

## **PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY CONTEXT**

### **Des Cox, RPS.**

#### **1.0 Qualifications and Relevant Experience**

- 1.1 My name is Des Cox, I am a Chartered Planner with some 14 years experience in the fields of regional, urban, rural and strategic planning. I am currently Operational Director with the Planning Division of RPS Group.
- 1.2 I hold a BA in Geography and Sociology from Trinity College Dublin, and a Master of Regional and Urban Planning (MRUP) from University College Dublin. I am a Member of both the Irish Planning Institute (IPI) and the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI).
- 1.3 I have been involved with the Corrib Onshore Pipeline project as part of the RPS Project Team, since January 2007.

#### **2.0 Introduction and Background**

- 2.1 The objective of this statement is to provide an overview of the Planning and Development Context for the proposed Corrib Onshore Pipeline development. This current proposal to modify the Onshore Pipeline element of the overall Corrib Gas Field project, while requiring to be assessed on its own merit, must be understood and considered as an integral element of the Corrib Gas Field project. This statement outlines the extensive History of Consents pertaining to the overall Corrib Field project, and the governing legislation for the proposed onshore pipeline development, in particular identifying the fact that more than one Statutory consent is required to implement the proposal. It also details the pertinent development policies relating to the proposed pipeline and overall project. This statement will demonstrate that the proposed development is in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, and with the policy context governing such development.
- 2.2 As An Bord Pleanála will be aware, and as detailed in the Preamble to the EIS, Shell E&P Ireland Limited (SEPIL) is developing the Corrib Gas Field off the coast of County Mayo.
- 2.3 As detailed in the application, the overall Corrib Gas Field project will operate as a subsea production facility tied back to the onshore gas terminal, prior to distribution of natural gas to the National network. The overall Corrib Gas Field project includes five inter-related and inter-dependent elements as follows:-
  - Offshore seabed installation (the subsea wellheads and manifold at the Gas Field);
  - Offshore gas pipeline (approx. 84 km between wellheads and landfall);
  - Onshore gas pipeline (approx. 9.2 km between landfall and gas terminal);
  - Bellanaboy Bridge Gas Terminal; and
  - The Mayo to Galway gas pipeline from the terminal to the National gas network (approx. 150km).

For clarity, these integrated elements are presented in a figurative format (**Slide No. 1**). As is detailed later in this statement, full regulatory approval has previously been received for the offshore seabed installation, a gas pipeline between the installation and gas terminal, the gas terminal, and the regional export pipeline. The gas terminal and subsea facilities are currently under construction; the Mayo to Galway pipeline was constructed in 2006; construction of the offshore element of the gas pipeline, as previously approved, has recently commenced.

- 2.4 Notwithstanding the fact that Statutory consent had been given for the various elements of the Corrib Gas Field development, in response to concerns expressed regarding the perceived safety of the development, an independent safety assessment by Advantica Consultants, was commissioned by the then Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources, via a Technical Advisory Group (TAG). The Advantica Report concluded that *“provided that it can be demonstrated that the pressure in the onshore pipeline will be limited effectively and that the recommendations made elsewhere in this report are followed, we believe that there will be a substantial safety margin in the pipeline design and the pipeline design and the proposed route should be accepted as meeting or exceeding international standards”*. This recommendation was evaluated and accepted by TAG.
- 2.5 In addition, following a well documented mediation process between SEPIL and people opposed to the gas pipeline project, the Mediator, Peter Cassells, published a report, including a recommendation *“to modify the pipeline in the vicinity of Rosspoint to address community concerns regarding proximity to housing”*. This recommendation, and the recommendations of the Advantica Report, were accepted by SEPIL. As a consequence, the proposal at the centre of this current application essentially comprises a modification of the onshore element of the previously approved Corrib Gas pipeline, including the assurance of the limitation of pressure in this element of the pipeline.
- 2.6 The governing legislation for development of the overall Corrib Field project is complex, and in particular, is not restricted to a single governing legislative code. Such complexity may be expected, given the extensive nature of the overall project, its offshore and onshore character, and the associated structures, works and activities required to facilitate the construction and operation of the project. However, one consequence of this is the number of separate consents that are required, and which previously have been obtained, under various legislation, to govern the construction and operation of the overall project. Environmental Impact Statements have accompanied each of the primary applications for regulatory approval of the overall Corrib Field project. These have addressed the cumulative impact of the overall project.

### **3.0 The History of Consents in Respect of the Overall Corrib Field Project**

- 3.1 As detailed on Figure 1, in 2001, Enterprise Energy Ireland Ltd submitted four applications in respect of the overall Corrib Gas Field project; these were submitted to different Statutory bodies under different legislative codes. These applications – having some degree of overlap - were:-
  - An application to Mayo County Council in April 2001 for Permission for a gas terminal at Bellanaboy Bridge, (Element 4 - as detailed on Figure 1).

- An application in November 2001 to construct a pipeline from the Corrib Field to the Terminal (under the Gas Act 1976 as amended) (Elements 2 and 3);
  - An application in November 2001 for a Foreshore Licence for all elements of the Corrib pipeline lying between the High Water Mark and the 12-mile territorial limit (Elements 2 and 3).
  - A Plan of Development in November 2001 under the Petroleum and Other Minerals Act (1960) (Elements 1, 2, 3 and 4).
- 3.2 The then Department of Marine and Natural Resources (now Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources) who was the recipient of these last three applications, decided to appoint a Marine Licence Vetting Committee, comprised of technical, scientific and engineering specialists, to undertake a co-ordinated assessment of the environmental implications of the proposed Corrib Gas Field Development in the light of those applications. The MLVC Report, published in 2002, recommended that the Minister issue the necessary consents to allow the proposed development to proceed, subject to conditions. The Plan of Development for the whole Corrib Gas Field Development, and the associated Statutory consents for the pipeline system, as outlined above and in Figure 1, were obtained in April and May of 2002.
- 3.3 In addition, in 2001 Bord Gais Eireann submitted an application for consent to construct the 150 km gas export pipeline between the Corrib Gas Terminal and the National gas network in Co. Galway (Element 5). Consent for the Mayo-Galway gas pipeline was obtained in February 2002.
- 3.4 In respect of the Bellanaboy Bridge Gas Terminal, following an appeal to An Bord Pleanála (Appeal Ref. PL16.126073), Permission was Refused in April 2003 for this element of the project, for a single Reason, specifically relating to the then proposed process for depositing excavated peat from the terminal site at two repositories on existing blanket bog on a site above the R314 Regional Road. The Board considered that:-

*“Having regard to –*

*the contours of the area of the repositories,  
the amount and pattern of rainfall in the area,  
the characteristics of the disaggregated peat,  
the method proposed for the moving of materials to and within the repositories,  
the details of the system for retaining the deposited materials,*

*the Board considers that the proposed surface drainage system would be ineffective in ensuring the integrity of the peat repositories as permanent structures for the retention of the peat and other unsuitable materials.*

*Consequently, the Board considers that both of the proposed repositories have a high probability of failure and that the proposed development would constitute an unacceptable risk to the health and safety of the local community and of the general public on the public road in the vicinity of the site, would constitute an unacceptable risk of pollution of salmonid waters in Glenamoy River, Sruwaddacon Bay and Carrowmore Lake, and would seriously injure the amenities of property in the vicinity. The proposed*

*development would, therefore, be contrary to the proper planning and development of the area”.*

3.5 SEPIL subsequently submitted a new planning application to Mayo County Council in December 2003 for the Gas Terminal element of the overall project (Planning Ref. P03/3343). It addressed the Board’s Reason for Refusal in the previous application by including a proposal to deposit peat at a Bord na Móna cut-over peatland at Srahmore, approx. 1 km north-west of Bangor Erris. Access between this facility and the terminal site would occur via an identified haul route. Following an Appeal to An Bord Pleanála (Appeal Ref. PL 16.207212), Permission for the terminal, and associated peat deposition at the Srahmore site, was granted in October 2004. In its Decision, An Bord Pleanála stated that it had regard to the following:-

- (a) The planning history relating to the Terminal site,
- (b) The strategic importance of the proposed development both nationally and regionally,
- (c) National policy as expressed in the National Development Plan 2000-2006, the National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020, the National Climate Change Strategy for Ireland 2000, and Government policy in relation to energy supply,
- (d) The limited duration of the earthworks and construction phase, including the transportation of peat,
- (e) The availability of vegetation and plantations to provide screening on the terminal site,
- (f) The nature, extent and low lying profile of the deposition site,
- (g) The legislative requirement to obtain licences from the Environmental Protection Agency in relation to the proposed activities on the two sites,
- (h) Consents granted under the Gas Act, 1976, as amended, and the Foreshore Act, 1933, as amended,
- (i) The development objectives and the conservation and amenity provisions of the Mayo County Development Plan 2003-2009,
- (j) The reports of the Health and Safety Authority to the planning authority and to An Bord Pleanála,

The Board concluded that the proposed development, subject to compliance with Conditions (as set out in its Order) *“would not be unduly injurious to the amenities of the area or property in the vicinity, would be acceptable in terms of traffic safety, would not be prejudicial to public health and safety and would be in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.”*

3.6 As such, by October 2004, all elements of the Corrib Gas Project had received appropriate consents, albeit under different legislative processes. An Bord Pleanála are requested to consider the proposed modified onshore pipeline development in the context of the existing Statutory consents pertaining to the overall project, and its previous acknowledgement of the strategic importance of the proposed development, both nationally and regionally.

#### **4.0 The Legislative Context for the Proposed Development (*Slide No. 2*)**

- 4.1 Following SEPIL's agreement to accept the recommendations made by Advantica and the Technical Advisory Group TAG, and recommendations made by Peter Cassells in his mediation report, as outlined above and in the Preamble to the EIS, the route of the Corrib Onshore Pipeline is now proposed to be modified in the vicinity of Rossport. In addition, a new Landfall Valve Installation is being sited at the interface of the onshore and offshore elements of the Corrib Gas pipeline, to limit the pressure in the onshore pipeline to 144 bar or below. This will be addressed in separate statements to this Hearing.
- 4.2 Although, as detailed above, the various elements of the Corrib Field project have already received regulatory approval, it was considered that the proposed modification to the onshore section of the pipeline could not be implemented under the existing consents previously obtained, for a number of reasons.
- 4.3 Firstly, the proposal to modify the route of the previously approved onshore pipeline comprises a strategic gas infrastructure development, as now covered under the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006 (for convenience referred to as the Strategic Infrastructure Act); as such, Approval of the proposed development is now sought from An Bord Pleanála under the provisions of that Act. The making of this application follows pre-application consultation with officers of An Bord Pleanála, in accordance with the provisions of Section 182C of the 2000 Act, as inserted by the 2006 Act.
- 4.4 Secondly, in accordance with the provisions of the Gas Acts, as inserted into the Strategic Infrastructure Act, SEPIL has concurrently applied to An Bord Pleanála for a Compulsory Acquisition Order in respect of rights over lands outside its ownership, in order to secure a wayleave within which to construct, operate and maintain the proposed modified onshore pipeline development. This reflects the long established practice of securing a wayleave to facilitate pipeline construction and operation on private lands by Bord Gais Éireann.
- 4.5 Thirdly, the proposed modifications to the Corrib Onshore Pipeline require a new Consent from the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources under Section 40 of the Gas Act 1976, as amended. This is despite the fact that an existing Ministerial Consent remains extant, and that the route of the offshore pipeline, including its landfall, has not altered from that which is the subject of the existing Ministerial Consent. This is because, as confirmed by the DCENR, there is no mechanism under the Gas Acts to amend a Ministerial Consent.
- 4.6 Fourthly, the planned modifications to the route alignment in areas below the High Water Mark (Sruwaddacon Bay) require a new Foreshore Licence from the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food under the Foreshore Acts 1933-2003.
- 4.7 Finally, an amendment to the previously approved Plan of Development is required, primarily to facilitate the proposed modified onshore pipeline route, and the proposed landfall valve installation.
- 4.8 Notwithstanding all this, however, it is clearly the case that the proposed modified onshore pipeline relies upon, and integrates with, previously Permitted and approved structures and activities that are either existing or under construction, in respect of the overall approved Corrib Field development. As

such, this proposal must be understood in the context of being part of the single overall strategic gas infrastructure project.

- 4.9 Again, it is easiest to demonstrate the relationship between the 5 project elements and the regulatory approvals processes now being complied with in respect of the planned modified onshore pipeline, by means of an illustrative diagram. In particular, it will be noted that the concurrent consents now being sought do not affect or alter existing Permissions and consents relating to the ongoing construction of the offshore seabed facilities and the offshore pipeline element, the terminal, and the Mayo-Galway Gas pipeline.

#### **The Pipeline Corridor**

- 4.10 As has been noted in the Overview, it is proposed to route the pipeline within an identified corridor of a general width of between 40m and 100m. It is acknowledged that this corridor is wider than the area of the construction spread and the permanent wayleave, and therefore is wider than that area for which temporary and permanent rights over land are concurrently being sought. The purpose of identifying such a wider corridor within which to route the pipeline is to facilitate minor local deviation to the pipeline route if required, without further recourse to An Bord Pleanála for Approval for such local deviation under the provisions of Section 182 of the Strategic Infrastructure Act.
- 4.11 The need for minor deviation of the intended pipeline route may be required in the context of a number of potential scenarios which would only be encountered during post-Approval construction of the pipeline; these include:-
- Unrecorded archaeology encountered during construction along the indicative line of the pipeline;
  - Unforeseen local ground conditions encountered during construction which have environmental or construction safety implications;
  - Post-Approval negotiations with affected landowners in order to minimise impact on agricultural practice, and other matters.
- 4.12 There is a variation in the corridor width proposed in this application; across agricultural lands, where ground conditions are more predictable, and where detailed landowner liaison and ground survey has occurred, the corridor is restricted to the 40m width required to facilitate the construction spread. In the blanket bog areas, including the commonage, a corridor of 100m is proposed to facilitate any local deviation deemed necessary during construction.
- 4.13 The Applicant has reviewed the cases of the two other strategic gas pipeline infrastructure proposals previously before An Bord Pleanála – GA0002 being the BGE gas pipeline from Curraleigh West, Co. Tipperary to Midleton, Co. Cork, and GA0003 being the Shannon LNG gas pipeline from the Permitted LNG Terminal at Ralappane, Co. Kerry to the natural gas network at Leahys, Co. Limerick. In both cases, the separate Applicants proposed, and were Granted Approval for, a 100m corridor within which to route the pipeline, on the basis of the rationale for necessary flexibility during construction as outlined above, and with a final permanent wayleave of 14m, as proposed in this application. The Applicant acknowledges that any Approval for the routing of

the proposed pipeline development within the identified corridor does not imply or confer any legal right to construct and operate the development outside lands over which it does not have, or is not granted, a legal interest.

#### **Peat Deposition at Srahmore**

- 4.14 As has been confirmed in the EIS, and will be addressed in separate statements to this Hearing, the proposed methodology for construction of the modified onshore pipeline within areas of blanket bog requires the extraction of up to 75,000m<sup>3</sup> of peat. It is proposed that this peat is transferred to the Bord na Móna Peat Deposition site at Srahmore, approx. 11 km south of the proposed pipeline route. Under Planning Ref. PL 16.207212 noted above, Permission was Granted by An Bord Pleanála in October 2004 in part for the transportation and deposition of 450,000m<sup>3</sup> of peat from the terminal site to the Bord na Móna site. The Permitted development included provision of ancillary reception, administration and other facilities at the Srahmore site.
- 4.15 A waste licence was issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in October 2004 (Licence Ref: W0199-01), for the operation of the facility. Between 2005 and 2007, approximately 448,000m<sup>3</sup> of peat was excavated from the terminal site, and transported to and deposited at the Srahmore facility. The Srahmore site is now considered to be a successful working example of the mass storage and stabilisation of transferred peat.
- 4.16 The peat proposed to be removed to facilitate construction of the onshore pipeline will be deposited within the same overall activity boundary of the Srahmore site as was previously Permitted by An Bord Pleanála. However, the development of the facility, including the transferred peat being deposited there, was clearly and specifically associated with the construction of the Bellanaboy Bridge gas terminal. There are therefore two factors necessitating the securing of an additional Approval under this current application, to allow the proposed transfer of peat from the alignment of the onshore pipeline to the Srahmore site; these are:-
- the source of the peat is different from that covered by the current Permission; and
  - the volume of peat proposed to be deposited at the facility under this application, combined with that already deposited at the facility associated with construction of the terminal, would be in excess of that allowed for under the current Permission.
- 4.17 For these reasons, this current application to An Bord Pleanála includes the associated proposed extension of the Permitted activity at the Srahmore Peat Deposition facility to accept the additional peat arising from construction of the onshore pipeline. This is addressed in Volume 3 of the EIS. However, in operational terms, the facility will generally receive and transfer peat in the same way as has successfully occurred in respect of peat previously transferred from the terminal. The facility will continue to be managed and controlled by Bord na Móna in accordance with the requirements of the governing Permission. Associated works and structures are required on the site, including administrative and other buildings; in addition, the existing waste licence is required to be separately reviewed to cover the deposition of the additional peat, and other matters relating to the operation of the facility.

## 5.0 Strategic Policy Context

5.1 It is essential also to understand the strategic policy context within which the proposed onshore pipeline development, and the wider Corrib Gas Field project, is framed. This includes policies relating to security of National energy supply, and to protection and enhancement of the local environment.

5.2 As addressed above, the proposed development comprises a modification to the onshore pipeline element of the overall Corrib Gas Field project which has been previously approved in its entirety. The strategic importance of, and need for, the overall project as a new indigenous energy source has been established and previously accepted by the relevant Statutory Authorities, both in the context of the various consents for the project, and in a number of policy reports and documents. For example, in its Decision to Grant Permission for the Bellanaboy Bridge gas terminal, An Bord Pleanála had specific regard to *“The strategic importance of the proposed development both nationally and regionally”*; The strategic policy context for the development, which is the underlying framework for the overall project, has been summarised in Section 4 of the cover letter accompanying this application to An Bord Pleanála.

5.3 This statement provides a brief summary of relevant International, European and National policy. This confirms the envisaged strategic importance of the overall project (and hence the proposed development, being a modification of a portion of that previously approved overall project) to contribute to security of National energy supply:-

- The International Energy Agency (IEA) in its report *Energy Policies of IEA Countries – Ireland 2007 Review* envisages that bringing the Corrib gas pipeline into production will have the effect of *‘supplying up to half of Irish Gas needs from indigenous supplies well into the next decade’* (p. 18). It concludes that *‘A stable and secure supply of natural gas at competitive prices is of crucial importance for Ireland...To diversify gas supply, the opening of the Corrib gas field is a priority and should be supported by the government’* (p. 120).
- The European Commission Green Paper - *‘European Strategy for Sustainable, Competitive and Secure Energy’* (March 2006) identifies a series of Priority Areas, including competitiveness, sustainability, and security of supply. It concludes that an integrated approach to tackling the EU’s rising dependence on imported energy is required, including diversifying the EU’s energy mix with greater use of competitive indigenous and renewable energy.
- The 2007 Energy White Paper, published by the then Minister for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources primarily seeks to ensure secure and reliable electricity and gas supplies, and to enhance the diversity of fuels used for power generation. Section 3.3. details Strategic Goal 2: Ensuring the Security and Reliability of Gas Supplies; this envisages that:- *“in light of global, EU and UK trends, natural gas will continue to play a vital role in the Irish fuel mix for some decades yet. Business as usual projections indicate that more than 70% of our electricity would be generated from natural gas by 2020. Our alternative scenario, with renewables contributing 33% by 2020, will see greater diversity in the fuel mix with gas contributing just under 50% to power generation”*.



- The Commission for Energy Regulation (CER) *'Report on Ireland's Security of Electricity'* (July 2008), notes that *'the discovery of gas at the Corrib gas field off the west coast of Ireland provides potential for Ireland in improving its ability to reduce its reliance on imported gas and reduce the exposure the Irish system has to imported gas transportation and supply shocks'*. It envisages that, at its outset, the Corrib Field will meet approximately 40% of Ireland's peak-day demand and 60% of Ireland's annual demand (P. 39).
- The recent Bord Gáis Networks (BGN) *'Transmission Development Statement'*, covering the period from the gas year 2006/07 until the gas year 2012/13, confirms that *'if either the Corrib project or the Shannon LNG project (which is due to operate from 2012/13) is delayed beyond 2012/13, then either the existing system in Scotland will need to be reinforced for 2012/13, or commercial solutions (e.g. interruptible capacity) will need to be developed for the market'* (p. 41). This confirms the strategic need for the timely construction and operation of the planned Corrib Gas project.
- The National Spatial Strategy (NSS) 2002-2020 identifies the fact that reliable and effective energy systems, such as gas and electricity to power industry and services, are prerequisites for effective regional development. Ireland's electricity and gas networks are evolving in an integrated way, serving the whole island, while focusing on strategic locations. A priority for energy in the NSS is to extend the gas network to support the development of identified existing and proposed gateways and hubs. It is reasonable to suggest that this requires timely investment in, and development of, a strategic National gas pipeline network, fuelled by both domestic and international gas supplies.

#### **The Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2004**

- 5.4 The Guidelines identify the Corrib Gas Field as a major opportunity for the West Region, in conjunction with the plan to expand the natural gas transmission network to the West. It notes that quality of energy infrastructure is not comprehensively strong enough to attract significant investment to the Region; improvement in energy infrastructure is identified as an urgent need.
- 5.5 It is a policy of the Regional Planning Guidelines to facilitate the successful utilisation of the Corrib Gas Field reserves both to benefit the Region (primarily by facilitating access to gas by the main population centres in the Region) and the entire country. In this context, it is a Regional infrastructural priority to recommend the operation of a gas powered generating station (Bellacorrick), should the reserves of the Corrib Gas field come onshore in the future.
- 5.6 The Guidelines conclude in this regard that the Gas grid in the Region should be extended to all towns in excess of 3,000 population as first priority, and to other towns with large energy users, together with towns close to the network; subsequently, the grid should be extended to all urban areas in the Region.

5.7 The Board may be aware in this regard of the current Gaswest Project, being implemented by Bord Gáis Eireann. This is a €40 million development project for the West of Ireland, making natural gas available to towns along the Mayo-Galway Transmission Pipeline. Bord Gáis Eireann has confirmed that Castlebar, Westport and Ballina are now operating from the natural gas network; Claremorris and Crossmolina are now connected to the network, and the changeover process is currently occurring, while pipe-laying works have commenced in Ballinrobe. Other towns intended for connection to the network are Ballyhaunis, and Knock in Co. Mayo, and Athenry, Craughwell, Headford and Tuam in Co. Galway.

#### **The Mayo County Development Plan 2008-2014**

5.8 The Statutory Development Plan for the area and vicinity of the proposed Corrib Onshore Pipeline is the Mayo County Development Plan 2008-2014.

5.9 The Plan identifies the fact that Mayo's peripherality and lack of a large-scale urban centre places it at a disadvantage in terms of attracting outside investment, a weakness reinforced by infrastructure inadequacies particularly in relation to strategic road and rail connections, telecommunications, and energy.

5.10 On the other hand, the County is identified as having considerable natural resources which are a vital element of the County's resource base, but which have not been developed to their full potential. A Key Issue of the Plan in this regard is the sustainable development of both renewable energy sources, and other valuable natural resources to their full potential, in a manner that has due regard to environmental protection, bio-diversity conservation, and the preservation of visual, scenic and residential amenities (p. 18).

5.11 The Overall Strategy of the County Development Plan includes the following:-

- To promote sustainability and vibrancy in rural communities, including small towns and villages;
- To promote the future growth and development needs of the County in a sustainable manner, and to ensure that the benefits of economic growth and prosperity are spread to all parts of the County;
- To promote and facilitate the provision of a sound infrastructure base throughout the County, and in particular critical infrastructure, which will enhance intra/inter-regional linkages in order to improve the economic competitiveness of Mayo;
- To protect, conserve and manage in a prudent and sustainable manner the County's outstanding natural and built heritage, its cultural resources, and to seek the enhancement of these resources where appropriate and feasible. (p. 22)

5.12 Emerging from this Overall Strategy are a number of stated Development Aims, including the following, considered of relevance to this project:-

(Section 2.1.1: Economic Development Aims; p.23)

- To promote development of all sections of the Mayo economy and optimise the contribution of the County's natural resource base to balanced, sustainable development, and ensure that the availability of infrastructure facilities is not a limiting factor;

- To ensure the County's natural resources are managed and developed in a sustainable manner that will ensure they can be enjoyed by future generations;

(Section 2.1.2: Transport and Infrastructure Development Aims; p. 23)

- To ensure that the energy supply and distribution throughout Mayo is expanded and upgraded sufficiently to enable economic, enterprise and other developments to locate in the county;

(Section 2.1.4: Environment Development Aims; p. 24)

- To ensure the conservation and responsible guardianship of Mayo's natural and built heritage for future generations, whilst optimising its potential role in sustaining local communities and the overall socio-economic development of the County;
- To ensure that the resource that is Mayo's diversity and variety of landscapes is utilised prudently and sustainably and that new development is integrated sympathetically into the landscape in a manner that will ensure that the landscape can be handed on to future generations without being degraded.

5.13 Section 2.2.7 of the County Plan refers to Rural Areas, noting that the rural and coastal areas of Mayo are home to some 67% of the County's population in 1996 (p. 35). These areas contain some of the most outstanding seascape and landscape in the world, and are designated as of high amenity in terms of their scenic and visual quality. Such areas are identified as vital to the tourism economy and as such could contribute to the diversification of the economy of these areas as traditional agriculture declines in economic importance.

5.14 The Plan refers to the Rural Villages of the County. These are seen as providing opportunities for a limited amount of future expansion and provision of services. In this context, a number of villages, including Ros Dumhach (Rosspport) and other settlements of the Erris area, are identified in Table 8 of the Plan as a focus for an appropriate level of expansion including small-scale housing development. In this regard, Policy CSS-3.1 states the strategic policy of the Plan:-

*"To strengthen the population base of the Rural Villages listed in Table 8, having regard to the availability of infrastructure and the principles of sustainability, by encouraging development of appropriate scale, size and design compatible with the intrinsic character, scale and amenities of the villages, so that they are sustained as focus for rural population growth and service provision" (p. 36).*

5.15 Part 3 of the Plan sets out a number of Development Policies and Objectives to underpin the Overall Strategy for the County. Policies and Objectives of note in this regard include the following:-

- **P/ED-AF3:** It is the policy of the Council to protect lake and coastal SACs and SPAs and to avoid adverse effects on marine habitats, and species in general, in co-operation with relevant Government departments and other relevant agencies (p. 52);
- **P/TI-E4:** It is the policy of the Council to support the development of a gas-powered generating station in North Mayo (p. 65);

- **O/TI-G1:** It is an objective of the Council that it fully supports the realisation of the Corrib Gas Field find and any other gas find in the County either on or off-shore (p. 68)
  - **O/TI-G2:** It is an objective of the Council to support and facilitate the provision of a gas supply to the seven towns identified by the Commission for Energy Regulation and to seek the extension of the gas network to other towns in the County, with the Council supporting the immediate provision of natural gas to Beal an Mhuirthead (Belmullet) town (p. 68).
  - **P/TI-IC2** It is the policy of the Council to safeguard and protect Infrastructure Corridors from development for non-infrastructure related purposes that would prejudice their future use (P. 68);
  - **P/TI-IC3** To protect areas of high sensitivity identified in the 'Landscape Appraisal of County Mayo' and other environmentally sensitive areas from large-scale visually intrusive energy infrastructure (p. 68);
  - **P/EH-VP1** It is the policy of the Council to ensure that development does not adversely interfere with views and prospects and the amenities of places and features of natural beauty and interest when viewed from the public realm. Views and prospects worthy of preservation and protection are indicated on Map 10 of the Plan. Map 10 identifies the view northwards over Sruwaddacon Bay from the L1202 (a designated Scenic Route) north of Inver and at Glengad to comprise a Highly Scenic View, while views over the Bay from this road at Pullathomais and Aghoose are Scenic Views (p. 80);
  - **P/EH-NH1** This is a policy to protect, enhance and conserve the Natural Heritage of the County, including designated areas and species (p. 87);
- 5.16 The proposed development of the Corrib Onshore Pipeline, including its design, and siting, and methodologies for its construction and mitigation of potential environmental impact, including visual impact, has been prepared in careful reference to these policies and objectives, as well as to the stated Overall Strategy and Development Aims of the County Development Plan. .

## 6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 The objective of this statement is to provide an overview of the Planning and Development Context for the proposed Corrib Onshore Pipeline development. The statement reinforces the established acceptance at strategic policy level of the need for the Corrib Gas Field project to ensure a sustainable indigenous energy source. The realisation of the proposed Corrib Onshore Pipeline development, as a key element of the overall Corrib Gas Field project, will be of crucial importance in achieving these National and European objectives for security of energy supply.
- 6.2 The proposed development is in compliance with strategic energy and infrastructure policies at Local, Regional and National planning levels; it will assist in ensuring balanced regional spatial development, by ensuring an enhanced and reliable energy source to the West – and indeed to the State as a whole. Equally, having regard to the nature and extent of the proposed development, including measures to mitigate potential environmental impact, I consider that the proposed development does not conflict with the environmental and amenity objectives of the Statutory Development Plan as outlined above; rather, such policies and objectives have comprised a key consideration in developing the specific nature and design of the proposal.
- 6.3 Having regard to the History of Consents in respect of the Corrib Onshore Pipeline, as part of the wider overall Corrib Field Project, and the legislative requirements of the proposal, I am satisfied that the proposal is entirely in accordance with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.