



**GALWAY COUNTY COUNCIL
CONNEMARA GREENWAY PROJECT – CLIFDEN TO
OUGHTERARD CPO NO. 2 OF 2024
(PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE)**

**AN BORD PLEANÁLA
ORAL HEARING**

PLANNING

BRIEF OF EVIDENCE

Prepared by:

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GALWAY COUNTY COUNCIL

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Qualifications and Experience

I commenced working with Galway County Council in August 1999 as an Assistant Planner and was appointed Executive Planner in 2002 and Senior Executive Planner in September 2005. I currently hold the position of Senior Planner since 2015.

I hold a B.A. (Hons) Degree from University of Galway in Mathematics and Geography. I was conferred with a Masters Degree in Regional and Urban Planning from University College Dublin and also hold a Higher Diploma in Education from the University of Galway.

I have in excess of 27 years of experience working as a planner within the Local Authority sector.

1.0 The Project

The Connemara Greenway Project -Clifden to Oughterard scheme received consent from An Bord Pleanala in 2013. The scheme consists of a walking/cycling greenway along the dismantled Galway to Clifden railway line from Clifden to Oughterard.

The purpose of the project is to provide all members of the local community and visitors alike with a safe and accessible way of using the dismantled railway line for walking and cycling.

The purpose of this hearing is to confirm or otherwise the proposed CPO for a number of sections along the route to provide for the completion of the approved project.

The project was approved on the basis of permissive access and failing, that the mechanism of CPO would allow for the building out of the project, if approved by An Bord Pleanala.

2.0 Policy Context

At the time of the approval of the project the following was the policy context:

2.1 Fáilte Ireland's West Tourism Development Plan 2008-2010

As part of Failte Ireland's strategy its first strategic goal was to develop the region as Ireland's primary outdoor and adventure destination while focusing on environmental sustainability.

A specific key action included in this plan is to 'Support the feasibility of reopening the Galway-Clifden railway line as a Greenway for walking and cycling'.

2.2 Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2010-2022

The aim of the guidelines was to provide a framework for long term strategic development of the West region for the period of 2010-2022.

Section 7.4 of the guidelines deals specifically with leisure facilities and the following is the associated stated policy that supports this particular project.

SCP13: *Support and assist in promoting national programmes to develop walking and cycle routes including the ‘Irish Trails strategy’ and the ‘cycle strategy for the Western Region’. Plans proposing the development of such routes must be subject to Habitats Directive Assessment where appropriate.*

SCO11: *Support local authority consultations with developers and local communities in the provision and improvement of recreational facilities. This will be achieved through proper planning and sustainable development and will be subject to Habitat Directive Appropriate Assessment screening and/or other relevant environmental assessment where appropriate.*

2.3 County Galway Development Plan 2009-2015

The following are the Policy and Objectives associated with the County Development Plan that was in place at the time of the approval of the project.

Policy CS28: *The Council will seek to protect the alignment of the Clifden Railway Line as a cycle and walkway.*

Policy CS22: *where possible, combine with developers and local communities in the provision and improvement of recreational facilities.*

Policy CS23: *Support cycling and walking groups in promoting their disciplines and developing routes and facilities.*

Policy CS30: *Support and help promote national programmes to develop walking and cycle routes including the ‘Irish trails strategy and cycle strategy for the western region’.*

The following objective also supports the proposed project:

Objective CS3: *To provide an increased number of recreational outlets including public parks, play areas and walkways.*

Other policies in the plan also sustain the greenway proposal.

Policy ED20: *Positively support and promote sustainable tourism infrastructure development related to the enhancement of the County’s tourism profile..... and ensure that all such developments are built to a high environmental standard to protect the County’s most significant tourism asset – It’s natural environment and landscape.*

3.0 Current Policy Context

Policy documents currently in place support the greenway project as follows:

In terms of the overall strategic context, the following high-level documents support the project and also support the confirmation of the CPO, should the Bord approve:

3.1 National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040

The National Planning Framework supports the provision of greenways under various National Policy Objectives.

National Policy Objective 22 *aims to facilitate tourism development including national and regional connectivity via a National Greenways, Blueways and Peatways Strategy.*

National Policy Objective 58 *stipulates that integrated planning for Green Infrastructure and ecosystem services should be incorporated into the preparation of statutory land use plans.*

National Policy Objective 60 *aims to conserve and enhance the rich qualities of natural and cultural heritage of Ireland.*

3.2 The National Development Plan 2021-2030

The National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030 recognises the importance of active travel not only in reducing carbon emissions, but also in achieving other national strategic outcomes such as compact urban growth and balanced regional development. Other national policy, such as the Climate Action Plans, the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways, and the National Physical Activity Plan highlight the multi-faceted benefits provided by active travel investment, including carbon emission reductions, physical and mental health benefits, tourism and improvements to accessibility and social inclusion.

The Project also accords with the Climate Action Plan 2024

3.3 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region 2020-2032

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy contains the following Regional Policy Objectives that support the provision of green infrastructure including greenways

Regional Policy Objective 3.6.13 *supports the delivery of a Greenway Network which includes National Dublin to Galway Cycleway, Oranmore to Bearna Coastal Greenway and the Galway to Clifden Greenway*

Regional Policy Objective 4.14 *promotes the development of integrated walking, cycling and bridle routes throughout the region as an activity for both international visitors and local tourists.*

At County level the provision of the greenway is also supported:

3.4 County Galway Development Plan 2022-2028

Chapter 6 of the County Development Plan contains the following text and policy objectives in support of the greenway project

Section 6.5.2.2 Greenways and Blueways

The Council actively supports the provision of greenway infrastructure within the county and acknowledges that benefits from a recreational amenity perspective which encourages an active and healthy lifestyle for our communities. The Council also acknowledges the economic benefits which arise from greenways particularly from a tourism perspective. The Council will continue support and facilitate the provision of greenways where appropriate within the county. Greenways are further examined and detailed in Chapter 9 Biodiversity, Green Infrastructure and Natural Heritage

The following Policy Objectives are included in this Chapter 9 County Development Plan

GBW 1 Greenways

To support the development of an integrated Strategic Greenway Network of national and regional routes and maximise connectivity to existing greenways through linkages of cycling and walking infrastructure in a manner that is compatible with nature conservation and other environmental policies.

This will include but is not limited to the following which are of National and Regional importance;

- *National Greenway Dublin to Galway*
- *Connemara Greenway i.e. (Clifden to Oughterard, Galway to Oughterard)*

GBW 2 Future Development of Network of Greenways

To support the delivery of sustainable strategic greenway/blueway projects in the county in accordance with the Strategy for Future Development of National and Regional Greenways.

The Council is fully committed to developing a network of Greenways, Blueways and Peatways in accordance with the requirements of national policy, including the Department of Transport, Sport and Tourism 'Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways' (2018).

Policy Objectives Network of Blueways, Greenways and Peatways are as follows:

BGP 1 Strategic Greenways/Blueways

Support the delivery of sustainable strategic Greenway/Blueway projects in the County in accordance with the Strategy for the Future Development of National and Regional Greenways, enabling legislation, best practice in a manner that is compatible with nature conservation and other environmental policies.

BGP 2 Development of Strategic Greenway Network

Support the development of an integrated Strategic Greenway Network of national and regional routes and maximise connectivity to existing greenways through linkages of cycling and walking infrastructure in a manner that is compatible with nature conservation and other environmental policies.

This will include the following;

- *National Galway to Dublin Cycleway/ Greenway;*
- *Connemara Greenway i.e., (Clifden to Oughterard, Galway to Oughterard);*
 - *Oranmore to Bearnna Coastal Greenway;*
- *Athenry to Tuam;*
- *Clifden to Derrygimlagh;*
- *Clifden to Letterfrack.*

BGP 3 Greenways, Blueways, Peatways and Trails

a) It is a policy objective to support the extension of greenways, blueways, peatways and trails within the county and the integration and linkage of them with other existing / proposed greenways, blueways, peatways and trails both within and outside the county.

b) It is a policy objective to support where relevant the concept of Greenways to consider local travel infrastructure, and connectivity to local towns and villages in the design of any Greenway route.

4.0 Conclusion

It is considered that the CPO as proposed on this project is compliant with planning policies at a European, National, Regional and Local level, is in accordance with the policies and objectives of the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 and complies with the relevant National and Regional documents and policies as expressed in the National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040 and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region 2020-2032.

On this basis, it is considered that the proposed CPO (Connemara Greenway project -Clifden to Oughterard CPO No.2 of 2024 (physical Infrastructure) is in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.