

**Minutes of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly Meeting
held on 16th June 2023 at 11am in Roscommon Chamber.**

Present:

Cllr. Enda McGloin	Cllr. Tim Broderick	Cllr. Jimmy McClearn
Cllr. John Caulfield	Cllr. Declan Bree	Cllr. Joe Sheridan
Cllr. Orla Leyden	Cllr. Clifford Kelly	Cllr. Christy Hyland
Cllr. Donal Gilroy	Cllr. Justin Warnock	Cllr. Declan McDonnell
Cllr. Patrick McGowan		

Presided: Cllr. David Collins (Cathaoirleach)

Apologies: Cllr. Enda Stenson, Cllr. Michael Crowe, Cllr. Frank McBrearty, Cllr. Brian McKenna, Cllr. Donal Lyons, Cllr. David Maxwell, Cllr. John Naughten, Cllr. Jack Murray, Cllr. Niall McNelis, Cllr. Jarlath Munnely, Cllr. Áine Smith.

Officials: Northern & Western Regional Assembly:

Mr. Denis Kelly (Director)
Mr. Gerry Doyle (Assistant Director)
Mr. Frank Flanagan (A/Assistant Director / Senior Planner)
Mr. Brendan Mooney (A/Assistant Director)
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 19th May 2023 (Circulated):

Proposed by: Cllr. Clifford Kelly
Seconded by: Cllr. Patrick McGowan and
Unanimously resolved that:

“That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Northern & Western Regional Assembly held on 19th May be adopted”.

2) Matters Arising

Members enquired as to whether there was any progress in arranging a meeting with the Taoiseach. The Cathaoirleach David Collins stated that MEP Maria Walsh had been in contact with him regarding the invitation to the Taoiseach to meet with the Assembly Members. He stated that there was a possibility of a meeting but not in the next few months, possibly in October, but no date had been confirmed.

Mr Gerry Doyle stated that there had been no response from the Minister for Transport, Eamon Ryan, regarding the request for a meeting, adding that he would follow up regarding the request to meet with the Members.

Motion

Proposed: Cllr Donal Gilroy
Seconded: Cllr Declan McDonnell and
Unanimously agreed that:

‘the Northern and Western Regional Assembly extend their deepest sympathy to the families of the victim of the recent tragic incident on the Sligo to Dublin train line at Ballisodare on June 14th’

3) Director's Update

Mr Denis Kelly updated members on activities over the previous month. This included an Article in the Irish Examiner on 5th June on the widening economic gap between this region and the rest of Ireland which featured discussion with Mr John Daly, NWRA. He also advised of a meeting held with French MEP Younous Omarjee, Chair of the EU Parliament's Committee on Regional Development (REGI) and Chris McManus MEP on the performance of the Northern and Western region. He also advised of a potential article in Council Review publication that would speak to the widening economic gap – thus cumulatively building awareness of the ongoing challenges in harnessing the potential of the region. He also noted that arrangements were being made for MEPs in the region to attend a meeting of the Assembly in Q3 and consideration to be given to arranging a meeting of Oireachtas Members in Q3.

4) Planning and Economic Development

Frank Flanagan, Assistant Director reminded Members of the background to the development of a position paper on Marine Spatial Planning DMAPS and welcomed Dr Cormac Walsh to present on the Position Paper he had developed.

a) **Marine Spatial Planning and the Preparations of Designated Maritime Area Plans (DMAPs) – Position Paper presentation by Dr Cormac Walsh. – Presentation at Appendix 1**

Dr Cormac Walsh presented a detailed overview of the position paper. His presentation focused on the importance of Maritime Planning in the region, he summarised the opportunities and outlined the recommendations set out in the report.

Comments and Questions

- Members thanked Dr Walsh for the presentation stating that Marine planning is vital for the development of the region.
- It was queried whether certain areas should specialise in certain industries to develop strong industries in these locations.
- It was noted that this planning should have been set out a long time ago and there was much work to be done in relation to maritime planning.
- Members raised the topic of Carbon Sinking stating the high potential in the region.
- Concerns were raised regarding national governance of the zoning of these areas, it was suggested that the Regional Assemblies should be included in the process.
- The vast opportunity of offshore wind was highlighted by Members. It was queried would any of the recommendations set out in the position paper hinder the development of offshore wind generation.
- The need to protect certain areas of the marine environment was acknowledged by Members but it was stated that this should not be over regulated. It was stated that Marine Protected Areas (MAPS) does not mean that nothing can happen in those areas, but that people should be more environmentally conscious when carrying out activities in these areas. It was noted that tourism could be carried out in these zones as a means to educate tourists about our biodiversity.
- The potential of harvesting seaweed was discussed it was stated that there was a right and a wrong way to harvest seaweed however it could be a very important industry if done correctly.
- Members highlighted the allocation of MPA from 2021 stated the high amount of work needed, the sources of additional resources was queried.
- It was noted that our fishing opportunities were given away it was hoped that this would not be repeated with any further marine opportunities.

- Issues with the OPR were highlighted, it was stated that getting planning would hinder the development of these areas.
- It was stated that coordination and joined up thinking was needed to fully capitalise on all opportunities.
- The importance of community involvement was noted by Members.

Responses:

- Dr Walsh stated that Smart Specialisation was important adding that localised strengths would need to be analysed. He stated that Local Authorities should not be competing but working together.
- The importance of carbon sinking was noted by Dr Walsh adding that it would be beneficial in the restoration of marine economies.
- Dr Walsh noted that seaweed harvesting could be damaging to the marine ecosystem and can also be detrimental to carbon sinking but agreed with Members that this could potentially be done with sensitivity to the environment.
- Dr Walsh agreed that MPA's should not just be boundaries where no activity is permitted. He stated that the zones should be focused on sustainability and traditional cultural practices should be promoted as appropriate. Dr Walsh noted that the recommendations were not specific to any offshore wind developments.
- Dr Walsh stated that designations of Marine Planning Framework was not part of Marine Spatial Planning legislation however they were being developed in parallel. He added that it would be a period of time before it would be fully enacted.
- Dr Walsh agreed with Members that resources were essential for successful marine planning adding that this was a focus for the position paper which highlights the resources the Region will need to maximise benefits.
- Dr Walsh agreed that community involvement and engagement is vital for the success of any initiative, he added the community ownership is not addresses through planning.

Mr Denis Kelly thanked Dr Cormac Walsh for his informative presentation, he added that the Assembly were lucky to have his expertise in marine planning. Mr Kelly advised that the report is rich with important information and guidance. He said the report would be circulated with relevant stakeholders.

b) Submission to Bus Connects Galway Consultation (Circulated for noting)

Proposed: Cllr. Joe Sheridan

Seconded: Cllr. Jimmy McClearn and

Unanimously agreed that:

'Members note the submission to Bus Connects Galway Consultation'

c) Consideration of report on Draft Sligo LECP 2023-2030 (Circulated)

Proposed: Cllr. Donal Gilroy

Seconded: Cllr. Declan Bree and

Unanimously agreed that:

'That the Northern and Western Regional Assembly agree the Statement relating to the Draft Sligo LECP 2023- 2030 as set out in the report'

d) Review Monaghan CDP 2019-2025 and prepare Monaghan CDP 2025 – 2031 – Issues Paper (Circulated) (Slides at Appendix 2)

Mr Conall McGettigan presented a detailed summary on the issues paper. He outlined the guidance given and outlined how it would guide the drafting of the new plan..

Proposed: Cllr. Jimmy McClearn

Seconded: Cllr. Declan McDonnell

Unanimously agreed that:

'Members agree the submission as set out in the report.'

e) Submission to Mid-term review of the Regional Airports Programme 2021-2025 – for noting:

Mr Frank Flanagan outlined the details of the review. He stated the report had a narrow focus which the planning team had to broaden out for strategic analysis. Mr Flanagan stated that regional airports shouldn't be looked at in isolation from the overall economic needs of the region.

Proposed: Cllr. John Caulfield

Seconded: Cllr. Christy Hyland and

Unanimously agreed that:

'Members note the submission to the Midterm review of the Regional Airports Programme 2021-2025'

f) Interim Report Athenry Local Area Plan – update (Circulated) (Slides at Appendix 2)

Mr Frank Flanagan outlined the update and submission. He informed members that the closing date would be early July. Mr Flanagan emphasised the importance of the town as outlined in the RSES.

Members comments

- The amount of zoned land in Athenry was queried.
- The potential of Athenry was highlighted. The benefits of the motorway, train service and the high skilled jobs in the areas was noted as showing the prospective benefits. It was stated that there was potential for more jobs if planned correctly.
- Members queried the figures for population growth for Athenry.
- It was asked was the proposal ambitious enough.
- Issues with wastewater facilities was highlighted as a barrier to further development.
- Members highlighted the potential of land owned by the IDA for necessary development in the town.
- It was noted that some areas are Zone 1 but often times planning permission is rejected. Members added that common sense was needed stating that if an area is Zone 1 planning permission should be easier to achieve.
- The importance of Athenry as a connectivity hub was highlighted.
- Members emphasized that a major barrier for development within the Region was the lack of investment in a good road network.
- The proposal to dezone some lands was noted as regretful as it was stated houses were needed for the growing population.
- It was stated that increases of population means that further investment will be needed in various public services like schools.

Responses

- Mr Flanagan stated that he would need to confirm the exact figures relating to the amount of zoned land in Athenry.
- It was acknowledged that the population increase from 2016 2022 is 5% There was a 10% increase between 2011 and 2016.
- Mr Flanagan stated that wastewater had been addressed in the plan.
- Mr Flanagan noted that zoning didn't identify shovel ready land, he acknowledged this could be something the council could consider in the context of large job announcement for Athenry.

- Mr Flanagan stated that the Assembly was not critical of ambition but added that delivery to date was not great. He stated that there was no clear acceleration identified to achieve the objectives set out.

Mr Flanagan advised that the report would be finalised in consultation with the Cathaoirleach within the statutory timeframe for submissions. The finalised submission would be brought to the July Meeting for noting.

5) Correspondence

Mr Gerry Doyle outlined the two pieces correspondence received, which had been circulated to members.

- Vote of congratulations to previous Director David Minton, passed by Sligo County Council.
- Response from the Minister for Finance to a motion passed at Decembers Assembly meeting regarding the Temporary Business Energy Support Scheme (TBESS).

6) Any other Business

Cllr. Donal Gilroy highlighted that list of Assembly members on the Assembly website is not up to date and he asked that this be updated.

Mr Denis Kelly assured members that he would arrange to have the website updated urgently.

Motion

Proposed: Cllr. Orla Leyden

Seconded: Cllr. Justin Warnock and

Unanimously agreed

'that the Assembly would look at options for a study visit abroad for Members which would assist them in learning from successful European projects. Further details of possible locations and dates to be brought for the consideration of the Members at the next Assembly meeting in July.'

It was agreed that the July Assembly meeting, on the 21st of July, would start at 11am and the AGM would follow directly after at the time to be agreed with the Cathaoirleach.

The meeting concluded.

Signed: _____ **(Cathaoirleach)**

Date: _____