

CHOMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

**MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING OF GALWAY COUNTY COUNCIL
HELD AT ÁRAS AN CHONTAE, PROSPECT HILL ON MONDAY 14th
DECEMBER, 2009.**

CATHAOIRLEACH: Cllr. T. McHugh

ILATHAIR FREISIN:

Baill: Cllrs. T. Broderick, S. Canney, L. Carroll, D. Connolly, M. Connolly, Cllrs. J. Cuddy, Comh S O’Cuaig, Comh T. Ó Curraoin, Cllrs. M. Fahy, P. Feeney, G. Finnerty, M. Hoade, P. Hynes, C. Keaveney, S. Kyne, M. Maher, E. Mannion, T. Mannion, J. McClearn, J. McDonagh, M. Mullins, M. Noone, P. Roche, Comh S. Ó Tuairisg, Cllrs. S. Walsh, T. Walsh, T. Welby, B. Willers.

Oifigigh: Ms. M. Moloney, County Manager; Messrs. J. Cullen, K. Kelly, F. Gilmore, P. Ridge, Directors of Service; E. Molloy, M. Dolly, J. Eising, M. Lavelle, Senior Engineers; B. McDermott, County Secretary; M. Owens, A. Comer, Senior Executive Officers; A. Farrell, Ballinasloe Town Clerk, C. Wynne, A/Senior Executive Engineer; G. Healy, Staff Officer.

Thosnaigh an cruinniú leis an paidir.

RESOLUTIONS OF SYMPATHY **192**

A resolution of sympathy was extended to Cllr. Mogie Maher on the death of his grandmother, Mrs. Ann O’Neill,

A minutes silence was observed as a mark of respect for the deceased.

Cllr. McDonagh proposed that the December Monthly Meeting of the Council which was scheduled to be held on Friday 18th December, 2009 be rescheduled to Monday 21st December, 2009 at 2 p.m. due to the official opening of the M6 on Friday and this was seconded by Comh. O’Curraoin and agreed.

RECENT SEVERE FLOODING **193**

The Mayor indicated that this Special Meeting of the Council was called in the aftermath of the recent severe flooding which occurred around the county and he

welcomed Mr. Richard Dooley and Mr. John Murphy from the Office of Public Works to the Meeting.

He read out a letter which had been received from President Mary McAleese thanking the staff and Members of the Council and also the communities around the county who did such tremendous work during the flooding crisis in order to alleviate the suffering of those affected by the floods.

He then invited Mr Murphy to make a presentation to the Members.

Mr Murphy commenced his presentation by making the following points:

- Flooding is a natural phenomenon with numerous causes the main one being excessive and persistent rainfall
- Flooding problems cannot be eliminated but can be managed so as to minimize their impacts
- Human activity can cause an increase in the risk of damage from flooding
- Because of the unpredictable nature of rainfall and other climatic factors, it is not possible to foresee when and where flooding may occur in the long term
- There is no statutory duty on any State or other authority to prevent flooding
- It is clear that flooding has been a major concern in this country for at least the past two centuries, as reflected in the various Drainage Acts passed.

The OPW derives its powers from the 1945 and the 1995 Arterial Drainage Acts and is the lead agency going forward in dealing with the Floods Directive. It is responsible for the maintenance of all rivers, embankments and urban flood defences on which it has executed work under the 1945 and 1995 Arterial Drainage Acts. An annual programme of maintenance is drawn up at the beginning of each year based on the condition of the channels and the resources available. In all, the OPW is responsible for approximately 25% of the rivers and streams in the country. Local Authorities are responsible for maintenance of rivers and streams in their Drainage Districts. The main Drainage Districts in Co. Galway are: River Suck, Dunkellin, Lavalley and Ahascragh, however, a major difficulty for Local Authorities in fulfilling such obligations is lack of adequate funding. It is worth noting that while 14 different Bodies have functions in respect of the River Shannon, no one body has legislative responsibility.

Along with its primary drainage and flood relief functions, it is an objective of the OPW to make available all reasonable assistance to the recognized emergency response units to minimize the risk from flooding to persons and property.

The recent flooding was the most severe on record experienced in many parts of the country. Co Galway was one of the areas to suffer most. Unprecedented rainfall fell throughout the month of November. 314mm. was recorded for the county in the first 25 days of the month, with 127mm. falling in four days between the 15th and 20th November. The Clare River in Claregalway exceeded the 100 year flood.

A Joint Working Committee has been formed between the OPW and Galway County Council to deal with issues arising from this severe flood event. Nationally €70m has been assigned by the Government towards Flood Relief in 2010.

The Mayor thanked the OPW for their presentation but stated that many people are experiencing extreme hardship due to flooding of their homes, flooding of their land and hazardous driving conditions.

The Members all raised issues of concern to them and the following was the response of the OPW:

- Maintenance of channels is the responsibility of the OPW but the River Suck Drainage District is the responsibility of the River Suck Drainage Committee which is made up of representatives of Roscommon and Galway County Councils and this committee does not have adequate funds available for its maintenance. However, the OPW may be in a position to provide assistance to the Local Authorities in carrying out a drainage scheme on the River Suck.
- Flood Relief Schemes take some considerable time to complete as compliance with EU legislation is necessary. In general, the OPW has good working relationship with the National Parks & Wildlife Service.
- The OPW will be the lead agency from now on in dealing with flooding issues. The River Shannon is not the responsibility of any one body but a study of the Shannon will commence in 2010 and the question of the removal of silt will be examined.
- In relation to the Ardrahan/Peterswell area, a works programme is in place for 2010 on the Dunkellin River in order to clean up the river and to carry out other minor improvement works. The OPW and the IFA are in broad agreement on this matter.
- In relation to the flooding at Lisheenavalla, Coolarne, Ballyglass, etc : the Bridge at Claregalway was unable to take the recent flood waters as it was designed for a 25 year flood and the recent flooding exceeded the 100 year flood.. The OPW is responsible for the Clare River and its tributaries and will be carrying out a study of the river which may result in widening of the river at Claregalway and replacement of the Crusheen Bridge and also may result in the removal of silt if necessary.
- The OPW is legally obliged to keep levels of Lough Corrib regulated for navigation and water abstraction purposes and the OPW does not consider that the opening of the sluice gates at the Salmon Weir had any effect on flooding at Claregalway. Daily records are kept of openings.
- In relation to the possibility that the construction of the new M6 may have blocked underground drains; an underground study would be required in order to determine this.
- The issue regarding the pumping out water from a quarry is a legal matter

- Oranmore/Bushfield will be included in a study to be carried out with Claregalway. In relation to Upper Moneymore, a possible solution may have been identified and the OPW will be required to consult with the National Parks & Wildlife Service and the Council in this regard.
- In relation to the Curragh Line: even though the N84 is constantly sinking the bridge is well above the flood.
- The OPW does make submissions in respect of Local Area Plans
- It may be possible to carry out minor schemes to address some local issues raised (Galway Co Co and OPW)

It was proposed by Cllr. McDonagh, seconded by Cllr. Mannion and agreed that the Standing Orders be suspended to allow the Meeting continue after 6 p.m.

A discussion took place on the best way to deal with the issues raised and on whether it should be at national or local level.

The Manager expressed sympathy to those affected by the flooding crisis which had had a devastating effect on some families.

She said that the Council has expended significant resources to date in dealing with the flooding crisis.

The Council has already met with the OPW and a Working Group has been set up comprising of officials from OPW and Galway County Council and which will meet again before Christmas. She said that the Working Group will agree an Action Plan for areas where the flooding problems can be resolved by carrying out local minor works in partnership with the OPW. However, some major works will need to be addressed on a national basis eg River Shannon. The Manager indicated that it was her intention to Chair this group initially.

The Members indicated satisfaction with the arrangement set out by the Manager.

It was proposed by Cllr. Mullins, seconded by Cllr. T. Mannion and agreed that in relation to the serious flooding issue: the Council calls on the Taoiseach to appoint a Senior Cabinet Member to drive a project to ensure that we never have a repeat of the recent devastation. This Minister should have an appropriate budget to fund the preventative measures required.

The Mayor invited Mr. Michael Silke from the IFA to address the meeting.

Mr. Silke referred to the major flooding issue in the County. He complimented the staff of Galway County Council and the local volunteers who worked so hard.

The Mayor thanked the representatives of the OPW for attending the Meeting.

Cllr. D. Connolly referred to the official opening of the M6 which is scheduled to be held on Friday, 18th December, 2009 and he expressed the view that the Elected Members of the Council should not attend the official opening in protest at the fact that some haulage routes have been left in bad repair by the M6 Construction Company.

The Manager stated that she understands the Members concerns, however, significant progress has been made on the arrangement put in place to address the issues raised and this appears to be working. The opening of the M6 is a critical piece of infrastructure for Galway County Council and should be viewed in a positive light.

Criochnaigh an Cruinniú Ansin.