**Claregalway GAA Chairman’s Address 2022**.

Go manadh Dia Dhiabh.

It gives me great pleasure to welcome members to this Claregalway GAA AGM of 2022.For the first time in 2 years we can meet indoors to reflect on the year gone by and make plans for the year and years ahead without restriction. As the stretch in daylight now gradually dominates the winter darkness, let us look joyfully forward to a year of greater Freedom, of Hope, Enjoyment and ambition in the year ahead. The Pandemic has been tough on everyone but it is coming to an end. To those who lost loved ones, we extend our deepest sympathies. To those who have been ill, we wish you a speedy return to full health, to those front-line workers, many of them members of our Club, we salute you and thank you for your care for all of us and your dedication through this difficult time. To our Covid Officers, Club Coaches, Officers, Players and Parents whose efforts guided us through this Pandemic, we thank you for your efforts and consistency. We pause now for a moment in silence as a mark of respect to the deceased and in a prayer of thanks for our great health workers.

On-Field activities;.

Despite Covid interruptions our teams performed admirably in all sections of the Club. Our Ladies club continued to build their numbers at juvenile level and the scenes of greater participation of young Girls in Knockdoemore on a Saturday evening are now quickly replicating what we experienced with the Boys section over earlier years. The concept of **Gaelic for Girls** is kicking on from strength to strength each year. With their dedicated Coaches constantly pushing the barriers for skill and competitiveness, the girls are exhibiting every sign of a group that are really enjoying themselves. Our teenage Ladies teams are dominant at all levels and our Senior Ladies again contested the County Senior Final. The Senior girls should not be despondent about these losses in finals to Kilkerrin-Clonberne, who are a unique generation and vastly more experienced than our younger Claregalway outfit. It is clear that our girls continue to improve and only a matter of time before they overpower them and dominate Ladies football in Galway. The continued growth and success of **the Ladies Club is a success story in itself** and due to the outstanding inputs of its Officers, Elaine Goldrick, Lorna McNicholas and all the Coaches and of course the massive **enthusiasm** of the Girls themselves.

**Our Juvenile** section continues to expand its numbers and the range of new garda-vetted Coaches coming on board each year is simply inspiring. Coaching standards are constantly improving each year, while the recruitment of young members and the promotion of Gaelic Football by the Juvenile Committee goes on unabated. Huge thanks must go here to Barry O Halloran and his team in the juvenile Committee and Brendan Morley and his Coaches and Managers in the Coaching Committee. The most remarkable benchmark of achievement in this section is the number of teams that we now enter in so many competitions. Two teams minimum at every grade and as many as 4 teams at u 12 levels and below. We are now seeing this growth in membership reflected at all levels. Growth in recruitment, Good Coaching and care for those young players placed in our Care is seeing a raising of competitive standards across all levels and that is now reflected **in the strength and depth of our underage squads, culminating in the winning this year of an u 17 A and B titles by separate squads on the same pitch on the same day- A truly unique achievement in Gaelic football anywhere.**

Well done to Paul Concannon, Shaun Morgan and their respective Coaching teams in giving us such great success and a generation of immense promise and talent to look forward to.

Success came our way in our adult teams also this year with Our **Junior Cs** qualifying for the Shield final and losing out narrowly, **Junior Bs** reached a North Final**, Junior As** clinched a North Title and one feels a Promotion to Intermediate may not be far away for them, while the **u 19s** lost out in the North Final after a penalty shoot-out , the worst of all ways to end a contest.

Our youthful team continue to grow stronger. With 10 of the team under 22 they can be proud of their efforts and their progress. We know that getting closer to the Top 4 in Galway takes time. The development of the maturity, Physicality, guile and experience to go to the next level is well under way with this squad who play attractive football. The Management, Fitness, Coaching, Organisation and Planning necessary is in place to bring these lads to the next level. We must be patient and supportive of Players and Management alike. We must strengthen our Club structures to ensure that we are **retaining and developing** **more players**. We will only achieve success from this youthful generation if we have the right **graduation platform** to stream our emerging players through in their journey from youth to adult football. We have lost too many players from this journey in the past. Huge work is going on here on player retention and development with our adult teams. John Fitzmaurice, Alan Daly, Seamus Mc Donnell, John Noone ,their backroom teams and my own colleagues at u 19 last year have all sincerely engaged with young adult players and are mentoring our young players successfully in the right pathway.

I wish to pay tribute also to Gabriel Kearney who stepped down last week from the Chair of the Senior Football Committee after 5 years where he, alongside Padraic Fitzmaurice and Alan Moran improved the support structure of the Senior section of the Club , making it highly efficient. I wish Shane Moylan well in the role. I know he will bring his normal energy and positivity to carrying on the good work for the future.

**Development;**

We were delighted to see further development in Knockdoemore this year. The completion of footpaths and fencing are a welcome enhancement. We are delighted also to report a grant for the purchase of a new mower from Sport Ireland and the Knockdoemore Park – Lackagh walkway has been included on the Irish Trails network, a vital aspect of securing insurance for this great community Walkway which was a source of sanctuary and sanity for many in those dark days of Covid. Our thanks must go to Tony Clarke and Tony Stephens here for their constant efforts at improving the facilities. Not a day goes by that they don’t do some job that makes the place better for all of us.

**Baile Pheil- Astro Turf Project**

I would dearly love to be able to report today that the Astro Turf project contained in our 10 year Plan- **Towards 2030** launched at our 2019 AGM and reaffirmed in greater detail at the AGMs in 2020 and 2021, was on target for completion this summer as planned. Alas, this is not the case.

Despite extensive efforts on the Engineering, E tender and Application front over the last year, we have not yet received the grant offer required to allow the building of this facility to go ahead. While the Officials and Procedures of Roinn na Gaeltachta are no champions of speed or decisiveness ,the most disappointing aspect of the delays experienced can be accounted for by the clear opposition to the grant aid by a group of protestors from Claregalway.

Their actions included but were not limited to;

* Writing to the Minister /Dept of the Gaeltacht, claiming that our application represented only a “ small group of people within the area” and naming a so-called larger grouping who opposed it. It was alleged that we had not consulted with the local community on the Lakeview Project despite the fact that the project had the support of Colaiste Baile Chalir with 1200 students and we had 3 successive planning permissions granted by Galway Council and we held 2 public meetings attended by local residents groups.
* The same letter called on the Minister not to grant aid the project and alleged that the Club Trustees would not support the removal of the grass pitch at Lakeview.
* Correspondence was circulated to the Trustees calling on them to reject the request by the Club to allow a legal charge on the Lakeview property for Grant and Borrowing purposes .
* Contact was established with the planning Office of Galway County Council which questioned the playing of matches in Knockdoemore under our Planning permission.

While I have no difficulty whatsoever in members of the Club or the local Community expressing a different minority view on any local matter, I fail to see how the actions above can be justified by people who call themselves supporters of Claregalway GAA Club. All of these actions were in direct conflict with the Club’s interests and the democratically taken decisions of its members. The plans of the Club are well known to members since the AGM of 2019. All efforts undertaken by the Club were duly authorized by three successive Club AGMs and extensive engagement took place with Community Groups. All efforts on grant applications, community Support, planning and financing were thoroughly discussed by the Project Development Committee appointed in early 2000.

Why did these protestors wait until the plan was almost approved before starting their poison pen campaign against the Club and their desperate tactics of interference with Trustees and Public Officials. ? Was it because they thought the Club would not achieve its ambitions initially or was it lately, because they couldn’t care less what damage or division they did to the Club or Community, once they got their own way in a narrow belief about facilities that would take us back to the 1980s

.I know right well how people can be passionate about their beliefs. Particularly in GAA . I can even understand that passion and would usually welcome it. My appeal today to everyone is to channel their passion for the Club in the same direction. Respect the Club . If you wish to have your view expressed or articulated ,you will all have your chance to do so. Use your powers of logic in your argument to **persuade now rather than to protest later**. Trust your fellow members in their decisions and put **CLUB UNITY** at the top of this agenda, today and always.

Our duty as Officers is to administer and abide by the rules of the Association. Claregalway GAA Club has always acted within the rules of the Association and it will again today. Those GAA rules require all motions and plans of the Club to have the **support of a majority** of paid -up **members assembled and entitled to vote**. The Club’s 5 standing Committees for Ladies, Juvenile, Senior , Development and Coaching ,all made submissions advocating this development for the last three years. These Committees may intend to bring forward further motions today with perhaps some amendments or different approaches. W**hatever the majority rule or outcome of those votes on those motions will determine the actions taken by the Club going forward**. There should be no personal ill feelings, no time for recriminations or grudges. We look back not with bitterness but with pride – We look forward to the freedom of going out to support Claregalway again. We anticipate the joy of watching our young people grow up in a new enlarged and hugely positive Claregalway. We stand as a Club for all those who belong to Claregalway. We dream of days when our youth bring further pride in our green and gold, to our great place . We value and celebrate our unique cultural identity in Gaeltacht an Eicreidh.- A place and a Club of which we are all so proud.

Before signing off today I want to thank my fellow Officers who have been so supportive for the last 5 years. Alan Moran, Tony Stephens, Tony Clarke, Padraic Fitzmaurice, Tony and Elaine Goldrick, Peadar Dolan, JP Kilbane, Gabriel Kearney ,Barry O Halloran ,Brendan Morley , all of our Committee Officials ,our Coaches and many, many more. Without their help we would achieve nothing.

I want you as members to know how lucky you are to have these great people in our Club.The endless hours of work they put in, the quality of those inputs and the integrity and vision that they bring to their roles which in turn reflects so proudly on all of us. I would like to thank Trish and Morgan also and my partners in Q Financial , who always gave me the freedom and the time to serve the Club without reservation.

I have enjoyed my term as Chairman. It started out with trying to make sure we had somewhere to play for all our members. It has moved on to planning the facilities for those who have come to join our Club membership in such great numbers and today we are talking about facilities for even those that have not yet arrived in Claregalway. I hope when they do arrive, they will say that those who came before , **had done their very best.**

I hope to continue to serve the Club and will leave no job unfinished. I would be happy to serve on the Development Committee or in any continuity capacity with any Group in the Club or Community that needs help but I cannot attempt to do both roles. The last year has been stressful and engaging for many people in the Club to say the least. The Years ahead will also be demanding but ever so rewarding and exciting for those who come next. I believe that the development needs of the Club should be contained in the brief of the development Committee. I also believe that the Executive and other roles within the Club must get on with its day-to-day business away from the glare of unfair protest, distraction or attention. Positive energy from new faces and new ideas from new voices must be heard in the Club.

Officers and Issues will come and go but CLG Baile Chlair will go on in perpetuity.

There is a time to come and a time to go and my time to go , has come.

Go raibh maith agaibh go leir.

John Morrin 30/01/2022.