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Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe Galway County Council

Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment Determination

under Article 8 (14A) (3) Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) Regulations 2004 (SI No. 436 of 2004), as amended by the Planning and Development (Strategic Environmental Assessment) (Amendment) Regulations 2011 (SI No. 201 of 2011) for the:

Draft Gort Local Area Plan 2024-2030

This Screening for Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) determination regarding whether or not implementation of the Draft Gort Local Area Plan 2024-2030 would be likely to have significant effects on the environment is being made under the above Regulations.

As part of this determination, the Council is considering whether or not implementation of the local area plan or amended plan would be likely to have significant effects on the environment, taking account of relevant criteria set out in Schedule 2A of the above Regulations. These criteria are taken into account as follows:

PART 1

1. The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: the degree to which the plan sets a framework for projects and other activities, either with regard to the location, nature, size and operating conditions or by allocating resources

The Draft Gort Local Area Plan 2024-2030 will be prepared over the coming months. The Plan will provide a six-year framework for the sustainable development of Gort, while considering the conservation and protection of the built and natural environment. It will set out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the town in terms of its social, cultural, economic and physical development and will consist of a written statement supported by mapping and other appendices indicating the development objectives for Gort.

2. The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: the degree to which the plan influences other plans, including those in a hierarchy

The Plan will be guided by the National Planning Framework, the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region and the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028. In turn, the Plan will guide any lower-tier plans and future proposals for land use developments and activities.

3. The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: the relevance of the plan for the integration of environmental considerations in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development

The Plan will integrate environmental considerations with a view to promoting sustainable development at local level in Gort.

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4. The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: environmental problems relevant to the plan

Environmental problems arise where there is a conflict between current environmental conditions and legislative targets.

It is intended that, through provisions relating to environmental protection and management, the Plan will contribute towards ensuring that environmental conditions do not get worse and, where possible, they contribute towards its amelioration.

The status of rivers and streams (2016-2021) draining the Plan is identified as being good (Kilchreest) and moderate (Cannahowna). The status (2016-2021) of Lough Cutra c. 2 km to the south-east of the Plan area is identified as good. Provisions contributing towards the Water Framework Directive's overall objective of good status are provided by the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028.

There are significant areas at elevated levels of flood risk within the Plan area – including those at risk from fluvial (from rivers/streams) and groundwater sources. Other sources of flood risk present including those from rainwater (pluvial) and surface drainage systems.

5. The characteristics of the plan having regard, in particular, to: the relevance of the plan for the implementation of European Union legislation on the environment (e.g. plans linked to waste-management or water protection)

The Plan relates to the land use and town planning sector. It is expected that the Plan will integrate considerations with regard to EU and national legislation on the environment, including those relating to the waste management and the Water Framework Directive.

PART 2

1. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the probability, duration, frequency and reversibility of the effects

The development of the Plan area will involve a range of land use developments and activities that would be likely to, if unmitigated, significantly affect all environmental components; this would include positive and negative effects across the Plan area and beyond. Such effects would encompass short term construction effects and longer-term operational effects.

Effects could be mitigated by integrating measures relating to environmental protection and management into the Plan and by adhering to such provisions from the existing Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028.

2. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the cumulative nature of the effects

There are two types of potential cumulative effects that would be likely to occur, namely:

- Potential intra-Plan cumulative effects - these would be likely to arise from the interactions between different types of potential environmental effects resulting from the Plan. Examples of interrelationships between environmental components that help determine such effects include those between: human health and water quality; human health and air quality; human health and flood risk; and ecology and water quality.
- Potential inter-Plan cumulative effects - these would be likely to arise when the effects of the implementation of Plan occur in combination with those of other plans, programmes, etc. such as the County Development Plan and the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy.

3. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the transboundary nature of the effects

Potential effects, such as those on water will extend beyond the Plan boundary; however, significant environmental effects on other countries are unlikely.

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4. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the risks to human health or the environment (e.g. due to accidents)

Human health has the potential to be impacted upon by environmental vectors (i.e. environmental components such as air, water or soil through which contaminants or pollutants, which have the potential to cause harm, can be transported so that they come into contact with human beings). Hazards or nuisances to human health can arise as a result of exposure to these vectors arising from incompatible adjacent land uses for example. There is historic and predictive evidence of Fluvial flooding in various locations across the Plan area.

5. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the magnitude and spatial extent of the effects (geographical area and size of the population likely to be affected)

The spatial extent of potential effects includes the Plan area and areas downstream. The population most likely to be affected would be the population of the Plan area. Census 2016 recorded a population of 2,994 persons in Gort and the town is identified as a "Self-Sustaining Town" in the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028. Self-Sustaining Towns have a high levels of population growth and a limited employment base and are reliant on other areas for employment and/or services requiring targeted 'catch up' investment to become more self-sustaining.

6. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the value and vulnerability of the area likely to be affected due to:

a) special natural characteristics or cultural heritage;

Key ecological sensitivities within and surrounding the Plan area include those relating to:

- Ecologically designated sites located less than 5 km of the Plan area, including: Pollduagh Cave, Gort proposed Natural Heritage Area (partially adjacent to the south of the Plan area); The Coole-Garryland Complex Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area and proposed Natural Heritage Area (c. 1 km to the north-west of the Plan area); and Lough Cutra Special Area of Conservation, Special Protection Area and proposed Natural Heritage Area (c. 2 km to the south-east of the Plan area);
- Locally important habitats within the Plan area, various woodlands, parks, gardens, hedgerows, old buildings/stone walls and lands used for agriculture within and surrounding the Plan area, providing habitats for flora and fauna and facilitating linkages and corridors to the surrounding countryside for the wildlife; and
- Aquatic and riverine ecology associated with the Cannahowna River (including its tributaries and riparian buffer zones) and the Coole-Garryland Turlough and Caherglassaun Turlough.

The emerging finding of the Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) process being undertaken alongside the preparation of the Draft Plan is that the Plan has the potential, if unmitigated, to affect European Sites.

There are various entries to the Record of Monuments and Places within and around the Plan area, such as: castles; churches; graveyards; holy wells; ringforts; enclosures; ponds; and ecclesiastical remains.

There are many Protected Structures within and surrounding the Plan area, including examples of: railway stations; religious buildings; courthouses; barracks; terraced houses; and schools. Gort has a several buildings and structures of architectural interest, including: well-preserved Georgian period market town; St. Colman's Catholic Church; Gort Crane House; Gort Library; Gort Bridge; and St. Colman's Hall Heritage Centre. There is one Architectural Conservation Area designated within the Plan area: Gort Town Centre ACA. Many of the Protected Structures in the town are located within this ACA.

b) exceeded environmental quality standards or limit values, and;

The status of rivers and streams (2016-2021) draining the Plan is identified as being good (Kilchreest) and moderate (Cannahowna). The status (2016-2021) of Lough Cutra c. 2 km to the south-east of the Plan area is identified as good. Provisions contributing towards the Water Framework Directive's overall objective of good status are provided by the Galway County

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Development Plan 2022-2028. Provisions contributing towards the Water Framework Directive's overall objective of good status are provided by the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028.

c) intensive land-use.

The Plan will provide for the relative intensive land use of urban and semi urban areas within the Plan area.

7. Characteristics of the effects and of the area likely to be affected, having regard, in particular, to: the effects on areas or landscapes which have a recognised national, European Union or international protection status

Gort is located in a generally flat area towards the south of the County of Galway. The Cannahowna River runs from south to north through the centre of the Plan area and provides a recreational amenity for the town (3 km looped Gort River Walk). The land surrounding Gort is predominantly made up of agricultural lands with woodlands associated with the Coole-Garryland Nature Reserve to the north-west and Lough Cutra to the south-west of the Plan area.

The existing Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 identifies three Landscape Regions, which include ten Landscape Character Types (subdivided into smaller Landscape Character Units), 52 Viewing Points and seven Scenic Routes within the Council's administrative area. Landscape Character Units in County Galway are arranged in a hierarchy according to the level of their sensitivity.

The Plan area is located within the 'South Galway Region' Landscape Region, the 'Urban Environs' and 'Central Galway Complex' Landscape Character Types and the 'Urban Environs' and 'Kilchreest Basin Unit' Landscape Character Units. These Landscape Character Areas are classified as 'low' landscape value. Other landscape designations within the Plan area include 'Slieve Aughty Scenic Route'.

Furthermore, the emerging finding of the Screening for Appropriate Assessment (AA) process being undertaken alongside the preparation of the Draft Plan is that the Plan has the potential, if unmitigated, to affect European Sites. Stage 2 AA must therefore be carried out for the Plan. The SEA Directive (Article 3 para. 2) requires that SEA is carried out for certain plans and programmes that are being subject to Stage 2 AA. As a result, SEA must be carried out for the Plan.

With reference to the foregoing information, it is determined that the Plan would, if unmitigated, be likely to result in significant environmental effects and that SEA is required to be undertaken on the Draft Gort Local Area Plan 2024-2030.

Signed on behalf of Galway County Council:

Date: February 2023

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