

Galway City Business Association



Submission

Ireland 2040

National Planning Framework



31 March 2017

INTRODUCTION

Galway City Business Association comprises business people who are committed to the needs of Galway City. Our mission is to promote Galway as a relaxing, safe, friendly and vibrant place in which to do business and to visit.

We work in collaboration with other groups, e.g. Galway Chamber, Galway City Council, The Latin Quarter, East Village, to name just a few, with the common aim of promoting and creating a city and region that are successful and prosperous.

Galway City has achieved designation as European Green Leaf 2017, European Capital of Culture 2020, and, together with Galway County, European Region of Gastronomy 2018. These are no mean achievements for a small city like Galway, but there is much more that can be done by government to help Galway City and County grow and develop into a vibrant region which could be the envy of Europe. Galway is regarded as one of the friendliest cities in Europe; the friendliness of the people and strong support from the business community were very important factors in Galway achieving the designation of European Capital of Culture 2020.

European Region of Gastronomy 2018 and European Capital of Culture 2020 will have a positive impact on Galway's economy. However, there are many challenges to be faced in the region, not least the impact of BREXIT and what that may mean for the tourism industry, food producers and other sectors of business in the West of Ireland. Galway must face these challenges; we must work towards becoming a city that is dynamic and offers a good quality of life for its citizens; a city that is a centre for culture and learning; a city that encourages an awareness of the environment and our natural resources; a city that is served well with public transport and good infrastructure.

Galway City Business Association acknowledges that submissions from other stakeholders in the local economy will be made to the National Planning Framework, in particular, Galway City Council and Galway Chamber. We fully support and endorse their submissions. In addition, we set out in this document our key objectives and vision for Galway that we would like to see included in future planning for the development of Galway City, County and Region.

KEY OBJECTIVES FOR GALWAY CITY AND COUNTY

1. Promotion of the cultural heritage and history of Galway

Galway is a medieval city that is steeped in culture and history. Future development of the city is necessary and our cultural heritage should be preserved in a sustainable and practical manner. The “Heart” of Galway i.e. its existing streets and businesses must be protected and enhanced. Regulations that are in place to protect and preserve our cultural heritage must be respected; however, such regulation must not be invoked to the extent that development and progress in the business community are hindered or obstructed. Planning for the future development of Galway City must acknowledge our cultural heritage but it must not prevent progress: our past is important, but our progress into the future is equally important.

Planning regulations and restrictions should not lead to vacant/derelict premises lying idle in the centre of the city. “Eyesores” that become covered with graffiti are not attractive to the visitor to our city. In addition, ways of bringing life into the vacant upper storeys of older buildings should be explored and their potential exploited so that they can become commercially viable.

There should be immediate and ongoing planned investment in improving: public amenity, signage, surfacing of the streets, sewer and water networks, street lighting, etc so that the city is a pleasant environment in which to live, work, shop and visit.

A food and craft market located in the centre of Galway would bring a great boost to the economy and atmosphere of the city. Such a market would showcase local artisan food producers and craft workers.

2. The regeneration of key city centre sites in state control (Ceannt Station and the Harbour/Docklands)

It is important to ensure that fundamental development policies are adapted to enhance and complement the existing vibrant city scape. Provision should be made for a mixture of commercial space (office, retail, R&D centres), public space (transport network, civic amenities, tourism activities, recreational and leisure activities) and residential accommodation – there should be a balance between sustainable infrastructure, employment, residential space and tourism.

3. The delivery of a sustainable public transport network

The delivery of an outer by-pass is long overdue. Galway cannot afford and should not be the victim of reactive and slow policy decision making. An efficient public transport system must be implemented as a matter of urgency in Galway. A better, more efficient public transport system

would see a reduction in the number of cars on the roads, and, consequently, fewer problems with traffic congestion, leading to a less stressed population in the city and county.

Future development of publicly or privately operated transport initiatives for Galway must include adopting and promoting an environmentally friendly transport infrastructure to include: a city centre transport hub that integrates light rail, QBCs/BRT, cars, coach parking, bike parking.

More dedicated cycle lanes must be introduced to accommodate the increased number of cyclists on our roads.

A major problem in Galway City is the lack of a fit-for-purpose public transport corridor to service the business parks which has a knock-on impact on city traffic congestion, their employers' businesses and the individuals themselves.

With Galway ranking 4th globally as a Medtech hub location (and generally punching above our weight in attracting foreign direct investment), a Galway City public transport infrastructure strategy and investment plan, incorporating a consultation process with the business community, should be looked at to ensure Galway City remains a great place to live, work and do business.

4. Focus on the tourism industry and the arts

The tourism industry is vital to the economy of Galway City and County. Approximately 70% of the jobs in the city centre are in the service and tourism industries. Galway attracts a significant number of tourists every year, but the city needs a conference venue to cater for the leisure and corporate tourist market.

The reputation of Galway in the area of the arts and culture is renowned worldwide. However, Galway is still without a proper performance and cultural venue: we are lauded for our poets and musicians, but there is no large performance venue where a large production like a West End musical, a rock concert or exhibition centre could be staged.

The lack of a conference and exhibition venue means that Galway loses out on the opportunity for significant amounts of revenue: the "business" tourist brings a lot more revenue to a local economy than the "traditional" tourist. Future planning for the development of Galway must take this into account and treat it as a matter of urgency.

Greater emphasis should be placed on the further development and promotion of 'Green, Educational and Recreational' tourism for instance; Bike Greenways, Marine Sports, Language Institutes, Sustainable living Centres.

5. Promotion of Galway as the leading Marine & Bio Medical R&D Centres in Europe / worldwide
Galway is a centre of excellence in the area of marine science. Future planning for Galway should facilitate and promote Galway as a leading marine and bio medical R&D centre for Europe and the world. There should be emphasis on developing a “Blue Policy” where our marine resources are developed in a sustainable way to the benefit of the economy of the whole region. The Harbour and UCHG / Merlin Campuses are prime for development of such centres of excellence.

6. A reform of the planning process to deliver a quality interactive consultation process

The national planning process must be reformed and streamlined to ensure the delivery of key infrastructural projects that will not be hindered by undue red tape process, minority groups or individuals.

The GCBA advocates that Galway City should have a dedicated Architect to implement set objectives while delivering best practice and policy. It is imperative that a proactive, collaborative approach is adopted and clear deadlines and targets are set at Council/ National level.

7. Setting “Green Energy City” targets

Planning for the Galway region must promote investment in tidal, solar, wind and other sources of energy. Renewable energy targets should be set and achieved; 35% green power to the Galway grid by 2025 and 85% by 2040. Similar emphasis and targets should be placed on water conservation and carbon emissions.

8. Provision of sport and recreational centres of excellence

Provision must be made in future planning to develop more sport, recreational, walkways and amenity facilities in the Galway region for all. With established links to third level institutes like NUI, Galway, and GMIT, such facilities could become centres of excellence and provide great benefit to the student population as well as the local population. Such centres of excellence would play a key role in promoting healthy lifestyle choices for everyone.

Galway City’s location, on the Atlantic coast and close to Connemara, makes it an ideal centre for international sporting events like Iron Man challenges etc.

9. Promotion of the role of the Galway Development Authority

Future planning should promote the establishment of a Galway Development Authority/Agency. This group should be formed through the private sector business community and feed into local policy. It would collaborate with the city officials and have responsibility for seeking international and EU funding, attracting foreign and domestic investment, PPP schemes, etc for large scale infrastructural and community based projects. The role of the GDA should promote the Western Region and collaborate with all agencies to ensure that Galway City and County evolves and develops in a sustainable manner.

10. Engagement and interaction with the key stakeholders on key policy issues

Greater engagement and interaction with the business sector stakeholders on key policy issues to do with environment, health, finance, etc must be promoted in a future plan for Galway City and County. The business community is 100% invested in the future success of the City and County, and continues to be the key driver in the region. While the composition of city councils and councillors may change over the years, the presence of businesses over generations in the city centre is As commercial rate-payers the business community's collective objectives and input should be requested, considered and factored in when setting budgets and delivering services.

11. A 5-year "health" check of all policies and projects

A 5-year "health" check or review of all policies and projects is recommended to ensure the delivery of critical infrastructural projects. Galway's progress and goals should be measured and results should be achieved.

We recommend that key executive positions in the public and private sectors are awarded to the best candidates on merit, with a proven track record in their field.

CONCLUSION

Galway is a vibrant, dynamic city that celebrates its people, beauty, diversity and talent. Our educational institutions provide a highly-educated workforce which is a significant factor in attracting multi-national companies to the West of Ireland. Galway's excellence in the arts and culture is recognised all over the world. The beauty of the landscape/cityscape and the warmth of the people of Galway attract thousands of visitors to the region every year.

It is our hope that the National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040 will ensure that Galway and its people are given the resources to grow and develop into the future so that it becomes the “Heart” of the West of Ireland.

Galway City Business Association extends its sincere thanks to Simon Coveney, Minister for Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government for affording us the opportunity to make this submission. We fully support the Minister in the development of the National Planning Framework – Ireland 2040.

Signed: ***Cormac McGuckian*** (Chairperson)

Galway City Business Association
5/6 Shop Street
Galway

Date: **31st March 2017**