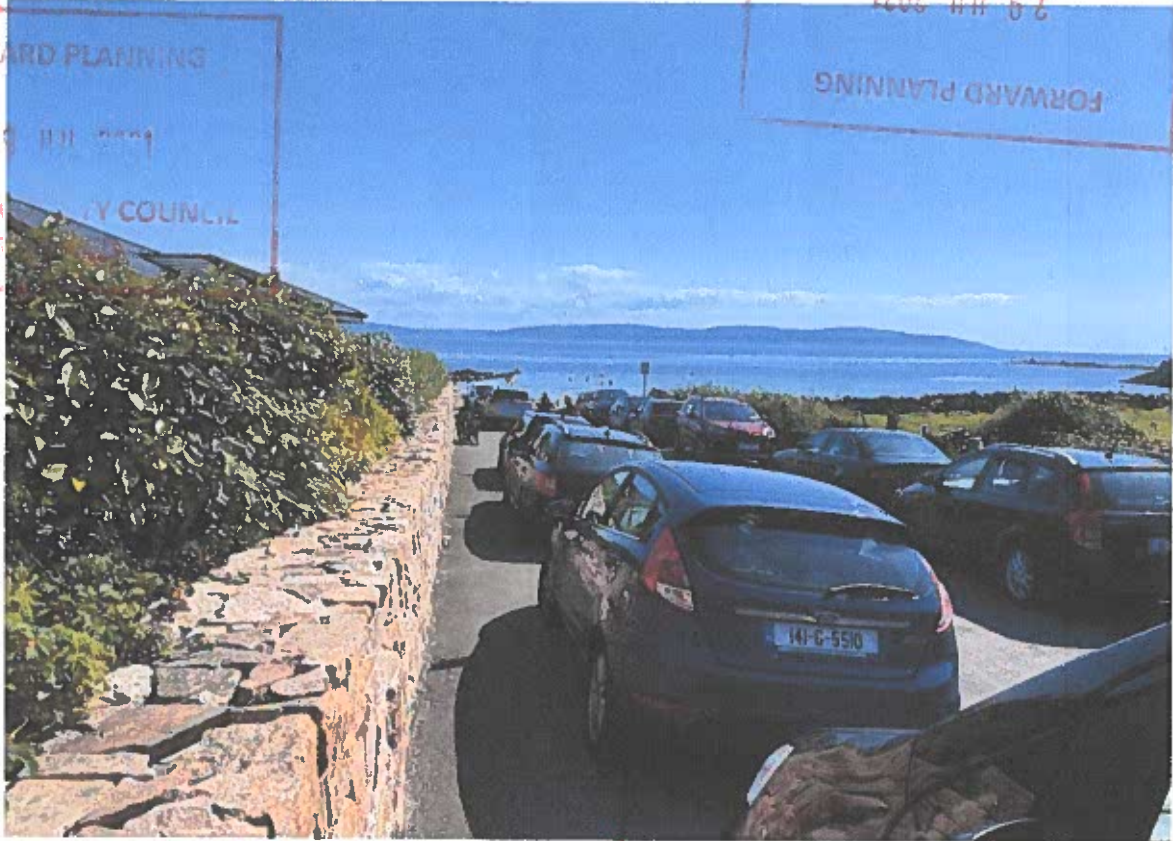


# Pobal Bheama

Freeport, Bearna, Co. Galway.

## An Samhradh - Summer!



## An Geimhreadh - Winter!



Planning Department,  
Galway County Council,  
Aras an Chontae,  
Prospect Hill,  
Galway.



**Re: Submission re Draft County Development Plan (CDP) 2022-2028.**

Dear Sir/Madam,

The Pobal Bhearna community group was established in 2004 in response to the concerns being expressed by local residents at the unsustainable development frenzy that was taking place in Bearna at that time. We have previously provided a substantial, community derived, submission to the Draft 2007-2013 LAP for Bearna and subsequent amendments to that LAP in addition to submissions to previous draft CDPs. We have continued to monitor implementation of LAP for Bearna (adopted in December 2007) and subsequent revisions.

Pobal Bhearna supports the stated overall vision of the CDP to

“Promote the creation of an attractive county to live, work, visit and enable businesses to flourish in an environment that offers a range of housing options, robust and diverse range of employment opportunities, access to quality infrastructure and community facilities with a high-quality sustainable environment for all”

and the Policy Objectives outlined in BSMP 1-20 – though we strongly disagree with the inclusion of Bearna as part of a Galway area Metropolitan Settlement Plan, at this point in time, due to the infrastructural deficits outlined below.

We believe this CDP is fundamentally flawed, at least with respect to the Bearna area - which has been subject to dramatic population growth and unsustainable development since 2000 in the face of significant infrastructural deficits. In this context, we believe the zoning designations for the Bearna Village area as currently outlined in the Draft 2022-2028 CDP are inappropriate, focused on rapid urbanisation and facilitation of compact 'infill residential' developments, without addressing some of the key challenges around physical and social infrastructure, environmental protection and climate change. There is a significant opportunity to develop a very attractive high-quality sustainable living environment for all in the Bearna area, with a thriving commercial centre and tourism economy, while protecting the local cultural and linguistic sensitivities – with an integrated and appropriate land zoning policy which is more clearly aligned with the stated Policy Objectives for Bearna (BSMP 1-20).

We would like to bring to your attention the following:

1. Basing the CDP on the 2016 Census figures is a flawed and risky strategy which will continue the unsustainable development of the area. The 2016 Census shows a population of 1,998 in Bearna. The CDP is proposing a population growth allocation of 750 persons for Bearna between 2022-2028.

Bearna Centre Major Developemnts (Post 2016 Census)	Planning/ Reference No.	No. of Units	Population Equivalent <sup>1</sup>	Comment
<i>Truskey East - Burkeway</i>	TA07.308431	121	339	Granted by ABP - subject to judicial review
<i>An Maolan - Paint Box Road</i>	Ref. 171314/181527	48	134	Under construction - close to completion
<i>Truskey West Development</i>	PL07.308037	40	112	Granted by ABP - but not yet started
<i>Barna Road An Cnochan Carrach</i>	Ref. 19314/202060	22	62	Land for sale with planning in place
<i>Freeport - Pier Road</i>	Ref. 18321	4	11	Construction completed
<i>Bearna Village - Rinn na Mara</i>	Ref. 16147	18	50	Occupied
<b>Total</b>		<b>253</b>	<b>708</b>	

<sup>1</sup> Assumes average population 2.8 per household size as measured in 2016 Census for Galway

**Table 1** Some of the major developments in the Bearna area that have acquired planning permission since the 2016 Census.

Analysis of planning awards in Bearna, **since the 2016 Census**, indicates that a minimum of 253 residential units (catering for a population equivalent of 708) have already been granted approval and/or are in various stages of construction and/or are occupied. This equates to a potential 35.4% increase in the population of Bearna, since 2016 and represents 94.4% of the target population growth for the 2022-2028 CDP period.

Also, of note from the 2016 Census (re Bearna) is that it recorded 39 unoccupied holiday homes together with 51 other vacant dwellings – a total of 90 unoccupied units (population equivalent 252) in the Bearna area. When aggregated with the population expansion associated with the post 2016 planning approvals, outlined in Table 1 (252 + 708 = 960 persons), this suggests that sufficient land zoning and housing stock is already in place in Bearna for the projected population growth allocation of 750 persons contained in the 2022-2028 CDP.

2. Analysis of the travel data from the 2016 census reveals very high car ownership and car use levels in the Bearna district – most likely due to the lack of alternative transport options. Over 90% of households own a car and more than half of those households own two cars. Less than 9% of commuters (workers, students and school children) commute by public transport. The Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP) which categorises Bearna with other ‘residential targets’ on the eastern side of Galway City is flawed and inappropriate given the infrastructural deficits around transport within the Bearna area. Unlike these other areas, residents of Bearna have access to very limited public transport, no rail system, a skeletal bus service and a singular traffic artery (R336) which experiences significant traffic jams at many times of the day and during summer season. In our opinion, the traffic congestion along the R336 in Bearna, can only be improved when ‘through traffic’ is directed away from the village and Galway City via the Galway City Outer Bypass. Sustainable compact development is not feasible in the Bearna area until this ‘Galway City Outer Bypass’ has been constructed. An ‘internal Bearna bypass’ may open up further land for unsustainable development but it will not address the R336 traffic congestion issue.

Traffic congestion within Bearna is already significant – with both the Pier Road and Mags Boreen becoming unpassable due to parking at certain times of peak usage (see front page top photo – showing parking along Mags Boreen, at the access point to Freeport beach, during summer season).

3. Sustainable development in Bearna can only take place when the area has sufficient waste water treatment capacity – either via local waste water treatment

facilities or via connection capacity to the Mutton Island Sewerage Scheme. Zoning land for development in advance of that capacity being available will continue to contribute to pollution of the local environment including community amenities such as the local beaches. Use of 'temporary sewerage arrangements' in planning awards should not be acceptable and is not consistent with many CDP objectives. Objective 2.9.1 is aspirational as stated in the CDP – this critical piece of physical infrastructure should be in place before any further zoning to facilitate large-scale developments is considered by the County Council.

In our opinion, Bearna should not be considered as a population growth centre until these infrastructure deficits are addressed. Recent County Council water testing in Bearna has revealed dangerously high levels of E. Coli pollution at the inlet stream that discharges into the local pier close to the most popular bathing spot in the village (Water Testing on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2021 revealed E.coli at 198,636 cfu/100 ml and Enterococci at 2,900 cfu/100 ml – reflecting significant pollution and a public health hazard due to rapid run-off, potentially of sewerage from septic tanks or temporary treatment systems, within the catchment area of the stream).

4. The rapid expansion in population has occurred without a concomitant development in social infrastructure, community facilities, amenity spaces etc. As acknowledged in the CDP, most of the limited sports facilities are at a distance from the Village Centre population and are only accessible by car. (Note the stated CDP land use zoning objectives GCMA 10,11, 12, 13,14, 15 and 18 and stated policy objectives for Bearna BMSP – and minimalist approach to these objectives re zoning in the Bearna area)

Policy objective BSMP 5 & 7 are completely ignored in the zoning map for Bearna. The proposed coastal amenity park will only be achieved if the CDP includes a linear zonation of a minimum 50m zone **measured from the foreshore boundary wall (between Mags Boreen and Lacklea Boreen)** – with an absolute prohibition on any building or development within that zone - to allow sufficient space for the development of a promenade, cycleway, children's playground, general amenity space. This coastal amenity park will reinforce Freeport Beach and Bearna Pier to Lacklea Road as the main village centre amenity area – which is being used year-round by the local community.

5. The Bearna zoning map contained in the Draft CDP makes no provision for a coastal amenity park – zoning most of the land between Mags Boreen and Lacklea Boreen as 'Town Centre' or 'Town Centre Infill/Residential' which offers 'carte blanche' to developers to build close to the shore and will continue to erode the shoreline visual amenity, the 'fishing village' ambiance and completely undermine policy concepts such as a coastal amenity park, Oranmore-Bearna Greenway/Cycleway and Tourism Development in Bearna. The CDP 2022-2028 presents a golden opportunity to zone a 50m coastal strip (**as measured from the foreshore boundary wall**) as coastal amenity lands - promoting a "Metropolitan network of open spaces, parks, green corridors and trails" (MASP 1.9.5) and "enhancement of walking and cycling facilities" (MASP 1.9.7). This will help to reclaim Bearna's identity as a maritime village, increase Bearna's attractiveness as a tourism destination, and enhance community amenities.

6. The Flood Risk Management assessment must be viewed in the context of global warming, changing storm patterns and recent NASA report/prediction of a decade of high tide flooding in the 2030's due to changing lunar orbital patterns. We notice that there are a number of existing buildings, including those resulting

from recent planning awards, within the area designated Flood Zone A. In addition, the Village Centre coastal strip designated Flood Zone B/C (difficult to differentiate on the map) has experienced sporadic storm damage within the last decade (including a large fishing vessel cast over the boundary wall) - which would further support, for safety reasons, a minimum building setback of 50m from the foreshore boundary wall (see front page bottom photo – showing removal of fishing craft **from circa 40m inside the foreshore boundary wall** after 2014 Atlantic Storm).

7. We strongly support Policy Objectives BSMP 16 and 17 with respect to the Irish Language as we believe these objectives will help to reinforce the linguistic heritage of Bearna for future generations.

8. With respect to BMSP 10 – “prepare and publish an Architectural Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan for the existing ACA along Pier Road, including Pier Road, the adjoining lands and structures identified and Bearna Pier”. This is a matter of some urgency as considerable development has already occurred in this area which reduces conservation options going forwards. The Pier Road area has been a key part of the Bearna Village’s identity and heritage and remains a village focal point though its amenity value and traditional fishing village ambiance is under threat from ad hoc development and traffic congestion.

Yours sincerely,



**Pobal Bhearna Committee**

**On behalf of the Pobal Bhearna Committee**

Pobal Bhearna, a community-wide residents' group, believes that all development work in the Bearna area should be compatible with the character, heritage and needs of the Village.

**Visit our website at [www.pobalbearn.com](http://www.pobalbearn.com)**