



Teamwork flowing through Galway's water services

With Galway City's population expected to grow by 50% in the next 20 years and the county proving a popular spot to set up home, Irish Water's engineers are working with their local authority colleagues to ensure water services are ready for the surge in growth.

"It's about thinking ahead and planning for the future as much as the current situation. We're working on plans for the future of wastewater with the Galway Drainage Area Plan and the Greater Galway Strategic Drainage Study underway. In the meantime, we're doing our best to make sure we can accommodate development. We're advancing projects to accommodate growth," explained Denise McManus, Irish Water's Asset Planning Specialist.

Denise's Irish Water colleague Elaine Heneghan has a strong association with the City of the Tribes after studying Civil Engineering in NUI Galway.

"It's good to be working on plans that support the growth ambitions set out in Galway's Development Plans as well as in Ireland's National Planning Framework Project Ireland 2040."

The Drainage Area Plan will improve the performance of the wastewater network, protect the environment and facilitate social and economic development over the coming years.

Then the overarching Strategic Drainage Study will view the long-term wastewater treatment needs of the Greater Galway area.

"We're making sure we have capacity for the planned growth and where we don't, we look at the projects that are coming down the line and the solutions we need," added Elaine.

Martina Connaughton is an NUI Galway graduate and Galway County Council's Senior Executive Engineer looking after capital projects. She's been with the local authority for more than two decades and has been lucky enough to work on some of the biggest projects in the county but she's excited about what the future holds.

"It's an exciting time. There's a gap between where development can take place and where services are available, but we've been lucky enough to get a number of new wastewater treatment plants at our pinch points in – Oughterard Kinvara, Claregalway and Athenry.

“The Drainage Area plan and Strategic Drainage Study will take pressure off Mutton Island and also feed the new developing areas on the East of the city and county, areas like Garraun and Ardaun-new planning areas and help the likes of Oranmore and Athenry for future development.”

Elizabeth Fanning is the Senior Engineer with Galway City Council, heading up the Water Services team for the past six years.

“We’re working with Irish Water to make sure the infrastructure is in place for all the new and exciting things happening in Galway and to ensure it is a successful, sustainable and competitive regional city. Our projects are moving along. We all have the same goals; we’ve got a lot of great work done.

“We also have to focus on climate change and sustainability and ensure the city is resilient to this challenge.

“Funding and resources will always be a concern and timing is important. It’s about making sure we have the infrastructure in place in time for the development. A lot of our projects are long term ones so it’s that co-ordinating and driving them along and making sure we have them all in place in time for the development that’s coming that’s the major challenge.”

With Engineers Week and International Women’s Day this month, all four women are keen to stress that their sex has not impeded career success.

“Being female hasn’t helped or hindered me in my career. Engineering has more to do with your character rather than male or female. We like things black and white and we don’t see ourselves as being different from our male counterparts. If you’re interested in making a difference and you love problem solving, Engineering is the great way to go,” Denise said.

With an engineering degree under your arm, the career possibilities are endless.

Elizabeth, a UCD graduate began her career in the private sector during the boom years working on apartments and hotels as a consultant structural design engineer. She got her first taste for water services with Dublin City Council in 2001 before she moved on site, working as a resident engineer on Quality Bus Corridors, an initiative to give dedicated road space and traffic signal priority to buses in Dublin.

But the pull of the West and water services and she moved to the City of the Tribes in 2008.

“I wanted to move to Galway. I tried for years to move to Galway. I was starting to have kids and I wanted to move to the country and I’ve never looked back.”

For both Martina and Elaine, the highlight of the job is the end result.

“It’s nice to be able to see a project go from the concept stage right through to construction. You get a satisfaction at the end of the day seeing a structure that has been purpose built,” explained Martina.

“I like the fact that my job allows me to assist growth and development while also protecting the environment. It’s a great industry to be in, it’s challenging and interesting and there are so many avenues to go down,” added Elaine.