

Galway County PPN
Economic, Rural & Community Development Unit
Galway County Council
Áras an Chontae
Galway

Galway, November 2022

RE: Galway County Public Participation Network Submission on Galway County Council Litter Management Plan 2023-2025

Galway County Public Participation Network is a network of **1146 community groups** active across Galway County. The network is organised into three 'Colleges' which gather these member groups in terms of their interests and activities – these are the Environmental college, Social Inclusion college and Community and Voluntary college.

The main purpose of the Galway Co PPN is to fulfil the **statutory requirement of local authorities to consult with the communities** and include them in the processes of local decision-making. By including the community in the structures of local government and consulting them on the decisions that will ultimately affect them, better and more sustainable decisions can be made. This involvement in **local policy design** is borne of the long-standing commitment, at national level, to promote **active citizenship** and fulfil the promise of a functioning **deliberative democracy** in Ireland (beyond a representative democracy).

The formal role of the PPN, to facilitate the **representation of the community voice in local government**, is underpinned by other supportive mechanisms for community groups which focus on: information sharing and networking, advice on access to funding and grants; all manner of capacity building activities, including workshops,

trainings, and mentoring. To **Represent**, **Inform**, and **Educate** are thus the three main objectives that guide the work of the PPN, and all actions thereunder are geared towards developing a strong, resilient civil society network in the County, that is able to advocate for the needs and interests of the community.¹

Each submission made by Galway County PPN results from direct consultation with the network members and ongoing activities to collect the communities' views and aspirations for current and future generations. The recommendations contained in this document were collated following wide-ranging consultative process with members and a **special purpose information** event for PPN members with Staff from the Environment Section in Galway County Council held on 16 November 2022. Comments and feedback received for this submission were collected verbally, on the phone and via email, a draft was then sent to all members for review before this final report was issued to the Galway County Council on 5 December 2022.

The contents of this submission are organised in accordance with the 4 categories of action in the current [Litter Management Plan 2019 - 2022](#) (hereafter, 'the Plan'). The 4 targets mentioned therein address the prevention and management of litter, the enforcement of litter legislation in County Galway and the means to achieve these. The actions in the current Plan are listed under the following headings, as are our comments: Partnership, Awareness, Enforcement, Operations.

- **Partnership**

The Galway County PPN are keen to work with the Galway County Council on making Galway more **aesthetically pleasing**. The PPN wish to highlight the work of many community groups, local volunteers and particularly Tidy Town groups who go

¹ The Galway County PPN is funded jointly by the Department of Rural and Community Development and Galway County Council but is autonomous and its activities are directed by its members through an elected Secretariat. More information about the Galway County PPN can be accessed on its website: www.galwaycountyppn.ie

to **great efforts to regularly collect litter**, helping to keep our Towns and Villages clean.

The PPN welcome the Councils' focus on a 'Partnership' approach to tackling litter pollution and wish to encourage more support for Tidy Towns Committees from the Council, for their activities around litter reduction. In this vein, the PPN suggest that the Council actively acknowledge and promote **best practice examples** amongst community groups to encourage learning and knowledge sharing.

For example, Kinvara Tidy Towns has set up a 'Litter Squad' to encourage ownership and action to keep Kinvara litter free. The PPN suggest that one means to support a cross-pollination of ideas under a partnership approach is to organise an event, to **gather active groups from across Galway**. This way, unique and effective approaches to combat littering can be discussed at a grass-roots level and shared to achieve greater influence and successes within communities.

The PPN also wish to see the 'Partnership' approach pursued by the Council to include targeted actions aimed at the **business sector**. Similar to the a 'Community event' suggested prior, the PPN suggest organising a regular engagement event with local businesses that include the community, to meet, discuss and set targets to reduce **littering caused by businesses**. Additionally, the PPN wish to remark that any partnerships/ activities should also include **larger organisations** such as the GAA as these have a large remit, reach and influence.

- **Awareness**

The PPN commends the work of the ['Love this Place- Leave no Trace'](#) campaign and suggest incorporating its principles in the next Litter Management Plan.

Generally, the PPN believes more should be done to appeal to **younger generations** by embracing more modern social media channels such as 'Instagram' and 'Tik Tok', in

their campaigns. This would help **modernise** and streamline the delivery of any awareness campaigns and make it easier for groups to help share the message.

The PPN wish to highlight the success that the REPAK recycling campaign has had by using 'big name' **Ambassadors** to help spread the word. The PPN suggest that a similar approach, ie using a known figure, to raise awareness against littering, should be considered. Collaborations with role models, such as popular GAA figures, would help target younger groups and spread awareness and compliance.

The PPN note that '**Anti Litter Anti Graffiti**' funding is available, yet this is not well known. Awareness and provision of this funding needs to be increased.

Raising awareness within the community must also target local businesses, as particularly, littering generated by **fast-food** outlets is problematic. The PPN thus, suggest targeting local fast-food businesses, pubs and restaurants with a campaign to encourage them to address any littering as a result of their trading practices. One member suggested making it a stipulation of their licence that they provide bins of a certain size. Another member suggested imposing the requirement that all packaging by such businesses be rapidly biodegradable and include a levy on outlets to contribute to the Council's litter collections with making them more frequent in the towns and villages throughout the County. It was also suggested that larger businesses and organisation should be incentivised to clean up after large events or promotional activities.

The PPN would like to see the next plan focus on raising awareness among youth groups and younger people, focusing on the connection between littering and climate change. The PPN wish to highlight the work of the **Kinvara Earthkeepers** campaign. This campaign works in collaboration with TY co-ordinators in the area, as well as the 'Green Schools' and the 'An Gaisce' programme. Biodiversity and Zero-waste campaigns are part of this campaign as is a project called 'Picker Pals'. Noting the success of this project, the PPN suggest installing more litter-pick stations in Villages

and in key spots to promote 'two-minute litter-picks'. One idea shared considered promoting 'two-minute cleans' as part of well-being and warm-up activities for sports groups. One member suggests designing a short Tik Tok video promoting the two-minute street cleans with different age groups represented.

One member also suggested looking to Japanese culture for inspiration. Japan is a very tidy society and there is no litter to be found anywhere. Cleanliness, hygiene and responsibility for same is taught from a very early age onwards. Children and school tidy their area as part of the school curriculum and there is a **cultural aversion to litter and unhygienic situations**. There is a strong sense that 'no one else is responsible for your mess'. To adopt a similar approach would require a long-term strategy and must target the individual and not solely rely on local authority services as the responsible party.

The PPN also wish to highlight a local project run by the **Seaweed centre in Lettermullen**. As part of a pilot scheme, national school children were brought down to the shore. They collected litter and then discussed what they found, this encouraged children to bring a bag next time they go to a beach to collect litter. The PPN would like to see this pilot project adopted across the County, focusing particularly on the **impact of litter on beaches**. The PPN suggest that these efforts could be supported by the development of an **App that shows the impact of littering**.

A final recommendation under the 'Awareness' heading the PPN wish to share is the idea of organizing a **designated 'Lets Battle Litter' day** in Galway to promote the **launch of the new Litter Management Plan** and its planned actions and overall objectives.

- **Enforcement**

Generally, the PPN wish to see **more enforcement of the rules and regulations** around littering in the County. The PPN believes this is best approached by an **increased presence of Litter Officers, Waste Enforcement Officers and/or Community Wardens** and promoting better access to such personnel. Visibility is important and the PPN wish to see the next Plan **include targets** for an increased presence of Enforcement Officers, as well as a target for fines.

The PPN notes the actions on dog fouling outlined in the last Plan and the implementation of related measures. However, this is an on-going issue and continued efforts are needed to target irresponsible dog owners. The PPN consider that currently, the common perception is that there is no enforcement. The **utilisation of fines** must therefore be increased, in order to make the threat of financial punishment a **real deterrent** for repeat offenders.

The PPN are aware that littering and litter-compliance have generally improved over the last few years. However, as noted above, the PPN consider that more visibility of Community Wardens is required, particularly, to enforce fines for littering and dog fouling, which typically occurs late at night or early in the morning. Community groups often know where the littering and dog-fouling 'black-spots' in their towns and villages are, yet they are unsure how to reports this. The PPN thus suggest that the Council repeatedly inform each community of **how to report offences** to the relevant contact points. Community Wardens could run **local information sessions, introducing themselves** and their work. The PPN suggest that providing a '**direct line**' to a Community Warden should be considered.

- **Operations**

PPN Member Groups from Gort and Moycullen note that most public bins, including those in community playgrounds, are **constantly over-flowing**. This was even noted by a judge during the Tidy Towns adjudication process. Similarly, the 'Mutt Mitt' boxes are always **empty**. The PPN wish to see an increased commitment to more

regular emptying of public bins and filling up of the 'Mutt Mitt' boxes. A PPN member also suggested providing **larger bins** to counteract the constant overflowing of bins.

Members also remarked that more attention must be paid to **drains and gullies**. Especially in busy towns, drains along the streets need to be inspected and cleaned as these can become **blocked with leaves, litter, causing small-scale flooding** and bad smell. The resulting potential for flash flooding can become traffic and safety hazards. This issue effects Gort in particular, and it was suggested that drain-cleaning become part of the **urban/winter cleaning plans going forward**.

Similarly, litter tends to gather around local '**Bring-banks**'. The PPN is curious to know whether the CCTV operating around Bring-banks is successful, as it remains that these are popular dumping and littering spots. The PPN suggest that these areas are therefore tended to more frequently, by the Council.

The PPN wish to acknowledge the recent launch of the **bottle refund initiative** and suggest that a plastic bottle collection unit be made available in public places in each Village and Town in the County. These machines issue a credit for a local shop and is already operating successfully in other EU countries such as Germany.

The PPN remarked on the actions of An Garda Síochána to tackle **bogus litter collectors** who are unregistered and collecting waste from houses for a fee which they then dump illegally. There is an **anti-dumping committee** on the Joint Policing Committee. The PPN suggest that Council engage with and also take on a role, working with stakeholders to support these endeavors.

The PPN remarked that the litter picked up from **beaches** by local authorities is not separated and goes into landfill. The PPN note that this should get **separated** and go into an incinerator. Aware of the definition of 'litter' as opposed to 'waste', for the purposes of this Plan, the PPN is also aware that there is often an overlap in addressing both waste and litter. The PPN therefore also wish to express their

concern about the **practices of private waste collectors**. Contractors need to be regulated to ensure that they are separating the waste they collect. Here, the PPN asks the Council to call for more accountability and transparency around the practices of private contractors.

In a similar vein, the littering caused by **industrial muscle farming** needs to be observed and regulated. Local piers are being taken over by the industry and local communities are cleaning up most of the litter generated by these farms. Greater scrutiny of this industry and of their litter management must be practiced by the Council. The PPN again, suggests enforcing fines for this purpose.

We thank you for the opportunity to make this submission and trust that its contents will be considered.

Le dea-ghuí,
(with kindest regards)

Dr Charlotte May (she/her)

Galway County PPN Coordinator