

Submission for Stage 1 draft for county development plan 2022 to 2028

To whom it may concern.

This is a personal submission I am resident of the Aran Islands. I would like to make a couple points in relation to drafting of the plan for County Galways future. My submission is short and more than likely full of grammar, spelling and auto correct mistakes. I am very pushed for time in writing it. I not going to use the question format supplied instead I'm going to list my ideas and concerns for this entry.

The area I wish to focus on is in relation to the offshore Islands. Galway County has 4 of Irelands inhabited Islands under its remit (Arann, Inis Meáin, Inis Oírr & Inishbofin). In fact, almost half of the population of all of Irelands offshore islands live in Galway county. In my view this should make Galway county council an expert on Island administration and engagement with those communities. This is not always the case. The Islands themselves are famous due to their uniqueness and as Covid 19 has shown a huge tourism draw during this troubled time. Aran (Inishmore) Itself is my main focus as where I live but I try to cover the other Islands also.

In the Pervious CDP and LAP for the Gaeltacht many good points where made and much of that should be retained. In relation housing, Landscape, Biodiversity, Development. Where it might of lacked was not clear on joined up approach on the plan for the Islands for Galway.

Contact Liaison person: It might be helpful for the council and Islands if there was one person within the council who had some sort of knowledge or authority when it came to Islands. I know from my work with many community groups its is sometime difficult to establish who need to be contacted for assistance on certain projects. Tourism, Heritage, Harbours and water as examples.

Local Area Plans:

I believe the Aran Islands should have their own Local Area Plan. In the last County Development Plan where included in Variation No.2. The Islands are indeed a part of Gaeltacht and a very important part but their inclusion seem more of afterthought at the end of document. Considering the importance of islands to the county even though their overall population may be small than an area such as Bearna and Clifden. It may help to have a vision for the islands as there are difficulties that need to be resolved to the benefit of all. It would also help other stage agency's as many government departments deal with Islands.

The Title of the Gaeltacht Plan does not even list the Islands. EG: (Including settlements of An CHEATHRÚ RUA, An SPIDÉAL and BAILE CHLÁIR) and the section covering the Islands is very generic and should be built upon.

Marine and Fishing.

Inis Oírr. Is in desperate need of a new harbour facility. I believe plan are underway for its development but it is long overdue. It is an ascendant waiting to happen.

Inis Meain. The second phase of the harbour in Inis Meain should be completed. Its open in Bad weather and high tides. It makes landing difficult in the winter months.

On Aran (Inishmore) there should consideration giving to installing pontoons for small boats and ferries. For small boats the 5 m tidal range on ladders is difficult and spacing of ladder is very far apart. It could also be of benefit to visiting boats which would good for tourism sailing which currently anchor off on morning. A visiting berth would be very beneficial. From a ferries perspective they load on in Rossaveal on pontoon why not of load on Aran. It would reduce gangways and dealing with stairs. This would benefit the disabled and elderly.

For small boat fisherman it would allow a safer working environment. It is this type of fishing that is sustainable and creates families on the Island.

There also need to be a toilet to be installed to deal with tourist traffic and the answer to that may be the old fisherman shed which sits in middle of this modern harbour. Currently boarded up. It could also welcome point onto the island. The First thing a tourist meets is a derelict building when they arrive in Cill Roinn which is under council control.

Island and Town Planning:

Currently there is little vision for how the Islands should operate. In the past houses developed around the wells. Giving us 14 villages on Aran for example. Once piped water became available the villages started to grow latterly since the 70s. This led to villages merging. We need a vision for the villages as it currently stands we are creating a car depended Islands.

CillRonain as the largest of the settlement on the 3 Islands has many difficulties due to lay out and size. For example, a one-way street system for car traffic could help ease congestion and stress. A pedestrian board walk outside the wall from the Lifeboat slip to old pier would remove a dangerous stretch where buses, cars, walkers, bicycles and horses often have to interact in confined space. This is also the point where the public toilets are causing further congestion and safety issues.

Planning: Planning is often a concern for the islanders. It's a difficult process and often takes years. On the other side there is a huge amount of empty and derelict units. Many are old and built of stone. Could steps not be taken to help renovate these building to help with the current housing problems. Many young couples complain they can't find anywhere rent or buy and cost of buying is very expensive. An Islands housing plan where stock was taken of what's not in use and how it can be brought back for benefit for Islanders and not for Holiday home market. Many of these older houses are not energy efficient and could not be easily renovated.

A possible 3 islands wide BER study could be done to help establish the quality of islands housing stock as all energy to fuels these homes need to imported.

Climate Change: The islands are going to have many changeless in relation to climate change in coming years. Sea level rise and effects on harbour and housing, Coastal erosion, Storm damage and the most common currently water shortage due to lack of rain fall and our ability to capture it

Energy independence:

From the Pervious CDP "Objective ER 9 – Oileáin Árann an Energy Transition Community
The Council shall continue to support Comharchumann Fuinnimh Oileáin Árann (Aran Islands Energy Cooperative), SEAI and Údarás na Gaeltachta in their objective to develop the Islands as being energy independent by 2022 and becoming Ireland's first energy transition community"

Could this be amended to go past 2022 as this group is doing great work towards energy Independence and sustainable islands. They should be contacted for their input

Septic System: Cill Ronain is dire need of a public septic system. It is listed as one of the action in the last plan. It would be very difficult to do ground works on Island to collect this waste to central point. If waste processing facility was built a collection system could be used instead. It would create employment and could also be used to collect of the other two islands as we have a common cargo service. It would be huge boast to Galway bay to have this issue sorted once and for all.

Waste and recycling: The Islands have a great system when it comes to handling its waste. This is run in conjunction with the council. I noticed from the Last CDP "*6.18 Waste Management*" that it a was not really mentioned. Last year Athchursail-Arann won a major prize (Packman) in how it managed waste across the Aran Islands. I believe this operation should be included in CDP as it is supported through funding by the Council.

Water: Each year the Islands are going into drought more often. I know this is an issue for Irish water but the council through tourism should be looking for water saving measure in homes and business. Such as grey water reuse, Extra storage in homes, and volumes used.

Tourism:

Is very important to Islands and last numbers of years numbers of visitors have grown across all the Islands. An example of this is the Islands of Inis Oirr after improvements to pier in Doollin County Clare the

numbers grew massively. The old way looking at number of pax landed (Footfall) is not a great indicator as to what that tourist brings to local area. The Islands are overrun with Day-trippers and we should have vision with Fáilte Ireland not to grow that market any more but to encourage the overnight market. To date it is difficult to establish the number of tourist that are acutely arriving onto the islands and what is sustainable. This places a huge pressure on Islands in relation to water as well know but also things like waste, Traffic and toilets facilities.

Traffic management at Dun Aonghasa: A plan for how visitors arrive at the Cill Mhuirbhuigh before waking up to Dun Aonghasa on Aran should be draw up with other relevant stake holders, OPW, Garda, Land owners, Bike Operators, Bus operators, Horse trap operators, Landowners and Islander in general. There is no system it is a massive bottle neck with a lot of moving traffic. Someone will be killed and in 2020 it's hard to believe an area that can have up 1300 people moving through an area in a couple hours is not managed or looks so run down. Up to 130,000 people move through it each year. There are many solutions it just need a plan and leadership.

Dark sky Area: The Aran Islands would be perfect area for Galway to ear mark for a dark sky reserve. Like the have in Kenmare in Co Kerry. It would be huge boast for area and would not require huge amount work. Currently the council's projects are some of the biggest light polluters on the Islands. Inis Main harbour and Cill Ronain harbour and Cill Ronain itself. These could be easily altered and example of this was the LED light upgrade that happened in Aran last year showed. Not alone would this boast for how the Islands look it also good for Biodiversity. Insects are not drawn to lights and birds sleep instead singing all night.

GMIT Study: Is advertising a research position to conduct a study into tourism across the Aran Islands. The results of this study should be worked into this future plan where possible.

Green Way on Aran. On Aran the rocks road from Lower Cill Ronain to Gort na gCapall then via An caiseal road to Cill Mhuirbhuigh should be consider as possible green way. This would be excellent for walkers and cyclist. Considerations would need to given to framers for access as they use this road frequently. This would huge befits in relation to recreation on Islands. There is often pressure to have this road fully paved for safety (Also known as rocks Road).

Buses: Are very important to how tourist move on islands. Year on year their numbers grow and they are like the Burren in County Clare become a problem in relation to traffic. Difficult to pass and intimidating to cyclists. Most buses are of reasonable sizes but we do have a number of oversized buses considering our road widths on Aran.

Public Toilets: All public toilets across the Islands should be assessed to see if they are fit for purpose. Currently ones in are have served the tourist well but are dated. There are not enough toilet facilities in Cill Ronain harbour. It is believed that up 200,000 a year are being landed in Cillronain and it has limited public toilets facility's. Consider the development that happened with harbour.

Please note that Arainn should be used instead Inis Mór as it is not correct. If referring to Islands in English Inishmore can be used but I noted from reading the perivous plans that Islands are referred to In Irish. (Please see Tim Robison's Maps NUIG <https://digital.library.nuigalway.ie/islandora/object/nuigalway%3A10957>)

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