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Sent: 30 March 2017 23:42
To: National Planning Framework
Subject: Fw: Submission

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Submission from Cllr. Dermot Connolly and Claire Kerrane

Ballinasloe is the county town of Galway. Every sector of the town has suffered detrimentally during the years of austerity and this is glaringly obvious by simply driving through the once thriving town. If we are to make any credible plans to revitalise rural Ireland, Ballinasloe must be central to this.

The town of Ballinasloe is located in the easternmost part of County Galway with a population of 7,226 (Census 2011) making it one of the largest town in the County.

Ballinasloe is predominately a town of industry with agriculture firmly at the heart of rural life. In recent years, industry in the town has been severely hit with the closure of a number of manufacturing plants. While, other companies remain in place, the economy of the town itself has not been revitalised. With this, the downgrading of St Brigid's has had a considerable impact on the town.

The hotels, factories and the hospital in place need sufficient assistance and investment to ensure that they can continue to thrive as the only major employment providers in the town.

Inward investment is at an all time low, IDA visits are far too seldom and this has meant that the town has been overlooked despite, its proximity to Galway city.

While, Ballinasloe is easily accessible by road, rail and bus, the condition of roads within the town itself and its surrounding areas have been badly maintained. For 2017, the funding provided to the local authority is €105 million, considerably less than the €160 million paid in 2007. This amount is insufficient to maintain essential services.

The opening of the M6 motorway in 2009 has meant that Ballinasloe is bypassed and this has impacted on visitors to the town and has added to the economic difficulties experience by the town in recent years. However, on the other hand, the motorway provides excellent access to Ballinasloe and has improved links to Galway city and other surrounding towns.

The infrastructure in place including, the motorway and the railway line greatly increases Ballinasloe's potential and therefore, the infrastructure would benefit from further investment. The schools, sporting facilities and the hospitals all illustrate that Ballinasloe can take investment.

There has been a serious and recurring issue with flooding in Ballinasloe which impedes on the local community and business owners. There is a need for adequate river maintenance and river management including, the River Shannon, River Suck and their tributaries. This would have a long lasting and positive impact locally.

The huge downgrading of St. Brigid's hospital has had a huge impact on the town. The building remains closed and unused despite, its central location in the town. The complex has huge potential for development and if this space was to be utilised properly for industry, it would lead to the creation of local jobs.

Agriculture is a focal point of life in Ballinasloe with the mart of vital importance to the town and the spinoff it creates for other businesses on a weekly basis. Ballinasloe's location and long standing farming culture and tradition lends itself as one of the greatest beef producing towns in the country. However, the potential to grow this has not been realised.

With meaningful investment Ballinasloe can become a thriving town and a focal point for the West of Ireland. In particular, it can lead as a food producing town for the West. The retention of all current services at Portiuncula hospital is crucial and continuous investment is needed here to ensure this as well as to expand and grow the hospital into the future.

The importance of investment and enhancement of infrastructure in Ballinasloe cannot be emphasised enough. There is

an opportunity to make Ballinasloe a real driver in job creation and improved economic development which will have a knock on affect for Galway, South Roscommon and North Offaly.

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