



Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe  
Galway County Council

## Miontuairiscí Coiste Polasaí Straitéiseach Pobal & Cultúr

### Minutes of the Community and Culture Strategic Policy Committee Special Meeting

**Dé Céadaoin 22ú Feabhra 2023 10:30**

Wednesday 22nd February 2023 at 10.30 a.m.

Venue; County Council Chamber

#### Members in attendance:

Cllr. Dermot Connolly (Chairperson)	Galway County Council
Cllr. Peter Keaveney	Galway County Council (online)
Cllr. Liam Carroll	Galway County Council
Cllr. Padraic Mac an Iomaire	Galway County Council
Cllr. Ivan Canning	Galway County Council
Máirtín Davy	PPN Representative
Megan Flynn Dixon	PPN Representative

#### Staff in attendance:

Michael Owens	Director of Services
Laura Sharkey	Administrative Officer
Shane Coogan	Water Safety Development Officer
Sharon O'Grady	Arts Officer
Claire Connolly	Clerical Officer

#### Apologies:

Cllr. Andrew Reddington	Galway County Council
Helena McElmeel	Business Representative

Cllr. Connolly welcomed all members to presentations for proposed draft beach bye laws.

Cllr. Carroll wished to sympathise with Cllr. Eileen Mannion and the Mannion family on the sad passing on her mother. Cllr. Connolly on behalf of all also expressed sympathies.

Mr. Owens thanked all for coming today and outlined the process to date for the proposed Beach Bye Laws reiterating that at no stage was it ever the intention of the proposed beach bye laws to ban water sports, he then introduced Ms. Sharkey who outlined the proceedings for the presentations and named those unable to attend who had submissions and allowed ten minutes per presentation to those present.

The following presented.

**1. Mr. Brian Coll- Water Sports (City)**

Mr. Coll following on from received submission gave his outline by PowerPoint presentation of the main two pillars:

1. wording, 2. Zoning.

He made comparisons with Mayo/Clare/Kerry & Donegal wording & zoning and suggested a third pillar in line with recommendations from Irish sailing, canoeing & rowing.

He recommended that word change to be clearer, and zoning be implemented with blue flag criteria and zoning.

**2. Mr. Ciaran Murphy -Irish Sailing (Connemara)**

Mr. Murphy following on from submission received gave his full endorsement to Mr. Coll's submission. Priority is safety – he referenced Donegal - how to provide all water sports safe for all.

In County Clare consequences – swimmers on their own when water sports were omitted. He mentioned government document on Marine Action Plan- chapter 6 provision of shared resources. Zoning is the piece that allows for this to work.

1.Swimming, 2. Surf,3. Jet Skies

It's important to look at risk, in summer it is very busy for lifeguards while it's important to respect the zones all year round and all users of the sea help each other.

**3. Mr. Steve Fahy – Canoeing Ireland ( Wicklow)**

Mr. Fahy following on from submission received said how popular Galway is as a destination for water sports and the positive economic effect it has on the area. He feels that events will move elsewhere having an adverse effect on the economy if not zoned.

**4. Mr. Peadar Harvey- Water Sports (Athenry)**

Mr Harvey following on from submission received supports zoning and presented 7500.00 signatures from petition “Water Sports Ban Galway”.

He outlined access to beach for water sports. From a tourism perspective water sports should be promoted as year round activities with zoning and signage in place.

**Mr. Barra Nevin- Water Sports (Athenry)**

Mr Nevin following on from submission received, outlined that he was the media face of campaign. He outlined the following issues safety, health benefits, Tourism.

Going forward would like safety for all, keep the water open to all and have zoning in place.

**5. Mr. Pierce Purcell- Sailing Club Renville- Oranmore**

Mr Purcell following on from submission, has seen great progress in water sports in recent years. Training in water activities ensures that from a young age water sport users respect the areas where swimmers use, and cooperation is required with swimmers and water sport users.

**7. Mr. John McMyler – Swimmer (Barna)**

Mr. McMyler following on from submission agrees with zoning and is wondering how this will work on small beaches.

Outlined speed at which extreme sport Kite surfing can cover distance at speeds of 107 km per hour.

Kite and wind surfers move at speed and make it difficult on swimmers – this can be uncomfortable on small beaches in Galway.

Zoning implies policing, and compliance and he said this would be welcomed.

Mr. McMyler pointed out that some of the other speakers had made comparisons with large areas in Mayo, Clare, Kerry and Donegal, none of these were relevant to the small beaches in Galway.

**8. Mr. Shane McElligott – Roundstone Community Council**

Mr. McElligott following on from submission spoke specifically about Dogs Bay and Gurteen , Roundstone part S and designation of beaches.

Looking at alternative wording to have personal responsibility for safety of all in the water to ensure safety to all.

Roundstone tourism is the main trade due to having holiday homes in the area coming specifically for water sports – important to support local to ensure water sports open to all.

**9. Ms. Anne De Courcy- Roundstone / Connemara Chamber of Commerce**

Ms. DeCourcy following on from submission agreed with all said by Mr. McElligott and was at the meeting to represent Connemara Chamber of Commerce.

**10. Mr. Cathal Groonell- Spiddal Connemara**

Mr. Groonell following submission spoke about Tra na Mban which is very popular in the area for sea swimming and important to zone.

He said Tra na Ceibhe is important to zone for all water sports, it can be difficult to access to shean cave and cave nua. It is an important resource and would hope to expand on the facilities and promote and encourage water sports.

**11. Ms. Roisin Elsafty- Spiddal Sailing Club Connemara**

Ms Elsafty following on from submission spoke on the importance of water sports in the area. Damien Brown was able to use the area to get to land safely from his round the world trip – if the bye laws prohibit, this will be an issue allied with the fact that there has never been an incident.

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Cllr. Canning thanked all for presentations and contributions and said it seemed that all are in favour of zoning. He outlined the importance of all involved having their say and especially locals. He posed the question should all beaches be looked at being zoned separately? If this happens then some beaches will be too small for both water sports and swimming.

Cllr. Carroll welcomed this discussion and debate to ensure that byelaws are right. He said that he is looking at certain wording being dropped, and he said there is no intention on a ban on water sports. He recommends that Galway take a lead on these byelaws with wording and zoning being looked at.

Cllr. Mac an Iomaire thanked all for the presentations and said that Connemara depends on tourism, and it was never the intention to ban water sports. Connemara depends on water sports during the summer for especially for Irish college. He feels that Tra Mor in Spiddal would be difficult to zone.

Ms. Flynn Dixon thanked all for presentations and was delighted to see such collaboration and posed the question how do we get to the next stage as this is complex with issues for 6 beaches to retain blue flags and then the other beaches. Speaking from personal experience living abroad, all have to take personal responsibility, for example, looking at high viz as part of regulations doing any water activity.

Mr. Davey commented that there are more words than actions and 3 words; sea, seashore, sand, allied with Special Needs and environment. All water sports must be inclusive for all, and all needs to be respected. It is important to ensure that smaller beaches to be looked at.

Cllr. Connolly thanked all for contributions and SPC members for work and engagement to date. He assured all present that all views will be taken on board and appreciates the wide spectrum of views.

### **Following a break, the SPC Members reconvened**

Mr. Owens outlined following submissions that zoning is already in the draft byelaws and outlined that decisions will need to be made regarding zoning, then risk assessment will be required to be carried out independently by trained individuals which is already on a three-year rolling process. Outcomes will be looking at risk assessments at the end of process there may be indications that it may not be possible to multizone. Clearly byelaws cover all beaches – do we look at byelaws for 6 blue flag beaches and leave 1997 byelaws for all other beaches?

Cllr. Carroll said that we must protect blue flag beaches. One submission mentioned to zone bathing areas on beaches if this happens then there may be areas where water sports may not be possible. Cllr Canning said that we have no choice but to look after blue flag beaches. Why are we looking at bye laws now?

Mr Owens said that criteria in relation to blue flags had been updated and right now we must update byelaws to meet criteria for blue flag. We have not received clarification regarding blue flags to date.

Ms. Flynn posed the question wondering if we can get an extension? Can we pilot to get zoning on blue flags and noted that the process to date has been great.

Cllr. Mac an Iomaire said we must look at keeping blue flag beaches and zone them and keep byelaws on others.

Mr. Davy said that he is worried about the impact on smaller beaches and environments affecting beaches.

Cllr. Carroll said that it is difficult to place responsibility on lifeguards to police beaches to the point of asking people to leave and asked Mr. Coogan about the risk assessment process. Mr. Coogan outlined that risk assessment is carried out independently and its findings must be implemented.

Cllr. Connolly said we need to see what we can achieve on blue flag beaches and engage on this point and see how we can advance and achieve. Cllr. Canning said that we should proceed on zoning 6 blue flag beaches. Mr. Coogan said that we are waiting for last year's risk assessment to be completed and it is unlikely to be completed on time for summer 2023. He mentioned that we have two beaches with beach wheelchairs which must also be accommodated. Cllr Connolly said that with 300 kite surfers we need to evaluate policy to facilitate all users for as many as possible.

Mr. Owens said If it's the wish to engage on blue flag beaches on 6 beaches, we will then need to proceed with those findings and then look at other beaches. We will seek clarification from An Taisce what element of additional time will be awarded.

Cllr Carroll said that the recommendation by one of the contributors regarding wording and asked if these can be accommodated and looked for clarification. Mr Owens said If we end up with risk assessment that may lend themselves to restrictions that may limit to one use. On certain beaches multiple uses will be allowed and a ban on others depending on size.

Mr. Coogan said that concerns were raised in relation to Renville Pier in Oranmore, that the mixed use activity was a danger to children and others in the water. Jet skis, sail boats, the landing of fish and several other activities were taking place in this location. A risk assessment was conducted by Water Safety Ireland which stated that the area was not suitable for swimmers due to mixed use. It was stated that risk assessments when conducted must be implemented.

Cllr Carroll said It's out there that there is a special agreement for Renville – it's an accommodation not a byelaw.

Cllr Canning posed the question regarding wording for zoning as to how the decision made to divide areas? Cllr Connolly replied that the Risk assessment will decide on areas with multipurpose use.

Mr Davey said that the Wild Atlantic way from Barna to Carroroe appears to be stopped which will provide good access to beaches from scheme – what is the situation with this now? Cllr Connolly replied that it depends on indemnity on the size of job and sometimes jobs stop for that reason.

Cllr Carroll posed the question can we look at designation of launch areas for craft?

Mr. Coogan replied that kite surfers need a wide space to launch, this effects other users in the bathing area.

Cllr. Canning replied in agreement and said specific space needs to be given to launch craft one at a time to reduce space used. It is important to prioritize swimmers and families using the water.

Mr. Owens clarified with all proceeding with engaging for blue flag on 6 beaches

Cllr. Connolly thanked all for contributions and asked all to update colleagues.

Meeting ended with next meeting being planned in near future.