



Oifig an
Rialaitheora Pleanála
Office of the
Planning Regulator

OPR Ref: MA-001-25

20th June 2025

Forward Planning Section,
Galway County Council,
Prospect Hill,
Galway.

Re: Material Alterations to the Draft Gort Local Area Plan 2025-2031

A chara,

Thank you for your authority's work in preparing the proposed Material Alterations (material alterations) to the draft Gort Local Area Plan 2025-2031 (the Local Area Plan).

As Galway County Council (the Planning Authority) is aware, a core function of the Office of the Planning Regulator (the Office) is the strategic evaluation and assessment of statutory plans to ensure consistency with legislative and policy requirements relating to planning. This includes a requirement to make submissions on statutory plans, including any observations or recommendations the Office considers necessary to ensure the effective co-ordination of national, regional and local planning requirements.

The Office has evaluated and assessed the proposed material alterations under the provisions of sections 31AO(1) and 31AO(2) of the Planning and Development Act 2000, as amended (the Act), and within the context of the Office's earlier recommendations and observations.

The Office's evaluation and assessment of the proposed material alterations has regard to the current Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028 (the County Development Plan), the Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy (RSES) for the Northern and Western Regional Assembly (NWRA) area, and relevant section 28 guidelines.

Overview

The Office made four recommendations and four observations on the draft Local Area Plan to enhance its alignment with the County Development Plan and the objectives of the RSES in relation to the core strategy and residential land use zoning, economy and employment, town centre and regeneration, transport and accessibility, flood risk management and implementation and monitoring of the draft Local Area Plan.

The Office is generally satisfied with the response to its recommendations and the provision of a number of changes which provided more clarity. Furthermore, there are a number of material alterations which the Office particularly welcomes including MA 2 and MA 7, in relation to opportunities to improve the integration of proposals for Town Centre First and Opportunity Sites including the concept of establishing of a working group with Active Travel, Town Centre Regeneration Office and Planning to create synergy and consistency in the delivery of regeneration and active travel proposals.

The Office also notes and welcomes MA 1 in response to Recommendation 1(i) (core strategy and residential land) of its submission to the draft Local Area Plan, and while the opportunity to review the structure and content of the Infrastructure Assessments has not been included at this stage, the Office welcomes the Planning Authority's acknowledgement that the existing assessments are not sufficient and its commitment to review such matters on a county wide basis in collaboration with Uisce Éireann (UÉ) for future local area plans.

The Office also notes the Planning Authority's commitment to a county wide housing capacity review of Town Centre/Mixed Use areas in response to Recommendation 1 of the Office's submission to the draft Local Area Plan and advises that the Planning Authority should also include the provision of information of housing yield for zoned Residential Phase 1 and Phase 2 in all plans and capacity reviews, in the interest of transparency.

In relation to residential zonings, R2d and R2a (Recommendation 1(v) and (vi)) of the Office's submission to the draft Local Area Plan notes the Chief Executive's response and reasons for including these lands as Residential R2. However, the material alterations introduce further R2 lands, which are more peripherally located, and which are not required to ensure a sufficient supply of zoned land consistent

with the core strategy of the County Development Plan. These material alterations are specifically addressed below.

The Office commends the Planning Authority's response to Recommendation 2, (Employment zoned lands) of its submission to the draft Local Area Plan, in respect of its commitment to review employment lands infrastructure assessments inclusive of land uptake and availability for the county and, in particular, the Office acknowledges the inclusion of a draft infrastructure assessment table in the Chief Executive's Report (CE's Report) and respectively requests the inclusion of this draft table into the adopted Local Area Plan.

The Office also welcomes the clarity regarding policy objective GSST 6 and notes the consistency issue with other local area plans.

In relation to Recommendation 3, (Integrated transport and land use planning) of its submission to the draft Local Area Plan, the Office also commends a number of material alterations in respect to the inclusion of public realm initiatives and short term measures for active travel at MA 3, MA 4, MA 6 within the Local Transport Plan (LTP), and inclusion of text to support improving safety policies, safe routes for schools, including NNR5 and Travel Plans for schools at MA 8, which is also welcomed. The Office also welcomes the inclusion of MA 26 regarding the provision of additional bus stops to support a modal shift to sustainable travel and MA 17 which includes additional text to the LTP to support reference to Electric Vehicle (EV) Infrastructure Strategy 2022-2025 and relevant national and regional plans.

However, the Office notes the Chief Executive's comments in relation to the decision not to include mode share targets for Gort in the Local Area Plan (Recommendation 3(ii) of the Office's submission to the draft Local Area Plan). The Office remains of the view that the Planning Authority should give consideration to setting modal share targets for towns of this scale in future plans in order to address the mandatory climate action targets in the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended.

The Office also welcomes MA 10 and MA 11 which addresses matters raised under Recommendation 4 of its submission to the draft Local Area Plan in respect of Gort Lowlands Flood Relief Scheme and a minor update of the correct Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (SFRA) Fluvial Mapping. While the Office acknowledges the inclusion of MA 14 and MA 15 in relation to Constrained Land Use, the Office

remains concerned regarding the reliance on Policy Objective GSST 25 Constrained Land Use to limit inappropriate development on the Opportunity Site 4 (Recommendation 4(i)) and Existing Residential at Tubber Road (Recommendation 4(ii)). This matter could however be satisfactorily addressed by way of a minor modification to include reference to section 3.0 of the Planning System and Flood Risk Management Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2009), which defines water compatible uses.

This matter should be highlighted in your authority's notice letter upon adoption as per section 31AO(5) of the Act and will be fully considered by the Office at that stage. In relation to relation to Recommendation 4(iii) (Business & Technology Park at Glenbrack Road) of the Office's submission to the draft Local Area Plan, the Planning Authority is advised to provide details in that notice letter to provide clarity where there are particular characteristics that affect the nature of the flood risk identified in the SFRA mapping.

With the exception of the matters raised below, the Office also considers that the approach taken to the material alterations has been robust and evidence-based.

It is within this context the submission below sets out one (1) recommendation and one (1) observation under the following themes:

Key theme	Recommendation	Observation
1. Core strategy and residential land use zoning	MA Recommendation 1	-
2. Integrated transport and land use planning	-	MA Observation 1

Recommendations issued by the Office relate to clear breaches of the relevant legislative provisions, of the national or regional policy framework and/or of the policy of Government, as set out in the Ministerial guidelines under section 28. As such, planning authorities are requested to implement or address recommendation(s) made by the Office in order to ensure consistency with the relevant policy and legislative provisions.

Observations take the form of a request for further information, justification on a particular matter, or clarification regarding particular provisions of a plan on issues

that are required to ensure alignment with policy and legislative provisions. Planning authorities are advised by the Office to action an observation.

A submission can include advice on matters that the Office considers would contribute positively to the proper planning and sustainable development of the area. Planning authorities are requested by the Office to give full consideration to the advice contained in a submission.

1. Core strategy and residential zoned lands

The Office notes MA 33 and MA 34 propose to amend lands from Existing Residential and Residential Phase 1, respectively, to Town Centre. These lands formed part of the southern portion of the R1b zoning and the potential access point onto the Loughrea Road in the draft Local Area Plan. This is a centrally located, Tier 1, Residential Phase 1 zoning with the benefit of planning permission, and the Office is concerned with the loss of potential supply of such key residential lands, in a more spatially sequential and sustainable location. Furthermore, the Office notes that detaching this portion of the zoning with both MA 33 and MA 34 combined, would likely undermine and restrict the access options to the lower part of the Ennis Road, closer to the town centre. As such, the Office concludes that the subject lands should be retained as Residential Phase 1 in order to protect key Residential Phase 1 lands and be consistent with the core strategy of the County Development Plan.

The Office also notes MA 42, which proposes to amend lands from Residential Phase 2 to Agriculture. This site is strategically located within the existing Residential Phase 2 lands, and is bounded by residential zoned lands. The Office is concerned that by amending this land to Agriculture, lands to the east of this site shall be severed access, and the north and south from opportunity to comprehensively develop and access the site for future housing resulting in piecemeal and unsustainable patterns of development. Furthermore, the Office is concerned, overall, with the loss of residential zoned land at this centrally located site. Therefore, the Office concludes that this site should be retained as Residential Phase 2.

Whereas the above material alterations would reduce the availability of residential zoned land in strategic and sequentially preferable locations, the Office notes that a number of substantial new zonings have been included as material alterations to the south-east of the town which are unserviced and peripherally located, and which

have the potential to undermine the core strategy of the County Development Plan and the sustainable and compact growth of the town.

MA 36 amends lands from land outside the plan boundary to Residential Phase 2 lands (c.4.9 ha). These lands are located outside the plan boundary and largely outside the CSO boundary, and in a non-sequential location to the south of the town. Also, in respect to servicing, UÉ has advised that a sewer extension between 50-250m may be required and potentially third-party access and local upgrades may also be required. The Office also has concerns regarding a further individual access on the lower part of Ennis Road.

In addition, the Office notes that MA 37 (1.1 ha) to rezone land from Business and Enterprise to Residential Phase 2 and MA 38 (0.2 ha) to rezone land from outside the plan boundary to Residential Phase 2. These material alterations do not support the principles of compact growth and are spatially non sequential. Also, UÉ has advised that third-party lands may be required to link with the sewerage system 300m away and may require an upgrade depending on the cumulative effect of multiple developments in the area.

Furthermore, in relation to MA 38, the change from Business and Technology reduces the extent of lands remaining for employment lands in the town, and of this type and in consequence creates a narrow strip of zoned Business and Technology lands remaining which is piecemeal in scale, nature and accessibility for future development.

The draft Local Area Plan, excluding the material alterations, included c.12.8 ha Residential Phase 1 lands, and c.28.6 ha of Residential Phase 2. The Office is of the opinion, therefore, that the draft Local Area Plan includes a significant quantum of Residential Phase 2 lands which, together with the material alterations which are not subject of the MA Recommendation 1, are better located than MA 36, MA 37 and MA 38 to support the longer term growth needs of Gort consistent with the core strategy of the County Development Plan.

In respect of MA 36, MA 37 and MA 38, the Strategic Environmental Assessment Environmental report also identifies, in summary table 5.1, that the proposed zoning material alterations are likely to give rise to significant environmental effects in that the proposed alterations would not provide the most evidence-based framework for development and has the potential to undermine sustainable development and

proper planning, with potential for associated unnecessary adverse environmental effects on various environmental components.

As such, the Office concludes that the MA 36, MA 37 and MA 38 lands should revert to the zoning objectives in the draft Local Area Plan consistent with the core strategy of the County Development Plan, and the objectives of the RSES and County Development Plan for compact growth and the sequential approach to zoning and accessibility to infrastructure capacity.

MA Recommendation 1 – Core strategy and residential land use zoning

Having regard to the provision of new residential homes at locations that support compact and sustainable development and the coordination of housing delivery and infrastructure, and in particular to:

- RPO 3.2, RPO 3.4 of the RSES for compact growth;
- the core strategy of the Galway County Development Plan 2023- 2028 (the County Development Plan);
- Policy Objectives CS1, CS2, CS3 of the County Development Plan regarding sequential and compact development;
- Policy Objectives WS1, WW1 and WW2 of the County Development Plan regarding infrastructure capacity and delivery;
- the policy and objective that planning authorities adopt a sequential approach when zoning lands for development under section 6.2.3 of the Development Plans, Guidelines for Planning Authorities (2022) (the Development Plans Guidelines); and
- the policy and objective for zoned land to be informed by a settlement Capacity Audit under section 6.2.1 of the Development Plans Guidelines,

the Office recommends that the Planning Authority:

- (i) review the Infrastructure Assessment which accompanies the draft Local Area Plan to include the new residential zoning material alterations to include the site area, density, potential housing yield and up to date information in respect of water and wastewater capacity;

- (ii) omit zoning objectives if they cannot be reasonably or cost effectively serviced within the plan period;
- (iii) make the Local Area Plan without MA 33 to rezone the lands from Existing Residential to Town Centre;
- (iv) make the Local Area Plan without MA 34 to rezone the lands from Residential Phase 1 to Town Centre;
- (v) make the Local Area Plan without MA 42 to rezone the lands from Residential Phase 2 lands to Agriculture;
- (vi) make the Local Area Plan without MA 36 to rezone from lands outside the plan boundary to Residential Phase 2;
- (vii) make the Local Area Plan without MA 37 to rezone the lands from Business and Enterprise to Residential Phase 2; and
- (viii) make the plan without MA 38 to rezone from lands outside the plan boundary to Residential Phase 2.

2. Integrated transport and land use planning

The Office notes MA 5 and MA 29 to address Recommendation 3(iv) of its submission to the draft Local Area Plan in relation to town centre car parking and whilst the quantum of on-street carparking overall has been reduced by 53 car parking spaces at figure in 2.3.4 of appendix C of the LTP, it would appear that the number of off-street car parking spaces has been increased by 125 spaces at two new car parks which results in an overall increase of 72 spaces in the town centre. There also appears to be an anomaly at MA 5, as the legend has not been transferred over to new diagram to clarify the actual figures of existing and proposed for on-street and off-street parking. As such, the Office considers, in the interest of clarity, that this anomaly is amended and also advises that a modification is made to MA 29 to strengthen the Planning Authority's commitment in the Local Area Plan to review and demonstrate the rationalisation of overall car parking to support an overall reduction in car parking and private vehicle usage in the town centre.

MA Observation 1 – Integrated transport and Land use planning

Having regard to the integration of land use and sustainable transport and in particular to:

- RPO 6.26, RPO 6.27, RPO 6.28, RPO 6.29 of the RSES;
- Policy Objectives GCTPS3, ILUTP 1, ILUTP 3, PT1, NNR 8 of the Galway County Development Plan 2022-2028; and
- the Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act 2015, as amended, mandatory target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 51%, the Climate Action Plan 2024, and associated actions including the National Sustainable Mobility Policy (2022) targets to reduce vehicle kilometres travelled per year and the National Investment Framework for Transport in Ireland (2021),

the Planning Authority is advised to:

- (i) modify MA 5 at figure at section 2.3.4 of appendix C, Local Transport Plan to include the existing and proposed on street and off-street parking figures and the subsequent overall change of car parking spaces as a result of town centre public realm improvements and proposals; and
- (ii) modify MA 29 to add additional text to clarify and strengthen the town centre management strategy to include a stronger commitment to establishing modal share targets for the town and the reduction of the overall number of car parking spaces commensurate with those targets.

Summary

The Office requests that your authority addresses the recommendations and observations outlined above. As you are aware, the report of the Chief Executive of your authority prepared for the elected members under section 20 of the Act must summarise these recommendations and the manner in which they will be addressed.

At the end of the process, your authorities are required to notify this Office within **five working days** of the making of the Local Area Plan under section 31AO(5) of the Act. Where your authorities decide not to comply with the recommendations of the Office, or otherwise makes the Local Area Plan in such a manner as to be inconsistent with the recommendations of the Office, the CE must, in the notice

letter, inform the Office accordingly and state the reasons for the decision of the planning authority.

Please feel free to contact the staff of the Office in the context of your authority's responses to the above, which we would be happy to facilitate. Contact can be initiated through plans@opr.ie.

Is mise le meas,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'AM O'Connor'.

Anne Marie O'Connor

Deputy Regulator and Director of Plans Evaluation

Designated Public Official under the Regulation of Lobbying Act 2015
