

Chapter 8

# **Tourism and Landscape**

*To encourage the development of the tourism sector as an economic driver for the County whilst ensuring the landscapes and seascapes which are one of the county's most important assets are protected.*

## **8.1 Introduction**

Galway County Council recognises the potential of tourism as a key driver of sustainable socio-economic growth across the urban, rural, island and coastal settings of the County. Sustainable development of the tourism industry is of critical importance to the county. Galway is one of the most successful counties in the country in terms of the numbers of both domestic and foreign visitors and the economic benefit derived as a result of this tourism activity. The Council aims to integrate sustainable tourism as a core economic activity, by investment in infrastructure, attractions, outdoor activity facilities; festivals and events across the county as well as supporting the development of appropriate visitor infrastructure such as facilities; accommodation; and outdoor recreation and trails; and by enhancing the public realm and increasing attractiveness of urban and rural settings.

The protection of the landscapes is of significant importance to the Council as it is recognised as one of the key attributes within the county. There are a variety of landscapes types in the county ranging from the quartzite mountain ranges and blanket bogs of Conamara to the fertile patchwork of farmland in east Galway and the bare karst pavements of the Oileáin Árann and South Galway. The Council aims to support sustainable development at appropriate locations throughout the county whilst also protecting the landscapes from inappropriate developments.

## **8.2 Strategic Aims**

Galway County Council shall work with the appropriate agencies and state bodies to ensure that the tourism industry is promoted and supported and that our landscapes are suitably protected and will accord with the following strategic aims:

- To safeguard and augment County Galway’s extensive tourism sector;
- To maximise the potential of sustainable tourism thereby contributing to the balanced economic development of the County;
- To work in partnership with Fáilte Ireland, and other agencies to develop tourism in county Galway;
- To support the preparation and implementation of a Tourism Strategy for County Galway;
- To develop and enhance new and existing tourism products, attractions and tourism infrastructure;
- To capitalise on the distinct tourist attractions that County Galway has to offer including Destination Towns, natural, built and cultural heritage, scenic landscapes and natural amenities;
- To work to improve the visitor experience and to support Destination Experience Development Plans and Visitor Experience Development Plans across the county to ensure that all visitors enjoy the unique experience of County Galway;
- To capitalise on the County’s identified nodes along the Wild Atlantic Way and Irelands Hidden Heartlands;
- To protect the landscape categories within the County and avoid negative impacts upon the natural environment.

### 8.3 Strategic Context

This chapter is prepared in the context of the following National and Regional Plans, Policies and Guidelines:

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| National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040   |
| National Development Plan 2018-2027  |
| Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region 2020-2032 |

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| Climate Action Plan 2019  |
| National Mitigation Plan 2017   |
| Tourism Development and Innovation – A Strategy for Investment 2016 – 2022 (Failte Ireland, 2016) |
| People, Place and Policy – Growing Tourism to 2025  |
| Tourism Recovery Plan 2020 - 2023 Prepared by the Tourism Recovery Taskforce October 2020         |
| Tourism Action Plan 2019-2021   |
| National Action Plan for Rural Development  |
| Food Wise 2025: A 10 Year Vision for the Irish Agri-Food Industry (2015)                          |
| Local Economic and Community Plan 2016-2022 (Galway County Council)                               |
| Údarás na Gaeltachta Strategic Plan 2018 – 2020   |

### 8.3.1 National Planning Framework

The National Planning Framework (NPF) recognises the importance of landscape and tourism. The importance of our landscapes has been emphasised within NPO 14 which highlights that the Irish rural landscapes are important as 'authentic and attractive as places to live, work and visit'. The importance of facilitating tourism development in particular greenways, blueways and peatways is supported within NPO22. The importance of protecting the natural landscapes from a rural tourism perspective has been highlighted within NPO 23. The NPF has also emphasised the importance of co-ordination and promotion of an all-island tourism initiatives through continued co-operation between the relevant tourism agencies and Tourism Ireland within NPO 49.

### **8.3.2 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy**

The Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) identifies the importance of recreational tourism particularly within our countryside and coastal areas, and trails. The enhancement and development water based leisure sector, greenways, blueways, bridle routes have been emphasised. The Strategy supports the delivery of the National Dublin to Galway Cycleway, Oranmore to Bearna Coastal Greenway and the Galway to Clifden Greenway. The Strategy has also highlighted the established Lough Derg Blueway which includes Portumna. The RSES has also references the importance of existing tourism brands such as the Wild Atlantic Way and Irelands Hidden Heartlands as well as the need to upgrade and improve facilities for the growth of visitors by cars, buses and cyclist. The importance of the preparation and implementation of Visitor Experience Development Plans (VEDPs) has also been highlighted. The strategy further identifies the need to support the provision and/or upgrade of cultural facilities, the importance of tourism to our Gaeltacht and Island communities.

## **8.4 Climate Change**

This plan aims to support and promote the tourism industry within the county whilst protecting the counties landscapes over the life of this plan while also ensuring development proposals can be facilitated in a way to ensure the county's transition to a low carbon and climate resilient society.

The sustainable development of the tourism sector will play a contributing factor in addressing the challenges faced by climate change in the county in terms of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and supporting climate action measure in developments. The tourism sector within the county in many instances is particularly vulnerable to climate change with respect to extreme weather events including flooding, increase in sea level rise, water shortages and loss and damage to natural assets and attractions at destinations. The development of tourism infrastructure such as greenways will encourage the use of more sustainable modes of transports such as walking and cycling which will assist in reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

As the tourism sector develops there will need to be a greater emphasis on addressing climate change particularly in areas such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions in this growing sector, especially from transport.

Chapter 14 *Climate Change, Energy and Renewable Resource* will also address in more detail Climate Change and the interrelationship between the policy objectives of this chapter and the transition to a resilient society.

## **8.5 Tourism in County Galway**

The tourism sector is extremely important to the economic development of the county. There are a number of explanations for the strength of tourism in the county, with its extraordinary natural beauty and cultural assets which includes the largest Gaeltacht in Ireland. The county extends from the Atlantic coastal regions in the west and the dramatic landscape of the Conamara mountains to the callows bordering the River Shannon in the east. At its centre, the County contains the largest inland lake in the Republic of Ireland, Lough Corrib, and to the southeast, Lough Derg. Tourism supports job creation; local enterprise development; increases revenues to the County as well as supporting sustainability of towns and villages, while also contributing to the conservation of built and natural heritage.

The county encompasses some of the key tourism destinations in the country and currently ranks as the most visited County in Ireland; it has traditionally maintained a high ranking among the most visited counties. Galway City and County attracted 1 million domestic visitors in 2018 and generated €175million, with the number of international visitors attracted at 1.729million visitors generating €626 million in revenue. In 2019, 2.7m visitors to Co. Galway, of which 1.6m were overseas and 1.1m were domestic. Revenue generated was €743m total, broken down as €532m from overseas visitors and €211m from domestic visitors.

The Council will support the co-ordination of industry partners across the County, including agencies such as Fáilte Ireland, OPW, Waterways Ireland, Coillte and Údarás na Gaeltachta; as well as the industry that that underpins tourism

development. The Council will also continue to lead specific product development projects and supports the development of visitor information services as well as engaging in marketing and public relations to ensure that the County is advantageously positioned in a competitive domestic and international visitor economy. The continued growth and development of the tourism is of utmost importance as it is noted that 12-14% of businesses in Galway are involved in tourism and the sector accounts for 21,000 jobs in Galway (City and County; IHF 2020), while hospitality forms 27.6% of total employment in Clifden, (WDC Insights March 2019) .

### Policy Objectives Tourism

#### **TOU 1                      Tourism Sector**

To co-operate with all relevant stakeholders in initiatives that strengthen the tourism sector in the county.

#### **TOU 2                      Key Economic Pillars**

To promote and facilitate tourism as an economic pillar of the County's economy and to support the provision of appropriate visitor attractions and improvement in public spaces to promote attractive and vibrant town centres as key places for tourists.

## 8.6 Galway County Tourism Strategy

The Council have identified the requirement for the preparation of a Galway County Tourism Strategy (GCTS) to both support the existing tourism sector whilst also ensuring the county is maximising its tourism potential. The plan will support both the preparation and implementation of this Strategy.

The core objective of the Tourism Strategy will be to capture and reflect the essence of County Galway; in developing strategic priorities for the delivery of compelling and sustainable visitor experiences. The tourism strategy will be focused throughout the county in all locations and will support the creation of opportunities over a wide varieties of tourist experiences.

The marketing element of the Tourism Strategy will set out a roadmap to develop a singular destination brand; aiming to build a suite of assets to be used in promotional material and to inform visitors. This in turn will support the economy and facilitate the revitalisation of inland, coastal, island and rural communities.

### Policy Objective Galway County Tourism Strategy

#### GCTS 1 Galway County Tourism Strategy

To support the preparation and implementation of the Galway County Tourism Strategy.

## 8.7 Visitor Experience Development Plan Areas

The Council will support the preparation of Destination Experience Development Plans (DEDP) and Visitor Experience Development Plans (VEDP) and other tourism masterplans both within the county and also those which crosses from the county into neighbouring counties. There are four existing DEDP's/VEDP's/tourism masterplans in the county which include The Connemara Coast and Aran Islands VEDP's (2018), Burren & Cliffs of Moher VEDP (2021), Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020-2030 Waterways Ireland (2020) and the Lough Derg VEDP 2020-2024.

- **The Connemara Coast and Aran Islands Visitor Experience Development Plan (2018);**

This VEDP was led by Fáilte Ireland and explores the visitor experience in Connemara by signposting hero products, supporting products and experience development priorities. The Connemara VEDP is implemented by the Connemara and Aran Island Tourism Network.

- **Burren & Cliffs of Moher Visitor Experience Development Plan (2021);**

This was initiated by Failte Ireland and focuses on Kinvara as part of the Burren; identifying hero and supporting products and gaps.



- **Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon 2020-2030 Waterways Ireland (2020);**

Waterways Ireland in association with Fáilte Ireland and the 10 Local Authorities within the region, commissioned SLR Consulting and partners to develop a Tourism Masterplan for the Shannon. This is the first time a single, holistic and dedicated plan of any type is being undertaken on the Shannon and Shannon Erne and aims to reposition the Shannon as a destination of international scale and singularity at the centre of Ireland’s Hidden Heartlands.

- **Lough Derg Visitor Experience Development Plan 2020-2024** (Counties Tipperary, Clare and Galway);

The Lough Derg Marketing Group delivered its second plan in 2020, focusing on co-ordinating destination development across the lake wide geography and builds a foundation for a new approach to growing the visitor experience at the lake. This approach embeds the plan in the authentic experiences of places that is at the core of the slow travel approach and also acknowledges the varying stages of destination development around the lake.

The Council will support the implementation of these aforementioned plans and also support the preparation of further such plans at appropriate locations throughout the county.

### **Policy Objective Visitor Experience Development Plans**

#### **VEDP 1 Visitor Experience Development Plans**

To support the preparation and implementation of Visitor Experience Development Plans (VEDPs) In the county and to underpin the overarching tourism benefits and to promote the natural and cultural assets of the county.

## **8.8 Tourist Infrastructure**

Research has shown that overseas tourists want to visit a destination with a variety of experiences to offer. While the county is in the fortunate position to possess some of the best destinations and experiences in the country it is important that the support services and high-quality infrastructure are in place to meet the needs of these visitors when they come to the county. The plan will focus on identifying key strategic projects and areas for investment to deliver tourism products of scale with the capacity to ensure the county tourism industry can continue to prosper and grow.

### **8.8.1 Visitor Information and Interpretation**

Galway County Council will continue to liaise with bodies such as Failte Ireland, the tourism industry and other stakeholders to identify visitor services in areas that require enhanced facilities. The Council will ensure that tourism attraction will be supported for expansion projects such as car parking areas, and interpretative centres/signage as appropriate. With the increased visitor numbers, it is important that the provision of the required infrastructure is supported where appropriate. Tourism-related development proposals will be required to demonstrate a high standard of design, potential impact in terms of scale and intensity and the potential for the proposal to add significantly to the quality of the visitor experience.

### **8.8.2 Accommodation**

The county has a significant level of accommodation with a total of 20,119 bedstock available for guest accommodation in 2019 which equates to 7% of the guest bedstock accommodation nationally. This accommodation is provided within 81 hotels, 17 Guesthouses, 114 Bed and Breakfasts, 86 Self Catering Units, 14 hostels, 4 Caravan and Camping Parks and with 20 Failte Ireland Irish Welcome Standard businesses. The Council recognises that the provision of accommodation such as those highlighted are essential to enable growth in the tourism sector. The Council shall support the development of tourism in the county by encouraging the provision of a wide range of tourist accommodation types and restricting development that

would be likely to reduce the capacity of the resource, or have a detrimental impact on the local environment.

In general such developments shall be encouraged to locate within or in close proximity to existing towns and villages where they can avail of existing public services, commercial and community facilities. The Council will support the development and upgrade of accommodation to meet Fáilte Ireland Quality Standards, subject to development management criteria and will require that such relevant standards are met in development proposals where appropriate.

## **Policy Objectives for Tourism Infrastructure**

### **TI 1 Tourist Infrastructure**

Encourage and promote tourism related facilities and accommodation within existing settlements in the county. Consideration will be given to such facilities in rural areas where there is a justified requirement for the proposal at that location. These proposals are required to comply with environmental considerations and the relevant DM Standards.

### **TI 2 Visitor Accommodation**

Encourage and facilitate visitor accommodation facilities at appropriate locations within the county where there is a justifiable requirement for such facilities. These proposals are required to comply with environmental considerations and the relevant DM Standards.

### **TI 3 Energy Efficiency**

Support best-practice environmental management including energy efficiency, waste management, procurement and recycling in accommodation providers and tourism enterprises in the County.

### **TI 4 Tourism and Infrastructure Capacity**

The potential environmental effects of a likely increase in tourists/tourism-related traffic volumes in particular locations/along particular routes shall be considered and mitigated as appropriate. Such a consideration should include potential impacts on existing infrastructure (including drinking water, wastewater, waste and transport) resulting from tourism proposals. Galway County Council will support Irish Water and Fáilte Ireland to ensure that tourism is serviced by adequate and appropriate water services infrastructure.

#### **TI 5 Camper Van Parking Facilities**

Galway County Council will support, where practical, and in the interest of proper planning and sustainable development of the area locations for overnight parking with facilities for camper vans in South Connemara from An Spidéal back to An Ceathrú Rua.

#### **TI 6 Glenlo Abbey**

It is a policy objective of the Planning Authority to support the enhanced development of the Glenlo Abbey Hotel and Estate to secure an integrated tourism and recreational complex on the Estate grounds, including the enhancement of leisure, golf and hotel facilities, connection to the Connemara Greenway, enhanced connection to Lough Corrib, and potential future development on the grounds of the Estate.

#### **TI 7 Bearna Golf Club**

Facilitate the development of an integrated tourism and recreational complex at Bearna Golf and Country Club, including the development of a hotel, leisure centre, conference centre, golf apartments, apart-hotel and associated residential units.

## **8.9 Outdoor Tourism Pursuits**

### **8.9.1 Greenways / Blueways**

The Council actively supports the provision of greenway and blueway infrastructure within the county and acknowledges that benefits from tourism and recreational amenity perspective. Pillar 3 of the National Action Plan for Rural Development focuses on '*Maximising our Rural Tourism and Recreational Potential*', with a specific recommendation to promote the development of greenways and blueways, and other recreational opportunities, and to support sustainable rural jobs through targeted tourism initiatives. The Council will continue to support and facilitate the provision of greenways/blueways where appropriate within the county. These are further examined in Chapter 9 *Biodiversity, Green Infrastructure and Natural Heritage*.

## Policy Objectives Greenways/ Blueways

### **GBW 1 Walkways and Cycleways**

To promote and facilitate the development of walkways and cycleways at appropriate locations throughout the County subject to environmental considerations.

### **GBW 2 Future Development of Network of Greenways**

To support the delivery of sustainable strategic greenway/blueways projects in the county in accordance with the Strategy for Future Development of National and Regional Greenways.

## 8.9.2 Coastal and Marine Tourism

County Galway has both an extensive coastline and Islands which are a major tourism asset attraction particularly in the summer months. The county has three blue flag beaches which includes Traught in Kinvara, An Trá Mhór in Inverin and Trá an Dóilin in Carraroe. The county's beaches are a popular resource for a number of water sports activities including surfing, kite-surfing, swimming, paddle boarding, kayaking etc. and also for activities such as walking, jogging and general enjoyment of the coastal area. The protection of the coastline as a tourism asset is imperative to ensure long-term benefits from tourism activities.

## Policy Objectives Coastal Tourism

### **CT 1 Tourism Resource**

To protect beaches, and bathing areas as valuable local amenities and as a tourism resource and support the maintenance, protection and improvement of access to these amenities.

### **CT 2 Water Sports**

To encourage the development of coastal tourism in areas such as water-sports and water-related activities and events subject to normal planning and environmental criteria.

**CT3 Tourism Development**

To support proposals for tourism development in coastal areas where it can be demonstrated that there will be no negative impacts on the amenities of the area, the integrity of the natural, environment or the economic value of the County's coastline and beaches.

**CT 4 Blue Flags**

To continue to work with An Taisce, the local community and other relevant stakeholders to retain and increase the number of Blue Flag awards in the County.

**CT 5 Tourism Products**

To support the protection and enhancement of our islands, coastline and waterways as tourism products and attractions, subject to community and environmental carrying capacity.

### 8.9.3 Lakeland and Waterway Tourism

The lakelands and waterways of the county are rich natural resources that attract numerous visitors each year. In Lough Corrib the county contains the largest lake in the Republic of Ireland. In addition to their scenic beauty they offer opportunities for a wide range of activities such as fishing, Kayaking, rowing, sailing, bird-watching and pleasure boating. Ensuring access to the lakes and waterways and the sustainable management of activities taking place on the water, on the lakeshore and in the riparian zone of waterways is essential to ensure a balance between tourism development and conservation of natural heritage in these areas.

#### Policy Objective Lakeland and Waterway Tourism

**LWT 1 Lakeland and Waterways Tourism**

To support the development of tourism activities in lakeland areas and waterways subject to Normal Planning and environmental criteria. All proposed developments shall be in accordance with the Water Framework Directive and all relevant EU Directives.

## 8.10 Cultural Tourism

### 8.10.1 Heritage Tourism

The Council acknowledges the importance of and wealth of heritage tourism which is located within the county. Galway is home to Ireland's largest 'living' Gaeltacht and a rich mosaic of heritage attractions, arts, traditional music and cultural activities. The arts, culture, heritage and the unique linguistic heritage of Galway form a significant element of the tourism industry in the County. There are a number of examples of the vibrancy of heritage tourism in the county which is apparent from the tourism visitor numbers of 2019 including Kylemore Abbey & Garden at 560,000, Connemara National Park at 238,378, Dún Aonghasa at 131,273 and Leenane Cultural Centre at 92,000.

While it is important to recognise the economic contribution that is made through heritage tourism, there is the potential to further enhance heritage tourism development in the county. The integration of activities, including our heritage assets, our unique culture including linguistic and the local history can further enhance this area. The Council will support the protection and appropriate enhancement of our heritage tourism sites for the advancement of the tourism sector.

#### Policy Objectives Heritage Tourism

##### HT 1 Stakeholders

To work with the relevant stakeholders including the OPW, the Heritage Council, Fáilte Ireland, Údarás Na Gaeltachta, the Arts Council, Waterways Ireland, local communities and businesses to support the development of heritage and cultural tourism in Galway.

##### HT2 Heritage Assets

To support and protect the heritage assets (built and natural) that are the focus for tourism development and that best practice standards in relation to the environmental management of tourism enterprises are adhered to.

**HT3**

**Sustainable Tourism Industry**

To support the development of a more sustainable tourism industry which minimises adverse impacts on local communities, the built heritage, landscapes, habitats and species; leaving them undiminished as a resource for future generations, while supporting social and economic prosperity.

### 8.10.2 Food and Craft

There is a burgeoning speciality food and craft sector in the County, with many small producers and manufacturers contributing niche foods and crafts to the domestic and international markets. Foreign trade expeditions and promotional initiatives such as the ‘Made in Galway’ campaign and the food tourism network with ‘Discover Galway Food Experiences’ are integral components in championing their emergence, as they provide a platform to exhibit an array of indigenous foods and local artisan industries to a wider audience. Domestically, examples of standard bearers for the sector include GMIT Letterfrack, the National Centre for Furniture Design and Technology which has gained international recognition for its excellence and the world renowned Clarinbridge Oyster Festival. Institutions and events such as these and others are an invaluable asset to the local economy and contribute to showcasing some of the finest food and crafts on offer in the County. The enhancement of the traditional farmer’s markets and a proliferation in this type of regularised casual trading throughout the County can contribute to augmenting the wider food and craft industry of the County. These markets will contribute to create interest and vibrancy in town centres as well as providing food producers sites to retail food. Markets offer a healthier, safer outdoor retail experience.

#### Policy Objective for Food and Craft

**FC 1**

**Food and Crafts**

To support the development and marketing of the foods and crafts of the County through networking and developing trade links with regions, locally, nationally and internationally.



### 8.10.3 Events and Festivals

Galway is well renowned for the volume and quality of events and festivals which take place within the county on an annual basis. These events and festivals are an important means of attracting visitors and economic activity into the county at various periods during the year. The county presently hosts numerous events and festivals, which make an important contribution to the tourism and economic development of the County. Such events have included the Clarinbridge Oyster Festival, Clifden Arts Week, Ballinasloe Horse Fair, Loughrea Medieval Festival, Shorelines Arts Festival Portumna, Connemara Pony Show, Clarinbridge Oyster Festival, Autumn Gathering Coole Park.

#### Policy Objective Events and Festivals

##### EF 1 Events and Festivals

Support and promote the existing festivals and cultural events which take place in the county and facilitate the establishment of new events where appropriate in order to increase the profile of the county as a key tourism destination.

### 8.10.4 Dark Skies

“Dark Skies” is a movement that has developed over the last 30 years across the world, the largest organisation from which to emerge being the International Dark-Sky Association. The aim of these organisations is to identify and preserve areas which have pristine night time skies. These are night skies which allow for the clear observation of stars and the Milky Way by the naked eye (clouds permitting). The extent of these areas are dwindling due to an increase in areas with light pollution. Light pollution is the process whereby a high density of artificial lighting causes Milky Way, and in more severe cases the stars, to become completely obscured by a light haze.

There is significant potential for the development of dark skies designated areas in the county primarily with the Conamara area due to the low population density and its distance from any major cities means it suffers from minimal light pollution and

contains many areas where not a single source of artificial light may be seen. The Council will support the investigation of the development of designated dark skies areas within the most appropriate locations.

### **Policy Objective Dark Skies**

#### **DS 1                      Dark Skies**

To investigate the potential for dark skies designated areas at appropriate locations throughout the county.

## **8.11    Additional Tourism Experiences**

Galway County Council is supportive of the development of additional tourism experiences or tourism attractions of scale, which would serve to enhance tourism and employment within the county. The Plan supports the sustainable development of facilities such as outdoor activity or leisure parks at suitable locations throughout the County. Development proposals for unique tourism offerings will be considered on their merits subject to the protection of the integrity of the built and natural heritage of the County.

### **Policy Objective Additional Tourism Experiences**

#### **ATE 1                      Additional Tourism Initiatives**

To facilitate the sustainable development of the tourism sector and provide for the delivery of a unique combination of tourism opportunities drawing on the network of attractions in County Galway and potential future attractions.

## **8.12    Failte Ireland Tourism Brands**

County Galway encompasses some of Ireland's most beautiful landscapes and seascapes, forming parts of both the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brand regions. The Council will support development and investment in both the Wild Atlantic Way and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands brand regions.

### **8.12.1 Wild Atlantic Way**

The Wild Atlantic Way has been a transformational tourism initiative led by Fáilte Ireland, for the West of Ireland. It showcases the natural assets and outstanding scenery of the West and has been an important economic driver for the county. The Galway stage of the Wild Atlantic Way is 300km long starting from the village of Kinvara near the county Clare border and finishing at Leenane near the county Mayo border. The route encompasses numerous visitor attractions including Dunguaire Castle, ferry crossings to the Aran Island and Inisbofin, the wider Conamara area including villages such as Roundstone and Ballyconneely, and Kylemore Abbey. The Council recognises the importance of the branding of the Wild Atlantic Way and its positive impact on the tourism sector and the economic growth of the county.

### **8.12.2 Irelands Hidden Heartlands**

Irelands Hidden Heartlands proposition; which includes east Galway; has rebranded the midlands since 2018; as a way of boosting tourism in this area. The River Shannon is central to the proposition, the Shannon Tourism Masterplan' is proposed to focus tourism concentration on and around the river and in surrounding towns. It will focus on the River Shannon, the development of new food networks and trails and the creation of new walking hubs are part of the campaign to attract a larger number of visitors. The plan is to entice visitors with the area's walkways and lakes, and the campaign will promote activities like walking, cycling, fishing and boating. A walkway and trail network, the Beara Breifne Way, will have an extensive reach, with many towns along the route (including Portumna, Tiernascragh, Meelick, Eyrecourt, Clonfert, Ballinasloe, Aghrim, Ahascragh and Ballygar in Co. Galway to be identified as "walking hubs." The Galway section of the Beara Breifne Way is known as the Hymany Way.

### **8.12.3 Destination Towns**

Faillte Ireland research confirms that attractive towns are a key motivator for holidaymakers in choosing Ireland as a holiday destination, as is interesting heritage, culture and friendly people. However, the challenge is to unlock the economic potential of the visitor for local businesses and communities, and deliver high quality

destination town experiences for visitors, that still capture local distinctiveness and support thriving local communities.

Clifden has been designated as the first Destination Town in the county under the Fáilte Ireland's Destination Towns Initiative. Funding will be allocated by Fáilte Ireland under this initiative to boost the attractiveness and tourism potential of the town. The Fáilte Ireland scheme is part of the National Tourism Development Authority's work to drive a better regional spread of overseas and domestic visitors and spend. The scheme is funded under the Government's Project Ireland 2040 strategy with the aim of driving sustainable growth in the Irish tourism sector and higher revenue and job creation around Ireland.

Clifden is located in the western coastal area of Connemara in County Galway, approximately 80 kilometres northwest of Galway City and is the main urban settlement serving the Connemara area. The town is synonymous with Irish tourism and hospitality and the funding as secured under the Destination Towns Initiative will assist in strengthening the tourism sector of the town.

## Policy Objectives County Tourism Brands

### **CTB 1                      Tourism Branding**

To support the promotion of the Wild Atlantic Way and Irelands Hidden Heartlands in their role to grow the economic contribution of tourism along their routes.

### **CTB 2                      Tourism Stakeholders**

To support Fáilte Ireland and any other stakeholders in identifying suitable locations for both new and improved infrastructure to cater for the growth in visitor cars, buses, and cyclists using the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) and Irelands Hidden Heartlands (IHH) touring network and visitor attractions within the county.

### **CTB 3                      Slow Tourism**

To support the provision of Orientation and Information Points targeted at the 'Slow Tourism' market particularly the assets within Irelands Hidden Heartlands.

#### **CTB 4 Shannon Tourism Masterplan**

Promote, encourage and facilitate the implementation of the Shannon Tourism Masterplan and its objectives in co-operation with Waterways Ireland, Fáilte Ireland and adjoining local authorities. This includes proposals for the increased access to and visibility of the Shannon's scenic attributes and its use for land-based activities such as cycling and walking.

#### **CTB 5 Destination Towns**

(a) To support the promotion of Clifden as the First Destination Town and as the principal visitor Services Centre and hub for Fáilte Ireland's Wild Atlantic Way in the County;

(b) Support the designation of additional "Destination Towns" within the county if opportunities arise.

## **8.13 Landscape**

### **8.13.1 Landscape Character**

Landscape is a precious national asset with a variety of landscape types ranging from the quartzite mountain ranges and blanket bogs of Conamara to the fertile patchwork of farmland in east Galway and the bare karst pavements of the Oileáin Árann and South Galway. The natural diversity of the landscapes of the County coupled with built and cultural heritage features such as the archaeological monuments, stone walls, hedgerows, woodlands, field patterns, settlements and buildings has given the county its distinctive character.

Galway County Council has prepared a Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) for the county. Landscape Character Assessment is a process that describes, maps and classifies landscapes objectively. Defining landscape character enables an understanding to be formed of the inherent value and importance of individual landscape elements and the processes that may alter landscape character into the future. The LCA will assist in the identification of the most appropriate locations for development.

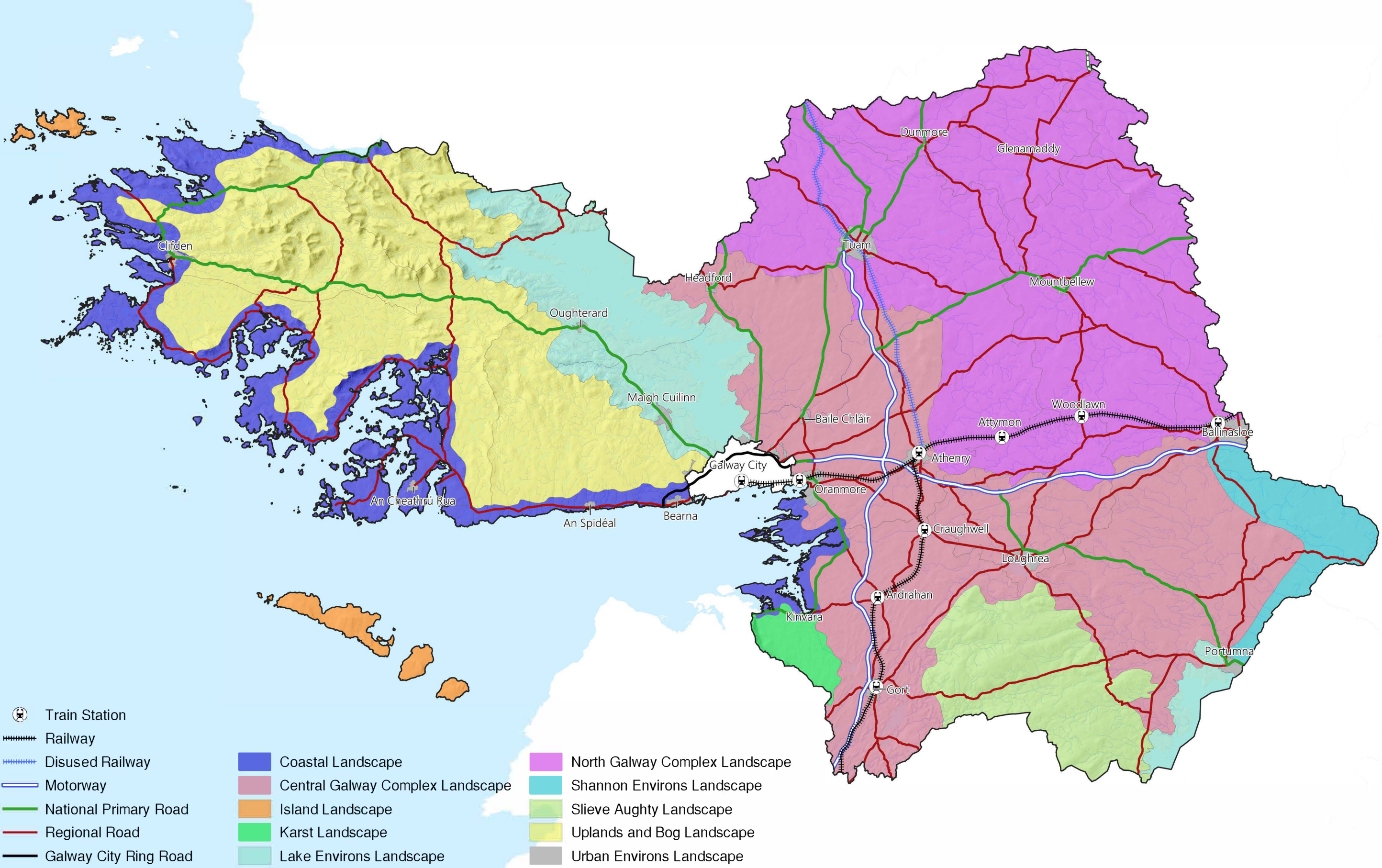
This LCA has subdivided the county Galway into three landscape regions and the coast. These are the foundations of the county's landscape character, that are

determined by the underlying geology and glacial drifts that have determined topography, soil, vegetation and patterns of human settlement from prehistory to today. These three regions and the coast are as follows:

- **The West Galway Region** is a zone that is mostly underlain by older harder geology that gives rise to large-scale rugged, complex landscapes of mountains, lakes, bogs, islands and coastal inlets in the western parts of the county;
- **The Eastern Plains Region** is underlain by younger, softer rocks. This gets most of its character from the covering blanket of glacial soils that give rise to extensive, level plains of grasslands, with many areas of bog in the north;
- **The South Galway Region** where the Slieve Aughty Mountain's older, harder rock meet the younger, yielding geology of the Burren in the west and the Shannon basin in the east. The result is a collection of small landscapes which vary considerably as one travels from west to east;
- **The Coast** is a separate region that derives differences in its character areas principally from its proximity and interactions with terrestrial areas.

These landscape regions have been further broken down into ten separate landscape types. The Landscape Character Types for County Galway are as follows and are identified in Map 8.1 below.

- Coastal;
- Islands;
- Uplands and bogs;
- Lake environs;
- North Galway Complex;
- Shannon Environs;
- Central Galway Complex;
- Karst Landscapes;
- Slieve Aughty; and
- Urban Environs.



🚂 Train Station

🚊 Railway

🚊 Disused Railway

🛣️ Motorway

🛣️ National Primary Road

🛣️ Regional Road

🛣️ Galway City Ring Road

🟡 Coastal Landscape

🟠 Central Galway Complex Landscape

🟠 Island Landscape

🟠 Karst Landscape

🟠 Lake Environs Landscape

🟡 North Galway Complex Landscape

🟡 Shannon Environs Landscape

🟡 Slieve Aughty Landscape

🟡 Uplands and Bog Landscape

🟡 Urban Environs Landscape

**Map 8.1: Landscape Character Areas**

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### **8.13.2 Landscape Sensitivity**

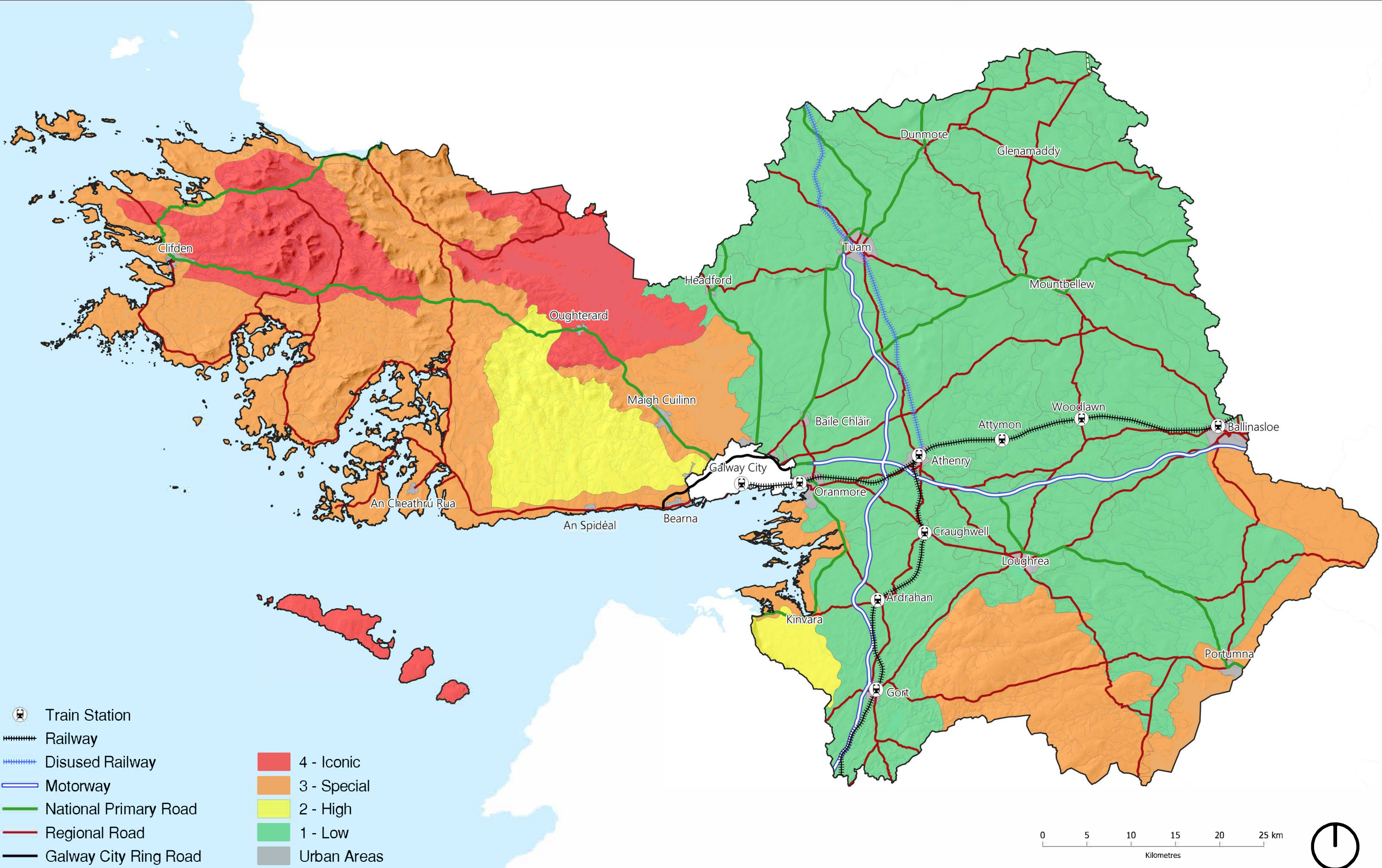
A landscape's capacity to absorb new development, without exhibiting a significant alteration of character or change of appearance is referred to as its 'sensitivity'. This depends on factors such as elevation, slope, as well as the types of land-cover and soil. The area is classified as being increasingly sensitive as more of these factors are present in the same place.

The Landscape Character Assessment for the county has outlined four separate Landscape Character Units as follows:

- Class 1 - Low: Unlikely to be adversely affected by change
- Class 2 - High: Elevated sensitivity to change
- Class 3 - Special: High sensitivity to change
- Class 4 - Iconic: Unique Landscape with high sensitivity to change

Subject to the provisions of the plan the control of permissible development shall be in accordance with the policy objectives outlined below as they relate to these four Landscape Character Units. Based on the assessment of the landscape and the establishment of sensitivity ratings for various areas of the County, the Planning Authority shall implement the following policy objectives.





**Map 8.2: Landscape Sensitivity**

## Policy Objectives Landscape Conservation and Management

### **LCM 1                      Preservation of Landscape Character**

Preserve and enhance the character of the landscape where, and to the extent that, in the opinion of the Planning Authority, the proper planning and sustainable development of the area requires it, including the preservation and enhancement, where possible of views and prospects and the amenities of places and features of natural beauty or interest.

### **LCM 2                      Landscape Sensitivity Classification**

The Planning Authority shall have regard to the landscape sensitivity classification of sites in the consideration of any significant development proposals and, where necessary, require a Landscape/Visual Impact Assessment to accompany such proposals. This shall be balanced against the need to develop key strategic infrastructure to meet the strategic aims of the plan.

### **LCM 3                      Landscape Sensitivity Ratings**

Consideration of landscape sensitivity ratings shall be an important factor in determining development uses in areas of the County. In areas of high landscape sensitivity, the design and the choice of location of proposed development in the landscape will also be critical considerations.

### **LCM 4                      Open/Unfenced Landscape**

Preserve the status of traditionally open/unfenced landscape. The merits of each case will be considered in light of landscape sensitivity ratings and views of amenity importance.

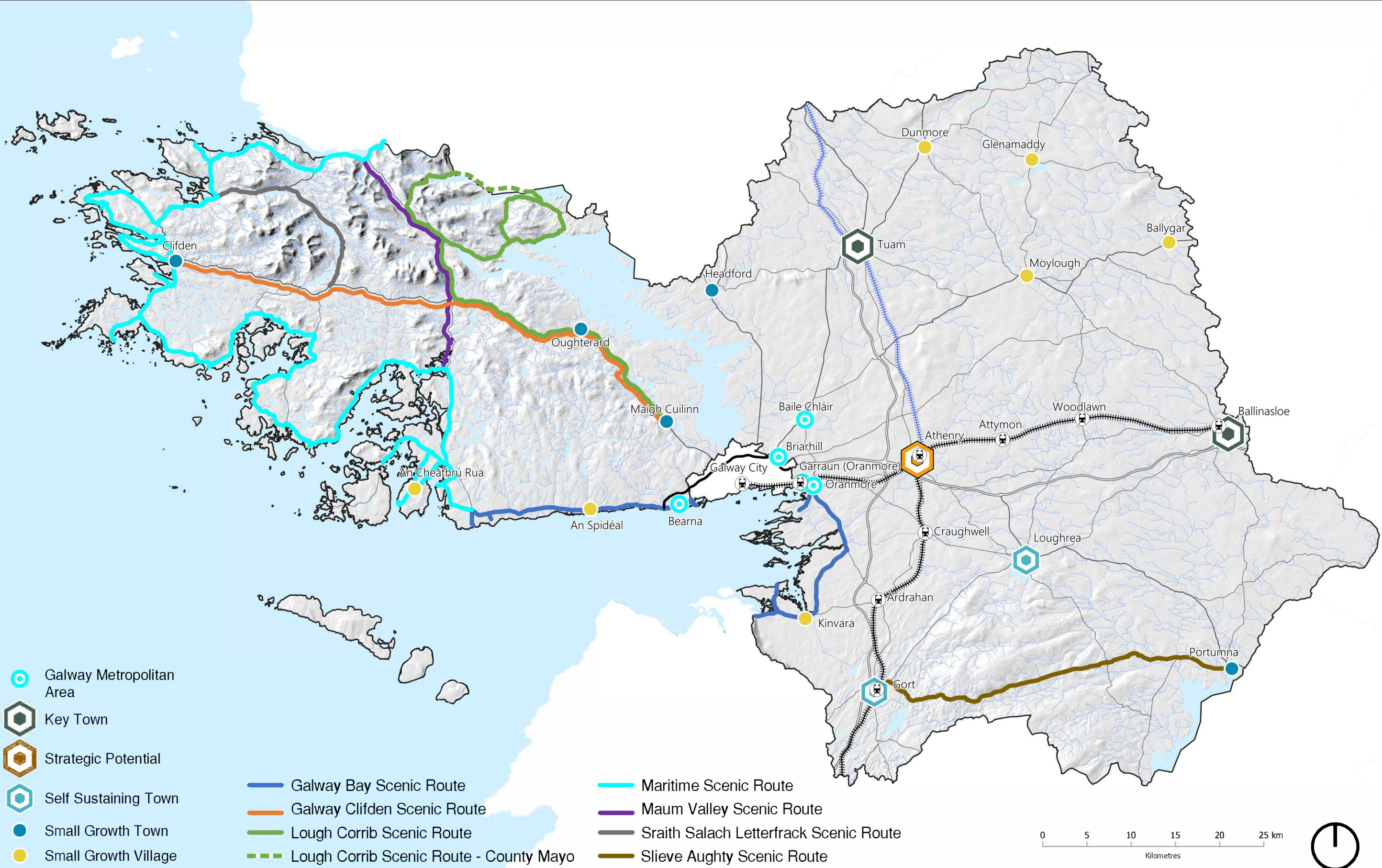
### **LCM 5                      Prospecting and Mining**

It is a policy objective of the Planning Authority to give careful consideration in exceptional circumstances for prospecting or mining for gold, silver or base metals in landscapes class 3 or 4.

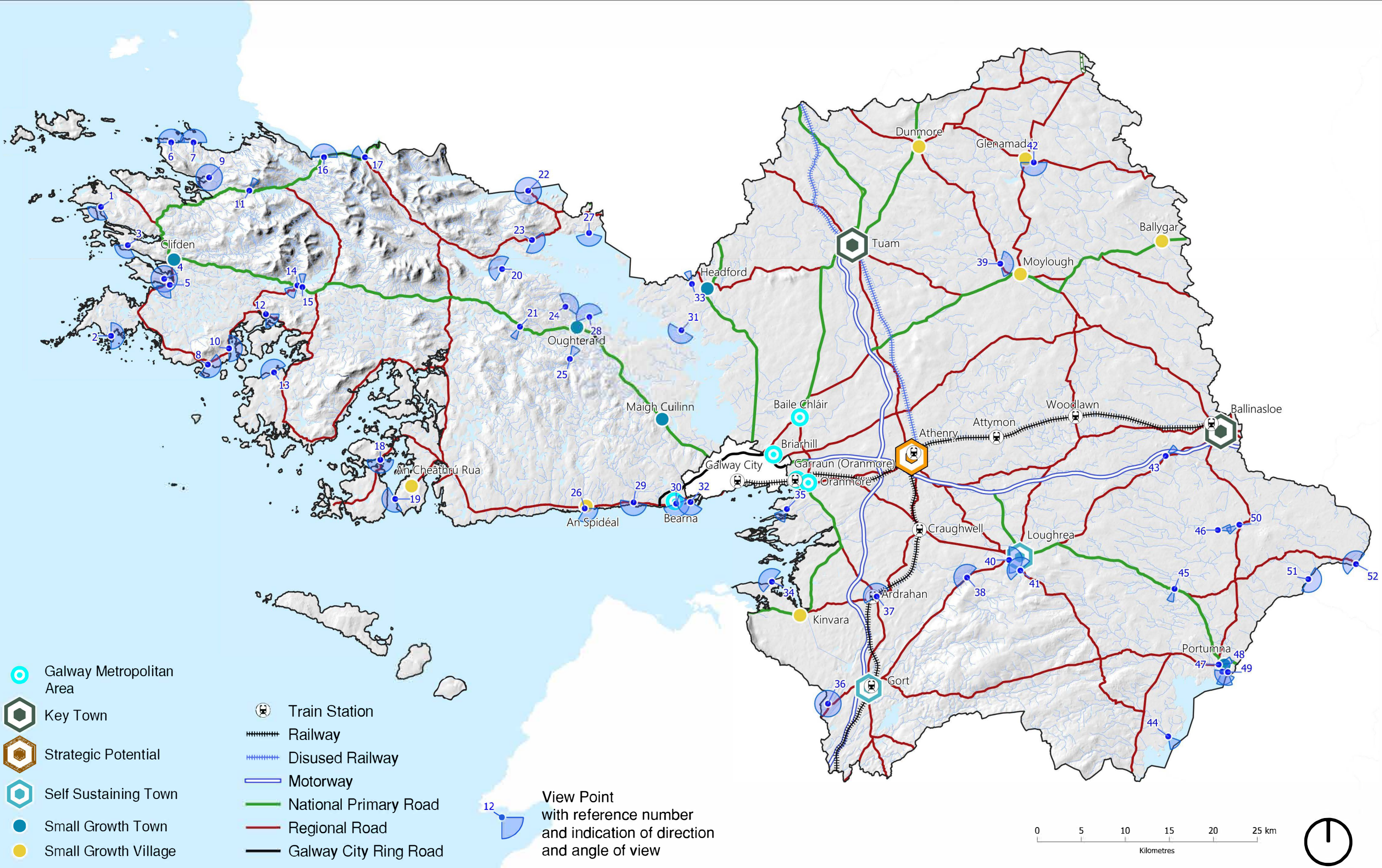
## **8.13.3 Protected Views and Scenic Routes**

This protected views and scenic routes have been identified in the Landscape Character Assessment which is located within Appendix 4 of the plan. The county has many important protected views and scenic routes of great natural beauty located across the county. These protected views and scenic routes have a very important amenity, tourism, economic and cultural value for the county and its

people. It is therefore important to protect and conserve these views and development where permitted should not hinder or obstruct these views but should be located and designed in a manner so as not to negatively impact on these protected views and scenic routes.



**Map 8.3 Scenic Routes**



**Map 8.4 Protected Views**

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## Policy Objective Landscape Conservation and Management

### **PVSR 1 – Protected Views and Scenic Routes**

Preserve the protected views and scenic routes as detailed in Maps 8.3 and 8.4 from development that in the view of the Planning Authority would negatively impact on said protected views and scenic routes. This shall be balanced against the need to develop key infrastructure to meet the strategic aims of the plan.