

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Ceantar Bardasach Chonamara

Municipal District of Conamara

Minutes of the Monthly Meeting of the Municipal District of Conamara

held on Monday 7th March 2025 at 10.30am in the Western Hotel.

I LATHAIR:

CATHAORILEACH: Cllr. T. Welby

BAILL: Comh T. Ó Curraoin, Comh Mac An Iomaire, Cllr. S. Walsh, Cllr M. Leainde, Cllr. N. Thomas, Cllr Martin Lee, Cllr E Mannion, Cllr G. King.

OIFIGH: U Finn Director of Services, L Hanrahan DOS, Planning and Economic Development, V. Loughnane, S. Planner, Patrick O'Sullivan, S.E. Planner, D. Egan, E. Planner, C. Cosgrave. S.E. Planner Rachel Lowe S.E, T Prendergast S.E, TJ Redmond S.E.E, N O'Conaola E.E, Liam Tierney E.T, I Martyn A.O. Meetings, S. Casey A.S.O,

1. Confirmation of the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Municipal District of Conamara held on Friday 14th February 2025.

On the **Proposal** by Cllr Mannion and **Seconded** by Comh Mac An Iomaire the Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting MD Conamara held on 14th February 2025 were then agreed upon.

2. Matters Arising.

No Matters Arising.

3. Chief Executive Report - Sceirde Rocks Offshore Wind Farm.

Mr. Hanrahan informed members that under Section 291 of the Planning and Development Act 2000(as amended) requires a Chief Executive Report must be submitted to An Bord Pleanála. This final Chief Executive report will be presented to the Elected Members of Galway County Council on the 24th March, 2025 by the Planning Department. Elected members will then have the opportunity to express their concerns and views on the proposed development and these will be recorded in Appendix 1 of the report in accordance with Section 291(6)&(7) of the Act.

He reminded the members to keep in mind the importance that Galway County Council do not set the planning conditions as this lies solely with An Bord Pleanála but that members could and should recommend local conditions to bring to An Bord Pleanála and to see it as an opportunity to raise questions. Comments from the Roads, Climate, Conservation, Heritage, Biodiversity and Environment Departments in Galway County Council have been requested and will be included in the final CE Report also.

Mr. Hanrahan highlighted however, that although Galway County Council has no authority in determining the proposed application a list of conditions has been outlined and will include conditions such as:

Planning Conditions – Plans and Particulars, Time Frames, Community Liaison Officer and Agreement of Development Details.

Financial Contributions- Special Contributions, S48 Contribution, Community Benefit Fund and Bonds. Environment Conditions i.e. Ensuring compliance with mitigation measures set out in the EIAR, NIS and CEMP.

Roads- Construction and Maintenance Stage, Haul Roads, Use of Ports and Mitigation.

Decommissioning Conditions.

Mr. Hanrahan shared with members that Galway County Council must ensure that these conditions are in place and is recommending prior to development that a Community Benefit Fund must be put in place by the Developer and agreed in writing with Galway County Council in line with the Offshore Renewal Electricity Support Scheme (ORESS).

The Community Benefit Fund would set out the working environment between each Generator and Fund Administrator. The importance of a simple mechanism for running the fund must be established.

Again, it was repeated that submissions or observations may be made only to An Bord Pleanála in writing or online. This would be at a cost of €50 and must be received by the Bord no later than 5.30pm 24th March 2025. These submissions must state the name of the person making the submission, the name of the person acting on his or her behalf and the address to which the correspondence relating to the application should be sent, the subject matter of the observation/submission and the reasons, consideration and arguments on which the submission is based in full. It was also stated by Mr. Hanrahan that it was imperative that these submissions/observations be logged with An Bord Pleanála and not Galway County Council.

It was communicated at the meeting that any questions in relation to the application process should be directed to the Marine Area Planning Section of An Bord Pleanála (Tel 01-8588100) and that it was acceptable for a person in accordance with section 50 of the Planning and development Act 2000 to question the validity of the Bord's decision by way of application for judicial review under Order 84 of the Rules of Superior Courts. Practical information on the judicial review can be sought under the heading Publications-Judial Review Notice on the Bords's website www.pleanala.ie or www.citizensinformation.ie. The application is to be decided upon by 28th July, 2025 but this could possibly be extended although there is no confirmation that this is going to happen.

Council members were notified that a Marine Application had been lodged and Mr. Hanrahan enlightened members that this was a 10 Year development permission and had a 38-year operational lifespan. This concluded Mr. Hanrahan's update on the Offshore Windfarm.

Matters Arising and Responses:

Cathaoirleach Cllr Welby thanked Mr. Hanrahan for his detailed report on the Wind Farm project and stated that he himself has never witnessed a project as large as this in his lifetime. He reminded the Members that opinions and concerns could be shared but that the council had no influence in making any decisions in relation to this work.

Cllr. Mannion enquired regarding funding and stated that the Connemara roads and those particular in Carna were in a bad state as it was, never mind having to cater for more traffic and heavy loads if this application is granted. She also noted that roads flooding was always a risk in that area.

In reply to Cllr Mannion, Mr. Hanrahan replied that a contribution will be sought by the Council from the developer.

Comh Mac An Iomaire enquired if the developers would be using the Ros a' Mhil Port as a service area for this work.

Mr. Hanrahan replied that Ros a' Mhil may be used as a service point but how much it would be utilised, he didn't know at this stage.

Cllr. King enquired if the turbines would be floating or fixed.

Mr. Hanrahan confirmed that all the turbines would be fixed.

Comh Ó Curraoin indicated that he was extremely concerned about the location of these turbines and that Galway Bay was very scenic and the landscape would be forever changed. He declared he was also very worried about the fishing community in the area and how this development would affect this community. He stated that nobody owned the sea, but everyone had a right to fish in it. He added that he did not agree with An Bord Pleanála in relation to this matter and that the Bord should be consistent and straight across the board with this matter.

Comh Ó Curraoin indicated that if it goes ahead Ros a'Mhil should benefit.

Comh Ó Curraoin acknowledged that we must move forward with cleaner energy but felt that Connemara is being littered with Wind Farms and that fishing grounds should not be disturbed by these Farms. He advised that he would be submitting his own submission to An Bord.

Cllr. Leainde speculated that if the planning permission for Ros a'Mhil deepwater quay is not put through how this will impact the development in Conamara. It was clarified that this was a separate application.

Cllr. Walsh revealed that he had been connecting with the public about this matter and people are very upset. Many of them feel like the fisherman were not dealt with adequately. Although members of the public see the merit in wind energy, they are also worried that with more development comes more disruption to the area. One of their major concern is how large and high the turbines are in stature and the scenery of the locality will be forever destroyed. He also mentioned that locals are very aware of the many restrictions regarding building homes in Conamara but this company can place these huge turbines out on our coast.

Cllr. Walsh implied that perhaps more interaction and consolidation between the developers and locals would benefit all. He assumed that the people of the area will be compensated and particularly people in Meenish should favourably benefit.

Cllr. Mannion agreed with Cllr Walsh that the persons most impacted should get the most compensation. She pronounced that there was no point in sacrificing the Conamara coast line unless the area benefited from the development and jobs have to be local. She agreed too that fisherman were not 100% happy with the project but she said it may be good for the area.

Cllr. King informed the members that he would be adding a submission to An Bord Pleanála and that the Community Fund should be strongest to the nearest point of land and communities most impacted should benefit first from the Community Benefit Fund.

Cllr. Mannion added that An Bord Pleanála should extend the submission date to allow more time.

Comh O'Curraoin commented that even if fishermen were compensated that it was still within their rights to fish in the sea.

Cathaoirleach Cllr Welby highlighted that Conamara has a lot of issues with roads and noted that everyone wanted Ros a'Mhil to be used and developed for the community. He suggested that the community funds could be used as leverage to benefit the area and the 20yrs lifetime of the fund could be a game changer for the locality. He reminded all that this process was a nationally designed one and he strenuously encouraged that the local people should avail of the community fund.

Comh O'Curraoin again said he was very apprehensive about the location of the turbines, and suggested that they should be further out at sea.

In response to comments made by members in relation to impact on local roads in Conamara due to heavy loads, Mr. Finn stated that he had not seen any indication of such in the proposed development application, but that Roads and Transport will be issuing a report on the proposed development.

- Cllr. Mannion proposed that the comments and observations should be included in the report and all the members agreed with this.
- Mr. Hanrahan told the meeting that all queries will be dealt with. Galway Port and Ros a'Mhill will be highly recommended by them as a service point. He noted that visuals as well as amenities and proximity to the shore were all chief concerns and because of this encouraged all to make submissions but cautioned that the work could not be moved out of the planning zone. He advised anyone that was making submissions to make them as detailed and specific as possible.
- Mr. Finn reassured the members that all comments would be included in the appendix of the Chief Executive Report and will be brought to the Plenary Meeting in March.

4. To consider and adopt the 2025 Annual Schedule of proposed Works of maintenance and repair to be carried out in the Connemara Municipal District

Mr. Finn told the members that no budget allocations have yet been received from T.I.I. and therefore the item will be deferred to the April meeting.

Cathaoirleach Cllr. Welby addressed the members to see if they agreed with this and they all returned that they did.

5. Municipal District of Conamara Directors Business.

Mr. Finn confirmed he had nothing to add to item.

6. Municipal District of Conamara Cathaoirleach's Business.

Cllr. Lee enquired if there was any update on the road to An Maolan, Na Forbacha as this road is in a terrible condition.

Comh O'Curraoin acknowledged that this development still was not completed, and the road was indeed in a very bad state.

Comh Mac An Iomaire noted that he was getting numerous complaints regarding the condition of this road.

Cathaoirleach Cllr. Welby questioned the agreement with the developers and their responsibility for maintenance of the road or if the deadline expired?

Ms. Lowe confirmed that such an agreement was in place and that the Council going forward were trying to establish more correlation between developers, the roads department and planning department in future.

Cllr. Walsh informed that there was a meeting in Rosmuc about the graveyard Reilig Chill Bhriocán/Kilbricken Cemetery and he advised that this needs urgent attention as the cemetery is in dis-array.

Cllr. Mannion replied that her understanding is that the issues have been dealt with.

Mr. O'Conaola responded that a contractor was to be brought in, to clear and tidy the cemetery.

Cathaoirleach Cllr. Welby pointed out that there was a great amount of heavy, hard stone in the graveyard and that it was very hard to dig because of that stone.

Cllr. Mannion brought forth the issue with Oughterard Bridge and that it was lethal around this area. Traffic was very congested in that area as it is in Letterfrack village where they have been looking for a pedestrian crossing for years. Some traffic management plan must be devised.

Cllr. Mannion **Proposed** that the Traffic Management Plan be added to the Agenda for the April MD meeting, and this was **Seconded** by Cathaoirleach Welby.

Comh. Mac An Iomaire was also very concerned about the traffic in Bearná and how dangerous it will be with children crossing the road from the Bearná school to the new shop on the opposite side of the road.

Comh O'Curraoin added that a pedestrian crossing was required for the school.

Cllr. Leainde agreed with Comh O'Curraoin that there should be a pedestrian crossing and that this should be included in the planning permission for all schools in the future.

Cllr. Lee concurred with both Councillors on this matter.

Comh Mac An Iomaire said he agreed that there should be an active travel plan.

Cathaoirleach Cllr. Welby said that safe travel to school was of the upmost importance and the Department of Education needed to be more conscious of roads and services when planning/building a new school. Cathaoirleach Cllr. Welby then questioned Mr. Prendergast about the speed limits coming into villages.

Mr. Prendergast replied that the speed limits were to be reviewed. Guidelines were to be finalised and a workshop must be attended by all engineers concerning the speed limits for various roads. He added that the speed limit to enter a village was under review and there was a great deal of work to be done and a lot of things to consider. He recommended that the speed limits should be rolled out at schools; urban roads taking priority and then secondary roads and so on and so forth.

Ms. Lowe added herself and Ms. Paula Higgins met with the parents of the pupils in Bearná National School to discuss the School's Safety Programme. She advised that signage and safety was being considered and the planning permission was being investigated. She highlighted the importance of the Council to work with developers to ensure the highest levels of safety and services were achieved and that the active travel team were working closely with the planning department involving footpaths and road services. Safe routes to school were vitally important and that 65 schools had Road Safety Projects in place, and everyone should work together to safeguard achieving the maximum of safety for all involved.

Cllr. Mannion requested an update on the Oughterard Bridge.

Cathaoirleach Cllr. Welby explained that a site survey had been completed quite punctually and that both farmers were content with the course the development was taking.

Cathaoirleach Cllr. Welby informed the meeting that the Residential Zoned Land Tax was brought to his attention at an SPC meeting and he was asked to mention that landowners can appeal the Residential Zone Land Tax up to 1st April.

7. **Votes of Sympathy/Congratulations.**

Comh O'Curraoin offered his deepest condolences and sympathy to the family of Gerry Molloy, Threadneedle Rd, Salthill who had sadly passed away that morning.

8. **AOB**

The Members agreed to defer any use of LPT funds for two years.

Mr. Finn concurred and advised that it should be ring-fenced for five years to allow funds to build-up and be used for more significant projects. He further suggested that at the end of two years it could be used for matched funding to get additional funding.

Comh O'Curraoin queried if there was any update from Udarás na Gaeltachta in relation to the footpath in Carraroe as it is extremely dangerous.

Cathaorileach Cllr. Welby replied that he would contact Udarás Na Gaeltachta.

Comh Mac An Iomaire questioned if a landowner could cut down the trees in the aftermath of the storm.

Mr. Finn responded that in situations like this it must be assessed on a case-by-case basis and more details were required before he could comment on the matter.

Cllr Welby **Proposed** that the members should meet for the next Conamara MD meeting on 11th of April at 10am in the Council Chamber and this was **Seconded** by Cllr Mannion.

Cathaoirleach Cllr Welby concluded the meeting.

Críochnaigh an Cruinniú Ansin.

Signed: h Welby

Date: 11/4/25

