Draft Submission

My name is Niall O’Dowda, I am a member Kildare Branch of the Inland Waterways Association of Ireland and have been boating on our inland waterways for thirty-five years. Firstly, I would like to compliment Kildare County Council on their foresight in including the canals in their vision for the future. They are a wonderful historic, cultural and leisure resource and have been neglected for decades. I see public parks and museums being meticulously maintained country wide at no cost to visitors and wonder why the same approach cannot be applied to our canals. Now that both greenways and blueways are becoming popular along the canals it would be wonderful for the same level of maintenance to be applied to the waterways themselves.

Kildare is unique in many ways when it comes to the canal resources in the county.  Kildare must have the most milage of canals in the country having both The Royal Canal, The Grand Canal, with the latter splitting into the Shannon and Barrow lines in Lowtown. Also, in the county is: The Naas Branch, The Corbally Branch, The Triangular Route in Lowtown. Other notable features include: The Leinster Aqueduct, The Four Pots and The Side Chamber at Lock 16.  There are many points of interest connected to the canals, their construction, their heritage, and their historic role transporting goods and passengers throughout the country.  One which particularly caught my attention is that the locks were constructed to a design by none other than Leonardo DaVinci.

It is well known that history, heritage and water all attract visitors and tourists and the canals combine all three. Be it walking or cycling along the towpaths, canoeing, paddleboarding, fishing, trip boats, private boats or hire boats or coffee shops there is a myriad of activities that can take place on or along canals.  I and my fellow boaters frequently speak of the amount of interest and excitement our boats generate as we cruise along or are passing through a lock. We even attract a lot of attention when moored up.  Canals were built principally for boats to transport cargo and passengers, and having boats use the canals brings them to life as a working centuries old piece of our heritage.

I suppose what I would like to see happening is the aforementioned improvement to canal maintenance that would result in them being navigable all year round.  This would require water levels being maintained, weed being cut, dredging being done where necessary and infrastructure being maintained. The latter though is in good condition at present.  Other aspirations would include the reopening of The Corbally Branch to navigation and the development of Corbally Harbour.  I would also refer to the outline above of how the best use can be made of the wonderful resource that canals offer the county of Kildare, i.e., that Kildare has on its doorstep.

Regards,

Niall O’Dowda

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