scheme for Gort would not happen for at least 20 years once the preliminary works went ahead. Mr. Cullen advised that the Gort Scheme would proceed as quickly as possible. He stated that they would be doing the advance remedial works as they were urgently needed to be carried out. He advised that the GRWS was a major scheme and it would take a number of years to complete. He said that it was hoped to interconnect the scheme with Loughrea eventually.

Courthouse in Portumna

Cllr. W. Burke advised that Courts Service had passed back the old Court House building in Portumna to the Council. Taking on the advice given by the Council at a previous meeting, the Chamber of Commerce, Tidy Towns, etc. had formed an umbrella group representing the people of Portumna and they had indicated that they would like to set up a Civic Centre in the town. He said that there is an absence of a civic centre in Portumna and asked if there was a means by which they could negotiate the transfer of the building to the Community. He said that there would be no onus on the Council to provide any funding towards it. He asked that Mr. Cullen would investigate that matter and get back to him on what the way forward would be. Cllr. Feeney suggested that there may be a funding possibility through the refurbishment of public buildings, especially buildings of heritage interest. He suggested that they talk to Ms. Doddy, Conservation Officer regarding this funding. Mr. Cullen stated that this was an interesting type of proposal and he would explore this proposal and would come back to him on it.

Backlawn Car-Park, Athenry

Cllr. Feeney queried when work would begin on the construction of the Backlawn Car-park and stated that they still had a situation where they had no public car-park in Athenry. Mr. Breathnach stated that he would have the matter checked out for the next Meeting.

Fisherman's Wharf Estate, Portumna

Cllr. W. Burke stated that an Enforcement Order (Env 03/741) had been served on the developer of the Housing Estate known as Fisherman's Wharf in Portumna for non-compliance with the Planning Conditions (98/4577) in January 2004. He asked if the bond lodged with the Planning Permission for that development had been drawn down and asked that this would be checked out. He said that of the eight lights in the estate, only two were working now and there was no one willing to fix them. He said that the sewer network is connected to the foul sewer and was causing a nuisance to the residents living there. He said that there were some remedial works that could be carried out by the Council and some of the issues could be easily resolved. Cllr. Hynes stated that they should talk to the Council's Law Agent and institute proceedings against the Developer. Cllr. Willers stated that the enforcement process was quite a lengthy process. Mr. Cullen stated that it was a very difficult process and advised that if there was no bond, non-compliance of the planning conditions was the only legal route that can be taken. Cllr. W. Burke queried if a costing could be provided on the outstanding works. It was agreed that Enforcement Section would be asked for an up-to-date position on this issue.

Ennis Bridge, Athenry

Cllr. Feeney queried if there were any plans for alternative routes when C.I.E. take down the Ennis Bridge in the next few weeks. Mr. Raftery stated that C.I.E. had not been in touch about this but that he would contact them and forward the details to Cllr. Feeney.

Chríochnaigh an Cruinniú ansin