

COMMUNITY ISSUES AND PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

EVIDENCE DELIVERED BY MR KIERAN KENNEDY, RPS.

1.0 Qualifications and Relevant Experience

My name is Kieran Kennedy. I am a Chartered Town Planner with over 30 years professional experience in all areas of town planning in both the public and private sectors. I am currently managing director of RPS Planning & Environment Ltd and a group director of RPS Group Ireland. Previously I held the positions of Director of Planning with South Dublin County Council and Inspector with An Bord Pleanala.

I hold a Masters Degree in Town Planning from the University of London and a Masters Degree in Environmental Science from University College Dublin. I am a Member of the Royal Town Planning Institute.

I have been involved with the Corrib Onshore Pipeline project as part of the RPS Project Team since May 2010.

2.0 Introduction

My former colleague Mr. Des Cox prepared Statements on community and socio economic issues and on the planning policy context which were presented to An Bord Pleanala at the Oral Hearing in 2009 in association with the previous route. I have revised and updated this material as appropriate to the current proposal. My Statement is focused on the revised route and generally does not restate material previously presented to the Board by Mr Cox in 2009. In this regard Mr Cox made specific reference to a series of policy documents regarding the strategic importance of the development at a national and regional level, including;

- *Energy Policies of IEA Countries – Ireland 2007 Review,*
- *The 2007 Energy White Paper,*
- *Report on Irelands Security of Electricity (July 2008), (CER)*
- *Transmission Development Statement, Bord Gais Networks covering the period from the gas year 2006/07 until the gas year 2012/13,*
- *The National Spatial Strategy 2002-2020,*
- *The Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2004.*

These documents are already before the Board in evidence and I do not propose to discuss them further in my Statement.

The revisions to the proposed Corrib Onshore Pipeline were made following a written request by An Bord Pleanala dated 2nd November 2009. The requested revisions were subsequently submitted to An Bord Pleanala on 31st May 2010. This Statement addresses a number of key issues of the revised Corrib Onshore Pipeline development, and cumulatively, the wider Corrib Field project, which directly or indirectly affect the local residential, working and visiting communities of the area, and the wider regional and national populations. It does not address matters of safety in respect of the proposed development, which are addressed in separate Statements to this Hearing by other witnesses.

Any residual negative impacts of the project, as detailed in the EIS, however slight and whether temporary or permanent, can be expected to be most keenly experienced by the communities of the local environment in which it will be situated. However, there will also be direct and indirect local benefits as the Erris area receives one of the largest construction projects in the State, including the planned roll-out of a long-term community investment programme.

The application, and this Statement, acknowledge the concerns of individuals and groups with regard to the principle and nature of the proposed development, and note that such concerns are not restricted to the local vicinity of the proposed development. However, it is also acknowledged that there is both local and wider support for the project.

3.0 Community Engagement and Liaison

Since January 2007 RPS has undertaken a process of community engagement, consultation, and information gathering and dissemination in respect of the onshore pipeline development. Community and stakeholder engagement was identified at the outset as a fundamental element of the overall project strategy. Extensive evidence was presented on this issue by Mr Cox at the Oral Hearing in 2009 and it is not proposed to reiterate this material here. Rather, my focus will be to outline the direct engagement with members of the community which was carried out by SEPIL's Community Liaison Officers (CLOs) and RPS staff following An Bord Pleanála's invitation to modify the pipeline route in November 2009. The purpose of this engagement, carried out in March and April 2010, was to inform the community of the implications of the letter issued by An Bord Pleanála and to gather feedback in relation to the modified route and associated construction methodology.

This has involved:

1. A Community Update Brochure (distributed to approximately 3,500 houses in Iorrais (Erris)) with a feedback form and an invitation to arrange a small group meeting;
2. A letter outlining the project status and an invitation to meet with the project team issued to over 600 people in Kilcommon;
3. Every attempt was made to have contact with all those living in the immediate vicinity of the pipeline (approximately 1,000m from the mid line in the Bay, which was taken as an estimated location of the revised route). The CLO team telephoned or called door-to-door to approximately 150 homes in the area gathering feedback from the community. It is noted that, at the initial time of contact, some members of the local community expressed their wish not to engage in this liaison process;
4. A series of small group meetings involving approximately 40 members of the local community;

The above was in addition to an online feedback form and contact received through the project phonenumber and email.

SEPIL and RPS remain engaged in ongoing and regular contact with owners and occupiers of lands along the pipeline route who are prepared to engage in

the liaison process. Such contact principally includes face-to-face meetings, but also includes telephone calls and other correspondence, as not all landowners are resident in the area, or even the State. Meetings occur primarily at the properties of these affected persons, or in other venues of their choosing.

Concerns of the community regarding matters relating to both the construction and operation of the planned onshore pipeline development, and indeed the wider Corrib Field Project, will continue to be addressed through ongoing community and landowner liaison.

4.0 Socio-Economic Profile

In order to evaluate information being gathered during the ongoing community liaison and consultation process, and to substantiate observations obtained during area driving surveys, as detailed in Chapter 6 of the revised EIS, RPS carried out a desktop socio-economic profile assessment of the Erris Area (also detailed in Chapter 6 of the EIS). This was substantially based upon the most recent (2006) Census of Population. The assessment was evaluated against the area assessment detailed in the Cill Chomáin Development Plan 2006-2010, a locally prepared non statutory development strategy for the wider area of the Corrib project.

In the Plan, the area assessment suggests a socio-economic profile characterised by a dispersed settlement pattern, a deficiency in local employment opportunities, a traditional dependence on small-scale primary sector activities such as farming and fishing, but a recent growth in construction employment.

5.0 Potential Impacts and Mitigation Measures

The proposed development is not predicted to have any likely and significant impact on the population and demographic profile of the area during the construction phase. There may be some increased demand for local residential accommodation services arising from the workforce involved in the construction of the development; however this will be short-term and will not alter the established population profile of the area.

The EIS has acknowledged that construction of the proposed development will result in temporary nuisance and disturbance to residential communities in the vicinity of the planned works, however it is considered that short term and temporary consequence would be expected in any significant construction project. The principal remedial measures required to minimise the potential impacts of disturbance on the local resident, working and visiting communities during the construction phase relate to the application of appropriate management of construction. With respect to the possible adverse impacts associated with dirt and dust generation, noise, traffic and other impacts arising from the construction works generally, a number of measures are proposed as outlined in the EIS.

A key element for the overall mitigation of adverse impact on the local communities during construction is the continuation of a structured system for public information, communication, and feedback. In this latter regard, the continuing availability of SEPIL's Community Liaison Officers in the community, listening and responding to queries that individuals or groups may have, will facilitate the ongoing communication of issues with the technical team, which will allow for work practices to be altered if necessary. Operational changes

have been made in the past to facilitate activities and events in the community as a result of information received by the CLOs'. This system of ongoing engagement and response to feedback will continue throughout the construction phase of the onshore pipeline.

As detailed at Section 6.4.1.2 of the EIS, it is anticipated that some 120-140 persons will be employed at the peak of the construction of the proposed onshore pipeline. In addition, based on experience arising during construction of the terminal, it is envisaged that, during construction of the pipeline, there will be an economic benefit to the local and wider community in support services such as retailing, building supplies, transport and accommodation.

In cumulative terms, at the peak of construction activity on the overall Corrib Field Development Project in the summer of 2009, when the offshore pipeline was being laid and activity on the construction of the terminal was at its height some 1500 people were employed on the project (Section 6.4.1.2 EIS). In operation, the Applicant envisages that some 55 permanent jobs will be created in the technical operation and maintenance of the terminal. The recruitment process for this employment has commenced, with over half the jobs being filled to date by suitably qualified persons residing in County Mayo. In addition, it is anticipated that some 76 persons will be employed in support occupations, such as administration, catering, general maintenance, etc. The Applicant envisages that support services can be provided as local contracts. Visiting staff to the terminal requiring overnight stay will avail of local accommodation and associated facilities.

The proposed development is not predicted to have any likely and significant impacts on population and demography of the area during the operational phase. It is more likely the case that the ongoing operation of the overall Corrib Gas Field Development, of which the proposed onshore pipeline comprises one crucial element, will assist in consolidating population levels within the Study Area, particularly in the context of recorded declining population levels in this area.

The Corrib Gas Field Development will remain an important employer in its receiving environment, with resulting economic benefit for the area. This in no way conflicts with other provisions for Enterprise and Employment contained in the Action Plan of the Cill Chomáin Development Plan 2006-2010. In particular, Action No. 1 seeks to examine the feasibility of developing new employment initiatives as an alternative to traditional farming, fishing, and industry. Whilst the Corrib Gas Field Development is not explicitly stated in this regard, it can help to mitigate the local impact arising from the envisaged continuing decline in primary sector employment activities.

As detailed in Section 11.3.3 of the EIS, it is considered that the proposed pipeline development will have no impact upon the development potential of land in the vicinity, outside the permanent wayleave. This derives from the consideration that impact from the proposed onshore pipeline on development potential (particularly for residential purposes) can clearly only occur where such development potential actually exists. Having regard to designated conservation sites and habitats in this area, as well as the statutory policies and guidelines for development in rural areas, it is considered that such potential only occurs within the settlement areas of Glengad / Pollatomish and Aghoos, along the L1202, rather than directly along the alignment of the proposed onshore pipeline, which is set adjacent to the coastline some distance from the

public road. It is not considered that the proposed development will have any impact upon development potential – primarily infill residential development – along the linear extent of the existing settlements. As noted in Section 11.3 of the EIS, it is considered that there is no development potential along the specific route of the proposed onshore pipeline, or those coastline backlands to the north of the alignment of the L1202. Development potential will continue to occur within the existing linear roadside settlements of the area, and in particular, along the L1202 coast road. As such, no potential impact arises in this respect, and thus no mitigation measures are necessary.

The ‘hazard distance’ as referred to by An Bord Pleanála is not a development sterilization zone. It relates to one of a series of criteria introduced by the Board to assist it in the consideration of the proposed development. Should the Board grant planning permission for the proposed development, the decision will have no impact on the rights of third parties to develop their land outside the permanent wayleave subject to the normal requirements of planning as set out in the County Development Plan and other relevant documents.

The proposed development requires the removal from use of one existing habitable dwelling, situated on the L1202 coast road in the townland of na hEachú (Aghoos). This property is in the ownership of SEPIL and as such there is no impact upon the development potential of a third party.

Whilst every effort has been made to minimise the impact on agriculture, approximately 5 hectares of privately owned good quality agricultural land in Glengad will be removed from production for a short term during the construction and reinstatement stage of the proposed development.

Approximately 17 hectares of agricultural land used for rough grazing in Aghoos will be removed from production for a short term during the construction and reinstatement stage of the proposed development

Approximately 0.5 hectares of farmland will be required for the LVI (and permanent access road) at Glengad. This land is in the ownership of SEPIL.

Agricultural lands will be re-instated to pre-construction conditions subject to the agreement of the landowner. In designated conservation sites, reinstatement will be subject to the approval of NPWS.

Approximately 4.0 hectares of forestry will not be replanted within the permanent wayleave along the proposed route.

A number of land parcels in Glengad will be severed during construction of the proposed development on a short term basis. Access to forestry blocks will be affected during construction of the proposed development on a short term basis.

The proposed development will have a minor, long term residual impact at the LVI due to loss of land for production. The proposed development will have a moderate, long term residual impact on forestry production within the permanent wayleave. The residual impact on the remaining lands used for grazing and grass production will be short term and minor.

The primary mitigation for all such temporary and permanent impact of removal of use and/or landtake will be by compensation, which is not a matter of proper

planning and sustainable development to be addressed at this Hearing. Existing means of access to agricultural lands will be maintained where practicable; alternative temporary access points will be provided to such affected landholdings where retention of an existing access is not possible.

6.0 Community Investment

The Community Investment Programme currently being implemented by SEPIL is a key element of the overall Corrib Project. Deriving from a recommendation of the Cassells Mediation Report, this Programme of community investment must be considered to constitute a significant commitment by the Applicant to ensuring a community gain for the Erris area. The funds are directed specifically at the needs of the community. This is a significant and positive impact of the proposed development. Overall, this source of short, medium, and long-term community gain will provide a significant and positive impact in the local and wider vicinity of the proposed Corrib Gas Field Development.

Until 2009, the Programme was made up of a Local Grants Programme and a Third-Level Scholarship Programme, open to students attending the four local secondary schools. In January 2009 SEPIL launched the long-term Corrib Natural Gas Erris Development Fund, with a fund of €5m for the first three years. These three strands are identified in Section 6.5.3 of the revised EIS.

While the Programme is open to all community, voluntary and sporting organisations within the Erris area, projects brought forward by groups within the parish of Cill Chomáin are prioritised in the case of the Local Grants Programme and Erris Development Fund

The three elements of the community investment programme are described below:

1. Corrib Natural Gas Erris Development Fund

In December 2007 an Advisory Board comprising representatives of local development agencies (Mayo County Council, Údarás na Gaeltachta, Leader, Mayo County Enterprise Board and the Council for the West) was appointed to help establish this Fund. The Corrib Gas Erris Development Fund was launched in January 2009.

The objectives of the Fund are twofold:

- To contribute to the long term economic, social, environmental and cultural development of Kilcommon and the wider Erris area;
- To contribute to capacity building in Kilcommon and the wider Erris area by providing both financial and non-financial assistance which will benefit the community. Non-financial assistance includes providing advice and support for business planning for community-led projects, and development of mentoring networks to provide professional advice and assistance.

Whilst funded by the Applicant, the implementation of the Fund has direct and pro-active input by an advisory panel, the members of which all have experience of community development through their respective agencies. This has ensured

that the Fund will contribute to the long-term economic, social and environmental development of the Erris area.

In advance of the commencement of this long-term fund, a number of one-off financial grants were made in the Study Area and its environs. These included a grant of €150,000 to Belmullet GAA Club towards the redevelopment of its clubhouse and playing field facilities, and a grant of €130,000 to the Glenamoy Community Angling Association to redevelop the fisheries at Glenamoy.

Since the establishment of the fund, 52 applications have been received and over €2.2m has been allocated to 17 different projects within the Erris community. SEPIL has committed to the continuation of this Fund throughout the lifetime of the Corrib project.

2. The Local Grants Programme

An additional Local Grants Programme has been operating since 2006 - on an ad hoc basis up to 2008. In that year, the Programme was reviewed, clear criteria were applied, and a number of community information events were held to increase awareness of the revised programme. Increased engagement took place within the community and as a result the number of applications significantly increased, including participation from Cill Chomáin (Kilcommon). This Programme, supported by the contractors developing the Bellanaboy Bridge Gas Terminal, invites applications from local groups and organisations seeking funding – up to a maximum of €10,000 – for specific projects. All applications for funding under this Programme are assessed against three criteria:

- **Sustainability** – a sustainable project is one that continues to benefit a community. In practice, this means that the project must be financially viable and solvent. Short-term projects must have sufficient funds or firm commitments for funding in order to complete the project/event within a realistic timeframe.
- **Local** – all applications should be local to, and be of benefit to, the lorras (Erris) area. However priority is given to applications from communities that are in close proximity to the project site, ie Cill Chomáin (Kilcommon).
- **Inclusive** – projects should demonstrate benefits to a general community, and not just to a few individuals. Priority will be given to initiatives which bring groups and individuals together in delivering their project or event, and which can demonstrate effective strategies to attract participation from all sections of the community.

In 2008, a total of 127 no. community groups applied for funding under this Programme and 83 no. groups were subsequently awarded grants of between €1,000 and €10,000. In 2009, 124 applications were received, 94 organisations were recommended for funding, with a total allocation of €350,000. Of these funded organisations, 14 were from Kilcommon. In 2010 to date, a total of 121 applications were received, with 61 organisations recommended for funding, with an allocation to date of €250,000. 11 of the funded organisations are from Kilcommon, with a total allocation of €87,000. The second round of funding is currently underway, with 40 applications received.

3. The Scholarship Programme

In 2007, the Corrib Gas Partners launched a scholarship programme for students from the four participating secondary schools in the Iorras (Erris) area to facilitate their going on to third level studies. The programme offers ten scholarships, each worth €4,000 per annum, to students studying engineering, natural or physical sciences, mathematics, business, finance, IT or operational health and safety. An Independent Selection Board was appointed to assess all applications and to award the scholarships; the Board is made up of local people including the former editor of a local newspaper, a parish priest, and a former school principal. All board members have local experience of involvement in education, either through teaching or involvement on school boards of management.

This programme ran successfully from 2007 to 2009, with a review thereafter. Some €450,000 was invested by SEPIL and its partners in the project. In 2009, a review of the programme was undertaken by the selection board and a recommendation was made that the programme be continued for a further three years, due to its widely accepted success as a sustainable investment programme. It was further proposed that the programme be open to students pursuing courses in any discipline, as distinct from the previously more limited range of applicable disciplines. SEPIL accepted these recommendations and, in January 2010, a public commitment was made to continue the programme for a further three years, with the new qualifying criteria in place.

The extent of community investment by the Applicant must also have cumulative regard to the various levies and contributions paid in respect of Conditions of Permission relating to the Gas Terminal per Appeal Ref. PL 16.207212. In total, financial contributions towards upgrading of local and regional roads and water supply infrastructure amounted to over €5.7 million; a special contribution of €30,000 was directed towards specialist infrastructure required by Mayo County Fire Service; the Applicant is to provide artwork to a maximum value of €64,000; finally, the Board conditioned a Peat Levy amounting to €1 per m³ of waste peat transported to the deposition site towards the cost of the provision of environmental improvements, recreational or community amenities in the locality. The Peat Levy fund, of €450,000 was administered by Mayo County Council.

Whilst the totality of community investment by the Applicant in the area comprises both a voluntary programme of investment and by way of Condition pursuant to a Permission for development, it must be considered to comprise a significant community gain for the local and wider vicinity of the proposed development, in the context of good planning practice, and to the benefit of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.

PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

7.0 Draft Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2010-2022

The Draft Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region were published on 22nd January 2010. The aim of the Draft Guidelines is to provide a framework for long term strategic development in the West Region for the period 2010-2022 which is consistent with the National Spatial Strategy (NSS) 2002-2020

and which ensures the successful implementation of the NSS at the regional, county and local level.

Section 2.1 of the Draft Guidelines identifies “Strategic Goals for the West Region”. In terms of Service Infrastructure (page 16) it is a stated goal:

“To ensure that a framework is devised to meet the service infrastructural requirements of the Region for both now and into the future.....”

One of the measures identified in the Draft Regional Guidelines to fulfil this goal is stated as follows:

- e. *Utilising the valuable resources in the Corrib Gas Field to directly benefit the region and provide an additional energy source for the country as a whole.”*

Furthermore the Draft Regional Planning Guidelines states that:

“The discovery of the Corrib Gas field represents a major opportunity for the West Region. The development of the necessary on shore facilities to enable the potential of the gas field to be utilised in the region and national context is supported. Into the future, the potential of this very important natural resource can be of enormous benefit to the region as a whole and is seen as a project of large scale potential development for the region.

To enable the region to extract the full benefit of this natural resource, a major distribution network serving all major urban centres in the region must be constructed. This will enable a competitive choice of energy sources to potential entrepreneurs as well as providing a cheap clean residential energy supply.” (page 75)

These inclusions within the Draft Regional Guidelines for the West Region 2010-2022 emphasise the importance of the Corrib Gas Field from a regional and national perspective.

While the Draft Guidelines have not yet been formally adopted by the Regional Authority and could be subject to further amendment prior to adoption, they are nevertheless a relevant consideration for the Board in this development. The Draft Guidelines when adopted will replace the current *Regional Planning Guidelines for the West Region 2004*, which are also supportive of the Corrib Gas Field development. As explained earlier in my Statement, Mr Cox presented evidence on the current Guidelines in 2009.

8.0 The Mayo County Development Plan 2008-2014

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

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.

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).

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.

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

- **P/ED-AF1:** It is the policy of the Council to support the sustainable development of the marine aquaculture and fishing industries having regard to best environmental practices, so as to maximise their contribution to jobs and growth in coastal communities (p. 52);
- **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). (In this regard the Board will be aware of the current Gaswest Project, being implemented by Bord Gáis Eireann. This is a €50 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).
- **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 as a Highly Scenic View, while views over the Bay from this road at Pullathomais and Aghoos are Scenic Views (p. 80);
- **P/EH-NH1** It is policy to protect, enhance and conserve the Natural Heritage of the County, including designated areas and species (p. 87);

The following are of relevance to the proposed revised development:

- Much of the revised route section at Glengad is within the Glenamoy Bog Complex candidate Special Area of Conservation (c SAC). However it is noteworthy that the revised route is not located within the Priority Habitat part of the Glenamoy Bog Complex
- The estuarine and intertidal habitats of Scruwadden Bay lie within both the c SAC and Blacksod Bay/Broadhaven proposed Special Protection Area (p SPA).

Chapter 10 of the revised EIS pertains to Landscape and Visual Impacts of the revised development. It is identified that the L1202 around Dooncarton from the R314 at Barnatra to a point approximately 2km west of the R314 at Bellagelley South overlooking Broadhaven Bay and Sruwaddacon Bay is designated as a scenic route. A series of protected views are also designated along the scenic route. The scenic routes are identified on Map 10 of the Mayo County Development Plan. Chapter 10 identifies that as the gas pipeline, services and outfall pipeline will be buried throughout its length and will be in a tunnel under Sruwaddacon Bay there will be no permanent impact on the landscape. The proposed Landfall Valve Installation at Glengad will contain above ground features but following construction works will not be a prominent feature in the landscape due to its low-lying nature and design mitigation measures. The visual and landscape impact of the proposed development is dealt with by Mr Ray Holbeach in his Statement to the Oral Hearing.

Overall the revised 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.

In November 2009 Mayo County Council made a Variation to the County Development Plan 2008 – 2014 in response to a direction issued by the Minister for the Environment Heritage and Local Government on 16th September 2009. The Variation revised various aspects of policy. With regard to rural housing policy the Variation stipulates, inter alia, the following;

In Coastal Areas and Areas of High Scenic Amenity, it is the policy of the Council:

P/RH-14; *That in the areas identified as Sensitive or Vulnerable in the Landscape Appraisal of County Mayo, to accommodate the permanent housing needs of the established rural community subject at all times to the consideration of the proper planning and sustainable development of the area.*

P/RH-15; *That in the areas identified as Sensitive or Vulnerable in the Landscape Appraisal of County Mayo, the siting and design of new housing shall ensure the ability of the dwelling to be absorbed into the surrounding landscape without generating an adverse visual impact.*

P/RH-16; *That areas along the sea, estuaries and lake shore lines shall be referred to as scenic areas and that scenic views in those areas are protected as much as possible, and only planning permission for replacement housing, extensions or where a farmer has no other land, except in those areas will be allowed.*

The above policies demonstrate that the potential for new residential development in the vicinity of Sruwaddacon Bay is limited and subject to strict planning control.

9.0 Conclusions

Having considered the policy appropriate to the project it is my opinion that the realisation of the revised Corrib Onshore Pipeline development, as a key element of the overall Corrib Gas Field project, is of importance in achieving national, regional and local policy objectives.

It will assist in securing balanced regional spatial development, by ensuring an enhanced and reliable energy source to the West – and indeed to the State as a whole. Equally, as will be detailed in separate statements to this Hearing, 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. A decision to grant permission for the onshore pipeline as proposed by the applicants will not detract from the ability of third parties to development their lands outside the permanent wayleave.