

## 24th June 2020 Thematic Discussions Notes

### Economic, Community and Cultural Development Notes

The group was facilitated by Fiona Blaney - GCCN Development Worker, who invited all to check in and see how each organisation had been coping through this unusual time.

- Westside Resource Centre (WRC) has been open and functioning, but classes have been postponed and/or cancelled. A return to normal will not be easy and there will be an amount of work required to make community groups feel comfortable coming back again.
- Music for Galway have been hard hit by the consequences of COVID-19. All events related to Galway 2020 were cancelled in March for the year. This was a full years' work in addition to three years of planning. Their overall aim in participating had been to foster an interest in classical music. Through participating they, along with a number of other groups, wanted to make a case for a dedicated venue for music and dance. The current situation is that as a result of social distancing venues will be down to a 10% capacity in closed venues. There is the option of holding events online.
- Atmos Collective had been funded under Small Towns Big Ideas (group is both city and county based) to deliver a number of projects involving the arts using digital skills. They have looked at delivering courses online and possible classroom delivery. The realities of delivering a project in a classroom throws up a lot of questions around feasibility. Atmos Collective had advocated for a central space for the arts in all its forms to be included in the upcoming Arts Plan.
- Visionisation (Drama Group) had activities planned from March to May and all these were cancelled, including all subsequent work that would have happened as a result. During this time the group had seen themselves as building up relationships and laying the foundation for future work.
- Junior Chamber Galway have been networking and involved in a number of community events around the city.

#### Discussion

The main points of the discussion included:

- There is a clash between the needs of culture and economics.
- Is there going to be extra support for arts groups and how will this happen?
- How we think about culture is part of how we view it.
- If culture is not given a platform in mainstream media it is not in peoples consciousness or seen as normal. An example which was given is that of news items containing cultural matters on a daily basis.

- Work that aims to deliver around social inclusion requires time and the building up of relationships. This is difficult if it does not take place in person as a process.
- In terms of physically meeting up, the group talked about creating indoor and outdoor spaces that could be used by communities for events. These would ideally be Council-regulated and fully set up for social distancing. This would instil confidence among community groups and the wider public that it will be safe to run and attend events occurring in these locations.

#### **Actions and questions**

- The Network (GCCN) needs to be used more by member organisations to help each other out.
- Large spaces that could be used by communities for events: Galway City Council has in its ownership both Leisure Land and the Black Box.
- Groups need more time to come up with alternative ways of working.
- Groups are asking to be given more time to look at a number of areas and this requires funding. This could be one of the talked about legacies from Galway 2020. This requires funding and clarity is needed as to what remainder of the budget from Galway 2020 is.

#### **Useful resources**

- GCCN and GCP have compiled Returning to Work...Returning to Community Activity: A Guide for Community Organisations
- Theatre Forum have a set of Guidelines on Reopening Arts Centres

Atmos Collective also enquired about ways of pooling Covid 19 appropriate resources between community groups. For example, many groups are reliant on free versions of software like Zoom or video editing software for getting info up online, or software for making/updating social media posters/newsletters. The free versions have limited capabilities. Julie Flavin questioned if some of the most commonly used pieces of software, Mailchimp, Zoom, Microsoft teams and the Adobe Suite for example, could be identified and maybe some shared accounts created that could be accessed by the various groups.

## Climate Action, Environment, Recreation and Amenity Notes

The group was facilitated by Eleanor Hough – GCCN Representative.

### Issues and Concerns

Deferring of appointment of Biodiversity Officer, Tree Officer, assistant Superintendent Parks Dept. engineers and craftsmen by Galway City Council.

### Solutions

- It was mentioned that the Programme for Government commits to instructing Local Authorities to appoint Biodiversity Officers.  
PFG p40 Ensure that all local authorities have a sufficient number of biodiversity and heritage officers among their staff complement;
- Make direct advocacy to new government, with TDs and look for meeting with Minister.

### Issues and Concerns

Education and awareness for promotion of biodiversity and the All Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP)

### Solutions

- Continue to highlight at the Climate Action, Environment, Recreation and Amenity SPC;
- Showcase areas that highlight biodiversity and promote the All Ireland Pollinator Plan in parks (Galway City Council), Community Gardens and the Healthy Green Spaces initiative

### Issues and Concerns

Implementation plan for LCDP proposes support for Biodiversity Forum and implementation of Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP).

### Solutions

- LCDC to push for implementation of BAP and establishment of Biodiversity Forum.

### Issues and Concerns

Establishment of Climate Action Council for city, to include expertise and sectoral representation

### Solutions

- LCDC to start proposal in July and make a push in September.

### Issues and Concerns

Establishment of Galway Waterways Forum – no progress since June 2019, despite repeated requests.

### Solutions

- Look for support from relevant GCCN members;
- Confirm if Corrib Beo have joined GCCN.

### Issues and Concerns

Challenges of meeting high COVID-19 demands from Basketball Ireland for local Tribes Basketball Club as the club tries to get back on court for all ages, particularly with their hopes to expand activities for younger players. Challenges include stipulations for venues, toilets, banning parents from matches, possibility of postponing expansion plans for a year.

### Solutions

- The discussion included a suggestion to look at stipulations for other sports e.g. GAA, rugby, liaison with Galway Sports Partnership for support with implementation, recognition that the time scale for restrictions may be limited, depending on progress in regard to COVID-19.

## Community Safety, Social Inclusion and Equality Notes

The group was facilitated by Ann Irwin – GCCN Co-ordinator.

### Issues and Concerns

- Communities getting back to the new 'normal'.
- Community safety and anti-social behaviour
- People with disabilities during the crisis
- Young people and their mental health
- Racism

### Discussion

- The Gardaí have been very proactive and have played an important role in maintaining contact with 'vulnerable' people during COVID-19. There is a new policing plan in place and two new Community Gardaí have been assigned.
- There is an issue with access to accessible transport for people with disabilities during COVID. The Gardaí may have a role to play.
- Access for All met with Galway City Council officials in the City Mobility Team to highlight issues for people with disabilities with particular reference to the need for the general public to be aware of issues for people with disabilities. The importance of people with lived experience of the issues providing feedback was noted.
- The issue of having to pay €9 for a meal, particularly for older people and people on fixed incomes was noted.
- The welfare and mental health and wellbeing of children and young people was raised as a major concern. Children and young people are experiencing high levels of anxiety and there are serious concerns about educational disadvantage. These issues have been consistently raised with the Galway City COVID-19 Community Response Forum but there has been no satisfactory response. There are serious deficits in accessing technology to allow for remote education and learning. The University of Sanctuary is working with Insight, GTM, the Chamber and others to try to address this.
- Concern for those experiencing domestic violence was also raised. COVID-19 has seen a reduction in the number of women and children presenting for support as they have far fewer opportunities during lockdown.
- Anti-social behaviour has increased and there is a significant increase in drug use. There are few mechanisms available to people experiencing the effects of anti-social behaviour.
- The issue of racism was noted and it was stated that racism, individual and institutional, is very present in Galway. The recent protests in support of Black Lives Matter were noted. It is encouraging to see young Black people taking a lead, but the restrictions should not be ignored.
- GTM has been supporting the Traveller community, particularly vulnerable members of the community, since the onset of the pandemic.
- There is a concern that the pandemic may reduce access to health services, including abortion services. Telemedicine seems to be working well for many women and this should be maintained where possible.

It was agreed to hold a dedicated Social Inclusion Linkage Group in the autumn to provide a forum for further discussion of the issues.

## Housing & Accommodation / Planning / Transportation Notes

The group was facilitated by Oana Nicoara – GCCN Communications and Support Worker.

### Discussion:

- There are issues with the Augustin Hill development in light of COVID-19 as it is publicly owned land and the development plan has not been approved risking leaving it now unused for years. Galway needs housing development.
- The plans for Augustine development refer to excess height (now potentially approvable by An Bord Pleanála) and excess retail facilities (similar to the ones already available in the city centre), both of which are worrying for Galway city. Also, the Metropolitan Area Spatial Plan which was mentioned in the Advertiser the week before, is very important for the city and requires further public debate.
- There are issues with the employment structure of Galway City Council, especially the directors of services and the CEO, given the lack of inclusion of the communities that will be impacted by their decisions. This structure needs to be changed to provide people able to collaborate.
- The issue with the poor engagement in Galway City Council is now aggravated by the COVID-19. The Mobility Plan for example would need to be implemented soon, but at this stage there are doubts if it was only an exercise or if anything concrete will result out of it. The pedestrianisation of Cross Street and maybe changes in Salthill will go ahead. The Sandy Road site is encouraging and there is an opportunity here to inform public engagement.
- A further issue is the Mutton Island Plant. The sewage has been diverted because the system is overloaded with water in high rain situations. But the plant is actually not capable of dealing with the city capacity and it is incapable of dealing with the additional load. A second treatment plant is needed and this has been talked about for years but there is no planning for that still.
- In regard to the Sandy Road development there is a planning issue that negatively impacts the service provision for economic development, because many affordable units that will be lost. Galway City Council is in the process of transferring some units from Sandy Road to the Westside, but no new units will be rebuilt, and this is an issue.
- In light of COVID-19, there are many good things happening in the East exposing the local authorities in Cork and Galway that are not as fast and proficient. Especially in Galway there seems to be an intentional delay of action.
- Questions were raised in regard to councillors and their support towards the community representatives. It was suggested that councillors would potentially support the representatives if actions were agreed and backed up by solid proposals.
- It was mentioned that there seems to be an obsession with having master plans created by developers and then not liking them when the solution would be creating a local area plan. And this is the case for the Ceannt station and this is causing delays in developing housing much needed in Galway city.
- The developments for the new neighbourhood in Sandy Road has engaged five different architects and this is very encouraging.

### Potential Solutions

- It was suggested to write a press release to express frustration for the Ceannt station plans, while expressing appreciation for the Sandy Road development process so far.
- Find ways to get Galway City Council to engage properly and maybe write a formal complaint in regards to the lack of collaboration, especially since both the Planning SPC and the Transportation SPC share the same director of services that has been representing a huge barrier to the democratic collaboration.