

COMHAIRLE CHONTAE NA GAILLIMHE

Minutes of the Planning ,Environment ,Agriculture & Emergency Services Strategic Policy Committee Meeting held on MS Teams, 23rd June 2021

I Lathair

Baill : Cllr Michael Connolly ,Chairperson
Cllr Dermot Connolly
Cllr Donagh Killilea
Cllr Daithi Cualain
Cllr Shane Curley
Mr. Mark Green
Ms Anne Mitchell
Aodán Mac Donncha Uasal

Oifigh:

Mr Michael Owens Director of Services
Ms Valerie Loughnane, Senior Planner Planning
Ms Eileen Keaveney, Administrative Officer, Planning
Mr Mike Melody, Senior Executive Engineer, Environment.
Ms Ann Dolan ,Executive Scientist ,Environment
Ms Carmel Egan, A/Assistant Staff Officer, Planning

Item 1- Minutes of the meeting of the Planning ,Environment ,Agriculture & Emergency Services Strategic Policy Committee Meeting held on MS Teams, 28th April 2021.

The minutes of the meeting dated 28th April 2021 were proposed by Mark Green, seconded by Cllr Donagh Killilea and agreed.

Cllr Donagh Killilea wished Eileen Ruane well in her new role and welcomed Michael Owens as Director of Services, Planning.

Cllr Michael Connolly concurred and noted that Eileen Ruane would still be involved with the SPC as Director of Services for Environment & Emergency Services.

Michael Owens thanked Cllrs Killilea & Connolly and said he looked forward to working with the SPC members and said it was fortunate that Eileen Ruane will remain working with the SPC as he would have the benefit of her guidance.

Cllr M Connolly reiterated his concern at amount of dereliction in towns and villages and felt the SPC should try and come up with initiatives to tackle this. He stated that most towns have good broadband and many have good sewerage infrastructure and action is needed to revitalize them.

Item 2: Update on the Draft County Development Plan 2022-2028

Ms Loughnane informed the meeting that a webinar had been hosted on the 22nd June for the PPN and a number of SPC members had attended

She stated that further public webinars are to be held on 30th June and 1st July Ms Loughnane confirmed that the closing date for submissions to the Draft County Development Plan was 30th July at 4.30pm. and that, approximately 50 submissions had been received to date. She said that her team continue to engage by emails, phone calls etc.

She went on to say that the webinars were being advertised on Galway Bay FM and social media and stressed the importance of engaging with the public throughout the Draft Plan process.

Cllr Killilea raised the issue of the legislation allowing for the extension of the timeframes for preparing the Co Development Plan. He stated that he was not in favour of the extension and felt that the Plan could be done within the existing timeframe if all work together with the Forward Planning team.

He had an issue with the maps as he felt they were difficult to read and asked for a hard copy

Cllr D Cualain also asked for hard copy of the maps, particularly in relation to wind turbines. He asked if advertising was done on Connemara radio and Radio na Gaeltachta and said he would be concerned that we are not engaging enough. He was happy to hear about the webinars but feared people would come to him after the process was complete and say they weren't aware of the draft Plan being on display.

Cllr D Connolly welcomed Michael Owens and he asked whether Shannonside radio was used for publicity.

He was also concerned that not all areas would be covered.

Cllr M Connolly said we must do our best to publicize the Plan . He asked for a copy of amendments to the Draft

Cllr Shane Curley queried whether the extension of time under the Ministerial Order was a decision for the SPC or the full plenary Council

Mr Owens said that the legislation is in progress to enable extension of the time, but he didn't consider it necessary as we are on schedule

We may require additional time later if full environmental assessment required.

Mr Green agreed with Michael Owens that the process should be kept on track and said he couldn't see any benefit to extension . He said it would be different if face-to-face meetings could be held but there were no dates on that yet, so it couldn't be justified.

Cllr D Cualain said that public consultation is a concern and asked are we ticking all the boxes when it comes to reaching out to the public to make them aware of Draft Plan.

Mr Owens said he felt that the maximum is being done in relation to public participation over a significant period of time. He said the webinar held already was very well received and there was good engagement.

He stated that the aim of the Webinar is to engage and take queries ,Cllrs will be included in the Webinar but the focus is on the public. Local radio stations are been engaged with ,Galway Bay Fm, Connemara Radio, Shannon Side and Mid West radio.

Ms. Loughnane again confirmed that we will be contacting all other radio stations, trying to get message out to all areas and that people are engaging with the process.

She stated that as Cllrs seem to be concerned with engagement; the forward planning team can meet people face to face if required by appointment but not many people have asked for this due to Covid.

She said that if Councillors email forward planning section to get copy of maps they will be sent out.

She noted that legislation is not in place yet regarding the extension of time of Plan process. A survey has taken place with all Local Authorities and Galway County Council are on target in the 99 weeks.

In relation to the copy of amendments, minutes and maps ,they can be sent out.

Cllr D Connolly raised the issue of the naming of estates and asked if this is included in the County Development Plan .

Ms Loughnane confirmed that there is a policy in place in the County Development in relation to naming of estates. The local culture and landmarks etc are considered when naming estates. She also stated that there is a naming of estates committee which includes the Heritage Officer and the Irish Officer who must agree names for all new estates. In response to Cllr S Curley re Irish language, she said that all names are required to be in the Irish language.

Ms Loughnane confirmed that with regard to the Draft Plan, the Chief Executive report must be prepared within 12 weeks after the closing date for submissions on the 30th July. This will be placed before the Council meeting and can be accepted or rejected and if amendments made, it has to be put back on public display.

Item 3 - Vacant sites and derelict sites registers.

Mr. Green queried why the Vacant sites register on the Council website was empty. He said this topic featured on RTE's Prime Time and that there is an issue with registers and that Galway County Council is in lower half of transparency scale. He asked what the plan for improvement is.

Cllr Killillea asked Mr. Green to clarify what he meant about the lower part of transparency

Mr. Green said that the vacant site register is empty and derelict site register is not on the website.

Cllr D Connolly said that Derelict buildings in Ballinasloe are an eye sore and asked is there any focus we can put on this, in a proactive way. He queried whether the Council could purchase buildings by CPO and bring them back into use.

Mr. M Melody outlined the process required under Derelict Site legislation
He said that a part of the problem is ownership and unregistered properties. In some cases, financial institutions have hold on the properties.

There has been engagement with local Councillors in relation to this. He said it is an active but frustrating process.

Cllr M Connolly commended Mike Melody & Aidan Cunningham, in the Environment section for their work in relation to this.

Cllr Shane Curley asked if the tackling of dereliction in town centres could be accelerated. He said it is difficult to attract tourists if properties are boarded up.

Cllr Killilea said that Derelict sites affect towns and businesses trying to get restarted. There are legal difficulties, trying to get developers to finish estates. He said the Council doesn't have the manpower to tackle this issue. He queried whether rates could be increased on vacant premises.

He went on to say that people want to relocate from Cities to work from home . He said there should be some way to impose penalties on property owners leaving sites and properties vacant until prices go up. He said he would like to see the SPC dealing with unfinished estates.

Ms. Loughnane confirmed that the vacant site levy had to be an objective in the County Development Plan so when the plan is adopted the register will be populated.

Mr. M Green thanked Ms. Loughnane and Mr. Melody and said the issue seemed to be with the legislation and said he was prepared to lobby at national level for amendment of the legislation.

Mr. M Melody agreed with Mr. Green and said it is a very bureaucratic process and that sometimes it works better if they can talk to people and get them to address minor issues.

Cllr M Connolly said the Council is seriously lacking in funding and that more people are needed on the ground and not just legislation.

Item 4 -Any Other Business

Cllr D Connolly said that the Ballinasloe Town Enhancement Scheme is complete and that a few loose ends need to be tidied up. He stated that the River Suck is a great amenity but he feels it is not being fully utilized. He said if supports were in place to improve this, it would be a great benefit to the town.

Cllr D Cualain queried whether there was 1. any update regarding burial grounds and 2. why brown bins were not being provided in some areas.

Ms. A Dolan confirmed that there is no obligation to provide a brown bin in areas with less than 500 population, but she hopes that all households will get a brown bin in the next year.

Mr. M Melody said that an expression of interest in sale of land for burial ground had been advertised but this had not proved to be very fruitful. The suitability of the ground is an issue and he said they would welcome the community to come forward with proposals, as the Council had exhausted all channels.

Cllr M Connolly queried who had administrative responsibility now for burial grounds and Mr. Melody confirmed that it is Maria Finn, Environment section. She manages funding to area offices and applies for funding to National Monuments service.

Cllr M Connolly mentioned a case where a wall had been knocked and a burial ground was being trodden on by a farmer and asked for this to be dealt with as a matter of urgency.

Cllr D Connolly stated that there is an issue with staffing levels in area offices which needs to be addressed.

The date for the next meeting was agreed as Wednesday 29th September 2021.

The meeting then concluded