

**Minutes of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Meeting held on 18th of June 2021 in Roscommon
County Council Chamber at 11am**

Present:

Cllr. Declan Bree	Cllr. Justin Warnock	Cllr. Brian McKenna
Cllr. David Collins	Cllr. Donal Lyons	Cllr. Niall McNelis
Cllr. Jarlath Munnelly	Cllr. Enda Stenson	Cllr. Jack Murray
Cllr. John Naughten	Cllr. Jimmy McClearn	Cllr. Enda McGloin
Cllr. Christy Hyland	Cllr. Declan McDonnell	Cllr. Joe Sheridan
Cllr. Orla Leyden	Cllr. Patrick McGowan	Cllr. Frank McBrearty
	Cllr. Donal Gilroy	

Cllr. Tim Broderick (Vice Chairperson) **PRESIDED**

Apologies: Cllr. Craig Lovett, Cllr. John Caulfield, Cllr. Michael Crowe, Cllr. David Maxwell, Cllr. Sean Smith
Mr Brendan McGrath Chief Executive Galway City Council

Officials: Northern & Western Regional Assembly:

Mr David Minton (Director)
Mr Denis Kelly (Assistant Director & Senior Planner)
Mr Gerry Doyle (Assistant Director)
Mr Conall McGettigan (Senior Executive Planner)
Mr Frank Flanagan (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 21st of May 2021 (circulated):

Proposed by: Cllr. Donal Lyons
Seconded by: Cllr. Enda Stenson

Resolved:

“That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 21st of May 2021 be adopted”.

2. Any Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

3. Planning and Economic Development:

a) The MOSES Project – Presentation by Dr Stephen Hynes, SEMRU (Socio-Economic Marine Research Unit), Whitaker Institute, NUIG. (Appendix 1)

Mr Denis Kelly, in introducing Dr Stephen Hynes, outlined that the MOSES project was one of a suite of projects that the NWRA was participating in – he gave details of the other projects. He advised that the project is funded under the EU Interreg Atlantic Area Programme – under Priority 4, Enhancing Biodiversity and the Natural and Cultural Assets. He said that the Assembly were fortunate to be working with Dr Stephen Hynes and NUIG on the MOSES project. He added that the collaboration was very successful, and he also acknowledged the work of the team, which included Barry Guckian, Frank Flanagan, Brendan Mooney and Noel Ballantyne – with Noel Ballantyne majoring on the project and had been a great asset for the organisation.

Dr Stephen Hynes gave a detailed presentation on the project outlining that the objective of the project was to examine the size and growth of key strategic marine industries across the Atlantic Arc and to propose the blue growth pathway for sustainable development of the major sectors operating in the Atlantic space. He proceeded to highlight the different elements of the Moses project and its benefits for the region. Dr Hynes focussed on a tourism study carried out and how it could be helpful for a post Covid response in the area. Details of this presentation are attached in Appendix 1.

Following the presentation, the Leas Cathaoirleach, Tim Broderick, invited Members contributions/questions and the following points were made:

Cllr. Joe Sheridan questioned whether a study was completed to assess the capacity of offshore energy generation. He questioned whether offshore wind generation was taken into account in the heat maps shown in the presentation.

Cllr. Donal Gilroy highlighted that tourism will be an important factor for the region going forward however there was a need to focus on tourism outside the usual popular spots. He emphasized the beauty and unique landscape of other regions that are being left behind from a tourism perspective.

Cllr. Christy Hyland highlighted the benefit of a greenway stretching the whole way from Donegal to Galway. He stated he supported greenways but that they needed to be strategically located to maximise benefit.

In response to Cllr. Sheridan, Dr Hynes agreed that the west coast was a prime location to benefit from Offshore energy. He added that there are wind farms going through planning at the moment and that these could potentially be very beneficial for the region. Dr Hynes stated that existing capacity was good but there was great potential for expansion.

In response to Cllr. Gilroy, Dr Hynes emphasized that Fáilte Ireland is very eager to spread the benefit of tourism more evenly to all areas. He added that in the Post Covid world there will be even more demand for less crowded tourism locations, which would be beneficial for the less developed tourist areas.

In response to Cllr. Hyland, Dr Hynes highlighted the benefits and opportunities of greenways. He added that there was great tourism potential and could be transformative for the West of Ireland.

In closing the discussion, the Leas Cathaoirleach and David Minton, Director, paid tribute to the work undertaken and that the learning to be had was invaluable to the region.

(b) Review of County Development Plans

Draft Roscommon County Development Plan 2021-2027(Circulated)

Mr Frank Flanagan advised that Members had been issued with a copy of a report in respect of the Draft Plan and that he would take them through it in the presentation. He said that the draft consisted of two volumes, the first is the written statement and the second is a series of area plans. It is accompanied by five complementary documents, Housing Strategy, Renewable Energy Strategy, Retail Strategy, Landscape Character Assessment, and a Record of Protected Structures. In addition, there are three environmental reports, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Appropriate Assessment and Flood Risk Assessment. He advised that members would be familiar with the extensive documentation that was required to be within a development plan and that this plan was no different, but Roscommon County Council was to be commended on quality of the plan that was easy to read and has visually interesting graphics. He emphasised that the plan in general was very consistent with the RSES. He outlined some inconsistencies that needed attention under a number of headings (See Appendix 2). Mr Flanagan concluded advising that a final matter that needs consideration that is not in the report relates to flooding. He outlined that the SFRA does not contain an assessment of Athlone or provide spatial details of works contemplated in flood relief schemes. The maps in Appendix II do not provide usable information at settlement level and do not fully inform the public. The PFRA maps are not the latest available mapping and he advised perhaps the council should consider using the latest published mapping from the OPW in Appendices II and III. Furthermore, he advised

that the ground truthing carried out for the area plans and set out in Table 4 could better inform the public if they were mapped.

In relation to the justification test he advised that there are undeveloped lands zoned in Ballaghaderreen, Castlerea, Elphin and Strokestown. He said that there may be a similar situation in Hodson Bay/Barrymore, there are no flood risk maps included in this area plan. He advised that the Assembly could suggest that the SFRA be re-examined, and a revised version prepared which includes justification tests and thus better inform the public.

Questions and Comments from Members

Cllr. Naughten thanked the team for their input, he added that a lot has been said and it will be taken onboard. He explained that Monksland was a strategic location for development with a lot of potential that will grow as the Growth Centre develops and there was a shortfall of housing in the area. He accepted that the population figure might need to be adjusted but would prefer the submission did not ask for changes. Cllr. Naughten acknowledged that the issue of rural housing should be looked at. He also explained the reason for the simplified zoning, and he said that this was to give more flexibility in how towns develop, acknowledging that Ballinasloe is a strategic town.

Cllr. Orla Leyden also thanked the team for their input into what is a very lengthy plan needed to meet the requirements in guidelines. She stated that it was good to see how the plan could be improved. Cllr. Leyden acknowledged that the goal posts for population/housing needs had been changed by government during the preparation of the plan. She stated she recognized the issue with the plan for rural housing. She acknowledged the plan was not perfect and that time pressures had impacted the plan, but she stated that there is still time to submit input on the plan and that many councillors were planning on doing this. Cllr. Leyden stated that although the plan needed more attention in certain areas it was agreed to let it go out with a view to amending at a later stage, if needed.

Cllr. Tim Broderick referred to the forgotten area of Creagh he hoped there would be some joined up thinking on the matter between Roscommon and Galway County Councils development plans.

Cllr. Declan McDonnell questioned whether the housing strategy had a mixed tenure of housing. He stated that it was now government policy to have not only, social, and affordable housing but housing suitable for people with disabilities and the elderly. Cllr. McDonnell questioned whether this was included in the plan and if not, he stated that we should be recommending that it is included. He stated that he believed there should more of a focus on social housing to improve integration. Cllr. McDonnell added that this should be part of all plans going forward.

Cllr. Justin Warnock highlighted that not all people in the countryside live on farms and there was a large population living in rural areas in the region. He stated that the plans for rural houses were far too low. Cllr. Warnock highlighted that people living in rural areas make a huge economic benefit to our region. He added that there seems to be a leaning towards urbanisation and that if we have learnt anything from Covid-19 we should be going in the other direction.

Mr Frank Flanagan acknowledged that the region is majority rural based, stating that the urban rural divide is 27% Urban 73% Rural. He also acknowledged that there are many rural people who are not living on farms. With regards to the simplification of zoning, he was stated it was a matter of whether zoning is plan led or developer led. He stated that the overall population figures in the plan were pretty much in line with the RSES, with some relatively small differences, however there is some difference in how they are divided up and the timeframe in question. Mr Flanagan agreed with the comments made regarding Creagh and that the merits could be further considered by the Council. He stated that believes there is a policy objective within the plan regarding mixed tenure and he acknowledged that this is a factor in the RSES also.

Cllr. Naughten reiterated his view that the submission not ask for changes to the Monksland Population figures.

Mr Denis Kelly thanked Frank Flanagan for his presentation and in summing up referred to the conclusion made that the draft was very consistent with the RSES. He said that the draft plan is part of a process and that there will always be little wrinkles to be ironed out. He acknowledged that Cllr Naughton was reluctant for the submission to be asking for changes to targets for Monksland but on the other hand the Assembly is required to give its opinion on consistency with the RSES. Mr Kelly advised members that he felt that the recommendation in the report should be retained and that the team are available to discuss the issues with the planning team in Roscommon County Council or members of the Assembly, should the need arise.

Cllr. Orla Leyden agreed with Mr Denis Kelly acknowledging the importance of reflecting the RSES. She concurred with the suggestion of leaving the submission as is. Cllr. Leyden highlighted that there will be many discussions on the plan and that this is just one element that will need to be looked at. She stated that what we need to do is ensure the plan is consistent with the RSES.

Proposed: Cllr. Orla Leyden

Seconded: Cllr. John Naughten

Resolved:

'That the Northern and Western Regional Assembly agree the submission to the Draft Roscommon County Development Plan as set out in the report subject to the additional issue regarding Flood risk being included.'

(c) Defective Concrete Blocks Grant scheme (Mica Redress Scheme).

The Leas Cathaoirleach noted the time available and that time constraints due to covid-19 restrictions may present a barrier to a lengthy debate and asked Members for guidance.

A discussion ensued and there was an acknowledgement of the level of discussion required for this item. Cllr. Frank McBrearty highlighted the huge issue this will become for the entire region. He stated that is no longer just Donegal and Mayo that are being affected. It was ultimately agreed that due to time pressures at this meeting a Special Meeting would be arranged to allow for a full debate on the topic

Proposed: Cllr. Frank McBrearty

Seconded: Cllr. Patrick McGowan

Resolved that:

'A Special Meeting will be organised to discuss the issue of Defective Concrete Blocks Grant Scheme (Mica Redress Scheme)'

4. Update on Health Support Scheme

Mr Gerry Doyle, Assistant Director, outlined the scheme of EU funding for PPE supplies for medical use in the region during the Covid 19 pandemic. He highlighted the huge increase in demand for PPE and the great work of the HSE during this time. He stated that there will be a joint ministerial press release from the Minister for Health and the Minister Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to this matter.

Mr David Minton acknowledged the great work of the team at the Assembly who were involved with this project

5. Annual Financial Statement 2020(circulated)

Mr Gerry Doyle outlined the financial performance of the Assembly in 2020 following the completion of the Local Government Audit Service's audit for 2020. He added that no material change had been made since the draft Annual Financial Statement was brought to members at April's Assembly meeting.

6. Correspondence

Mr Gerry Doyle drew members attention to the correspondence received from Coillte, regarding its five-year plan. (circulated). He added that submission close on the 23rd of July and that submissions can be sent by email which is included on the circulated document.

7. Any other Business

Cllr Declan McDonnell extended the Assembly's condolence to the Director of the Southern Regional Assembly whose brother has passed away.

Proposed: Cllr. Declan McDonnell

Seconded: Cllr. Tim Broderick

Resolved that:

'Northern and Western Regional Assembly extend condolences to the Director of the Southern Regional Assembly on the passing of their mother.'

It was highlighted that some Councils have difficulties when it comes to co-financing URDF and RRDF projects.

Mr David Minton stated we would engage with the local authorities on the matter and consider how our economist could collate the extent of difficulty in the region.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____

Cathaoirleach

Date: _____