

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS AT ONLINE SPECIAL MEETING OF LIMERICK CITY AND COUNTY COUNCIL HELD ON FRIDAY, 5TH FEBRUARY, 2021, AT 3PM.

PRESENT IN THE CHAIR:

Councillor M. Collins, Mayor.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillors Benson, Butler, Carey, Collins (B), Collins (J), Costeloe, Daly, Donegan, Foley, Galvin, Hartigan, Keary, Kiely, Kilcoyne, Leddin, McSweeney, Mitchell, Murphy, Novak Uí Chonchúir, O'Brien, O'Dea, O'Donovan, O'Hanlon, O'Sullivan, Ruddle, Ryan (E), Ryan (M), Scanlan, Secas, Sheahan (J), Sheahan (K), Sheahan (M), Sheehan (C), Slattery, Talukder, Teefy, Teskey.

OFFICIALS IN ATTENDANCE:

Chief Executive (Mr. P. Daly), Deputy Chief Executive and Director, Support Services (Mr. S. Coughlan), Director, Housing Development (Ms. A. Duke), A/Director, Capital Investment (Mr. S. Hanrahan), Director, Service Operations (Mr. K. Lehane), A/Director, Economic Development (Mr. V. Murray), A/Director, Physical Development (Mr. D. McGuigan), Meetings Administrator (Mr. J. Clune), Administrative Officer, Corporate Services and Governance (Mr. M. Leahy), A/Administrative Officer, Corporate Services and Governance (Mr. P. Williams), A/Senior Executive Officer, Design and Delivery (Mr. S. McGlynn), Senior Executive Engineer, Design and Delivery (Mr. K. O'Gorman), A/Senior Executive Engineer, Design and Delivery (Mr. D. Slavin).

The Mayor commenced the Meeting by welcoming the Members and members of the public and press who were present online for the Meeting. He stated that the Special Meeting had been convened to discuss the issue as set out in the Requisition received on 25th January, 2021, and signed by a number of Members as follows:

“We, the undersigned Members wish to submit an Emergency Motion calling on the Minister for Transport, Mr. Eamon Ryan, T.D., to meet with the Members as a matter of urgency to discuss the Coonagh Knockalisheen Road.

We therefore request a Special Meeting to discuss this Motion.”

Signed: Councillors S. Benson, J. Costeloe, E. Secas, C. Sheehan, J. Leddin.

The Mayor then gave his full support to the commencement and completion of the Coonagh to Knockalisheen Road in full. He said the road was arguably the single biggest and most important project of Limerick Regeneration, and that the people of Moyross were fully supportive of the construction of this road as they saw its importance to all residents in the area, and that Limerick Chamber was behind the road, as was Limerick Institute of Technology. He said the Government had announced funding for the delivery of its *Programme for Government*, which mentioned the Coonagh to Knockalisheen Road, and that a third of the project budget had already been spent on a number of enabling works with

contractors now waiting at the starting line to begin the road proper. He pointed out that the project was so well advanced that aerial photographs of the site showed exactly where the road would be and that the entire route would have footpaths and segregated cycleways, as well as creating a whole new amenity.

He also made it clear that supporting the construction of the road did not mean pitting alternative forms of transport against each other and that each one had a part to play in the development of Limerick. He said rail transport needed critical mass, cycleways, and that walkways needed to be safe and accessible and that road, rail, bicycle and on-foot infrastructure was vital to have a thriving, vibrant, healthy and attractive Limerick - it was just that the road infrastructure element was further advanced than the others at present for this particular project.

The Mayor concluded by saying that the Coonagh to Knockalisheen Road was not just a road, it was a serious statement of intent - to the people of Moyross, to the communities on the northside of Limerick, to those hoping to buy a home, to those looking for a job, and to those wishing to invest. This road was about people, it was about their futures, their opportunities for employment and education, as well as connection. The Coonagh to Knockalisheen Road was going to deliver a major aspect of Limerick Regeneration and, in doing so, help in the rejuvenation of the entire Region. He called on Minister Ryan to immediately sign the Commencement Order to allow the road – in full – to proceed.

The Chief Executive then addressed the Meeting and made the Members aware that the Executive had met with Minister Ryan during the week and would be meeting with Minister Ryan again in the coming days on the Coonagh Knockalisheen issue. He said the matter was not about whether there was a road or a light rail solution for the North of Limerick City, but that it was about delivering on a project contained in the National Development Plan - the Coonagh to Knockalisheen Road. He said it was possible to both complete the road as per the planning permission and also, later, add light-rail and improve public transport in the northside of the city. The Chief Executive gave his and the Executive's full support on the issue of having the Coonagh to Knockalisheen Road commence and be completed.

There was unanimous support from the Members for the Motion put forward to the Special Meeting. The Members then spoke in turn and the following points were made by them in the ensuing discussion:

- The Council was in near total support for the construction of the Coonagh to Knockalisheen Road, in its entirety.
- The community that the construction most affected was in support of building this road.
- Civic Leaders, including the Limerick Chamber, were in support of the completion of this project.
- Limerick Institute of Technology was in support of the road being completed.

- The project was not a new project; it was listed in the sign-off in the National Development Plan 2018-2027 and the Programme for Government. €17 million had already been spent on the project.
- The Coonagh to Knockalisheen Road was about putting in place the infrastructure for proper economic development on the northside of Limerick. The project, when delivered as planned, would attract investment into the area and, by extension, employment.
- Regeneration plans envisaged the construction of the Northern Distributor Road and it was a crucial project in terms of removing the physical isolation and exclusion that Moyross/North Limerick City had faced. The reason the road was initiated in the first instance was to fulfill the Regeneration Plan for Moyross. The Fitzgerald Report in 2007 stated: *“Experience with other regeneration projects has shown that a key element in developing economic activity, and ending the isolation of deprived areas, is through putting in place a sound roads and transport infrastructure.”*
- The road needed to commence and be completed to deliver the promised connectivity for all of the northside, and many people across numerous neighbourhoods had participated in years of public consultation about the road.
- Moyross was a large cul-de-sac, and the Coonagh to Knockalisheen Road would improve access in and out of Moyross and open it up to the wider area.
- The proposal to partially construct the Coonagh to Knockalisheen Road was rejected by An Bord Pleanála at the planning stage.
- Regeneration was based on three pillars: Physical Development; Social Development; Economic Development. Progress had been made in terms of the social and physical aspect, but the economic side was yet to be achieved. The Coonagh to Knockalisheen Road (in its entirety) would be the foundation for economic enhancement.
- Offering half the road, or two-thirds, was not acceptable. Offering rail as ‘either/or’ was also not acceptable. The northside of Limerick needed and deserved both the Northern Distributor Road and enhanced public transport/a light rail system.
- There were issues with the proposed shortened road scheme and there were factors which needed to be considered to complete the full project as per the National Development Plan:
 - It would bring extra traffic through the centre of Moyross as this would then be the main link between Longpavement and Coonagh. Progressing the overall road scheme and upgrading the Knockalisheen Road would avoid this and allow for significant traffic calming within Moyross;

- There were significant HGV movements on the Knockalisheen Road and the Longpavement Road coming from quarries in Clare and some of these could divert through Moyross if the road scheme were not built in full;
- The overall Scheme included for approx. 5km of new Cycle and Walking paths along its full length providing not just a sustainable cycling/walking route, but also a very important recreational walking/jogging/cycling route for people trying to get fit and stay fit. Linking this to Condell Road provided an overall connected length of approx. 10km of Recreational paths on the northside;
- The overall road scheme provided footpath and cyclepath linkages to the Direct Provision Centre in Knockalisheen allowing residents to access schools, LIT and Tesco at Coonagh Cross;
- The section of the existing Knockalisheen Road just after Castlepark out to the Clare boundary was low lying, poorly constructed and liable to flooding in Winter and would be raised and upgraded as part of the road scheme, removing a dangerous section of road;
- The upgrade of Knockalisheen Road from Watchhouse Cross out to Castlepark would provide a new upgraded road and entrance at the main existing Moyross entrance and Watchhouse Cross junction, allowing for significant safety, environmental, public realm and landscaping improvements, improving the overall impression and look of the area on entering Moyross. This would also provide decent footpaths and cyclepaths in front of the houses along Knockalisheen Road and upgrade the non-existent footpaths and cyclepaths going over the rail bridge, improving safety for children, cyclists and walkers using this section of the road to access schools and work.
- The land between Coonagh and Cratloe Road was liable to flooding and not generally suitable to developing industry/offices. The better development land was located between Cratloe Road and Knockalisheen Road and therefore building this part of the road would allow for greater overall economic benefit to the area in terms of developing a future Business Park on the northside of the city, creating much-needed jobs and employment;
- To obtain the widest economic benefit from the road scheme, the entire road - as given planning permission by An Bord Pleanála - needed to be constructed. The cost benefit of the road was calculated at planning stage. The economic cost to benefit rate of return for the overall scheme was in excess of three if the scheme were built in its entirety, meaning that for every €1 spent in construction, the economy would benefit by more than €3 in relation to the wider environmental, economic and social benefits.
- Rail investment was envisaged by Planners when designing the road as the plans contained a provision to widen two bridges to facilitate twin-track development within the road scheme.

- It was questioned that should the proposed alternative road project commence, would the development still be in accordance with the permission granted and, if not, if it was an unauthorised development, could it be injunctioned. By extension, it was asked if the project needed to restart with a fresh application – after 14 years of consultation.
- Journey time from the Plassey Technology and Business Park to Shannon Airport could be halved by the full completion of the Northern Distributor Road.

The Green Party Members made the following points:

- The people of Moyross needed a road and needed connectivity to Coonagh and the city and much more.
- Residents of Moyross and neighbouring communities also needed proper connectivity with each other and direct, safe access to the existing LIT campus, shops, schools, sports clubs and other facilities.
- The high number of people in Moyross who were travelling by sustainable modes such as public transport, walking and cycling needed to be facilitated. They needed quick and direct access to the city and the facilities that existed on the other side of the city.
- Limerick's expansion into the suburbs and adjacent counties over the last 50 years had hollowed out the city and if the expansion continued, it would make the situation worse. The city needed to be developed if Limerick wanted a vibrant city centre. Limerick was planned to grow to 200,000 people. Excellent public transport, walking and cycling routes into the city were required in order to create vibrant and liveable communities.
- Finally, they did not believe the *Programme for Government* precluded some rethinking of the current plan but would welcome an opportunity for the Council to meet the Minister to discuss the road and would support the Motion calling for a meeting with the Minister.

In response to the comments about Regeneration efforts in Moyross, the Director of Housing Development commended the communities in Regeneration areas and pointed out that the Council was in Year 7 of a 10-Year Regeneration Plan, that the Council had delivered on many physical infrastructure and community centre projects and that there was much more to do. She also pointed out the Council had received very positive feedback from the communities in Regeneration areas about Regeneration initiatives that had been completed.

An amendment to the original Motion was proposed by Councillor O' Hanlon, and seconded by Councillor J. Sheahan. The amended Motion read as follows:

"That, (a) Limerick City and County Council call on the Minister for Transport, Mr. Eamon Ryan, TD, to meet with this Council as a matter of urgency to discuss the Coonagh Knockalisheen Road; (b) this Council call on the Transport Minister to sign the necessary documentation to allow for the completion of the Coonagh Knockailsheen Road, as already agreed, and which is included in the Programme for Government, without any further delay or any changes or modifications."

An amendment to the amended Motion was then proposed by Councillor Leddin, and seconded by Councillor C. Sheehan. The amended Motion read as follows:

"That, (a) Limerick City and County Council call on the Minister for Transport, Mr. Eamon Ryan, TD, to meet with this Council as a matter of urgency to discuss the Coonagh Knockalisheen Road; (b) this Council call on the Transport Minister to sign the necessary documentation to allow for the completion of the Coonagh Knockailsheen Road, as already agreed, and which is included in the Programme for Government, without any further delay or any changes or modifications; and (c) Limerick City and County Council request a meeting with An Taoiseach to seek his support and commitment for the delivery of the Northern Distributor Road as originally approved by Statutory Agencies."

It was then asked if all parties agreed with the proposed Amendment. The Green Party Members stated that while they agreed to the initial Motion to meet Minister Ryan to discuss the matter, they could not support the second part of the Motion to give Direction to the Minister for Transport.

A vote was then taken on the amended Motion as proposed by Councillor Leddin and seconded by Councillor C. Sheehan. The result of the voting was as follows:

For:

Councillors Benson, Butler, Carey, Collins (B), Collins (J), Collins (M), Costelloe, Daly, Donegan, Foley, Galvin, Keary, Kiely, Kilcoyne, Leddin, McSweeney, Mitchell, Murphy, O'Dea, O'Donovan, O'Hanlon, O'Sullivan, Ruddle, Ryan (E), Scanlan, Secas, Sheahan (J), Sheahan (K), Sheahan (M), Sheehan (C), Slattery, Talukder, Teefy. (33)

Against:

None

Abstentions:

Councillors Hartigan and Novak. (2)

The Mayor declared the Amended Motion proposed by Councillor Leddin and seconded by Councillor C. Sheehan as carried and it was agreed that the resolution would be adopted by the same voting.

This concluded the Meeting.

Signed: _____
Mayor

Date: _____