



IWAI Royal Canal
c/o Sprucefield, Carrick
Edenderry
Co. Offaly
royalcanal@iwai.ie

Senior Executive Officer,
Planning Department,
Kildare County Council,
Áras Chill Dara,
Devoy Park,
Naas,
Co. Kildare

8th March 2021

Below please find the IWAI Royal Canal branch's submission regarding the **Kildare CDP Review**. The IWAI Royal Canal branch together with our IWAI Nav-Watch partners welcome the opportunity to submit to the Draft Plan public consultation process.

1. Introduction

Kildare is fortunate to have both Royal and Grand canals run through its regions. The towns of Leixlip, Maynooth and Kilcock are proud of their Royal connection, while Sallins, Prosperous, Robertstown, Naas, Ticknevin, Rathangan, Monasterevin and Athy identify strongly with the Grand canal, its two hundred years of heritage and ongoing living history.



Kilcock Harbour



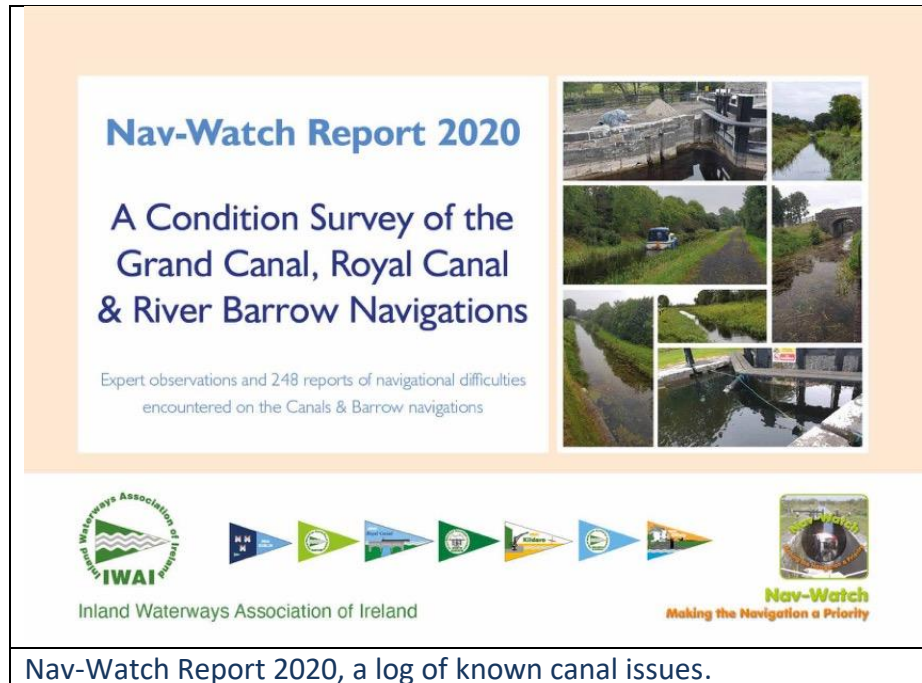
Heritage boats heading for Sallins

2. Future Proofing the Canals Network

The canals, particularly the Grand are in a gradual state of decline. Since 2008 Waterways Ireland's continually reducing budgets have resulted in a reduction of manpower on the ground and a visible reduction of maintenance. However, we seem to be on the brink of a period of change and great opportunity for those towns closely connected to the canal. To look at the canals from a purely 'Kildare' perspective is to do so in isolation. The canals are a great network of waterways linking the capital with the Shannon and linking down south through the Barrow navigation and river.

The recently launched Shannon Master Plan sets out to expand and improve on boat tourism facilities and services on the Shannon river. The growth in tourism expected through this expansion can have a knock-on effect on the canals network as tourists look more closely at our waterways and where else they can explore.

Boat tourism on the Shannon is basically restricted to a six month season. The canals offer the opportunity for year round boat tourism, cruising the canals is possible all year round (the winter months are termed Maintenance Season when works can result in localised closures, but generally the canals are open). Our warmer climate in recent years makes winter cruising on the canals all the more viable. The days are gone when the canal could be expected to freeze over for a period each winter. The Inland Waterways Association of Ireland's Nav-Watch group have recently surveyed the canals and documented areas where dredging or maintenance needs are greater (see/download Nav-Watch Report 2020: www.iwai.ie/nav-watch/surveyreport). It is hoped that this focus on critical maintenance will improve the navigation and leave it better able to cope with a variety of vessels travelling between the Shannon and Dublin.



Nav-Watch Report 2020, a log of known canal issues.

We take our canals very much for granted, they are just there, people are very surprised and always attracted and intrigued when they see a boat or barge pass by. The built heritage of these tremendous assets is largely overlooked. **Much of this 200 year old system still functions well today, it is working living history.** The longest hand-made structure in this country is the 146km length of the Royal Canal, yet few people are aware of this.

Tourism links between the bogs and the canal

With our boglands being re-watered/returned to nature there is considerable scope in developing eco-tourism links between tourist attractions developed throughout the boglands with boat tourism emanating from the canals and Barrow navigation. Mooring posts, jetties and greenway trails linking the canal with bogland and local attractions will encourage boat tourists to come, stop, explore, walk, cycle and most importantly spend at local attractions.

Positives of creating links between bogs and waterways:

- Establish a trail at the closest point between canal and bog
- Erect mooring bollards and trail signage at the trail head (in conjunction with Waterways Ireland)
- In wider sections of the canal where space is available it would be advantageous to install a jetty (in conjunction with WI) where hire boats who are less familiar with canal mooring etiquette can safely moor and disembark to walk or cycle through the bog trail and to any visitor attractions

- Support rural tourism development
- Supports and brings added traffic to the Grand Canal
- As more accessible facilities and recreational attractions link with the canal, more boat tourists will be encouraged to venture up the canal.

The Explosion in Liveaboard Communities

The Grand Canal has had small communities of liveaboards along rail links to Dublin for many years, at Hazelhatch and Sallins. The recent housing crisis has seen an explosion of people turning toward living aboard a boat in desperation as they give up on hopes of owning their own home. The canal provides a wonderful opportunity to provide small clusters of liveaboard communities close to towns and also spread along its length. Basic services need to be provided for these people such as pump-out stations where they can empty holding tanks of sewage and grey water, electricity, drinking water, lighting, mooring posts or jetties and broadband.

Currently these communities have to bring in drinking water and some travel long distances to find a working pump-out. These are the most basic services required by liveaboards, without which we are resigning them to living in slum conditions not seen in Ireland since the early part of the last century. The towns closest to Dublin have seen an influx of liveaboard barges and boats. Where there were just a few liveaboards in Sallins village and Confey beside Leixlip, now the numbers have quadrupled. This trend shows no sign of falling off and indeed appears to be growing stronger. There is an urgent need for KCC to come together with Waterways Ireland and develop facilities for these communities. Those same facilities will also serve to supply boat tourists and attract much needed tourism to those suburban towns.

Inland Marina Development

The regeneration of the bogs presents a wonderful opportunity which can benefit all involved and do so for many years into the future. The raised water level in the bogs adjoining the Grand Canal present great opportunities for tourism development. The development of inland marina(s) on flooded bogs connected to the canal was a dream of those involved in the Canalania Project close to Robertstown in Co. Kildare some forty years ago. It was a bold dream supported by Kildare Co. Co. at the time but never got off the ground, today it is more possible to realise than it was then. This is a tourism attracting development which can also generate income for its developer, be it KCC, Bord na Móna or public/private partnership. The Norfolk Broads in the UK have been a tourism mecca for decades, the Broads are themselves a series of flooded cut-away bogs.

A well serviced marina will have floating jetties, a pumpout station for emptying holding tanks, water and power provided at bollards on jetties, lighting, toilets and shower block facilities. Berths can be rented out annually, half yearly, monthly, weekly or just overnight in the case of passing tourists. The

same facilities can support camper vans and campers. The opportunity then arises to rent out a number of berths to a hire boat company promoting canal boat tourism holidays centred at the marina. There is also scope for liveaboards within such a marina. These important facilities then offer a new alternative to the local housing market which is already struggling to cope. It offers a possibility to young couples who otherwise see no opportunity of entering the property market. It also offers a unique alternative to those who strive to live life closer to, and more in tune with nature.

Creating an inland marina presents the following opportunities:

- Develop a recreation centre comprising of Marina, Campsite, Visitor Centre, Toilet facilities.
- Catering for camping, glamping, cycling, running, walking and boating.
- All based on environmentally sound principles and showcasing the flora and fauna of the bogs.
- An inland marina will attract boat tourists in from the Shannon and along the canal.
- Low carbon footprint centre (boaters are very adept at low carbon living, their power being generally only 12 volt + solar).
- There are not enough marinas on the Shannon.
- A canal based marina presents the opportunity of year round boating as the canals are open the year round and recent warmer winters have made winter cruising far more enjoyable. The Shannon boat hire season is primarily for the six months of April-September.
- A canal based marina will help support boat tourism between the Shannon and Dublin.
- It presents an option for canal boaters to moor securely through the winter months.
- This presents a new and exciting business venture and income stream for Bord na Móna which is low carbon and very eco friendly.
- As the Grand Canal Greenway is nearing completion the need for overnight camping facilities has never been greater. The Greenways have been developed with little consideration for toilet facilities, rest stops or overnight accommodation for the tourists who are coming to walk, cycle and run its length.

Low-carbon Community

By their nature, boating communities are low-carbon communities. Shore power is not always available. When disconnected from any communal electricity grid, each boat is responsible for its own electricity and heat generation. Boats commonly use off-grid electricity production methods such as solar panels and wind turbines to meet the electricity needs of the boatowner. Every electrical appliance is carefully chosen in order to reduce the electrical demand. Most boats run on a 12 volt system similar to that used in cars.

Every decision to switch on an application is a calculated decision for the boatowner, based on an assessment on whether there has been enough electrical power generated that day and whether the use of electricity is necessary. In comparison with conventional housing, there is a much greater

awareness of energy usage and no demand on the electricity grid. With recent advances in the efficiency solar panels, there is a growing number of liveaboards boaters who are completely off grid with their electricity usage.

Alongside this, the lifestyle of a liveaboard boater is in general very eco-friendly. There is less often household waste generated due to space restrictions. Water usage is kept to a minimum as the size of the water tank limits daily usage. This focus on renewable energy, low waste and water conservation results in a very low carbon lifestyle.

Rent

These berths would generate income for the developer. If well serviced, an annual berth might be worth approx €1,200-1,500. It is important to pitch these berth prices in line with private Shannon based marinas, over pricing will attract few but pitched as an option to Shannon marinas be an attractive option to many. Fees from berthing, campervans and camping will ensure that this development can fund itself and raise income for its developer.

Restoring access to the Corbally Line

Previously, KCC culverted a bridge along the R409 main road from Naas to Rathangan, this culvert effectively closed the canal beyond it and cut-off Corbally Harbour. The beautiful harbour at Corbally remains, run down but intact. It presents a wonderful opportunity for tourism development through boating and kayaking. A greenway along its length is already proposed and will attract much attention. Developing much needed services at the harbour will give the opportunity to install adequate parking and toilet facilities, facilities which most of the recent greenway developments are greatly lacking in.



Naas Harbour – Corbally could be this vibrant.

Corbally Harbour is fed by a spring which is an important feeder to the Naas Line and the Grand Canal as a whole. Closure has resulted in the Corbally line, which originally serviced deep draught canal barges, becoming so silted that there is barely a foot (300mm) of water in the harbour and along much of the line. This silt obstruction has severely reduced the volume of water reaching the Grand Canal and will continue to contribute to the reduced water supply conditions experienced in recent drier years. This needs to be reversed and the supply restored fully. Naas Harbour also has a spring supply which supplies the line and has been allowed to silt the harbour to the extent that the back of the harbour is unuseable by boats.

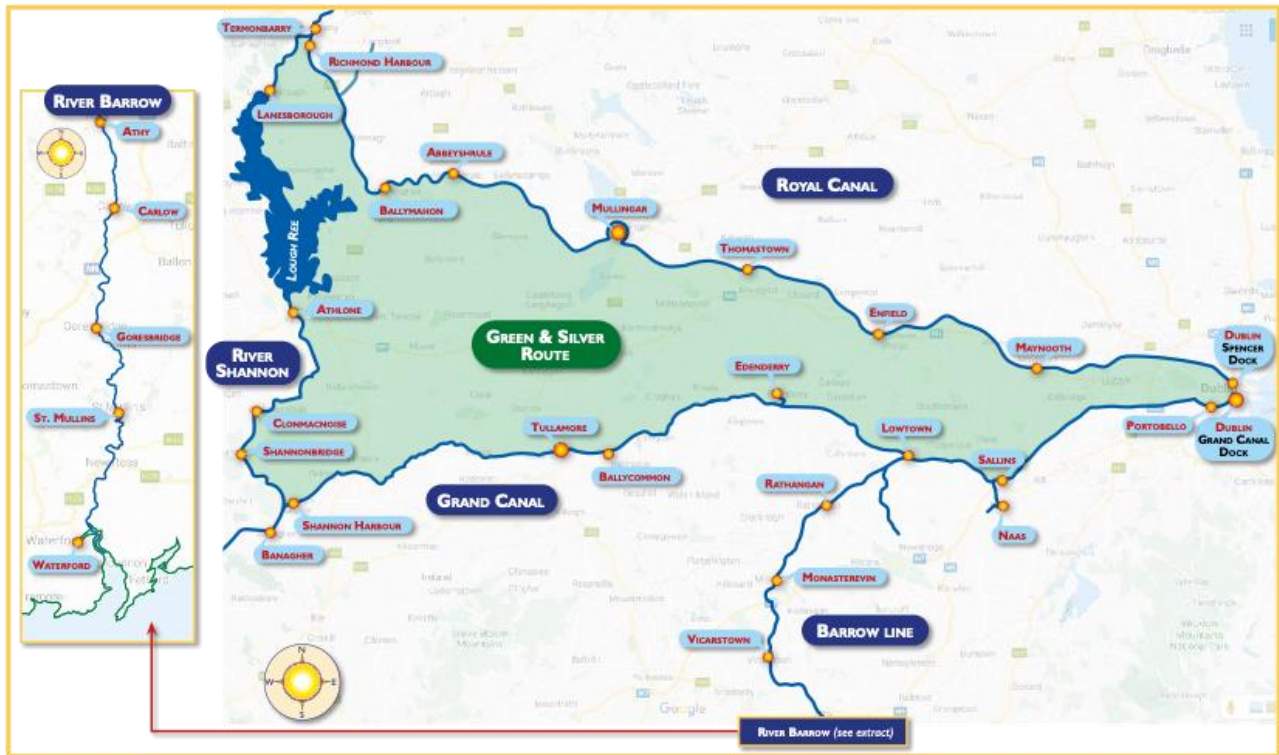
The R409 culvert urgently needs to be replaced by a bridge to reopen this line. The opportunity to do so is fading as development encroaches the site of the culvert. Currently the immediately surrounding land is undeveloped and installing a bridge would be straightforward, this would be far more difficult should the land be developed and ramps to the bridge be an obstruction to that development.

3. The Spectacular *Green & Silver* Route

The '*Green and Silver*' route is based on the route taken on a documented triangular journey undertaken by L.T.C. Rolt in 1946. His subsequent publication of '*The Green & Silver*' book in 1949, is now its 7th edition and as a boating 'classic' has become a bible for canals navigation enthusiasts in Ireland and many visitors from overseas. Rolt was one of the founders of the Inland Waterways Association (UK) in 1946.

This Green & Silver waterways route between Dublin and the midlands¹, which is of huge potential for economic benefit and social activity for the regions it passes through. It comprises a waterways triangular route of the Royal Canal, the mid Shannon, Grand Canal and in Dublin (crossing the Liffey to get back to the Royal to complete the journey). This navigation route is of international significance, ignored as yet by our tourism organisations, **it is the only circular boating route in Ireland and needs to be elevated to national planning status level to flourish**. This route runs right through Westmeath and the beautiful harbour in Mullingar, a significant stop-off point on the Royal Canal leg of the journey. **This is a spectacularly beautiful route is a bucket-list goal for many boaters. It's potential for development as a tourist route has yet to be realized.**

¹ Green & Silver Route - Dublin, Royal Canal, River Shannon, Grand Canal triangular navigation route.



Green & Silver route – the Royal Canal, The Grand Canal (crossing the Liffey in Dublin) and the Mid Shannon region.



The Green and Silver book– The route is approx. 320 km and can be completed in 10-12 days of continuous travel by boat, however it is preferable to take as long as you can.

Boaters who currently do this route in Ireland can register to take part in the Green & Silver logbook challenge, by which they get various passport style stamps on an old fashioned log book format; a certificate; and a polished metal plaque to mark their achievement. The Dublin branch of the IWA have been the main drivers behind the promotion of this route and administer the registration, log book and plaque allocations. However it is also the users of the Green & Silver route who have contributed to it becoming known in the boating community over the last decade (only possible since the reopening of the Royal Canal) and it is an excellent example of 'ground up' grassroots user based perspective being able to contribute to regional development, once the relevant support and resources to push it on further are considered and applied. It is 70 years since the publication of the original book so it is timely that in 2021 it gains more exposure.



The Green & Silver route runs through nine of the twelve local authority areas – from Dublin City Council out the Royal Canal through Fingal, Meath, Kildare, Westmeath and Longford to the River Shannon (with access from the Shannon to the Camlin River – a particularly tranquil and secret spot on the overall navigation), back in the Grand Canal through Offaly, Kildare and South Dublin, with a spur line off in into Laois to access the River Barrow system. This route has the potential to be a major international level boating destination servicing both the city and the wider region and should be viewed as a collective resource with regard to its navigable future.

The canals network in Ireland is some 200 years old, and still functioning in much the same way as it is in the early 1800's. Manually operated lock are still operated the same way, the canal banks ensure the immediate natural environment is available and local history and heritage is on its doorstep in the many towns and villages through which the Green & Silver route passes. We are very good at

presenting our nation's history through documentaries, drama, theatre and so on, but there is nothing that can evoke the actual real experience of canal boating except to undertake it. We constantly hear said by German and British tourists on our waterways ***"You have the best waterways in Europe, why don't you use them more!"*** In the case of the canals, this could not be more true. We have failed to invest in their tourist potential so far.

The Green & Silver route runs through large and small towns such as Ballymahon, Longford, Mullingar, Enfield, Kilcock, Leixlip, Maynooth, Naas, Edenderry, Tullamore and Athlone. These can offer local boating route points e.g. weekend hire boats, to use the local areas of the Green & Silver from those locations. Small businesses in this area are starting up and indeed somewhat established - notably Royal Canal Boat Trips operating trips between Clonsilla and Kilcock on the Royal Canal (ref <https://royalcanalgreenway.ie/listing/royal-canal-boat-trips/>); on the Grand Canal bargetrip.ie based in Sallins and more recently boattrips.ie on the Barrow adding to the long established Barrowline cruisers in Vicarstown. Also, as mentioned earlier, there are several hire companies on the Shannon that would be willing to send their tourist hire boaters into the midlands if they could be confident of access and reliability of use.

The Grand, Royal and Barrow have much more to offer tourists be they travelling upon or alongside it.

Yours sincerely,

Denis M-Baker
Chairman, IWAI Royal Canal branch
Nav-Watch group member

John Banim
Secretary, IWAI Royal Canal branch