

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Minutes of the Planning, Environment, Agriculture & Emergency Services Strategic Policy Committee Meeting held on MS Teams, Wednesday 18th November 2020

I LATHAIR:

Baill: Cllr. Michael Connolly, Chairperson
Cllr. Dermot Connolly
Cllr. Shane Curley
Cllr. Donagh Killilea
Mr. Mark Green
Aodán MacDonncha, Uasal
Ms. Anne Mitchell
Mr. Colm Ryan

Oifigigh: Ms. Eileen Ruane, Director of Services, Planning, Environment & Emergency Services
Ms. Valerie Loughnane, Senior Planner, Planning
Mr. Brendan Dunne, Executive Planner, Planning
Ms. Eileen Keaveney, Administrative Officer, Planning
Ms. Ann Dolan, Executive Scientist, Environment
Ms. Caroline Hannon, Assistant Staff Officer, Planning

Apologies: Cllrs. Moeige Maher, PJ Murphy & Comh. Daithí Ó’Cualáin.

Item No. 1 - Minutes of the meeting of the Planning, Environment, Agriculture & Emergency Services SPC dated 7th July 2020

Cllr. M. Connolly welcomed everyone to the meeting. The minutes of the meeting dated 7th July 2020 were proposed by Ms. Mitchell, seconded by Cllr. Curley and agreed.

Cllr. Killilea referred to the issue regarding unfinished estates and queried what avenues could be taken through planning to deal with same. He explained that he had spoken with the Roads Department who had advised that it was a matter for the Planning Unit. He asked if the SPC could write to the Department asking for clarity on what changes need to be met before a condition could be added which would require developers to finish an estate before starting a new development. Ms. Ruane explained that it would be difficult to implement such a condition as they could be using different company names.

Ms. Loughnane highlighted that there was legislation, but it had not been enacted by any other Council to date. It allows the authority to go back on past performances by builders, but it comes with a lot of legal difficulties so this may be why no other Local Authority had introduced this. She stated that she would check with the Department and ask what they would recommend. She also explained that Taken in Charge was previously under the Planning Unit but now under the Roads Unit. She stated that the Taken

in Charge Unit was engaging well with developers to do work and were linking in with the Enforcement Unit to ensure compliance of conditions.

Cllr. D. Connolly asked if something could be done now in order to prevent this from happening again in the future, as it can be difficult to get matters rectified after.

Cllr. M. Connolly referred to some estates which required work to be completed and explained how difficult it was. He highlighted that the bond would cover the work required but this involved a lot of paperwork and liaising with the developer in advance to try sort out the issues.

Cllr. Killilea pointed out that it was not all builders who were like this but there does seem to be an issue in some towns with the same builders repeatedly. This cannot be allowed to continue, nor allowing builders to get planning permission for a new development when previous estates were not completed. He suggested that if a developer was applying for planning permission, they should be asked for financial payment to cover previous estates if not fully completed. He highlighted that Tuam in particular, was very bad with unfinished estates. He outlined that 12 estates had been taken in charge, but the money left towards the development did not cover the costs for same. He thanked Ms. Loughnane for agreeing to liaise with the Department on this matter.

Ms. Loughnane advised that she would revert to members at the next SPC meeting in relation to this matter after she liaises with the Department.

Cllr. D. Connolly & M. Connolly also thanked Ms. Loughnane for dealing with this matter.

Item No. 2 - Update on Stage 1 of the County Development Plan process

Ms. Loughnane gave a summary regarding the update of the Draft County Development Plan process and thanked all the staff from Forward Planning for all their hard work on same. She advised that the Issues Paper had been on display from 18th June 2020 – 10th September 2020 and during this time 148 submissions had been received, compared to 50 at the same stage for the last County Development Plan. She explained that the Chief Executives Report had been circulated to members and would be discussed in full by members at a special meeting held in early January 2021. After this meeting all comments would be taken on board and the Draft County Development Plan will be prepared. She also advised that an eBook of the Chief Executives Report would be available on the website shortly for all to view. It is envisaged that the Draft County Development Plan would be presented to members at the end of quarter 1 2021, with it then going on full public display in quarter 2 of 2021.

Cllr. M. Connolly queried if the submissions were available to view. Ms. Loughnane confirmed that the submissions were available to view on the website.

Mr. Dunne gave a brief summary on the submissions received. He explained that the submissions received were grouped under the relevant topics and were currently looking at how best to create the County Development Plan. He advised that looking at Urban Living/Rural Housing, there would be two separate chapters on Urban Placemaking and Rural Placemaking. He explained that there were still a lot of discussions to have about same.

Mr. Green asked if the report could be sent to SPC members. Mr. Dunne advised that the report would be available to view online in the next day or two, in both English and Irish. He stated that if anyone needed a hard copy of the report, same could be sent out to them.

Cllr. M. Connolly and Cllr. Killilea thanked the forward planning staff for all the work done to date. Cllr. Killilea highlighted that previous meetings regarding the development plan took quite a substantial amount of time, he asked if time would allow for submissions to be divided and presented to each Municipal District to be discussed prior to the Council meetings.

Ms. Loughnane explained that it was planned to have workshops but due to covid restrictions that had not been possible. She stated that when the Draft Plan is given to members it is intended to go to the Municipal District Meetings then but will depend on covid restrictions in place at the time. She highlighted that there would be time between members receiving the draft plan and same going on public display. She explained that Forward Planning want to be able go through the issues prior to the plenary council meeting to try make the process as easy as possible for all involved.

Cllr. M. Connolly highlighted that the plan was a county wide plan and was important to have engagement from as many people as possible. He stated that discussions could be done at MD meetings, but the public do tend to wait until the last few weeks to engage with members which can create last minute changes. Ms. Loughnane stated that the Forward Planning Staff were available to speak to members and the public and would hold meetings if needed to allow for discussions to take place.

Mr. Green commented that it was great to see such a big response so far and would be great to keep that up moving forward. He queried if the same engagement was planned for the draft plan. Ms. Loughnane advised that the team would be looking at ways to constantly engage with the public. She stated it was hoped to do workshops, but this would be covid health dependent. She also stated that they were currently looking at new IT methods to make it easier for submissions to be lodged. Mr. Green explained that he would be encouraging the PPN members to engage in the next part of the process again.

Ms. Ruane outlined that this was a critical piece of work for the County. She stated that the team had done a great volume of work and would encourage all SPC members and PPN members to encourage forums to engage as soon as possible to have any concerns raised and dealt with efficiently.

Item No. 3 - Update on River Basin Catchment Management Plan

Ms. Dolan gave an update on the River Basin Catchment Management Plan. She explained that there was a continuous decline which was alarming. She advised that there would have to be measures to address the decline included in the Draft River Basin Catchment Management Plan. She stated that it would be difficult but were required to protect water bodies. She advised that Galway was slightly above average in relation to the quality of water. She outlined that the councils are required to feed into the National policies as to what each council is doing to protect our waters. She stated that they were currently looking at what resources would be required for this, explaining that at present they have a Community Water Officer who was holding virtual meetings to allow engagement from people. She commented that would need to look at the bigger picture, should not have a decline in water quality, something is going wrong. With climate change getting worse this needs to be dealt with now. Will need to do more

research around wastewater treatment systems and how the lack of infrastructure in towns and villages was having an impact. She explained that they were currently on the third cycle of the plan and working with other stakeholders to see what areas will focus on as priority, approx. 14 priority areas at present. She advised that the plan would be available at the end of this year and would go on public display for 6 months before the final plan was prepared in early 2022.

Cllr. M. Connolly commented that it seemed to be down to a lack of resources. He advised that the issues in the different areas need to be resolved, a lack of investment will cause huge problems. He also commented that Environmental Systems need to be put in place in relation to farming in order to get farmers on board. He felt it was a huge task ahead and unfortunately due to the lack of resources would be unable to carry it out.

Ms. Dolan advised that with previous plans there had not been much public engagement but since 2016 more operational groups are getting involved. Quarterly meetings held with stakeholders and at National Level also. She explained that there were agricultural advisors who go out to farmers to show them best practices and has been great uptake on this which is very positive. In most situations have found people to be very engaging and working well together.

Cllr. D. Connolly thanked Ms. Dolan for the presentation. He stated that some villages did need the infrastructure updated. He outlined his concern at present with work being done in forestry. He stated that it might be an option to add conditions to the County Development Plan in relation to same. He advised that he had put a motion forward at a previous MD meeting that just one body would deal with this matter.

Cllr. M. Connolly stated that he did not think one individual body could solve the problems, would have reservations about same. He felt it was easier to make a phone call locally and have the matter dealt with locally.

Ms. Ruane advised that it was essential work which impacts on everything we do regarding infrastructure, health etc. She explained that resources for the Local Authority and investment in infrastructure was needed.

Ms. Mitchell outlined her concern for farmers in Gort due to flooding. Very dangerous in parts for people and will impact on farmers for grants. She advised that she would like this looked at as was very serious in the lowlands. Relocation would be an option and that planning would be approved for same.

Ms. Dolan advised that as an objective of the Environment Section all septic tanks are to be mapped. Cllr. Killilea asked if there was a deadline to have it completed and queried if inspections were taking place and how it was going. Ms. Dolan advised that there was a map showing vulnerability of each area. Required to investigate a certain percentage in each vulnerable area, a random selection of inspections carried out in areas where an impact will be made. Cllr. Killilea asked if confident that all septic tanks have now been registered. Ms. Dolan advised that overall 92% of the country is registered.

Cllr. Killilea referred to issues with flooding at slatted sheds. He referred to an area in Belclare where previously an applicant applied for a slatted shed and was asked to move the shed back even though he

advised them that that area was prone to flooding, this was prior to flood risk maps. Now that farmer must be on high alert with heavy rain incase of flooding and he needs to move animals. He commented that applicants should be listened too in relation to site selection. Cllr. M. Connolly agreed that the applicant themselves have the best local knowledge of the site selection.

Ms. Dolan explained that most applications for sheds come through Environment for consideration and each staff member assessing applications are fully qualified.

Ms. Ruane highlighted the importance of pre planning when site characterization is dealt with.

Item No. 4 – Any Other Business

Cllr. Killilea thanked Ms. Keaveney and the Planning Team for ensuring a recent submission was made against the application for proposed nuclear power plant.

The meeting then concluded.