

Minutes of Meeting of Planning Strategic Policy Committee held on 14th June 2022 via Zoom & in Council Chamber

Presiding: Cllr. Peter Keane

Present: Cllr. Mike Crowe
Cllr. Noel Larkin
Mr. Brendan Mulligan (Galway City Community Network)

In Attendance: Ms. Patricia Philbin, Director of Services
Ms. Caroline Phelan, Senior Planner
Mr. Liam Blake, Senior Executive Planner
Ms. Helen Coleman, Senior Executive Planner
Mr. Jim Higgins, Heritage Officer
Ms. Emma Silke, Administrative Officer
Ms. Ann Marie Cusack, Executive Architect
Mr. Fergal McNamara, 7L Architects
Ms. Simone Watson, Senior Staff Officer

Present Online: Cllr. Owen Hanley
Cllr. Niall McNelis
Cllr. Imelda Byrne
Cllr. Clodagh Higgins
Cllr. Frank Fahy
Mr. Derrick Hambleton (Galway City Community Network)
Ms. Marian Spelman (ICTU)

Ms. Norann Keane, Senior Staff Officer
Ms. Marcella Kilgarriff, Assistant Staff Officer
Ms. Elaine Coffey, Assistant Staff Officer

Cllr. Peter Keane, Chairperson, welcomed members and officials to the meeting which was being held virtually via Zoom & from the Council Chamber.

1. Minutes & Matters Arising

Cllr. I Byrne asked if there was any progress on the recruitment of staff for the Planning Department. Ms. P. Philbin advised that sanction has been given for 3 additional staff members but there has been no new staff assigned to Short Term Letting. She further advised that there is a full review of all City Council staffing being undertaken by Human Resources in conjunction with the Department.

The minutes of the meeting held on 1st March 2022 were proposed by Cllr. N. Larkin and seconded by Cllr. MJ Crowe.

2. Joint SPC Meeting

Cllr. P. Keane welcomed feedback in relation to the joint SPC meeting held with the County Council, NWRA and Irish Water on 26th May 2022. Disappointment was expressed with the presentation given by Irish Water and the lack of information specific to Galway. It was agreed that the joint meetings should be continued and the next meeting is to take place later in the year, with a date to be decided.

3 & 4. Update on 3 Castles and Public Realm Plans

Ms. A. Cusack introduced Mr. F. McNamara from 7L Architects, who has been involved in the conservation work taking place at Tirellan, Merlin and Menlough Castles since 2020. Mr. McNamara gave a presentation outlining the work that has taken place on the castles thus far and providing information on how the castles could be integrated into the surrounding areas and made use of in the future as cultural and heritage sites.

A discussion was held regarding the feasibility and potential advantages and disadvantages of roofing Merlin Castle.

It was also advised that Menlough Castle is in worse condition than was envisaged prior to survey and the initial scope of works required will be in terms of safety.

The scale and importance of the works to date was recognised Cllr. P. Keane suggested that the presentation should be brought to the full Council to highlight and reinforce the valuable work being done.

5. City Development Plan Update

Ms. C. Phelan advised that work on the Draft City Development Plan commenced in January 2021 with pre-draft consultation. The draft was prepared and went on public display. The CE report is now being prepared and should be ready to go before Members this week and will be online for the public to view next week. The CE report and any material alterations will be discussed at a series of Council meetings in July.

Mr. B. Mulligan requested that the Planning SPC be given an opportunity to feed into the Plan. Cllr. P. Keane suggested that an SPC meeting be held in September. It was agreed to discuss the Development Plan at the September meeting.

6. OPR Review

Ms. P. Philbin gave an update on the review carried out by the OPR, which was published in December 2021. The review was very positive and noted that the enforcement function has been carried out to a high standard. The low number of invalidated planning applications was also highlighted. The review acknowledged the limited resources in the department and 19 recommendations were made which are being reviewed as resourcing allows.

Cllr. O. Hanley recognised the solid reflection of work undertaken by staff and acknowledged the review as an opportunity to identify areas for expansion of staffing in particular in terms of environment and conservation. He requested details of the new staffing structure proposed once the internal review was complete.

7. Development Contributions Scheme & Vacant Site Levy

Ms. E. Silke gave an update on the new Development Contributions Scheme which came into effect in 2021 and the Vacant Site Levy. There are currently 7 sites on the Vacant Site Register in the city. One was paid, five have been issued with payment requests and one has been appealed to the Valuations Tribunal.

8. Agenda for Next Meeting

Cllr. MJ Crowe asked if facilities/ESB boxes could be discussed with the possibility of including something in the Development Plan or elsewhere in relation to same.

Mr. B. Mulligan asked that the SPC work programme be discussed, potentially for 2023.

9. AOB

Mr. D. Hambleton asked for an update in relation to the Heritage Forum. Ms. C. Phelan advised that the Heritage Council had decided to set up a Heritage Officers sub group. An update from Mr. J. Higgins is to be provided at the next SPC meeting.

Cllr. P. Keane thanked all for attending and the meeting then concluded.