

## **COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE**

### **Ceantar Bardasach Bhaile Locha Riach *Municipal District of LOUGHREA***

#### **Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Municipal District of Loughrea held in the Council Chamber, Loughrea on 13<sup>th</sup> January 2025**

##### **I LATHAIR:**

##### **Cathaoirleach**

Cllr. M. Kinane

##### **Baill:**

Cllr's. M. Maher, G. Finnerty, G. Donohue, J. McClearn,  
S. Curley (Remote), D. Kelly, P. Killilea

##### **Oifigigh:**

Ms. R. Lowe, Senior Engineer  
Ms. V. Loughnane, Senior Planner  
Mr. G. Haugh, Senior Executive Engineer  
Mr. N. Kennedy, Executive Engineer  
Mr. D. O'Loughlin, Executive Engineer  
Mr. B. Corcoran, Senior Executive Planner  
Ms. M. Flynn, Administrative Officer  
Ms. D. Feeney, Administrative Officer  
Ms. S. Cleary, Staff Officer  
Ms. C. Kennedy, Clerical Officer

##### **Apologies:**

Cllrs. I. Canning, P.J. Murphy,  
Ms. E. Ruane, Director of Services

The Kilcolgan Community Development Committee made a presentation to the Members to highlight short-term and long-term safety concerns for the village. The Committee requested the engagement and feedback from Galway County Council in creating a realistic and achievable Strategic Development Plan.

#### **Confirmation of Minutes of Monthly Meeting of the Municipal District of Loughrea held in the Council Chamber, Galway County Council on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2024** **LMD2399**

The Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of the Municipal District (MD) of Loughrea held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2024 were **PROPOSED** by Cllr. Maher, **SECONDED** by Cllr. Donohue and agreed and signed by the Cathaoirleach.

Cllr. McClearn requested clarification be provided to all Members on the procedure for the allocation of additional funding provided on foot of an increase to the Local Property Tax (LPT). He stated any proposals to allocate LPT funds must be brought before the Municipal

District (MD) for agreement. The Cathaoirleach and members agreed to meet at 10.00 am on Monday 10<sup>th</sup> February 2025 immediately before the Municipal District Meeting where clarification from the Head of Finance can be provided.

Cllr. Finnerty enquired about hedge cutting and water table maintenance along the Gort to Loughrea Road. He stated, drainage works have not been satisfactorily carried out by a contractor at this location and suggested that Galway County Council (GCC) staff should be carrying out this work. Mr. Haugh responded that while occasionally some of the works to open water tables is contracted out there wasn't any contract in place at the current time. He stated that works were carried out by GCC outdoor staff as recently as last week on the road referenced. He stated Mr. O'Loughlin will review the route to identify necessary works. Mr. Haugh stated, the extent of any drainage works is reliant on budget allocations.

The Cathaoirleach and members thanked the outdoor staff for their work during the recent cold weather event.

Cllr. Donohue enquired if it would be possible to purchase a mechanical salt spread for the salting of streets. She stated, there is not enough outdoor staff in the Loughrea MD area and advocated for additional resources. Mr. Haugh stated, in Loughrea Town alone there is approximately 20 kilometres of footpath. It would not be possible to salt every footpath within the Loughrea MD area to adequately address Portumna, Gort, Killimor, Kiltormer etc. He referred to the availability of salt bins for use by the public/local voluntary groups/business owners to avail of for safety purposes. He added, the outdoor staff gritted public car parks and gritting took place on Priority Routes 1, 2 and 3 contained in the Winter Maintenance Programme, a copy of which was provided to the Members. In relation to a comment on resources, Ms. Lowe responded, there is a General Operative panel in place, and it is good to be back in the recruitment era. She added, it is possible that some staff currently working with Uisce Eireann will move across to the Council.

Cllr. Maher enquired when hedge cutting would be completed between Seefin and Kilchreest.

Cllr. Kelly stated it is likely that flooding will occur on roads resulting from thawing.

The Cathaoirleach stated the provision of salt/salt bins was very helpful and enquired if it is possible to provide additional bins in areas such as Kilcolgan. Mr. Haugh responded that salt bins must be located on public spaces to allow for maintenance/re-filling. He added the refilling of the bin's places an additional workload on the outdoor staff. Additional bins may result in bins not being refilled as frequently as necessary and this may generate negative publicity. He referred to a map previously provided to the Members identifying the location of the salt bins.

Cllr. McClearn stated, he is aware that roads were gritted, but people were unaware of this. He stated, following gritting, there was a shower of rain, and the roads froze over again. With respect to making salt available, he stated people need to understand that bins will be replenished, and it's unnecessary to take buckets of salt, but to take only what is needed.

Cllr. Finnerty enquired if the provision of additional machinery could assist outdoor staff managing severe weather events. Ms. Lowe responded that she and the Senior Executive Engineers carry out reviews after events to determine if changes should be made. She stated that it is open to businesses to purchase salt bins and salt as these items are widely available. She suggested that this is something that the Department of Education could consider, she added it would be great to see more resilience on a wider scale to help deal with the impacts from severe weather. She reminded the Members, that filling salt bins 3 or 4 times daily is an additional demand on resources. Ms. Lowe stated that the technical team meet every month to review Area related matters.

Cllr. Maher referred to his concern previously raised regarding the Lake Road, he stated there has been another accident there recently, he requested temporary speed ramps be installed. He stated cars travel on the road at up to 100 miles per hour adding someone is going to be killed. He stated there is only one footpath along the busy road. Mr. Haugh stated, that he will assess the matter, and arrange for a vehicle speed survey to be undertaken. The results of that survey will be made available to all members in due course but would take several weeks.

#### **Briefing on the Draft Gort Local Area Plan 2025-2031**

**LMD2400**

Ms. Loughnane provided the Members with an update on the Gort Local Area Plan (LAP) advising that the draft LAP is on display since 9<sup>th</sup> January 2025 and will remain on display up to 20<sup>th</sup> February 2025. She advised that submissions can be made online and in written form. She added, a public consultation is scheduled to take place on 5<sup>th</sup> February 2025 in the Lady Gregory Hotel in Gort from 2pm to 7pm, and a webinar will be held on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2025.

Ms. Loughnane stated the members can contact her and Mr. Corcoran individually or as a group and consultation can take place with members of the public on 5<sup>th</sup> February.

The Cathaoirleach and members thanked Ms. Loughnane for the briefing.

Cllr. Finnerty sought clarification from Ms. Loughnane on the new Residential Zoned Land Tax (RZLT) and in particular implications of R1 and R2's tax. Ms. Loughnane stated that the National Planning Framework (NPF) is awaited, she said submissions were made in September, and when completed this will be reviewed. She stated that, the Gort LAP is the only LAP outstanding.

Ms. Loughnane responded to Cllr. Finnerty's query on tax implications of the RZLT adding, this is a separate process, and maps will be made available following which people can make submissions. She added, maps for Loughrea and Athenry will also be available.

In response to Cllr. Curley's query, Ms. Loughnane confirmed following the period of making submissions, which is 6 weeks, members have a further 6 weeks for consideration. Cllr. McClearn stated, if land is zoned, it will be taxed or made available for development. He added, a lot of people don't agree with the tax, but stated he does as it makes clear what land is available. He added, all landowners should be aware of what is happening. Ms. Loughnane responded, new guidelines have been made available.

In December the environmental consultants completed their review of the amended construction proposals that had been prepared by the engineering consultants. No negative environmental impacts had been identified for the proposed construction works.

The next step in the preparation of the EIAR is the examination of the 'indirect impacts' of the proposals, on the Qualifying Interests of the EU sites. The focus of this examination are the changes to the hydrological regime following the proposed works and especially where the channels lower natural water levels in turloughs during a flood event.

Three months have been spent examining the use of 'flow controls' or 'weirs' at specific locations in the study area. Three suitable locations have been identified (Blackrock, Ballylee and Coole), where 'gates' could be installed to maintain normal water levels and opened only during extreme flood events.

The project team will consult with National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS) on these proposals in the next week.

Mott MacDonald will complete their IRPOI review of the scheme following the discussions with the NPWS. If there are no outstanding potential IRPOI issues, the EIAR will be updated, reviewed and forwarded to the OPW for their review in February.

Photomontages for the scheme are being reviewed and developed to include the flow controls, if they are adapted. The project agronomist will be back to specific sites next week and ecological surveys for excavated material sites are being further reviewed.

In response to queries from Cllr Finnerty, Mr Gallagher confirmed that the flow controls would be very tightly monitored and controlled if they are installed on the scheme. There would be no discretion to open the controls to alleviate flood waters from lands, they would only become operational during flood events where houses or identified transport routes were at risk of flooding. Mr Gallagher confirmed he would contact the SGFRC following the completion of discussions with NPWS, to provide an update to the group.

Mr Gallagher confirmed to Cllr Donohue that significant upgrade works would be required to the M18 culverts at Raheen, if the scheme progresses. The works would involve the closing of lanes on the M18 and diversion of traffic on to the R458 (old N18) from Gort town to the Kiltiernan junction. High level discussions have taken place previously between the Council and TII on this issue. The required works are buildable. The works upgrade works would be undertaken by the M18 consortium, under the supervision of TII. The funding source for the works has not yet been determined and may not be revisited until the progression of the flood scheme has been confirmed.

Mr Gallagher confirmed to Cllr Maher that ongoing funding for the maintenance of Drainage Districts is anticipated for 2025. As per previous years, the Area offices will be contacted when

the funding has been confirmed and asked to submit works proposals. Municipal Districts should expect to have budgets like those available in 2024.

### **Three Year Roads Programme**

**LMD2402**

Ms. Lowe advised the members that it is a requirement for the Local Authority to prepare a 3-year Multi-Annual Restoration Improvement Programme and the current programme covers the years 2025 to 2027. She stated, it is required to draft the programme based on the 2024 budget allocation as the budget allocation for 2025, 2026 and 2027 is not confirmed yet. She explained, the multi-annual programme applies to restoration improvement grant works only, which are significant road works. She added, roads are prioritised based on their pavement condition ratings, and 15% must be allocated to regional road works.

Ms. Lowe also presented a draft of the 2025 Roads Programme in more detail to the Members. She confirmed that the roads budget is allocated in February or March of each year and whilst it is preferential to have works completed by October or November each year, some works may continue over the Christmas period depending on weather conditions. She said roads can be looked at in greater detail when the budget figure is available. She advised the members that the roads programme will formally be presented for adoption in February or March when the actual allocations are issued to local authorities and at present the Roads team is just presenting a draft of the 2025 programme based on the 2024 allocations to show councillors the intended direction of travel. The full 2025 Roads Programme (with all grant categories) will be presented as part of the Schedule of MD works in due course and the adoption of this is a reserved function.

Mr. Haugh expressed his thanks to the Engineering and Technical staff and to the Councillors for their input into the preparation of the Roads Programme for the Loughrea MD and advised that he, Mr. Kennedy and Mr. O'Loughlin are available to discuss the Roads Programme following the meeting.

Cllr. Donohue queried if costs could increase in delivering the programme as occurred in 2024. Ms. Lowe responded that this is possible but, it the Roads team may tender some works earlier to see if an advantage can be gained and possible to comment works sooner. Ms. Lowe stated she is hopeful the new government will increase the Roads allocations

In response to Cllr. Finnerty's query, Mr. Haugh responded that tertiary roads for the year 2025 only are included in the programme presented at the meeting.

Cllr. Maher thanked the staff involved in preparing the Roads Programme and stated it is great for all Members to have some influence in prioritising some roads for inclusion.

Cllr. McClearn stated that the Council's allocation has not changed for his area for many years and there are a lot of roads to be improved. He stated there is a lot of work to be done having regard to the available resources.

The Cathoirleach and members confirmed their agreement to the 2025 Road Programme and the 3-year Multi-Annual Restoration Improvement Programme presented and thanked the team for their work.

### **Greenway**

**LMD2403**

Ms. Finn, Administrative Officer read an update to the members provided by Mr. Uinsinn Finn, Director of Services in which he stated, the proposal to develop a Greenway from Galway to Athlone will be submitted to An Bord Pleanála for planning consent. As part of this process, an environmental assessment will be undertaken in compliance with the EU Habitats Directive. This assessment will ensure that any proposed project does not adversely impact the designated sites along the route, including Kilcaimin Bay Special Areas of Conservation/SPA/MPA or any other protected areas.

An intense discussion took place, and the members sought Ms. Flynn to request the attendance of the Director at the February MD meeting.

Cllr. Gerry Finnerty **PROPOSED** that the plan for the Greenway is put on hold until the Director of Services comes to the meeting of the Loughrea Municipal Area and presents the plan to the Councillors first, the proposal was **SECONDED** by Cllr. Michael Maher and agreed by the Members.

### **Kinvara Traffic Management Plan**

**LMD2404**

Ms. Lowe stated that a Community Transport Study is being drafted for Kinvara. She stated the study will include suggested active travel measures aimed to improve sustainable mobility in Kinvara. Ms. Lowe added, Galway County Council completed its latest review of the draft study over the Christmas period, and it is hoped to receive the final draft shortly and to be able to publish it imminently allowing the public an opportunity to feed into it.

She stated the preparation of a Traffic Management Plan work is included in the Councils contract with Systra Ireland. She stated a traffic management plan is a set of Schedules that regulate traffic in a settlement and may include Parking to Be Prohibited at All Times, Pay and Display Parking, Loading Bays, One Way Streets, Disabled Persons Parking, Bus Bays, Yellow Box Junctions, Pedestrianised Streets depending on the settlement. She added the schedules are accompanied by a drawing showing the locations of the regulations.

Ms Lowe noted that concerns had been raised by the Kinvara community in respect of the lack of availability of a large central carpark. Ms. Lowe said that the development of a carpark would have to align with the zonings in the Galway County Development Plan. Ms. Lowe stated that a facility such as this would give more flexibility in respect of drafting a traffic management plan but the County Council does not have a site for same. Lands would have to be made available for same to the Council or another party to develop a car park. She added, the cost would have to be reasonable and subject to available funding. Ms. Lowe stated any proposed carpark would have to align with the zonings as laid down in the Small Growth Villages plan for Kinvara. She stated a carpark is 'open for consideration' under certain zonings

but prohibited under other zonings. She clarified; the Council is not seeking expressions of interest but is open to ideas, suggestions etc. from the Councillors.

Cllr. Killilea stated this matter needs to be progressed as there are 1000 children using this small street regularly, he referred to Cllr. Byrne's delegation in 2023.

The Cathaoirleach stated the immediate issue is the provision of a pedestrian crossing in Kinvara as pedestrian safety is an issue. Ms. Lowe responded that she understood the call for crossings and applications for funding for same would not be delayed by the CTS process.

### **Cathaoirleach's Business**

**LMD2405**

Ms. Flynn advised the Cathaoirleach and Members that she will be retiring from Galway County Council in February after 40 years' service in the Local Authority Sector. She advised that Ms. Denise Feeney, Administrative Officer will take on the role of Meetings Administrator until a Meeting's Administrator is appointed.

The Cathaoirleach stated that Ms. Flynn would be a huge loss to the Council, and she expressed her good wishes to Ms. Flynn on her retirement. Cllrs. Maher, McClearn, Donohue, Finnerty and Curley in turn thanked Ms. Flynn for her exceptional work and wished her good health and happiness on her retirement.

Cllr. Finnerty raised concerns regarding two 80kph (kilometre per hour) signs which have recently been erected on the Kilbeacanty road approximately a quarter of a mile and a half mile each side of the school. He stated this is causing confusion for motorists. He stated a delegation took place five years previously and nothing has been done regarding speed limits at school locations. He questioned how there is no funding to remove water from road surfaces however there is funding to erect these speed signs. Cllr. Finnerty raised concerns regarding road safety issues at Ballyglass school. Mr. Haugh responded, speed signs were erected as part of the Speed Limit Review and are funded nationally. He added, the purpose of most of the new signage is to reinforce the communication of speed limits to motorists when moving from local to regional roads. He added that the signs being questioned reflected the existing speed limits and that there was no change to the speed limit in force.

Cllr. Finnerty referred to a response received from Uisce Eireann (UE) regarding concerns both he and Cllr. Donohue raised and in which UE advise an upgrade is scheduled for the Gort area. He sought clarification on what works are planned and what disruption will be caused to Gort residents.

Cllr. Maher stated that the signing of a €3.8 million contract to refurbish the Town Hall is welcome news and is a great day for Loughrea Town. He stated the facility will include a theatre and office space upstairs.

Cllr. Donohue enquired if there was a mix-up with the erection of speed limit signs at Kilbeacanty School. She stated she contributed NOM funding for the provision of rumble strips at the location. Mr. Haugh advised, there has been no change to the speed limit at the location.

Cllr. Donohue raised concerns regarding the gritting of roads around the county, she stated the Councillors were provided with priority routes 1, 2, 3 and 4. She emphasised that local roads should also be gritted and referred to difficulties faced by school buses navigating local roads in icy conditions and motorists who must travel to work at 5am/6am. Mr. Haugh advised that the Council gritted between 600km – 1,200km of roads nightly when required, and it would not be possible to grit over 2,000km of roads in the Loughrea MD alone, sometimes twice in 24 hours. He stated regard must be given to the cost of purchasing salt, storage requirements and the potential environmental impact. He added, local roads will be gritted where deemed necessary as per the Winter Maintenance Plan. Cllr. Curley stated, a discussion should be had at a Plenary Meeting to ensure adequate funding is available for purchasing salt. He added a plan needs to be in place 3 or 4 days in advance of bad weather events for farmers and members of the public. He asked the Executive to work with the Members in ensuring adequate funding is available. Mr. Haugh responded, funding is one element, but consideration must be given to the scale of the County and Municipal District.

Cllr. Donohue stated that water hydrants are often covered over and not exposed as they should be. She enquired regarding procedures in place to monitor this. Mr. Haugh responded, where road improvement works are carried out, the road is surveyed in advance and a contractor is engaged to expose any ironworks as soon as possible. If Cllr. Donohue had any specific examples; she should report these to the area office.

Cllr. Donohue expressed her thanks to all involved in the development of the Loughrea Town Hall and complimented LARC on their work.

Cllr. McClearn stated the Council worked with LARC, and today is a great day for them. He stated that the Credit Union and Chamber of Commerce were on board to get the Town Hall project over the line. He stated that the Town Hall is an iconic building, and it is great to see it being brought back into use.

Cllr. Curley stated the Town Hall is a focal point in the town and expressed his thanks to the Executive and each member of staff, the Councillors, and the late Cllr. Pat Hynes (RIP) for their work in bringing the project to this point.

In response to a request for dog bins to be located at the Blue Way in Portumna, Mr. Haugh responded he will follow up on this request to determine where responsibility might lie in this regard.

**CHRIOGHNAIGH AN CRUINNIU ANSIN**

*Martina Kinane*

**CLLR MARTINA KINANE**

*10th February 2025*

**DATE**



**Notice of Motion: Cllr. Finnerty**

I request Galway County Council to conduct a survey on the public lights in Gort town. The public believe they are inadequate. They are a safety issue for pedestrians and walkers. Many drivers have remarked that you don't spot people trying to cross the street. There is a general believe lights are very sparse and are of poor lighting quality. A few also are hidden by overgrowth.

In response, Mr. Haugh clarified circumstances where NOM funding can be utilised for public lighting works. In particular, he clarified that NOM funding could be accepted for Public Lighting upgrades on Regional Roads. He added, a targeted review of public lighting in a specific area can be carried out if Cllr Finnerty highlights locations of concern to the area office.

