



Connemara Chamber

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The Secretary
An Bord Pleanála
64 Marlborough Street
Dublin 1 D01V902
laps@pleanala.ie

Re: Submissions and observations on the Planning Application to An Bord Pleanála for the public realm enhancement works at Clifden, Co. Galway by Galway County Council.

Dear Secretary,

This letter is our submission and observations on *implications of the proposed development for proper planning and sustainable development in the area concerned*.

Connemara Chamber of Commerce and its members have been engaged in consultation on the plans for public realm enhancement works at Clifden Co. Galway (also known as 'Clifden Regeneration') since its inception.

The proposed plan has the potential to have positive transformational effect on the visual aspect of the town centre, beach road area and harbour park. However, speaking on behalf of our members, the overwhelming view is that there are two key topics that must be addressed before proceeding with these works, one outside of the plan and one within the plan itself – these are:

1. There is no mitigation in the plan for the loss car parking spaces
2. The proposed change to the direction of on-street car parking

Car Parking Spaces – Why Mitigation of Losses Is Critical

- The general plan to make the town more pedestrian friendly through the widening of footpaths, addition of breakout areas, landscaping and reduction in the amount of vehicles using on-street parking is welcome but unless sufficient mitigation is made for the loss of vehicle parking in the town centre there will be a serious and determinantal impact on business activity in Clifden.
 - As per our attached document there is a proposed reduction of 31.5% to available on-street public car park spaces in Clifden Town Centre.
 - Clifden already has a problem regarding car park spaces in the town centre. Thanks to increased visitors to Clifden nearly throughout the year, there is now a near year-round issue with car parking spaces in the general business environment. This has been

exacerbated by what appears to be a general increase in cars parking in the town combined with outdoor dining usage of spaces.

- Due to apparent planning policy, there appears to be a general requirement on the town plan designers to reduce vehicular parking and increase other forms of transport such as cycling and buses. While this is laudable, the practicalities and unique nature of how rural towns operate especially ones with a rural hinterland like Clifden has i.e. that are 90%+ reliant on cars makes it imperative that mitigations by made for parking space reductions of the scale of 30%+.
- There are references made to ‘other’ car parking options in Clifden such as the SuperValu car park in Clifden town centre and Clifden Station House Hotel complex. It should be noted that these are privately owned are already close to capacity for most of the year and, by their nature are subject to restricted access at any time and in the interests of sustainable planning should not be relied on as ‘other’ car parking options.
- As well as the 30%+ proposed reduced in on-street public parking, there will naturally be a much larger reduction in parking during the implementation phase of this plan. Anecdotally, other towns and cities in Ireland have suffered the imposition of enhancement works and should no advance migration of the loss of temporary car park spaces be made, it will have a negative effect on businesses within the town.

Proposed Change of Car Parking Direction

- At present, the majority of on-street public parking in Clifden is carried out by drivers leaving the road and parking their car at an acute angle to the road – effectively driving forward into to the available car park space. Exiting the space is carried out by reversing the car out onto the road again. In general, this has served the town well since it was implemented many years ago. The proposed plan now seeks to change the way this operates by requiring vehicle users to reverse into, rather than drive forward into car park spaces. Our members and other stakeholders see this new strategy as being very problematic for the following reasons:
 - Clifden operates on a one-way system at present with vehicles driving in a clockwise direction around the town. At present the majority of the thoroughfare though the town allows for a vehicle to bypass another stationary vehicle or other obstruction. The new proposed plan (that proposes to widen the footpaths all around the town and add a cycle lane) aims to narrow the thoroughfare to one lane, which combined with reverse parking will likely lead to a blocking up of the entire town.
 - The introduction of reserve parking strategy is also problematic for the following reasons:
 - Clifden town centre’s topography is very changeable with hills in many places and a high camber of the road. Road users will be expected to reverse park down at an angle in much of the town. This may cause problems for drivers but also increase the time it takes to park a vehicle, clogging up the proposed narrower throughfare.
 - Due to the gradient of the town, major concerns have been raised by a number of businesses as drivers will be reversing down a slope towards the footpath. This is a significant health and safety issue as pedestrians will be at risk.
 - In an Irish context we believe reverse parking is an untested direction of parking strategy and that combined with a tight throughfare will lead to unnecessary major holdups for road users of all types.

- In general, the widening of the footpaths is very welcome, as is the cycle lane, as is the parallel parking and the narrower thoroughfare which will make the whole town much more pedestrian friendly. However, the introduction of reverse parking appears to be unnecessary and will likely have to be changed soon after, should it be implemented.

Other General Observations of the Proposed Plans

- **Unnecessary Bus Stop Space extension on Market Street** - The proposed plans to extend the temporary bus parking space on Market Street will have a very negative impact to adjacent residential and commercial premises. The proposal is to increase the current temporary bus parking/pull in space by 50% is excessively large and unnecessary as the current setup works well for the frequency of buses coming in and out of Clifden. There is also a second recently constructed and very accessible bus stop with toilet facilities on the Galway Road available to public and private bus operators.
- **Loading bays** – the distribution of loading bays throughout the town requires further consultation with stakeholders.
- **Bike lane** – the additional of a cycle lane throughout the town is very welcome and sets the town up well for the Connemara Greenway and related north and south extensions that are proposed.
- **Bottlenecks** – during the 6-week peak summer period, there are several traffic bottlenecks within the town. With some carefully planning, these bottlenecks could be reduced.
- **Car Parking Strategy** – Connemara Chamber and other stakeholders are well aware of responsible parking and how the town itself can encourage car users to park better. We see the following tactics as part of an overall future car parking strategy for the town:
 - Future proof parking via an extra story on existing town centre public car park - We propose for an extra story to be added to the existing (town centre located tourist office and Local Authority owned) car park on the Galway Road. The future proofing of parking spaces for this rural town needs to be considered at this point. The location of this car park would reduce the number of cars travelling around the town as it can be accessed from the N59, a main artery into the town. Thus, providing locals and visitors with convenient access to the town centre from the car park.
 - Signage - Better signage for the available public and private car park places
 - Live Parking Numbers – to encourage a higher usage of the existing available parking locations, both public and private – we suggest the installation of live available parking displays on the approach roads to Clifden town.
 - Welcome enforcement of paid parking – we welcome the strong enforcement of paid parking in Clifden to keep spaces available for locals and visitors alike.
 - Business owners and staff car parking – finding alternative parking spaces for staff and business owners during the working week as well as an education and encouragement plan to park better.
- **Town square & related landscaping** – the main town square area and plans for same require further discussion such as what public realm art will be added, removed etc as well as the type of materials being used and management of landscaping.
- **Cycle path route adjustments** – the start and stop point of the cycle track in the town needs further refinement, for example on the current designs it runs through the Friday market location / festival and event space which needs discussion.

- **Beach Road Quay Area** - The revised plans do not include any car parking spaces in the Beach Road area. There is a need to consider the additional of parking spaces for both residents, visitors, fishermen, RNLI in this part of the plan.
- **The Harbour Park Plan** - a hugely welcome addition to the town. Given its ambitious nature and probable high financial cost, we believe an interim plan should be considered for the location, should a general timeframe for delivery of the main plan not be made available. Also, the provision of toilets at this park would be very important.

About the Connemara Chamber

- Based in the heart of Clifden, Co. Galway
- Over 30 years in existence
- 120 members from the Clifden & Connemara area

Yours Sincerely,

Conall Joyce

on behalf of the board of

Connemara Chamber of Commerce