

**AN COISTE COMHAIRLEACH  
PLEAN 5 BHLIANA IORRAS AITHNEACH.  
CEANTAR – CARNA AGUS CILL CHIARÁIN.  
CONAMARA.**

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**Response to the Issues Paper in relation to the  
Galway County Development Plan 2022-2027.**

**English language version.**

**4-9-2020**

## **INTRODUCTION.**

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**We welcome the emphasis on the value of the Agricultural sector- a highly significant percentage of national agricultural output emanating from County Galway - in the Issues Paper published by Galway County Council in advance of the preparation of the new County Development Plan 2022-2027.**

**It is also important to stress that much greater developments could be based on our marine resources and that is also an industry based mainly in rural areas and on the islands.**

**We also welcome the emphasis placed on the Gaeltacht areas. As you will know, the strongest Gaeltacht areas in County Galway, where the overwhelming majority of people speak Irish daily, are located in the rural parts of Connemara from Cois Fharráige west to Carna - Category 'A' Gaeltacht areas.**

**Our native language, heritage and culture find a resonance associated with the land and the sea in our rural countryside. It is a heritage that gives the county of Galway a cultural richness as well as an indigenous economic base.**

**In order to maintain and promote the social, economic and cultural heritage foundations of this County, it is imperative that we do all in our power to strengthen the fabric of rural communities.**

**Above all else, we must ensure that people are given every opportunity to live in the townlands and villages of County Galway. In order to achieve that objective real practical issues must be addressed – e.g. a favourable and reasonable approach to granting planning permission in these areas; help with the costs of attaining**

planning permission in areas that are blanketed by environmental designations from Europe and from Ireland (surely environmental designations were never meant to prevent people from living in their own communities); the provision of high standards of infrastructure and the provision of employment opportunities.

The people of rural County Galway will be the ultimate custodians of the fabric and the environment of the countryside.

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### Approach to the Issues Paper in relation to the forthcoming Galway County Development Plan.

We are now submitting a number of proposals and suggesting that the wording in these proposals be included in the Draft Plan Galway County Development Plan which will be published later in 2020.

### **Proposal – Support for an Údarás na Gaeltachta 5 Year Plan in The South West Connemara Gaeltacht.**

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Galway County Council recognizes that a number of areas in the County have shown a continual decline in their socio-economic status as highlighted in the successive Census. The South West Connemara Gaeltacht is a prime example of that decline as shown in Galway County Council publications following an examination of successive Census reports. The continuing decline in population, employment opportunities, and the resultant demographic imbalance in that South West Connemara area poses a threat to the bedrock of the Irish language.

Galway County Council strongly supports the implementation of the Údarás na Gaeltachta 5 Year Plan for the Carna/Cill Chiaráin area, the benefits of which would also accrue to surrounding communities.

Galway County Council supports the development of Páirc na Mara on the site chosen by Údarás na Gaeltacht in Cill Chiaráin and recognize it as an innovative project in utilizing the marine sector for the benefit of the community and acknowledges this to be a project which has the potential to be of national and international significance.

Galway County Council also supports the implementation of the Údarás na Gaeltachta Irish Language Action Plan in the Mid-Connemara area which emanates from the State's approach to the fostering of the Irish language throughout the Gaeltacht.

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Galway County Council will continue to lend its practical help to Údarás na Gaeltachta 5 Year Development Plan for the Carna/Cill Chiaráin and west Connemara Gaeltacht area through actions such as the development of the R. 340 and the upgrading of infrastructure and amenities in the local villages of Cill Chiaráin and Carna. The completion of footpaths in the entirety of Cill Chiaráin village will be a short term objective of the County Council.

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It is recognized by Galway County Council that the villages of Cill Chiaráin and Carna are in need of public sewerage schemes and the importance of such schemes will be stressed and highlighted by Galway County Council in its contacts with Irish Water.

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### **Proposals – developments in the Gaeltacht/ The Irish language.**

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This is a bilingual County insofar as both official languages are widely spoken within its boundaries. The preservation and fostering of the Irish language is a primary objective of Galway County Council and it is equally acknowledged

that our commitment to the language must be underpinned by the development of social and physical infrastructure in the Gaeltacht areas of this county.

Galway County Council acknowledges that practical measures are urgently needed to strengthen the economic and social fabric of Gaeltacht communities, particularly in the peripheral area, in order to sustain the vibrancy of the Irish language. A continuous decline in the population in some of those areas allied to high unemployment and emigration is acknowledged to be a huge threat to some Gaeltacht communities and consequently a threat to the status of the Irish language in this county and this country. Galway County Council acknowledges that this is a bilingual County insofar as both official languages are widely spoken within its boundaries. The preservation and fostering of the Irish language is a primary objective of Galway County Council and it is equally acknowledged that our commitment to the language must be underpinned by the development of infrastructure in the Gaeltacht areas of this county.

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### **Proposal: - Roads and Infrastructure.**

Galway County Council has the objective of creating good infrastructure in all parts of the County. Significant development of the road network, particularly in the eastern part of the County, in recent years, has brought about a substantial improvement in connectivity. Improved and increased train and bus connections have also been beneficial to the part of the County east of Galway City; the new N. 4 from Galway to Ballinasloe and the N. 18 and the N17 motorways have all contributed to better and more streamlined infrastructure.

The western part of the county continues to be impacted by substandard roads that leave many communities – some of which are a long distance from necessary services such as employment, essential services, and hospitals- at a serious disadvantage in terms of infrastructure. Galway County Council is mindful of the need to substantially improve the road network in Connemara and has made attempts to do that, some of which have not met with success mainly on environmental grounds.

Given the notable improvement in roads and rail services in other parts of the County, it is now the intention of Galway County Council to focus on a total upgrade of the part of the N. 59 in Connemara and on the development of a new R. 336 road from Bearna to Carna in the Development Plan 2022-2027 and a total upgrade of the R. 340 road which is a vital link between the R. 336 and the N. 59 in the West Connemara Gaeltacht. Roads of a lower grading in the National Transport hierarchy in Connemara will also be focused on.

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### **Proposals – The Marine Sector.**

Galway County Council is mindful of the decline in traditional fishing methods as a means of generating income and proposes to adopt a policy that encourages the utilization of our marine resources along our extensive coastline of 500 kilometres as a source of employment in communities that are contiguous to the Atlantic. In pursuance of that objective, Galway County Council will, in principle, look favourably on planning applications for the development of marine-related industries and activities.

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Galway County Council acknowledges the importance of Cill Chiaráin Pier as regards the fishing industry, the aquaculture industry and the seaweed and seashore industry in the west Connemara area. It is also envisaged that given its strategic location that the Cill Chiaráin Pier would be an important focal point for coastal initiatives in alternative energy creation in the future and that its further development could open up new initiatives in marine tourism.

**Galway County Council shall be active in endeavouring to be part of a plan of action for further developments on Cill Chiaráin Pier.**

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**In acknowledging the importance of the marine in our geographic location Galway County Council intends to deploy more personnel to assist in energizing industries that are based on the marine, and on the bays and seashore around us. The ambit of such activities will include industry, services and, recreational/tourism facilities pertaining to the marine.**

### **Proposals – Planning and housing in Rural and Gaeltacht areas.**

**Galway County Council acknowledges that family and community networks are a supportive and traditional part of the fabric of rural County Galway. It is also acknowledged that the continuation of farming and marine activities are vital to the socio-economic fabric of the county and that those activities have also formed a large part of our heritage and culture.**

**In order to sustain those ways of life in agriculture and the marine, it is acknowledged that a young population immersed in the skills and culture of agriculture and the marine is vital in rural and coastal communities. This has implications for our planning policy which will be favourably disposed towards keeping young people in the rural townlands of County Galway.**

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**Galway County Council shall institute a policy of allowing rural houses to be built on a quarter-acre site in townlands in the countryside.**

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**Galway County Council acknowledges that a high proportion of land conservation and other environmental designations have been applied to certain parts of the County and that Connemara, both in the Gaeltacht and non-Gaeltacht areas, and the offshore islands are primary examples of this process.**

**It is acknowledged by Galway County Council that this may lead to particular stress and substantial extra expense in obtaining planning permission for the**

building of dwelling houses which, in turn, may deter or prevent young people from settling in their native communities. Ensuring the continued vibrancy of rural areas and of Gaeltacht areas are both Galway County Council objectives and it is recognized that outward migration of local people would have a damaging effect on the stability of rural communities and on the efforts to strengthen Gaeltacht areas.

Galway County Council will seek to identify, as a matter of urgency, a means of recompense for a portion of the high costs that sometimes accrue to applicants applying for planning permission in the rural areas as a result of environmental designations. Such recompense or assistance may be in the form of grant aid or other measures and efforts will be made to source such support at National and European levels.

It is acknowledged that inordinate expenses should not accrue to a person with a housing need who is seeking planning permission for a residence in a rural area as a result of environmental preservation and protection designations. This strategy is aimed at ameliorating the stress and expense suffered by many people due to the imposition of land and environmental designations.

Inordinate expenses shall be defined as being a greater sum than that which would be the average cost of attaining planning permission for a house in a part of rural Co Galway where no such environmental preservation and protection designations apply.

### **Proposal – Tourism.**

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Tourism is a major industry and a means of producing real foreign earnings in County Galway. It is the policy of Galway County Council to increase the number of staff that will be assigned to assist in the promotion of tourism. Galway County Council aspires to appoint three of its staff to the development of the tourism potential of this county.

Personnel will liaise with other agencies that are specifically focused on the promotion of tourism and will have a particular role in promoting the industry in areas of the County that are less engaged in tourism.

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## **Background.**

We are “An Coiste Comhairleach do Phlean Gníomhaíochta Forbartha 5 Bhliana d’Iorras Aithneach”, a Five Year Action Plan for the Carna/Cill Chiaráin area which has been put in place by Údarás na Gaeltachta.

The Coiste is an amalgam of representatives from various Community organisations in the Cill Chiaráin/Carna area. Please see Addendum number 2.

Iorras Aithneach translates to the Windy Peninsula. It comprises the Cill Chiaráin and Carna area in the southwest Connemara Gaeltachta. It takes in three District Electoral Divisions: Cnoc Buí, Abhainn Ghabhla and Scainnimh.

It is recognized by experts as being in the top category of Gaeltacht areas in Ireland as regards the strength of the Irish language.

The Carna/Cill Chiaráin area has an unemployment rate of 34% and has been listed among the worst 15 unemployment Black Spots in Ireland.

A 54% decline in the Primary School going numbers over the past 30 years is undermining the very future of the area.

While the population of County Galway has increased by 12.6% between 1996 and 2016 population of Carna/Cill Chiaráin has been in continuous decline in every Census over the past 25 years.

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Such is the level of socio-economic decline in this area that it has been deemed of such urgency by Údarás na Gaeltachta that a 5 Year Development Plan was instituted in 2019. We are the community consultative group in relation to that Plan. But this Plan must be a multi-agency effort and Galway County Council has a very significant role to play.

Our members have also been actively involved in various capacities and, on a voluntary basis, in efforts to address the deficiencies in the economic and social structure of this community.

We shall further outline some of those efforts in an addendum to this document.

**MOST UNDERDEVELOPED GEOGRAPHIC BLOC IN THE COUNTY.**

The entire area from Camus leading northwest toward Cashel and Roundstone –including Ros Muc, Cill Chiaráin and Carna - has long been shown to be the most under-developed widespread geographic bloc in the County in socio-economic terms. This has come up in successive socio-economic reports from Galway County Council, those reports being based on Census figures over the years.

### **The Hasse/Pratschke Index.**

This is one of most recognized yardsticks as regards socio-economic standing. Zero (0) on the scale is taken to be the mean or absolute.

Barna, at the very eastern extremity of West Co Galway is at + 11.5.

The D.E.D. Abhainn Ghabhla in the Carna/Chill Chiaráin area is at -13.7

That is a 25 point gap between Barna and Carna...negative for Carna.

PLEASE SEE ADDENDUM (1).

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**What if these trends were happening on a widespread basis in the County? It would be called a disastrous downturn and a situation bordering on tipping point.**

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In our situation in the Carna/Cill Chiaráin community, three issues need to be addressed urgently:

- The provision of gainful work/employment and the development of activities and industries that generate income;
- The provision of good infrastructure.
- An easing of planning restriction for those entitled to housing in the community and the provision of County Council housing both in people's native townlands and in local villages.

Allied to those above-mentioned necessities, many hugely difficult constraints must be addressed:

- Poor infrastructure –inadequate roads; absence of sewerage schemes; inadequate broadband services.
- The County Council obviously trying to back away from building social houses on people’s own and on lands in in the villages.
- The high cost of obtaining planning permission whether it be for building a house or industrial premises.
- The suffocating impact of environmental designations on the community in several different ways...eg roads, farming etc.

Strong, practical and well-focused measures to address the decline in peripheral rural and Gaeltacht area are needed

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## ADDENDUM (1)

### The Hasse/Pratschke Index.

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The Hasse/Pratschke Demographic Profile is measured by five indicators:

- the percentage change in population over the previous five years
- the percentage of the population aged under 15 or over 64 years of age
- the percentage of the population with a primary school education only
- the percentage of the population with a third-level education
- the percentage of households with children aged under 15 years and headed by a single parent

- the average number of persons per room

**Social Class Composition is measured by five indicators:**

- the percentage of the population with a primary school education only
- the percentage of the population with a third-level education
- the percentage of households headed by professionals or managerial and technical employees, including farmers with 100 acres or more
- the percentage of households headed by semi-skilled or unskilled manual workers, including farmers with less than 30 acres
- the average number of persons per room

## **ADDENDUM (2).**

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**This members of this Consultative Committee have worked tirelessly and, in a voluntary capacity, over the years in efforts to stem the rising tide of emigration, unemployment and socio-economic underdevelopment in this area.**

**Here are some of the developments which were initiated and driven on through voluntary community work in Carna/Cill Chiaráin:**

- **Carna Nursing Home – opened in 2003 and now providing care for almost 50 people and full time and part time jobs.**
- **A Community Ambulance Service in the area for many years.**
- **The development of the Regional Water Supply Scheme serving Cill Chiaráin, Carna, Cashel, Roundstone and part of Ros Muc – brought about by a sustained campaign.**
- **Identifying and facilitating the title regularisation and the transfer of sites to Galway County Council for the building of 31 social houses now occupied by local people.**
- **Áras Shorcha Ní Ghuairim – a campaign which facilitated engagement between NUIG, Údarás na Gaeltachta and Roinn na Gaeltachta to develop the facility in the former Vocational School. Later attached to Acadamh na hOllscoile Gaeilge. It provides some employment.**

- **An Advance Factory on the Industrial Estate in Carna. Gaining acceptance from Údarás na Gaeltachta that the building of that unit was an important step for future development.**
- **The Innovation Centre – now being adapted for the purposes of the G-Tech Centre where there is a focus on the creation of jobs based on working remotely. The Centre was originally developed in response to a community campaign.**
- **The Ionad Cúram Leanaí – Childcare and Creche. Finance approved following a lengthy campaign and meetings with Government Ministers and Údarás na Gaeltachta. It is a vitally important facility in relation to the fostering of the Irish language. It also provides a number of jobs.**
- **Children’s Playground in Cill Chiaráin**
- **All weather Sportsfield with ongoing plans for more facilities such as dressing rooms in Cill Chiaráin.**
- **The publication of a Community Yearbook “Iorras Aithneach” over the past 30 years. Linking the community at home and abroad and bringing issues past and present to light as well as fostering a knowledge of our heritage and culture.**
- **Campaigns for the improvement of roads – some work done, a lot more to do.**
- **Holding on to the Carna bus service to Galway when it was proposed to take in off the road ten years ago.**
- **The development of the Ionad Cuimhneacháin na nImirceach – the Emigrants Commemorative Centre – with plans strongly afoot for further developments. The development of a network of ambassadors overseas.**
- **The development of walking routes in the locality.**
- **Regular contact and meetings with sources in the Marine industry including the Shellfish Research Centre; the seaweed industry and others with a focus on maintaining employment and creating further jobs.**
- **Campaigns supporting employment – including Páirc na Mara.**

