



# Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028

Submission in response to the  
Public Consultation on the  
Draft Galway County  
Development Plan 2021

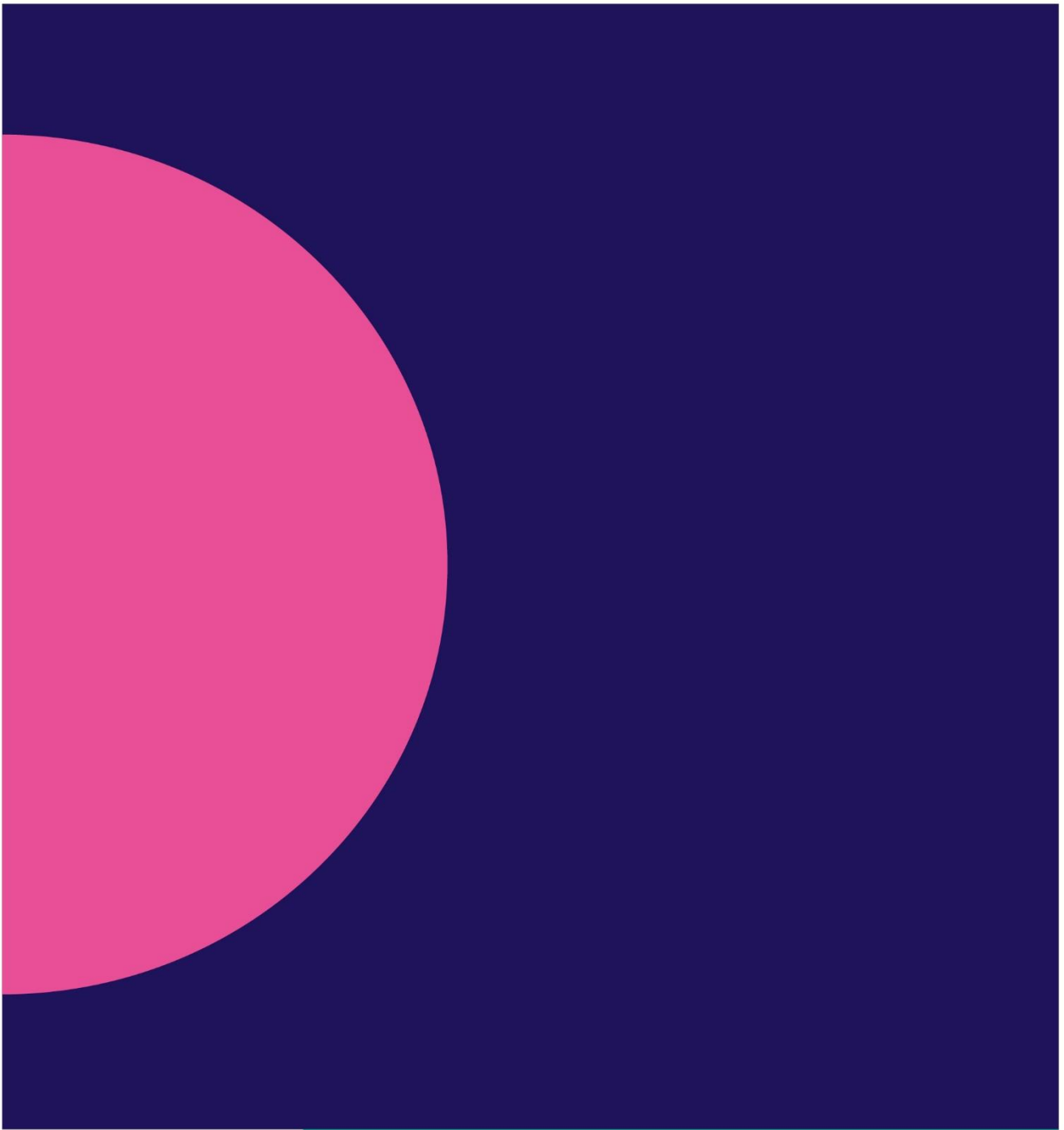
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## Key Recommendations

- Support the delivery of the N6 Galway City Ring Road, which will form part of the TEN-T network.
- Accelerate the delivery of the Galway Area Transport Strategy (GTS) and provide clear timelines and milestones.
- Develop the Atlantic Corridor from Galway northwards by completion of the M17 Tuam to Sligo.
- Improve rail services and infrastructure, including a dual track on the Galway-Athenry rail route, to reduce journey time between Galway and Dublin.
- Support investment in sustainable transport infrastructure that will make walking, cycling, and public transport more attractive, appealing and accessible for all.
- Provide sufficient funding to improve the existing stock and to implement substantial works on the existing road network.
- Develop transport and land use through a coordinated approach to support compact, urban growth.
- Support the continued operation and growth of Knock Airport and Shannon Airport through enhanced connectivity, particularly by public transport.
- Progress the development of the Circular Economy Action Plan at a local level. Set an ambition to make Galway a leader in resource efficiency and sustainable value creation.
- Ensure a consistent approach to land use zoning and community gain that balances the legitimate interests of transport providers and users, energy providers and users, and local communities.
- Support the sustainable reinforcement and provision of new energy infrastructure by infrastructure providers (subject to appropriate environmental assessment and the planning process), ensuring the energy needs of future population and economic expansion across Galway can be delivered in a sustainable and timely manner.
- Deliver quality and affordable homes, continue investment in social housing and support the delivery of the right housing and tenure mix (e.g., apartment focus, rental sector, ageing population, students, social housing, affordable housing etc).
- Avoid delays to supporting infrastructure, so that housing and other key projects in Galway can progress without delay.
- Ensure the rapid roll-out of the National Broadband Plan and a supporting regulatory environment for the successful roll-out of 5G.
- Support compact urban growth, through supporting investment that allows for higher density development.
- Provide a focus on re-intensification of existing business locations, to create the right conditions for enterprise to thrive such as placemaking, 'smart' specialisation and clustering.
- Facilitate urban resilience and recovery through investment in mitigating against legacy issues caused by Covid, remote working, changes to retail and other external factors.
- Consider all options of funding regional projects. The potential of Exchequer and non-Exchequer funding of regional and local projects must be fully exploited. This includes encouraging new partnership models such as City Deals and leveraging the potential of competitive finance.
- Prioritise investment in the tourism infrastructure and new product development. Investment should support visitor experience development, upgrading of existing attractions and sites, visitor awareness and accessibility.
- Prioritise investment in underpinning and supporting the necessary infrastructure to build on the opportunities of the AEC and actively engage in joint spatial planning and development along the Corridor.



# Introduction

## Introduction

Ibec is a national organisation with a strong regional structure. The West Regional Executive Committee (REC) is made up of nominees from Ibec member companies operating within the counties of Galway, Mayo and Roscommon. It includes both multinational and indigenous companies and reflects the diversity of business in terms of business sectors and company size. The committee works to shape, guide and influence business policy priorities for the region that contribute to sustainable economic growth and employment.

Skills, talent, connectivity and quality of life are critical to the Region's productivity and a key part of a value proposition to attract and retain businesses and workers. In an increasingly competitive environment in Europe, the Region has proven that it can be an engine for growth for the whole country.

The Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 comes at a critical time for the economy and society. Since the creation of the current Development Plan, several factors, including the twin crises of Brexit and Covid, have significantly changed the policy landscape in the intervening period. The priorities for the new Galway County Development Plan therefore need to reflect these developments in the external environment and identify, resource and deliver solutions to address these new and emerging challenges. With the right focus, investment and planning, Galway can continue to grow and be successful, and provide a vibrant and sustainable environment where future generations can live and work.

The Galway County Development Plan should be accompanied by a clear statement on its alignment with the National Planning Framework, Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy and the Galway Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan. A lack of cooperation and collaboration between authorities in many areas has led to unsustainable development patterns and urban sprawl. Institutionalising collaboration and coordination between local authorities on economic and spatial development is to be welcomed.

## Connectivity

The RSES and MASP set a framework for the sustainable growth of Galway by over an additional 38,300 persons to 2031 with an expected population growth of 18,655 for County Galway over the Development Plan period. The NPF, NDP and RSES identifies several key enablers to support this growth, which will enhance transport connectivity within the Galway Metropolitan Area and benefit the wider region.

The region is highly dependent on private car use, with 2016 census data confirming 70% of commuter trips are made by private car. Private vehicle use is dominant for both commuter and education-based in the County, with 90% and 65% of the respective trips made as a car/van driver or passenger. Investment is needed to transition travel patterns to public transport and active modes. Good public transport, cycling, and pedestrian infrastructure make for liveable communities with a lower requirement for private car use and a lower burden of traffic congestion.

Transport policies must allow people to choose where they want to live and work, rather than having these decisions dictated by circumstance. Connectivity and effective land use planning will ensure Galway is a living county. It is essential that land use and transport are developed and planned through a coordinated approach. Strengthening our multi-modal transport networks for enhanced international connectivity, enhanced regional connectivity and transitioning to smarter, sustainable mobility, are critical to future proof our infrastructure for economic and climate change resilience.

### Sustainable mobility

Greater modal change to sustainable forms of travel is needed to ensure targeted growth is infrastructure-led. The County Development Plan must support comprehensive public transport and active travel programmes which have been committed to in Galway Transport Strategy (GTS).

Metropolitan and regional growth are inter-dependent. Sustainable mobility will require a package of investment measures and behavioural incentives to deliver a lasting modal shift for commuting. These will not be cheap or easy to implement but are fully justified in terms of wider societal co-benefits, including improved air quality and public health.

Investment in public transport services including enhanced public transport services to county towns would offer significantly greater potential to displace private cars. Progressive measures aimed at improving the public transport system should be encouraged in all sustainable modes of transport. To do this, capital investment in other public intra-urban projects should be increased. A major investment programme is needed to support the decarbonisation of our transport system, support alternative fuels, promote active travel, and build a user-friendly integrated public transport system.

### **Active travel infrastructure**

Increasing investment in active mobility is a necessity to better reflect the changed hierarchy of road users. Investment programmes should support the provision and maintenance of quality footpaths and dedicated cycling infrastructure. There should be a conscious effort by Galway County Council to continue reallocation of road space to more sustainable modes long-term. Installation of new cycle routes or projects involving the reorientation of traffic and/or access routes should occur after consultation with the local businesses have been carried out. Improvements to the public transport and active travel network in Galway, must be under-pinned by appropriate land use decisions at local authority level that maximise opportunities for sustainable travel and directs future development to existing or planned higher capacity public transport corridors. This is essential for Galway's competitiveness, quality of life and to transition to a carbon zero economy and society.

### **Road infrastructure**

It is critical for Galway that strategic road projects as identified in the NPF, NDP, RSES and MASPs are prioritised. These projects complete strategic links to enhance our international and regional connectivity between economic drivers of growth, especially between cities and ports. These projects are integral infrastructure for sustainable multi-modal transport. Car dependency in the region means that an ever-increasing number of commuting trips cannot all be adequately accommodated on the Galway Road network. Inadequate road infrastructure and insufficient capacity, risks undermining the region's liveability and hence the ability of the region to attract and retain staff and compete for investment. Commuting and accessibility impact considerably on quality of life.

A core priority under the NPF is the essential requirement to enhance and upgrade accessibility between urban centres of population and their regions. The Development Plan must support the accelerated delivery of the N6 Galway City Ring Road and other major routes connecting cities, key towns, towns, villages, rural areas. It will enhance integration with the Atlantic Economic Corridor. The Atlantic Corridor is the key to balancing future development on the Island, which would benefit all regions - attracting investment, supporting job creation and contributing to an improved quality of life. The combined potential of the regions is key in creating a counterbalance to Dublin and achieving balanced regional development. It will be a major growth enabler for Galway City and County.

Quality is a key component of any analysis of our built environment. Galway County Council must continue to improve road connectivity and road quality locally. Poorly maintained roads have a significant impact on competitiveness, in the form of increased journey times and capital overheads. They are also an additional cost on businesses at a local level. This requires increased funding for local bodies to improve the existing stock and to implement substantial works on the existing road network. A new approach to funding road maintenance is required, and without a restructuring the quality of our roads will continue to deteriorate. Finally, the issue of surface quality does not solely impact motorists, as bus and cycle lanes also need to be kept to a high standard for safety and comfort. Therefore, improving the quality of our roads retains relevance in the transition to more sustainable modes of transport.

## International connectivity

Strategic assets supporting international connectivity include the Port of Galway and Shannon and Knock Airports. The continued development of these assets and drivers for growth for the entire region is key to attracting investment, diversifying the economy and building resilience. As we are an island-economy, the success of our economic recovery will be shaped by our capacity to engage in international connectivity and mobility. This connectivity is critical to the economic development of the West and Ireland, including trade, tourism, FDI and business location decisions. The challenges presented by Covid, and Brexit require Ireland to enhance global connectivity through our airports. The Covid pandemic has impacted severely on the Irish aviation sector, leading to sharp reductions in passenger numbers.

The County Council should support the continued operation and growth of both Ireland West Airport and Shannon International Airport as an important element of transport and communications infrastructure. It is of critical importance that the Development Plan prioritise the enhancement of connections particularly by public transport and road network from the county to nearby airports to ensure connectivity to international markets which will be of benefit to the local economy.

The Port of Galway is recognised as a port of regional significance that helps to service the County Galway area. It provides for sustainable transport of product to and from the entire Region. It is currently used by various businesses including for the import of wind energy components, steel, timber and the export of scrap steel to name just some of the main tonnage throughput. Port infrastructure will be vital in supporting the marine renewable sector. As this sector evolves, supporting land-based infrastructure such as ports will play a key role in linking marine renewable energy developments to the National Grid.

## Recommendations

- Make Galway's transport network more connected, integrated, and efficient. Commuting patterns have and will change from what was observed pre-Covid, and the Plan must be reflective of this.
- Accelerate the delivery of the Galway Transport Strategy (GTS) and provide clear timelines and milestones.
- Collaborate with Galway City Council to implement transport proposals and measures which will enhance travel to and from the city.
- Improve rail services and infrastructure, including a dual track on the Galway-Athenry rail route, to reduce journey time between Galway and Dublin.
- Support delivery of the N6 Galway City Ring Road, which will form part of the TEN-T network.
- Support investment in sustainable transport infrastructure and public realm projects that will make walking, cycling, and public transport more attractive, appealing and accessible for all.
- Enhance Park & Ride facilities in the County to encourage commuters to utilise public transport.
- Successfully connect transport to land use policies to allow people to choose where they want to live and work, rather than having these decisions dictated by circumstance.
- Continue to implement behavioural change initiatives and 'softer measures' aimed at enabling and promoting sustainable travel across Galway as identified in GTS.

- Progress new and upgrading of existing rail networks and railway stations and protect, as required, lands necessary for the upgrading of existing railway lines or stations, which would improve journey times and enable an increase in the frequency of services and connections.
- Transport investment should be integrated with land use and development objectives, resulting in an ambitious multimodal transport network.
- Sufficient funding should be made available to improve the existing stock and to implement substantial works on the existing road network.
- Support the delivery of greenways in the County such as the proposed Dublin to Galway and Galway to Clifden projects, blueways and signature discovery points along the Wild Atlantic Way and enhance provision of tourism and leisure amenities.
- Support the continued operation and growth of Knock Airport and Shannon Airport through enhanced connectivity, particularly by public transport.
- Support the sustainable expansion and upgrade of Galway Harbour and Galway Port as part of the overall vision to grow Galway as a Region.

## Atlantic Economic Corridor

Project Ireland 2040 supports the development of the Atlantic Economic Corridor (AEC) and specifically highlights the contribution that the AEC can make to achieving the regional growth objectives of the NPF. The County Development Plan must enable the region to make a significant contribution to the growth of the AEC. It has a crucial role to play in maximising the growth potential of the regional urban centres, rural areas, and the economy as a whole. Local regeneration and rural development will stem from the AEC.

Projects within the AEC are key in delivering the objective of enhanced regional accessibility and allowing regions to act as a counterbalance to Dublin and the East coast. Business organisations, including Ibec, have been actively promoting the development of an AEC, involving high quality road connections between urban centres such as Waterford, Cork, Limerick, Galway, Sligo and Letterkenny. Improved inter-urban connectivity would enhance the prospects for enterprise development and job creation, especially at strategic locations along the AEC. It is hoped that they can act as a collective counterbalance to Dublin, thereby attracting talent and promoting investment in the regions. Sections of this scheme are already complete, while others are at various stages of planning.

A key objective of the County Development Plan must be to maximise the assets along the western seaboard and connect the economic hubs, clusters, and catchments of the region to attract investment, support job creation and contribute to an improved quality of life. This will be a major enabler of regional development.

The benefits that will follow from the completion of the network will include:

- Reduction in relative peripherality (from faster/shorter travel times).
- Increased commercial and business links (e.g., supply chains/cluster development).
- Additional cost-effective opportunities for (re)locating public facilities (e.g., social/health care).
- Supports the development of the all-island economy.

## Recommendations

- Develop the Atlantic Corridor from Galway northwards by completion of the M17 Tuam to Sligo.

- Support the development of a network of strong urban centres along the Atlantic coast, which are attractive areas to live and work, supporting effective and sustainable regional development goals.
- Prioritise investment in underpinning and supporting the necessary infrastructure to build on the opportunities of the AEC and actively engage in joint spatial planning and development along the Corridor.

## Digital Infrastructure

The expanding digital economy plays an increasingly crucial role in the exchange of goods and services. Insufficient broadband connectivity leaves local businesses and householders at a significant disadvantage. The opportunities the digitalisation offers cut across sectors and play to the strengths of both urban and rural areas. Digital infrastructure and smart technologies are critical enablers for economic and social revitalisation. A Smart Region, embedding digital technology across many functions will enhance Galway's competitiveness, attractiveness and economic resilience.

The National Broadband Plan (NBP) will provide the infrastructure for high-speed broadband that could not be provided commercially. Rapid roll-out of the NBP is essential to bring high speed broadband to the remaining 23% of homes and businesses in the State currently without high-speed broadband, including rural areas of Galway County. There are 38,714 premises within the intervention area for Galway for the National Broadband Plan. Covid-19 has highlighted the urgent need to accelerate the process as fast as possible. It is imperative that Galway County Council acts to remove any unnecessary administrative or regulatory obstacles to achieving this. Local Authority Broadband Officers should be empowered to co-ordinate the local implementation of any necessary changes.

5G will be very important to Ireland's economic recovery and future competitiveness. In the context of Brexit, Ireland must not fall behind its nearest neighbour when it comes to digital competitiveness. The Development Plan must support 5G infrastructure deployment.

## Recommendations

- Support the delivery and implementation of the National Broadband Plan.
- Address any local obstacles to the speedy roll-out of the National Broadband Plan and other telecommunications infrastructure so that networks are improved, and fibre broadband delivered as rapidly as possible.
- Ensure a supporting regulatory environment for the successful roll-out of 5G.
- Develop Galway's digital infrastructure as a driver of a Smart Region.
- Support investment in incubation and ICT infrastructure to capitalise on remote working and learning opportunities, enterprise start-ups, e-commerce and up-scaling for businesses across all settlements in the County.
- Ensure all communities can transition to digitalisation for a better quality of life and eliminate digital inequalities, in terms of access to digital networks for the purposes of business, access to public services and education.

## Sustainability

In a changing world, where investment, consumers, and talent follow environmental integrity, Galway has no option but to transform its economy. Significant investment and smart policymaking will be needed in the coming years to ensure economic growth in the county is decoupled from

environmental harm. Issues like climate change, waste circularity, air pollution, and water quality need to be central considerations in the Development Plan. With the right approach Galway has an opportunity to become a leader in sustainability and a destination for green investment, talent and purpose driven tourism, all while improving the quality of life and economic wellbeing of citizens.

## **Climate Action**

In 2021, Ireland's climate ambition and international obligations will increase significantly because of the European Green Deal, as well as the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Bill 2021 and the 2020 Programme for Government. Ireland will now be targeting 51% emissions reduction by 2030, and net zero emissions by 2050. This increase in ambition reflects a greater understanding of the threat posed by climate change and the closing window for an effective response.

The new ambition will be enormously challenging for Ireland. Our record on climate action is poor compared to other member states and we are struggling to meet even existing greenhouse gas emissions reduction obligations. The lockdown of our economy last year, and the resulting temporary 6% fall in emissions, has revealed the full extent to which our economy remains wedded to carbon, and our lack of progress in recent years.

Only through an escalation in sustainable investment, and a major transformation of Irish society, will we be able to deliver the emissions reduction needed to meet our new targets and play our part in the global effort to combat climate change. A cleaner and more resilient environment, delivered in a smart way, can bring both societal and economic benefits. We must climate-proof the Galway County Development Plan to allow the delivery of a low carbon, climate resilient, and environmentally sustainable economy.

The Development Plan will need to facilitate the incorporation of long-term emissions considerations in planning and infrastructure decisions across Galway County. Many infrastructure and development decisions are effective over several decades and hence decisions in the 2020s could affect Ireland's emissions profile in 2050. More effective land and marine planning and development will be needed to increase Galway County's resilience to climate change, reduce emissions and support the delivery of vital energy infrastructure.

Climate actions are central to policy proposals for people and places, economy and employment, transport and mobility inter alia. The Development Plan, by adhering to climate smart planning principles, will become the main driver for effective climate action at a local level, in the years to come. It is important that the Council makes progress in the delivery of actions on Climate Change and the transition to a low carbon future for all sectors. Furthermore, it is crucial that the County Development Plan enhances and expands renewable energy infrastructure in Galway which will support the Region's Green Economy. The strengthening of Biodiversity, Green and Blue Infrastructure will be not just be a key enabler for climate action but also for economic growth and connectivity.

As outlined in Ibec's 2019 report Building a Low Carbon Economy, natural gas is an established alternative transport fuel and can help to reduce GHG emissions and improve air quality. As Ireland's anaerobic digestion and CNG refuelling networks are developed, an increasing proportion of the road fleet can be fuelled with biomethane. Similar considerations apply to LPG and bio-LPG. Hydrogen is yet another credible option for the transport sector with the possibility to produce it from indigenous renewable electricity generation. The EU has proposed ambitious hydrogen targets. As with other technologies, supports will be required to stimulate the industry and overcome significant costs. Further research will be required to investigate how to reduce deployment costs.

## **Water and wastewater infrastructure**

High quality water is a vital resource and is essential to the region's economy and broader society. Water is an important resource to industry, agriculture and tourism. It will underpin sustainable growth of the region's population for decades to come.

Adequate water services infrastructure is essential for the region to thrive. We support investment in water infrastructure through regional projects to meet growing demands from both industry and the increasing population. Along with investment in water infrastructure it is necessary that the region undergo efforts to conserve mains water. Investment in water conservation should be prioritised to reduce demand on current supply. Promotion of water reuse and recycling initiatives should be supported. This will be necessary to secure an additional water source in the medium term.

The country faces EU sanctions for continuing to discharge inadequately treated municipal sewage at multiple locations. Poor water quality in our estuarine regions can be a serious problem not just for marine life, but also for leisure and tourism activity. Irish Water's proposed new framework for the National Water Resources Plan, and the subsequent rollout of regional implementation plans, is likely to identify the need for additional investments across a multitude of water supply zones. It is also imperative to accelerate the programme of network maintenance to bring the leakage rate more into line with EU norms.

## **The transition to a Circular Economy**

The traditional focus of waste policy in Ireland was on how to best manage waste disposal and increase recycling and recovery rates. However, with the European Green Deal and Ireland's National Waste Policy 2020-2025, the narrative has shifted. The objective now is the near elimination of waste through the development of a circular economy where products and packaging are designed, manufactured, and distributed in such a way that they remain in circulation as long as technically possible. Ibec strongly supports this objective. The current linear take-make-waste approach is not compatible with future demographic growth and resource availability. Ireland is already struggling to manage current levels of waste production. We produce approximately 14 million tonnes of waste each year and export 38% of this for recycling and recovery. As Galway is the third most populous county in Ireland, its transition to a circular economy must form a key part of the Development plan. The plan must develop the necessary infrastructure and assist businesses, communities and public entities make the necessary transformations.

## **Recommendations**

- Ensure Ireland's long-term emission reduction obligations and wider environmental objectives are considered when making planning decisions for new developments and strategic infrastructure.
- Support the sustainable reinforcement and provision of new energy infrastructure by infrastructure providers (subject to appropriate environmental assessment and the planning process), ensuring the energy needs of future population and economic expansion across Galway can be delivered in a sustainable and timely manner.
- Support the transition of the gas network to a carbon neutral network by 2050, thereby supporting Galway to become carbon neutral.
- Ensure that all future and retrofitted infrastructure is climate proofed, through design and construction, and does not become an obstacle to transition.
- Support the development of renewable energy projects in support of national climate change objectives.
- Avoid delays to supporting infrastructure so that housing and other key projects in Galway County can progress without delay.
- Liaise with Irish Water during the lifetime of the Plan to secure investment in the provision, extension and upgrading of the piped water distribution network and wastewater pipe network across the County, to serve existing population and future population growth and sustain economic growth, in accordance with the requirements of the Core and Settlement Strategies.

- Ensure adequate and appropriate wastewater infrastructure is available to cater for existing and proposed development, in collaboration with Irish Water, to avoid any deterioration in the quality of receiving waters and to ensure that discharge meets the requirements of the Water Framework Directive.
- Ensure the principles of circularity and smart resource use are embedded in the Plan.
- Progress the development of the Circular Economy Action Plan at a local level. Set an ambition to make Galway a leader in resource efficiency and sustainable value creation.
- Identify specific short-term deliverables to build early momentum.
- Support the research and development of green fuels such as biogas, biomethane and hydrogen as fuels for power generation, manufacturing, energy storage and transport.

## Housing

The biggest single domestic driver of competitiveness pressures is the lack of housing supply. Continued shortage of affordable housing threatens to undermine the achievement of many economic policy goals, including the attraction of overseas investment into Ireland, the promotion of third-level education, the reduction of emissions and the improvement of household incomes and wellbeing.

It is essential that land use and transport are developed and planned through a coordinated approach to avoid the mistakes of the past that handcuffed the growth to urban sprawl. Compact, urban growth must be actively supported through the Galway County Development Plan. Remote working and digitalisation of services, including retail (e.g., omnichannel) were growing trends prior to the pandemic; they have accelerated since March 2020.

We need the right mix of housing in the right areas, in accordance with suitable and sustainable development practices. Ramping up of shovel-ready construction projects will be key to delivering quality and affordable homes. The construction of enabling infrastructure must be delivered in key development areas to pre-empt and expedite delivery of housing.

The Council must provide social and affordable housing specifically to meet the forecast housing needs of new additional households over the housing strategy period to 2028 as identified by the Galway County Housing Strategy and Housing Need Demand Assessment (HNDA). With an expected population growth of 18,655 for County Galway over the Plan period, and an expected household size of 2.5, an overall housing demand of 7,469 units is anticipated for the County over 2022-2028 (i.e., 1,607 households per annum on average). By ensuring an appropriate mix of housing, more sustainable communities are created.

### Plan for a population increase to meet economic potential

The Northern and Western RSES sets out the population projections for the region and county/local authority contained within. The population targets and 25% additional growth allocated between the period 2016 to 2026 for Galway City and County, will guide the location of housing and population growth across the region. Sufficient zoned lands should be provided to ensure that no shortage in supply arises during the lifetime of the development plan. In prioritising the zoning of lands, regard should be had to their deliverability, accessibility, and capacity to consolidate urban development.

Given the level of growth targeted for metropolitan areas and their role as engines of growth at the top of the Region's settlement hierarchy, the distribution of population and employment growth needs to be transport infrastructure led, so employment, housing and other services are better integrated and support sustainable travel. The Galway Metropolitan Area encompasses both City and County Council areas (Baile Chláir, Bearna and Oranmore). The role of the MASP is to

accommodate population growth within the area that will ensure the vitality and appeal of Galway City and the surrounding towns and village settlements.

## **A changing housing and tenure mix**

Ireland will see a steady increase in the number of new households being formed, reflecting the growth in population coupled with a decline in average household size. Based on these forecasts, we estimate that nationally new household formation will average over 36,000 per annum between 2018 and 2046. Each of these households will need a home. This will involve a combination of owner-occupied and renting households.

There is currently a mismatch between what housing is suitable and what is available. This affects affordability of housing and ultimately Ireland's ability to attract or retain people. The demand for homes is also driven by changes in the average household size.

Galway's housing strategy must account for the required change in household mix and tenure. We need the right mix of housing in the right areas, in accordance with suitable and sustainable development practices. It is important that the County's housing policy adequately accounts for the expected demographic changes that will impact the housing stock and mix required over the coming years. A holistic view of housing is required, allowing for an appropriate mix of location, type, tenure and accommodation. Students, young professionals, families, and an older population all have different housing needs.

## **Increased housing supply requires availability of zones and serviceable land**

Increasing the availability of zoned and serviceable land will be essential to meeting Ireland's housing needs. It is critical that funding is available to ensure sites can be provided with the necessary supporting utilities and infrastructure. Only 45% of the cost of delivering a new home is accounted for by the build cost. Additional measures such as a bridging finance scheme will be required to better utilise the supply of zoned and serviceable land suitable for housing.

## **Enhanced delivery of social housing**

Increased housing provision by the local authority sector would provide immediate economic and social benefit across the country. Over the next few years, the maintenance and refurbishment of the existing social housing stock will come to the fore. The social housing stock is ageing in key urban areas. Taking housing out of the system adds to the demand for additional housing.

Maintenance, refurbishment, and potential replacement will become an increasing focus of local authorities in metropolitan areas. The age and condition of units impact the reletting time of social housing. The social housing stock will also require deep and substantial retrofitting.

## **Recommendations**

- Develop transport and land use through a coordinated approach to support compact, urban growth.
- Change housing design guidance to allow greater density of new home development.
- Continue investment on social housing. The demands for purpose-built social housing have not dissipated and only been exacerbated by the economic shock brought on by Covid.
- Increase the availability of zoned and serviceable land.
- Seek to promote the creation of sustainable places and healthy communities, while ensuring that development occurs at an appropriate pace and that infrastructure is delivered in tandem to support this growth.
- Encourage compact growth, through the development of infill sites, brownfield lands, under-utilised land/buildings, vacant sites and derelict sites.

- Support redevelopment and reuse, including energy retrofitting, of existing housing stock.

## Reimagining and Rethinking Galway

### Town centres that work

Covid has resulted in dramatic changes to how people live and work and many of these changes will ultimately become embedded in a 'new normal'. The post-pandemic economic fate of town centres across Galway County cannot be left to chance. It must be planned for and invested in.

Immediate challenges, if not mitigated or addressed, will cause lasting damage, and undermine any recovery effort. The revised Development Plan must provide the tools to help reimagine and revitalise towns and maximise the new and unexpected employment and investment opportunities for towns and villages in Galway County.

There is a strong interdependence between the planning, development and creation of an attractive environment and enterprise development. Companies are attracted to invest in locations where they can access skills, where people will want to live and work and where the surrounding infrastructure is supportive of business (including, for example, transport and broadband networks; education and training facilities, retail etc.). Establishing a strong sense of place contributes to the attractiveness factors for entrepreneurship, for business investment, for foreign direct investment (FDI), talent and tourism.

### Strategy for reimagining and rethinking our town centres

The focus must be on re-intensification of existing business locations. This strategy aims to create the right conditions for enterprise to thrive, to create wealth and improve quality of life for all. Key aspects are orderly growth, placemaking, smart specialisation and clustering. Consideration is given to future proofing risk management so that growth is sustainable, competitive, inclusive and resilient. Skills, talent and innovation are identified as drivers for resilient and sustainable growth.

Towns must be developed in terms of their economic self-sufficiency to minimise the need for commuting and support the development of surrounding areas. This would support locally generated employment and create prospects for growth. Employment creation will come from a broad base of possible activities; it is critical that potential is recognised and supported across a range of possible sources both indigenous and from overseas.

We must help firms attract and retain scarce talent; maintain a greater focus on supporting indigenous enterprises; and commit to underscore Ireland as a beacon of certainty for mobile investment in an increasingly uncertain global economy. Employment, along with social protection and pension systems, needs to support easy career transitions.

Town centres will have to be rejuvenated but they will also need to be reimagined. They must be able to adequately respond to trends that have accelerated over recent years, including those that experienced hyper-acceleration at the outset of the crisis. These include the effects of continued growth in remote working and online retail on town centres. Increasing footfall is one priority and is important to helping town centre businesses navigate the current crisis.

Remote working is an accelerating trend which is here to stay and will require an adequate local response, as this has an immediate knock-on effect on other town centre businesses. It is time to address the long-term sustainability and resilience of town centres. A combination of tax relief and other supports should be put in place to incentivise levels of home and remote working.

The importance of daily services and accessibility, including last-mile delivery, for the retail sector should be taken into consideration for future investment. Given the significant contribution the sector makes to our town centres, consultation should be made with businesses regarding rejuvenation and restructuring plans, to support existing stores and accurately reflect the requirements of retail.

The pragmatic response of local authorities to Covid in terms of actively supporting outdoor seating and the use of the public realm should become a positive legacy of the crisis. Efforts such as this, pedestrianisation initiatives, and the creation of new public spaces will improve local destinations. Ongoing consultation and engagement must be had with local businesses in the design and development of these schemes. It is important that the space made available is actively used, sustains local economic activity and contributes to urban placemaking.

## **Urban living key to sustainable town centres**

Achieving greater diversity of land use within urban areas will aid sustainable rejuvenation. This requires a better and more appropriate balance between residential, retail, and other commercial or business activity. According to the OECD, the crisis provides an opportunity to develop a new long-term strategy for urban spaces based on accessibility to amenities and services.

This replaces previous thinking of designing urban areas from solely the logic of mobility, which has led to unsustainable commuting patterns. It requires a focus on the “localisation of the Sustainable Development Goals”, “the 10-minute settlement concept” and “tactical urbanism”. Above all, it is a core pillar of the National Planning Framework (NPF). This fundamental shift will require a collaborative approach between local businesses, Galway County Council and Government to be successful. The Plan must promote the development of additional convenience retail to support housing and population growth. New residential settlements should be supported with required services.

In the past year, the retail industry has seen an unprecedented level of change, particularly in regard to digitalisation and online shopping. The retail sector is pivotal to regeneration and renewal of Town Centre areas, their economic viability and delivery of a high-quality public realm, built environment and sense of place.

## **Recommendations**

- Development and regeneration of town centres through careful planning and a high-quality public realm with increased usage of green landscaping to enhance urban areas.
- Facilitate urban resilience and recovery through investment in mitigating against legacy issues caused by Covid, remote working, changes to retail and other external factors.
- Develop the ‘Key Towns’ of Ballinasloe and Tuam and Strategic Potential town of Athenry to sufficient scale to be drivers of regional growth and promote their development as major centres of employment and population.
- Support Self-Sustaining Towns (Gort and Loughrea) and Small Growth Towns and Villages as areas for local services, residential and employment potential.
- Work with partners across the Region to implement smart initiatives.
- Support the delivery of the right housing and tenure mix (e.g., apartment focus, rental sector, ageing population, students, social housing, affordable housing etc).
- Promote the development of additional convenience retail in line with housing and population growth.
- Support compact urban growth, through supporting investment that allows for higher density development.
- Provide a focus on re-intensification of existing business locations, to create the right conditions for enterprise to thrive such as placemaking, ‘smart’ specialisation and clustering.
- Consider all options of funding regional projects. The potential of Exchequer and non-Exchequer funding of regional and local projects must be fully exploited. This includes encouraging new partnership models such as City Deals and leveraging the potential of competitive financing.

- Promote and support the renewal and revitalisation of rural town and village centres to enhance the vitality and viability of settlements as attractive residential and service centres, including actively addressing issues of vacancy and dereliction in settlements in Galway.
- Invest in sustainable transport measures to support the ‘10-minute settlement’ concept.

## Tourism

As tourism is an important indigenous sector in Galway, attractions and infrastructure will need to be upgraded over the coming years, in addition to developing new experiences that could be enjoyed by locals and visitors alike. Stakeholders will need to work together to facilitate the better targeting of tourism investment across visitor experience development, visitor awareness and accessibility, and critical enablers. Local, regional, and national public bodies must continue to advance projects that leverage place-based assets and catchments sustainably. This includes the development of infrastructure assets such as greenways and blueways. The natural assets of the Coastline play a valuable role as economic resources for tourism, particularly in rural areas. The protection of the coastline as a tourism asset is imperative to ensure long-term benefits from tourism activities.

### Tourism promotion and marketing

An increase in tourism promotion and marketing will need to occur in tandem with the re-opening of the country. The priority should be to target international visitors in the higher spending source markets and segments. This will result in sustainable growth in employment across the sector, which will in turn boost employment levels. Focus should be on the development and enhancement of cultural and heritage experiences to attract a wide range of visitors to Ireland.

### Supporting the experience and night-time economies

The wider experience economy, particularly those activities in the evening and night-time, is a key pillar underpinning sustainable city recovery.

Incorporating the needs of the night-time economy is key to reimagining our town centres. It can make a significant contribution to the local economy to the benefit of towns and villages across County Galway. Galway County Council must actively support the needs of its local night-time economy, which includes rethinking the use of public space and reimagining under-utilised spaces.

A new events strategy is required. This would cover areas such as short-stay visits, conferences, events, markets, and other local visitor attractions. Galway County Council and other regulators must adopt a partnership approach to events. This includes consistent, predictable, and simplified licensing procedures; a constructive approach to risk management; and incorporating short-term and long-term economic benefits into the decision-making process. This includes the role events play in supporting the night-time economy; increased footfall; and local economic benefits such as direct (e.g., venue owner, events contractors etc) and indirect (e.g., neighbouring bars and restaurants, accommodation, transport, supply-chains etc).

### Recommendations

- Prioritise investment in the tourism infrastructure and new product development. Investment should support visitor experience development, upgrading of existing attractions and sites, visitor awareness and accessibility.
- Renewed focus on the night-time economy. Prioritise immediate investment in supporting infrastructure, such as late-night transport provision, for the recovery and growth of the night-time economy. Galway County Council must actively support local night-time economic development, which includes re-thinking the use of public space and re-imagining under-utilised spaces.
- Support development of the tourism sector in Galway including investment in both the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands and capture key opportunities to grow the

sector based around Waterways, Activities, Heritage, Arts and Culture, in an urban and a rural environment.

## Local Enterprise Development

Covid has altered the labour market, resulting in job losses in all sectors. Work is needed to make the Region more resilient and globally competitive due to Covid, Brexit, and other global threats, with sectors such as tourism, hospitality, and leisure particularly exposed. Government is committed to the national objective of balanced regional development, which will continue to prioritise the location of new FDI outside Dublin. Galway County must also scale its indigenous enterprise base. It must be a location of choice for entrepreneurs. Galway County Council has a key role to play in future economic development.

The proposed redevelopment of Galway Airport to an Innovation, Business and Technology Campus should be supported within the County Development Plan. The development will be a key enabler for business, employment and attracting investment into the region. The site strategy and vision for the redevelopment will deliver economic benefit to Galway and the wider region.

Placemaking, addressing strengths and weaknesses of each region, and smart specialisation are core components of Ireland 2025, the national enterprise strategy. Enterprise agencies such as IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland have ambitious regional targets and goals. These are supported by each local authority through the local enterprise office network. The Action Plan for Jobs process, including regional enterprise plans, together with the Regional Skills Fora and the Action Plan for Rural Development underpin smart specialisation strategies, sectoral ecosystems and regional development. It is the interest of these agencies that enterprise growth can be achieved and sustained across all regions. Meeting their objectives in terms of delivering new jobs and investments, requires an adequate supply of commercial and residential property, attractive areas to live and availability of skills. These underpin regional and local value propositions.

Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) play a vital role in local economies by offering support, guidance and training to people who want to start or grow a business. Galway County Council's local enterprise network will play an important role during the economic recovery phase. Awareness of their existence is growing. Also, the Programme for Government envisages a stronger role for the LEOs where they will be allowed to provide direct grants to businesses with more than 10 employees; to ensure companies experience seamless transition moving from being a LEO to an Enterprise Ireland client; and streamlined application procedures for enterprise agency support.

### Recommendations

- Continue to support Galway County Council's local enterprise network through LEOs.
- Ensure quality of life factors are incorporated into Galway County Council's enterprise policies. Quality of life is critical to the County's productivity and a key part of a value proposition to attract and retain businesses and workers.
- Progress planning and development of the former Galway Airport brownfield site to support sustained economic growth.

## Planning Capabilities

Spatial planning at county level must be consistent with those at regional level under the NPF. Planning capabilities at local authority level have been reduced over recent years, yet local authorities are usually the first point of call on planning matters. The local development plan making process, NDP commitments and private sector investment will compound the demand for planners and other key skills further. A programme to upskill existing local authority staff is needed to provide

a more active role in performing planning including forward planning, regulatory policy, development management and enforcement.

In addition, sharing of planners and other specialist skills between local authorities must be encouraged. This will ensure professional and timely planning operations can be maintained. It would allow an individual local authority scale to meet the sustainable future development at short-term or immediate pressures because planning applications can vary in size, complexity, and timeframe. This is in addition to the required investment in e-planning.

Local authorities must not frustrate the provision of much needed infrastructure. Local charges can substantially affect the cost base of existing energy generation sites or undermine the attractiveness to develop new infrastructure projects. The local charging regime should be designed to incentivise development. However, it is through the development plan process that local authorities can threaten the delivery or viability of projects.

Local development plans through zoning practices can reduce the availability of land for infrastructure development. Implementation of the NPF at a local level will hopefully mitigate wholesale problems of old. Past practices have particularly frustrated efforts to meet Ireland's renewable energy needs such as windfarm development. This is not consistent with the stated priority to transition to a low carbon, clean energy and building climate resilience.

The regulation of noise pollution is complex and evolving. It has the potential to impact not only on urban infrastructure such as roads and airports, but also on rural areas where new wind energy projects are being considered. It will be important to ensure a consistent approach to land use zoning and community gain that balances the legitimate interests of transport providers and users, energy providers and users, and local communities.

## **Recommendations**

- Create a programme to upskill existing local authority staff to provide a more active role in performing planning including forward planning, regulatory policy, development management and enforcement.
- Ensure a greater pooling and sharing of specialist skills between local authorities and other public bodies, involved in planning and construction.
- Ensure a consistent approach to land use zoning and community gain that balances the legitimate interests of transport providers and users, energy providers and users, and local communities.



## About Ibec

Ibec is Ireland's largest lobby group and business representative. We campaign for real changes to the policies that matter most to business. Policy is shaped by our diverse membership, who are home grown, multinational, big and small and employ 70% of the private sector workforce in Ireland. With 36 trade associations covering a range of industry sectors, 6 offices around Ireland as well as an office in Brussels. With over 240 employees, Ibec communicates the Irish business voice to key stakeholders at home and abroad. Ibec also provides a wide range of professional services and management training to members on all aspects of human resource management, occupational health and safety, employee relations and employment law.

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