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Comhairle Chontae na Gaillimhe Galway County Council

8th February 2019

To: Director of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly

RE: Galway County Council's Observations on the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Regional Assembly

A chara,

Galway County Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Draft Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) that was published on the 19th November 2018. The themes and layout of the Draft RSES are closely aligned with the National Planning Framework 2040 (NPF 2040). It must be acknowledged that the region is substantial and varied in terms of geographic, economic and social characteristics. The identification of Galway as the key economic driver of the region is aligned with the National Planning Framework, but other areas appear to be considered in a more substantial way than Galway.

The new Galway Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan (MASP), encompasses the administrative area of Galway City and extends to the settlements of Bearna, Baile Chláir and Oranmore in the county. It is considered that this regional strategy is an opportunity for the area to build on key strengths to ensure the future prosperity of the city and wider region. As previously conveyed, Galway County Council has concerns relating to the content, layout and structure of the Galway Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan. Attached in appendix A is a revised Galway Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan that follows the broad parameters of the strategic outcomes as outlined in the NPF 2040. It is considered that the content of the document as published reflects large tranches of the current Galway City Development Plan 2017-2023, rather than been an overarching statement of policies and objectives. It should also be stated that in relation to the boundary of the Galway Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan, there is a lack of clarity, as to the criteria used to determine same.

In considering the Galway MASP, it must be considered that the issues pertaining to other areas where a city or large town spills over an administrative boundary into an adjoining area, are not replicated to the same

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extent as within Galway. There are no significant retail developments in the county area competing with the city retail attraction and offer. Although numerous towns provide a residential location for commuters who travel to work in the city (including Athenry, Baile Chláir, Maigh Cuillin, Bearna, Oranmore, Oughterard, Headford, Tuam Loughrea, Gort and Ballinalsoe), there is no overspill of residential development across the boundary between the city and the county.

The only location of employment overspill is at Parkmore and is very much contained to the existing IDA land holding at this location. Infrastructure provision is co-ordinated between the two local authorities on an ongoing basis. Mutton Island WWTP provides service to county development. The proposed East Galway Main Drainage Scheme will provide service to city development. Agreements are in place for the authority to deliver each piece of infrastructure such as N6 Galway City Ring Road (N6GCRR), Tuam Road Bus Corridor etc.

Therefore, the somewhat unique characteristics of Galway and the existing position must inform the Galway MASP. The Galway MASP must set out a clear vision which identifies and supports future infrastructural requirements which outlines the growth to be accommodated within the MASP area and it should be clear how the level and location of this growth will serve to support Galway in its role as a regional driver.

The Local Authority welcomes the reference in the draft RSES to Ballinasloe and Tuam as Key Towns and the role that they play in the county. In addition, the reference to Athenry is also welcomed and its unique location along the Dublin-Galway rail line and it is strategically located along the Strategic Economic Corridor. There is significant potential for these towns to develop further to accommodate future residential and employment uses.

Whilst the Galway Metropolitan Area Strategic Plan, forms a large part of this submission, a review of the remainder of the draft RSES document was also undertaken. The general Growth Ambitions as identified are broadly acceptable. In relation to *Growth Ambition 1-Economy and Employment-Vibrant Region* it is considered that there should be greater emphasis on the potential of the region including identification of the economic drivers in the region and where the potential exists to develop these further. The sub regions identified and the global trends in relation to the attraction and retention of high end industries are noted however there should be greater emphasis on the attractiveness of Galway in relation to its potential to expand and grow. The tourism potential of Galway has not been fully exploited and

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there should be greater emphasis on the natural, cultural and physical attributes of the region. It is considered that there should be greater emphasis on the potential of the greenways (Dublin-Clifden greenway) and the islands adjoining the western seaboard in raising the tourism industry as a niche market.

The renewable energy section of the document identifies this sector as a potential growth area. It is considered that there should be greater reference to offshore and tidal wave energy. Along with the tourism potential of the city and county it is considered that the Agri-Food sector as outlined in the draft document could explore further the full potential of the region. For instance, the Galway region has had a number of success in terms of agri-food awards such as being designated the European Region of Gastronomy 2018. This award indicates the success of the county and region and has focussed attention on the vital role of the food industry in the West of Ireland. Reference to this award and other similar innovative accolades in the region should be identified. There is currently a €4 million investment in a food and innovation campus in Athenry. The *BIA Innovator Campus* is predicted to create a potential 360 jobs in over 40 businesses in the food and drinks industry. It is considered that this innovative industry should be referenced in this section of the document to demonstrate the potential of the county and region in developing this important sector of the economy.

The marine industry has historically played a significant role in the economy of the country. There is an existing port in Galway city and at Ros a Mhíl. In recent years this has evolved with more research and innovative sectors being developed within the industry. To this end the inclusion of the Marine Industry and reference to the potential of Galway Port and Páirc na Mara is welcomed. The success of the Marine Institute located in Rinville, Oranmore should be acknowledged as well as the work being carried out in the *Ryan Institute in NUI Galway* in developing this sector of the economy. It is envisaged that Páirc na Mara would also contribute substantially to the expansion and progression of the marine industry along the western coastline. Consideration should also be given to referencing the forthcoming *National Marine Planning Framework*.

The med-tech industry and development of the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Services is extremely important to the economy of Galway and it is considered that the potential of these industries has not been fully developed in this section.

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In relation to the *Growth Ambition 2-Environment-Natural Region* it is considered that there should be greater emphasis placed on the unique landscape of the region and what these landscapes can provide for all sectors of society. The narrative and regional policy objectives are noted however further expansion of these are required to exploit the full potential of the unique environment that we are situated in.

In relation to the *Growth Ambition 3-Connectivity-Connected Region*, due to the location of the county and region when considered against the location of Dublin, connectivity within and to the county is of paramount importance. The inclusion and reference to the *Galway Transport Strategy (GTS)* is welcomed, as this strategy is pivotal in the provision of transport infrastructure in the city and the areas surrounding the city boundary. The success of a transport network in the form of public transport initiatives and road network will ensure that the city and immediate environs will increase its attractiveness to attract visitors and industries to the area. The inclusion of the N6 Galway City Ring Road (N6 GCRR) and the N59 Moycullen bypass is welcomed as a regional policy objective. It is suggested that Baile Chláir bypass should also be included as an objective. The rail network in terms of its importance to the future growth of the area should also be included, which would include support for the improvements of the rail network generally and the dualling of the tracks between Galway and Athlone.

In relation to the *Growth Ambition 4-Quality of Life-Inclusive Region*, it has been acknowledged that the region has numerous attributes that contributes to a robust economy, diverse population, abundant natural assets and sense of place. It is considered that this section should build on these attributes and tangible goals included in order for the region to further develop and improve the quality of life for all residents/visitors to the region. The supply of housing, community and social infrastructure is key to improving the quality of life of citizens. The Local Authority considers that it is vital that the supply and location of jobs and homes are closely aligned. This will be further expanded in Appendix A.

In relation to the *Growth Ambition 5: Infrastructure-Enabling our Region*, the provision of managed infrastructure is key to delivering connected, vibrant and resilient economic development. The provision of services (water, broadband, electricity and gas) along with infrastructure in the form of road and rail are key to the success of the region in attracting new employment opportunities and people to the region. The Regional Policy Objectives are

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noted and the Local Authority supports their inclusion. The reference to the Galway East Main Drainage Scheme and the various improvements to water infrastructure is welcomed. It is considered that the progression of these projects will enable the growth of the metropolitan area and the county in tandem with the projected populations as outlined in the National Planning Framework.

As outlined Galway County Council welcomes the opportunity to input into the Draft Regional and Spatial Economic Strategy and have made several suggestions for the vision and aspirations of the strategy to be robust and meaningful. In addition, please find attached as Appendix A, for your consideration an amended **Draft Galway Metropolitan Strategic Area Plan**.

Is mise le meas,

Eileen Ruane

Director of Services