



South Galway Vision

- Cycle /hub with bike hire, bicycle repair, showers, storage amenities
- Biodiversity and greening
- Heritage Enhancement and preservation of Flowervale House
- Accessible connections and pedestrian
- Remote working hub in proximity to Gort Station

This document also outlines a set of recommendations for inclusion in the Gort LAP.

Opportunity for Gort

A proposed Gort Eco Park and Amenity Hub at the Gort River Walk Entrance is presented as a transformative opportunity for tourism, active travel, and community engagement. With the Galway-Athlone Cycleway nearing Gort, this project will serve as a key gateway for cyclists and visitors exploring the region, offering seamless connectivity to the Wild Atlantic Way and beyond.

Situated just 50m from Gort Railway Station, the hub will integrate sustainable transport options, providing bicycle rental, repair, and storage services, as well as shower facilities, a café, a remote working space, and a small hostel. This initiative directly aligns with national, regional, and local development strategies, supporting active travel, climate resilience, and economic regeneration.

Imagine cycling into Gort along the scenic Galway-Athlone Cycleway, arriving at a modern Cycle Hub just minutes from the town centre. Here, you can secure your bike, refresh with a hot shower, and relax in a welcoming heritage café before setting off to explore. The cycleway will bring people on a dedicated route right into Gort's town centre.

Visitors can wander through Gort's historic streets, the town's vibrant market square and local shops or continue their journey and visit cultural landmarks like Coole Park, Kilmacduagh, Thoor Ballylee, and the Kiltartan Gregory Museum. When you're ready to continue your journey, the Gort Railway Station—just 50 metres away—offers seamless connections to Galway, Ennis, Limerick, and Dublin, or stay another night in a vibrant hostel. Whether you're on a long-distance cycling adventure or a day trip, Gort provides the perfect stop to recharge, experience local culture, and effortlessly transition from saddle to station.



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Figure 2 : Restored Flowervale house - cafe and interpretive centre

Driving factors

Gort Town becomes a key access point for the Galway-Dublin Cycleway which will provide a dedicated direct link to the town and be easily accessible for pedestrian/cyclists utilising the train.

Gort Town can also become a unique destination for remote workers that want to spend a day or 2 in the area and to work. The Gort River walk is within easy access for a stroll or a 1 minute walk into the town can offer shops, restaurants and cafes.

The Gort municipal landfill site is due for remediation in the near future and within the timeline of this LAP, there is a significant opportunity to redevelop this site from wasteland to a vibrant amenity and offer recreational facilities to the community and visitors.

The river walk and Amenity Hub will be the focus for increased community social activities, including meeting for a coffee with the sound of the river in the background. Meeting rooms with a biodiversity and nature focus will offer services for schools and adults as an education centre.



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Key Aspects

The following represents a vision that should be captured as part of a Gort LAP Opportunity Site.

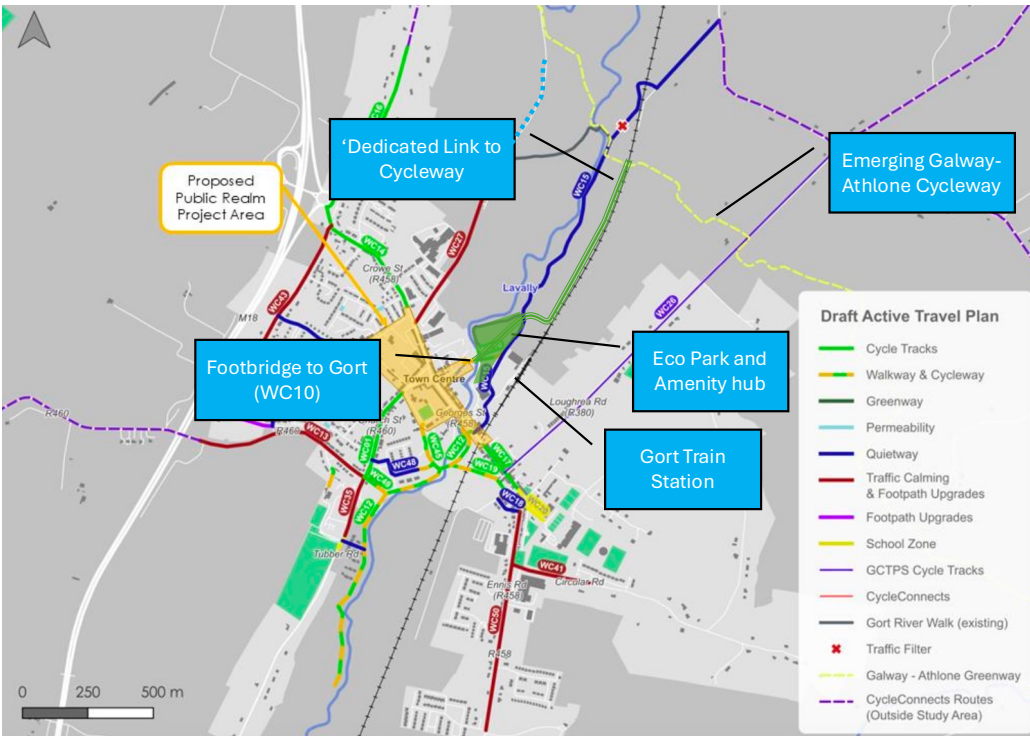


Figure 3 : The Galway-Athlone cycleway with direct connection to Gort and Amenity Hub



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The Gort Eco Park & Amenity Hub development integrates key infrastructure and amenities to enhance sustainable tourism, active travel, and community engagement. The main features include:

Cycle Hub & Facilities

While the LAP acknowledges cycling, it does not include a fully integrated cycle network or a cycle-friendly transport hub. A dedicated Cycle Hub should be included in the LAP including:

- Bike rental, repair, and secure storage facilities for cyclists.
- Showers and changing rooms for visitors freshening up before exploring Gort.
- E-bike charging stations to support long-distance and sustainable travel.
- Cycling training and safety information area

This Cycle Hub should be developed with pedestrian/cyclist access to Gort Railway Station for seamless rail-bike integration.

Greenway & Connectivity

- Direct, safe and dedicated link to the Galway-Athlone Cycleway, making Gort a prime stop for cyclists including a new pedestrian and cycle bridge connection to Gort, (part of the Gort Town Centre First Plan) . This dedicated link limits the shared-use of cycleway with traffic, a key policy of the Galway-Athlone cycleway.
- Upgraded walking and cycling paths linking the hub to the Gort River Walk and local amenities including the key proposals of active travel of the LTP enable safe connectivity of most of Gort to the cycleway.
- Enhanced accessibility for Gort River Walk and pedestrian link between station and Ecopark.

Community & Recreational Spaces

- Restoration of Flowervale House as a community café and interpretive centre, celebrating local heritage.
- Installation of more accessible entrances to Gort River Walk
- A nature-focused meeting area that can be used by the community (community school, scouts, local groups) for biodiversity training and nature workshops
- Children's bike pump track, encouraging cycling among younger visitors.
- Designated picnic areas with seating, offering relaxing spaces along the river.
- Green open spaces for nature engagement and social interaction.
- An additional walking loop around the old Gort landfill with exercise stations
- Tennis courts and additional sports facilities.
- The inclusion of a walking labyrinth for meditative recreation
- Service buildings (requested by Gort River Walk Development Group) to store equipment for trail maintenance and scout storage.
- Scout Den building to host the Gort Scouts, who are involved in the Gort River Walk.



Sustainable Accommodation & Remote Working

- A small hostel for cyclists and eco-tourists seeking overnight stays.
- Potential for a remote working hub (depending on other community projects), allowing commuters and digital nomads to work in a scenic, vibrant, and well-connected location

Heritage, Cultural & Environmental Features

- Restoration of Flowervale House with interpretive centre for Gort River and Burren lowlands karst landscape
- Integration of biodiversity areas and riverbank restoration to enhance natural surroundings.
- Water feature with a pavilion, creating a scenic focal point for visitors and community gatherings.
- A welcoming Art installation greets amenity users and is visible from train users as they arrive in Gort.

Strategic Transport Integration

- Located just 50m from Gort Railway Station, ensuring seamless train-bike connectivity.
- Located 120m from Gort Bus stop
- No car access required, promoting active and sustainable travel options.

It is envisaged that most buildings would include solar panels and generate their own electricity and be fully sustainable.

This multi-functional hub aligns with the Gort Town Centre First Plan and Gort LAP 2025-2031, making it a landmark project for active tourism, heritage preservation, and local economic revitalization.



Key users of the Park/hub

Target Audience & Slow Tourism Appeal



The project will attract visitors who prioritize sustainable, experience-based travel, aligning with the growing trend of slow tourism, which focuses on immersive and environmentally conscious travel experiences.

Key Visitor Groups:

- Cyclists & Eco-Tourists – Using the Galway-Athlone Cycleway as a low-carbon way to explore the region.
- Remote Workers & Digital Nomads – Seeking co-working spaces with strong transport links.
- Cultural & Heritage Visitors – Visiting Coole Park, Thoor Ballylee, and the Kiltartan Gregory Museum.
- Families & Outdoor Enthusiasts – Can enjoy a bike bump track, river walk, and nature-based activities.

Nearby Attractions & Experiences:

- Gort Town Centre
- Coole Park & Gardens – Once home to Lady Gregory, this historic estate is a major draw for literary and heritage tourists.
- Thoor Ballylee – A 16th-century Norman tower house associated with W.B. Yeats, attracting literature and history enthusiasts.
- Kiltartan Gregory Museum – A key cultural site showcasing the legacy of Lady Gregory and the Irish Literary Revival.
- Kilmacduagh monastic site



Community Focus

The restoration of Flowervale House as a community café and interpretive centre will celebrate local heritage while providing a welcoming space for residents and visitors. A nature-focused workshop area will support biodiversity training and educational programs for local groups, including schools and scouts. The site will feature a children's bike pump track to encourage cycling from an early age, along with designated picnic areas and green open spaces to promote social interaction and relaxation along the river.

A new walking loop around the Gort landfill site, integrated with exercise stations, will enhance outdoor recreation, while tennis courts or other sports facilities will provide additional fitness opportunities.

A walking labyrinth will offer a unique meditative space for mindfulness and well-being.



Figure 4 : Example of walking Labyrinth close to the trail and Gort River

Essential service buildings will be included for trail maintenance equipment storage for the Gort River Walk development and also include storage facilities for the Gort Scouts, who play an active role in the Gort River Walk.



Benefits to the Town & Region

The Gort Eco Park & Amenity Hub is a transformative project that enhances sustainable tourism, community engagement, and climate resilience, aligning with key national, regional, and local development strategies.

Sustainable Tourism & Economic Growth

- Gort as a Key Cycleway Hub – Positioned at the entrance to the Galway-Athlone Cycleway, attracting eco-tourists and cyclists directly into the town and train station.
- The Ecopark (and Art Installation) will also be visible from the train and enhance Gort's image as an attractive destination.
- New Business & Employment Opportunities – The café, bike rental shop, interpretive centre, hostel and remote working hub will create jobs and support the local economy ensuring Gort in its vision as a self-sustaining town.
- A Destination for Remote Workers & Digital Nomads – The co-working hub provides a scenic, well-connected space for professionals, enhancing Gort's appeal as a stay-over destination.

Climate Change Resilience & Sustainable Mobility

- Supports Low-Carbon Travel – Seamless integration with Gort Railway Station & Gort Bus Stop encourages train and bike travel over car usage.
- Green Infrastructure & Renewable Energy – Buildings will feature solar panels and on-site self-sustaining energy systems, reducing overall carbon emissions.
- Limited Car Access Required – Prioritizing cycling and pedestrian movement reduces traffic congestion and pollution.

Biodiversity & Environmental Enhancement

- Restoration of the Gort River Walk & Riverbank Biodiversity Areas – Improves local ecosystems and enhances habitats for wildlife.
- Repurposing a Former Landfill – The remediation of the municipal landfill into a vibrant green space transforms wasteland into a thriving ecological and recreational area including natural meadows, shrubs and other biodiversity installations like beehives.
- Inclusion of a Walking Labyrinth & Green Open Spaces – Encourages nature engagement, relaxation, and mindfulness.



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Community Well-Being & Recreation

- New Social & Recreational Facilities – The picnic areas, café, sports facilities e.g. sports courts/buildings, children’s pump track, additional trails, exercise stations create inclusive spaces for all age groups.



Figure 5 : Concept of a bump track close to Gort Station

- Flowervale House Restoration – The heritage building will serve as a community café and interpretive centre, enriching local history and storytelling.
- River Walk Activation – The new pedestrian bridge to Gort, part of the Gort Town Centre First Plan, will enhance connectivity and encourage outdoor social interactions.

Cultural & Heritage Promotion

- Gateway to Iconic Attractions – Easy access to Coole Park, Thoor Ballylee, and the Kiltartan Gregory Museum, Kilmacduagh, reinforcing Gort as a heritage tourism hub.
- Interpretive Centre for the Gort River and Burren Lowlands – Educates visitors on local ecology, heritage, and the significance of the Gort River.

This project repurposes underutilised land, improves climate resilience, enhances biodiversity, and strengthens Gort’s role in sustainable tourism and community well-being. By leveraging its strategic location and integrating renewable energy, green transport, and heritage preservation, the Gort Ecopark & Amenity Hub will become a landmark development, ensuring a greener, healthier, and more connected future for the town.



Justification & Policy Alignment

The Gort Ecopark & Amenity Hub aligns with key national, regional, and local policy objectives, contributing to sustainable tourism, economic development, climate resilience, and biodiversity enhancement. The project directly supports

- The Gort Town Centre First Plan (TCFP)
- Key objectives within the Gort Local Area Plan (LAP) 2025-2031,
- Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028

This reinforces active travel, heritage restoration, and environmental conservation.

Strategic Fit with National & Regional Policy

Town Centre First Policy & Project Ireland 2040

- The Gort Town Centre First Plan emphasizes town centre revitalization, sustainable mobility, and economic regeneration. This plan also proposed a new foot bridge over the river to a now revitalised amenity and biodiversity space
- Project Ireland 2040 prioritizes the development of connected, compact, and climate-resilient urban centres, aligning with Gort's redevelopment as a cycling and eco-tourism hub.
- This vision delivers probably one of the most significant impacts across the key themes in the Gort Town Centre First Plan including :
 - Theme 01 | Reanimating heritage
 - Theme 03 | Social inclusion, community spirit & well-being
 - Theme 04 | Connectivity
 - Theme 05 | Re-purposing vacant & derelict buildings
 - Theme 06 | Vibrant local economy
 - Theme 07 | Sustainable urban living
 - Theme 08 | Attracting visitors
 - Theme 09 | Natural environment and biodiversity

Galway County Development Plan (GCDP) 2022-2028

- Identifies Gort as a self-sustaining town, requiring targeted investment in employment, infrastructure, and tourism facilities .
- Supports cycling and greenway infrastructure as part of Galway's sustainable transport network .

Northern & Western Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES)

- Emphasizes compact growth, improved mobility, and climate resilience—all key aspects of the Gort Ecopark & Amenity Hub.



Economic & Tourism Development

Boosting Local Business & Employment

- The Gort LAP 2025-2031 supports tourism and recreation investment, highlighting the potential of Coole Park, Thoor Ballylee, and the Kiltartan Gregory Museum to drive visitor numbers.
- The hostel, café, and cycle hub will create new jobs and attract slow tourism, fostering sustainable economic growth .
- The Galway County Tourism Strategy 2023-2031 supports thematic tourism development, including greenways, heritage sites, and eco-tourism experiences.

Enhancing Gort's Role as a Cycling Destination

- The GCDP 2022-2028 supports the Galway-Athlone Cycleway as a major tourism and transport project, making Gort a key stopping point. The direct connection link from the Greenway to Gort Town Centre is a unique opportunity.
- The Gort Local Transport Plan prioritizes cycling and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure, aligning with the Ecopark's active travel focus .

Climate Resilience & Sustainable Development

Promoting Low-Carbon Travel

- The LAP 2025-2031 and GCDP 2022-2028 emphasize reducing car dependency by investing in walking, cycling, and rail connectivity .
- The Ecopark's proximity to Gort Railway Station (50m) and Gort Bus Stop (120m) ensures seamless bike-train integration, reducing transport emissions .

Green Energy & Low-Impact Infrastructure

- The Ecopark's solar-powered buildings align with Galway County's Climate Action and Renewable Energy Strategy, promoting energy self-sufficiency .
- The use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) enhances stormwater management and biodiversity, addressing climate risks .

Transforming a Former Landfill into Green Space

- The Gort municipal landfill is scheduled for remediation, and repurposing the site as an ecopark aligns with circular economy principles .
- This rehabilitation project enhances community well-being, turning wasteland into a vibrant, usable public amenity.

Biodiversity & Natural Heritage Enhancement

Strengthening Local Ecosystems

- The Gort LAP prioritizes biodiversity restoration, including enhanced river walk spaces, native tree planting, and riverbank conservation .
- The integration of nature-based solutions, such as a walking labyrinth and green recreational zones, fosters environmental stewardship and mental well-being .



Enhancing the Gort River Walk & Community Spaces

- The extension of the Gort River Walk and the addition of picnic areas will create more social spaces for residents and visitors .
- The new pedestrian and cycle bridge will enhance connectivity, making the river walk a focal point for community activities .

Cultural & Heritage Conservation

Restoring Flowervale House as a Heritage & Community Hub

- The adaptive reuse of Flowervale House as a café and interpretive centre aligns with the Gort LAP's vision for preserving historic sites .
- The interpretive centre will educate visitors about the Gort River, the Burren Lowlands, and local history, reinforcing Gort's cultural identity.

Leveraging Nearby Attractions

- The hub's location strategically links visitors to Coole Park, Thoor Ballylee, and Kiltartan Gregory Museum, Kilmacduagh, strengthening Gort's tourism appeal .

Community Well-Being & Active Living

Providing Inclusive Recreational Spaces

- The bike pump track, picnic areas, and sports facilities support active lifestyles for all age groups, improving community health and engagement .
- The walking labyrinth will offer a unique meditative space, fostering mental well-being and mindfulness.
- Linkage between the Market Square and this new eco-park/Amenity Hub will have a positive impact on community well-being.

Encouraging Social Interaction

- The café space , picnic area and additional trails, will serve as a gathering point for residents, remote workers, and visitors, strengthening Gort's sense of community .

The Gort Ecopark & Amenity Hub is fully aligned with national, regional, and local strategies for sustainable development, active travel, tourism growth, and climate resilience. It will:

- Enhance Gort's economic viability by attracting eco-tourists, remote workers, and heritage visitors.
- Promote sustainable transport through cycling, walking, and rail connectivity.
- Improve climate resilience with low-carbon infrastructure, biodiversity conservation, and flood mitigation.
- Transform an underutilised landfill into a vibrant green space, benefiting both residents and visitors.
- Strengthen cultural and community assets, restoring Flowervale House and extending the river walk.

This multi-functional hub will establish Gort as a leading destination for slow tourism and sustainable living, ensuring a healthier, greener, and more connected future.



Opportunities for Funding

There is significant opportunity of funding through various sources. As a significant part of the area proposed is on or near a landfill undergoing remediation, it can be strongly considered for funding, particularly if the project aligns with environmental rehabilitation, economic regeneration, or sustainable development goals. There are several funding mechanisms that can support such an initiative:

Urban & Rural Regeneration Funds

- Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) – Supporting town and city renewal projects, including brownfield redevelopment.
- Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) – Funding rural town revitalization, infrastructure, and community-driven projects.

2. Environmental & Circular Economy Grants

- Circular Economy Fund (EPA) – Supports projects that promote sustainability, waste reuse, and environmental rehabilitation.
- National Just Transition Fund – Funds climate-friendly economic projects in areas affected by industrial change(Landfill).

3. EU & Climate Action Funds

- EU LIFE Programme – Supporting environmental restoration, biodiversity, and waste management projects.
- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) – Funding brownfield redevelopment with an economic and sustainability focus.

4. Greenway & Tourism-Related Funds

- Fáilte Ireland: Tourism Development Fund – Funds tourism infrastructure, particularly eco-tourism and cycling-related projects.
- Active Travel Investment Programme (NTA) – Supports walking and cycling infrastructure, including connections to greenways.



Missing Opportunity

The current LAP Draft does not identify any *Opportunity Sites* that are Amenity-focused and this is therefore a missed opportunity. The eco-park and Amenity Hub concept proposal demonstrates that there is a high-value opportunity to :

- Establish an eco-park as part of landfill remediation to provide an incredible amenity space to the community and visitors
- Connect the Town Square directly to the emerging Galway-Dublin cycleway and provide essential services to cyclists
- Promote a remote-working environment for the community and visitors in an ideal setting.

While there is a *Community Lands* opportunity outlined in the LAP (*Opportunity site 4*), the opportunity presented is distinctive, independent and **complementary** with Site 4 as it is more focused on the Amenity potential, the connection to the cycleway and the landfill remediation potential which can be facilitated through various funding streams.

This opportunity will be lost if this entire section of land is zoned all Amenity/Open space or if not specifically highlighted in the LAP.

Additional feedback on LAP

- The LAP and LTP fail to demonstrate how pedestrian and cycling networks will integrate seamlessly with the town centre.
- The LAP does not adequately integrate the Local Transport Plan (LTP) objectives, missing key details on transport priorities, cycling, and public transport infrastructure.
- While the LAP acknowledges cycling, it does not include a fully integrated cycle network or a cycle-friendly transport hub. There is no clear plan for a dedicated, safe cycling route linking the Galway-Athlone-Dublin Cycleway to Gort town centre.
- The LAP does not leverage Gort Railway Station's potential to support rail-cycle tourism.
- The LAP designates the landfill site as "Amenity", but does not outline how this space could be transformed into a functional public asset. There is no phased development plan, funding strategy, or list of potential recreational uses to guide the site's transition post-remediation. Without a structured approach, the landfill site may remain an unused, passive green space with limited community benefit.
- The LAP does not specify what types of facilities will be provided in the amenity zone in the landfill (e.g., trails, playgrounds, sports facilities, nature walks).
- There is no vision for community engagement, such as outdoor classrooms, biodiversity gardens, or wellness spaces. Without a clear recreational framework, the site risks being a green space with no real function or attraction.
- The zoning of all land (landfill site and land north of Aldi) is too restrictive for the vision of a Gort Ecopark and Amenity Hub.



Key Recommendations

The key recommendation is therefore to :

- Present this as distinctive **Opportunity Site 5 – Ecopark and Amenity Hub** including provisions for a dedicated cycle hub, direct cycleway access to the town centre and the inclusion of a new footbridge/cycle bridge in the town.
- Ensure that the land north of Aldi is zoned ‘Community Facilities’ or ‘Town Centre’, to facilitate development such as remote working hub, hostel, interpretive centre/café, storage, parking etc.

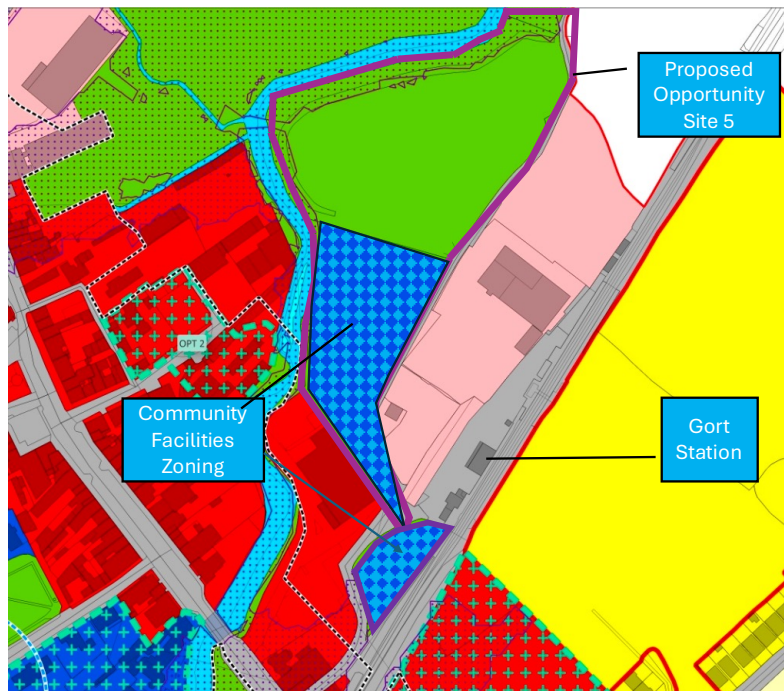


Figure 6 : Proposal for Opportunity 5 with less constrictive zoning

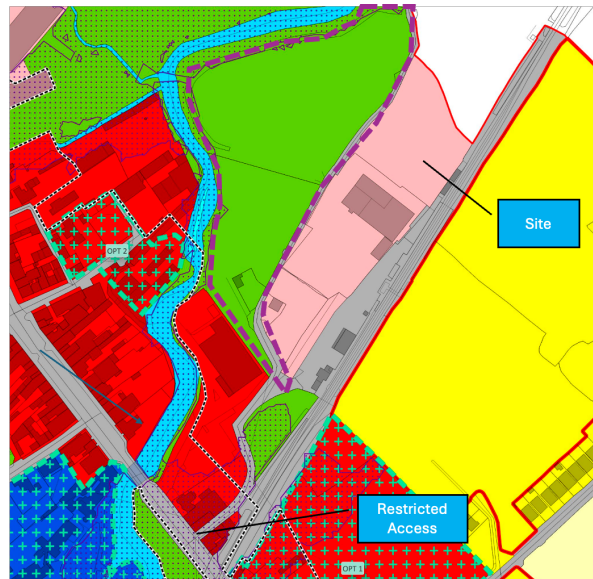
The LAP should also include more specific objectives to enable such a proposal, including the following:

- Explicitly outline a **dedicated** cycle path from the Galway-Athlone-Dublin Cycleway into the town centre. New pedestrian and cycle bridge connections should be prioritized to ensure direct, car-free access between the greenway and the town. (A new WC route along the railway/modified WC10)
- Enhance **rail-cycle integration**, making Gort a key stop for slow tourism. A dedicated Cycle Hub should be included in the LAP which should be strategically placed near Gort Railway Station for seamless rail-bike integration
- The LTP objectives should be explicitly included in Section 2.8 of the LAP, listing priority/short-term transport measures. (also NTA Recommendation)
- Explicitly identify the opportunity to transform the Gort landfill and list some key examples of the recreational uses of such a site.
- Include objectives for restoration of Flowervale into an interpretive centre, café, with ancillary community meeting rooms.
- Objective to include Cycle hub, accommodation, remote working , storage facilities to create a vibrant Amenity Hub



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- GSST 19 should be updated support land provision e.g. identify, secure, and acquire lands (through purchase, lease, or wayleave agreements) for the development of open space, recreation, and community facilities, ensuring permanent public access and long-term sustainability of the amenity network in Gort.
- Recent planning applications have been refused planning because of the restricted access from Georges St to Station/Pound road and called into question the development of the 'backlands' as highlighted in the Gort Town Centre First Plan. The site highlighted below is the subject of planning enforcement and in its current state, it detracts significantly from the area (hedgerow removal and tall steel fencing). This could be an additional area for amenity or focus of a potential climate change/renewable project so a keeping of current zoning or changing to OS/Amenity, Community facility, would be preferable e.g. for sports facility. This should probably have 'constrained' land use also.



Conclusion

The Gort Eco park & Amenity Hub is a vision that represents a transformative opportunity to enhance sustainable tourism, biodiversity conservation, active travel, and community well-being. By integrating cycling infrastructure, eco-friendly facilities, and cultural heritage restoration, this development will position Gort as a leading destination for slow tourism and sustainable living.

Aligned with the Gort Town Centre First Plan, Gort LAP 2025-2031, and Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028, this project will drive economic growth, support climate resilience, and foster a greener, healthier, and more connected future for the town. By repurposing underutilised land, enhancing the river walk, and leveraging strategic funding sources, Gort can become a model for sustainable rural development in Ireland.

To support this vision, the Gort LAP should explicitly identify “Opportunity Site 5 – Eco park & Amenity Hub” and ensure zoning designations support this and highlights some of the key objectives of this opportunity. This initiative will unlock the full potential of Gort, creating a lasting legacy for the community and visitors alike.