

Minutes of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> of November 2021 at 11am  
online Via Zoom.

---

**Present:**

Cllr. Declan Bree	Cllr. Frank McBrearty	Cllr. Justin Warnock
Cllr. Donal Lyons	Cllr. Donal Gilroy	Cllr. Jack Murray
Cllr. Jarlath Munnely	Cllr. Enda Stenson	Cllr. Joe Sheridan
Cllr. John Naughten	Cllr. Patrick McGowan	Cllr. Enda McGloin
Cllr. David Maxwell	Cllr. Declan McDonnell	Cllr. David Collins
Cllr. Brian McKenna	Cllr. Niall McNelis	Cllr. Tim Broderick
Cllr. Michael Crowe		

Cllr. Christy Hyland **PRESIDED**

**Apologies:** Cllr. Orla Leyden, Cllr. Craig Lovett, Cllr. Sean Smith, Cllr. John Caulfield

**Officials: Northern & Western Regional Assembly:**

Mr Brendan McGrath (Chief Executive Galway City Council)  
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)  
Mr John Daly (Economic and Sustainable Development Officer)  
Mr Barry Guckian (Programme Executive)  
Ms Catriona Meehan (Clerical Officer)

**1) Adoption of the Draft Supplementary Standing Orders regulating the proceedings of the Assembly when holding remote meetings**

**Proposed:** Cllr. Donal Lyons

**Seconded:** Cllr. Donal Gilroy

**Resolved:**

“That the Draft Supplementary Standing Orders regulating the proceedings of the Assembly when holding remote meetings be adopted.”

**2) Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on the 15th of October 2021 (circulated):**

**Proposed by:** Cllr. Donal Lyons

**Seconded by:** Cllr. Declan McDonnell

**Resolved:**

“That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2021 be adopted”.

**3) Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising

**4) Budget 2022: Consideration of the Draft Budget for the financial year ending the 31<sup>st</sup> of December 2022**

Mr Gerry Doyle Assistant Director made a presentation of the Draft Budget for 2022. It stated that a 5% increase in the statutory demands was proposed for 2022. He stated that there had been no increase from 2020 to 2021 so the increase proposed if approved would be the first increase in two years. The major increases in expenditure arose from an increase in salaries due to National Wage Agreement. He stated

that the increase in RSES monitoring costs was due to a number of studies required to be prepared in 2022. He further advised that the Assembly was enlisting the services of an IT company for help with a Digital Transformation Plan and day to day IT support. Mr Doyle noted the projected increase in travel and training costs and that it was difficult to predict how much would be spent until the pandemic eases. He added the importance of in person training for Members and staff. He added that overall, the Assembly was in a good financial position which was very important going forward.

Cllr. Brian McKenna questioned what supports NWRA are giving the Local Authorities, he asked were discussions currently ongoing or was there a plan in place regarding the supports that have been mentioned at previous meetings. Cllr. McKenna raised this question in relation to queries that might be raised at LA Budget meetings regarding the increase in statutory demands.

Cllr. Justin Warnock asked how many people were employed by NWRA he also questioned how long was left on the lease for the NWRA office.

Mr David Minton, Director stated that a briefing with all Chief Executives with regards to supports had occurred that morning. He stated that he briefed them on all the supports that were available through the Regional Assembly. He used the example that 50% of grants that come through the local enterprise office is co-financed through ERDF are delivered through the Border Midlands and Western Operational Programme. Mr Minton also mentioned the database of companies in each county that are benefiting from ERDF, which is hosted by Enterprise Ireland. Mr Minton also referred to the new programme in which it is hoped that the Assembly would be able to support each Local Authority to secure additional planning and design resources to aid in the new 'Town Centre First' approach and aid their bid writing teams in the preparation of URDF and RRDF applications. Mr Minton also highlighted the indirect supports through transnational cooperation programmes. He stated that he would circulate the database and a briefing document detailing the various programmes on a county by county break down. In response to the queries relating to staff numbers he confirmed that there were 17 full-time equivalent staff. Mr Minton added that the NWRA had low numbers of staff when compared to the other Regional Assemblies. With reference to the lease, Mr Minton stated that there are currently ongoing negotiations with the landlord relating to modifications to the building to reduce and adapt the building with the hope that the lease can be reduced in line with the modifications and in line with the new mode of Remote Working.

**Proposed:** Cllr. Donal Lyons

**Seconded:** Cllr. David Maxwell

**Resolved:**

"That the Draft Budget of the Northern and Western Regional Assembly for the year ending December 31<sup>st</sup> 2022, be adopted

## 5) Planning and Economic Development

### a) **RSES Analysis of the National Development Plan – Presentation by John Daly**

Mr Denis Kelly in introducing John Daly advised Members that this presentation was a follow-up to the October Assembly Meeting presentation on this topic but was a deeper examination of priority projects referenced in the RSES to identify if they were apparent in the renewed NDP.

John Daly provided a detailed presentation of his analysis of how well the NDP aligns with the RSES. He outlined the various projects that were identified in the RSES RPOs relating to infrastructure, under the sub-headings of the Galway MASP, Regional Growth Centres (Letterkenny, Sligo and Athlone) and the Growth Ambitions – connected & Infrastructure. The presentation colour coded and identified projects based on whether they were to some degree supported, mentioned or not clear if it is mentioned in the NDP.

He concluded that there is reasonable alignment between the new NDP 2021-2030 and the RSES, with some areas very well aligned but some areas not aligned. He reiterated the key message from the October presentation that the Northern and Western Region has not received its minimum share of

significant projects of scale and that positive discrimination has not occurred - which is necessary to revitalise our region's economy and regain our status as a More Developed Region.

At this time the Cathaoirleach Christy Hyland had to leave the meeting, Leas Cathaoirleach Cllr Jimmy McClearn took over the chair.

#### **Comments and Questions identified by members**

The comments and points below were highlighted by members.

- Frustration was expressed at the length of time it is taking for the Galway Ring Road to be started. Members wondered would there be anything that the NWRA could do to speed the decision-making process up (An Bord Pleanála).
- Concern at lack of development on a vacant site in Knocknacarra/Rahoon, Galway City.
- Questioned if the Ulster Canal project was not included in the NDP. It was also stated that Ulster Canal Greenway was separate to the development of the Canal itself.
- ⊖ The importance of the reopening of the Western Rail Corridor was emphasised and that no greenway should be permitted which prejudices the realisation of this priority project. The RSES gave priority to the reopening of the WRC and this should be clarified to WDC, Deputy Cannon and Galway County Council.
- The condition of the N15 was highlighted stating that North of Sligo the road was not fit for purpose and should not be called a National Primary Road as it is not being maintained to this standard. The N16 Sligo to Blacklion was described as being similar.
- No mention of the N14 in the presentation.
- Is the importance of Climate change initiatives for the Region emphasized sufficiently in the NDP importance of offshore wind was highlighted in terms of the ability of the road network.
- The issue of Galway County Council Zoning of only Council lands at the Airport Site was also raised - should have included lands across the road - as set out in RPO.3.6.6.

Leas Cathaoirleach Jimmy McClearn urged members to focus on what Mr Daly was asked to do which was to examine the NDP was doing what it should for the region in terms of the key projects outlined in the RSES.

Mr John Daly responded to members questions stating that the Ulster Canal Phase II Restoration was included in slide 20 and it includes Greenways/Blueways (€12m) and he advised restoration. He stated that the Galway ring road is supported He stated that the N15 was included in the RSES but not committed to in the NDP. He explained that projects under RPO6.6 were at the construction stages, RPO6.7 were at a later stage whereby they were committed to and those within RPO6.8 were at the earlier stage again and it was unclear if they were committed to. Mr John Daly stated that there is mention on the Climate Action plan in relation to Bus Connects etc. but certain areas were lacking.

Mr Denis Kelly added that the aim of the presentation was to examine the NDP within the lens of our call for positive discrimination in the submission to the consultation to the draft Review to Renew NDP – justified on the basis of the region's designation as a "Transition Region", "Lagging Region" and a "Moderate Innovator". Members had asked that the new NDP be scrutinised to determine if those projects in the RSES had been reflected in the RSES and John's presentation has been provided on that basis – seeking to identify whether the NDP had captured the priority projects of the RSES. His presentation has illustrated that in some cases the NDP has included the priorities but in other cases it hasn't and in other cases it is less clear whether it has or not.

He advised that during the discussion Members have raised the Galway Ring Road project and he advised that this project was being considered by An Bord Pleanála and the Assembly could write to it asking for the decision to be expedited if that was the wish of Members. He advised that Members

had asked about the Western Rail Corridor and the priority given to it in the RSES. He advised that priority is given to the restoration of the WRC through RPOs 6.11, 6.12 and 6.13.

**Proposed:** Cllr. Declan McDonnell

**Seconded:** Cllr. Tim Broderick

**Resolved:**

“That the Assembly write to the Western development Commission, Chief Executive of Galway County Council and Deputy Cannon and to confirm to them the priority given to the re-opening of the Western Rail Corridor in the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy for the Northern and Western Region, emphasizing the Importance of adhering to the RSES.”

**Proposed:** Cllr. Donal Lyons

**Seconded:** Cllr. Declan McDonnell

**Resolved:**

“That the Assembly write to An Bord Pleanála in respect of the Galway Ring Road proposal and ask that the decision-making process be expedited.”

**b) Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy (RSES) 2 Year Implementation Report – Update**

Mr Denis Kelly informed members that as referenced at the previous meeting it was necessary for the Assembly to prepare a 2yr report and that each local authority and public body has to prepare a report setting out how it has progressed on implementing the RSES. In order to assist in the report of the local authorities, a draft framework had been worked up and issued to Chief Executives asking for feedback before it is issued formally. He gave Members an outline of the framework. When this framework is finalised it will be circulated to Local Authorities so that it can inform their report to the NWRA-

**c) Ballinasloe Local Area Plan (for mention)**

Mr Denis Kelly advised that Galway County Council published its Draft LAP on 22<sup>nd</sup> October and had received notification on 10<sup>th</sup> November, with the closing date for receipt of submissions being 3<sup>rd</sup> December. It had not been possible to include a report with the agenda due to constrained timelines outlined above but the assessment is now undertaken and he asked Frank Flanagan to provide a report to Members.

Mr Frank Flanagan outlined a brief introduction to the plan advising that the Assembly is not a prescribed body in relation to LAPs. He advised that The Draft LAP comprises 7 separate documents, written statement, NIR, SEA, FRA, LTP, DFM and Zoning Maps. The written statement was identified as being a relatively short document which concentrates on providing objectives for the town and minimises the level of narratives included. He confirmed

- I. that the LAP is being prepared contemporaneously with the preparation of the County Development Plan which is an obvious challenge when it comes to achieving consistency with a plan that does not exist.
- II. The Draft LAP is very ambitious in proposing that all of the population projection for Ballinasloe up to 2040 will be achieved by 2028, providing that 805 new dwellings would be delivered and 30% of these will be landfill/brownfield sites.
- III. The areas in the centre of the town close to the Suck and other watercourses are subject to flooding. A very comprehensive and informative Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) has been carried out for the town, it includes a number of justification tests for areas of the town that are historically known to flood and a rationale for their further development is provided.
- IV. The Draft LAP contains 13 objectives relating to flooding which is indicative of the importance attributed to it in the plan. The development of Ballinasloe is constrained by the absence of a flood relief scheme and the plan states that a scheme is unlikely to be delivered during the lifetime of the plan.
- V. Reference to residential vacancy or how such might be addressed in terms of regeneration is limited.

- VI. Objectives confirm the primacy of the town centre for new commercial and retail development, and they propose the preparation of a town centre management plan.
- VII. Regeneration in the town centre will be of limited scale and the major regeneration project in the town is St. Brigid's Hospital site and grounds.
- VIII. Objectives cover tourism, infrastructure, community facilities and aside from a small number of road projects they are all written at a very general level and project identification, or prioritisation are not strong features of the plan.
- IX. Objectives propose collaboration with Westmeath and Roscommon. This is welcome and fits well with cooperation on bordering towns which appears to be ongoing nationally. Notwithstanding, there are significant serviced lands in Creagh, Co Roscommon which should be considered for development jointly – an issue raised in the NWRA submission to the Roscommon Draft CDP.

Mr Flanagan outlined that arising from the assessment, the following recommendations/observations recommended as follows:

1. Recommendation that population projection be aligned with RSES figures.
2. Recommendation that data on residential vacancy be included in the plan.
3. Recommendation that timeframes be given for the preparation of a town centre management plan and a masterplan for St. Brigid's Hospital.
4. Recommendation that specific lands be identified and zoned for nursing homes to comply with RPO.
5. Observation that the delivery of a flood relief scheme for Ballinasloe should have high priority and a timeline associated with its delivery.
6. Observation that a timeline for the feasibility study on Ballinasloe Town Park be included in the plans.

There followed a discussion with Cllr. Tim Broderick asking what the population projections should be by 2028 and agreeing with Mr Flanagan in reference to the flood defence plan stating it was a good plan. He stated that he believed the residential vacancy rates were not a major problem, but the commercial vacancy rates were a problem. Cllr. Broderick agreed with Mr Flanagan around the Zoning and raised concern at the lack of commercial zoning. He also highlighted the area of Creagh which he feels should be included in the plan. Cllr. Joe Sheridan also made reference to the availability of lands at Garbally and how best to align with the RSES. Cllr John Naughton supported the inclusion of Creagh in a joint LAP.

In response Mr Frank Flanagan stated that a rough estimate of population increases of circa 1,000 may be reasonable for Ballinasloe by 2028. He added that the flood relief scheme was under delivery, but it was not expected within the lifetime of the plan. Mr Flanagan stated that joint plans are possible, and he believed Ballinasloe would benefit from one. He advised that he had no details to hand on the quantity of industrial lands but some was not developed and that capacity seems to be available. He said that objectives are in place for the relief road.

Mr Denis Kelly emphasised that the purpose of the report was confined to consistency with the RSES at a high level and suggested that an additional point could be included regarding Creagh – in a manner similar to that included in the submission to the Draft Roscommon CDP.

**Proposed:** Cllr. David Maxwell

**Seconded:** Cllr. Tim Broderick

**Resolved:**

“That the Northern and Western Regional Assembly agree the submission to the proposed amendments to the Ballinasloe Local Area Plan as outlined in the presentation to Members and to include an additional observation that “The Regional Assembly would urge that the council prepare a Joint Local Area Plan with Roscommon County to include the areas in Creagh serviced with sewerage with a view to making it a linked settlement.”

6) **Update on ERDF Regional Programme 2021-2027**

Due to time constraints it was unanimously agreed to postpone the update until the December Assembly Meeting to give it due consideration.

7) **Notice of Motion(s)**

**Motion Proposed by Cllr Frank McBrearty**

*"I am calling on the NWRA to bring a delegation to the European Parliament to highlight the issues with Mica, Pyrite, Pyrrhotite, Sulphide minerals and all deleterious materials contained and used in aggregate for concrete, concrete blocks and all concrete products in Ireland. We should seek the assistance of experts such as, Prof Paul Dunlop, Dr Robbie Goodhue and Dr Ambrose McCloskey, so that we can give a detailed presentation to the parliament from an engineering and scientific perspective. These professionals will give the Parliament an overall understanding of the issues we face in Ireland with Mica, Pyrite, Pyrrhotite and other Sulphide minerals contained in aggregate used for concrete products."*

**Members comments**

There was unanimous recognition of the importance of the motion. Members suggested that more thought and attention needed to be put into who would be sent and who they would meet with in the European Parliament. It was suggested that the Assembly should consult with MEPs to establish the best way to go about bringing this very important issue to the attention of the right people in the European Parliament and to have the correct information and data around the issue. It was also suggested that the Assembly should not pre-empt what will be announced by the government in the way of a redress scheme.

It was suggested that the Director and staff at the NWRA should determine who is best to consult with and who is best to lead the delegation.

Mr David Minton agreed with the members on the importance of the issue and stated that there are some instruments that can be used to aid in the process. Mr Minton also echoed the sentiment of councilors that the Assembly does not preempt the outcome of the national redress scheme. He suggested that should the motion be adopted we could come back at December Meeting for timelines etc.

**Proposed:** Cllr. Frank McBrearty

**Seconded:** Cllr. Declan Bree

**Resolved:**

*'That the motion be adopted'*

8) **Any other Business**

- (i) Cllr. Patrick McGowan noted that the National Transport Authority are carrying out a Consultation Process on 'Connecting Ireland' he suggested that due to the rural nature of the region the Assembly should lodge a submission.

Mr David Minton confirmed to Cllr. McGowan that the planning team are in the process of preparing a submission to the NTA Consultation for 'Connecting Ireland'. He also informed members that the Assembly has a new 3-year strategy in partnership with GMIT, Letterkenny and Sligo looking at that strategic impact of climate change on transport in our region.

Mr Denis Kelly added that if any members had any specific points for inclusion in the submission, he asked them to be emailed directly to him.

- (ii) Cllr. Niall McNelis highlighted the issue that the Gardai were not a prescribed body when it comes to submissions on items like roads and planning. He stated that there is process of design in planning aiming to design out crime especially in newer housing estates. It is hoped that the design of the estates can help minimize crime Cllr. McNelis asked how the Gardai would be invited to make a submission on

those applications instead of having to pay twenty euro for every submission. He stated he believed they should be a prescribed body.

Mr David Minton stated that the Gardai are not a prescribed body in most legislation and asked Denis Kelly to comment.

Mr Denis Kelly advised that he would consider their contribution to planning policy would be important and confirmed that they are not a prescribed body and a fee would be applicable if it wants to make a submission to a planning application. He advised that they could approach the government to request to be added to the prescribed body list.

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ (Cathaoirleach)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_