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Submission on Galway City Development Plan 2023 – 2029 – Galway Chamber

Galway Chamber welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the ‘Our City, Our Future’ process as set out in the Issues Paper as issued by Galway City Council. Further to your meeting with J.P. Gilmartin, President and Kenneth Deery, CEO of Galway Chamber, we are committed to each stage in the preparation of the Development Plan and look forward to your engagement with the committees of Galway Chamber as part of the next steps in the process.

Our ambition, as the ‘Voice of Business in Galway’, is to see Galway city and county develop in a sustainable way that: (i) helps us achieve the UN sustainable development goal targets; (ii) delivers on enterprise development ambitions by creating and retaining high value sustainable jobs attracting foreign direct investment; (iii) provides affordable urban housing options; (iv) supports the development of our 3rd level institutions; (v) promotes a culture of innovation and research; and (vi) secures further investment in the development of our world class tourism, cultural and creative industries.

To support all this activity, we need to reorient how we move through and around our city, much of which has been set out in the Galway Transport Strategy, launched in 2016.

We welcome this timely initiative by Galway City Council and look forward to playing a role in the preparation of the Development Plan 2023 – 2029 (the ‘Plan’). We acknowledge that you are at the early stages of developing the Plan and that consultation to date is focussed on the Issues Paper.

We have reviewed the Issues Paper and the following comments are intended to assist you in the further formulation of the policies and objectives to be met and addressed in the next

stage of publication. Our comments are set-out in line with the sections of the Issues Paper, as follows:

Project Ireland 2040 – NPF 2040

As you are aware, the Northern and Western Region has been downgraded to a Transition Region falling behind the country's other two regions. A recent report from our colleagues in the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) comments:

“Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the performance of the region's economy had already been experiencing notable difficulties. In 2019 alone, household income within the region continued to remain well below the State norm, while above average commercial vacancy rates were recorded in most of its counties and key settlements. Up to the end of 2019, the region had been unable to attract as many high valued jobs compared to the Irish and European norm. Furthermore, the region's deprivation rate has continued to rise in recent times; to the point where one in five people living in the region are experiencing enforced deprivation as of 2019.”

Project Ireland 2040 recognises that cities create opportunities and play a key role in creating jobs, enhancing market competition and improving liveability. We are of the opinion that the City Development Plan needs to directly acknowledge the fact that Galway is a Region in Transition and use to its advantage the increased level of EU funding available to such a region. This gives Galway a competitive advantage over other cities in Ireland in securing funding for much needed infrastructure projects.

NPF – Growth Enablers

Consideration should be given to the inclusion of the following Growth Enablers:

- Development of the Port as a marine transport and renewable energy hub
- Park & Ride facilities
- Commitment to an Acute hospital
- Creating more innovation and incubation hubs for start-ups which will enable growth and expansion opportunities in both local and global markets

Galway Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP)

The MASP does not address any infrastructure requirements outside the current city boundaries but suggests significant population growth in areas such as Claregalway. Based on our review, the Plan does not appear to address any transport solutions for these and other developments outside the current city area and Ardaun. Consideration should be given to this in the development of the Plan.

The MASP is a broad document, however, the final version of the Plan needs to put detail and enabling mechanisms in place. The process is currently at issues paper stage so currently it's

about including broader issues that can be fleshed out by November when the draft Plan is produced. For now, we need to ensure that broader issues such as infrastructure and water and waste are identified which enable development to take place.

Consideration should also be given to the adoption of a Sustainable Urban Development (SUD) approach, as advocated by the EU, with the Development plan as a living document which can flex, contract or vary as the strategy evolves.

Population Growth & Housing

(Commentary on the Plan, Narratives and Key Questions)

- Need more overt commitment to plans for Harbour district development to include housing as a component of mixed development.
- The impact of COVID on the City Centre has been devastating leaving a growing number of empty units. Yet, there is not enough commitment in the Plan to revitalising the City Centre through mixed development including housing, small enterprise incubation hubs, Work from Home hubs etc., even though the Plan identifies “response to the impact of COVID on our communities” as one of its major challenges.
- Housing delivery could be accelerated by providing 24x7 ‘Working from Home Hubs’ in the City Centre thus reducing the need for the inclusion of a ‘home office’ in new builds (more houses/apartments – same footprint)!!
- The Plan will need to support choice, affordability and sustainability. This means addressing barriers such as building costs, unit density and unit types being driven by actual data rather than historical demand. Flexibility in planning permissions allowing for the development of multi-use buildings rather than single use.
- How are we addressing an aging population? Appropriate residential housing in both city and suburbs needs ‘Inclusion’ as a key element.

Economic Development, Employment & Enterprise

(Commentary on the Plan, Narratives and Key Questions)

- The Plan narrative needs to be more focused on Innovation Hubs – not just Technology but also Film/Creative economy, Maritime, Renewable Energy, small enterprise start-up, Food, e.g. Indoor Food Market, etc.
- Plan needs to give strong consideration to economic growth across all socioeconomic sectors. Better access to a variety of Education offerings will lead to greater economic prosperity and help redress the issues of poverty. Reskilling will be a foundation stone for economic growth especially with the forecast growth in the over 65 population.
- In the wake of COVID (including online–sales impact as acknowledged by the Plan) the retail sector cannot be the go-to solution for economic development, employment and Enterprise in our City Centre. An alternate real estate ‘use strategy’ for vacant city centre units is needed to support the development of enterprises of all sizes.

- We need to create an innovation culture which supports risk takers and removes barriers to growth and facilitates establishment and failure of new enterprises with key learnings from both experiences, captured and shared.
- Pockets of socioeconomic disadvantage need targeted localised educations (Further Education programs not necessarily 3rd level) and service supports. Why are we building large single tenure social housing estates?
- The NDP clearly identifies ‘Enhanced hospital facilities and healthcare services’ as a growth enabler for Galway City. There is no indication that this will be a component of the Plan.
- Broadband plans need to be more ambitious, covering wider areas with faster speeds in both city, the Metropolitan Area and county.
- How do we attract more FDIs into the West? More importantly, how can we scale home-grown start-ups to become successful and support more Irish IPOs?

Transport and Sustainable Mobility

(Commentary on the Plan, Narratives and Key Questions)

- Enhanced Regional Accessibility is one of the NPF Strategic Outcomes but, with the possible exception of the GCRR, this does not appear to have been addressed. As the capital of the region (NWRA or AEC), citizens throughout the region need to have easier and faster access to the services (e.g. hospitals, council, etc.), workplaces, amenities, education opportunities, etc. The GTS stops at or near the city limits and does not extend even to the rest of the Metropolitan Area.
- Consideration should be given to the application of the ‘15 Minute City’ model.
- Current Plan talks about Electric vehicles. The Plan needs to look (i) inward to all public service vehicles and (ii) Galway City Council should add the stipulation for all service providers, that they sub-contract to, to have a fully electric fleet.
- Needs more detail around Climate Action, as well as pedestrian and cycle modes of transport for a growing community.
- Talk of the Port being an important Transport facility needs to be considered in terms of sustainability both environmentally, socially, recreationally and liveability – not just transport.
- Not enough commitment/vision in the Plan to closing the City Centre to private vehicles prior to 2029.

Built Environment and Placemaking

(Commentary on the Plan, Narratives and Key Questions)

- Keep the focus on:
 - Galway Public Realm strategy
 - Medieval Port City that is easily traversed
 - Walkable and disability friendly city

- Elder Living
- Prioritise the Lived Environment over the Built Environment by using operation/management driven housing development and not architect driven development. Adopt a place-based approach rather than one size fits all.
- How does the Plan reflect a City which has a variety of green and blue spaces within walking distance of the city and suburbs?

Green Network and Biodiversity

(Commentary on the Plan, Narratives and Key Questions)

- Involvement of the enabling public is key to success, e.g. the positive impact of public involvement in the Tidy Towns.
- In relation to Sports facilities, every neighbourhood does not require their own dedicated facilities. This turns neighbourhoods into Ghettos. Appropriately located community (vs. neighbourhood) municipal Sports complex would be more appropriate.
- What is the plan with regards to marine based sports facilities and its positive impact on the indigenous population as well as tourism?
- Consideration to the provision of a Green-Corridor to facilitate movement of indigenous wildlife (similar to the Bat Bridge on the M17).
- Is there an opportunity to create sustainability focused / green start-up innovation hubs?

Climate Action

(Commentary on the Plan, Narratives and Key Questions)

- The Plan needs to acknowledge and integrate elements of the EU Green Wave Deal. This crosses many of the pillars e.g. District Heating Strategy for Galway City, ringfencing of EU Emission Trading System credits generated in Galway for sustainable city development.
- Galway needs to put in place a circular economy strategy.
- Community based retrofit subsidised projects for the mitigation of historic climate action.
- An adoption of the One Planet Living principals for all new construction.

Community, Culture and Education

(Commentary on the Plan, Narratives and Key Questions)

- Need more emphasis on further education, community-based reskilling, apprenticeships, etc.
- Develop metrics to capture the societal and economic benefits to the city of these three areas and use them to develop policies and investment.

- A focus on health and activity will benefit a population of all ages, attract more people to the region, and encourage active retirement.
- Is there inclusivity for all ages? Are youth interests being met (e.g. skate parks) as well as an aging population?

Energy and Infrastructure

(Commentary on the Plan, Narratives and Key Questions)

- Need a commitment to a more significant offshore wind generation capacity.
- Circular economy. Include Offshore Renewables as envisaged by the EU Green Deal.
- Biogas energy generation.

Environmental Assessments

(Commentary on the Plan, Narratives and Key Questions)

- Why is a proportionate approach not adopted to these assessments which sees flexibility at the heart of proposed mitigation actions? Currently, these assessments can significantly delay or stop much needed projects which support and deliver on the long-term objectives for Galway.
- More focus needs to be put on flood risk – this is a major risk for business and people alike. In the event of a Port relocation, the existing dock gates and dock basin should be considered as part of the solution to Galway’s flood defences.
- How can the local community contribute more to environmental initiatives?

We look forward to your future engagement with the committees of Galway Chamber and working with you on the formulation of the Plan as it moves forward in line with the timeline as set out on pages 6 and 7 of the Issues Paper. As always, we are available to assist in whatever way possible. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any requirements in this regard.

Yours sincerely,
Galway Chamber



J.P. Gilmartin
President