

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Ceantar Bardasach Chonamara **Municipal District of Conamara**

Minutes of the Meeting of the Municipal District of Conamara held in the Council Chamber, Aras an Chontae, Galway on the 21st April 2017 @ 2.30 p.m

ILATHAIR:

Baill:

Cllr. N. Thomas Cathaoirleach,
S. Walsh, S. O'Tuairisg, S. Ó Cualáin,
T. Ó Cuirraoin, T. Healy, N. Byrne, T. Welby,
E. Mannion

Oifigigh:

G. Mullarkey, Head of Finance
M. Timmins, Acting Director of Services
P. Breathnach, S.E.E Conamara
T.J Redmond, Area Engineer, N. Conamara
M. Ní Chionna, Senior Engineer, Roads
Elaine O'Riordan, Ecologist NUI
Catherine Seale, Community Water Officer
E. Keaveney, AO Planning & Development
S. Groarke, Meetings Administrator

Apologies:

1. Minutes of the MD of Conamara Meeting held on the 10-2-2017 CMD 17012

The adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting held on the 10-2-2017 was proposed by Comh. T. O'Curraoin and seconded by Comh. S. O'Tuairisg .

2. Matters arising from the Minutes CMD 17013

Cllr. N. Thomas requested clarification in regard to the service of notices on private landowners regarding the cutting of trees, bushes and hedges which overhang on public roads and can be a potential hazard to traffic. M. Timmins advised that the Council places a public notice in newspapers every year informing landowners of their legal obligation to cut trees, hedges and bushes growing on their land which overhangs onto the public road and poses a danger to traffic. He also confirmed that the Council will serve notice on individual private landowners where safety issues arise. He stated that the Council cuts trees and

bushes growing on the verges of Regional & Local roads between September and February. Cllr. E. Mannion enquired about the responsibility for tree and hedge cutting along the N59. M. Timmins advised that it is undertaken by the local Area Office in accordance with the grant allocation received from T.I.I Comh. S. O' Tuairisg enquired about whether CES schemes could do this work or are they prevented due to health & safety reasons. Comh. S. O' Cualáin stated that he was aware of other schemes where works were undertaken at the side of the road and there appears to be no problems with health & safety. He enquired if Udarás na Gaeltachta were preventing CES schemes from undertaking this type of work due to insurance issues. Comh. T. O'Curraoin advised that Kevin Finn had contacted Udarás about this problem in the past. Cllr. S. Walsh stated that there were men working at the side of the road in the Maam Valley and advised that the Council should be able to get CES schemes to do likewise. M. Timmins advised that some local authorities encourage local communities to do this work by means of grant payments. Cllr. N. Byrne requested clarification in regard to the proposed footbridge for Oughterard and referred to an inaccurate newspaper report on it. P. Breathnach advised that the Council has sought funding from TII for the footbridge as the location is on the National Secondary route. Cllr. S. Walsh advised that the Lough Corrib Navigation Trust have a different relationship with NPWS than the Council as there appears to be better communication to avoid holdups and he enquired in regard to the Councils contacts with NPWS on the proposed footbridge. P. Breathnach advised that the Council has got an environmental assessment and has been in contact with NPWS on the matter. He described the 4 environmental constraints as regards the habitats for salmon, otter, pearl mussel and bats. He stated that the method of construction was intended to have minimum impact as it would be based on a stainless steel structure placed on pads. Comh. S. O' Tuairisg stated that a similar bridge to this was erected in Spiddal. He also enquired about the proposed works for the pier at Inishere for which planning permission was granted and €8.5 was allocated in the Government's Capital Program. He stated that responsibility for its implementation lay with Roinn na Gaeltachta and expressed his concern about losing the funding if there was no progress on this scheme. M. Timmins advised that the Council has sought a fee proposal from the Consultants in order to re-engage them on this project. He hoped that contract documents would be available by October and the Council could go to the tender stage then.

3. Update on the N59

CMD 17014

M. Timmins advised that the design has been completed for the overlay for a 6 km section between Bunnakill and Claremount which is 10 km in length and the receipt of tenders is scheduled for the first week of May. He stated that work on the overlay is anticipated for the end of May/early June and will take 6-8 weeks to complete. He advised that work on the design for the overlay on the remaining 4 km section will continue – he explained that the Council cannot undertake surface dressing works after September. He confirmed that the Consultants have been engaged to prepare method statements in regard to Maam Cross-Bunnakill which will then be sent to NPWS. He advised that once the method statements have been agreed with NPWS-the Council will proceed to the Site Investigation stage and he hoped that the Design Stage will be completed at the end of the year. He stated that the ecologist has been on site. He confirmed that TII are committed to re-investigating the options in regard to Maam Cross-Clifden in light of the Bord Pleanála planning decision. In regard to the Clifden-Leenane section of the N59 –he advised of work on the preliminary design stage for the road west of Letterfrack. He stated that work including accommodation works was been completed on the approach roads to Moycullen and that the preparation of

contract documents for the Moycullen Bypass will be reactivated. Cllr. T. Healy enquired if the Council and the NRDO had sufficient staff resources at present and whether an overlay should be considered for the Clifden-Maam Cross section of the N59. M. Timmins confirmed that TII has requested the Council to engage more staff for the national road projects and they are committed to funding these staff resources. He explained the need to have suitable staff with relevant training and expertise. He also explained that TII have an intervention program to assess roads before they get below a certain standard and the section between Clifden-Maam Cross is getting close to that. He stated that in his opinion this road will have to be overlaid in the future. Comh. S. O'Tuairisg enquired if the Council could use the NRDO office in Roscommon and explained that Pascal O'Donohue, Minister for Public Expenditure had recently announced the €2.56 bn Local Infrastructural Fund which was available for relevant projects. He also advised that Roinn na Gaeltachta had provided funding for roads in Conamara in the past. M. Timmins advised that the Council did approach the NRDO in Roscommon but they are currently not in a position to provide staff resources. Cllr. E. Mannion raised her concerns about the impact that the proposed overlay works scheduled to commence in June will have as regards traffic delays and inconvenience to tourists. She also expressed her concern as regards the lack of progress on Clifden-Maam Cross and enquired if a decision on the overlay could be speeded up. She enquired if the Derrylea-Clifden section could be progressed under Part 8. M. Timmins explained that this would have to be considered on its merits and whether it is feasible to undertake it as a standalone project. Comh. S'O Cualáin stated that it was important that NPWS give a quick response when they receive the method statements for Maam Cross-Bunnakill. Cllr. N. Byrne referred to the 100 km/h speed limit on the Claremount- Bunnakill section and the location of a national school along the route. M. Timmins advised that once the overlay commences the road works speed limit of 60 km/h will apply along the entire section. M. Ní Chionna advised that consideration of speed limits will be on the agenda for the June meeting –the Council has been in consultation with TII and Tobins Consultants. Cllr. N. Thomas welcomes the fact that there is some initial progress in regard to the overlay and the method statements for part of the N59. He referred to the topography which consists of bog and expressed concern that the overlay may become a permanent feature and recommended the installation of membranes. He also referred to the proposed bypass for Moycullen and the instigation of the consultation process again. He stated that the works on the entrances to the village in particular the Roscahill & Tullykyne side should have been designed in accordance with the 2013 DMurs manual- which refers to the implementation of landscaping and streetscaping works.

4. Update on the R-336

CMD 17015

Comh. S. O'Tuairisg advised that the current planning restrictions imposed on lands adjoining the indicative routes for the proposed new R-336 should be lifted until the emerging route for the N6 Bypass is announced- he stated that these routes were introduced in 2006. The planning restrictions are preventing members of the local community from lodging planning applications for housing and are causing hardship to those who are forced to rent property as a result. Comh. T. O'Curraoin state that there are too many routes proposed for the R-336 and that the Councillors have made their preference known i.e the Brown Route which is approximately half way between the N59 and the existing R-336 Coast Road. Comh. S. O'Cualáin referred to the lack of progress on the R-336 and stated that he could not see any reason why planning restrictions could not be removed from most of the routes. Cllr. S. Walsh stated that developers appear to be able to get roads built leading to windfarm developments in Conamara. He advised that if the

Council cannot secure agreement on a preferred route-then serious consideration should be given to the upgrading of an alternative existing route. The route he proposed was Ragoon Cemetery Road-Paddy's Cross –Lettergunnet-Shannafreaghoge-Moycullen/Spiddal Road-Spiddal. He advised that there are less problems with traffic to the west of Spiddal and that the Council has not examined this alternative proposal. Cllr. E. Mannion advised that this proposal should be seconded and that the Councillors would need to have a meeting with M. Timmins and the Consultants in regard to this. Comh. T. O'Curraoin advised that the road from the tie in between the Western Distributor Road with the Cappagh Road out to Paddy's Cross could also be considered for upgrading. Cllr. N. Thomas stated that the Council needs to be decisive and make a decision on this matter and explained that he wants to see a major road constructed back to Rossaveal in order to further assist its development as a commercial harbour. Comh. S. O'Tuairisg referred to the section to Spiddal which is in an NHA (National Heritage Area) and enquired about the feasibility of having a corridor set aside for the R-336. He also referred to the situation regarding the construction of the A9 road through the Cairngorm National Park in Scotland where it appears that Scottish National Heritage, the equivalent of NPWS, does work with local authorities to sort out planning problems. This area does include habitats containing pearl mussels and he recommended that relevant personnel from Jacobs Consultants should be made available to the Councillors to advise as to how Scotland is able to progress these new road projects. M. Ní Chionna advised that due to the fact M. Timmins had to leave the meeting- she has made note of the points made by the Councillors and she will discuss the proposed alternative route from Ragoon to Paddy's Cross to the Moycullen-Spiddal Road with him.

5. Conamara Greenway

CMD 17016

Cllr. N. Thomas confirmed that he has been in contact with Shane Ross T.D Minister for Transport in regard to the proposed Greenways for County Galway and that he recently received an e-mail response from him. He advised that the process was flawed as there was no proper consultation with the landowners at the outset. He stated that the Council officials who were sent out to negotiate the rights for permissive access with the landowners had their hands tied as they were required to adhere to the old railway line route and had no flexibility as a result. He explained that compensation for the landowners and flexibility as regards the route direction will have to be a factor-the public consultation process should involve Council officials discussing the process with the landowners in a room with the aid of maps in order to try and get their consent. He referred to the fact that the proposed route is mainly along small farm holdings and commonage in Conamara. He advised that he informed the Minister that funding will be required in order for the Council to negotiate the purchase of the relevant land. He referred to the potential economic boost which a Greenway would provide to Conamara and it was essential that funding be committed as it is a vital project that needs to progress. He explained that the assumption made by the Department in the past that the system used by Mayo County Council of obtaining the consent of landowners by means of permissive access could be replicated elsewhere was not realistic. He stated that the vast majority of the community are in favour of the Greenway –but some want it beside by-roads or near the N59. He explained that the Council intends to seek planning permission from Bord Pleánála for the Galway City-Oughterard section later this year.

Cllr. S. Walsh advised that the Council got planning permission for the Clifden-Oughterard section of the Greenway without obtaining the consent of the landowners. He stated that the lack of proper consultation indicated to the landowners that there was no compassion for their plight and the knock on effects on their existing frugal livelihoods –such as their entitlements to the single farm payments. There was also the question of the impact of severance or where their farms could be split in half. He advised that the consent of the landowners is required in order to obtain planning permission. Cllr. E. Mannion explained that the section of the Greenway between Clifden –Dooneen has been completed and work is ongoing at Ballinahinch. Cllr. T. Healy stated that the concerns of the landowners have to be respected and consensus is required- he felt that some of their concerns can be addressed by proper consultation. He advised that the landowners on the section between Oughterard –Roscahill think there are alternatives. He referred to the economic benefits accrued by the Mayo Greenway and stated that the N59 is a dangerous road for cyclists and pedestrians. Comh. S. O’Cualáin referred to the problems farmers have in regard to designations and inspections –they are used to wheeling and dealing and have to be consulted in a proper way. Cllr. T. Welby stated that planning applications are going through without landowners consent. The planning permission granted by Bord Pleanála in regard to Clifden- Oughterard was not based on a CPO application- permissive access allows the farmers complete ownership and control. He advised that the section between Clifden- Ballinahinch is been done on the basis of landowners consent and stated that in his opinion that in regard to planning the Council does not have to strictly follow the railway line route. He referred to the fact that no planning application was submitted by Mayo County Council but it is required in County Galway due to the SACs. He stated that the Conamara Greenway Alliance want to consult with the Councillors and that a meeting has been arranged for 3.00 p.m on the 2-5-2017 in the County Buildings which will include 2 speakers to provide information on the newly completed Waterford-Dungarvan Greenway. He advised that there is a potential large customer base for a Greenway in Conamara and the wider community will reap the benefit- there was an estimated 20,000 people using the Waterford Greenway the previous weekend.

Cllr. N. Thomas advised that TII took the wrong approach in regard to the proposed Galway-Athlone Greenway by publishing the route as a fait accompli. He stated that there is a greater understanding/recognition in the Department now in regard to the effect on farmers and the next step is the adoption of a new realistic approach in regard to the strategy and the public consultation process. He advised that he has sought a commitment from the Department in regard to this. He referred to the National Cycle Network strategy and advised that the Department’s priority is the Dublin-Galway route and it could take a long time before a Greenway for Conamara is provided. M. Ní Chionna advised that she noted what the Councillors have stated at the meeting and she will discuss the matter with M. Timmins and C. Wynne in the Roads Department.

6. Water Catchment Areas/River Basin Management
Presentation by Catherine Seale -Community Water Officer

CMD 17017

Cllr. N. Thomas introduced Catherine Seale to the meeting-who is the Community Water Officer for the local authority areas of Galway County Council, Galway City Council and Roscommon County Council. She advised that the European Union (Water Policy) Regulations 2014 places new obligations on Local Authorities in coordinating the catchment

management and public participation elements of the Water Framework Directive. It assigns responsibility to Local Authorities for regional coordination, public participation and support to the Department and the EPA in the development and implementation of the River Basin Management and Program of Measures. She explained that LAWCO (Local Authorities Waters and Communities Office) was established by Local Authorities to promote public awareness, participation and knowledge sharing in regard to this. She advised that LAWCO is managed jointly by Kilkenny and Tipperary County Councils and operates as a shared service on behalf of all 31 Local Authorities. It has a staff complement of 3 regional coordinators, 3 specialist support staff based in Clonmel and 12 Community Water Officers operating from different centres throughout the country- she is based in the Environment Section of the Council at Centre Point in Líosban. She stated that a participatory approach to water management with the involvement of local communities will lead to a more innovative and democratic water management process and will provide a mechanism through which real public participation can be brought to bear on the development, adoption and implementation of the River Basin Management Plan.

She explained that the Water Framework Directive (WFD) was adopted by the EU in 2000 to establish a framework across member states for the protection and improvement of natural water bodies which include rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters and groundwater. Compliance with the WFD is to be achieved through River Basin Management Plans and a Program of Measures that are reviewed every 6 years- the second cycle of those plans 2016-2021 is underway. The EU (Water Policy) Regulations 2015 was introduced to give effect to the WFD in Irish Law. She advised that these regulations established a new 3 tier interlocking governance structure to implement the WFD across the country with clear responsibilities assigned to the Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government, the EPA and Local Authorities.

Tier 1 Is the Water Policy Advisory Committee which is chaired by the Department and consists of the EPA, OPW, HSE, CCMA, GSI (Geological Survey of Ireland), CER (Commission for Energy Regulation), DFAM (Department of Agriculture, Food & Marine), DAHG (Department of Arts, Heritage & Gaeltacht) & the Department of Health. Its principal role is oversight of the process, policy, regulation and resources and to sign off on the River Basin Management Plans and Programs of Measures.

Tier 2: refers to the EPA which is responsible for technical implementation and reporting. Its role involves the lead on the scientific aspects of the WFD, monitoring, assessment & reporting, Preparation of the River Basin Management Plans, evaluation and implementation of measures and monitoring of enforcement tasks and environmental outcomes.

Tier 3: refers to Local Authorities who are responsible for regional implementation and public participation. Their role involves LAWCO, public engagement and participation, monitoring, licencing and enforcement actions and implementation of the River Basin Management Plans and Program of Measures.

She stated that public participation is a core element of the WFD and experiences to date have indicated that the success of any plans and measures will require a collaborative approach between communities, public bodies and relevant stakeholders. She cited the

annual Tidy Towns Awards was a good example of this. She explained that funding will be critical if communities are to take on a greater role in the management of their local water environment. LAWCO will provide technical advice and assistance in relation to local, regional, national and EU funding streams connected to water quality management. She stated that successful river basin management planning requires an integrated approach to the protection, improvement and management of the whole water environment. This process revolves around a 6 year cycle of planning, action and review. A revised River Basin Management Plan is produced every 6 years –but Ireland is currently running 2 years behind schedule to produce its second cycle plan and therefore the next plan will run from January 2018-December 2021. She advised that the current timelines that the draft RBMP plan will be issued for public consultation by June 2017 and LAWCO will coordinate and undertake this work on behalf of Local Authorities. The Plan and Program of Measures is scheduled to be published in December 2017. She stated that there is a public consultation meeting scheduled for Maam Cross on the 2nd of May. She also referred to a new website www.catchments.ie that has been developed in partnership by the Department, the EPA and LAWCO to provide public access to information and data connected to rivers, lakes and coastal waters that has been gathered by the EPA and other public bodies. Accounts of successful community initiatives with a connection to water quality management will also be made available on this site.

Cllr. N. Thomas commended C. Seale for her presentation and referred to the need to protect great water resources such as the Corrib and the Moycullen Lakes. He advised that the legislation governing the registration of septic tanks appears to be a money collecting exercise and is a small target as regards enforcement as the EPA attribute only 5% of water pollution to it- it is industry and farming that cause the bulk of the pollution. Comh. S. O’Cualáin enquired about Lough Oorid which is in a commonage area with no houses and where the water standard had a low indication on the map. M. Ní Chionna advised that this may be due to the fact that expected fish species were not in the lake and that peat was getting into the water. Cllr. E. Mannion enquired about Lough Ocras and was advised by E. O’Riordan that fish species were the problem here also.

7. Draft Invasive Species Strategy

Presentation by Elaine O’Riordan Biodiversity Project Manager

CMD 17018

Cllr. N. Thomas introduced Elaine O’Riordan to the meeting who is the Biodiversity Project Manager in regard to the Draft Invasive Species Strategy for County Galway –she is a staff member of the Applied Ecology Unit –Centre for Environmental Science at NUI Galway. She advised the meeting that she was engaged by the Council to prepare an Invasive Species Strategy for County Galway. She defined Invasive Alien Species as plants and animals that have been introduced to a new area outside of their normal range –where in the absence of natural controls such as predators or disease they spread rapidly and cause ecological, health or economic impacts in their new environment. They become a serious pest and are considered to be the second greatest threat to biodiversity worldwide after habitat loss. They cause a range of environmental problems such as:

- Out-competing native species for resources such as space and food
- Introducing new diseases and parasites affecting native wild or domestic species.
- Diluting of native gene pool by interbreeding with native species.
- Predation of native species or grazing of native plants/habitats.

- Erosion, alteration of waterways, flooding and visual landscape impacts.

There is also an economic factor which includes loss of productive land and the cost associated with treatment. She advised that there is a long list of recognized invasive species in Ireland including a broad range of plant and animal species. These species were the subject of a risk assessment process undertaken by Invasive Species Ireland. She stated that from the Council's perspective not all the invasive plants and animals warrant the same level of concern and in terms of the strategy it was decided to categorise them in order of importance/criteria and assign a priority rating of 1-4. Under the assessment criteria most of the invasive species which have been categorized as priority relate to terrestrial or aquatic plant species.

1. **Primary Concern:** High impact species requiring urgent, direct action on behalf of GCC through active control, monitoring, recording, awareness and education, promote and support community control projects, notification of landowners. These include the following:

- Japanese, Giant, Bohemian and Himalayan Knotweed (*Fallopia* species) which are growing extensively on roadsides and public and private property around the County.
- Giant Rhubarb: (*Gunnera*) is a problem to public and private property in Conamara. It appears to have spread rapidly in recent years.
- Giant Hogweed: (*Heracleum M*) has been identified as a problem in Tuam and areas such as Maam and Rossaveal.
- Himalayan Balsam: (*Glandulifera Impatiens*) is becoming well established in a number of locations e.g near rivers at Spiddal, Maam and Clifden. Considered to be more widespread than previously thought.
- Rhododendron Ponticum: is widespread and extensive in Conamara and in a number of woodland areas throughout the County.

2. **Secondary Concern:** High impact species requiring urgent action. The Council will engage in indirect action via partnership with other agencies in active control, monitoring, recording, awareness and education, promote and support community control projects, notification of landowners. These include the following:

- Zebra Mussel (*Dreissena P*) which is widespread throughout Lough Corrib and other lakes in the west of the County.
- New Zealand Pygmy Weed (*Crassula helmsii*): is present in a number of locations on Lough Corrib.
- Curly African Pondweed (*Lararosiphon major*): occurs in many of the bays throughout Lough Corrib and is dealt with by a weed management team from Inland Fisheries with the support of the OPW and GCC.

3. **High/Medium impact species of local concern:** The Council will engage mostly through recording, monitoring and raising awareness, Support or engage in active control on a case by case basis.
4. **Low Priority Species:** All other species –the Council will provide advice or control on a case by case basis where issues arise.

She advised that the key legislation dealing with problem Invasive Species in Ireland is the EC (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011 where under Section 49 it is an offence to; plant, allow or cause to disperse, spread or cause to grow any plants or animals nor ordinarily resident in the state as well as those listed in Part 1 of the Third Schedule. Section 50 makes it an offence to: import, buy, sell, breed, reproduce or propagate, advertise, offer or expose for sale, publish a price list, transport or distribute any plant or animal species or vector material listed in the Third Schedule. The EC Regulation on the prevention and management of the introduction and spread of invasive alien species came into force for member states in January 2015. Member states will be required to put monitoring and control strategies in place to deal with listed species. She explained that the limits of the County Council in terms of its jurisdictional powers, resources and practical capacity must be recognized in regard to the problem. It is a large county with severe invasive species infestations in some areas such as knotweed- with much of it on private land-the Council alone cannot make an impact. It would also be very difficult for the Council to control widespread invasive animal species such as mink or New Zealand flatworm. She stated that the Council shares physical and jurisdictional boundaries with private individuals and other state agencies and bodies such as ESB, IFI, Coillte, Watersways Ireland, NPWS, Irish Water and the OPW and that it is important to develop and maintain a good working partnership with them in order to implement the strategy and limit the spread of invasive species. She advised that it is important that the Council is seen to be taking action to tackle invasive species and demonstrates best practice in dealing with it. She referred to the fact that the County Development Plan has a number of policies and objectives relating to it including where the potential for the spread of invasive species is identified as part of a development proposal - the developer will be required to submit an invasive species management plan. She explained that a working group was set up in 2015 which included Council staff to develop a policy and strategy and a meeting was organized with representatives from other agencies and organisations to discuss the co-ordination of efforts to manage the problem. She stated that while work has commenced on aspects of the strategy it would be ideal to have a dedicated Invasive Species Officer within the Council who can coordinate the actions of the plan and liaise with the working group as well as the partner agencies, community groups and the public. In the long term the implementation of the invasive species strategy will be overseen by the Biodiversity Project Manager/IS Officer and the IS working group. She advised that it is likely that much of the work in terms of education, awareness, recording, mapping and erecting signage can be carried out by existing staff but it likely that the use of specialist contractors will be the most practical and efficient approach to tackling infestations of invasive weeds on the ground. She advised that it is imperative that adequate resources are allocated to the implementation of the strategy and funding will be sought from Central Government, Local Councillors, Partner agencies and sources to be identified.

She concluded by stating that the draft Strategy has to go before the SPC and for outside consultation and getting partner agencies and local communities involved is vital. A dedicated budget is essential and she cited the fact that Peter Gill in Mayo was allocated a budget of €100,000 to deal with Japanese knotweed-which has to be chemically treated and should not be cut.

Cllr. N. Thomas complimented her on the comprehensive presentation and advised that it is a serious problem—as a professional landscape gardener he has been treating Japanese knotweed which takes 3-5 years to eradicate using herbicides. He advised that other plant invasive species are not as difficult to treat as Japanese knotweed—which has the capacity to regenerate and travel 11 m underground. He stated that treatment can be effective but it is important that affected landowners recognise the seriousness of the problem and the methods of treatment and prevention. He stated that location maps are vital to indicate precisely which areas were sprayed each year. He mentioned that P. Breathnach implemented a good program as regards spraying the roadside areas last year. He cited the importance of community involvement on tackling the problem and bodies such as Moycullen Tidy Towns Committee will need support. He stated that bindweed was becoming a problem as well as the New Zealand flatworm which eats native earthworms. He described how the Great Lakes in North America were infested by Zebra mussels which on the positive side can purify water through filtration of matter. Cllr. N. Byrne thanked E.O’ Riordan for an informative presentation and advised that funding should be prioritized to deal with the problem. Comh. S.O’ Tuairisg advised of the importance of getting to grips with the problem and having an eradication program. He stated that Cornamona and Clonbur are badly affected by knotweed and that contractors are required to do a proper job. He referred to the damage being done to native earthworms by the New Zealand flatworm and the increase in the spread of the Giant Rhubarb. Cllr. T. Healy enquired as to the process to be used by TII in treating the verges of the National Roads- he had not seen them treated yet. He also stated that he was willing to make NOM funding available. E. O’Riordan responded by advising that the optimum time to treat the weeds was the end of the season and that is why he may not have witnessed the treatment by TII. Cllr. T. Welby described a site in Furbo where it took 3 years to eradicate knotweed and cited lack of education as a problem. He advised that the spread of zebra mussels was rampant in the Corrib where the water quality has improved. He described how NPWS have responsibility for dealing with invasive species which they have abdicated- Inland Fisheries Ireland are doing their job as regards the Corrib. They appear to have a narrow focus as regards their role. He advised that the strategy should be circulated to planning agents. Comh. S. O’Cualáin described the treatment of knotweed on his own land and enquired if the Department of Agriculture or Teagasc have any role in the eradication of these invasive weeds or will they provide a contribution from their budgets. Cllr. E. Mannion advised of the spread of rhododendron in the Letterfrack-Kylemore area. E. O’Riordan advised that Coillte are focused on the spread of rhododendron in wooded areas and she will arrange to compile a leaflet on it as it needs to be treated. Cllr. N. Thomas stated that the Department of Agriculture are involved in the treatment of the sooty mould fungus. Comh. T. O’Curraoin enquired as to who is responsible for the treatment of invasive weeds on lands in the possession of NAMA and was advised by E. O’Riordan that NPWS had the responsibility for the enforcement of the legislation.

8. Annual Report-2016

CMD 17019

The adoption of the 2016 Annual Report for the Municipal District of Conamara was proposed by Comh. Seosamh O’Cualáin and seconded by Cllr. N. Byrne and agreed. This will form part of the Annual Report of Galway County Council for 2016.

9. Request for Pre-Planning Clinics

MD 17020

Comh. S. O’Tuairisg referred to the fact that pre-planning clinics were held in the past and requested that they be instated once a month as they would be useful in regard to sorting out problems at the initial stage of proposed developments. He advised that it can take up to 3 months to get a pre-planning meeting. E. Keaveney advised that it now takes approximately 2 months to schedule a pre-planning meeting but that she will discuss the matter with Catherine McConnell DOS. She stated that lack of staff resources will be a major factor –there are 2 new planners for the Conamara Area. She stated that the Planning Office will be placing Planning Guidelines on the Council website in the near future and a seminar is planned for Architects and Planning Agents.

10. Date & Venue for Next Meeting

MD 17021

It was agreed that the Annual Meeting and the next ordinary meeting would be held commencing at 11.00 a.m on Tuesday 6-6-2017 in the Council Chamber.

11. Cathaoirleach’s Business

CMD 17022

The Councilors paid tribute to T. J Redmond who is being transferred from the Clifden Area Office to the NRDO. They complimented him for the efficient, methodical and proactive way he undertook his duties and was at all times considerate and helpful- they spoke of the reliance Councilors have on the local Area Engineer to get things done. The meeting was reminded of the time he had closed the road leading to the damaged bridge at Leenane in time to prevent tragedy. They spoke of the need for Councilors to be informed in advance of such changes and being provided with information as to what staff are working on the N59 and other projects. It was also proposed that he be retained at the Clifden Area Office – until he could train his successor.

12. Any Other Business

CMD 17023

Comh. S. O’Tuairisg spoke of his concern at the lack of outdoor staff in Conamara- it appears that some of them are being transferred to the east of the County to work on water schemes. Cllr. T. Healy stated that the Council required more staff and it was not getting enough financial resources- the fact that the Planning Office could not provide planning clinics is an example of this. Cllr. N. Byrne enquired as to the Council making an application for Clár Funding for safety measures at Tooreeny and Moycullen National Schools. She also referred to the Town & Village Renewal Scheme and made an appeal to Directors of Services and Senior Engineers to nominate a staff member to oversee the application process for the funding. She requested an answer to her queries before the June meeting.

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