

Galway Harbour Company



Galway Harbour Extension

Volume 1B

Planning Report



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1 BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Galway Harbour Company Limited is applying for planning permission for an extension of Galway Harbour adjacent to the Galway Harbour Enterprise Park, approximately 500 metres south-east of the existing commercial Inner Harbour.

This Planning Report sets out the overall rationale for the proposed Galway Harbour Extension, including the general role of ports in Ireland and along the Atlantic seaboard and a summary of the current Galway Harbour operation. The Report sets out the relevant planning policy context, including at European, national, regional and local levels, and it considers Galway's role within this context. The Report outlines the main considerations in assessing alternative options, including alternative locations and alternative designs for the Galway Harbour Extension. In this regard, the Report provides the rationale for the New Port and an account of the evolution in its design.

1.2 PLANNING APPLICATION

The planning application for the Galway Harbour Extension is being made directly to An Bord Pleanála, in accordance with the provisions of Section 37 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010. In this regard, the proposed development represents “*Strategic Infrastructure Development*” (SID) as defined in Schedule 7 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010, which includes the following type of development within the definition of SID:

“A harbour or port installation (which may include facilities in the form of loading or unloading areas, vehicle queuing and parking areas, ship repair areas, areas for berthing or dry docking of ships, areas for the weighing, handling or transport of goods or the movement or trans-port of passengers (including customs or passport control facilities), associated administrative offices or other similar facilities directly related to and forming an integral part of the installation)—

- (a) where the area or additional area of water enclosed would be 20 hectares or more, or*
- (b) which would involve the reclamation of 5 hectares or more of land,*
- (c) or which would involve the construction of one or more quays which or each of which would exceed 100 metres in length, or*
- (d) which would enable a vessel of over 1350 tonnes to enter within it.”*

In addition to meeting the above definition, An Bord Pleanála is satisfied that the proposed Galway Harbour Extension is of “*strategic economic importance to the State and West Region*”. The Board ultimately determined that the proposed development is SID and that the application must therefore be made directly to An Bord Pleanála. This was confirmed by An Bord Pleanála in its determination dated 2nd October 2013 (issued on 7th October 2013).

In making a decision on an SID project under Section 37 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2010, An Bord Pleanála may consider any relevant information available and any other relevant matters. In this regard, the main considerations include the following:

- The Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
- Submissions or observations made
- Any reports that the Board requests
- The Oral Hearing report (if any)
- Provisions of the Development Plan
- Provisions of the Regional Planning Guidelines
- Matters in relation to any European Site (Natura 2000)

- National policies and objectives
- The National Interest

The above demonstrates that, whilst the EIS is a key consideration in the decision-making process, there are a number of other matters that the Board can have regard to in determining the application.

The planning application is accompanied by an EIS and Natura Impact Statement (NIS) and it is not intended to unduly repeat information that is contained in the EIS or NIS in this Planning Report. Nevertheless, for the purposes of context and for ease of reference, this Report presents the planning context for the Galway Harbour Extension in a consolidated document and, in particular, sets out the rationale for the development, including its location, and shows how it accords with relevant planning policy objectives.

2 ROLE OF PORTS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Ports form an integral part of the logistical supply chain of goods throughout the globe. They are centres of import/export activity and perform a very important role in the economic and social well-being of countries, particularly island nations. It is important that the network of ports around the Irish coast is efficient, effective and adequate for the needs of the all-island economy.

Importers and exporters seek to minimise overall freight costs between origin and destination. This is an economic reality and is driven by the need to provide goods in the most economically competitive way. As shipping costs are generally cheaper than road freight costs, on a per unit basis, import/export companies will use the nearest port that offers the required services and facilities for their particular freight movements and needs. This may be considered as an example of the “proximity principle,” whereby the use of facilities that are in locations close to the source of demand or production represents a more sustainable approach to the distribution of goods.

2.2 DISTRIBUTION OF PORTS IN IRELAND

There is a network of established ports around the coast of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland that seeks to serve the all-island needs for the import and export of goods. This represents a national transport chain of port services and these are linked to all parts of the island through the road and rail network. It is important that the network of port facilities is efficient, effective and adequate for the needs of the all-island economy. This is recognised in many national policy documents, including the National Development Plan 2007-2013 and the Government's Ports Policy document. These note that Ireland's commercial seaports are vital transport arteries carrying 95% by volume of the island's external trade.

The principal customers of a port are, usually, the companies located in the hinterland of the port. This, however, is dependent on a number of important issues, including adequate facilities, access routes, journey times and frequent/reliable services that match the customer's requirements. Accordingly, a port's natural catchment area is its hinterland and therefore there is a need for a network of ports around the coast of Ireland.

Figure 2.2.1 (below) illustrates the network of main ports throughout the island and provides a notional representation of their hinterlands. This shows that the entire island relies on the network of established ports, rather than 1 or 2 individual ports. There is a concentration of ports along the eastern/south-eastern seaboard, with the entire Atlantic seaboard being serviced by the main ports at Shannon/Foynes and Galway, as well as Derry and Cork. In this context, the catchment area of the Galway port approximately equates to the West Region and extends northwards to Sligo, eastwards to the Shannon and southward into County Clare.

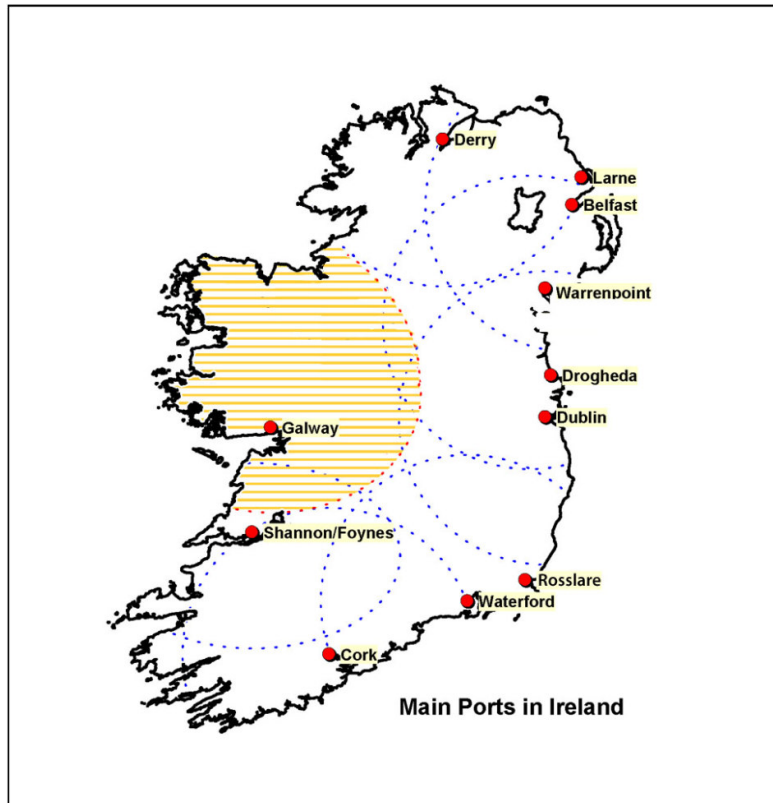


Figure 2.2.1 - Map Illustrating the Distribution of Main Ports in Ireland

3 STRATEGIC POLICY CONTEXT

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The planning policy context for the Galway Harbour Extension is influenced by a number of policy documents and strategies at different levels, including at European Union level and at national and local levels. At EU level, there is an objective to achieve a modal shift in transport and freight movements from road to more sustainable modes, including by sea, and this is evidenced in the EU “Marco Polo Programme” and the White Paper “European Transport Policy for 2010: Time to Decide”.

There are also policies and strategies at a national level that seek to promote sustainable modes of transport, including for freight, and a key document in this regard is “Smarter Travel – A Sustainable Alternative Transport policy 2009-2020”. Whilst this deals mainly with the movement of people, it also acknowledges the opportunities for more sustainable forms of freight transport.

In addition to the above sustainable transport context, there are a number of important planning strategies and policy documents that are of particular relevance to the Galway Harbour Extension. A summary of the relevant policy context is set out below.

3.2 EUROPEAN POLICY CONTEXT

European transport policy has encouraged a modal shift from road freight transport to rail, inland waterway and, more recently, short sea shipping. In this regard, there have been a number of European programmes to encourage intermodal transport and, in particular, facilitate maritime transportation of goods within the European Union. Such programmes include the PACT and Marco Polo programmes and their replacements.

3.2.1 *The ‘PACT’ Programme*

The PACT Programme ((Pilot Action for Combined Transport) 1997-2001) sets out to increase the use of combined transport (transport operations where the main part of the journey is by rail, inland waterway or sea) by supporting market-driven innovative initiatives (pilot actions) in the combined transport services sector. The PACT programme, launched in 1992, was superseded by the “Marco Polo” intermodality programme in 2003. The key aims of the Marco Polo programme include the improved sustainability of transportation through a partial shift from road freight to other modes, including short sea shipping. This is of particular relevance to the Galway Harbour Extension where increased freight activities could reduce reliance on road freight across the island of Ireland.

3.2.2 *“European Transport Policy for 2010: Time to Decide”*

In the EU White Paper “*European transport policy for 2010: time to decide*” (2001), the European Commission proposed measures aimed at developing a European transport system capable of shifting the balance between modes of transport, revitalising the railways, promoting transport by sea and inland waterways and controlling the growth in air transport.

The primary objectives and associated problems with existing intermodality facilities and maritime transport and the proposals to improve these, as identified by the Commission, included the following (emphasis added to highlight particular relevance to Galway Harbour Extension):

“- Objectives: To develop the infrastructure, simplify the regulatory framework by creating one-stop offices and integrate the social legislation in order to build veritable “motorways of the sea”

- *Objectives: To shift the balance between modes of transport by means of a pro-active policy to promote intermodality and transport by rail, sea and inland waterway. In this connection, one of the major initiatives is the "Marco Polo" Community support programme to replace the current PACT (Pilot Action for Combined Transport) programme.*

- *Problems: Transport by sea and transport by inland waterway are a truly competitive alternative to transport by land. They are reliable, economical, clean and quiet. However, their capacity remains underused. Better use could be made of the inland waterways in particular. In this context, a number of infrastructure problems remain, such as bottlenecks, inappropriate gauges, bridge heights, operation of locks, lack of transshipment equipment, etc.*

- *Problems: The balance between modes of transport must cope with the fact that there is no close connection between sea, inland waterways and rail.*

- *Measures proposed: Transport by sea and transport by inland waterway are a key part of intermodality, they allow a way round bottlenecks between France and Spain in the Pyrenees or between Italy and the rest of Europe in the Alps, as well as between France and the United Kingdom and, looking ahead, between Germany and Poland.*

- *Measures proposed: The "Marco Polo" intermodality programme is open to all appropriate proposals to shift freight from road to other more environmentally friendly modes. The aim is to turn intermodality into a competitive, economically viable reality, particularly by promoting motorways of the sea.*

3.2.3 Trans-European Transport Network

Transport infrastructure is of fundamental importance for the smooth operation of the EU internal market, the movement of people and goods and for the economic & social cohesion of the European Union. Most of the existing transport infrastructure has been developed by national states under national policy provisions. However, in recognition of the importance of an efficient and integrated transport system, the EU established the "trans-European transport network" (TEN-T). This is a key element in the Lisbon Strategy for competitiveness and employment and is also key to the attainment of the objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy. In this regard, the EU recognises the need to build the missing transport links and remove any bottlenecks, as well as ensuring the future sustainability of transport networks by addressing energy efficiency and climate change challenges. This supports the promotion of a network of modern ports to support maritime freight operations, which are more fuel efficient and sustainable.

3.2.4 Borders Midlands & West Region – Operational Programme 2007-2013

The BMW Regional Operational Programme 2007-2013 has a planned investment of €458m of which €229m is provided by the EU Structural Funds under the Regional Competitiveness and Employment objective. One of the conditions of the Region's designation as an Objective 2 'phasing in' region is that 79% of the EU contribution has been committed over the first three years of the programme.

The objective of the Operational Programme is "to facilitate innovation, ensure sustainable development, improve accessibility and develop the urban fabric within the region, in order to enhance overall productivity and competitiveness." The development strategy to achieve the above is objective includes a focus on "Urban Development and Secondary Transport Networks". The Galway Harbour Extension clearly accords with the objectives to ensure competitiveness, improve accessibility and achieve sustainable development.

3.3 NATIONAL POLICY

3.3.1 National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020

The National Spatial Strategy (NSS), which was published by the Government in October 2002, is a 20 year planning framework designed to deliver more balanced social, economic, and physical development between Regions in the overall National interest. It is designed to inform strategic investment, transport and other infrastructure decisions. The Government has committed itself to ensuring that its own policies will be implemented in a manner that is consistent with the NSS. Under the provisions of the NSS, Galway's strategic location in the West Region is reflected in its designation as a "Gateway", which is defined as "a city having a strategic location nationally and relative to their surrounding areas and providing national scale social, economic infrastructure and support services".

A core objective of the NSS is to strengthen the critical mass of the designated Gateways. It states a number of key characteristics of Gateways, including:

- large clusters of national/ international scale enterprises, including those involved in advanced sectors.
- focal point in transportation and communications terms: i.e. on national road and rail networks; within 1 hour of an airport; adequate, reliable, cost effective and efficient access to port facilities; and effective competitive broadband access.

The Strategy notes that strengthening the critical mass of the existing Gateways of Cork, Limerick/Shannon, Galway and Waterford, strategically located in different parts of the country, to complement Dublin's successful national spatial role, offers the most immediate prospects of establishing more balanced patterns of development over the next few years. They have considerable potential for further development and expansion to achieve more balanced regional development and will allow substantial new investment to be generated in and attracted to the regions complementing the successful national spatial role of Dublin.

Building on the dynamic role of the Galway Gateway and expanding its influence in promoting economic activity is at the heart of extending balanced regional development to the West Region (Counties Galway, Mayo and Roscommon). The support of the additional potential of Castlebar and Ballina in County Mayo and Tuam in County Galway as hub towns will also be crucial. Galway, with its population catchment, quality of life attractions, transport connections and capacity to innovate with the support of its third level institutions, will continue to play the critical role that is essential in activating the potential of the West Region.

In confirming its decision that the proposed development satisfied the necessary SID criteria, the An Bord Pleanála Inspector considered the policies and objectives in the NSS. The Inspector found that *"the proposed development would contribute substantially to the fulfilment of objectives in the National Spatial Strategy for the Gateway of Galway and the objectives for the redevelopment and expansion of Galway Harbour in the Regional Planning Guidelines for West Region 2010-2022."* In reaching this conclusion, the Inspector noted the Galway Gateway designation, the importance of the harbour to Galway and the West Region, the constraints inherent in the existing harbour, the importance of expansion/relocation to the harbour's future and the redevelopment opportunities that would arise in the inner harbour area. The Inspector stated that the proposed Galway Harbour Extension would be of *"strategic economic importance to the State and West Region...substantially contributing to the fulfilment of objectives contained within the National Spatial Strategy and the Regional Planning Guidelines for West Region 2010-2022."*

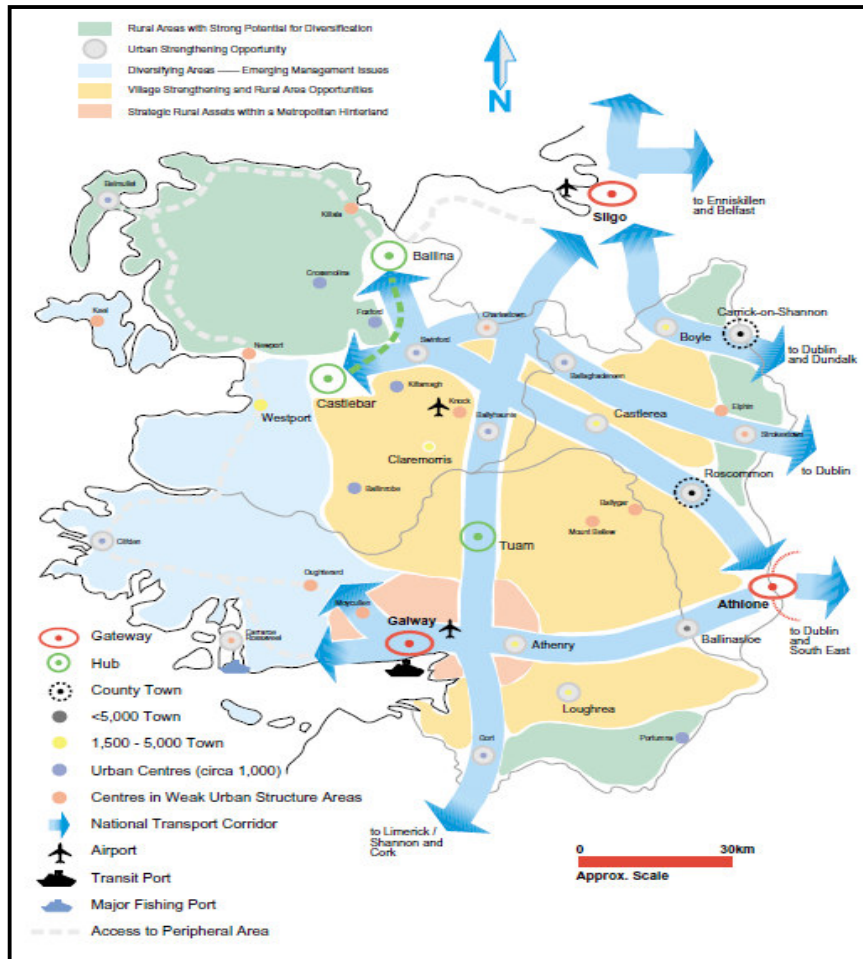


Figure 3.3.1 - Extract from NSS – Map Illustrating the Galway Gateway

3.3.2 National Development Plan 2007-2013

The aim of the National Development Plan 2007-2013 (NDP) is to ensure Ireland's continued competitiveness in a global market and to ensure balanced development within the regions. The NDP states that *"balanced regional development means supporting the economic and social development of all regions in their effort to achieve their full potential. This Plan aims to promote the development of all regions in Ireland in line with the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) and within a coordinated, coherent and mutually beneficial framework which builds on regional strengths and addresses regional weaknesses. The promotion of regional development will aim to ensure that each NSS Gateway region maximises its potential for economic and social development; that a better balance is achieved in the economic and social development of the regions; and that there is enhanced co-ordination in the development of the Gateways and their regions and between planning and investment at local, regional and national levels"*. The NDP acknowledges that investment in the commercial ports will play a key role in promoting internal and external accessibility.

Chapter 3 of the NDP (Strategy for Individual Gateways) states that *"Galway is the principal economic and population centre in the West Region... Galway has performed very strongly throughout the 1980's and 1990's. Its population grew by 17% between 1996 and 2002, the highest of any gateway other than Letterkenny. Galway City and County grew by a further 10.5% to 231,035 in 2006."* It further identifies a number of key development and investment priorities

over the period of the Plan, including “*Regeneration of docks area of Galway city*”. The Galway Harbour Extension will facilitate the regeneration of the inner city docks.

3.3.3 Smarter Travel - A Sustainable Alternative Transport Policy 2009 – 2020

Current national transport policy is contained in the Government’s Policy Document: “*Smarter Travel - A Sustainable Alternative Transport Policy 2009 – 2020*.” Whilst this Policy Document deals with all transport demands, particularly the movement of people, it also acknowledges the impact of the transport of goods into and within the nation. It states that “*95% of all goods are moved by road and over 30% of transport greenhouse gas emissions are from the freight sector*”. In its key actions, the Document includes the following for freight transport:

“Ensure that the Department of Transport deals with freight policy issues in a more integrated manner and prepares a specific strategy for the freight sector. We will set a target aimed at reducing the environmental impact of freight while at the same time improving efficiency in the movement of goods and promoting economic competitiveness.

Organise a forum to bring all interested parties together, including industrial development agencies and industry representative bodies, to explore in greater depth the issues relating to the movement of goods, including:

*The realistic potential for rail freight;
Priority freight routes allowing access to vehicles with greater load factors and capacity;
Developing key logistics centres to transfer goods to more sustainable forms of transport for final delivery in urban areas;
Scheduling of deliveries from the ports and in urban areas to avoid peak use of networks as far as possible;
The incentives and disincentives needed to move to more fuel-efficient vehicles;
The need to have more rigorous testing of goods vehicles to reduce emissions;
The potential of Intelligent Transport Systems and Services to improve efficiency.”*

The Policy Document makes particular reference to the importance of ports to the national interest. In this regard, the Document includes a commitment to review the Ports Policy Statement 2005 (see below) in order to seek to maximise the efficiency of freight transport.

3.3.4 National Ports Policy 2013

The Government published a new National Ports Policy in 2013 to replace the previous policy statement published in 2005. The core objective of National Ports Policy (NPP) is to facilitate a competitive and effective market for maritime transport services. It acknowledges that the long-term international trend in ports and shipping is towards optimising of efficiencies of scale, with larger vessels, greater depths of water required in ports and enhanced landside transport connections.

The NPP acknowledges that ports in Ireland differ in size and current capability and it introduces a categorisation of them into ports of National Significance (Tiers 1 & 2) and Ports of Regional Significance. In this regard, the Ports of National Significance are Dublin, Cork, Shannon/Foynes, Waterford & Rosslare. Galway port is included within a group of 14 no. Ports of Regional Significance. The Policy states that the Regional Ports “*handle commercial traffic and function as important facilitators of trade for their regional and local hinterland.*” It further notes that 5 no. of the Regional Ports are in state control, including Galway Harbour.

The NPP is a key consideration in the planning assessment of the Galway Harbour Extension. In terms of Regional Ports, the NPP identifies important but different “*roles for the 5 state owned ports of regional significance.*” It recognises the importance of these ports in serving their hinterlands and in supporting balanced regional development. It further notes that these ports

could play a more significant role in supporting national economic development in certain specialised trades (eg oil/petroleum import & storage/off-shore energy servicing) and maritime tourism. The NPP also supports the development of the cruise tourism sector.

Galway Harbour is identified as an “*important strategic regional hub for petroleum importation, storage and distribution*” (Section 2.7.3). The NPP also identifies Galway Harbour as having important potential in terms of servicing the ocean energy sector by endorsing the findings of the IMDO Report (Section 4.2). It further identifies the benefits of reintegration and rejuvenation between port and city using Volvo Ocean Race as a demonstration of success in this regard (Section 4.5).

The NPP notes that its close proximity to Galway city centre limits the potential to handle additional trade at the existing harbour. However, it acknowledges that the inner harbour is “*an immensely attractive location for the development of marine tourism and leisure facilities, in particular a marina, as well as for urban redevelopment*”. It confirms that the NPP endorses the development proposals in respect of the inner harbour, as referred to in the *Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2010–2022* and the *Galway City Development Plan 2011–2017*, for marine tourism and leisure facilities as well as for urban redevelopment and regeneration. It further confirms the Government’s support of development of cruise tourist traffic at Galway harbour, specifically noting Galway Harbour Company’s efforts to develop this business. The NPP also acknowledges that the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport and other relevant agencies are currently giving detailed consideration to the plans to relocate commercial port activities on adjacent lands, as part of the Galway Harbour Extension project.

Further to the above, in confirming its decision that the proposed Galway Harbour Extension satisfied the necessary SID criteria, An Bord Pleanála acknowledged the economic significance of the further development of Galway Port to the economy of Galway, its hinterland and the West Region.

3.3.5 Forfas –*Overview of Main Infrastructure Issues for Enterprise (2012)*

Forfas, in its May 2012 document, *Overview of the Main Infrastructure Issues for Enterprise*, notes that good international air and sea access, coupled with effective internal connectivity, is a key factor in mitigating the impact of Ireland’s peripheral location. An efficient and integrated national transport system, with adequate capacity and with levels of service comparable to other countries with which we compete for investment and trade, plays an essential role in achieving this. In relation to air and sea ports, it states that:

*“The key issue for enterprise is ensuring that we have good international access by air and sea in terms of locations served, frequency and costs:
Clarity on the ownership and governance of our air and sea ports is important to enable the parties involved invest in a timely manner to ensure the current and future needs of enterprise are met (e.g. development of deeper water facilities).”*

The document states that “*both importers and exporters will require increasingly sophisticated, high quality and cost competitive sea freight services to get their products to market efficiently.*” A key policy priority for enterprise, according to the Forfas document, is the need for deeper water facilities at Irish ports to accommodate the international trend toward larger shipping vessels and to ensure that Irish importers and exporters continue to have access to a wide range and frequency of port services at competitive prices. The following are a number of the policy priorities for enterprise identified by Forfas (emphasis added to highlight particular relevance to the Galway Harbour Extension):

- *"While air and sea access infrastructure is generally not funded directly from public capital expenditure budgets, public policy has a key role to play in ensuring that the private sector (i.e. commercial semi-states and others) invests in a timely manner to ensure the current and future needs of enterprise are met. Periodic reviews of future needs are required to ensure that we continue to have good sea and air access in the long term."*
- *In the long term, we need to develop deeper water facilities at Irish ports to accommodate the international trend toward larger shipping vessels and ensure that Irish importers and exporters continue to have access to a wide range and frequency of port services at competitive prices."*

3.3.6 Forfas – Assessment of Port Services Issues for Enterprise (2009)

The Forfas document "Assessment of Port Services *Issues for Enterprise*" (2009), notes that port services are critically important for enterprise in getting product to market. The Forfas study assessed a number of ports related efficiency and operational issues, including the comparative performance for freight services of the Irish ports, the adequacy of internal road and rail access and the changing enterprise needs for port services.

The key findings of the study included that land access to some ports raises issues for enterprise, in getting their goods to market, "*particularly the congestion in the Greater Dublin Area and the poor access from the west to ports outside of Dublin.*" It notes that the refusal of permission for new port facilities at Ringaskiddy due to absence of rail infrastructure "*highlights the need for an integrated approach to transport policy across all modes (road, rail, seaports and airports).*"

The study also noted that "*rising fuel costs are likely to lead to larger ships in the medium term....this will require deeper water facilities at Irish ports to handle the larger vessels.*" This links to the findings of the Forfas "*Overview of the Main Infrastructure Issues for Enterprise*" (see above), which also notes the need to develop deeper water facilities at Irish ports. The Galway Harbour Extension will achieve this objective.

3.4 EUROPEAN AND NATIONAL PLANNING POLICY CONCLUSION

The proposed development of a Galway Harbour Extension is in line with the relevant European and national planning, sustainable transport and regional development policies and objectives. EU objectives to promote maritime transport, including short sea shipping, as a sustainable alternative to road and air freight and to improve intermodality fully support the proposed Galway Harbour Extension.

In addition, in confirming the SID status for the Galway Harbour Extension, An Bord Pleanála has determined that the Galway Harbour Extension satisfies all relevant national policies and objectives and, in particular, "*the proposed development would contribute substantially to the fulfilment of objectives in the National Spatial Strategy for the Gateway of Galway and the objectives for the redevelopment and expansion of Galway Harbour in the Regional Planning Guidelines for West Region 2010-2022.*"

4 REGIONAL & LOCAL PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

4.1 REGIONAL PLANNING GUIDELINES FOR THE WEST 2010-2022

The Regional Planning Guidelines (RPGs) for the West Region 2010 – 2022 provide a framework for long-term strategic development in the West Region, which comprises the administrative areas of Galway County Council, Galway City Council, Mayo County Council and Roscommon County Council. The RPGs aim to ensure the successful implementation of the National Spatial Strategy and a key aspect of the RPGs is to maintain a balance between protecting and enhancing the environment and sustainable economic development of the West Region.

RPGs have become much more influential within the planning policy hierarchy following the enactment of the Planning and Development Act 2010, which requires all relevant Development Plans to be compliant with the RPGs. The West Regional Authority adopted the current RPGs in October 2010. The key policies of the RPGs include the following:

“Support a framework which incorporates a network of growth nodes creating an Atlantic Development Corridor which will enhance economic, social and environmental opportunities and will enable the western seaboard to compete successfully with other economic corridors, thus benefiting the people of the whole region.”

The RPGs set out the aims for the West Region through the formulation of strategic policies. The RPGs make specific reference to harbours and ports and acknowledge that:

“Galway Sea Port is of strategic importance to the West Region....The plans for the relocation and extension of Galway Harbour area which includes deepwater port facilities has the potential to contribute to both tourism and enterprise in the local economy and is considered critical for growth in the region. Ports and Harbours contribute to the economic development and are important transportation links to facilitate the growth and connectivity of the Region. Adequate infrastructure must be in place to facilitate the sustainable development of the aqua-culture industry, marine tourism industry and to facilitate water based leisure activities/sports in the West Region.” [emphasis added]

Objective IO21 of the RPGs states the following:

*“Support the sustainable redevelopment and expansion of Galway Harbour which is critical for the continued important role in the growth of the West Region. Galway Harbour is also supported in its role to serve and promote water-based tourism. Facilities/ infrastructure could include a secure berthing area for the marine leisure industry. All proposals will be subject to assessment on environmental sustainability, including impacts on the Natura 2000 network through Habitats Directive Assessment, visual, travel and transport impacts.
Any proposals should support enhanced integration with the rail and road network.”*

The requirements of Objective IO21 in relation to environmental assessment are addressed in the EIS and NIS that accompany this SID application. In confirming its decision that the proposed development satisfied the necessary SID criteria, the An Bord Pleanála Inspector considered the Regional Planning Guidelines and stated the following:

“I would draw the Board’s attention to the clearly stated objectives and policies that are outlined, in respect of the relocation of Galway Port to a new location with deepwater access, both in the City Development Plan and in the Regional Planning Guidelines.....in particular there is a specific objective in the RPG, Objective IO21, which refers to support for the “sustainable redevelopment

and expansion of Galway Harbour which is critical for the continued important role on growth of the West Region”.

4.2 GALWAY CITY DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2011-2017

The Galway City Development Plan 2011-2017 was adopted by Galway City Council in January 2011 and took effect in February 2011. The Plan sets out the City Council's development strategy for the period up to 2017 and acknowledges Galway City's special status as a Gateway for the West Region and its important role in the regional economy. The Strategic Goals of the Development Plan include the following:

- *Promote balanced and sustainable economic development that will enable Galway City to fulfil its role as a National Gateway and a Regional Centre, providing sufficient employment opportunities and appropriate services.*
- *Use the role of the Gateway to harness the strengths and maximise the economic development of the region.*
- *Provide for a built and natural environment that is of high quality and that contributes to providing a good quality of life for residents and visitors and affords sustainable transportation opportunities.*
- *Promote the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions through proactive measures in line with EU commitments to tackle climate change.*

One of the key aims of the Development Plan is as follows:

“to facilitate and promote the balanced and sustainable economic development of the city as a National Gateway and provide for a diverse range of employment needs in order to maximise employment opportunities and provide for a high level of service provision and drive national and regional competitiveness.”

The Development Plan acknowledges that Galway Harbour is an important transport facility and confirms Council support for proposals for the development of new and extended harbour facilities and supporting infrastructure. It further acknowledges the need to relocate harbour activities to a modern port and the potential to redevelop the existing inner harbour area. Indeed, the Plan's Development Strategy states:

“The development strategy is to capitalise on the brownfield site opportunities offered by both Ceannt Station and Galway Harbour. These areas, owing to their proximity to the city centre, their combined scale and attractive location on Galway Bay, offer great potential for a sustainable mixed use quarter. They offer a sequential solution to the expansion of the city centre, linked with a transportation hub, reinforcing the prime role of the city centre in both Galway City and the Gateway region. Expanding the city in this direction does not only respond to floorspace demand it also enhances the image of the city physically, the tourism function and allows for an expansion to a scale commensurate with its designated role under the NSS. The planning of both sites will be encompassed in framework plans/masterplans which will complement and have regard to the interdependence of the sites.”

The Development Plan further states that:

“the need to modernise Galway Harbour facilities will require the docks' functions to be relocated to an alternative site. Galway Harbour Company currently has plans for such a development to the east of the existing Inner Harbour which will free up the existing site for re-development. This represents a welcome challenge to re-establish links with the sea and open up new opportunities for a range of uses including water-related leisure uses.”

The Plan includes policies and objectives that generally or specifically support the further development of Galway Harbour, including the following:

“Promote and facilitate sustainable employment creation and opportunities in the city by ensuring the availability of an adequate supply of serviced land at appropriate locations for industrial development.”

“Support further sustainable development of Galway Harbour subject to environmental, visual, economic viability and transportation considerations.”

“Promote further sustainable development of the Harbour Enterprise Park and related harbour activities subject to acceptability from the appropriate authorities.”

“Facilitate and encourage sustainable tourism development, which is based on and reflects the city’s distinctive history, culture and environment.”

“Support the development of cruise line tourism acknowledging the significant contribution and diversity it could add to the local and regional tourist economy.”

There are other references to the proposed new harbour in the Development Plan, including the following statements:

“A re-development of the Galway Port facilities is proposed. This would include for the relocation of the port to a deepwater location and development of the existing facilities as a marina. This would increase the potential to improve linkage for both passengers and freight into the city. The integrated transportation study scheduled by the GTU [Galway Transportation Unit] will look at the strategic implications and opportunities this would afford the city and explore the tie in with both the rail and road network

The plans for the re-location and extension of the Harbour area which include for deepwater port facilities has potential to contribute to both tourism and enterprise in the local economy. It is acknowledged that such a development could have strategic importance for the city and is supported subject to assessment on economic viability, environmental, visual and transport

The Harbour Enterprise Park currently supports a number of industries, some of a ‘heavy industrial nature’ and some with direct links to the harbour facilities. The Council will continue to support these developments particularly in the context of the expansion plans envisaged by the Galway Harbour Board where they do not have an adverse impact on the integrity of the Natura 2000 sites.”

All the above demonstrate that the City Development Plan’s overall strategy and detailed policies and objectives fully support the proposed development of a Galway Harbour Extension and that the proposal is, therefore, fully integrated with the City Council’s Development Strategy and the Development Plan’s Core Strategy. It should also be noted that the requirement of the City Development plan in relation to sustainable development and Appropriate Assessment are addressed in the EIS and NIS that accompany this SID application. It should be further noted that, in confirming its decision that the proposed development satisfied the necessary SID criteria, the An Bord Pleanála Inspector acknowledged that Galway Harbour Extension was in accordance with the objectives set out in the City Development Plan.

In addition to the above, the City Development Plan also sets out the land use zoning objectives and other specific objectives for all areas of the city. The Plan provides for an “industrial” land use zoning objective for the existing harbour lands at the Harbour Enterprise Park. The objective for this zoning is to “provide for enterprise, industry and related uses.” The Galway Harbour Extension, insofar as it comprises zoned land, is in accordance with this zoning objective.

4.3 REGIONAL & LOCAL PLANNING POLICY CONCLUSION

The proposed development of a Galway Harbour Extension is in line with the relevant regional and local planning, sustainable transport and regional development policies and objectives. EU objectives to promote maritime transport, including short sea shipping, as a sustainable alternative to road and air freight and to improve intermodality fully support the proposed Galway Harbour Extension.

The proposed Galway Harbour Extension is also consistent with the relevant national planning policies and objectives, including the National Spatial Strategy and the Ports' Policy Statement. In addition, the proposed development is fully supported by the policies and specific objectives included in the current Regional Planning Guidelines and the City Development Plan. The proposed Galway Harbour Extension is in the interests of balanced regional development and will further ensure the long-term strategic role of Galway City as a Gateway city.

5 RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

There are a number of planning applications in the vicinity of the proposed Galway Harbour Extension, many of which relate to the individual businesses that operate within the Galway Harbour Enterprise Park, including Cold Chon and Enwest Limited. The majority of these applications are of little relevance to the current proposal. However, the following planning applications are of note, particularly in terms of the recent planning context for this area.

PI. Ref. No 68/95

Planning permission granted to Galway Harbour Commissioners for industrial development (16.81ha), harbour offices, ancillary port facilities, storage areas, coal yards, fish processing units, bulk goods storage areas, parking areas, filling/reclamation (7.55ha), open space(8.11ha), sea walls (1095m) and shore line promenade (1170m).

Permission granted by Galway City Council on 26th October 1995 for the reclamation and development of the Harbour Enterprise Park and included an Environmental Impact Statement. The conditions attached to the permission had the effect of granting outline permission only for a number of specified uses, including coal/oil storage and fish/feeds processing.

PI. Ref. No. 592/98

Planning permission granted to Cold Chon Limited to construct 3 no. bitumen storage tanks, covered loading gantry, boiler house, control office and ancillary site works.

Permission granted by Galway City Council on 29th October 1998. This permission marked the first in a number of permissions for bitumen storage tanks and associated developments in the Harbour Enterprise Park. These bitumen storage facilities continue to be operated by Cold Chon Limited.

PI. Ref. No. 04/188

Planning permission granted to Cold Chon Limited to construct an oil storage and distribution terminal with associated offices, car parking, ESB substation and ancillary accommodation.

Permission granted by Galway City Council on 31st August 2004. This decision was subject to a third party appeal. However, permission was ultimately granted by An Bord Pleanála on 4th February 2005. It is noted that the Major Accidents Regulations apply to this development. This oil storage and distribution terminal is operated by Enwest Limited.

PI. Ref. No. 07/372

Planning permission granted to Bus Eireann Limited to construct a Bus Garage (modifications to previous PI. Ref No. 842/00). The development includes a bus maintenance building with administrative offices and ancillary bus servicing and storage facilities. Permission was granted by An Bord Pleanála on 4th June 2008 following a first party appeal against Galway City Council's decision to refuse permission. This permission has been implemented.

6 CURRENT GALWAY HARBOUR

6.1 GALWAY HARBOUR COMPANY

The Galway Harbour Company Limited is a stand-alone economic entity with a mandate to sustain and grow the business of the Port of Galway. During the past decade, the Galway Harbour Company has developed the port into one of the more successful commercial regional ports in Ireland. In 1997, a change in corporate structure saw the Galway Harbour Company become a semi-state company. This change has facilitated the Port's future development and allows greater flexibility in its operations.

The Harbour Company acknowledges that the existing port capacity and facilities are severely inadequate and do not meet the modern requirements of new national and international business, as well as the changing requirements of existing customers.

The Galway Harbour Company's proposals for the Galway Harbour Extension aims to ensuring that the port remains at the heart of the economic and social development of Galway City and the West Region.

6.2 THE CURRENT HARBOUR OPERATION

The Galway Harbour Company currently occupies approximately 16 hectares (39.5 acres) of inner city docklands in Galway City (13 ha of yard areas and 3ha of working quays). In addition, the Galway Harbour Enterprise Park extends to approximately 16 hectares (39.5 acres) of yard area to the east of the existing harbour at Renmore. The working harbour is restricted in size and is further subject to significant tidal restrictions.

Bitumen is imported into Galway, Dublin and Belfast by Cold Chon Ltd from France and is sold to local authorities for road works. The product is pumped directly from the ship to Cold Chon's tanks at the port. Steel is imported from mills in the UK, France, Germany, Turkey and Spain. Coal is imported from Poland, Spain and UK by Bord na Mona. Scrap steel is exported to steel mills in Spain and Portugal. Many fishing vessels moor up in Galway for repairs and maintenance and there is significant potential for additional repair services due to annual inspection requirements.

The import of Petroleum Products is a significant trade through the port. Galway is the gateway to the west and northwest and is located strategically for the oil companies to allow them to distribute their products north to Sligo, east as far as Moate and south as far as Limerick. There are two tank farms in Galway: the new EnWest Oil Terminal at the Galway Harbour Enterprise Park and the Fareplay or Leaside Terminal at Lough Atalia Road.

Tourism has long been very important to the economy of Galway and the West Region and maritime/water-based tourism is of particular importance – evidenced by the successful hosting of the Volvo Ocean Race 2009 stopover and 2012 final. Galway also benefits from passenger cruise liners, although limited berthing and passenger handling facilities disadvantage the port over other locations. The proposed development offers very significant potential to take advantage of growth in maritime tourism, including water-based sports and activities, yachting/boating marina and cruise liners.

6.3 CURRENT CONSTRAINTS AT GALWAY HARBOUR

As referred to above, the current working harbour is restricted in size and is further subject to tidal restrictions. The Inner Harbour dock gates are less than 20 metres in width and this is a significant construction on the size of vessels that can be accommodated. Similarly, the berthage and quayside areas are very limited in scale. In addition, the shallow dredged channel and tidal constraints render the harbour operational for very limited periods, with access/egress only being available around high tide times.

Whilst Galway Harbour continues to operate on a commercial basis, the existing constraints outlined above have seriously inhibited its growth. Indeed, the significant restrictions in capacity, particularly in relation to size of vessels and tidal access, continue to prejudice the long term viability of the harbour at its current location.

The worldwide demand for larger shipping vessels, driven by operational economies of scale, results in requirements for deep water berthage and improved quayside handling facilities. The existing Galway Harbour is becoming less suitable in this regard and faces strong competition from other ports. Without significantly improved port facilities, Galway will lose customers, resulting in the ultimate demise of the commercial port operation and knock-on socio-economic impacts for the City and region.

Galway Harbour Company has developed the proposals for the Galway Harbour Extension to the south of the Galway Harbour Enterprise Park to accommodate larger vessels and service significantly larger volumes of freight, as well as passenger liners. The proposed Galway Harbour Extension will provide modern inter-modal freight handling facilities that will serve the City and the West Region for the future.

In addition to the above, the new proposals incorporate improved oil handling facilities that will address current SEVESO issues relating to the oil tanks in the inner harbour area. The Control of Major Accident Hazards Directive (Seveso II Directive - 96/82 EC) covers certain industrial activities and the storage of dangerous substances, including oil and other fuels. This has an impact on planning decisions close to any relevant storage facility and has restricted some city centre development to date. The Galway Harbour Extension will facilitate the removal of all oil handling and storage to a new location, away from the inner harbour and thereby relieving the risk to the City Centre area.

7 ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Having concluded that there is a need to address the current limitations of Galway harbour and the constraints on its future economic success, there is also a need to consider alternative options to serve the City and Region's needs, including different locations and designs. A detailed assessment of alternatives, including alternative locations, is included with this planning application. It is acknowledged that a further potential scenario is the “*do nothing option*” and, whilst this will not support the long term viability of the existing harbour, this must also be considered.

7.1 “DO-NOTHING” SCENARIO

The existing constrained nature of Galway Harbour is outlined above and the harbour cannot handle vessels of the size that modern requirements demand. The “do-nothing” scenario means the existing port situation prevailing, with no significant improvement to port facilities or capacity. This would not address the very significant tidal and capacity constraints and will lead to the decline of the harbour, with serious socio-economic implications for Galway City and the West Region.

Without a commercially viable port in Galway to serve local and regional needs, goods will require to be imported and exported via other ports in Ireland. This will result in increased road transportation and carbon costs to the West and is contrary to sustainable transport objectives.

7.2 IMPROVEMENTS TO INNER HARBOUR SCENARIO

The tidal and space constraints at the existing Galway Harbour render this scenario a non-option as there is no scope to improve tidal or berthage facilities. The future outlook would therefore be similar to the “do-nothing” scenario, described above.

7.3 OTHER WEST COAST PORTS SCENARIO

Galway Harbour provides important facility for the City and Region, including to a number of key customers who rely on the import and export of specific goods, including petroleum products, bitumen and steel. Whilst some of these goods could be accommodated at other west coast ports, there are a number of significant disadvantages in these scenarios.

Sligo Port is a regional port owned by Sligo County Council. There is an unused rail link to the harbour. However, Sligo Port is unsuitable as an alternative to Galway as it cannot accommodate medium or large vessels, has limited landside storage/handling facilities and it is also tidal. In addition, the additional road haulage distances required to serve Galway city and region would be contrary to sustainable freight transport objectives.

Shannon Foynes Port comprises a number of separate terminals along the Shannon. The port is a major deepwater port catering for bulk goods and it has substantial landside handling and storage facilities. Whilst transport access to the hinterland is generally good, connectivity to the existing rail and motorway networks raises some concerns. Shannon Foynes is not regarded as a viable and appropriate alternative to the Galway Harbour Extension because of its distance from the main market that Galway Harbour serves. In this regard, Shannon Foynes serves a separate catchment area from Galway and it is not sustainable for it to service the Galway catchment, which extends as far north as Sligo.

Londonderry Port is a general, deep-water, regional cargo port with capacity for 30,000 tonne vessels and cruise vessels. Transport access to Derry's regional hinterland is generally good, including to Donegal and much of the north-west of Northern Ireland. However, Derry is not seen as a viable alternative to Galway Harbour because of its distance from the main market place

that Galway serves. As is the case with Shannon Foynes, Derry serves a separate catchment area from Galway and it is not sustainable for it to service the Galway catchment.

7.4 GALWAY BAY PORT SCENARIOS

The above assessments indicate that consideration has to be given to the catchment area of ports and, in particular, to the need to minimise road haulage distances in the interests of sustainable transport objectives. Individual ports have viable catchment areas and it is considered that the West Region itself can be considered as its own catchment market to be served from a well-located regional port with easy access to rail and road infrastructure. Therefore, further consideration has been given to alternative locations in the Galway Bay area, including Tawin Island & Mutton Island

The above analysis indicate that the Galway City location, as currently proposed, is the optimal location for the proposed new port. The other locations have greater environmental issues and have challenges which virtually render them unviable, including for reasons relating to poor road access, lack of potential rail access, shallow waters and visual/aesthetic issues.

In summary, the proposed development of the Galway Harbour Extension is considered to be necessary for the economic and social health of the city and region and is the only viable and sustainable alternative. It is also the optimum location for taking advantage of the potential growth in maritime tourism as it is proximate to an existing vibrant tourist centre with a wide range of attractions and services.

The proposed Galway Harbour Extension will deliver the following:

- Removal of tidal constraints
- Improved handling capacity.
- Resolution of Seveso issues
- Growth of Port Business
- Regional Socio-Economic Benefits
- Maintenance of maritime tradition
- Further leisure/marina/cruise liner opportunities
- Freight Rail link
- Avoids increased carbon footprint of diverted traffic
- Allows city centre to develop to existing harbour frontage

8 PROPOSED GALWAY HARBOUR EXTENSION

8.1 DEVELOPMENT DESCRIPTION

This application is for a Galway Harbour Extension, located approximately 500 metres south-east of the existing Galway Harbour, primarily on lands to be reclaimed from the sea to the south of the Galway Harbour Enterprise Park.

The full description of the proposed development, as per the public notices is as follows:

Planning permission is sought for the development of an extension of Galway Harbour at Renmore and Townparks Townlands and on lands to be reclaimed from the foreshore and the sea in Galway Bay to the south of the existing Galway Harbour Enterprise Park, which contains a Seveso site. The works will include re-development of some of the land at Galway Harbour Enterprise Park.

Access to the development will be via the existing access at the junction of Lough Atalia Road and Bóthar na Long. The proposed development will include the relocation of the majority of the existing harbour related activities and businesses from the existing dock area to the new deep water berths, quays, jetties and yards to be located at the harbour extension.

The proposed development is largely in an area of Galway Bay which is designated as a candidate Special Area of Conservation [cSAC] and a Special Protection Area [SPA] and includes works on Lough Atalia Road Rail Bridge [a protected structure].

The proposed development will include:-

- (i) quay walls, breakwaters and wave walls to create commercial quays and a deep water docking facility, extending southwards into Galway Bay
- (ii) dredging to create a new approach channel to the commercial quays and the deep water docking facility berths
- (iii) reclamation of approx 27 ha from the foreshore and sea bed
- (iv) development of the reclaimed lands and redevelopment of part of the adjacent Galway Harbour Enterprise Park lands for Harbour related business
- (v) marina on the western side
- (vi) fishing quays, slipway for a lifeboat station and a nautical centre on the eastern side
- (vii) a twin track freight rail link from the existing Galway to Dublin rail line to the commercial quays, including embankments, rail over-bridge to existing service road and noise abatement screening
- (viii) the construction of oil and bitumen transfer pipelines to the existing oil and bitumen tank farms on the Galway Harbour Enterprise Park and the provision of fire water storage facilities. This falls within the remit of EU Directive (96/82 EC) on the control of Major Accident Hazards, known as the SEVESO II Directive
- (ix) harbour related buildings, including Port Operations Office (4 storeys); Harbour Management Warehouse (single storey); Marina Office (single storey); Passenger Terminal (single storey); and ancillary car parking and site services, including 3 No. ESB sub-stations, demolition of 1 No. ESB sub-station, 3 No. Control Offices and Oil Terminal Water Pumphouse and a helicopter pad for search and rescue purposes.
- (x) the construction / improvement of access roads including the horizontal and vertical realignment of the road under Lough Atalia Road Rail Bridge [a protected structure] and realignment and improvements including traffic lights at Dock Road / Bóthar na Long / Galway Harbour Enterprise Park Access Road junction (adjacent to Harbour Hotel)

- (xi) the provision of landscaping and amenity areas, including replacement of the previously permitted amenity strip from the southern seaward boundary of the Galway Harbour Enterprise Park to form an amenity link from the marina to the nautical centre.
- (xii) the proposal includes for all associated temporary and permanent site development [including service roads / realignment of roads and underground works], landscape works [including public lighting and services) and activities to facilitate the construction of the development.

The application is accompanied by an Environmental Impact Statement [EIS] and a Natura Impact Statement [NIS]. Elements of the development will require a Waste Licence, a Waste Water Discharge Licence and a Foreshore Licence / Lease.

A ten year permission is being sought.

As set out in Section 1 of this Report, the application is being made direct to An Bord Pleanála under the Strategic Infrastructure development provisions of Section 37 of the Planning and Development Acts 2000-2012.

8.2 KEY ELEMENTS OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The description of the proposed development is set out in Section 8.1 above. The following represents a breakdown of some of the key elements of the development:

The New Port will provide the following:

- Total land development / redevelopment = 28.07 ha
- 660m of quay berth to –14.9m O.D. depth
- Port development serviced by a channel to -10.9m O.D.
- A 400m turning circle to -10.9m O.D.
- Western Marina with 216 No. berths.
- Fishing Pier
- Nautical Centre Slipway
- Freight rail link

As noted above the New Port land area to be developed is 28.07 ha. This will provide for the following land uses:

- Commercial Port back up Yards
- Commercial Quay Areas
- Harbour Company Warehouse Yards
- Future Oil and Bitumen Yards
- ESB, Security Yard & Fire Water Storage
- Fishing Pier and Yards
- Roads and Access
- Rail Line and Embankment
- Nautical Yard & Slipway
- Passenger Terminal Yard
- Parklands and landscaped areas
- Renmore Promenade
- Marina Promenade

Vehicular access to the Galway Harbour Extension will be via the existing Galway Harbour Enterprise Park (GHEP), subject to a number of junction improvements. It is also proposed to improve the clearance under the Lough Atalia Bridge, which is a protected structure.

8.3 BENEFITS OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

The proposed Galway Harbour Extension will bring many very significant benefits to Galway City, Galway County, the West Region and beyond. The primary and most important benefits relate to socio-economic benefits for the City and Region – including in sustaining a viable and competitive port operation in Galway, a gateway city, and providing employment and sustaining employment and businesses throughout the Region.

The proposed Galway Harbour Extension facilitates a change in focus of the land uses in and around the Inner Harbour, resulting in a more attractive environment and facilitating increased leisure, cultural and tourism-based uses and amenities. The proposed development is considered to have an overall positive impact in relation to public amenities.

At present, the existing Inner Harbour accommodates commercial vessels and is located only 40m from the nearest apartment in the Ce na Mara apartment complex (18m of quay and 22m of road/parking) and only 25m the other residential developments facing onto the Inner Harbour (10m of quay and 15m of road/parking). This potential source of conflict with residential amenity will be removed when the commercial/freight operations are relocated to the Galway Harbour Extension. This will improve the environmental and visual quality of the city centre area and facilitates the introduction of new uses in the inner harbour area that will significantly improve its amenity value.

In addition to the socio-economic benefits, the Galway Harbour Extension also incorporates facilities that will be of benefit to residents and visitors to Galway City. The works include the provision of a marina, public access areas and a bayside promenade that creates a vital link in the wider coastal path network. The entire Galway Harbour Extension area will be open to public access, with the exception of secure storage areas and other restricted areas where access must be controlled in the interests of public safety and security. There will be open areas, landscaped areas and walkways which will be accessible to the public and will be under the control of the management company including for maintenance.

The overall area of open space within the proposed development is 5.44 hectares, which includes landscaped parkland areas, the Renmore and Marina promenades and other landscaped areas. Public access will be widely available to much of the Galway Harbour Extension, in particular, to the new park, coastal walkways, marina and nautical slipway. In addition, the construction of the new Port will result in the creation of a sheltered area to the east of the development, where safe boating and other water-based activities can occur.

In summary, the Galway Harbour Extension will deliver the following wider benefits:

1. Socio-economic benefits for Galway Gateway City and West Region
2. Facilitate the redevelopment and regeneration of Inner Harbour lands
3. Provision of a new marina
4. Creation of sheltered areas for water sports
5. Public access to new waterfront areas and other landscaped areas

8.4 NATURA IMPACT ASSESSMENT

As part of the application process and, in particular, as part of the assessment of the proposed development in terms of potential environmental impacts (EIS) or impacts on Natura 2000 sites (NIS), alternative designs, layouts and locations were examined. With particular reference to locations, alternatives were assessed, both within Galway Bay and outside, as potential sites where a harbour of similar size and infrastructural support (e.g. rail, road) could be constructed. Each potential alternative was assessed, firstly in the context of the project objectives and secondly in terms of its impact on a Natura 2000 site. These are presented in Chapter 3 of Volume 2B of the EIS and Volume 1C: Natura Impact Statement.

With regard to the NIS, Article 6 of the Habitats Directive states if it is shown that:

“ the project would have adverse effects on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site, Stage 3 must examine any alternative solutions or options that could enable the plan or project to proceed without adverse effects on the integrity of the Natura 2000 site. The process must return to Stage 2 as alternatives will require appropriate assessment in order to proceed”

As can be seen from Chapter 3 of the EIS none of the alternative options in Inner Galway Bay meet this criterion (*i.e.* the alternatives considered within Galway Bay will have a greater adverse effect on the integrity of the cSAC and SPA) and, therefore, appropriate assessment of any of these options is not required. This appendix demonstrates that the least damaging option has been selected. In this regard, it is acknowledged that the NIS concludes that impacts on a Natura 2000 site arising from the proposed development site cannot be ruled out. Therefore, in accordance with the Habitats Directive, a detailed assessment of alternatives must be undertaken. This primarily requires to justify the proposed development on socio-economic grounds and is known as “IROPI – Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest”. This assessment of alternatives is included in this planning application.

The assessment of alternative solutions examines alternative ways of implementing the project or plan that, where possible, avoid any adverse impacts on the integrity of a Natura 2000 site. Before a project or plan, that either alone or in combination with other projects or plans has adverse effects on a Natura 2000 site, can proceed, it must be objectively concluded that no alternative solutions exist. The assessment of alternative solutions is required when the competent authority, having carried out appropriate assessment, has concluded that adverse impacts are likely, or cannot be ruled out. In examining alternative solutions, other assessment criteria, such as economic criteria, cannot overrule ecological criteria. The examination of alternative solutions requires therefore, that the conservation objectives and status of the Natura 2000 site will outweigh any consideration of costs, delays or other aspects of an alternative solution.

Possible alternative solutions could include the following:

- Locations
- Scale or size
- Means of meeting objectives (eg demand management)
- Methods of construction
- Operational methods
- Decommissioning methods at the end of the projects life
- Scheduling & timescale proposals (eg. Seasonal working).

The assessment of alternatives has concluded that there is no other suitable potential proposal through which the fundamental Galway Harbour Extension project objectives can be achieved. This assessment, which is included in the EIS, is further supported by the Cost Benefit Analysis undertaken by DKM Economic Consultants, which is also included with this application.

In reaching its decision to designate the proposed development as SID, An Bord Pleanála has clearly acknowledged the socio-economic importance of the Galway Harbour Extension to Galway City, its hinterland and the entire West Region. The Board has taken full account of National, Regional and local planning policies, including the National Ports Policy 2013 and the need to promote balanced regional development.

It is acknowledged that An Bord Pleanála is the competent authority in this case in terms of the Habitats Directive, including in relation to IROPI. Nevertheless, it is the opinion of the applicant and its project team that the proposed Galway Harbour Extension satisfies the socio-economic criteria under Article 6(4) of the Habitats Directive and that there are Imperative Reasons of Overriding Public Interest to allow the proposed development to proceed.

