

Minutes of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Meeting held on 19th of March 2021 on Zoom at 11am

Present:

Cllr. Declan Bree	Cllr. Sean Smith	Cllr. Brian McKenna
Cllr. Tim Broderick	Cllr. Donal Lyons	Cllr. Niall McNelis
Cllr. David Collins	Cllr. Frank McBrearty	Cllr. Jack Murray
Cllr. Donal Gilroy	Cllr. Jimmy McClearn	Cllr. Joe Sheridan
Cllr. Christy Hyland	Cllr. Declan McDonnell	Cllr. Justin Warnock
Cllr. Orla Leyden	Cllr. Patrick McGowan	Cllr. Enda McGloin
Cllr. Michael Crowe	Cllr. John Naughten	Cllr. Enda Stenson
	Cllr. John Caulfield	

Cllr. David Maxwell **PRESIDED**

Apologies: Cllr. Craig Lovett, Cllr. Jarlath Munnelly

Officials: Northern & Western Regional Assembly:

Mr David Minton (Director)
Mr Denis Kelly (Assistant Director – Senior Planner)
Mr Frank Flanagan (Senior Executive Planner)
Mr Gerry Doyle (Assistant Director)
Mr Barry Guckian (Programme Executive)
Mr Conall McGettigan (Senior Executive Planner)
Ms Catriona Meehan (Clerical Officer)

1. Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on the 19th of February 2021 (circulated):

Mr Denis Kelly stated there had been an error at point 4.2 in the Draft Minutes where ‘Mayo County Council’ was stated instead of ‘Galway City Council’ and that this would be amended subject to the agreement of the Members.

Proposed by: Cllr. Donal Lyons

Seconded by: Cllr. Enda Stenson

Resolved:

“That the Draft Minutes of the meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 19th of February 2021 be adopted the only amendment being the substitution of Galway City Council for Mayo County Council at Point 4.2 therein ”

2. Matters Arising:

There were no matters arising.

3. Planning and Economic Development:

a) *Presentation by Dr Sean Duffy Executive Technical Lead CUA*

Dr Sean Duffy in his detailed presentation outlined that the Connaught Ulster Alliance was an alliance between, Sligo IT, GMIT and LYIT who aimed to join forces and become a Technological University (TU). He gave an update on the Technical University application process and he stated they would soon be ready to submit the application. Dr Duffy highlighted the next steps to be completed and stated that they aimed to ensure that all key stakeholders

would be engaged with before a submission is made. He advised that the CUA would be the second largest TU, connecting students, enterprise and communities that straddles this coastal and border catchment.

Following the presentation, the Cathaoirleach, David Maxwell, invited Members contributions/questions and the following points were made:

Cllr. Enda McGloin: He advised that he was aware that St Angela's College Sligo is currently aligned with NUIG but that it is being looked at whether they might be re-aligned with Sligo IT or the new Technological University (TU). Cllr McGloin also emphasised the vastness of the region and queried whether each campus would have a specific focus or speciality and if there would be a main campus or a headquarters for the TU.

Cllr. Jack Murray: He asked for the presentation to be circulated. He stated that previously there had been momentum for LYIT aligning with the University of Ulster. Cllr. Murray stated that this link made logical sense due to the proximity of LYIT to Ulster Universities. He queried would Letterkenny IT's connection with other Ulster Universities be impacted by the Connaught Ulster Alliance. Cllr Murray also emphasised the huge size of the region.

Dr Sean Duffy in response advised that St Angela's are presently linked with NUIG but are in discussions with Sligo IT regarding a possible re-alignment. He added that he considered it would be a good fit for St. Angela's to join Sligo IT and it could then become part of the TU via Sligo IT. Dr Duffy stated no decision on this had been made yet however by St. Angela's.

Dr Duffy acknowledged the vastness of the region. He stated that currently there is no plan to have one main headquarters and that it would be more likely that an executive headquarters would be established on each campus. Dr Duffy highlighted the level of engagement that has been conducted to date which has greatly enhanced the application process. Dr Duffy stated that there is no plan at the moment for only having a limited number of specialities in each campus as the TU will respond to the needs of the region as a whole. However he stated there was a possibility of having specialist research elements or specialist expertise in certain campuses over time. Dr Duffy acknowledged the connections between Letterkenny IT and the University of Ulster and stated these are very important and he hopes to continue to work on these links. Dr Duffy stated there is a belief that we will be stronger in building these connections as a Technological University. Dr Duffy emphasised the focus on cross border development and stated that Letterkenny IT will have a key part to play in this relationship in terms of research, higher education and in terms of developing pathways across the border.

Dr Sean Duffy stated that he will keep the members informed on any updates to the application.

Cathaoirleach, David Maxwell thanked Dr Sean Duffy for his presentation and attendance at the meeting.

(b) Development Plan Consultations

i. Proposed Variation to the County Donegal Development Plan 2018-2024 in respect for the TEN-T Priority Route Improvement Project, Donegal. (Circulated)

Presentation by Mr Conall McGettigan outlining the proposed material amendments to the project.

Mr Conall McGettigan advised Members that they had been circulated with a detailed report by email in respect of the proposed Variation and his presentation was a synopsis of it. He set out the nature of the Variation and concluded by highlighting the plans consistency with the RSES, in terms of both the National Roads Projects and the enabling of infrastructure in Letterkenny Regional Growth Centre Plan.

Following the presentation, the Cathaoirleach, David Maxwell, asked Members if they had any queries/comments.

Cllr. Frank McBrearty stated that he is not against the route, but he questioned why a previous route had not got the go ahead. Cllr. McBrearty stated that there had been a report of swans in the area, but no proof had

been provided showing swans to be indigenous in the area. He stated that the new route possibly disturbs rare birds and that the previous route would have been fine. He highlighted the unfairness of the change for farmers in the area. He also highlighted the issue with the Bonagee link which have not properly been addressed.

Cllr Jack Murray questioned whether there were plans to upgrade the Manorcunningham to Derry City road. He stated he would be concerned about a four-lane road in Derry changing into two lanes at the Derry/Donegal border - this is an extremely busy road as it will soon be the quickest way from Donegal to Dublin.

Cllr. Patrick McGowan stated that he was happy enough with the plan, but some adjustments were needed. He stated that the passing of market towns could be an issue, but he was supportive of the plan and he believes most people will be in support of the variation.

Cllr. Brain McKenna questioned whether the variation had been approved by Donegal County Council, had everyone agreed?

Mr Denis Kelly responded by advising that the process was for Members of the Donegal County Council to agree to the publication of a proposed variation and this has happened – thus the current consultation. He said that Members will have to consider all submissions made and Donegal County Council elected members will have to satisfy themselves that the Appropriate Assessment and Strategic Environmental Assessment has been completed satisfactorily. Mr Kelly in conclusion set out the observations recommended in the report and highlighted that one of the observations referenced that the Manorcunningham to Bridge End road is a priority project to be pursued in the RSES. The submission would highlight the importance of the connection with Derry City.

Proposed: Cllr. Patrick McGowan

Seconded: Cllr. Niall McNelis

Resolved:

“That the Northern and Western Regional Assembly agree the submission to the proposed material Variation to the Draft Donegal County Development Plan 2018 -2024 in respect of the TEN-T Priority Route Improvement Project, Donegal, as set out in the report circulated.”

ii. Notification of Preparation of a Local Area Plan for Castlebar and its Environs – Issues Paper

Mr Frank Flanagan outlined that Mayo County Council had notified the Assembly of its intention to prepare a LAP for Castlebar and its Environs and published an Issues Paper. He highlighted that there was no statutory obligation for publication of an Issues Paper. Mr Flanagan highlighted the plans for a high level of consultation with the local area. He stated that the Local Area Plan will need to be consistent with the County Development Plan and the RSES. Mr Flanagan stated that there will be another round of consultation at the draft stage where there will be more detail to consider. He stated that at the moment there are no big issues with the Issues Paper. Mr Flanagan referred to a previous meeting where the Assembly found that the Mayo County Development Plan was very consistent with the RSES.

Proposed: Cllr. Donal Lyons

Seconded: Cllr. Donal Gilroy

Resolved:

“That the Northern and Western Regional Assembly write to Mayo County Council and show support for the making of a Local Area Plan for Castlebar and its Environs.”

Directors Update and Work Programme 2021-2027 (Both Circulated)

4.

Mr David Minton (Director) outlined various initiatives undertaken by the NWRA recently.

- 'Let's Be More' Campaign, which helped securing the Managing Authority Status for NWRA 2021-2027. Mr Minton stated there was a focus on positive discrimination for the region. Mr Minton stated that he hoped this concept of positive discrimination would be captured in the National Development Plan.
- EU Cohesion Fund- it is hoped that because of the region in transition status there will be a large increase in the ERDF for the region.
- Application to manage the Atlantic Area Programme – decision still awaited.
- Regional Economic Performance Update: The figures in the report outlines disposable income per capita. Mr Minton highlighted that there are some alarming trends in the gap in disposable income between the Northern and Western region and the other two regions. This region has fallen further behind in terms of income per capita. Mr Minton hopes that these figures will lead to positive discrimination in the NDP.
- OECD pilot programme to develop an Innovation Diffusion Toolkit: Mr Minton outlines this pilot programme which works with regional stakeholders in various Institutions and Enterprise Offices to see how we can address levels of innovation in the region.
- European Digital Innovation Hub: The European Commission will fund three Digital Innovation Hubs in Ireland. Mr Minton stated that the NWRA had led a consortium of the main players across the region in applying to have at least one of these hubs based in our region. He added that he believes it will be very difficult for the government to not allocate one to this region. .
- Covid Response: Mr Minton stated that the Operational programme Team managed to mobilise €97 million worth of ERDF and work with the Department of Health in acquiring PPE in support of all health providers tackling the Covid 19 pandemic in our region.
- EU Green Deal Week: Mr Minton highlighted the great success of the EU Green Deal Event organised by the NWRA and the Irish College Leuven. He thanked Cllr. McDonnell and Cllr. Stenson from the Committee of the Regions for their participation in the event. He highlighted the extraordinary level of attendance at the event including some international attendees. Mr Minton emphasised the importance of the Green Deal Policy in our region in the coming years.
- Summary of the Review to Renew the National Development Plan submission from the NWRA was also contained in report.

Cllr. Niall McNelis questioned the deadlock regarding the designation of Managing Authority for the Atlantic Area Programme and queried how the decision will be made. In relation to the Innovation hubs Cllr. Mc Nelis enquired whether each local authority could do anything to help. Cllr. McNelis questioned whether the NWRA were part of the steering groups asked to feed into the National Development Plan review. Cllr. McNelis complimented the amount of work that had gone into the Directors report and questioned how the word could be spread as to the good work the Assembly was doing.

Cllr. Brian McKenna enquired whether each TD in the region had been informed of our bid to secure at least one Innovation Hub in the region.

Cllr. Donal Gilroy stated it was easier to apply for URDF than RRDF and pointed out that the majority of our region is rural. He queried whether there was anything that could be done to ensure positive discrimination for rural areas.

Mr Minton stated that in relation to EDI hubs he is sending out correspondence to all our regional representatives and that he also would send the Elected Members all the information he was circulating so they would also be well informed on the matter. Mr Minton stated that in relation to the designation of Managing Authority for the Atlantic Area the decision would come down to negotiation and perhaps splitting the roles in the hope that a number of the jobs would be in the region if not all. Mr Minton stated that they are responding to some Local Authorities that requested representation from some of our planning staff on LECP reviews. He added there was an opportunity to link up economic policy at a local level in relation to Smart Specialisation. Mr Minton stated that the Cathaoirleach had been working with him on a communications campaign around the newsletter which will be released soon. Mr Minton acknowledged there had been a notable divergence of those accessing the RRDF. Mr Minton stated that this issue had come up before and that he would raise the issue to see if there was a problem at a local or national level with regards to accessing RRDF.

Proposed: Cllr. Niall McNelis

Seconded: Cllr. Declan Mc Donnell

Resolved:

Members note the Directors Update and the Work Programme 2021-2027

5. Correspondence (Circulated)

Mr Gerry Doyle outlined five correspondence which were circulated to the members.

- Response from the Minister of State for Housing, Local Government and Heritage regarding the exemption of all public buildings, especially schools, from the planning regulation for solar panels.
- Response from the Department of Health regarding the Planet Youth Initiative.
- Response from the Minister of State for Transport regarding the financial support of Sligo Airport.
- Response from Minister of State for Transport regarding the financial support of An Post network.
- Email regarding the Public Consultation process for the Commission on the Defence Forces.

Cllr. Niall McNelis queried whether the Assembly was making a submission to the Public Consultation process for the Defence Forces. He stressed the economic value of having the Defence Forces in the region.

Mr Denis Kelly discussed the consultation with the Defence Forces under various headings. Mr Kelly explained that a response had been drafted and is ready to be issued. He added that he feels it is an opportunity let people know about the Assembly and the RSES and our status as a lagging region. Mr Kelly said there were opportunities for the Defence Forces to invest in existing infrastructure in the region. Mr Kelly stated that part of the submission was the suggestion of a second naval base to be located in the West / North West, as geographically it is the most logical location especially in relation to Brexit. Mr Kelly stated that there was also a proposal in the submission recognising the Defence Forces assisting the existing emergency services in terms of trained personnel and organisational capabilities.

6. AOB

Mr Gerry Doyle reminded all members to return their declarations of address that had been sent to them as soon as possible.

The Cathaoirleach added that this is a legal requirement.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____
Cathaoirleach

Date: _____