

Cllr. Aengus O'Rourke

Newsletter

"Not just at Election Time"



Issue 1 Summer 2010

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Met Éireann Long Range Summer Forecast

MAY: Very wet to start and unsettled with cool conditions. Conditions will improve second half of month.

JUNE: Dry at first, some rain mid-month with dry and warm weather to end. A reasonably dry month overall.

JULY: Warm weather for first 10 days then warm but thundery.

AUGUST: Rain mixed with dry spells, but a reasonably sunny month, certainly a lot better than last year!

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Hello and welcome to my first Newsletter,

As a newly elected member of Athlone Town Council I am honoured to serve the people of Athlone. From Athlone, I worked overseas and in Dublin for a number of years before returning to Athlone in 2005 to establish my own business, Snap Printing on Pearse Street. Married to Lisa we have 4 young children, our youngest, Scott, was born in January.

For many years I have seen at close quarters the tremendous work that can be done for and with people through political life. I believe that my broad life experience gives me a useful perspective on the many challenges that face us as parents and in society in general. I am also acutely aware 'first-hand', how difficult it is to run a business in these very difficult times.

I am pleased to issue this newsletter, the intention of which is to keep you up-to-date with local Council matters, upcoming events and my Council work. I hope that you find it informative and useful. If you have any suggestions or require more information on any of the topics inside please contact me, all my contact details are above.

As citizens of Athlone we all have a role to play in making our town a great place to live, now and into the future, for ourselves and for our children. In order to make the most of our town I think it is important that we all have as much information as possible on local Council matters, upcoming events, future proposals, on-going projects etc. So, I hope this newsletter helps in this regard.

I would also appreciate if you would keep me up-to-date with any local events, meetings, initiatives that may be happening in your area and I will do what ever I can to support your activities and efforts.

Finally, feedback is very important, so if you have any ideas, suggestions or concerns that you would like to raise with me, please contact me - I would be delighted to hear from you.

Best wishes

Until my next newsletter you can keep up-to-date by logging onto my new website www.aengusorourke.ie



2010 - A Big Year for Athlone

Athlone is the envy of every town and city in Ireland this year. 2010 will see Athlone welcome thousands of visitors during the coming months to a variety of festivals, conferences and sporting events. At a time when businesses are struggling to survive, this sizable influx of visitors is a welcome boost to the local hospitality sector and to the wider economy. And at the same time, this year represents a huge opportunity for Athlone, after all, our town is on show to thousands of visitors. If they go home happy and spread the good news about Athlone, we could benefit from repeat visits, conferences, sporting events and who knows what else!

So, this really is a big test for us all; the Council, businesses and the citizens of Athlone. I am pushing the Council to make sure that the town is properly prepared and looking well for our 2010 events. Its simple, you only get one opportunity to make a good first impression, so this town needs to be gleaming and looking its very best. Businesses must play their part too by offering good value and giving good service while resisting the temptation to hike prices when our visitors are here. Finally, we all need to come out with our friends, neighbours and family to welcome our European visitors, cheer on the athletes, sample the festivities and in general support all that's going on in Athlone this year. And, if we are to believe the long-term weather forecasters, the good news is we are in for a decent summer!

A flavour of whats on in 2010:



RTÉ All Ireland Drama Festival

The RTÉ All Ireland Drama Festival is Athlone's biggest annual theatrical event with hundreds of people from all over Ireland visiting Athlone. Held at the Dean Crowe Theatre from 30th April to 8th May, the event sees Ireland's top nine amateur drama groups compete for the coveted Festival Trophy. The festival comes at the end of a grueling circuit in which over thirty drama groups from all over Ireland compete at 35 local festivals held nationwide from February to April. The top nine groups qualify for the finals in Athlone and will battle it out for the premier award and for the honour of being declared All Ireland Champions.

starts
30th
April

Euro Festival Athlone 2010

The European Peoples Festival will be hosted by Athlone Town Council from July 24th to 31st. The Festival promises to bring a unique flavour of the diverse and distinctive culture and language of our European colleagues to our home town. Almost 900 participants from 15 European countries will be our guests for the week as they compete in sport, art, photography and street theatre events. There will also be a range of performances and demonstrations by each of the visiting countries. For example in the euro-village area there will be cultural performances, cooking demonstrations, music and dance. Promotional material will also be available from each of the participating countries.

starts
24th
July

Waterways Ireland triAthlone



starts
1st
July

Waterways Ireland triAthlone, incorporating the ITU European Triathlon Championships will take place from Thursday 1st - Sunday 4th July 2010. Athlone is hosting the 2010 European triathlon championships as part of triAthlone this year. The European championships will take place on the Saturday and Sunday. This is the biggest sporting event ever to take place in Athlone and will see over 5000 athletes from around Ireland and Europe compete in over 12 different triathlon events. Interestingly, with 25 people allowed per age group per sex for the host country, if Ireland filled all our slots we could have an Irish team of over 600 athletes across all events.

HSE Community Games - AIT Athlone

1st Weekend Friday 28th May 2010.

2nd Weekend Friday 13th Aug 2010.

3rd Weekend Friday 20th Aug 2010.



For decades the Community Games Finals were held at Mosney but decided to find a new location for their

28th
May

13th
Aug

20th
Aug

2009 finals. Given Athlone's fine sporting infrastructure, central location and accommodation base, the games moved to Athlone in 2009. The Community Games is an independent voluntary organisation providing opportunities for children and young people to grow and develop in a positive and healthy way through sporting and cultural activities. The games are a fantastic win for Athlone bringing significant revenue to the town each year. These games are however only committed to Athlone for 2 more years. I will be working hard with the games organisers, the AIT and the Council to make sure that the games make Athlone their long-term home.

Since Joining the Council

The most frustrating thing for me since joining the Council has been the financial restrictions on the Council, due to the economic climate. We simply can not do all that we want to do. However, this does not mean we can not make progress, of course we can. Outlined below are some of the areas of progress that I am happy to present to you as definitely going ahead this year:

Some of Athlone's Development/Improvement Projects 2010:

- **Major Regeneration of Athlone Castle** to include an interpretive centre, café, viewing room, displays of historical memorabilia and an interactive presentation. This work will be complete in December 2010 with work commencing this summer.
- **Extension to Athlone Regional Sports Centre.** The Gym area will be substantially extended enabling the centre to provide a range of new services and equipment to their facilities.
- **Upgrading of Westside (Leftbank area)** roads and paths which includes a very attractive road and pathway finish along with new street furnishings and planting. Phase 1 is almost complete with further phases due to commence later this year.
- **The Army Memorial** is now firmly in place and was unveiled in April. This memorial will stand in memory to the Defence Force Personnel of the 4th Western Brigade who died in the service of peace.
- **Development of a new Art Gallery,** work is due to commence this year. This development will add yet another key infrastructural asset to the town and will attract many visitors to Athlone.

- **Complete Refurbishment of the Athlone by-pass.** For safety reasons I have been very concerned about this very poor stretch of road. At our November '09 Council meeting I made a strong case for it to be overhauled. In Jan '09 €7 million was allocated and that work will commence this year.

- **Baylough area** will see a programme of works commencing later this year to improve the road surface, road markings, footpath, signage and traffic calming. I am also working on a plan with the Council to change the Roscommon Road junction to a more user friendly, practical and safer junction.

- **Retreat Area Traffic Management Plan.** With three very busy schools so close together in the Retreat area, a proper traffic management plan is urgently required. Such a plan would deal with the safety of pedestrians/students and indeed all road users particularly around the busy school opening and closing times. I am working with the Council and local Gardai to devise a plan that will deal with all aspects of this problem.

A number of measures that I am particularly interested in including in the plan: designated student crossing points, early warning signs either side of the Retreat area, improved road markings, clarity on bus pick-up and drop areas and general signage. With so much traffic, vehicular and human, converging in the one space with no pedestrian or traffic plan in place is a serious health and safety issue. A traffic free-for-all during school opening & closing times can no longer continue.

With Brian Lenihan T.D. Minister for Finance at a recent visit to Hodson Bay.



It was a great honour to be a judge at this years Westmeath Rose. The winner, Cathy Brougham, from Garnefailaigh, will now battle it out at the Regional Finals in June for a place at the Rose of Tralee Festival in August. Best of luck to Cathy over the coming months.

It has been a very busy time since joining the council. I believe I have made a positive contribution and will continue to work hard for Athlone. Here are just some of the projects I have been involved in:

Athlone Canal Clean-up

I am currently working on a plan to have our canal cleaned up and looking as it should. It is an expensive exercise and one that the Council could not afford to do on its own. So, I approached Waterways Ireland and persuaded them to clean up the canal with the help of Athlone Town Council. Weather and water levels permitting the work should be underway this year.



Athlone Green Route - Cycle Friendly

In October 2009 I called on the Council to do a full assessment of Athlone with a view to developing a 'Cycle Friendly' plan for Athlone. I am pleased to say that this plan will be undertaken this year. Once completed, I will push to have the plan implemented as soon as possible. I believe that we should do all we can to get people out of their cars and use alternative transport, our town is too congested with vehicles. So, the more people that take the option to travel by bike the better. This is where the cycle friendly plan comes in, with proper road markings, signage, bike parking facilities, shelters etc. in place, people will be more inclined to cycle.



Improvements to Roads in Baylough

At Council Meetings I have been pushing hard for long overdue improvements to the 2km stretch of road from Talbot Avenue to the new motorway roundabout beyond Baylough. I have called on Westmeath County Council (this road is their responsibility) to give this piece of road infrastructure a complete overhaul to include the following: improved road surface, traffic calming measures and pedestrian crossing where required, significant improvements to footpaths, signage and a review of all junctions to include either a roundabout and/or a traffic light arrangement at the top of the Roscommon road. I am assured that despite financial restrictions, some of this work will happen this year and I will be pushing hard for this to happen.

Athlone Flood Relief Centre



Nov 2009 at Athlone Flood Relief Centre. Making a case to An Taoiseach for immediate government action to be taken in relation to flooding. Part funding was allocated in March.

The devastating recent floods left a lot of people who were trying to help those affected feeling utterly helpless, and I was one of those. While doing what I could at the time by delivering sandbags and helping where I could, I still felt desperately helpless because we were beaten by the water every day. So, together with a group of like minded business people I helped to establish the Athlone Flood Relief Centre. The centre was an incredible success with people from all over this island donating everything from wellies to tellies. Thousands of bags of clothes were donated, furniture, bed linen, fuel, skips, food, water and a lot more. We also accepted donations of money and our initial 'ball park' target figure was €50,000. However, we severely underestimated the generosity and goodwill of the Irish people. The fund has raised close to €4 million. On behalf of the Flood Relief Centre I would like to thank all of those who made a difference by donating either money or goods. Finally, without the many volunteers who worked around the clock in the centre, the relief effort could not have made the impact it did, well done and thanks to all the volunteers.

Athlone Peoples Park

For a town and population base of its size, Athlone desperately needs a 'Peoples Park'. One of the first matters I raised at the Council was the need for such a facility. The Athlone Peoples Park would be an area of no less than 15 acres of open green space where families with young children could go and relax, play, picnic and feel safe. The park would be locked in the evening and opened again at dawn. The Council have agreed to undertake a review of all of our open spaces with a view to examining the possibility of developing a suitable park. I will ensure that the development of a Peoples Park remains high on the Councils agenda.

These are just some of the projects I have been involved in, if you would like further information on any of the items above or if you have any issues you would like to raise with me, please feel free to contact me.