

Planning Cover Report

Woodquay Park Enhancement





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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preamble

On behalf of the Applicant, Galway City Council (GCC), we are submitting a Part 10. planning application seeking the upgrade of the existing Woodquay Park and surrounding public realm in Galway City.

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

- “i. Upgrades and expansion of the Woodquay park including the provision of:

 - a. Hard and soft landscaping including rain gardens, seating areas, natural play landform, and planting of Molina meadow, spring bulbs, hedge row, and ground cover;
 - b. Removal of 1 no. ‘Class C’, and 1 no. ‘Class B’ trees. Planting of 4 no. new ‘Golden Alder’ trees;
 - c. Relocation and reduction in size of existing bike share station;
 - d. Galway Orb Sculpture and Light Feature;
 - e. Litter Bins;
 - f. Bollards;
 - g. Flexible Events and Open Space Area;
 - h. Enhanced Public Lighting;
 - i. Enhanced SuDS based surface water management,
 - j. Relocation of existing ICA memorial; and
 - k. All other associated and ancillary works;*
- ii. Provision of 4 no. pedestrian crossings including 2 no. across Riverside, 1 no. across Waterside, and 1 no. across Corrib Terrace;*
- iii. Hard and soft landscaping adjacent to the park (across Riverside) to provide enhanced public realm including: public lighting, drainage rain garden, seating areas, and all other associated and ancillary works;*
- iv. Vehicular parking consisting of relocation of 2 no. EV parking spaces, relocation of 2 no. accessible parking spaces, retention of approx. 10 no. on street parking spaces on Corrib Terrace with modifications for new pedestrian crossings, and relocation of 4 no. motorcycle spaces. This is a net removal of 11 no. existing car spaces.*
- v. Hard and soft landscaping adjacent to the park (across Waterside) to enable a continuation of paving type, wider footpaths, enhanced lighting, and consistent public realm design;*
- vi. All other associated and ancillary development and site works.*

A Natura Impact Statement (NIS) has been prepared in respect of the Proposed Development.”

The newspaper notice was published on the 19th of September 2024 in the Galway Advertiser and the site notice was erected on the 19th of September 2024. A copy of the site notice has been submitted as part of this application. In addition, 1 no. original, 1 no. paper copy, and 1 no. digital scan of the newspaper notice has been submitted.

1.2

The Project Team

The Applicant has retained a multi-disciplined professional team comprising: McCarthy Keville O'Sullivan Planning and Environmental Consultants (MKO), in association with LUC Landscape Architects, PUNCH Consulting Engineers (Civil and Drainage), Don O'Malley Consulting Engineers (Mechanical and Electrical), TOBAR Archaeological Services, ACP Conservation Architects, Edward Cotter Partnership Chartered Surveyors, and NCW Surveys, to assist with the preparation of a comprehensive planning application to An Bord Pleanála (ABP) seeking permission for the proposed development as outlined above.

1.3

Structure of the Report

Following this Introduction section, the report is set out as follows:

Section 2	Provides a description of the site's location context within the surrounding area.
Section 3	Provides a description of the relevant planning history for the subject site and area.
Section 4	Provides a description and further detail on the proposed development.
Section 5	Outlines the relevant policy context.
Section 6	Provides a planning assessment of the proposed development.
Section 7	Conclusion.

2.

SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

2.1

Site Location in Context

The subject site is located in the heart of Galway City Centre, to the north of the R338 Road (colloquially known as the Headford Road) and Woodquay Street. It is bordered by Waterside and the River Corrib to the northwest, Riverside and terrace housing to the northeast, and Corrib Terrace and terrace housing to the southwest. The wider area consists of the historic Woodquay neighbourhood within the city centre of Galway, which is known for its close cultural and physical ties to the River Corrib, vibrant shops and pubs, and charming residences. There is a mix of both historic structures, such as the terrace housing bordering the park, and more modern structures such as the nearby Mercy Primary School in the wider area. A bus stop serving Bus Eireann Route 407 is located to the north of the subject site. On street parallel parking is located adjacent to the subject site on both Riverside and Corrib Terrace. **Figure 2-1**, below shows the site's location in context.



Figure 2-1: Site location map.

2.2

Site Description

The subject site itself consists of the current extent of the Woodquay Park, the parking currently located to the south of it, and the current pocket of parking located to east of the park across Riverside. The park is currently lightly landscaped with grass, 18 no. of trees, 5 no. benches, a path running through the park between each entrance (one on Corrib Terrace, and one on Riverside) and partially down the length of the park to the southeast. The park is currently bordered by a hedge and fencing, with gates located at each entrance point. The parking lot to the immediate south of the park contains 10 no. parking spaces, 2 no. of which provide for disabled access. There is also a TFI Bike Rental station with docks for 20 no. bikes. The parking area to the east of the park contains 9 no parking spaces in total; 2 no. are EV spaces, 3 no. are standard, and 4 no. are motorcycle parking. Vehicular access to the driveway of the houses no. 7 and 8, Walsh's Terrace, Galway is made through this area. Finally, there is non-demarcated parallel parking on Corrib Terrace and on Riverside.



Plate 2-1: Existing view of the site from Corrib Terrace, looking south east toward the TFI Bikes, Headford Road.



Plate 2-2: View of the parking area to the East of Riverside.



Plate 2-3: Current central pathway through the park with no level or accessible access.



Plate 2-4: View from the centre of the park towards the Corrib and Waterside.



Plate 2-5: view of the northern boundary of the park and Waterside.



Plate 2-6: View from the inside of the park looking south east towards the Headford Road.

2.2.1

Architectural, Archaeological, and Heritage

The subject site contains no buildings recorded on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (NIAH), Registered Protected Structures (RPS), or National Monuments. It is also not located within an Architectural Conservation Area (ACA) or protected view. The presence of several heritage assets surrounding the site are, however, noted. The nearest RPS/NIAH Buildings are the current Town Hall Theatre, which was built and previously used as a courthouse (NIAH Reg. No. 30314012, RPS No. 2602), and house nos. 7, 8, and 9, Waterside which form a row of terrace house (RPS Nos. 10501, 10502, & 10503). The status of the pillars, walls, bridges pierce, embankments, and other associated infrastructure of the River Corrib as an RPS is also noted (Reg. No. 8601). The nearest National Monument is the Quay north of Waterside (SMR No. GA094-100059). The presence of a protected view looking northward from Waterside and Riverside and “encompassing the River Corrib and adjoining lands from Quincentenary Bridge” are noted. The proposed design has sought to protect and

enhance access to this view. More detail can be found in **Section 6.1.2**, below. For further detail on the heritage assets surround the subject site please refer to **Figure 2-2**, below.

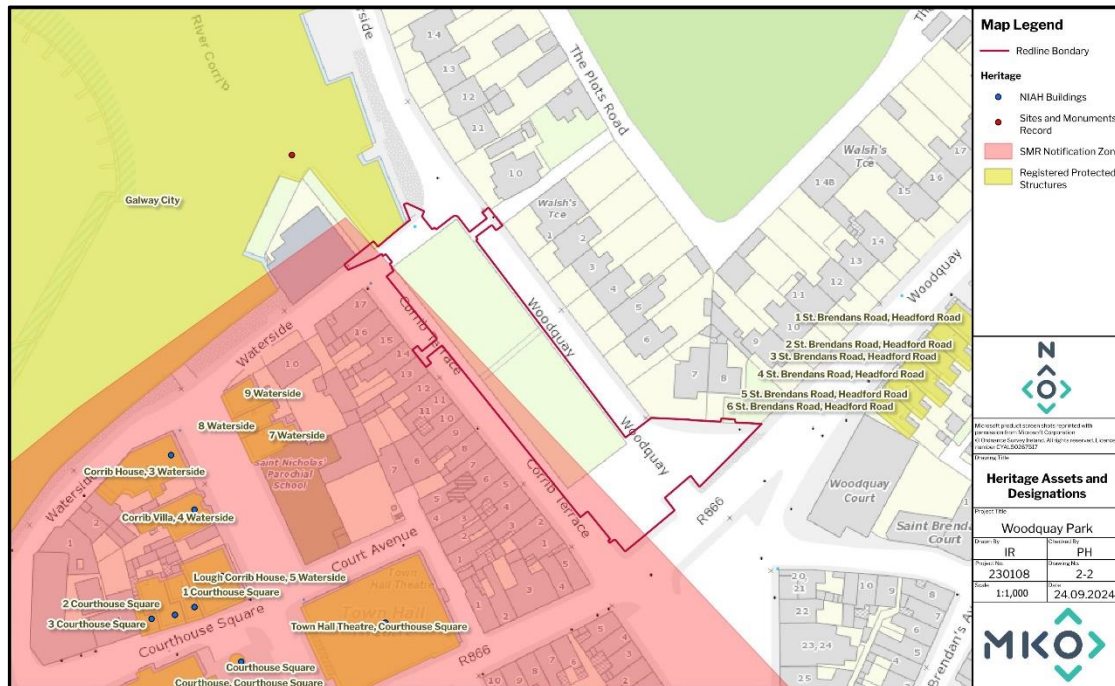


Figure 2-2: Heritage assets within the vicinity of the subject site.

2.2.2 Flooding

The subject site is located in Flood Zone C as per the Galway City Development Plan 2023-2029, and the latest NCFHM and CFRAM mapping. The *2009 Flood Risk Management Guidelines* identify “amenity open space”, such as the proposed development, as “water-compatible development”. It also states that development in Flood Zone C is “appropriate from a flood risk perspective.” As a result, it is submitted that the location of the proposed in Flood Zone C is acceptable in principle under these guidelines, and does not need a Flood Risk Assessment. For further detail on the latest NCFHM and CFRAM flood mapping please refer to **Figure 2-3**, below.

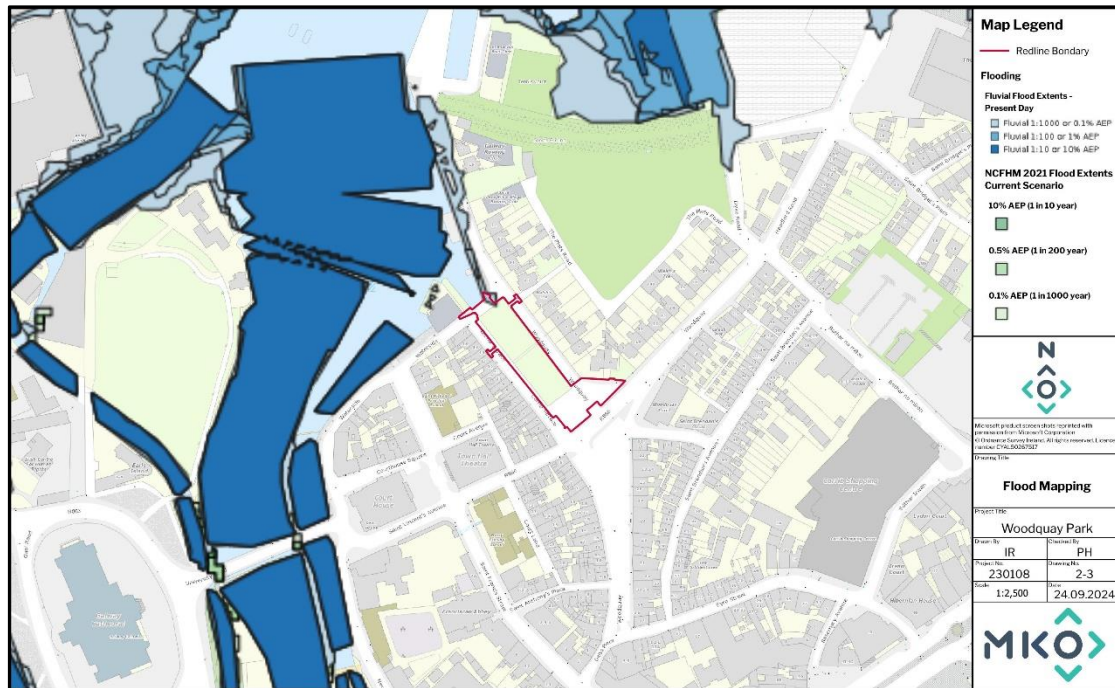


Figure 2-3: Flood zones modelled under the current climate scenario, corresponding to Flood Zones A and B in the GCDP 2023-2029.

2.2.3 Ecology

The are the closest European Sites to the proposed development, and are immediately adjacent to the site and 1.5km away, respectively. **Table 2-1** and **Figure 2-4** provide further detail on Natura 2000 sites surrounding the subject site. An Appropriate Assessment Screening Report (AASR) and Natura Impact Statement (NIS) have been submitted with the planning application, as discussed in detail in **Section 6.6** below.

Table 2-1: Designated European Sites grouped by type and listed by distanced from the proposed development as prepared by MKO from data made available by NPWS.

European Designated Site Name	Distance
SACs	
Lough Corrib SAC	The Proposed Works Site is located Directly Adjacent to this SAC
Galway Bay Complex SAC	680m
Connemara Bog Complex SAC	12.7km
Ross Lake and Woods SAC	13.7km
Lough Fingall Complex SAC	14km
Black Head- Poulsallagh Complex SAC	17.6km
SPAs	
Inner Galway Bay SPA	1.5km
Lough Corrib SPA	3km

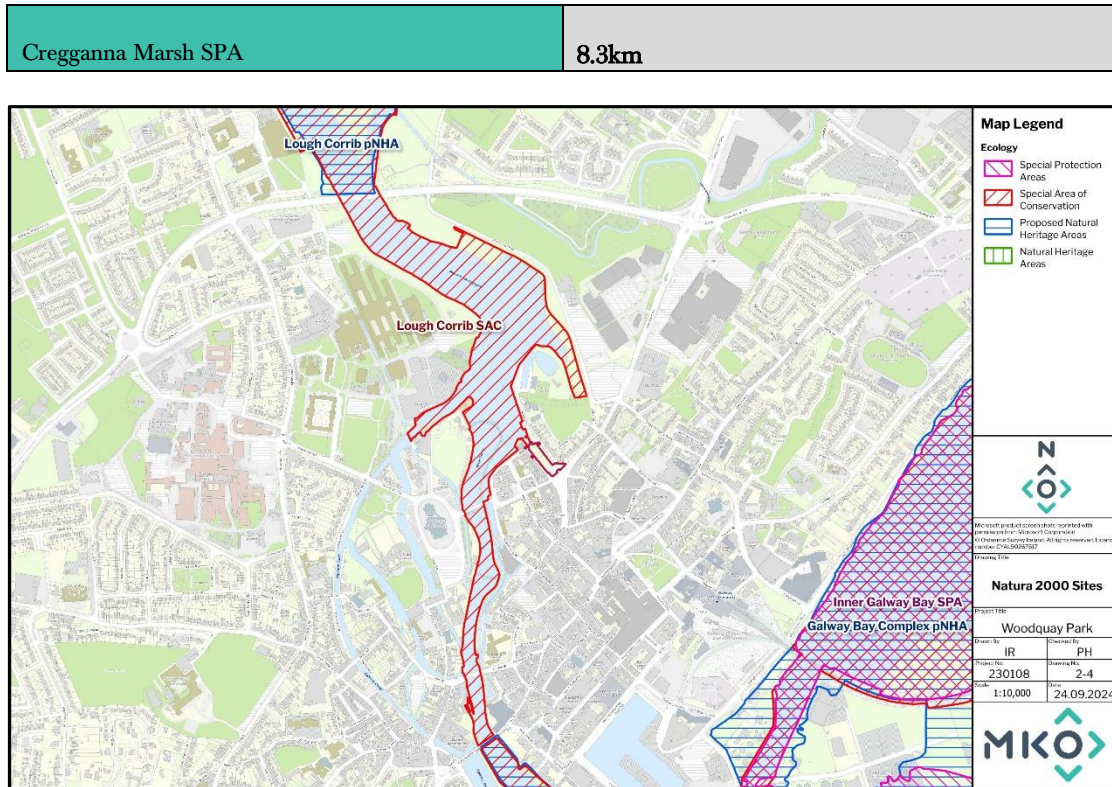


Figure 2-4: Natura 2000 sites within the vicinity of the subject site.

3.

PLANNING HISTORY

There is no noted planning history on the subject site. The only overlap with a Local Authority Planning Application or An Bord Pleanála case is with a referral, details of which are set out in **Table 3-1** below. Planning Applications and Cases within 50m of the subject site are detailed in **Table 3-2**. These largely relate to renovations and modifications of domestic properties or commercial spaces.

Of note is **ABP Case 314597**, which is the application the Galway Cross City Link. This development is part of Galway's Bus Connects programme and seeks to reallocate space within the City Centre and along key routes in and out of it to sustainable and active modes of travel. The proposed development has sought to be cognisant of this application, and as a result there is no overlap between the redlines of the two projects. In addition, the design of the proposed development as sought to eliminate potential design conflicts with the Cross City Link scheme. Further detail can be found in **Section 6.9.2** below.

Table 3-1: Planning History of the subject site, as prepared by MKO using data from the planning register.

Pl. Ref.	Description	Decision
313491	Whether the temporary closure of 6 roads in Galway City is or is not development or is or is not exempted development.	29/09/2023 Is not development

Table 3-2: Planning History within 50m of the subject site, as prepared by MKO using data from the planning register.

Pl. Ref.	Description	Decision
314597	BusConnects Galway Cross-City Link Scheme.	Further consideration required
16360	Permission for development which will consist of the refurbishment of an existing 4 storey office / commercial building, comprising modifications to the existing facades including new elevational features and finishes, replacement of windows throughout, minor extension for the provision of new fire stairs, alteration and partial replacement of existing roof, demolition and removal of third floor mansard roof and windows and replacement with new roof treatment and glazing at third floor level, internal alterations. Demolition and replacement of existing boundary wall and railing with new, alterations to existing paving, footpaths, drainage, lighting, services connections, signage & all associated site works	28/04/2017 Conditional
17164	Permission for development which will consist of minor alterations to front (North) and side (West) elevations of premises, previously permitted development, under Planning Reference No. 16/360, comprising provision of new revolving door and wheelchair accessible door, new shopfront signage, associated lighting and all associated site works	10/08/2017 Conditional
18359	Permission for extension/alterations to existing building to include: alterations to shop front and provision of new entrance door to first floor residential, extension to first floor residential accommodation, internal alterations to ground floor office/retail space along with all ancillary site works and site services	11/01/2019 Refused
19141	Planning permission is sought for refurbishment and partial change of use from office to residential of an existing three- storey terraced house, including all associated site works	05/11/2019 Conditional

Pl. Ref.	Description	Decision
2329	Permission and Retention for development which consists of 1) Change of Use from previously approved residential and office use to residential only at 1st and 2nd floor levels, 2) Retention of residential accommodation in lieu of external balcony at 1st floor level (area 12sqm), 3) Reconfiguration of existing residential accommodation to form 1 no.1 bedroomed studio apartment at 1st floor level and 1 bedroomed apartment at 1st and 2nd floor levels	17/05/2023 Conditional
16202	Permission for two storey and single storey extension to the rear of existing building to include 1. 2 No. Ground Floor recovery rooms and waiting area; 2. First floor storage room with all associated site works and services	08/09/2016 Conditional
18416	Permission for development which will consist of (1) Ground Floor extension to kitchen (2) First floor extension laundry area. (3) Second floor extension including bedrooms 11 & 12. (4) Third floor extension to including storage rooms, all extension to the rear.(5) Internal renovations to existing hostel. (6) Alteration to front elevations and all associated site works	11/06/2019 Conditional
1732	Permission for alterations and extension to existing house to include, retention of existing two storey extension to rear, relocation of front door, demolition and reconstruction of existing sun room, single storey extension to rear, re-positioning and enlargement of access gate at rear of property and all associated site works and services	29/04/2017 Conditional
19173	Permission for extension / alterations to existing dwelling house to include construction of new first floor extension (looking onto Corrib Terrace), along with all the ancillary site works and site services	03/03/2020 Conditional
19229	Retention is sought for (1) single storey extension to the rear and renovations to existing dwelling house (2) renovations to old shed to rear of the house, along with all associated works,	03/10/2019 Conditional
21334	Permission for development which will consist of construction of a vehicle entrance to the back of site accessing from The Plots Road	08/12/2021 Conditional
2360062	Permission for development which consists of construct a single storey extension to the back of existing dwelling house	02/11/2023 Conditional
2266	Permission for retention which will consist of retention of first floor level rear extension	16/05/2022 Conditional
2267	Permission for retention which will consist of retention of demolition to rear wall of house and existing rear extension. Construction of new rear single and two storey extension. Modifications to existing house and all associated site works to house	16/05/2022 Conditional
19172	Permission for extension / alterations to existing building to include: alterations to shop front and provision of new entrance door to first floor accommodation, Change of use of first floor from photo studio to office use and extension of first floor office accommodation, internal alterations	03/03/2020 Conditional

Pl. Ref.	Description	Decision
	to ground floor office / retail space along with all ancillary site works and site services.	

4.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND HISTORY

The proposed development seeks to enhance the existing Woodquay Public Park and surrounding public realm. The proposal includes the renovation and extension of the existing park with new landscaping including rain gardens, molinia meadows, and spring bulbs. Two unhealthy trees will be removed, and four new ones will be added to replace them. It is also proposed to provide seating areas, a natural play mound, planting areas, and lighting. The boundary of the park will be defined by hedge planting, requiring the removal of the existing railing which is in poor condition. This will also include placement of the Galway Orb as a sculpture feature within the park. The Orb is one of six that was commissioned as part of the Galway 2020 Capital of Culture celebrations and is currently in need of a permanent home.

The extension of the park will encompass what is currently vehicular parking located to the southeast of existing park. This will enable the improved park to extend all the way up to the footpath of the R866 Road, and better engage with the enhanced public plaza proposed under the Cross City Link scheme across the R336 in Woodquay. In addition, public realm upgrades are proposed for the area of parking to the northeast of the proposed extension, across Riverside. This includes provision of green infrastructure in the form of a rain garden and permeable paving, as well as seating areas, 2 no. accessible car parking spaces, and 4 no. motorcycle parking spaces. By including this area, the Applicant is seeking to extend the high-quality public realm design of the park to its wider environs, creating a cohesive design language for the area, in tandem with Cross City Link. To further this effort and open views of the River Corrib from the park, repaving and enhancements are proposed to the area to the northwest of the existing park across Waterside, including the provision of a raised crossing. These works provide the final piece to ensure that the improved public space is continued from where Cross City Link stops in Woodquay to the edge of the River Corrib.

To enable the proposed transformation, a loss of 11 no. car parking spaces is required, largely in the area where the park is to be extended. This results in a total provision of 19 no. spaces (10 no. parallel parking spaces on Corrib Terrace, 2 no. EV parking spaces on Corrib Terrace, 2 no. accessible spaces, and 4 no. motorcycle spaces) within the redline boundary. In addition, the existing TFI Bike Rental station will be reduced from 20 to 10 docks and relocated to the area east of Riverside. This places it closer to the proposed Cross City Link bus stops, enabling greater ease for multi-modal journeys. The reduction in spaces has been agreed in principle by the NTA, due to the relatively low use of the station currently. Finally, 4 no. pedestrian courtesy crossings are proposed to provide access into the park. These will replace the 2 existing pedestrian courtesy crossings/entrances.

The project is being funded under Fáilte Ireland's Urban Animation Capital Investment Scheme. The scheme is aimed at supporting sustainable tourism development through public realm and urban animation projects. Project granted funding must re-imagine urban centres for visitors and communities. In particular, the re-imagined spaces should help transform urban areas into safe, welcoming, vibrant places and as destinations to live, work and visit.

Galway City Council (GCC) progressed with the redesign of Woodquay Park following the hard work of the local residents to bring awareness to the need for upgrade works to the park, and to imagine what a revitalised public space would look like for the community. This was done through a conceptual redesign of the park created by renowned garden designer Mary Reynolds, who was hired by residents. Following the resident's engagement with GCC, a tender was issued for the project and the current design team was appointed in 2023 by GCC to review the concept proposals, develop the brief for the

park with the landowner, Galway City Council, and develop a comprehensive proposal for this key city space that would align with other public realm and transport strategies.

It was necessary to modify the Mary Reynolds design to ensure the deliverability of the project. Changes to her design were necessary to support future maintenance regimes, ensure alignment with the relevant planning policy and standards, accommodate the All-Ireland Pollinators Plan, incorporate further SuDS measures, and to assess and manage the impact on existing trees and habitats. As a result of the deep and active engagement of residents to improve their community and a desire to ensure their continued satisfaction and engagement, the project has undergone two stages of consultation before entering the statutory planning process. These are detailed in the Consultation Report for the project contained in the **Consultation Report** prepared by MKO and submitted with this application.

5.

POLICY FRAMEWORK

5.1

Project Ireland 2040: National Planning Framework

In February 2018 the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government published the National Planning Framework (NPF) entitled 'Ireland 2040' to succeed the National Spatial Strategy. The NPF comprises the Government's long-term strategic planning framework to guide national, regional and local planning and investment decisions over the next 25 years.

The NPF is a high-level document which provides a framework for future development and investment in Ireland, providing a long-term and place-based aspect to public policy and investment, and aiming to coordinate sectoral areas such as housing, jobs, transport, education, health, environment, energy and communications, into an overall coherent strategy.

The NPF consists of a range of National Strategic Outcomes. Relevant to this application are

- **NSO 1:** Compact Growth
- **NSO 7:** Enhanced Heritage and amenity
- **NSO 8:** Transition to a Low Carbon and Climate Resilient Society
- **NSO 9:** Sustainable Management of Water, Waste, and other Environmental Resources

Relevant National Policy Objectives listed in the NPF also include:

- **NPO 4:** *"Ensure the creation of attractive, liveable, well designed, high quality urban places that are home to diverse and integrated communities that enjoy a high quality of life and well-being."*
- **NPO 6:** *"Regenerate and rejuvenate cities, towns and villages of all types and scale as environmental assets, that can accommodate changing roles and functions, increased residential population and employment activity and enhanced levels of amenity and design quality, in order to sustainably influence and support their surrounding area."*
- **NSO 27:** *"Ensure the integration of safe and convenient alternatives to the car into the design of our communities, by prioritising walking and cycling accessibility to both existing and proposed developments, and integrating physical activity facilities for all ages."*
- **NPO 49:** *"Support the coordination and promotion of all-island tourism initiatives through continued co-operation between the relevant tourism agencies and Tourism Ireland."*
- **NPO 60:** *"Conserve and enhance the rich qualities of natural and cultural heritage of Ireland in a manner appropriate to their significance."*

5.1.1

Draft First Revision to the National Planning Framework

The Draft First Revision to the NPF was released on the 10th of July 2024 for public consultation. The Draft Revision focuses on the need to update the Framework to appropriately reflect changes to government policy that have taken place since its initial publication six years ago. Key drivers of change that were identified as part of the process include: the climate transition, regional development, changing and diverse demographics, digitalisation, and investment and prioritisation.

As part of the revision, several updates and additions were made to the National Policy Objectives contained in the Framework. This resulted in the amendment of 49, replacement/removal of 5, and addition of 20 new NPO's to the document. For the purposes of this proposed development, the following material changes in policy content are noted:

What was originally NPO 6 is proposed to be NPO 14. The new text is provided below with additions to the original text shown in bold, and removals struck through.

*“Regenerate and rejuvenate cities, towns and villages of all types and scale as environmental assets; that can accommodate changing roles and functions, increased residential population and employment activity, enhanced levels of amenity and design **and placemaking** quality, in order to sustainably influence and support their surrounding area **to ensure progress toward national achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals.**”*

Additionally, the current NPO 49 is proposed to be NPO 64. The new text is provided below with additions to the original text shown in bold, and removals struck through.

*“Support the coordination and promotion of all-island tourism initiatives through continued co-operation between the relevant tourism agencies and Tourism Ireland, **pursue the further development of sport, and invest in the diverse heritage, arts and cultural and linguistic traditions of the island.**”*

Finally, NPO 60 is proposed to be NPO 87. The new text is provided below with additions to the original text shown in bold, and removals struck through.

*“Conserve and enhance the rich qualities of natural, cultural **and built** heritage of Ireland in a manner appropriate to their **cultural and environmental** significance.”*

As is noted above, a number of brand-new policy objectives have also been added to the Draft National Planning Framework. Draft NPO 79 relates to the proposed development and states:

“Support the management of stormwater, rainwater and surface water flood risk through the use of nature-based solutions and sustainable drainage systems.”

The proposed changes, removals, and additions to the National Policy Objectives, and wider National Planning Framework have been considered by the Applicant and the Design Team and integrated into the design of the proposed development.

5.2 Climate Action Plan 2024

The third annual update to Ireland's Climate Action Plan, Climate Action Plan (CAP) 2024 seeks to continue the development of Ireland's road to a decarbonised economy. More than that it seeks a transition to a “*climate resilient, biodiversity rich, environmentally sustainable and climate neutral economy.*” The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development Act (2021, as amended) sets a mandatory reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions of 51% of 2018 levels, by 2030.

Sustainability has been a core priority of the proposed development, and a number of measures are proposed for the site to support it. SuDS measures and robust eco-friendly landscaping are all integrated into the design to enhance the long-term sustainability of the proposed development. The retention of as many trees as possible within the park, and their embodied carbon, was also a high priority. Where trees must be removed, it is proposed that they are replaced on a 1-to-1 basis. Further detail on these measures, which seek to address the goals and policies in CAP 2024, can be found in **Section 6.2** below.

5.3 Regional Spatial and Economic Strategy: Northern and Western Region 2020-2023

The Regional Spatial & Economic Strategy for the Northern & Western Regional Assembly (RSES NWRA) was adopted on 24th January 2020. The principal purpose of the (RSES) is to support the

implementation of the National Planning Framework and the economic policies and objectives of the Government by providing a long-term strategic planning and economic framework for the development of the regions. The proposed site is located with the Galway City & Environs sub-region of the plan.

The redevelopment of is supported by, and will assist in achieving, the Regional Policy Objectives detailed below.

- **RPO 3.5:** Identify and develop quality green infrastructure, within and adjacent to City, Regional Growth Centres and Key Towns.
- **RPO 4.2:** To support the maintenance of, and enhanced access to state lands, such as National Parks, Forest Parks, Waterways together with Monuments and Historic Properties, for recreation and tourism purposes
- **RPO 4.14** Promote the development of integrated walking, cycling and bridle routes throughout the region as an activity for both international visitors and local tourists in a manner that is compatible with nature conservation and other environmental policies
- **RPO 5.11:** Support the provision and/or upgrade of cultural facilities (e.g. multi-purpose arts centres, theatres, galleries, libraries, museums etc) where the public, and visitors to the region, may enjoy and participate in cultural activities, with particular priority given to the City of Galway, Regional Growth Centres, Key Towns and to Gaeltacht Towns.
- **RPO 5.13:** Protect, enhance and harness the potential of the region's cultural and heritage assets.
- **RPO 5.17:** Support the adaptation and re-use of heritage buildings and places.
- **RPO 6.41:** Promote technology interventions and best practice that enhance sustainability in public places, parks, waterways and building management.

5.4

Galway City Development Plan 2023-2029

The current statutory planning document for the subject site is the Galway County Development Plan (GCDP) 2023-2029, which was adopted on the 24th of November 2022. The plan guides the physical, social, and economic development of the City over its 6-year lifespan in line with national and regional policy. The Strategic Vision for the plan sets out a place that is 'a successful, sustainable, competitive, regional city' with high quality housing and employment, resilient infrastructure, and that is environmentally responsible.

The plan sets out several key policies as regards the proposed improvements to Woodquay Park, which have been identified below. The design team has had cognisance of these requirements, and the proposed development has been designed line with them and to the highest possible quality. **Figure 5-1** below shows a number of key policies and corridors which are set out in the GCDP and contain a specific spatial presence.

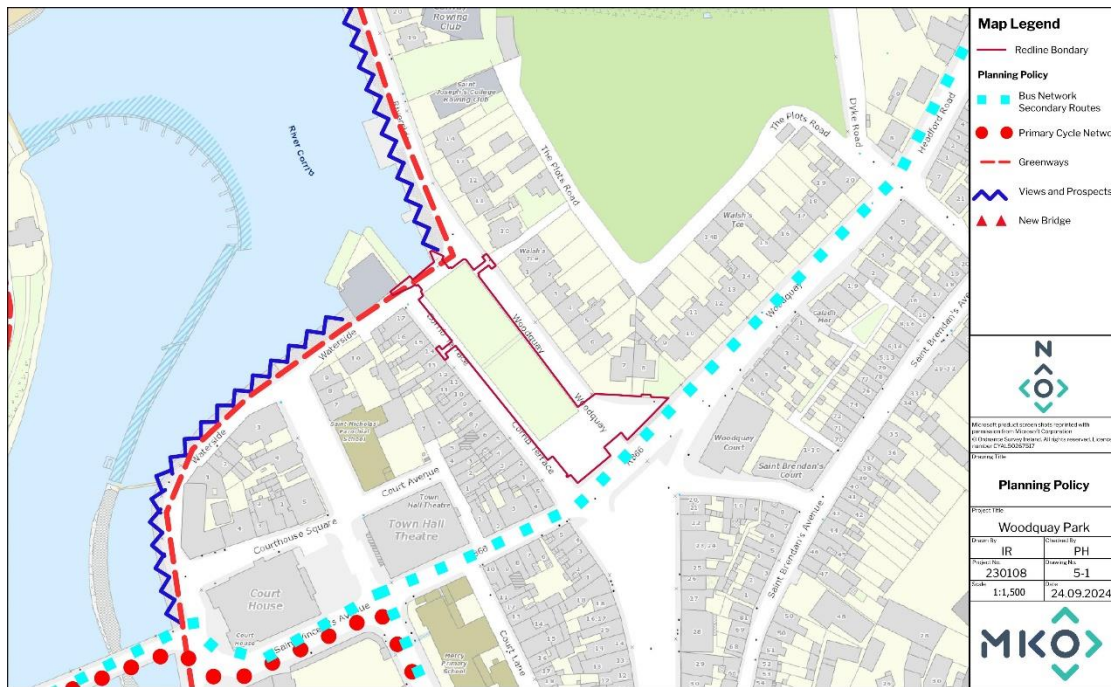


Figure 5-1: Key spatial policies from the GCDP 2023-2029.

5.4.1 Climate Action

The proposed development seeks to support the delivery of climate mitigation and adaptation measures in Galway City. The expansive use of SuDS in the proposed development seeks to ensure that Woodquay park is fit for a Climate Change scenario and makes the most efficient use of the water. Further detail can be found in **Section 6.2**.

Policy 2.2 Climate Action	
8.	Support the implementation of water management measures through mechanisms such as SuDS, rain water harvesting, use of grey water, water storage and nature based solutions to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

5.4.2 Housing and Sustainable Neighbourhoods

It is acknowledged that Woodquay Park serves as the main greenspace for residents in the Woodquay area. As a result, it is acknowledged that it will be key to ensuring that the neighbourhood is a sustainable and pleasant place to live, which meets the needs of its residents. The proposed renovation has been designed to enhance the accessibility of this essential green space, strengthen the biodiversity and environmental vibrancy of the area, take into account factors like passive oversight for security, and make a meaningful contribution to the character of the neighbourhood. Further it continues the utilization of the space to host the TFI bike share scheme. In short, it seeks to ensure that Woodquay Park serves as the green heart of the Woodquay neighbourhood for the next 100 years.

Policy 3.3 Sustainable Neighbourhood Concept	
1.	Promote the development of compact, well designed, safe and attractive neighbourhoods that deliver efficient use of land and have effective integration with social and physical

	infrastructure, including public transport, that will enable the development of successful communities and facilitate the growth strategy for Galway City as envisioned in the NPF and RSES.
3.	Support neighbourhoods that can meet the needs of an aging and increasingly diverse society and that can accommodate social and physical inclusiveness and contribute to a good quality of life and general wellbeing.
11.	Promote and facilitate the development of Public Bike/other share schemes across the city.
Policy 3.7 City Centre Residential Areas	
3.	Enhance city centre residential areas through implementation of environmental improvement schemes and improvements to the public realm, including, where appropriate, home zones and recreational facilities in conjunction with local residents.

5.4.3 Sustainable Mobility and Transportation

The proposed improvements to the park make a number of material improvements to the active travel infrastructure currently present. A number of new and enhanced pedestrian crossings are proposed into the park, which also enable pedestrian permeability through the park. This includes access to The Plots via the pedestrian crossing at the northwest corner of the subject site, which will facilitate access to future greenway developments and the proposed Clifden Railway Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge. The proposed crossings utilise dropped curbs to ensure accessible and step free access is maintained throughout the park. Finally, as previously discussed, the proposed development seeks to continue the presence of the TFI Bike Share scheme on the subject site.

Policy 4.4 Sustainable Mobility - Walk and Cycle	
4.	Implement a structured programme of improvements across the whole city pedestrian network and at street crossings.
8.	Promote, facilitate and maintain maximum connectivity and permeability for pedestrians and cyclists in the design and management of new public and private projects and in upgrading and retrofitting existing developments in accordance with the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets (2019) and Permeability a Best Practice Guide, NTA (2015).
11.	Promote and facilitate the development of Public Bike/other share schemes across the city.

5.4.4 Natural Heritage, Recreation and Amenity

The proposed development has sought to incorporate pollinator friendly planting across the landscaped areas, and support the biodiversity of the Woodquay area and Galway City as much as possible. Complementing this are robust nature-based solutions including SuDS and the retention and replacement of trees where appropriate. All of these elements are provided as a key part of the enhanced recreational facility proposed, which has also been designed to high accessibility standards. These design features are all discussed in **Section 6.2** below.

Policy 5.1 Green Network and Biodiversity	
4.	Support the implementation of the National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) 2017-2021 (and any subsequent NBAP) and the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (2021-2025) and support the actions of the City Council's Heritage Plan 2016-2021 and Biodiversity Action Plan 2014-2024 relating to the promotion of ecological awareness, biodiversity and best practices.

5.	Support climate action through implementation of nature based solutions that enhance biodiversity in the green network, including measures such as tree planting, SuDS, and the use of green infrastructure. Such measures will be informed by the Green Space Strategy
12.	Improve accessibility to the City Parks, recreation and amenity areas and facilities and include for sustainable modes of transport, where appropriate.
13.	Retain, extend and enhance opportunities for recreation within the green network for all members of the community including people with disabilities.

The proposed dropped pedestrian crossing over Riverside towards the plots seeks to provide a tie-in to facilitate access to future greenway developments and the proposed Clifden Railway Pedestrian and Cycle Bridge.

Policy 5.5 Community Spaces: Greenways, Boreens and Public Rights of Way	
1.	Continue to develop and improve the greenway network in the city, providing alternative accessible circulation routes for pedestrians and cyclists, for the enjoyment of the entire community.

As part of the proposed development a natural play mound is proposed. This element seeks to provide a dedicated space for children to engage with and play in the park, despite the limited space for traditional play equipment.

Policy 5.6 Community Spaces: Child Friendly City	
2.	Support the right of the child to play by ensuring the creation and maintenance of inclusive natural and built play areas within every community.

The proposed development has sought to open up the protected view of the River Corrib from Waterside through the park, and all the way in to Woodquay proper. Planting has been designed to balance providing adequate green infrastructure, shade, and pleasant landscaping with improving access to this special view.

Policy 5.7 Community Spaces: Protected Views of Special Amenity Value and Interest	
1.	Protect views and prospects of special amenity value and interest, which contribute significantly to the visual amenity and character of the city, through the control of inappropriate development.
2.	Require landscaping schemes as part of planning applications to have regard to such views and limit any planting which could have a detrimental impact on the value of protected views.

The Public Realm Strategy has informed the design of the proposed development at all stages, and a focus on the creating a space which is maintainable and long lasting was a key goal of the design team. Further information can be found in **Section 5.6** below.

Policy 5.9 Open Spaces: Public Realm	
1.	Implement the Public Realm Strategy for the public domain which contributes to the creation and maintenance of high quality and successful open spaces.

5.4.5 Community and Culture

Promoting accessing and social inclusion is a key goal of both the proposed design, and has also been a key goal of the design process itself. The design as proposed seeks to provide an age and accessibility friendly environment which offers a significant improvement over the current provision in Woodquay Park. Acknowledging that stakeholders would have unique local knowledge of the area and would be able to make meaningful contributions to the design a robust programme of consultation was undertaken. This is further detailed in the Public Consultation Report contained in the **Consultation Report** prepared by MKO and submitted with this application..

Policy 7.3 Inclusive City	
1.	Proactively promote all forms of social inclusion, where feasible in land use planning particularly in the built environment and public realm, housing, community facilities, employment opportunities, transport and accessibility.
4.	Ensure meaningful public participation, engagement and knowledge sharing in the planning process and in relation to other strategic policy and projects within the city.
9.	Support the Galway City & County Age Friendly programme

5.4.6 Built Heritage, Placemaking and Urban Design

The careful assessment and protection of structures on the RPS, as well as the assessment and protection of any archaeological features in the area was an important priority of the design team. A **Architectural Heritage Impact** Assessment and **Archaeological Impact Assessment** are included with this application and discussed further in **Section 6.4** and **Section 6.5** below.

Policy 8.1 Record of Protected Structures	
1.	Protect structures listed in the Record of Protected Structures, in accordance with legislation and DEHLG Architectural Heritage Protection Guidelines 2011.
2.	Ensure new development enhances the character or setting of a protected structure.
Policy 8.4 Archaeology	
1.	Protect, preserve and promote the archaeological heritage of the city including underwater archaeology in rivers, lakes, intertidal and subtidal environments.
2.	Ensure that proposed development within the designated city centre Zone of Archaeological Notification is not detrimental to the character of an archaeological site or its setting.
5.	Require the surveying, recording or excavation of archaeological heritage to include standing historic buildings and underwater archaeological heritage during the development process, where appropriate

The Public Realm Strategy has informed the design of the proposed development at all stages, and a focus on the creating a space which is maintainable and long lasting was a key goal of the design team. Further information can be found in **Section 5.6** below. Robust and expanded nature based solutions, SuDS, and green infrastructure are all proposed as part of the development. Further details on design, accessibility, and green infrastructure can also be found in **Section 6.2** below. Finally, support of the measures included in the GTS including pedestrianisation and modal shift have been supported by the reduction of parking in the area, continued presence of bike share, and enhanced pedestrian facilities.

Policy 8.7 Urban Design and Placemaking	
1.	Encourage high quality urban design in all developments.
2.	Improve qualitative design standards through the application of design guidelines and standards of the Development Plan, the Galway Public Realm Strategy (2019) and accompanying design, activity and delivery manuals, Galway Shopfront and Signage Design Guidelines (2012) and Design Guidelines Canopies (2011).
3.	Ensure that development delivers high quality urban design, place making and public realm that contributes to urban regeneration in the city and that is resilient to potential impacts of climate change.
7.	Promote sustainable and inclusive urban design, urban form and architecture that positively contributes to the city's existing character and distinctiveness.
Policy 8.8 Public Realm	
1.	Progress implementation of the Public Realm Strategy (2019) and accompanying manuals including the delivery of enhancement projects and a typology of streets and public spaces that positively contributes to the city's environment and heritage.
2.	Build upon Galway's distinctive materiality and character to inform the design of the public realm.
3.	Rationalise materials, street furniture and planting in Galway to create well-designed, coordinated public realm.
4.	Prioritise the safe movement of people on streets and create a high quality environment through design promoting connectivity, accessibility and the principles of universal design.
5.	Promote nature based SUDS solutions in the public realm where possible to enhance biodiversity and resilience to climate change.
6.	Promote the important role that public space plays in providing for informal social interaction and maximise opportunities for outdoor gathering places, play areas, outdoor dining and living and outdoor public seating, where appropriate and in accordance with the Public Realm Strategy and accompanying manuals.
7.	Support measures in the GTS to ensure that qualitative public realm considerations are integrated into GTS projects promoting sustainable transport use and the pedestrianisation of specific city centre streets.
10.	Promote high standards of design, materials and workmanship in the public realm. Ensure that such works adhere to the principles and guidance of the Public Realm Strategy and has regard to the distinctive character of an area.
Specific Objectives: Public Realm	
8.	Support public realm enhancement projects contained in the Public Realm Strategy and accompanying manuals and their integration with GTS projects, environmental improvements and initiatives relating to climate adaption, biodiversity, public art and activities in the public realm.

10.	Progress the delivery of Urban Regeneration and Development Fund (URDF) projects which comprise of new public spaces at Woodquay and the Galway Cathedral, rejuvenated space at Fishmarket, Eyre Square (North) and increased City Centre pedestrianisation.
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5.4.7

Environment and Infrastructure

Policy 9.4 Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS)	
1.	Ensure the use of Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (SuDS) and sustainable surface water drainage management, wherever practical in the design of development to enable surface water run-off to be managed as near to its source as possible and achieve wider benefits such as sustainable development, water quality, biodiversity local amenity and climate adaptation.
2.	Promote the use of green infrastructure e.g. green roofs, green walls, bioswales, planting and green spaces for surface water retention purposes as an integrated part of SUDS and to deliver all the ancillary benefits.

5.4.8

Compact Growth and Regeneration

Policy 10.1 City Centre	
1.	Maintain and enhance the resilience of the city centre by reinforcing its dominant role for commerce, shopping, tourism, cultural and leisure activities, enhancing its vitality and attractiveness as a place to work, live and visit
6.	Maintain and enhance the environmental quality of the city centre to support city centre living and to ensure a safe and attractive legible environment.
7.	Maintain and enhance the quality of the city centre public realm and enhance accessibility and connectivity to and within the city centre through improvements to the network of streets, footpaths and public spaces and through implementation of the Public Realm Strategy.
10.	Improve the public realm and residential amenities of existing city centre communities at Woodquay and Bowling Green by the implementation of improvement schemes.

5.5

Galway City Council Local Authority Climate Action Plan 2024-2029

The Galway City Local Authority Climate Action Plan (LACAP) 2024-2029 was adopted by the council on the 12th of February 2024 and sets out a strategy to mitigate and adapt to climate change within the Local Authority. It considers factors such as reducing emissions, creating a circular economy, adapting to more frequent severe weather, and creating more sustainable land use patterns. The proposed development has placed a strong emphasis on sustainability and has sought to comply with the goals and actions of the LACAP. It is also based off a Climate Risk Assessment undertaken by the Local Authority. That assessment identified that Galway City is at risk from increased coastal erosion, flood events (fluvial, pluvial, coastal, and groundwater), heatwaves. It is also noted that extreme weather events will also result in increased incidences of extreme flooding and heatwave events.

Action 27 of the LACAP commits GCC to working in partnership with key stakeholders across the city to support climate action initiatives, including for water conservation and nature-based solutions. The action sets the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) as being *“the number of engagements per annum across sectors (workshops, co-design, information events, wider engagement events, community onestop*

shops) delivered in partnership with local groups annually.” As part of the proposed development two live consultation events, as well as an online consultation were conducted to allow the community the opportunity to comment on and impact the design of the park, including its sustainability features. Further details on the consultations conducted can be found in the Public Consultation Report in the **Consultation Report** prepared by MKO and submitted with this application.

Also relevant is **Action 42** of the LACAP. LACAP. It states that GCC will

“Explore the potential for integrating Nature Based Solutions (NBS) on all internal and GCC permitted projects, with the aim of enhancing climate resilience and fostering biodiversity net gain. Further to include sustainable urban drainage systems, with appropriate regard to environmental protection requirements, including designated European sites. Increase in leaf cover in Galway City area, considering trees and vertical shading solutions.”

The relevant KPI's for the project include the implementation of nature-based solutions including SuDS in all GCC projects, and the annual % increase in leaf cover of Galway City. The project has implemented a robust landscape plan which makes extensive use of SuDS and nature-based solutions. The proposed development also has retained existing trees where possible, and replaced any the must be removed on a 1 to 1 basis. For further information refer to **Section 6.1.2** of this report.

Action 47 seeks to support uptake of active travel and encourage modal shift through the implementation of work programmes and the Galway Transport Strategy (GTS). The KPI for the action is based on the number of projects delivered and the inter-census data on improvements to sustainable modes in the City. It is also bolstered by **Action 50** which seeks to support community mobility schemes including bike share and EV charging. KPI's are based on the number of projects supported and quantity of funding approved to support these projects.

Both of these Actions are supported by the proposed reallocation of public space away from parking, and towards being an extension of the park or offering additional active pedestrian space in the surrounding environment. The reduction of available parking in the City is an action identified and supported by Section 4.7 of the GTS, and will assist in driving modal shift away from cars by reducing the convenience of their use in the city. In addition, the project proposes to relocate the existing TFI bike share station, continuing to offer this amenity as an alternative to private vehicular travel.

5.6

Galway Public Realm Strategy (2019)

The Galway Public Realm Strategy was commissioned by GCC's planning department in conjunction with the NPF, and is intended to coincide with the ambition of realising Galway's potential as a Regional City. The strategy won the Design Category at the Irish Planning Institute's (IPI) 2019/20 planning awards, acknowledging its exceptional quality. The Strategy seeks to build off of Galway's existing strong and well regarded character, and support the liveability and prosperity of the city. It also recognises the importance of responding to the existing stone and water elements of the City. Finally, it is noted that a number of Policy Objectives in the Galway City Development Plan 2023-2029 make reference to the strategy and require alignment with its goals and actions.

The Strategy sets out five key design principles for the City's public realm that the proposed development has sought to abide by in its design. They are:

1. *Protect and enhance Galway's unique character*
2. *Rationalise and de-clutter*
3. *Make Galway accessible for all*
4. *Make Galway an exemplar of sustainability*
5. *Maintain the public realm to high standards*

The Strategy also identifies the Woodquay area across the Headford Rd and its transformation into a public plaza as a key project. This includes the extension of the park towards the Headford Road, and transformation of the triangular area across Riverside included in this proposed development. Further the areas around Woodquay Park are identified as being in line of general public realm upgrades and as being Canal/Riverside areas (in particular, the area across Riverside) and sets out design examples, standards, and materials which the project has adhered to. Overall, the proposed development has sought to adhere to the standards set out in the Strategy, and progress the actions and key projects it contains as part of the Woodquay area.

6.

PLANNING ASSESSMENT

6.1

Principle of Development

As is detailed in Section 4 of this report, the proposed development seeks to upgrade the existing Woodquay Park, a project which was initiated at the behest of the Woodquay Residents. The project is in line with the plans and policies of the GCDP 2023-2029 identified in **Section 5.4** above, and also contributes to the realization of the Galway Public Realm Strategy as identified in **Section 5.6** above.

The use of the subject site as a public park is in accordance with its longstanding history as a park, as well as the Recreation and Amenity Zoning objective discussed in **Section 6.1.1**, below. Further, as discussed in **Section 6.1.2**, the proposed development has had cognisance of and sought to comply with all relevant development management standards.

6.1.1

Land Use Zoning

The subject site is zoned 'RA – Recreation and Amenity' which carries the objective 'To provide for and protect recreational uses, open space, amenity uses, natural heritage and biodiversity.' The use identified as being compatible with to the objective is 'Outdoor Recreation' as identified in **Table 6-1** below. The proposed development seeks the upgrade of the existing Woodquay Park, which forms an essential green space and recreational area for the local neighbourhood and wider City. The proposed development seeks to add amenities including natural mound play forms, enhanced planting for improved biodiversity, SuDS and nature-based drainage solutions which enhance climate resilience, and a public art installation. As such, it is submitted that the proposed development is in line with the objectives of the 'RA – Recreation and Amenity' land use zoning.

Table 6-1: Zoning Objective RA as per the GCDP 2023-2029.

Zoning Objective RA: To provide for and protect recreational uses, open space, amenity uses, natural heritage and biodiversity	
Uses which are compatible with and contribute to the zoning objective, for example:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Outdoor recreation
Uses which may contribute to the zoning objectives, dependent on the RA location and scale of development, for example:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Development of buildings of a recreational, cultural or educational nature or car parking areas related to and secondary to the primary use of land/water body for outdoor recreation ➤ Public utilities ➤ Burial grounds and associated services



Figure 6-1: Land use zoning of the subject site under the GCDP 2023-2029

6.1.2 Development Management Standards

There are a number of Development Management Standards in the Galway City Development Plan 2023-2029 which are applicable to the proposed development. The standards have been accounted for by the design team and their requirements incorporated into the proposed design. The section below details the relevant standards and identifies the measures undertaken to ensure proposed developments compliance with them.

6.1.2.1 Amenity Open Space Provision in Residential Developments: Communal Open Space

“Communal open space in all types of residential development should:

- *Be visually as well as functionally accessible to the maximum number of dwellings within the residential area.*
- *Be overlooked by residential units.*
- *Integrate natural features (for example natural contours, outcrops of rock), where appropriate, as part of the open space.*
- *Be viable spaces, linked together where possible, designed as an integral part of the overall layout and adjoining neighbouring communal open spaces.*
- *Not include narrow pedestrian walkways, which are not overlooked by house frontages.*
- *Create safe, convenient and accessible amenity areas for persons of all abilities regardless of mobility or age.*
- *Generally no rear boundaries should face onto public open space. Blank gables shall not, generally face onto roads or streets. Side boundary walls, which face onto public open space, should be minimised.*
- *Provide for quality hard and soft landscaping and incorporate urban greening and encourage biodiversity.”*

It is acknowledged that the proposed development is not residential in nature. However, as identified in Galway City Council's Recreational and Amenity Needs Study (2008), Woodquay Park serves as a local

park. As a result, it was sought to comply with this standard as an acknowledgment that the area serves as a crucial amenity for residents, and the main Communal Open Space for residents in the area.

The location of the park already benefits from its central location and high level of overlooking from the frontages of adjacent residences, and not facing into any rear boundaries. The proposed design has sought to ensure that the benefits of this feature are maximised. Residents will be able to continue enjoying the green space present outside their front windows, and that the park remains a place with a high level of overlooking and natural surveillance.

The current park's existing natural features are largely made up of the currently present trees. These have been retained in so far as is possible, with only those in poor health being removed and replaced as matter of good stewardship. High quality hard and soft landscaping, which offers level and accessible access through the entire park is proposed. Measures to encourage biodiversity including a robust plant mix and numerous types of planting/garden areas are included. Please refer to **Section 6.1.2.** for further details.

6.1.2.2 Green Design & Surface Water/SuDS

“New development shall consider the use of innovative design features in buildings including Green roofs, walls and roof gardens. These are important measures in the control of surface water runoff, providing thermal insulation, enhancing biodiversity and promoting a varied cityscape. Development proposals which include any of the above elements shall be accompanied by details of construction techniques, long-term viability, maintenance and management, prepared by a suitably qualified landscape designer.

Development proposals will be required to be accompanied by a comprehensive SuDS assessment that addresses run-off quantity, run-off quality and its impact on the existing habitat and water quality and will have regard to guidance set out in Planning for Watercourses in the Urban Environment (IFI 2020) and Nature Based Solutions to the Management of Rainwater and Surface Water Runoff in Urban Areas, Water Sensitive Urban Design Best Practice Interim Guidance Document' (DHLG) (November 2021).”

The proposed development makes extensive use of innovative green design features, in particular SuDS measures. Multiple rain gardens are provided in the proposed development, alongside permeable paving, extensive planting, and retention of existing healthy trees. The development reduces the area of sealed surface and offers a significantly enhanced biodiversity offering. A SuDS Assessment has been prepared by PUNCH to assess these features and has been submitted with this application in the **Engineering Planning Report**. Further details can be found in **Section 6.2.2.**

6.1.2.3 Recreation and Sports Facilities

“Recreation and sport facilities should be designed to high architectural standards and have regard to safety and accessibility considerations.

- *Developments of a passive and active recreational and sports nature will be assessed against the strategy adopted in the Council's Recreation and Amenity Needs Study (2008) and the imminent Green Space Strategy as set out in Chapter 5.*
- *Developments of a passive and active recreational and sports nature will be considered/assessed in the context of potential impact on the environment, sites of ecological and biodiversity importance and general amenity, where appropriate.”*

The Recreation and Amenity Needs Study (2008) identifies the Woodquay area as having the potential for enhancement, as well as for the creation of new civic spaces, but prescribes no further actions for the park. The Green Space Strategy has not been released as of the date of lodgement of this application. The proposed development expands and upgrades Woodquay Park in a way which serves

the needs of local residents, as well as the wider city. Details of ecological assessment can be found in **Section 6.6.**, and the proposed biodiversity and recreation measures are further detailed in **Section 6.1.2.** It is submitted that the proposed design is in line with the 2008 Recreation and Amenity Needs Study, and the requirements of the DM Standard.

6.1.2.4 **Appropriate Assessment / Natura Impact Statement**

“Under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive there is a requirement to establish whether, in relation to plans and projects, appropriate assessment (AA) is required. If, following screening, it is considered that AA is required then the proponent of the plan or project must prepare a Natura Impact Report/Natura Impact Statement...”

A Natura Impact Statement with Appropriate Assessment Screening Report has been prepared by MKO and submitted as part of this application. Further discussion on the report can be found in **Section 6.6.**

6.1.2.5 **Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA)**

“An Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) will be required to be undertaken for developments proposed in areas that support, or have the potential to support, protected species or features of biodiversity importance, and that appropriate avoidance and mitigation measures are incorporated into all development proposals where the requirements of section 11.32 do not apply.”

An Ecological Impact Assessment has been prepared by MKO and submitted as part of this application. Further discussion on the report can be found in **Section 6.6.**

6.2 **Landscape Design and Sustainability**

A Landscape Design Report has been prepared by LUC which details the design methodology, process, and reasoning of the proposed development. Several key priorities have guided the design of the space throughout the iterative design process and consultation undertaken on the project. Amongst these are biodiversity, climate adaption and mitigation, accessibility and social inclusion, and activating the currently underutilised park space. The design also had to align with the standards set out in the Galway Public Realm Strategy and complement the Bus Connects Cross City Link while also complying with all other forms of relevant planning, design, and ecological policy.

The result has been a design which retains all but two trees in the current park. Hardscaping and street furniture in the park and its environs significantly increases the accessibility of the space, while also providing the scene for a new and engaging space for city life to occur. The park is also to be extended towards the Headford Road, replacing what is currently parking. This enhanced public space will create a gateway from the wider Woodquay area on the southern side of the Headford Rd, inviting people into the park and towards to Waterside and the Corrib. This new area is anchored by the presence of the Galway Orb, placing public art and Galway City’s famed culture front and centre. Space for children to play, including the mounded landform, will enable local schools to gain greater benefit from the space. They will also benefit from the enhanced, biodiverse landscaping which will provide an educational opportunity for students to learn more about nature and sustainability.

The biodiversity of the space is underpinned by five key types of landscaped area within the park. These are rain gardens, Molinia meadows, bulbs, ground cover, and hedge. The rain gardens in particular will play a crucial role in the park by supporting sustainable urban drainage for the park, while including a wide variety of resilient, pollinator friendly plant species which will also enhance the visuals of the park. The Molinia Meadows seeks to reference the Molinia Meadows Qualifying Habitat found in the Lough Corrib SAC, and provide a representation of the native habitats next to the Corrib. Hedging, ground cover, and bulbs will fill in remaining landscaped space, with each providing visual

and biodiversity benefits. Keeping in line with the current use of the park, and feedback received from local schools and residents, grass areas will be provided to enable the use of the space for picnics and further space for children to play. The proposed landscaping has sought to be mindful of the need to adapt to and mitigate for climate change. Improvements to biodiversity, greater planting, retention of existing trees, and removal of City Centre parking all make meaningful contributions to reducing the greenhouse gas emissions of Galway City and moving towards a more sustainable City in line with the GCDP 2023-2029 and Galway City LACAP 2024-2029.

Overall, the proposed design of the park has sought to balance the needs of a range of stakeholders for the area including the residents of Woodquay, Local Schools, residents of the wider city, and tourists. The space has been designed to create an engaging and accessible area which enhances the liveliness of the wider Woodquay area. This is in line with the proposal to create a new public plaza south of the Headford Rd. under Cross City Link. Further detail on the design, and the iterative process undertaken to achieve it are available in the **Landscape Design Report** prepared by LUC and included with this application. Further details on a number of key factors which have been designed for in line with the requirements of the GCDP 2023-2029 are contained in **Sections 6.2.1 and 6.2.2** below.

6.2.1 Accessibility

The current status of Woodquay Park and the surrounding environment make them potentially inaccessible for those with disabilities or other mobility challenges. Pavements are broken, there is a lack of level access across streets, and within the park, and the layout of parking creates a number of unsafe environments. In line with Galway City's commitment to being an Age Friendly City, promoting social inclusion, and enhancing accessibility under the GCDP 2023-2029, the upgrades to Woodquay park have sought to pay specific attention to the needs of those with disabilities.

The first stage of fulfilling this commitment involved consulting with Access for All to gather the views of its membership on the current issues and successes in the area, as well as on what they would like to see from the proposed development. The group highlighted that the current state of the area makes it very difficult to navigate. Inversely, they expressed that the disabled parking which is currently present is very beneficial. Further detail on this consultation and its outcomes can be found in the Consultation Report included in the **Consultation Report** prepared by MKO and submitted with this application.

The proposed design has sought to incorporate the feedback received, and ensure a high quality design. The provision of 2 no. disabled parking spaces is retained in the proposed design. In addition, on street parallel parking, which was identified as enabling vehicles with a rear access ramp for wheelchairs, has been retained. Dropped crossings have been located nearby to key parallel parking spots to enable quick and safe movement to the footpath. We also wish to note that the proposed development has sought to facilitate and ensure no conflicts with the delivery of Bus Connects Cross City Link. This project will create new high quality bus stops along the Headford Road near Woodquay Park which will enable better, more reliable, and safer level boarding of public transport vehicles.

Within the park, the main path has been designed to a spec of a minimum 2.0 metres width, while smaller ancillary path has been designed to a minimum of 1.2 metres width. Raised crossings, or dropped curbs are provided at all entrances to the park, including the one which enables direct access to the new link between Woodquay Park and the Plots. As part of the Quality Audit detailed in **Section 6.9.1** below an Access Audit was conducted. This highlighted potential issues with the tactile paving at crossings, and the layout of the driveway in the southeastern corner of the scheme. As a result of the feedback, tactile paving design has been updated and the design of the driveway amended to enable better awareness for visually impaired users.

It is submitted that the proposed development has been able to achieve a high level of accessible and inclusive design that balances the needs of those with mobility impairments, with the other goals and requirements of the scheme. This has been bolstered by the robust consultation that has occurred throughout the project, including dedicated consultation with Disabled Persons Groups.

6.2.2 Surface Water

PUNCH has developed a comprehensive plan for surface water drainage and management in the proposed development, which is fully detailed in the Engineering Planning Report and associated drawings. The proposed development aims to improve the existing capacity of Woodquay Park to manage and retain surface water, following a Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) approach. Stormwater will be managed primarily through ground infiltration, including the use of rain gardens, supported by BRE365 testing, which has confirmed favourable infiltration rates.

Stormwater will be treated using permeable pavement and rain garden biofiltration systems. There will be no discharge into the River Corrib or the existing Irish Water combined sewer. New road gully traps will be installed on the raised carriageway at Waterside to prevent ponding, with runoff directed to the adjacent rain garden within the park.

6.3 Tree Schedule and Condition Survey

An Arboreal Report and Assessment was conducted by Tom Bradford Landscape Architects (TBLA) on behalf of LUC to assess the health and nature of the existing trees on the site. Four trees within the subject site were identified as being in poor health, with about 10 years of remaining contribution. The rest of the trees on the subject site are assessed as being in health category A or B and have 20 to 40 + years of remaining contribution. Overall, however, the report concludes that:

“All the trees are largely in good condition with no significant defects. The trees have been planted in evenly spaced rows and help provide definition to the space.”

Therefore, with the exception of two, all trees within the subject site are being retained. Of the two being removed, one is because it is growing within the hedge and will be unavoidably impacted by any works to improve the boundary. The second has a slight lean which could pose a potential risk to park users and property, as well as obstructing the sightlines within the park. It is acknowledged that one of the key wishes of the residents was the retention of as many trees as possible in the new park. It is submitted that the proposed design has achieved this to the highest degree possible.

6.4 Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment

An Architectural Heritage Impact Assessment has been prepared by ACP Conservation Architects. The assessment was undertaken due to historic nature of the area. However, the subject site does not include or lie within the curtilage of any protected structures or NIAH recorded buildings. The assessment included a site visit and inspection but a Building Conversation Accredited Surveyor and Chartered Building Engineer, desktop study of the Record of Protected Structures, meetings with the design team, and assessment of the development proposal. The report concludes that:

“In conclusion the proposals, as set out in this report, will ensure that Woodquay Park will be more functional and user friendly. The proposed development will have no impact on any protected structures or historic buildings. No mitigation measures are proposed.”

6.5 Archaeological Impact Assessment

An Archaeological Impact Assessment has been prepared by TOBAR Archaeological Services and is included with the planning application. No recorded monuments are located within the Proposed development site. However, redline boundary does partially fall within the Zone of Notification (ZoN) for the historic town of Galway (GA094-100—) and its associated town defences (GA094-100001-). This triggered the need for the assessment in line with the GCDP 2023-2029.

The assessment utilised a desktop assessment, GIS based assessment, and site inspection to determine the potential for impacts on archaeological heritage resources within and adjacent to the proposed development site. The site inspection involved the excavation of two trial pits to establish ground conditions and the presence of groundwater. Excavations work were monitored and no finds, features, or deposits were noted. The conclusion of the assessment is as follows:

“No direct impacts to any recorded monuments as a result of the Proposed Development have been identified. A potential direct impact to any previously unrecorded sub-surface archaeological finds, features or deposits which may exist within the Proposed Development site has been identified. Appropriate mitigation in the form of archaeological monitoring of Site Investigations and construction stage ground works has been recommended. A change to the wider setting of the nearby recorded monument Quay GA094- 100059- is acknowledged and is regarded as Imperceptible.”

6.6

Ecology

A Natura Impact Statement with Appropriate Assessment Screening, as well as an Ecological Impact Assessment and Appropriate Assessment Screening Report, prepared by MKO, are included with the planning application. The assessments quantify any potential effects relating to biodiversity and identifies the measures required to avoid, reduce and mitigate likely significant effects.

The Natura Impact Assessment concludes:

“Where the potential for any adverse effect on any European Site has been identified, the pathway by which any such effect may occur has been robustly blocked through the use of avoidance, appropriate design and mitigation measures as set out within this report and its appendices. The measures ensure that the construction and operation of the proposed development does not adversely affect the integrity of European sites.

Therefore, it can be objectively concluded that the Proposed Development, individually or in combination with other plans or projects, will not adversely affect the integrity of any European Site”

The Ecological Impact Assessment concludes:

“The potential residual impacts on ecological receptors will not be significant and no potential for the proposed works to contribute to any cumulative impacts on biodiversity when considered in-combination with other plans and projects was identified.

In conclusion, provided that the proposed works are constructed and operated in accordance with the design described within this application, there will be no significant effects on biodiversity at any geographic scale.”

6.7

Construction and Environmental Management Plan

A Construction and Environmental Management Plan CEMP has been prepared by MKO for the proposed development to ensure that the relevant standards for environmental control are met across all stages of the construction process. Measures to control dust, noise, traffic, invasive species, and vibration are included. In addition, a detailed waste management plan is included to ensure the efficient, safe, and environmentally conservative management of all waste on site. Finally, an implementation and emergency response plan have been developed to ensure the measures identified are carried out.

6.8 Site Services

6.8.1 Water and Wastewater

It is not proposed to include a connection to fresh or wastewater facilities as part of the development. As a result, it is submitted that the proposed development does not need a Confirmation of Feasibility from Uisce Eireann.

6.9 Transport and Mobility

6.9.1 Quality Audit Including Road Safety Audit

A Quality Audit of the proposed development was prepared by PCME Engineers on behalf of PUNCH to assess the design of the proposed scheme. The Quality Audit contains several reports within it, each with the goal of assessing the proposed designs suitability from a transportation and mobility perspective. These include an Access Audit, Cycle Audit, Walking Audit, Stage 1&2 Road Safety Audit, and Non-Motorised Adult Audit.

The Quality Audit identified a number of potential issues, which have been resolved as part of the iterative design process for the development. These include:

- Inter-Visibility Restricted by Parking Space
 - Resolved by moving the crossing point and creating a build out for the crossing point
- Inter-visibility Restricted by Hedge Line
 - Hedge planting has been removed
- Kerb Heights
 - Compliant kerbing details provided in the LUC Landscape Drawings
- Layout of Vehicular Access Driveway
 - No level difference between surfaces. Hazard warning paving has been introduced to increase awareness for the visually impaired.
- Unaccommodated Pedestrian Desire Line
 - Planting has been extended across to block the ends of the routes, and encourage use of the formal crossings.
- Width of Internal Paths
 - Paths intended to be used by pedestrians only. All paths a minimum of 1.2 meters wide, main paths are 2.0 meters wide.
- Depth of Tactile Paving
 - Depth of tactile paving extended to 1.2 meters depth
- Visibility of Bollards
 - Bollards have been repositioned and reflective strips included
- Absence of Drainage Measures
 - Additional drainage gulleys have been introduced. See PUNCH drainage drawings.
- Mounting Height of Trees
 - No cycle access is proposed within the park.
- Location of Motorcycle Parking Spaces
 - Swept path analysis conducted by PUNCH. Parking spaces have been adjusted to ensure no clash occurs.

6.9.2 Bus Connects: Cross City Link

The redline boundary of the proposed development stops at the boundary of the proposed Bus Connects Cross City Link scheme with is currently awaiting a decision from An Bord Pleanála (ABP

Ref. 314597). As part of the consultations undertaken for the project, detailed conversations and workshops were held with the Cross City Link design team to ensure that the Woodquay Park Enhancement did not conflict with or prejudice the potential approval and delivery of Cross City Link. The design team was presented with the final design and indicated that they had no objections to it. Further detail on the consultation done with the design team can be found in the **Consultation Report** prepared by MKO and submitted with this application.

The proposed scheme has been designed to be deliverable before, in tandem with, or after any potential delivery of the Cross City Link scheme. A site layout plan showing the proposed scheme with and without the Cross City Link has been prepared by LUC and submitted with this application. In the event that the Woodquay Park Enhancement moves to construction before the Cross City Link, it is proposed to provide temporary tie-ins to the existing pavement and footpaths to enable its delivery. These will be removed if and when Cross City Link is delivered, with the Woodquay scheme prepared to completely align with the design proposed in the Cross City Link application. Regardless of delivery timelines, any final choices on detailed pavement material for the proposed scheme will take place in conjunction with the Cross City Link team to ensure a consistent and cohesive public realm, and to ensure a high-quality finishing for the park and its environs.

7.

CONCLUSION

The proposed development seeks the enhancement of the existing Woodquay Park in Galway City Centre by the Applicant, Galway City Council. The proposed design has sought to balance the needs of a range of stakeholders, as well as the design brief, and has been the result of a long and detailed iterative design process to ensure the needs of all stakeholders are fulfilled, and as many of their wants are achieved as possible.

The proposed enhancements also seek to make a significant contribution to the biodiversity and climate resilience of the Woodquay area, providing an area which is pollinator friendly and utilises SuDS measures to manage all surface water. The removal of city centre parking is in line with the GTS, GCDP 2023-2029, and will support the City in creating a modal shift from private vehicles to sustainable transport. These measures are all in line with the Galway LACAP 2024-2029.

In short, the proposed enhancement of Woodquay Park represents a significant material planning gain for the area, and will contribute to ensuring that the Woodquay area remains a vibrant and resilient neighbourhood for years to come.