

Minutes of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Meeting held on 20th May 2022 at 11am online Via Zoom.

Present:

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

Presided: Cllr. Christy Hyland (Cathaoirleach)

Mr Brendan McGrath (Chief Executive Galway City Council)

Apologies: Cllr. Sean Smith, Cllr. John Caulfield, Cllr. Clifford Kelly Cllr. Michael Crowe, Cllr. Jarlath Munnely, Mr David Minton (Director)

Officials: Northern & Western Regional Assembly:

Mr Denis Kelly (Assistant Director & Senior Planner)

Mr Gerry Doyle (Assistant Director)

Mr Patrick Devine (A/Senior Staff Officer)

Mr Conall McGettigan (Senior Executive Planner)

Mr Frank Flanagan (Senior Executive Planner)

Ms Fiona Timoney (Clerical Officer)

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. Enda Stenson

Resolved:

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

2) Adoption of the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on the 22nd April 2022 (circulated):

Proposed by: Cllr. Donal Lyons

Seconded by: Cllr. Justin Warnock

Resolved:

“That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 22nd April 2022 be adopted”.

3) Matters Arising

There were no matters arising

4) Planning and Economic Development

a) Planning Reports

i. Notice of intention to extend the duration of the existing Leitrim County Development Plan 2015-2021 (as varied) (Report Circulated)

Mr Denis Kelly gave a brief synopsis of the report that recommended to the Assembly that there was no objection to the extension of the duration to enable completion of the process to make a new Leitrim County Development Plan.

Proposed: Cllr. Jimmy McClearn

Seconded: Cllr. David Maxwell

Resolved

'That members endorse the report and decide to make a submission as recommended, stating no objection to the extension of the duration of the Leitrim County Development Plan 2015 - 2021'

ii. **Proposed variation (in respect of wind energy policy framework) to the Donegal County Development Plan 2018 – 2024- as Varied (presentation at Appendix 1) (Report Circulated)**

Mr Conall McGettigan gave a detailed presentation on the proposed variation, he summarised the issues and challenges identified in the circulated report.

Members raised the following comments/questions:

- The high number of Wind Farms in Donegal was noted.
- The issues of peat slide during the construction of Wind Farms was highlighted and environmental impacts that arise from this.
- It was noted that some of the areas where new developments were potentially to be allowed were very close to areas of high population or National Primary Roads.
- The issue regarding protecting freshwater pearl Mussels was noted.
- The mapping of the location of existing wind farms in the county / region would be very beneficial for analysis.
- Members queried the proposed inclusion of the separation distance based on the height of proposed turbines, asking if this was a national standard or one devised by Donegal County Council.
- The lack of power of Councillors in relation to planning issues was raised.
- It was noted that there needed to be a focus on offshore wind and wave energy
- Members stated that community ownership or share in projects would improve acceptance of these developments. Successful examples abroad were noted.
- Derrybrien wind farm was stated as being an example of what can go wrong.

Mr McGettigan stated that 2019 Draft Guidelines suggested a separation distance of 4 times the height of turbines (tip height). He added that there was no explanation justifying the proposed separation distance.

Mr Denis Kelly emphasised the focus on renewable energy in the RSES. He advised that much emphasis was placed upon the 2019 draft Guidelines and that Donegal County Council had accepted that it was contrary to separation distances stated in those draft Guidelines. However, he advised that it is the 2006 Guidelines and the 2017 Interim Guidelines that are the relevant Guidelines currently in operation and, as outlined in the report, it is not clear whether or not the variation is fully consistent with the said Guidelines. He said that Members had a significant role in determining planning policy.

Proposed: Cllr. David Maxwell

Seconded: Cllr. Enda McGloin

Resolved

'That Members endorse the report and decide to make a submission to the proposed variation to the Donegal County Development Plan 2018-2024 –as Varied, in accordance with the circulated report'

iii. **Review of Existing Donegal County Development Plan (2018-2024) - as Varied, and Prepare new County Development Plan (2024-2030) (Report Circulated) (presentation at Appendix 1)**

Mr Conall McGettigan gave a presentation on the circulated report. He advised that the report reflected the content of the RSES. He outlined the background to the plan, where it is currently and a summary of what was felt should be added. Mr McGettigan explained that there was a significant short fall in the delivery of housing stock that needed to be addressed and that

Letterkenny was significantly behind where it needed to be to achieve the RSES growth targets, but this is consistent with other settlements in the region.

Members comments

- Issues around the number of Tier 2 towns has previously been noted and that the tier system in Donegal is distorted - with too many Tier 2 towns.
- The recommendation for Stranorlar as Tier 2 was welcomed.
- It was agreed that there is a serious housing crisis, and it was stated that it won't be sorted anytime soon. Members noted that government policy will not likely go far enough to have an appreciable impact.
- Ability to build in the countryside is conditional on proving a strong link to the area. This is proving more difficult.
- The need for improved rail links was noted.
- Highlighted issue of vacancy or dereliction. It was added that more understanding was needed around the policies that are being proposed. It was noted that changing building use is not as easy as it might seem.
- Members added that these issues are not unique to Donegal, it was acknowledged that the planning regulator played a key role.

Proposed: Cllr. Justin Warnock

Seconded: Cllr. Patrick McGowan

Resolved that:

'That Members endorse the report and decide to make a submission in accordance with the circulated report'

b) Update on 2 Year Review (Appendix 1)

Mr Frank Flanagan provided a brief update on the RSES 2-year review, explaining that Local Authorities were required to submit a report regarding how the objectives of the RSES were being delivered. He advised that some LAs had returned their report, but many had not. Mr Flanagan acknowledged that LAs are busy with other work, but this requirement remains.

Cllr. Donal Gilroy enquired if there was a deadline for LAs to respond and if there were any implications if they missed the deadlines. He stated that perhaps a list of those who had not responded could be prepared for the next meeting and perhaps this could encourage the return of the reports.

Mr Flanagan stated that reminders had been sent to LAs who had not made their return, he added that the process is continuing regardless of whether all returns had been received. Mr Flanagan stated that there were no repercussions for LAs not returning their report.

Mr Denis Kelly informed members that the report will be compiled with or without the reports as the process must be concluded.

5) Events

a) Brussels Programme Visit – June 2022

Mr Denis Kelly stated that the trip is currently being organised and that update including a programme would be emailed to the members who are attending in due course.

b) Update on Association of Irish Regions (Training Event)

Cllr. Declan McDonnell informed members that the three Assemblies are collaborating on a conference expected to be held in October. He stated that the agenda had not been confirmed but it would be circulated to Members at a later stage along with detail of the proposed venue.

6) Correspondence

Mr Gerry Doyle outlined the circulated correspondence regarding the holding of remote meetings. He stated that remote attendance of meetings could continue going forward without any need for a Covid exemption. Mr Doyle added that there was commitment by the Department that remote attendance would not impact the Members' Allowance. He stated that as of now the facilities in the Chamber in Ballaghaderreen were not in place to host blended meetings so meetings would need to be either fully physical or fully remote for the time being.

- Members explained that physical gatherings are important for the sharing of ideas and collaboration across the region. It was stated that the impact of the Assembly would be lessened without this interaction.
- It was noted that Members preference would be hybrid meetings to allow members who could not attend in person to log in online when needed.
- Members requested that a costing be done to upgrade the Assembly Chamber to allow for blended meetings.
- It was noted that connection issues had been a feature of previous meetings when held fully online.

Mr Doyle stated that a costing on the renovation of the Chamber to facilitate blended meetings had not yet been received but it was likely to be quite high. He added that the Assembly did not own the building where the Chamber is located so the Landlord would need to be consulted and their approval received regarding all works to be completed to facilitate blended meetings.

It was agreed that the June and July meeting will be fully physical meetings held in the Chamber in Ballaghaderreen. After this, the situation would be further examined regarding the option of blended meetings.

7) Any other business

Proposed: Cllr. Orla Leyden

Seconded: Cllr, Enda McGloin

Noted that

'Members extended congratulations to Amy Broadhurst and Lisa O'Rourke on their world championship boxing victories. It was stated that this was inspiring for the region that both athletes could be competing in the next Olympics'

This concluded the business of the meeting.

Signed: _____ (Cathaoirleach)

Date: _____