

Opportunity: Gort Eco Park & Amenity Hub

Opportunity for Gort

The proposed Gort Eco Park and Amenity Hub at the Gort River Walk Entrance presents 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. Wander through Gort's historic streets, and the town's vibrant market square and local shops. Take while to visit cultural landmarks like Coole Park, 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, 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.



Figure 1 : Restored Flowerdale house - cafe and interpretive centre

Driving factors

Gort Town becomes a key access point for the Galway-Dublin Cycleway which is accessible for pedestrian/cyclists from then they get off the train. There are facilities nearby to hire bicycles and storage area.

Gort Town becomes a 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 and the next few years offer an opportune time to redevelop this site from wasteland to a vibrant amenity and offer recreational facilities to the community and visitors.

The river walk becomes a focus for more community social activities including meeting for a coffee with the sound of the river in the background.



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:

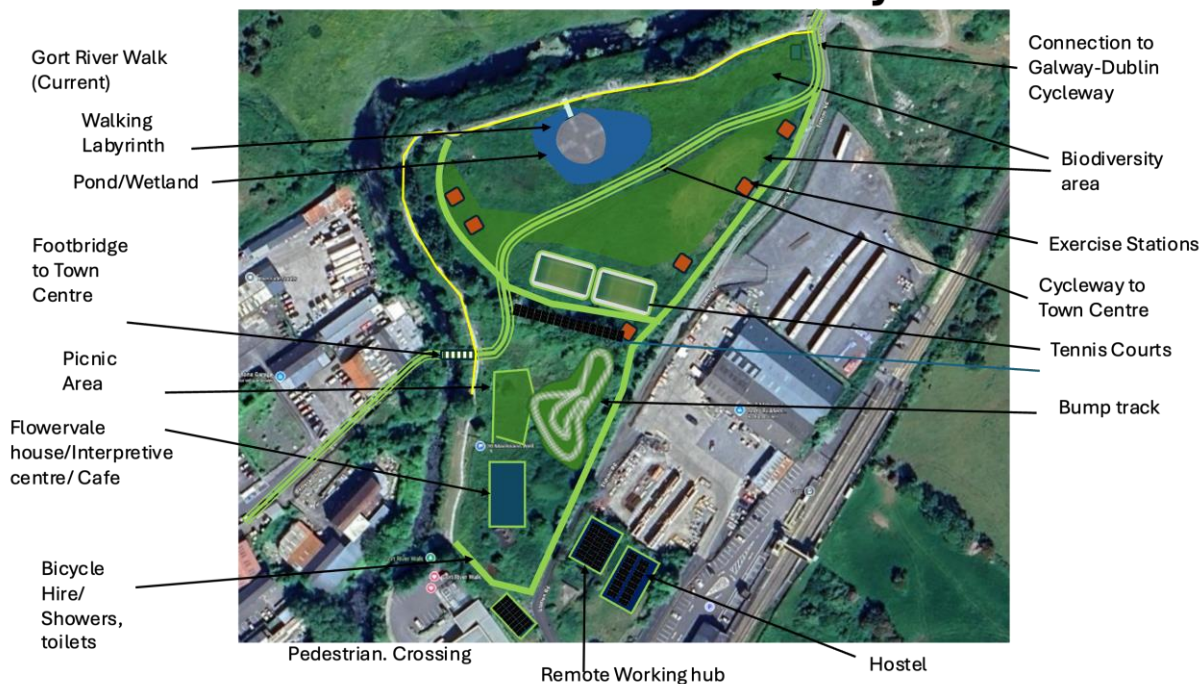
- Cyclists & Eco-Tourists – Using the Galway-Athlone Cycleway as a low-carbon way to explore the region.
- Remote Workers & Digital Nomads – Seeking co-working spaces with strong transport links.
- Cultural & Heritage Visitors – Visiting Coole Park, Thoor Ballylee, and the Kiltartan Gregory Museum.
-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

Nearby Attractions & Experiences:

- 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.

Key Aspects of the Development

Gort EcoPark and Amenity Hub



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

Cycle Hub & Facilities

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

Greenway & Connectivity

- Direct access to the Galway-Athlone Cycleway, making Gort a prime stop for cyclists.
- New pedestrian and cycle bridge connection to Gort, part of the Gort Town Centre First Plan, enhancing accessibility between the hub and town centre.
- Upgraded walking and cycling paths linking the hub to the Gort River Walk and local amenities.

Community & Recreational Spaces

- Restoration of Flowervale House as a community café and interpretive centre, celebrating local heritage.
- An workshop area that can be used by the community school for Biodiversity 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.

- Exercise stations
- Tennis courts, or other sports facilities
- An inclusion of a walking Labyrinth for meditative walking
- Service buildings (requested by Gort River Walk Development Group) to store equipment for trail maintenance.
- 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.
- A remote working hub, allowing commuters and digital nomads to work in a scenic, vibrant and well-connected location.

Heritage & Environmental Features

- Restoration of Flowervale house with interpretive centre for Gort River and burren lowlands 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.

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.

Benefits to the Town & Region

The Gort Ecopark & 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.
- New Business & Employment Opportunities – The café, bike rental shop, and hostel will create jobs and support the local economy.
- 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 self-sustaining energy systems, reducing carbon emissions.
- No 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.
- Inclusion of a Walking Labyrinth & Green Open Spaces – Encourages nature engagement and mindfulness activities.
- Repurposing a Former Landfill – The remediation of the municipal landfill into a vibrant green space transforms wasteland into a thriving ecological and recreational area.

Community Well-Being & Recreation

- New Social & Recreational Facilities – The picnic areas, sports courts, children's pump track, and exercise stations create inclusive spaces for all age groups.
- 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, reinforcing Gort as a heritage tourism hub.
- Interpretive Centre for the Burren Lowlands – Educates visitors on local ecology, heritage, and the significance of the Gort River.

This project repurposes underutilized 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), the Gort Local Area Plan (LAP) 2025-2031, and the Galway County Development Plan (GCDP) 2022-2028, reinforcing 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 .
- 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 .

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 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, 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.

Encouraging Social Interaction

- The public plaza and café space 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 underutilized 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 this area is on or near a landfill undergoing remediation, it can be considered for funding, particularly if the project aligns with environmental rehabilitation, economic regeneration, or sustainable development goals. Several funding mechanisms may support such an initiative:

Urban & Rural Regeneration Funds

- Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) – Supports town and city renewal projects, including brownfield redevelopment.
- Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) – Funds 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.

3. EU & Climate Action Funds

- EU LIFE Programme – Supports environmental restoration, biodiversity, and waste management projects.
- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) – Funds 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.

Missed Opportunity

The current LAP Draft does not identify any ‘**Opportunity Sites**’ that are Amenity-focused and we think that this is currently a missed opportunity. Our concept proposal indicates that there is high-value opportunity to :

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

While we recognise that there is a Community Lands, (**Opportunity site 4**), this is a distinctive opportunity and 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, especially the ERDF funds.

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

Key Recommendation

The key recommendation is therefore to :

- Present this as distinctive **Opportunity Site 5 – Ecopark and Amenity Hub**.
- 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.

Conclusion

The Gort Ecopark & Amenity Hub 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 underutilized land, restoring the river walk, and leveraging strategic funding sources, Gort will become a model for sustainable rural development in Ireland.

The next steps involve securing key funding sources, formalizing planning designations, and ensuring the inclusion of this site as a designated “Opportunity Site 5 – Ecopark & Amenity Hub” in the Local Area Plan. This initiative will unlock the full potential of Gort, creating a lasting legacy for residents and visitors alike.

Support

This proposal is strongly supported and endorsed by:

- Gort River Walk Development Group
- Burren Lowlands CLG
- Gort Town Team