

Planning Report

Clifden Public Realm Enhancement Scheme





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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preamble

This planning report has been prepared by MKO, on behalf of our client Galway County Council, in conjunction with a planning application to An Bord Pleanála for a Public Realm Scheme in Clifden, Co. Galway. The proposed development has been prepared in respect of Public Realm upgrades to the town of Clifden, relating specifically to upgrades at Beach Road Quay, Harbour Park and Clifden Town Centre. The proposed development will be considered under Part 10 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001-2015, in accordance with Part 11, Section 179 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended.

The Development Description and details of the proposed development are set out in full in Section 4 of this Planning Application Report and within the associated technical documentation included with this application.

This report includes detailed discussion in respect of the proposed development relating to the site location and context, the development description, and the relevant planning history. This report also provides a detailed assessment of the proposed development's consistency with the relevant planning policy documents at national, regional, and local levels.

1.2 The Design Team

A comprehensive and experienced design team has been put together to prepare the planning application. The full design team is as follows:

- › MKO – Planning, Environmental, and Ecology Consultants
- › Tobin Consulting Engineers
- › Land Use Consultants (LUC)

1.3 Report Structure

Following this Introduction section, the report is set out as follows:

- › **Section 2** Provides a description of the site's context within the surrounding area.
- › **Section 3** Itemises the relevant planning history of the application site and other relevant sites in the surrounding area.
- › **Section 4** Provides a description of the proposed scheme.
- › **Section 5** Provides an overview of the public consultation undertaken for the proposed scheme,
- › **Section 6** Provides an overview of the relevant national, regional and local planning policy framework.
- › **Section 7** Provides a planning assessment of the proposed scheme by setting out the following:
 - Principle of Development
 - Compliance with Zoning

- **Section 8** Draws out and summarises the key features of the proposed development, in addition to providing a concluding statement on the proposed scheme's contribution to the proper planning and development of the area.

2. SITE CONTEXT

2.1 Site Location

Clifden is located in the western coastal area of Connemara in County Galway, approximately 80 kilometres northwest of Galway City. The town of Clifden is the main urban settlement serving the Connemara area as well a considerable rural hinterland in the west of the county. Apart from Galway City, the nearest large urban settlement is Westport in County Mayo, which is located 80km to the north-east. Clifden is served by the National Secondary Road, the N59 which is the main Galway-Clifden-Westport route, serving Connemara. Clifden (Irish: An Clochán, meaning "stepping stones") is a coastal town in County Galway, Ireland, in the region of Connemara, located on the Owenglin River where it flows into Clifden Bay. As the largest town in the region, it is often referred to as "the Capital of Connemara". Frequented by tourists, Clifden is linked to Galway city by the N59. Clifden has a population of 1,259 (census 2022). The town of Clifden is the main urban settlement serving the Conamara area as well a considerable rural hinterland in the west of the county. Clifden has been designated a Small Growth Town (SGT) in the settlement Hierarchy for the County. Clifden is also the main urban settlement serving the Conamara area as well a large rural hinterland in the west of the county offering a wide variety of skills. There is an established tourism industry in Clifden, Cleggan and Ballyconnelly and the potential spin off tourism benefits.

Clifden, "An Clochan" in Irish, is a planned town, founded in the 19th century by John D'Arcy of Kiltullagh, Athenry. His castle located west of the town centre on the Sky Road. Clifden has a rich history which has moulded the town both physically and culturally. In particular, its associations with Marconi and Alcock & Brown during the 19th Century; the Galway-Clifden railway; and its function as a Maritime Port. Its historical importance as a settlement is demonstrated in monuments such as the Famine Graveyard, Clifden Castle and Clifden Gaol, and Clifden Courthouse.

The study area for this application is split into three separate study areas, The total site boundary is 3.83ha:

- > Beach Road Quay
- > Harbour Park
- > Town Centre



Figure 1: Subject Site, Source: MKO QGIS

2.1.1 Beach Road Quay

Clifden’s Quay and Beach Road were instrumental in the development of the town, and reflect the areas rich built heritage. The quay is used predominately by leisure boats, no longer operating as a commercial quay.

The total study boundary area is 0.23ha.

2.1.2 Harbour Park

The Harbour Park is located to the west of Clifden Town Centre approximately x m away from the town centre, on the banks of Clifden Bay. The site is accessed via the Beach Road, from the town centre. The eastern boundary and west of the site is bounded by town centre uses such Clifden Town hall, and a number of residential dwellings, the north of the site is bounded by greenfield lands, the south of the site bounded by the banks of Clifden Bay. The coastal location provides a scenic view of Clifden bay.

The study area boundary is 1.65ha.

2.1.3 Town Centre

The Town Centre study area is located directly in the centre of Clifden Town, at the intersection of Main Street and Bridge Street. the Town Centre including the Main Street, Market Square, Bridge Street and Hulk Street have been the focal point of the Town, playing a pivotal role in the administrative, commercial, cultural and recreational functioning of the Town. The study boundary is 1.95ha.

2.2 Ecology

The application boundary is within proximity to a number of European sites as indicated on **Figure 2** below.

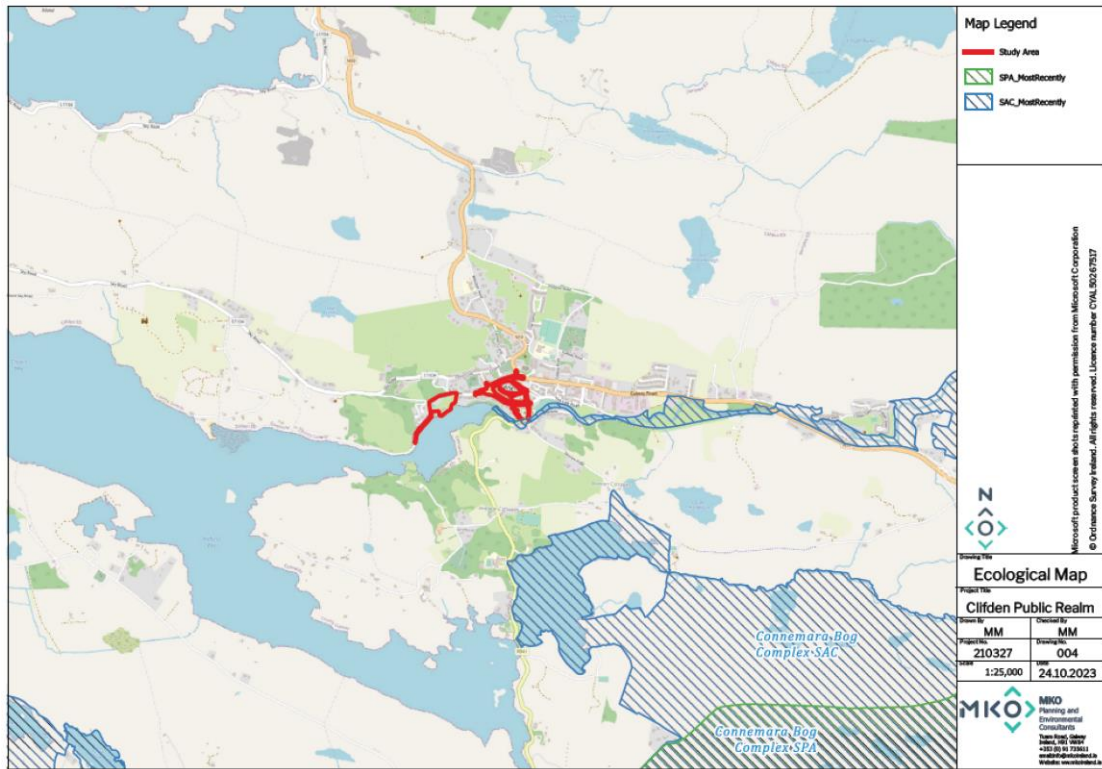


Figure 2: Ecological Constraints Map, Source: MKO QGIS

2.3 Flooding

Clifden’s position beside on the coast makes it susceptible to flooding as indicated on Figure 3, parts of the application are located within flood zones associated with a high risk of flooding. Given the proximity to Clifden bay there are parts of the study area located within Flood Zones A & B, particularly in the Beach Road Quay area. In respect of this a Flood Risk Assessment has been prepared by Tobin Consulting Engineers to assess the risk associated with the proposed development.



Figure 3: Flood Map, Source: MKO QGIS

2.4

Cultural Context

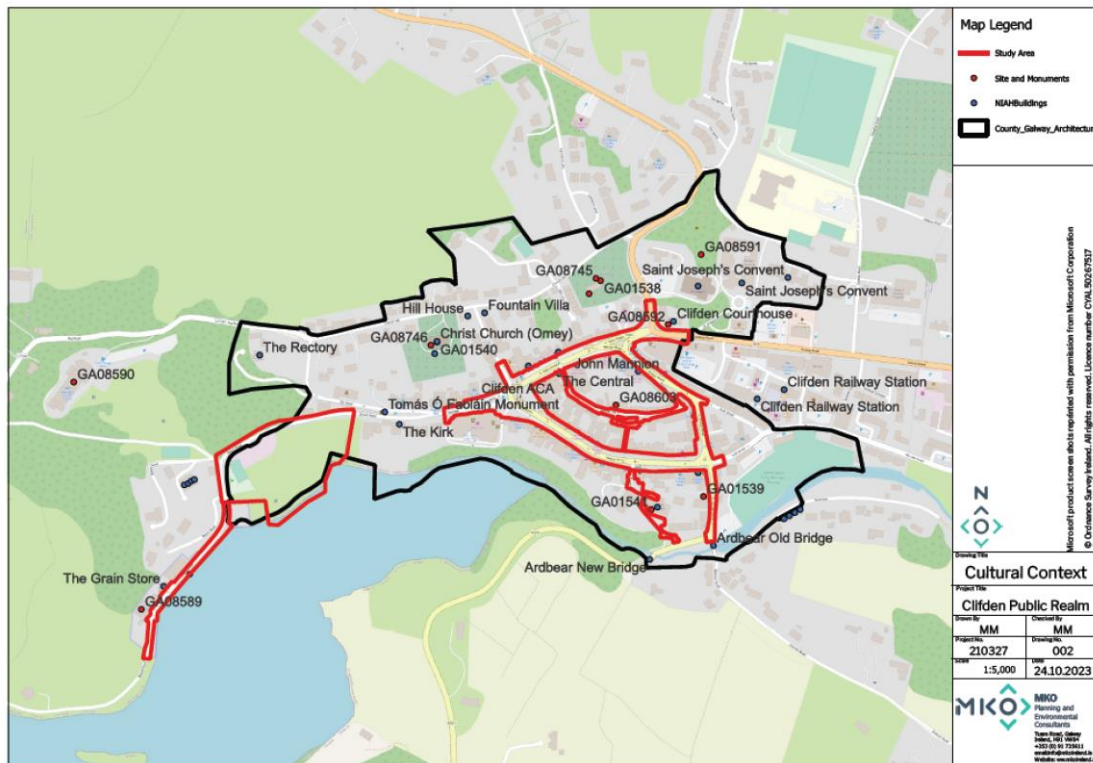


Figure 4: Cultural Constraints Map

Clifden possesses a rich and varied architectural heritage and is designated an Architectural Conservation Area. It was planned in a coherent manner throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, it remains today a town of strong historical character, retaining many of its original buildings and



functions. The town of Clifden follows the classic nineteenth century layout with an oval plan and three principal streets– Market Street, Main Street and Bridge Street with a Market Square.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

3.1 Beach Road Quay

A review of the Galway County Council online planning history indicates that there is no planning history within the red line boundary of the subject site.

3.2 Harbour Park

Table 1: Harbour Park Planning History

Planning reference	Applicant	Development Description	Decision
09/1024	Clifden & District Community Council	Application for an All-weather Pitch, ancillary fittings, fencing and lighting at the Ball Alley	Granted 19/10/2009
12/146	Clifden & District Community Council	Application for the construction of a new harbour side public amenity park for the town of Clifden incorporating the following : (1) a new off road public park (2) the demolition of part of the existing ball alley structure (3) the demolition of the roadside wall of the ball alley to within 0.9metres of existing ground level and retaining the remainder as a roadside wall (4) two new boccia/bowling courts (5) two new hand ball/ball wall courts (6) new out-door gym and recreation equipment (7) a new skate park (8) new public pathways and associated public lighting, viewing areas (9) a new teen zone recreational area (10) a new extension of existing playground (11) filling and draining of existing lands to create raised open parkland (12) the provision of new amenity woodland and associated walkway. And all associated landscaping and site development works to facilitate the above (gross floor space ball alley 260sqm)	Granted 14/05/2012
16/1627	Clifden & District Community Council	Extension of Duration for the construction of a new harbour side public amenity park for the town of Clifden incorporating the following : (1) a new off road public park (2) the demolition of part of the existing ball alley structure (3) the demolition of the roadside wall of the ball alley to within 0.9metres of existing ground level and retaining the remainder as a roadside wall (4) two new boccia/bowling courts (5) two new hand ball/ball wall courts (6) new out-door gym and recreation equipment (7) a new skate park (8) new public pathways and associated public lighting, viewing areas (9) a new teen zone recreational area (10) a new extension of existing playground	Granted 02/02/2017

		(11) filling and draining of existing lands to create raised open parkland (12) the provision of new amenity woodland and associated walkway. And all associated landscaping and site development works to facilitate the above (gross floor space ball alley 260sqm) (Previous Planning Ref. No. 12/146.)	
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3.3

Town Centre

Table 2: Town Centre Planning History

Planning reference	Development Description	Decision
Part 8 ID: LA5504	Ardbear Bridge	Granted
Part 8 ID: LA2602	Extension to Clifden Branch Library	Granted

4. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Development Description

Planning and Development Act, 2000, as amended, Notice of Direct Planning Application to An Bord Pleanála. In accordance with Section 177AE of the Planning and Development Act 2000 as amended, Galway County Council are seeking approval from An Bord Pleanála for the proposed development of a public realm scheme in Clifden, Co. Galway.

The proposed works include:

- i. Alterations works to the Clifden Town Centre area on Seaview Road, Main Street, Market Street, Market Hill, Bridgewell Lane, Bridge Street, and Hulk Street comprising:
 - a. The reconfiguration and resurfacing of roads and realignment of parking spaces including removal of 58 no. On-street parking spaces leaving a total of 155 no. on street parking spaces,
 - b. The widening and realignment of existing footpath areas, including the provision of new soft and hard landscaping,
 - c. The installation of new and upgraded public lighting throughout the town,
 - d. Relocation of The Beacon Statue,
 - e. Installation of new public art,
- ii. Alterations to and resurfacing of Beach Road Quay public realm comprising:
 - a. The provision of pedestrian and seating areas on the quay side of Beach Road quay, including the installation of 6 no. seating areas, and ancillary paving and landscaping,
 - b. Remedial works to the quay wall (NIAH reg no. 30325017), including the resetting of dislodged stones, the removal of vegetation, and remedial masonry works,
 - c. The replacement of existing railings along the quay wall,
 - d. The installation of public lighting along the roadside,
- iii. Redevelopment of the Harbour Park area south of Beach Road and to the west of Clifden town centre.
 - a. The demolition of the existing playground on site, and the construction of a new park including multi-age playground areas, including the provision of:
 - i. Cycle Parking,
 - ii. Timber Play Furniture,
 - iii. Picnic benches and seating areas,
 - iv. An Amphitheatre Performance Spaces,
 - v. Climbing Wall
 - vi. Pump track,
 - vii. Running Track,
 - viii. Car Park,
 - ix. Sports pitch,
 - b. Resurfacing, paving and hard & soft landscaping of the park area,
- iv. All other associated and ancillary works

This application is supported by Natura Impact Statement (NIS)

An Environmental Impact Assessment Screening Report has been undertaken in respect of the proposed development and concluded that an Environmental Impact Assessment Report is not required.

4.2 Proposed Development

As outlined in the development description, the public realm scheme has a focus on three separate areas within Clifden Town, these are Beach Road Quay, Harbour Park, and the Town Centre areas of Clifden Town.

4.2.1 Beach Road Quay

The Beach Road Quay project aims to transform the area into a high-quality waterside space with better connections to Clifden town centre and Harbour Park. Currently, the quay is used for leisure boats and some fishing, causing issues with equipment storage and pedestrian access. The lack of pavement and significant on-street parking pose safety risks. The project will address these issues by providing formal mooring bollards, seating areas, and restricting parking by the quay wall. It will enhance the pedestrian experience along Beach Road while maintaining vehicle access. Key elements include robust street furniture with a maritime feel, stone seating walls, and improved lighting. The project also plans to declutter the streetscape, introduce native planting, and create a more pedestrian-friendly environment.

4.2.2 Harbour Park

The Harbour Park project aims to transform a derelict site west of Clifden town centre into a vibrant recreational area. Located between Beach Road and Clifden Bay, the site offers excellent views and a level topography ideal for development. The project plans include creating viewing areas, an amphitheatre, and community gardens within the existing embankment. It will also serve as a link between the town centre and Beach Road Quay, enhancing the visitor experience. Key improvements address current deficiencies such as bringing the land into use, enhancing the limited park area, and managing invasive weeds. Features include the relocation of the Beacon sculpture, a new amphitheatre, a 200m running track, flood prevention measures, and accessible routes. The park will offer diverse play elements, improved parking, and robust street furniture designed to blend with the coastal setting.

4.2.3 Town Centre

The Clifden Town Centre Public Realm Improvements project is guided by feedback from in-person and online consultations. Key points include creating a more pedestrian-friendly town centre, retaining sufficient parking. Despite concerns about reduced on-street parking, a survey confirmed that nearby surplus parking will compensate for the loss. The project aims to enhance Main Street, Bridge Street, Market Hill, Market Street, Market Square, and connecting pathways. Objectives include encouraging longer visitor stays, resolving pedestrian-vehicle conflicts, expanding narrow pavements for outdoor dining, integrating the Connemara Greenway, and reducing carriageway widths to improve pedestrian zones. Additional goals are revitalizing run-down areas, reducing parking dominance, and increasing greenery. Key elements include an off-road cycleway, rain gardens, improved pedestrian zones, shared surfaces, better crossing points, upgraded public realm materials, relocating the 'Beacon' sculpture, improved lighting, and new parking arrangements. A separate part 8 application for off street public parking will be progressed alongside this application.

4.3 Project Funding

This project has been approved through a successful category 2 funding application through the Rural Regeneration Development Fund (RRDF) and includes the 3 key project areas of Clifden Town Centre, Clifden new Harbour Park and Beach Quay Road. Although set out at three distinctive project areas the design work will be well-connected to Clifden as whole, and ensure future change is cohesive across the town, strengthening local character and heritage. Bring multiple benefits to both the local community and visitors to the town.

Clifden was also awarded Destination Towns funding from Failte Ireland for public realm interventions in the streetscape of the town centre in advance of the RRDF funding award. The Failte Ireland's Destination Towns scheme underpins its two strategic pillars; to spread tourism across a wider geography and creating a broader tourism season so businesses can remain open for longer.

Clifden is unique in many ways, not only for its location within County Galway as a coastal town on the Wild Atlantic Way, but also for its unique, rich heritage being one of the last towns to be built in Ireland founded by John D’Arcy in 1812. The design work will seek to respect the local landscape character and built heritage whilst driving meaningful positive change to Clifden that can better cope with future tourism and environmental demands. Development will seek to reinforce Clifden’s position as the ‘Capital of Connemara’.

5. PUBLIC CONSULTATION

5.1 Public Consultation

Galway County Council have appointed MKO, alongside LUC, Tobin, and a wider design team to progress works on a number of town enhancement projects in Clifden. These projects centre around the Town Centre, the Harbour Park area, and Beach Road Quay.

The Public Consultation on the Clifden regeneration Project took place between Wednesday 23rd March and Wednesday 13th April 2022. This round of consultation consisted of meetings with various stakeholder groups, an interview on the Clifden Community Radio, an online survey circulated to the local businesses, to the wider community, and to the students of Clifden Community School. Consultation was also held with the students of 3rd and 5th Class in Scoil Mhuire National School which involved interactive artwork and mind mapping from the students surrounding how they perceive their town now and what they would like their Dream Town and Dream Park to be.

The survey questionnaires focussed on gaining an insight into how the community of Clifden and the local businesses perceive the town and how they would like to see the town in the future, including the types of facilities they would like in the town.

Fantastic feedback was received from the local people of Clifden, which are quantified below:

- **Community Responses:** 254
- **Local Business Responses:** 81
- **Clifden Community School Responses:** 20
- **Scoil Mhuire National School Participants:** 3rd Class and 5th Class

The second Clifden Town Centre Public Realm Enhancements Project Public Engagement Event took place successfully at Clifden Town Hall on Sky Road, Clifden, Co. Galway, on Wednesday, June 8th, 2022. The event, which ran from 1pm to 8pm, attracted a strong turnout throughout the day, surpassing expectations. The event was organized by Galway County Council in collaboration with consultants MKO and LUC, and served as the second round of public consultation for the project.

The second round of public consultation for the Clifden Town Centre Public Realm Enhancements Project offered the community an important opportunity to voice their opinions on the proposed development. This phase of the project reflected the ideas and feedback gathered during the first round of consultation. Attendees were able to see how their input had shaped the updated designs, providing further suggestions and engaging in discussions about the future of Clifden's key areas, including the town centre, Harbour Park, and Beach Road Quay.

The atmosphere was positive and engaging, with the public taking an active interest in the designs for the town centre, Harbour Park, and Beach Road Quay, which had been revised based on feedback from the first consultation. The event's layout facilitated easy navigation through the displayed project boards, while the feedback forms placed at the end of the exhibition allowed for public input on specific and open-ended questions. Tea, coffee, and refreshments were provided, contributing to a welcoming environment for all attendees.

The event team, including representatives from MKO and LUC, guided attendees through the project materials, answered questions, and gathered feedback. The team members, who wore name badges with their roles clearly stated, facilitated discussions and ensured the event ran smoothly.

6. PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

6.1 National Policy

6.1.1 National Planning Framework

The Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government recently published the National Planning Framework (NPF) entitled 'Ireland 2040' to succeed the NSS. The NPF comprises the Government's proposed long-term strategic planning framework to guide national, regional and local planning and investment decisions over the next 25 years. The NPF is a high-level document which provides a framework for future development and investment in Ireland, providing a long-term and place-based aspect to public policy and investment, and aiming to coordinate sectoral areas such as housing, jobs, transport, education, health, environment, energy and communications, into an overall coherent strategy.

Chapter 4 of the NPF refers to the creation of stronger urban places and provides a number of policies and sections within the chapter outlining how this will be fulfilled:

National Policy Objective 4 – *'Ensure the creation of attractive, liveable, well designed, high quality urban places that are home to diverse and integrated communities that enjoy a high quality of life and well-being'.*

National Policy Objective 6 – *'Regenerate and rejuvenate cities, towns and villages of all types and scale as environmental assets, that can accommodate changing roles and functions, increased residential population and employment activity and enhanced levels of amenity and design quality, in order to sustainably influence and support their surrounding area'.*

National Policy Objective 13 – *'In urban areas, planning and related standards, including in particular building height and car parking will be based on performance criteria that seek to achieve well-designed high-quality outcomes in order to achieve targeted growth. These standards will be subject to a range of tolerance that enables alternative solutions to be proposed to achieve stated outcomes, provided public safety is not compromised and the environment is suitably protected'.*

National Policy Objective 17 – *'Enhance, integrate and protect the special physical, social, economic and cultural value of built heritage assets through appropriate and sensitive use now and for future generations'.*

National Policy Objective 18a – *'To support the proportionate growth of and appropriately designed development in rural towns that will contribute to their regeneration and renewal, including interventions in the public realm, the provision of amenities, the acquisition of sites and the provision of services'.*

National Policy Objective 22 – *'Facilitate tourism development and in particular a National Greenways, Blueways and Peatways Strategy, which prioritises projects on the basis of achieving maximum impact and connectivity at national and regional level'.*

6.1.2 Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets

The Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) was published by the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government in April 2013. DMURS provides guidance relating to the design of urban roads and streets. DMURS encourages designers to give due consideration to creating a 'sense of place' which is of core significance

to the creation of safe and more integrated street designs. The guidance document notes that four interlinked characteristics influence the sense of place within a street, including:

- **Connectivity:** The creation of vibrant and active places requires pedestrian activity. This in turn requires walkable street networks that can be easily navigated and are well connected.
- **Enclosure:** A sense of enclosure spatially defines streets and creates a more intimate and supervised environment. A sense of enclosure is achieved by orientating buildings toward the street and placing them along its edge. The use of street trees can also enhance the feeling of enclosure.
- **Active Edge:** An active frontage enlivens the edge of the street creating a more interesting and engaging environment. An active frontage is achieved with frequent entrances and openings that ensure the street is overlooked and generate pedestrian activity as people come and go from buildings.
- **Pedestrian Activity/Facilities:** The sense of intimacy, interest and overlooking that is created by a street that is enclosed and lined with active frontages enhances a pedestrian's feeling of security and well-being. Good pedestrian facilities (such as wide footpaths and well-designed crossings) also make walking a more convenient and pleasurable experience that will further encourage pedestrian activity.

6.2 Town Centre First

The *Town Centre First* policy aims to create town centres that function as viable, vibrant and attractive locations for people to live, work and visit, while also functioning as the service, social, cultural and recreational hub for the local community. It sets out a range of policies and actions will create the framework required to support towns in order to achieve sustainable development and positive placemaking.

The Town Centre First policy recognises that successful places:

- Are characterised by an attractive public realm (streets, spaces and parks) that is designed to invite people to meet, mingle and dwell
- Conserve, adapt and highlight historical buildings and streetscapes that provide the town with a unique identity
- Are attractive vibrant places for enterprises to grow and develop
- Manage traffic within central areas so that streets prioritise vulnerable users (pedestrians and cyclists), enabling them to move about safely and in comfort
- Are well connected and accessible to sustainable modes of transport, enabling a high proportion of journeys to be made by foot and/or bicycle from the immediate hinterland (e.g. the '10 minute town' concept)

The Town Centre First policy can encourage and support local communities to be creative and ambitious in developing a public realm that is welcoming to all, is safe, is easy to access for all modes of travel (particularly walking), has low noise and air pollution levels and provides the community with things to do, places to sit and relax, and attractive views. The compact, sustainable development of town centres will be a significant contributor to this work and will serve as a co-ordinating focus for a wide-range of funding and activity programmes under *Project Ireland 2040*.

6.3 Our Rural Future: Rural Development Policy 2021-2025

The document titled *Our Rural Future* sets out the Irish Government's strategy for rural development from 2021 to 2025. It aims to create vibrant, sustainable, and resilient rural

communities by addressing challenges and leveraging opportunities in areas such as employment, digital connectivity, town regeneration, and public services.

The key goals include:

- Promoting remote work infrastructure to reduce commuting and support local economies.
- Regenerating rural towns and villages by addressing vacancy issues and encouraging residential and commercial use.
- Improving public services in rural areas, including transport and health.
- Ensuring rural Ireland contributes to and benefits from the transition to a climate-neutral economy.

The policy also emphasizes the centrality of rural communities to Ireland's overall economic and social well-being, aiming for a place-based approach that recognizes the diverse needs of different rural areas. It is aligned with broader national plans, such as Project Ireland 2040, and international frameworks like the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

6.4

Climate Action Plan 2024

The Climate Action Plan 2024 outlines Ireland's strategy to address climate change through a comprehensive set of measures aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and fostering sustainability across multiple sectors. It sets ambitious targets to achieve a 51% reduction in emissions by 2030 and to transition to a climate-neutral economy by 2050. Two major components of this plan focus on enhancing active travel infrastructure and promoting town centre regeneration, both essential for reducing reliance on cars, revitalizing local communities, and creating sustainable urban environments.

Active travel is a key priority in the plan, aiming to increase the share of journeys made by walking and cycling. Significant investments are being made in expanding active travel networks across cities and towns, with the goal of creating safer, more accessible pathways for pedestrians and cyclists. Initiatives like Safe Routes to School and dedicated cycling routes are central to reducing car dependency and encouraging more sustainable modes of transport. These improvements not only reduce transport-related emissions but also promote healthier lifestyles and reduce traffic congestion.

The plan's approach to town centre regeneration focuses on creating more vibrant, pedestrian-friendly environments. This includes reducing the dominance of vehicles in town centres, making them more accessible and attractive for people to walk, cycle, and spend time in. Public realm improvements and the development of mixed-use areas aim to support local businesses while reducing urban sprawl by promoting compact growth. By prioritizing sustainable mobility and fostering local economic activity, the plan envisions town centres that are hubs of community life and commerce, contributing to Ireland's broader climate goals.

6.5

Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region

The Northern & Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) adopted the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) on the 24th January 2020. This RSES provides a high-level development framework for the Northern and Western Region that supports the implementation of the National Planning

Framework (NPF) and the relevant economic policies and objectives of Government. It provides a 12-year strategy to deliver the transformational change that is necessary to achieve the objectives and vision of the Assembly. Key policies of the RSES that are relevant to and fulfilled by the proposed development are set out below:

Clifden is recognised as a key destination seasonal town on the Wild Atlantic Way Tourism route. The towns listed have the available bed-night stock, potential to expand, and are strategically positioned to serve as vacation points to facilitate onward travel to some of the region's most outstanding assets, and natural attractions.

RPO 3.4: *'To support the regeneration and renewal of small towns and villages in rural areas'*.

RPO 3.6.13 – *'The Assembly supports the delivery of a strategic Greenway Network for the GTS to include National Dublin to Galway Cycleway, Oranmore to Bearna Coastal Greenway and the Galway to Clifden Greenway (S/M)'.*

RPO 3.13: *'To support the role of smaller and medium sized towns, which demonstrate an important role in terms of service provision and employment for their catchments within the economic function of the county. Such settlements will be identified through the Development Plan process as part of the Settlement Hierarchy and the Core Strategy'.*

RPO 4.4 – *'That the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) touring network and visitor attractions within the region shall be upgraded and improved to cater for the growth in visitor cars, buses, and cyclists using the route'.*

RPO 4.5 – *'To enhance access to our tourist assets, including the development of a Coastal Walking/Cycling Route along the Western Seaboard, which extends generally along the Route of the WAW, and incorporates existing resources, such as beaches, ports, harbours, piers and marinas. This coastal route to be subject to a route option analysis, and feasibility study in Counties Galway, Mayo, Sligo, Leitrim and Donegal. Stakeholders will include Fáilte Ireland, NWRA, the relevant local authorities and the public'.*

6.6 Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028

The relevant development plan is the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028, and hereafter referred to as the 'CDP', sets out an overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of Galway County over a 6-year period. The CDP takes into account recent key development trends and national, regional and local policy developments, and also takes into account the need for the preservation, improvement, and extension of amenities and recreational amenities.

The CPD came into effect on the 20th June 2022.

CS 7 Active Land Management – *'To promote, support, and facilitate the re-use of under-utilised or vacant lands, or lands identified for regeneration, through a co-ordinated approach to active land management between the Council and stakeholders'.*

Section 3.2 of the GCDP outlines the strategic aims for Placemaking, Regeneration & Urban Living throughout the plan period, they are as follows:

- *To promote town and village centre living in a high-quality environment with good connectivity and access to local services;*
- *To reinforce the vitality and future of urban and rural settlements and recognise the role that they play in a wider social and economic context;*
- *To facilitate town and village centre public realm improvement works, regeneration and infrastructure upgrades as deemed appropriate;*

- *To support and promote the sustainable social and economic development of urban and rural settlements;*
- *To ensure the delivery of good quality public open space of varying scales for use by inhabitants and visitors;*
- *To encourage a mix of house types and sizes, enable homeowners to modify their properties to facilitate modern living as their needs change.*

PM 1 Placemaking – *‘To promote and facilitate the sustainable development of a high-quality built environment where there is a distinctive sense of place in attractive streets, spaces, and neighbourhoods that are accessible and safe places for all members of the community to meet and socialise’.*

PM 2 Regeneration – *‘To prioritise projects and proposals which will result in both social and economic rejuvenation and regeneration within towns and villages. The Planning Authority will leverage the variety of funds available including LIHAF, Urban and Rural Regeneration and Development Funds, Climate Activation Fund and Disruptive Technologies Fund in pursuance of this objective’.*

PM 4 Sustainable Movement within Towns – *‘It is a policy objective of the Planning Authority to encourage modal shift in our towns to more sustainable transport alternatives through mixed use development that enables local living and working which is well connected to sustainable transport infrastructure such as walking, cycling, public bus and rail transport’.*

PM 5 Sustainable Transport – *‘Promote sustainable transport options as an alternative to the private car for people to access local services which will facilitate the transition to a low carbon climate resilient society’.*

PM 7 Inclusivity – *‘To ensure our urban settlements are inclusive and welcoming to all people of all ages regardless of their physical ability ensuring that they have access to the services available in the towns and villages across the County’.*

PM 8 Character and Identity – *‘Ensure the best quality of design is achieved for all new development and that design respects and enhances the specific characteristics unique features of the towns and villages throughout the County’.*

PM 12 Permeability – *‘Encourage improved permeability in town centres including the connection of blueways and greenways to adjacent towns. Ensure appropriate signage strategies are in place to direct visitors and residents to key public spaces and attractions’.*

PM 13 Public Realm – *‘Opportunities Promote enhanced and increased public realm opportunities including the shared use of spaces, for outdoor experiences, with a priority on pedestrian uses’.*

CGR 2 Regeneration – *‘To promote the redevelopment and renewal of areas in towns and villages that are in need of regeneration’.*

CGR 8 Town and Village Centre – *‘To encourage and support a range of appropriate uses in town and village centres that will assist in the regeneration and reuse of vacant and under-utilised buildings and land and will re-energise the town and village centres, subject to a high standard of development being achieved’.*

CGR 9 Delivering Improved Public Realm – *‘Provide for a high-quality public realm and public spaces in towns and villages by promoting quality design that accommodates creative patterns of use having regard to the physical, cultural, and social identities of individual settlements’.*

CSA 12 High Quality Retail Environment – *‘Support the development of appropriate types, scales and patterns of retail development in suitable locations within the settlements of the County and with high quality design that:*

- *Support the vitality and viability of the existing settlement centre and associated main streets and/or do not undermine their vibrancy;*
- *Protect investment in strategic roads and infrastructure and provide ease of accessibility to retail areas, particularly in terms of public transport;*
- *Contribute to the creation of a high-quality retail environment.*

GCTPS 4 – *‘Walking and Cycling Support for, and enhancement of, existing and new walking and cycling networks as the “first choice” for shorter local journeys and to link settlements within the County and to Galway City’.*

ILUTP 1 Sustainable Transportation – *‘Encourage transition towards sustainable and low carbon transport modes, through the promotion of alternative modes of transport, and ‘walkable communities’ and Active Travel, together with promotion of compact urban forms close to public transport corridors to encourage more sustainable patterns of movement’.*

WC 1 Pedestrian and Cycling Infrastructure – *‘To require the design of pedestrian and cycling infrastructure to be in accordance with the principles, approaches and standards set out in the National Cycle Manual and the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets, TII Publications, ‘The Treatment of Transition Zones to Towns and Villages on National Roads’, and the NTA document Permeability: Best Practice Guide’.*

WC 2 Bicycle Parking – *‘To encourage the provision of secure bicycle parking facilities and associated facilities within the public realm of towns and villages throughout the County’.*

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’.*

MCT 2 Coastal Tourism and Recreation – *‘To facilitate sustainable tourism and recreation activities where appropriate, whilst encouraging the diversification and utilisation of existing facilities in accordance with environmental considerations’.*

6.6.1 **Zoning**

Given the public realm improvements are subject to three different areas, there are different zonings in each of the subject areas:

The Beach Road Quay and Town Centre areas are both subject to Transport Infrastructure zoning, this has a zoning description of *‘To allow for the reservation of lands to facilitate public roads, foot paths, harbours, canals, cycleways, bus stops and landscaping together with any necessary associated works, as appropriate’.* And a policy objective to *‘Facilitate the provision and maintenance of essential transportation infrastructure’.*

Harbour Park is zoned Community Facilities within the GCDP, this has a zoning description of *‘To facilitate the development of necessary community, health, religious educational social and civic infrastructure’.* And a policy objective of *‘To provide for civic, community and educational facilities’.*

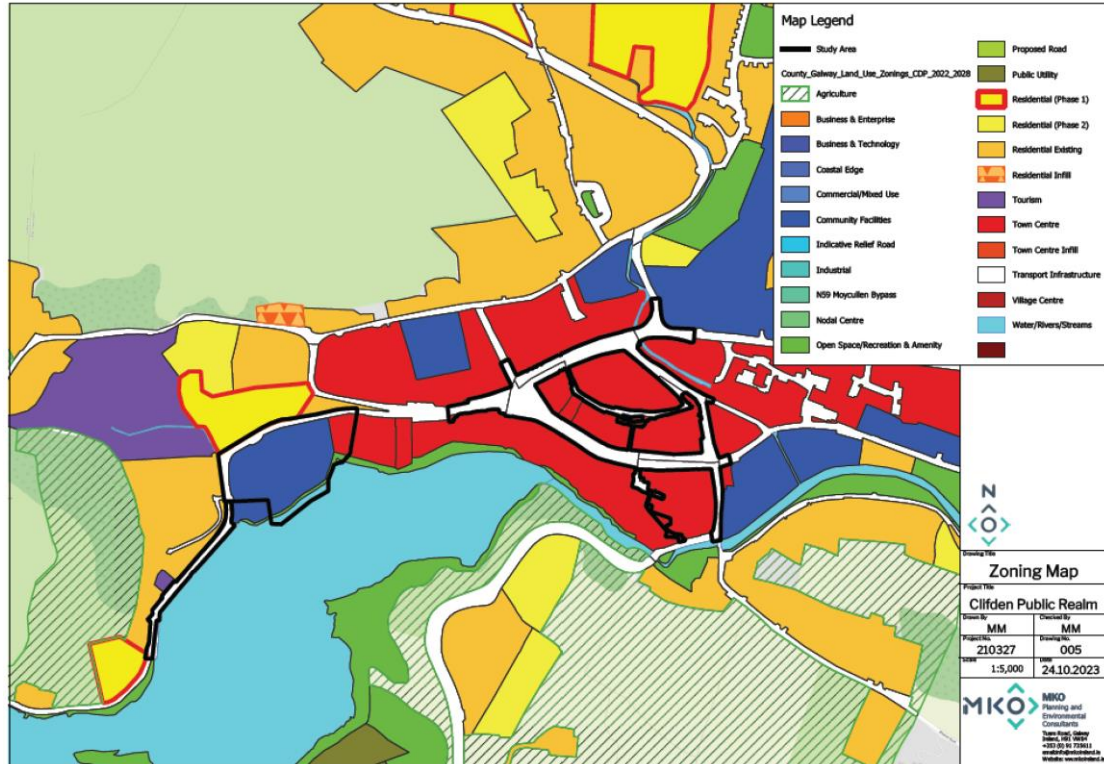


Figure 5: Site Zoning Map, Source: MKO QGIS (Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028)

7. PLANNING ASSESSMENT

7.1 Principle of Development

The proposed development seeks to deliver Public Realm Enhancements to Clifden, mainly through the proposed redevelopment of the key areas within Clifden Town, the Town Centre, Harbour Park and Beach Road Quay. The proposed public realm enhancements to Clifden are compliant with policy objectives at local, regional, and national levels as set out in section 6 of this report. At a national level the proposals are in accordance with 6 regenerating the town centre in order to create a more attractive town centre in Clifden. The proposed upgrades would align with the NPF's objectives of balanced regional development, sustainable communities, and infrastructure investment. The project focuses on enhancing public spaces to support local economies, improve quality of life, and promote sustainable development. Specifically, **NPO 4** aims to '*Ensure the creation of attractive, liveable, well designed, high quality urban places that are home to diverse and integrated communities that enjoy a high quality of life and well-being*'. The proposed development fulfils this policy objective by delivering a well-designed public realm within the town centre. By also enhancing pedestrian infrastructure, the open space of Wolfe Tone Square is more accessible and safer, encouraging locals to make use of the space through markets and events. This will provide a variety of additional opportunities within the area, and encourages multi-use space with increased footfall, promoting social cohesion and a sense of community.

NPO 18a specifically targets the regeneration of rural towns within the policy goal. At a local level there are also numerous policies towards regenerating towns and villages across Galway, **PM 1 & 2** focus on placemaking and regeneration which the proposed development will achieve through the provision of the public realm enhancements.

The proposed public realm upgrades also adhere to the RSES's guidelines for strategic planning in the region. The proposed development addresses key objectives related to urban regeneration, transportation infrastructure, and community development to support regional growth. **RPO 3.4:** '*To support the regeneration and renewal of small towns and villages in rural areas*', can successfully be fulfilled by the proposed public realm upgrades of Clifden Town Centre and the surrounding area. Specifically, these enhancements of the town centre through these upgrades, such as an increased area for pedestrians, road realignment, a variety of landscaping upgrades, all contribute to the overall regeneration and renewal of town. This will bring about significant revitalization of the town centre, making it a more desirable and attractive place to live, work and visit. The proposal will create a visually attractive town square, but also one which has a variety of practical uses for locals and visitors alike, including market space, a shelter, safe pedestrian connectivity through the main square, enhanced footpaths and public open space, new planting, new seating areas. This will, therefore, enhance the renewal of Clifden town centre.

These initiatives resonate with the National Planning Framework's aim for vibrant town centres and sustainable communities, emphasizing pedestrian-friendly spaces and cycling infrastructure. Regionally, they echo the goals outlined in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy, focusing on urban regeneration and sustainable transport. At the local level, these upgrades seamlessly integrate with the Galway County Development Plan, prioritising enhanced town centre vitality and economic growth. Collectively, these upgrades reflect a strategic compliance with policies across multiple governance levels, promising a revitalized and inclusive urban landscape that complies with diverse planning objectives.

7.2 Design and Layout

The proposed public realm upgrades works to the Town Centre, Beach Road Quay and Harbour Park areas of Clifden have been designed to ensure there is no adverse impact on residential amenity for those living within proximity to the proposals. The proposed works will seek to prioritise community

well being and aim to improve the local living environment without compromising the quality of life for nearby residents. It also must be noted that the majority of surrounding land uses are typically retail, commercial and community facilities. The proposal's has been revised in response to the submissions received throughout the public consultation process.

In addressing potential noise disruptions, innovative design elements such as strategically placed greenery, trees, and planting can act sound-absorbing materials and are integrated across all the study areas. Traffic management strategies are carefully considered, with plans for one-way systems and widened footpaths. This approach not only enhances traffic flow but also prioritizes pedestrian safety and tranquillity for residents and locals, effectively reducing vehicle speeds and fostering a more walkable environment. Furthermore, the upgrades emphasise environmental sensitivity, integrating green spaces and sustainable design practices. These eco-friendly measures aim to enhance the area's ambiance and ecological balance without compromising the residential amenity.

Community engagement has formed a pivotal aspect of the planning process and design development. Actively seeking and incorporating resident feedback ensures that concerns regarding potential disturbances, privacy, or access has been addressed proactively and reflected within the project design. This consultative approach ensures that the proposed upgrades align with the needs and aspirations of the local community. This feedback is exhibited within the architectural aesthetics, which have been considered to ensure that the upgrades blend seamlessly with the existing residential structures and wider urban fabric. By respecting and complementing the area's unique character, these upgrades strive to enhance, rather than disrupt, the residential surroundings.

In summary, the comprehensive approach adopted in the planning of these public realm upgrades underscores a commitment not only to revitalizing public spaces but also to preserving and enhancing the residential amenity for the benefit of Clifden's residents.

7.3

Public Realm

The proposed development has public realm enhancements at the fore, ensuring high quality design that is both attractive and practical for Clifden local community and tourists. These enhancements in the Town Centre will increase the area of the square itself, with new paving proposed around the wider area in order to uplift the town centre. Lighting upgrades and the refurbishment of existing lighting columns will provide a sense of safety in the area, particularly at night. The development of pedestrian crossing points at the corner of Town Centre will also improve walkability and pedestrian connectivity through the town, and highlights efforts for pedestrian prioritisation. Upgraded paving will uplift the attractiveness of the town centre and ensure high quality footpaths to encourage pedestrian safety and mobility.

The proposals for Beach Road Quay, Harbour Park, and the town centre collectively aim to transform Clifden's public realm into a more vibrant, accessible, and enjoyable environment. By addressing issues such as pedestrian safety, parking, and the need for recreational spaces, these projects will create a cohesive and attractive townscape. Key elements include formal mooring bollards, seating areas, and improved lighting at Beach Road Quay; viewing areas, an amphitheatre, community gardens, and a running track at Harbour Park; and expanded pavements, integrated greenways, and enhanced pedestrian zones in the town centre. These improvements will not only enhance the aesthetic appeal of Clifden but also provide safer, more accessible, and enjoyable spaces for both residents and visitors. The use of sustainable and robust materials ensures long-lasting benefits, making Clifden a more appealing destination overall.

7.3.1

Beach Road Quay

The Beach Road Quay project seeks to enhance a currently under utilised area used mainly for mooring leisure boats and some fishing activities, giving people an area within the town to connect with the sea and Clifden's rich maritime history. The existing setup presents challenges such as equipment

storage issues, pedestrian safety risks due to the lack of pavement, and significant on-street parking that reduces space for pedestrians and cyclists. The project aims to create a high-quality waterside space with improved connections to Clifden town centre and Harbour Park, allowing people to enjoy the coastal setting.



Figure 6: Dwg no. 11632-LUC-BR-XX-DR-L-0001 - Beach Road Key Plan, as prepared by LUC

Key issues to be addressed include the provision of formal mooring bollards to prevent further damage to the quay wall and remove ropes from the grassed area. The project will also highlight the quay’s historical and working character through the use of robust, sympathetic materials. Seating opportunities will be provided to enjoy views off the road, and parking restrictions will be implemented to protect the quay wall structure. The pedestrian experience along Beach Road will be improved while still allowing vehicle access. The project will define the edge of the equipment storage area and explore the possibility of undergrounding overhead electrical wires to reduce visual clutter.

Key elements of the proposals include seating within planted areas to create off-road locations for enjoying bay views, and mooring bollards next to the quay wall. The street furniture will be robust with a maritime feel, linking the town centre to the more naturalistic Harbour Park. Stone seating walls will highlight the area’s historic character, and bollards and lighting columns will prevent vehicles from parking on the grass. Stone paving will create a high-quality surface area that appears more pedestrian-friendly while remaining accessible to vehicles. The project will also retain and enhance the grass area with coastal wildflowers and low-level amenity planting, using locally native species. The overall aim is to declutter the streetscape and improve connectivity while using sustainable, long-lasting materials.

In accordance with **CSGT 8 Pedestrian and Cycle Network**, the Beach Road Quay project aims to enhance pedestrian safety and accessibility by providing formal mooring bollards, seating areas, and improved lighting. These improvements align with the policy’s objective to promote a safe and convenient pedestrian network. Additionally, in line with **CSGT 7 Public Infrastructure – Public Realm**, the project will enhance the public realm by creating a high-quality waterside space that improves connections to the town centre and Harbour Park. The use of robust, sympathetic materials aligns with **Policy Objective AH 6 Vernacular Architecture** preserving the quay’s historical character. It is respectfully submitted that these enhancements are appropriate and in keeping with the principles of proper planning and sustainable development.

7.3.2 Harbour Park

Harbour Park, The Quay, and Beach Road are situated along the shores of Clifden Bay, historically known as Ardbear Bay. This shoreline has seen continuous development due to its strategic connections to both Clifden Town Centre and The Quay Beach Road. Over time, its character and condition have been shaped by evolving uses and community needs as the town’s population has grown, infrastructure has expanded, and transport links have improved.

Changes in Clifden’s economy have also influenced the landscape we see today. Once a key Irish sea port, Clifden Harbour developed its coastline to support both fishing and pastoral farming, which extended to the water’s edge. Today, the area’s development focuses on embracing Clifden Bay as a popular tourist destination.

The Harbour Park project seeks to revitalise a derelict piece of land west of Clifden town centre, situated between Beach Road and Clifden Bay. This unused site, with its level topography and excellent bay views, presents an opportunity to create valuable recreational facilities for the community. The project aims to work with the existing topography to develop viewing areas, an amphitheatre, and community gardens within the embankment. The park will act as a bridge between the town centre and Beach Road Quay, significantly enhancing the visitor experience.

The project addresses several deficiencies, including bringing the derelict land into meaningful use, enhancing the limited existing park area, and managing invasive weed species. Key elements of the proposals include relocating the Beacon sculpture to the park’s main entrance, creating a viewing area with an accessible ramp, and establishing a new amphitheatre and outdoor events space. An informal 200m running track will be added for fitness enthusiasts, along with a new public park featuring hard and soft landscaping, tree planting, furniture, lighting, and boundary treatments. Flood prevention measures and sustainable drainage systems will be integrated, particularly in the south east corner near Ogwenlin River.

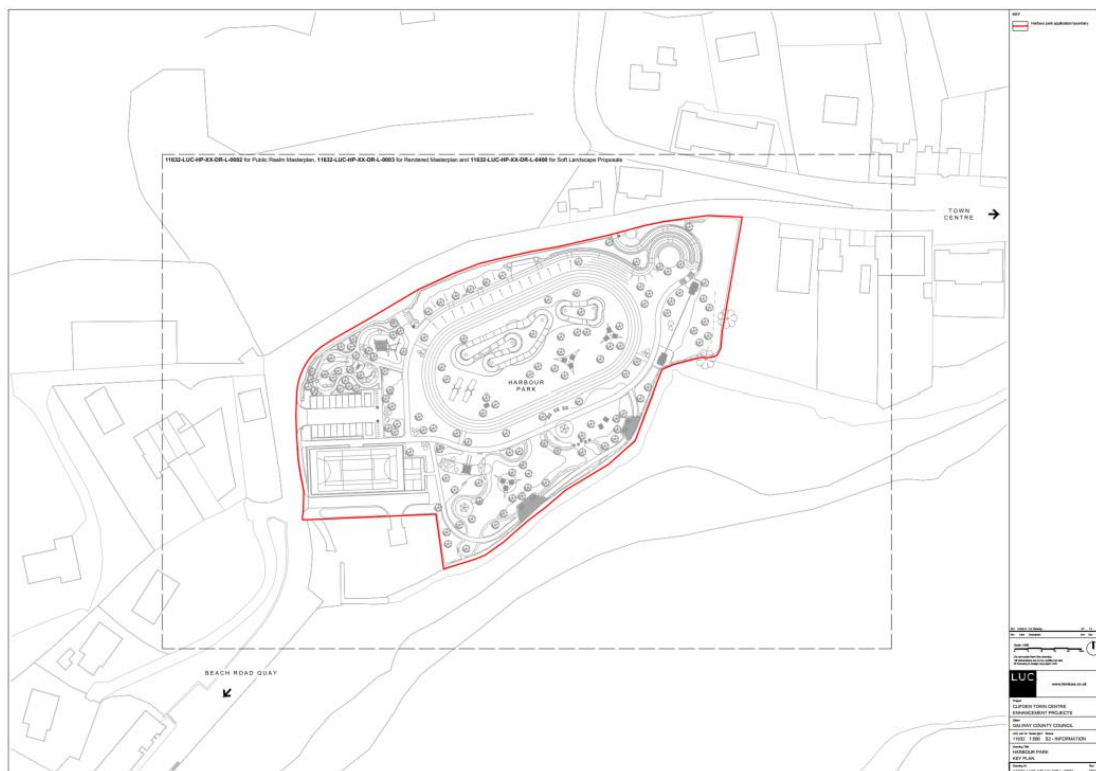


Figure 7: Dwg no. 11632-LUC-HP-XX-DR-L-0001 Harbour Park - Key Plan, as prepared by LUC

The park will also feature off-street pedestrian routes, step-free accessible walkways, native planting, and opportunities for increased biodiversity. Play elements catering to all ages, including a pump track, MUGA, and climbing wall, will be included. Improved car and cycle parking facilities, including accessible bays, will be provided. The project will remediate invasive plant species and asbestos found on-site. Street furniture will be robust and made from hard-wearing materials with a natural finish, aligning with the coastal setting. The design aims to declutter footways and streetscapes, using furniture placement to minimize pedestrian movement impact and deter ad-hoc parking.

In accordance with **CSGT 3 Community Facilities and Services**, the Harbour Park project seeks to transform a derelict site into a valuable recreational area with viewing areas, an amphitheatre, community gardens, and a running track. These features support the policy's aim to provide and enhance community facilities for residents and visitors. The integration of flood prevention measures and sustainable drainage systems aligns with **WW 7 Sustainable Drainage Systems**, ensuring the park is resilient to environmental challenges. Additionally, the use of native planting and biodiversity opportunities aligns with **Policy Objective CC 10 – Green Infrastructure**. It is respectfully submitted that these improvements are appropriate and in keeping with the principles of proper planning and sustainable development.

7.3.3 Town Centre

The Clifden Town Centre Public Realm Improvements project is shaped by feedback from both in-person and online consultations. The main objectives are to create a more pedestrian and cycle friendly town centre, and retain sufficient parking. Concerns about reduced on-street parking led to a commissioned survey, which concluded that surplus parking nearby would offset the loss. In addition a separate off street public car park is being developed by Galway County Council The project focuses on enhancing Main Street, Bridge Street, Market Hill, Market Street, Market Square, and connecting pathways to Ballyconneely Road via the old Gaol site.

Key areas of improvement include expanding the town centre's appeal to encourage longer visitor stays, resolving conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles, and enhancing narrow pavements currently used for outdoor dining. The project also aims to integrate the Connemara Greenway directly into the town centre, reduce carriageway widths to improve pedestrian zones, and revitalize run-down areas like Market Hill and the Old Gaol site. Additional goals are to reduce the visual dominance of parking and increase greenery and street trees.



Figure 8: Dwg no. 11623-LUC-TC-XX-DR-L-0001 Key plan P01, as prepared by LUC

Key elements of the project include the provision of an off-road cycleway linking the town centre with the new Connemara Greenway, reducing carriageway widths to improve pedestrian zones, and using planting to mark arrival points and highlight crossing areas. Planting areas will also serve as rain gardens for natural drainage solutions. Enhanced pedestrian zones along Market Street and Main Street aim to create a vibrant ‘café culture.’ Shared surfaces at junctions will slow vehicles and mark arrival points, while improved crossing points will enhance pedestrian safety. The project also plans to upgrade public realm materials, relocate the ‘Beacon’ sculpture to Harbour Park, improve lighting while respecting ‘Dark Sky’ sensitivities, and introduce new parking arrangements, including reverse echelon parking on Market Street and parallel parking on its eastern end.

In accordance with **CSGT 1 Sustainable Town Centre**, the town centre improvements, including expanded pavements, pedestrian zones, and the integration of the Connemara Greenway, aim to boost local businesses and tourism by encouraging longer visitor stays. These enhancements align with the policy’s objective to support the sustainable economic development of towns and villages. The proposals also align with **CSGT 9 Amenity Network**, by promoting a safe and convenient pedestrian and cycle network. The enhancement of underutilised areas and the increase in biodiversity and street trees align with **Policy Objective CC 10 – Green Infrastructure** and **Policy AH 6 Vernacular Architecture**, preserving and enhancing the town’s natural and built environment. It is respectfully submitted that these improvements are appropriate and in keeping with the principles of proper planning and sustainable development.

7.4 Traffic and Transport

7.4.1 DMURS Compliance

A DMURS compliance statement has been prepared by Tobin Consulting engineers in respect of the proposed development. This statement of consistency confirms that the roads and streets proposed as part of the project have been designed in accordance with the principles and guidance as set out in the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (DMURS) 2019.

The objective of the project from a roads and streets perspective seeks to enhance the pedestrian experience, reduce motor vehicle dominance, and engage the local community through a thorough public consultation strategy. Key components include redesigning Market Square, creating welcoming gateways, incorporating universal design principles, minimizing visual clutter, and improving soft landscaping. Additionally, provisions will be made to provide extra space for businesses, utilize high-quality materials in line with the town's historic character, and ensure the long-term durability and maintenance of infrastructure. Rationalizing parking, implementing a lighting strategy, and opening up Market Hill are further strategies to boost the nighttime economy and enhance connectivity within the town centre. Overall, the project aims to create a vibrant, accessible, and inclusive environment that celebrates Clifden's unique identity while fostering economic growth and community cohesion.

7.4.2 Car Parking Survey

The Clifden Town Centre Car Parking Survey Report, prepared by Tobin Consulting Engineers for Galway County Council, evaluates the parking situation in Clifden as part of the Clifden Town Centre Enhancement Project. The initial on-street parking survey was conducted on November 5, 2021, covering 225 spaces over a seven-hour period in three key locations: Main Street (61 spaces), Market Street (128 spaces), and Bridge Street (24 spaces). Twelve spaces were designated for outdoor dining. The survey revealed that a significant percentage of spaces were occupied long-term (over six hours), with Main Street showing 74% long-term occupancy, Bridge Street at 54%, and Market Street at 39%. This indicated that much of the parking was utilized by local business owners, employees, and residents.

Following the initial survey, an additional parking study was carried out in October 2022 to identify potential replacement parking sites due to the expected loss of 63 spaces as part of the enhancement project. The survey added data for eight additional parking sites, which included private and public lots near the town centre, such as the Tourist Information Office, SuperValu Multistorey, Church, and Diocese School Parking. These sites provided a total of 412 spaces, with 30% of them being occupied for long-term durations. Notably, the Diocese School Parking and Lower Bridge Street had the highest rates of long-term occupancy at 72% and 67%, respectively, while SuperValu Level 3 had the lowest long-term occupancy at 6%, indicating available capacity.

The report highlights that several additional parking sites are within a short walking distance to the town centre, making them viable substitutes for lost parking. For instance, the Tourist Office parking (57 spaces) is just a 3-minute walk, the Church parking (43 spaces) is only 1 minute away, and Station House (83 spaces) can be reached within 2 minutes. Galway County Council are progressing with plans for an additional car park within proximity to the town centre.

The report concludes that despite the loss of 63 on-street spaces, the additional parking locations, along with the proposed parking lot, should absorb the displaced vehicles. The enhancement project will retain 150 spaces in the town centre, distributed across Main Street (28 spaces), Market Street (76 spaces), Bridge Street (28 spaces), and Seaview (9 spaces). The study also suggests that the SuperValu multistorey parking, with its low occupancy rates, offers significant potential to alleviate parking pressures, particularly on the rarely used Level 3.

Overall, the report indicates that with the inclusion of these new parking options, Clifden's parking demand will be adequately met, ensuring minimal disruption to visitors, local businesses, and residents during and after the town centre enhancement works.

7.5 Ecology

7.5.1 Natura Impact Statement

An Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report and Natura Impact Statement (NIS) were prepared by MKO for the Clifden Town Centre Public Realm Enhancement Project. This assessment was conducted under the requirements of Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and associated Irish legislation, ensuring that the project would not adversely impact designated European sites.

The AA Screening Report examined the likelihood of significant effects on relevant European sites and concluded that such effects could not be excluded. Therefore, a Natura Impact Statement (NIS) was required. The report included a desk study and field surveys conducted in November 2021 and September 2023, detailing potential impacts on habitats and species, such as hydrological effects and disturbance to species like the otter (*Lutra lutra*).

The NIS assessed the potential effects of the proposed works on the integrity of European sites, including the Twelve Bens/Garraun Complex SAC, Slyne Head Peninsula SAC, and West Connacht Coast SAC. Specific mitigation measures were proposed to avoid any significant adverse effects, particularly related to water quality and habitat disturbance during the construction phase.

The assessment concluded that with the implementation of mitigation measures, there would be no significant effects on the conservation objectives of any European site. Therefore, the project can proceed without causing harm to these protected areas.

In accordance with the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028, specifically Policy Objective **NHB 2 Protection of European Sites**, an Appropriate Assessment (AA) Screening Report and Natura Impact Statement (NIS) were prepared by MKO for the Clifden Town Centre Public Realm Enhancement Project. Conducted under Article 6(3) of the EU Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) and associated Irish legislation, these assessments ensure the project will not adversely impact designated European sites.

7.5.2 Ecological Impact Assessment

MKO was commissioned by Galway County Council to conduct an Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) for the Clifden Town Centre Public Realm Enhancement Project in Clifden, Co. Galway. The assessment covers the ecological impacts of the project during construction, operation, and decommissioning, providing a detailed description of the project's ecological baseline and proposed works. These works span three areas—Clifden Town Centre, Harbour Park, and Beach Road Quay—covering approximately 3.83 hectares.

The assessment, based on field surveys in November 2021 and September 2023, classified habitats in accordance with Irish habitat guidelines and evaluated potential impacts on biodiversity, including effects on protected species like otters. Proposed works include resurfacing roads, realigning parking spaces, and redeveloping Harbour Park with new playgrounds, sports pitches, and landscaping.

Key ecological receptors were identified and assessed, and mitigation measures were outlined to prevent or reduce ecological impacts. The assessment concludes that "there will be no significant impacts on biodiversity" at any geographic scale, provided that "the proposed works are constructed and operated in accordance with the design described within this application." Additionally, it states that the residual impacts after mitigation "will not be significant," and that "no potential for the proposed works to contribute to any cumulative impacts on biodiversity when considered in combination with other plans and projects was identified."

In summary, the project, as proposed, is expected to have no significant long-term effects on the ecological integrity of the site, with the assessment providing confidence that "following the implementation of best practice and mitigation, there will be no significant effects on biodiversity."

In accordance with the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028, specifically Policy Objective **NHB 4 Ecological Appraisal**, an Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) was conducted by MKO for the Clifden Town Centre Public Realm Enhancement Project. This assessment covers the ecological impacts during construction, operation, and decommissioning phases, providing a detailed description of the project's ecological baseline and proposed works across Clifden Town Centre, Harbour Park, and Beach Road Quay.

7.5.3 Invasive Species Management Plan

MKO prepared an Invasive Species Management Plan (ISMP) on behalf of Galway County Council for the Clifden Town Centre Public Realm Enhancement Project. This plan was developed to address the presence of invasive species, including Giant Rhubarb (*Gunnera tinctoria*) and Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*), as identified during field surveys. The ISMP was prepared in line with national guidelines on invasive species control and is designed to mitigate potential negative ecological impacts during construction, operation, and decommissioning phases of the project.

The ISMP outlines best practice methodologies for the identification, control, and removal of invasive species within the development area. The report includes measures for ongoing monitoring, proper disposal of contaminated materials, and ensuring no further spread of the species during the project lifecycle. Specifically, Giant Rhubarb and Japanese Knotweed require careful excavation, chemical treatment, and long-term monitoring to prevent regrowth.

The report concludes that adherence to the ISMP will ensure the project does not contribute to the spread of invasive species and will protect the local ecosystem. Regular inspections and appropriate remediation measures, as recommended in the ISMP, are integral to the project's successful environmental management.

In accordance with the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028, specifically **Policy Objectives IS 1 & 2 Invasive Species Management**, the Invasive Species Management Plan (ISMP) prepared by MKO for the Clifden Town Centre Public Realm Enhancement Project addresses the presence of invasive species such as Giant Rhubarb and Japanese Knotweed. The ISMP, developed in line with national guidelines, outlines best practices for identification, control, and removal of these species to mitigate ecological impacts during all project phases. It is respectfully submitted that adherence to the ISMP will ensure the project aligns with principles of proper planning and sustainable development by preventing the spread of invasive species and protecting the local ecosystem.

7.6 EIA Screening

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Screening Report was carried out by MKO in respect of this proposed development. The purpose of this report, in accordance with Section 179 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) to demonstrate that an EIA Report is not required as part of this application.

This EIA Screening Report sets out that the proposed development relates to development within Class 10(b)(i) and Class 10(b)(iv) in Part 2 of the Schedule 5 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) which includes “*Urban development which would involve an area greater than 2 hectares in the case of a business district, 10 hectares in the case of other parts of a built-up area and 20 hectares elsewhere.*”

As the proposed development encompasses an area of approximately 3.93ha, it is considered to be subthreshold development. A preliminary examination was carried out and it was determined that EIA is not required. The Screening Report concluded that:

“The preliminary examination as required by Article 120 of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended) has determined that formal EIA Screening is not required therefore it is not

necessary to proceed to Step 3. Step 3 is noted in the Screening Report to be a more detailed examination based on Schedule 7a of the Planning and Development Regulations 2001 (as amended).

7.7 Flood Risk Assessment

Given part of the subject sites boundary is within Flood Zones A & B as indicated on **Figure 3**, a Flood Risk Assessment (FRA) has been prepared by Tobin Consulting Engineers in respect of the proposed development. The FRA has been prepared in accordance with policy objective **FL 2** of the GCDP 2022-2028, stating that *‘Development proposals in areas where there is an identified or potential risk of flooding or that could give rise to a risk of flooding elsewhere will be required to carry out a Site Specific Flood Risk Assessment’*.

The report concludes that:

For both fluvial and coastal flooding: *‘The public realm improvements are considered “water compatible” in terms of their sensitivity to flooding and are not predicted to impact flood risk elsewhere therefore it is estimated that the risk of flooding associated with the proposed scheme is minimal’*.

‘Based on the findings of this Flood Risk Assessment the subject site is appropriately located in Flood Zones A and C in accordance with the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines’.

In accordance with Policy Objective **FL 8 Flood Risk Assessment for Planning Applications and CFRAMS** the flood risk of the proposed development has been identified as *‘water compatible’*, and it is respectfully put to the Board that the proposed development is appropriate in keeping with the principles of proper planning and sustainable development.

7.8 Cultural Heritage

A Cultural Heritage Impact Assessment has been prepared by Moore Archaeological & Environmental Services Limited. This report describes the results of a cultural heritage desktop and walkover assessment of a Public Realm Enhancement proposed. The methodology for accessing the potential impact of the proposed development came through a desktop review of All known cultural heritage sites were reviewed on the Archaeological Survey of Ireland (ASI) along with aerial photography and Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSI) mapping. Sites mapped included the following:

- UNESCO World Heritage Sites including the tentative list of candidate sites.
- National Monuments, be they in the ownership or guardianship of the State, in the ownership of a local authority or monuments under preservation orders.
- Record of Monuments & Places (RMP) and Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) from www.archaeology.ie.

A site inspection of the study areas also took place in January 2022. The report provides a background of the historic growth and use of Clifden throughout the Neolithic, Bronze and Modern ages. It is noted within the report that there are no World Heritage sites or National Monuments within the subject site boundary. However there are a number of protected structures within the application boundary as outlined within section 2.4 of this report above. It is outlined in section 2.5.1 of the Cultural Impact Assessment that *‘There will be no impact on any recorded archaeological monuments by the proposed development’*, and *‘Groundworks have limited potential to impact on previously unrecorded archaeological remains’*. The report does recommend any mitigation measures on residual impacts given *‘There will be no residual impact either physical or visual to any known and recorded archaeological or architectural sites by the proposed Public Realm Enhancement works at Clifden’*.

Therefore, it is respectfully put to the Board that the proposed development is in full compliance with policy objective **ARC 4** of the GCDP, to ensure the protection of archaeological sites and should be considered permissible in principle.

7.9

Architectural Heritage

The Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment for the Clifden Town Centre Enhancement Project, prepared by ACP Architectural Conservation Professionals, evaluates the potential impact of proposed public realm enhancements on Clifden's architectural heritage. The town, notable for its 19th-century planned layout under the vision of John D'Arcy, retains a significant portion of its historic streetscape and buildings, particularly within the designated Architectural Conservation Area (ACA).

The assessment examines key structures within the ACA, such as the Church of St. Joseph, Clifden Court House, and various protected townhouses, all of which contribute to Clifden's historical character. The report emphasizes the need for sensitive development in line with conservation principles to avoid negatively affecting these structures. Proposed works include resurfacing streets, realigning footpaths, and reconfiguring parking, alongside improvements in public spaces.

The report highlights specific concerns, such as the removal or alteration of traditional streetscape elements and the introduction of modern materials that may detract from the town's historic character. It calls for the retention of original features, such as stone walls, paving, and traditional shopfronts, and recommends that any new interventions be sympathetic to the existing architectural style. Mitigation measures are suggested to minimize negative impacts, including the use of appropriate materials and methods during construction.

The report concludes that while the proposed enhancements will modernize the town centre, careful attention to design and materials will ensure that Clifden's architectural heritage is preserved. The impact on the ACA and individual protected structures is anticipated to be neutral to positive, provided that all recommended conservation guidelines are followed.

In accordance with the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028, specifically Policy Objective AH 1 Protection of Architectural Heritage, the Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment (AHIA) prepared by ACP Architectural Conservation Professionals evaluates the potential impact of the Clifden Town Centre Public Realm Enhancement Project on Clifden's architectural heritage. The town, notable for its 19th-century planned layout, retains a significant portion of its historic streetscape and buildings, particularly within the designated Architectural Conservation Area (ACA).

7.10

Public Lighting

An outdoor lighting layout and strategy has been prepared by Maloney Fox Consulting Engineers in respect of the proposed development. This light report outlines the lighting layout for each of the study areas and the levels of lux and light spillage in each area. The report also outlines the measures put in place to reduce the levels of light pollution in Clifden with the proposed lighting.

7.11

Quay Structural Survey

Tobin Consulting Engineers were commissioned by Galway County Council to perform a structural condition inspection of the quay wall at Clifden as part of the Clifden Town Centre Public Realm Enhancement Project. The inspection, carried out on March 23, 2022, focused on the pier along Beach Road, Clifden Bay. The 200-meter-long pier, constructed from large rocks with minimal pointing, was found to have no significant structural movement or settlement. However, some stones were dislodged, and vegetation was growing between the rocks, which could eventually compromise the wall's integrity.

The proposed public realm works include drainage improvements, landscaping, and pedestrian access near the quay wall. Mooring points will require careful design to prevent excessive force on the wall.



The report concludes that the quay wall's structural integrity is sound but recommends resetting dislodged stones, removing vegetation, and securing capping stones to prevent further dislodgment by mooring lines.

8.

CONCLUSION

The proposed public realm works to the Beach Road Quay, Town Centre and Harbour Park areas in Clifden represent a transformative public realm upgrade project that promotes positive planning, community engagement, and strategic alignment with local, regional, and national planning frameworks.

Engagement with the community has been fundamental, shaping the upgrades to address resident concerns and aspirations. The central aim has been to enhance public spaces that seamlessly integrate with the existing landscape and land uses.

The design assessment demonstrates the appropriateness of the proposed development, which is embedded in sustainable planning practices and positive placemaking in order to enhance the vibrancy and vitality of Clifden. The proposed upgrades reflect environmental sustainability practices, incorporating green spaces, sustainable design practices. In addition, preserving Clifden cultural heritage has been a key consideration throughout the design process. The enhancements at the various areas surrounding Town Centre and Beach Road Quay, seek not only to revitalise public spaces and enhance the pedestrian connectivity and usability of the town centre, but also to provide an improved platform for the community events, celebrations, and cultural gatherings which frequently occur in Clifden. The integration of versatile spaces conducive to hosting festivals, markets, and gatherings aligns with Clifden's legacy as a hub for cultural expression and community engagement, as the largest town in the Connemara.

In conclusion, this Part 10 Planning Application for the public realm upgrades to the town centre represents a strategic approach that amalgamates policy compliance, community engagement, environmental sustainability, and cultural preservation. Stemming from this, the proposed development aims to deliver positive planning and sustainable development to Clifden town centre.

