



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe  
Galway County Council

**Minutes of the Economic Development, Enterprise & Planning Strategic Policy Committee**  
**Meeting held on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2025 at 11am – Room G01**

**I LÁTHAIR:**

**Baill:** Cllr. Donagh Killilea, Chairperson

Cllr. Mary Hoade

Cllr. Gerry King

Cllr. Tom Welby

Cllr. Declan Geraghty

Cllr. David Collins

Ms. Deborah Reynolds, Trade Union

Ms. Helen McElmeel, Business/Commercial

Ms. Paul Carey, Development/Construction

Ms. Lyn Donnelly, Community/Voluntary

**Oifigigh:** Mr. Liam Hanrahan, Director of Services, Planning & Economic Development

Ms. Valerie Loughnane, Senior Planner, Planning

Ms. Ciara Cosgrave, A/Senior Executive Planner, Planning

Mr. Eoin Connaire, Business Advisor, Local Enterprise Office

Mr. Ronan Conway, A/Senior Executive Engineer, Urban & Rural Regeneration Office

Ms. Eileen Keaveney, Administrative Officer, Planning

Ms. Sinéad Burns, Assistant Staff Officer, Planning

**Item No. 1 – Minutes of meeting dated 4/12/24**

Cllr. Killilea opened the meeting. Minutes of the SPC meeting held on 04/12/24 were proposed by Cllr. King and seconded by Ms. McElmeel. No matters arising.

### **Item No. 2 – Local Enterprise Office update**

Mr. Connaire gave a presentation on LEO programmes - Start Your Own Business (SYOB) and Training Programmes, Lean Supports, Lean & Digital Supports, Decarbonisation for small businesses through Green Supports, Management Development Programmes and Supports.

Mr. Carey said that carbon footprint is of major importance for supermarkets, restaurants and coffee shops.

Mr. Connaire said that businesses are making savings of approximately 10%.

Mr. Hanrahan added that there is a significant amount of money available and this is the first opportunity that LEO can give supports to the service industry. It helps significantly with the Climate Action Plan.

Cllr. Collins said that the procedures to improve carbon footprint are beneficial and that energy audits are worth doing whether businesses are applying for a grant or not.

Ms. McElmeel asked if AI is captured in Lean for Business Programme?

Mr. Connaire said it is not currently covered but is being reviewed and needs to be added.

Cllr. Geraghty said that supports are important to be given in rural areas and asked if these support programmes have been advertised?

Mr. Connaire stated that the supports are advertised and promotional events are taking place this week in Clifden, Ballinasloe, Gort, Tuam and Loughrea.

Ms. Donnelly commended LEO for the supports available and said that supports were very limited prior to now.

### **Item No. 3 – Gort Area Plan update**

Ms. Loughnane said that the Draft Gort LAP was on public display from 9th January 2025 to 20<sup>th</sup> February, 2025. 121 submissions were received. A Chief Executives Report is currently being prepared and will then be presented to the members of the Loughrea MD in the first week of April. A workshop with the Elected Members will take place in the second week in May. If there are material alterations, these will be on public display for 4 weeks, another Chief Executives Report will be prepared, and it is anticipated that there will be final adoption of the plan in September, 2025.

Ms. Loughnane added that the majority of submissions related to the Local Transport Plan around the areas of public transport, bus stops, river walk and also the zoning of land. This will be the final Local Area Plan, new legislation signed in October 2024 mean that plans will be titled Urban Area Plans from now on.

Cllr. Welby asked if the LAP was prepared under the population allocation in the current CDP.

Ms. Loughnane replied that yes the population allocation was under the Current County Development Plan and the figure was 12.8 hectares of residential phase one zoned land.

### **Item No. 4 – Residential Zoned Land Tax update**

Ms. Loughnane stated that maps are currently on display from 1<sup>st</sup> February to 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2025 on the Department website and on Galway County Council website. Submissions for

rezoning requests on the final map for 2025 can be made by the 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2025. Maps for Athenry and Loughrea were not previously on display but are now on display due to the recent adoption of both Local Area Plans. Gort will not be subject to tax until 2027 as this Local Area Plan has not yet been adopted. There is new guidance in relation to economic activity on site with respect to the RLT liability. Every Local Authority will deal with this issue individually. When submissions come in they will be assessed individually and submissions will be assessed on a case by case basis. There may be some exemptions from Revenue Commissioners mainly with respect to agricultural activities on sites. Further guidance is to issue on this matter.

The Tax will be coming into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> February, 2026 and will be payable directly to the Revenue Commissioners.

Cllr. Geraghty said that members of the public may not be aware of the RZLT and had it been advertised?

Ms. Loughnane said that it is on display on the Galway County Council website, advertised in local newspapers and was advertised on Galway County Council Social Media platforms.

Ms. Loughnane stated that there are 6 criteria for consideration when assessing parcels of land for the RZLT.

Cllr. Hoade asked if those who had already made submissions would be written to.

Ms. Loughnane said that contact will be made only to those who made submissions including those who made submissions regarding zoning.

Cllr. Hoade said that not all members of the public would use the website and perhaps not aware of the tax.

Cllr. Geraghty said that neighbours talk to each other and word will spread.

Mr. Hanrahan said that not all land will be zoned. It is strictly in relation to residential lands except Town Centre.

Ms. Loughnane added that there is an increase in the number of queries this year than those of previous years.

Cllr. Killilea asked if Elected Members have any role in the final decision.

Ms. Loughnane said that members can be informed but don't have a role in the decision.

Ms. Loughnane said that it will have to correlate with the National Planning Framework (NPF). A variation to the County Development Plan is the only alternative for the Elected Members.

Ms. Loughnane expressed the opinion that rather than to dezone land, it would be more beneficial for the Revenue Commissioners to consider giving an exemption for a number of years. This suggestion has been shared with the Junior Ministers.

Mr. Hanrahan said that the Elected Members made a judgement at the time on zoning with Local Area Plans and the County Development Plan, and it will remain as such.

Ms. Loughnane said that as there are lots of changes underway i.e there will be a new National Planning Framework in the next few months, the new Planning Act and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), there may be further changes and possibly other mechanisms available.

Mr. Carey said that there has been an ethos that developers are holding on to land. If a farmer stays farming and is actively using land they should be exempt for a number of years.

Ms. Loughnane said that there may be a possible mechanism if proven.

Ms. Reynolds asked if it applies to all lands and zoned lands are very different?

Ms. Loughnane clarified that it only applies to serviced areas and is specific to 15 towns, 2 Urban Design Frameworks and 5 LAP areas.

Cllr. Killilea said that a deferred payment would be beneficial.

Cllr. Geraghty asked if the review of speed limits and town boundaries being extended would affect the current zoning? Ms. Loughnane said the current zoning would not be affected.

#### **Item No. 5 – Urban Regeneration Development Fund projects**

#### **Item No. 6 – Town Centre First Plans and progress to date**

Both items 5 & 6 were dealt with together.

Mr. Conway made a presentation on the Portumna Courthouse Redevelopment – Rural Regeneration and Development Fund. There will be a launch next month with Elected Members and Staff and later for the general public.

There are a number of other projects – Loughrea Town Hall, Tuam Town Hall and Athenry.

Mr. Conway added that the scheme is rolling now and processes are in place.

Cllr. Killilea complimented Mr. Conway and the Team on the work done to date.

Cllr. Welby said that it was a fabulous job and great work had been done on the buildings.

Mr. Conway said that there was an advertisement for a Manager of the building, last Friday was the closing date and 12 applications were received.

Oranmore URDF: Ms. Loughnane said that a planning application was granted on 17/2/25 and is currently in the appeal period. It is hoped that works will commence towards the end of the year. Consultants are on board for completion of a topology study and urban space study and design of the Eco park. There is currently a query with the NTA regarding design of the car park tender. There is a working group and steering group with representatives from the NTA, Irish Rail and Galway County Council.

Cllr. Killilea asked about the Tuam town project.

Mr. Conway said that OCC Architects have just been assigned and a detailed design and tendering process is underway. The Athenry project will run parallel to Tuam.

In relation to the Tuam Station Quarter, a meeting is to be arranged with Irish Rail.

Cllr. King asked about Clifden.

Mr. Conway confirmed that this project is going through the planning process with a Part 10 application.

Cllr. Collins complimented the Team on the work to date and in relation to Town Centre First. Mr. Conway said that the new town team has 12 representatives, there is a consultant

on board and a list is being compiled of all the projects the town wants to see. There will be a Public Consultation evening at the Newpark in Athenry.

Cllr. Hoade asked about Headford. Mr. Conway said that Brent Mostert will contact town teams. Headford is the next town to be focused on. Funding has not yet been allocated.

Cllr. Geraghty asked about Garbally College and St. Brigids. He added that there has not been any progress from the H.S.E.

Cllr. Killilea said it needs to be discussed at MD level.

Mr. Hanrahan added that the HSE have need for limited use for the premises. There are potential uses for the site and it is being prepared for market.

Mr. Hanrahan stated that in relation to Garbally and the school buildings, a planning application would be required. If the two schools in Ballinasloe were to amalgamate, it would be practical to use an existing site rather than build on a new site.

Mr. Carey said that in relation to St. Brigids, there are protected structures on the site and it would be difficult to find an entity to convert it.

Cllr. Killilea said it would need to be determined what it should be used for and a Master Plan compiled.

Ms. Donnelly asked where would funding come from for a Master Plan.

Cllr. Killilea said that the HSE would set aside funding for a Master Plan.

#### **Item No. 7 – Draft Joint Retail Strategy update**

The draft strategy is compiled by Galway County Council and Galway City Council. There is a policy objective in the County Development Plan relating to the Joint Retail Strategy. It includes parts of the MASP – Oranmore, Baile Chláir and Bearnna. There will be consultation with the Public Participation Network (PPN) also. A Joint SPC will be held with Galway City Council regarding the strategy. The consultants involved are KPMG who will formalize the strategy.

Cllr. Geraghty asked how many small retailers are involved.

Ms. Loughnane said that there have been over 1,200 surveys with different retailers. The strategy is at second draft stage now. It will go to the Joint SPC and then to Plenary.

Mr. Hanrahan said that there will be a Joint SPC around Easter time.

Cllr. Welby asked if there will be a wider strategy compiled for the county.

Ms. Loughnane said yes if funding is available. Work is currently underway with students that are on work placement, there are other projects with NUIG and Presentation College, Athenry.

Mr. Hanrahan said that the format will be in place and if useful the template can be used.

Cllr. Geraghty said that retail is going down in the county.

Ms. Loughnane said this is due to the high volume of online shopping.

#### **Item No. 8 – Government Circulars**

The circular regarding 'Outdoor Events Licence' was circulated prior to the meeting and any new circulars will be circulated by Ms. Keaveney and if any advice is needed on them, it will be discussed at the SPC meeting.

Cllr. Collins asked about the concerts at the airport site, if there had been any update or if they were going ahead this year.

Mr. Hanrahan said that there had not been any request to date from MCD for this year.

Mr. Hanrahan added that Galway County Council and Galway City Council were in the process of looking at selling on the property and that legal work is underway.

#### **Item No. 9 – Any Other Business**

Cllr. Welby said that a number of agents had enquired about policy around backlands development in the Connemara area.

Mr. Hanrahan said the policy is as members approved and added that the pre planning meeting facility was proving to be very successful. Deirdre Egan had compiled a report on backland development and the report will be made available at the next SPC meeting.

Mr. Hanrahan said that the majority of applications being refused were going down on one issue i.e. independent 100 metre driveways. Houses should be discreet, behind the family home. Applications may be viable if there was a shared entrance and pre planning meetings are encouraged.

Ms. Loughnane added that applications are considered on a case by case basis, there are strict guidelines and the 8km policy is there.

Mr. Hanrahan stated that there is an 86% success rate granting applications.

Ms. McElmeel said that it is positive that there are pre planning meetings as not all authorities provide this service.

Cllr. Welby asked about site suitability assessments, if the reports have been completed outside two years are they not acceptable, the EPA do not hold this view.

Ms. Loughnane said that in light of flood events in the last number of years the best practice is not to accept any assessments that are more than two years old.

Cllr. Killilea highlighted the recent accident at Zerotech in Claregalway on the 31<sup>st</sup> January, he said the company was very progressive and a huge loss to Claregalway, 520 jobs were lost.

Mr. Hanrahan said that the incident was discussed at the management meeting in regard to the Fire Services involvement. He said that the public risk was low and the evacuation of the area was a precautionary measure. Following further advice, everything was reopened the next day.

Mr. Hanrahan added that there was planning permission on the site, a complaint had been made to Enforcement case in relation to storage area that was on site. Mr. Hanrahan stressed that the site was for assembling battery packs only and not for producing batteries and that

no raw materials were being used. The Environment Section had also confirmed that no discharge licence was required.

Cllr. Geraghty asked about the situation with planning exemptions in relation to log cabins. Ms. Loughnane said that there was no regulation and no exemptions currently and that there are very tight limitations.

The meeting concluded.

Cathaoirleach Signature: 

Date: 4/06/2025