

**Minutes of the Special Meeting of Clare County Council held in the  
Council Chamber, Áras Contae an Chláir, New Road, Ennis, Co. Clare on  
Monday, 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2019 at 3:00 p.m.**

**Present:**

Councillors J. Flynn, C. Collieran Molloy, P. Murphy, A. Norton, P. Daly, J. Cooney, P. Hayes, P. Burke, A. O’Callaghan, T. O’Brien, C. Crowe, J. Crowe, M. Begley, P.J. Ryan, P. McMahon, G. Flynn, S. Talty, J. Killeen, J. Garrihy, R. Garvey, P.J. Kelly, B. Chambers, G. Keating, C. Murphy, I. Lynch.

- Mr. Pat Dowling, Chief Executive.
- Ms. Ann Reynolds, Meetings Administrator.
- Ms. Margaret O’Rourke, Assistant Staff Officer.
- Ms. Anne Haugh, Director of Social Development.
- Mr. Liam Conneally, Director of Economic Development.
- Mr. John Leahy, Senior Engineer, Physical Development.

**Apologies:** Cllr. M. McKee.

The Cathaoirleach, Cllr. C. Crowe presided and he outlined that this special meeting had been convened specifically to discuss matters in relation to Shannon Airport. He welcomed Mary Considine, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Shannon Group and Caroline Kelleher, Director of Public Affairs, Shannon Group. He then invited Ms. Considine to address the meeting.

Mary Considine addressed the meeting and stated that she would provide an overview of what the Shannon Group are trying to achieve and outline the challenges facing Shannon Group. She stated that Shannon Group was set up in late 2014 and its main focus is to promote and optimise return on land and property, air connectivity, develop tourism products to draw numbers into the region and growth and development of international aviation. She stated that over 650 staff are employed in the seasonal business run by Shannon Heritage and Shannon Airport, and that nearly 1million visitors have visited the eight Shannon Heritage attractions to date in 2019. She informed the meeting that the International Aviation Services Centre (IASC) are working to promote aviation in Shannon. Ms. Considine stated that 30 routes operate from Shannon Airport servicing the UK, transatlantic and Europe and that Shannon Airport catered for 1.86m passengers in 2018 but unfortunately after six years of growth numbers will be down this year due to the Max Jet grounding.

Ms. Considine informed the members that Shannon Group are working on hiring talent into sales and marketing to work on promoting Shannon Airport and outlined details of the customer research programme undertaken to promote the brand internationally. She also noted that last week marked the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first passenger air craft landing at Shannon Airport. Ms. Considine referred to the Annual Aviation Awards 2019 held recently and noted that Shannon Duty Free received the Best Retail Award and that IASC - the largest aviation cluster in Ireland, with over 80 companies based in the Shannon Free Zone received

their award for Aviation Support Services Award and noted that these are international awards that will help promote Shannon Group and attract new business.

Ms. Considine stated that Shannon Group are very focused on increased occupancy ratings in their commercial properties. Referring to Shannon Heritage visitor attractions, Ms. Considine stated that they are ambitious to grow visitor numbers and to improve the product they have by advertising new initiatives and appointing an Education Officer. It was noted that Shannon Group work in partnership with Fáilte Ireland who have been very supportive in promoting tourist products.

Ms. Considine stated that Shannon Airport has had growing passenger numbers for the past six years but due to the grounding of the Max Jet aircraft it is estimated that 120,000 seats have been taken out of the market place and this is a huge loss to Shannon Airport, the broader region and that hotel operators are also feeling the impact. Ms. Considine emphasised that passenger safety is paramount. This unfortunate event has seen a loss of 13 services per week from Shannon Airport. She referred to the need to build resilience and that demand for services is the key to sustained services.

Ms. Considine referred to engagement with Government particularly with the Department of Transport Officials and emphasised that airport connectivity is vital to competitiveness, future progress and balanced regional development.

She stated that the Government have provided funding to privately run airports and she would like this issue to be addressed. Ms. Considine outlined that under EU rules Shannon is eligible for Government supports and that this lack of support is curtailing their ability to fund other projects and address historic 'under-investment'. Ms. Considine informed the members that the National Planning Framework recognises that "the effectiveness of our airports will be vital to our competitiveness and future prospects" with research stating that "airports are particularly important for high tech FDI and knowledge intensive firms".

In relation to capital investment, Ms. Considine stated that Shannon Airport has taken on debt of €4m to resurface its runway, hold baggage screening upgrade will cost a similar amount and that significant additional Capex funding is required and this expenditure significantly reduces the airport funds available for other projects. Ms. Considine stated that Shannon Group are seeking Government funding to assist such capital intensive projects.

Ms. Considine stated that Shannon's links to hubs in the US and in Europe via London are critical for regional development and that connectivity to an EU hub is critical and that targeted action is required to growing connectivity to airports outside Dublin. She informed the meeting that regional targets for new airline routes will address Government's ambition to drive regionality and seasonality. Ms. Considine outlined that improved support mechanism from Tourism Ireland and other sources to support airlines establishing new routes are needed.

Ms. Considine stated that Shannon Group are working in partnership with Clare County Council on the Clare Tourism Strategy and welcomed progress on the Shannon Embankments Project and the airport approach road upgrade. Ms. Considine informed the meeting that Shannon Group is a significant rate payer, paying €2.5m in rates per annum with the hanger paying an additional €1.1m as well as the companies in Shannon Free Zone paying rates to Clare County Council.

Ms. Considine informed the meeting that the Public Appointments Service run the process of appointing members to the Board of Shannon Group and that the Minister for Transport is the decision maker.

The elected members thanked Mary Considine for her presentation and congratulated Shannon on its 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary in aviation. The concerns of constituents were outlined. The members stated that people from the region should be using Shannon Airport and committed to working together to improve development in Shannon Airport. The members expressed disappointment that the Chair of Shannon Group was not in attendance. The need for government support, short haul flights, a taxi rank at the airport, changes to the drop off arrangement, transport to and from the airport, more connectivity and research into tourism market and how to increase passenger numbers was emphasised by the members present. The members acknowledged the unforeseen challenges caused by grounding the Max Jet and the need for Shannon Airport to develop a business resilience in order to sustain itself. The members questioned why Shannon Group did not use the Dubai Duty Free Irish Open held recently in Lahinch as a platform to promote Shannon Airport and stated that this was a missed marketing opportunity.

Many members expressed disappointment that Clare County Council is not represented on the Board of Shannon Group and that Council representatives were not invited to recent events in Shannon Airport namely the visit by President Donald Trump and the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It was stated that Shannon Airport is a huge economic driver in the region and that the airport must remain viable for the survival of the West of Ireland. It was suggested that Government Ministers and Oireachtas members be lobbied to change policy at national level in order to achieve regional economic development. The members questioned the marketing expertise available to Shannon Group and it was suggested that an elitist group outside airport and political structure with knowledge of aviation and marketing should be established. Concerns were expressed at the lack of EU hubs and attracting new routes being provided. The elected members emphasised the need to work together in pooling resources from the region to promote Shannon Airport and its benefits for the region.

**Item 26. Shannon Airport.**

Ar moladh Cllr. P. McMahon  
Cuidithe at Cllr. J. Killeen agus glacadh leis

“In view of the wide spread concern regarding passenger numbers at Shannon Airport, masked somewhat by positive announcements at the commercial arm, that Clare County Council give serious consideration to initiate a campaign to revitalise public support for the Airport in Co. Clare Mid West and further afield.” (M)

**Leonard Cleary, Director of Rural Development replied as follows:**

“Clare County Council is very committed to working in partnership with Shannon Airport as the main air access point to the Wild Atlantic Way, Hidden Heartlands and the Mid-West. This issue arose as part of the consultations on the new Clare Tourism Strategy and is likely to emerge as an action. Clare County Council will engage with Shannon Airport and the Shannon Group on this proposal.”

Pat Dowling, Chief Executive then addressed the meeting. He thanked Mary Considine, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Shannon Group for her presentation which covered a huge range of issues all equally valid. He also welcomed Caroline Kelleher, Director of Public Affairs to the meeting. Mr. Dowling stated that Clare County Council have worked closely with the last two Directors of Shannon Group and will continue to do so. He exercised caution in relation to the dominance of Dublin Airport and that it cannot be allowed to spell the demise of Shannon Airport. Mr. Dowling informed the meeting that Clare County

Council ensured that the Limerick Shannon mass area strategic plan be included in the National Planning Framework and emphasised that Clare County Council are making every effort possible to support Shannon Group but there is only so much that can be done locally, it is a national issue. Referring to short haul flights, Ms. Considine stated that this is not commercially viable as there is a good road network in the country.

Mary Considine thanked the members for their helpful comments and responded by saying that working in partnership is vital, that the challenges are not confined by the county boundary and that Shannon Airport needs the support of the region behind it. Ms. Considine emphasised the need for continued investment and government support. She informed the members that the airport charges account for 5% of airline and that there are heavily discounted charges for the first 3-5 years. She outlined the need to drive down costs and drive non commercial revenue and stated that Shannon Group don't have money for marketing. She stated that Tourism Ireland are committed to promoting the region and the Wild Atlantic Way and this has been beneficial as awareness is starting to grow in the states. She informed the meeting that Fáilte Ireland have assisted in branding but there is a need to do more promotion nationally.

In relation to invitation to events, Ms. Considine stated that Shannon Groups relationship with Clare County Council is very important and that the US Presidential visit was run by the Department of an Taoiseach, not Shannon Airport so they could not issue invitations. Referring to the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Ms. Considine stated that Shannon Airport highlighted the event in local and national media but did not host an actual event. She informed the members that budgets did not allow marketing at the Irish Open. Ms. Considine stated that the National Transport Authority have responsibility for granting public transport licences for services to Limerick and Galway.

Referring to establishing new routes, Ms. Considine stated that it can take up to 2-3 years to implement as detailed route analysis to establish demand has to be carried out. She emphasised that there are very experienced people working in these spaces who are working with the resources available. Ms. Considine stated that Shannon Group work in collaboration with tourism bodies and Tourism Ireland is mandated by the state to promote Ireland.

In relation to cargo hub, Ms. Considine stated that this was investigated but unfortunately it was not commercially viable at the time and that no stone is being left unturned. She informed the members that Shannon Group want the airport to succeed and grow and that they have ambitious targets. She stated that they have been disproportionately affected this year due to the Max Jet grounding, but this is a hard reality. Ms. Considine acknowledged how important connectivity is to this region and stated that Shannon Group are working with Norweigan and Air Canada and hope to have routes restored in 2020.

Ms. Considine informed the meeting that the Chair of Shannon Group is away on annual leave and sent her apologies.

The elected members thanked Ms. Considine for her responses and committed to working together to see tangible benefits as everybody wants to see the airport working well. It was also noted that there is a strong need for more constructive partnership with Shannon town.

It was agreed that Mr. Shane Ross, Minister for Transport be invited to meet a delegation from Clare County Council, consisting of the Cathaoirleach, Chairperson from each Municipal District, Chief Executive and Shannon Group, in Shannon Airport in the near future.”

The meeting then concluded at 5:20 p.m.

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Riarthóir Cruinnithe**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_  
**Cathaoirleach**

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_