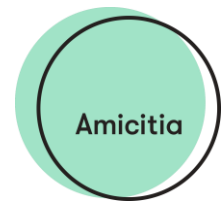


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Old Church Street,
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[REDACTED]



28th July 2021

Draft Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 Consultation
Planning Department,
Galway County Council,
Áras an Chontae,
Prospect Hill,
Galway.

To whom it may concern,

Amicitia is a social enterprise based in Athenry, Co. Galway. At Amicitia we believe that a deep consideration of people, place and planet can revitalise local communities. We work with the inhabitants of rural towns and villages, where there are higher levels of consistent poverty, to cocreate initiatives which will improve the quality of life, health and wellbeing of local residents.

Public participation and citizens engagement are very important, and often overlooked, aspects of community life and we welcome the opportunity to make a submission in respect of the Draft Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028. ***In May 2019, Ireland became the second country in the world to declare a climate and biodiversity emergency.*** This is a welcome development, and while the impact has not felt like a response to an emergency we do finally see a trend towards climate action creeping into everyday discourse and Government policy. In July 2020, The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 was signed into law. This now puts Ireland on a legally binding path to net-Zero emissions no later than 2050, and to a 51% reduction in emissions by the end of this decade.

There is recognition of the magnitude of this change in the Draft Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 which references climate action responsibilities in every chapter of the plan. But it's impossible to read the document and not wonder if we should be doing more?

As I read through the development plan it is clear that there is an acceptance of the problems we face but a resistance to the kind of transformational change that is required to successfully respond to a climate and biodiversity emergency.

It should be recognised at this point that this resistance is not helped by deeper governance issues. Most obvious of these is that Ireland ranks last in the European local democracy index. The impact of this is laid bare in the research paper, *Democracy Works If You Let It*, by Dr Mary Murphy of Maynooth University. In this paper, Dr. Murphy brings to light the fact that only 8% of Irish public spending occurs at local government level, compared to an EU average of over 23%, and that a quarter of the Irish spend is not fully under local authority control. It needs to be recognised that the fault here is a failure of an overly centralised system of governance. Only by acknowledging this fact can we begin to explore alternatives with a strong rationale for doing so. The latest development plan offers an opportunity to begin this process.

Dr. Murphy wisely suggests we begin at a citizen level when she states ***"we need to rebuild Irish local democracy and citizen participation to build strong local economies based on good jobs and decent incomes, and to address climate change."***

This research validates our belief that citizen-led environmental action should be the central motivation behind each and every objective in this development plan. If you intentionally consider this as the central motivation for development we can begin to see the alternative opportunities that could emerge to position Galway County as a leading local authority in the country. But this can only occur if we choose to implement citizen-led change with a unique appreciation of people, place and planet. As things stand, the Draft Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 reads like that of any other county. It is difficult to understand from the current document what is truly distinctive about County Galway that will attract new businesses, families and visitors.

It helps to consider an example to highlight how an alternative approach might work in practice. Throughout 2021, the city of Gothenburg, in Sweden, celebrates it's 400-year anniversary. To mark the occasion they decided to look inward, rather than out, and focus on the unique characteristics of the city which experiences rain every third day on average. As people in Galway will be well aware, rain is not always a welcome visitor. But rather than focusing on the problem the city Gothenburg embraced

the idea of working together to make their city more attractive to live in, run a business in or visit by taking rain as a starting point.

This led to a vision to become the best city in the world when it's raining. By taking a bold and creative approach, this initiative aims to build more robust and attractive water drainage and rainfall solutions, while also changing the perception of rain, its connection to the climate, and using it to the advantage of the city. The unique aspect of the 'Rain Gothenburg' initiative is that the city will, from now on, always highlight rain from architectural, social, cultural and climate-related perspectives when developing the city's infrastructure. You can find more information on this clever initiative here: <https://www.goteborg2021.com/en/jubileumsprojekt/rain-göteborg-2/>

How different would Galway County look if it took a rain first approach? Or adopted a fully citizenled approach to environmental action? These may or may not be questions you have considered before but its a useful exercise when thinking about the future of our local areas. What other scenarios would be useful to suggest?

The point of this example is to highlight the power of switching the narrative and looking at the problems we face from a different perspective. This is often considered as a strength-based, or asset-led, approach that focuses not on the weaknesses in an area but rather the local assets that can be utilised in more productive ways. There are welcome references to this in the draft plan but the real power of this approach comes from the community-level, up.

Reading through the draft it is clear we are stuck looking for ideas from the opposite direction. The document is littered with references from a wide variety of sources including the National Planning Framework. While it is important to use these as guidance drafting the development plan it is disappointing to see that their recommendations are followed blindly with little critical feedback, alternative suggestions or enhancements. If each and every council is tied to following the same recommendations verbatim are we moving towards a homogenised society that doesn't encourage diversity of thought? This is a dangerous road to travel that will only serve to stifle innovation in the long-term and lead to a further concentration of power in the wrong areas of society.

So what is the alternative? How can County Galway readdress this imbalance of power? Communities can become the places to experiment with new ideas and social innovations and Galway County Council can play an important role as a facilitator of this citizen-led action.

Below is a short summary of suggestions that may in some way strengthen the development plan. Many examples included in this response are taken from projects already happening in Ireland and other countries around the world. It is important to note that Galway County Council is it's own place and has it's own set of challenges. There are no one size fits all solutions and the real challenge lies in understanding the strengths that exist in communities across Galway.

By working together we can collective harness these assets to create truly unique alternatives. The sections are broken up by the individual chapters related to the draft document and we hope that you will find them useful while crafting the next version of the development plan.

Your sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Patrick Mulvihill". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name and last name clearly distinguishable.

Patrick Mulvihill
Director - Amicitia

Chapter 2: Core Strategy, Settlement Strategy and Housing Strategy

The chapter related to settlement and housing should be commended for emphasising the need for better use of land, more sustainable compact growth, renewable energy solutions, inclusivity and enhanced mobility options.

The plan suggests that the “the county’s most significant place-making challenge will be to plan and deliver future development in a way that moves more towards self-sustaining, rather than commuter driven activity, therefore allowing its towns, villages and rural components to play to their strengths, while above all, moving from a sprawl-led development model”

This move away from a sprawl-led development model begins by recognising that housing is more than just an asset and we, as a society, have failed to appreciate it’s role building communities of place.

Proposed amendment or inclusion:

- **Community-Led Housing** - evolving across Europe and the wider world - empowers communities to develop solutions which address their particular housing needs. This approach provides a framework for residents and communities to collaborate in the creation and revitalisation of new and existing neighbourhoods. **The unique feature of Community-Led Housing is the empowerment of future residents to meaningfully participate in both the design and long-term management of their homes.** Community-Led Housing is an umbrella term, encompassing a wide range of approaches, including cooperative housing, cohousing, Community Land Trusts (CLTs), and self-help housing. Although no two Community- Led Housing projects are the same, they all share a common goal of meeting specific local housing needs via collaboration, empowerment and mutual support. **Community-Led Housing (CLH) is premised on the conviction that a house is not just a building, or an asset, it is a home: a place to live.** SOA have released some very important publications on this topic which has led to recent amends amendments made to the Affordable Housing Bill. This will see community-led housing and community land trusts referenced in Irish legislation for the first time. This research can be found here: <https://soa.ie/>

Rationale:

The Draft plan currently has no references to community-led housing. With it’s recent addition to the Affordable Housing Bill, Galway County Council can take the lead and implement community-led solutions that can quickly alleviate the housing crisis across this county. This contributes to the efforts to achieve SDG 1, 3, 10, 11 and 17.

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3: Placemaking, Regeneration & Urban Living

One of the policy objectives highlighted in this chapter is ***“PM 2 Regeneration: To prioritise projects and proposals which will result in both social and economic rejuvenation and regeneration within towns and villages. The Council 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.”*** These funds are important to support regeneration but the development plan should also recognise and support the importance of citizen-led and social financing opportunities in this area.

Proposed amendment or inclusion:

- The Galway County Development Plan should support new and innovative social finance initiatives to give power to local communities and shift the balance of power away from central sources of finance and towards citizen-led action.
- In 2017, South Dublin County Council’s **Participatory Budget initiative**, the first in Ireland, allowed citizens to vote for projects designed and submitted by citizens. An additional EUR 300,000 was provided specifically for this purpose. Citizens took part in facilitated workshops to generate ideas, identify community needs, and develop supportive networks. More details can be found here: <http://www.sdublincoco.ie/Media/Item/41961>
- **Community shares** are a way to raise money by offering communities a chance to own shares in a local organisation. They are usually about more than just profit and work best for people who want to get involved and support a cause or a project that they really care about. They are particularly useful in rural areas and issued to support the community to take over a vacant building or ensure a local pub is not closed. <https://communitysharesscotland.org.uk/>
- **The community right to buy abandoned, neglected or detrimental land** came into force in Scotland on 27 June 2018. It gives community bodies a right to compulsorily purchase land (and by land they mean land, bridges and other structures built on or over land, inland waters, canals and the foreshore) which is wholly or mainly, abandoned or neglected or the use or management of the land is causing harm to the environmental wellbeing of the community. In 2020, this act was updated to provide the opportunity for communities across Scotland to apply for a compulsory right to buy at market value for the purpose of sustainable development. While it is recognised that this is a complex process that goes beyond the remit of Galway County Council and the current development plan, it is included to highlight depth of change that will be necessary to achieve whole-scale sustainable development.

Rationale:

Relying solely on external funding from central government can delay regeneration and placemaking efforts across the county. Taking a citizen-led and proactive approach to financing and public participation can open up new opportunities and actively involve citizens in the process of building communities.

5: Economic Development, Enterprise and Retail Development

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This chapter opens with the ambition *“to develop and build on the economic strengths and assets of the county as a thriving, competitive and attractive place for a range of sectors to locate, based on the principles of a well-established economic base that is highly appealing to both investors and employees”*.

- But the offer to make the county an attractive place for a **range of sectors** to locate fails to recognise the increasingly important role social enterprises and co-operatives play in Irish society.
- The suggestion that we should appeal to **both investors and employees** is valid but also fails to highlight the important role that businesses can play supporting their local communities - and not just as employers and ratepayers but as active participants in the sustainable development of the region.

Proposed amendment or inclusion:

- The first National Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland was published in 2019 and with the recognition of social enterprises as businesses whose “core objective is to achieve a social, societal or environmental impact. Like other businesses, social enterprises trade in goods or services on an ongoing basis. However, any surpluses they generate are re-invested into achieving a social impact.”
- The growth of organisations such as Rethink Ireland highlights the emergence of this sector. Since 2016 they have established a €72 million fund, supporting 246 social innovations, reaching over 400,000 people, creating over 500 jobs in the social innovation sector and supporting almost 1,000 people into employment. It is important to note that this ‘growth’ delivered by social innovations is more sustainable, just and economically viable in the long-term.
- Galway County Council can support this sector by making including the following commitments in the Local Area Development Plan:
- A commitment to facilitate, enable and support the development of a vibrant Social Enterprise sector, as a valuable and important component of the overall economic vision for County Galway.
- A commitment to work with Social Enterprises to access and develop appropriate fit for purpose land and buildings as spaces to enable development and growth of new services and products.
- A commitment to include Social Clauses in Public Procurement.
- A commitment to identify and disseminate best practice local examples of social enterprises and increase public understanding of their contribution to society and the economy.

Rationale:

The Draft plan currently has no references to social enterprises or cooperatives as potential drivers of sustainable development despite these organisations being best placed to do so. A strong social enterprise sector in the county can support Galway Councils aim to achieve the SDG’s by 2030.

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Organisations such as [Social Enterprise Republic of Ireland](#) (SERI) are available meet with local authorities to advise how best support local Social Enterprises across their county.

5: Economic Development, Enterprise and Retail Development

Chapter 5 also includes the suggestion that when *“identifying areas for employment, enterprise and retail related development a concerted emphasis will be placed on facilitating and encouraging carbon reduction through various mechanisms. The focus on delivering jobs in close proximity to residential areas to enable people to use sustainable transport modes to access work (walking, cycling and public transport) is at a most basic level something that is supported to help address the Climate Change agenda. The shift to a low carbon economy across Galway is seen as an opportunity for further employment creation within this sector through technological innovation and investment.”*

Proposed amendment or inclusion:

- Proposing that we shift to more sustainable transport modes to access work is, as suggested, something that should be done at the most basic level. In reality, the entire economic system we live in needs to be adjusted. This shift is already happening in a number of locations across the world and Galway County Council can lead in this transformation in Ireland by collaborating with communities to implement new ideas. Two of the primary drivers in this area are:
 - ◆ **Doughnut Economics** which offers a vision of what it means for humanity to thrive in the 21st century - Further information, including the implementation of this model in a number of locations can be found here: <https://doughnuteconomics.org/>
 - ◆ **Community Wealth Building** is a new people-centred approach to local economic development, which redirects wealth back into the local economy, and places control and benefits into the hands of local people. This model has proven to be particularly successful in Preston in the UK and Cleveland in the US with more local councils now adopting the model with great success. More information can be found on: <https://cles.org.uk/>

While both of these models (and others) are relatively new in practice the County Development Plan can begin to look at their implementation at a local level by working with communities in strategic sites they have identified in the plan. Pilot programmes should be included to test and experiment with new economic ideas that can support regeneration efforts across the county.

Rationale:

ES1 of the Draft Development Plan states it's *“Support the preparation of an Economic Development Strategy for County Galway”* with an emphasis on *“significant economic growth within the metropolitan towns, key towns and areas of strategic potential”*. The challenge with this position is that economic growth, in a business-as-usual scenario, contradicts the climate action objectives of the plan. Doughnut Economics and Community Wealth Building offer two examples of emerging economic models that are place-based and more sustainable to a society confronted with a climate

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and biodiversity emergency. The onus is on Galway County Council to recognise these emerging innovations and work towards something that is truly more sustainable. A more open and experimental approach needs to be taken that works with and co-designs solutions at a community level. This re-emphasises the above point that social enterprises and cooperatives need to be included as important actors in economic, enterprise and retail development in the region.

12: Architectural, Archaeological and Cultural Heritage

In section 12.8, Creativity and The Arts, suggests that *“the county of Galway has long been associated with the arts and culture, with an exceptional quality of life and natural landscape offering artists and creatives the type of environment to thrive. Supporting creative communities is vital and there is a responsibility to ensure that the landscape is protected, the built and natural heritage is further developed in a sustainable manner and that the elements that are conducive to creativity are safeguarded.”*

While this subsection correctly identifies creativity and the arts as a vital component of community life it fails to recognise the central role artists can play supporting a Just Transition. Artistic expression and design is more than window dressing. It is central to the collective imagination we need to understand the complexity of moving towards a carbon neutral society. Galway County Council can become important actors in this process by amplifying the voice of creative sector and connecting this with a multidisciplinary response to the climate and biodiversity emergency.

Proposed amendment or inclusion:

- Galway County Council should adopt a more creative approach to policy making that encourages co-design with local communities, understands the need for experimental thinking and recognises storytelling as a core component of this process.
- To achieve this, the appropriate supports should be put in place to bring artists and designers into the process of policy making and encourage multidisciplinary networks to emerge across the county. There are a number of examples of this working in practice including:
 - UK Policy Lab <https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/>
 - Public policy labs in European Union members states
<https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC102665>

Rationale:

The Draft Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 can do more to encourage multidisciplinary collaboration. This is not an easy process, it requires a shift away from siloed thinking towards open innovation and participatory practices. Artists, designers and other creative practitioners are uniquely positioned to help facilitate this process and it is important that Galway County Council put in place supports for this now.

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To briefly highlight this point, the word *imagination* does not appear once in the entire document. While this is an overly simplistic example it is offered to emphasise a point made in the opening statement of this document. The language we choose to use everyday matters. Galway County Council has an opportunity to craft a distinctive voice for the region and this can only be achieved by encouraging creativity as a core component of the plan. Opening up to citizen-led action will create the space for our collective imagination to guide us to more sustainable ways of everyday life.