

Introduction.

The Galway County PPN (Public Participation Network) is a network of 941 community groups from across County Galway. Collectively the PPN represents the interests of communities with a united voice and ensures they are heard in local decision-making processes. The PPN does this by electing representatives to various bodies and committees within the Council, especially the Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs). Crucially, the PPN also influences policy by consulting its members on planned policies and making submissions such as this one.

Galway County PPN welcomes the opportunity to submit its feedback, notes and views in relation to the County Development Plan for 2022-2028 (hereafter, 'the Plan'). Most of this submission is based on input collected at a consultation event hosted by the Galway County PPN on 23rd July 2020 at Claregalway Castle in Claregalway. At the event the PPN representatives of the Planning, Environment, Agriculture & Emergency Services SPC introduced the Issues Paper and informed the PPN members of the planned consultation process. The PPN wish to thank the many representatives of community groups that contributed to the consultation (including those that submitted feedback by email).¹

Topic 1: Core Strategy and Housing.

The PPN expressed a number of important issues in regard to housing that it wished to see reflected in the Plan which are outlined in the following:

More affordable and flexible housing options are needed in the County which allow an **ageing population** to live independently in secure environments in the vicinity of others. The PPN identified a need to incentivize and encourage living at home or living **independently** in settlements and discourage rural nursing homes as this leads to **social isolation**. Besides ensuring better community care and supports, the PPN suggest developing retirement villages and housing developments that promote **intergenerational living** to accommodate smaller and larger family units. As part of this, improved provision of housing for refugees moving out of Direct Provision Centres should also be considered. The PPN suggest that new housing developments should include specific allocations for the elderly providing smaller, single story accommodation. The PPN encourage the Council to explore housing models that

¹ Groups represented include: Athenry Tidy Towns, Comhlacht Forbartha an Spidéal Teo, Third Space Galway, Parkrun, St. Fursa's Historical Society, Corrib Beo Partnership, Clár Éifeachtach Fuinneamh, Corbally Corrandrum Dowras Corrandrum (CCDC) Residence Association, Athenry Community Council, Galway IFA, Lakeview Residents Association, An Taisce, Action Tuam, Ardahan Activity and Social Group, 9 Arch Music Society, Annaghdown Handball Club, Solstice Headford, Kiltartan Gregory Museum, Kilbecanty Community Development Association, Tuam Tidy Towns, Monivea Community Alert, Moycullen 2030, Sauti Youth Project-Youth Work Galway, Athenry Traders Group, Lakeview Estate Residents Association, Oranmore Arts Festival, Oranmore Supper Club, Gaeilge Dhúiche Sheoigheach & Thuar Mhic Éadaigh, among others.

are already successfully implemented elsewhere (for example the Ballyhoura Development in Limerick).

Members are concerned that there are several **vacant, derelict properties** in the County and suggest that funding or financial incentives should be made available to **retrofit** empty houses to address current housing need. More investment in such properties, and generally using existing resources and **repurposing** facilities and buildings in rural areas would contribute to **revitalizing** rural areas. In towns, on the other hand, habitable buildings may be subject to **preservation** rules with significant costs involved to retrofit such properties which presents a problem that needs to be addressed. Also in regard to vacant properties, some members suggested offsetting the vacant tax levy against the provision of space for community and small business use where possible. Imposing the vacant property tax or compulsory possession orders on vacant urban centre buildings or land could be repurposed for social use. This idea should include commercial units for rent at reasonable cost to encourage start-ups, social enterprises, small business groups or working hubs.

A further aspect the PPN wish to see addressed in the Plan is an issue facing many residential areas suffering from **illegal parking** at the entrance to their estates. The PPN identify this as a significant health and safety issue as it **obstructs access** for emergency vehicles. The laying of double yellow lines at the entrance to all estates in towns would solve this and be easily enforceable by traffic wardens and Gardai.

The PPN laments that current **planning procedures** for domestic dwellings are **arduous, cumbersome** and lengthy. Applying for planning permission should be made easier and results should be more consistent. Approving single houses in and adjacent to existing settlements will help address the population decline in rural areas and strengthen the local community.

With regard to the general development of the County, the PPN wishes to see the County expand as a **metropolis** that complements Galway City. Improved transport infrastructure and the provision of third level education in the County are identified as key means to achieve this.

A core part of the Plan should focus on making **rural life more attractive** by developing small towns and villages in the County and creating cultural hubs for crafts and musicians. The PPN suggest initiating a **campaign** to this effect similar to the campaign created to promote the Wild Atlantic Way. As part of this campaign, rural living must be made more appealing by improving electricity and water services, broadband and phone network coverage and transport infrastructure. The Plan should also adapt to the **current shifts in working life** as a response to the Covid-19 pandemic and support those working from home.

The PPN are also concerned that in some locations, wastewater is not treated correctly and ending up in the sea. This not only harms the Ocean, reducing its capacity to mitigate climate change but also affects tourism where bathing bans are imposed on beaches throughout the year. Additionally, the PPN notes that the lack of progress on the pipe network

upgrade for the sewage system in Athenry has stifled development in the town and requires urgent attention.

Addressing the delivery of the Plans and related strategies, the PPN note that the **implementation** of existing plans is problematic and that proper **evaluation** and **review processes** of these need to be put in place.

Topic 2 & 3: Urban living and Placemaking and Rural Placemaking and the Countryside.

Galway County PPN believe that the MASP must focus on improved and more **frequent Bus services**, initiate a **Park & Ride service** into the City to ease congestion and create **more cycle paths**. This would help dismantle the ‘car hierarchy’ in towns and villages’ identified by some members.

The PPN note that the implementation of temporary free parking at the Back Lawn Car Park on the outskirts of Athenry showed tremendous foresight and freed up parking in the town centre for short term use. Similar initiatives should be rolled out elsewhere and be made **permanent** in the Plan. To increase **footfall** in smaller towns the PPN suggest designating free parking spaces/periods in towns, as well as providing **Super Charging points for electric cars** which will attract visitors to towns along the motorways. Where relevant, the Plan should foresee the development of multi-storey/ underground car parking to reduce land space requirements.

The PPN lament that many **bus stops are not easily identifiable** as such and often do not have a shelter which is required given the frequent rainfall in the County. The Moycullen 2030 Project² also identified that a **bus shelter** was needed and notes that bus connections are essential to achieve **connectivity between towns**. Members also identified that bus shelters were needed in Oranmore Village and often timetables are missing at bus stops. Digital trackers would help passengers know when buses will arrive (see system used by Dublin Bus).

Working in the city or in outlier towns can also be encouraged by creating **local, co-working hubs** while at the same time encourage working from home. In smaller towns, the PPN suggest designating a building as a local **digital hub** offering a strong broadband connection which will help generate businesses and improve social living. The PPN hope that the Plan will heavily focus on **attracting retail and commercial development** to smaller towns. Providing **better broadband**, generally, was identified by the PPN as crucial to promoting development in the County. The PPN welcome the **Broadband Connection Point project** and encourage the further role out of such connection points in rural areas.

An important aspect of promoting urban living, as well as rural place making, is ensuring that the **local community has a voice** in local development decisions, that there are

² A village plan for Moycullen available at: <http://whitakerinstitute.ie/project/moycullen-2030-a-village-plan/>

ample childcare and **playground/recreational** facilities and **good access** to local services. The PPN hope that the Plan will envision more green spaces in urban centres. Some members suggested retaining naturalised green amenity areas claimed during the Covid lockdown (for example, the field adjacent to Oranmore Aldi by the river). The PPN also encourages the development of community centres which are used as multi-use facilities (for example 4 Mile House in Roscommon) and ensuring creches are located near schools.

The PPN suggest **pedestrianizing** at least one street in town at night during reduced traffic to **encourage urban night life** in smaller towns. Members also suggest that the Plan should promote temporary street closures for events and community activities and establish a public strategy guide for same. The PPN also wish to see more decision-making powers attributed at local level to ensure that any **repair or improvement works** in towns and villages are conducted in timely manner.

The PPN also report that in some parts of the County **rubbish is burnt or illegally dumped**. Stronger measures to fight this are necessary and vital. To make urban places (Metropolitan areas, Towns and villages) more attractive, the PPN suggest ensuring litter is removed and introducing **stricter fines** on dumping.

Incentives are needed to renovate, revive or repurpose empty or derelict shops. The PPN also suggest extending pavements, providing street lighting and more public seating/benches in the countryside (location to be decided by community) **to encourage socialising**. The PPN propose the idea of turning rural hand pump locations into drinking water fountains as meeting points. Additionally, the PPN remark that in some parts of the County the quality of drinking water is very poor and must be upgraded thus eliminating the need for boil water notices.

Rural housing design can be improved by e.g. building to NZEB & Passive House standards, having more staff working in the area of building control and by promoting the use of quality of materials and finishes. Some members wished to see more robust design standards applied to rural housing (one idea provided was to limit the floor area allowance of rural housing to prevent inappropriate one-off dwellings in the landscape).

The PPN believe that Arts and Culture play a vital part in creating **vibrant communities** in towns and villages. Therefore, the Plan must focus on developing facilities, such as community centres, to be used as **venue for arts and culture**.

The expansion of suitable spaces to facilitate arts activities could be progressed if some buildings which are currently in public ownership could be repurposed for the arts and publicly managed.

Topic 4: Economic, Enterprise, Tourism and Retail Development.

The PPN wishes to see a focus placed in the Plan on engaging and supporting local enterprises and projects with ongoing investment in **community enterprise centers**. The Plan will also need to acknowledge that this sector will be particularly hit by Covid-19 and must **adapt** as a result. Numerous supports will therefore be required to adapt to the current situation, particularly the rise in **remote working**, which must be factored into the Plan. With regard to the general development of enterprise in the County, the PPN believe that Galway needs to **harness its central position** within the **Atlantic Economic Corridor** and develop better links with the north and south as part of the AEC.

Local production and **smart enterprises** should be promoted in the Plan (reignite the 'Made In Galway' campaign) with a significant emphasis placed on 'reduce, reuse and recycle' across all aspects of industry. A further idea to promote local opportunities suggested by the PPN is to prevent mass lot sales of commercial units such as shopping centres. Instead, the sale of single units would promote smaller enterprises. The Plan should encourage the use of materials by industries that are **sourced sustainably and locally**, and members note the merits of sheep wool for a variety of purposes (such as insulation), an avenue which should be further reflected upon in the Plan.

The PPN suggest investing in particularly **organic supports** that encourage a **Bioregional approach**³ which sees the production of food, fuel and other goods at local level contributing to a **circular economy** (amongst other benefits, circular economies are more resilient to the effects of economic recessions). To achieve this the Plan should focus on developing supports and allocating resources to local, **community-led cooperatives**. This investment in community cooperatives should be accompanied by an **educational programme** as some very successful energy cooperatives exist around the County.

The PPN wishes to see any future marketing and tourism strategy focus on the **whole** of Galway. The PPN report that currently no regional **tourism concept** or plan exists for the **east of Galway** and that tourism in the area needs to be boosted. An overall tourism concept would be welcome for the entire County, not just the west and Connemara region. An effort to promote East Galway was made in 2005 but lost momentum due to a lack of funding and overall tourism promotion. Tourism can only become sustainable if there are adequate promotional activities and support material and brochures.

The Plan must also promote the Galway to Dublin Green/cycleway and other **greenway projects** (such as a Headford-Galway cycleway or Oranmore- Renville Park) as integral parts of its tourism strategy (the Waterford Greenway has significantly benefitted the surrounding area). The PPN suggest setting out a **Greenway Charter** that clarifies important issues such as landowners' rights, responsibilities and compensation.

³ A Bioregional, holistic approach is a crucial means by which all aspects of agriculture, nature and community are integrated and connected.

The PPN also suggested that tourism in Galway should build more **spurs off** the Wild Atlantic Way (WAW) and showcase events in villages and towns in conjunction with the WAW. Similar to the approach taken in the WAW, the PPN suggests identifying key, **unique assets** of each community, enhancing and using this as **brand** to promote the area. The Moycullen 2030 project suggests a similar approach to branding Moycullen as a visitor experience and promotes collaborations between businesses for this. Other members wished to see Oranmore and Renville promoted as key tourist attraction. Ideas for this include a sea ferry from the Galway docks and better bus routes and cycle routes from the city to Renville Park.

An additional idea the PPN wish to see included in the Plan is a focus on **promoting local tourism** (hiking-) **trails**, (including boat or archaeology tour) highlighting heritage and culture along these, simultaneously creating a network of businesses working together. Food trails, for example, bring together retail, farming and tourism sectors. Encouraging the local production of food and facilities for sale, similar to the English market in Cork, would further boost the local economy and increase tourism. The PPN remark that an important part of any marketing and tourism strategy is to encourage **community supported development** to encourage local, sustainable projects.

Overall, the PPN lament the lack of a **local development officer** to help develop this sector in the local area in conjunction with the local community. A local development officer would provide a **crucial link** between local business, assess local need and identify community aspirations for the area. The officer could work with focus groups, for example teenagers, to promote their involvement and establish needs and strategies. The officer would also work on the Local Area Action Plans to ensure the relevant and targeted development of the area.

Topic 5: Infrastructure and Transport.

The PPN would like the Plan to focus on **improving the transport network** in County Galway. An improved rural transport network would reduce the reliance on cars and mitigate the problem of **rural depopulation**. Efforts to this effect should include reopening Phase 2 of the Western Rail Corridor to support the development of **rail transport**, improved and more frequent train services which are **better connected to bus services**. The PPN emphasize the need to link rural areas into towns and main routes and be mindful of the ‘last mile transport solution’ (for example linking the Oranmore Train station with the Village).⁴ moreover, the PP highlight that a double rail track to Athenry should be put in place as well as an assessment undertaken into the feasibility of a double track to Athlone. The report on the rail connection to Tuam and Claremorris should be published, and a decision be made immediately to upgrade the track or replace it with a Greenway. Bus services that run **between towns** in the County and not just into the City are needed (i.e. lateral routes and not just a ‘spoked’

⁴ the **last mile problem** is the challenge of moving people between **transportation** hubs and their **final** destinations, like the walk from the nearest bus or train station to your place of work.

network). The availability of better transport services will also increase employment in rural area. Additionally, the PPN wish to see **localized, community-led transport options** in rural areas for older people such as the Local Link service operating in Mayo. Some PPN members also note that lack of bus parking in the village of Oranmore, for example. This has been identified by businesses as prohibitive to economic and tourism opportunities.

The PPN wish to see **more cycle lanes** and **wider footpaths** in towns with safety highlighted along them. The cycle routes should connect residential areas with key amenities and should be well lit and off road where possible for safety (see the greenway starting in Westport, Mayo as a good example). This would encourage the uptake of a cycling generally, as well as a **School Cycle Bus** system supported by parents.⁵

The PPN strongly supports the **development of Greenways** across the County and wishes to see this reflected in the Plan, along with the **maintenance of rural roads** to ensure safety and to preserve these. A further maintenance aspect the PPN wishes to highlight refers to **road signage**. The amount of road signage on the roads needs to be monitored and updated as some signs along roads in the County advertise venues that are long closed which causes confusion.

The Plan has to facilitate the move away from car transport to Galway city. A more frequent bus services with an attractive fare structure and permission for private coach operators to run services on the 7 orbital routes to the city is needed. Additional bus lanes and shelters at appropriate points on the routes is also required.⁶ The routes are (1) Headford, (2) Tuam (Turloughmore /Claregalway). (3) Athenry/Monivea, (4) Loughrea, (5) Gort. (6) An Spidéal and (7) Oughterard/Moycullen which are all within approx. 20km of Galway City. All school children living within 15km of Galway travelling to city area schools should use bus transport only to reduce traffic levels (traffic levels increase during school term).

Working from home should be encouraged to reduce car commuting. Other ideas that need to be explored to reduce car only commuting include Car-pooling, Park and Ride and cycle lanes on the 7 routes.

Topic 6: Environment, Renewable Energies and Communications.

The PPN wishes to see a strong emphasis in the Plan on **raising awareness** of current environmental concerns. The PPN suggest that the Plan supports robust initiatives to invest in renewable energy sources (such as **solar energy**, tidal energy, district heating and cooling model (such as that in Copenhagen, Denmark), off-shore wind farms, etc.) but also provide

⁵ This is a collection of school children on bike that cycle to school every morning guided by parents. See here for more information: <https://galwaycyclebus.weebly.com/>

⁶ Transport infrastructure Ireland says its current interest in installing bus shelters is in the Galway city area only and the County Council, Bus Eireann and the national transport authority do not accept that it's their responsibility to provide the bus shelters.

housing **loans to retrofit** houses with heat recovery units. The PPN suggest that **rainwater harvesting** in Schools, Marts and in other public spaces, become mandatory. Moreover, the Plan should encourage the development of a Bioregional approach to sources of fuel, food and fibres.

The PPN identify that there are considerable environmental concerns resulting from the COVID19 pandemic. The Plan must address these and promote **reusable materials** and ban the **use of single use plastics**, single use facemasks and plastic gloves and non-biodegradable wipes.

As part of its environmental strategy, the PPN consider that the Plan must include a strategy to reflect a stronger commitment to **recycling** and promoting this across the County. The PPN wish to see more and frequent **WEEE recycling collection events**. WEEE collection events should be free of charge and more frequent (on member noted attending a WEEE event and being charged €5.00 for the disposal of one empty paint tin). Littering and dumping needs to be tackled more systematically. The Plan should therefore include an awareness and educational campaign and allow for a stronger enforcement of relevant laws around dumping (higher fines, for example).

Moreover, the Plan must increase ‘Bog-awareness’ and promote systematic **audits of biodiversity** across the County which are crucial to review and prevent its decline (Milltown River Walk is a good example). The Plan could introduce guidelines that regulate the cutting of grass verges in residential areas, to allow these to grow naturally to enable pollination (see and implement the **All-Ireland Pollinator Plan**).

Regarding communications, the PPN wish to see the Plan tackle **communication black spots** in the County, by addressing weak Broadband and phone coverage which is essential given the rise in remote working. A further communication issue, the PPN would like to draw attention to is the communication between the **Galway County Council and communities** which needs to improve. Members note that often there are no replies from emails sent to the Council. Additionally, members note that the Council website is very outdated, not user-friendly and falls well behind in terms of an information portal relative to other Council websites. The PPN suggests that the website needs to be completely redesigned for simplicity of use.

The PPN believe the Plan should support **community led energy cooperatives** and projects (for example, the Cloughjordan Eco Hub). The use of **solar energy** should be encouraged, and community buildings should be fitted with solar panels. The plan must encourage the investment in solar energy generally and all GI should be owned by the community.

Topic 7: Architectural and Archaeological Heritage.

The PPN suggest that a **comprehensive audit** is conducted that captures historic, protected structures, and those considered as such by each local community. The PPN note that there are many examples of such structures located around Lough Corrib and its islands. Resources must be allocated towards this endeavour and collaborations for this historical project with relevant departments in NUIG/GMIT should be sought. The further development of the list of protected structures should include Furze Lodge, Renville and other examples of historic architecture. The aim should be to encourage restoration and public ownership of protected buildings with grants for redevelopment. For those in public ownership, the PPN suggest possibly allowing an extended lease agreement for private occupation with low/ no rent, provided that the occupier maintain, develop, and promote the structure. The PPN believe that the main purpose of identifying, listing and protecting buildings and landscapes should be to retain their character. Any proposals in agreement with the Council must be in keeping with the original purpose and style as applied in the Clarinbridge Local Area Plan.

While an audit on structures in the County was carried out in recent years, in the town of Tuam with many structures, mainly houses and some shops, on the list of protected structures is considered to be a hindrance because of the subsequent restraints regarding improvements and development with resulting costs involved. The PPN would like the Plan to strike a balance between protection and the wish to upgrade buildings to address this issue. The PPN also suggested encouraging public participation in the restoration of publicly owned protected buildings through workshops (see, for example the work of the [SPAB Ireland](#)).

The PPN would like to see the Plan encourage the **protection of visual artists works** around the County, as well as the repurposing of old buildings and spaces (the Galway Airport for example, could be developed as a Park and Ride facility to ease congestion). The PPN emphasise that it is important that the **public are consulted** with regard to any town or village area planning applications that may interfere with protected structures or historical, unlisted sites which may be locally regarded as important landmarks. Local communities need more information on plans for disused buildings of historical value and for Architectural Conservation Areas. **Damage** to local historical sites and buildings must be policed better.

The PPN also wished to see the Plan ensure scenic views are protected as points of interest. This should include the view from the bridge in Oranmore to the Castle, currently obscured by landfill.

Topic 8: Social, Community and Cultural Development.

The PPN suggests that the Plan includes a **project to survey** each town, village, and settlement capturing its community assets and facilities. This will highlight which services are lacking in each locality (many don't have recreational facilities). Some members noted that

particularly in Oranmore more indoor amenity spaces for sports, music, arts, theatre, were needed. Generally, the Plan must include work towards ensuring that each town, village and area has an innovation and enterprise centre, playgrounds and other **community amenities**. The PPN believe that in future it will be particularly important to establish **digital hubs close to community facilities** due to the rise of remote working. The PPN also wish to see the Plan promote the development of other community facilities such as community kitchens, allotments, hubs for artists, Men's Sheds and facilities for young people. The PPN note that current planning systems demands that large scale housing developments provide creche facilities, however, no such provision is made for facilities schools (Primary or Secondary).

The PPN also suggest that national schools and childcare facilities, where possible, are located in tight proximity to reduce car and bus journeys for families (4 Mile House in Roscommon, demonstrates how the co-location of schools and childcare works). Some members suggested that safe footpaths for school children to use on their way to school should be provided spanning a radius of 5kms in all directions from every school in Galway.

Safe access and transport are particularly essential in areas of clustered school development. The concentration of 3 schools in Claregalway has resulted in serious traffic congestion in the area. The abandonment of the bypass for Claregalway adds the school traffic to the approx. 20k vehicles passing through Claregalway regardless of the opening on the N17/18 motorway.

The PPN wish to see the Plan encourage the development of community gyms or other **focal points for physical activities**, so that walking and running groups can come together. **Members suggested that the plan should promote county wide consistent signage to highlight pre-existing walking / running circuits**. The Plan should also encourage the implementation of the National (and County) **Age friendly Strategy** in all towns and villages to raise 'age-awareness' and provide seating in graveyards.

The PPN believe that it is critical that each MD receive more resources to support **community development**. It suggests that a group of development officers is assigned to each area to support groups to make grant applications and to **provide leadership to encourage community building**. **This initiative would help encourage, assess and establish open and transparent Community Development Groups to seek community participation and feedback and ownership.**

The PPN members suggest that a **central information page** listing all available funds for communities would be beneficial, this would help communities understand the schemes better. The PPN highlight again, that the **Council website is out of date** and needs revising.

Further community initiatives that the PPN wish to see added in the Plan include:

- The development of a **coordinated Arts sector** and facilities for the Arts in smaller towns.
- More **river walks**, including awareness-raising around our natural habitat (use existing facilities such as GAA pitches to create info hubs with signs educating people of the local flora and fauna)

- Increase the provision of **water safety courses** for groups of all ages that are active in areas close to water.
- Provide funding for **smaller outdoor sport facilities** other than GAA (handball/tennis)
- Organize **recreational park runs** in every town.
- Promote **local heritage trails** to showcase and promote visits to local communities and local crafts such as lacemaking, knitting, woodwork, jewelry making (consider turning Heritage Week into Heritage Year and to involve schools in maintaining traditional skills)
- Umbrella share project (similar to bike share) to be located at car parks, bus stations, etc.

There has been a noticeable increase in the County of people of other nationalities and cultures. Efforts should be included in the Plan that encourage integration in local communities. This can only be done if there is a strong sense of community. Community facilities are vital in supporting the inclusion of all members of society.

Topic 9: The Galway Gaeltacht.

The PPN note that there are 10 Irish language community areas in Galway, most of them in the County.⁷ The PPN encourage the fact that among the main objectives of the Plan is the protection and promotion of the Irish language and Gaeltacht regions over the coming years. Few PPN members, however, expressed their concern over some of the **compulsory elements** associated with the promotion of the Irish language, particularly that in compulsory education.

The PPN suggest that some of the signage in villages, towns, amenities and historical sites in the County should be bilingual. This is because in some instances Irish signage can cause confusion, especially among visitors, tourists and foreign nationals. A member provided an example, referring to the signage for Baile Chláir (Claregalway) on the motorway network which is reportedly regularly confused with Belclare (Béal an Chláir). This issue was however contested by other members. The PPN would, therefore, urge the Plan to reflect the need to provide clear road signage that is accessible to all users, but reflect the provisions of the Official Languages Act 2003.

The PPN suggest **surveying local communities**, particularly those around the Lough Corrib to gauge their **ideas and support for the active revival** of the use of Irish Language in these communities. The PPN suggest that retailers could be encouraged to use Irish while

⁷ Irish language planning officers will be in place by 2022 in the Gaeltacht and each area will have a budget (€700,000 to €1m over 7years) to assist the implementation of a 7 year Language plan to retain and increase the level of daily Irish speakers. This is funded under the 2030 Irish language plan.

trading by providing **free Irish language classes**, including grants to **promote bilingual signage** in shops.

Topic 10: Natural Heritage, Landscape and Green Infrastructure

The PPN note that the flora and fauna of the Slieve Aughty mountains should be protected.

The PPN also consider that the natural heritage and landscape of each area in the County needs to be assessed with a view to controlling the flora & fauna rather than allowing uncontrolled growth that can give rise to problems such as flooding.

Topic 11: Agriculture, Fishing Marine and Forestry.

The PPN wish to see the Plan incorporate a land use strategy that focuses on the unique landscape of the West. It suggests that a **public land bank** should allocate land for community use to support enterprises in the county, (not just the city enterprises), including **community supported agriculture**.⁸

The PPN wishes to see the Plan support organic, community farming through relevant infrastructure and education. The PPN highlight that farmers and the local authority must be educated on the importance of maintaining our biodiversity and to cease using **chemical sprays**. It suggests encouraging the participation in NOTS (National Organic Training Skillnet) across the county courses. The Plan should encourage a focus in Agriculture and Forestry towards becoming domestic EFF (Environmental Fuel Free).

In regard to Agriculture, the Plan should concentrate on supporting **regenerative farming** (finding alternative uses for wool, for example) through grants for organic farming and focus on **preventing topsoil erosion** and creating healthy soils. The PPN suggested introducing subsidies for farms to prevent **floods using tillage methods to de-compact land**. Ensuring clean rivers which flow freely, without rubbish and effluent discharges is a further means to prevent flooding.

The PPN also wish to highlight the importance of preventing the **pollution of local rivers** and preventing the runoff of slurry which includes farming chemicals into rivers. The use of **phosphate and nitrogen** in farming destroys local fauna and is the biggest killer of natural habitats and native species and must be addressed in the Plan. The over-use of chlorine must also be addressed. A **campaign** to raise awareness of these concerns would be beneficial, as well as assistance to empty septic tanks to prevent overflowing into local water

⁸ **land banking** is the practice of aggregating parcels of land for future sale or development.

systems. The **restoration of ecosystems** is vital and requires a community-led campaign on addressing biodiversity, our farming heritage and the effect on natural landscapes.

With regard to Forestry, the PPN would like the Plan to review the Sitka Spruce Plantations, for their effect upon local **biodiversity**. The PPN note that better support to grow **hardwoods** is required and that **clear** felling was a major concern. The PPN suggests that the Plan incorporate a continuous cover policy and invest in plant heritage and supporting **eco-tourism** as part of this.

There are many suitable areas in the county that could be utilised for the planting of native Irish trees. While these trees such as Oak, willow, birch would be a long-term undertaking, these would help to secure the land bank from erosion.

Overall, the PPN wish to see a **Bioregional** approach adopted in this sector.⁹ This would ensure that a holistic approach to farming and environmental recovery is adopted, including one that focuses on meeting local needs for fuel and food through community-led initiatives. A Bioregional, holistic approach is a crucial means by which all aspects of agriculture, nature and community are integrated and connected.

The PPN also suggest that the Plan should encourage the development of the first **Marine Park in Ireland**. This could integrate the **cultural identity of the Corrib catchment areas**, raising awareness, appreciation, respect for place, and people, inviting engagement and positive action.

Project IDEA:

The PPN suggest establishing a **community-led central data portal for the River Corrib** which includes a dashboard with live updates of the status of the area and waters, including existing projects initiated in the area. This project would bring groups together to network and develop a common vision and voice for action on Fishing, Forestry and Farming around the Corrib catchment area. Collaborative projects and information on existing projects on environmental sustainability could be shared, inviting agencies to feed into this network. The Plan should help fund professional and collective input into development of a system that encourages this, or a similar, community project.

Other:

The PPN wish to be informed of how its submission will **influence** the Plan and in general, what influence the community has on the development, implementation and review

⁹ **Bioregionalism** is a political, cultural, and ecological system or set of views based on naturally defined areas called **bioregions**, similar to ecoregions. **Bioregions** are defined through physical and environmental features, including watershed boundaries and soil and terrain characteristics.

thereof. The PPN also wish to be informed of the process by which the Council will **design the policies** that are elaborated on the Plan.

The PPN note that **young people** would like to be included in consultation processes directly, as well as in the SPCs. The Plan should include a focus on involving **marginalised voices in decision-making at County-level** with regard to all aspects of the Plan (such as those of ethnic minorities, young people and people with disabilities).