



Oifig an
Rialaitheora Pleanála
Office of the
Planning Regulator

30th July 2021

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

Re: Draft Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028

A chara,

Thank you for your authority's work in preparing the draft Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 (the draft Plan).

The Office of the Planning Regulator (the Office) wishes to acknowledge the considerable work your authority has undertaken in the preparation of the draft Plan against the backdrop of an evolving national and regional planning policy and regulatory context. In particular, the Office wishes to acknowledge the high standard of presentation and layout of the draft Plan and supporting documents, which provide a clear and concise strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of the county.

The Office would also like to congratulate the local authority on its recent success in securing funding through the Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) and Rural Regeneration and Development Fund (RRDF) for substantial projects at Oranmore railway station and for the Portumna vision 2030, both of which demonstrate the council's commitment to delivering on compact growth.

More recently, you will have been notified of the Ministerial Letter to Local Authorities of 18/12/20 relating to Structural Housing Demand in Ireland and Housing Supply Targets, and the associated section 28 guidelines: Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning. The planning authority will, therefore, be required to review the draft Plan, and in particular the Core Strategy, in the context of this guidance which issued subsequent to the draft Plan. Further advice in relation to this matter is provided below.



As your authority is aware, a key function of the Office is the assessment of statutory plans to ensure consistency with legislative and policy requirements relating to planning.

The Office has evaluated and assessed the draft Plan under the provisions of sections 31AM(1) and (2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act) and this submission has been prepared accordingly.

Recommendations issued by the Office relate to clear breaches of the relevant legislative provisions, of the national or regional policy framework and/or of the policy of Government, as set out in the Ministerial guidelines under section 28. As such, the planning authority is required to implement or address recommendation(s) made by the Office in order to ensure consistency with the relevant policy and legislative provisions.

Observations take the form of a request for further information, justification on a particular matter, or clarification regarding particular provisions of a plan on issues that are required to ensure alignment with policy and legislative provisions. The planning authority is requested by the Office to action an observation.

A submission also can include advice on matters that the Office considers would contribute positively to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. The planning authority is requested by the Office to give full consideration to the advice contained in a submission.

Overview

The draft Plan is being prepared at a crucial time following the preparation of the National Planning Framework (NPF) and the NWRA Regional Assembly Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES), which seek to promote the rebalancing of regional development in a sustainable manner. The draft Plan has proactively embraced many of the challenges and opportunities identified in the NPF, the RSES and the Galway MASP, by establishing a strong strategic approach to compact growth through the settlement hierarchy, by directing population and economic growth to the MASP, key towns and settlements in a balanced and measured way.



In particular, the plan-led approach to the key development areas within Galway metropolitan area, demonstrate the planning authority's commitment to an urban design led approach to provide vision for new growth areas. This is commended and will provide solid foundations for the development of the City, county and region.

Likewise, the provision of concise policies, land use maps and identification of opportunity sites for a significant proportion of the county's smaller towns and rural villages, will support the National Strategic Objective for strengthening rural economies and communities.

The Office commends the planning authority for inclusion of a comprehensive transport strategy and the renewable energy strategy. Both these elements will be beneficial in contributing to the climate action agenda.

The Office has, however, identified a number of areas which require further consideration in order to more fully align the development framework for the county within the current national policy context. In particular, the population and housing targets in the draft Plan are not consistent with the *Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2020)* and must be reviewed.

Likewise, further coordination of the objectives of the plan with Galway City Council will also be required, particularly with regard to the delivery and prioritisation of infrastructure and the integration of land use and transportation. This coordination will be fundamental to achieving compact growth, avoiding suburban sprawl along the fringes of the City boundary, and providing a sustainable settlement and transportation strategy for the metropolitan area.

The planning authority will also be aware that the Office's evaluation of the plan is required under section 31AM(2)(a) to address, in particular, matters within the scope of section 10(2)(n) of the Act in relation to climate change. The definition of appropriate settlement boundaries, the zoning of lands for specific uses (section 10(2)(a) of the Act), and the establishment of guiding policies for smaller towns and settlements are vital tools available to the planning authority in promoting effective



integration of land use and transportation policies and addressing the requirements of section 10(2)(n).

It is within this context the submission below sets out 17 recommendations and 12 observations under the following ten themes:

Key theme	Recommendation	Observation
Core strategy and settlement strategy	1, 2 and 3	1 and 2
Development approach	4 and 5	
Compact growth, regeneration and tiered approach of zoning	6, 7 and 8	3
Rural housing and rural regeneration	9 and 10	4
Economic development and employment (including retail)	11 and 12	5, 6, 7 and 8
Sustainable transport and accessibility	13 and 14	9, 10 and 11
Climate action and renewable energy		
Flood risk management	15	
Environment, heritage and amenities	16 and 17	
Implementation and monitoring		12

1. Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy

1.1 Core Strategy

The Office notes that the plan estimates that the total population of County Galway at the end of the plan period will be 211,100 persons having regard to the NPF roadmap, the population targets in the RSES for Galway City (115 ,000 persons by 2031), and applying a pro rata basis for the life of this plan. However, the assumptions made in relation to the growth during the period from 2016 – 2020 appear to have over-estimated the population growth (10,444) compared to what can

reasonably be deduced from the CSO housing completion data (2668 units). This may explain the misalignment between the population projections and the housing supply targets discussed below.

As you are aware the Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning, Guidelines for Planning Authorities were published in December 2020 and set out the latest required methodology for determining housing supply targets for the plan period. These Guidelines, published by the Minister under Section 28 of the Act, provide a focussed approach to the delivery of just over 33,000 new households per annum nationally, in line with government policy and in accordance with the NPF targeted population growth and the distribution of this growth across our counties.

The Guidelines specify that it will be necessary to demonstrate the manner in which the Core Strategy and other elements of the plan are consistent with the NPF 50:50 City housing demand projection scenario identified by the ERSI (Appendix 1 Table 20) subject to the methodology set out in Section 4.0 of the Guidelines and adjusted for your plan period. While it is noted that a Housing Supply Target (HST) has been identified in the Housing Strategy and HNDA prepared by your authority, the Core Strategy and Settlement Strategy are not aligned with the Guidelines.

This will require a review of the draft Plan in order to plan to provide housing to the extent identified in the Guidelines and the accompanying Circular in the core strategy, settlement strategy and associated identification of development potential and zoning exercises.

At present the information presented in the Core Strategy tables is based on population only and does not provide full clarity in relation to population growth between 2016 and beyond the plan period. In particular, the Core Strategy table does not include a population projection for each settlement which includes the period between 2016 and the start of the plan period, and projecting beyond the plan period to 2031 as required by section 10(2A)(f)(v)-(vi) of the Act.

Having regard to the constraints of working with population data due to the gap between the census, a clear focus on housing numbers which are recorded on a

quarterly basis by the CSO is a better tool in terms of monitoring the implementation of the plan and delivering homes within your county.

It is noted that the HST methodology set out in the Housing Strategy and HNDA concludes that a total of 10,258 homes (Table 37) will be required for the plan period. From its initial review, the Office would consider that both this figure and the requirement for an additional 7,469 housing units (Table 2.9), are below the HST as calculated in accordance with the methodology.

Clarification and review of the Core Strategy is therefore required in order to demonstrate consistency with the Section 28 Guidelines and to provide a robust strategy for the plan period. The Office would welcome a discussion with the planning authority in this respect if it was considered to be of assistance.

Recommendation 1 – Core Strategy

The planning authority is required to review the proposed Core Strategy (including settlement strategy and associated identification of development potential and zoning exercises), Housing Strategy and HNDA, and to revise as necessary to comply with the requirements of the Section 28 Guidelines: Housing Supply Target Methodology for Development Planning and Appendix 1 of the accompanying Ministerial Letter to Local Authorities of 18/12/20.

1.2 Settlement Strategy

Settlement Hierarchy

The Office welcomes the overall approach and structure of the settlement hierarchy. This comprises seven logical tiers that have clearly been informed by the NPF and RSES. Likewise it is considered that the settlement hierarchy reflects the significance of Galway city and underscores those areas identified for growth in the MASP.

The key towns identified in the plan are consistent with the settlement strategy in the RSES, which designates Tuam and Ballinsloe as key towns for County Galway. Furthermore, the strategic potential of Athenry, particularly in terms of industry and investment, is reflected in its position within the third tier of the settlement hierarchy.

While it is observed that the population of Loughrea is larger than that of Athenry, the Office accepts that Athenry warrants an elevated position and this is considered consistent with the RSES.

The Office also welcome the terminology used in the hierarchy which is clear and consistent with the broader policy framework.

At the middle-lower tiers, there is logic and rationale to the categorisation of the 'self-sustaining towns' with population ranging c.3000-6000persons; 'small growth towns' with population c. 1000-2000persons and the smaller growth villages, population ranging from c.200-800 persons.

In relation to the lowest tier (level 7) 'Rural Settlements and Rural Countryside', however, the Office notes that the number of listed settlements exceeds 100 and lacks the coherence and focus of the upper tiers. Some of these settlements are sizeable and benefit from physical infrastructure, local services, education, social and community facilities, whereas others are more similar in nature to rural nodes serving a broader dispersed rural population.

The plan policy seeks to support these rural villages a sustainable approach to maintaining the rural economy and population and as a viable alternative to one-off housing in the open countryside. However, the Office is concerned that a blanket approach to the inclusion of rural villages of significantly different size, scale and function within tier 7, may undermine or dilute the overarching policy intention to support rural villages.

The Office considers, therefore, that further consideration should be given to this tier in order to identify larger rural villages with capacity to absorb development, and to support rural regeneration within these areas. Village maps to define the settlement boundaries for those large settlements would also be of assistance.

This could include mapping, policy objectives and/or a village design statement approach to proactively manage and support growth of a more select group of



settlements. Such an approach would also complement the rural housing strategy, discussed further below.

Observation 1 – Settlement Hierarchy (tier 7)

Having regard to NPO15, RPO 3.4 and the Section 28 Rural Housing Guidelines, which support renewal and regeneration of rural areas, the planning authority is requested to revisit the approach to the designation of rural settlements/rural villages within tier 7 (level 7) of the settlement hierarchy. Consideration should be given to the following:

- (i) An internal hierarchy of settlements, villages and/or rural nodes within level 7
- (ii) Inclusion of village maps to define the settlement boundary for those settlements of larger scale or with greater capacity to absorb development
- (iii) Inclusion of, or a policy to prepare, village design statements to map and outline specific local objectives for these settlements e.g. village core area, focal spaces, amenities, local features, opportunity sites etc.
- (iv) A composite map showing the location of all rural villages in level 7.

Distribution of Growth

From the evaluation under taken by the Office, it is considered that in terms of proportionality the distribution of growth across the tiers of the settlement hierarchy is consistent with the overarching policy framework NPO's 3, 6,7, 9, 16, 18a and RPO 3.1.

In particular, the NPF and RSES promote a shift away from a 'business as usual' development scenario towards more compact growth. This is reflected in RPO 3.1 which seeks to '*develop urban places of regional scale*', including by delivering significant compact growth in Key Towns. This is of particular relevance to County Galway given the designations afforded to Tuam and Ballinsloe as key towns and Athenry as a place of strategic potential. The development of urban areas within the MASP, and in particular the key strategic growth areas of Garraun and Briarhill, is also consistent with the RSES.



The Office also welcomes the planning authority's focus on the management of urban generated growth in rural areas under urban influence and the focus on rural towns and villages (Tiers 4-6) as an alternative to urban generated housing in open countryside.

Where revisions to the Core Strategy are required on foot of Recommendation 1, the Office considers that the focus of growth should continue to be directed to the MASP area and the Key Towns where homes can be provided with access to public transport, services and amenities in manner that is consistent with national and regional policy for compact growth and sustainable transport and settlement strategies.

1.3 Residential Land Supply

Table 2.9 of the draft Plan identifies the housing land requirement based on 6,564 housing units in the towns and villages (tiers 1-6). The Office has, however, concerns that the density assumptions used are based upon a range from 30 units per hectare in the top tiers, to 11 units per hectare in tier 6 (with the exception of Garraun).

While it is reasonable for the draft Plan to provide a tailored approach to the consideration of residential densities for settlements depending on their size and character/function, it is nonetheless important that it complies with national policy and higher residential densities within the ranges advised in the section 28 guidelines on *Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas* (2009)¹ to support national and regional policy objectives for compact growth, particularly in tier 1, 2 and 3 settlements. The Office notes that it is a requirement of section 10 2(A) that the Core Strategy is consistent with specific planning policy requirements of section 28 guidelines. In addition the 'Guidance Note on Core Strategies' clearly reinforces that density assumptions used in the preparation of a Core Strategy should be consistent with the Planning Guidelines for Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2009).

¹ Circular letter NRUP 02/2021 also applies

Having regard to the guidelines on *Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas* (2009) (SRDUA), with the exception of Gort the settlements in tiers 1-3 of the hierarchy in County Galway constitute 'large towns' which are defined as those with a population greater than 5000 persons. Therefore the density targets should reflect those set out in chapter 5 of the guidelines, being not less than 30 units per hectare; 35-50 units per hectare generally and 50 units per hectare on transport corridors.

The two specific growth areas within the MASP, Briarhill and Garraun, in particular provide the opportunity for greater density in order to support the delivery of infrastructure (including rail at Garraun) and provide for sustainable communities.

In this context and having regard to the guidelines, the Office considers that there is scope for the core strategy to apply higher density assumptions that are more closely aligned to the guidelines, in the interests of promoting compact growth. Thereby ensuring consistency with the guidelines and requirements of the Act.

The planning authority's attention is also drawn to the requirement in sections 10(2A)(c) and (d) of the Act that Core Strategies include information on the area of land both (a) already zoned and (b) proposed to be zoned for residential use **or** a mix of residential and other uses. This is necessary to satisfy legislative requirements and to demonstrate consistency with the *Guidance Note on Core Strategies* (2010) and avoid over-zoning of land to meet the housing targets.

The Office welcomes the inclusion of the final column in table 2.9, which sets out the number of units in each settlement required within built up footprint of the settlements. This is considered broadly consistent with compliance with NPO 3, RPO 3.1 and RPO 3.7.2 in relation to compact growth and will assist in monitoring the plan. However, the Office notes that the text states 'up to 30%' whereas NPO 3 sets the 30% requirement as a minimum.

It is further noted that RPO 3.3 sets out a similar policy for new housing in rural areas, and requires that 'at least 20%' of all new housing in rural areas is required on brownfield sites. This requirement is relevant for tiers 6 and 7 of the settlement hierarchy and the small growth town of Headford, within tier 5.



In conclusion the Office considers that the core strategy is required to be reviewed and amended in accordance with Recommendation 1, and also to comply with the provisions of the relevant statutory and policy provisions.

Recommendation 2 – Residential Land Supply

In accordance with sections 10 (2A) (c) & (d) and 10 (2C) (b)(ii) of the *Planning and Development Act 2000* (as amended) and having regard to the *Guidance Note on Core Strategies 2010*, the planning authority is required to amend core strategy Table 2.9 as follows:

- (i) to ensure that the density assumptions used to calculate the housing land requirements for the plan period are consistent with requirements of 10(2A), Guidance Notes and the section 28 *Planning Guidelines for Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas (2009)* and/or are justified on an evidenced based approach and site survey analysis;
- (ii) to include the area and potential housing yield of both residential zoned lands and other lands zoned for a mixture of residential and others uses, as required by Section 10(2A)(c) and (d);
- (iii) to clearly state that a minimum of 30% of residential units shall be located within the built up footprint (in lieu of 'up to') as required by NPO 3; and
- (iv) to include for the requirement of RPO 3.3 to provide 20% of rural housing on brownfield sites, which applies to Headford and tiers 6 and 7 of the settlement hierarchy.

1.4 Housing Strategy and HNDA

The Office commends the planning authority for undertaking a Housing Need Demand Assessment in advance of the formal requirement to do so under the recent Section 28 guidelines. The Office acknowledges that the development management chapter (15) and place-making chapter (3) also provide supportive policies on the inclusivity, universal design, and provide for a range of uses on residential lands, including nursing homes and homes for the elderly.



Traveller Accommodation

In the 2016 Census County Galway had the highest Traveller population (2647) within the State. The Office notes that section 2.5 of the draft Plan includes policies arising from the housing strategy to address the specialised housing requirements of certain sectors of society, including Objective SH3.

The Office considers, however, that the draft Plan does not sufficiently respond to the requirements of the Traveller community identified in the Galway Traveller Accommodation Programme (TAP). For example, the Galway TAP identifies the need for the following:

- 2-3 additional group housing schemes, to accommodate 10 families.
- Four new culturally appropriate traveller accommodation schemes to accommodate c. 25 families.
- Seven casual halting sites.

Therefore, the Office considers that the inclusion of a single policy of general support for the TAP does not adequately provide clear and implementable objectives for the provision of accommodation for Travellers. The land use zoning maps also do not appear to indicate the location of lands to provide for such accommodation, as required under section 10(2)(i) of the Act.

Recommendation 3 - Traveller Accommodation

Having regard to the requirements of section 10(2)(i) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, (as amended) the planning authority is required to include objectives in the plan for the provision of accommodation for Travellers, and the use of particular areas for that purpose in accordance with the legislative requirements under section 10(2)(i) of the Act.

Age Friendly Housing

The RSES aims to make the Northern and Western Region an Age-Friendly region (RPO 7.13) and specifically RPO 7.14 requires the designation of lands in

development plans for nursing homes and sheltered housing. While it is acknowledged that there is general policy support for this specialist housing, the planning authority should consider providing a more focussed policy in accordance with RPO 7.14.

Observation 2 – Age Friendly Housing

The planning authority is requested to include a more proactive strategy in relation to the provision of nursing homes and sheltered housing in order to ensure consistency with RPO 7.14.

2. Development Approach

2.1 Galway Metropolitan Area

The ambition for the growth of Galway to drive regional development in the NFP and the preparation of the MASP as part of the RSES provides both a challenge and opportunity for the County. It is crucial that in meeting these challenges the county development plan provides a framework for compact growth and a sustainable land use and transport strategy rather than continued suburban sprawl and car-dependant development. Collaboration and co-operation between the planning authorities in terms of their spatial plans will be crucial in terms of prioritising investment in infrastructure and delivering on the vision for Galway set out in the MASP.

In this respect, the Office welcomes the inclusion of section 1 in volume 2, which demonstrates the strong linkages at a strategic level to the City. Having regard to section 9(4) of the Act, the Office considers that the draft plan, together with the forthcoming plan for the City, provides the opportunity to co-ordinate the objectives of the respective development plans. This is particularly the case in relation to land use zonings, identification and delivery of infrastructure priorities, and sustainable transportation on the edge of the City boundary.

The Office also considers that there is a need for more detailed co-ordination in terms of the integration of land use and transport policies for the connected metropolitan settlements of Gaurran, Ardaun (City) and Briarhill.



In relation to Briarhill and Garraun, the Office has concerns as to whether the use of a non-statutory framework plan is an appropriate vehicle to guide the development of such an extensive land bank in a MASP location. Consideration should be given to the preparation of a Local Area Plan which would provide for detailed consideration of infrastructure capacity or constraints and their resolution, and better integration of sustainable transportation (not only rail, but also bus, cycling and walking modes).

Recommendation 4 – Co-ordination with Galway City Council

Having regard to section 9(4) of the Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended) and to the requirement for a sustainable settlement and transportation strategy under section 10(2)(n), the planning authority is required to coordinate the objectives of the development plan with those of Galway City Council to:

- (i) review land use zonings on the edge of and contiguous to the boundary of the city council in accordance with the principles of compact growth; and sequential approach to development, and tiered approach to zoning; and
- (ii) prepare a joint Local Area Plan or at the least a joint strategy to form part of the draft Plan, including a transport strategy and/or local transport plan for the connected metropolitan settlements of Gaurran, Ardaun (City) and Briarhill. This should also involve engagement with all other relevant stakeholders, particularly TII, NTA, IW, and OPW.

A further observation of the Office in relation to the overall approach to development relates to the acknowledgement that certain policy objectives will require joint actions with the City Council, examples include the preparation of a joint retail strategy, height study and the airport masterplan. It is important, however, that these actions have firm timelines to ensure they are delivered swiftly and are available to guide development within the life of the Plan (these are discussed further in the following sections Recommendations 8 & 12 and Observations 6 & 7).

Specifically in respect of the airport site, it would appear that the council has pursued a vision of the lands with certain state agencies (IDA, Enterprise Ireland) but does

not appear to have had meaningful engagement with other key service providers including NTA, TII and Irish Water, for example. This should be a priority focus for any future development of the masterplan for these lands as required by the RSES (RPO 3.6.6).

2.2 Other Settlements

The Office welcomes and commends the work of the planning authority in preparing land use zoning maps and policies for the settlements within the MASP. In addition the Office acknowledges and welcomes the extensive work on the tier 5, small growth towns, and tier 6, small growth villages and the inclusion of concise land use maps and policies.

Together the suite of plan policies and land-use mapping serve to communicate a coherent plan-led approach to the development of the county.

In respect of the middle tiers 2-4 the office welcomes the intention to prepare Local Area Plans for Ballinasloe and Tuam (Tier 2), for Athenry (Tier 3), Gort and Loughrea (Tier 4) and acknowledges that these are required by the Planning Act, with exception of Gort where the population does not exceed 5000 at this time.

However, it is considered that there is greater scope through the plan to set the framework for the future local area plans. Indeed, the updates to the core strategy required under Recommendations 1 and 2 will assist in establishing a number of key parameters for the future preparation of the LAPs for these settlements. The inclusion of a plan or map, in the CDP, to define the boundary of the future LAPs would provide a stronger policy implementation framework. This is particularly important in the context of compact growth and regeneration (NPOs 3, 6, 7; RPOs 3.1, 3.2 and 6.27), and demonstrating that sustainable settlement and transportation strategies for urban and rural areas are being promoted under the development plan, as required under section 10(2)(n). This is particularly important in the context of compact growth and regeneration (NPOs 3, 6, 7; RPOs 3.1, 3.2 and 6.27), and demonstrating that sustainable settlement and transportation strategies for urban and rural areas are being promoted under the development plan, as required under section 10(2)(n).

Recommendation 5 - Development Approach to settlements in tiers 2-4 of the settlement hierarchy

The planning authority is required to supplement section 2.4 of the plan, the settlement hierarchy and/or volume 2 of the plan (settlement plans) to provide greater clarity and transparency in the delivery of the core strategy objectives for the towns in tiers 2-4 of the settlement hierarchy and to clearly set out how the objectives in section 10(2) of the *Planning and Development Act 2000* (as amended) are to be achieved in the interim and pending the adoption of Local Area Plans for these settlements. At a minimum the planning authority is required to prepare maps and stronger policy objectives, identifying strategic objectives for each settlement consistent with NPOs 3, 6, 7 and RPOs 3.1, 3.2 and 6.27. In this regard, the settlement plans should include a settlement boundary, compact growth area, core retail area, key regeneration sites, strategic employment sites, constraints such as flooding, sustainable mobility objectives and relevant key future priorities.

3. Compact Growth, Regeneration and Tiered Approach to Zoning

3.1 Compact Growth

The Office welcomes the strong policy commitment to compact growth as the first key principle of the draft Plan's core strategy.

Moreover the Office congratulates the planning authority on securing funding through the URDF and RRDF for substantial projects at Oranmore railway station and for the Portumna vision 2030, both of which demonstrate the council's commitment to delivering on compact growth.

The Office also welcomes the inclusion of land use zoning maps for the tier 1-MASP settlements, tier 5- small growth towns and tier 6- small growth villages. It is acknowledged that the zoning maps annotate town centre infill/residential sites, phase 1 and phase 2 within the MASP settlements (Tier 1) Baile Chláir and Bearna².

² Except Garraun and Briarhill which are greenfield sites.

Likewise in relation to the tier 5-6, the policy and maps identify 'Opportunity sites' which include a brief description, site area and potential of the specific sites. The Office acknowledges the significant resource and commitment that has gone into the preparation of maps which are a key tool for achieving the plans objectives in a general sense. The planning authority should include on the land use zoning maps those lands that will contribute to the compact growth target and accommodate infill/brownfield development. This should form part of the response to Recommendation 6 (TAZ) below.

3.2 Regeneration

The Office also welcomes Policy CGR11 (strategic sites) and CGR12 (opportunity sites) in chapter 3 which identify the policy intention to establish a database of strategic brownfield and infill sites and to 'facilitate, promote and encourage re-development'. These policies are to be welcomed but would benefit from more precise detail on the timelines and detail on the action that will be undertaken by the planning authority, in order to more effectively monitor their implementation.

For settlements in tiers 2-4, which will be subject of future LAPs, the plan does not include this level of detail. However, as discussed in Recommendation 5 the approach and framework for those plans should be clearly set in the CDP, including the establishment of parameters for compact growth.

Observation 3 – Active Land Management

Having regard to NPO 6 and RPO 3.2, RPO 3.3 and RPO 3.6 on Regeneration, Brownfield and Infill Development within the RSES, the planning authority is requested to:

- (i) set out a clear timeline and strategic approach to carrying out the Active Land Management approach identified in policies CGR11-12 of the plan, including measurable targets and timelines against which the implementation can be monitored and measured; and
- (ii) stipulate that the database established under CGR11, will include briefs specifically for brownfield sites zoned for development, which will be

continually renewed and updated as opportunities arise through active land management process.

3.3. Tiered Approach to Zoning

The Office notes that at the outset of the draft Plan the overall approach to the Core Strategy identifies that *‘all lands identified for development are in accordance with the “Tiered Approach to Land Use Zoning” as set out in the NPF’*.

NPO 72a requires planning authorities to apply a standardised tiered approach to differentiate between tier 1 lands (serviced land) and tier 2 lands (lands that can be serviced during the plan period) for all land use zoning types. This requires the planning authority to make a reasonable estimate of the full cost of delivery of specified services (at draft and final plan stages) in a report (NPO 72b), the methodology for which is set out in Appendix 3 of the NPF. Lands that cannot be serviced within the plan period should not be zoned (NPO 72c).

Chapter 3 and in particular table 7.10 the draft Plan provides a high-level overview of the critical infrastructure for the core strategy. It is not sufficiently comprehensive or detailed to distinguish between lands and are fully serviced and lands that have outstanding requirements for specific service/infrastructure provision, but which can feasibly be provided during the plan period.

It appears that much of this information required in an infrastructural assessment as set out in the methodology for TAZ in the NPF is available and has informed the plan. However, this needs to be provided in a format consistent with Appendix 3 of the NPF. By way of example the planning authority is advised examine how other development plans presented their infrastructural assessment, in this regard both Louth and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Councils are good examples.

Recommendation 6 – Tiered Approach to Zoning

Having regard to NPO 72a, NPO 72b and NPO 72c, the planning authority is required to elaborate and expand upon its infrastructural assessment, as necessary, to fully address the status of all lands proposed to be zoned under the

plan in accordance with the methodology for a tiered approach to land zoning under Appendix 3 of the NPF, relating to existing development services, *i.e.* road and footpath access including public lighting, foul sewer drainage, surface water drainage, water supply and/or additional service capacity. It must also include a reasonable estimate of the full cost of delivery of the required infrastructure to the identified zoned lands at draft and final plan stages of the plan making process.

The written infrastructural assessment is required to determine which lands are tier 1 serviced zoned lands and which lands are tier 2 serviceable zoned land (*i.e.* they can feasibly be serviced during the plan period to accommodate development).

Lands which cannot be serviced during the period should not be zoned or taken into account in the core strategy for calculation purposes.

3.4 Specific Residential Zonings

The Office notes that a number of anomalies have been identified in the environmental report. In particular, the Office notes that three residential land use zonings are included in the plan, which lack sufficient planning justification and would undermine the achievement of compact sustainable development. This would be contrary to achievement of the national strategic objective on compact growth, contrary to a tiered approach to zoning (NPO 72) and the principles of a sequential approach to development as required by the Section 28 guidelines for Development Plans. A fourth residential parcel also contravenes the flooding guidelines [this is addressed under Recommendation 15 (vii)].

The sites are:

- A. Oranmore – dezoning of residential land (as per current LAP) to amenity, on the basis of flood risk where none exists.
- B. Oranmore - inclusion of a substantial parcel of land for residential phase 2 to the south of the town, where there is no planning justification.
- C. Oughterard – inclusion of lands to the east of the town, accessed from the Pier Road, for residential phase 1 where there is no planning justification.

Recommendation 7- Residential Zonings

Having regard to the national and regional objectives for compact growth NPO 3c and RPO 3.2; the requirement under the ‘*Development Plan Guidelines for Planning Authorities*’ (2007) that a sequential approach to the zoning of lands is applied and the tiered approach to zoning outlined in NPO72 the planning authority is required to:

- (i) Oranmore – omit the inclusion of a substantial parcel of land for residential phase 2 to the south of the town on the Maree road.
- (ii) Oughterard – omit the inclusion of lands to the east of the town, accessed from the Pier Road, for residential phase 1.
- (iii) adjust the zoning of lands to the north of Oranmore, accessed via Carrowmoneash road, and revert to the existing established residential land use zoning, unless there is evidence to corroborate that the site is flood zone A or a sound planning justification for this amendment.

3.5 Development Management Standards

Height - RPO 3.6.3 of the RSES expressly supports the preparation of a building height study for Galway MASP. The Office acknowledges policy CGR7 which outlines the intention to identify appropriate locations for increased building heights which will be considered as appropriate, but considers that a timescale should be provided in addition to a commitment to coordinate with the City County in relation to the MSP area. The Office also considers that this plan presents an opportunity to identify areas within the county, especially the MASP, where increased height would be appropriate in accordance with SPPR1 of the *Urban Development and Building Heights Guidelines (2018)*.

Density – The Office further notes that policy CGR5 of the plan seeks to ‘*prepare a density typology study as considered appropriate within the lifetime of the development plan as resources permit.*’ In the intervening period from adoption of this plan and the undertaking this density typology study it is unclear as to the implications for any development proposal coming forward. A study of this nature



should be undertaken as a priority in order to avoid either (a) development being hindered or (b) inappropriate development occurring. In the context of the government's policy on climate action, the housing crisis and imminent 'Housing for All' policy together with the Project Ireland (NPF and NDP), either of these outcomes would not be acceptable.

It is also observed that the draft Plan's development management standards (table 15.1) appears to introduce a maximum density of 50 d.p,h without any evidence basis and fails to include reference to transport corridors or cross-reference to the Section 28 guidelines. The Office is concerned that this table could be misinterpreted and could undermine the achievement of appropriate densities.

Car Parking Standards - The NPF signals a move away from rigidly applied, blanket planning standards in relation to building height and car parking in favour of performance based standards (NPO 13) where appropriate. Chapter 15, development management standard 32, sets out the policy in respect of car parking. It is acknowledged that reference is made to a flexible approach for town centres, infill sites and sites adjacent to transport corridors or civic parking. Dual usage in mixed-use development and allowances for former site uses are also provided for. However table 15.5, does not clearly state that the standards are maximums.

Recommendation 8 - Development Management Standards

Having regard to NPO 3, 6, 13 and 35, the planning authority is required to:

- (i) amend Table 15.1 residential density so that it is fully consistent fully with the residential densities set out in the Sustainable Residential Development in Urban Areas Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012) and Circular NRUP 02/2021 Residential Densities in Towns and Villages;
- (ii) Amend policy CGR7 (building height) such that it is specific and measurable and makes reference to engagement with the City Council; and

(iii) Review the car parking standards in table 15.5 in consultation with the National Transportation Authority and clarify that the standards (which may be revised) are maximum.

4 Rural Housing and Rural Regeneration

4.1 Rural Housing Policy

The Office notes the plan's objective to 'support the role of rural areas in maintaining a stable population base through a strong network of villages and small towns', and this consistent with NPF's national strategic outcome to strengthen rural economies and communities.

The HNDA in the plan states that the percentage of one-off housing units relative to the overall number of housing units permitted for the period of the current plan 2015-2019 was 40%. The HNDA extrapolates that if that trend continues for the life of the forthcoming plan that would equate to almost 4,400 single one-off houses in the open countryside. Applying an average household size of 2.5, this would equate to 11,000 population out of the stated 18,655 population growth envisaged by the plan. Clearly this would not be consistent with the NPF or RSES and the planning authority are to be commended for taking measures through the core strategy and settlement hierarchy to shift away from the business as usual approach and to provide for a rebalancing and a more sustainable pattern of development.

The rural housing policy approach is therefore considered to be evidence-based, reasonable and generally consistent with the legislative and policy context, including NPO 15 and 19 and the *Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2005).

The success of achieving the core's vision and focussing development the towns and villages within the settlement hierarchy will, however, depend on the degree to which development is actively managed within the lower tiers and rural settlements. In turn, it will depend on the strength of the rural housing policy for the open countryside.

In this regard, the Office considers that there are aspects of the rural policy that should be further refined in order to achieve the council's strategic policy set out in the core strategy.

Identification of areas under urban influence

Consistent with NPO 19, the plan identifies two rural area typologies, areas under strong urban influence and structurally weak areas. The areas under strong urban influence is aligned with the 'Metropolitan Area and the Galway County Transport Planning Strategy' (GCTPS), which stretches to An Cheathrú Rua in the west, to Tuam in the North and to the county boundary south of Gort.

The Office acknowledges, that the areas are informed by the Galway County Transport Planning Strategy, which is a strong evidence base and identifies the influence of Galway city. However, this approach may not fully reflect the influence of other large settlements (such as Athlone or Nenagh). Likewise, it may not fully reveal the influence of the rail infrastructure, which connects Ballinasloe to Athlone Regional Growth Centre and the east of the country.

Recommendation 9- Rural Map /NPO 19

Having regard to NPO19, the planning authority is required to review, in an evidence-based approach, the rural area typologies map in respect of the area to the east of the county which may be within the influence, or catchment, of larger settlements, such as Athlone and Nenagh. Furthermore, the influence of the rail infrastructure on the east of the county, which connects Ballinasloe not only to Galway city but to the midlands and eastern areas of the country should also be considered further.

4.2 Rural Housing Criteria

The Office generally considers that the rural housing criteria are consistent with NPO 19 and the Rural Housing Guidelines subject to the following considerations:

- Policies RH1 guiding development in Rural Housing Zone 1 (rural metropolitan area), policy RH2 for Rural Housing Zone 2 (areas under strong urban



influence), RH 4 for Rural Housing Zone 4 (Landscapes classification 2, 3, and 4) all make reference to demonstrable economic and/or social links. NPO 19 clearly however refers to demonstrable economic or social need. The continuation of the term 'links' a feature in the current plan, is not consistent with NPO 19 and is likely to result in confusion.

- Similarly in relation demonstrable economic or social need, it is noted that Policy RH 19, removes the requirement entirely to demonstrate any 'intrinsic links' to an area where lands have been in family ownership for a period of 20 years or more. This is also contrary to NPO 19.
- The Office welcomes, that the plan defines and clarifies what is meant by a rural housing need and clearly sets out what is expected of an applicant in complying with the criteria. However, it is noted that this definition is not applied to RH1 (rural metropolitan area) nor to parts 1(a), (c) or (d) of RH2 (areas under strong influence). This should be rectified to ensure that only those with a housing need are accommodated in the rural areas in keeping with NPO 19 and the Section 28 guidelines on sustainable rural housing.
- As highlighted in the environmental report and noted as a feature of the current CDP, policy RH2 (areas under strong urban pressure) included an 'urban fringe' area to the towns of Gort, Loughrea, Athenry and Tuam. The Office considers that to omit this aspect of the policy would be inconsistent with the stated intention of the plan policy to promote compact growth and would be contrary to NPO19.
- Through the process of making the plan RH15 policy was altered to broaden the qualifying criteria from 'an immediate family member' to 'family members including nieces and nephews'. It also opens up the geographical areas where backland development is permissible. The dilution of this policy will have the effect of broadening both the locations where backland pattern is acceptable and remove the restriction on the number of sites/family members that qualify. This is internally conflicted with the strategic intentions of the plan to manage

and direct growth away from the open countryside and reverse previous trends.

Recommendation 10 - Rural Housing Criteria

Having regard to NPO 15, 19 and the Sustainable Rural Housing Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2005), the planning authority is required to revise section 4.6.3 rural housing strategy to:

- (i) amend rural housing policies RH1 (Rural Housing Zone 1 - rural metropolitan area), policy RH2 (Rural Housing Zone 2 - areas under strong urban influence) and RH 4 (Rural Housing Zone 4 - Landscapes classification 2, 3, and 4) to ensure that the specific criterion for consideration is linked to demonstrable social or economic 'need' (not 'links' as stated in the Draft Plan);
- (ii) include the requirement to demonstrate 'substantiated rural housing need' within policy RH1 (rural metropolitan area) and parts 1(a), (c) and (d) of RH2 (areas under strong influence);
- (iii) reinstate the concept of protecting the urban fringe of of Gort, Loughrea, Athenry and Tuam and illustrate the relevant areas on the rural map; and
- (iv) reinstate the development management criteria in RH15 in respect of backland development to narrow the qualification to one family member and to restrict this pattern of development to areas where it already an existing/historical pattern of backland or cluster development

4.3 Rural Economy

The Office acknowledges the rural character of the county and the significance of agriculture to the economic and social viability of rural areas. It is welcome that the plan makes provision for policies to guide rural enterprise(RD1-4), agriculture (AD1-4), agri-diversificaiton (AGD 1), horticulture (HO1-2), forestry(F1-6) and equine industries (EQ1). These polices are equally supported by the inclusion of practical and appropriate development management standards in chapter 15 of the plan.

The Office welcomes the inclusion of policy CD1, which guides small-scale rural enterprises and requires that these locate within existing farm buildings and brownfield sites; this is consistent with RPO 9.3(b).

Section 4.14 addresses mineral extraction and quarries, policy MEQ 1 provides an overarching support for the industry, while policies MEQ2-MEQ4 set out specific policies in relation to the management of sites and long-term rehabilitation once exhausted. The Office considers that these are fair and reasonable, reflective of the guidelines.

However, the draft Plan does not identify or map the location of major deposits as advised by the section 28 ‘*Quarries and Ancillary Activities Guidelines for Planning Authorities*’ (DEHLG, 2004). The NPF highlights the play a key role of the planning process in realising the potential of extractive industries in identifying and protecting important mineral reserves for future use.

In the absence of mapping or identifying these resources through the development plan it will not be possible to safeguard valuable unworked deposits for future extraction. Having regard to the critical role quarries play in the Irish construction industry and to the availability of existing mapped data from the GSI and other agencies / sources, it would be advisable to produce a high level map of mineral resource opportunities and environmental constraints to facilitate a planned approach to mineral resource management in the county to be implemented as part of the plan.

Observation 4 – Quarries Map

Having regard to the provisions of *Quarries and Ancillary Activities Guidelines for Planning Authorities*’ (DEHLG, 2004) and to the important role that extraction activities play in the rural economy, the planning authority is advised to prioritise the identification of major mineral deposits in the development plan, including through mapping as appropriate.



5. Economic Development and Employment

5.1 Employment Zoned Land

The draft Plan introduces a strategic approach to economic development, enterprise and retail development. The plan ensures consistency with the MASP by inclusion of lands at Parkmore, Briarhill and Oranmore and the former Airport as key locations for industry and technology (RPO 3.6.5).

The plan is also consistent with the RSES and duly reflects the opportunity sites and potentials for both key towns and the strategic potential of Athenry.

However, the Office does have concerns in relation to the integration of sustainable transportation objectives and compliance with national roads policy, in designating new employment areas through the LAPs. In this regard, the council's commitment to the implementation of local transport plans (ILUTP2) is welcome and Recommendation 4 will also address these concerns.

The Office acknowledges that global figures are provided relating to the quantum of employment land and targets are set for number of jobs to be created within table 5.1. However, this is not broken down in respect of the land use zoning provided across the settlement hierarchy to achieve/secure the employment targets. It also not apparent from the high level assessment (section 5.5.7) whether lands are serviced (tier 1) or can feasibly be fully serviced within the plan period (tier 2) consistent with the tiered approach to zoning, which requires a more focussed and evidence based approach to zonings in the interest of efficiency and of maximising return on infrastructural investments.

The Office appreciates the need for the planning authority to facilitate employment generating development through zoning sufficient lands, however the following zonings conflict with the principle of compact growth and concerns have been raised through the concurrent SEA process and the environmental report that accompanies the plan:

- Land to the south of Headford zoned for 'Business and Enterprise' is not in accordance with the principle of compact growth, is not contiguous to the



settlement and is a clearly 'leap frogging' other lands. As discussed below [Recommendation 15 Flood Risk– site (iv)], the eastern portion of these lands are also subject to flooding.

- A further site zoned for tourism within Oughterard has no planning justification, is contrary to compact growth and as highlighted in the Environmental Report could result in adverse effects on the environment, including visual impacts.

Recommendation 11 – Land zoned for employment uses

Having regard to the National Strategic Outcome for Compact Growth, the principles of sequential approach to zoning (Section 28 Development Plan Guidelines, paragraph 4.19) the planning authority is required to remove the following land use zonings:

- (i) Business and Enterprise lands zoned to the south of Headford, on the eastern side of the N84 road to Galway; and
- (ii) Tourism lands to the Northeast of Oughterard, accessed from the Pier Road.

Observation 5 – Tiered Approach to Zoning for employment land

Having regard to National Strategic Outcome for Compact Growth, the planning authority is requested to demonstrate in the plan that the approach to zoning of lands for employment throughout the county, has had regard to the requirement to:

- (i) implement the Tiered Approach to Zoning under NPO 72a-c of the NPF; and
- (ii) mitigate climate change through sustainable settlement and transport strategies under section 10(2)(a) of the Act, including future-proofing through more compact forms of development including the prioritisation of locations that are served, or that over the lifetime of the Plan, will be served by the public transport and active travel networks necessary to facilitate sustainable travel.

5.2 Airport Site

The airport site is identified as a key future growth enabler for Galway and RPO 3.6.6 specifically supports the preparation of a masterplan:

The planning authority is commended in taking the lead in the discussion on the future of the airport site, through the preparation of a high-level strategy for this key brownfield site. The Office acknowledges that key actions are identified on foot of this vision include to ‘*Communicate the Opportunity and Vision amongst key stakeholders, and establish consensus.*’

The Office notes that the approach has been discussed with and is supported by the IDA and Enterprise Ireland. It is considered that any further advancement of the concepts for the future development of these lands should be fully informed by sustainable transport principles and engagement therefore with the NTA and TII will be crucial. Moreover the role of the regional assembly and other key stakeholders should be prioritised.

Finally, it is likely that the preparation of plans for this site is likely to take considerable time, given the extensive consultation and the time taken to prepare a masterplan (as per RPO 3.6.6) and it may evolve or change from the vision as outlined. Therefore, in order not to date the forthcoming plan it would be prudent to publish the document separate to the statutory plan.

Observation 6 – Airport site

The planning authority is requested to remove the vision document for the Airport site from the development plan and publish, or make it available, outside of the statutory development plan. This will avoid the plan dating as work progresses on the masterplan in consultation with relevant stakeholders.

In this regard, the planning authority is requested to amend policy EL 4 to clearly indicate that the future masterplan for the area, required under RPO 3.6.6, will be prepared in consultation with all relevant stakeholders and in particular the NTA,

TII and Galway City Council in order to ensure that future development at that site promotes sustainable travel patterns.

This is necessary to ensure that the masterplan is based upon sustainable settlement and transport strategies required under section 10(2)(n) of the Act and can be anticipated to help the planning authority to secure a reduction in energy use and in GHG emissions.

5.3 Retail

The Office welcomes the alignment of the core settlement hierarchy and the ‘Retail Hierarchy’ for the county, and acknowledges the primacy of Galway city within level 1. For avoidance of doubt the Office understands that reference to Galway city is to be taken to mean the city council’s functional area and not the overall MASP area in general. On that basis it is considered that the retail hierarchy as contained in the Draft Plan is appropriate. It is also observed that the settlements within the MASP area are not referenced in the hierarchy, however from an examination of the land use zoning maps and policies in volume two, it is evident there are no aspirations for major retail development at these locations. This should be more clearly communicated in table 5.5.

Policy RET 3 outlines the planning authority’s intention to jointly prepare a retail strategy with the City Council. This collaborative approach is welcome and should be further enhanced by inclusion of a timeframe within which this policy will be implemented.

In relation to core shopping areas, as the retail strategy is a future action, the settlement maps provided do not identify the core areas. This reinforces the need to prepare, in a timely fashion, the joint retail strategy.

Recommendation 12 - Joint Retail Strategy

Having regard to the provisions of the Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines for Planning Authorities Retail Planning, 2012, and in particular paragraph 3.5 ‘Joint or Multi-Authority Retail Strategies’, and retail strategy for the MASP set out at

section 3.6 of the RSES, the planning authority is required to review Policy RET315 and associated retail policies to include additional policy objectives in the draft Plan to:

- (i) address mechanisms and deliverable timelines to ensure that the Joint or Multi-Authority Retail Strategy for the Galway Metropolitan Area will be undertaken with adjoining relevant authorities, and
- (ii) appropriately restrict further retail provision which should be considered as part of the Joint Retail Strategy until such time as that Strategy is prepared.

Observation 7 – Retail

The planning authority is requested to incorporate the following amendments to the retail policy to ensure consistency with the Section 28, Retail Planning Guidelines:

- (i) Table 5.5. should clearly stipulate that level 1 of the retail hierarchy, Galway city, refers to the city council’s functional area and core retail area therein. Thereby making it clear that other areas in the MASP, within the county’s function area are not considered to be level 1 within the retail hierarchy; and
- (ii) Table 5.5. should clearly indicate the intended retail role and the retail functions that will be provided by the settlements of Baile Chláir, Bearna, Oranmore and future growth areas of Garraun and Briarhill.

5.4 Mandatory Objective - Major Accidents Directive [Section 10(2)(k)]

The draft Plan identifies (table 7.11) that there is one upper tier (Chemoran) and one lower tier facility in the county (Tynagh Energy Ltd.), this is supported by policy objectives MAS01-3.

The settlement plan for Oranmore, also provides detail on the Chemoran site, which is located therein, and identifies that there is an 800m consultation zone. Reference is made to map 1A/B and 2A/B; however these were not available and the 800m was not delineated on the land use zoning map. Furthermore it is unclear as to the consultation requirements for the lower tier facility.



Observation 8 – Seveso Sites

The planning authority is requested to clarify in section 7.9.5 of the plan the relevant Health and Safety consultation radii associated with the two Seveso sites located in the county and ensure that these are appropriately mapped within the plan.

6. Sustainable Transport and Accessibility

6.1 Sustainable Transport Strategy

The Office notes the inclusion of the Galway County Transport and Planning Strategy (GCTPS) and the proactive approach to transport and movement by the inclusion of a range of policies. In particular the policy that LAPs for the key towns will be informed by local transport plans (Policy ILUTP 2) is welcome.

However, as discussed in the opening sections, there is greater need to ensure integration between the city and county functional areas for the MASP area and particularly in terms of providing an integrated approach to land use and transportation and compliance with Section 10(2)(n).

In this vein the Office notes the NTA's observations and the need to ensure that there is consistency between the land use and transport planning objective of the plan and the Galway Transport Strategy (GTS), which was jointly prepared by the City Council and the NTA in 2016 prior the NPF, RSES and the establishment of the MASP.

In order to optimise the achievement of climate policies and promote sustainable travel patterns it is necessary that the GCTPS and the transport policies of the plan are reviewed to fully integrate with the GTS.

In the matter of modal shift targets the Office welcomes the inclusion of targets within the CGTPS, however it is considered that stronger and more explicit targets should be provided not only at a county level, but also for towns and villages across the settlement hierarchy.

Finally, having regard to the high rural population base within the county the Office notes and welcomes the inclusion of reference to the ‘Local Link’ rural transport service in policy PT4.

Recommendation 13 – Modal Shift Targets

In order to ensure the effective planning, implementation and monitoring of the development plan requirements under section 10(2)(n) of the Act, the planning authority is required, in consultation with the NTA (and TII), as appropriate, to:

- (i) supplement the plan’s transport and movement policies by including baseline figures for modal share for the overall county to as well as baseline details and targets for settlements. It is recommended that this could best be provided at individual settlement level for the larger settlements, and at aggregate level for tier 6 and 7 settlements and open countryside, of the settlement hierarchy; and
- (ii) provide an effective monitoring regime for the implementation of the planning authority’s sustainable transport strategy and the modal share targets in particular.

Observation 9 – Galway County Transport Planning Strategy

The planning authority is requested to review and update the Galway County Transport Planning Strategy (GCTPS) and associated policies in transport and movement chapter and settlement plans to ensure consistency with the Galway Transport Strategy.

6.2 Rail Network

The county benefits from rail network to the south and east of the country, it is acknowledged that the plan further supports the opening of the western rail corridor route from Athenry, Tuam, Claremorris to Colloney. This is consistent with RPO 6.11 which seeks a review of the West Rail Corridor project.



A further policy objective (PT9) has been included in the plan in relation to the addition of Loughrea to the Western Rail Corridor and for the addition of a commuter route to Galway by linking to either Attymon or Athenry train station. This project did not form part of the Western Rail Corridor review and it is noted that the NTA do not envisage adequate demand at this time.

The Office encourages local authorities to include visionary objectives especially if these are an attempt to promote modal shift and contribute to climate action. Nonetheless, the Office must ensure that the plan is consistent with the current strategic and statutory policy framework and internally consistent. The inclusion of policy PT8, as phrased, is considered to conflict PRP2 of the draft Plan and is unlikely to be achievable within the life of the plan, it should therefore be revised to take account of the current policy context.

Observation 10 – Loughrea Rail Infrastructure

The planning authority is requested to revise the wording of policy PT8 in respect to Loughrea rail infrastructure, to identify that:

- (i) in the first instance, an appropriate feasibility and consultation exercise will be undertaken with the relevant stakeholders (including TII and NTA); and
- (ii) clearly state that the time horizon, if deemed feasible and appropriate, any such infrastructure project will be long term and beyond the life of the plan and the current RSES for the NWRA.

6.3 Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012):

The Office has reviewed the plan in the context of the Section 28 guidelines and having regard to the observations of the NTA and TII. It is considered that there is scope to improve cross linkage between sections within the plan to ensure that the policy on national roads is clear and unambiguous.

A number of key policies and objectives of the plan should be strengthened and enhanced to improve alignment/consistency with the Section 28 guidelines and safeguard the national network.

Observation 11 – Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012)

In order to ensure the effective planning, implementation and monitoring of the development plan requirements under section 10(2)(n) of the Act and consistency with the Section 28 *Spatial Planning and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities* (2012), the planning authority is requested to revisit and strengthen the transport aspects of the following:

- (i) provide the evidence base for the proposed objectives relating to improvements to the national road network as outlined in the Galway County Transport and Planning Strategy (GCTPS); and
- (ii) set out a plan-led approach to the development of the Strategic Economic Corridor and the Atlantic Economic Corridor concepts with due consideration of the Section 28 Ministerial Guidelines.

6.4 Access to National Roads

The Office considers that there is scope to strengthen and expand on the policy objectives for access to national roads, as per the section 28 guidelines, and to ensure that the policy on national roads is clear and unambiguous. In this regard, it is noted that policies NR1- NR3 are not fully consistent with the guidelines or based on a plan-led approach. Furthermore, policy RH16, for rural housing, and DM standard 27 need to ensure adherence to and alignment with the provisions of the guidelines.

Recommendation 14 - Access to National Roads

The planning authority is required to re-examine the policy objectives across the plan for national roads to ensure that the plan is consistent the Spatial Planning

and National Roads Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2012). In this regard, the planning authority should strengthen and expand the policy objectives as follows:

- (i) strengthen the Core Strategy Objectives to reflect strategic objectives relating to safeguarding the strategic function of the existing national road network, and associated junctions;
- (ii) supplement policies NR1-3 to ensure consistency with the guidelines and a plan-led approach in order to safeguard the strategic capacity of national road junctions; and
- (iii) revise policy RH16, for rural housing, and DM standard 27 to ensure adherence to and alignment with the provisions of the guidelines.

7. Climate Action and Renewable Energy

7.1 Climate Action

The Office welcomes the inclusion of a dedicated chapter on climate action and the detailing of the actions and objectives relevant to the achievement of reduced energy demand and reduced anthropogenic GHG emissions, and to the necessity to adapt to climate change.

The draft Plan's overall strategy, in terms of the focus of growth on the Metropolitan Area and on the key towns and villages, is consistent with the promotion of sustainable settlement, in addition to the NPF and the RSES. However, as noted above, there are elements of the transportation and movement policy objectives that require review to align with the spatial aspects of the plan. In addressing Recommendations 1, 4, 5, 7 and 11 above, the planning authority should consider the requirement to promote sustainable settlement and transport strategies for urban and rural areas 10(2)(n).

7.2 Renewable Energy

The Office acknowledges and welcomes the inclusion of a specific detailed Local Authority Renewable Energy Strategy (LARES) for the county.



The Office commends the planning authority for providing a coherent, rational and well-balanced renewable energy strategy covering a wide range of renewable energy types and providing a justified approach to the consideration of onshore wind energy projects through the application of sieve analysis. This is considered to be best practice and is consistent with the *Wind Energy Development Guidelines (2006)*.

The Office welcomes the inclusion of the estimated contribution of the planning authority to the Government's renewable energy targets, which is consistent with the SPPR of the *Interim Guidelines for Planning Authorities on Statutory Plans, Renewable Energy and Climate Change (2017)* and includes reference to the relevant national renewable energy targets, set out in the *Climate Action Plan 2019*.

Moreover the Office welcomes the inclusion within the LARES of a consistency map to illustrate the renewable energy mapping between adjoining counties and County Galway. This demonstrates a high degree of consistency and potential opportunities for renewable energy synergies.

8. Flood Risk Management

A *Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA)* has been carried out by the planning authority and is appended to the draft Plan with relevant policies included in chapter 14. This has been reviewed by the Office and by the OPW which has highlighted a number of inconsistencies with the guidelines published by the Minister for Housing Local Government and Heritage under Section 28 of the Act titled *The Planning System and Flood Risk Management, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (DECLG and DECHLG, 2009)* and *Circular PL2/2014*.

In particular, the plan-making Justification Test does not appear to have been applied correctly as it addresses each settlement as opposed to a review of existing zoned land and does not carry out all five parts of the justification test as required under *Circular PL2/2014*.

The policies in the plan (FL8) also enables development in flood zones A and B, subject to a development management justification test (Box 5.1 of the guidelines) and site specific FRA. This is inconsistent with the Guidelines which requires that zoned land must be subject to a Justification Test at the plan stage (section 4.23 of



the guidelines). Where the zoning fails to meet the requirements of the Justification Test it should not be zoned for development.

The planning authority should review the SFRA in light of the above, and in particular to examine the following where inconsistencies with the Guidelines have been identified:

Settlement	Site/location	Flood Risk
An Spidéal	Opportunity site 1 (retail/commercial)	(iii) Climate change scenarios, (iv) Spidéal may be vulnerable to coastal erosion and overtopping.
Clifden	Community Facilities site to the west of the town	Flood zone A.
Garraun	Part of residential (phase 1)	Potential risk in climate change scenarios.
Headford	'Business & Enterprise' (BE) and 'Community Facilities' (CF) zonings south of the town centre and east of the N84, Galway road.	Flood Zone A.
Kinvara	Opportunity site (OPR-KI 1)	At risk to coastal flooding with climate change. Vulnerable to wave overtopping.
Maigh Cuilinn	N59 Moycullen Bypass at two locations;	Flood Zone A.
Oranmore	Areas zoned Residential (Phase 1) west of N67 and east of Maree Road.	At risk of flooding in climate change scenarios
Oughterard*	Lands to southwest of Glan road and adjoining Carrowmanagh Park zoned Residential (Phase 1)	Flood Zone A and B.
Portumna	Residential infill areas at Shannon Road, south of the town.	At risk of flooding in climate change scenarios

*The SFRA notes that this zoning was the subject of a member's amendment in the making of the plan.

Recommendation 15 – Flood Risk Management

Having regard to the detailed requirements of The Planning System and Flood Risk Management, Guidelines for Planning Authorities’ (DECLG and DECHLG, 2009), section 28 guidelines, the planning authority is required to review the Strategic Flood Risk Assessment, in consultation with the OPW, to ensure consistency with the said Guidelines.

The land use zoning objectives under the draft Plan are also required to be reviewed and amended, as appropriate, having regard to the revised SFRA, and in accordance with the application of the sequential approach, and the Justification Test where appropriate, and having regard to potential climate change effects. The land use zonings at the following specific locations should be reviewed and revised where consistency with guidelines cannot be demonstrated:

- (i) An Spidéal- Opportunity site 1 (retail/commercial)
- (ii) Clifden- Community Facilities site to the west of the town
- (iii) Garraun- Part of residential (Phase 1)
- (iv) Headford- ‘Business & Enterprise’ and ‘Community’ facilities’ zonings located to the south of the town centre and east of the N84, Galway road.
- (v) Kinvara- Opportunity site (OPR-KI 1)
- (vi) Maigh
Cuilinn- N59 Moycullen Bypass at two locations.
- (vii) Oranmore- Areas zoned Residential (Phase 1) west of N67 and east of Maree Road.
- (viii) Oughterard- Lands to southwest of Glan road and adjoining Carrowmanagh Park zoned Residential (Phase 1).
- (ix) Portumna - Residential infill areas at Shannon Road, south of the town.



9. Environment, Heritage and Amenities

The Office notes the introduction of Policy WW9 to require a minimum 100m setback for all new wastewater treatment plants in An Ceathrú Rua. As identified in the Environmental Report, there is no policy basis or scientific evidence for this policy. At present untreated waste is discharged to the sea. The plan's core strategy also allocates an additional 60 dwellings for Ceathrú Rua, which would further add to the loading and exacerbate the negative impacts on the environment contrary to Section 10(1D) of the Act which requires that that the development objective in the development plan are consistent with the conservation and protection of the environment.

Irish water have advanced plans to develop a waste water treatment plant at this location (1000p.e.) and the introduction of a constraint without policy or environmental justification may prejudice the delivery of this key infrastructure.

Recommendation 16 - Cheathrú Rua WWTP

Having regard to Section 10(1D) and Section 12(11) of the Planning Act, the planning authority is required to remove policy WW9 and reference to the minimum 100 metre separation distance for all new wastewater treatment plants in An Cheathrú Rua.

The planning authority is to be commended for its comprehensive policy on built and natural heritage, including a Landscape Character Assessment and architectural conservation areas, and the Galway Gaeltacht and Islands. Section 10(2)(o) of the Act, however, also requires public rights of way to be located on both a map and on a list appended to the development plan. It appears that the plan does not include objectives for public rights of way nor are there any maps to illustrate any existing or proposed. This is consistent with the findings of OPR's recent Case Study Paper on this subject matter. The planning authority's attention is drawn to examples of good practice identified in that Case Study Paper.

Recommendation 17 – Public Rights of Way

Having regard to the requirements of Section 10(2)(o) of the Act, the planning authority is required to include written policy together with maps identifying public rights of way.

9.1 Environmental Reports

The Office considers that there has been strong integration between the environmental reporting and the draft Plan preparation process. The inclusion of an analysis of the Member's amendments in the Environmental Report is welcome and is consistent with the strategic environmental assessment process in accordance with the SEA Directive and the Section 28 ministerial Guidelines.

In relation to Appropriate Assessment, the Office notes that the NIR conclusion refers to the absence of significant effects following implementation of mitigation measure. The Planning authority's attention is drawn, however, to the requirement that the plan will not adversely affect the integrity of a European Site in view of the conservation objectives for the site.

10. Implementation and Monitoring

The Office welcomes the inclusion of section 1.7 Implementation and Monitoring, which indicates the planning authority's intention to securing and monitoring the implementation of the strategies, policies and objectives of the Plan. However, in view of the constraints on resources it is unlikely to be practical for the planning authority to monitor the implementation of every policy or objective and therefore a more strategic approach to monitoring will be required to facilitate the planning authority in carrying out effective monitoring.

The Office would suggest that implementation monitoring would be best to focus on the anticipated or proposed key outcomes of the plan, as determined by the planning authority. These may relate to the core strategy (e.g. population growth and housing delivery), compact growth, rural housing, urban and rural regeneration (e.g. projects implemented under URDF and RRDF), the sustainable transport strategy (e.g. modal

share, preparation of Local Transport Plan), climate action (e.g. renewable energy development, projects), biodiversity and landscape (e.g. status of designate habitats) and others.

The inclusion of an Infrastructural Assessment Report (Recommendation 6) will be a further resource to enable monitoring of the effectiveness of the plan. These and other similar quantifiable indicators could be used to determine whether key outcomes have been achieved.

Observation 12 – Implementation and monitoring

Having regard to the commitment of the planning authority to securing and monitoring the implementation of the strategies, policies and objectives of the Plan, the Office would advise the planning authority to consider how section 1.7 Implementation and Monitoring could be amended and enhanced to ensure that any monitoring is strategic in nature and practical to be carried out.

10.1 Extent of Documents

Notwithstanding the large scale of the county and the very considerable task of preparing a development plan, the Office commends the planning authority on the relative conciseness and usability of the plan, this will promote active engagement with the public.

The format approach employed in the draft Plan, including the principle volumes 1 and 2 together with several detailed appendices, is good and it can be seen that there had been significant effort to cross reference within the plan and not to restate other publications. This is welcomed.

The Office considers that there may be scope to further streamline the main volumes of the plan by publishing the detailed content of the Airport vision and Briarhill and Garraun Framework Plans as separate volumes or publications; since the detailed development of these sites are likely to evolve over the life of the plan and these are likely to be superseded.



Summary

The Office requests that your authority addresses the recommendations and observations outlined above. As you are aware, the report of the chief executive of your authority prepared for the elected members under section 13 of the Act must summarise these recommendations and the manner in which they will be addressed.

At the end of the process, your authority is required to notify this Office within five working days of the decision of the planning authority in relation to the draft Plan. Where your authority decides not to comply with the recommendations of the Office, or otherwise makes the plan in such a manner as to be inconsistent with the recommendations made by this Office, then the chief executive shall inform the Office and give reasons for this decision.

Please feel free to contact the staff of the Office in the context of your authority's responses to the above, which we would be happy to facilitate. Contact can be initiated through *plans@opr.ie*.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Marie O'Connor

Deputy Regulator and Director of Plans Evaluations