

Aighneacht chuig Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe maidir le Plean an Chontae 2022-2028

Having moved down to Galway, I look forward to raising my family here in the region and it is indeed a fantastic region to live in. As a primary school teacher, I believe that it has allowed me to discuss and gain a unique insight into the aspirations for the area in the minds of the youth of today and what they also hope their region will look like in the future.

It is in this context we would like to make the submission to Galway County Council with regards to the new county development plan 2022-2028.

1. Provision and enhancement of a new family friendly cycle way, other cycle paths and footpaths (Greenways and Blueways) for the local community and tourists.

I would like to submit that the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 should make provision for the installation and enhancement cycle paths (and footpaths) (i) potential cycle way using the collection of windfarms in the Spiddal/Moycullen/Rosscahill region (ii) along main roads (iii) along the seashore.

I would like to draw your attention to the unique range of windfarms that are presently found in the Spiddal/Oughterard/Rosscahill region. With the provision of the new projected windfarm being developed by Amazon in Arrderroo, the potential for a unique cycleway for the local community and tourist population linking the present windfarms off the Spiddal to Moycullen road, to the proposed windfarm in Arrderroo, to the SSE wind farm in the Seecon in the Rosscahill region is a unique opportunity to provide a car free, safe trail for cyclists of all ages to exercise. Here the unique scenery of Connemara could be appreciated using the terrain in the region for a new cycleway. This would meet the criteria on page 14 which asks “how should the countryside be enhanced with better design?” There is no housing development to hinder this development and it would be the first of its kind in the country which would be a huge tourist attraction to exhibit the unique Connemara landscape in an innovative way.

With the development of the Connemara Greenway and the Barna Greenway (and the formation of the Salthill Greenway Group), there is a huge thirst for cycling within the community in Galway. This family friendly, pastime for all ages has the potential to exponentially grow with the correct support. I would propose the development of a cycle route along the Moycullen to Spiddal road in the future in order to create a safe loop that would enhance tourism, transport and healthy living from the community of Galway city and Connemara. This would meet the challenge of “providing sufficient physical and social infrastructure to support economic development and to enhance our quality of life”.

Page 18 of the issues paper asks “what areas of the County have the potential of become sustainable key tourism attractions and what areas within Galway have the potential to form part of the development of a comprehensive tourist trail within the County?”. This new cycleway would have the potential to draw a diverse range of potential tourists to the region. It would also have the benefit of being the first of its kind on such a potentially large scale.

If the area had safe pathways, walking trails and cycle paths with additional amenities of picnic tables, viewing points for buses and cars and safe parking etc tourist dwell time would increase. I submit that the provision of footpaths, walking trails and cycle paths in the form of Greenways and Blueways along the coast would significantly enhance the South Connemara countryside.

GCC asks on page 26 of the issues paper “are you satisfied with provision of community and cultural facilities in your area?” I would see at first hand from my position as a teacher the dangers children speak of when travelling to school and cycling in their own time. The provision of a unique cycleway utilising the wind farms in the region mentioned above would allow people of all ages to exercise safely while offering them the chance to admire the natural beauty in our local area.

2. Planning permission for Irish language speakers in the Gaeltacht

At present, the inability to secure planning permission is having an adverse effect on the locals wishing to build and immerse themselves in the local language and culture. The sustainability of any community relies on the ability of young couples to settle in the area, raise children in that area and make a positive contribution to the community. Without young families, the energy and spirit and life of the local area will wane and dwindle causing untold damage to the future of the language. This will result in the decline of the Galway Gaeltacht and the language within the country. There must be a solution to alleviate the pressures on young families who wish to settle in their local area who have the land and the willingness to bring up the generation for the future.

This issue is particularly sensitive in a Connemara context. Without sufficient young families in the Gaeltacht the living community language cannot survive. Young families living in the Gaelacht with a living community language is the basic premise of the process of language planning that is underway at the moment. This is Government policy under the 20-year strategy for the Irish language.

Solution: Where there is an established pattern of cluster housing within a locality, then GCC should adopt a presumption in favour of development of new residential homes within that area for

- families who want to raise their children as Gaeilge in the Gaeltacht
- families who wish to return home with their children to raise their children as Gaeilge in the Gaeltacht

- for people without children who wish to return home to contribute to their local community with whatever skills they have
- families who wish to build housing to a high BER level/passive housing

3. Provision of “bathing status” to beaches, other tourists and the local community

The health and safety of local families and tourists should be paramount to the future development of the Galway region. There are a significant number of beaches in the area where the water quality is not monitored and where facilities are lacking. Given what GCC states on pages 19 and 20 of the issues paper, GCC should seek to ensure that “bathing status” is granted to every beach used by the public, by thousands of Irish College Students, by the local community and by tourists annually. In this way, regional towns would become inherently more liveable in the future.

Safe outdoor amenities are now more important than ever as we as a society battle Covid-19 and Coronavirus and into the future, clean bathing waters lends itself to a healthy lifestyle for all ages, from the very young to the very old.

GCC should also ensure that there is adequate access and parking facilities for emergency services and appropriate waste disposal facilities at these designated bathing areas/beaches. It would be fantastic to see tasteful bike parking also available at every beach in the county in order to encourage the general population, especially those who live locally to use green transport to each beach.

4. Provision of a ‘buggy friendly’ specific bus at weekends and increased stops and bus shelters

I submit that the provision of off road bus stops and bus shelters located at safe, practical and strategic locations along the R336 (i.e. at schools, community halls, other community facilities) would help ease the heavy traffic congestion on this road and improve the safety of the R336 for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles. Certain areas such as in village centres or at beaches such as that at Silver Strand in Barna and Spiddal beach would also benefit from traffic calming measures for those wishing to cross the street. I would also propose that a specific – buggy friendly bus that has the ‘city style’ double doors and can lower to pedestrian level.. I am aware that buggies can presently utilise the bus service but the ability of the double doors to lower to pedestrian level would make it far more appealing for young families to use.

5. Quality of Drinking Water

The Cois Fharrage District regularly suffers from drinking water outages and shortages. There is also a recurring issue with the quality of the drinking water in the region which can cause issue for the general population and Irish colleges in the region.

6. Provision for the continuation of the fantastic coastal walk in Spiddal

I would like to submit that the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 should make provision for the enhancement of the present coastal walkway in Spiddal. At present a grant of €80,000 will create the continued uninterrupted walk of over 1.3km. This is a huge tourist attraction for the area and also a great local amenity. There is huge scope to continue this walkway westwards with the trá mór in Inverin less than 3.5km away from the present walkway. Page 18 of the issues paper asks “what areas of the County have the potential of become sustainable key tourism attractions and what areas within Galway have the potential to form part of the development of a comprehensive tourist trail within the County?”. A continued development of this facility would not only serve the local community but provide a unique tourist attraction with unrivalled views that would be akin to the ‘Cascais to Estoril’ walkway in Portugal.

I would like to thank you for your time in reading the e-mail and I appreciate the ability to having an input into the development of such a fantastic region.

Le gach dea-ghuí,

Éanna Byrne