

**MINUTES OF MEETING OF STRANORLAR ELECTORAL AREA
COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 31ST OCTOBER 2006 IN THE
REGIONAL TRAINING CENTRE, STRANORLAR**

Members Present:

Cllr Alice Bonnar (Chairperson)
Cllr J J Reid
Cllr Patrick McGowan

Officials Present:

Gerry Gilroy, Area Manager, Corporate Services
Patrick McLaughlin, Divisional Manager, Housing and Building
Tommy Doherty, Area Engineer, Housing and Building
Barney McLaughlin, Community and Enterprise Development Officer
Shane Sweeney, Assistant Engineer, Water, Environment and Emergency Services
John Hegarty, Executive Engineer, Water, Environment and Emergency Services
Peadar Thomas, Area Manager, Roads and Transportation
Claire McGeever, Executive Engineer, Roads and Transportation
Paul Christy, Executive Planner
Ann Harvey, A/Staff Officer, Corporate Services
Agnes Devenney, A/ASO, Corporate Services

Apologies:

Mary Hannigan, Area Manager, Housing and Building
Michael Breslin, Area Manager, Water, Environment and Emergency Services

SEC 39.00 ADOPTION OF MINUTES

39.01 Vote of Sympathy

The Committee expressed sympathy on the death of Mr Hugh McGinley, former Council Employee and father of Ann Harvey, Corporate Services.

39.02 Vote of Congratulations

The Committee wished to congratulate two Members of the Twin Towns Boxing Club, Mr Stephen O'Reilly and Mr Danny Tourish, on their recent success in the National Boxing Championships held in Dublin.

39.03 Adoption of Minutes

On the proposal of Cllr J J Reid, seconded by Cllr Alice Bonnar, the Minutes of the Electoral Area Committee Meeting held on 5th September 2006 were adopted.

It was agreed that matters arising would be dealt with under each relevant service.

SEC 40.00 HOUSING AND BUILDING

40.01 Matters Arising from Previous Meeting

Voluntary Housing Scheme at Ard Mhuileann, Convoy

Members were advised that North and West Housing were in the process of re-allocating a number of dwellings in this Scheme after some individuals refused the offer of re-housing there.

Members were also advised that approval had been obtained to construct two special-needs houses in Ard Mhuileann.

Sign for Glenpatrick Housing Scheme, Ballybofey.

Members were advised that the contractor is currently organising signage for Glenpatrick and the new scheme at Sessiagh View, and that it was hoped to have signage in place shortly.

40.02 Report regarding proposed Purchases.

Members noted report circulated with the Agenda that set out various attempts to purchase property in Castlefin and Stranorlar.

In reply to a query raised by Cllr Reid, Tommy Doherty advised that these proposed purchases consisted of Houses with some land attached.

Members then went on to discuss the need for a land bank for housing in the Stranorlar Electoral Area.

Cllr McGowan submitted that the Council would have to source land outside of the town boundaries and, therefore, should not wait until services are taken out from the town before acquiring land for housing purposes as, by the time this would happen, land prices would have significantly increased.

Cllr Reid questioned why it was proving difficult for the Council to obtain any land for housing purposes, yet the developers were able to source an adequate supply to meet their needs. He added that land was available but that the Council would have to pay the going-rate for it.

Cllr Bonnar agreed that it was imperative that the Council build up a suitable land bank for housing and stated that more land may become available with the lifting of the SACs.

Tommy Doherty advised Members that it was his understanding that the control points for the purchase of land were set within the speed limits of the town.

Members requested that Eamonn Canney should attend the next Meeting to clarify the position with regard to this.

Cllr Bonnar felt this matter should go to full Council Meeting, as countrywide practices have to be addressed through the full Council Meeting.

Gerry Gilroy advised that when an item is put on the G.P. Agenda the Service dealing with it provides a report on the issue.

Following further consideration and on the proposal of Cllr McGowan, seconded by Cllr Alice Bonnar, it was agreed that Eamonn Canney should attend the next Electoral Area Committee Meeting to address this issue.

40.03 Section 183 – Sale of 1 Sessiagh View

Members were requested to support the disposal of No 1 Sessiagh View, Ballybofey to Gordon and Brenda Lucas, in accordance with the terms set out in the Notice circulated.

On the proposal of Cllr Patrick McGowan, seconded by Cllr Alice Bonnar, Members expressed their support for this disposal and agreed the matter will be included on the agenda of the next full meeting of the Council.

40.04 Housing Capital Programme/Social Housing

Members noted reports circulated with the Agenda

40.05 Casual Vacancy Report

Members noted report circulated with the Agenda.

Cllr Bonnar raised a query regarding the Assessment of applicants for Housing and exactly what this entailed. She enquired whether the Housing Assessment Officer had interviewed all 350 applicants in the Stranorlar Electoral Area.

In reply, Patrick McLaughlin advised that the Housing Assessment Officer would have contacted the majority of the applicants either by way of interview or by telephone, and would compile up-to-date information with regard to their circumstances. He added that the report from the Housing Assessment Officer was almost completed.

40.06 Disabled Person's Grants – Progress Report

Members noted report circulated with Agenda.

Cllr J J Reid questioned why it was taking six months to assess some applications under this Scheme.

Patrick McLaughlin advised Members that some applications had a turnaround time of two months but that in more complicated cases, it could take six months to address problems with the applications. In addition, delays were experienced due to staffing problems with the Occupational Therapists.

Cllr Reid queried whether there was an alternative method of assessing the needs of an applicant apart from a Report from an Occupational Therapist.

Mr McLaughlin advised that the Occupational Therapist was the best qualified to assess an applicant's requirements but he added that the entire process was currently under review and all options were being examined. He added that 300 assessments had been carried out to-date and of these, 30% had been carried out within 2 months of receipt of application. The remaining 70% had taken longer to assess, due to the volume of applications and the fact that many were not straightforward applications.

Cllr McGowan expressed fears that the current system was open to abuse and suggested that the Council either train existing staff or hire in Occupational Therapists to do the assessments.

Mr McLaughlin advised that his Section were reviewing the process and all options were being considered including the out-sourcing of Occupational Therapists. He added that he was in the process of looking at practices being carried out in other counties with regard to the issue.

40.07 Office Accommodation

Members acknowledged that they had discussed this issue at length during the Budget Workshop that morning and requested to meet Mr Fitz Howard at the next meeting.

40.08 Any Other Business

Curragh Housing Estate

Cllr McGowan referred to two roads at Back Lane that the Council had agreed to tar and chip. Cllr McGowan requested that Housing also install lights at the location. Tommy Doherty advised that the Curragh is being improved under the Refurbishment Scheme which is out to Tender at present. He added that he would follow up this issue and report back at a later date.

Hillhead, Castlefin

Members referred to a green area at Hillhead and to residents concern that the Council might build further houses on it.

Patrick McLaughlin advised Members that a request had been received from the occupier of a house adjacent to acquire this area of land. Members were of the view that this should be retained as a green area and that people did not want to see houses built on it. Mr McLaughlin advised that the Council must explore what use could be made of it before considering the request for disposal and it was agreed a report would be available on this issue for the next meeting.

Townparks, Convoy

Cllr Patrick McGowan raised the issue of the poor condition of footpaths at Townparks, Convoy stating that the whole area needed investment. He requested that a draft programme for improvement of footpaths in all Housing Schemes in the Stranorlar area be available for consideration at the next Meeting.

Tenancy Courses

Patrick McLaughlin advised Members that all new tenants were required to complete a pre-tenancy course prior to occupying their houses.

At this course they are advised about setting up a Resident's Association and of their responsibility for the upkeep of common areas, including grass cutting, and the support available from the Council.

Cllr McGowan proposed the Council consider imposing a charge per house to assist this. Cllr Bonnar supported this option.

In reply, Patrick McLaughlin advised that a certain number of Tenants would not cooperate with this and it was felt that a local Resident's Association would stand a better chance of getting support and contributions.

Lights at Anne McDaid's House, Railway Road

Cllr Bonnar requested that this issue be put on the Housing Agenda for the next Electoral Area Meeting.

Lighting Issues at Devenney's House, Ard McCool

Members were informed that the ducting had been installed and that they were awaiting the ESB to complete the work.

Footpaths at Ard McCool

Cllr Reid raised the issue that a number of Tenants could not get their cars parked because the height of the footpaths was raised after recent re-surfacing at Ard McCool. Cllr Reid requested a Report on the issue for the next Electoral Area Meeting.

Curragh Estate

Cllr McGowan advised that the Curragh Estate would celebrate its 50th anniversary during 2007 and requested that the Council provide assistance to mark the occasion. Patrick McLaughlin advised that this Estate would benefit under the Refurbishment Scheme and that he would endeavour to provide assistance to help fund a suitable project.

Hilltop Crescent

Tommy Doherty advised Members that the keys for the vacant house at Hilltop Crescent had not yet been given back to the Council and that certain legal matters were ongoing in relation to this property.

SEC 41.00 COMMUNITY AND ENTERPRISE

41.01 Report on Community and Enterprise**Ballybofey and Stranorlar Integrated Community Company**

Barney McLaughlin advised Members that the group are currently working on IAP and consulting with other groups in the area to include their views within their IAP.

HEART Project

Mr McLaughlin advised that expressions of interest had been invited with regard to Shop Fronts under the HEART project. Under the project, successful applicants may receive support up to 40% to a maximum of €10,000 towards installing new shop fronts. Mr McLaughlin advised that no budget for the project had been decided and no formal application had been lodged so far. The closing date had been extended to the end of November for expressions of interest, he added.

Stranorlar Inter Agency Initiative

Members were advised of current progress.

Donegal Local Development Company Ltd

Mr McLaughlin advised Members that the CEO had proposed that a Staff Member from DLDC should regularly present a report on DLDC issues and would take any questions raised by Members.

Members agreed to this proposal.

Local Area Teams

Members were advised that the next meeting of Castlefin LAT would take place on 2nd November 2006 in the CPI centre.

41.02 Youth Council

Mr McLaughlin provided Members with a Report concerning the recent Youth Council Elections for the Stranorlar Electoral Area. Members were informed that six candidates stood in the Stranorlar Electoral Area contesting five seats. The total electorate was 978 with a turnout of 97% and the five elected councillors were: Aisling Bonner, Rachael Kelly, Andrew McDermott, Ciara Ward and Roisin Dunnion.

Mr McLaughlin advised that the Youth Councillors would be attending a future Electoral Area Committee Meeting.

Cllr McGowan requested and it was agreed that Mr McLaughlin send formal congratulations to the Youth Councillors on behalf of the Members of the Stranorlar Electoral Area.

41.03 Cultural Services

Mr McLaughlin advised that the written Cultural Services Report was not to-hand for the Meeting. He informed Members that Ms Maura Logue had been appointed as Community Arts and Education Officer.

Cllr McGowan queried what Public Art projects would start in the Stranorlar Electoral Area, adding that almost all the projects appeared to be concentrated in the Letterkenny Electoral Area in the past.

In reply, Mr McLaughlin advised that he would compile a list of projects and their start times and arrange a Meeting on a Workshop Basis to update Members.

41.04 Members Development Fund

Members noted Report circulated with the Agenda.

41.05 Donegal County Childcare Report

Members noted Report circulated with the Agenda.

SEC 42.00 WATER, ENVIRONMENT AND EMERGENCY SERVICES

42.01 Update on matters from previous Meeting

Civic Amenity Site

Mr Shane Sweeney advised Members that the Report from Michael Breslin regarding the situation with the Bring Banks was not yet to-hand. This matter to be considered at the next meeting.

Meenalaught Group Water Scheme

Members were advised that this Scheme went to Tender two weeks ago.

Gleneely Corradooey Group Water Scheme

Members were advised that new pumps had been installed and that work was ongoing upgrading the lines. The Council's work would be completed by the end of November 2006 after which the ESB would be involved.

Odour from Convoy Sewerage Scheme

Mr Sweeney advised Members that the Council was dealing with this issue through the Contractor concerned. The problem had arisen because the private Treatment Plant had not been working properly but this had been addressed in the past two weeks. Mr Sweeney added that as it can take up to four weeks for the measures to take effect, the matter would be reviewed in two weeks time.

41.02 Ballybofey/Stranorlar Sewer Network Proposed Back Lane/Chestnut Drive Upgrade

Mr Sweeney advised that this proposed upgrade was going out to Tender in January and work would commence in approximately three months.

Drumboe

Cllr Alice Bonnar raised a query in relation to the capacity of the network at Drumboe and whether funding was available for improvements.

Mr Sweeney advised that a Report would be available for the next Electoral Area Meeting.

Cllr Bonnar requested that consideration should be given to upgrading this line as soon as possible but agreed that an overflow valve be put in place as an interim measure.

Mr Hegarty advised that some temporary repairs could be undertaken, but that the most beneficial option would be to take out the storm flow.

41.03 Report on Ballybofey/Stranorlar Network Studies

Mr John Hegarty, Executive Engineer, Capital Works, presented a report on the Ballybofey/Stranorlar network studies that were carried out recently. Mr Hegarty advised that these studies were carried out under three stages: Manhole survey, CCTV Survey and Hydraulic Modelling using information gathered from the first two stages. This enables a model to be produced on computer to test various scenarios and ensures that the best options can be used in any future developments or upgrades.

Mr Hegarty pointed out that owing to the increase in new developments in the Twin Towns in recent years, and storm water entering the sewer network, the network became overloaded at times. He made particular reference to the pipeline from the Glenfin Road when silt gathers in the pipes and blocks up the sewers. As a result of these blockages, sewage was backing up and coming up through manholes at a number of locations, including Main Street, Ballybofey. Members were advised that a number of developers were working in conjunction with the Council to reroute the flow of sewerage away from pressure points.

Mr Hegarty advised that the Council were required to bundle the Twin Towns/Castlefin and Lifford sewerage schemes into one project. This meant that the successful Contractor would build all three schemes starting with the Twin Towns. This scheme would cost in the region of €4.1 million whilst the other two projects would cost about €1.5 million each. The works would involve a secondary treatment plant in Stranorlar as well as the installation of larger sewer pipes.

Members were advised that the Briefs for the Schemes were nearing completion and would be submitted to the Department during December 2006.

Mr Hegarty also advised that the bundling of the three schemes would not result in delay for any of the schemes.

Cllr Bonnar expressed concern that if the capacity was not increased soon, developments could be held up or even stopped as a result.

Members thanked Mr Hegarty for the presentation.

41.04 Other Matters Arising Killygordon Sewerage Scheme

Following a query from Cllr McGowan regarding the above scheme, John Hegarty advised that there was a possibility of a scheme being put in place through a developer but it was in the early stages.

Water Leak at Meetinghouse Street, Stranorlar

Cllr J J Reid queried why a leak at the above location had not been repaired, even though the Council was aware of its existence for the past four years.

In reply, Mr Sweeney advised that he had no knowledge of this and he would follow up and report back at a future Meeting.

SEC 42.00 ROADS AND TRANSPORTATION

42.01 Update on Lifford/Stranorlar Road

Peadar Thomas circulated a Report to Members informing that the Route Selection Report for this road had been sent to the NRA for approval. The project had been suspended in 2002, but the Council now propose to bring the scheme to preliminary design and land acquisition stage by 2007.

Mr Thomas advised that a new public consultation would be held before the end of the year due to the time- lapse between the previous public consultation and the adoption of the route selection report.

42.02 Ballybofey/Stranorlar Bypass

Mr Thomas advised Members that he had no new updates on this issue.

42.03 Castlefin Bridge – Preliminary Options Report

A Report on the preliminary options for Castlefin Bridge was presented by Mr Tommy Stephenson, representing WDR and RT TAGGART. Cliodhna Campbell and Mark Kerr from NRDO were also in attendance.

Mr Stephenson advised that a structural assessment and condition report was carried out on Castlefin Bridge in 2003 and a strengthening/replacement option report was carried out this year.

From these assessments, it was concluded that 2 of the stone arches could only carry a maximum load of 3 tonnes. It was acknowledged that lorries weighing 40 tonne passed over the bridge every day. The remaining 3 river arches could only carry a maximum load of ten tonne whilst the embankment arches on either side of the bridge are capable of carrying 40 tonne.

Mr Stephenson advised Members that the Report set out 10 different options, ranging from pointing of the arches, which would increase the carrying capacity to 7.5 tonne, at a cost of approximately €5000 to replacing the bridge at an approximate cost of €2.4 million. He added that each option had its pros and cons and the Members would

have to take matters such as funding, etc into account before recommending acceptance of any option.

Cllr McGowan stated that he felt not all issues relating to public safety had been addressed in this Report. He queried whether the Consultants had surveyed the bridge during a flood, as the river rises quickly and flood water can come up to the top of the bridge wall. He added that public safety would be compromised if a blockage of a number of arches occurred during severe flooding.

Cllr McGowan pointed out that this bridge was situated on a Regional Road and had important economic benefits for the County. It was a strategic tourism road and was used by Coillte for the movement of timber into Northern Ireland.

Cllr Alice Bonnar expressed concern that 40 tonne vehicles were passing over the bridge when the structure was only capable of carrying 3 tonnes in places. She stated that the Report was a wake-up call to the Councillors and that the sensible option would be to replace the bridge.

Cllr Reid questioned the cost estimate of the new bridge and stated that based on the cost of Dreenan Bridge, he considered the cost would be nearer €6 million rather than the €2.4 million mentioned in the Report.

Members were in agreement that the issue was a countywide one and that funding should not be a matter for the Stranorlar Electoral Area alone.

On the proposal of Cllr McGowan, seconded by Cllr Bonnar, Members agreed to request that the issue be considered as part of the Budget 2007.

42.04 LIS Allocation List

Members noted Report circulated with Agenda.

Cllr Reid queried if there was a separate application form for LIS schemes for the Stranorlar Electoral Area as he had been advised that applications were being returned when made on the standard application form. Cllr Reid also advised that Area Aid Maps were being requested with applications when other Electoral Areas were not requesting such maps.

Mr Thomas advised that LIS applications were subject to standard rules and conditions. A standard application form was required and a map had to be included with the application.

Mr Thomas advised that he would look into the matters raised and report back to Members at a later date.

With regard to a further query from Cllr Reid regarding the eligibility of a road connecting two county roads to be considered for LIS, Mr Thomas advised he would follow up the matter and report back to Members.

42.05 Development Contributions 2006

Members noted Report circulated with Agenda.

Cllr Bonnar questioned the removal of an allocation of €20,000 agreed for Donegal Road Drainage from an earlier list and requested that this item be put back on the list. This was agreed. Mr Thomas advised that nothing had been taken off the agreed list.

42.06 Roadworks Programme

Members noted Report circulated with Agenda.

Cllr McGowan queried whether all the funds allocated would be spent this year.

Mr Thomas advised that the Programme was 80% complete and it was envisaged that all funding secured would be spent by the end of the year. He added that the crews were putting in extra hours, including working on Saturdays, to ensure that work is completed on time.

Members agreed that the road crews should be congratulated for their efforts and stated that their work was very much appreciated.

Mr Thomas advised that an extra € million had been secured this year that had to be spent before the end of the year and added that he would pass on the Members' comments to the crews regarding their work.

42.07 Other Matters Arising

Cross-Junction

Cllr McGowan queried whether funding was available for extra signage at this location, stating that there was no clarity on the right of way through the junction. Claire McGeever advised that it might be possible to paint signage on the road as an interim measure until funding is found for extra signage.

Footpath at New School, Drumboe

Following a query from Cllr Bonnar regarding the provision of a footpath at Drumboe, Mr Thomas informed Members that funding for this development was included in the Budget for 2007. Mr Thomas also stated that the Council should seek a contribution from Developers in the area towards the cost of the project.

Cllr Bonnar stated that the granting of Planning Permission for the new school had been delayed because of the lack of a footpath at this location so it was imperative that it should be constructed as a matter of urgency.

SEC 43.00 PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
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Mr Paul Christy advised Members that no permanent replacement had been put in place for Denis Kelly to-date.

43.01 Consideration of recent refusals

Members noted Report circulated with Agenda.

43.02 Planning Statistics

Members noted Report circulated with Agenda.

43.03 Planning Enforcement

Members noted Report circulated with Agenda.

Cllr McGowan raised the issue of the lack of enforcement, with particular emphasis on the Convoy Area, where Developers failed to complete work on footpaths, lights etc. Cllr McGowan acknowledged that staff shortages are impacting on enforcement but stated that if this matter were not addressed then Developers would not complete any of this work in a few years time.

Cllr McGowan requested a Report regarding footpaths, lights etc for Developments in the Convoy area for the next Electoral Meeting.

SEC 44.00 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

44.01 The next scheduled Meeting of the Stranorlar Electoral Area Committee will take place on Tuesday 28th November 2006 at 2.00 pm in the Regional Training Centre, Stranorlar.